

# Memorial to Charles Storrow Denny 1911–1999

JAMES P. MINARD  
*U.S. Geological Survey, Retired*

Charlie Denny died at his home in New London, New Hampshire, on August 21, 1999. He was born on September 17, 1911, in Brookline, Massachusetts, son of Dr. and Mrs. Francis P. Denny. He graduated from Harvard cum laude in geology in 1934. He received his Master's degree in geology from Yale in 1935 and his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1938. When he went to Yale, Richard Flint took him to meet Dr. Knopf, head of the geology department, and said "Mr. Denny has come to be educated."

As an undergraduate, Charlie studied under Kirk Bryan and spent two summers in New Mexico at Bryan's geology summer school. Kirk Bryan came from New Mexico and had many of his students do their graduate theses on quadrangles there. Charlie came to love the Southwest and always enjoyed working there.

In June 1938, Charlie married Ann Mason Hodges of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and started as an instructor in geology at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. In 1942, he became an assistant professor of geology at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. In the summer of 1943, Charlie went with Hugh Raup of Harvard to northwest Canada. With aerial photographs then available, they combined their knowledge of botany and geology to study terrain along the Alcan Highway, just being built. In 1944, Charlie joined the Military Geology Branch of the U.S. Geological Survey, along with several old friends from Harvard graduate school. They did geological research and made maps, providing information for the U.S. Army during World War II.

After the war, Charlie continued with the Geologic Division of the USGS in Washington, D.C., and did field work in various parts of the country (see Selected Bibliography). Among other things, he wrote the story of John Wesley Powell in 1969. Ann and Charlie went out to see the reenactment of Powell's start down the Colorado River for an anniversary year of that trip.

Charlie retired in 1978, and in 1983 he moved from the Washington, D.C., area to New London, New Hampshire, where his family spent summers for many years. He and Ann took several trips abroad, and he spent a great deal of time writing up family history from old letters and journals. He left behind his loved and loving wife of 61 years, three daughters, seven grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. Charlie was the recipient of the Kirk Bryan Award for Geomorphology from the Geological Society of America, in 1966.

Charlie Denny's long, illustrious career in his chosen field of geology, his sterling personality, his innate humility and compassion for others along with an undercurrent of great strength, the genuine affection of his colleagues, the scientific recognition of his endeavors and papers—all are testimony of the high esteem in which he was held throughout his career.

His many well-received, highly respected, often thought-provoking papers were major contributions to the advancement and recognition of his profession and the USGS. As one colleague said, "All his friends and acquaintances in graduate school admired him simply for his quiet



presence and obvious technical knowledge.” He favored Pleistocene-age deposits and processes, particularly glacial geology.

Charlie’s unassuming, considerate help to neophytes entering his profession was most welcome. He took me, a farm-grown World War II survivor, with GI Bill benefits, who wanted to be a geologist, under his wing. One of the first lessons he taught me was brevity. He reviewed my first short USGS paper, paring its four pages down to two pages of pertinent basics, with no loss of important points.

What is more rewarding than to meet an apparently “nice guy” and discover that he is genuine? Despite this, however, to the occasional unfortunate who carelessly displayed a boorish bent, a glint of Charlie’s internal steel became evident.

One of Charlie’s younger friends tells this story: “My first encounter with this elderly New England gentleman was on a field trip Charlie agreed to provide for Johns Hopkins University students in upstate New York. A distinguished soil scientist accompanied us as a visiting professor. He was heavily involved in the new definitive document on soil classification for the SCS, ‘The Seventh Approximation.’ As usual, he was full of himself and postured as the source of much alternative wisdom; apparently deeming it necessary to confirm and expand on Charlie’s comments on soil types and origins. That evening, the professor was introduced to Charlie, who offered a handshake and a glass of Jim Beam and, with wry wit, asked, ‘Well, how is the Eighth Approximation coming along?’ I will always remember Charlie’s personal hospitality and interest in people.”

Along with colleagues Louis Conant, Gil Espenshade, and Joe Upson (to name a few), Charlie was one of the last of the true, old-fashioned, courtly gentlemen who met the challenges of our profession and were proud pillars who helped uphold its integrity.

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF C.S. DENNY

- 1936 Periglacial phenomena in southern Connecticut: *American Journal of Science*, v. 32, p. 322–342.
- 1940 Stone-rings on New Hampshire mountains: *American Journal of Science*, v. 238, p. 432–438.
- Santa Fe Formation in the Española valley, New Mexico: *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, v. 51, p. 677–693.
- 1941 Quaternary geology of the San Acacia area, New Mexico: *Journal of Geology*, v. 49, p. 225–260.
- 1950 (with Raup, H.M.) Photo interpretation of the terrain along the southern part of the Alaska Highway: *U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin* 963-D, p. 95–135.
- 1951 Pleistocene frost action near the border of the Wisconsin drift in Pennsylvania: *Ohio Journal of Science*, v. 51, p. 116–125.
- 1952 Late Quaternary geology and frost phenomena along the Alaska Highway, northern British Columbia and southeastern Yukon: *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, v. 63, p. 883–921.
- 1956 Wisconsin drifts in the Elmira region, New York and their possible equivalents in New England: *American Journal of Science*, v. 254, p. 82–95.
- 1958 Surficial geology of the Canaan area, New Hampshire: *U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin* 1061-C, p. 73–101.
- 1961 Landslides east of Funeral Mountains, near Death Valley Junction, California: *Geological and Hydrologic Sciences*, article 293–435.
- 1964 (and Postel, A.W.) Rapid method of estimating lithology of glacial drift of the Adirondack Mountains, New York: *U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper* 501-B, p. B143–B145.

- Geology of the Brushart Quadrangle, Kentucky: U.S. Geological Survey Geologic Quadrangle Map GQ-324, scale 1:24,000.
- 1967 Fans and pediments: *American Journal of Science*, v. 265, p. 81–105.
- 1968 (and Goodlett, John) True-throw origin of patterned ground on beaches of the ancient Champlain sea near Plattsburg, New York: U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 600-B, p. B157–B164.
- 1979 (and Owens, James P.) Sand dunes on the Central Delmarva Peninsula, Maryland and Delaware: U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1067-C, 15 p.
- (with Owens, James P.) Upper Cenozoic deposits of the Central Delmarva Peninsula, Maryland and Delaware: U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1067-A, 28 p.
- (and Owens, James P., Sirkin, Leslie A., and Rubin, Meyer) The Parsonsburg sand in the Central Delmarva Peninsula, Maryland and Delaware: U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1067-B, 16 p.

