Msgr. Francis Glenn was a rarity in his field. He was — like Eusebius, the ancient father of Church history — an historian who made history. He made history with his research alone, producing perhaps the most significant work of Western Pennsylvania’s ecclesiastical history in the latter half of this century. With his 240-page volume, Shepherds of the Faith: A Brief History of the Bishops of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, he earned a permanent place on the region’s library shelves.

He served as diocesan archivist from 1949 to 1969. And he was a founding member of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1940. In recent years, in recognition of his achievements in historical research, the society bestowed on Msgr. Glenn the title of “honorary president for life.”

“It had been years since Msgr. Glenn purchased a lifetime membership to the society,” said Father Joseph Scheib, society treasurer. “But he still paid his dues every year. He loved this work.”

His research was itself historic. But it was through his priestly life and his community activism that Msgr. Glenn earned his rightful place in any future histories written of this diocese.

An Inspired Life
Francis Glenn was born in Masontown, Fayette County, Oct. 4, 1912. He studied at Duquesne University (bachelor of arts, 1934) and St. Vincent College (master’s degree, 1936) and was ordained on June 12, 1938.

He served as parochial vicar at Assumption in Bellevue, St. Mary in Beaver Falls, Epiphany in Uptown, and Resurrection in Brookline. He also served as assistant chaplain at Mercy Hospital and as chaplain to the St. Joseph Sisters in Baden and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

He was founding pastor of St. Bonaventure in Glenshaw, 1957-1965. Afterward, he served as pastor of St. Paul in Butler and St. Christopher in Prospect for twenty-four years, until his retirement in 1989. In 1968, Pope Paul VI named him a domestic prelate with the title of monsignor.

Along the way, he also served as dean of Butler County, diocesan consultor, and director of the diocesan ecumenical commission.

On retirement, he took up residence at St. Mary of Mercy, Downtown, where he continued to offer daily Mass and hear confessions. He taught a lunchtime Scripture class on Wednesdays and served as spiritual moderator of the Ladies of Charity of Pittsburgh, an organization that helps the hungry and needy.

It was at his Butler assignment, however, that Msgr. Glenn made his greatest impact as an activist. In the mid-1980s, his parishioners watched as “entrepreneurs” opened a pornographic bookstore on Route 8. From the pulpit, Msgr. Glenn preached that local public officials were doing nothing to stop pornography because they perceived that...
GLENN continued
no one really cared. The homily inspired his parishioners, most especially Norma Norris, who then created the White Ribbon Against Pornography (WRAP) campaign, which is now marked nationwide, and which has been emulated by many other “ribbon” campaigns by other charities.

Shortly after the first WRAP campaign, the porn vendors were evicted and the store bulldozed. But the anti-porn campaign continued for Msgr. Glenn, who joined the board of the Pittsburgh Coalition Against Pornography in 1990.

A Gentleman and a Scholar
His successor at St. Paul’s, Father Hugh Gloninger, recalled in the Butler Eagle that Msgr. Glenn “was a gentleman always and all ways.” Those who knew him will confirm that observation. He was mild-mannered, even when he was most impassioned. “Scholarly” is the way most associates described him.

His wry wit enlivened his telling of Church history. Msgr. Glenn had a keen eye for stories that showed the foibles of the human condition, especially as manifested in the lives and work of churchmen.

In research, he was a tireless sleuth, combing documents, correspondence, and even homilies for clues. Trying to ascertain Bishop Michael O’Connor’s role in the formulation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Msgr. Glenn unearthed the bishop’s travel itineraries, carefully noting his trips to Rome in the years leading up to the promulgation of the dogma in 1854, then tracking Bishop O’Connor’s use of the term “Immaculate Conception” throughout those same years. It was Bishop O’Connor who consecrated the Diocese of Pittsburgh to the Immaculate Conception.

Just three months before his death, Msgr. Glenn was featured in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette for his research on Catholic Indians of the region during the French colonial period. “In 1739,” Monsignor told the newspaper, “an expedition of the French . . . came to Western Pennsylvania with three chaplains. One was for the soldiers, the other two for the 319 Catholic Shawnees, Senecas and Delawares” who had been converted by earlier missionaries.

That was Msgr. Glenn — making sure that the long-ago pioneers of our Communion of Saints would not be forgotten or overlooked.

We are richer, in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, because Msgr. Francis Glenn made history for us, in every sense of the phrase. He revealed to us our Catholic forebears, and all that was human in them, and all that was divine.

Now, he is one of them.

Memorial Mass for Msgr. Glenn
The Historical Society will offer Mass in memory of Msgr. Glenn Sunday, Nov. 22, at 2:30 p.m. at St. Mary of Mercy Church, Stanwix St. and Third Ave., Downtown. All friends, associates, and admirers of Msgr. Glenn are welcome to attend.

From the Introduction to Msgr. Glenn’s Shepherds of the Faith

The evil that men do, lives after them:
The good is oft interred with their bones.
— Shakespeare. Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2

Mark Antony’s reflection on the life of Julius Caesar summarizes the disparity between the achievements of the 19th-century bishops of Pittsburgh and the difficulties they experienced in the formation of the diocese. The great accomplishments of the bishops became mere statistics, while controversies are recorded for posterity.

Bishop Michael O’Connor’s proficiency in organizing the Diocese of Pittsburgh is overshadowed by the constant irritations of bigots like Mayor Joe Barker and attacks by the anti-Catholic newspapers of the period.

In the episcopates of Bishop Michael Domenec and Bishop John Tuigg, the wonderful successes in meeting the needs of their adherents are obscured by civil litigations and internal disputes which interfered with their dedicated efforts . . .

A diocese is established when a bishop is assigned to administer the affairs of the church in a specific territory. A natural outline of the history of a diocese is determined by the terms of the individual bishops. Each bishop makes an imprint on the affairs and progress of the church in a diocese and each epoch of a diocese is usually marked and remembered in reference to the bishop of that time. This natural design is followed in this history of the diocese.