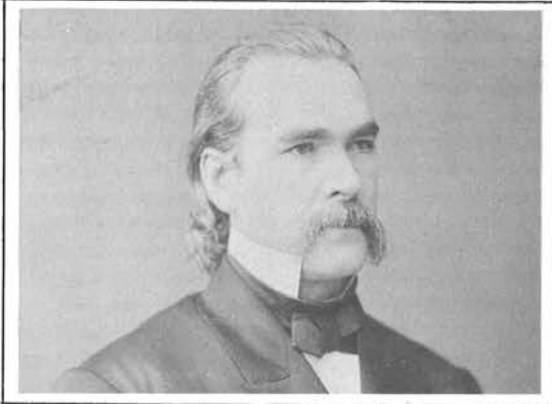


The Lackawanna Historical Society BULLETIN

Vol. 11, No. 3

June 1978



JUDGE JOHN HANDLEY

THE FIRST OFFICIALS OF LACKAWANNA COUNTY

Lackawanna County was created 100 years ago by an official proclamation of Governor John Hartranft on August 21, 1878 following a special election held in the proposed county on August 13 when the electors voted 8 to 1 favor of a new county. The Governor also commissioned the following named gentlemen to serve as officers of the new county of "Lackawanna".

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Horace F. Barrett
Henry L. Gaige
Dennis Tierney
Atty. Frederick L. Hitchcock - Prothonotary
Asa B. Stevens - Sheriff
Joshua R. Thomas - Clerk of Courts
A. Miner Renshaw - Recorder of Deeds
John L. Lee - Register of Wills
Frederick W. Gunster - District Attorney
Edward J. Lynett - Auditor
James Lynch &
Eugene Snyder - Jury Commissioners
Col. William N. Monies - Treasurer

At the same time Hon. Benjamin S. Bentley was commissioned as the President Judge but because the Governor had failed to create a new judicial district, he was disqualified and the County Courts had to be reorganized. This was done on Oct. 24, 1878 by Judges Garrick M. Harding, John Handley and William H. Stanton. On that occasion a total of 72 lawyers were admitted to practice at the Bar. Until the present Court House was completed in 1884, the Court sessions were held in Washington Hall which stood on the site now occupied by Samters store and the County officers were located in the Second National Bank Bldg. which stood on the opposite side of Lackawanna Avenue.

The first Judges to serve the Courts of the new county were Hon. John Handley and Hon. William H. Stanton. However the latter served only a few months, resigning on Feb. 25, 1879 and was succeeded by Hon. Alfred Hand who was appointed to take his place. Two additional lay judges were also appointed to serve: William J. Lewis and Patrick N. Moffatt.

As we approach the Centennial celebration of Lackawanna County, it may be of interest to the public to learn something about the lives and work of several of these first county officials. The compiler has researched these individuals and found some very interesting details about them.

> JOHN HANDLEY, probably one of the most colorful and elusive characters in our county's history, was appointed to serve as the first Presiding Judge of Lackawanna County. A native of Enniscorthy, Ireland, where he was born in 1835, Handley had emigrated to the United States at the age of 19 and first located in Rochester, N.Y. Later he moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked as a clerk in a Government office, studied law and was admitted to practice as a lawyer in 1860. There he also married a wealthy Southern widow, Mrs. Catherine Thayer. (They were later divorced and never had any children) Later in 1860 Handley came to Scranton, Pa. where he had some relatives and here he made his home for the rest of his life, becoming a prominent lawyer, judge, real estate dealer and banker. He was a successful at whatever he did; for he enjoyed a very lucrative law practice, he organized and owned two banks: the Merchants and Mechanics Bank and the County Savings and Trust Co.; he owned a considerable amount of valuable real estate in Scranton including the Wyoming House hotel and he served with distinction as the first Presiding Judge of Lackawanna County from 1878 to 1885. However

although Scranton was in spite of the fact that he had become a very wealthy man through his business dealings in Scranton, Handley later became disappointed and disillusioned with his fellow citizens for several reasons. The result was that when he died in 1895, Handley in a lengthy will left his entire estate amounting to a huge sum of over \$2 million dollars to the city of Winchester, Virginia. A Trust was set up by the will through which a beautiful public library and a magnificent "Handley High School" have been erected and maintained at Winchester, where he is also buried. Why he left his fortune to Winchester instead of to Scranton has always been a lively question but it was probably the result of a disagreement he had with the City officials over the paving of Lackawanna Avenue in front of his hotel and bank; his disappointment at not being reelected to serve another term as Judge and also his well known Southern sympathies and a number of friends he had made during visits to Winchester. Handley was a Democrat, a tall man with a dignified bearing and served our County with distinction and honor as a wise Judge. Behind an austere and reserved appearance, he had a very generous heart which Winchester, Va. has ever since come to appreciate.

WILLIAM H. STANTON, the other first County Judge, was a native of New York City. He was educated at St. Joseph's College, came to Scranton where he read law and was admitted to the Bar in 1868. He served first as District Attorney for the Mayor's Court for three years, then was elected State Senator from Luzerne County for two years and in 1876 he was elected to the Congress of the United States to fill an unexpired term. He was also the owner and editor of the "Scranton Daily Times" in 1870-71. When Lackawanna County was created he was appointed as one of the Judges; however he served only four months and resigned on Feb. 25, 1879. Afterwards he continued to practice law in Scranton until his death in 1900 and resided at 129 S. Bromley Ave. in Hyde Park.

ALFRED HAND was appointed by Gov. Hoyt on March 4, 1879 to fill Judge Stanton's place as an additional law judge and in an election later that same year, he was elected for a ten year term which he served from 1880 to 1890.

A native of Honesdale, Pa. Hand was born in 1835, educated at Yale University, read law at Montrose and was admitted to the Bar in 1860. That same year he came to Scranton and for almost 60 years thereafter he was an active, useful and honored citizen. He was one of the prime movers for the creation of Lackawanna

built in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Winchester, Virginia. w/over 300 Confederate soldiers buried by 1900 explosion

1878 one of city's 1st hotels

County, served as one of its first Judges and later was appointed as one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. He was a Republican and enjoyed not only a very successful career as a lawyer but also served as President of the Third National Bank, an elder in the First Presbyterian Church and on the boards of many local institutions. He married twice: to Phebe Jessup and Helen Sanderson and had eight children. In 1895 he built a handsome stone residence at 505 Jefferson Avenue where he resided until his death in 1917. His family sold the house in 1939 to the St. Nicholas Orthodox Greek Catholic Church which remodeled the house into a very fine church building.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

HORACE F. BARRETT, one of the first County Commissioners, was born on Staten Island, N.Y. in 1846, came to this area after the Civil War, married Jennie Nichols daughter of Dr. Hiram Nichols of Clarks Green, a direct descendent of Deacon William Clark. For many years Barrett was a well known merchant at Shultzville, Pa.

HENRY L. GAIGE was born in Albany Co. N.Y., grew up in Binghamton and located at Moscow, Pa. in 1857 where for over 40 years he was a leading merchant. He conducted a large general store on Main St. in Moscow and also ran a steam grist mill and lumber yard on Mill Street. He married a Miss Mary Dalrymple and they were the parents of three children.

DENNIS TIERNEY, the third of the first County Commissioners, was born in Ireland, came to America and located in Scranton where he was a well known blacksmith. He lived at 215 Franklin Ave. when that area was a residential section of the city. Among the other first officials of the new county were the following men:

FREDERICK L. HITCHCOCK, the first County Prothonotary. He was born in Waterbury, Conn. in 1837, came to Scranton as a young man studied law and was admitted to the Bar in 1860. When the Civil War began, he entered the Union Army and served courageously throughout the conflict, rising to the rank of Colonel. After the War, he returned to Scranton where he became a prominent lawyer and honored citizen. He was one of the strongest workers for the formation of Lackawanna County and was appointed the first prothonotary. He had a long and successful career as a lawyer, was involved in many civic endeavors, wrote and compiled an excellent two volume "History of Scranton" in 1914 and served as President of the Lackawanna Historical Society from 1918 to 1924. He married

a Miss Caroline Kingsbury and was the father of seven children. They lived at 1659 N. Washington Ave. in Green Ridge and for many years he was a beloved Sunday School Supt. of the Green Ridge Presbyterian Church. He died in 1924.

ASA B. STEVENS, the first County Sheriff, was a native of Broome Co. N.Y.. He also served in the Civil War and was an active mover for the formation of the new county. He had a successful career as a marble cutter, banker, merchant and coal operator. His wife was Elvira Colvin from Dalton and they lived at 411 N. Seventh St.

FREDERICK W. GUNSTER, the first District Attorney, was born in Prussia and came to Scranton with his parents in 1853. He went to Williams College and was admitted to the Bar in 1868. He was elected to the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1874 on the Democratic ticket and there worked actively to secure the passage of the new county bill for the formation of Lackawanna County. He was later elected as one of the presiding Judges of the county in 1888 and served in that capacity with honor for ten years. He lived at 809 Jefferson Ave. with his wife Maggie Brehl and their six children.

COL. WILLIAM N. MONIES was born in Scotland in 1827 and came to the United States in 1849. Mary Baker came over on the same boat and both went to Carbondale where they were married and he began business as a baker. He came to Scranton in 1858, served nobly during the Civil War as a Colonel and for many years conducted a successful retail and wholesale baking business on Lackawanna Ave. known as Monies and Pugh. He served as Mayor of Scranton from 1869 to 1872, was a vigorous champion for the new county and on its creation, was appointed its first treasurer. He died in 1881.

EDWARD J. LYNETT, the youngest of the new officers, was appointed the auditor in 1878. He was born in Dunmore in 1857 of Irish parentage and educated at Millersville State Normal School. He began work as a breaker boy and a clerk but his interest was in the field of journalism. He secured a job as a reporter for the "Scranton FreePress" where he worked until 1895 when he purchased the "Scranton Times". This daily he successfully owned and edited until his death in 1943, making it one of the most influential newspapers in Pennsylvania. He married Nellie Ruddy, had three children and resided at 841 Clay Ave. His family still own and publish the "Times".