

The Lackawanna Historical Society BULLETIN

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November – December 1972

RECENT NOTES

Attendance at the Society's fall meetings has been exceptionally good, with every available chair occupied on one occasion. Following a capacity crowd at the September meeting, an interesting presentation by Kenneth Moffat concerning a year spent in Greece; Mary Theresa Connolly at the October meeting drew an enthusiastic response from a large audience with her paper on the Pennsylvania Coal Company's gravity railroad plus the November meeting was also well attended and well received.

The November meeting, of particular interest because it related to the feasibility of acquiring restoring or rehabilitating the Tripp Homestead as an historic landmark, was addressed by a restoration architect, Mr. Russell Keune (pronounced Coiny) an official of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C.

Mr. Keune's talk, which was accompanied by a film, showing examples of what the trust has accomplished in this field, was preceded by a meeting of the Historical Society's trustees in the afternoon, at which the subject of the Tripp home was discussed.

Since it is a live and current subject, this Bulletin will be largely devoted to three photographs of the edifice in question as well as a brief summary of information about it.

The December meeting of the society is to be held on Tuesday, Dec. 12, at the Catlin Home at 8 p.m. It is announced as a Christmas meeting with music by the University of Scranton Glee Club, conducted by Norbert Betti, accompanied by Marlene Evans and moderated by Father Osterle.

There will be no meeting in January on account of the usually inclement weather in that month. February's time and subject will be announced later.

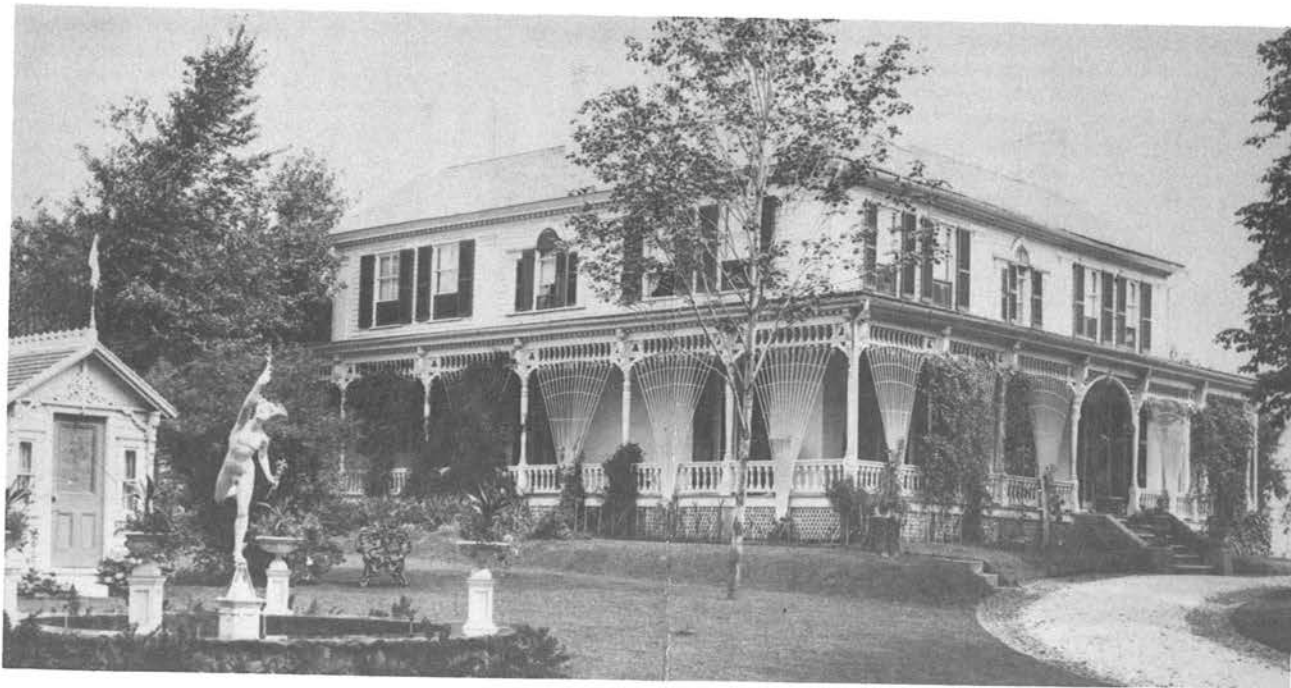
Our Secretary announces three new members, Alex Stefeo, Leo M. Nolan and Mrs. W. D. Wheeler, all of Scranton. Mrs. Wheeler is a life member.

THE TRIPP HOMESTEAD

Attention to the Tripp Homestead was drawn when it was learned about a year ago that the Scranton Redevelopment Authority had acquired the old building and was planning its demolition. The news was received with considerable shock by community citizens who had knowledge of the history of the building, resulting in wide public protest, headed by Rev. William P. Lewis, president of our society. Rev. Lewis brought to attention the fact that the gracious old building was not only the oldest house standing in Scranton but was the site of



THE HOUSE IN WINTER, ABOUT 1900. COL. TRIPP (with beard) IN FRONT OF STEPS.



SUMMERTIME – SOME YEARS LATER, SHOWING CHANGES IN PORCH, ETC.

a log cabin built there 200 years ago by Isaac Tripp, first settler in what is now Scranton, so of considerable historical interest locally.

As a result of Rev. Lewis's research and of the attendant publicity, the building has been recognized as an historical site by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Director of Operations of the SRA, John R. Pomeroy, has placed a "hold" on the building, protecting it from demolition until some way of preserving it is decided on.

When the attention of the National Trust for Historic Preservation was drawn to the matter, it designated Mr. Keune to investigate and make recommendations about the house. As stated above, Mr. Keune gave the society his views after a visit and inspection of the property.

Mr. Keune advised that in his opinion as an architect, the building was sound and could be restored to its earlier appearance. He expressed himself as greatly interested, not only in the Tripp building, but in many other interesting old buildings in Scranton. He felt that some of them constitute a living museum of fine Victorian architecture.

However, Mr. Keune warned of the large expense attendant, not only on the restoration costs, but if the building is to be refurbished in the style of the period in which it was built, the annual sums necessary to maintain it in that condition. He cited similar situations in various parts of the United States where people had run into these problems and in some cases had not been able to meet them or had met them with great difficulty.

Mr. Keune is thoroughly conversant with the present state of public money available for the project and pointed out that it mostly consists of matching funds, whereby one half of the amount needed for restoration has to be raised locally and all of the maintenance must be locally born.

For this reason, he gave as his belief that the best plan would be to have the building restored and utilized by a rent-paying tenant, such as an insurance company or other commercial enterprise which could use the building for its offices and by doing so reap considerable favorable publicity.

The architect offered a number of examples of old buildings which were restored and utilized in this manner. Some of them were shown in his film presentation, demonstrating convincingly the correctness of his statements. The Society's trustees took no formal action on the project but the general opinion was that if restoration were to be done, the only way it would be financially feasible would be along the lines of Mr. Keune's suggestions.

The house, which may be easily seen from the Scranton Expressway, stands on North Main Ave., just to the right of the North Main Ave. Interchange as one drives northward and, as may be seen on the present day photograph, stands between The Discount Cleaners and the Parodi Cigar Co. Mr. Keune pointed out that the cleaning plant would have to be razed in order to provide a proper background to set off the old house, if and when it was restored.



AS THE TRIPP MANSION LOOKS TODAY

The house was built in 1812, by New England builders brought here from Connecticut and resembles the Clark Mansion in Clarks Green, now owned by Mrs. John L. Ryon. In all probability they were both built by the same people. It was built by Isaac Tripp III, who owned 600 acres of land between Hyde Park and Bulls Head. His son, Col. Ira Tripp, was born in this house on Jan. 6, 1814. He inherited the family home and lands and was the last of the Tripp name to live in the house. Col. Tripp, who served in the Civil War, was a wealthy man, who owned a coal mine on his own property and a prosperous farm, among other things. He was a colorful individual, who made many "improvements" and changes in the house, including a fountain and playhouse in the front yard. The fountain, shown in a photograph in this Bulletin, was in the form of the Greek god, Hermes and a subsequent owner is reported to have had a tin apron placed about the god's loins in order to present an appearance more in accordance with her idea of propriety.

Col. Tripp died Aug. 6, 1891. Since then, the property has been in various hands; however, the fundamental strength and features of the building have been recognized and it is basically unchanged. Although the inside has been made into apartments, the original partitions remain.

It is certainly clear that the old mansion should not be razed and replaced by some modern structure which, although perhaps more economical of maintenance, would not retain the aura of early Scranton history which surrounds this reminder of the past, still standing and aching to be restored to distinction, if old buildings are capable of reflection.

The stumbling block is good, old fashioned, money, which public support could produce, particularly if anyone can interest a corporation which would put up the money for renewing the exterior and making the interior into comfortable offices.

Rev. Lewis and The Trustees of the Society will welcome any help at finding a suitable company or corporation, which may begin discussion of ways and means of conserving and rehabilitating the historical building.

H.H.N. III

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