MAKING careful judgements about history is at the base of what institutions like the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania are all about. Decisions about what materials to collect, how to preserve fragile pieces of the past, and what stories ought to be selected for telling through a range of public venues - publications, exhibits, lectures, tours - can be agonizing given any institution’s limited resources.

Rather belatedly, twentieth century collecting has received a great deal of attention in the last decade. The push to document life in this century before the millenium closes involves new ways of looking at history and society. These concerns of history museums and archives are profoundly affected by trends in scholarship among academic historians. Certain decisions to add to our holdings and program offerings are guided by the need to fill gaps, gaps which have been identified by the work of historians or by curators who note with sadness the passive collecting which marked many history repositories in the past because of lack of funding, staff, and space.

The history of ethnic groups, certain kinds of work, social and political life, and leisure time have not been well represented in America’s museums and archives.

The last five years have been important ones for the Historical Society’s collecting. Pro-active staff have been working with the various academics associated with our board and committee structure and with other groups to take initiatives before much of Western Pennsylvania’s history is lost. Collecting efforts among the Jewish, Italian, Polish, African-American, and Slovak communities, and special interest in the areas of business, industry, and sports history have been launched to greatly increase our documentation of life in Western Pennsylvania.

A very exciting collection has been acquired which, because of the time period and type of family it represents, may be unique nationally. In September 1992, Miss Gertrude Kins donated to the Historical Society the entire contents of her family home in Lawrenceville, one of Pittsburgh’s many ethnic neighborhoods. Three hundred and fifty boxes of artifacts and archival materials were retrieved with an additional 500 artifacts which were too large to be boxed. Together, these materials represent the life of a typical Eastern European family from 1920-1940. It is very rare to find a working class family retaining such a complete collection of artifacts and documents.

Site History

The brick Greek Revival house was built around 1850 and purchased by two brothers in 1852, Parker and George Hines. They were butchers and, in addition to their families, they provided lodging to several boarders and apprentices. In 1920, the house was sold by the Hines family to Anthony and Frances Kins, Polish immigrants to Pittsburgh. The Kins physically blocked

![Image](image_url)

Anthony Kins with his daughter Audrey (now Audrey Brashear) in the family’s kitchen, 1952. Anthony and his wife Frances bought the house in 1920. The home will become an historic house museum run by the Historical Society.

John Herbst would like to extend his appreciation to Keith Cochran, a Lawrenceville resident, who brought the Kins House to the Society’s attention, and to Ray and Gertrude Kins for their cooperation in ensuring that an important part of history was preserved. Special thanks goes to the Museum Programs and Library and Archives staff and other volunteers who worked intensely for six days to retrieve the Kins collection.
Mary Konczal (center), mother of Frances Kins, at her coal mine company-built house in Mt. Pleasant, Pa., c. 1945. Frances (believed to be the woman on the left) owned the house in Lawrenceville that the Historical Society recently purchased. Gertrude Kins (right), daughter of Frances and Anthony Kins, and her brother, Ray, were instrumental to the Society’s purchase of the home.
off passage to the rear wing and rented it to various tenants over the years, some of whom were relatives and recent arrivals from Poland. There are four rooms on the first floor, five and a half rooms on the second, and one room on the third floor. There is a full basement and a small backyard.

**Kins Family Sketch**

Anthony Koziozinski immigrated to Pittsburgh from Warsaw, Poland before the First World War. Among Anthony's first jobs was as a waiter in the Duquesne Club, where several members who were attorneys offered to process the papers to anglicize the name to Kins. Mr. Kins spoke Polish and Russian but he and his wife, Frances, spoke English at home to their three children, Henry, Gertrude, and Ray. The family's move to Lawrenceville placed them in a neighborhood where Poles predominated and where the Kins children attended Polish language lessons at Holy Family School. Anthony worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and later in Lawrenceville for Pittsburgh Maleable Iron Company at 35th Street where he was a foundryman. Gertrude began work in 1935 for A & P; Ray joined A & P as a baker and Henry became a police officer. Gertrude became responsible for the house. When her father died in 1959, Gertrude stayed on and lived with her mother until her death in 1972. Very little was altered in the house from the furniture and style of the 1920s and 1930s.

**Kins Family Collection**

The materials in the Kins donation represent a wide range of Pittsburgh family life, especially ephemera, the kind of everyday items which get easily dispersed over time. Included in the gift is a c.1915 coal/wood kitchen cookstove; c.1930 parlor coal stove; upright piano; metal bedframes; Pittsburgh Police uniform; archival materials related to the Pittsburgh Police Department including training manuals and fraternal records; kitchen wares and equipment; approximately 100 family photographs including ones taken in Poland; textiles including 1920s-1930s children's clothes, curtains, and linens; five washing machines bought successively from 1920 to 1950; record and minute books from the Catholic War Veterans; various archival materials from St. Augustine Church, Schenley High School, Holy Family School, and other community organizations; religious statuary and items; framed decorative prints and photographs; dress form and c.1910 sewing machine; handmade sauerkraut tamper; grinding wheel and numerous tools; shoemaking forms and tools; and court records and correspondence relating to a lawsuit brought by neighbors in 1926 when the Kins closed the backyard privy used by residents on adjoining properties.

**Purchase of Property for House Museum**

In November 1992, the Historical Society purchased the house from Miss Kins. Over the next few years, the Society will create one of America's most unique house museums. Preliminary plans network the Kins house, a four minute car ride from the History Center, with the visitation to the new facility. Twenty thousand people are projected to experience the life of a typical ethnic family from 1920-1940.

The ephemera of life so abundant in the donated collection allows for a very accurate interior restoration, reflecting the real-life setting of the Kins family. Original wood finishes, door shutters, mantles, stoves, and a structure not at all altered since 1920 provides a special historic setting representing thousands of ordinary people who immigrated to this country and built the dynamic, fascinating region we know today. Stay tuned as the Kins house fills an important gap in historic house museums in the nation.

Henry Kins, son of Anthony and Frances, became a Pittsburgh police officer. He's pictured here (fourth from left, back row) in July, 1953. Henry, a lieutenant, passed away in 1968.