

**EXHIBITION RENOVATION**

The second floor of the Catlin House is temporarily closed to visitors as efforts are underway to complete the project of renovating an existing exhibit, "Coal Mining History".

The entire project which also includes the "Two Centuries of Railroading" exhibit, was made possible in part by a grant from the County Commissioners "Arts to the People" Program. We expect to complete the work as soon as possible in order to coincide with our March program, "Steam Era Railroading", presented by Ranger Tony Pann, and Ranger Sue Pridemore, Interpretive Specialist, both with the National Park Service at Steamtown.

**THANKS...**

As December's program was a celebration of the Holiday season, we also marked the close of another fine year at the Catlin House.

At this time we wish to thank Marie Smith and all the members of the LHS Reception Committee for their efforts in making our programs more enjoyable. Also, a special thanks to members Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Spegar, for their thoughtfulness at December's program.

Most of all, a gracious thanks to you our members for your support throughout the year. We look forward to this new year and with warm regards, hope to see all of you very soon.

**RESEARCHING THEIR PAST**

Genealogy is now a familiar word to some young 7th and 8th grade students in the Scranton School District.

The Academically Gifted Program has been utilizing the Society's Library facility at the George H. Catlin Memorial House for their research. The students were delighted when they found a family name in the early Scranton City Directories which date back to 1859, and many were surprised to discover how old their houses are. One young researcher found out that a cigar manufacturer had his business in his backyard, and some students followed the rise and fall of family fortunes!

The Gifted Program in the Scranton School District includes students from grades K - 12. The program emphasizes local history and architecture as part of its curriculum.

This was a first time visit for many of the students. According to Eileen Pocius, the Intermediate School teacher of the Gifted Program, some of the students have been bitten by the family history "bug" and can't wait to come back to the Catlin House again.

**CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS**

The Social Science Department of Luzerne County Community College will sponsor its 2nd Annual Conference on the "History of Northeastern Pennsylvania: The Last Two Hundred Years" on Friday, October 26, 1990, in the College Conference Center. Anyone interested in making a presentation should contact Dr. Robert Mittrick, Chairperson, by either writing to him at the College in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania 18634, or calling (717)-821-1512.

The LHS Library is open Tuesday through Friday 10 AM to 5 PM.

1990 Maryellen Calemno  
Photography: Ward V. Roe

**CALANDAR OF EVENTS**

**Sunday, March 11, 1990, 2:00 PM**

"Steam Era Railroading at Steamtown," a slide lecture, featuring guest speakers Tony Pann, and Interpretive Specialist Sue Pridemore, both with the National Park Service at Steamtown.

**Wednesday, April 11, 1990, 7:30 PM**

"John Willard Rought and Anthracite Era Art," with guest speaker Richard Stanislaus, includes slides and discussion of the artists who documented the anthracite industry in the 19th century.

**Wednesday, May 9, 1990, 6:30 PM**

**ANNUAL LHS DINNER & BUSINESS MEETING**

At 8:00 PM, guest speaker Francis C.M. Bosak will present "The Bosak Family: History of an Immigrant Success," a slide lecture on Slovak immigrant Michael Bosak's entrepreneurial success in the early 20th century.

All programs are open to the public and presented free of charge with the exception of the Annual Dinner. The lectures and performances are supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

The LHS JOURNAL is published quarterly by the Society



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The George H. Catlin Memorial House  
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### A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

As we begin the New Year I welcome those of you who have joined The Lackawanna Historical Society for the first time! And, I greet those of you who recently renewed their memberships for 1990!

If you attended our annual Christmas program meeting, you are aware that Dorothy Silva has left the post of Executive Director to accept a position with a Scranton architectural firm. While Dorothy certainly is missed, I am pleased to report that she continues to be an active and loyal member!

I am also pleased to report that Maryellen Calemno has assumed the duties left by the vacancy in the Executive Directorship, effective January 16, 1990.

The next program meeting is scheduled for Sunday, March 11, at 2:00 P.M. in the George H. Catlin Memorial House. Featured will be a presentation by Tony Pann and Sue Pridemore entitled, "Steam Era Railroading at Steamtown." Rangers Pridemore and Pann currently serve at the Steamtown National Historical Site.

Although this next meeting is not until March, I encourage members to stop by and visit the Society's headquarters. Why not take along a friend to tour the exhibits? And, while you are there, be sure to pick up your membership card.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Cimini, Esq.  
President

*Miss Dorthea Mattes, long-time staff member at the George H. Catlin Memorial until her retirement in 1972, died Sunday, January 14, 1990. The Lackawanna Historical Society recently received a note of thanks from the Mattes family for its gift of flowers and expression of condolences.*



**This photograph ca.1890 shows the Lackawanna Historical Society's Wooton Desk as it appeared within its original office setting**

The Ordinary grade had no veneer at all; Standard had burl walnut; Extra had Spanish cedar or maple; while the Superior (so rare that only about four are known to exist) was veneered in holly, satinwood, and ebony; and its hardware and hinges were gold plated. The desk could also be ordered in any one of three sizes to accommodate the owner. Obviously, the Wooton Desk was not an inexpensive purchase. Ranging in price from \$100 for an Ordinary to \$800 for a Superior, in an era when a seven piece parlor set cost \$55 and an experienced cabinet maker who built the desk averaged \$2 a week. It was the most expensive factory produced desk of the time. Even John D. Rockefeller did not aspire to a Superior grade; although his Extra grade had a special gallery designed for it.

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For all their popularity, the Wooton Desk was only made for a little over twenty years. The decline in popularity late in the 1890's can be attributed to several factors. The general public began to turn

away from Victorian "fussiness" and toward a simpler less elaborate oak furniture made popular by the *Arts and Crafts* movement and such designers as Frank Lloyd Wright and Gustav Stickley. Another factor was that the heavy wings of the desk made it a time consuming effort to be opened and closed many times in one day. Finally, while the drop front provided adequate support for letter writing it proved much too flimsy for the newest innovation of the late 19th century office: *the typewriter*.

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For over 70 years Wooton Desks had collected dust in the recesses of old warehouses and basements. However, due to their superb workmanship and hardwoods, these desks suffered little deterioration and once again the Wooton Desk has become a prized acquisition. The Lackawanna Historical Society is pleased to have in its collection and on exhibit, this extraordinary example of 19th century office furniture, the Wooton Desk.





**Wooton Desk on display at the Catlin House Museum**

### THE WOOTON DESK

The term "businessman," which originated around 1830 in America, portrayed executives as pillars of the community's business. In the mid 19th Century, individuals also active in commerce were making the transitions from traders, merchants, and shopkeepers to business owners, managers, and employers. As people found ways to harness energy from coal, steam, and electricity, the industrial revolution rapidly changed thousands of offices required to organize and market the goods being produced.

By the early 1870's, the typical business office, consisting of a large open room with rows of long flat desks for employees, had apparent shortcomings. Many businesses developed a desire for order, organization, and an environment to foster clear thinking.

One of the first requirements sought was a desk that would offer privacy, security, and organization. Several styles of desks emerged. One in particular was the revolutionary *Wooton Desk*.

William S. Wooton, an Indiana-born Quaker minister trained as a furniture pattern maker invented the Wooton Desk. His solution to office modernization in 1874 was literally an "office with in an office." With two large hinged side compartments that could be locked at night; a drop down writing surface for correspondence, horizontal slots for stationary or documents, cubbyholes for envelopes and letters, vertical compartments for private ledger books, several size drawers for supplies; and even a cast iron letter slot for mail that arrived after the desk was closed and locked. The Wooton Desk provided the proud owner with a myriad of conveniences.

By 1875, Wooton had invented four *grades* of the desk: *the Ordinary*, *the Standard*, *the Extra*, and *the Superior*. Basically they were all the same desk made usually of black walnut or oak. The difference in the grades was primarily in the handcraftsmanship and the veneer on the exterior of the case.



## Valentine's Day



*Perishable paper items, known formally as ephemera, such as postcards, trade cards, product labels, and valentines, like the one pictured here, became immensely popular by the turn of the century. (postcard ca. 1905, courtesy of Jack Hiddlestone)*

*The name Valentine, and its connection with the day in which lovers send tokens of affection to one another, is somewhat of a historical mystery. An explanation may be found in a combination of theories, dating back as far as ancient Rome, culminating in our present traditions of flowers, candies and greeting cards.*

*Some historians believe the name Valentine comes from an association with early Christian martyrology. There are two saints connected with February 14th named Valentine, both suffered martyrdom in the second half of the third century and were buried at the Porta del Popolo (Gate of the People), known once as the Gate of St. Valentine, Rome, Italy.*

*The custom of romance on February 14th may also originate in Rome. On February 14th, the day before the feast of Lupercalia, the names of young women were placed in a container from which they were drawn by young men. The young men were then to become gallants to their chosen ladies for the duration of the festival. This drawing of young women's names from a box on February 14th continued for centuries.*

*By the 17th century, the custom of sending 'valentines' to one's favorite developed. At first these were simple home-made items. Not until 1800 did the first commercial valentines appear, reaching their peak by the Victorian Age. These vivid colorful symbols of romance; Cupids, hearts, flowers, bows and arrows the most commonly associated, are familiar to us all. Women of the late 19th century spent much time collecting embossed and die-cut images to paste in their 'scrap' books. Many of our present day symbols stem from this time and as a recent interest in this period is now prevalent, major card companies have gone back to their archives to reissue some of these more elaborate designs so they may be seen again and enjoyed by all.*

