

# BOOK REVIEWS



## **The Point of Pittsburgh: Production and Struggle at the Forks of the Ohio**

By Charles McColleston

Illustrations by Bill Yund

(Pittsburgh: Battle of Homestead Foundation, 2008)

Illustrations, maps, index, 456 pp., \$35 softcover

There is both irony and tragedy to this region in the economic disasters that overtook the nation just before last year's historic national election. The subtitle in this new and outstanding book tells it all, for most of us have associated our native or adopted city with producing goods from the riches of the land that characterized Pittsburgh as an industrial powerhouse during the end of the 19th and much of the 20th century.

Few of us, however, recognize that this growth of heavy industry and the meshing of technology for manufacturing came at a terrible cost, largely consumed in the faceless hundreds of thousands in ethnic communities who had left an oppressive Europe only to find a melting pot that demanded rigid compliance. The struggle that author Charles McColleston details is the chronicle of these people achieving a democratic workplace to complement the religious and cultural freedom that they had achieved.

Surprisingly, that struggle encompassed disparate peoples—from Native Americans, to Whiskey rebels in the first years of the

Republic, to the first Scottish and Irish who saw Pittsburgh as the gateway to the heartland, and eventually the flow from southern and eastern Europe to those discontented from the empires of the Hapsburgs and the provinces of Imperial Russia and their occupied lands. Those who stayed in Pittsburgh brought their talents and commitment to building a workable society.

McColleston traces this presence and the role that the workers would play in the great industrialization at the turn of the centuries. He contrasts the “big man” theory of the Carnegies and Mellons and Fricks with the more progressive builders like Westinghouse, to place in balance the men and women who with their sweat and ingenuity built and maintained the mills and factories. After their 12-hour days, they would come home to their communities to literally build their own churches and fraternal halls.

He recalls the struggle in the great upheavals after the Civil War—when dozens of Pittsburgh working people were shot down by the Philadelphia militia in the Great Strike of 1877, and the many more

who were victims to Pinkerton gunmen in Westmoreland mines and at Homestead in 1892 and later in 1919 when the mills went cold in the Great “Hunky” Strike.

With exceptional illustrations by Bill Yund, a Pittsburgh building tradesperson who became a graphic artist (McColleston, a doctorate in philosophy, labored at the Switch and Signal), and an excellent bibliography and index, this volume represents a long-needed history of the region in the tradition of Howard Zinn.

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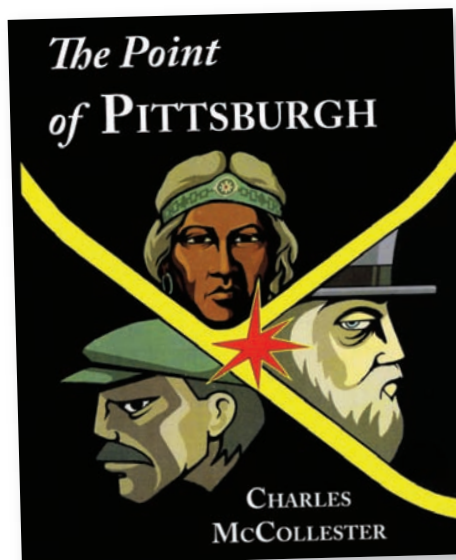
**Russell W. Gibbons** is past editor and communications director at the USW and head of the Philip Murray Institute of Labor Studies.

## **Forbes Field: Essays and Memories of the Pirates' Historic Ballpark, 1909–1971**

Edited by David Cicotello and Angelo J. Louisa  
(Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007)

Illustrations, index, xii, 242 pp., \$39.95 softcover

By today's standards, Forbes Field, the storied former home of the Pittsburgh Pirates, would certainly be described as cozy. However, fans attending the opening game 100 years ago would likely have been awed by the grand scale of the park, which at the time held the most seats in baseball. The construction of Forbes Field was a massive undertaking spearheaded by Pirates owner Barney Dreyfuss, who was fleeing the flood-prone confines of Exposition Park, situated along the banks of the Allegheny River (not far from the Pirates' current home, PNC Park, whose design strives to capture the same intimacy). With help from Andrew Carnegie, Dreyfuss purchased seven acres of land adjacent to Schenley Park in the Oakland



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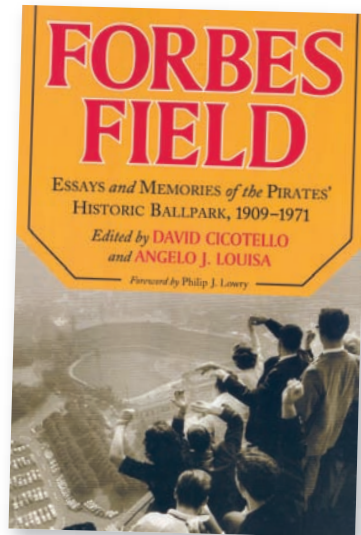
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section of town, at that time something of a pastoral hinterland.

The new park would differ from typical stadiums of the day in a number of ways. It would be built from steel and concrete rather than wood, feature a dramatically increased seating capacity, and offer amenities such as telephones, luxury box seats, and an underground parking garage. Dreyfuss hoped that these upscale features would attract a higher class clientele than the “common men” who were the sport’s typical fans. Skeptics, who thought the remote location of the stadium would lead to scores of empty seats, dubbed the million-dollar plan “Dreyfuss’ Folly.” Just four months after ground was broken on the site, Forbes Field opened to a sold-out crowd. The Pirates did their part to sell tickets, finishing out the inaugural season of Forbes Field by winning the World Series over the Detroit Tigers.

*Forbes Field*, consisting of 11 chapters by different authors, covers the history of the park from its inception to its final game. Though most of the book focuses on the Pirates, it also sheds light on the other teams that called the park home. Negro League teams, most notably the Homestead Grays, played at the stadium, where rivals Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige sometimes dueled on the field. Other sports were played at Forbes Field as well. The Pittsburgh Steelers

got their inauspicious start at the park, wallowing in mediocrity for several decades before moving to Pitt Stadium. Guided by legendary coach Glenn “Pop” Warner, the Pitt Panthers were more successful, stringing together several undefeated seasons. Boxing fans also flocked to Forbes

Field to watch local greats Billy Conn, Harry Greb, and Fritzie Zivic.

The final section of the book—which at 85 pages may test the patience of all but the most nostalgic of readers—consists of first-hand accounts of Forbes Field by fans, players, and a longtime usher. Still, this minor criticism should not dissuade Pittsburgh sports enthusiasts from leafing through the book. While playing at Forbes Field, the Pirates won three World Series and fielded the likes of Honus Wagner, Ralph Kiner, and Roberto Clemente. With the current incarnation of the team poised to break the Major League record for the most consecutive losing seasons, long-suffering fans might appreciate this escape into a celebrated past.

**Matthew Strauss** is a project archivist at the Heinz History Center.

**Learn more about Forbes Field by visiting the History Center’s exhibition *Forbes Field: A Century of Memories* through November 8, 2009.**



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