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## **2008 State History Awards Presented at State History Conference**

The Historical Society of Michigan presented its 2008 State History Awards at the 134<sup>th</sup> annual State History Conference being held in Grand Rapids, Michigan September 26-28. The awards were presented at the annual awards banquet on Friday evening. The State History Awards are the highest recognition presented by the state's official historical society and oldest cultural organization, established in 1828.

Fifteen awards were presented this year in a variety categories including Publications: University and Commercial Press, Educator, Publications: Private Printing, Publications: Children and Youth, Communications, Educational Programs, Restoration & Preservation, Distinguished Volunteer Service, Institutions, Special Programs and Events and Lifetime Achievement.

This is the second year that the Historical Society has presented its Lifetime Achievement Award which was created in 2007 to honor the full body of work of men and women who have dedicated themselves to the preservation and promotion of Michigan's history in a wide variety of ways.

The 2008 **Lifetime Achievement Award** was presented to Michigan historian and archivist John Cumming.

Growing up in Massachusetts, John Cumming developed a love for books. His mother was an avid reader who passed the enthusiasm on to her child. John's father and grandfather had worked as type engravers until their craft was outmoded by photographic reproductions in newspapers.

These influences led John to pursue careers as a journalist and a journalism instructor. After working in the Detroit Public School system, he became director of the fledgling Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University in 1961. During the next two decades, Cumming carried out a wide variety of roles and responsibilities.

One of those assignments involved searching for historical items at auctions. Cumming traveled an estimated 28,000 miles annually chasing down leads. He discovered some gems along the way, including Douglas Houghton's daily survey records from 1838 to his death in 1845. The Houghton notebooks represented some of the most important field journals in our state's early history.

In addition to these endeavors Cumming was also an active writer of books and articles of

history as well as a leader in the preservation of the state's newspapers on microfilm. His work in the historical field professionally and personally has spanned decades and his receipt of the Lifetime Achievement award is a salute to all his endeavors through the years.

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

Brian Leigh Dunnigan received a State History Award for his book, *A Picturesque Situation: Mackinac Before Photography, 1615-1860* published by the Wayne State University Press. Dunnigan's collection of images made before photography contributes to a fascinating story set amid the area's unmatched natural beauty in a meaningful and engaging way. Dunnigan's solid scholarship, compelling stories, engaging prose, rich and colorful illustrations, and fine craftsmanship all make *A Picturesque Situation* a joy to read. The amazing collection of pre-photographic images includes maps, plans, drawings, engravings, and paintings which illuminate Mackinac's natural and built environments as well as its people.

The second book to receive a State History Award in the University and Commercial Press category is Grant Brown's *Ninety Years Crossing Lake Michigan: The History of the Ann Arbor Car Ferries* published by University of Michigan Press. Grant Brown, Jr., spent eight years in the Coast Guard Reserve and raced sailboats in northern Michigan, Boston and St. Louis. Little wonder that he turned his considerable research and writing talents to maritime history. His work has resulted in a fascinating study of an often-overlooked aspect of Michigan's maritime heritage: railroad ferries. Brown's work draws on ships' logs, government reports, newspaper articles and interviews with former crewmen to craft a detailed and well-written history of the car ferry business.

The third book to receive a State History Award in the University and Commercial Press category is David I. MacLeod's *Mapping in Michigan & the Great Lakes Region* published by Michigan State University Press. *Mapping in Michigan and the Great Lakes Region* uses twelve contributed essays and a wealth of reproduced maps to tell the story of cartography over four centuries. Readers will discover in this book a world of varied cultures and a nation's zeal for exploration.

In the category of **Books: Private Printing**, the Historical Society of Michigan presented three State History Awards. The first award was presented to the Ernest Ostuno for his book *Paths of Destruction: The Story of West Michigan's Worst Natural Disaster: The Tornadoes of April 3, 1956* published by the Grand Rapids Historical Society. Ostuno, a senior forecaster at the National Weather Service, gives expert analysis about the events surrounding the deadliest tornado in area history. He collected more than 100 narratives and 200 photographs from survivors. He also conducted careful background research to track the routes of the tornadoes and measure their magnitude. Ostuno offers a comprehensive look at what happened on a day when 18 people were killed and more than 300 injured.

A second award in the category of private printing was presented to Barbara Siepker for her book *Historic Cottages of Glen Lake* published by Leelenau Press. The book is a wonderful tribute to both the architecture and nostalgia for cottage life that is rapidly disappearing from the shores of Glen Lake. The beautiful black and white exterior and interior photographs by Dietrich Floeter capture the warmth and charm of the summer homes. Siepker provides historical background on each cottage including cottage lore and family memories. Over 75 past and present owners were interviewed in the process of researching the 51 cottages included in this book. *Historic*

*Cottages of Glen Lake* captures the essence of these wonderful cottages and invokes a reference for their charm and simplicity.

The third award in the category of private printing was presented to Dave and Dottie Seibold for their book *Grand Haven in the Path of Destiny a History of Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg and Adjoining Townships* published by the Tri-Cities Historical Museum. The book is an interpretive history of the area from 1900-1923. Early events in Grand Haven are interwoven with stories, tales, accounts, yarns and more all adding to the color and spirit of this communities local history. First-hand accounts from interviews conducted by the authors helps complete this rich and detailed story of the Grand Haven area.

*Icebound! The Adventures of Young George Sheldon and the SS Michigan* by Valerie van Heest published by In-Depth Editions was this year's winner in the category of **Publications: Books - Children and Youth**. An expertly crafted narrative and illustrations bring this story of a sunken Michigan-built passenger steamer and the discovery of its remains by a team of explorers to life. The book can be enjoyed by all generations as it tells the story of the book's hero George Sheldon. The story of personal dedication and responsibility speaks to the little documented life of crewmen on Great Lakes steamers and can be embraced by children today.

In the **Communications: Newsletters and Websites** category the website [www.arcadiami.com](http://www.arcadiami.com) was honored with the award in 2008. The Arcadia Historical Museum has taken the challenge to develop and maintain its own web site [www.arcadia.mi.com](http://www.arcadia.mi.com). This web site is special with such highlights as a virtual tour of each room in its museum, a postcard photographer's walk and a virtual tour of Arcadia as it appeared 100 years ago. The website also provides oral histories from local residents that provide a rich narrative to the town's history. Many visitors to the museum and to the town have commented that after seeing the web site, they made the special effort to drive to Arcadia.

Michael Artman was awarded the award in the category of **Educator**. An outstanding educator who leads and inspires his students to give their very best back to the community, Artman, a teacher at Port Huron Northern High School made history come alive for his students by engaging them in a number of creative activities, analyzing artifacts, building timelines, touring museums, researching Port Huron's architecture, conducting oral histories, and researching 19<sup>th</sup> century persons who are buried in Port Huron's Lakeside Cemetery

In the category of **Educational Programs** the Society presented the State History Award to the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan "Settlers to Citizens" tour. The tour goes beyond textbooks and readings and it endeavors to bring the people and events from the past alive for those students on the bus tour. The tour shows how Jewish immigrants to Michigan, in the process of becoming Americans, worked hard for their families, the Jewish people and their communities. The "Settlers to Citizens" tour emphasizes values and character over dry facts and dates. It focuses on courage, faith, justice, optimism and patriotism. The tour is based on the concept that pride in one's heritage is a stepping stone that guides young people to become contributing citizens to a wider community.

The State History Award in the category of **Institutions** was awarded to the Grand Rapids Public Library History and Special Collections Department. What was once a small room of the main library floor now houses more than 4,000 linear feet of historical documents and images. The department's trusted staff maintains one of the great collections of historic materials in the Midwest. Some of the department's most significant collections document the birth and growth

of the American furniture industry as well as original records of settlement in Michigan and the Old Northwest and primary descriptions of Native American life in the nineteenth century.

The 2008 State History Award in the **Restoration/Preservation** category was presented to the Keewenaw County Historical Society for their work in preserving and restoring the Central Mine. Located just north of Calumet, Michigan the copper mine and village was restored by the society and its volunteers. The Central Mine opened in 1854 and at one time was home to 1,200 residents. Today the Keweenaw Historical Society uses the restored properties as a Visitor's Center, House Museum and Milliner/Seamstress Shop and Dwelling. Visitor's to the site can see restored exteriors of residences and view interpretive exhibits about Central. The Central Mine restoration provides a legacy to the hardships of isolation and dangers of hard rock mining in Michigan.

In the category of **Distinguished Volunteer Service** the Society awarded Betty Beeby the 2008 State History Award. Beeby has made enormous contributions to Michigan history. Her illustrations include thirty book covers for Eerdmans and classics like *Whistle Up the Bay* and *Potawatomi Indian Summer*. Visitors to the Fort Michilimackinac Orientation Center will recall her 11' x 50' mural of the Mackinac Bridge and Straits of Mackinac. She played an instrumental role in saving the historic Wilkinson Homestead in Eastport from the wrecking ball and turning it into a historic site. Beeby has also saved written and oral documentation of life in northern Michigan. Her recover of a collection of letters from her family barn in Eastport that are now preserved in the Regional Archives at Western Michigan University became the basis of her book *Breath Escaping Envelopes*, which tells of the hardships faced by several women living through Michigan winters on Grand Traverse Bay from 1870 to 1910. In 1999, Betty headed an effort to preserve a collection of over one thousand glass plate negatives produced by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Mancelona photographer, Emil Johnson. Beeby's hard work will provide a lasting legacy to much of Michigan's past.

Finally, a **Special Programs and Events** State History Award was presented to Jan Cushman for her work on the Allegan Country Trail project. The trail is a self-driving 122 mile tour of Allegan County that spotlights 28 historically significant sites which took almost ten years to complete. This special project includes the erection of interpretive markers along the route, a map, a 38 page guide booklet with color photos and a two CD set of audio narration to use while driving the route. The Allegan County Tourist Council, under the leadership of Ms. Jan Cushman, coordinated the project.

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 held in Grand Rapids. Nomination forms for 2009 Awards can be found on its website at [www.hsmichigan.org](http://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](http://www.hsmichigan.org), call toll toll-free (800) 692-1828 or write the Historical Society of Michigan, 1305 Abbot Rd. East Lansing, MI 48823.