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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2006 State History Awards Presented at State History Conference

The Historical Society of Michigan handed out its 2006 State History Awards September 22 at the 132nd State History Conference held in Bay City, Michigan. The State History Awards are the highest recognition presented by the state's official historical society and oldest cultural organization, established in 1828.

Seventeen awards were presented in a variety categories including Publications: University and Commercial Press Local Societies, Publications: Private Printing, Publications: Children and Youth, Communications, Media, Educational Programs, Restoration & Preservation, Distinguished Volunteer Service, Distinguished Professional Service, and Special Programs and Events.

Five books were recognized with State History Awards in the **Books: University and Commercial Press** category.

Dr. Randall Jelks received a State History Award to for his book "African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids" published by the University of Illinois Press. Dr. Jelks' work represents a continuing effort on the part of scholars to examine racial and ethnic groups using the American city as its backdrop. Despite being denied equal access and equal opportunity, the Black community of Grand Rapids has contributed to the social, economic, political and cultural, life of Michigan's second largest city. Dr. Jelks' work can also be used as a model for other Michigan historians to examine racial or ethnic groups in other American or Michigan cities.

Nora Faires and Nancy Hanflik were recognized with an award for their book "Jewish Life in the Industrial Promised Land, 1855-2006" published by Michigan State University Press. This volume examines the history of the Jewish community in Flint, Michigan. It discusses the evolution of a small ethnic and religious community while also chronicling the dramatic rise and decline of an industrial boomtown. Faires and Hanflik provide a unique window on the religious, social and communal structures created by Jews in this turbulent environment.

Paul Finkelman and Martin J. Hershock received a state award for their book "The History of Michigan Law" published by the Ohio University Press. This book represents the first serious survey of Michigan's rich legal past. It documents the legacy of the state's population and a history of people with different social, political and ethnic origins who transported ideas and beliefs from where they came to a new region and applied them there.

The Society recognized author Robert Beasecker, editor, for “I Hope to Do My Country Service” issued by Wayne State University Press. The published letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers has become a very commonplace event and rarely offer new or unusual views or insights into the war itself. Dr. John Bennett’s letters, chronicled in this book, are an exception and his correspondence shows an insightful, observant, and well-educated man with a wide range of interests and concerns.

Finally in the category of University and Commercial Press, the Historical Society of Michigan presented a State History Award to Timothy J. Todish and Todd E. Harburn for their Purple Mountain Press book “A Most Troublesome Situation: The British Military and the Pontiac Indian Uprising of 1763-1764.” Pontiac’s Rebellion is often dismissed rather briefly as a footnote to the French and Indian War. This book demonstrates the major role this uprising played and was a significant factor in the coming of the American Revolution. Many current volumes that cover these events tend to be written from the viewpoint of Western Pennsylvania or New York. While covering events in these regions carefully and well, this book brings you into the Midwest and specifically Michigan in great detail.

In the category of **Books: Private Printing**, the Historical Society of Michigan presented two State History Awards. The first award was presented to Robert W. Emmert of Bangor. Emmert is known around the community simply as “Bob,” the local historian and preservationist. His love of the history of the city of Bangor led him to collect photographs of the city and to research its history. One product of his years of effort is the book “Bangor, Michigan: a Pictorial History” which takes readers on a visual journey through the history of the town, while its narrative sets the city in a broader context of state and national events. Its publication fills a gap in Michigan history. The book impressed the awards committee with its quality of writing and the strength of its photographic images.

A second award in the category of private printing was presented to Evelyn Johnson, for “Barns of Old Mission Peninsula and Their Stories.” This is an intriguing combination of research and oral accounts covering an extremely interesting subject matter. Johnson, a retired teacher, has taken a topic that evolved and became her passion over time. This is demonstrated in her compilation of stories and photographs of the barns of Old Mission Peninsula.

In the category of **Books: Children and Youth**, Anna Egan Smucker was recognized with a State History Award for her book, “To Keep the South Manitou Light.” Smucker presents youthful readers with both the architectural qualities and realities of life at a Michigan lighthouse in the 19th century in a very readable and engaging fashion. She tells the tale of a young girl whose family kept the light for generations – and the challenges she faced both physically and emotionally – as she strove to maintain the family’s legacy as light keepers.

In addition to the development of believable characters and the allure of Michigan’s Leelanau Peninsula, Smucker’s book includes a series of drawings, maps, architectural plans and historic photographs which lend valuable context and authenticity to the era, place and subject its story represents. For the reader who wants to learn more, Smucker has also provided a convenient listing of sources for information about South Manitou Island. Her book is an interesting and well-written addition to the historical literature genre for young readers.

This year's award in the **Local Societies** category was given to the Belding Museum. The Belding Museum Board took a derelict building - and a largely forgotten bit of Michigan history - and revitalized them both. The museum rehabilitated a hundred-year-old dormitory building that housed single girls working in the community's silk mills and restored and breathed new life into the now very handsome colonial revival building. Interior displays detail silk industry scenes and includes a typical girls' dorm room and a silk products retail store. In addition they have set up displays of other local features such as a one-room schoolhouse and general store. It stands as a monument to what a small group of committed people can accomplish.

In the **Communications: Newsletters and Websites** category, The Elk Rapids Historical Society was given a State History Award for its newsletter, which goes far beyond the run-of-the-mill. Its summer 2006 newsletter included a special feature entitled "Farmers: The Last Geniuses," that the state society's awards committee deemed truly outstanding. Today, rural Antrim County is threatened with urban sprawl, condominiums and mega-mansions. The Elk Rapids newsletter has documented the county's rural heritage and helped build an appreciation for both what has been and what can be preserved.

In the category of **Media**, the Historical Society of Michigan presented a State History Award to Equity Studios for the film "From Moccasins to Main Street." The film is "a cross between a historical documentary, a drama and a travelogue." There is much to enjoy in this production, documenting the 300 mile trip spanning Detroit to Chicago. The film documents 300 years of history and chronicles the origins of US 12 as an Indian pathway known as the Sauk Trail. Settlers to the Territory of Michigan brought new villages along the road, with communities developing about every 15 miles. Mike Mort, owner of Equity Studios, notes that this has been a "work in progress for many years." A grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation moved the project forward.

In the category of **Educational Programs** the Society presented awarded to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' L.A.P.s program created by EDCO Publishing of Auburn Hills, Michigan. L.A.P.s stands for Learn from the past, Appreciate the present and Preserve our outdoor heritage and was created in partnership with the DNR as a supplemental curriculum for fourth grade students. L.A.P.s is a multi-media program that showcases state parks, natural resources, geography and history. Since its inception in 1999, the program's educational materials have been distributed to over 950,000 fourth graders and over 12,000 Michigan educators have attended free L.A.P.s workshops.

Two State History Awards were presented in the **Restoration and Preservation** category. The community of Bay City recognized the importance of the cinema in the lives of the people in their community by preserving the Bay City State Theatre. The Friends of the State Theatre, which received the first award in this category, spearheaded the charge to preserve this landmark by marshalling together human and financial resources. The State Theatre was built in 1908 and first renovated in 1930. Preservation efforts began at that time when it was renovated by renowned architect, C. Howard Crane, transforming it into a single screen movie palace, transforming the theatre into a Mayan temple with 9,500 square feet.

The most recent preservation effort features a multi-million dollar project that is in the final phase of the restoration process. The State Theatre will serve as a landmark for future generations to remind them “newer is not always better.”

A second restoration and preservation award was presented to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Many of our national parks have seen the deterioration or even the complete loss of historic material culture within their care. In an effort to minimize this kind of tragic loss, park staff at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore researched, nominated and placed on the National Register of Historic Places a concentration of intact farmsteads and other community structures known as the Port Oneida Rural Historic District. This District includes 19 historic farms, more than 300 buildings, houses and barns, a large variety of specialized vernacular outbuildings, and an equally rich variety of fields, orchards, fence rows, road, cemeteries and forested landscapes.

They also developed a special community partnership and collaboration that is today effectively preserving and restoring historic resources within this District. This pioneering “Partnership Program” includes an arrangement whereby select not for profit organizations can adopt historic properties for their use in exchange for providing renovation services and restoration dollars. This informal partnership is saving, preserving and restoring historic properties, and at the same time, engaging public participation and much needed monetary support in a variety of ways.

In the category of **Distinguished Volunteer Service** the Society awarded John Alquist the 2006 State History Award. Historic preservation in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula has for many years been blessed with the services of a dedicated corps of volunteers, and John Alquist ranks as a most outstanding contributor to this very important cause.

One of Alquist’s many contributions is the Quinnesec Centennial Book. He also worked closely with local historians and authors in the writing, editing and publishing of Dickinson County Michigan, from the Earliest Times Through the Twenties. Alquist provided the Diocese of Marquette with an historical account of the Catholic Church in Quinnesec. His work was so well received that he went on to compile similar histories of the Methodist and Lutheran Churches in Quinnesec.

In 2006 John received the Dickinson County Genealogical Lifetime Achievement Award. In related initiatives, he has shown leadership by spearheading efforts to create and maintain a local history room at the Dickinson County Library in Iron Mountain, and by assisting visitors in their research. He is even a popular lecturer in the Local History room that he so diligently worked to establish.

In the category of **Distinguished Professional Service** a State History Award was presented to Catherine A. Larson. In February, 2006, Catherine retired as the local history librarian of the Kalamazoo Public Library after a career of 32 years with Kalamazoo Public Library, twenty-five of those as the local history librarian. While the Local History Room had existed as a department within the library for years before Catherine assumed leadership, it was a small collection of materials and difficult to locate. Larson has grown the collection to include more than 5,000 books, 3,000 photographs, and a vast vertical file system. She has been involved in two moves

of the collection, including the last one which coincided with a major renovation and expansion of the main branch of the Kalamazoo Public Library.

A **Special Programs and Events** award was presented to the Matrix Theatre Company of Detroit. Historical knowledge is typically presented through the written word in books and articles, but in recent years other formats have become increasingly popular. The Matrix Theater Company has brought Michigan history to life on the stage through a series of dynamic projects.

The theater's production of "Homelands" looks at Detroit history through the experiences of two young people trying to find their place in the community. The character of George, a stationmaster from the Michigan Central Railroad depot, leads them on a journey through the city's past in a depot that served as the gateway to Michigan for untold thousands of immigrants.

The play "Boomtown" introduces audiences to five women from the 1920s, including a Hungarian widow, a widowed black woman, and a wealthy young socialite. Boomtown opens a window into early 20th century Detroit's racial, social and cultural conflicts and alliances. A third play, "Once Was Paradise," was written for Detroit's tercentennial. Probably the theater's most ambitious undertaking, a cast of several dozen actors present a history of the area that spans several hundred years and ranges from Detroit's prehistory to the Civil Rights Movement.

All of Matrix's productions are based on real events. The scripts are documented with oral histories and with primary and secondary research conducted by Matrix's executive director, Dr. Shaun Nethercott, and students at the University of Michigan.

This year's State History Awards were presented at the Historical Society of Michigan's Presidents Reception and State History Awards Banquet at its annual State History Conference. Nomination forms for 2007 Awards can be found on its website at www.hsmichigan.org.

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.

For more information visit www.hsmichigan.org, call toll-free (800) 692-1828 or write the Historical Society of Michigan, 1305 Abbott Rd. East Lansing, MI 48823.