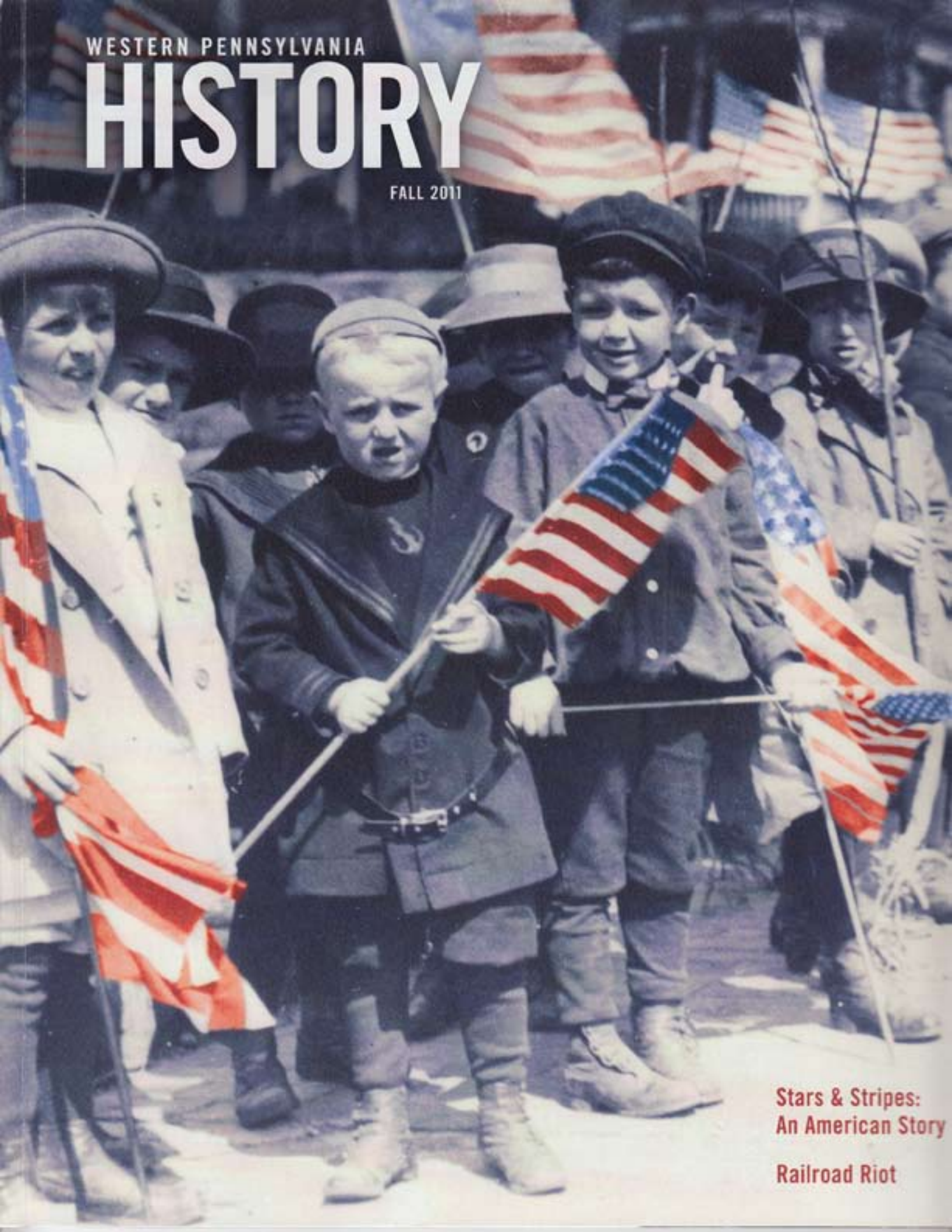


WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

HISTORY

FALL 2011



**Stars & Stripes:
An American Story**

Railroad Riot

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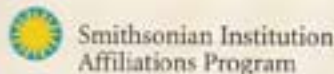
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Kids from Roosevelt School in Carrick celebrate the neighborhood's annual Bird Day in April 1912. Even Pennsylvania Governor John Tener attended to join in the songs, speeches, and the distribution of 2,000 mulberry and cherry trees, plus boxes for bluebirds and wrens to lay their eggs.

HC USA, Pittsburgh Public Schools Photographs, 1980-1981, NWP 117.

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WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SPORTS MUSEUM

By Anne Madarasz,

Director of the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum

Tough Guys

It started with barroom boasting and has grown into a sport followed by millions on cable TV and in arenas nationwide. Frank Caliguri of Arnold, Pa.—a black belt in karate and owner of the Academy of Martial Arts—was motivated by the ribbing he got while promoting karate, and so he decided to stage a “Battle of the Tough Guys” competition with fellow black belt Bill Viola. As Caliguri described it in 1980, “I’ve staged martial arts shows and tournaments for years, and every time I’ve gone into a local bar or diner to tack up a poster for a tournament, the local guys would hoot and holler that they could take on anybody and didn’t need karate. Now they’ll have their chance.”

Caliguri and Viola carefully planned the event, and promoted it through their company, C.V. Productions. They developed detailed rules and regulations to guide their “Tough Guy Contest,” described as, “The martial arts way of fighting as it’s done in the Orient.” All contestants were required to wear protective equipment including head gear, mouth guards, padded gloves, and boots, the same equipment used in the sanctioned karate and kick boxing tournaments the pair had promoted. They booked the ballroom of the New Kensington Holiday Inn for March 20 through 22, and raised \$6,000 in prize money. Then they began advertising for amateur fighters.



Mike Murray and Dave Jones answered the call. Murray, a car salesman from Arnold, took the ring against Jones, a laborer from Irwin, in the first match of the lightweight division on Thursday evening, March 20. Murray struggled, battling against the bigger Jones, who pinned him for a 10-count in the first round, then knocked him down twice in the second and third before the match was stopped. Battered and bruised after his technical knockout, Murray remained unfazed, declaring afterwards, “He got in some punches, but I’d do it again. I’m bad! I’m tough!”

That three-round bout has been identified as the first of its kind in the nation. Though billed as a “Battle of the Tough Guys,” the event featured the mix of boxing, wrestling,

Frank Caliguri (left) and Bill Viola, 1980. The three-round bout fought by Jones and Murray has been identified as the first of its kind in the nation. Though billed as a “Battle of the Tough Guys,” the event featured the mix of boxing, wrestling, and martial arts fighting that is today considered mixed martial arts. Caliguri and Viola’s vision for the sport is now a reality.

PHC Museum Collection, gift of Bill Viola

and martial arts fighting that is today considered mixed martial arts. Caliguri and Viola staged their multi-day event, intending it to serve as the first of a series of regional bouts leading up to a national championship. They held their finals, the “Battle of the Brawlers,” in Pittsburgh at the Stanley Theatre in mid-April and crowned a champion, Frank Tigano. Interest soared and the events in New Kensington and downtown both drew standing room-only crowds.

But the sport ended almost as quickly as it had begun. Pressure from the boxing commission and wrestling federation (though they had no jurisdiction over the sport) combined with a death in a similarly titled but unrelated “Tough Man” boxing event in Johnstown, led to the banning of all tough



Bill Jones (left) and Mike Murray compete in the first bout of the Tough Guys, March 20, 1980. Jones, a former truck driver, and Murray, a car salesman in Westwood, Pa., competed in the first bout of the heavyweight division. The bigger fighter, Jones, a former student of Bill Viola's, battered Murray (right) who ended in the third round.

and brawlers contests. In 1983, the state legislature outlawed the sport in Pennsylvania. Frank Caliguri and Viola found themselves unable to proceed with their events. It was more than two decades before the sport returned to mixed martial arts, now one of the nation's most popular and fastest growing sports.

The story of that first Tough Guy event held in a New Kensington ballroom lives on at the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum. Bill Viola, Mike Murray, Bill Viola, and Frank Caliguri worked with curators to assemble objects such as uniforms and protective gear, and archival materials such as programs, posters, photographs, and tickets—a collection that traces the roots of mixed martial arts in the United States back to the Pittsburgh region. ❸

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Poster, program, and ringside ticket for the first Tough Man contest, 1980. WPC Museum Collection, gift of Bill Viola.