

**S** NOW was flying horizontal to the ground in its Pittsburgh way one day last winter when I realized I had four manuscripts in hand that consisted either of historical letters or of people writing about their lives. We the staff — Susan Lewis, Curt Miner and I — puzzled about whether to place them evenly over several issues. We decided against that linear approach in favor of this, an issue purely of correspondence and memoirs.

It has been said that the best way to advance appreciation for a goal or belief is to show people how to do it themselves. That's the point of this presentation of what historians call "primary documents." Personal accounts can be so good because even if the analysis is anecdotal and not so conclusive, lesser processing packs a special flavor of insight. Sometimes, even the author of such work senses his or her passion or poignancy. Then you have something really special.

I think you will see that here. Henry Koerner, whose painting is on the cover, has written but not published his autobiography. He and I worked together slicing out parts of his manuscript to make the fillet that begins on page 172.

Evelyn Pearson had written a full account of her life, mostly to please her family. I asked her to answer a long list of questions about her earliest recollections — about her father's commuting habits, her mother's home-tending and shopping habits, family servants, much more — because I thought social historians might value the work especially. Her parents were in many ways typical of the suburban pioneers who helped transform American cities socially and spatially early this century. She wove the answers into a stylish account that is extra valuable because of its low percentage of "hearsay."

The letters of Everett Johns about World War II Pittsburgh fill a major hole in the historical literature on the city. There are the subtly gripping Civil War letters edited by Peter Boag, himself a descendant of soldier-author Francis Elliott from Bedford County. Finally, see a Civil War surgeon unmasked as an imposter. (This one would have played big in check-out counter tabloids of the late nineteenth century.) Both it and the Johns letters come from the Historical Society's Archives.

All these articles taken together give the issue an impressive sweep of 130 years, with studies in three distinct, historically important, periods. Our usual book review section rounds out our seventy-second

year of publication, and our first of *Pittsburgh History*. We will publish personal recollections in future issues, but we hope you enjoy us going overboard just this once.

## C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

### Courthouse history defended

Dear Editor,

In reference to Franklin Toker's book review in *Pittsburgh History* (Fall 1989), *Majesty of the Law: The Court Houses of Allegheny County* is, in fact, an abridgement of James Van Trump's original manuscript, which would fill two large printed volumes, was much more detailed, and did in fact contain extensive notes. For those who are interested, the full manuscript is on file at the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. The abridgement (*Majesty of the Law*) was admittedly a compromise, ending as a work for architecture lovers rather than architectural historians and reduced in bulk to make it more readily affordable. Publication in full was cost-prohibitive and would have resulted in a book daunting to the general public. Obviously, much more can be done with the county buildings and their local and national historic and architectural contexts, and it may be that Jamie's full text would be a useful contribution to such an effort.

Walter Kidney  
Historian, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks

### Courthouse historian defends

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you as a result of a review of my book, *Majesty of the Law*, which I had published with the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation in 1988 in connection with the bicentennial of Allegheny County. In the early 1970s I had written the book — it was a half- or two-thirds longer than its published version. It had been done under a grant from the late Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and I felt that it was fairly complete as far as a description of the  
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