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.

Crossroads of Commerce: The Pennsylvania Railroad Calendar Art of Griff Teller
By Dan Cupper, photography by Ken Murry (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2003) 150 color and 70 b/w photos, 184 pp., $29.95 paperback
Starting in 1925, the Pennsylvania Railroad commissioned an oil painting of a PRR engine for its wall calendars. Teller painted 27 of the 33 annual scenes plus three times that many images in later life. The book includes stories of Pittsburgh’s role as the western terminus of the line and later as a crossroads for the PRR. Local landmarks captured included the Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, a coal mine complex near Johnstown, and the Conway yard along the Ohio River along with many period research photos. Revised from 1992 with a new epilogue.

Groundhog Day
By Don Yoder (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2003) 60 b/w photos, bibliography, index, 160 pp., $19.95 hardcover
An in-depth look behind the yearly festivities in Punxsutawney on February 2. The author traces its European origins as a pagan mid-winter festival to a Christian celebration called Candlemas that became associated with weather-predicting animals. The groundhog in history is also explored, from mythological status to its culinary role in celebrations of a century ago. The author was cofounder of the Pennsylvania Folklife Society and longtime editor of Pennsylvania Folklife journal.

The Most Learned Woman in America: A Life of Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson
By Anne M. Ousterhout (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004) Endnotes, index, xx + 391 pp., $35 hardcover
A full-length biography of “America’s first great female savant” who educated herself in literature, history, and languages. Born to a wealthy family in 1737, Fergusson was at the center of the cultural and intellectual world of colonial America. She was especially known for hosting a Saturday evening salon during the 1770s but later infamous for her financial troubles, bad romances, and political indiscretions.

The Soldiers’ Revolution: Pennsylvaniaians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity
By Gregory T. Knouff (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004) Footnotes, index, 320 pp., $45 hardcover
An examination using journals and other records to discern why common Americans fought in the Revolution. Reasons varied but were usually driven by localist concerns, from defense of local communities to political advancement. Also compares these views to the better-known philosophical ones, and examines how motivations shifted during the course of the war.

Under the Southern Sun: Stories of the Real Italy and the Americans Who Created It
By Paul Paolicelli (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003) xxi + 263 pp., $24.95 hardcover
This second book by Pittsburgh native Paul Paolicelli takes readers through the southern Italian regions of Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicilia in an attempt to explore the complex and ever-changing concept of heritage among Americans of Italian descent. Explores many aspects of southern Italian society including its history, economics, politics, and the cultural practices that have been passed down for generations. A must-read for Italian Americans interested in their ancestral roots.
Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of

By David Carlyon
(New York: Public Affairs, 2001) Illustrations, endnotes. xix, 507 pp., $30 hardcover

always say that if an event or person is significant, then there usually is a Pittsburgh connection. This is certainly no truer than in the case of Dan Rice. Never heard of him? Neither had I until author and researcher, David Carlyon, walked into the Carnegie Library in Oakland seeking background information on early nineteenth century Pittsburgh and references to Rice in the local newspapers.

Between 1830 and 1840, the population of Pittsburgh almost doubled in size as thousands of immigrants flowed into town. Pittsburgh was the original gateway to the west and served as a natural magnet that drew tinkers, tailors, carpenters, farmers, and even entertainers and clowns. One of these was Dan Rice who arrived here in 1837 traveling from Buffalo, NY and leading a horse.

Obscure to us today, Dan Rice was a significant phenomenon in the world directly preceding and just following the Civil War. Rice rose to national prominence as he combined the elements of animal trainer, strongman, vocalist, lecturer, and blackface performer in the glittering world of the circus. The author, David Carlyon, takes us on an amazing journey through this world. We are front row witnesses to nineteenth century rural and urban America when the circus came to town.

In Pittsburgh, Rice's energy, ambition, and engaging personality propelled him from a carriage driver to the owner and main attraction of his own circus, "Dan Rice's Great Show.” Dan Rice often was billed in the newspapers as "The Only Original Humorist."

Rice was renowned for his combination of wise-cracking humor, animal acts, and musical compositions. He began his career touring the hills of Western Pennsylvania with a “learned” pig. He later interjected a form of high-brow clowning when he appeared as the English playwright, William Shakespeare. His act embraced the popular music of the day including songs by his friend, Stephen Foster. He debated political issues of the day. Finally, he campaigned for several public offices including a brief run for President.

Born into gentile poverty in New York City in 1823, Rice was the son of Daniel McLaren and Elizabeth Crum. Manhattan in the first half of the nineteenth century was perilously wild with gang violence attending most public activities from elections to the theater. As a young boy, Rice learned to survive and even thrive in these conditions.

How he acquired the name "Rice" is subject to conjecture. Carlyon speculates on the origins of the name and why young Dan selected the moniker that became a household word.

The book is similar in scope and style to Ken Emerson's Doo-dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture (Simon & Schuster, 1997). As he traces the evolution of the career and style of Dan Rice, Carlyon also examines the social, economic, and political aspects of mid-19th century America as the country painfully transformed itself from a "small, agrarian republic...into a large, industrialized, interconnected democracy."

The author, a graduate of Clown College, traveled with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus for three years. Among his other occupations, he worked as an actor and university professor and served in the Army. David Carlyon holds a Ph.D. in Theatre from Northwestern University and a law degree from Berkeley.

In 1853, an Arkansas newspaper styled Rice's circus as "the greatest show on earth" years before other circuses exploited the phrase. According to Carlyon, Rice became the best circus clown this country has ever known. That clown and the world that he impacted disappeared over a hundred years ago — disappeared so thoroughly that we were no longer aware that he even had existed. Combining extensive research and elegant prose, Carlyon takes us deep into that world and introduces us to the most famous man that — until now — we had "never heard of."

Audrey Abbott Iacone, Manager, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Beechview

By Robert F. Ensminger

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). Illustrations, diagrams, maps, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. xvii + 348 pp., $28 paperback

A ubiquitous form on the agricultural landscape of the Mid-Atlantic region, the Pennsylvania Barn stands as a testament to the ingenuity of Swiss-German farmers who began constructing it in southeastern Pennsylvania in the early 18th century. Functional as well as aesthetic, the barn was adopted by the English, Scots-Irish, and others who, with the Germanic groups, carried it with them when migrating to the backcountry of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and points farther south, and westward to Ohio, Indiana, and beyond.

While this building type has attracted a considerable amount of attention from material culture scholars over the years, perhaps none have pursued the genre more diligently than Robert Ensminger. A professor of geography, emeritus, at Kutztown University, Ensminger has devoted much of his career to researching and writing about the Pennsylvania Barn. When the first edition of The Pennsylvania Barn was published in 1992, it immediately became the authoritative text on the subject. In contrast to a number of barn studies that either focus on specific architectural features or a barn's existence in a particular geographic region, Ensminger's holistic treatment of the subject allows the reader to gain a thorough understanding of the origin, evolution, and widespread distribution of this barn type in North America. Specifically, Ensminger identifies the diagnostic features that make the Pennsylvania Barn what it is: a two-story, multi-purpose structure banked into a hillside, with a cantilevered forebay that extends out over the first story. This ingenious arrangement saved time and effort by allowing farmers to drop feed down from the storage area above to the animal stalls below, and provided shelter from the elements for both man and beast. Of particular usefulness to barn scholars is the classification system that Ensminger developed. His organizational scheme eases the burden of sorting out the plethora of different Pennsylvania Barn subtypes. Perhaps most significantly, Ensminger presents a convincing argument as to the origins of the Pennsylvania Barn. While other scholars have conjectured its development as uniquely American, Ensminger hypothesizes that its antecedents rest in Alpine Switzerland.

Whatever minor shortcomings the first edition had were addressed in the second edition. While his original arguments for a Swiss origin were well conceived and substantiated with empirical field investigations, additional fieldwork in Europe conducted for this new edition further supports his hypothesis. In particular, he located other sub-regions of Switzerland where substantial numbers of forebay barns were located, including one canton where forebay barns show an unmistakable resemblance to those in Pennsylvania. However, he also addresses the immigration of Swiss Mennonite farmers from these cantons to Germany and eventually southeastern Pennsylvania. This genealogical corroboration was lacking in the first edition, and its presence in the second edition makes a more solid case for a Swiss origin for the Pennsylvania Barn. Another issue that was not completely addressed in the first edition was the contribution of English settlers to the development of the Pennsylvania Barn. This is rectified in the second edition, where he credits the English with the design for several barn subtypes, which are predominantly located in the counties of most intense English settlements around Philadelphia.

With the publication of the second edition, Ensminger makes an already stellar work that much more outstanding. He updates every major section of the first edition and organizes the updates into an easy-to-read format. A true scholar, Ensminger does not let prior conclusions get in the way of new evidence. When he discovered a new barn subtype in Western Pennsylvania, he revised his classification system to include it. As a result, he extended the Pennsylvania Barn's domain to include the counties between the Allegheny Front and Pittsburgh. In essence, Ensminger's penchant for field work—a necessity in the discipline of vernacular architecture—drives his conclusions.
As a result of many years of research, Ensminger has produced a piece that is a required text for serious students of vernacular architecture, history, geography, and folklife. However, Ensminger's clear and coherent writing style and organizational ability will render the book of interest to the recreational reader as well, and the publication of the second edition of *The Pennsylvania Barn* will undoubtedly attract new admirers of this unique cultural resource.

Jeff Everett, Cultural Landscape Historian, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

In the Fall 2003 issue of *Western Pennsylvania History* a quote appears by Arthur Lee from 1784 that says, "Pittsburgh is inhabited almost entirely by Scots and Irish and there is not a priest of any persuasion, nor church, nor chapel."

Mr. Lee was not very observant, nor well informed. In fact, there was a German church already two years old in Pittsburgh, pastored by a minister who had fled Philadelphia.

Smithfield United Church has a proud Pittsburgh heritage dating back to its organization in 1782, a time when Germans played a prominent role in the development of our city.

Just thought you'd like to know.

J. Douglas Patterson
Senior Minister
Smithfield United Church

A brochure accompanying this letter indicates that a church was not built until 1791, perhaps accounting for Mr. Lee's impression. – ed.

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