Abstract: My research explores the relationship between the economic, urban and symbolic development of the Pittsburgh “Renaissance” and the transformation of the region’s rural hinterland. Beginning in the mid-1940s, Pittsburgh’s business and political elite reinvented the city, first as a center of corporate administration and later as a ‘post-industrial’ hub of the high-tech and service sectors. With downtown’s “Golden Triangle” firmly established as an administrative center by the late 1950s, business and political leaders expanded the scope of their economic development efforts beyond downtown to the region’s rural and suburban communities. I focused on the rise of the recreation and tourism industries in the Laurel Highlands, a rural area fifty miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Much of the early postwar development of the region was overseen by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, one of Pittsburgh’s celebrated public-private partnerships with an explicitly regional agenda. The Conservancy was particularly active in the development of Ohiopyle, a scenic area along the Youghiogheny River famous for whitewater rafting and Fallingwater, an estate designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for retail magnate Edgar Kaufmann.

By 1982, attendance at Ohiopyle State Park reached more than 1.5 million, the third highest in the state, with whitewater activities alone producing multi-million dollar revenues and well over 100 jobs. Ohiopyle’s transformation from a depressed mining and lumbering town to a tourist hotspot thus presents an excellent opportunity to study the role of urban capital in reshaping rural Pennsylvania. While urban historians have not fully expanded their metropolitan framework to include the postwar countryside, the activities of public-private partnerships, such as the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, dramatize the important regional dimensions of the Pittsburgh Renaissance. Just as in the central city, the countryside, too, had its winners and losers as older communities were depopulated and displaced whether by the decline of both agriculture and industrial employment, the growth of surface mining after 1950 or, as in the case of Ohiopyle, by the creation of new “wilderness areas.” This process created a region of rural contrasts mirroring those of the metropolitan core. The full paper is available at http://ship.academia.edu/AllenDieterichWard/Talks.