Arms Makers of Colonial America
by James B. Whisker

Whisker is a leading authority on early American weaponry; this volume, as exhaustive as the name suggests, presents capsule descriptions of thousands of people and firms engaged in gun manufacturing, contracting, and selling. The Pennsylvania industry was enormous. Whisker's approach and writing seems highly arcane, but for those interested in the topic, his book is clearly indispensable. — Paul Roberts

A Patch of Land Owned by the Company
by Stephen G. Warfel

The title of this book is quite literal, as the text offers an in-depth study of house lots at Eckley Miners' Village in Luzerne County, Pa. Settled in 1854, Eckley was built as a company town for the anthracite coal-mining industry of the area. The site was acquired by the state in 1971, and is administered as a living history museum, interpreting the daily life of coal miners and their families. The book focuses on an excavation project that was prompted by restoration work on one of the company houses. Students of the author, enrolled in Penn State University's field school in historical archeology, conducted the excavations.

The book begins with summaries of oral histories — the exact text is not included, though it must have included some colorful recollections. Rather, the text quickly slips into the archeological examinations — strategies, methods, and soils, and then the findings. Although the explanations are often technical, the items unearthed were always interesting: coins, toys, glassware, jewelry, smoking pipes, earthware, and even an oval Catholic medal. Along with artifacts, remains of earlier porches, walls, and walkways were uncovered. This section is filled with photographs, charts, and soil strata drawings. The second half of the book is comprised of artifact inventories of the excavated lots. Overall, this is not for the casual reader, but it will be enjoyed by anyone interested in archeology or company towns. — Brian Butko

Along Interstate 80
by Dr. Steven C. Price

Whether for roadside or armchair travel, this book tells the reader what historical sites, museums, industries, vegetation, and even geology and fossils lie along I-80. The book also covers surrounding areas, and that means a lot of territory — even attractions in Pittsburgh, considered a "side-trip" down I-79.

The book begins with an overview of the history and geography of the route, and then turns to the east-to-west guide. Three categories top each page — Historic Beginnings; Geology; and Vegetation, Agriculture, Industry, and Miscellaneous. As the route traverses the state, each category is appropriately described. Locations are referenced by the mileposts along the route. Industrial and historic sites are all covered, but one will need to look elsewhere for amusements, lodging, or even a sense of place. — Brian Butko

Manufactured by Hand: The Soap Hollow School
Various authors

PUBLISHED as a guide to the exhibition (March 27-May 31, 1993) of 19th century furniture from rural central Pennsylvania, the book is a collection of essays about this unique folk furniture and its makers, mainly Amish and Mennonite cabinet-builders. "Soap Hollow" refers to the 3-mile-long valley in northern Somerset County where the families lived. The book, with its photographs and scholarship, is invaluable to anyone genuinely interested in genuine regional arts and crafts. — Paul Roberts