

## TEN YEARS TO MAKE A BEGINNING: THE HISTORY CENTER OPENS AT LAST

by John A. Herbst, Executive Director

*(The Executive Director made the following remarks at opening day ceremonies, April 27, 1996, for the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center.)*

**I**T'S TAKEN 10 years to make this beginning. I want to speak to you briefly today about those 10 years and then to talk about what happens afterward — from this point forward.

This project was carried out in a fashion not typical for Pittsburgh's cultural projects. Since the days of Andrew Carnegie, the great cultural endeavors of the city were created and launched by fiat — an Andrew Carnegie, a Richard King Mellon, a Jack Heinz would say, in effect, "This is a good idea, I wish to see this done, I am putting up the bulk of the funds and I expect all of you community leaders to do what you can to bring this about." These major figures of wealth, power, and authority helped to order our universe in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.

For the 10 years that I have been a part of this community, I've heard a general lament about the challenges of moving forward major regional initiatives without such a figure. The History Center provides a different example.

For the first eight and one-half years of this project, we nicked and dimed our way to excellence — moving the project forward on the basis of cash raised, and then cash applied to one of a million tasks that needed to be performed. We had to exercise the best and most strategic of judgements about which piece moved ahead with the resources available at that moment.

To cover all the gaps — to provide a level of professionalism and institutional purpose and, most of all, to provide services to the broader community we choose to serve — puts a tremendous burden on a group of people on whom everything has depended: this is our Historical Society staff. You will really never know the kinds of sacrifices they have made, the obstacles they have overcome, to bring this gift to you, and I would like them to come forward and for you to join with me in acknowledging our debt to their dedication and service.

When a not-for-profit executive director like myself charts an entrepreneurial role for his institution, he had better have the love and support of the important people in his life because it's our families who have to endure the stress and the absences, the financial sacrifice, and job security itself, if that is what's called for. The two people who have borne that for me are my wife Karen and son Johnny and I'd like to ask them to stand.

I also have here in the audience many friends from Pittsburgh, from New Jersey, and from the museum field throughout the

United States. You have been extraordinarily generous friends and I am very grateful you are here to share this day with us.

A little over a year and a half ago, after construction and renovation on this structure began, we knew that without financing, work on the project couldn't continue on the cash basis we were used to. There wouldn't be a facility this impressive, and this complete, if it weren't for Frank Cahouet, who at the critical moment, exercised critical leadership. The provision of financing in this last year from Mellon Bank allowed, for the first time in the history of the project, a logical sequence of tasks to be completed that ensured a successful outcome to both the facility and the program we offer to you today. Frank, I would ask you to stand. You have been the pivotal person in our success and you have our undying gratitude.

Along with these funds, Mellon also provided two executives to help with the construction and cash flow during this period of financing and I want to thank Kenn Popko and John Brandstetter for what they've contributed to bring this project to a successful conclusion.

*(continued on page 144)*



**From left: David McCullough, honorary chairman of the History Center Capital Campaign, HSWP Executive Director John Herbst, Teresa Heinz, and Frank V. Cahouet, chairman of the campaign.**

cities including McKeesport, Beaver Falls, Washington, etc.; and a photo essay from the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (by this reviewer). While not comprehensive, this book is unique in that it brings together material and stories from many aspects of baseball in Pittsburgh and provides the readers with a better understanding of its importance beyond Mazerowski's famed homer or a Josh Gibson blast at Greenlee Field. — *Corey Seeman, Library and Archives Division* 🌟

---

(Continued from page 91)

Most especially our fearless chairman Bill King, our extraordinary president Steve Graffam, senior partner in Grogan, Graffam, McGinley & Lucchino, the members of our executive committee, and the Board of Trustees have performed heroically. And what would we have done without David and Rosalee McCullough. David, you have surely been a tremendous, powerful spokesman and advocate for this center. Rosalee, you've provided support, enthusiasm and encouragement every step of the way. In a decade of downsizing, cutbacks in government and other funding for culture, together you have all been an incredible alliance in the creation of a facility which to many seemed impossible. We heard that word a great deal over the last 10 years — impossible: "It's impossible for the Historical Society to take on a project like that." "It's impossible for this community to support another capital campaign." "It's impossible to convert that old ugly ice house into a museum." "It's impossible to have those exhibits ready by opening." But impossible things can happen. People make them happen.

To our community leaders like Tom Foerster, Mayor Tom Murphy, county commissioners Dunn, Cranmer, and Dawida, and many friends in Congress, Sen. Len Bodack and many friends in the state legislature, on City Council, and in the corporate and foundation community, your generous participation got us to where we are.

Ten years to make this beginning. And what a beginning it is — a new life for the 117-year-old Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We are about to realize our institution's mission to connect our people to their unique heritage in a way only dreamed of by the people who came before us. Their concern for a place to properly house and care for the artifacts and archival materials which represent our history has now been realized, as has been our concern that these materials be interpreted and shared with the broadest possible audience.

The History Center's exhibit program will generate a new blockbuster each year on topics ranging from the glass industry (opening in 1997), to the Heinz family and company in 1998, to the history of sports, and of medicine, bridges, and a host of other topics. Our programs will allow for learning in a variety of styles: lectures, bus trips, gallery talks, our museum theater program, ethnic cooking classes, thematic weekend programming and many, many others which will educate, excite and inspire.

We make a special pledge to the educational community to continue to provide our classroom materials for the teaching of Western Pennsylvania history, to sponsor the National History Day program, and now to be a place for field trips for museum-based learning.

This new History Center can and will play a role in developing the Pittsburgh region as a travel and tourism destination. When people travel, they want to come away with a sense of where they've been, and an understanding of the uniqueness and special character of the place. As you will see as you visit this magnificent structure, everything around you has been especially designed to convey a sense of place — this place, Pittsburgh and its region.

Most of all, the history we gather, care for and showcase here for succeeding generations is *your* history. Mrs. Heinz, when you and your sons allowed us to name the new facility for the senator, something very important and very beautiful happened. The generous and caring life of a public servant, whose life was rooted in this region, was linked forever to a place which conjures up the very essence and spirit of the people he represented.

Early in my life, I was fortunate to gain an understanding and appreciation of history from the best of all possible sources, my paternal grandparents in whose household I was raised. They were the children of immigrants from textile centers in Switzerland and Germany who had come to Paterson, New Jersey, to work in that city's silk mills. My grandparents were steeped in an understanding of their personal pasts, our family's past. Although they never lived here, their memory, their appreciation of ethnicity, their work ethic, and their love of history is very much with me here today in Pittsburgh. They influenced me early in my life to form a belief in the transforming quality that "backyard" history can have, especially for young people. And I've spent the last 22 years as a professional and volunteer in history organizations which provide that sense of place so lacking in most of our contemporary society with serial marriages, broken homes, and as great a geographic mobility as this nation of nomads has ever known. Local history gives us a touchstone, a touchstone which provides the character and cultural identification to bind us all together, giving our citizens understanding, depth, and meaning. One of the historical references that our staff discovered in their research for our exhibits was part of a speech given by Pittsburgher Harry Castle in 1896 at a convention being held at the Point in the old Exposition Hall. He said: "I know of no other city with darker skies, brighter men and women, dirtier hands and cleaner hearts with narrow or crooked streets and broader, straighter hospitality."

We have taken care of the dark skies, and in this marvelous new facility look forward to communicating to our modern visitors that the Pittsburgh tradition of hospitality, inventiveness, and heart is still with us.

On behalf of those of us who have had a role in creating this new, wonderful place for learning and enjoyment — to all who did whatever they could to help us — I thank you more than you could ever know for launching the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center. 🌟