BOOKREVIEWS

Those interested in reviewing books should contact Nicholas Ciotola at npciotola@hswp.org. Publishers and authors can send review copies to the Editor, *Western Pennsylvania History*, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1212 Smallman Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15222.

County Courthouses of Pennsylvania: A Guide
By Oliver P. Williams (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2001). Illustrations, glossary, sources, index. xi + 244 pp. $19.95 paper

A guide to the state's 67 courthouses that includes detailed explanations of each building's history and architectural style. Includes an introduction to styles and a timeline of extant structures.

From Sugar Camps to Star Barns: Rural Life and Landscape in a Western Pennsylvania Community
By Sally McMurtry. (University Park: Penn State Univ. Press, 2001). Illustrations, diagrams, maps. xiii + 175 pp., $50 cloth, $24.95 paper

A thorough survey of the history of the Somerset County landscape, chronicling its evolution from a heavily forested region in the 18th century to a progressive, agricultural region in the 20th century.

Houston: Then...and Now

The Borough of Houston covers less than half a square mile, but this Chartiers Valley community has been home to everything from Blue Star Potato Chip and Nut Co. (which annually processed 2.6 million pounds of potatoes) to a still-operating Allegheny-Ludlum Steel plant. Lots of old photos, lists, and interesting stories.

Klondikes, Chipped Ham, & Skyscraper Cones:
The Story of Isaly's
By Brian Butko (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2001). Illustrations, store list, Web site with bibliography. x + 100 pp., $12.95 paper

Narrative account of the rise of Isaly's Dairy, the family company that spread stores and plants across Ohio and Western Pennsylvania. The chain became known for its customer service as well as its products, particularly the Klondike ice cream bar, now sold nationally.

Knowledge in a Nutshell on Popular Products,
Heinz Edition
By Charles Reichblum, with John Dryer (Pittsburgh: apr, inc., 2001). ix + 223 pp., $9.50 paper

A collection of curious facts about the Pittsburgh-based H.J. Heinz Company including its history and products, from ketchup to pickles to company history.

Pennsylvania's Covered Bridges: A Complete Guide
By Benjamin D. Evans and June R. Evans (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). Illustrations, index. x + 306 pp., $19.95 paper

Guidebook identifying each of the 221 remaining covered bridges in Pennsylvania, with specifications such as type, builder, etc. First published in 1993, this revised and updated version contains new photographs — all in color! — and new information.

Wealth, Waste, and Alienation: Growth and Decline in the Connellsville Coke Industry
By Kenneth Warren (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). Illustrations, charts, index. xix + 297 pp., $30.00 cloth

Explores the rise and fall of the Connellsville Coke industry with particular emphasis on the industry's impact on the Western Pennsylvania environment.

FEATURE

Mission to America: A History of Saint Vincent Archabbey, the First Benedictine Monastery in the United States
By Jerome Oetgen (Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2000). Illustrations, index. xiii + 607 pp., $39.95 cloth

In Europe, the Benedictine monks have a long and rich tradition of supporting the Catholic Church by providing education, scholarship, and missionaries in accordance with the rule of St. Benedict. After surviving the assaults of Enlightenment thinkers and Napoleon's anti-monastic policies, the Benedictines emerged with a new enthusiasm and determination to reclaim their role in the 19th century. This new enthusiasm was personified in the aspirations of a young German monk from the abbey of St. Michaels in Metten named Boniface Wimmer. Wimmer believed that the Benedictines should establish a monastery in the United States to...
tend to the needs of its large German immigrant population. In 1846, after many discussions and debates, Wimmer was given his opportunity and set off for America with a handful of supporters. They established a small community near Latrobe, Pa., that eventually grew into the St. Vincent Archabbey and St. Vincent College. In *Mission to America*, Jerome Oetgen skillfully reconstructs the story of Wimmer’s mission, the growth of the community, and the creation of new monastic communities around the country.

Oetgen approaches this institutional history in a direct way, focusing on the growth of St. Vincent Archabbey and the conflicts that threatened it. His engaging writing style and focus on individuals draws the reader into the history and conveys a greater understanding of the day-to-day problems that the monks faced, such as their struggle to balance strict monastic life and observances with their active role in the community and their attempt to maintain their German identity. At the same time, Oetgen manages to show the larger mission of the Benedictines and their place in society by emphasizing their role as missionaries, teachers, and priests. The book manages to walk the fine line between scholarly and popular writing, making the book accessible to both audiences.

The narrative is organized chronologically and begins by tracing the early history of the site that would later become the archabbey. The tract of land that the monastery occupies was originally known as Sportsman’s Hall. The land was obtained by local Catholic German immigrants so that they could make it the site of a new parish. After a series of both good and bad pastors, struggles over the true ownership of the property, and the intervention of Michael O’Connor, first bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the land was offered to the newly arrived Boniface Wimmer and his monks. It seemed the ideal place to create a monastery and to meet the needs of the local Catholic German population.

Led by Wimmer, the monks of St. Vincent overcame many difficulties in the early years. Oetgen emphasizes Wimmer’s determination to make the monastery successful and self-sufficient. Wimmer sometimes found himself at odds with Bishop O’Connor and others over various issues such as the educational role of the Benedictines and the monastery’s brewery. He successfully guided the monastery through the Civil War and dealt with the internal division that resulted when a ghost supposedly visited a young dissenting monk. Until his death in 1887, Boniface Wimmer maintained stability at St. Vincent and sent out missionaries to establish new monastic communities around the country, many of which eventually became independent Benedictine abbeys. They are discussed at length throughout the book, though occasionally in more detail than the reader will find necessary.

Oetgen discusses the role of each succeeding abbot, starting with Wimmer’s replacement, Andrew Hintenach, and the effect that their leadership had on the abbey. Later chapters trace the growth and development of the seminary and St. Vincent College. Almost an entire chapter is dedicated to the unsuccessful mission to China that almost bankrupted the monastery in the 1920s. The monastery preserved its German identity through both world wars while remaining patriotic, and it persevered throughout the Great Depression (attendance actually increased at the school).

In one of the best parts of the book, Oetgen vividly describes the terrible fire that burned some of the monastery and college buildings in 1963. The narrative concludes with the election of Archabbot Rembert Weakland as coadjutor to Archabbot Denis Stittmatter later that year after disputes over reconstruction.

Jerome Oetgen has successfully captured the long and complex history of St. Vincent Archabbey in a very readable yet thorough form. There are a few sections dealing with the missions and the recent history where there are probably more details than necessary, but it does not detract from the flow of the book. The extensive appendices and bibliography reflect Oetgen’s level of archival research on both sides of the Atlantic. He has illuminated one of Western Pennsylvania’s oldest religious institutions. *Mission to America* is a valuable contribution to the study of religion in America.

**Tom White, Project Archivist**
**Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania**