The Story of Crafton, 1740-1992
by Betsy Martin, photos by Chuck Gigliotti

Among the few nicely designed examples of its type, this town history is also organized unusually: because of the importance of transportation change to communities on the outskirts of a city (such as this Pittsburgh suburb), the author covers Crafton history under the headings of “travel by creek and footpath,” roads, railroads, streetcar, and automobile. The result is still basically chronological, with Native Americans getting the usual scant mention, but the people and events key to major transportation changes get an extra measure of attention and the story is better researched than standard community histories. Contemporary photographs are a valuable touch. — Paul Roberts

McConnell’s Mill — Echoes of the Past
by Dale Currie

A curious composite of history, personal accounts and memories, and home-spun humor, Currie’s ramblings suggest something mysterious about the importance to locals of the beautiful creek-and-mill site — also a state park — in Lawrence County, 40 miles northwest of Pittsburgh. The mixed blessing of self-publishing is also evident, for the book contains passages on black Americans that many people would consider bigoted or shockingly racist. This is Currie’s follow-up to McConnell’s Mill Yesteryear and Other Stories, which is now out of print from selling so well. — Paul Roberts

The Wine Regions of America: Geographical Reflections and Appraisals
by John J. Baxevanis

Billled by the author, a writer and geography professor at East Stroudsburg State University, as the most comprehensive tome on the subject, the book is indeed long on information. A small fraction of it is new and insightful. Valuable passages pop up regularly but unexpectedly, an unnerving experience heightened by ghastly graphic design and typographical errors on nearly every spread. Yet, his treatment of the unique intersections between wine-growing and social history (in eastern America especially) is worthwhile; and sections based on his academic specialty — geography, geology, natural history — are even stronger, so that detailed but nicely written technical material creeps into this general work. — Paul Roberts

The Allegheny River: Watershed of the Nation
by Jim Schafer and Mike Sanja

Schafer’s color photos seem to almost speak, so strong is his deep affection and understanding of the Allegheny. The words of Sanja, currently the region’s most accomplished outdoors writer, compliment the pictures with an authoritative, thoughtful gracefulness that surely places him among the leading environmentalist voices. The book’s strength is simplicity — in purpose, tone, and graphic design — and it is brimming with crisp, straightforward historical narratives of famous people and their relationship with the river. It would be hard to imagine a more attractive book about a river for popular audiences. — Paul Roberts