



For more information contact:
The Historical Society of Michigan
1305 Abbot Rd. East Lansing, Michigan 48823
Website: www.hsmichigan.org E-mail: hsm@hsmichigan.org
Phone: (517) 324-1828 Fax: (517) 324-4370

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2009 State History Awards Presented on Mackinac Island

MACKINAC ISLAND MI: The Historical Society of Michigan presented its 2009 State History Awards at the 135th annual Meeting and State History Conference being held on Mackinac Island, Michigan October 2-4. 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.

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

This is the third 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 2009 **Lifetime Achievement Award** was presented to distinguished Michigan historian Dr. Philip P. Mason. Mason has enjoyed a long and productive career as a writer, editor, university professor, popular speaker, oral historian, mentor and organizer of historical conferences. He is also one of the most respected archivists in America. A superb collector, Mason helped create the finest labor archives in the world. His vision, energy and skill were instrumental in establishing the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs. Its archives have grown to become the official depository for the inactive records of nine international labor unions and include the files of several thousand labor leaders, reformers and prominent community officials. This major research center draws hundreds of scholars, writers and film producers annually.

From 1953 to 1958, Mason was Michigan's state archivist. In 1958, Dr. Mason began at Wayne State University. During his tenure there, he served as editor or co-editor of Wayne State's award-winning Great Lakes Books Series. In 1992, Mason became editor of the Henry R. Schoolcraft series at Michigan State University Press and helped make the works of Michigan's great explorer and ethnologist available to additional generations of researchers.

Mason was the driving force for a half century behind "Michigan in Perspective," the annual conference on local history. Following his retirement from the conference in 2008, the Historical Society of Michigan has provided conference administration, building on Dr. Mason's

exceptional work on this very successful annual gathering. Attendees reflect a wide range of interests, from historians to genealogists, archivists, academicians, educators, and preservationists.

Along the way, Dr. Mason has authored or co-authored eight books and assisted and inspired hundreds of young scholars to carve out careers in local history. His support and encouragement proved crucial. Those who carry on this important work have been touched by Mason's dedication and the love of his calling. 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 many endeavors through the years.

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

James M. McClurken received a State History Award for his book, *Our People, Our Journey: The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians*, published by Michigan State University Press. The book is a beautifully and thoughtfully done work that tells the long and often tortured story of a people's search for their identity and place in an often indifferent world. It is done with compassion and sympathy but without the attempts to stir maudlin emotionalism. It is a heart warming story of successes, failures, and internal issues. But mostly, it is a story of perseverance.

The second book to receive a State History Award in the University and Commercial Press category is Jeff Alexander's *Pandora's Locks: The Opening of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway*. Alexander is an award-winning author and former environmental journalist. He covered Great Lakes issues for the past 20 years for several Michigan newspapers and currently works in media relations for the National Wildlife Federation. *Pandora's Locks* tells the frightening story of zebra mussels and other invasive species that have infiltrated the lakes system by way of ocean vessels. Special interests, indifference, political pressures, confusing regulations, delaying tactics and even misguided environmentalist concerns have blocked efforts to stem the flow of the invasion.

The third book to receive a State History Award in the University and Commercial Press category is Donald Faber's *The Toledo War: The First Michigan-Ohio Rivalry*. Faber's work is the first complete history of this crucial conflict and furnishes readers with an outstanding study of this inter-state conflict. The book is thoroughly researched in primary source documents located in the state archives of Michigan and Ohio, the Clements Library, the Burton Collection of the Detroit Public Library, the Monroe County Historical Museum and the Lucas County Public Library. Published by the University of Michigan Press, *The Toledo War* fills a critical gap in Michigan historiography with its engagingly written and well-documented narrative.

The fourth book to receive a State History Award in the University and Commercial Press category is Anthony Yanik's, *Maxwell Motor and the Making of the Chrysler Corporation*, published by Wayne State University Press. The work charts the history of this innovative automaker from the company origins as the Maxwell-Briscoe Motor Company in 1903 to the deal that transferred all of Maxwell's assets to form the new Chrysler Corporation in 1925. Unknown to many is the fact that Maxwell numbered among America's leading automobile manufacturers of the early 20th century and introduced many innovative features.

In the category of **Books: Private Printing**, the Historical Society of Michigan presented a State History Award to William Lafferty and Valerie van Heest for their recent book, *Buckets and Belts: Evolution of the Great Lakes Self Unloader*. Published by In-Depth Editions, the publishing partner of Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates, the book was supported by a grant from the Michigan Humanities Council and a supplemental grant from the Association for Great Lakes Maritime Heritage. *Buckets and Belts* is a well researched account of relatively undocumented maritime history. The book brings the development of the self-unloader in a broad context of Michigan's economic history and more narrowly the limestone quarrying history.

In the **Communications: Newsletters and Websites** category the quarterly newsletter *Ypsilanti Gleanings*, from the Ypsilanti Historical Society, was honored with the award in 2009. The newsletter was first published in 1973 and features historical articles along with reminiscences of the people and places in Ypsilanti and the surrounding communities. The newsletter features articles and photos documenting the history of the area as well as regular columns and local advertisers. Past issues of the newsletter have been digitized and can now be searched online at the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti public libraries.

In the **Media** category Ruben Rodriquez was awarded a State History Award for his video documentary, *The Murals of Royal Oak* that tells the story of a grass-roots effort to save three priceless Depression-era artworks from oblivion. The documentary follows the story of the campaign by community members to locate, restore and reinstall the three 22 foot high murals created by the Works Progress Administration in 1934. Ruben Rodriguez of VideoWorks Production Services produced, photographed, edited and directed the documentary. It was shot over the course of four years, and used interviews and extensive supporting footage. The result highlights the importance of art, history, and the value of a community coming together in a popular endeavor.

In the category of **Educational Programs** the Society presented the State History Award to Leland Public School for their program, *Leelanau Remembers*. Leland Public School paired with the Leelanau Historical Museum for the project which required student pairs (a 10th grader and a fourth grader) to systematically collect, record, and archive the personal testimony of an older Leland community resident. The goal was to make these oral histories more accessible to the public as a rich source of information. The students involved in *Leelanau Remembers* found that while history books could teach them about major events, talking with the people who actually lived through those events offered a unique human perspective. The project was presented to the public on May 20, 2009 in the Performing Arts Center at Leland Public School. Hosted by the students, the presentation included a 45-minute video and a large visual timeline exhibit.

The 2008 State History Award in the **Restoration/Preservation** category was presented to the Dexter Area Historical Society and Museum for their work preserving Gordon Hall and its view shed. Gordon Hall, built in the 1840s by Samuel W. Dexter, is one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the state of Michigan. The Dexter Area Historical Society raised \$1.5 million dollars to acquire the land and building in 2006 and began restoring it to its original glory. This wonderful historical building is open to the public for functions and tours during special occasions.

In the category of **Distinguished Volunteer Service** the Society presented two awards.

The first was awarded to Norma Ward. Growing up in the shadow of the 22,000-square-foot

station Durand Union Station, Ward's love of the building and railroading became a lifelong devotion. Ward has been a potent force in documenting state and local railroad history, while spending much of her life rehabilitating, protecting and promoting the depot that still captures the splendor of the Victorian era. Her dedicated service helped save one of Michigan's finest historic landmarks. Ward also set the wheels in motion to secure a location for Durand's first railroad history museum. Today, the massive train station is home to the Michigan Railroad History Museum, the Margaret Zdunic Railroad Archives and the Henry Earle Riggs Railroad Library. The station is also a regular stop on Amtrak's Blue Water line that provides daily rail passenger service between Port Huron and Chicago.

The second award in the category of Distinguished Volunteer Service was given to Carl Bajema. Bajema, a biology professor at Grand Valley State University with a penchant for local history research. For more than two decades Carl Bajema has spent time at the microfilm reader/printer scrolling through old newspapers in the Grand Rapids Public Library. During his research, Bajema has donated thousands of clippings from various Grand Rapids newspapers as well as other Michigan publications including the Detroit News, Marquette Mining Journal, the Grand Haven Tribune and many more. The Carl Bajema Newspaper Clipping Collection is used by scholars, students, independent researchers, genealogists and library staff. More than a century of struggle and achievement are covered in 5,000 clippings from the African-American collection and approximately 7,000 articles in the Women's history collection. Historian Paul Lee described Bajema's articles as "a major resource on African American history and culture" available for public use. "There can't be 10 collections in the United States as important as this" according to Lee.

Finally, a **Special Programs and Events** State History Award was presented to The Heritage Museum and Cultural Center in St. Joseph, Michigan, for their multi-faceted program entitled *Working Waterfronts: Planning and Preserving the Maritime Traditions of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor*. The program includes a museum exhibit; a second complementary exhibit focusing on three shipwrecks off the southwest Michigan coast; a documentary video entitled *The Rise of the Self-Unloader*; a 300-page book, *Buckets and Belts: Evolution of the Great Lakes Self-Unloader*; a curriculum guide for educators; a student lending kit; a series of public programs and events; a *Working Waterfronts* website; walking tours; a series of fourteen full-color heritage trail interpretive signs; and plans for the preservation of St. Joseph's historic 1906-1907 north pier lights. The exhibit, publications and programs educate and engage the public in the preservation issues that face southwest Michigan only surviving working waterfront.

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 on Mackinac Island. Nomination forms for 2010 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 toll-free (800) 692-1828 or write the Historical Society of Michigan, 1305 Abbot Rd. East Lansing, MI 48823.