Citation by R.H. Dott Jr.

I first met our awardee in 1965 when a Ph.D. candidate in English literature named Dennis Dean showed up in the first class that I taught on the history of geology. I may well have gained more from our classroom experiences than he, for Dennis introduced me to a wealth of 19th Century literary allusions to geology. One example that particularly delighted me, and which he later published, was how Edward Hitchcock’s celebrated Connecticut Valley trackways inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s famous passage “Footprints on the sands of time” from the Psalm of Life (published in 1838). Dennis’ Master’s thesis at Stanford had been about Emerson and Geology, and when he joined my class, he was working on his Ph.D. dissertation about Geology and the British Romantic Poets. After graduate school, Dennis joined the humanities faculty of the University of Wisconsin at Parkside, where he taught for 25 years.

He gradually expanded his duality of interests, which has made him unique among historians of geology.

Over the years, Dennis has researched and written increasingly about the history of geology, and his work has gained much authority. His efforts have culminated with outstanding scientific biographies of James Hutton published in 1992 and Gideon Mantell published in 1999, which are now the definitive references for these two important figures. Dennis made a coup in his serendipitous discovery of a rich store of Mantell resources in New Zealand, where one of Gideon’s sons had emigrated, but I leave it for him to tell that story.

Those two books alone would justify our award for Dennis Dean, but he also has published important articles about the history of geology in such journals as Isis, Annals of Science, Modern Geology, and the Journal of Geological (now Geoscience) Education. These have concerned not only Hutton and Mantell, but also Erasmus Darwin, Playfair, Lyell, Hitchcock, Mallet, Benjamin Franklin, and William MacLure. He has published important essays about Sir Walter Scott and the neptunist-vulcanist dispute; Tennyson and geology; the controversy between Muir and Whitney about the origin of Yosemite Valley; the age of the earth controversy; and the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. He has contributed to symposium volumes and encyclopedias, notably 14 entries for the new Dictionary of National Biography. For the 1997 Hutton-Lyell bicentenary, Dennis edited an augmented reprint edition of James Hutton’s v. III of Theory of the Earth - the long lost volume, which was first published in 1899. He is presently the General Editor for a History of Earth Sciences reprint series and frequently participates in both national and international conferences on the history of geology.

Response by Dennis Dean

Thank you, Bob, my friend and mentor, for nominating me to receive the same History of Geology Award that has in the past been presented to so many worthy scholars. If any among us still doubts the appropriateness of its going to a humanist like myself, I hope that he or she will ready my books.

Though reading has always been one of my greatest pleasures in life, I began to collect rocks even earlier, before I could read. In 1941, when my family was living in northern Illinois (not far from where I live now), my mother and two of her sisters took my older brother and me on a lengthy car trip through Canada and New England. We stopped at a place called the desert of Maine, at which colorful sands were exposed. While there my aunt Bea saw how fascinated I was with some of the pegmatite minerals on sale in the gift shop and bought a few specimens for me, of which I still have. My rock collection began on that date and has continued ever since—for more than sixty years.

Having started at age three, I had plenty of time to expand my origi-
nal interest in rocks to include fossils, artifacts, and geological and cultural history. I discovered the history of science as a graduate student at Stanford, but only through private reading (in March 1961). A book called *The History of Science and the New Humanism*, by George Sarton, showed me how I could put the scientific and humanistic sides of my mind together. I began to write literary term papers emphasizing the cultural influence of science, and later did a Master’s thesis on Emerson and geology (1962), explaining that writer’s numerous allusions to earth science.

Following two years in the army, I returned to graduate school at Wisconsin, where I was the first ever to pair a doctoral program in English with a minor in the history of science. As part of that unique curriculum, I undertook three credits of work with Bob Dott, who was then the same “peach of a fellow” (as someone assured me) that he still is today. My dissertation topic, as he mentioned, was “Geology and the British Romantic Poets”—in other words, the literary contemporaries of Hutton, Playfair, and the early Lyell.

In 1977, while on my way home from a Senior Fulbright lectureship in Korea, I stopped off in Wellington, New Zealand, to see four letters by Mary Shelley, wife of the poet and the author of *Frankenstein*; I knew two of the letters to be unpublished. All four were to Gideon Mantell, of whom I had heard by reason of my work on Emerson and the *American Journal of Science*. But I was entirely unprepared for the previously unknown riches of the Alexander Turnbull Library’s superb Mantell collection. Revising my schedule of the spot, I spent four days—as much time as I could spare—researching two essays, one on Mary Shelley and Gideon Mantell, the other on the Mantell collection itself. Someone, I was convinced, really ought to write a biography of the fascinating and greatly underrated British discoverer of dinosaurs. It took me several months to figure out who that someone had to be. Eventually, I returned to New Zealand for a more extended stay of nine weeks, funded by the National Science Foundation—this with a doctorate in English literature—and the book itself (my third) took twenty-two years in all. My current book-length project has to do with Charles Lyell and won’t, I hope, take as long.

Thank you very much.