The collecting of World War II information has accelerated the past decade as veterans of that war pass retirement age. Many of us have parents who served in some capacity, whether a mom working in a mill or a dad in the field.

My father-in-law, Ed Link, was stationed in the South Pacific. He captioned this photo, "The good old jeep and I." It looks to be a Ford GPW; identifying the exact model is important to those who study them. Locals know that Butler, Pennsylvania, plays a crucial role in the jeep story. American Bantam, a maker of small cars there in the 1930s, created the design and prototype jeep. Contracts for large quantities were then shifted to the big factories of Willys and Ford, which were given Bantam's blueprints and watched the prototype in action.

The History Center has the oldest extant jeep — the only survivor of a run of 50 (named "Mark II" or BRC-60) produced by Bantam after the prototype was approved. A major exhibit examining Bantam's role and the legacy of their pioneering product will open at the History Center in September 2007.

Museum staff is seeking things like this image — local vets with photos and artifacts, remembrances related to the jeep, and families who worked at Bantam. To continue the story after the war, they're also looking for people who worked at a Willys dealer selling jeeps, or who now collect vintage jeeps. Contact Curatorial Consultant Rachel A. Colker RAColker@hswp.org to discuss artifacts or recollections.

Astronomers in North America awoke early on the morning of June 8, 2004, to catch a glimpse of a rare event, the Transit of Venus. Here in Pittsburgh, residents could view the planet Venus crossing between the Earth and the Sun for only a few minutes. There was a lot of excitement about this celestial event, because the last time it had occurred was 122 years earlier on December 6, 1882.

Not long ago, when sorting through a small group of letters written by Samuel P. Langley to William Thaw, I was delighted to discover one piece of correspondence that described the 1882 Transit of Venus in Langley's own hand. At the time, Langley was the director of Allegheny Observatory, located in Riverview Park in the City of Allegheny, known today as Pittsburgh's North Side. Langley describes the difficulty they had viewing the celestial event because of a cloudy sky. He also mentions
James Keeler, the man who would succeed him as director of the observatory.

William Thaw, a wealthy financier of shipping lines and railroads, was a longtime friend and supporter of both Langley and the Allegheny Observatory. One of the key areas of research for Langley was the accuracy of time, obtained by recording the position of the stars as they crossed the sky. Uniformity of time was vital to the transportation of goods and was of special interest to the railroad industry. (See "Time Travel" by Ken Kobus, p. 12.)

In 1912, more than 20 years after his death, William Thaw was remembered when the Thaw Memorial Telescope was unveiled at the dedication ceremony of a new and much larger observatory building.

This correspondence is a recent addition to the Thaw Family Papers and was a gift of William Thaw's Great-Great Granddaughter Mary Barnes Blair. It is just one of many interesting collections shedding light on Pittsburghers' contributions to science.

The Library & Archives is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday through Saturday.

The following is a transcription by David Grinnell. All efforts were made to accurately reflect original punctuation and spelling.

This letter from Prof. Langley was recd by Wm. Thaw at his home Pitt St. (5th St.) Pittsburgh at eleven o'clock in the morning on Wed Dec 6, 1882 being an Early note of the Transit of Venus which also Wm. Thaw & family saw through olive glass. This letter preserved as there will not be another Transit of Venus until AD - 2004

Dec. 6, 1882
W. Thaw, Esq.
Dear Sir,
The observation of the 1st and 2nd contacts was made here under considerable difficulty owing to clouds. The 2nd occurred just as a momentarily passing cloud was densest but we have a fair observation under the circumstances. The most curious observation was that of the light around the limb of the planet outside the sun, which a contributor to the New Astronomy has been seen before, what we saw was a remarkable inequality seen this morning for the first time.

Sun
[inserted here is a drawing] like this

The observations now being taken will be in no way interfered with by your visit if you should be disposed to favor us with a call. While the planet is on the Sun.

If you do not come up, I will if it suit your convenience call on you Thursday (tomorrow) morning with Mr. Keeler at 10 A.M.

Very truly Yours
S. P. Langley

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