

A MAGAZINE GROWS UP

By Andrew E. Masich & Brian Butko

This issue of *Western Pennsylvania History* celebrates the magazine's centennial. We believe it is the longest continuously published journal west of the Allegheny Mountains — and since 1918 it has documented regional history. Articles in this issue and throughout the year will focus on 1918 and later events influenced by that tumultuous year.

The History Center's flagship publication was actually founded decades after the

institution itself. City leaders established the first historical society in 1834, just 18 years after Pittsburgh's incorporation. The Historical Society of Pittsburgh, acting more like a chamber of commerce, quickly died out, and another attempt in 1843 lasted only four years, no doubt hampered by the Great Fire of 1845, which destroyed the Society's collection.

In 1858, as Pittsburgh celebrated the centennial of the founding of Fort Pitt and

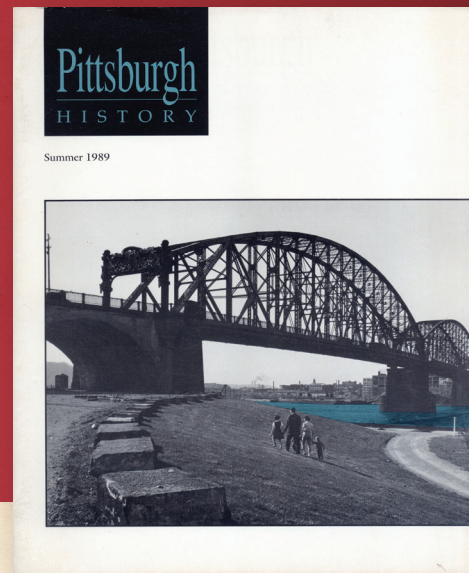
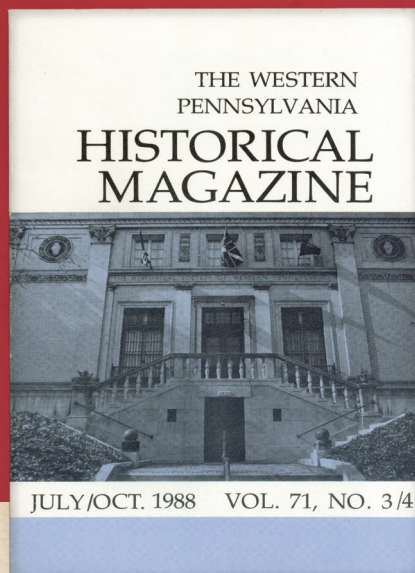
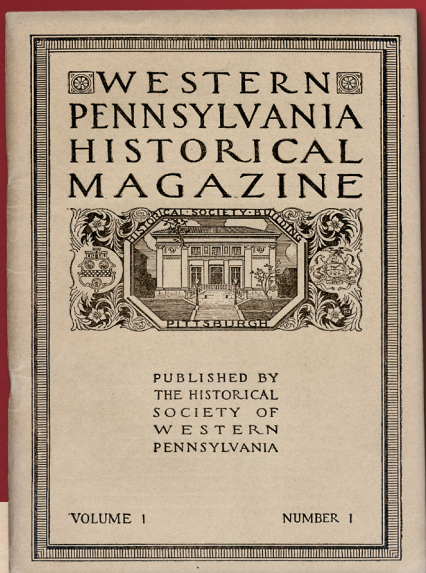
the naming of the city, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania was formed. It was the most active yet and even included a Publications Committee, but nothing was published and the organization disbanded two years later.

Then in 1879, a new organization picked up the torch that kept the spark of history alive: The Old Residents of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, with membership open only to men who had lived here more than 50 years. In 1881, the organization changed its name to the Historical Society of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, and in 1882, a rival group was founded: the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society (they mended fences and merged in 1885).

Though it took until 1891 for the first woman to be accepted as a member, two women had already presented papers. Mrs. Charles Wade, aka Bessie Bramble,



Laying of the cornerstone at the Bigelow Boulevard location, 1912.



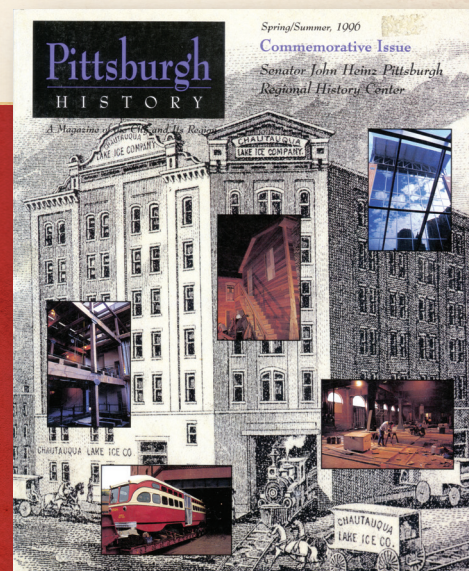
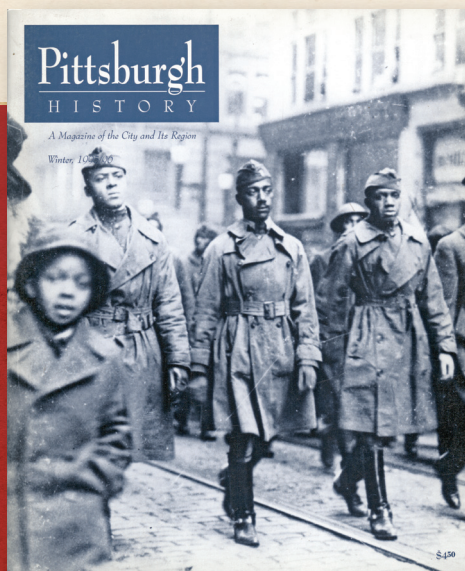
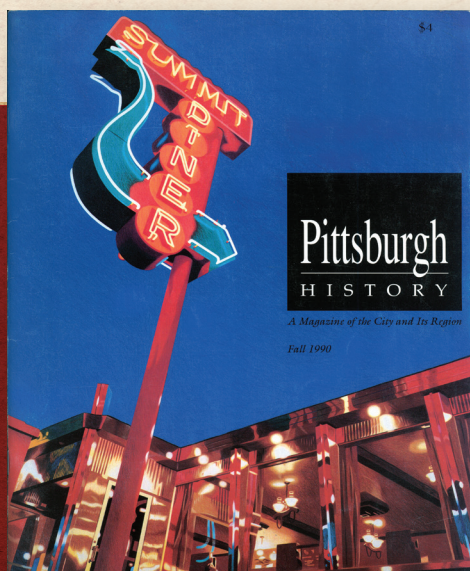
penned “A Reform Needed in History,” in which she chastised writers for ignoring women in historical accounts, observing that “We know Pilgrim Fathers but not Pilgrim Mothers.”

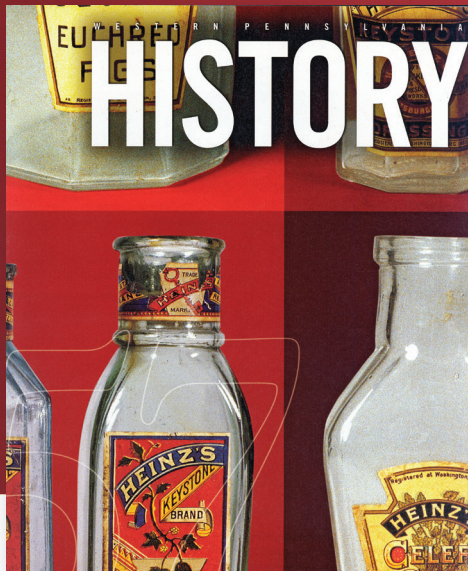
The regular publication of a journal was proposed, to be called either the *Historical Magazine of Western Pennsylvania* or *Fort Pitt Magazine*, but no volunteers stepped up to take on the unfunded effort.

In 1908, the sesquicentennial of Fort Pitt’s founding reinvigorated the society and led to the building of a headquarters on Bigelow Boulevard in Oakland, the quickly growing cultural district east of downtown. The cornerstone was laid on October 30, 1912, by Gov. John Kinley Tener — he had also played baseball for the Pittsburgh Burghers and later served as President of the National League. The doors opened in 1914, spurring the society’s

growth, and in 1918, the organization began to publish historical research and writing in a quarterly journal, *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*.

Little would change with the journal over the next seven decades, though the society had a brief literary flowering in the 1930s when it received a grant from the Buhl Foundation to conduct the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey. Nine books were published





in collaboration with the newly established University of Pittsburgh Press. The Society continued to publish the quarterly journal while also offering talks and automobile tours to engage the public.

The early society focused on collecting relics and curios, while early journals concentrated on forts and the frontier. Then in the 1930s, as collecting expanded into American decorative arts, the journal began

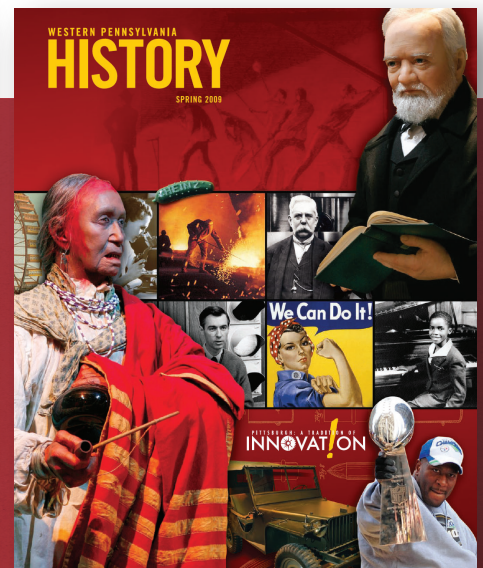
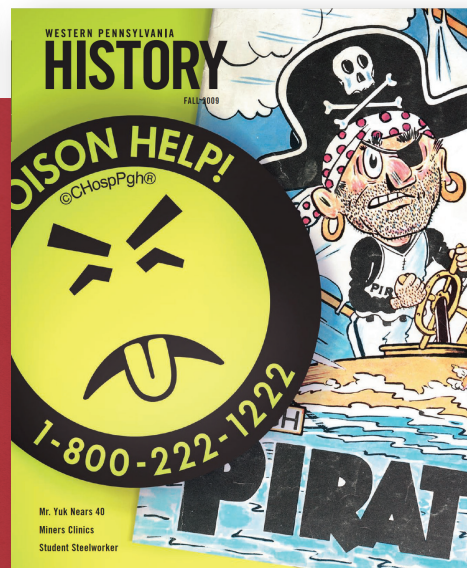
running features on glass and furniture. By the 1980s, the museum began collecting the region's industrial and ethnic heritage, community life, and social history. The magazine followed suit.

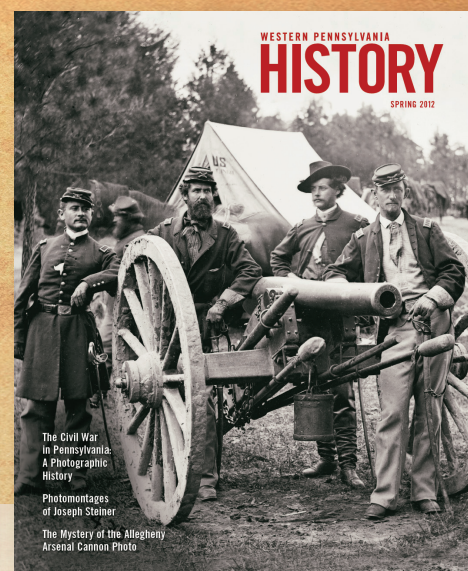
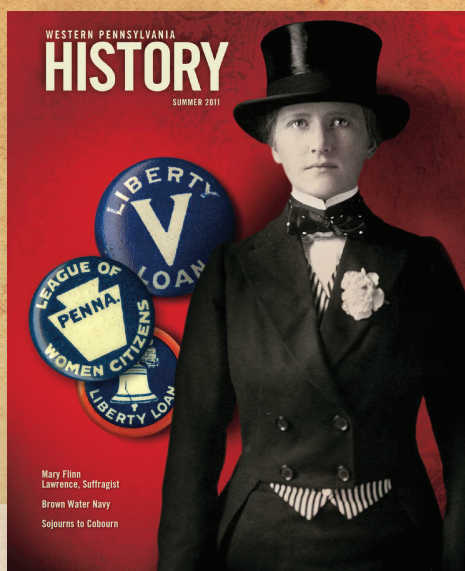
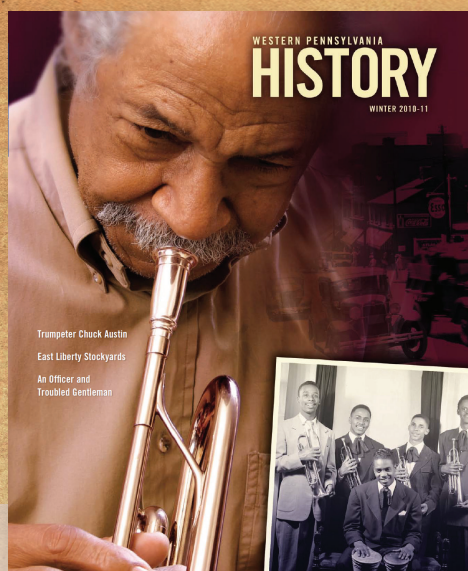
With the advent of social history, historical studies and museum exhibits began to emphasize the everyday lives of ordinary people. The Historical Society initiated a Local History Resource Service to assist

regional historical societies and museums.

The small, plain journal made its first and only major change for 1989 when it grew to magazine format to broaden its appeal. In 1996, after a decade of planning, the Senator John Heinz History Center opened in its current location in the Strip District; the society's journal noted the occasion with a double-length commemorative issue.

With the change to the magazine format,





illustrations became more important and subjects broadened, with articles now ranging from archaeology to diners, immigrant foodways to rural life. Most importantly, the magazine focused on the stories of people. At the same time, articles reflected cutting-edge research, usually with extensive endnotes.

Brian Butko, Editor of today's award-winning *Western Pennsylvania History*, started as a volunteer in 1986. When the

historical society got its first computer, a little Macintosh, it was shared by four departments each day, literally by being carried between floors. The printing has evolved from lead linotype to computerized design and publishing. The only thing that has not changed is the corps of skilled researchers, writers, and editors all passionate about history.



The Communicator Award.

