

Broadcasting the Local News: The Early Years of Pittsburgh's KDKA-TV

by Lynn Boyd Hinds

State College: Penn State Press, 1995. Pp. xiv, 173. Photographs, preface, appendices, notes, index. \$40, \$16.95 paper.

THIS NICELY TOLD account of “one of the first television stations in America to offer local news” is constricted perhaps only by the volume of events and the time that had to be covered. The station, which began as WDTV in 1949, means nearly as much to television history as the radio affiliate does to radio history, placing Pittsburgh at the front of development of both media nationally.

Unfortunately, not much context is provided for tracking Pittsburgh's TV news history alongside the rest of the nation's — the story stays pretty much within the Golden Triangle — but that probably would have been too much to expect.

Hinds, an associate professor of journalism at West Virginia University, doesn't over-reach, sticking to events that provide a narrative for his story, then opening out a little in the end chapter with a provocative then-and-now on how and why local TV news is different than it was in 1950. The book is scholarly solid, yet communicates in an easy-going popular way. Historians could go to school on this journalist's use of “oral history” in the form of interview excerpts: they are almost all interesting to read — the product most likely of good set-up questions — and also educational. Period and candid photographs impress, too. — PR ☀

When Radio Was Young: Questions and Answers about Early Pittsburgh Radio

by William Beal, Alice Sapienza-Donnelly, Richard J. Harris

Wilkesburg, Pa.: Wilkesburg Commission, 1995. Pp. 159. Photographs, preface. \$23.50 paperback, postpaid, from When Radio Was Young, 407 Woodside Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

From one extreme to the other, we turn to this large-format, color cover, downright wacky treatment of local radio history, with a co-author (Beal) who figures prominently in the KDKA history above. (He masterminded the famous “Pitt Parade”

news show in the '50s, and, by the way, wrote for the Winter 1996/97 *Pittsburgh History*.)

This lighthearted effort uses period photography and a peppy quiz show format — “Who were some of the local female singing trios?” — to cover primarily the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, giving answers, dropping names, and spinning yarns. It's surely entertaining for anyone interested, but a lack of clear attribution or documentation — much less citations — diminishes the book's value for researchers. Its only other regrettable features are the poor photographic reproductions, and the school yearbook-like typography and design. — PR ☀

Saint Vincent: A Benedictine Place

Edited by Campion P. Gavalier

Latrobe, Pa.: Saint Vincent Archabbey, 1995. Pp. 119. Introduction, acknowledgements, illustrations, notes on illustrations. \$29.30 postpaid from the archabbey, Box RR, Latrobe, PA 15650.

Gracious and thoughtful words, excellent photographs, and blessedly good design add up to a short book of institutional history as fine as any in a long time. Its release commemorated the 150th anniversary in 1996 of the archabbey, college, seminary, parish, and foundations comprising the institution founded by Boniface Wimmer, who came with 18 others from Bavaria to start the first Benedictine monastery and school in the United States. (Latrobe is 40 miles east of Pittsburgh.) This monastic tradition, with roots in the 6th century work of Saint Benedict of Nursia, is part of a worldwide network today.

In keeping with the spirit of Benedictine philosophy and education, the book uses essays, poems, and photographs — an overall soft but sure touch — to evoke as much as document or recount Saint Vincent's history, and to keep it inextricably bound in the larger traditions and mission that give any organization true importance.

A drawback is that the impact on Westmoreland County surrounding the institution receives little attention, so that as a window on local history this one has a limited view. But where so many institutional histories waste much space and brain cells on physical plant renovations, lists of board members through the ages, and other strictly provincial concerns, this very private history is consciously pitched to those who know little about the Benedictines and what they've built. It's an approach that manages broad appeal. — PR ☀