

### BROADENING OUR AUDIENCE, SEEING YOURSELF

by John A. Herbst

"Museums can be a place to 'see yourself' and in seeing yourself, a place to gain a context, a sense of place, and possibility. Historically museums exhibited a narrow representation of who 'we' are. If not rich, not male, not of Anglo-Saxon descent, chances are the objects on view did not reflect familiar images. Lacking affirmation of themselves many potential visitors saw museums as a foreign environment, off-limits. In their view, museums existed largely as closed spheres. Yet because of their cultural prominence in our cities, museums had, and continue to have, a pervasive influence on public perceptions of who and what are important in our collective past."

—Amina J. Dickerson, "Modes to What End"

**A**MINA DICKERSON'S observations are most apt for those of us involved with the various services and programs of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Over the last 10 years, our institution has made tremendous strides to insure that everyone "sees themselves" in the activities we sponsor.

For instance, the Historical Society has mounted a major effort to document people who have been noticeably absent from the collections and materials which constitute the historical record cared for by our institution. Native Americans and African-Americans are two groups of people of color who had an early presence in Western Pennsylvania and are now being studied in a wide variety of public programs, including lecture series, bus tours, and outreach programs organized by our education staff here in Pittsburgh and at Meadowcroft Museum of Rural Life. Patricia Pugh Mitchell, who coordinates our African-American programs, has authored a major enhancement to the teaching of African-American history, *Beyond Adversity*. This classroom package contains materials for classes of 30 middle and high school students, including a text booklet, reproduced period newspapers, biography cards, and interview transcripts. It also has an oral history tape and a teacher's guide with questions, assignments, and field trip suggestions. Funded by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Beyond Adversity* received the Award of Merit from the American Association of State and Local History, and is being used in several hundred schools throughout the region. *Beyond Adversity* followed another extremely successful classroom package, *Between Two Worlds*, which interpreted Native American history in this region.

Exhibits in the new Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center will also reflect a more inclusive picture of our history. The core exhibit about the history of the region will look at the experience of Native Americans and their interaction with European settlers at the confluence of the three rivers, and a major section on African-American life in the Hill District will help convey the presence and scope of the African-American presence there. Our reinstalled "Pittsburgh Rhythms" exhibit will allow the visitor to experience and see the tradition of gospel and jazz

musical forms which grew and developed in the African-American community of Pittsburgh.

We are very pleased to present this special issue of *Pittsburgh History* which has been edited by Laurence Glasco and Joseph Trotter with production assistants from our staff. They have assembled a fascinating collection of articles about people of color. These articles add immeasurably to the scholarship available to the public, widening the historical record to reflect the experiences of Pittsburgh's varied communities. ☼



In May, a state historical marker was unveiled in front of Westinghouse High School honoring jazz musician Billy Strayhorn, who attended school there. Looking on, from left, is Billy's nephew, Darryl Strayhorn; Billy's sister, Lillian Strayhorn Dicks; PHMC commissioner Dr. LeRoy Patrick; Billy's nephew, Dr. Gregory Morris; and Patricia Pugh Mitchell, coordinator, African-American Program, HSWP.