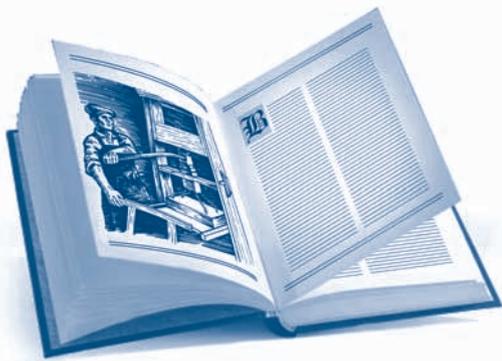


BOOK REVIEWS



Velocity

By Nancy Krygowski
(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007)
80pp., \$14 softcover

Nancy Krygowski's debut collection of poems, *Velocity*, time-travels through galaxies of memory and conjecture to return, sometimes ruefully, always generously, to the difficult and lovely planet of the here-and-now. Along the way, these poems observe the transforming moments of a life lived wide-awake in ordinary places and among persons upon whom fortune has not smiled long or widely. Krygowski's poems embrace these lives with a persistence to seek what it is that joins us to each other—even as the forces of loss and grief withhold us from knowing, or from loving, as much as we would wish to. Krygowski, a Youngstown, Ohio, native, long ago made Pittsburgh her home. She teaches adult literacy here. Her poems are infused with the city's domestic detail: a thrifty landlord, Russian neighbors, checkout lines, kids rapping "Red Rover." The book opens with a prelude, "This Loss, Any;," a poem whose fragmented images congregate into a gesture of empathy, solidarity, with each of us in our own particular losses. As Krygowski knows, "this loss, any: wears a body: ... goes inside: listens / to the names." In "Dear Annette," a letter to a dead sister, she laments a shared history of silences, now pinnacled by an ailing mother's lapses into dementia:

...still
what she says
is nothing.
(*it took me an hour to clean the back room.*)
and nothing.
(*why do you wear your hair like that?*)
terrible is the word
she never forgets.

This could be one of the most distressing moments in the book (and it is), yet with Krygowski's gift to make words do the things that were left undone, the poem is also chatty and witty, and finally tender: "your daughter," she tells Annette,

has your thick eyebrows
and small fistled
breasts. she gets angry.
over the phone
I blow kisses, send wishes.
we say, *I love you. I love you.*
I love you more. ten years
into your new dead life.
we carry phones.
can you give us a call?

Loss and love occupy the hearth of this collection in poems that speak with restless honesty about desire and the longing for consolation. The happinesses in *Velocity* show up suddenly, quirkily, sometimes as random synchronicities, sometimes in moments of pure sensory pleasure as when the poet reminds us, "See this single bougainvillea flower? / Do you hear that word, / *bougainvillea*, / how it loves your mouth?" Another poem shows us the cosmos in a wet Pittsburgh sidewalk at night, where "cement and water / could hold galaxies"—

the large light a sun,
the smaller ones
planets, each with its
mythical name.

Krygowski's interest in life outside the door takes us on exuberant excursions across many subjects—from panties to linguistics, prairies to Vaseline, grocery

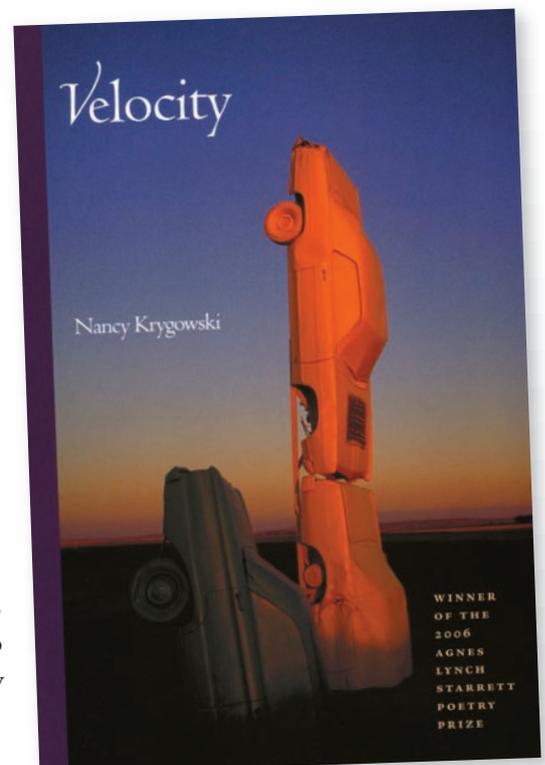
stores to "heaven, as we know it"—and reveals the affinities among things and ideas. In a wry love note to "sweet brain, / needy brain," Krygowski scolds its relentless cogitations: "...I'm tired of your sheep / that need shearing to make a sweater / with a hole in the elbow / that will need patching. [...]" Slow down," she pleads. "I've got some / feeling to do."

And *Velocity*'s poems are deeply felt, deeply smart. In the book's title poem, Krygowski recasts a teenager's loss of innocence as a math problem:

...A girl
on a bike travels at 20 mph.
Two men in a truck
moving at a slightly faster speed

pull up. One grabs her hair.
What will the outcome be?

If, like me, you don't always read books in page order, then find this poem first—for the thrill of its reasoning, its haunting music, and the strange sense it makes of accident.



“Velocity” evokes an instance of fracture in a sweet life, and shows how poetry can save what is wondrous amid what is wounding. “I was in love / with speed, long hair trailing behind / like a visible wind,” the poet says. “I had been learning, slowly, / to love my solitude, a fire / inside.” That “fire,” Krygowski’s radiant voice of elegy and practical love, sings its plainspoken reckonings across this collection in lines so well-turned they shimmer. Some lines are just too lovely, too consoling, not to share. In the closing stanza of “The Sky Is Right,” we’re invited to imagine, “All the people I’ve loved, / dead or alive, / are in fields across the country / playing baseball, / and no one wants anything / they cannot have.” Krygowski’s poems nudge me to pick up the phone, knock on my neighbor’s door. Reading them feels like holding a life-vest, fashioned from a dailyness whose depth and beauty we might not see without this poet’s salvaging eye. Read them aloud; your mouth will thank you.

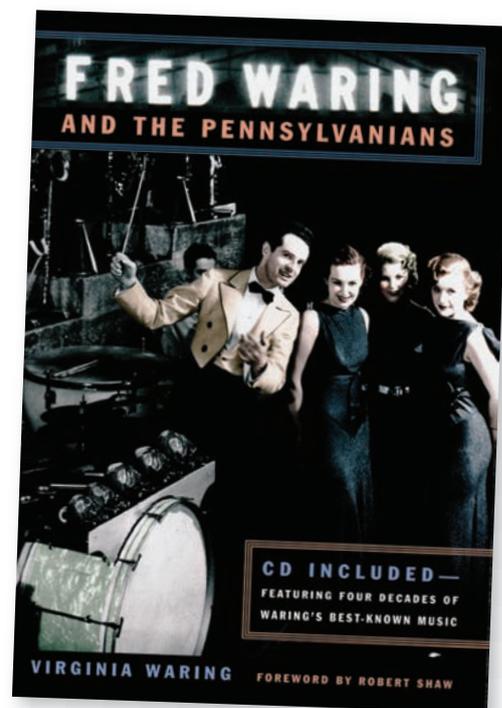
Lois Williams is a writer and lecturer at the University of Pittsburgh.

Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians

By Virginia Waring
(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007)
Photographs, cartoons, CD, 464 pp. \$29.95 hardcover

The concept of a “band leader” has been significantly redefined over the last quarter century, with the closest present-day analogy being that of an orchestra conductor overseeing all things musical, as opposed to a CEO-like figure handling every aspect of the band. As Virginia Waring endearingly shows in her biography of her husband’s band, *Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians*, the job of band leader was once a position of prestige in the arena of popular music. As she convincingly demonstrates, Fred Waring was at the top of the class in his chosen profession, in part due to the lack of contemporaries whose careers spanned six decades as Waring’s did. Regardless, *Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians* paints a delightful, if slightly homespun, tale of the trials and travels of an American legend, filled with firsthand anecdotes from Virginia, as well as from other surviving band members.

In terms of musical context, Fred Waring was in a class by himself. As the book begins,



the reader learns Waring was, “the first to have a singing band, the first to use megaphones, to feature vocalists and an orchestra, to combine an orchestra with a glee club, to originate the show choir concept, to make a full-length musical talking picture, and the first to present weekly musical spectaculars on television.” In other words, Waring created a base upon which other musicians of his time could build,

SENATOR JOHN HEINZ HISTORY CENTER BOARD OF TRUSTEES*

Dan D. Sandman,
Chairman,
Board of Trustees

John F. Bitzer, Jr.,
Vice Chairman,
Board of Trustees

Ron Davenport, Sr.,
Vice Chairman,
Board of Trustees

Paul O'Neill,
Treasurer,
Board of Trustees

Robert Barenfeld,
Secretary,
Board of Trustees

Andrew E. Masich,
President & CEO,
Senator John Heinz
History Center

Arthur L. Baldwin

Esther L. Barazzone, Ph.D.

Susie Barbour

Nadine E. Bognar

Suzanne W. Broadhurst

Commissioner J. Bracken
Burns, Sr.

Esther L. Bush

Estelle F. Comay, Esq.

Mrs. James F. Compton

The Honorable
Jay Costa, Jr.

Charles J. Dougherty,
Ph.D.

Beverlynn Elliott

The Honorable
Brian L. Ellis

Sigo Falk

Timothy O. Fisher

Stan Geier

Chuck Hammel

Matthew G. Harbaugh

Franco Harris

Torrence M. Hunt, Jr.

Robert W. Kampmeier

F. Michael Langley

Mark D. Lay

The Honorable Victor
J. Lescovitz

Gerald F. MacCleary

Andrea T. Mahone

Sandra J. McLaughlin

Glen T. Meakem

Sandy Mellon

Edward K. Muller, Ph.D.

Terrence J. Murphy

Ralph J. Papa

Robert N. Peirce, Jr., Esq.

The Honorable John R. Pippy

Dan Rooney

Carol Semple-Thompson

H. Woodruff Turner, Esq.

Margaret Snively

Arthur H. Stroyd, Esq.

Kaveri Subbarao

Kevin F. Sullivan

Alvaro Garcia-Tunon

Joe William Trotter, Jr., Ph.D.

Stephen R. Tritch

The Honorable Michael Turzai

The Honorable Jack Wagner

The Honorable Don Walko

Dennis A. Watson, Esq.

Honorary Trustee

Teresa Heinz

The Honorable Dan Onorato

The Honorable Luke Ravenstahl

Trustee Emeritus

Frank V. Cahouet

John P. Davis, Jr.

Stephen W. Graffam, Esq.

Maxwell King

William C. King

The Honorable Frank J. Lucchino

David McCullough

Martin G. McGuinn

The Honorable Tim Murphy

* Legal name: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

BOOK REVIEWS

musicians like Paul Whiteman, Fred's longtime friendly rival who shared his love of choral clarity and innovative musical technique, and one of the few who Fred admired as a true original. It is hard to find examples in modern times to compare to "the Waring sound," simply because the chorus as a vehicle for popular music has all but disappeared on the airwaves. Bing Crosby and Perry Como, with their accessible crooning styles, would perhaps be the closest comparison, although this similarity is easily explained given that these are just two of the many well-known names Waring shared tee-times with.

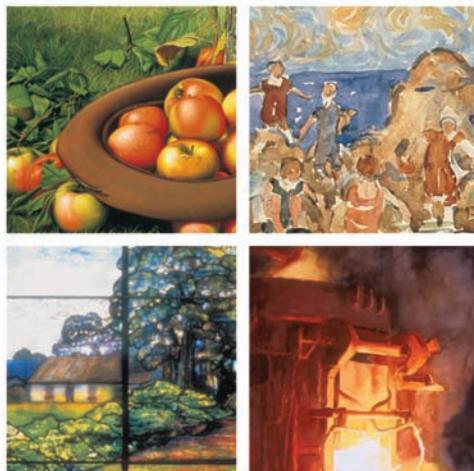
Waring's beginnings were humble, growing up in rural Pennsylvania in a pious family with four brothers and sisters, one of which—Tom—originated the band idea. Their father was an extremely traditional man, who brought home hobos as well as traveling preachers in order to give them a clean bed and a piece of advice as they left in the morning. This was a practice Fred adopted in his later life, much to the chagrin of each of his three wives. Frank, Fred's father, encouraged the learning of music, which eventually led to Fred's calling, although once his son deviated from the strictly church setting Frank's approval waned. This

relationship between father and son is less central to the book than the one between Fred and his brother, Tom, who was the more musical and less business-oriented of the two.

Fred was a born business person, constantly promoting and creating new opportunities through his music, whereas Tom regarded their music as the end to Fred's means. This is the most telling description of the actual position of band leader as Waring occupied it, in that he truly did everything for the band—from securing gigs to designing costumes and arranging music. This renaissance attitude got him in some trouble, however, when he began to tinker with the idea of a musicians' union.

As Fred saw it, musicians deserved recompense for their property when it was played over the airwaves and on jukeboxes. He followed his idea of musical justice all the way to the Supreme Court, where political pressure caused Fred's contemporaries to abandon him, leaving Waring as the unfortunate poster child of the effort for the remainder of his career. As Fred remembers, "I asked [the bartender] if he ever used any Fred Waring records. He said, 'No, the son-of-a-bitch is trying to wreck my job.'" This rocky relationship with the purveyors of music did not help to ensure Waring's musical legacy.

Virginia Waring's unique perspective on Fred's remarkable 60-year career, which ended with his death in 1980, is what keeps this memoir interesting. She began as part of a piano duo, touring with the Pennsylvanians under the name Morley & Gearhart. Her duo, the second half of which was her former husband, exemplifies the modus operandi of Waring's band, in that he was quick to acquire new acts to increase the variety and showmanship possibilities of his stage show.



America the beautiful.

Travel only 35 miles east of Pittsburgh and see America. The Westmoreland features works from the nation's most celebrated artists. Art that is worth the trip.

May 11–June 8 *The Westmoreland Juried Biennial*

June 29–Oct 19 *Painting in the United States*

 **THE WESTMORELAND**
The Place for American Art

221 North Main Street / Greensburg, PA 15601

Hours: Wed–Sun 11 AM to 5 PM; Thurs 11 AM to 9 PM;
closed Monday, Tuesday and most holidays.

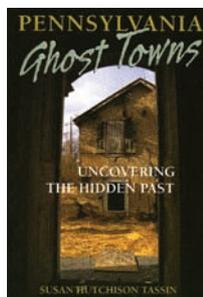
For more information, please call 724.837.1500 or visit www.wmuseumaa.org

BOOK REVIEW CAPSULES

Whereas today a four-piece band is the standard, Waring traveled with 65 musicians, give or take a few, depending on the show. He was also never satisfied with a set list until half hour before the curtain, as many of his band-members recall. It kept the show fresh and interesting for the band as well as the audience.

Virginia Waring's writing style is anecdotal, and will appeal to readers who share her frame of reference. She leaves the reader to fill in the social surroundings of his career, as she focuses on specific instances and relationships that were unique to the Warings. It is mostly chronological, although not entirely, and thus becomes difficult to follow at points when the text leaps in time spanning a decade. The book is nevertheless an enlightening read in relationship to the life and times of an important band that has been neglected by posterity.

Maxwell Jones is an Americorps member currently teaching adult literacy at the Allegheny County Jail.

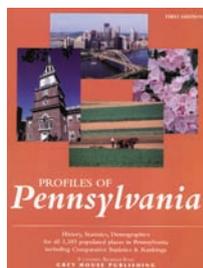


Pennsylvania Ghost Towns: Uncovering the Hidden Past

By Susan Hutchinson Tassin
(Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2007)

Bibliography, index, viii, 151 pp., \$10.95 softcover

Pennsylvania has a rich history, but many towns that helped make up its legacy are now gone. This book strives to keep the memory of these "Ghost Towns" alive. The book divides Pennsylvania into six regions and covers such places as Pithole City in Venango County, which lasted only 500 days, and Teutonia in McKean County, a German communal society. Several forts, towns with supposed lost treasure and secret silver mines, and old mining and lumber towns are among the other locations explored in this book. A history of each town, what it is like today, and driving directions are included. —Debbie Day



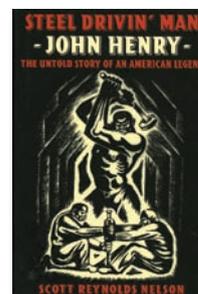
Profiles of Pennsylvania: Histories, statistics, demographics for all 3,385 populated places in Pennsylvania including Comparative Statistics and Rankings

(Millerton, N.Y.: Grey House, 2006)

Colored maps, tables, place index, user's guide, xli, 994 pp., \$186.25 softcover

Profiles of Pennsylvania is a mammoth compendium of statistical and demographic information on the 3,385 "populated places" that comprise the state. Drawn mostly from the 2000 U.S. Census (with additional data

from 2005), each area's profile includes geography, ancestry, economy, housing, transportation, industry, education, population, safety, and local contact information. Parallel data is also presented for the 67 counties, with the addition of weather, religion, health, taxes, and recent election facts. In addition to the profiles, there are comparative statistics for Pennsylvania's 100 largest areas, an extensive section on ancestry demographics, in-depth data on the state's Hispanic and Asian populations, and weather service station tables. While not the ultimate resource, it is an extremely useful tool to easily discover information about areas of the state, especially those small places not addressed elsewhere. —Lisa Lazar



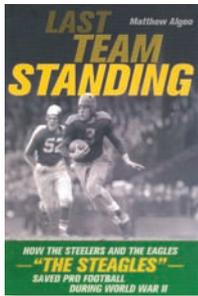
Steel Drivin' Man – John Henry – The Untold Story of an American Legend

By Scott Reynolds Nelson
(Oxford University Press, 2006)
Illustrations, notes, index, 214 pp., \$25.00 hardcover

Many of us are familiar with the folk song "John Henry." If you've ever wondered if the ballad is based on a real person, the answer is yes and this book tells the story of that young man from Virginia—a convict who worked and died during the construction of the first railroad through the Appalachian Mountains. Was there really a contest between John Henry and a steam drill? If so, which was faster? *Steel Drivin' Man* has the answers. As well as uncovering the life of the man behind the song, the author traces the evolution of the song itself. Nelson also examines how John Henry became the inspiration for the

BOOK REVIEWS

many comic book heroes that followed. Liberally illustrated with wonderful old photos and drawings. –Debbie Day



**Last Team Standing:
How the Steelers
and the Eagles
– “The Steagles” –
Saved Pro Football
during World War II**

By Matthew Algeo
(Cambridge, Mass.:
Da Capo Press, 2006)

Photographs, index, bibliography, xvi, 270 pp.,
\$26.00 hardcover

Matthew Algeo’s tremendous book looks at how World War II’s effect on the homefront intertwines with professional sports in the story of the Steagles. The Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles merged to form the Steagles in order to keep the 1943 NFL season going despite the assignment of most healthy men to the military or essential industry. Most players were “4-Fs,” or “physically unfit for service.” The Steagles, already beset by limitations such as ulcers, partial blindness,

and perforated eardrums, struggled with intercity rivalry; animosity among the newly-joined owners, players, and coaches; the difficulties of a 500-mile separation between the two teams, and the need for players to maintain full-time jobs to avoid the draft. *Last Man Standing* is an intimate view of the players’ and coaches’ lives, as well as a spirited retelling of the political and historical events that shaped this unusual season. –Lisa Lazar



Credit: Jodi L. Torboli

This spring will bring new improvements to Meadowcroft Rockshelter, a National Historic Landmark, and the oldest site of human habitation in North America.

After 16,000 years of history, we think it’s well worth the wait.

**Grand Opening
May 2008**

**A Grand Opening 16,000
Years in the Making**



ROCKSHELTER AND
MUSEUM OF RURAL LIFE

www.pghhistory.org/meadowcroft • 724-587-3412