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.

Breaking the Backcountry
By Matthew C. Ward (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Illustrations, maps, 318 pp., $45.95 hardcover
Analysis of the Seven Years’ War (French and Indian War) from the perspective of those living in the very region where the war began – the backcountry of Virginia and Western Pennsylvania.

Bella Giornata and Elbow Grease:
Remembering Papa and Mama, the Sparanos of New Castle, Pennsylvania
This engaging memoir illustrates life as a second-generation Italian female immigrant while offering a comprehensive look into 20th century New Castle and surrounding areas.

Samuel Rosenberg: Portrait of a Painter
By Barbara L. Jones (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Illustrations, x + 184 pp., $37.50 hardcover
Eighty-two color reproductions and 50 black and white illustrations examine the life and work of this Pittsburgh painter known for his emotionally-charged urban landscapes of the Hill District.

The Forgotten Charge: The 123rd Pennsylvania at Marye’s Heights, Fredericksburg, Virginia
By Scott B. Lang (Shippensburg: White Mane Books, 2002). Illustrations, maps, index, xii + 179 pp., $12.95 paperback
Explores the formation and campaigns of the 123rd Pennsylvania Volunteers, a unit organized in Western Pennsylvania, leading up to their ill-fated charge at the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg.

Times of Sorrow and Hope: Documenting Everyday Life in Pennsylvania during the Depression and World War II
By Allen Cohen and Ronald L. Filippelli (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003). Illustrations, xiii + 265 pp., $45.00 hardcover
Photographic history documenting aspects of everyday life in Pennsylvania; organized by various themes including children, home, land, leisure, the Plain People, coal, steel, and patriotism.

Where the Evidence Leads: An Autobiography
By Dick Thornburgh (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Illustrations, index, xii + 386 pp., $35.00 hardcover
Autobiography of this Western Pennsylvania native and two-time governor of Pennsylvania who also served as U.S. Attorney General in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush.

Traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad: The Photographs of William H. Rau

S
omewhere in my childhood home, I once came across an old stock certificate issued by the Pennsylvania Railroad. I still remember admiring the striking image of the Horseshoe Curve that adorned its face. My admiration, it turns out, was no accident: the Pennsylvania Railroad used the dramatic Horseshoe Curve – John Edgar Thomson's engineering feat that winds its way over the Allegheny Mountains just outside Altoona – to represent the corporation for nearly a century, until its merger with the New York Central in 1968. Traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad shows what made this combination of technology, capitalism, and the Pennsylvania landscape such a powerful symbol.

In the early 1890s, Philadelphia photographer William H. Rau (1855-1920) shot as many as 3,000 photos of the Pennsylvania Railroad and its surroundings. Commissioned directly by the PRR (which hoped the images would lure leisure travelers to the line), Rau approached the assignment as both a technical and an artistic challenge. He succeeded on both counts, creating some of the most remarkable photographs of the 19th-century American landscape ever created. Traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad presents nearly a hundred of Rau's pictures, together with brief essays by a range of scholars, in a well-produced volume.

The images range from tranquil shots of railroad stations in Philadelphia's Main Line...
suburbs to head-on confrontations with the raw landscapes of the coal and steel industries. Rau coupled technical precision with a keen eye for the visual delights of the railroad's angular geometry overlaid on nature's more curvaceous rhythms. Such artistry, Mary Panzer points out in an accompanying essay, suggests Rau participated in turn-of-the-century debates among photographers about how to exploit the new medium's possibilities as an art form.

Rau's photographs are now much appreciated by art historians, but they also provide a window on the social and cultural history of Pennsylvania. Rau conveys the force with which the railroad cut its way across the Keystone State in the 19th century. He tells a story—at first glance, a heroic story—of the triumph of industry over nature. Rivers and mountains here bow before the might of the iron horse. Rau records not the birth of the railroad, but the railroad in the 1890s as a mature technology and the dominant force on the landscape, a whole way of seeing the world that had already reorganized the nation's economy and reshaped America's basic definitions of time and space.

That worldview was marked by hubris, even when a little humility might have served it better. Rau photographed several views of Johnstown in 1891, just two years after a dam burst at the South Fork Hunting and Fishing Club, flooding the city in just 10 minutes. As debris in the torrid Conemaugh River slammed up against the Pennsylvania Railroad's bridge, dozens of people were trapped in the burning wreckage. Rau's Johnstown pictures show none of that. Instead, empty swathes of low-lying land surround sturdy new factory buildings chugging away with renewed determination. Days after the flood, John Fulton, the general manager of the city's Cambria Iron Works, urged townspeople back to work: "Labor, energy and capital, by God's grace, shall make the city more thriving than ever in the past!" Rau shows that Fulton's audience was listening.

The tragedy of Johnstown is not the only historical event missing from these photographs. It takes careful looking to discern here any visual trace of environmental degradation, of displaced farmers, of workplace accidents that left railwaymen crippled for life. The engines of the Pennsylvania Railroad—which enriched the likes of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick—rode at the head of this country's violent entrance into the modern industrial world. Of all that, Rau shows us nothing.

This should not surprise anyone. Rau's photographs were advertisements, visual records of the Gilded Age's most glamorous fantasies. "The shrewd railroad men know this," wrote Rau, "and they employ no servant whose labors repay them so handsomely as the photographer." These are not just paeans to the PRR, but also, as John R. Stilgoe writes, advertisements for modernity itself, a modernity that would master Pennsylvania on the railroad's own terms. Rau's camera was part of the company's apparatus, and it would be wrong to fault him in hindsight for not having been a muckraking documentary photographer like Jacob Riis, who wandered New York City's tenements while Rau rode the rails. But the contributors to Traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad, thorough masters of art history and

Capital's Utopia
Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, 1855–1916
Anne E. Mosher
"Mosher blends her skills as a geographer, historian, and storyteller to create a deep history of a most unique locale.
In Capital's Utopia, the story of Vandergrift becomes a crucial and unexplored intersection between industrial land use and community planning all wrapped in the issues of economic class and paternalism that defined the Gilded Age."—Brian Black, The Pennsylvania State University
$45.00 hardcover

Petrolia
The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom
Brian Black
Winner of the Oil Heritage Region, Inc.'s Paul H. Gildens Prize in Oil History
"A clear, concise telling of Petrolia's fascinating story... Black does an excellent job of examining the oil boom's impact on many aspects of the life and culture of the region."—Ralph Wilcox, Vernacular Architecture Newsletter
$21.95 paperback

Creating the North American Landscape
Gregory Conoff, E. K. Milner, and David Schuyler, Consulting Editors
George E. Thompson, Series Founder and Director

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railroad technology, could have done more to tell everyone's story. James J.D. Lynch, for example, mentions only in passing that Pittsburgh's railroad station was destroyed in the upheaval of the city's 1877 strike.

The Pennsylvania Railroad is no more, its stock certificates worthless slips of paper. Gone too, notes Lynch, are dozens of the charming station houses Rau photographed. And gone, ultimately, is the whole way of life the railroad embodied, from the glamour of the first-class dining car to the thick soot that dusted the shoes of the kids who lingered at the margins of Rau's pictures, dreaming of escape from hardscrabble Pennsylvania hill towns. Reading *Traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad* gives a feeling like the Doppler Effect, in which a train whistles the same note but its sound strikes us differently across the shifts of time and space. Pictures that once foretold what the future might hold now show something irretrievably gone, rendering the Horseshoe Curve a marvel as distant as the ancient wonders of the world.

Christopher Capozzola, Assistant Professor of History at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass.

Pittsburgh, and Erie – covers important railroads located in that sector, famous figures and significant events in rail history, as well as the location of some of the remaining infrastructure and/or places to visit. The work is written in small modules, making it easy to put down and resume reading at a later time without losing context.

The problem that I have with the book is in its treatment of the Pittsburgh region. Of the 256 pages of text, only 30 are allotted to the city and little more than 12 of those deal with the area's history. Where pages are used to describe the architectural detail of beautiful stations and affluent neighborhoods that developed along the rail lines of Philadelphia, this was accomplished in one paragraph for our city. Again, pages were spent describing the network of rail lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad in the eastern part of the state whereas, although Pittsburgh was its destination as well as the traffic center and hub of the Pennsylvania Lines West of Pittsburgh network, once more only a few paragraphs.

Nothing is said of the significance of the region as a freight center or, for instance, that Port Perry near Braddock was the point of highest freight traffic density in the entire world. The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad or Little Giant is presented in slightly more than a page, yet the meaning of the P&LE's moniker is left wanting. Reportedly, the railroad had a better credit rating than its owner, the New York Central, and because of this was used to purchase many of the cars for the system. Supposedly, all of these cars were sent back to the home rails of the P&LE, there was not enough track on the railroad to hold them. No mention is made of the region's industrial railroads such as the Union Railroad, which carried more
freight tonnage than most of America's major railroads.

Philadelphia had the Baldwin Locomotive Company, one of the world's finest, but nothing is revealed of the three locomotive builders here. Neither is America's largest remaining locomotive builder, the General Electric plant at Erie, cited. Nor is anything pointed out about the Westinghouse Air Brake Company, or Union Switch and Signal, or McConway and Torley where Janey couplers were manufactured by the tens of thousands. Each of these manufacturers were of immeasurable importance to the development of railroad industry throughout the world, helping make them safe places to ride and to work. Before these companies made their impact, railroads were notoriously dangerous places for their employees to work and, as touted by the yellow journalists of the time, for anyone to ride. Certainly Pittsburgh is worthy of more copy than printed; it is not as though the information is unavailable.

Despite what I've said, I feel that Railroads of Pennsylvania is interesting, informative, and well worth reading. It includes more than 100 photos and lithographs, and a list of historical societies and visitor information centers. But if you want to learn about the important role that Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania had in that history, you'll have to find something else.

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Ken Kobus has written widely on railroads, including as co-author of The Penny in the Steel City: 150 Years of the Pennsylvania Railroad in Pittsburgh. He also was chairman of the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society's 1996 national convention held in Pittsburgh for the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

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In the very first issue of "Western Pennsylvania History" that I received (Summer 2003) after joining the HSWP, there was an article on Christopher Lyman Magee. My great-great-great-uncle, Thomas Fording, was considered to be the "boss" of the West End, or at least the 36th Ward, for the Magee-Flinn ring. Thomas Fording applied for a job with the city of Pittsburgh when Temperanceville became part of the city. My understanding is that his first position was with the Board of Health. Later he was a street commissioner and the Superintendent of the Bureau of Water Rent Assessment under Edward Bigelow. After leaving the city's employ, I believe he had a position as贴 staff in the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. My great-grandfather, Arthur Fording, recounts an interesting "behind-the-scenes" story in the family history that he wrote. The story relates to the conflict between the Republican and Citizens Parties in the West End. Charles Cavett, an old schoolmate of my great-grandfather's, is agreed to be the Republican candidate in an election (1902, I think) for City Council. His employer, T. Hersheber, was at that time the City Councilman for the Ward. He asked Cavett to be the candidate for the Citizen's Party. Cavett refused as he had already agreed to be on the Republican ticket. Hersherber then decided to campaign for re-election and took time off during business hours leaving Cavett in charge at the office. My great-grandfather writes that Uncle Thomas went to State Senator Flinn and, with his help, was able to find Cavett another job. Cavett was then able to spend time campaigning against Hersheber. I don't recall who won...I think it was Cavett.

My great-grandfather, who belonged to the HSWP (I'm not sure exactly when—I think in the 1920s), also kept a journal about his life in Pittsburgh for a few years in the early 1890s (I hope to transcribe these some day) and named my grandfather "Norman Magee". A final family connection to the Magee-Flinn ring is that my great-grandfather writes that his father worked for Booth & Flinn for a time after losing his job as a letter carrier.

With all this family connection, you can see why I was interested in the article about Christopher Magee. I've been using the Historic Pittsburgh data over the web and have been able to find biographies of both Uncle Thomas and my great-grandfather there, as well as learn that Judge Christopher Magee had a son Norman who died young but whom my great-grandfather may have known.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Fording

The magazine also received a detailed letter from Timothy Bintrim, English Ph.D. Program, Duquesne University, and Kari Ronning, Willa Cather Scholarly Editions, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, praising Peter Sullivan's article on Willa Cather (Summer 2003) and outlining their research, which reads in part, "As scholars researching the family magazine Cather edited 1896-1897 in Pittsburgh, we too have become interested in George W. Gerwig, who wrote several short stories and articles for Home Monthly. Whereas Sullivan focuses on the cultural context of Allegheny's Deutschtown enclave, our focus is biographical and genealogical, concerned with tracing Cather's network of familial, social, and professional relationships." Their full letter, including footnotes, is available in the History Center's Library & Archives. — Ed.