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Vol. 4 No. 1

# The LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Bulletin

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1969



### THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SCRANTON'S WATER SUPPLY

Today, as in the past, water – one of man's most important natural resources – is still largely taken for granted. Few in this area realize what an exceptional water system Scranton has. This was partly due to geographic location and partly to the foresight of Joseph H. Scranton, organizer and first president of the Scranton Gas and Water Company, and his son, W. W. Scranton.

Before the Scranton Gas and Water Company began service in 1858, the community depended upon springs, wells, cisterns, and rain barrels for its water supply. Organized by Joseph H. Scranton and incorporated by Dr. Benjamin Throop, Edward C. Fuller, and others, the company was chartered in 1854 to meet the expanding needs of industry and of a growing population. Eventually the watershed of the company would extend for 168 square miles. By 1926 the territory covered sounded like a travelogue, as described by the October 12 issue of *The Scranton Times*:

From the eastern slopes and meadows of Susquehanna County; from the western watersheds of Wayne; the headwaters of the Lehigh; the eastern and western slopes of West Mountain, back into the Abington region, in Scott and Newton; from the lakes and rivers and brooks that wind their way Scrantonward, comes Scranton's most valued commodity.

Development of water companies in the anthracite areas of Pennsylvania was directly related to the growth of the mining industry, which by the late 1820's was expanding, with coal being carried to city markets via the Gravity Railroad and the D & H canal system.

Although mining had begun in the Carbondale area and prospered because of the Gravity Railroad and the canal, few mining operations existed in the Scranton – Wilkes-Barre area before completion of the D. L. & W. Railroad in 1851. During the early years of mining, men, mules and steam provided the power to operate mines and collieries, which were usually located on streams. The streams, in turn, were dammed and the water was either pumped or flowed by gravity for use in the mining operations.

In the first years of the Scranton company, water was drawn directly from the Lackawanna River to a pumping station at Carbon Street (now Olive Street); then stored in a reservoir on the present site of the Westminister Presbyterian Church at the corner of Madison Avenue and Olive Street. From the reservoir, water flowed through mains by gravity to the "village" of Scranton.

As the river gradually became polluted through the discharge of acid water from mine operations, the company built a dam on Roaring Brook in 1867. When this source too became polluted from sulphur mine water, a new dam was constructed in Dunmore and tied into the storage reservoir at Olive and Madison. Built in 1872, the new dam was named, "Number 7" because of its proximity to the No. 7 plane in the Gravity Railroad.

It was W. W. Scranton who initiated the organization's policy of expansion that eventually led to its becoming the largest privately-owned water company in the United States and one of the few water systems operated solely by gravity.



First Reservoir, Scranton Gas & Water Co.  
Corner Madison Ave. and Olive St.

When W. W. (William Walker) Scranton was named to the Presidency of the Water Company in 1879, nine years after the death of his father and 25 years after the company was originally chartered, the company was responsible for supplying the water needs of central city, Petersburg, South Scranton, and Hyde Park. Limited by the resources of No. 7 Dam in Dunmore and the single reservoir in Scranton, it was obvious that further sources would have to be tapped to supply the rapidly growing needs of the booming industrial valley.

Under the guidance of Mr. Scranton, the Scranton Gas and Water Company acquired the water companies of Providence, Dunmore, Blakely, Olyphant, and Archbald, and in the valley from Jermyn to Forest City. Construction was undertaken on the Elmhurst, Oak Run, and No. 5 Reservoirs, the Williams Bridge Dam on Stafford-Meadow Brook, and the Lake Scranton Reservoir. A pumping station was built at Gouldsboro to bring water from the Lehigh River when needed. From one small reservoir, pumping 1,000,000 gallons daily in 1879, W. W. Scranton expanded the company to twenty reservoirs capable of delivering 30,000,000 gallons daily in 1916.

The foresight of the Scrantons was evident not too long ago during the long drought of the mid-1960's, when all the resources of the system were tapped. Residents of Scranton fared much better than most of the citizens in the drought-stricken East.

Mr. Scranton often recalled a quotation that appeared in the diary of his father, Joseph H. Scranton, which was supposedly from Goethe who said,

The longer I live the more certain I am that the great difference between men, the great and the insignificant, is energy. Invincible determination, an honest purpose once fixed, and then – death or victory. That quality will do anything that can be done in the world, and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunity will make a two-legged creature a man without it.

*Our Thanks to Mr. Roswell Paterson, Office Manager, Scranton Gas and Water Co., for making available to us much of the historical material used in preparing this article.*



## IN MEMORIAM

During the interim following our last bulletin, we have lost two of the most faithful "FRIENDS" our Society has known.

Henry Frichtel, taken by death June 22, and Dan Williams, October 5, 1969, each after lingering illnesses. Henry and Dan had a great rapport through long years of close friendship. There is an eloquent difference between being just a "Member or Officer" methodically going through the motions of responsibility, and, "An enthusiastic participation in the Promotion of Forward Thinking programs of activity." It was my privilege, to have worked with both of these Men, and this is how I knew them and will remember them. They shared two qualities in almost equal proportion - A Keen Sense of Humor, backed by hard headed "Common Sense."

When Mrs. Keese resigned as executive secretary of the Historical Society, in 1958, due to ill health, Dan Williams took over as President, and from a quiet organization minding it's own business, it became "Electrified with Action." Dan's survey of what was needed, took shape, and the momentum of his activity is still felt - and much of his "physical planning" for the welfare of the building has been accomplished, by the ensuing administrations of Dr. MacLean, William L. Connell, Jr., and presently by the Rev. William P. Lewis.

Henry Frichtel was a modest unassuming man, and wanted no fan-fare for his good deeds. Hence from time to time, where certain needs presented themselves in the semi-luxury class, "Anonymous Gifts, from a Friend" made such things possible as, certain interior painting projects - public address system - tape recorder - two types of projectors, (slide and overhead) with a massive screen and later a splendid and expensive color slide camera particularly to show changes in our environment and record them as historical data, for the future. Henry and his good wife Lottie, who survives him, although in frail health at this time, never did things by halves - they bought the "Best of it's Kind" for us. Anonymous gifts, yes, but now it can be told. Genial, practical and generous, is how I would describe my memories of Henry.

The many facets of Dan Williams, as I knew him, date back to a firm friendship of about 35 years. Born of reasonably humble parents, he set out on his own, at a tender age - with a thorough knowledge of stenography and typing. 45 years ago his ability was noted by Judge George Maxey, then Judge of the County Courts, of Lackawanna, and Dan settled into the role of "Top Flight"

Court Stenographer, serving in his long activity under 30 judges. His devotion to his court work is evidenced by the fact that he was still retained into his 80th year of life, in daily work, because of his vast knowledge of court procedure.

In fact Dan's thirst for knowledge, kept him active in many pursuits: In 1940, when I joined the Sawtelle-Emmons Bible Class which met on Thursday at noon, at the Y. M. C. A., Dan was already there and a power in the class serving as president for two administrations during our 25 years together, as members of the group. Sometime in the Forties I joined a group formed at the Scranton Public Library, for the "Discussion of Great Books." Dan was already there and his voice spoke out with authority. He was a devoted member of the Green Ridge Presbyterian Church and taught in the Church School for many years. He was a great lover of flowers, and propagated them in his basement, during the winter months, to have a quick jump on the warm spring sunshine. Dan's devotion to the Historical Society, needs no amplification.

When one contemplates 45 years of brushing elbows with the "Seamy Side" of life in court trials, it is amazing how Dan kept his sunny disposition. He seemed able to erase the sordid and retain the humorous. He always had a pocketful of funny anecdotes of his experience in the courts, which he shared with me on many occasions. His passion for walking kept him slim and trim. I have passed him, even picking his way in the snow, stopped the car and offered him a lift up the hill. His reply, invariably was, "No thanks Bob, I like to walk and it's good for me." Would to God we all had this philosophy.

*the Curator*

### CALENDAR 1969-70

December 11 "A History of the Diocese  
of Scranton"  
Thursday ..... Father John P. Gallagher, Ph.D.

January 15 "Early Photography Including  
Brady's Work During The Civil  
War."  
Thursday ..... Dr. John Feller

(If any members wish to display their own  
Daguerreotype collections at this meeting,  
please call the office, 344-3841.)

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