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UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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May 5, 2006

**Contact:** UM President George Dennison, (406) 243-2311.

### **FORT BENTON RESIDENT TO RECEIVE UM HONORARY DOCTORATE**

#### **MISSOULA—**

Teacher, author and historian John “Jack” Lepley of **Fort Benton** will receive The University of Montana’s highest recognition -- an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters -- during Commencement ceremonies Saturday, May 13.

The University will present the degree to Lepley at the afternoon Commencement ceremony, which begins at 2 p.m. in the Adams Center.

From 1960 to 1993, Lepley taught biology at Fort Benton High School and chaired the school’s Science Department. During his teaching career, he also taught summer courses at Purdue and Cornell universities and at the University of Oregon.

Lepley earned a Bachelor of Science degree at UM in 1950 and received a Master of Science degree from the University in 1962.

He is a Fort Benton native who devotes himself to preserving the history of the area. Through his outstanding efforts, energy and foresight, much of the original fort at Fort Benton has been rebuilt.

Lepley also was instrumental in the establishment of the Montana Agricultural Center and the Museum of the Northern Great Plains at Fort Benton. Throughout the 1960s and

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1970s, he spearheaded improvements and additions to the museum and aided in the development of the historic steamboat levee, which is still in place today.

Lepley is an expert on the history and historic sites of the Wild and Scenic Missouri. Through research and exploration, he located many of the actual Lewis and Clark campsites, as well as those of Maximillian and Bodner. He has helped groups such as the National Geographic Society, several prominent Western art museums and dozens of artists and authors find their way to historic points of interest on the Missouri River.

In the 1990s, Lepley began writing regional history books that filled gaps in the historic picture of early Montana, "Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton" is a pictorial history mostly from Lepley's own personal photography collection.

His book "Packets to Paradise" is an in-depth study of all the steamboats on the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, and "Blackfoot Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri" explains the sequence and importance of the fur trade in a very hostile part of early Montana and Alberta, Canada.

Harry Fritz, chair of UM's Department of History, nominated Lepley for the honorary doctorate.

"Jack Lepley has been a sterling example of the quality individual that The University of Montana has produced in the past and today," Fritz said. "His contributions to his community and the state of Montana, both civic and historic, are most noteworthy."

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