BOOK REVIEWS

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.

Amusement Parks of Pennsylvania
By Jim Futrell. (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 2002). Illustrations, index, xii + 212 pp., $19.95 paper
A general history of parks, a state history, and stories about the state’s 13 largest parks. Western Pennsylvania parks covered include Kennywood, Idlewild, Waladameer, Conneaut Lake, Del Grosso’s, and Lakemont.

Butler County, Pennsylvania, Celebrates its Bicentennial
By the staff of the Butler Eagle. (Pittsburgh: Local History Company, 2001). Illustrations, maps, index, ix + 435 pp., $39.95 hardcover
Celebratory overview of the history of Butler County, Pa., that examines many facets of the county’s economic, political, military, and social history.

Down the Susquehanna to the Chesapeake
By Jack Brubaker. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002). Illustrations, maps, notes, index, xiv + 277 pp., $34.95 hardcover
Traces the path of the East Coast’s largest river through New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Includes geological descriptions and history of how the Susquehanna has shaped the communities on its banks, and vice versa.

Indiana, Pennsylvania
Photographic history of the borough of Indiana, Pa., containing more than 200 images of prominent individuals, places, and institutions. A book in the “Images of America” series.

Pittsburgh During the American Civil War, 1860 – 1865
By Arthur B. Fox. (Chicora, Pa.: Mechanicsburg Bookbindery, 2002). Illustrations, maps, xii + 236 pp., $39.95 hardcover
Comprehensive examination of the Pittsburgh home front during the Civil War. Discusses the Civil War camps of Pittsburgh, Fort Pitt Foundry, Artillery Proving Grounds, Allegheny Arsenal, Sanitary Fair, and defenses of Pittsburgh.

Sauerkraut Yankees: Pennsylvania Dutch Foods & Foodways
By William Wos Weaver. (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 2002). Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, xxiv + 216 pp., $19.95 paper
From an 1848 cookbook called Die Geschickte Hausfrau, (The Handy Housewife), the author translates recipes from High German, while discussing their history and significance within Dutch culture.

Pittsburgh Sports: Stories from the Steel City
Edited by Randy Roberts. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). Illustrations, index, 282 pp., $29.95 hardcover
By standard sports clichés, baseball is the smell of cut grass and rawhide on wood. For me, it will always be my grandfather sitting in his easy chair on summer afternoons in McKeesport, listening to the 1971 Pirates on his radio. On certain days, a warm, sulfur-infused breeze would waft through the window, and for a moment, sport and place achieved a certain memorable synchronicity.

For many of the contributors to this volume, it is moments such as these that best capture the relationship between Pittsburgh and its professional sports franchises. If there's a unifying theme to this collection of essays, it is the easily overlooked notion that professional sports are best understood when experienced in their historical and geographic context, whether that be expressed in personal or social terms.

Editor Randy Roberts' opening essay sets the tone. As a child, his family moved from Pittsburgh to central Pennsylvania. The author clung to his father's tales of the old country, as he calls it: "To hear my dad talk, [Pittsburgh] was a land fully magical, filled with shadows and street lights that turned on at noon..."
Within that "grander narrative," Roberts' father introduced him to "the handful of Pittsburgh men who became gods and champions... boxers... with names like Harry Greb, Billy Conn, and Fritzie Zivic."

The personal story is also useful because it pushes beyond the cliché of Pittsburgh as a "sports" city, whose teams reflect the "pride" and "work ethic" of its gritty, down-to-earth, blue-collar residents. It's not that there's not
some truth in such aphorisms; it's just that in this volume, well-worn platitudes are subjected to a good road test. Historically, we learn, being a Pittsburgh sports fan has meant having to endure long seasons of hapless sports franchises that nonetheless managed to instill a die-hard loyalty.

It's a lesson that emerges clearly in Richard Peterson's account of his street urchin-like existence in the 1950s. Relying on street smarts, Peterson managed to take in every sports team Pittsburgh had to offer — in one case, from a concealed perch on top of a Forbes Field concession stand, in another, from the hole in the roof of the old Duquesne Gardens. By the time Pittsburgh emerged from its perennial loser cocoon in the 1970s, the author had moved on and could only watch its teams by satellite. "The irony of watching Pittsburgh sports on television is that the great Pirate and Steeler Teams of the 1970s ... loom small in my mind's eye." By contrast, "those Pirate rinky dinks and the same old Steelers still seem as large as life ... the closest thing I had to heroes in an otherwise drab blue-collar world."

One of the most satisfying contributions is Chris Elzey's account of the Pittsburgh Pipers, the city's short-lived ABA franchise. In recounting the team's 1967 season, Elzey carefully constructs a social-historical narrative that sets the Pipers' championship year against the backdrop of increasingly tense race relations, which culminated in the 1968 race riots following the King assassination. Even as the franchise advanced to the ABA finals, there were lots of empty seats. Poor attendance was blamed on the riots, which were literally outside the door of the Civic Arena in the Lower Hill. The local paper blamed the Pipers' disappointing fan base on the city's innate racism. Regardless, the rarely heard story of the Pittsburgh Pipers suggests the sorts of insights that can be derived from looking at the city's sports failures and in what it collectively failed to embrace. As with any collection, there are some near and broad misses: a chapter that tempts with the promise of exploring Pittsburgh's football tradition slips instead into a chronology of interscholastic leagues. And while the subtext of race relations is given plenty of attention, the impact of social class and ethnicity is played with too light a touch. Most readers are familiar with the story of racial exclusion and integration, but what about the impact of the city's myriad white ethnic groups on the contours of Pittsburgh sports? One need look no further than the fan groups spawned by the 70s Steelers: Franco's Italian Army with its red, white, and green flags and helmets, or Jack Ham's fans flying a huge "Dobra Shunka" banner (Polish for "the Great Ham").

Most of the contributors write neither as complete insiders, nor as outsiders. Some are permanent expatriates; some are newcomers eager to connect to their adopted hometown; still others, like Laurie Graham, who writes of her distantly inherited attachment to the Pirates, are somewhere in between. For all three varieties, Pittsburgh's teams offer a window on the soul of the city. The perspective offered in this collection also underscores another truism, often amidst the relentless mass marketing of pro sports today. Professional sports may be all business, but teams are themselves more process than product, a continually evolving stew of colorful players, coaches, owners, and most importantly, loyal and wonderfully human fans.

Cart Miner, Senior Curator, Political History and Popular Culture, State Museum of Pennsylvania

The Long Road: From Oran to Pilsen. Oral histories of World War II, European Theater of Operations

Edited by David Wilmes. (Latrobe, Pa.: St. Vincent College Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, 1999). Illustrations, 386 pp., $28 hardcover

Books about World War II keep coming, even though the war ended 56 years ago, and a generation of Americans has grown to adulthood scarcely knowing who was fighting whom. Two kinds of history dominate the flow: those concerned with the big picture, and those concerned with the life, and often death, of the men who did the fighting.

More of the latter — personal and small unit histories — are being published these days. World War II vets know they won't be around many more years, and they have an urge to tell it like it was while they can.

The Long Road, based on interviews with 28 U.S. Army Ground Forces vets from central and Western Pennsylvania, falls into the personal history category. All participated in battles that destroyed the Nazi and Italian Fascist war machines in Western Europe and the Mediterranean theater in 1943 – 45.