transcend Pennsylvania as “topic.” Jeff Oaks weaves a moving emotional landscape with the familiar physical features of Pittsburgh in “My Father Likes Pittsburgh.” Robin Becker gives us “The Poconos” of her mother’s summer camp experiences. Ed Ochester’s ecstatic “Miracle Mile” explodes the banal landscape of Red Lobster and the Monroeville Mall, questing “to recover / through the detours of art / the two or three simple / great images which first / gained access to our hearts.” Labor and race are treated powerfully in Daniel J. Wideman’s “Slaving,” in which his great-grandfather watches “the mills belch up minstrels. / A tribe of white men in blackface, / stained by furnace tar.” This multiplicity of experience and perspective allows the long-term resident and the visitor alike to see the familiar anew.

*Common Wealth* delivers the Pennsylvania we know and the Pennsylvania we thought we knew; the Pennsylvania we have never seen, never seen “just so,” or had forgotten. The “wealth,” then, is both common and uncommon, and although the anthology’s original intended was those who identify as Pennsylvanians, most of these poems speak to a broader audience as well.

Ultimately, the question of what makes a poem “place-based” remains unanswered. Spring Peepers arrive in New Hampshire as well as Pennsylvania; coal mines scar landscapes in Kentucky; subways and rivers and odd landmarks and neighborhood characters can be found across the globe. The notion of the “authentic” has been disassembled to a large degree by a postmodern sense of constructed, rather than natural, culture and identity. Taken together, however, these poems celebrate what the editors call “our sacred places” and offer a multi-dimensional poetic “map” of Pennsylvania to all comers.

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*Images of America: Duquesne*  
By Daniel J. Burns  

“It was a town with a rough and gritty exterior, but it was a place that always put community and family above all else. It was a town where people worshipped and attended
church faithfully, where neighbors took care of and watched out for one another.”

Located 11 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, Duquesne’s history begins in 1755 as British Major General Edward Braddock and American Colonel George Washington march through the area and are defeated by the French. Once a part of Mifflin Township, Duquesne was later named in honor of the French governor of Canada. Through the 1880s, the area was fertile farmland; the town was incorporated in 1891. After construction of the Carnegie Steel Mill in 1901, Duquesne became an industrial giant in steel production. In the 20th century, the mill employed immigrants from all over the world who had come to join the growing industrial labor force. Rich in culture, Duquesne attracted people from diverse ethnic backgrounds whose skills helped build the community.

This book recounts Duquesne’s history from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, mostly through photographs and detailed captions. Burns provides a one-page introduction followed by seven chapters: “Pioneers and Settlers,” “A Town Forged in Steel,” “A True Community,” “The Landscape,” “Those Who Served,” “Reading, Writing, and Religion,” and “Just for Fun.”

Most of the photographs in the book were provided by Burns or given by longtime residents to the [Homestead] and Mifflin Township Historical Society, where Burns serves as president. Serendipity also played a role: a former employee of United States Steel’s Duquesne Works salvaged pictures headed for the garbage when it closed in the 1980s and handed them over to Burns. Burns himself served as “rescuer” when he retrieved a 1909 picture of the Duquesne Police Force from a City Hall trash bin.

For caption information, Burns listened to oral histories and scoured newspapers, census data, and other records. The author could have supplemented the captions more or, perhaps, added a brief paragraph at the beginning of each chapter. But many of the photographs are of large groups and most likely the originals lacked identification on the back (the worst nightmare for any genealogist or historian). Also, Arcadia tends to follow a standardized format. The “Images of America” series celebrates the history of neighborhoods, towns, and cities through archival photographs, and as a result, there isn’t much flexibility in terms of storytelling.

Burns learned about the city’s colorful past—including its buildings, people, and even its crimes—from residents during his time as sergeant on the Duquesne police force. With his easy-to-read caption style, he writes from an unbiased perspective and does not over-sentimentalize.

He should be commended for his ability to breathe life into many unknown faces and places, giving readers a sense of the moment captured. He also never lets us forget that
Duquesne was “a town forged in steel” and a “true community.”

The U.S. Steel Duquesne Works officially closed in 1984. As a child, I remember summer evenings spent standing on the back porch of my grandparents’ two-story house on Hill Street, not far from the Duquesne Works. I watched the blue and orange flames as they burned from the largest blast furnace, which the Duquesne residents had affectionately named Dorothy. But the Duquesne of my childhood has all but disappeared; the mills closed, and with them went a way of life. The flames from Dorothy are gone, and the houses in the surrounding blocks are now rundown or neglected. The neighborhood stores where my grandmothers used to shop are boarded up, and the ethnic churches they attended threatened by consolidation and closure.

In December 1995, I left Duquesne for Ithaca, New York. These two towns could not be more different. While there are many long-time residents, Ithaca’s culture is more transient, being home to Cornell University and Ithaca College. The residents on my street are mere acquaintances, whereas the people on our street in Duquesne were like family—I was taught as a child to refer to our next door neighbors as “Aunt Marie and Uncle Timmy,” and continued to use these endearments even as an adult.

As a genealogist, I explore the intricate connections between family history and community history, and have mined these issues through my own writing. My father was a standout on the Duquesne High School Basketball Team, and later played for local league teams USA Local 1256 of the U.S. Steel Plant and the Duquesne Serbs. Even those family members who moved away look back fondly, and through his book, Daniel Burns gives all of us a wonderful keepsake. One hundred years from now, someone can pick it up and get to know this Duquesne.

Instead of photographs stashed in attics, scattered in any number of different repositories, or worse yet, discarded in the trash, Burns has preserved this once-booming steel town’s history.

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Those interested in reviewing books should contact Art Louderback at calouderback@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.