



The Society of American Historians

TO ENCOURAGE LITERARY DISTINCTION IN THE WRITING OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

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PRESS RELEASE

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS HONORS
LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH AND THREE OTHERS
FOR LITERARY DISTINCTION IN HISTORICAL WRITING

Four prizes honoring historical writing of exceptional literary merit were awarded by the Society of American Historians on May 20, 2013 at its annual dinner at The Century Association in New York City. Founded in 1939 by historian and journalist Allan Nevins, the Society encourages and promotes literary distinction in the writing and presentation of American history. Members--by invitation only--include scholars, journalists, documentarians, filmmakers, essayists, novelists, biographers, and poets.

The 6th annual **Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Award** for “distinguished writing in American history of enduring public significance,” given jointly with the Roosevelt Institute, was presented to **Laurel Thatcher Ulrich**.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 300th Anniversary University Professor at Harvard University, has devoted her career to the cause of designing and delivering remedies of great efficacy for the nation’s afflictions of amnesia. Her best known work, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on her Diary* (1990), offered an extraordinary performance in interweaving the life of an individual with the broader context of her society and times, and made a grand sweep through the prize committees of the profession, winning the Pulitzer Prize for History, the Bancroft Prize in American History, and many others. But every one of her books, including *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (1982); *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2001); and *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (2007), stands as a model—equally supplied with inspiration and practicality, and always marked by felicity and lucidity of prose—for the enterprise of historical writing. By any measure of skill, and vitality, and achievement known to the historical profession, Prof. Ulrich ranks at the top.

The 56th annual **Francis Parkman Prize** was given to **Fredrik Logevall of Cornell University** for *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (Random House). This extraordinary work of modern history combines powerful narrative thrust, deep scholarly authority, and quiet interpretive confidence to chart the development of Ho Chi Minh's liberation movement, the loss of the French empire, and the fateful decisions of the United States in the late 1950s to enter the conflict in Southeast Asia. Revealing how the American commitment in Vietnam originated in the tangled logic of French engagement there, Logevall also shows how the United States was never able to free itself from taking the same steps that had led France into an earlier, fatal quagmire. His exemplary research in French, Vietnamese, and American sources, both published and archival and in at least three languages, reveals multiple perspectives on the conflict between a single, small, divided, people and two of the richest and most powerful nations on earth.

The Parkman Prize, named for a 19th-century historian widely honored for his elegant prose style, is awarded annually to a nonfiction book that is distinguished by its literary merit and makes an important contribution to the history of what is now the United States.

The 11th biennial **James Fenimore Cooper Prize** was awarded to **Stephen Harrigan** for *Remember Ben Clayton* (Alfred A. Knopf). Harrigan has written a masterly novel that weaves stories of frontier Texas through the tragedies of World War I. Harrigan's spirited narrative of family, history, and memory carries readers from an artist's studio to a West Texas ranch and from the trenches of eastern France to the streets of early twentieth-century New York.

The Cooper Prize, named for the most famous American historical novelist of the nineteenth century, is awarded in odd-numbered years to a work of historical fiction that makes a significant contribution to historical understanding, authentically portrays the people and events of the historical past, and displays skills in narrative construction and prose style.

The 53rd annual **Allan Nevins Prize** was awarded to **William Thomas Okie**, a recent PhD graduate of the University of Georgia, for his dissertation “Everything is Peaches Down in Georgia!: Culture and Agriculture in the American South. In this remarkable work, Okie takes what appears to be an everyday object (even a cliché), “the Georgia peach,” and crafts a beautifully written, elegantly rendered tale that is full of surprises and of profound implications for our understanding of America's past. Ranging with deceptive ease across an impressive array of sources (popular songs and Peach Carnivals, business records and oral histories, horticultural society proceedings and USDA reports), he brings to light, and to life, a colorful, diverse, energetic, and sometimes eccentric cast of characters.

The Allan Nevins Prize, named for the historian and journalist who in 1939 founded the Society of American Historians to promote literary distinction in the writing of history and biography, is awarded annually for the best-written doctoral dissertation on an American subject. The winning dissertation will be published by one of the publisher members of the Society.

At the close of the dinner, **Patricia Nelson Limerick**, Faculty Director and Chair of the Board of the Center of the American West at the University of Colorado, was succeeded as president by **David Blight**, Class of 1954 Professor of American History, Yale University, who will serve for the year 2013-14.

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