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The LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin



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

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LIBRARY BROWSINGS

The library of the Lackawanna Historical Society is not large, as libraries go, but many of its books are out-of-print and are unobtainable anywhere else. That's what makes them so valuable for the student of history. In an effort to illustrate the treasure-trove that awaits the scholar, serious or dilettante, here is a random sampling.

In 1779, a military expedition under General John Sullivan of the Continental Army was dispatched to Northeastern Pennsylvania to rout out the Indians who had been responsible for the Wyoming Massacre. A number of the men who took part in the march kept diaries. The following excerpt is from the diary of Sergeant Thomas Roberts:

July 1st: Marched from Wyoming 10 miles up the river and incamped at Lackenwanney whear the Land is the Best that ever I see. Timmothy as high as my head and the Bildings all Burnt by the Savages the warter is But Poor the Wild turkes wery plenty the young ones yelping throug the Woods as if it Was inhabited ever So thick...

In these days of super-highways and fast automobiles, let us consider the journey of an early settler in this area. On February 16, 1798, he traveled from Bethany, Wayne County, to Wyoming, Luzerne County, to get a load of grain for the family bread. The man was Major Jason Torrey, and here is how his son described the journey:

Arriving there [at Wyoming] at the farm of a Mr. Jackson, he was obliged to sell one of his horses in order to buy the grain—the horse to be sent back to the buyer after helping to haul the grain. A little before daylight [after having crossed the Susquehanna River on the previous night] he reached Taylor's Mills on Roaring Brook where he paused to have the grain ground. A day and a night was consumed in this process for the mill ground slowly. Next morning he passed through Cobb's Gap and spent the night

at Swingle's in South Canaan. He was home about noon the next day.

In 1843 a book titled *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania* made this observation about anthracite coal:

The coal for some years after its discovery was wrought at the surface by stripping and carrying away the superincumbent rock; but this being too expensive has been superseded, both at Carbondale and Wilkes-Barre by the usual mode of drifting...

Now, a hundred and twenty-five years later, in the age of automation, it is less expensive to strip coal than to mine it. How strangely the cycle of history turns!

Here is a description of the borough of Providence from the *Scranton Directory for 1867-68*:

It stood and still stands on the terrace slope rising from the shallow waters of the Lackawanna into an eminence, commanding a look-out far up and down the valley, veined with brooks, farms, coal works and villages, all cultivated, active and thrifty; and although the low Moosic, encircling the prospect, gives out no bold cliffs nor Alpine views, it shows here such graceful swells, and there such gentle depressions in the mountain for the passage of the gentle trout stream as to render the village unsurpassed in the beauty of its scenery or the elegance of its location. Nor are the inhabitants of the place excelled in modest bearing, in quite firesides, or in the general good feeling pervading the entire community. It is true there are sometimes here as well as elsewhere in the wide world dissensions and strifes, political asperities and personal feuds and other vexations, making up their part of village life the world over; but these are only clouds floating in a genial sky; which may disturb but not destroy the otherwise harmonious relations of a village population, characterized by absence of display, by general intelligence, by universal kindness of feeling, and by a generous charity for the shortcomings of others.

In 1886, Ambrose Mulley, a Providence businessman, published a *Pocket Directory and Street Guide to Scranton*. It retailed for fifty cents, and the style of its preface is strongly reminiscent of Charles Dickens:

As this little volume contains nothing injurious to public health or good morals; as it is not thickly interspersed with puffs of merchandise, interlarded with ante-mortem epitaphs, nor decorated with portraits or caricatures, no apology is offered for its appearance.

Moreover, being issued at the writer's own cost and charges, it is thought no other party will be asked to share possible financial loss in the venture.

No mass meeting in favor of the object has been held; no flattering invitation or request received, to evolve the work; neither has production been prompted by hope of immediate personal profit, but it is the result of a constantly recurring business need of being able to quickly localize places, streets, residences, and ascertain the nearest route thereto. Also, because of the belief that many others, residents and strangers, having experienced the same want, a few copies, if fairly adapted to the purpose might be sold...

The adaptation to Scranton is original. The statistics have been collated from headquarters and then added to, verified or corrected, as the case may be, by many days travel throughout the length and breadth of the city. Yet the work is far short of perfection. Only dead cities can have complete directories, much less one that is growing as rapidly as Scranton.

... thanks are due to many gentlemen in private life for information—with one exception—cheerfully given...

So this pocket companion which has cost more time, patience and cash than was expected, is thrown upon the vast ocean of books, to sink

perhaps to the lowest depths of oblivion, or perchance to float to a humble haven of usefulness.

Mr. Mulley's spirit need have no qualms. His little directory of Scranton has found a "haven of usefulness."

Statistics are often cold and impersonal, but sometimes they are extremely poignant. Witness a report made in March, 1888, to the Secretary of Internal Affairs by Patrick Blewitt, Inspector of Mines:

There were 57 fatal accidents in 1887.
There were 225 non-fatal accidents.
There were 32 wives made widows.

The last statistic is one to tear at your heart-strings.

One of the most prominent men in the development of the city of Scranton was Colonel Frederick L. Hitchcock. Hanging over the upright piano in the front sitting room of Catlin House is a picture of Colonel Hitchcock and his horse which was taken at Falmouth, Virginia, in the winter of 1862-63. The description of the horse is taken from Hitchcock's book, *War From the Inside*, which was published in 1904:

May I digress long enough to speak of this remarkable horse. Dr. Holland says that there is always hope for any man who has heart enough to love a good horse. Army life was well calculated to develop the sterling qualities of both man and beast. Hence, I suppose, every man who had a good horse could regard him as "most remarkable."

I had named this splendid animal "Don Fulano" after that superb horse in Winthrop's "John Brent," not because he was a magnificent black charger, etc., on the contrary, in many respects he was the opposite of the original Don Fulano. Raised on an unromantic farm near Scranton, an unattractive yellow bay, rather too heavy limbed and too stockily built to be called handsome, yet powerful, courageous, intelligent (he could almost talk), high spirited, with a heavy, shaggy mane and forelock, through which gleamed a pair of fierce, keen eyes, he had many of the qualities which distinguished his noble prototype.

He had not the honor to die carrying a slave to liberty, but when the final account is come to be squared up in horses' heaven, it is possible that the credit of having passed unflinchingly through the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and of having safely carried a wounded soldier off each field, may prove to be a little something in favor of my splendid "Don."

One of Mr. Daniel Williams' pet projects during his tenure as president of the Lackawanna Historical had been the persuading of some of the senior citizens of the area to talk about the local scene, particularly what the area was like in the days of their youth. Here are two excerpts that testify to the wisdom of Mr. Williams' endeavors. The first is from Chaffee's *History of the Wyoming Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*:

Thousands of letters have been written to pastors and laymen asking for facts. Again and again I have been told that the parties who knew all about the early history had recently passed away.

That was written in 1903. Do you want further proof?

... the compiler has been compeled to undertake personally the tour of the entire state; spending much time in each county examining ancient newspapers and musty manuscripts; conversing with aged pioneers, and collecting from them, orally, many interesting facts never before published, which otherwise would probably not have been preserved.

He has often had occasion to regret in the course of his pilgrimage that this research had not been commenced some fifteen years earlier. Many aged men during that time have gone down to the grave, whose memories treasured up a thousand interesting facts, which their descendants have neglected to preserve.

Sheridan Day wrote those words - in 1843! So the next time you clean out your attic, do it with the care of an archaeologist. Remember that today's "junk," may be tomorrow's treasure.

MAY MEETING

The final meeting of the current season of the Lackawanna Historical Society will take place on Monday, May 27, beginning at 6:30 P.M. This will be a dinner meeting, so remember to make your reservations with the executive secretary, Miss Dorothea Mattes. The featured speaker, following the dinner, will be Dr. John L. Earl, Associate Professor of History at the University of Scranton. Dr. Earl will speak on his tour of the Soviet Union during the summer of 1967, and will illustrate his talk with photographs which he took during the Russian trip.

..... Bernard J. McGurl

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