Council Fires on the Upper Ohio, a Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795. By Randolph C. Downes. (Pitts-
burgh, The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1940. x, 367 p. Head-
pieces, map.)

Here is a good example of the constructive historian’s method of presenting the history of a region. Each of the thirteen chapters carries the narrative onward with all the interest of an adventure story, from the Indians of Al-
legania to the final conflict for the Ohio River boundary, 1789–95, and the chapter headings between describe with almost photographic detail the peaks of Iroquois, French, British, and American supremacy.

In his endeavor to present a correct picture without retouching, Dr. Downes has performed a real service and one that will bring added respect for the historical researches of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, sponsored jointly by the Buhl Foundation, the Historical Society of Western Pennsyl-
vania, and the University of Pittsburgh.

Unlike many works of history, characteristic of an uncritical period, this work impartially studies the struggle between opposing groups, seeking to discover motives, to present all the facts, and to examine the viewpoint of each party involved. Indeed the author states that “although this work confines it-
self to the facts of the conflict, the reader should be able to gain, from the presentation of the two conflicting sets of values involved, a better basis from which to judge their relative merits.”

In the very first chapter we are given “The Indian Point of View,” which details an attitude toward occupancy of the land and the use of its resources not usually given consideration in works of history. Says the author, “the story here narrated is one of a conflict between two civilizations, that of the Indians and that of the white men; or, more definitively, between two methods of living, one based on hunting and fishing, the other on farming and commerce. This conflict, grim and unceasing, was born of the utter incompatibility of two differ-
ent sets of folkways, and it was nourished by the profound conviction of each race that its ways were superior to those of the other. In the white man this conviction was aggressive and militant and justified the displacement or extermination of the Indian. In the Indian it was defensive and heroic and gave strength, in the face of despair and overwhelming force, for resistance against the hated conqueror.”
In the chapters that ensue the attitudes here mentioned are followed with great detail. In fact one seldom sees a book of history so entertainingly written that follows as accurately and as understandingly such an intricate commingling of events. The author with consummate skill has described and analyzed episodes which change with such startling rapidity that they might be described as kaleidoscopic.

The story of the struggle to take over the area of the upper Allegheny is broken down in the chapters under descriptive headings. “The Indian Point of View,” for example, is followed by a description of “The Indians of Allegania, 1720–1745,” and in rapid sequence the other chapters describe: “A Decade of Iroquois Supremacy, 1745–1754”; “The Breakdown of French Ascendancy, 1755–1758”; “Indian Revolt against British Economy, 1758–1765”; “A Decade of British Muddling, 1765–1774”; “Dunmore’s War”; “The Indians and the Outbreak of Revolution on the Frontier”; “The Fort McIntosh-Fort Laurens Indian Frontier, 1778–1779”; “George Rogers Clark”; “Indian War, 1779–1782”; “The Revival of American Aggression, 1782–1789”; and in the final chapter, “The War for the Ohio River Boundary, 1789–1795.”

With such an outline thus placed before the reader the author carries his narrative through a study of the conflict of the two races to the treaty of Greenville, which settled forever the high hopes of Little Turtle and the other leaders for the confederation of Indian tribes in that region.

The author tells us that “out of the disparity between the two civilizations grew long decades of conflict on the North American continent. This disparity may be illustrated by the respective attitudes of the whites and the Indians in regard to the hunting grounds of the Shawnee, which were transferred by the Iroquois to the English at the treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768.”

The author presages here the proneness of the Iroquois to assume ownership of land and then cede it when it served their purposes, as mentioned later in the case of the Delawares. In describing the economic conflict and the disparity of viewpoint, he mentions the expeditions of such hunters as Daniel Boone who slew without any thought of conservation and “threatened to wipe out the game of the forest — the very essence of the domain over which the Indians considered themselves rulers.” He further quotes the parting advice given to Boone when he was liberated from captivity. The Indians, endeavoring patiently to explain their viewpoint even when their territory had been greatly injured, said: “Now, brothers, go home and stay there. Don’t come here any more, for this is the Indians’ hunting ground, and all the animals,
skeins and furs are ours; and if you are so foolish as to venture here again, you may be sure the wasps and yellow-jackets will sting you severely."

The author probing still more deeply tells us that the reason for the inevitable defeat of the Indians came from their limited knowledge of the arts, theirs being simple and arising from a state of nature. "They were no match," he observes, "for those whose art were capable of harnessing nature to more effective uses in sustaining large units of population."

The book reveals the author's grounding in economics. He shows briefly by statement and likewise by implication that the Indians received the products of civilization, such as guns and utensils, which were far beyond their capacity to manufacture, and that finding such things efficient and much better than their own they gradually came to depend almost entirely upon the French and English traders. This is an important consideration and has much bearing upon the struggle for the frontier. The principle behind it was penetrated by Pontiac who wanted his people to return to the use of their native manufacture and to economic independence.

As the narrative proceeds we are given a glimpse of the background following the defeat of Crawford in the battle of Blue Licks and of the defeats of Generals Harmar and St. Clair; after which "peace was but an interlude." The region affected was the hills and forests of western Pennsylvania in 1700 where "the waters of the Allegheny and the Monongahela flowed untroubled to their union, where no trader's fort, nor even an Indian wigwam, marred the prospect. No man had learned to call this land a homeland."

After this we are given a detailed picture of how various groups endeavored to make this "debatable land" a place of habitation. The struggle of the Shawnee and the Delaware for dominion is given and the difficulty of the peaceful settlement is indicated by reference to the statute of 1722, entitled "An Act to prohibit the selling of Rum and other Strong Liquors to the Indians, and to prevent the Abuses that may happen thereby."

The author sagely remarks that where there were no enforcing officers, this law had no effect, even though the Indians complained grievously and begged for some regulation. Later, "since the government of Pennsylvania was unable to control the rum trade to the western parts, the Shawnee finally hit upon the device of associating among themselves under the guidance of the licensed and approved traders in order to be rid of the evil." It was this difficulty of distribution of liquor to dissolute Indians that caused the colony much trouble, and so concerned was Governor Thomas that admitting the lack of control in the past he confesses, "I cannot but be apprehensive that the Indian Trade as
it is now carry'd on will involve us in some fatal Quarrel with the Indians. Our Traders in Defiance of the Law carry Spirituous Liquors amongst them, and take the Advantage of their inordinate Appetite for it to cheat them of their Skins and their Wampum, which is their Money, and often to debauch their Wives into the Bargain."

In the end the Shawnee began a migration which the author states meant a drastic change in the population set-up of western Pennsylvania. The Iroquois now came in and became "the dominant Indians in western Pennsylvania during the decade from 1745 to 1754."

The English in endeavoring to penetrate had as their ministering agent George Croghan, and we are told that it was through his action that Pennsylvania began taking more interest in Indian affairs; an interest which had "failed miserably in the French crisis of 1753-54." The author remarks: "It is significant of the new state of things in the West that the western Indians were more disposed for warfare in behalf of the English than were the New York Iroquois"; and thus grew the decade of Iroquois supremacy.

The struggle between France and England continued and even though Braddock's defeat led many of the Ohio Valley Indians to believe that the French were destined to extend their power, both the Indians and the French were doomed to disappointment, for New France at last was forced to capitulate and the English flag was raised in Kuskuski in November, 1758. But if the Iroquois and other Indians were enthusiastic in their feeling that English rule was more to be preferred, they soon began a revolt, and the story of this revolt and the muddling that brought about Dunmore's War is told in three revealing chapters. The position of the settlers on the frontier and the problems which they faced in the upper Ohio Valley are vividly described, for if the Indians were disgruntled the white frontiersmen were little better satisfied with the British policy. Those who espoused the American cause were likewise fearful lest the Indians unite with the British and fling themselves against the settler who had leanings toward independence. Racial fear and economic rivalry bred distrust.

The campaigns on the frontier are carefully examined, but there may be some who will criticize the account of Brodhead's campaign (page 252). In general, however, one who has examined the original documents would say that the story of the Indian war is well written and adequate. In the end both the British and the Indians were defeated and "peace returned to America in 1782, but a strange peace it was for the Indians." The Americans were relieved of restraint and "racial hatred on the frontier, fed by the memory of the bloodshed of years of war, could now find a freer vent." The settlers now
found opportunity for vengeance and demands for reparations in the form of land cessions, and as a result, “confronted by this menace from the American frontier, the Indians naturally turned to their British allies for protection.”

The red man, knowing not where to turn and not trusting any party overmuch, appealed to the British, who, he thought, might unite with him in resisting further encroachment. He felt, too, that the English might assist him in developing a confederacy of the western tribes as a means of resisting the Americans. The influence of Sir William Johnson and of Joseph Brant in developing the confederation is recognized by the author, who states that the Indians were unable to get a full guarantee from the British, who, though they lent support to the confederation in the end, “let the tribesmen fight the matter out alone at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794.”

Brant in describing the series of events which had placed the Indians in a serious predicament, and having in mind the terms of the Jay treaty, exclaimed: “This is the second time the poor Indians have been left in the lurch”; and the author of this present work asks, “but was it to be the last?”

The book ends with the story of the treaty of Greenville in 1795 and of it the author says; “The treaty of Greenville marked the end of the contest for the control of the upper Ohio. Never again were the Indians to menace the white man’s supremacy in that region. Never again was the cry of ‘Indian!’ to spread terror and panic among the frontier inhabitants. The land that the Indians had vainly fought to retain became the basis for a new civilization.”

A seven-page bibliography of source and secondary materials adds greatly to the usefulness of the book.

_Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences_  
Arthur C. Parker


John Alfred Brashear, one of Pittsburgh’s great men, typified the best of Pittsburgh life. It is fitting, therefore, that the story of his life should be written by two Pittsburgh authors, Harriet A. Gaul and Ruby Eiseman. Their work is a credit to them.

With woman’s lighter touch, they have shown forth Brashear’s human qualities so that we recall vividly the attractive personality we knew when he walked our streets. In so doing, they have woven, by giving us his movements and the details of his daily life, a tapestry of Pittsburgh from 1860 to 1920.