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Historical Society Presents 2004 State History Awards

The Historical Society of Michigan handed out its annual Awards of Merit at the 130th State History Conference held in St. Joseph recently. The conference, sponsored annually by the Historical Society of Michigan, featured focused on a wide variety of Michigan history topics. The Awards presentation at a special reception and banquet was a highlight of the meeting.

The annual State History Awards-Awards of Merit are prized statewide and are the highest recognition presented by the state's official historical society and oldest cultural organization.

Awards were presented in eight categories recognizing the contributions of local historical societies, distinguished volunteer service, distinguished professional service, Michigan history publications, media, restoration and preservation, special programs and education.

Local Historical Societies

Pittsfield Township Historical Society earned an Award of Merit in the Local Historical Society category. While a rather young organization, the Society has developed an extensive website, created an archival collection, sponsored monthly programs and special events, and published a newsletter regarding the Society and local history. The society helped initiate archaeological digs of local sites and has begun to investigate creating a historical village to relocate special community buildings.

The Pittsfield Township Historical Society has developed an educational website that features the history of local schools, early plat maps, historic photos, treaty and document texts, early farm family histories, and oral history transcripts.

Distinguished Volunteer Service

Dorothy and Michael Martich of Battle Creek received an Award of Merit for Distinguished Volunteer Service. More than 25 years ago, the couple began an intense research project that involved interviewing members of Battle Creek's African American community, borrowing and copying their photos of Battle Creek people, and following leads to information in local newspapers. A collection including photos, anecdotes, programs and other memorabilia resulted. Today, the Martich collection has been cataloged and presented to the Willard Public Library so that future generations will have access to this thorough record of African Americans in Battle Creek.

Distinguished Professional Service

Gordon Olson was recognized for his more than 25 years of service to the Grand Rapids area and the protection, preservation and promotion of that area's cultural heritage. Among his accomplishments are an outreach program that includes presentations to an estimated 1,200 groups and conducting hundreds of oral history interviews. These efforts all focused on building an archival collection at the Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Center at the Grand Rapids Public Library. Thanks to his work, this center now holds more than 3,000 cubic feet of archival records, and more than 1.2 million images, ranking the Center as one of the five largest pictorial collections in the nation.

Olson has conducted an impressive amount of personal research and scholarship. He has authored more than 20 books, and many shorter articles. He founded and continues to edit the *Grand River Valley History*, served on the boards of local, regional and national groups, including terms as president of the Michigan Oral History Association and the Historical Society of Michigan.

Publications

In the publication category awards were given to the following books: *Mancelona in the 20th Century* by Edward F. and Kathryn S. Crippen, **On the Brink: The Great Lakes in the 21st Century** by Dave Dempsey, **The Paradox of Progress: Economic Change, Individual Enterprise and Political Culture in Michigan 1837-1878** by Martin Hershock, *Omena: A Place in Time* by Amanda Holmes, *Song of the Heron* by Charles Martinez and *The Indians of Hungry Hollow* by Bill Dunlop and Marcia Fountain-Blackledge

Edward Crippen helped found the Mancelona Area Historical Society in 1998. In the following year he secured a \$1,000 grant for the Society with the stipulation that the Society publish a book about the history of Mancelona. **Ed and Cassie Crippen** spearheaded an effort that raised another \$12,000 toward the project, and then found themselves appointed editor and assistant editor. The result is an outstanding hardbound volume that relates the history of this small community in Antrim County. The book is illustrated with more than 250 photographs and it records the biographies of 290 Mancelona families. The Society has sold more than 1,000 copies of *Mancelona in the 20th Century*, enabling it to take the first steps toward the creation of an historical museum.

On the Brink: The Great Lakes in the 21st Century by **Dave Dempsey** is a work that thoughtfully discusses the Great Lakes' unique and natural features and weaves in 150 years of human actions, short-sighted human follies and calamities. He reviews the history of public attitudes and laws and the environmental impacts on the Lakes from industrial contamination, commercial fishing, sea lampreys and zebra mussels. Dempsey argues that frequent neglectful treatment of the Lakes was due to two faulty assumptions regarding the Great Lakes Basin: that it is such a big system that humans could not do it great harm and that it is a resource that can't be bent to the will of humans. He concludes that despite recent improvements, however, the Great Lakes are still "on the brink" and citizens must continue to challenge government leaders to reform and protect our treasured lakes.

Martin Hershock's *The Paradox of Progress: Economic Change, Individual Enterprise and Political Culture in Michigan, 1837-1878* examines what the author calls a “sadly neglected contradiction that lay at the heart of the supremely influential ideology of the early Republican Party.” Hershock explores in detail the central factors underlying the early GOP and its ideological dilemma over how to promote America’s acceptance of Gilded Age capitalism and yet win popular elections. He also explains how Michigan and America were transformed from an anti-monopoly and democratic Jacksonian ideology to business-dominated politics that featured mostly unregulated business excesses during the mid-19th century. In telling this story, Hershock has helped readers better understand an early era in Michigan’s history as well as made a contribution to economic and political history fields.

Omena: A Place in Time, sponsored by the Omena Historical Society and written by **Amanda Holmes**, traces Omena’s rich history, beginning as an Indian Mission and evolving into family farms and Victorian summer resorts. Oral histories, family scrapbooks and written accounts were used in creating this record of an interesting lakeshore community. Already in its second printing, the book is highly readable and well illustrated. In addition to the major body of work by Holmes, small vignettes by other authors are interspersed throughout the work.

Charles Martinez’s *Song of the Heron* traces West Bloomfield Township from prehistory to about 1920, concentrating on a period when this part of Oakland County was rural. *Song of the Heron* is written in an engaging style and has a smooth and easy narrative, and features a variety of black and white color illustrations, including maps. This attractive volume is solidly researched, fully cited and includes explanatory background comments, as well as including appendices and an index.

The Indians of Hungry Hollow by **Bill Dunlop** and **Marcia Fountain-Blacklidge** was awarded an Award of Merit in the Children and Youth Publications category. In this very special volume, Dunlop, a respected Ottawa elder and storyteller, recounts the experiences of his youth as a native a small northern Michigan community called Hungry Hollow. Marcia Fountain-Blacklidge, a woman of Chippewa heritage, faithfully records and presents Bill’s oral history in a most readable and engaging style. *The Indians of Hungry Hollow* recounts moving stories of family life, struggle, survival, strong values, and caring in a Michigan, Native American community during the early decades of the 20th century.

Historically significant, *The Indians of Hungry Hollow* helps to elucidate the transition that American Indians made from post-tribal days to their present culture. Although awarded in the category of Books for Children and Youth, its simple, lyrical language will engage readers of all ages.

Media

The 2004 Award of Merit for Michigan Media went to **Jackie Chandonnet and John Pepin** of Munising for their film entitled, “The Enemy in the Midst.”

During the World War II era, hundreds of thousands of Axis prisoners were kept in camps in the United States and they were paid to work. Chandonnet and Pepin include

numerous photographs, interviews with people who worked with the German prisoners and they interviewed two German survivors to give viewers a permanent record of a little known chapter in World War II's history. The video breaks new ground and provides an in-depth look at a unique feature of this major conflict.

Restoration and Preservation

An Award of Merit for restoration and preservation was awarded to **Bruce and Marcia Butgereit** for their tireless work to restore and preserve the nearly 120 year-old Kent County Civil War monument in downtown Grand Rapids. When erected, the monument was one of the largest white bronze (zinc) commissions in the state. As the monument aged the exterior weathered to a bluish-gray which later was determined to be closer to the color of the Confederate Army rather than the Union Army. The exterior was painted blue, completely altering the notable monument's original appearance.

Over the course of three years, the Butgereits raised in excess of \$300,000 to restore the altered and deteriorated monument. In addition to bringing the monument back to its original historic appearance, the restoration involved the total disassembling of the monument and the painstaking restoration of all its components. Once reinstalled, even the fountains once again functioned. Thanks to their efforts to achieve a meticulous and authentic restoration, the monument has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

A second Award of Merit for restoration and preservation was awarded to the **Rochester Area History Society**. In 1945 the Blue Star Mothers of Rochester dedicated a World War II Memorial Honor Roll with 16 panels of carrara glass inscribed with the names of the 1,116 men and women from the area who died in the war. The memorial held a place of honor in the community until neglect and urban renewal resulted in the dismantling of the memorial in 1963. By the early 1990s, through the efforts of the V.F.W., the panels resurfaced with some severe damage and missing pieces.

In the fall of 1999, the Rochester-Avon History Society decided to restore the Honor Roll. The project involved fundraising, volunteer coordination, and dealing with the research and labor needed to implement a restoration project. To replace broken and missing carrara glass panels, the Society made contact with a company in Pennsylvania which had originally produced the panels. The memorial was rededicated in 2002.

Special and Education Programs

The Historical Society of Michigan presented its Educator Award of Merit to **Judy Vander Linden** of Dowagiac who has made history come alive for thousands of people. As the Education Specialist at the Museum of Southwestern Michigan College, Vander Linden created programs that have taught children and adults about topics as diverse as the history of photography, the Potawatomi culture of southwest Michigan, and the commemoration of historical events. She plans special programs for home-school students, and even hosts tea parties for children in the American Girls Club.

The second Educator Award of Merit was presented to **Audrey Ridolphi** of Iron River.

Since she retired, Ridolphi has become a strong force in the cause of history and museum work. She has been particularly impressive in her work to involve and integrate local schools and their students with an active local museum and its numerous buildings. She successfully recruited presenters to give hands-on demonstrations of local historical activities and skills. She writes grants, keeps the art show going, helps with finances, is involved in publishing books and numerous articles and organizes many other events in her community.

Special Programs

Anna Van Deventer was given an Award of Merit in the Special Programs category for her work in coordinating Zeeland's first historical homes tour commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Zeeland Historical Society. Van Deventer formed a coalition of long-time residents and newcomers, such as herself, to form the committee of 50 needed to organize this first time tour. Expanding on the homes tour concept, the event required months of planning. The tour included 15 structures, private residences and churches, artists, Civil War re-enactors, and vintage automobiles to provide additional points of interest. Van Deventer and her husband, Vic, have been described as having "boundless energy" that "is contagious, as is their love for Zeeland's central city neighborhoods."

The Historical Society of Michigan presents its State History Awards-Awards of Merit each year at the State History Conference. Next year the Society will meet in East Lansing, Sept. 23-25, 2005. Award of Merit nominations are due by Aug. 1, 2005.

For more information on the Awards of Merit or for a nomination form visit www.hsmichigan.org or call the Society at (800) 692-1828. The Historical Society of Michigan is the state's oldest cultural organization, founded in 1828 by Lewis Cass and Henry Schoolcraft. It is an independent non-profit dedicated to the education and advancement of Michigan's historical story.