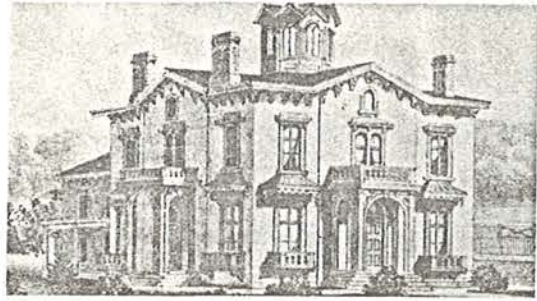


Although it is easy to understand why wooden buildings from the 1850's have not survived to the present, the demolition of brick structures is more difficult to justify, particularly if the site is later used for a parking lot. Unfortunately, this fate did befall one of the finest brick residences which Joel Amsden designed: The James Archbald Residence.



Proposed Design of James Archbald Residence

After the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company was established as a successful industry, with the D.L.&W. Railroad transporting its products, the capitalists and designers of those enterprises established permanent homes for themselves close to the businesses which they ran. Following the "ridge" behind Lackawanna Avenue, from Jefferson to Clay Avenue, a now vanished residential street called Ridge Row was lined with the mansions of the families of some of Scranton's leading citizens: the Scrantons, Platts, and Archbalds.

James Archbald, an immigrant from Scotland, was a self-made man who used his abilities and intelligence to make his own fortune. From humble beginnings as a mining and civil engineer, Archbald became chief engineer for the construction of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. In 1856, he commissioned Joel Amsden to design a residence which was built in 1857 at #5 Ridge Row. Historian Frederick L. Hitchcock, in his book *History of Scranton*, tells us that the Archbald Estate "was probably the finest residence place in Scranton." The brick home, in Italianate style, had an unusual low pitched roof of alternating hips and gables topped by an octagonal cupola. The exterior design of the building was unified by the extensive use of bracketing on the cupola, eaves, windows, porch roofs, and doors. (The canopies which were proposed in the architectural drawing were not included in the finished design.) James Archbald lived in the home until his death in 1870. Archbald's daughter Mary and her husband, banker George H. Catlin, lived in the family home and its ownership passed to Catlin on the death of his wife. After the Catlin House was built in 1912, the Archbald home stood vacant until 1918 when the Red Cross used it as a "Canteen." It was operated as a boarding house for the next two years by Mary A. Dean, and in 1925 it was torn down. The site is now a parking lot for the University of Scranton.



Joseph C. Platt Residence

Another brick mansion of Amsden design on Ridge Row was the residence of the family of Joseph C. Platt, one of the original founders of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company (Scrantons and Platt) and brother-in-law of Joseph H. Scranton. The home stood on a large piece of land, which later became known as Platt Place, situated between Ridge Row, Jefferson Avenue and a road called Bank Street. (The Scranton Expressway exit was constructed through the property in 1969.) The building was a typical example of Victorian Italianate architecture; it was large, but not unusual. Platt lived there until his death in 1887. The house was torn down in 1896 and the lot partitioned into portions where various members of the Platt family built homes on the court called Platt Place which divided the property.

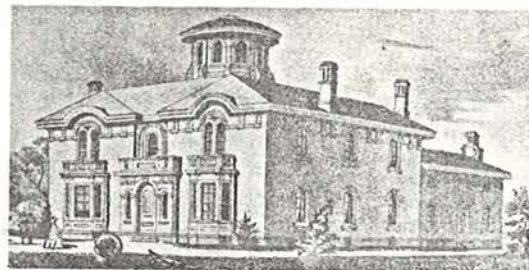
An architecturally interesting building was the residence of Charles T. Pierson at 415 North Washington Avenue, the present site of the Scranton School District Administration building. Pierson was an associate of Thomas Dickson at the Dickson and Company Machine Shops (later the Dickson Locomotive Works.) Also in Italianate architecture, the Pierson residence differed from Amsden's other works of this style, mainly in window and roof treatment. Whereas most of Amsden's previously executed works were designed with either hip or gable roofs, the Pierson residence featured twin Jerkin heads facing front. (A Jerkin head peak resembles a gable which has been "clipped back" at an angle and covered with roofing material.) The window treatment included rounded arches covered by heavy "eyebrow" window heads, and the front roof line was given further interest by creating a second "eyebrow" within the eave line over each of two large second story windows. Rather than the usual bracketed, overhanging eaves of most Italianate houses, the Pierson residence featured narrow eaves over a frieze. The whole was topped by an octagonal cupola with domical roof. After the death of Mr. and Mrs. Pierson, their heirs sold the home in 1883 to Charles Tropp, proprietor of the Lackawanna House hotel, whose family resided there until the building was torn down in 1910 to make way for the construction of the George Washington School building.

Joel Amsden died in 1868.

Article researched and written by Dorothy Allen



James Archbald Estate



Charles T. Pierson Residence

PROGRAM SCHEDULE - SPRING, 1987

- February 15 - 2:00 P.M. Dr. Leo Manglaviti will present a slide lecture about his recent research findings on the Delaware Indians.
- March 18- 8:00 P.M. David Martin and the Northeastern PA Folklore Society return to the Catlin House with more folk music from the Anthracite region.
- April 15 - 8:00 P.M. Delores Sernak, a local artist whose designs on eggs are currently in the Smithsonian Institution, will present a history and demonstration of the art of Ukranian Easter eggs.
- May 20 - 6:30 P.M. **LHS Annual Dinner Meeting** - Rosamond Peck, author of the recently published *The Flavor of Waverly* cookbook and history, will present a slide lecture outlining 18th and 19th century life in the Abingtons.
- June 21 - 2:00 P.M. **Annual Reception for New Members and Volunteers** - The afternoon will consist of an open house for new members with tours provided by LHS volunteer guides and presentation of volunteer appreciation awards, followed by a "get acquainted" hour with light refreshments.

All spring programs are at the Catlin House, 232 Monroe Avenue, Scranton, PA.

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Editor is Dorothy Allen, LHS Director

LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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232 MONROE AVENUE  
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18510

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## FADED IMAGES: FORMER BUILDINGS AND FORGOTTEN MEN

Who remembers an architect? Unless an architect is an innovator who creates a new style or is responsible for the design of a well-known public building or place of worship, the architect's name is usually forgotten. Often a building is deemed worthy of historic preservation, but the preservationists are hard-pressed to discover whose design it is that they wish to preserve. There is always something missing.

In the midst of the current interest in historic preservation, most residents are unaware that our present "historic" buildings are not the original structures erected in Scranton's earliest days. The exceptions are places such as the Tripp House, (on North Main Street) which was originally built in Federal style, and a few homes in the northern boroughs of Lackawanna County which date from Colonial times. Although most Colonial buildings have disappeared from the architectural landscape, many persons are aware that they were once there.

Persons with an interest in later architectural history travel to sites on North Adams, North Webster, North Washington, Sanderson, and Green Ridge Avenues for views of historic residential architecture. At those sites can be seen quintessential examples of Victorian Gothic, Queen Anne, Eastern Stick Style, Chateau, Victorian Romanesque, and even Second Empire residential architecture. Most existing residential structures of Victorian Era styles date from the 1870's through the early decades of the twentieth century.

We are aware of the Federal and Colonial "record" (1700 to 1840) and many persons are working hard to preserve what remains of area Victorian architecture (dating from the 1870's). What could be missing?

By 1848, George Scranton and his associates had established the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company (then called Scranton and Platt). They had secured contracts with various railroad companies, beginning with the New York and Erie, and had successfully produced tons of valuable iron and steel "T" rails. By 1856, Scranton became the major rail manufacturing city in the country. Workers, entrepreneurs, bankers, lawyers, and merchants lived in Scranton; however, aside from the faded views provided by a few very old photographs, there is not an extensive public record of what types of buildings the early capitalists inhabited. To our knowledge, no building constructed in Scranton in the 1850's has survived intact. The buildings are missing.

Fortunately, the history of 1850's architecture in Scranton can be documented through research in old atlases, city directories, deeds, and drawings; and the biography of Scranton's first architect can be obtained from various antique books:



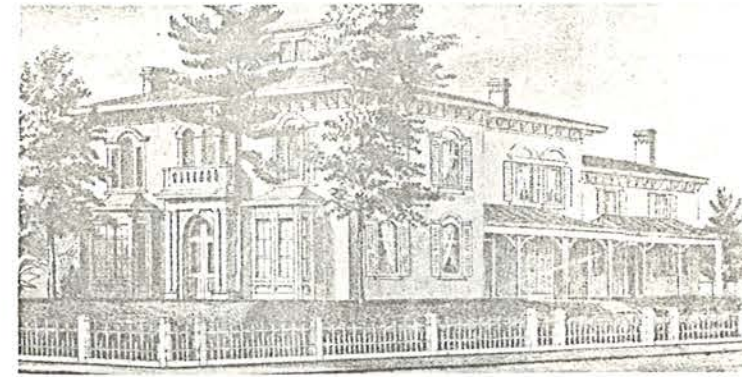
JOEL AMSDEN (1812 - 1868)

Joel Amsden arrived in Scranton in 1850 at the request of George Scranton. Educated at Norwich University in New Hampshire as a civil engineer, Amsden had gained professional experience during the 1830's and 1840's as a surveyor and engineer with various railroad and canal systems in New York state before turning his attention to architecture. Well-educated, multi-talented, and experienced, Amsden was an asset to the new Scrantons & Platt (Lackawanna Iron and Coal) Company as well as to the new community of Scranton.

Joel Amsden was born in Hartland, Vermont, on September 5, 1812, and after completing his education, he began his professional career as a surveyor with the New York and Erie Railroad. In 1838, he obtained the position of resident engineer on the Black River Canal (a branch of the Erie Canal in Oneida County, New York.) There he met and married Anna T. Power, an immigrant girl from County Waterford, Ireland. The Amsdens resided in Rome, New York, until 1846.

In 1846, Amsden moved to Charlestown, Massachusetts (near Boston) where he was employed for three years as chief engineer of the construction of a turbine water works. In 1849, he obtained the position of civil engineer at the Glendon Iron Works near Easton, where he also designed a number of public buildings. He met George Scranton on a business trip to New York City at about the same time that Mr. Scranton was in New York securing the contract with the New York and Erie Railroad to produce the first iron "T" rails which made the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company famous. George Scranton offered Amsden the position of engineer with the growing iron company and the Amsdens moved to the new community in 1850.

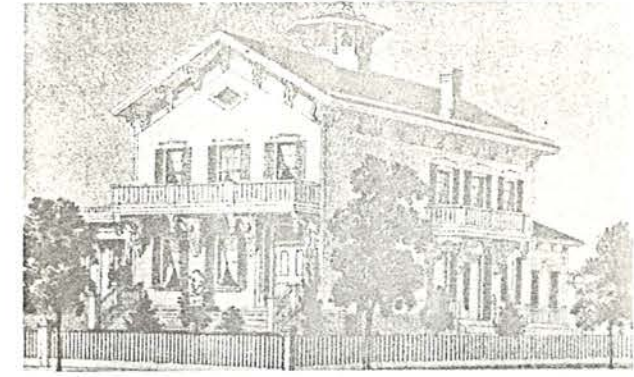
Timing was fortuitous for both the community of Scranton as well as for Joel Amsden. The 1850's were the years when the "rails ruled" and a great amount of railroad construction was begun in the U.S., particularly in the northeast. In addition



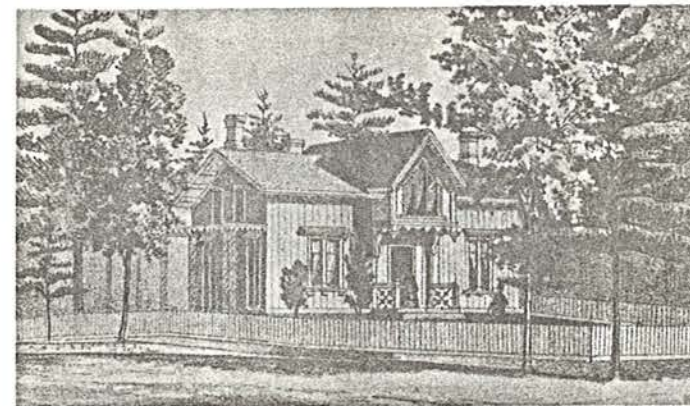
The George W. Scranton Residence

The first local residence designed by architect Joel Amsden was for George W. Scranton, the city's founding father. The Italianate style building was constructed in 1857 at 523 Lackawanna at the corner of Adams Avenue. The home was a two story wooden frame structure with a low pitched hip roof topped by a small square cupola. George Scranton lived in this home until his death in 1861. After the death of Mrs. Scranton, the estate was passed on to their daughter Elizabeth and her husband George A. Fuller. The building stood until the early 1900's, and the Hotel Casey was built on the site in 1910.

A similar frame structure was built in the same year for banker George Sanderson at 433 Mulberry Street at the corner of Washington Avenue. Sanderson soon built another new home in the Green Ridge section of the city and the residence on Mulberry Street was purchased in 1866 by industrialist and banker James Blair, one of the original stockholders of the D.L.&W. Railroad and the Lackawanna Furnaces. The Sanderson / Blair residence had a gabled roof with ornately decorative, bracketed overhanging eaves. Also in Italianate style, the building was noteworthy for its open porches which were overhung with balustraded balconies entirely supported by massive carved brackets which eliminated the need for supporting columns. The building was topped with an octagonal cupola. James Blair lived in the house until his death in 1897. In that year, the Hahnemann Hospital was organized and utilized the Blair residence for its first hospital location. In 1917, the building was razed and a Y.M.C.A. was built on the site, which is the present location of Mulberry Towers apartments.



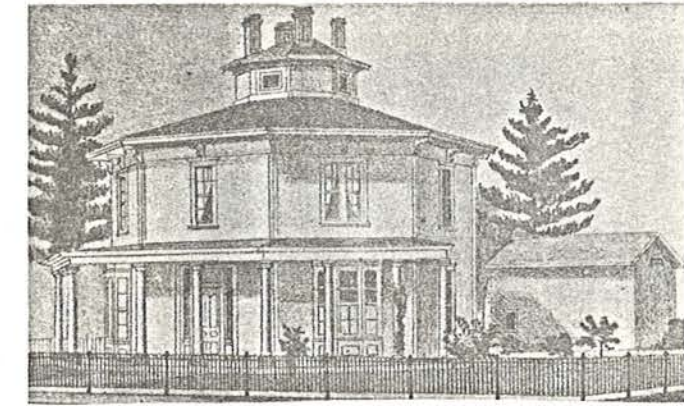
The Sanderson / Blair Residence



The William N. Jenks Residence

Not all of Amsden's designs were for elaborate mansions of the wealthy. Several of Amsden's designs were for dwellings "in the vernacular." One such home, surprisingly modern in appearance, was the residence of William N. Jenks who was a ticket agent with the D.L.&W. Railroad. Built in 1857, the house had some Queen Anne "gingerbread," but otherwise resembled present-day vacation homes, with vertical board siding, long narrow windows, and what we would now call a "loft" structure with large paned windows extending from the floor to the peak of the front gable. The loft floor extended forward past the front of the house, creating a canopy over the porch. The home stood at 201 Wyoming Avenue at the corner of Spruce Street (on the present site of the Bank Towers building). The Jenks family resided in the house only until 1861, and it was torn down sometime prior to 1877 when city maps show a brick home on the site.

The Octagon House was invented in 1850 by Orson Fowler who wanted to create an American design with the concept of the centrally planned home to meet the needs of the family living in it. A style far ahead of its time, the Octagon house was popular in the U.S. during the 1850's. Joel Amsden's version of the Octagon house was built for George S. Schott, Jr. at approximately 133 North Washington Avenue. The two story wooden building was a combination of Italianate styling (wide overhanging eaves with decorative brackets and an encircling porch distinguished by unfluted Roman columns) with Amsden's own innovation - a series of four central fire places with their chimneys extending through the roof of a central cupola. The home was later the residence of the Jaman H. Phelps family (1870-1877) and of Dr. William D. Haggerty (1878-1890). It was torn down approximately 1894 to make way for the construction of the Connell building.



The George Schott, Jr. Residence

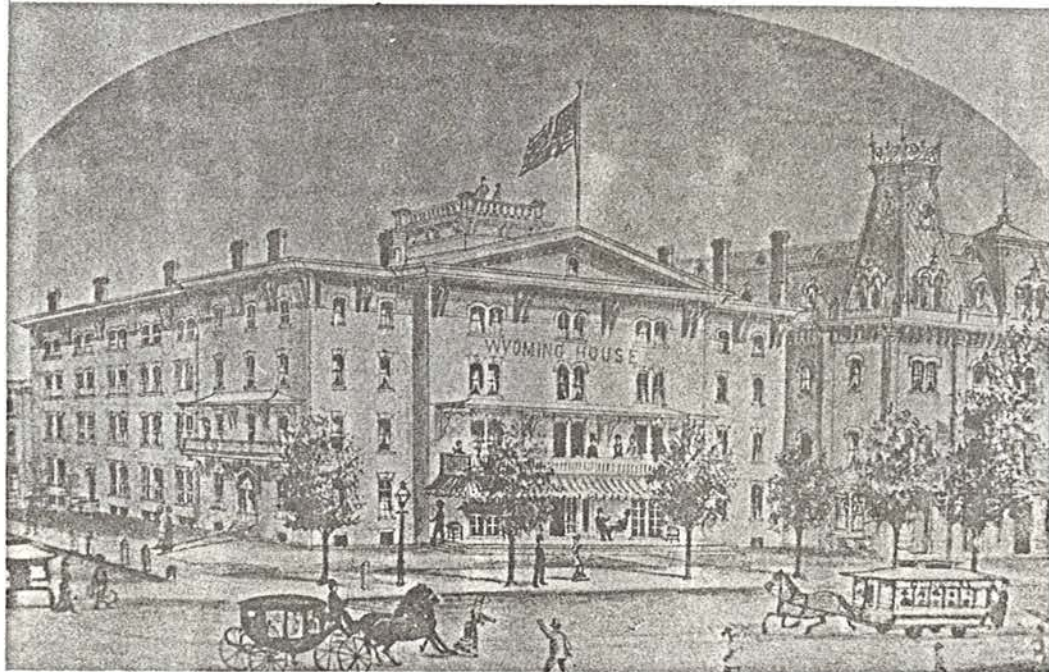




First St. Luke's Church

By the 1860's, there was a sizeable Roman Catholic population in Scranton, and land was purchased at the corner of Wyoming Avenue and Linden Street for the construction of a church. By this time, Joel Amsden's sons, Frank and Fred, had also become architects and the contract for the design of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul was given to the Amsden firm. With a seating capacity of 2,300 the 68 x 153 foot church was built in 1865 at a cost of \$70,000. There are no known photographs or drawings of the original architecture of this church which underwent extensive renovations in 1883 when it became St. Peter's Cathedral. We do know, however, that the original design of the building did not include the familiar two towers and entryway which appear in later photographs, and that the original windows had red and white diamond shaped panes.

When plans were begun for the construction of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad to carry products from the Lackawanna Iron Furnaces in 1850, the iron company donated a plot of land at the corner of Wyoming and Lackawanna Avenues to be used for the construction of a "first class" hotel to provide accommodations to travelers and businessmen from New York. Joel Amsden designed a three story brick hotel, The Wyoming House, which was completed in 1852 at a cost of \$40,000. The well-known hotel stood until 1896. The site is now occupied by the Oppenheim building.



The Wyoming House

The Amsdens were the only architects listed in Scranton City Directories until 1870. Consequently, many of the early residences of Scranton's pioneer industrialists, bankers, and merchants were constructed following Amsden's architectural plans. None of these early residences, which had been located in the downtown section of Scranton, have survived, mainly because the properties on which they stood were needed for the construction of business offices and retail establishments as the city grew. Not large buildings, the early Amsden residences were "typical" of the period in which they were constructed. However, each of them was unique in its own way and each had an interesting existence. The most noteworthy of Amsden's residential designs were the following.



to his duties with the L.I.&C. Co., Amsden became resident engineer for the construction of the northern division of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad (between Nicholson and Pocono Mountain) and chief engineer during the completion of its southern division, before that position was assumed by James Archbald. During the great period of railroad expansion in the U.S., the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company continued to obtain rail production contracts. Business prospered, and workers and professional people were attracted to the new borough of Scranton. The area which had been a wilderness which included a ravine and a swamp in 1840 was becoming part of the civilized world by 1850.

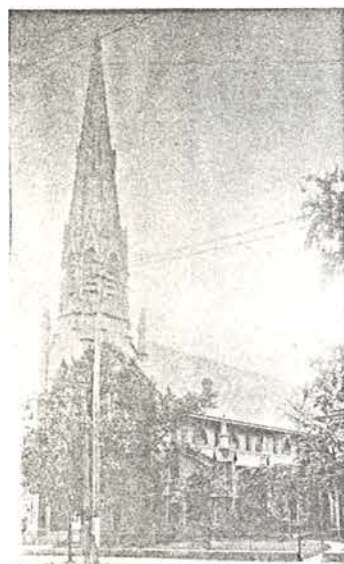
Amsden's first project apart from iron company work was the surveying and laying out of the land which is now downtown Scranton. With Joseph C. Platt, Amsden selected the names of Lackawanna and Wyoming Avenues (named after the two anthracite valleys) as well as the idea of naming avenues after great men and streets after the names of local trees.

He did his first private architectural work in Scranton for himself in 1851, on the northeast corner of Lackawanna and Washington Avenues (at the present site of the Scranton National Bank building.) Amsden and a Dr. Leavitt operated the first area book and stationery store from a portion of the original frame structure which was called the *Amsden Block*. The building remained until 1914 when it was razed to make way for the Union Trust Company building.

Amsden's life in the 1850's must have been as hectic as that of any of his modern counterparts. In addition to his employment with the L.I.&C. Company, his retail book business, his position with the D.L.&W. Railroad, and his private architectural work, Amsden served as postmaster of the borough of Scranton in 1853, after the death of postmaster John W. Moore and prior to the time Dr. Benjamin H. Troop assumed the post.

Amsden's first public commission was for the building of the First Presbyterian Church on property at 115 North Washington Avenue donated by Scrantons & Platt in 1851. The wooden structure, designed in Victorian Gothic Revival architecture, had a tall steeple with eight pointed, crenellated arches surrounding the bell tower. Lacy bargeboards graced the front eaves and a number of small towers and battlements decorated the roof edges. A trefoil design was used in both exterior and interior decoration to unify the building: the side windows were shaped like triangles with curved sides encasing trefoil stained glass and the interior arches incorporated a trefoil design.

#### The First Presbyterian Church



Exterior View



Interior View

Capable of seating 800 persons, the First Presbyterian Church was completed in 1853 at a cost of \$30,000. The church stood until 1902 when a new one was constructed.

After the construction of the First Presbyterian Church, the firm of Scrantons and Platt donated a second lot at 128 Penn Avenue to another congregation for the building of a church. The Rev. John Long, Episcopalian missionary in northeastern Pennsylvania, had written to New York architect Richard Upjohn asking for the design of an inexpensive wooden church building for the new parish of St. Luke. There is no record of whether Upjohn ever responded to the request, and the design which was used for the construction of the first St. Luke's Church was provided by Joel Amsden. A simple working-class church with seating for 225 persons, the building was constructed of wood in a vernacular Gothic style, with external walls of "unmatched boards battened." By 1866, the congregation outgrew the original building and the present St. Luke's Church was built on Wyoming Avenue. Amsden's St. Luke's Church building stood until 1875. (The Clark and Snover Company, tobaccoists, purchased the land in the 1880's for a retail store building which still stands.)