

The Lackawanna Historical Society

BULLETIN

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FEBRUARY 1981

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

Wednesday, February 25, 1981 - Catlin House 8 P.M.

Our February program will feature a slide illustrated lecture on the "History of the Jermyn Family" given by William P. Lewis, our Executive Director. For over a century this once numerous and wealthy family figured prominently in the development and growth of Scranton and Lackawanna County. The family was founded here by John Jermyn who came from England to Slocum Hollow in 1847. Hard working, industrious and determined, he became a wealthy coal operator, the founder of the town of Jermyn and the builder of the Hotel Jermyn and the Coal Exchange Building. When he died in 1902 he left an estate valued at \$7 million dollars. He and his wife Susan Knight Jermyn were the parents of ten children, among them six sons who became prominent in the civic and social life of Scranton, including E.B. Jermyn who served two terms as Mayor of the City. Their personalities, work, wives, homes and families with all come alive again through a series of slides. We hope you will come to see and hear this interesting genealogical and social study at the Catlin House on Wednesday February 25 at 8 p.m. A Social hour will follow the program.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMS

Monday, March 23 - Dr. Gary Nash, History professor at University of California, Los Angeles will present a lecture entitled "William Penn's Legacy". This program will be co-sponsored by the Community Conference Committee in connection with the Tercentenary of Pennsylvania 1681-1981.

Wednesday, April 22 - George Joel, former executive secretary of the Jewish Community Center and the Scranton Lackawanna Jewish Council will give a lecture on "The History of the Jewish Community Scranton."

Wednesday, May 13 - The Annual Dinner meeting and installation of officers at 6:30 p.m. Speaker for the occasion will be Robert Skaler, a Philadelphia architect who will give a slide presentation on "The Victorian Architecture of the Philadelphia Area."

CATLIN HOUSE NEWS

During the recent months of November, December and January we have had a steady flow of visitors and researchers coming to the Catlin House; in November we had 293; in December 211 and January 165. These numbers included a total of 21 groups, among them seven gifted classes from the Scranton School District, two classes from the Hebrew Day School, three Girl Scout Troops, The Philharmonic Women League Musical, the D.A.R. Essay Contest Winners, a University of Scranton Ethnic Studies class and a Mid-Valley Elementary School class. Our November and December programs were delightful and well attended. The Executive Director has been teaching school recently; Dalton history to the children in the Dalton Elementary School two days in December and Factoryville history in the Factoryville Elementary School three days in January. It was an interesting and challenging experience.

Notices for your 1981 annual dues have been sent out in January; many of our members have already paid; we will appreciate hearing from the rest of our members soon. Individual and Family membership dues in the Lackawanna Historical Society are still only \$10 annually.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

For the Year 1980

The past year was a good one for the Lackawanna Historical Society with many accomplishments to be noted and significant progress to be measured.

I have completed over four years as your Executive Director and am happy to say that our entire Staff has been willing, cooperative and loyal. Mr. and Mrs. James McLane our custodians and Mrs. June Wech our hostess-secretary have all given excellent service and are to be commended for their dependable work. Our Officers and Trustees have been interested and active as well. We now have a total of 383 members including 46 new members who joined during this past year. We continually need to find ways to increase our membership and find new friends for our Society.

During the summer months John Cagnetti and Thomas Horlacher did an excellent job of directing and supervising the restoration of the entire exterior of the Catlin House, including cleaning the brickwork, resetting the stonework and repainting all of the stucco and woodwork. This much-needed conservation work greatly enhances the appearance of the house and was completed for less than the estimated cost of \$15,000.

Our image in the community is constantly expanding as will be noted by the increased number of visitors to the House, the enthusiastic response to our regular program meetings and the opportunities that came to give historic talks numerous times in this area. The total attendance of visitors to the Catlin House during 1980 was 2771, an increase of over 500 more than the year before. This figure includes 77 group tours which came in. Our eight program meetings were very well attended with an average of 80 present each time. We have received a number of interesting donations and added several valuable new books to our Library. As Executive Director I plan all of our program meetings, answer innumerable telephone and mail inquiries, help researchers who come in for information as well as write and edit our bi-monthly bulletin and write numerous newspaper articles relating to local history. In addition I gave a total of 18 talks on historic subjects to organizations in our area and taught local history to Dalton Grade School students for two full days. The work is interesting and challenging and I am grateful for the opportunities.

Looking ahead, we need to find new ways to serve our community and to be involved in shaping its future as we seek to conserve and interpret its rich historical past.

William P. Lewis

1681 - 1781 - 1881 YEARS TO REMEMBER

This year 1981 is the anniversary year for several significant events in the history of our nation, making this a year to reflect on the past and look forward to the future with hope.

1681 - This year and next Pennsylvanians will celebrate the Tercentenary of our Commonwealth since King Charles II of England granted the Charter of Pennsylvania to William Penn in March 1681 and Penn arrived in Philadelphia in October to 1682. A number of events are being planned to appropriately celebrate this significant anniversary, not the least of which is our March program. Dr. Gary Nash, our featured speaker, will be in Philadelphia the week before participating in a Conference entitled "The World of William Penn" and we are fortunate to have him come to Scranton to speak to us. A new informative booklet on "William Penn, the Architect of a Nation" has been published by John Trussell for the Tercentenary. We will have copies available for \$2.25 each.

1781 - marked the Surrender of the British General Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia and the end of the American Revolutionary War. With the French Fleet in the Chesapeake Bay and General George

Washington's Army moving in by land, Cornwallis was forced to surrender his British Army on October 19, 1781. Though the Peace Treaty was not signed until two years later in Paris this event assured the independence of the American colonies and the beginning of the United States republic.

The year **1881** is remembered nationally for the Inauguration of James A. Garfield as our 20th President after a deeply contested election in which he defeated General Hancock. However only four months later Garfield was shot in Washington, D.C. on July 2 by a disappointed office seeker. He lingered in pain until September 19 when he died, being the second U.S. President to be assassinated. He was succeeded by Chester A. Arthur. That same year Czar Nicholas of Russia was also assassinated and Benjamin Disraeli, the former Prime Minister of Britain, died in London.

Here at home Scranton was a growing, thriving industrial city, rising to become the third city in the State in size, importance and population. The Census of 1880 showed a total of 45,925 persons in the City which had only recently been designated the seat of the new County of Lackawanna. Founded only 40 years before by the Scranton Brothers, the city had experienced a growth and development as rapid as any western boom mining town. A contemporary account written in 1880 said "Scranton is a place of vast mining and manufacturing interests deriving its prosperity from its immense rolling mills, furnaces and forges, its great steel works, its locomotive, brass and iron manufacturing establishments and its numerous factories for making wood, sheet iron stoves, silk, tools and leather goods. Besides these industries under the control of twenty incorporated companies, representing many millions of dollars, there are 34 churches, a large opera house, a public library, a large collection of Indian stone relics, a city hospital and a home for the friendless. Five railroads pass through the city and street cars travel to the four portions of the town."

Scranton was certainly an optimistic American city at that time with a growing prosperity and making rapid strides in trade, commerce and travel. It was situated in a valley underlaid with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of anthracite coal. Twenty big black wooden breakers or collieries dotted the landscape and below the surface 20,000 men and boys toiled with pick and shovels and mule cars to produce the millions of tons of anthracite coal then used by American industry.

In spite of all of this progress and prosperity, there was as yet no court house or city hall. Judge John Handley was the presiding Judge and Terrace V. Powderly was the well known Mayor. During the year 1881 plans were adopted for the New Court House, drawn by a Binghamton architect I.G. Perry, the construction contract was awarded to John Snaith of Ithica and ground was broken on April 15. The cornerstone was not set until the next year and the Court House was not completed until 1884. Also during 1881 a tragic fire occurred in Hyde Park destroying the St. Patrick's Orphanage and the lives 17 children. The first telephone exchange was installed and the first electric lights were turned on here during the previous year. James Redpath and Frances Willard lectured in the Academy of Music, the temperance and Prohibition movement was going strong and in September Memorial Services for the slain President Garfield were held here. Such was life in Scranton in the year 1881.

William P. Lewis
Executive Director

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