



**HISTORY BYTES**  
*A Lackawanna Historical Society Publication*

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Rick Sedlisk, Editor

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*Remembering Avondale  
September 6, 1869*

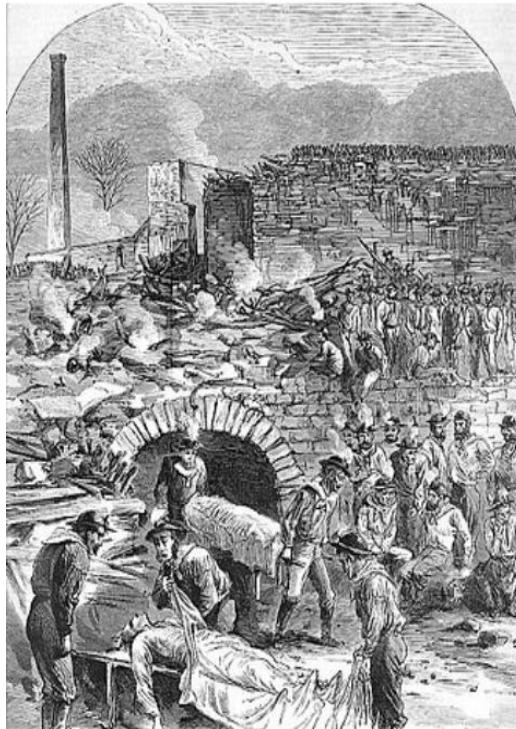


*Avondale Mine Site  
Image source: Wilkes – Barre Times Leader*

## *Remembering Avondale 156 Years Later*

Anthracite's worst mining tragedy occurred on September 6, 1869, at the Avondale Colliery in Plymouth Township where 110 men and boys lost their lives to asphyxiation following a below-ground fire. An investigative committee called the disaster an "accident", but many contemporary observers and subsequent historians have pointed to the suspicious nature of the blaze. Whatever the cause, Avondale still stands as the deadliest mining disaster in anthracite history.

# Avondale Mine Disaster Memorial Service



**Saturday, Sept. 6,  
2025, 1:00 PM**

**Washburn Street  
Cemetery, Scranton**

Join us to mark the 156<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this disaster that took 110 lives. Refreshments provided. Donations will be received for maintenance of the cemetery, where so many victims are buried.

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*Event Coordinator: Linda Scott  
Main Speaker: Robert Hughes  
Singers: Don Shappell & Don Sennett  
Attendees are encouraged to bring chairs*

*In Memoriam*  
*Steve Kondrad*



*Image source: legacy.com/us/obituaries/citizensvoice*

Each year when we remember the Avondale Mine Disaster that took place in Plymouth Twp. on September 6, 1869, we also remember Steve Kondrad who left us on January 18, 2024. Without his dedication and determination to preserve our region's anthracite and immigrant history and heritage, the Avondale tragedy might have been left on the pages of long forgotten newspapers. Thanks to Steve and the many who joined him in his efforts, the opposite happened.

In addition to Avondale, Steve was well known in his hometown of Plymouth for, among other things, his desire to make sure that veterans were honored and remembered. One example of that was the acquisition of a 45-star American flag that belonged to a Plymouth veterans group named after Julius B. Weil, a resident of Plymouth, who was killed in the 1898 Spanish-American War.

Steve served as the president of the Plymouth Historical Society for about a decade. In addition to military and town artifacts, the Society has an extensive collection of anthracite-related items. When he discussed the importance of documenting local history, the Avondale Mine Disaster was often foremost in his mind. His wife, Mary Beth, is a descendent of Avondale victims.

When Steve became custodian of the Avondale Mine Site, he and a large contingent worked diligently to turn the site from a dumping ground into a memorial to those who were killed in the mine on September 6, 1869.



*Memorial Garden Entrance 2013*  
*Photo courtesy of Steve Kondrad*

Ownership of the mine site by the Plymouth Historical Society cleared the way for land reclamation and gave the Society the legal right to prosecute anyone who vandalizes the property in any way. Trash dumping has been virtually eliminated since road gates were installed.



*Memorial Garden Post Clean Up*  
*Photo courtesy of Steve Kondrad*

Those who died in the disaster were immigrants. Steve wanted the Avondale victims to be recognized as Americans and to be remembered. "Preserving the history and heritage of our anthracite coal miners is of utmost importance," Steve said. "The sacrifices they made, working long hours in extremely dangerous working conditions, to provide for their families should never be forgotten."

*This was on the Plymouth Historical Facebook page. I think Steve maybe wrote it.  
-Bob Wolensky*

### *Avondale Remembered on Labor Day 2016*

I was at the Avondale Mine site, cutting grass, re-stocking flyers in the kiosk and placing some new flags and I couldn't help but notice how quiet and peaceful the site is today. As I sat on the edge of the flower box, cooling off with the mountain air flowing out of the tunnel, I wondered about the sounds and activity that were present when the coal mine was in operation. In particular, at the time of the disaster, back in 1869. For starters, I'd be sitting in the lower section of the old coal breaker. To the left of me stood the one and only mine shaft. The trees and greenery on the colliery land would be replaced with a barren hillside and wooden framed company homes.

After a long strike by the miners, the colliery owners were preparing to resume operations, on this date August 30, 1869. Seven days later, on Monday, September 6th, the miners and breaker boys returned to work. The sounds of people talking, machinery clanking and coal sliding down the chutes, surely filled the air. Before morning turned into afternoon, disaster hit the Avondale Mine, like no other disaster before or since. A terrible fire consumed the coal breaker and caused the suffocation of all one hundred and eight lives in the mine. Two more would perish in an attempt to rescue their fellow miners. News of the disaster traveled across the nation and around the world, especially in Wales where many of the victims were born. The Avondale Disaster was a turning point in anthracite mining history, as well as cause for the first mining safety legislation.

And here it sits till today, a little wedge of land, down over hill from the busy highway of Rt. 11 in Plymouth Township. Once a coal mine, later an illegal dumping ground and then through the hard work of good people, dedicated to preserving history, the Memorial Garden is ready, once again, to welcome you to sit and reflect on the sights and sounds of Avondale.

Although, there will be no formal ceremony at the Avondale Mine site, on the anniversary of the disaster, the security swing gate, on the trail near the Avondale Disaster Marker on Rt. 11, by Syl's Auto, will be open, on Labor Day, September 5th and Tuesday September 6th, from 10 am to 6 pm. Visitors are always welcome. The trail/dirt road is bumpy, but passable by most cars. Video surveillance is in use. The Avondale Mine site is owned and maintained by the Plymouth Historical Society.

Thank you for reading my ramblings.

*Steve Kondrad  
Bench Dedication  
June 8, 2025*



One of the last projects our former president, Steve Kondrad, worked on was a fundraiser for a bench at the Avondale Mine site. So, it is only fitting that we dedicate the bench in his name as a tribute to the endless work he did to preserve the history of mining in this area. The weather cooperated and we had a wonderful event.

Our next project will be to add a mural on the wall behind the bench. We hope our members and the public will donate generously to our cause.

*Avondale Mining Disaster Victims:  
John Burch and John Burch Jr.  
By Carol Wilkerson*

John Burch (also seen as Birch) and his son, John Burch Jr., were the 52nd and 53rd bodies recovered from the Avondale mine. Their bodies were brought out together, as the father had his arms around his son and they died in that position. Father and son are both buried in the lower row of disaster victims at Washburn Street Cemetery.

John Burch was born around 1828 in Aberdare, Glamorgan, Wales. His parents were John and Charlotte Werrett Burch. On August 18, 1851, John married Margaret Miles at Bedwelly, Monmouthshire, Wales, where John was almost certainly working as a miner. We know of five children born to John and Margaret, though there may have been others. While they were still in Wales, they had Ruth (1857), John Jr. (1859), and Naomi (1861).

About 1865, the couple immigrated to the United States, settling their family in the Providence area of Scranton, where there were plenty of mining jobs and a large Welsh community. Margaret subsequently gave birth to William (1866), and Mary (1869), who was born either just before or just after her father's death.

At some point, John switched his employment location to the Avondale mine, which was in Plymouth, some miles south of Scranton. As a result, he relocated his family to that community, where they lived near the Nottingham works. At the age of ten, John Jr. had already joined his father at work in the mines, contributing his wages to the support of the family.

On Monday, September 6, 1869, fire devastated the Avondale mine, turning the single exit from the shaft into an inferno. As a result, 108 miners perished. Two brave souls who entered the mine in a rescue attempt also died. Both John Burch and John Jr. were killed in the mine on that day.

By Wednesday, September 8, relief workers were finally able to enter the mine and remove the bodies. Huge crowds of family members and friends gathered around the entrance to howl in grief upon confirmation of the deaths. Reporters also provided detailed descriptions that were widely circulated in national periodicals.

One account of the removal of John and John Jr. described the situation like this: "So tightly were they locked in each other's arms, it was found to be a difficult task to separate them, and it did seem to be at last cruel to disunite their arms, when they had embraced each other in death, and lay down upon the bottom of the poisoned pit, kissed each other for the last time and perished."

After the bodies of John and John Jr. were conveyed to Scranton and buried, Margaret was left to raise her remaining children alone. By the time of the 1870 Census, she had returned to Providence, and was living there with Ruth (11), Naomi (8), William (3), and Mary (7 months). Initially, she was probably able to survive on the charitable funds contributed from around the country for the relief of the affected families. However, such funds would almost certainly not amount to a long-term solution.

By 1874, Margaret had adopted the survival practice used by many of the Avondale widows—she had remarried. Her second husband was John Chappell, a Civil War veteran whose first wife had died the prior year. Chappell provided Margaret and her children a home and economic stability, which must have been a great relief.

Unfortunately, there was still plenty of grief for the family. Mary Burch does not appear in any census after 1870, so presumably she died in childhood. According to church records, Ruth Burch died in January 1873. Presumably, both Mary and Ruth were buried at Washburn Street Cemetery, though the actual location is unknown.

But there was joy for the family as well as grief. Naomi married Noah Williams in 1879. Noah was the son of William N. Williams, another Avondale victim. In 1880, Naomi and Noah were living with Margaret and John Chappell in Providence, with both Noah and 13-year-old William working in the mines. William married Annie Jones in 1887, and both Naomi and William gave Margaret many grandchildren.

Margaret died in Scranton in 1900 and was buried at Washburn Street Cemetery, though not with John Burch, who was in the special section allotted to the Avondale disaster victims. Her daughter, Naomi Burch Williams, died in 1918 and is also buried at Washburn Street. William Burch died in 1945 and is buried at Canaan Corners Cemetery in Carbondale, the last of the children of Avondale victim, John Burch.

## *LHS 2025 Membership Information*

Membership privileges include unlimited access to the Society library, 10% discount in our bookstore, advance notice, special discounts and invitations to all Society activities, members-only programs, the quarterly newsletter, and the bi-monthly e-newsletter. Attached is a membership form to renew your membership or give to a friend who is interested in joining. Please return it to: Lackawanna Historical Society, 232 Monroe Ave., Scranton, PA 18510.

## *Lackawanna Historical Society Membership Form*

|                     |        |                 |
|---------------------|--------|-----------------|
| // Student          | \$10   | Name _____      |
| // Individual       | \$40   |                 |
| // Family           | \$60   | Address _____   |
| // Contributing     | \$100  | _____           |
| // Sustaining       | \$150  |                 |
| // Silver Corporate | \$250  | Telephone _____ |
| // Gold Corporate   | \$500  |                 |
| // Platinum         | \$1000 | Email _____     |

Following is a link for membership payment:  
<http://www.lackawannahistory.org/benefits.html>

## *Lackawanna Past Times*

Our monthly *Past Times* lecture series features famous local people and early regional history presented via Zoom. Email us at [lackawannahistory@gmail.com](mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com) to receive the Zoom link. Catch up on 70 past episodes on our YouTube channel at <https://tinyurl.com/y5hbsufx>

**Friday, Sept. 26, at 2 pm: A History of St. Joseph's Center** with Sister Maryalice Jacquinot  
**Friday, Oct. 24, at 2pm: Dominick Delfino's Great Escape** with William Sallurday  
**Friday, Nov. 21, at 2pm: NEPA Language and Life Project** with Lewis Esposito, Ph.D.

## *Save the Date*

**Saturday, September 20, 10 am – 2 pm: Local History Fair**, Viewmont Mall. See Page 11

**Sunday, October 12, 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm: Night of Amusements**, Details TBA

**Thursday, October 23: LHS Annual Dinner**, Details TBA

## *Ghostly Gallery Link*

<http://www.lackawannahistory.org/aghostlygallery.html>

## *Genealogy Forum*

### *European Tour IN-PERSON Sessions*

**Saturday, September 13, 10 am to Noon: Researching England and Wales** with Tom Price at the Abington Community Library.

To register for European Tour sessions, please visit:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdfaXp3wYsgRPQ7IA29lcix0Xyk0-8K7EfXpW8LInAHZXoNvw/viewform>

## *Genealogy for Beginners*

The Genealogy for Beginners workshop takes place at the Albright Memorial Library, 500 Vine St. in the Henkelman Room on the Second Floor on Saturdays, October 4, 11, 18, and 25 from 9:30 am to noon. Participants must commit to all four sessions. The class size is limited to 10 people. *Registration closes Friday, September 26, 2025*, \$25.00 for LHS Members or \$35.00 for Non-Members (non-refundable)

**Required: Laptop (NOT a tablet) / 3-ring binder / Notepaper**

If you would like to register for the Beginners Course, go to:

<https://forms.gle/QCwMRbxj2CYqF82w5>

## *Download That Raw DNA File! Take Charge of Your Genetic Data*

Downloading your raw DNA file from any commercial testing company—like 23andMe, AncestryDNA, or MyHeritage—is a must.

Thinking about deleting your 23andMe account? The raw DNA file provided by 23andMe contains unprocessed genetic data from your saliva sample, detailing specific genetic markers. This file is distinct from the interpreted health, ancestry, or trait reports you see on their platform. Here's why downloading it is essential:

- **You Own It:** You paid for the kit, the testing, and the data generated. The raw DNA file is part of what you've invested in, and downloading it ensures you retain access to your genetic information.
- **Future Use:** Raw DNA files can be uploaded to third-party platforms (e.g., GEDmatch, MyHeritage, or health-focused tools) for additional ancestry insights, health analysis, or research purposes.
- **Data Preservation:** If you delete your 23andMe kit or account, you may lose access to your results and raw data permanently. Downloading the file safeguards your information before it's gone.
- **Privacy Control:** Storing your raw DNA file offline (e.g., on a secure hard drive) gives you full control over your sensitive genetic information, especially if you're concerned about 23andMe's data storage practices.

## *Quick Tips for Any Testing Company*

- **Locate the Download Option:** Most companies (e.g., AncestryDNA under "DNA Settings," MyHeritage under "Manage DNA Kits") offer a raw data download in your account settings. Check their help or FAQ pages for specific steps.
- **Act Before Deleting:** Always download your raw DNA file and any reports before deleting a kit or account to avoid permanent loss.
- **Verify and Store Securely:** Ensure the file (usually a .txt or .zip) downloads correctly and store it in an encrypted, offline location.
- **Check Compatibility:** Different companies may format files slightly differently, but most third-party tools accept raw data from major providers.

*Disclaimer: This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal or medical advice. Always review the testing company's privacy policies and terms of service before downloading or deleting your data. For the latest instructions, visit official websites.*

R.T. Kebles  
DNA Genealogist

4TH ANNUAL

# Local History Fair

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
COLLECTIONS-PROGRAMS-EVENTS

**PARTICIPANTS**

## HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

ARCHBALD - BROOKLYN - CARBONDALE -CARBONDALE TWP - DICKSON CITY  
FOREST CITY - GREENFIELD TWP - JERMYN  
LACKAWANNA & WYOMING VALLEY RAILWAY  
NICHOLSON HERITAGE ASSOCIATION - NORTH POCONO - OLD FORGE  
LACKAWANNA COUNTY - SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY - WAYNE COUNTY

## ADDITIONAL HISTORY-DOERS

AUSTIN BURKE ART - SANDRA BURGETTE-MILLER, AUTHOR  
143<sup>RD</sup> PA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY (CIVIL WAR)  
BLACK SCRANTON PROJECT - DESTINATION FREEDOM - DUNMORE CEMETERY TOUR  
EVERHART MUSEUM - CHERYL KAISER, PHOTO ARCHAEOLOGIST  
ELECTRIC CITY TROLLEY MUSEUM - JOHN FITZGERALD, AUTHOR  
FRANCES DORRANCE CHAPTER SOC. FOR PA ARCHAEOLOGY LRCA  
GARDNER WARNER AMERICAN LEGION POST 154 - "JERSEY GRAYS" (REV WAR)  
LACKAWANNA COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM - LHVA - NICK PETULA, AUTHOR  
MONTROSE FIREMAN'S MUSEUM - PA ANTHRACITE HERITAGE MUSEUM  
OLD MILL VILLAGE - RAILROAD & LOCOMOTIVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
STEAMTOWN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE - BARBARA TAYLOR, AUTHOR

AND SWEET TREATS FROM EVIL SWEETS BY LULU!

VIEWMONT MALL  
DICKSON CITY

SHOP FOR LOCAL BOOKS  
AND SOUVENIRS!

**SAT., SEPT. 20 | 11AM-4PM**



Numerous restaurants support LHS through participation in Dine Lackawanna. Enjoy an evening away from the kitchen and help support these establishments and LHS. To ensure our program's success, please consider purchasing an advertisement. For information, please contact LHS at [lackawannahistory@gmail.com](mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com) or 570-344-3841.

**Wednesday, September 17: Chef Von & Mom** 501 Linden St., Scranton 570-955-0368  
**Wednesday, October 15: Pete's Place at the Manor** 8 Salem Ave., Carbondale (570) 281-6240  
**Wednesday, November 19: Stirna's Restaurant** 120 W. Market St., Scranton (570) 343-5742

*A Letter, A Notice, A Deed:  
What Happened to Michael Gilbride*  
By Nancy Gilbride Casey



A son's letter found in a Civil War pension file reconnected Michael Gilbride, Union veteran of the 52nd Pennsylvania, Co. H, with his family in Pennsylvania, and later in Lowell, Massachusetts. He had left Pennsylvania sometime after 1870, and according to son John's letter, was never heard from again.<sup>1</sup>

But the letter was just one surprise in Michael pension file. His original declaration for the invalid pension also stated, *"That since leaving the service this applicant has resided in Idaho Territory and California and his occupation has been that of a laborer."*<sup>2</sup>

What took him away from his family? And what drew him to Idaho and California?

Again, Michael's pension file provides some clues about his circumstances before and after the Civil War.

From at least 1860-1870, Michael worked as a miner in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The occupation of *miner* was distinct from other coal mining jobs, referring to ..."the workman who cuts the coal, as distinguished from the laborer who loads the wagons."<sup>3</sup>

A successful miner had to be in good physical condition, and affidavits in Michael's pension file attest to his fitness prior to the war. In his own declaration Michael stated, *"That prior to his entry into the service above named he was a man of good sound, physical health, being where enrolled a coal-miner."* Another affiant, James Morgan, stated that he knew Michael in Luzerne County *"until the year 1872, when he came to California,"* and *"...that at the time of such Enlistment his applicant was a coal miner and in the enjoyment of perfect health, Eyesight and use of his limbs..."*<sup>4</sup>

In Michael's words, written by his lawyer:

*"That while a member  
of the organization aforesaid in the service  
and in the line of his duty he re-  
ceived a bullet-wound in his left  
hand wrist, in a skirmish near  
the Santee River, South Carolina,  
about February 21st 1865.  
That furthermore he has had the mis-  
fortune of loosing his right eye, altho' he  
did not loose it while in actual service, still  
he firmly believes that the exposures and hardships  
he underwent in the army, helped toward the loss of the same.*

He goes on to say...

*"That he is now 2/3 dis-abled from ob-  
taining his subsistence by manual  
labor, by reason of his injuries above-  
described received in the service of the United  
States and he therefore makes this declara-  
tion for the purpose of being placed on the  
invalid pension roll of the United States"*

Prior to the war, and shortly thereafter, he seemed well settled with his growing family. In Jenkins Twp., he owned real estate valued at \$200 (\$7,152 today), and \$50 in personal property (\$1,788 today).<sup>5</sup> He purchased a home in Jenkins in January 1870 but quickly sold it in March of the same year.<sup>6</sup>

By June, he and his family were living in nearby Pittston. It could be that he sold the Jenkins home to take advantage of a better opportunity in the Pittston mines. By 1870 Michael's real estate was valued at \$2,500 (over \$56,000 today), and he was among the more prosperous miners

in Pittston.<sup>7</sup> It appears that perhaps his Civil War injuries did not hold him back too much in those early years.

However, two events during this time indicate there may have been trouble in the Gilbride household.

First, this notice:



It appears that Michael and wife Sarah were separated in 1869, though she was still listed in the 1870 census as his wife, "whose place of abode on the first day of June 1870, was in this family"—an abode which also included five children under the age of 15.<sup>8</sup>

This discrepancy could be explained by the instructions given to the census enumerator that year: "In column 3 will be entered the name of every person in each family, of whatever age, *including the names of such as were temporarily absent on the 1st day of June, 1870.*"<sup>9</sup>

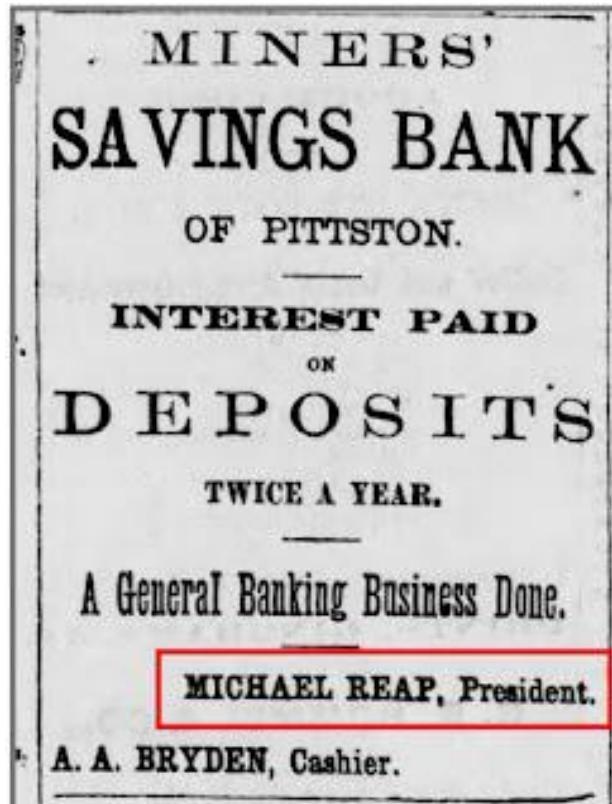
So, were Michael and Sarah separated and concealing it when the census was taken? Was she already living elsewhere? Though they could have divorced civilly in Pennsylvania at the time, for Catholics, divorce was forbidden. So, they may have separated and were living apart.

The second event was the recording of a deed in 1872 in Luzerne County, which hints at financial issues rather than personal. Here, Aaron Whitaker, Sheriff of Luzerne County, sold Michael Gilbride's Pittston property to Michael Reap, president of The Miner's Bank in Pittston.

*"I, Aaron Whitaker Sheriff of the County of Luzerne in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, send greeting; Whereas by virtue of Fieri Facias hearing \_\_\_\_\_ at Wilkes-Barre the Third day of January Anno Domini One Thousand Eight hundred and Seventy-Two, I was Commanded that of the Goods and Chattels, lands and tenements of Michael Gilbride, late of our County Yeoman in my Bailiwick I should cause to be levied as well a Certain Debt of Two Hundred and fifty-*

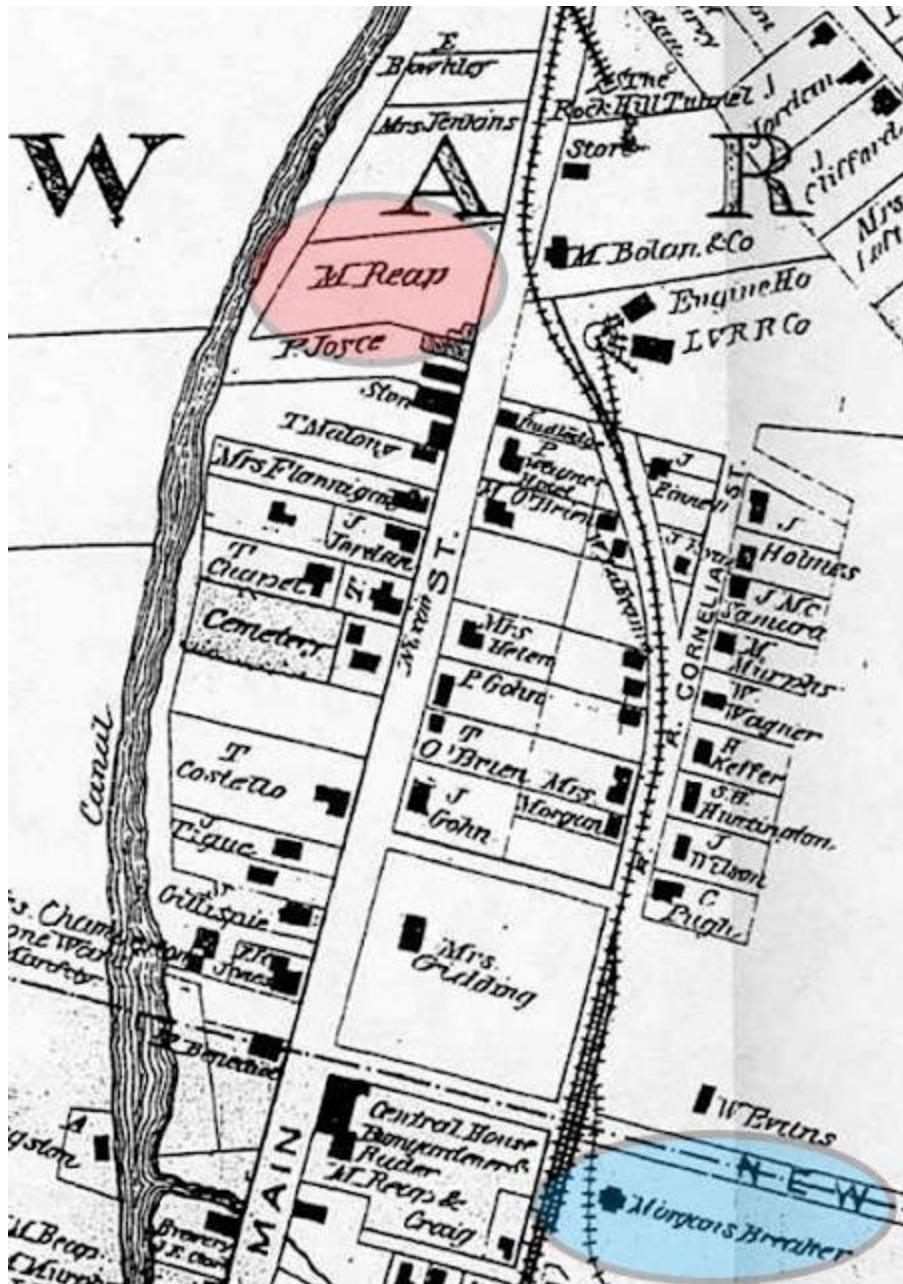
*dollars which Charles Pugh lately in our County Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County before our Judges at Wilkes-Barre recov-ered against him as for + 50/100 Dollars which in our said Court were adjudged for his dama-ges which he sustained by the detention of that debt..."*

"...In pursuance whereof I, the said Sheriff having given due and timely notice of the day of sale, did on the seventeenth day of February= expose the Premises ^ aforesaid to sale by public vendue or outcry and sold the same to Michael Reap for the sum of Eighty-five Dollars he being the highest and best bidder, and that the highest and best bidder for the same."<sup>10</sup>



*Ad for Miner's Bank in Pittston, Michael Reap, President.<sup>11</sup>*

The 1872 sale of the Pittston property directly aligns with James Morgan's statement that he knew Michael in Luzerne County "until the year 1872, when he came to California," as well as his son John's statement, "I have not heard from him since 1872."



*M. Reap* property on the D&H Canal, shown on an 1873 map of Pittston. The land description in the deed noted a location on Main Street, so this could be the property formerly owned by Michael Gilbride. At lower left is Morgan's Breaker, possibly owned by the James Morgan who knew Michael in the 1870s.<sup>12</sup>

The family split was complete. Michael was either in or on his way to Idaho or California, and the rest of the family relocated to Lowell, Middlesex, Massachusetts, no later than 1875—dated by Sarah's death there.<sup>13</sup>

Any one—or a combination of—the following reasons could account for the family's breakup:

- Michael's war injuries could have progressed and affected his ability to work in the physically-taxing miner's life. Perhaps he overextended himself or was unable to earn as much.

- This could have led to the debt to Charles Pugh, which Michael was unable to pay.
- The loss of their Pittston home in such a public and probably humiliating way could have driven the family to seek a new home far from Pennsylvania.
- Marital difficulties may have either precipitated or exacerbated Michael's financial woes, driving a wedge between the couple.
- The exploding need for workers in the Lowell cotton mills could have proven a tempting opportunity for Sarah and her children, as the mills employed both men and women.
- Michael may have sought to apply his remaining mining skills to rebuilding his fortunes in Idaho or California, perhaps intending to send for family members afterwards.

Follow Michael's move west in the next issue of *History Bytes*.

**Nancy Gilbride Casey** is a genealogical researcher and writer who has been researching her family roots since the early 2000s. She began her award-winning blog [Leaves on the Tree](#) in 2018 to share her discoveries. Nancy's writing has also been featured in genealogical publications in Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Ontario, Canada. She is a member of the National Genealogical Society, state societies in Texas, Pennsylvania, and Utah, and several local societies in her research localities. A proud Ohio native, she has lived in Texas for the past 27 years and currently lives in Tioga, Texas, with her husband. Reach her at ngcintx@gmail.com.

**IMAGE:** *Trompe L'Oeil* during 19th century by Carl Dietrich. Original from The Minneapolis Institute of Art. Digitally enhanced by rawpixel. In the public domain.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John A. Gilbride, letter to Commissioner of Pensions, 7 December 1901; combined with Michael Gilbride (Pvt., Co. H, 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry, Civil War), Invalid Application file, I.O. 523.651; Case Files of Approved Pension Applications; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Record Group 15; Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Gilbride (Pvt., Co. H, 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry, Civil War), Invalid Application file, I.O. 523.651, Applicant's declaration, 25 September 1884; Case Files of Approved Pension Applications; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Record Group 15; Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> 1860 United States Federal Census, Luzerne, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Jenkins Twp., p. 302 (stamped), 176 (penned), dwelling 1369, family 1389, household of Michael Gilbride (32); database/image, *Ancestry* ([https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7667/images/4292152\\_00319](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7667/images/4292152_00319) : accessed 25 October 2022); citing National Archives & Records Administration microfilm publication M593, Washington, D.C. *Also:* 1870 United States Federal Census, Luzerne, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Pittston Twp., p., 25 (penned), dwelling 169, family 191, household of Michael Gilbride (40); database/image, *Ancestry* ([https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7163/images/4278598\\_00684](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7163/images/4278598_00684) : accessed 25 October 2022); citing NARA microfilm publication M593, Washington, D.C. *Also:* R.W. Raymond, *A Glossary of Mining and Metallurgical Terms* (Easton, Penns., : American Institute of Mining Engineers, 1881), p. 58, Miner, Penn.; digital image, *Internet Archive* (<https://archive.org/details/glossaryofmining00raymrich/page/58/mode/2up> : accessed 3 November 2022); citing University of California Libraries, Berkeley.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Gilbride (Pvt., Co. H, 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry, Civil War), Invalid Application file, I.O. 523.651, James Morgan statement, 9 August 1886.

<sup>5</sup> 1860 United States Federal Census, Luzerne, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Jenkins Twp., p. 302 (stamped), 176 (penned), dwelling 1369, family 1389, household of Michael Gilbride. *Also: CPI Inflation Calculator* (<https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1860?amount=200> : accessed 7 November 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Luzerne, County, Deed Book 138, p. 326, Jesse B. Schooley & Eliza Jane Schooley to Michael Gilbride, Jenkins Twp., 22 January 1870; digital image, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSNT-S4S1> : accessed 5 November 2022); citing County Courthouse, Wilkes Barre; FHL Microfilm 008086762, image 463. *Also: Luzerne, County, Deed Book 141, p. 269, Michael Gilbride & Wife to James O'Donnell, Jenkins Twp., 6 March 1870; digital image, FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSNR-Q4ZL> : accessed 5 November 2022); citing County Courthouse, Wilkes Barre; FHL Microfilm 8086764, image 433.

<sup>7</sup> 1870 United States Federal Census, Luzerne, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Pittston Twp., p., 25 (penned), dwelling 169, family 191, household of Michael Gilbride.

<sup>8</sup> "NOTICE," *The Pittston (Pennsylvania) Gazette*, 16 September 1869, p. 2, col. 5, Wife Sarah left Mich'l Gilbride's bed and board; digital image, *Newspapers.com* (<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/19613460/notice-given-by-michl-gilbride/> : accessed 5 November 2022). *Also: 1870 United States Federal Census, Luzerne, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Pittston Twp., p., 25 (penned), dwelling 169, family 191, household of Michael Gilbride.*

<sup>9</sup> *United States Census Bureau*, "1870 Census Instructions to Enumerators," (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires/1870/1870-instructions.html> : accessed 7 November 2022), last revised 8 October 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, Deed Book 146, p. 398, Aaron Whitaker, Shff. to Michael Reap, 28 Feb. 1872; digital image, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSNR-Q2K8?i=506&cat=228810> : accessed 4 November 2022), FHL microfilm 008086427, images 507 and 509 ; citing County Courthouse, Wilkes Barre. *Fieri Facias: May you cause to be done.* A writ ordering the local law enforcement to ensure that damages awarded by the court are properly recovered.

<sup>11</sup> "Miner's Savings Bank," advertisement, *The Pittston (Pennsylvania) Gazette*, 28 March 1872, p. 4, col. 4; digital image, *Newspapers.com* (<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/112578579/michael-reap-pres-of-miners-savings/> : accessed 7 November 2022).

<sup>12</sup> D. G. Beers, *Atlas of Luzerne County Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia : A. Pomeroy & Co., 1873), np, "Part of the Borough of Pittston); digital image, *Luzerne County PA GenWeb* (<http://usgwarchives.net/maps/pa/county/luzerne/1873/pitts123.jpg> : accessed 7 November 2022). In the public domain.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel A. McPherties, Deaths, Vol. G., City of Lowell, Massachusetts, p. 84, #190, Sarah Gilbride, 16 March 1875; digital image, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9Q1-L3SM> : accessed 14 October 2022); citing Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth, Boston; FHL film 004282177, image 310.



*Abington Hills Cemetery Resident*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Russell R. Coates*  
*By Crystal Armideo*



In June of this year Bill Davis was at the cemetery cutting grass as he does on most days. He stopped to speak with a gentleman who was tending to the grave of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Russell R. Coates. This gentleman was Rick Sedlisky, not a relative of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Coates, but a writer from Lackawanna Historical Society's History Bytes. Through research on a mining village, Rick read about a very interesting young man who in his short life brought great joy to many in his hometown of Olyphant. Rick was intrigued; he decided to write a book about 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Coates. The story goes like this...

I learned about 1st Lt. Russell R. Coates while researching a coal mining village that existed from 1912 to 1936. The settlement was called Underwood Village and was located near the Underwood Mine in both Olyphant and Throop. Russell's dad was a

coal miner at Underwood as was my grandfather. Russell and his family lived in Underwood Village until it was closed in 1936.

Russell graduated from Olyphant High School in 1939 where he was captain of his football Greyhounds. He and his teammates finished the 1938-39 season with a return of the conference championship to Olyphant after a long absence. In September of that year, he enrolled in the University of Miami on a football scholarship where he eventually co-captained the Hurricanes football team.

Unfortunately, World War II got in the way. He enlisted in the Army Air Services (the predecessor of today's Air Force) where he earned his pilot's wings. He never saw action overseas. On December 5, 1944, the bomber he was co-piloting during a training mission near Charleston, SC, was hit by a fighter plane. Russell, as well as the fighter plane pilot in training and the other men onboard Russell's bomber were all killed. At age 25, he was laid to rest in the family plot at Abington Hills Cemetery.

I was fortunate to meet his niece who remembered him when she was very young. She and her son were kind enough to invite me to their home where they shared a lot of information about her Uncle Russ as she calls him.

During one of my visits, she mentioned that she never understood why her Uncle Russ never received his military marker. She said that he was laid to rest in an unmarked grave in the family plot for 69 years (that was in 2013). That information piqued my interest. I told her that if she signed off as next of kin, I'd do the legwork, and we'd obtain his military marker.

With the help of Elaine Lagreca, a genealogist from eastern Long Island, we found that the Veterans Administration had no record of his death. As far as they knew, he was still alive. Apparently, it was the proverbial glitch in the system. It's my understanding that the military didn't inform the VA of Russell's death.

I filed a copy of Russell's death certificate issued by the State of South Carolina with the VA and within a month, his bronze military marker arrived at Abington Hills. An informal remembrance was held for him during which his niece placed his flag and flag holder at his resting place.

About a month later, his niece called me to say that she received a large manila envelope from the Veterans Administration. In it was a proclamation recognizing Russell's service to our country signed by President Obama.

Learning about Russell and his accomplishments during his 25 years of life prompted me to take the next step and put his story into book form. The book, which is a work in progress, is titled, *Random Airman: The Story of 1st Lt. Russell R. Coates*.

-Rick Sedlisk



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Russell R. Coates' marker in place at Abington Hills  
Photo courtesy of Rick Sedlisk

## *Friends of Abington Hills Cemetery Update*

By Crystal Armideo

Summer has flown by! The weather is getting cooler. We will have work done on the garage in September. The roof has been cleaned off and stones removed from the front. We will be clearing out the front of the hill at some point so we can make it presentable.

Todd Campbell from the Johnson School will be bringing a crew in September to build a new door and to place vents on the roof. Previously, the vents were blocked so the moisture built up inside. Home Depot in Dickson City will provide the materials. When the Johnson School crew is finished, we will paint the outside of the garage. The inside is scheduled to be done next spring.

### *Labor Day* *September 1, 2025*

Labor Day was created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to pay tribute to the contributions made by workers. The holiday is celebrated in both the United States and Canada on the first Monday in September.

As labor unions continued to become more prominent, strikes and rallies were organized to protest poor working conditions and to negotiate with corporations for better hours and salaries. Following the strike on May 11, 1894, by employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company in Chicago who struck to protest wage cuts and the firing of union representatives, President Grover Cleveland signed legislation passed by Congress into law on June 28, 1894, making Labor Day a legal holiday.

In 1897, Labor Day was observed on Monday, September 6. No one knew that four days later Friday, September 10, the country would be outraged by one of the worst abuses of laborers the nation had ever seen, the murder of unarmed immigrant miners in the town of Lattimer, PA.

## *Dunmore Cemetery Tour 2025*



*Dearly Departed Player Roger Mattes*  
*Photo courtesy of Julie Esty*

The Dearly Departed Players return to the Dunmore Cemetery on Sunday, October 5 and Sunday, October 12, 2025, at 2:00 p.m., for their annual historical walking tour.

Tour Director, Julie Esty, notes that the cast has been rehearsing since mid-July in preparation for Tour 2025. The tour, which changes annually, will feature a dozen new costumed vignettes throughout the cemetery. Now taking place for more than two decades, this highly anticipated Autumn event draws visitors to the cemetery from the tri-state area and celebrates the history and heritage of the Lackawanna Valley.

This year the Players will be joined by members of Union, Peter Williamson, Hyde Park, Schiller and Aurora Masonic lodges. In conjunction with the Dearly Departed Players, members of those lodges will portray people who are significant to their history and who are buried in the cemetery. In one case, they will also tell “the rest of the story.”

Prior to the tours, the artists of Scranton Rocks will visit the cemetery and hide their creations so tour visitors can find and enjoy their beautiful artwork. Scranton Films, Dunmore Senior Center, and the Lackawanna Historical Society will decorate mausoleums in a harvest theme.

The tour is a recipient of a Lackawanna County Arts and Culture Grant, which helps bring this production to the public at no charge. Tour admission is free. No reservations

are necessary. Comfortable walking shoes are suggested. Each tour takes approximately two hours. It is suggested that tour attendees arrive early to obtain parking and see exhibits.



*< Dearly Departed player, Julie Esty, portrays a woman laid to rest in the Home for the Friendless Section.*

*Photo courtesy of Julie Esty*



*> Dearly Departed player, David Byers, as George Friant, a taxidermist.*

*Photo courtesy of Julie Esty*

*Follow the Dunmore Cemetery on Facebook  
<https://www.facebook.com/TheDunmoreCemeteryTour/>*

# LA FESTA ITALIANA



*Image source: [lafestaitaliana.com](http://lafestaitaliana.com)*

Northeast Pennsylvania is home to numerous food festivals that highlight ethnicities from virtually every part of the world. One of the most popular and well-attended festivals is La Festa Italiana. During Labor Day Weekend, Friday, August 29 through Monday, September 1, 2025, Downtown Scranton's Courthouse Square becomes a four-square block outdoor Italian restaurant.

La Festa Italiana began in 1976 when communities across the country were celebrating our nation's 200th birthday. Scranton's Italian American community wanted to contribute to the nation's celebration, thus "La Festa" was born.

Courthouse Square in Downtown Scranton was chosen as the festival location because it's reminiscent of a "piazza" or plaza in a typical Italian town. In Italy, the "piazza" is where festivals are held to honor saints and where people meet to discuss politics, display creative works, play music and generally socialize.

The initial "festa" had about 40 vendors located along the North Washington Ave. side of Courthouse Square. About 20,000 people attended. During the early years, the event

was held during Columbus Day Weekend. The only problem with October was that, oftentimes Mother Nature was less than cooperative. One weekend the temperature registered a “balmy” 18 above zero. In 1981, La Festa was moved to Labor Day Weekend and has been a Labor Day staple ever since.

“LaFesta” attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually from parts of the northeast United States. Visitors come mainly for the food, of which there is a wide variety of Italian items, including pizza, homemade pasta dishes, such as traditional spaghetti and meatballs, as well as delicious pastries and desserts. Cannoli is a favorite.

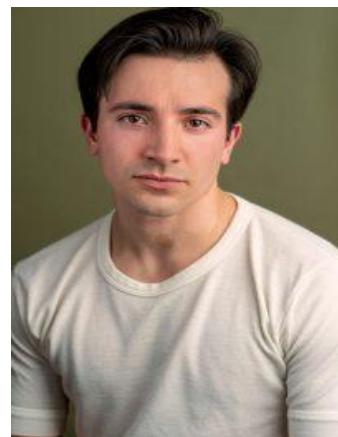


*Cannoli. Image source: lafestaitaliana.com*

The festival offers entertainment throughout the weekend. Friday, August 29, brings a tribute to recently deceased Paul LaBelle, leader of the Exact Change Band. Later that evening, popular band, Picture Perfect, takes the stage.

The Saturday, August 30, lineup features The Cameos, New Jersey’s favorite oldies group, as well as a Billy Joel tribute. From 1pm to 4pm, a car show, sponsored by Kost Tire & Auto Service, takes place.

Also, on Saturday at 8pm, actor and singer/songwriter and Scranton native, Lorenzo Pugliese, returns to Scranton to entertain the hometown crowd with his tribute to Frankie Valli. Among his stage credits are two national tours as SpongeBob in “The SpongeBob Musical,” various Scranton Shakes seasons as Ren in “Footloose” and Roger in “Rent.” He recently played the Frankie Valli role in “Jersey Boys” at the Village Theatre in Seattle. Lorenzo’s music is available under his stage name, *Valerian*, on Spotify and Apple Music: *IG lorenzo\_m\_pugliese*.



*Lorenzo Pugliese. Image source: lafestaitaliana.org*

The annual 10am Mass in Italian at the Cathedral of St. Peter begins Sunday’s events. Entertainment on that day includes, from the Metropolitan Opera, T.J. Capobianco, a

Connie Francis tribute, as well as a Frank Sinatra/Dean Martin Tribute Show with Chris DiMattio and Andy DiMino with Ken McGraw's Brass & Ivory Big Band.

La Festa Italiana winds down on Labor Day, September 1, with a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for WWII veteran, Gene "Dempsey" Passarella, maestro of the orchestra that bears his name. The festival's closing act is Popstar Drive.



*Image source: pahomepage.com*

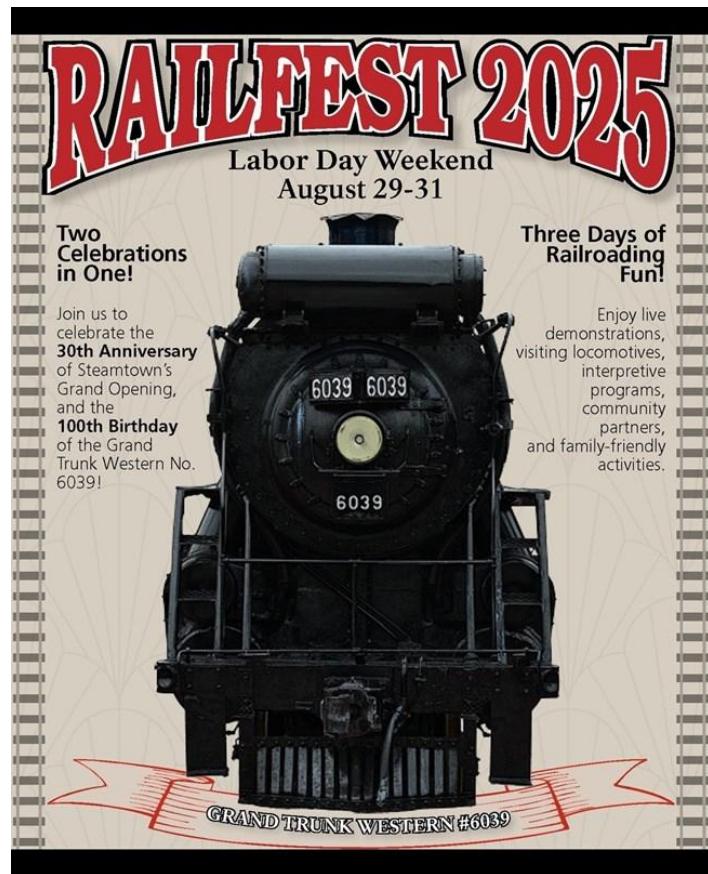


*Image source: visitnepa.org*



*Image source: lafestaitaliana.com*

## Steamtown Celebrates 30 Years



Labor Day Weekend, August 29 – 31, 2025 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton. This year's Railfest also celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Canadian National Railway locomotive #6039.

Steamtown NHS is located on the 40-acre Scranton Yard of the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad (DL&W) in Downtown Scranton. During the 1950s and 1960s, a New England seafood processor, F. Nelson Blount, assembled a substantial collection of standard-gauge steam locomotives, passenger and freight cars. In 1984, 17 years after the passing of Mr. Blount, his collection was brought to Scranton by the Steamtown Foundation for the Preservation of Steam and Railroad Americana, Inc. Both the rail yard and the collection became a part of the National Park System when Steamtown National Historic Site was created.

The original DL&W office and roundhouse were constructed in 1902. The roundhouse was expanded in 1937. Both the office and roundhouse are now integral parts of an expanded complex that includes the turntable, as well as the visitors center, theatre and history museum.



*Steamtown National Historic Site Roundhouse and Turntable*  
Image source: [npplan.com](http://npplan.com)

The locomotive collection varies in size from a very small industrial switcher built in 1937 by the H.K. Porter Co. to an extremely large "Big Boy" that was built in 1941 by the American Locomotive Co. (ALCO) for the Union Pacific Railroad. There is also a 122-year-old ALCO that was built for the Chicago Union Transfer Railway Company in 1903.



*Union Pacific "Big Boy" No. 4012*  
<https://www.nps.gov/stea/index.htm>

A variety of activities will take place over Labor Day Weekend from 9am to 5pm. There will be visiting equipment from the Delaware – Lackawanna Railroad on hand, including diesel locomotives, a sleeper car, as well as the “Black Diamond” business car from the former Lehigh Valley Railroad whose slogan was “Route of the Black Diamond”. A short steam train ride will be in operation as well as maintenance-of-way equipment such as a pump hand car and NJ Transit track car railroad speeders.

The locomotive shops will be open and will offer demonstrations of the drop table, the “ring of fire” and other restoration equipment. Model train layouts will be on display. In addition, there will be demonstrations of an Amtrak K-9 unit, as well as walking tours, and exhibits of Steamtown’s Grand Opening in 1995.

Again, this year, visitors can take advantage of the free shuttle bus between Railfest and La Festa Italiana in Downtown Scranton.

*Separately, from September through November, there will be a series of train excursions operating from Steamtown to Gouldsboro, Carbondale, East Stroudsburg, Cresco, Tobyhanna, Delaware Water Gap and Moscow. There will also be two “wine train” excursions departing from Carbondale. For a list of dates, times and ticket information, please visit <https://www.nps.gov/stea/planyourvisit/trainrides.htm/index.htm>*

## *Carbondalien Festival*

In 1974, a UFO reportedly fell from the sky into the Silt Pond in Carbondale, PA. While several explanations have been offered, the mystery of this sighting has become a key part of Carbondale’s Culture. Be sure to join everyone on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 11 am - 5 pm, to celebrate the 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary of this piece of Carbondale history.

*<https://carbondalienfestival.com/>*

## *The Carbondale UFO Incident*

*The Carbondale UFO Incident* is an approximately 11-minute WVIA-TV piece that includes interviews with people who on November 9, 1974, saw a light in the sky that wound up in Silt Pond in Russell Park, Carbondale.

The official explanation was that the light was a railroad lantern that someone tossed into the park. Although someone did throw a railroad lantern into the pond, when you see the size of the recovered lantern, decide for yourself if on that November night in 1974, you think the light from the lantern could be seen high in the Carbondale sky.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3UTm4xQc6A>*





This is the 9th in a series of edited reprints from "The Laurel Northeastern Pennsylvania's Magazine." It is planned to republish subsequent articles in their entirety as a special feature of History Bytes. All reprints will center on economic development, local history, culture, social programs and initiatives, and recreation in the Greater Scranton region.

As best as can be determined, "The Laurel" magazine had a short life. Four (4) issues, thought to be the total production, are in a private collection (Volume 1, Numbers 1-3, and Volume 2, Number 1). If anyone can supply additional issues, please contact the Lackawanna Historical Society at [lackawannahistory@gmail.com](mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com)

Charles Spruks, (1870-1964), was born in Beach Lake, Pennsylvania. He later lived in Scranton where he became a respected coal and lumber dealer. In 1943, Spruks donated 75 acres at Hickory Lake to the Scranton Y.M.C.A. The property, his boyhood home, was in Poyntelle, Pennsylvania, an area near Blooming Grove, in Wayne County. Spruks said the donation was for underprivileged boys in the area.

The Y.M.C.A. developed a camp there for boys between the ages of 8-16, and later offered sessions for older men, too. The camp operated from the late 1940s through the mid-1970s. It no longer appears to be operated by the "Y."

--Richard Fitzsimons, Ph.D.  
Transcriber



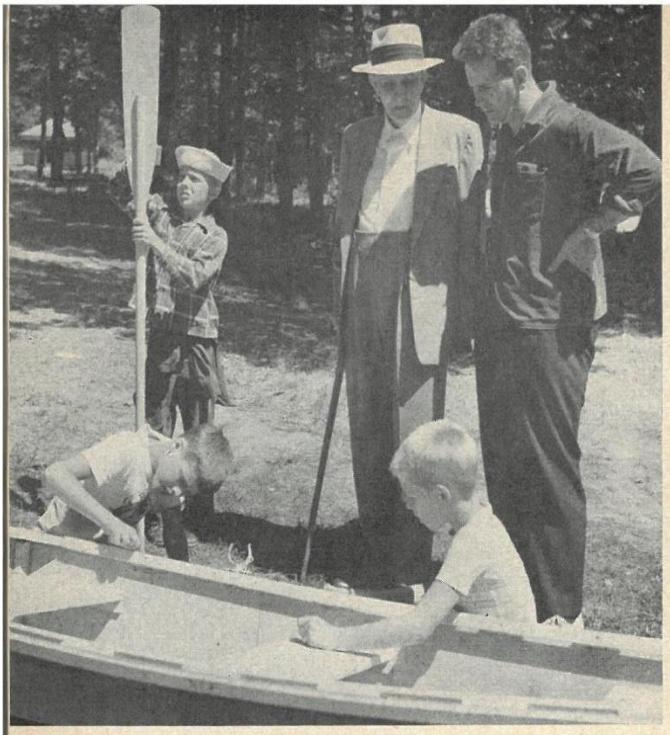
## Mr. Spruks visits Camp Spruks

Charles Spruks, Scranton business man and industrialist, was born and raised at Beech Lake in Wayne County. His boyhood was spent on a farm there which was surrounded by virgin wilderness.

As a young man he entered the lumbering business and cut the giant trees which covered the mountainside. Later he moved to Scranton where he entered the retail lumbering business and expanded his interests to many other business activities.

However, his love for country life and the forest lands never left him. He believed that every city boy should enjoy outdoor life during the summer time in the wilderness.

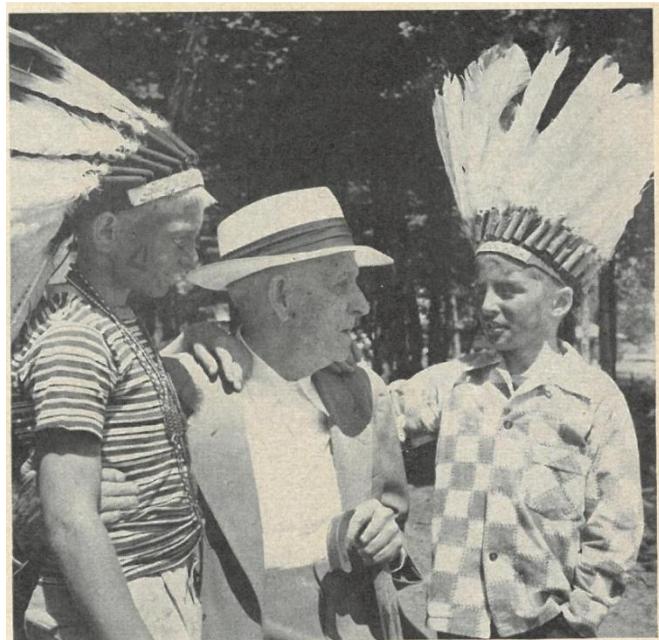
In 1939 he provided a tract of timberland containing big Hickory Lake, near his birthplace, which he believed would be an ideal spot for young lads to learn the wonders of nature. Here the Scranton Y. M. C. A. built a camp for city boys. Each year more than one hundred boys enjoy the outdoors as did Mr. Spruks in his boyhood. Mr. Spruks enjoys the camp as much as the kids and visits them whenever possible to relive with them his youth.



Left- Mr. Spruks talks to Grover Wickenhem, camp director, as three of the boys work on a rowboat.

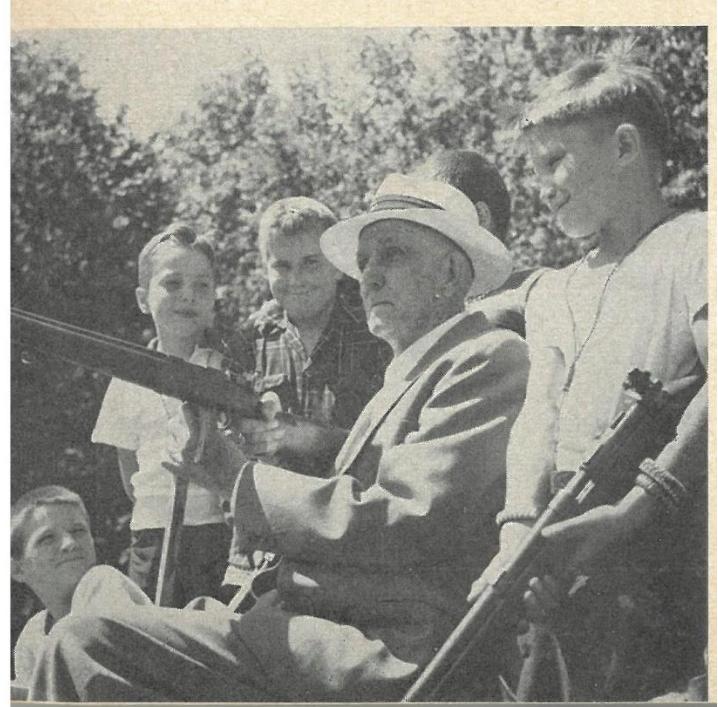


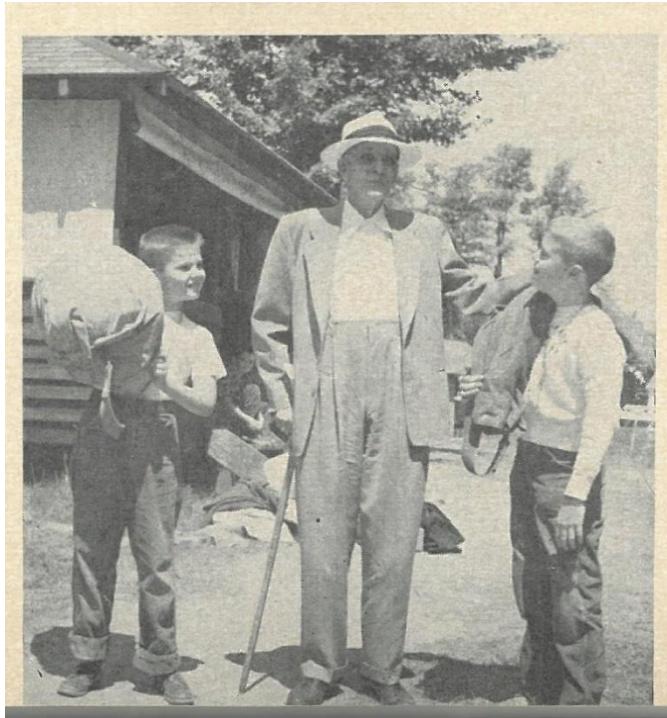
Above- He discusses swimming with the lads.



Above- He talks about Indians with two young campers.

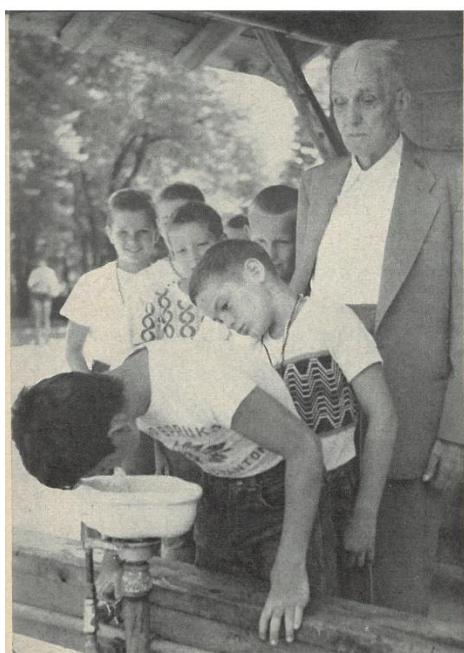
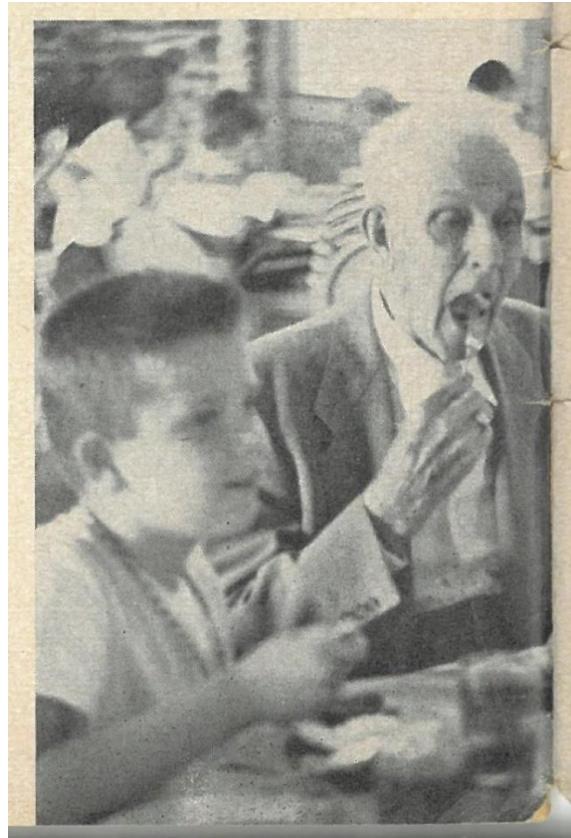
Right- Mr. Spruks shows Bud James, Dudley Jones and Jody Stauffer how to handle a rifle.





Above- He greets Bob Ruth and Bob White new campers who have just arrived.

Right- Mr. Spruks, enjoys chow with the boys.



Above- Mr. Spruks waits in line behind Tommy Valerio and Dick Bialkowski for a drink from the camp's deep well.

## *On the History of Immigration to the United States*

*By Robert P. Wolensky, King's College\**

We are an immigrant nation. Yet, there have always been problems associated with the newcomers. German speaking people constituted the largest number of new Pennsylvanians during the colonial period. By 1752, about 100,000 people from that category resided in the Commonwealth. None other than Benjamin Franklin noted the trend with concern. He worried that the “Germans” could eventually outnumber the Anglo-Americans and displace English as the dominant language. He also expressed a clear racial bias against them, even implying that they were not white and, therefore, inferior. According to historian Don Tolzmann in *The German-American Experience* (2000), Franklin declared that the Germans “Will never adopt our language, any more than they can acquire our complexion.” By the time of the American revolution in 1776, about one-third of all Pennsylvanians were of German ancestry. They were the first European group to suffer from discrimination on behalf of the Anglo-American majority.

During the 1840s and 1850s, massive inflows of Irish émigrés produced an even greater reaction. A potato famine swept across Ireland and prompted nearly two million Irish men and women to chance the Atlantic crossing. They were met with rejection because they were not only numerous but Catholic (in a predominantly Protestant country); plus, they were poor, had large families, and knew little about democracy. The “incursion” had political consequences as shown by the founding of the so-called “Know-Nothing Party” in 1844, a nationwide anti-Irish movement intended to cast off the people of Eire. If the tidal wave should continue, the Know-Nothings proclaimed, the Irish will replace the majority and dominate the society.

Between 1870 and 1920, the U.S. experienced the largest immigration period in our history. It included 25 million Eastern and Southern Europeans, mainly Slavs and Italians. Their arrival in Northeastern Pennsylvania and elsewhere caused a tremendous uproar. Never mind that the companies during the post-Civil War economic expansion needed a large army of new workers. The real problem was that, like the Irish, they were mainly Catholic, had large families, and knew little about democracy. Newspapers and magazines portrayed them not only as aliens but as people with feeble minds and/or criminal personalities. Certainly, the continuing arrival of those whom the *New York Times* referred to as “rattlesnakes” would further degrade the nation. The crisis was furthered by advocates of a new “scientific” theory called Eugenics, which taught that people with inferior genes produce more people like themselves. Thus, a common belief emerged that the “superior” people were being replaced by large numbers of “inferior” immigrants, or the good by the bad.

Peter Roberts, a Congregationalist minister and sociologist, was an observer of the anthracite region’s immigration patterns. In *Anthracite Coal Communities* (1904), he wrote: “These peoples furnished the cheap labor ... and supplied the operators with men willing to work under conditions which labor of a higher grade resented. The Sclavs [sic] represent possibly the lowest grade of European work men that can be imported [and they have] displaced the Anglo-Saxon, the Celt, and the German.” Roberts further viewed members of

the new groups as socially threatening: “Possibly the most dangerous element of the anthracite population . . . are the lower classes of Sclavs and Italians.”

Economist Frank Warne Jr. also wrote about our region in, *The Invasion of the Slavs and the Mineworkers* (1904). He cautioned that the millions of Polish, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian, Russian, and other migrants would have grave consequences for the U.S. His views were reflected by Reading Railroad executive, George Baer, who observed that that the Slavic miners were something less than human because they could endure a workload that would harm a “white man.” Yes, the immigrants who arrived between the mid-1800s and early 1900s were generally viewed as non-white. This reality was shown by historian Noel Ignatiev in his book, *How the Irish Became White* (1995); by anthropologist Karen Brodkin in *How the Jews Became White Folks* (1998); and by historians Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno in *Are Italians White?* (2004). Thus, was born the “whiteness” literature.

In 1907, Congress created the Dillingham Commission (1907-1910), which conducted hearings on “the immigration problem.” As many legislators had hoped, the well-respected academics, journalists, clergy, and other experts who testified argued that these lower types of individuals were degrading the nation’s moral and genetic integrity. Their numbers should be limited. The result was the passage of two national laws: The Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924. The measures virtually closed the door to people from Eastern and Southern Europe while increasing the quotas for Northern and Western Europeans.

Therefore, if you are a resident of Northeastern Pennsylvania, or anywhere else, with an ancestry from one of the restricted nations, your relatives (like mine) surely arrived before the 1920s.

We now see new groups arriving from Mexico, India, Eastern Europe, Central and South America, the West Indies, Nepal, Africa, and other places. Given the tradition of bias, it is perhaps not too surprising that anti-immigrant prejudices can again be found in some quarters. What is surprising is that the same people whose ancestors suffered from the barbs of discrimination and stereotyping are sometimes among those who now exhibit anti-immigrant attitudes.

However, another reality has been that the great majority of immigrants have eventually been assimilated into the community and society. Where would America be without the Germans, Poles, Mexicans, Welsh, Italians, Ukrainians, Africans, Irish, Lithuanians, Central Americans and the many others? As a great credit to us—and although it has not been easy—we have found places for the tens of millions who desired to make America their home. Moreover, as with the post-Civil War period, where would our companies be today without the (often exploited) labor of the recent newcomers?

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\*Prof. Wolensky is a native of the Wyoming Valley and serves as Adjunct Professor of History at King’s College. He has written books about Northeastern Pennsylvania’s coal mining and garment industries, with particular attention to labor relations, ethnic participation, economic change, and organized crime.

# *Lattimer Massacre*

## *September 10, 1897*



*Friday, September 10, 1897, protesting harsh working conditions,  
strikers march towards Lattimer collieries  
Operated by the Pardee Family-owned Calvin Pardee Company  
Image source: brewminate.com*

On September 10, 1897, 300 to 400 unarmed immigrant miners of Polish, Slavic and Lithuanian backgrounds began a march to the Lattimer collieries near Hazleton that

were operated by the Pardee Family-owned Calvin Pardee Company. The march followed a series of work stoppages that began a month or so earlier.

One of those work stoppages was the August 1897 layoff of workers at Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company strip mining operations, pay cuts for remaining workers and increased rents for those living in "company towns." The company continued with consolidation of mule stables that resulted in teenage drivers traveling longer distances to pick up their mules. The longer commute time was unpaid.

Talks between Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Co. and teenage drivers were inconclusive. On August 14, between 25 and 35 drivers struck. A dustup between a supervisor and drivers ensued, making matters worse. Over the next two days, strip miners and underground miners walked out resulting in about 2,000 on strike. By August 18, the vast majority of miners had joined the United Mine Workers (UMW). The expanding strike resulted in the closure of nearly all mines in the region.

It's important to point out that because Slavic miners experienced discrimination by English-speaking and American miners, they at that point were not UMW members. Another factor was that Slavic miners were originally used as strikebreakers, thus they and unionized miners were not on the best of terms. That changed when working conditions continued to deteriorate and the UMW called for a 15% pay hike. As a result, Slavic miners joined the union.

A second job action took place on August 25 when teenage breaker boys at the A. S. Van Wickle operation in Colerain also went on strike for wage increases. On August 27, the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Co. agreed to pay overtime and to increase wages to meet the regional average. In addition, miners were no longer required to use company doctors or to live in company housing. A. S. Van Wickle also agreed to increase wages to the regional average, thus ending the second strike around August 28.

The calm didn't last long. On September 1 when the new pay raises were announced, only a small number of workers received the increase. And, although management agreed to treat Slavic workers better than before, they reneged on other parts of the agreement. This of course resulted in the resumption of strikes. By September 3, about 3,300 workers struck four mines, shutting them down.

The companies' private and armed Coal & Iron Police were of little help because they were small in number. The company owners contacted Luzerne County Sheriff, James F. Martin, for help. He deputized a number of men and on September 6, 1897, issued a warning against unlawful assembly, "tumult", and interference with the peaceful operation of any mines or mining equipment. The stage was set for what would become an unprecedented confrontation.

Within a few days, between 8,000 and 10,000 men were on strike and on September 10, Slavic miners began their unarmed march. Their goal was to support the UMW workers at the Lattimer collieries, which were still operating.

The immigrant men met law enforcement men along the way but continued their march towards the Lattimer works. At 3:45pm they were met by Martin and his 150-armed men. Martin ordered them to turn around and tried to grab the American flag that a marcher was holding. Martin's men opened fire. Many of the miners retreated and while doing so, were shot in the back. A total of 21 men died that day.

Shortly after the murders took place, Sheriff Martin gave the press two contradictory accounts of what happened. In one he said he ordered his men to open fire. In the other, he didn't. Both accounts can be found at

<https://slate.com/culture/2019/09/lattimer-massacre-sheriff-martin-account.html> .

Martin and his men were tried in February 1898 for the murder of only one of the marchers, Michael Cheslock (Ceslak), who was a naturalized U.S. citizen. After hearing testimony from both sides, much of which was racist anti-Slavic rants by the defendants' attorneys, Martin and his deputies were acquitted. For in-depth information on the trials, it's highly recommended to visit the Internet and enter Lattimer, Lattimer Massacre, etc.

A sad reminder of the discrimination against the Slavic immigrant miners is that it took until 1972, 75 years, for a memorial to the Lattimer Massacre to become a reality.



Image source: [pabook.libraries.psu.edu](http://pabook.libraries.psu.edu)

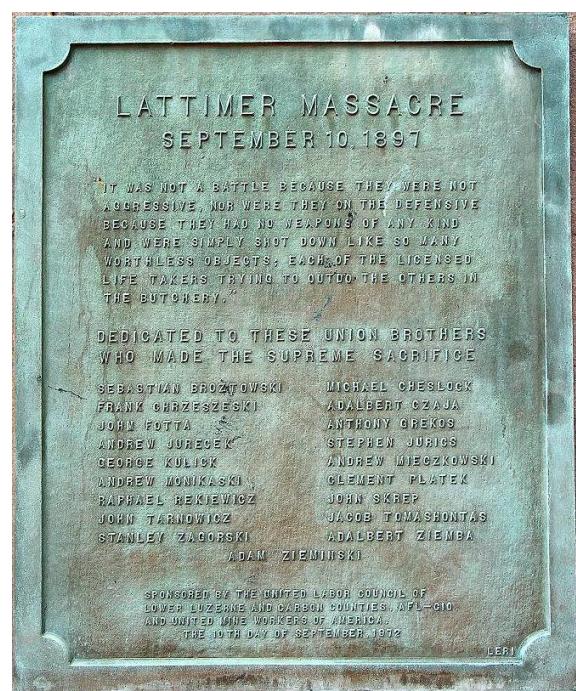
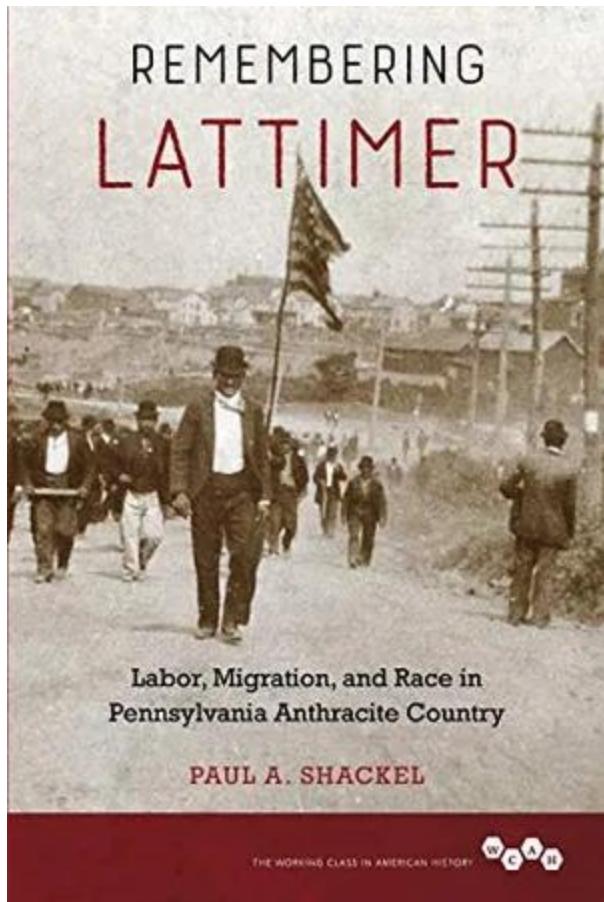


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### *Historical Attractions*

Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority  
Anthracite Museum and Iron Furnaces  
Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour

Steamtown National Historic Site  
Electric City Trolley Museum

### *Cultural Partners*

Albright Memorial Library and the Lackawanna County Library System  
The Everhart Museum  
Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple  
Scranton's Annual Civil War Weekend Events  
Scranton Times-Tribune's Pages from the Past

### *Anthracite Research*

Pennsylvania's Northern Anthracite Coal Field <http://www.northernfield.info/>  
The North-East United States Historical Geographical Information System (NEHGIS)  
<http://www.nehgis.org>

### *Historical Societies*

|   |                                       |
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| Carbondale Historical Society   | Luzerne County Historical Society     |
| Wayne County Historical Society   | Susquehanna County Historical Society |
| Monroe County Historical Society  | Wyoming County Historical Society     |
| Archbald Historical Society: Contact Ed Casey 570-614-3628  |                                       |
| <u>Plymouth Historical Society</u> <a href="http://www.plymouthhistoricalsocietyluzernecopa.org">www.plymouthhistoricalsocietyluzernecopa.org</a> |                                       |
| Scott Township Historical Society: Contact Robert Vail 570-254-9536   |                                       |
| Taylor Historical Society: Contact Christine Schaefer 570-562-1225  |                                       |

### *County and Educational Partners*

Lackawanna County  
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Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit

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## *Business Hours*

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| Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 5pm                                   | Saturday, 12pm – 3pm   |
| Address: The Catlin House, 232 Monroe Ave., Scranton, PA 18510 |  |
| Phone: 570-344-3841  | e-mail: <a href="mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com">lackawannahistory@gmail.com</a> |

*Founded in 1886 as the Lackawanna Institute of History and Science, the Lackawanna Historical Society provides the community with a record of local history through its museum and library collections, exhibits and programs. In 1942, from the bequest of George H. Catlin, the Society established its permanent home at Catlin's 1912 residence, located at 232 Monroe Avenue in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In 1965, it was designated as the official county historical society by Lackawanna County and continues to serve the county as a center for local historical resources. The Lackawanna Historical Society is a 501 ©3 nonprofit organization, is supported in part by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Catlin Memorial Trust, Lackawanna County and memberships.*