

Open:
Tuesday - Friday
10 - 4:30
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The LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1970



EXCITING NEW PROJECT UNDERWAY

The year 1970 will see a new project at the Lackawanna Historical Society - the exhibition of many interesting and beautiful objects of wearing apparel which, thru lack of space to exhibit them properly, have been packed away. A committee was appointed by president William Lewis to undertake this project and its first task was to arrange a place for such an exhibition. A large room on the second floor was cleaned and painted and an old fashioned maple four-poster bed, a gift to the society, was set up with a handsome antique hand-woven blue and white spread. Draperies for the two long windows are needed as well as small pieces of appropriate antique furniture to make the room look as much like a real bedroom as possible. Anyone who has, or knows of anyone who has draperies, period furniture, or oriental rugs of any size for which they would like to find a good home, please keep this in mind.

The second task and immediate need was to see to the preservation of a unique collection of the society - the five generations of wedding dresses given to the society by the Scranton family. These gowns span a period of one hundred and fourteen years from the simple white dress Jane Hiles wore when she married George W. Scranton in 1835 to the lovely one Elizabeth Littell wore in 1949 at her wedding to McLeod Lightburn. To house this collection, a glass case with an aluminum frame, sliding doors, and special lighting was designed by Searle Von Storch to fit the side wall of the display room. This has been installed and the wedding dresses will soon be moved into it.

And now to the third task - the delightful duty of the committee to unpack trunks, open boxes, and unwrap bundles. What a treasure trove! Trunks unpacked revealed elegant ball gowns of velvet and of lace, of beaded chiffon and fluted taffeta. There is one delicate and fragile flowered silk mull with a Worth of Paris label in it, and two extravagantly lovely tea gowns from the same



house. There are boxes of bonnets with little plumes on top and ribbons to tie under the chin. There are picture hats of the Gibson girl period and high buttoned boots and dainty little satin slippers. The task now is to catalogue, to mend, to have cleaned, to label with the name of the donor and when possible the name of the wearer and the date, and then to display. We are very grateful to Leslie Fay, Inc. for the gift of sixteen dress forms for this purpose. They are of various sizes so that with a little care even the very tiny waists of our great grandmother's dresses can be made to fit. Some of these forms are already standing in the display room and can be seen there wearing period costumes. The men are represented, too. There are a variety of uniforms, lots of gold braid, and khaki. There are large enveloping linen dusters and very fancy vests and ruffled shirts as well as old time evening clothes and overcoats. What people did as well as what they wore is suggested. There is a very old primitive pair of ice skates and it is interesting to imagine just where locally they might have been used. Then there are two uncomfortable looking and all-concealing bathing suits for ladies.

To further illustrate the changes in our way of living, one can examine the yards and yards of

hand embroidery on the voluminous petticoats as well on the insides of the bodices of some of the dresses where may be seen the intricate feather-stitching, the boning and the tiny stay stitches that have gone into their construction - a great contrast to the modern shift dress which can be run up on a machine in an hour. History is here too not only in the uniforms but in the complete outfit for a Red Cross nurse of World War I and the dull-colored Quaker dress with its two small triangular shoulder shawls, one of heavy dark wool for winter and a smaller lighter one for summer, and its heavily quilted brown bonnet so deep that it would be almost impossible to see who was inside it. The accessories are especially lovely. There are several collections of fans - feathered, beaded, embroidered, painted, and sequined - for every occasion and from places all over the world.

All these treasures have come as gifts to the society, from single items such as a Paisley shawl, a baby's embroidered christening robe, a small boy's sailor suit to trunks full of beautiful garments such as the one containing the Paris gowns. The largest collection was a generous gift from the Everhart Museum which in turn had received it from the Museum of the City of New York.

This brings the committee its fourth task which is to establish a permanent collection of costumes and accessories which have a valid interest to people of this area, to be documented, kept upstairs and exhibited. The committee also hopes to set up a program of changing displays appropriate for special events, holidays, and seasons of the year and also to organize a loan collection of clothing and accessories having no special area interest but which may be borrowed by local organizations needing historical costumes.

So the new project for 1970 is well under way and the committee is looking forward with enthusiasm to solving its problems and meeting its challenges and to being involved in its delights.

Rebecca Peck
Chairman, Costume Committee

In 1888 When It REALLY Snowed

About the only thing that's good about a record-making snowstorm is that it makes for sensational story-telling afterward. Take the storm of 1888. It started innocuously enough on Sunday, March 11, but it left the entire East Coast in a state of emergency when it finally let up four days later.

The Tuesday, March 13, 1888 *Scranton Republican* reported the situation this way:

The storm of Sunday night continued all day yesterday with furious and damaging results. Every colliery in this valley but a few were obliged to suspend operations . . .

The Suburban Electric Railway ran several cars until noon, when the snow became heavy on the rails and the circuit wires were frozen so badly that they would not convey the requisite power of locomotion. People from Dunmore . . . who did not go to their homes on the sleds which the street car company ran, were compelled to walk. The officials of this company resorted to every available means to keep their road in operation, but the storm was too much for them.

The following day, the newspaper presented an even more depressing description of the stranded city:

Communication with New York and Philadelphia and with western cities as well was cut off . . . In several parts of the city the snow had drifted to an extent making a gradual incline from the comb of the roof to the ground, completely covering the building side from roof to ground. Such sights have never before been witnessed here, the oldest settlers, who particularly hate to have their legendary tales outdone by events of the commonplace present, are obliged to admit that this is fully up to any situation they ever experienced in this locality.

The southern division of the D.L.&W. has been closed since Sunday . . . and the officials say it will be no surprise to them if the road is not opened this week . . . The northern division is open, but that's all that can be said of it. Only one train reached here from Binghamton yesterday, and that left there at 7:30 a.m. and reached Scranton at 4:20 p.m.

The Lackawanna Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Atty. and Mrs. Paul H. Price
Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Hendricks
Atty. and Mrs. George Houck
Mr. Kenneth W. Dolph, Sr.
Mr. John Van R. Clarke
Dr. and Mrs. Melvyn Wolk
Mrs. Florence L. Gillespie
Miss Mary F. McNamara
Mr. James M. Callender
Mr. William G. Lynch

CALENDAR

Thursday, February 12

William "Bill" Cullen
"The 100th Anniversary of *The Scranton Times*"

Thursday, March 12

Professor Frank Brown
"The Origin and Growth of Fire Protection
in Our Region"

All programs begin at 8:15 p.m. and are open to the public.

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LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CATLIN HOUSE
232 MONROE AVENUE
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18510