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.

Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism
By James D. Rose (Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001). Index. xi + 284 pp., $42.50 cloth

In the Duquesne steel works, two competing forces battled to achieve workplace representation for steelworkers: independent trade unions and employee representation plans, or ERPs. In documenting these two forces, Rose shows how the actions of the steelworkers themselves, not just management and politicians, were important in bringing about the rise of steel unionism.

Flares of Memory: Stories of Childhood
Edited by Anita Brostoff (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001). Index, illustrations. xxi + 344 pp., $27.50 cloth

Published in collaboration with the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh, this extensive compilation contains more than 100 compelling stories written by survivors of the Nazi occupation.

From Italy to Indiana County
By Nicholas P. Ciotola (Indiana: IUP University Museum, 2001). Illustrations. 46 pp., $10 paper

Exhibition catalog that provides an overview of the Italian immigrant settlement of Indiana County between 1900 and 1950, with a particular focus on work, religion, and family life.

From Shtetl to Milltown: Litvaks, Hungarians, and Galizianers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875–1925
By Robert Perlman (Pittsburgh: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 2001). Illustrations, charts, index. xiii + 123 pp., $18.95 paper

Narrative account of the immigration of Jews from the small towns, or shtetlach, in central and eastern Europe to the milltowns of Western Pennsylvania.

Pittsburgh Sports: Stories from the Steel City
Edited by Randy Roberts (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). Index, illustrations. 282 pp., $29.95 cloth

Collection of essays examining the history of professional sports in Pittsburgh including baseball, basketball, football, and ice hockey. Some are serious and scholarly, while others are informal, first-person recollections.

The Saint Vincent Archabbey Gristmill and Brewery, 1854–2000
By Omer U. Kline (Latrobe: Benedictine Society of Westmoreland County, 2000). 84 pp., $10 paper

Built by the Benedictine Monks, the Saint Vincent Archabbey Gristmill has been in continuous use since 1854. Kline's book explores the growth and development of the mill and its importance to Westmoreland County history.

The Steelers Reader
Edited by Randy Roberts and David Welky (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). xi + 329 pp., $25.00 cloth

A collection of essays about the history of the Steelers football club and some of its best-known personalities.

Their Story: The History of Blacks/African Americans in Sewickley and Edgeworth

History of the African American experience in Sewickley and Edgeworth based largely on oral history interviews conducted by the author. Explores many aspects of African American life including work, religion, education, family, and social life.

FEATURE

Big Steel: The First Century of the United States Steel Corporation, 1901–2001
By Kenneth Warren (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, index. xviii + 320 pp., $32 cloth

The Corporation: A Centennial Biography of United States Steel Corporation, 1901–2001
By Brian Apelt, edited by Warren Hull (Pittsburgh: Cathedral Publishing, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 2001). Illustrations, maps, index. ix + 547 pp., $29.95 cloth

After the 15-, 20-, and 50-year marks, United States Steel Corporation, or U.S. Steel, celebrated its past with published histories. Now at its centennial, Brian Apelt, with Warren Hull editing, presents the official company history of U.S. Steel in The Corporation. Kenneth Warren, a leading scholar in industrial history, presents his own analysis of the steel-making giant in Big Steel. Both works are arranged chronologically, with Warren breaking his history
into four distinct periods. Each work also comes to a similar conclusion: over the last century, U.S. Steel has evolved into one of the world’s most efficient steel producers. How each book comes to this conclusion is not so uniform.

Both *The Corporation* and *Big Steel* open with the famous December 1900 dinner in honor of Charles M. Schwab. Schwab’s remarks laid out an idealistic steel company plan so huge and efficient that it would reduce costs of production, lower the price for consumers, and reap huge profits for steel producers. In the months following, this ideal company would come to fruition as the United States Steel Corporation. U.S. Steel was a giant from its inception: it incorporated 10 major steel producers, and was capitalized at $1.4 billion. There was nothing like it in the world.

The sheer size of U.S. Steel “inspired awe mixed with some fear.” (*The Corporation*, p. 49) Many feared that it would destroy all competition in the country and then dominate the world market in steel. This fear led the way for government attempts to dismantle U.S. Steel for violating antitrust and monopoly laws beginning in 1911. The Corporation survived these investigations, but they marked the beginning of a long and, at times, not so pleasant relationship with the federal government.

Relations with the government eventually improved, especially in times of war. Steel played a crucial part in World War I and more so in World War II. When a strike threatened the production of steel during the Korean War, President Harry Truman ordered a government takeover of the mills. Although the takeover did not last long, it certainly illustrated the need for steel in times of war.

*The Corporation* is not a scholarly work. In the book’s foreword, Thomas J. Usher, chairman of USX Corporation, states that it is meant to be easily accessible to the reader and to be a “fond recollection of stories about people, processes … and about products.” This description certainly holds true. The interesting history of U.S. Steel can be quite confusing to a reader without a business background. Brian Apelt does an excellent job of organizing this massive, detailed history into a manageable and enjoyable book. Many “highlight” sections are included throughout that give further insight into significant people or events. Illustrations are plentiful and a helpful chart of the company’s growth and mergers is included inside the dust jacket.

This work follows *Steel Serves the Nation*, which was published as part of the golden anniversary celebration in 1951. Whereas that book was written more as a promotional tool for U.S. Steel products and employment, *The Corporation* is less self-serving and delves into more controversial topics. *The Corporation* inherited sore subjects such as environmental problems and issues dealing with the decline of the steel industry (mill shutdowns and massive layoffs). But, as would be expected from a company-commissioned work, there is much praise and little criticism regarding the actions of U.S. Steel. Judge Elbert Gary is extolled throughout these pages and is even given the curious distinction that he, “more than anyone else,” was responsible for instituting the eight-hour workday. (p. 121) This is certainly a bold claim, not to mention a controversial one.

Kenneth Warren’s *Big Steel* takes a more in-depth, scholarly approach to U.S. Steel’s first century. Warren analyzes the company’s actions and investigates the reasons behind those actions. The overall question that he addresses is whether U.S. Steel became everything that was envisioned in Schwab’s famous after-dinner speech in December 1900. Through its preeminent magnitude, U.S. Steel was supposed to draw “exceptional commercial advantages” in almost every aspect of the industry. “With such assets, U.S. Steel would become the industry price leader and might dominate trade worldwide,” just as its critics feared. “Yet in practice,” Warren tells us “many of these supposed advantages proved illusory.” (p. 3)

He goes on to show that U.S. Steel’s giant size, which should have been the cause for great advantages, was in fact the cause for many of its own disadvantages. Its enormity made it difficult to manage, complicated issues of growth and technology, and brought much attention and criticism from the government and the public. After the ups and downs of the last century, Warren concludes, U.S. Steel has become “one of the world’s most efficient major steel producers.” (p. 4) Apparently, the crises in the American steel industry of the 1970s and ‘80s forced U.S. Steel to rethink its entire structure. Although the corporation is a much leaner one than 100 years ago, it is a corporation much more suited for the rigorous demands of the modern steel industry.
I am writing with regard to “Aliquippa with Sunshine” by Curt Miner that appeared in the summer 2001 issue of Western Pennsylvania History.

Kaiser Steel was built approximately 60 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean for strategic reasons; namely, it provided the west coast defense industry with a local source of steel while being far enough away from the coast that it would be out of range from naval gun attack.

The author gave the impression that the mill was permanently closed following the 1983 bankruptcy. However, the fact of the matter is the former Kaiser Steel now operates as California Steel Industries; a producer of hot and cold rolled steel.

The former iron making portion of plant, which previously included the coke ovens and blast furnaces was not purchased by California Steel Industries and was later developed into the NASCAR Speedeway.

Additionally, the author again was in error in identifying that “...most of the plant was literally crated up and shipped off to a Japanese firm...”. In fact, California Steel Industries sold the idle BOF shop and continuous caster to a Chinese steel mill while, at the same time, making major capital investments in the hot and cold rolling mills and installing new, state-of-the-art equipment.

I would think that the author would, at least, visit the facility prior to submitting the article for publication.

Sincerely,
Jack J. Landesberg
Asset Recovery & Valuation
Mequon, Wisconsin

[Mr. Landesberg notes that he is a steel industry consultant]

Curt Miner replies:

I don’t disagree with Mr. Landesberg’s first few paragraphs: it’s a summary of what I wrote. But his point about California Steel is really a matter of perspective; there may be a remnant of steelmaking, but if you were one of the folks I spoke to who lost their job in 1983, what would it have mattered?

In City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles (Verso Books, 1990), author Mike Davis stated, “California Steel Industries employs a deunionized remnant of the Kaiser workforce...” To say that “the former Kaiser Steel now operates as California Steel Industries” is like saying that the former U.S. Steel Homestead Works now operates as a shopping complex.

As to the point about Japan vs. China, again City of Quartz states, “The most viable sections of the Fontana plant were immediately sold off — for $110 million ... to a remarkable consortium that included Japan’s giant Kawasaki Steel.”

The one point I will concede is Mr. Landesberg’s suggestion that I visit a facility prior to submitting an article for publication. Whom should I invoice for the flight?

Doug MacGregor, Project Archivist
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania