the line, to Silver Lake near Rochester, to Cascade Park near Buffalo, to the Kinzua Bridge region around Bradford, and most popular of all, the annual Hawley’s Peapicker Special, sponsored by the Hawley family’s pea canneries for their employees and apparently everyone else in Wyoming County, New York.

The Baltimore and Ohio had long dreamed of a rail route running directly west out of New York, bypassing both Pittsburgh and Buffalo, roughly paralleling what is now Interstate 80. It already controlled lines from New York as far west as Williamsport. It bought the BR&P and the neighboring Buffalo and Susquehanna which together gave it a route from its own mainline at Butler to within 40 miles of Williamsport. But the Depression made construction of that 40 miles impossible (the Interstate Commerce Commission had never thought it was necessary anyway), and floods took out most of the Buffalo and Susquehanna lines in the mid-1930s. The “Rainbow Route,” as it was called, never materialized. But that was how the little BR&P wound up as part of the B&O.

Paul Piertak’s book is a small but important contribution to the history of local commerce, industry, and folkways in that region of small cities between Pittsburgh and Rochester.

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“On the reefs of roast beef and apple pie socialist Utopias of every sort are sent to their doom” (p. 9). Werner Sombart said it, and generations of historians have echoed its sentiment: American workers have been conservative and lacking in class consciousness because they were, as a group, relatively well-off. Samuel Gompers did not dispute the fact of relative affluence. He offered his constituents more pie, pure and simple.

Peter Shergold’s Working-Class Life (a pathetically nondescript title) is the first rigorous test of the apple pie thesis. Comparing the working-class “standard” of living in Pittsburgh and Birmingham,
England, in the first fifteen years of the century, Shergold finds Americans better paid but also saddled with higher living costs. Food, purchased from hundreds of small Pittsburgh grocers, was more expensive than in Birmingham, where workers benefited from a well-developed system of cooperatives. Pittsburgh rents were some two-and-a-half times as high, and housing inferior in quality. Birmingham families were much more likely than their Pittsburgh counterparts to augment family income with the labor of women and juveniles, further reducing the basic wage differential. Although Pittsburgh workers were more fashionably dressed, their clothes were less durable.

Still, differences remained. Almost all Pittsburgh workers earned more money, measured by what they could purchase with it, than did those in Birmingham. But Shergold has more to offer than a cost-of-living correction to the apple pie thesis. By breaking down wages by skill level and occupation, he provides convincing evidence that only skilled workers enjoyed a standard of living that was meaningfully higher than that of their English equivalents. The Iron City's unskilled workers — mostly blacks and new immigrants — lived no better than did similar workers in Britain. "The dominant characteristic of the American labor force," Shergold concludes, "was not comparative income superiority, but the much greater inequality of wage distribution" (p. 255). [And Pittsburgh was, similarly, a city of extremes, a place, as one traveler put it, "to toil in and get rich," and "a place to toil in and go under" (p. 51).]

No brief review can capture the precision with which this argument is presented. Chapters on food prices, retailing, rents, and food, clothing and furniture, are grounded in meticulous research and careful reasoning. Although much of the book is taken up with statistics and graphs and explanations for them, Shergold draws enough material from traditional historical sources to enliven the text and give us a feeling for the tone and substance of working-class life.

If Shergold is to be faulted, it is for how he explains the data and what he does with them. Having documented the existence of an "aristocracy of labor," Shergold finds its source not, say, in the needs of employers for quiescent workers, but in certain characteristics of the labor force, especially the high concentration of new immigrants, "uprooted," shut out of promotional opportunities by their lack of familiarity with English, more willing than native-born workers to accept a lower standard of living. Because these new immigrants wanted to save rather than to consume, they "often chose to lead a far worse life" than their counterparts in Birmingham (p. 226). But
how many third-hand bakers had savings accounts? And how many engineering laborers can be said to have chosen to "go under"?

Shergold's discovery of a two-tiered working class leads him to reject the idea of "embourgeoisement" as a statistical illusion based on a nonexistent "average" and to substitute for it an interpretation of American workers based on the "wide material and ethnic divisions that separated them" (p. 228). These divisions, Shergold argues, made it difficult for workers to understand their "common exploitation" (p. 229). What this means is that the working-class aristocracy, well-fed and enjoying real wages some fifty percent above the British standard, did not feel exploited — and that is little more than a restatement of the idea of embourgeoisement. Though only labor's elite had apple pie, they had it à la mode.

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Lives of Their Own reflects the long-term research interests of three young but accomplished social historians who have individually honed their research skills in earlier studies of diverse urban places such as Warren, Pennsylvania, Steelton, Pennsylvania, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In this work the authors have collaborated to produce a comparative study of the racial and ethnic experiences of Polish, Italian, and black families who made their homes in twentieth-century Pittsburgh.

Bodnar, Simon, and Weber point out that most urban-based ethnic and racial studies have essentially posed mutually exclusive hypotheses: that is, the urban environment destroyed premigration culture, leaving the immigrant at the mercy of an acculturation process; or, and conversely, the migrants' racial and ethnic culture persisted in the urban environment and racial and ethnic families utilized their historic traditions as part of their strategy for survival. In what the authors call an "interactional framework," they attempt — and I believe succeed — to integrate the two perspectives. By viewing "over