worst sense, rendering the many intriguing photographs so fuzzy that everything is sort of a gray jumble. — Paul Roberts

Icon of Spring
by Sonya Jason

Billled as a “fond but realistic memoir” of a girl’s life in the Washington County, Pa., “patch” of Jefferson, Jason’s work is sort of the rural equivalent to Annie Dillard’s “in-town,” moneyminded perspective on growing up in Western Pennsylvania in this century. Jason’s writing, too, is professionally spare and evocative, often somber — a mood to match a life in the patch draped in Eastern Orthodoxy and infrequent material luxury. Historians likely will fault the book for providing too few of the details they prefer to analyze. But its ethnic flavor, its female perspective, period, setting, and — far exceeding Dillard’s logical audience — the socio-economic circumstance of the story will likely engage a broad cross-section of the region’s reading population. The book was heavily revised from a 1987 edition published by the Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. — Paul Roberts

After the Fire: The Destruction of the Lancaster County Amish
by Randy-Michael Testa

Reading more like a diary, After the Fire gives a personal look at the effect of encroaching urbanization upon the Amish in southeastern Pennsylvania. The author arranges to stay with a family, where he participates in daily chores and meals. Testa does this not out of novelty or to fulfill some deep-seated longing; he is researching his dissertation — one he feels passionately about. However, he soon realizes the somewhat warped view all outsiders have of these people, and he becomes an advocate for the causes which their beliefs prevent them from openly resisting. The constant stream of tourists, East Coast commuters looking for houses, and the misunderstandings of local officials are just a few of the problems. Testa tries to get Amish opinions heard, and even arranges for Gov. Robert Casey to visit the family to hear their concerns. Perhaps the most interesting part regards the plans of a local restaurateur who planned a subdivision and commercial buildings on his farm; the story illustrates the changing views of vocation and “rightful land use.” In one of Pennsylvania’s few areas of substantial population growth (Lancaster County accounted for 58 percent of the state’s growth between 1980 and 1987, Testa tells us on p. 142), these questions are critical. Testa sprinkles his work with Bible quotes, and though his stance is obvious, his treatment is fair. — Brian Butko

‘Remember Your Friend Until Death:’ A Collection of Civil War Letters from the West Overton Archives
edited by Robert M. Sandow
West Overton, Pa.: West Overton Museums, 1993. Pp. 73. Illustrations, bibliography. $11.17 paperback, postpaid from West Overton Museums, West Overton Village, Scottsdale, PA 15683.

The West Overton Museums are best known as the location of the former Overholt Distillery and the birthplace of Henry Clay Frick. However, its archives hold a fair amount of correspondence between Civil War soldiers and those at home. We’re not really told why the museums have these letters, but most are from Fayette and Westmoreland counties, and all of the holdings are reproduced in this volume. The first letters are from A.S.R. Overholt, so perhaps this was the beginning of a collecting effort. Nevertheless, each entry begins with an introduction giving a short biographical sketch of the writer and a view of the war at that juncture. Entries are also supplemented by photographs, documents, and other illustrations. This holistic approach does justice to the letters and gives readers a sense of the era and person they are reading about. — Brian Butko

Stories of Uniontown and Fayette County
by Walter “Buzz” Storey

Culled from decades’ worth of his newspaper columns, Storey’s book leads the reader on a journey through local history, legend, and nostalgia. There’s a little bit of everything — the Mason-Dixon line, the National Road, politics, wars, coke ovens, Uniontown Speedway, drug stores, rivers. Most of the stories run one to four pages, just enough to learn a bit of local history or folklore. The book does not have footnotes, and much of it is based on oral history, but Storey’s broad knowledge of the area makes it a fine reference book for general readers. Particularly interesting are two lists: one gives the origin of Fayette County town names, the other lists the locations of about 150 coal “patches” (towns) in the county, of which only about half still exist. — Brian Butko