ONE of the key features of the new Pittsburgh Regional History Center will be an exhibit where the vibrant history of Western Pennsylvania will come alive and excite hundreds of thousands of people each year. It will be a place where people can come in touch with objects, memories and images from 300 years of our area’s history. The Historical Society is working to build this exhibit in this great new museum which features the people, places and events that shaped our lives and our sense of being Western Pennsylvanians.

It will be an exhibit that asks visitors to remember the proudest moments, as well as the more painful episodes. The painful are included so that we should never repeat them and the proudest moments will inspire us for the future. In order to enrich the lives of diverse audiences and help them prepare for their futures, this central or “core” exhibit will provide a framework for examining change in Western Pennsylvania, one of the nation’s most complex and distinctive regions.

Physically, the exhibit will occupy about a half-acre of floor space and will be divided into three broad periods of time. Each period is entered through a life-size, reconstructed home of a family, representative of that period. There will be the log home of a Scots Irish settler family of 1750, the courtyard home of a Slovak steel-worker’s family of 1908, and the suburban home of a returning G.I.’s family of 1950.

The spaces in the reconstructed homes and in the more than 30 different sections of the exhibit will provide the chance to showcase hundreds of objects and images. Some objects will intrigue, like the silver teapot made in this area by Andrew Ostoff in 1815 with its intricately sculpted dog’s head as the spout, while others will be everyday, common things like the 1952 Air King television owned by the Loebach family of Trafford — a TV just like the ones purchased by hundreds of Western Pennsylvanians after World War II.

These real pieces of the past provide some of the most direct and emotional links we have to our ancestors. They give us a unique chance to examine closely, and in some cases even touch and feel, the same tool or doll or cup that someone held generations ago. They give us the magic to connect again with a Western Pennsylvania.

Historical Society Executive Director John Herbst lends the Director’s Gallery in this issue to the Society’s Bart A. Roselli, who is heading up development of the new core exhibit for the Pittsburgh Regional History Center, scheduled to open in 1995.

nian who may have marched into Fort Pitt, loaded a steamboat headed to New Orleans, brought his family to the New World, revolutionized the steelmaking process, left her home to work in a steel mill during World War II, played trumpet in jazz clubs, or worked on the team that transplanted a human heart.

Some of these things will be day-to-day necessities like a blacksmith’s hammer, handmade woolen stockings, or your grandmother’s coal stove. Some will be things families saved to sustain their spirits, like a prayer book, a favorite saint’s picture, sports souvenirs, or an uncle’s accordion. These objects, taken together and placed in context, will help the Historical Society tell the stories of what life was like in Western Pennsylvania from the time of the first contacts among Europeans and Native Americans to the present ... how things have changed ... what the region’s people have gained and what they have lost.

At the present time, HSWP is in the midst of a full-scale, seven-county-wide search to ensure that the objects and experiences of as many Western Pennsylvanians as possible have a place in the exhibit. HSWP is making it possible for citizens to contribute a part of their past to the Society’s permanent collection of objects, papers, films, home movies, photographs and memories. This is a call to the entire region to help build this exhibit on the history of Western Pennsylvania. We need your help and your partnership.

Around since 1879, and operating today with a highly trained staff of museum professionals caring for the objects entrusted to it, HSWP maintains the most comprehensive record of Western Pennsylvania’s past. Whether it is wood, glass, silk, paper, videotape or any other material, you can be assured that Historical Society staff will care for it as if it were their very own. We will preserve it, study it, listen to you about it, learn from it, and present it to the public in a way that provides enjoyment and provokes discussion. These valuable pieces from our past will help school children, families, visitors and scholars alike to reflect on the heritage and accomplishments of the region’s residents — how we got here and, most importantly, how we’re making history every day.

If you have a piece of your past you would like to offer for use in the new Pittsburgh Regional History Center, we can use your help. For more information, please contact our Collections and Research Department at 1212 Smallman Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15222, or call 412-281-2465.