

Open:
Tuesday – Friday
10 – 4:30
Saturday: 10 – 12

Closed:
Sunday & Monday

VOL. 2 – NO. 4

The LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

March - April 1968



CATLIN HOUSE
Home of the Historical Society
232 Monroe Ave., Scranton, Pa.

MARCH MEETING

A remarkable film, noted for its technical skill and its artistry, will be presented Wednesday, March 27. "Mark Twain's America" deals with the life and times of the great American humorist. Superb vintage photographs are brought to life by still-picture animation techniques and with a complementary musical score by Robert Russell Bennett, the film recreates the color and atmosphere of one of the most exciting periods of American history. Steam boating on the Mississippi, the settling of the West and the gold rush, the "Gilded Age" – this was the America and its people that Mark Twain immortalized in his books. The film is narrated by Howard Lindsay. It was originally produced for NBC's Project 20 series.

HALLEY'S COMET

The years of Mark Twain's entrance upon and departure from this earth remarkably enough coincided with the appearance of Halley's comet – the most famous and probably the most spectacular of the many millions of comets traveling around our sun. To be sure, Halley's comet appears only in 77-year intervals, give or take a year or two, so that this coincidence is noteworthy, especially since Twain had predicted his own demise would occur when the comet reappeared.

Edmund Halley, after whom the comet is named, had correctly predicted back in 1682 that the comet would reappear in 1759, in 1835 (the year of Twain's birth) and in 1910 (the year of Twain's death). It was not surprising that by 1910, with more advanced technology and with refined instruments, astronomers were predicting the exact hour for some of the comet's activities.

The *Scranton Tribune-Republican* carried news of the comet on its front page beginning in mid-April of 1910. (Twain died on April 21.)

"Halley's comet was plainly discerned yesterday morning at 4:30 o'clock on the Eastern horizon by hundreds of Scranton people. If conditions permit the comet may be seen at any time now during the transit. On May 18 it will be most prominent."

(April 11)

From mid-April until mid-May articles on the comet became more and more frequent and local excitement mounted to unbelievable heights. A new column, "I Saw the Comet" was created. In it were reports of the sightings of the comet, accounts of some exceptional experiences, historic footnotes, listings of "Comet Parties" and the invited guests, and solutions to the complex problems encountered by amateur astronomers.

While many people looked upon the comet's display as an excuse for added frivolity and partying, there were some who looked upon the event fearfully and others who viewed it hopefully.

Throughout the city comet parties are being arranged by young people. Others who are superstitious are planning to take advantage of the visit of Halley's. Young women, it is said, who when they first catch a glimpse of the comet make a wish for a wedding ring, will be married in less than twelve months. And again any person who will throw the breast bone of a rabbit at the comet's tail will be immune from fatal injury or illness for a year, it is said. (May 17)

There were those who were terrified lest the comet and the earth collide!

FLIGHT FROM COMET LAYS RICHARDS LOW WITH VITAL INJURY

North Scranton Man Runs
Wild in West Scranton in
Terror of Halley's

In terror because he feared that the end of the world had come, or was about to come, because of the influence of Halley's comet, David Richards, aged 28 years, who resides near the Storrs mine, in North Scranton, ran wildly down Sixteenth Street, in West Scranton, last night, stumbling in his haste, and fracturing his skull... (April 16)

The comet was blamed for damage actually caused by a wind storm, for an explosion which took nine lives, for the death of an 85-year-old York, Pa. man whose disappointment over the "poor display" hastened his end. In China there was race rioting brought on by fear of the comet, while in Puerto Rico natives left the sugar fields and cigar factories to hold religious processions and to pray.

Who can argue with history? On May 7 this item appeared in the *Tribune-Republican*:

Throughout the ages Halley's comet, centuries before it was known by that name, carried with it the dread and fully believed portent – "The coming of the comet marks the passing of a king." At Julius Caesar's death the comet blazed. When Nero died it illumed the skies. Throughout the ages kings have died while the comet passed. Yesterday in London King Edward passed away. That was Edward VII, to be succeeded by his son, George V.

There were some humorous incidents to write about, too. Mark Twain probably would have appreciated this one:

The fear that the comet may collide with the earth this trip has been pretty generally dissipated, although many people have been badly scared during the past two weeks. In North Scranton they tell of a woman, who awoke in the middle of the night and from her window saw a spark of light apparently only a few rods distant. The light flickered and flared. The woman, thinking it was the comet, aroused her family. The members gathered in her room and open-mouthed stared at the light. They discussed the probability of a collision and the disastrous effects that would follow.

Suddenly the red spark burst into a glare of light. The family shuddered. They closed their eyes. They were sure the dreaded collision had taken place.

Then one of the family, a ten year-old boy, opened his eyes. He looked twice.

"Why, mama!" he said, "it's only that new electric light they put in yesterday!" (May 11)

In mid-May headlines left no doubt that the most important event was to take place shortly:

**WHISK! AWAY
WE GO THROUGH
COMET'S TAIL**

No Cause for Fear — Halley's
Is Not Going To Hit or Even
Sidesweep the Earth on This
Trip — Two Hours' Sailing
Across the Field of Gas and
It's on Its Way Again

At 11:20 o'clock tomorrow night, the earth will enter the tail of Halley's comet and until 1:20 o'clock Thursday morning the tail of the comet will envelop the earth — if the tail is long enough.
(May 17)

**NO DANGER IN
THE PASSING
OF THE COMET**

Great Event Will
Occur Tonight
(May 18)

3,500 happy Scrantonians waited on the Spruce Street Bridge that night. They waited, and they waited, and they waited.....

**COMET FAILS TO
KEEP ITS DATE
WITH OLD EARTH**

Millions of Miles To
Spare During Passage
(May 20)

Everyone held a dim view of astronomers that week and for a long time afterward. The nation believed that the scientists had miscalculated and that the earth did not pass through the comet's tail as had been predicted. But it is now believed that the event actually did take place, probably on May 21.

Halley's comet is scheduled to reappear in 1986.

Will people again fear a collision between that remarkable heavenly body and the earth? Will a king succumb as is traditionally the case? Will a space laboratory penetrate and study the comet? If so, whose will it be? American? Russian? Chinese?

Tune in twenty years from now to find out!

APRIL MEETING

Known across America as an adventurer with a message, lecturer Philip Geary, a native Pennsylvanian, will present a program entitled "Passport to Adventure," a fascinating story of unusual world peoples on Thursday, April 25 at the Lackawanna Historical Society. During his globe-trotting pursuits, Mr. Geary has spent five years amongst the aboriginal Santals of India, and has made expeditions to the African Cameroons, Ethiopia, Ladakh, Baluchistan, and Colombia. Among the notables he has interviewed are the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, and the late Prime Minister Nehru of India. Currently Mr. Geary is associate director of Air World Education, for Trans World Airlines, a global program embracing 38 countries and the U.S.A. Throughout the country he has been enthusiastically received by audiences, for whatever his approach Mr. Geary injects an exciting perspective into a better understanding of world peoples and their problems. Members are encouraged to bring guests.

TRUSTEES MEETING.....

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Lackawanna Historical Society will be held on Wednesday, April 17, at 4:00 p.m. at the Catlin House. President William L. Connell, Jr. will preside.

This issue of *The Bulletin* was compiled by Mrs. Henry Friedmann and Mrs. Roswell S. Patterson, new members of The Board of Trustees. Previous issues were written by Mr. Bernard J. McGurl, Jr., a trustee who also serves this year as Program Chairman and who has in the past presented historical studies-in-depth of Scranton based on his own research and sometimes with a musical approach.

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. C. E. Weinberger
Mrs. Frank McHugh
Jerry T. Wills
Lawrence R. Macciocco
James McShaffery
John F. Tacchino
Chester G. Lesniewski
James J. Hines

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 56
Scranton, Pa.

LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CATLIN HOUSE

232 MONROE AVENUE
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18510