For Immediate Release

Announcing the Winners of the 2019 State History Awards

LANSING, Mich.—The Historical Society of Michigan announces its 2019 State History Awards, which will be presented during its annual Michigan History Conference in Ludington, Michigan, Sept. 27-29, 2019. The Society presents the State History Awards every year to individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the appreciation, collection, preservation and/or promotion of state and local history. The awards are the highest recognition presented by the Historical Society of Michigan, the state’s official historical society and oldest cultural organization.

The 16 winners are: (Detailed descriptions of each recipient are listed at the end of this news release.)

- **Lifetime Achievement Award**—Geneva Kebler Wiskemann of Lansing
- **Distinguished Volunteer Service**—Donald H. Sanborn of Portage
- **Books: University & Commercial Press**—
  - “Guardians of Detroit: Architectural Sculpture in the Motor City” by Jeff Morrison (Wayne State University Press)
  - “John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age” by Brian C. Wilson (Wayne State University Press)
  - “Once Upon a Time at the Opera House: Drama at Three Historic Michigan Theaters, 1882-1928” by James Berton Harris (Michigan State University Press)
- **Books: Private Printing**—
“Cheboygan Twin Lakes: Community in the Woods” by Thomas R. Knox (Thomas R. Knox)
“Hope College at 150: Anchored in Faith, Educating for Leadership and Service in a Global Society” by Jacob E. Nyenhuis et al (Van Raalte Press)

- Books: Children & Youth—
  “Sport: Ship Dog of the Great Lakes” written by Pamela Cameron and illustrated by Renée Graef (Wisconsin Historical Society Press)

- Communications: Printed Periodicals—“The Dearborn Historian” published by the Dearborn Historical Commission

- Education: Educational Programs—Jackson College Heritage Center for the center’s ongoing programs

- Education: Educator—Darrin Silvester of Canton

- Media—David B. Schock of Grand Haven for the documentary “A.J. Muste: Radical for Peace/Finding True North”

- Restoration/Preservation—The Michigan Theater Foundation for the renovation and restoration of the State Theatre in Ann Arbor

- Special Programs/Events—Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation for its “History, Homes + Heritage Tour”

- Best Article in Michigan History Magazine—“Keep ’Em Fighting: Chris-Craft’s Contribution to WWII” by Geoffrey D. Reynolds

The Michigan History Conference explores significant people, places and events in Michigan’s past through a diverse offering of keynote speakers, breakout sessions, workshops and tours. Each year, the conference moves to a different location to feature the local history of that area and to address notable statewide historical matters. **Registration closes Sept. 20, 2019.** Registration details and full session descriptions are available in the conference brochure.

The lead sponsor of this year’s Michigan History Conference is The Meijer Foundation. The conference is also sponsored by the Mason County Historical Society, West Shore Community College, Lake Michigan Carferry, Jamesport Brewing, Ludington Area CVB, Ludington Beverage, Ludington Daily News, MetalWorks, Pennies from Heaven Foundation, Synergy Media, Tom & Shirley Rasmussen, Watson Ludington, Western Land Services Inc. and West Shore Bank, along with the Dave and Chrissie Hall Fund of the Community Foundation, Great Lakes Castings, Harbor Front Financial Group, Hegg’s Gallery of Fine Furniture, House of Flavors, Ludington Public Schools and Riemer Eye Center.
The Historical Society of Michigan also hosts the Upper Peninsula History Conference, which focuses on the history of the Upper Peninsula, and Michigan in Perspective: The Local History Conference, which concentrates on southeast Michigan and statewide history.

The Historical Society of Michigan is the state’s oldest cultural organization, founded in 1828 by territorial governor Lewis Cass and explorer Henry Schoolcraft. A nongovernmental nonprofit, the Society focuses on publications, conferences, education, awards and recognition programming, and support for local history organizations to preserve and promote Michigan’s rich history.

The Historical Society of Michigan will recognize Geneva Kebler Wiskemann of Lansing with the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award. Wiskemann joined the ranks of Michigan historians in 1954 and has since played an instrumental role in crafting the present and future of our state’s past. The historian started out at the Library of Michigan in 1946; eight years later, she moved to the State Archives of Michigan, where she served until 1973. She co-founded several institutions, undertook the restoration of statues and monuments, and helped establish historical markers. In addition to all those endeavors, Wiskemann found time to write about history, and she published several works promoting Michigan’s heritage.

The 2019 State History Award for Distinguished Volunteer Service will be given to Donald H. Sanborn of Portage for his decades of service to promoting and preserving the history of the state. Sanborn has spent his life dedicated to volunteer service. He helped found the Schoolcraft Historical Society and played a key role in restoring the building known today as the Underground Railroad House. In recent years, Sanborn has become a popular volunteer guide at the Air Zoo Aerospace & Science Museum in Kalamazoo. He has contributed almost 10,000 hours as a docent at the Air Zoo; served on several committees; and written dozens of articles for the museum’s newsletter.

A State History Award in the category of Books: University & Commercial Press will go to Jeff Morrison of Oxford for “Guardians of Detroit: Architectural Sculpture in the Motor City,” published by Wayne State University Press. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Detroit experienced a massive building boom in which architectural sculptures of gargoyles, griffins, grotesques and other figures were popular. Those stone figures were often placed high on buildings and went unnoticed by passersby. In his book, author and photographer Jeff Morrison utilizes four maps and 770 photographs to bring Detroit’s sculptures down to earth, where readers can appreciate them.

A State History Award in the category of Books: University & Commercial Press will be given to Brian C. Wilson of Kalamazoo for “John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age,” published by Wayne State University Press. While many Michiganders remember Fetzer as a pioneering television and radio figure and longtime owner of the Detroit Tigers, Wilson’s book explores a lesser-known aspect of
Fetzer’s life: his metaphysical religious beliefs. Fetzer’s wealth, which came from multiple television and radio enterprises, allowed him to create the Fetzer Institute—a foundation that he hoped would lead to a global spiritual transformation.

The Historical Society of Michigan will present a State History Award in the category of Books: University and Commercial Press to James Berton Harris for “Once Upon a Time at the Opera House: Drama at Three Historic Michigan Theaters, 1882-1928.” Published by Michigan State University Press, the richly illustrated book explores how opera houses were centerpieces of community cultural life around the late 1800s and early 1900s. Author James Berton Harris of Ann Arbor focuses on three Michigan opera houses—in Coldwater, Calumet and Manistee—that have survived to the present day. The book also takes readers through the golden age of opera houses with historical facts, anecdotes, urban legends and tall tales.

A State History Award in the category of Books: Private Printing will go to Thomas R. Knox for his self-published book, “Cheboygan Twin Lakes: Community in the Woods.” Knox began writing about Cheboygan County after retiring from teaching history at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. His nuanced book takes readers through the geographic history of the Great Lakes region to set Cheboygan in historical context, discussing the Native-American and French-colonial history of the area. There are the customary highlights of settlers and businessmen, but the author gauges their impact on Twin Lakes’ development instead of attempting to paint them as heroes or villains.

“Edward Beebe’s Historic Leelanau Photographs: Leland, Suttons Bay, and North Manitou Island, 1909-1915” by Jack Hobey, which is published by Leelanau Press, will receive a State History Award in the category of Books: Private Printing. Edward Beebe started out as a studio photographer in the early 20th century but soon devoted more and more of his time traveling by railroad and wagon to capture images of remote communities in northern Michigan. In addition to showcasing the best of Beebe’s work—300 photographs of farms, logging operations, railroads, shipping ports, resorts and street scenes—author Jack Hobey of Glen Arbor has included a well-researched and engaging narrative about the places and times captured in the photographer’s images.

A State History Award in the category of Books: Private Printing will be presented to “Hope College at 150: Anchored in Faith, Educating for Leadership and Service in a Global Society,” published by Van Raalte Press. In the two-volume compilation, Jacob E. Nyenhuis and other contributors take a thematic approach to Hope College’s history, with each chapter focused on a different topic, including the school’s academic work, financial stewardship, athletics and commitment to diversity. Of particular note is an extensive section about the college’s architectural history, which features a thorough account of each building and an overview of the various architectural styles during different eras of campus development.

“Sport: Ship Dog of the Great Lakes” will receive a State History Award in the category of
Books: Children & Youth, published by Wisconsin Historical Society Press. Written by Pamela Cameron and illustrated by Renée Graef, the engaging children’s book tells the real-life story of the dog Sport, a Newfoundland-retriever mix. In the early 20th century, the crew of the Great Lakes lighthouse tender Hyacinth spots a puppy treading water in the Milwaukee River. Once rescued, Sport becomes the ship’s newest shipmate, a beloved mascot and a great asset to the crew. In addition to telling Sport’s story, the book includes educational details about lighthouse and marine procedures, ship terminology, and life on the Inland Seas.

The Historical Society of Michigan will present the 2019 State History Award for Communications: Printed Periodicals to the Dearborn Historical Commission for its quarterly journal, “The Dearborn Historian.” In 2011, “The Dearborn Historian” decided to highlight challenging topics of local history, offering readers a compelling series of articles on subjects traditionally left untouched, such as Dearborn’s rapidly growing Arab community and longtime mayor Orville Hubbard’s advocacy of racial segregation. Worldwide attention fixed on Dearborn this year when the current mayor prohibited distribution of an edition of the publication highlighting Henry Ford’s anti-Semitism. The commission has continued publication of the journal, but its future remains undetermined.

The Historical Society of Michigan will present a State History Award in the category of Education: Educational Programs to the Jackson College Heritage Center for its ongoing programs. The Jackson College Heritage Center helps college students and Jackson County residents connect with the past through research and storytelling. The center’s important role in the county began in 2007 with its Veterans History Project, which involved 1,200 hours of work and resulted in 22 oral histories and a film. Many projects have followed that initial program, including revitalizing the Sparks Museum and an oral history project exploring Jackson County during the Great Depression.

A State History Award in the category of Education: Educator will be presented to Darrin Silvester in recognition of his outstanding work in history education. Darrin Silvester has spent his career as a teacher in Plymouth-Canton Community Schools. During that time, he has introduced project-based learning experiences in local and community history. Over the years, he and more than 1,000 students transformed the Shearer Cemetery from an abandoned plot to a beautiful site with recovered gravestones, conducted an oral history project that contains the memories of school alumni, and produced a video project telling students’ stories.

David B. Schock of Grand Haven will receive a State History Award in the category of Media for his documentary, “A.J. Muste: Radical for Peace/Finding True North.” Abraham Johannes Muste was one of America’s most influential peace activists of the 20th century. A Michigan resident from the west side of the state, Muste dedicated his life to activism. He became a labor organizer and led the Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York, where he worked with W.E.B. DuBois to aid African-American
students. Schock’s documentary is the first of a series planned to highlight Muste’s work. It traces Muste’s life through the 1930s and includes archival images and interviews with biographers and the people who knew and worked with him.

A State History Award in the category of Restoration/Preservation will go to the Michigan Theater Foundation for its work in preserving and restoring the iconic State Theatre in Ann Arbor. The State Theatre opened in 1942. Audiences loved the building’s pleated brick façade; the brilliant marquee; and its 1,900-seat auditorium. As times changed, the State Theatre struggled to compete. It was remodeled, and in 2013, its owners slated it for conversion into an office building. At that point, the Michigan Theater Foundation stepped in. A $6.5 million capital campaign rescued, renovated and restored the theater, which reopened on December 8, 2017.

The Historical Society will present a State History Award in the category of Special Programs/Events to the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation for its “History, Homes + Heritage Tour.” Historic house tours offer a popular way to educate the public about the importance of architectural preservation. In 1977, the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation launched its first historic homes tour. Since then the tour has opened the doors to nearly 300 historic gems in the city. In 2019, the event was renamed the “History, Homes + Heritage Tour” to better showcase other historic buildings, such as stores, schools, churches and factories.

The 2019 State History Award for the Best Article in Michigan History Magazine will be presented to Geoffrey D. Reynolds of Holland for his article titled “Keep ’Em Fighting: Chris-Craft’s Contribution to WWII.” The article appeared in Michigan History’s July/August 2019 issue and explored the role that boat builder Chris-Craft played as part of America’s Arsenal of Democracy during World War II. Before the war, Chris-Craft factories were famous for their high-quality wooden pleasure boats. After Pearl Harbor, those factories turned out thousands of military watercraft, some of which were the first Allied landing craft to touch the sands of Normandy on D-Day.

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