



Former Joplin History Professor to Lead State Historical Society of Missouri

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBIA, MO, Nov. 5, 2019 – The State Historical Society of Missouri board of trustees has elected Virginia J. Laas of Joplin as president of the State Historical Society for a three-year term. The former Missouri Southern State University professor becomes the second woman to serve in the role of the Society's president. The first woman elected to the highest position in the organization's 121-year history was newspaper publisher Avis Tucker who served from 1992-1995.

Laas begins her presidency three months after the State Historical Society's new headquarters, the Center for Missouri Studies, opened to the public. The \$35 million building on the University of Missouri-Columbia campus was completed in August.

"I have watched this organization take giant leaps forward over the past 24 years," said Laas. "Our magnificent new building is an appropriate symbol for the expansion of our mission and extension of our outreach across the state."

Laas is an author and professor emerita who also serves on the board of the Post Memorial Art Library and the advisory board for the Sherwood/Rader Farm Civil War Memorial Park in Jasper County. Laas has been a trustee of the State Historical Society since 1995.

In addition to Laas, the board of trustees elected new officers to the board at its annual meeting Nov. 2, including Robert M. Clayton III, Hannibal; US Senator Roy Blunt, Springfield; Brent Schondelmeyer, Independence; Henry J. Waters, III, Columbia; Beatrice B. Litherland Smith, Columbia; Robert J. Mueller, Ste. Genevieve; and Edward W. Scavone, Columbia.

New to the board is Ann Covington of Columbia, who was the first woman to serve on the Missouri Supreme Court in 1989 and became the first woman to serve as chief justice of the state's highest court in 1993. She is a curator emerita of the University of Missouri.

At the board's annual meeting, the State Historical Society of Missouri's Distinguished Service Award was presented to journalist and historian Bob Priddy, who oversaw the planning and construction of the Society's new headquarters during his term as president of the Society.

The State Historical Society of Missouri is the premier research center for the study of Missouri state and local history. Founded in 1898, the Society collects, preserves, publishes, and makes available material related to all aspects and periods of Missouri history.

SHSMO also provides educational programs on the cultural heritage of the state through its research centers in Cape Girardeau, Columbia, Kansas City, Rolla, St. Louis, and Springfield.

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