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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Heaven, Hell or Hoboken: Exhibit, Lecture Series **Bring Hoboken's World War I Experience to Life**

Hoboken, N.J. – August 27, 2008 – Join the Hoboken Historical Museum on **Sunday, Sept. 7, from 2 – 5 p.m.** to inaugurate our latest exhibition, ***Heaven, Hell or Hoboken, a City Transformed by World War I***. Historian and Hoboken resident Dr. Christina Ziegler-McPherson, who specializes in Progressive Era immigration and social welfare policy, has meticulously researched the wrenching changes that Hoboken's designation as the main port of embarkation wrought on this heavily German-populated city.

The designation meant national fame for Hoboken – General John J. Pershing's promise to the troops that they'd be in "Heaven, Hell or Hoboken" by Christmas of 1917 became a national rallying cry for a swift end to the war, which actually dragged on for another year. But it also meant economic hardship for the city after the federal government seized Hoboken's piers and the German shipping lines, closed most of its bars and beer gardens, and displaced or interned hundreds of German nationals as "enemy aliens." At the time, German citizens and Americans of German descent made up about 25 percent of Hoboken's population, far outnumbering the next largest immigrant groups, Irish and Italians.

Between June 1917 and November 1918, some 1.5 – 2 million soldiers passed through Hoboken, but most were fed and housed by the U.S. military, while local businesses saw the local population decline and the city saw its revenues drop sharply. The exhibit will tell the story not only through research and talks by Ziegler-McPherson and other historians, but also through personal letters and artifacts of soldiers and residents of Hoboken.

Director Bob Foster and collections manager David Webster have assembled displays from the Museum’s collections and other sources, comprising uniforms, helmets, gas masks, rifles and other gear, as well as letters and photographs from Hoboken’s soldiers, 70 of whom lost their lives on the European battlefields or from disease. The Museum will even display Hoboken’s draft registration book, on loan from the City Clerk’s office. Also on view will be government-sponsored posters and advertisements by prominent artists and illustrators exhorting Americans to contribute to the war effort, through volunteering, war bonds, and general morale-boosting. Many posters are on loan from the Jersey City Free Public Library.

Education coordinator Sherrard Bostwick is developing programs for local school groups to experience the exhibition through activities such as imagining what soldiers might have taken with them to remind them of home.

Ziegler-McPherson will give a talk on **Sunday, Oct. 5 at 4 p.m. at the Museum.** (admission is \$5, free for Museum members), exploring the federal government’s struggle to build the infrastructure necessary to conduct the war, using a combination of persuasion, exhortation and coercion to drum up volunteers both to fight and to muster supplies and logistics for the effort. Most of the local draft boards, for example, were staffed by volunteers, as were the medical experts who examined the new recruits, she says.

The government hired so-called “dollar-a-year” men, professionals who donated their time and expertise to the war effort. The Red Cross, YMCA, and other social service organizations mobilized volunteers to conserve food and fuel, sell war bonds, and provide recreation, entertainment and spiritual services to the troops. Sometimes, volunteerism went too far, however, according to Ziegler-McPherson, as large networks of self-appointed vigilantes developed, such as the “American Protective League,” which numbered some 10,000 members nationally, who opened mail and spied on neighbors in the name of helping the government identify possible German operatives.

Then in November, historian Ann Hagedorn, author of 2007’s *Savage Peace, Hope and Fear in America, 1919*, will talk about the tensions generated throughout the nation by WWI and its aftermath. According to the author’s website, the book tells the story of the watershed year just after World War I, when the nation’s struggles eerily resemble ours today. *Savage Peace* is a striking portrait of American democracy under stress, at a time when Americans worried about terrorism and were deeply divided over the issues of domestic spying, free speech, immigration and U.S. intervention abroad.

Other speakers and dates are being arranged. Visit the Museum’s website, www.hobokenmuseum.org, for updates, or sign up for our e-mail announcements of events and activities.

About the Hoboken Historical Museum

Founded 1986, the Museum’s mission is to educate the public about Hoboken’s history, diverse culture, architecture and historic landmarks. In 2001, the Museum moved into one of the oldest buildings on the waterfront, in the former Bethlehem Steel shipyard, at 1301 Hudson St., Hoboken, where it maintains a series of rotating exhibits. The Museum is open six days a week, 2 – 9 pm on Tues. – Thurs., 1 – 5 pm on Fridays, and noon – 5 pm on weekends. It offers special exhibits, tours, events and lectures, as well as educational programs for adults and children on a weekly basis. An updated schedule of events and an online catalog of many items in its collections are available at www.hobokenmuseum.org. The Museum is a not-for-profit tax-exempt 501(c) entity.

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Note to editors: Photos are available; please call 201-683-6935.