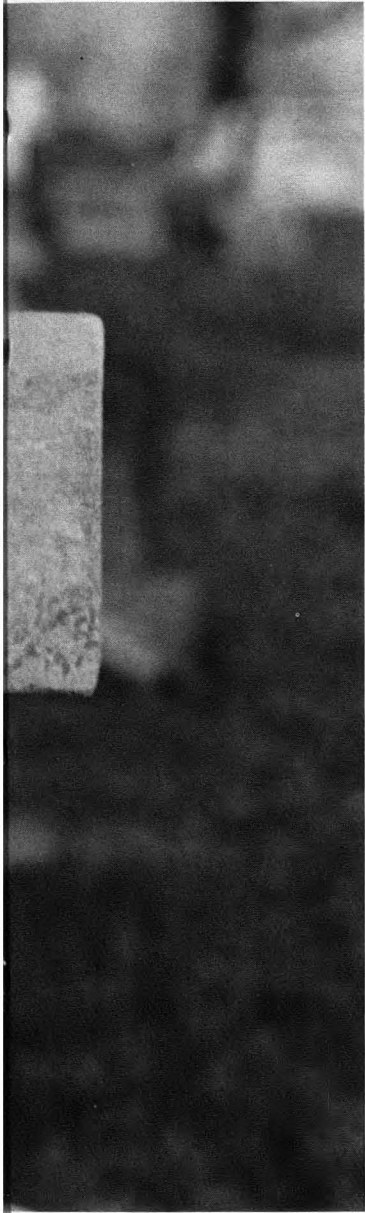




Monongahela Cemetery, Braddock Hills



THESE photographs, taken in cemeteries of the Pittsburgh region, reflect the distinctive social heritage of industrial America. Here lie many of those tens of thousands of immigrants from central, eastern and southern Europe who, beginning in the 1880s, came to work in Pittsburgh's industrial valleys until war in 1914 interrupted one of the largest migrations in modern history. Their story is not unique to Pittsburgh; it was repeated with changes of detail in scores of cities and towns in what we now denigrate as America's "rust belt."

These immigrants came with little, and many of them died with little more than

that provided plenty of cheap land. Soon new cemeteries, such as St. Nicholas in the hills above Millvale, St. Joseph in North Versailles and the Workmen's Circle Cemetery in Reserve Township, spread across the landscape with rows of stones in languages — Croatian, Polish, Hebrew — strange to most Americans.

Walking along the rows I realized it was, in the eloquent phrasing of Wright Morris, "their pastness that I wanted to salvage." We respond immediately to the headstones and markers, but with a little effort we can also see a range of messages offered by such as the flowers (real and plastic) and even by the ever present van-

The First Generation

By Eugene Levy

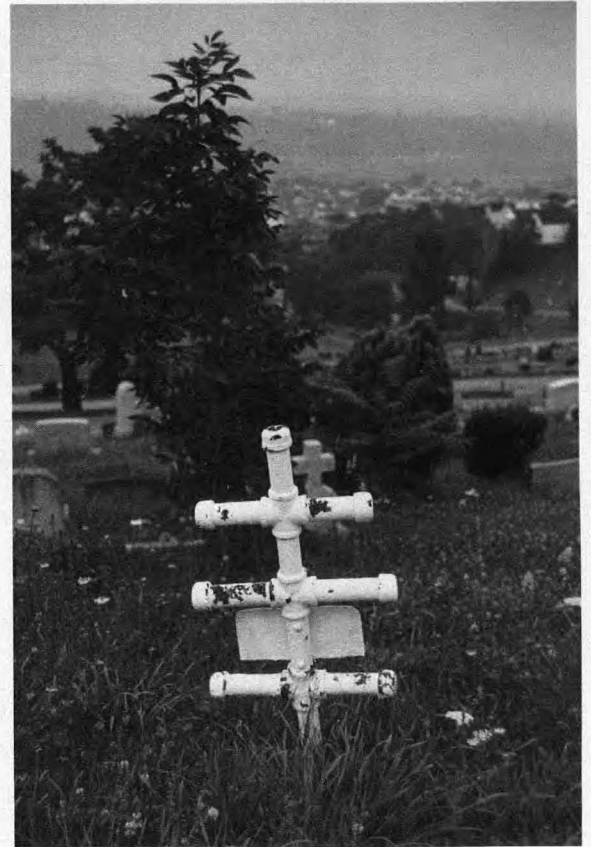
with what they came. In those first decades of the twentieth century they were often buried in the obscure back lots of established cemeteries whose more desirable sections had already been claimed by better off "old" Americans of English, German or Irish descent. Walk the paths, for example, of Monongahela Cemetery in Braddock Hills or Calvary Cemetery in Greenfield. There, as you move up, or in the case of the latter, over the steep slopes, you will walk along a time line, with dates etched in stone, marking the successive waves of migrants to the Pittsburgh region. Before long, however, many newly formed ethnic churches, synagogues and fraternal groups sought their own land as a final resting place for their members. The Pittsburgh landscape led these groups to remote hilltops and steep slopes, terrain

that provided plenty of cheap land. Soon new cemeteries, such as St. Nicholas in the hills above Millvale, St. Joseph in North Versailles and the Workmen's Circle Cemetery in Reserve Township, spread across the landscape with rows of stones in languages — Croatian, Polish, Hebrew — strange to most Americans. Walking along the rows I realized it was, in the eloquent phrasing of Wright Morris, "their pastness that I wanted to salvage." We respond immediately to the headstones and markers, but with a little effort we can also see a range of messages offered by such as the flowers (real and plastic) and even by the ever present vandalism. Poverty and harsh working conditions in the mills and mines produced homemade markers that, for all their simplicity, even crudity, evoke deep emotions in the viewer. Some messages look back to traditions carried over from a distant homeland: a first generation immigrant asks in Slovak for God's blessing, her photograph, a central European custom, carefully centered on a now worn stone; nearby, a vandalized triple cross marks the grave of an eastern rite Catholic. A different message declares a New World identity: an epitaph in English; a Memorial Day American flag fluttering over the grave of an Italian-surnamed veteran. Still other messages are unintended results of time's passage: the weathering away of names and dates; the neglect produced by a mobile society's scattering of friends and relatives. These scenes should be remembered, for they speak of the immigrant generation's hardships, of struggles between the new and the old, and of valiant but sometimes ineffective efforts of the living to commemorate the dead. ■

Eugene Levy is a Professor of History at Carnegie Mellon University. He last wrote for *Pittsburgh History* in Fall 1989 — as a co-author, with David Demarest — about a former zinc manufacturing site at Langeloth, Pa.



Workmen's Circle Cemetery, Reserve Township



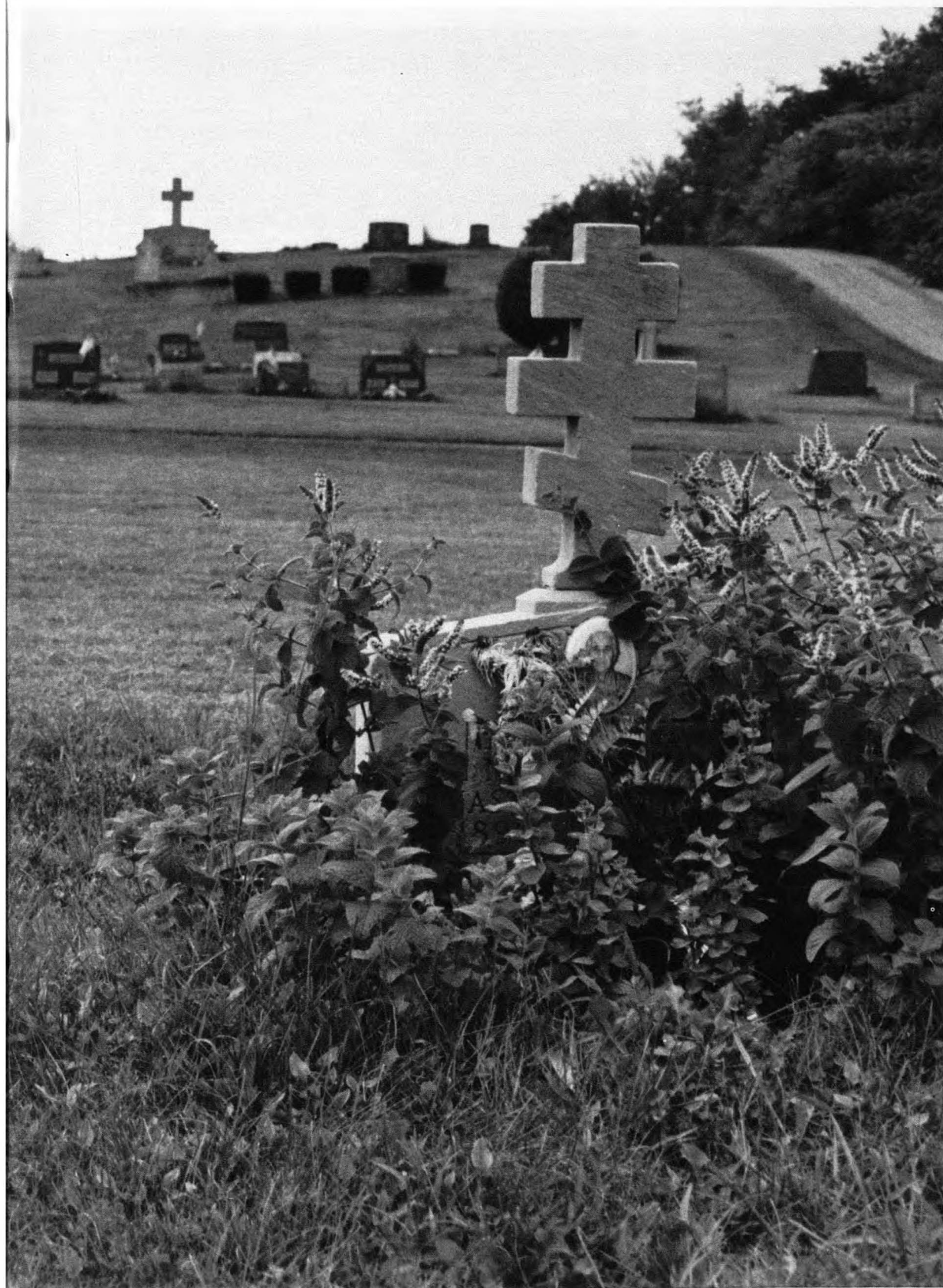
Monongahela Cemetery, Braddock Hills

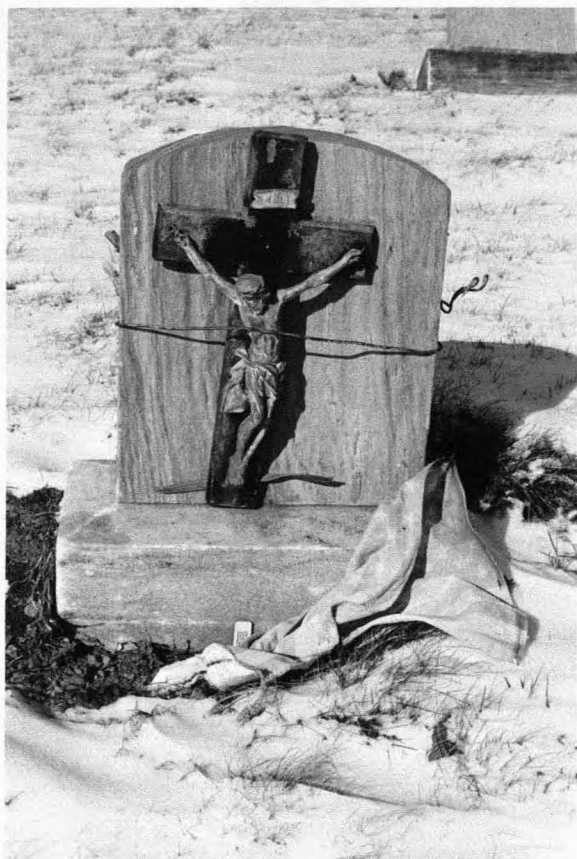


St. Stanislaus Cemetery, Shaler Township



St. Petka Cemetery, Johnstown

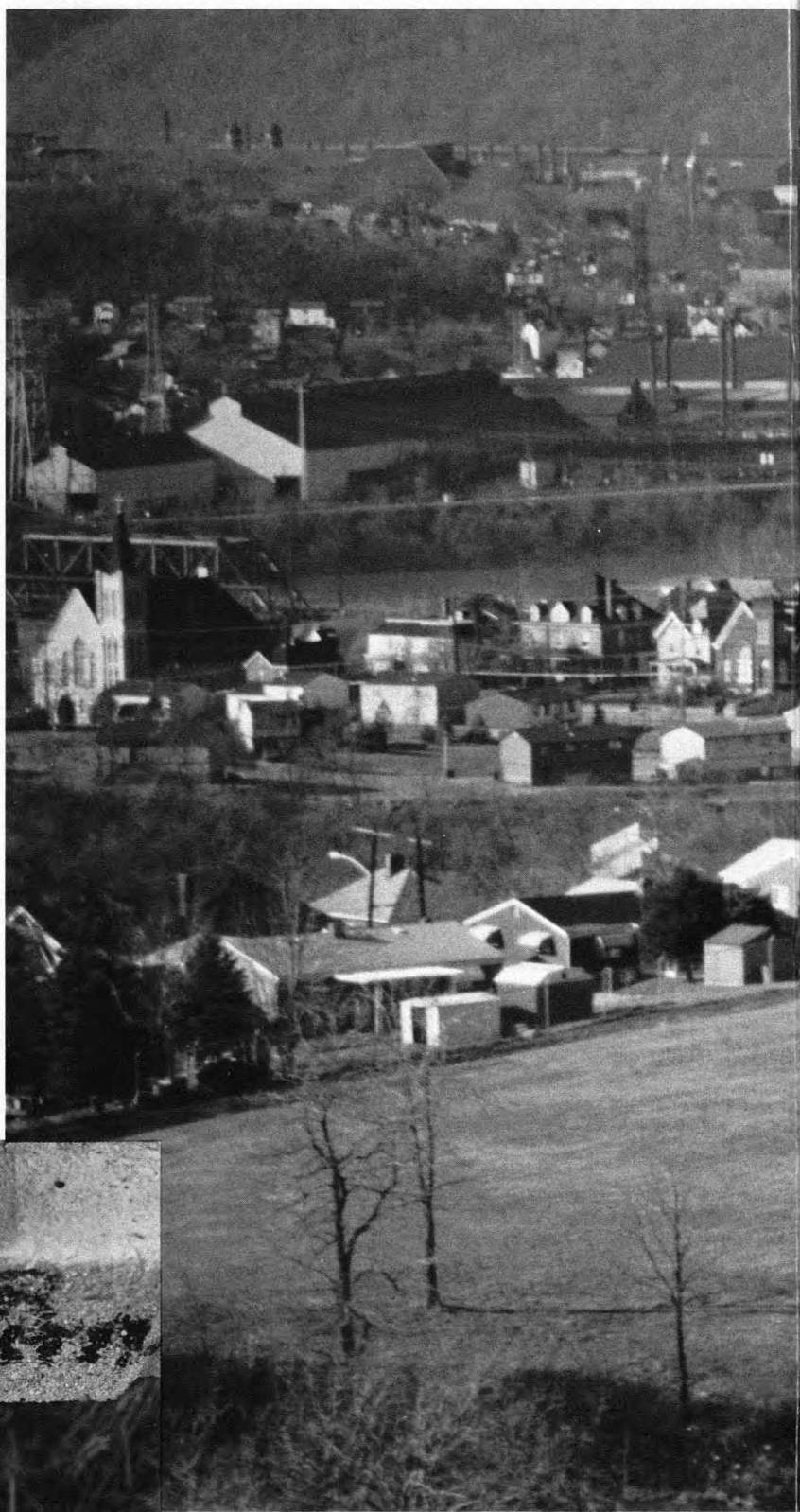




Calvary Cemetery, Pittsburgh



Calvary Cemetery, Pittsburgh





Monongahela Cemetery, Braddock Hills



Monongahela Cemetery, Braddock Hills