PITTSBURGH'S HISTORY and much of its present has been defined by the steel industry. The city's new "industries," such as the Sandcastle water amusement park, software/high-technology centers, or the casinos (promised, but not delivered) have not yet — and probably won't — fill the economic, physical and social gaps left by destruction of the giant mills along the rivers. Yet remembering and representing the steel industry and its workers is no simple matter. A sculptor's attempt at a "mill hunky" at the Three Rivers Arts Festival in downtown Pittsburgh a few years ago was denounced as an ethnic slur by certain county commissioners and many irate citizens. The travails of the Steel Valley Corporation in Homestead suggest that saving the physical remains of a small part of the Homestead Works has foundered on the antipathy of the Park Corporation and the indifference of Homestead Borough and, seemingly, much of the Monongahela River Valley. Certainly, many residents of Pittsburgh are prepared to embrace the former Smoky City's much-hyped status as America's "most livable city."

Yet the collapse of the steel industry had more of an impact on the region than simply removing a source of pollution. Despite its "livability," deindustrialized Pittsburgh is the American city with the oldest population outside the giant retirement community that is Florida. Social science or journalistic forays into the wilds of the Mon Valley suggest a region that has been stretched past the economic and social breaking point. Furthermore, although most observers and historians imagine the disemployed steelworker as a white man of Eastern European ethnicity, this perspective fails to account for the experiences and situation of the region's numerous African-American ex-industrial workers. Understanding how race filters what we know and remember about the steel industry goes far beyond a desire for "political correctness." It is necessary to understand how Pittsburgh, according to a recent report by the University of Pittsburgh, has become one of the most racially stratified cities in America.

Clearly, how to remember the steel industry, its workforce and their decline is an important task. A recent work by oral historian Michael Frisch and photographer Milton Rogovin offers an alternative model to understanding the steel industry, as well as an excellent and enjoyable book in its own right.

Portraits in Steel is organized around Rogovin's intimate photographs of Buffalo's steelworkers at work and home in the late 1970s, as well as an "after" photo of ex-steelworkers with their families in the late 1980s. As Frisch observes, Rogovin himself does not so much "take" photographs as allow people to "give" them to him. (Frisch conducted his interviews in the late 1980s after Rogovin took his second series of photographs.) Part of the pleasure in viewing Rogovin's portraits is in its subtle subversion of the normally elite nature of portrait photographs. Rogovin's images also differ from certain traditions in "workerist" photography, as these are not the heroic workers of a Lewis Hine photograph — Rogovin always tries to convey the human characteristics of these men and women. Even at work, their portraits reveal these workers to be humorous, worried, tired or triumphant. Furthermore, these photographs are linked with workers' narratives that allow the reader to better understand the person behind the photograph. (Unfortunately, all the photographs are grouped together rather than preceding each interview).

Rogovin's spirit imbues Frisch's interviews with the steelworkers and the two men use their respective interpretive skills to allow ordinary people to present their selves to the world. This doesn't mean the authors simply let workers "speak for themselves." As Frisch makes clear, he frequently intervenes in the workers' narratives by steering them with questions, editing their remarks (for clarity or brevity), and simply choosing which accounts make it into the book. What emerges, however, is a compelling series of portraits of steel work and ex-steelworkers confronting the difficult world of post-industrial America.

What makes the work particularly important for Pittsburgh is its willingness to present workers as a diverse group; several of the subjects in the book are women, black men and white males of varying ages. There is no attempt to show a portrait of the "typical" steelworker — quite the reverse. Only some of those portrayed worked for large steel firms; several worked for smaller shops. At least one worker only made a few dollars above minimum wage even in the heyday of the 1970s. A few individuals were "hot metal" workers while others worked "finishing" the cold iron and steel. A few were highly skilled, while many were "semi-skilled" chippers, hookers or machine operators. A couple were active trade unionists, most simply paid their dues. Although the book is focused on the Buffalo region, it still provides an implicit lesson for understanding steel in Pittsburgh: the workforce was diverse racially (and included some women); there were many occupations within the industry (though they often correlated to
This book celebrates the seminary’s 200th year. And what a tangled, fascinating story it is. Depending on how one counts, a half-dozen or more once-separate schools of theological education eventually converged into today’s Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. As the story unfolds, it touches down in Washington and Beaver counties, Philadelphia, New York, Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri, as well as various locations in Pittsburgh.

The title, *Ever a Frontier*, is intended to convey not only the school’s origins on the Western Pennsylvania frontier, but also its perpetual role as a pioneer in scholarship, overseas missions, and the church at home. The school counted a woman, Lee Alma Starr, among its 1893 graduates decades before American Presbyterians were willing to ordain women (she secured ordination in the Methodist Protestant Church); the first African-American student graduated in 1842, more than 20 years before slavery ended in the South.

Actually, this is a collection of 10 articles by nine authors. John E. Wilson, Jr., who teaches modern European and American church history at the seminary, opens the story with an essay on Presbyterian groups in Scotland. Dwight R. Guthrie, an emeritus professor of religion from Grove City College, follows with a description of early Western Pennsylvania Presbyterianism. The next five chapters tell the story of the seminary and its antecedent institutions; the writers are Wallace N. Jamison, former president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Robert L. Kelly, Jr., one of the seminary’s professors of Bible; James A. Walther, who taught New Testament literature at the seminary; and Howard Eshbaugh, a retired pastor and writer. Three additional chapters by current seminary faculty — librarian Stephen D. Crocco, historian Charles B. Partee, and curator Nancy L. Lapp — tell the histories of the seminary’s library, of its graduates’ work in overseas missions, and of leadership in archaeological research.

Wilson’s chapter on Scottish church divisions makes a natural starting point because these factions, when transplanted to America during the colonial period, organized separate Presbyterian denominations; these, in turn, founded separate institutions for theological education. As the groups gradually merged over the next 200 years, they consolidated their seminaries as well. This is at once Pittsburgh Theological Seminary’s rich heritage and the reason for its complicated path to the present.

There were three major streams of Scottish Presbyterians that came to America. The largest outpouring of immigrants came from the established Church of Scotland and became the main Presbyterian Church in this country; by the twentieth century, it was three times as large as the other streams combined. Headquartered for much of its history in Philadelphia, this body founded Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh in 1827.

The other two sources of American Presbyterianism were both Scottish dissenters. The first of these, the Covenanters, broke away in the seventeenth century in a bloody dispute over church-state relations; in America, these Scots called themselves Reformed Presbyterians. A second group, the Seceders, separated from the Scottish Church during pietistic awakenings that swept the Western world in the 1730s; in America, they became the Associate Presbyterian Church.

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*Ever a Frontier: The Bicentennial History of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

James Arthur Walther, editor


by Charles D. Cashdollar

Along Highland Avenue in Pittsburgh, across from Peabody High School, there is an elegant, wrought iron fence that marks the boundaries of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary campus. Many Pittsburghers no doubt have admired the cluster of red brick, neo-colonial buildings that stand serenely within. Pittsburghers with longer memories may recall the institution’s predecessors — Western Theological Seminary, whose buildings along Ridge Avenue are now occupied by the Community College of Allegheny County, and Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, which taught its students at the corner of North Avenue and Buena Vista Street on the North Side before relocating to the current Highland Avenue site in 1954.

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