OR those interested in religious affairs in a region as church-laden as Western Pennsylvania, the avenues opened to historical inquiry by this mammoth guide cannot be surpassed.

Covering the years 1800 to 1990, there are some 18,500 citations, half of them commented on by Hartley, who is director of a prominent church history research center at the Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary.

The topic index alone contains some 60 references to Pittsburgh — a large number in comparison to entries for other cities — and there are dozens more located via the author index. The reasons for the bibliography: to compile a resource guide to writings about organized religion’s impact on a wide range of urban issues from social services to immigration to business ethics. Much of the material cited appeared in obscure periodicals, so the entries make available thinking and writing that otherwise might forever have remained hidden.

The 25-page introduction provides an excellent broad overview of the church in urban development.

— Paul Roberts

FINALLY, here is a guide that describes the estimated 350,000 photographs among the holdings in the Division of Archives and Manuscripts of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Most materials there are documents, and are arranged into record groups. Photographs are found in these groups, as well as manuscript groups. This book describes only the record and manuscript groups that contain photographs.

Each record or manuscript group entry begins with a brief but helpful introduction, describing the source, arrangement, etc. of that group. Next, if appropriate, are the various subheadings — usually which bureau or office the material came from. Within these groups are often smaller series — for example, a negative, slide, or records file. Whichever level it’s broken down to, the text then describes the materials as to the size of the photos, where they were taken, and what they cover.

Some examples of typical groups

— Record Group 25, the Records of Special Commissions, has eight sub-groups such as the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg Commission, 1909-1914, a collection of 300 photos from various sources of the veterans’ reunion in July, 1913; or the Commission to Locate the Site of the Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania, 1894-1896, a collection of drawings, maps, and photographs of that topic, nine of which are photos. Other record groups come from the departments of Agriculture, Highways, or Education.

Manuscript groups are often more specific, coming from families or organizations. One file, from the Penn Central Railroad, contains over 4,800 cubic feet of records, ledgers, correspondence, and illustrated materials, among them general, engineering drawing, and auction photos. Personal collections are just as valuable. MG 240, William W. Stoeey Photographs, contains 2,282 glass plate negatives taken by this Civil War veteran between 1895 and 1925. Topics include natural history, town views, and transportation. A category of people includes many businesses — beauty salons, cigar factories, dairy and ice wagons, hotels, hydroelectric plants, ice cream parlors, stone quarries — and people in action — digging graves, swimming, playing cards and hockey, etc.

The photos cover many other subjects — Teddy Roosevelt at the 1906 dedication of the new Capitol in Harrisburg, Civilian Conservation Corps views of camps and work-sites, and images related to the Federal Writers Project of the WPA which focus on social and cultural conditions in the state during the 1930s. As you can tell, an amazing number of topics were photographed, and this book indexes most of them. The text is illustrated just about every other turn of the page. It’s an invaluable tool for beginning research, and since it’s written in text form, and not just lists, it’s also enjoyable to read. — Brian Butko