

# BOOK REVIEWS



## **Pie Traynor: A Baseball Biography**

By James Forr and David Proctor

Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010

265 pp., softcover \$29.95

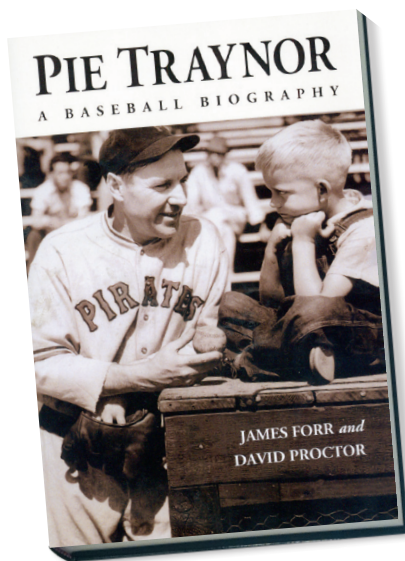
Reviewed by Craig Britcher, Project Coordinator and Curatorial Assistant of the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum

It has been 40 years since the passing of two beloved Pittsburgh Pirates Hall of Famers: Pie Traynor (#20) and Roberto Clemente (#21). While Clemente's legendary throws, World Series heroics, and extraordinary humanitarian efforts are often-told, Pie Traynor was perhaps the most prominent Hall of Famer to not yet be featured in a biography. In *Pie Traynor: A Baseball Biography*, authors James Forr and David Proctor explore Pie's quintessential "nice guy" reputation. Previous generations remember Pie as a man who never drove and only walked Pittsburgh's streets, saying hello to everyone he met. Humble and unpretentious, he was for a time considered the greatest third baseman in baseball history. Forr and Proctor provide an in-depth exploration of the career and well-researched stories of Traynor, which will satisfy members of the Society for American Baseball Research as well as the casual Pittsburgh baseball fan.

Before he was "Pie," Harold Joseph Traynor was born in Farmingham, Massachusetts, in 1898. Why "Pie"? Was it because he loved pie? Or maybe because his father once saw him after playing in dirt and said, "You look like pried type" (a printer's term for jumbled text). Pie claimed there was


perhaps some truth to each of the many stories. A high school dropout at 16, his skills soon became apparent as the Boston Braves and Red Sox showed significant interest. Looking for a solid replacement for Honus Wagner, who had retired in 1917, the Pirates signed him and debuted the young shortstop in 1920. Soon he would be moved to third, where he became unquestionably the greatest third baseman in franchise history.

Perhaps his most triumphant moment was hitting a home run off Hall of Famer Walter Johnson in the 1925 World Series. (The History Center is proud to showcase his 1925 championship pin within the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum.) A Hall of Fame induction in 1948 followed his career.



Pittsburghers loved Pie not only for his fielding and hitting, but also in his many roles that followed his playing days—as a Pirates manager and scout, Allegheny County's Recreation Supervisor in the Allegheny County Parks Department, radio broadcaster, and television personality/pitchman. He called early professional wrestling matches alongside Bill Cardille on WIIC-TV, and coordinated youth baseball leagues around the city.

Forr and Proctor's detail about Pie's life is unprecedented. Even his birth year is cleared up: Pie misled people about his age to appear as a younger prospect, a common practice of the era. This literally followed him to the grave where his tombstone incorrectly reads "1899" instead of 1898. Primary documentation unearthed clears any confusion. Traynor has at times been criticized for not pushing for African American integration of baseball and the Pirates in the 1930s. This criticism is unfounded as Forr and Proctor argue the manager was in no position to make changes. Finally, Pie's acclaim at being the greatest third baseman of all-time has faded, yet the authors place his greatness in context with greats of other generations.

Baseball fans will appreciate the insights but all readers will enjoy getting to know a down-to-earth sports star who served Pittsburgh on and off the field. 

## **Black Valley: The Life and Death of Fannie Sellins**

By Richard Gazarik

Latrobe: Saint Vincent College Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, 2011

137 pages, illus. 36, softcover, \$15.00 plus \$2.50 s/h, PA residents add 6% sales tax

Reviewed by Jason Martinek

In Richard Gazarik's *Black Valley: The Life and Death of Fannie Sellins*, the personal, political, and historical intersect to present readers with the history of a labor hero who has until now not gotten her just due. Surely, Sellins deserves to be in the same pantheon of women labor activists as Mother Jones, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Emma Goldman.

But unlike those women, Sellins did not write an autobiography. Also in contrast to the others, the extant primary source base is noticeably thinner. Given these constraints, local newspaper reporter Gazarik nonetheless

writes a lively narrative, doing an especially good job of dealing with Sellins' murder in 1919.

He starts the book with the story of his grandfather, a coalminer in Natrona, the place where Sellins was murdered. Although family lore had it that Gazarik's grandfather was there when Sellins was killed, he could find no evidence of it.

Sellins' life story is the stuff of legends. Born in 1872, she began her labor activism career in St. Louis' garment industry. In 1910, she was elected president of the local International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and headed an organizing drive that led to a lockout and retaliatory boycott. Ultimately, the company capitulated and Sellins earned a well-deserved reputation as a fighter for workers' rights and social justice.

Two years later, she left St. Louis to organize coal miners in West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania. For defying a labor injunction in Colliers, West Virginia, she got a six-month jail sentence, but was pardoned by President Woodrow Wilson after three. She impressed Philip Murray, who turned to her for help when miners in Natrona, Pennsylvania, went out on strike.

On August 26, 1919, she was beaten and shot to death by deputy police. In the context of the Red Scare, Sellins' family could not get justice. Her death served as an inspiration in the "Great Steel Strike" that began in September. A photograph of her post-autopsy head was circulated by workers with the words, "Shall fiendish cruelty rule America? Brains beaten out, body jumped on, ghoulishly mutilated by the Steel Trust's hellish crew." (p. 84)

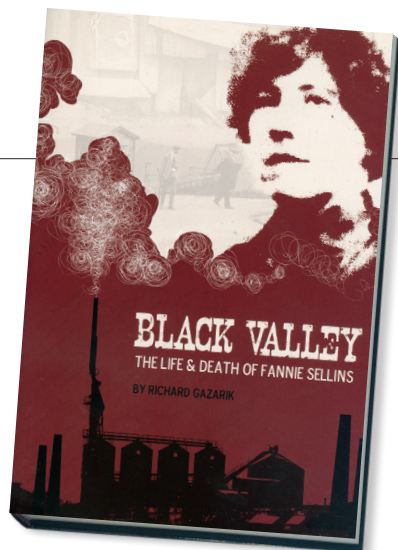
The United Mine Workers of America, on

whose behalf she worked, continued to bring attention to her case in the years that followed. Almost four years later, a jury found the deputy police not guilty of murder. Sellins is buried in Union Cemetery in New Kensington.

Whereas extant primary source documents about her life are sparse, there seems to be a rich source base surrounding Sellins' place in the historical memory of Western Pennsylvania miners. The author's own family story provides tantalizing clues about this history. I wish that Sellins' legacy was better fleshed out in the afterword.

Saint Vincent College's Center for North Appalachian Studies deserves praise for publishing this book about Sellins, who contributed so much to Western Pennsylvania history, but whose contributions have been under-appreciated. I hope Gazarik's book inspires more research on Sellins to help to ensure her place on the Mount Rushmore of women labor activists. ✪

**Jason Martinek** is an assistant professor of history at New Jersey City University. His first book, *Socialism and Print Culture in America, 1897-1920*, is due out this fall. He is now working on a book about the Pittsburgh Fire of 1845.



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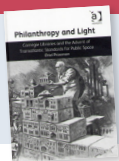
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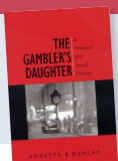
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