

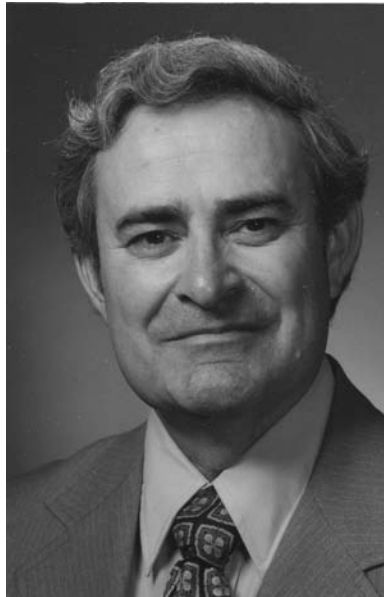
GERALD G. (GERRY) EGGERT (1926–2012)

In 1983 Gerry Eggert hired me to teach at Penn State's Berks Campus. He was very friendly and very honest: "We know you can publish," he said, or words to that effect, "but we'll fire you if you're not a good teacher." Fair enough, I said. About twenty-five years later, when I spoke about Benjamin Franklin to a group of retired faculty, Gerry was the host: after my talk, he repeated to the group what he had told me when I was hired, and said that as they could see, I could still teach.

Gerry was a mentor to both me and other faculty, including Gary Cross, whom he hired when he was head of the Penn State History Department (1980–85). He had a great sense of humor coupled with a humane, practical approach to administration. He knew the art of the possible, never got our hopes up too high, but also never let us down when he could support our scholarship or help our careers. He was an outstanding scholar of American business and labor history, the author of five major books: *Railway Labor Disputes: The Beginning of Federal Strike Policy* (University of Michigan Press, 1967); *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974); *Steel*

Masters and Labor Reform, 1886–1923 (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981); *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); and *Marking Iron on the Bald Eagle: Roland Curtin's Ironworks and Workers' Community* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). He also wrote a pamphlet on *The Iron Industry in Pennsylvania* that has always been a bestseller for the Pennsylvania Historical Association and numerous scholarly articles. One, "The Black Experience in Nineteenth Century Harrisburg," won the Philip S. Klein Prize awarded by the Pennsylvania Historical Association for the best article published in *Pennsylvania History* in 1991–92.

Much of Gerry's energies centered on Pennsylvania history. His scholarship focused on the typical rather than the sensational, and as a result we have a far more balanced understanding of Pennsylvania and American business and labor history. The United States has had many medium-sized industrial cities that were not the scene of spectacular strikes, growth, or decline, like Harrisburg; rural iron works like Curtin Furnace; and skilled workers who participated in reform movements outside of labor issues like the



Gerald G. (Gerry) Eggert, 1926–2012.
Photo courtesy of the Penn State Archives.

Pennsylvania steel masters. But they have generally attracted less attention than the large cities, factories, and violent strikes that have sometimes been presented as the whole story.

Gerry's contribution to history went far beyond teaching and scholarship. He served on the board of directors (1986–2001) and was president of the board (1994–95) of the Roland Curtin Furnace in Bald Eagle. That visitors may still enjoy this historic site that illustrates in microcosm how the iron industry that spurred Pennsylvania's economic growth operated we owe largely to him. And the Pennsylvania Historical Association owes much to Gerry's great efforts on its behalf. He was the business secretary from 1985 to 1991 and president in 1995–96. His last public speaking appearance, I believe, was at the 75th annual meeting of the Association in State College (2008), where he joined a distinguished past presidents panel that discussed the history of the journal and association. Having retired from the History Department in 1991, in 1994 he received the Liberal Arts College Alumni Society Emeritus Distinction Award for the faculty member in the college who had accomplished the most while retired.

Gerald Eggert was born in rural Michigan, and always told everyone how glad he was to have escaped the life of a farmer. He earned his BA at Western Michigan University in 1949 and his PhD in 1960 at the University of Michigan. He served in the United States Army Quartermaster Corps from 1946 to 1948 and taught public school in Battle Creek, Michigan, before embarking on his scholarly career. He taught at the University of Maryland and Bowling Green State University before coming to Penn State. He is survived by his wife of fifty-nine years, Jean, a brother and a sister, three children, and six grandchildren.

WILLIAM PENCAK