

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

Wednesday, February 13, 1985, 8:00 P.M.

Dr. Robert Schweitzer, curator of the Everhart Museum, will present a slide lecture about Dr. Isaiah Everhart and the Everhart Museum. A social hour with refreshments will follow the lecture. Members are encouraged to bring a guest!



DR. ISAIAH F. EVERHART

Dr. Everhart was born in Berks County in 1840, served as a surgeon during the Civil War, and settled in Scranton to practice medicine in 1868. However, he became more well-known for the pursuit of his hobby: collecting zoological specimens. He established a trust fund for the construction of a museum of natural history, and in 1908, the Everhart Museum was presented to the city of Scranton by Colonel Ezra H. Ripple and accepted by Mayor J. Benjamin Dimmick. It was well known that the Everhart Museum had, at that time, one of the largest bird collections in the country, and tourists came from all parts of the United States to see it.



FUTURE EVENTS - 1985

March 20, Wednesday, 8:00 P.M. - The Folklore Society of Northeastern Pennsylvania will present a program of music of the common people featuring English and Irish folk songs, mining and labor songs, and contemporary music.

April 17, Wednesday, 8:00 P.M. - The topic "Historic Preservation in Scranton" will be the major feature of a talk by Michael Washo, Director of Historic Preservation.

May 8, Wednesday, THE ANNUAL DINNER MEETING - will feature speaker Dr. David Salay, Director of the Anthracite Museum Complex, with the topic "The Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company."

UNUSUAL MEN AND UNUSUAL BUILDINGS

— by Dorothy Allen

In 1861, Judge John Handley came to Scranton and opened a law office and banking house at 420 Lackawanna Avenue. In 1871, a charter was granted to the firm as the City Bank of Scranton, and its name was changed to the Merchants and Mechanics Bank of Scranton soon after. The bank, although it had adequate assets, was not one of the larger banking firms in the city. Its lack of great popularity may have been due to the eccentricity and unpopularity of its owner and president, Judge Handley, who had lived for a time in Virginia and who was suspected of having been a "Rebel sympathizer" during the Civil War. He was six feet, five inches tall, with a long moustache and long hair worn down his neck, somewhat in the style of General George Custer. He died in 1895, leaving his fortune to the city of Winchester, Virginia, legend has it "to spite the people of Scranton and its politicians" with whom he had at one time argued over the re-paving of a street. He selected as his burial place a lot in the Stonewall Cemetery, Winchester, Virginia, where over three thousand Confederate soldiers are buried.

The Merchants and Mechanics Bank continued in business until 1900, when, according to historian F.L. Hitchcock, "a singular accident happened. . . A leakage of gas caused an explosion, practically wrecking the building."



M & M BANK, LACKAWANNA AVE.



AUGUST 4, 1900

In 1901, English-born architect Robert W. Gibson who had studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and who had become established at Albany, New York, was commissioned to build a new banking facility for the Merchants and Mechanics Bank at 419 Spruce Street. The new building was "eclectic," a combination of several architectural styles from the past, but its most striking feature was its large octagonal steel-and-glass dome, a Gibson trademark. Still, the banking firm was not particularly successful, perhaps because of its association with the name of Judge Handley in the minds of some residents of Scranton. The Merchants and Mechanics Bank merged with the First National Bank of Scranton in 1915, and in 1916, the building stood empty. In 1917, the structure was remodelled and converted to the Strand Theatre, with a new facade and marquee obscuring its architectural features.

Robert W. Gibson, the architect of the "new" Merchants and Mechanics Bank Building, had become famous by 1901. He had designed the bank buildings of the United States Trust Company (1889) and the Fifth Avenue Bank (1890) in New York City, and his bank buildings soon stood in many northern cities of the United States including Utica, Buffalo, Syracuse, Minneapolis, Providence, and Norwich, Connecticut, in addition to the Scranton structure. In 1905, Morton F. Plant, railroad and real estate tycoon, commissioned Gibson to design his Fifth Avenue house in New York City. The house later became known as "Cartier" and still stands today in almost original condition. In all, Gibson was known for at least forty architectural works, including Albany's Episcopal Cathedral of All Saints, a work for which he had competed against the architectural master of the period, H. H. Richardson, and won the commission. After publishing a book of personal philosophy, *The Morality of Nature*, Gibson died at his estate on Long Island in 1927.

Unfortunately, our Scranton Merchants and Mechanics Bank Building has not survived intact; however, the Savings Bank of Utica, New York, possesses features similar to those of the Merchants and Mechanics. Gibson, like many other "eclectic" architects of the 1890-1920 period, has been almost totally ignored by architectural historians in their attention to the work of the "early modern" architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright. The work of the eclectics had been dismissed as backward, and much of it has been demolished in the United States. However, their work had a great impact on the American cityscape.



SCRANTON, PA



UTICA, NY

AN INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP

Lackawanna Historical Society members have free use of the research library and they receive advance notice of all lectures, programs, and special events at the Catlin House, as well as a subscription to the *L. H. S. Bulletin*. Membership contributions are tax-deductible. Annual rates: Student \$3, Individual and Family \$15, Contributing \$25, and Sustaining \$50 +. If you would like to help preserve Lackawanna County's heritage, send your check to the Lackawanna Historical Society, 232 Monroe Avenue, Scranton, PA 18510.

VOLUNTEERS!!

Volunteers are an important aspect of the operation of the Historical Society. They include men and women from all walks of life who offer assistance, each in his or her own area of interest and ability, in a joint effort to direct the society to grow, to help maintain the collections, and to build for the future.

The Lackawanna Historical Society maintains an active volunteer program composed of students, housewives, professionals, and retired persons. The extensive historical collection depends heavily on volunteers; many tours of the Catlin House will soon be led by volunteer docent guides.

There is always something to be done! If you would like to join our volunteer staff and help us to preserve the best of the past and the present for the education of future generations, please contact us.

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Scranton, Pa.

LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CATLIN HOUSE
232 MONROE AVENUE
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