As Others See Us
By C. Hax McCullough

Each issue, this column features quotes about Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.

In July 1972, the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera staged Minnie's Boys, the story of the Marx Brothers family of comedians. Groucho Marx was asked to take a bow with the actors portraying his family. He wasn't able to make an appearance, but he sent this message, which was printed in the play's program.

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Dear Pittsburghers:
Whoever thought, when I first played your smoke-filled town as a boy soprano with an act called The Le May Trio, in 1905, that someday the life of the Marx Brothers would be knocking them dead here in a musical co-authored by my own son, and in a place as palatial as Heinz Hall? As a matter of fact, whoever thought the smoke would clear long enough for anyone to know there was a new theater in town at all, or even that there was a town here? But things have changed, and today, thanks to your urban redevelopment program, a number of concerned citizens and all those ecology-minded students, the only smoke you have to worry about is the marijuana smoke drifting through the ivy-covered walls of Carnegie Tech and the University of Pittsburgh.

But getting back to Minnie's Boys, who ever thought I'd someday be calling Kay[e] Ballard "Mom?"

As a singer and all-around talent, my real mother, Minnie Marx, couldn't hold a candle to Kay[e] Ballard. Nevertheless, she was a charming, loving and conscientious mother, without whose help the Marx Brothers might never have succeeded.

Like most stage mothers, Minnie was more interested in putting her boys in show business than she was in putting food on the table. Which was a wise move on her part, for the man who was allegedly the bread-winner in our family, our father, Sam — otherwise known as Frenchie — was as lousy a tailor as Chico was a gambler. And if we had to depend on him to come up with rent and food money, we would have starved to death, and you'd be home right now watching All in the Family instead of Minnie's Boys.

Luckily, Mom was aware of this, and she pushed the five of us — yes, in those days my brother Gummo was also in the act — into show business soon after we were bar mitzvahed.

I was only fifteen years old when I first played Pittsburgh with The Le May Trio, and here I am over eighty. Which goes to show how show business can age a person.

But enough of this reminiscing. Have a good time at the show, and be sure to keep your eye on this boy Lewis Stadlen, who plays me. He's better than I was at his age. As a matter of fact, keep your eye on the whole cast, for they're all worth watching.

Sincerely,
Groucho
There is an American city with a rich history of *Firsts.*

- **World's First Ferris Wheel**
- **World's First Wire Suspension Bridge**
- **America's First Transcontinental Flight**
- **America's First Steamboat for the Western Waters**

That city is Pittsburgh.

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