

Award Winner Spotlight

Cedar Lake Historical Association



The Albert B. Corey Award, named in honor of a founder and former president of AASLH, is our highest award for organizations. It recognizes primarily volunteer-operated historical organizations that best display the qualities of vigor, scholarship, and imagination in their work. The Corey Award highlights small organizations that work creatively with big impacts on their communities, and holds them up as models for the field of what can be accomplished even with limited resources. The 2022 winner of this prestigious award is the Cedar Lake Historical Association of Cedar Lake, Indiana, which created an incredible immersive experience for visitors to learn about their lake, its history as a local resort, and the science of steam-powered transportation. Partnering with the Hesston Steam Museum, CLHA and the *Steamer Dewey* brought new and returning visitors to the site for a unique educational experience on the water.

CLHA operates the Museum at Lassen's Resort within a hundred-year-old resort hotel that was a popular recreation site for visitors from the Chicago area in the early twentieth century. Traveling by train to the Monon Depot

on the western shoreline of Cedar Lake, vacationers could take ferries around the lake to more than fifty resorts. In 1896, entrepreneur Chris Lassen founded "The Dewey Line," a steam-powered fleet of six boats that carried visitors to their accommodations and on excursions in the popular summer season.

In July 2021, the association partnered with Hesston Steam Museum (HSM), an outdoor museum that interprets and operates steam-powered and agricultural equipment like trains, engines, and a saw-mill. *Steam through History* re-enacted the Dewey Line experience with excursions in HSM's twenty-passenger steamboat (circa 1915) that ran from Lassen's Resort to the former site of the Monon Depot. The experiential learning opportunity aboard the *Steamer Dewey* added a new layer to the permanent CLHA museum exhibits which tell the story of the lake's glacial formation, its ice-harvesting economy, and the science behind steam power.

This program offered a wide variety of ways to engage with history and the lake environment. During the excursion, HSM's engineer taught the mechanics of steam power, its significance in the Industrial Revolution, and how it promoted the economic development of

Cedar Lake in the 1920s. In addition to the boat ride, guests could also participate in self-guided tours of the museum and visit children's activity stations featuring origami boats, sailor hats, and water play on the porch. They could view three pre-recorded presentations, including an HSM virtual tour and lecture on steam power history, a program on American vacations through the 1920s, and one on Calumet regional geology. Finally, they could walk the new community placemaking pier on the lake to learn the significance of Cedar Lake history from interpretive panels installed along the pier, once again bringing together history education and outdoor recreation in a way that multiple generations and types of learners could enjoy.

CLHA's new offering proved enormously popular: in five days, they saw visitation numbers it normally took more than two months to achieve, and the boat rides sold out every seat. Roughly 40 percent of visitors came from the town of Cedar Lake (population around 12,000), representing locals rediscovering their small town museum.

91 percent of participants came from Indiana and Illinois. The program



A Dewey boat docking at Lassen's Resort in 1924.



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appealed to varied audiences across all ages, from history-minded adventurers to boating enthusiasts. Many passengers were initially attracted by the idea of getting out on the water, but hearing the whistle and feeling the heat off the steam engine while discovering the Cedar Lake story and the science of steam added an important and engaging educational dimension to a traditional summer lake day. Promotional posters for the program promised “The Town Looks Different from the Lake,” and the sentiment was confirmed by many appreciative visitors.

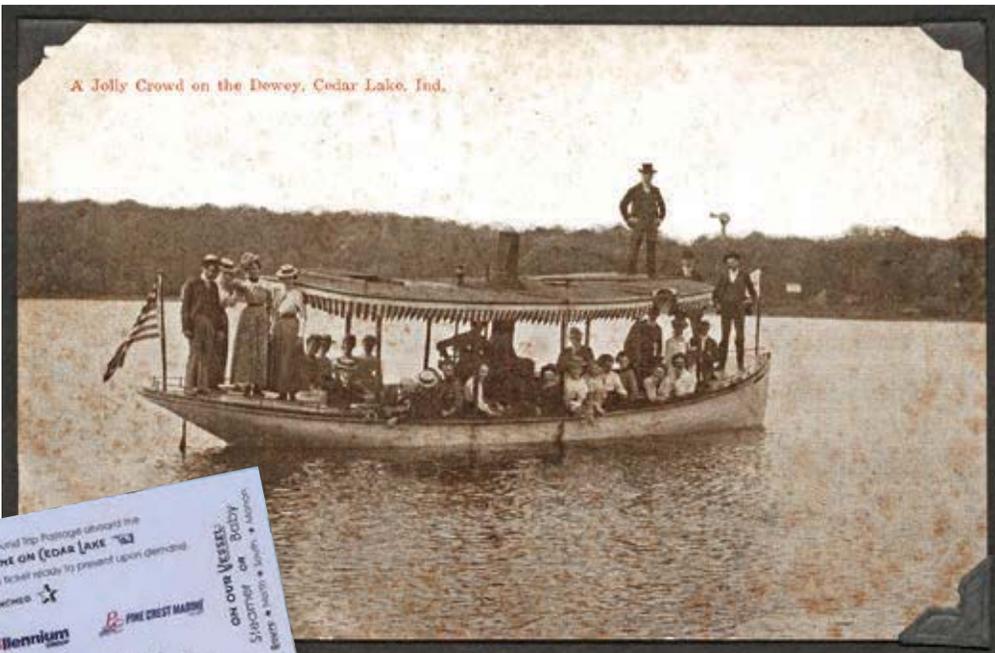
Steam through History brought new excitement and audiences to the small town museum and offered creative solutions to three significant and long-standing

organizational problems: cash flow, being an unknown community asset, and having no means to connect people to the lake in the “front yard.” Creativity and partnerships prevailed over difficulties and brought two organizations united by steam history together. The Cedar Lake Historical Association and the Hesston Steam Museum are sixty-five miles apart, yet volunteers collaborated on this unique program to take advantage of the strengths of both organizations and unite their distinct audiences. Securing the passenger-for-hire license from Indiana’s Department of Natural Resources presented its own set of challenges, but HSM overcame them with safety and operational modifications that brought the only

authentic steamboat ride in the state to the shores of Cedar Lake. Beyond cementing a fruitful partnership with the steam museum, this program also revitalized CLHA’s relationship with town administration and tripled their volunteer base. This one-of-a-kind opportunity, covered heavily in local newspapers, provided cash flow for both organizations, brought CLHA’s thirty-five-year-old museum out of the shadows with its most successful tourist season ever, and gave over a thousand people unprecedented access to the lake, its history, and a way to experience it as tourists did a hundred years ago.

As one reviewer wrote, “The significance in *Steam through History* lies not in just the boat excursion, the placemaking pier, or the museum exhibit—although all three elements could stand alone—but in the innovative ways that each aspect built upon the others to augment the visitor’s overall experience while also allowing people to engage with the topics on a personal level. With their passion for local history, the Cedar Lake Historical Association continuously seeks avenues to engage their community, and this project was directly on point for their mission.” CLHA has continued to build on their success, operating a second popular season of boat rides in summer 2022, developing more routes and historic tours, and christening a six-passenger electric boat, the *Baby Dewey*, for even more lake adventures to bring local history to life in the great outdoors. ●

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Top: A turn-of-the-century Dewey Line postcard. Bottom: The *Steam through History* program first cast off in July 2021.



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Cedar Lake Historical Association Wins Prestigious 2022 AASLH Albert B. Corey Award

Nashville, TN – The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) congratulates the Cedar Lake Historical Association for winning the Albert B. Corey Award for their work on the Steam Through History program.

The Albert B. Corey Award is part of the AASLH Leadership in History Awards, the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation of state and local history. Named in honor of a founder and former president of AASLH, the Albert B. Corey Award is limited to one winner per year. It recognizes a primarily volunteer-operated organization that best displays the qualities of vigor, scholarship, and imagination in their work. This special honor includes a \$500 award for the organization.

Steam Through History was a one-week collaborative program in July 2021 between The Museum at Lassen's Resort of Cedar Lake, IN, and the Hesston Steam Museum of LaPorte, IN. The signature experience re-enacted an 1896 journey across magnificent Cedar Lake from Lassen's Resort to the Monon Railway Depot aboard an authentic steamboat. Passengers discovered Cedar Lake's resort-era history while learning the science behind steam power. "Our goals were to increase guest attendance and volunteerism while creating excitement around the museum and engaging the community," explained Julie Zasada, Cedar Lake Historical Association executive director. "We succeeded brilliantly and welcomed over 1,000 passengers in five days, many who were on Cedar Lake for the very first time. As a result, we renewed our partnership for 2022."

This year, AASLH confers 53 national awards honoring people, projects, exhibits, and publications. The winners represent the best in the field and provide leadership for the future of state and local history.

The AASLH awards program was initiated in 1945 to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards not only honor significant achievement in the field of state and local history, but also bring public recognition of the opportunities for small and large organizations, institutions, and programs to make contributions in this arena. For more information about the Leadership in History Awards, contact AASLH at 615-320-3203, or go to www.aaslh.org.

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About the Cedar Lake Historical Association

The Cedar Lake Historical Association (CLHA), a nonprofit corporation, operates The Museum at Lassen's Resort within a 101-year-old resort hotel that was a popular, early twentieth century recreation destination for Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana visitors. CLHA presents the relevance of Cedar Lake history using its imaginative, hands-on, Story of Cedar Lake museum gallery. Along with its partner institution, the Hesston Steam Museum, CLHA offers the only passenger-for-hire steamboat ride in Indiana - an experiential learning opportunity where guests discover Cedar Lake resort history amidst a demonstration of steam power. For more information about CLHA visit www.lassensresort.org

About AASLH

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), a national nonprofit association, provides leadership and resources to help the history community thrive and make the past more meaningful for all people. AASLH serves the tens of thousands of history organizations, professionals, and volunteers around the country who help people of all ages develop critical thinking skills and understand how learning history helps society make progress toward justice. Through research, advocacy, and our field-leading professional development program, AASLH advances public history practice and connects history practitioners to critical issues in the field and to one another. For more information about AASLH visit www.aaslh.org.