The people behind the awards

Over the next few months, SME will briefly profile the engineers and miners who are remembered by the AIME-founded awards presented to SME members.

ROBERT H. RICHARDS

Robert H. Richards, inventor, author and teacher, was one of America’s pre-eminent ore dressing engineers, and he can rightly be called father of ore dressing in the United States. In 1874, Richards began studies of hydraulic classification that led to his discovery of and extensive research on the phenomenon of hindered settling. Based on these fundamental studies, he developed a series of sizing and concentrating classifiers, the Richards pulsator jig, and the concept of sizing before gravity concentration. In addition to this important research, Richards’ encyclopedic, four-volume treatise, Ore Dressing, published in 1909, was the first comprehensive work to codify and publicize all that was known about ore dressing in America at that time.

In 1868, Richards was in the first graduating class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Upon graduation, Richards stayed at MIT as an instructor, advancing to the rank of professor in 1884, and served as the head of the department of Mining and Metallurgy until his retirement in 1914. He joined AIME in 1873 and became its president in 1886. AIME honored Richards’ memory in 1948 by establishing the Robert H. Richards Award as the premier award in the field of ore processing.

WILLIAM LAWRENCE SAUNDERS

William Lawrence Saunders was born in 1856 in Columbus, GA, the son of Episcopal minister William Trebell Saunders and Eliza Morton of Virginia. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. As a young man, Saunders invented the apparatus for underwater drilling and became wealthy as a result of his equipment being used in the Russian oil fields. He was the founding editor of Compressed Air magazine and published two textbooks on compressed air magazine. In 1904, he became president of the Ingersoll-Rand Co after the death of William Russell Grace. In 1905, the Ingersoll-Rand Co merged into Ingersoll Rand. He became the first president of the now combined Ingersoll Rand in 1906. As the twice-elected mayor of North Plainfield, NJ, he campaigned for a woman’s right to vote.

During World War I, Saunders was chair of the Naval Consulting Board, which collected inventions and ideas from engineers and inventors to be used in the war effort. He also served as the 1915 president of AIME and deputy chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. He died in 1931. William Lawrence Saunders Gold Medal was established in 1927 and recognizes achievement in mining other than coal.