

The Lackawanna Historical Society BULLETIN

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NOTES

Last month's Bulletin contained a boo-boo, namely a reference to Curator Bob Mattes as "Custodian". It was an accidental mistake and the writer begs to be forgiven.

Things around the Catlin House have been quiet. No acquisitions. Eight new members reported: Charles J. Weber, contributing member; C.C. Young Insurance Agency, sustaining member; Mrs. Dorothy Swarts, Gouldsboro; Ernest W. Steiner, Taylor; Henry M. Biglan, Hop Bottom; John N. Bittenbender, Scranton and Joseph C. Popper, Plymouth.

Atty. Robert Munley, who spoke on the Sullivan Expedition and other local connection with the American Revolution, not only attracted a near-capacity crowd, but earned the admiration of all by his mastery of his subject and by the facility with which he delivered it — no notes, no reading, no stumbles.

The March Meeting at the Catlin House, will be held on Tuesday, March 27. Dr. Ben Powell, of Bloomsburg State College, will talk on Origins of the Anthracite Industry.

On Tuesday, April 24, Dr. John Bodnar, of the Historical Commission at Harrisburg, will be the speaker, his subject, Ethnic Groups in Pennsylvania.

The May meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 22. A musical program, based on the songs of Stephen Foster, is being readied.

BENJAMIN HENRY THROOP, M.D.

"Within my recollection, Scranton has been developed from a handful of hardy pioneers, sparsely settled over a wide area, or collected in three scanty hamlets, thoroughly rural in every particular, to a teeming city of over eighty thousand inhabitants, the commercial center of half a million people, and one of the proudest and most progressive daughters of the Keystone State."

Taken from Chapter one of his most interesting history, "A Half Century in Scranton", the above quotation not only informs us that the late Dr. Benjamin H. Throop was aware of his unique fortune in being a participant and eyewitness in a remarkable chapter of history, but that he was a many-sided man, who could write a book as well as attend to a medical practice and pile up a huge fortune by grasping the opportunities that were offered during his half century of residence here.

His little book offers to those who are interested, an easily-read way of acquiring a broad picture of the Lackawanna Valley as it rapidly changed from a wilderness to a city that matches and competes with other American cities.

The Doctor's half century here commenced on October 8, 1840 when "on that bright autumnal morning, I drove my gig through primitive wilderness in what is now the metropolis of the anthracite region." Since he was born at Oxford, N.Y. on Nov. 9, 1811 and died in Scranton on June 26, 1897 he came here at age 29 and extended his half century to 57 years.

Dr. Throop, like most of our early settlers, was of early New England stock. William Throope (as it was then spelled) a Puritan, came to America in the "Elizabeth" landing in Massachusetts in 1635. Through his son, Capt. William Throope; Capt. Throope's son, Rev. Benjamin Throop, (who dropped the final "e"); his son, Col. Benjamin Throop, who served throughout the American Revolution, including the winter at Valley Forge; and his son, Major Dan Throop, who also served in the Revolution, enlisting as a drummer boy at the age of 15, the Throop ancestry in America is traced to Benjamin H. Throop, the son of Major Dan Throop and Mary Gager Throop.



The young man began his education at Oxford Seminary and began his medical education at Fairfield Medical College in New York City, then the only medical college in New York State. He studied under Dr. Percy Packer, a renowned physician of his day, and received his M.D. in 1832. In that year he began practice in Honesdale, moving from there to Oswego, N.Y. in 1835. He didn't stay there very long, but returned to New York City and practiced there until 1840, at which time he returned to Honesdale for a visit.

For some reason or other (one source states that a Lackawanna doctor called him over for consultation) the young man made a trip of exploration to this area and, liking what he saw, came back to hang out his sign in Providence. He tells us in his history, that his early days there were a

struggle, being opposed by the physician then in residence, who he describes as an old gentleman, who was never in a hurry and rarely gave medicine, except rhubarb and soda.

After settling in Providence, Dr. Throop began to explore the surrounding country. He describes in his book, the various dirt roads which led through the second growth wilderness. He soon made a visit to Slocum Hollow, where he became acquainted with the pioneer ironmakers, who were just beginning their discouraging efforts at making iron. Apparently he made the acquaintance of the Scrantons and their partner, Sanford Grant, because in 1842 Dr. Throop married Harriet F. McKinney, who made her home with her sister, Mary, the wife of Sanford Grant.

In 1846, the young couple moved to Slocum Hollow, where the Scrantons had offered him land for a home and where most of his medical practice was situated. Dr. Throop erected on the land given him by the Scrantons, a home and a drug store, apparently both housed within the same two-story frame building. On May 6, 1853, he was appointed postmaster and in 1857 was so commissioned by Pres. Franklin Pierce. There had been a postoffice in Slocum Hollow, but it had been removed to Providence during the early years and was brought back to Scranton, the name finally chosen for what had been Harrison and Scranton. So Dr. Throop was the first postmaster of Scranton. The office was kept by his deputy, E. C. Fuller until his brother L. S. Fuller was appointed as Dr. Throop's successor.

Until Dr. Throop's appointment, there were postoffices in Hyde Park and in Providence and possibly in Dunmore, but none in Scranton, excepting the abortive one in Harrison and Scranton.

This move seems to have indicated that the young doctor's rise to affluence had begun. From there on, his largely autobiographical history gives no hint of want and many statements which reflected his rising wealth. For instance, in the early 1850's, when a campaign was waged to separate the Lackawanna district from Luzerne and form a new county, Dr. Throop spent much of a winter in Harrisburg in behalf of a bill introduced to bring this about and once, when the supporters all thought that victory was within their grasp, the doctor invited all and sundry to a banquet, which he states cost him between two and three hundred dollars. A dollar was a dollar in those days and it would appear that Dr. Throop was on his way up financially.

When the new county of Lackawanna was declared in 1878, Dr. Throop lent his substantial efforts toward influencing the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Co. to donate the land for a new court house. His book, by the way, contains an early photograph of the court house, showing that the buildings which now surround it were not there, but that small houses and trees were. Plainly, the city then grew up around the court house. An Episcopalian, he also had a hand in the establishment of St. Luke's Church at its present stance.

When the cornerstone of the courthouse was laid on May 25, 1882, there was a gala banquet at the Wyoming House, where the doctor presided.

Returning to 1861 and the outbreak of the Civil War, we find that Dr. Throop was not on the sidelines. He accompanied the Eighth Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers as surgeon. The regiment was at first quartered at Chambersburg, Pa., where the doctor established a hospital in a hotel, naming Ira Tripp as his hospital steward. He states that because of slow payment by the government it was necessary for him to use some of his own money to purchase the necessary medicines. From there, the Regiment took the field and suffered terrible casualties at Antietam, described by the surgeon who went there and set up a field hospital. All in all, he served for two months, at the end of which time, his own health was damaged and he had to return to Scranton.

Dr. Throop was involved in the establishment of banking in the growing community and served as president of one of the many banks which sprang up at the time. It must have been a profitable investment for those who participated, because a table of dividends paid annually by the First National Bank shows that from 1863 to 1869 it paid 10 per cent and the amounts grew until the payouts from 1892 to 1894 were made at a rate of 31 per cent.

The doctor also had his hand in early transportation and was one of the founders of a system of horse cars, serving Green Ridge, which later became the first electric trolley line in the United States, according to some historians.

However, it is apparent that the doctor's first and permanent love was real estate, which was the beginning of many Scranton fortunes. Dr. Throop was involved in it throughout its development and usually he informs us, profitably. Real estate, I should have added, which was underlaid with anthracite coal and to which the mining rights were retained when the old farms were divided up into lots and retailed.

He began by purchasing a small property on what is now West Market St. for \$500, later selling it for \$8000. In 1853 he bought a brick house on downtown Washington Ave. for \$2500 and two years later, sold it for \$5000. When the book was written, he figured it to be worth \$35,000. What it would be worth now is many times that. In 1864, he paid \$6000 for a lot in the Coal Exchange Block, which shortly after he sold for a "good profit." He bought his first farm in Hyde Park, the Kilmore Farm which lay on both sides of Jackson St. and covered much of the town as it developed. He paid \$100 an acre, but got ten adjacent acres for \$12.50 an acre in 1853. He then added 150 acres in Providence, but only says that he made a profit on it.

In 1857, Dr. Throop found time to propose and participate in the formation of the Scranton Gas and Water Co., but real estate was really his thing. He was instrumental in laying out the towns of Blakely and Jermyn and of course that of Throop, which was named after him.

The Village of Throop was incorporated as a borough on April 16, 1894 and Dr. Throop was present at a parade and celebration, being then at the age of 83 years. He was the principal owner of Price Pancoast Shaft in that borough. This shaft was the scene of Scranton's worst mine disaster on April 7, 1911 when 72 lives were lost as the result of an explosion.

Dr. Throop has no living descendants. He was the father of five children, Mary E. who married Horace B. Phelps, but who died childless; Eugene Romayne, Benjamin Henry, Jr. and William Bigler, all of whom died quite young and George Scranton Throop. George S. Throop was born Sept. 9, 1854 and was the youngest of the family. He graduated from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, but practiced a very short time and then went into business with his father. He married Jenny Wall, of Tunkhannock and the couple had two children, one of whom died in infancy. George Throop died in 1894, a year before "A Half Century in Scranton" was published.

Their son, Benjamin H. Throop was born December 22, 1899 and died May 10, 1935. He married Margaret E. Connell, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Alexander J. Connell. When this marriage ended in a divorce, he married Ruby DeRemer, which marriage also ended in a divorce. Both marriages were childless.

In looking over my work, I find that I have left out two other enterprises in which the energetic doctor engaged. Having noticed in his practice that there was a shortage of milk, necessary for the health of babies and children, Dr. Throop, about 1845, went into the dairy business. He purchased thirty or forty cows and hired a man to look after them on the Kilmer farm, where he says there was excellent pasturage. The milk was then sold in a regular milk route, the first in the young city.

About the same time, as postmaster, he noted that it was difficult to get small parcels into the outside world; whereupon he established an express line. He put an express office next to his drugstore and had regular messengers on each train. The line was continued for a number of years and later sold to Adams Express Co.

Dr. Throop also established the first hospital in the new city. He utilized an Episcopal Church, which had been vacated when the congregation moved to the present building and later moved it to a tavern building, which stood where the State Hospital now stands.

He secured state aid for it and became the president at the first meeting in 1871. In 1873 he resigned, stating in a letter to the new president, Alfred Hand, that "had I known you would have given fifty dollars for the position, it would have been yours without the trouble of an election."

Apparently the good doctor felt that he had had a raw deal.

And maybe he had. It's all so long ago.

H.H.N. III

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