

# BOOK REVIEWS



## **Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania**

Edited by Lu Donnelly, H. David Brumble IV,  
and Franklin Toker  
Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010, 641 pp.  
352 B & W illustrations, 12 line drawings, 61 maps  
\$75.00 cloth

Where do you begin with a book that weighs in at nearly three and a half pounds? In this case, with a prolonged round of applause for everyone who had a hand in bringing it to fruition. Lu Donnelly (who pens our Architecture column) and a cadre of others faced the daunting task of producing a volume for the Society of Architectural Historians' series "Buildings of the United States." The objective of the series is to "identify and celebrate the rich... diversity of the United States as reflected in the architecture of each state."

Because Pennsylvania's architectural history is so rich, and the eastern and western regions so different, it was decided that the state required two books. Thank goodness for that. Developing this volume took nearly 20 years and entailed surveying 33 counties in Western Pennsylvania to document not only houses, but town plans, bridges, agricultural buildings, industrial complexes, parks, and other built features that make our region unique.

The introduction takes you on a chronological tour of building techniques and

types and how they have altered the landscape. The bulk of the book contains highlights from the survey of each county. Western Pennsylvania is divided into five regions. Pittsburgh and Allegheny County get their own chapter. The remaining chapters cover five to ten counties each. A brief history introduces each county and city or town followed by descriptive entries from that location keyed to a map. The format is somewhat reminiscent of George Swetnam's *A Guidebook to Historic Western Pennsylvania* from the 1970s, though more expansive in both the histories and descriptions.

The editors cover a large geographical area and variety of structures from the Allegheny County Airport in West Mifflin, to the Cambria Iron Company blast furnaces in Johnstown, to the Norman Village farm complex in Loretto.

The book manages to avoid all the pitfalls you might expect of a work this size. It is well organized so you can easily find any geographical area you wish to explore. The maps are a helpful addition especially if you want to go see the buildings in person. The photographs, though necessarily small, are very clear. It even includes a small glossary in the back in case you need to brush up on architectural terms and styles.

Most impressive, however, is the writing. A

lot of architectural history is either dull and dry, or pompous and overwrought. This is a reference book, not the kind you'd expect to read for pleasure. But you could. The county and town histories are interesting and, even more surprising, the building descriptions are interesting. A great addition to the BUS series, it does Western Pennsylvania proud.

**Lauren Uhl** is museum project manager at the Heinz History Center and is co-author of *Pittsburgh's The Strip District: Around the World in a Neighborhood*.



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