On Scranton’s East Mountain there is a body of water called Mountain Lake. It’s located in Robinson Park, across from the ARC building and playgrounds, and can be reached either from East Elm St. via Derby Ave. or from the top of East Mountain Road. This 3-acre lake seems small and unremarkable compared with Lake Scranton less than 1 mile away, but looks can be deceiving. For starters it’s older than the water company reservoir, and it has a vibrant history. Nowadays when I pass Mountain Lake I’m likely to imagine land surveyors from the 1700s, the Slocum settlers exploring their land, laborers around 1850 building the dam and laying water pipes, Girl Scouts swimming in the lake, Boy Scouts camping on the shore for a multi-day jamboree, crowds of happy ice skaters in winter, an elderly man fishing with a bamboo pole, city folks enjoying boat rides, clambakes at Fleischli’s grove, miners working the coal beds nearby, and mules and horses treading the “bridle path/ mule path”. I still have much to learn about this lake, but here’s what I’ve discovered so far.

**Pennsylvania Coal Company Reservoir**

Mountain Lake is located on land that was part of Certified Providence Lot #38 and was sold July 19, 1852 by Joseph Slocum to the Pennsylvania Coal Company for $175. The deed of 1852 mentions the dam and the reservoir so it was constructed prior to that date, perhaps when the gravity railroad was built in 1849. Both the Slocum and the Providence Lot connections were surprises for me. The Providence “lots” were parcels of land in the Connecticut Township of Providence in the days when the colonies of Pennsylvania and Connecticut both claimed this area. The Susquehanna Company of Connecticut surveyed the Township in 1772 into 43 lots which were sold that year. Lots 24 to 43 lay east of the Lackawanna River and were long and narrow, stretching out to the City limits. Lot #38 (386 acres) was first owned by Deacon Ichabod Hopkins of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. By 1798 it came into the possession of Ebenezer and Benjamin Slocum and their title was officially “certified” when the Pennsylvania Connecticut land claims were settled. Joseph Slocum (1800-1890) was a son of Ebenezer Slocum. Ebenezer & Benjamin Slocum were the brothers who operated an iron forge on Roaring Brook from 1800 until 1822 near what is now downtown Scranton.
After Ebenezer died in 1832, Joseph stayed in the area. He served as the first burgess of Scranton borough, held many local offices, and was highly respected. By 1849 the Pennsylvania Coal Company had constructed a gravity railroad to transport coal from its mines near Pittston to Hawley to connect with the Delaware & Hudson Canal. A section of this railroad ran just east of what is now Moltke Ave. Three stationary steam engines lifted loaded cars up Plane No. 5, out of Stafford Meadow and were located in an engine house approximately 8 blocks southwest of Mountain Lake near the intersection of Blucher Ave. and Palm St. The Pennsylvania Coal Company used Mountain Lake (their reservoir) to supply water for the steam engines at Plane No. 5. The deed of 1852 includes a parcel of land 1 rod in width (16 ft.) “for the line of water logs from said reservoir”. The water line carried water to a smaller, circular reservoir near the engine house. This small reservoir was called “Rezzy Pond” in the 1940s but has since disappeared.

By 1885 the Pennsylvania Coal Company built a new locomotive railroad, the Erie and Wyoming Valley Railroad, and scrapped their Gravity line. In 1896 the Company sold Mountain Lake to John H. Jordan et al and in 1898 the Jordans sold it to Mina Robinson. In 1911 she donated more than 24 acres of East Mountain land to the City of Scranton for a public park to be called Robinson Park in memory of her sons and for a small amount she included Mountain Lake and access to E. Elm Street.

1890-1910

Before 1890, the East Mountain section of South Side was sparsely settled. After 1890 more folks bought land and moved to the Mountain. The lake is approximately 3 miles from center city. This distance (and elevation) was an attraction for city folk in good weather. A newspaper report of July 4 1897 says “hundreds of wagon loads of people spent the day at Mountain Lake” which it described as “the pretty little patch of earth and water in this back yard of south side”. Many social outings to Mountain Lake are reported in the *Scranton Tribune*. Here are some examples: Children of the Church of Peace (8/14/1902); the Banner Social Club’s reunion (8/14/1898); the Outing Club (3/13/02); Electric Social and Athletic Club annual outing (5/22/1899); Century Hose Company (7/9/1898); Star Social Club (5/26/1902); Company A Patriotic Guards picnic (7/2/1902); Limberger Social Club (9/21/1898); Lackawanna Knitting Mill employees clam bake (8/1/1900); Fourteen Friends (7/8/1901); Sterling Social Club (7/3/1897). Most of these gatherings were held at Eagle Park, Baldner’s Park, Graf’s Grove, or O’Kell’s Grove.

July 4, 1897 was the formal opening of Eagle Park near Mountain Lake. The Knights of the Golden Eagle held a patriotic celebration and christened the park. July 15, 1897 the Casey Brothers were reported to have secured an option on Mountain Lake and surrounding land with intent to erect a metropolitan hotel on the lake and make it a summer resort. According to Nubs of News (March 22, 1898), “the many who visit Mountain Lake this season will find new improvements around the picnic grounds” including a 10-room cottage, two 65-foot bowling alleys and shooting range under construction for Fred Baldner and possibly a dance pavilion, new swings & bath houses
to be erected by the Franz Brothers. The Baldner property included two small ponds that were used for fishing and swimming and ice making. (In the 1930s and 1940s a Mr. Jeroski owned and operated this property.) December 1902 the Mountain Lake Hunting & Fishing Club met at Graf’s lake house to elect officers and enjoy an old-fashioned German banquet served by Mr. & Mrs. Carl Graf Sr. Elected were: Alderman John Lentes, President; Herman Brill, Secretary; Edward Kell, Treasurer; Carl Graf, Steward; Councilman Charles Graf, Advisor/Referee. The club was chartered in 1901.

Despite this summer resort reputation, the lake’s distance from the city and lack of public transportation presented some difficulties. In February 1898 A. F. Westpfahl, son of a grocer, and his friend William Hammen left on foot from Willow & Pittston in south side to visit friends at Ore Mine Spring. Snow was falling and by the time they reached the top of the mountain walking was a struggle. They had to travel over “an almost unbroken stretch of unsettled country.” Close to midnight they finally reached their destination, chilled and lame. They took Kodak pictures of the journey!

August 1898 about 9 p.m. James Kressler and his wife were driving to the city on the road from the “burnt bridge”. A strap on the harness of the horse gave way and soon the wagon overturned and they were thrown into a pile of stones about a mile from Mountain Lake. Both were injured. Mr. Kressler finally found help in the settlement at Mountain Lake. Rudolph Frantz hitched his horse and transported Mrs. Kressler to his house. Later she was moved to her daughter’s house on Irving Ave. and got medical help. She suffered a broken wrist, dislocated shoulder and gashes on her head.

October 1898 a large building on Blucher Ave. was destroyed by fire. It was known to “the thousands who have visited the No.5 mountain this season” as the Florida house. It served as a grocery store, meat market, restaurant, and dwelling place owned by Fred Peterson. The fire department was of no help because the nearest call box and hydrant was no. 49 at the corner of Crown Ave. and Beech St. nearly a mile away. Mrs. Peterson was injured jumping from a second story window. March 1899 two small houses near Mountain Lake burned to the ground despite the efforts of a bucket brigade.

April 1902 Charles Fettig died near Mountain Lake. The funeral was held at his brother-in-law’s home in south side rather than the home of the deceased “for the convenience of those who desired to attend but could not make the journey to the lake and back”.

**Railways and Coal Mines**

By 1900 there was interest in improving local passenger service in the Lackawanna Valley which led to the development of the Laurel Line, but at first a number of corporations were chartered including The Connell Park and Speedway Street Railway Co. This company was organized in 1900 and drew up plans for a line that looped through East Mountain just west of Mountain Lake. These maps show Baldner’s Klondyke Clubhouse, the Mountain Lake Coal Co. breaker and mine railway, and a prominence labeled “Pagoda point”. This railway was never constructed. By the way, the Speedway was located in Dunmore on the Elmhurst Boulevard.

The Mountain Lake Land and Coal Company operated a coal breaker near the intersection of Blucher Ave. and Birch St. in 1893. Officers were: L. J. Siebecker,
President; C. C. Ferber, Secretary & Treasurer; P. A. Aulbach, Manager. From 1902 to 1908 Mountain Lake Coal Company operated the drift mine producing about 3500 tons per year, shipping some by rail, but most for local delivery. The company had between 17 and 22 employees and 5 horses or mules. Another drift mine, also near Mountain Lake, was operated from 1914-1918 as Spruks Coal Company producing as much as 23,500 tons per year and shipping most by rail. The company had between 30 and 48 employees and 4 horses. According to the PA Mine Inspection report for 1916, they installed a gasoline engine and built an engine house, a new office and scale house, mule barn, hospital with equipment, and track and trestle from breaker to Erie tracks and a set of coal pockets for storing coal for delivery. In subsequent years these mines were worked on a smaller scale. In 1988 serious subsidence was discovered at Mountain Lake. The Office of Surface Mining filled a significant void to stabilize the dam and correct a water runoff issue. More than 200 cubic yards of concrete were used to fill this hole.

Robinson Park

As mentioned previously, Mina Robinson in 1911 donated land to the city for a public park. Her letter to the city council states in part, “The only condition imposed is that the land and lake shall be used for park purposes only and maintained by the city for such purpose, and as a memorial to my late sons, Edmund and Robert, the same shall be known and called officially Robinson Park.”

Annual Reports of the Department of Public Works and Reports of the City Controller give us a glimpse of the early years of the Park. Charles Schumacher was “watchman” from at least 1916 to 1934. Fred Bonnert took over in 1934 and held the position until 1946. John Warner became the watchman in 1946. From the 1918 report: “Each year since its acceptance by the City of Scranton, we have spent considerable money in removing under-brush, and the construction of walks and roads, in order to place this park in a condition for park purposes. During the year 1918 we were decidedly hampered in the improvements made, owing to the scarcity of labor. .. We were able however to construct nearly 1,000 feet of seven foot walks though this area, as well as the removal of trees which had been killed by the chestnut blight.” The 1927 report states “Robinson Park lies in a part of the city far removed from the great center of population and is chiefly used by hikers, fishermen, and ice-skating in the winter months”, the roads were kept in a fair state of repair, and small wooden comfort stations were built. Making water available at the Park would require the construction of an artesian well but the appropriation was too small for such a project. An artesian well was finally added in 1942 and an electric pump and pump house in 1943.

Camp Laurel and Scouting

Girl Scouting started officially in Scranton about 1918. The local council established a camp at Mountain Lake called Camp Laurel named for the Mountain Laurel. Mrs. Earl Rounds (Marian Ford) became a “nature counselor” for Camp Laurel in 1936. Girl Scouts from many different troops and sections of the city used this camp during the summers. Activities included swimming in the lake. Three sections were roped off for swimming (different depths) and there was a floating dock. Janet Neu (Carey) was a counselor for 2 summers in the mid-1940s. Camp Laurel functioned
primarily as a day camp but sometimes was used for overnight camps. Ann Marie O’Hara recalls staying over in tents in August 1945. The next morning there was celebration and the adults were crying. It was VJ Day—the War (World War II) was over. Camp broke up early and everyone headed home. Bus service on East Mountain Road started in the 1930s. Ann Marie recalls going by bus part of the way to camp and walking the rest of the way. Camp Laurel was relocated to Blue Shutters Road in Roaring Brook Township around 1950 and continued to operate until 2010.27

Boy Scout Troop #16 of the Hickory Street Presbyterian Church was organized in 1915 and constructed a cabin on East Mountain in 1930, north of East Elm Street between Mountain Lake and Lake Scranton. It was called the “Joe Grieser Cabin” to honor the man who was most instrumental in completing the project. A well was dug and improvements made though the 1940s and 1950s. In 1965 the cabin was destroyed by fire.28 Boy Scout Troop #10 was organized at the Mattes Community Center. John Sheerin recalls as a young scout (around 1960), an area-wide jamboree held at Mountain Lake. He guesses there were about 100 scouts there for 2 or 3 nights. Troop 10 camped on the south side between the road and the shore of the lake while the other troops camped in the woods heading toward Lake Scranton and on Saturday night there was a huge bonfire in the field behind Harrison’s house.29

### Fishing, Hunting, Sportsman’s Club

The Mountain Lake Hunting and Fishing Club was chartered in 1901. On May 26, 1928 a shipment of 30,000 fish was expected from the state fish hatchery at Pleasant Mount including 13,000 wall-eyed pike and 15,000 yellow perch. Another 60,000 fish were expected during the year. In the previous year 83,000 pike, perch, blue fin and catfish had been dumped in Mountain Lake. The sportsmen were busy erecting a clubhouse at the lake.29

In August 1938 Scranton hosted a convention of the American Legion. A trapshooting event was planned at the Mountain Lake Gun Club. William A. Reap was Chairman.30

There was great interest in hunting and fishing on East Mountain. Early residents hunted and fished with little regard for licenses or “seasons”. “Popeye” (Alton Wescott) caught large fish in Mountain Lake even when the younger folks had little success.31

A large white building on the north shore of the lake was known as Harrison’s House. Behind the house was a large field. The interior of this sportsman’s club was very nice. Wedding receptions and other special events were held at this location and there was also a clam bake grove on the property. Carl Evans bought the building in later years after it had started to decline. It burned down in 1986.32

### Ice-skating

The topic of skating at Mountain Lake evokes fond memories for many folks, and it’s a topic that almost always comes up when I mention East Mountain. This interest spans multiple generations and extends beyond the mountain. When Fred Bonnert was watchman for Robinson Park there was a small shack by the Lake with wooden benches and a pot belly stove. Youngsters went into the shack during the winter to warm up when skating; as many as 15 or 20 could fit inside at the same time.33 Folks tell me that during the 1950s the entire lake was cleared for skating and so many people skated it was
difficult sometimes to find space to get onto the ice. Skaters came from south side, from the Petersburg area, and from the Hill section too. Apparently refreshments, especially hot chocolate, were available some years. After the Park watchman closed the skating shed for the night, sometimes people built a fire on the shore and stayed longer at the lake. One young man who lived near the lake recalls skating alone on windless nights. During the 1970’s East Scranton friends hiked to the lake on Sunday winter afternoons and met East Mountain friends to skate. Ice hockey teams were formed and a tradition of rivalry between the East Scranton and East Mountain teams began.\(^{35}\)

**Clambakes, Bars, etc.**

Peter Franz bought 16 acres of land near the lake from Frederick Simon in 1886.\(^{36}\) It was part of this parcel that Albert Fleischli purchased in 1929 from Peter’s son August. This property lies south of the lake. In those days and until recently there were few houses close to the lake. Mr. Fleischli operated a clambake grove and bar on his property. In August 1936 “members of Bartenders Local No. 134 held their first annual clambake at Fleischli’s Grove on the East Mountain. About 125 persons were present.”\(^{37}\) Fleischli’s Grove was a success and operated about 20 years. The property was sold to the Petrini family in 1951. They operated a restaurant at the location and held dances too. At least one couple who moved to Connecticut stopped by on Saturday nights whenever they were back in Scranton. Joseph Pica was the next owner, buying the property around 1964. Serge’s was the name of the bar in the late 1960s. John Sheerin recalls, “It was a real hot spot; always packed”, and because of limited parking, during winter or rainy nights, many cars got stuck in the mud and tow truck drivers were kept busy into the morning hours. There is no longer a bar or restaurant in that area and hasn’t been for at least 20 years.\(^{38}\)

**Recent History**

Mountain Lake is no longer regarded as a summer resort. The clambake groves, sportsman’s club, bars, dancehalls, community ice-skating, and scout camp are just memories. Private residences near the lake have increased in number. Non-residents come to the area to visit the ARC facilities and Friendship House campus. Lake Scranton is very popular with walkers many of whom drive to get there. In earlier days many folks who visited Mountain Lake got their exercise by walking to and from the lake. Numerous folks recall walking from south side or even west side and continuing on to Ore Mine Spring, and further still to Little Virginia or the No. 5 Reservoir in a big loop.\(^{39}\)

In 1977-78 new facilities were added to Robinson Park. This new camping area was funded by the city’s Community Development program for the Lackawanna County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens Inc. $182,768 was approved to construct an activities building, parking area, volleyball court, basketball court, and playground equipment. The park continues to be utilized by the general public. In October 1994 the East Mountain Improvement Association received a $10,000 award to purchase new playground equipment, including a new playground climber and padding. The city resurfaced the basketball court and installed new standards.\(^{40}\)
In 2006 vandalism was reported as a problem at Robinson Park, especially at night. Park benches, doors, roofing, and fencing had been damaged and drug paraphernalia found. The long-running day program operated by ARC of Lackawanna County has been very successful, but the area is vacant at night. The Residents Association requested a stronger, more continuous police presence. The lake was drained in 1988 to locate a gun during the investigation of the murder of Deborah Lucke, an 18 year-old Marywood student who lived on East Mountain. Her body had been found in Robinson Park. Also in 1988 the Office of Surface Mining repaired the serious mine subsidence located under the dam.

Many East Mountaineers have positive memories of the Lake and have supported the public nature of the Park and efforts to maintain and restore it. There have been complaints about the lack of funding for Robinson Park and the Lake. In 1994 residents effectively argued against a request by Swinick Homes to relocate 960 feet of Mountain Lake Road to create seven lake-front properties as part of its subdivision. Residents wanted to maintain public access to the city lake. Water lilies multiplied in the lake and seriously damaged its health in the 1990s but this problem was finally overcome, partly through the donated services of Russell James, owner of Ecoscience of Moscow. Oxygen levels returned to levels where fish could thrive.

Mountain Lake remains a unique feature of East Mountain; still appreciated by many, although not as well-known as in the past. Its past is certainly rich. Please share your memories, photos, and memorabilia about this neighborhood with the Lackawanna Historical Society.
4 City Atlas of Scranton, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1877), Plate I. Shows location of the “heavy” and “light” tracks of the Pennsylvania Coal Company gravity railroad and location of buildings at the top of Plane No. 5.
5 Slocum deed of 1852; Undated map showing the lake/reservoir and water line (Sal Mecca, Dunmore Historical Society).
6 Photo of circular reservoir (Sal Mecca, ca. 1980); Letter of Louise Lawrence Pettengill who lived on Blucher Ave. in the 1940s.
7 Deeds available at Recorder of Deeds Office, Lackawanna County (also available online at www.lackawannacounty.org through the Recorder of Deeds link). Jordan to Robinson April 13 1898, (Book 161, Page 274); Robinson to City of Scranton 1911, (Book 246, Page 473). For Mina Robinson’s letter see Hitchcock, History of Scranton, v.1, 104.
8 Scranton Tribune, July 6, 1897.
10 Scranton Tribune, July 5, 1897, 8.
11 “Hotel at Mountain Lake”, Scranton Tribune, July 15, 1897, 3.
15 “Serious Accident”, Scranton Tribune, August 31, 1898, 6.
17 “Funeral of the Late Charles Fettig”, Scranton Tribune, April 24, 1902, 8.
19 “Mountain Lake Mines”, Scranton Republican, October 14, 1893.
22 “Work at Lake will be Costly”, Scranton Times, April 6, 1988, 3.
23 Hitchcock, History of Scranton, vol.1, 104.
27 Interview with Lowell and Janet Neu and Bob Wintermantel, September 23, 2010 (LHS Oral History); Interview with Ann Marie O’Hara, 2012.
28 Boy Scout Troop 16 Hickory Street Presbyterian Church, *90 Years Around the Campfire: an Anniversary Celebration* (Scranton, 2006).
29 Interview with John Sheerin 2011.
30 “30,000 Fish Arrive in City for Mountain Lake”, *Scranton Times*, May 26, 1928, 7.
32 Neu & Wintermantel interview.
34 Neu and Wintermantel interview.
37 *Scranton Times*, August 17, 1936, 3.
39 Interviews with Mary Ann Gavern and William Fritz.