**Musical Service: The Life and Times of the Franklin Silver Cornet Band**

By Peter Greene  
(Xlibris Corporation, 2006)  
B/W photos, pp. 422, $34.99 softcover

Some say that a thorough enough description of any single thread in a society can lead to an understanding of that society’s entire tapestry. This certainly applies to Peter Greene’s engaging history of the Franklin Silver Cornet Band of Franklin, Pennsylvania. In the process of detailing the 150-year-old institution’s waxing and waning fortunes, membership, leadership, sources, and travels, Greene includes a fair sketch of local, regional, and national history as well as an examination of popular music’s history and performance.

Franklin, Pennsylvania, sits on the Allegheny River in Venango County about an hour northeast of Pittsburgh. For its first hundred years, the site of present-day Franklin hosted forts for the French, British, and Americans. It became a small agricultural community, then one of the “three sisters of oil” with Oil City and Titusville when the black gold rush hit in the 1860s. Greene sprinkles his chronicle with the fortunes of these oil tycoons (later industrialists and business people) who sometimes were supportive of small-town institutions, and sometimes not. Herb Baum, who was sent to Venango County in the 1990s to dismantle the last of the local oil companies—Quaker State—was vocal in his disdain for Franklin’s backwardness. Greene judges Baum harshly: “It was not enough to give us an economic kick in the breadbasket; Baum belittled our whole region, our lives, our culture.” That the small town was no longer the center of American life by the time of Baum’s arrival and departure defines the scope, the beginning though not the end, of Greene’s history.

While the mayors, employers, and civic and band leaders of Franklin and Venango County march across these pages in detail, Greene never fails to insert a paragraph situating his narrative in the greater scheme of things, with admirable and often humorous precision:

1905 had its share of firsts, from the first Rotary Club to the initial production of novocain. In McKeesport, Pennsylvania, the first true movie theater opened. On a somewhat loftier level, Einstein proposed his Theory of Relativity. But in Franklin, the biggest event on the horizon was the 1905 Old Home Week, the first such civic event attempted here.

The Silver Cornet Band itself falls into the category of the *town band*, which came into being in response to a demand for “music that required the audience to be neither musically sophisticated nor quietly attentive.” During much of the band’s history, that meant playing a preponderance of marches with an occasional admixture of show tunes, overtures, novelty numbers, and vocal feature songs. Other characteristics of the town band included a primarily amateur standing, though support was frequently sought for uniforms, travel, and sheet music. The town itself customarily supplied rehearsal and storage space of varying quality as well as a stipend for the summer concert season that took place, weather permitting (and it often didn’t), in a series of town center bandstands.
Concerts were not the bands only function, however. They were called on for most important community events, including factory openings, picnics, and parades on every conceivable occasion in a time when “there was no such thing as mass entertainment.” War time could be taxing and not every member was thrilled to march down Main Street each time a soldier headed off to war.

The Cornet Band survived the Swing and Big Band eras, and Pop music in all its forms—from jazz to the crooners to the British Invasion, rock, soul, and hip-hop. In the process it became a self-acknowledged anachronism with pride in just that fact—“What we do is quaint. It's backward.”—combined with a sense of wonder at what the band continues to mean to each member and to Franklin.

Membership evolved from an all-adult, male format to include high school boys and finally open membership to anyone, no matter the gender, race, nor age, at about the same time as the rest of society—the 1960s. Greene picks out the key components contributing to the band's survival, including a core of dedicated players who kept it going through hard times, a leader who could vary repertory and maintain a good musical standard, and a strong relationship with the head of the high school music program, who in many instances funneled in a stream of young players. The band’s inclusiveness is one of its defining characteristics. Though its standards of inclusion evolved in tandem with general social norms, members—one accepted—were in for life, whatever the musical consequences: “At no point in our history have we ever told an aging or ailing or just plain not-so-gifted player that it was time for him or her to step down.” On this front, Greene is faithful to his sources, providing a literal snapshot of the band, its membership, and repertory at frequent points in its 150-year history. The book is a precious commodity for the town of Franklin and for current and former band members, but at 400+ pages, it is slightly longer than the general reader might prefer.

Greene’s history of the Silver Cornet Band is a monument to his own participation in the life of Venango County, both as band member for 30 years and as journalist and teacher. Painstakingly researched, exhaustive in detail, and loving in its attention to small town realities, Greene’s volume transcends the genre of volunteer-written institutional history and will hold a place of honor in the very milieu he so reveres as well as being a resource for researchers in the areas of music history and the American small town.

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The Spectator and the Topographical City

By Martin Aurand
(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 150 illustrations, 248 pp. $29.95 hardcover

With its richly illustrated pages, Martin Aurand's *The Spectator and the Topographical City* floats the reader down Pittsburgh's rivers, backwards through time, to a place with three doors labeled "In View of a Golden Triangle," "Scenes From the Turtle Creek Valley," and "Oakland and the Complex Vista." By breaking the city into these three "terrestrial rooms," Aurand directs specific interest to the areas he feels "are at once essential to any understanding of Pittsburgh, singular in their scope and qualities, and representative of the spaces and visual experiences of the topographical city." Though these choices are subjective, Aurand spends just over 200 pages successfully convincing readers, via innumerable resources and works of visual art, that these are the three spaces vital to the spectator's understanding of the city.

Throughout the book, he parallels Pittsburgh with older cities' topographies; theirs' being primarily concerned with spiritual matters and Pittsburgh's dedicated to industrialism and capitalism: "In Pittsburgh, the steel industry and the tower substitute for the church and the dome." Thus, the tone is set for the examination of a secular, single-minded Pittsburgh that is the precedent of our topography. "In View of the Golden Triangle" documents the struggle to deconstruct Grant's Hill and the subsequent race to build amongst capitalists Henry Clay Frick, Henry Oliver, and Henry Phipps, among others. This competition culminates with the U. S. Steel Building, but the history of what we view in the city as spectators isn't the only focus. Aurand shifts his interest to how downtown is viewed from inside the city: from Point State Park to Market Square to Mount Washington. Of the latter, he concludes: "[Through] the act of viewing, the spectator, who identifies with the view and stands suspended within it, sees and assumes his or her place within the topographical city." It is his focus on how people define themselves through Pittsburgh's topography that sets this book apart from other historical works on the city.
“Scenes from the Turtle Creek Valley” focuses largely on the relationship between railroads and the steel mills within the valley, but again Aurand injects his perspective of how the rails impacted the spectator’s view: “The motion of the train shrank space, and thus displayed in immediate succession objects and pieces of scenery that in their original spatiality belonged in separate realms.” He explains how, as the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company dominated the Turtle Creek Valley in the early 20th century, it claimed both the valley and its topography. Westinghouse’s new style of factory, basically variations on the theme of the production shed, offered spectators on the valley floor “a continuous brick façade, displaying window after window after window,” while those observing from the surrounding hills saw only roofs covering the floor of the valley from side to side. This construction frenzy was capped off in 1931 by the George Westinghouse Bridge, again honoring an industrialist as “a triumphal arch may honor an emperor, and a bridge or dam may honor a president.”

The City Beautiful movement swept urban developers’ ideology in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, with its ideals that “sought to bring order to the chaos of the American industrial city and [became] dominated by an aesthetic point of view that promoted a monumental art integrating architecture, landscape, and the city.” Oakland was to encapsulate these ideals—far away enough from the downtown area to become, as developer Franklin F. Nicola felt, “a new Pittsburgh,” one that would be seen throughout the country as a model city. With this idea in tow, Aurand devotes 50 detailed pages to the development and history of Carnegie Technical Institute, now Carnegie Mellon University, and the role the site’s topography played in the construction and viewing of the campus. Aurand’s close attention to this institution is imperative to the function of his book as a whole: how the challenges of the landscape form the structure of the campus and the design of the buildings individually. For example, Machinery Hall, whose rear is dropped off the edge of Junction Hollow, exposes multiple stories not visible from the building’s front. Aurand emphasizes the spectator’s position in seeing the campus throughout “Oakland and the Complex Vista,” thoroughly examining design’s influences, from Italian villas and gardens to Thomas Jefferson’s design of the University of Virginia to Piero della Francesca’s use of linear perspective in his painting View of an Ideal City from the late 15th century. These disparate references, combined with his emphasis on the spectator’s position in viewing these elements, makes The Spectator and the Topographical City a distinctive and informative study on the history of Pittsburgh.

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BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW CAPSULES

Drifting Back in Time: Historical Sketches of Washington and Fayette Counties, Pennsylvania, including the Monongahela River Valley

By J.K. Folmar, I
(California, Pa.: Yohogania Press, 2005)
B/W photographs, index, pp. 240, $19.95 softcover

J.K. Folmar, longtime editor of The Voice of the Mon, the newsletter of the Monongahela River Buffs Association, has compiled 42 articles in this self-published book. Some are edited 1880s-era articles, while others are reprints of Folmar’s own local history writing from regional newspapers. Topics range from Isaac Meason’s Fayette County empire, steamboats, and Dr. Clemmer’s early art of medicine to a look at historic celebrations of Halloween, Christmas, July Fourth, and New Years in the Mon Valley. Black-and-white photographs illustrate the writing throughout. Both old and new articles are filled with surprising facts about the region. –SF

"Kiss It Goodbye!: The Frank Thomas Story

By Frank Thomas, with Ronnie Joyner and Bill Bozeman
(Dunkirk, Md.: Pepperpot Productions, Inc., 2005)
Photos, 515 pp., $29.00 hardcover

This detailed biography of candid Pittsburgh Pirates slugger and hometown hero Frank Thomas is a must-read for every baseball enthusiast. A teammate of Kiner, Clemente, Banks, Aaron, and Frank Robinson, Thomas was a feared power hitter who helped turn around the dismal Pirates teams of the early 1950s. He was well-known for challenging players to try their hardest throw and he would catch it bare-handed—which he did successfully. Much more than a season-by-season retelling of his 17 years in the Major Leagues with eight teams, fans can glimpse the seldom-exposed inner workings of the era’s stingy ownership, the challenges of battling through the minor leagues, and an All-Star’s persistence through numerous trades. The inspirational core value of speaking truthfully and the importance of family, religion, education, and charity are consistent themes throughout the book and in Thomas’ character. –CB

A Patrician of Ideas: A Biography of A.W. Schmidt

By Clarke M. Thomas
(Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks, 2006)
Illustrations, bibliography, pp. 181, $24.95 softcover

A Patrician of Ideas is a very interesting biography of a man who was involved in many of the great changes in the Pittsburgh area, especially during the Renaissance, but who remains largely unknown. A.W. Schmidt was the son of a druggist from McKeesport; he did well academically and attended both Princeton and Harvard. He met and married Patsy Mellon, which put him into contact with the Pittsburgh elite. During the war, he was part of the OSS, which later became the CIA. Later, he was the manager of the A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust where he was involved with Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the establishment of the School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. An intriguing story of a man who influenced many of the great improvements in Pittsburgh but has remained in the shadows. –AL

Haunted Pennsylvania: Ghosts and Strange Phenomena of the Keystone State

By Mark Nesbitt and Patty A. Wilson
(Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2006)
Illustrations, bibliography, pp. 135, $9.95 softcover

This is a nice collection of odd occurrences in Pennsylvania, with the last half of the book dedicated to the central and western part of the state. There are familiar stories, some that are new, including a tale about the haunting of the Sen. John Heinz History Center, where this magazine originates. Both authors have published previous books on hauntings in Gettysburg and central Pennsylvania. –AL
Each year, $8,000 in scholarship monies are offered by the committees of the Italian Nationality Room at the University of Pittsburgh. In 2006, as part of their fundraising efforts, the Executive Committee of the Italian Room published this cookbook, a unique collection of recipes from Pittsburgh's Italian-American community. These are the recipes of the none, or grandmothers, many not found in typical cookbooks. The book also contains facts about the Italian Room and stories about the recipes, which recall the presence of these dishes at family dinners and celebrations in the U.S. and Italy. —NC

Many people know about the Allegheny Arsenal explosion or that Stephen Foster was born in Lawrenceville and the town was laid out by his father and named for Capt. James Lawrence who coined the phrase "Don't give up the ship." But there is much more to Lawrenceville history, and James and Jude Wudarczyk, along with others, have been writing down the stories for a number of years. Subjects as diverse as Fritzie Zivic and Mayor Kline's carpet have roots in this Pittsburgh neighborhood. This is the third book of stories on the area: A Doughboy's Tale, written with the help of Allan Becer and Daren Stanchak, was published in 2004, and a revised version of Monster on the Allegheny was published in 2005 by the same publishers and priced as mentioned above. —AL