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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 3, 2005

### Historical Society Presents 2005 State History Awards

The Historical Society of Michigan handed out its annual State History Awards at the 131<sup>st</sup> State History Conference held in East Lansing recently. The conference focused on a wide variety of Michigan history topics. The Awards presentation at a special reception and banquet was one of the highlights of the meeting.

The annual State History Awards 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 educators, educational programs, distinguished volunteer service, distinguished professional service, Michigan history publications, media, restoration and preservation, and special programs.

#### Educator

Dr. Thomas Gwaltney earned a State History Award in the Educator category. Dr. Gwaltney joined the faculty of Eastern Michigan University in 1964, and has taught thousands of undergraduate and graduate students.

During the 1980s, he played a key role in having EMU acquire the Geddes Town Hall School from rural Washtenaw County and move it to the university campus. He helped with restoring the building, equipping it with artifacts, and creating programming for it. All of his students have been able to experience the this living history site on a first-hand basis.

Dr. Geddes also edited the book, *Down the Myrtle Path*, about the Town Hall School, and contributed many of the photographs used in it. Dr. Geddes is a charter member and officer of the Michigan One-Room School Association. He has written articles and made presentations at national conferences about country schools and their contributions to American society, and as a Michigan Humanities Professional for the Michigan Humanities Council has assisted local historical societies and school districts to preserve their own educational resources

#### Educational Programs

The MotorCities National Heritage Area received a State History Award for their Steven P. Yokich KIDZ Program. The MotorCities National Heritage Area was designated by Congress in 1998 to promote, preserve and protect the rich automotive heritage found within its 10,000 square mile section of southeastern and central Michigan.

The Stephen P. Yokich Program consists of several key components, all serving the purpose of educating students about Michigan's rich automotive and labor history and heritage. Motorcities KIDZ focuses on students categorized by age groups using the MEAP Content Standards and Benchmarks. Each category includes interactive assignments and readings,

providing teachers with lesson plans and other resources. Some of the activities include intergeneration learning, contests, volunteering, research and workforce development.

To date, the program has reached 100,000 Michigan students, encompassing 200 schools and including more than 7000 teachers. Students gain a better understanding of Michigan's automotive and labor history and heritage, which translates into pride of community.

#### Distinguished Volunteer Service

Nancy Moyer McCain of Mount Clemens was awarded a State History Award in the Distinguished Volunteer Service award category for decades of dedication to the preservation of Macomb County. Nancy was instrumental in forming the Macomb County Historical Society and making the public aware of the unique local history and the importance of saving it. Without her help, much of Macomb County's history would have been lost, most notably the first mayoral home, which now serves as a local history museum. Her efforts paid off and the Crocker House Museum grows stronger each year.

Geneva Wiskemann also received a State History Award for Distinguished Volunteer Service. Wiskemann began working for the Library of Michigan's circulation department in 1946. She served as Personal Aid to the State Librarian after a 1951 fire caused severe damage to the library, and afterward took charge of the book service area in the Capitol Building. In 1955, Dr. Phil Mason brought Wiskemann into the State Archives of Michigan as a research assistant. She spent a good deal of her own time and money tracking down and purchasing historical photographs of Michigan, which she then donated to the State Archives.

Over many years, Wiskemann has volunteered her time to many historical organizations. She co-founded the Clinton County Historical Society, the REO Transportation Museum, and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, to name but three. Her publications include *Reproduction of the Topographical Map of the Counties of Ingham and Livingston, Michigan*, and *Oral History: A Guide for the Media Specialist*.

#### Distinguished Professional Service

In the Distinguished Profession Service category, Edna Stephens received the State History Award for her contributions to the encouragement of learning Michigan history. She has taken over two decades of classroom teaching experience and observations and carried this further into a means of creating and sharing so that others, adults and children, may benefit.

After her years of teaching experience, she founded EDCO Publishing, Inc. Her goal was to create quality educational material for Michigan teachers and in this she has certainly more than just succeeded. She has not only created material for teachers but also has done programs for the Michigan D.N.R., Ford Motor Company, and the Walter P. Chrysler Museum.

#### Publications

In the publication category awards were given to the following books: *Rendezvous at the Straits; Fur Trade and Military Activities at Fort De Baude and Fort Michilimackinac, 1669-1781* by Timothy Kent, *Our Michigan Adventure* by David B. McConnell, *A Tale of One Village* by Dr. Arle Schneider, *The Dodge Brothers: The Men, The Motor Cars, and the Legacy* by Dr. Charles Hyde, *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers during the Reuther Years, 1935-*

1970 by John Barnard, *Michigan Agricultural College: The Evolution of a Land-Grant Philosophy, 1855-1925* by Keith R. Widder, and *Soapy* by Thomas J. Noer.

In his two-volume publication, *Rendezvous at the Straits, Fur Trade and Military Activities at Fort de Baude and Fort Michilmackinac, 1669-1781*, Timothy Kent presents the story of the fur trade and military community at the Straits of Mackinac from the earliest years through the British period. The well researched volumes include a complementary 25 page reference list of secondary literature, printed primary sources and original documents including correspondence, orders, trade licenses and maps. Using a readable narrative style that includes extensive quotes from original documents, Kent chronicles the growth and development of the fur trade and military community at the Straits as well as the challenges and frustrations of administering the trade and military community.

David B. McConnell is a very active writer and publisher from Hillsdale who has done other books prior to *Our Michigan Adventure*, including *Discover Michigan* and *Forging the Peninsulas: Michigan Is Made*. Not only does he write and publish, but he also gives presentations and does classroom visits in Michigan history. *Our Michigan Adventure* is well written, beautifully presented, and will do much to make the teaching of Michigan history easier—and more enjoyable.

Dr. Arle Schneider's *A Tale of One Village* was designed as a fund-raising vehicle for the Vicksburg Historical Society's endowment fund. It consists of 469 pages and over 200 photographs—many of which had not been published before.

The book is a valuable reference tool for anyone interested in the Vicksburg area. It is accurate and well researched, expanding on previously written local histories. It has something to offer both casual and serious researchers. It includes many historical facts and anecdotes and is beautifully illustrated with photos and maps. Footnotes provide additional points of reference for those wanting to pursue this history.

*The Dodge Brothers: The Men, The Motor Cars, The Legacy* by Dr. Charles K. Hyde succeeds as a scholarly, eminently readable, and altogether fascinating study of two men who influenced the history of American manufacturing. Historians of automotive history need look no further than Hyde's work for quality research rich in detail. As one of the book's reviewers has noted, "He has written the definitive history of both the men and their firm."

Automobile historians are familiar with the story of the Dodge's supplying engines and transmissions to the Olds Motor Works, and nearly every part needed by the Ford Motor Company. They also know that the Dodges introduced their own automobile in 1914, and that both brothers died at relatively young ages in 1920. Less familiar are the stories of their civic contributions to Detroit, hiring of women and minorities, and their many charitable contributions. This book, however, is not a Dodge hagiography. It also discusses the Dodge's struggles with alcohol, their sometimes violent temper, and their privileged treatment by the legal system.

John Barnard's *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935-1970* provides the first history of the UAW for both general and academic audiences. The book covers the early organizing and struggles of the UAW. The second part of the book discusses the union during Walter P. Reuther's presidency. Barnard provides balanced interpretations grounded in evidence. He also places the activities and personalities within the context of the auto industry and national politics. This volume, 624 pages in length, is thorough

and engaging. Barnard integrates primary and secondary sources and has included voluminous photographs from Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit. There are more than 80 illustrations in total.

Keith R. Widder's *Michigan Agricultural College: The Evolution of a Land-Grant Philosophy, 1855-1925* chronicles the evolution of an institution that originated in the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century to teach practical farming techniques. Written in celebration of Michigan Agricultural College's sesquicentennial, Widder's volume interprets how, in the end, the school transformed itself into a grand experiment to meet the educational needs of a nation. Widder demonstrates how presidents, teachers, researchers and students worked to carve out an institution of grand vision that would become much more than an ag-school – and related contributions made to the world's scientific and intellectual development. It is a story that not only reflects the remarkable transformation of this institution – but also the development of practical higher education in America

Thomas J. Noer also received a State History Award for his publication, *Soapy*. Noer's work is the first comprehensive biography of this legendary figure. More than four decades in Michigan, the moniker "Soapy" was instantly recognizable to nearly every person in the state. G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams was one of the most controversial and colorful politicians in 20th century American history. His remarkable life has been captured by exhaustive research and in-depth analysis by Noer. In an age of bland politicians, guided by focus groups and media consultants, documenting the life of G. Mennen Williams is a refreshing reminder of a time when personality and issues dominated in America. The University of Michigan Press published *Soapy*.

Jim Cameron is an award-winning teacher in the Saline School system. He has been responsible for stimulating a large number of projects that have brought about enthusiastic student and adult participation.

For many years Jim has been a pillar in the Michigan Oral History Association and is past president of the group. His award this year is for a project that reflects his appreciation of recorded history and oral history, *Voices of the Valley*. This is a fascinating recounting of the over twenty-year history of a cooperative farm near Saline, Saline Valley Farms. This book not only tells a little known part of our social history but the proceeds are being used to further historical projects in the Saline area.

## Media

In the area of Communications: Newsletters & Websites, the Historical Society of Michigan presented a State History Award for the Chester Township History & Genealogy Website developed by Jo Kelly. The website focuses on the history of Chester Township in the northeast corner of Ottawa County. The website was developed in 2004 and contains information about early settlers, villages, schools, churches, businesses, and so much more. It is an outgrowth of a 40 year interest in the history of Chester Township which dates back to Ms. Kelly's high school days. HSM encourages others to look at the site and learn about the history of Chester Township. See site at <http://mysite.verizon.net/res6xy3i>

## Restoration and Preservation

The State History Award for Restoration and Preservation was presented to the Michigan Theater of Ann Arbor. Based on this strong community support, the scope and diversity of the film and live on-stage programs, the effectiveness of the theater's restoration and the beauty of the architecture, the theater's restoration effort deserved to be recognized. When it opened on January 5, 1928, the Michigan was hailed as "a shrine to arts...not built for today only, but constructed in the hopes that it might be a monument for years to come and a credit to the community even when the city is many times its present size."

Increasing levels of neglect in the 1960s and 1970s threatened the movie palace grandeur of architect Maurice Finkel's original design. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the restoration began. In subsequent decades, the Michigan Theater became the catalyst for Ann Arbor's downtown revitalization. With the injection of energy that the theater provided, excellent restaurants and retail stores opened nearby.

The theater remains a highly sustainable community project. Each year, 300,000 admissions are paid to Michigan Theater programs. A volunteer army of more than 300 individuals provides services that help the theater continue to thrive. The theater is an example of living history that is uniquely accessible by the community on a daily basis.

### Special Programs

The Special Program Award went to the Mosaic Youth Theater of Detroit for *Mosaic Does Motown*: and the related theatrical performance *Now That I Can Dance – Motown 1962*. *Now That I Can Dance* was based on interviews with pioneers of the Motown record industry administered by teen representatives of the Mosaic Youth Theater. The resulting play and performances chronicled the story of the Marvelettes, Motown's first successful girl group. The play, *Hitsville*, and an accompanying Study Guide were prepared in collaboration with the Motown Historical Museum and the University of Michigan Arts of Citizenship program. The play and associated materials presented, in a most meaningful and understandable way, how Motown records broke down certain racial barriers of the period through their crossover appeal to both black and white audiences and cultures. The play complemented this theme by engaging and offering its performances to young people of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds. It also provided the youth involved in its production with professional performance arts training, as well as a dynamic experience and appreciation for the techniques, power, and value of historical research and learning.

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