L&A Treasures
By Lora Hershey

Long before the Pennsylvania license plates declared “America Starts Here” or trumpeted the state’s Web site, regional attractions were billing themselves as fetching alternatives to a week at the shore or a sojourn to the islands — and at a more appealing price.

In the 1963 Family Guide to 33 Scenic, Historic Counties in Pennsylvania, the area between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh was heralded as “Family Plan Vacationland.... That’s the name local folks proudly give to their broad, rolling mountains and meadows comprising a Top-of-the-World setting packed with pleasure every family can afford.”

According to the 1940 Pennsylvania, Where Vacations Mean More, the state “can provide any form of vacation activity and outdoor enjoyment with the exception of salt water bathing.” Presque Isle came close, though, with “surf-bathing” and “surf-fishing” in an atmosphere “akin to that of the sea coast.”

If the mountains were more your style, a 1957 brochure from Hidden Valley Farm Inn, A Laurel Mountain Resort, offered overnight accommodations for a “carefully chosen clientele.” For $6 a night, guests got a “double bed room” with a semi-private bath on the European plan.

The History Center’s Library & Archives collects materials like vacation guides and brochures that pertain to regional places of interest. These materials and others relating to Western Pennsylvania history are available for viewing by visitors Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Architecture Around Us
By Lu Donnelly

Plantation Plenty
State Route 231
Independence Township

One of the most beautiful farms in Western Pennsylvania nestles into a scoop of land closer to Wellsburg, W.Va., than to Washington, Pa. The gently slope hillsides are well-watered at the base of the valley, and provide space for cultivation and grazing. Just as important, Plantation Plenty is the best preserved and most architecturally significant farm in the region.

The land has been in the same family since 1797, when Isaac Manchester (1762-1851) spotted it while traveling the Wellsburg Pike (now State Route 844) from Rhode Island to Kentucky. He continued his trip, but was drawn back to this piece of land already called “Plantation Plenty.”

About 1803, the barn and the pens were outlined with stone walls. The house, called “Whitehall,” was built between 1810 and 1815, with the joinery completed by Philadelphian John McGowen.

Manchester, a distinguished carpenter of Middletown, R.I., near Newport, said he built his house in the valley so that, since he would see it only occasionally, he could savor the view from the ridge. His descendants favor the notion that this house stands in its valley not for the aesthetics, but because it is out of the wind, and water is nearby.

Despite its sturdy utilitarian functioning, the house is an eastern seaboard transplant to what, at the time, was an arduous trek from the shores of Narragansett Bay.

Lu Donnelly is one of the authors of Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, a forthcoming book in the 58-volume series on American architecture sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians, titled Buildings of the United States. She has authored several books and National Register nominations on Allegheny County topics.