

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## ***City of Steel: How Pittsburgh Became the World's Steelmaking Capital During the Carnegie Era***

By Ken Kobus

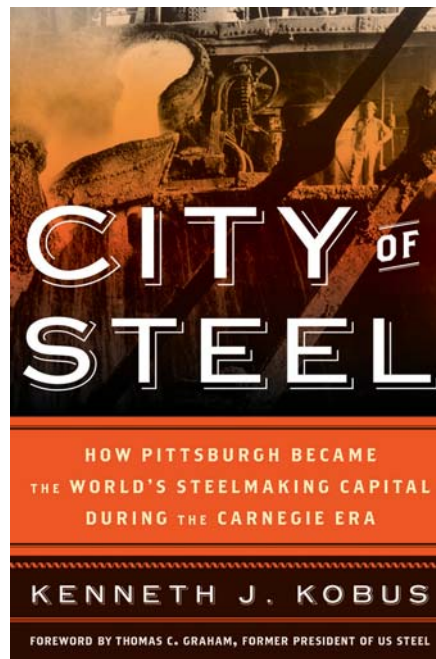
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015

320 pp.

Hardcover \$45, eBook \$44.99

Reviewed by Matthew G. Hyland, Ph.D.

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So much of Pittsburgh's steel history, from corporate records and machinery to production processes and the factories themselves, has been lost. Over time, the inter-relationships among labor, capital, finance, immigration, technology, and raw materials that gave rise to the Pittsburgh steel industry in the Gilded Age have unraveled. *City of Steel* seeks to recover this past and explain the initial growth and development of steelmaking in Pittsburgh by focusing on the Carnegie Steel Company.

Kobus's main interest is the industry's early period, defined by the incorporation of the Carnegie Steel Company and the construction of its first furnaces in the 1870s up to the sale of the company to J.P. Morgan and Carnegie's withdrawal from the industry in the early 1900s. His time interval selection reveals a company on the rise, hitting record-setting production markets, buying out competitors, and making spectacular

profits for shareholders. Kobus attributes such success to decisions by the company in adopting innovative techniques and equipment, what Joseph Schumpeter called creative destruction, that is, the paradox of advancing by sweeping away the things that had brought such progress. Kobus also makes the usual arguments for such success based on Pittsburgh transportation facilities, low-cost immigrant labor, and availability of natural resources for making iron and steel.

Kobus places production and the grandeur of heavy industry at the center of his narrative. Production processes, production numbers, systems of production, production records, and production methods dominate the chapters. His knowledge of production is helpful if you have ever walked the underground passage from the Steel Plaza "T" station to the U. S. Steel building. There, you may have noticed H.R.

Shuler's 1985 mural *Challenge — Pittsburgh*, particularly the first section of the mural showing all the elements that go into making and strengthening steel. Kobus's chapters on crucible steel making, puddling, surveying the quantities of coal mined from the Pittsburgh seam, cooking and distilling coal into coke, the Bessemer process, and open hearth furnaces carefully detail all of the processes and ingredients of steel-making and what Shuler has visualized in the mural. *City of Steel* makes a fine companion for appreciating Shuler's mural or for reading the documentation of Pittsburgh steel mills by the Historic American Engineering Record.

Despite the detail on production, *City of Steel* provides only a snapshot of the steel industry during the Carnegie era, written from the point of view of the factory floor. Missing from *City of Steel* is a wider explanation for the rising demand for steel products by consumers,

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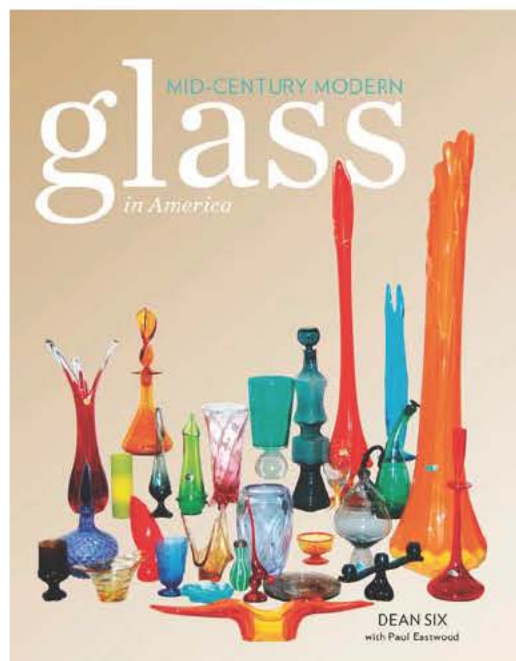
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the intricacies of steel-focused investment banking, sustained comparisons with other Great Lakes steel companies (Lackawanna Steel, for instance), and labor's struggles for better working conditions. Kobus's assertion that Pittsburgh became the Steel Capital of the World during the Gilded Age is dominated by his detailed exposition of the steel making processes. It is a wonderful look at the processes but leaves open the possibility of a sequel that looks at the industry itself.

### ***Mid-century Modern Glass in America***

By Dean Six with Paul Eastwood

Schiffer Publishing, 2014

272 pp., 690 color and b&w illustrations

Hardcover \$39.99

Reviewed by Emilia Boehm Emig,  
Curator of Collections at the Marblehead Museum in  
Marblehead, Mass.

"Can it be a little modern or must it scream?"

In *Mid-century Modern Glass in America*, veteran glass collector and author Dean Six (along with contributor Paul Eastwood) tackles this and other intriguing questions as he welcomes readers to the subset of glassware known as American Mid-Century Modern (AMCM). Defining AMCM is Six's first task and presents no small challenge, beginning with establishing the timeframe under discussion. Ultimately, Six focused on American (plus a few Canadian-made) glass designed, produced, and marketed between 1945 and 1974. The term *modern* also requires delineation; here, Six settled on a broad meaning of "denouncing and rebelling against the form, embellishment, and visual appeal that came before."

The majority of the book is dedicated to examinations of more than 30 glass manufacturers, accompanied by illustrations