The influx of people from abroad, coupled with African American migrants from the South, reshaped the cultural landscape of Pittsburgh. Many of these unskilled newcomers became integral cogs in the industrial machine by providing much-needed labor. Others imported ingenuity and ideas from their homeland, adding further creativity to the region’s inventive spirit.

Industrialization, urbanization, and immigration also spawned a host of problems. Worker safety and public health issues challenged social reformers, private companies, and governmental agencies, which sought to protect workers. The burgeoning labor movement shared this desire and added to its crusade a quest for shorter working hours and higher pay. Pittsburgh became the birthplace of labor unions, and the city fostered trade unions dedicated to the ideology of uplifting the working class. Some worked within established networks; others used radical means.

In fall 1919, labor leaders in Pittsburgh organized a nationwide strike of 350,000 steelworkers to improve pay and working conditions. Known as the “hunky strike” for the many foreign-born workers it involved, the action failed in its 15th week.
The Pittsburgh Survey

The lives of men, the fair living of families—these are worth conserving to the uttermost against the risks of work. These the industries of America waste without tally.

— Paul Kellogg, editor of the Pittsburgh Survey

Using the power of their pens, Pittsburgh Survey authors directed public attention to the plight of the poor and fostered governmental reforms that improved the life of the American worker. With words, they changed the course of history. In 1907–1908, the first comprehensive sociological investigation of life in industrial America used Pittsburgh as its laboratory. Published in six volumes as the Pittsburgh Survey, the Progressive-era investigation exposed the dangers faced by the poorest Americans and provided a model for implementation of much-needed reforms. An impressive array of methodological investigations tackled such subjects as public health, sanitation, child labor, housing conditions, and, most importantly, the dangers of industrial work.
Crystal Eastman and Social Reform

“No woman who allows her husband and children to absorb her whole time and interest is safe against disaster,” wrote a precocious 15-year-old Crystal Eastman (1881–1928). Her feminist views didn’t stop there. They set the stage for a lifelong commitment to social reform. After earning a law degree from New York University in 1907, Eastman worked in Pittsburgh on the Pittsburgh Survey. Her book Work Accidents and the Law exposed the many dangers faced by Pittsburgh industrial workers and inspired the governor of New York to enlist the young progressive on a committee examining worker safety. There, Eastman drafted the nation’s first workers’ compensation law. She later helped found the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Pittsburgh Coal Seam

It heated homes, ran railroads, powered ships, lit lamps, operated industrial machinery, and manufactured coke for iron and steel production. In the 1760s, Coal Hill—now known as Mount Washington—supplied fuel for the British outpost at Fort Pitt, making Pittsburgh the site of one of the earliest American coal mining operations. By the early 1900s, the industry had expanded precipitously and the global demand for coal reached immense proportions. The Pittsburgh Coal Seam, a rich bituminous vein covering Northern West Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania, provided one of the most important natural resources in the world. Even in the “Steel City,” coal was king.
Coal Mining Calamity

Stark and cold with a light snow on the frozen ground—that was December 1907, the most deadly month in mining history. On December 1, an explosion at the Naomi Mine in Fayette City killed 34 miners. A few days later, the single worst coal mining calamity in American history occurred at Monongah, West Virginia, when 361 men and boys died. Then, on December 19, the Darr Mine near Jacob’s Creek, Westmoreland County, exploded, killing 239. Two other disasters elsewhere in the United States brought the death toll that month to well over 700 miners. Most of the blasts were blamed on open-flamed lamps that ignited methane gas or coal dust. Between 1900 and 1910, more than 20,000 coal miners died on the job. By 1930, the mines had claimed over 70,000 lives—more than all American battle deaths in World War I. These and other recurring calamities in American mines in the years after 1907 necessitated action. Pittsburgh responded.
Mine Safety Appliances Company

Within a span of 25 years, explosions in mines had decreased 75 percent. How? With the adoption of the Mine Safety Appliances Company flameless safety lamp. MSA also created the McCaa breathing apparatus, a self-contained breathing device for rescue workers patented in 1927. For the large contingent of immigrant workers, the company also produced instructional signage in five languages to enhance worker safety and efficiency. MSA designed, patented, and produced an array of other safety products making the company the most important mine safety business in the world.

Joseph Joy’s Joy Loader

When Joseph Joy’s wife sustained a severe back injury, he designed and patented a mechanical bed for her recovery and then sold the bed to a local hospital. Joy didn’t practice medicine, though. He worked in the coal mines, and he invented using imaginative ideas, a hard work ethic, and an innate gift for problem-solving. Joy revolutionized coal mining by securing a staggering 190 patents, including a wide array of devices that mechanized the mining industry. His most significant invention, a gathering machine called the Joy Loader, collected coal automatically and rendered obsolete the pick and shovel. Building on his early experiences with the Pittsburgh Coal Company, Joy formed his own mining machinery company in 1919 with headquarters in Franklin, Pa.
Carnegie Hero Fund Commission

On the morning of January 25, 1904, the Allegheny Coal Company mine in Harwick exploded, claiming the lives of 181 coal miners. Two miners died that day trying to save others. Andrew Carnegie believed that ordinary citizens who performed such extraordinary feats of heroism should be honored for their actions. This terrible coal mining disaster inspired him to create a commission to do just that. Within three months of the tragedy, Carnegie earmarked $5 million to recognize those who performed courageous acts and to provide financial help to the families of these fallen heroes. The commission also donated to the relief funds of other mine disasters, including $35,000 to the Monongah Mine Relief Fund, and evolved to reward heroic acts outside the realm of coal mining.

The Pittsburgh Agreement Helps Form Czechoslovakia

Imagine Pittsburgh in the early 1900s—home to one of the largest concentrations of Slovaks outside of Slovakia combined with a significant population of Czechs living on Bohemia Hill on the North Side. That’s why one of the most important political documents in the history of the Slovak and Czech people has direct ties to Western Pennsylvania. On May 30, 1918, representatives of several Slovak and Czech organizations gathered in Pittsburgh to discuss, draft, and sign the Pittsburgh Agreement. Written by Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, it represented the first time Slovaks and Czechs issued a public, written document expressing the intention of forming a single common state.

Masaryk addressed a crowd of 20,000 supportive Pittsburghers and went on to become the first president of a new nation: Czechoslovakia. “jeho konštitúcia bude demokratická” let the world know the nation’s constitution would be democratic.
Immigrant Inventors

Impoverished. Uneducated. Illiterate. Ignorant. These words appeared in local newspapers to describe the masses of immigrants in Pittsburgh. Although many lacked education and came as unskilled workers, not all immigrants to Pittsburgh fit the stereotype of downtrodden, huddled masses. Educated in their native country, some brought with them specialized trades, skills, and mechanical knowledge. Others, unskilled and uneducated upon arrival, used their limited free time to obtain a formal or trade education. Consequently, many immigrants joined the ranks of the region’s creative population and invented a surprising array of products designed to make life and work in Western Pennsylvania easier.

An immigrant from Norway, Edwin Ruud came to Pittsburgh to practice his trade as a mechanical engineer. In 1889, Ruud patented the world’s first automatic storage water heater, changing households everywhere. The cast-iron device used an internal copper coil to automatically and conveniently heat water. This model contains a honorary seal that reads “Awarded by the Franklin Institute to Edwin Ruud for his Automatic Water Heater, 1904.”

An immigrant from Belluno, Italy, Italo Alfred DePolo settled in the coal mining community of Connellsville, Fayette County. In 1918, he invented a complicated device used to screen and separate coal—an important step in the production of coke.

Calbraith Perry Rodgers completes first flight across U.S. in Vin Fiz airplane named for grape soda sponsor.

Gulf opens first company-owned, architect-designed drive-in gas station

Andrew and Richard B. Mellon found Mellon Institute

1913

CHAPTER 3

W E S T E R N  P E N N S Y L V A N I A  H I S T O R Y

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Anarchy Amongst Industrial Workers: Alexander Berkman

In 1892, Alexander Berkman attempted to assassinate steel magnate Henry Clay Frick in retaliation for crushing striking steel workers at the Homestead Works. Accounts describe Berkman as a crazed Lithuanian immigrant, but the well-educated would-be assassin’s act—though unconnected with the strikers and inexcusably violent—was grounded in a growing philosophy of political thought. The burgeoning anarchist movement eschewed capitalism and organized government in favor of empowering workers. Because it drew its support from disenchanted industrial workers and coal miners, anarchism had deep roots in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh Proclamation of 1883—an important, early statement of anarchist thought directed at American workers—grew out of a convention of national anarchist leaders who chose this working class city as the ideal place to share their radical message.

After wounding Henry Clay Frick with his handgun, Alexander Berkman reportedly used this dagger to strike at his victim’s legs. Quickly subdued by aides, Berkman’s assassination attempt failed. Frick returned to work within a week, while Berkman served his prison sentence in Allegheny Penitentiary. He later chronicled his experiences in the book, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. 
Union Alphabet Soup

The eight-hour work day. Equal pay to women for equal work. We have unions to thank for these and other working-class advancements. A unique combination of geography, timing, and a motivated populace made Pittsburgh the cradle of the American labor movement.

Many unions were born here. They grew from humble roots to national institutions with a commitment to protecting workers’ rights:

- **AFL–CIO** – American Federation of Labor–Congress of International Organizations
- **BCTGM** – Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers, and Grain Millers International Union
- **IABSORIW** – International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers
- **CIUNA** – Coopers’ International Union of North America
- **IUEC** – International Union of Elevator Constructors
- **IAFF** – International Association of Firefighters
- **AFGWU** – American Flint Glass Workers Union of North America
- **FOP** – Fraternal Order of Police
- **BRS** – Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen
- **SWOC** – Steel Workers Organizing Committee
- **USWA** – United Steelworkers of America

Lunch boxes with union letters are displayed in the Innovators exhibition at the History Center. The archival photograph in the background shows United Mineworkers of America in Avella, Pa. Photograph Brian Boba.

1918

- First meeting of Fraternal Order of Police held in Pittsburgh
- Daylight Savings Time created with the Boreland Bill
- Joy Mining Machinery is founded

1919

- Joy Mining Machinery is founded