



# LHS

The Lackawanna  
Historical Society  
Journal

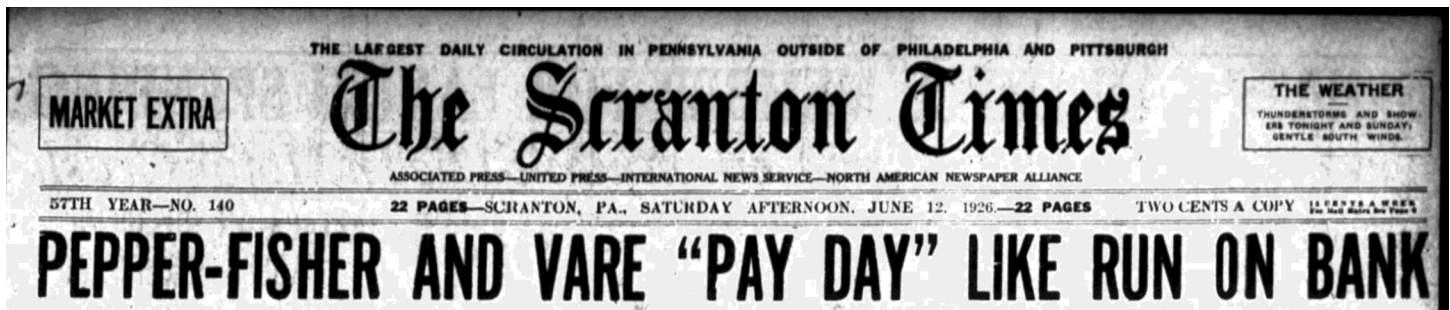
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## One Sentence Changed an Election

By: Gary Ryman



Historically, newspaper articles, editorials, complaints by citizens and losing politicians have been common after elections, and rarely have any impact on the end result. There was one case, though, when a few words in a single sentence ultimately changed the outcome of a major election in Pennsylvania.

In 1926, Pennsylvania governors could not serve consecutive terms. As his tenure in office began winding down, Governor Gifford Pinchot considered what was next. His initial plan was to return to private life and “go fishing.” Soon however, his thoughts turned to a run against George Pepper in the primary for the U.S. Senate seat, since continuing in Harrisburg was not an option. Gifford was attracted to the fight—which he knew would be an uphill battle—by the defeat of the Giant Power reforms in 1925 as well as losses in the Prohibition law enforcement area. Pepper’s congenial attitude toward political machines and their faded friendship may have also played a role.

After consulting with friends and family, most likely to reinforce what he already wanted to do, Gifford announced his candidacy for the Senate on March 13, 1926. A few days later, one of the Philadelphia machine leaders, William S. Vare joined Gifford and Pepper in the race.

At the time, Republicans had a steep registration advantage across the state, so the winner of the primary would be the almost-certain winner in the November general election. Because of this, there was great interest in the three-way race among various advocacy organizations in the state. There were suggestions and requests that various candidates drop out of the race to avoid splitting the vote and ensuring the election of a candidate less desirable on a particular issue. None of

the candidates acquiesced, and the race was on.

While the Senate primary plotting was in progress, maneuvering for the governorship was underway. While Andrew Mellon supported Pepper for the Senate, his machine had not decided on a candidate for governor. The Grundy organization supported John S. Fisher for governor but despised Pepper and were not supporting him for the Senate. Republican Chairman Harry Baker was harnessing the state committee apparatus to support former lieutenant governor Edward Beidelman for the governor’s mansion. But politics is a game of deal-making. Mellon needed help in Pepper’s campaign and Grundy similarly needed support for Fisher. A deal was struck for Mellon to support Fisher and Grundy to back Pepper, and Pepper-Fisher campaign offices throughout the state sprang up.

Pinchot spent considerably less than both opponents in the campaign, out of a desire to limit expenses, but almost certainly due to a major difference in available financial resources as well. The election was a battle between the candidates of the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh political machines, and Gifford was the odd man out. He lost badly with Vare taking 596,928 votes, Pepper 515,502, and Gifford bringing up the rear with only 339,127. Vare won only two counties, Philadelphia and Dauphin, but receiving 337,994 from Philadelphia alone was the difference. In Lackawanna County, “...the gang withheld certain ballot boxes and return sheets so long that the citizens became aroused and stormed the Court-house in Scranton.”

The voting patterns in Pennsylvania and the allegations of corruption were not only noticed within the commonwealth. The U.S. Senate took note as well; the Reed Committee chaired by Senator

*Cont. on pg. 6*

## *A Word from the President...*

**H**ello Everyone,

I know I've mentioned before how pleasant it is to live in an area that has all four seasons. The character of each season manifests itself in the weather, the celebrated holidays, and the daylight received. My favorite reflection of seasonal change noticed is in the landscape. That is a joy of living where we do, especially now that I've had my cataract surgery completed in both eyes! If any of you reading this has also had lens implants, then you understand. If you haven't yet had the procedure yet, be ready for a very pleasant change.

I must also say how pleased I was with this year's house and garden tour, offered to the community in late June. It was enjoyed by many: more than 300 attended, 70 volunteers helped to greet visitors at each site, and funding and sponsorship support was offered from six local businesses, three in-kind contributions, and twenty-five advertisers. Thank you to everyone involved in making this special event a wonderful success. As always, our LHS staff put their skilled effort into it, providing site histories, coordinating volunteers, and designing the tour book. It was a great way to celebrate summer.

Now, as we transition from summer and get ready for fall, I know it's not easy for everyone. So many of us fully enjoy the summertime fun, food and flowers but I think that change can be a good thing, and offer us much to anticipate. We can look forward to the beauty of the fall foliage and a long list of autumn activities! And I hope that some of the planned LHS programs detailed in this issue make your list!

As always thank you for your support,  
Michael Gilmartin President

### ***2024 Renewals are due in December!***

**About Membership...** *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 and the quarterly newsletter.* Attached is a membership form you can use to renew your membership or give to a friend or neighbor who is interested in joining. Please return it to:

The Lackawanna Historical Society at 232 Monroe Avenue, Scranton, PA 18510

#### **LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$35		
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$45	ADDRESS	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing	\$75		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$150		
<input type="checkbox"/> Silver	\$250	TELEPHONE	_____
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<input type="checkbox"/> Platinum	\$1000	EMAIL	_____

### ***The Lackawanna Historical Society 2023***

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The Lackawanna Historical Society is a 501(C) (3) non-profit organization which is dedicated to keeping vital the history of Lackawanna County. It is supported in part by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the Catlin Memorial Trust, Lackawanna County, and membership dues. Regular hours are Tues. - Fri. 10 am to 5 pm and Saturdays noon to 3 pm.

The Lackawanna Historical Society Journal is published by the Lackawanna Historical Society, 232 Monroe Avenue, Scranton, PA 18510 Tel. (570) 344-3841. Address questions to lackawannahistory@gmail.com

Members of the Society receive this publication. Membership contributions are \$35 and up for Individuals, \$45 for Families, and \$125 for Organizations. Special Silver, Gold, and Platinum levels of memberships are also available.

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# Thanks for your Support...

## History Makers A testimonial from one of our Legacy Society members:



In 2018, LHS member and then Trustee, John Farkas established a life insurance policy and named LHS as the beneficiary. We asked him to share this brief testimonial:

*Life Insurance is not something you typically buy for yourself—you buy it for those individuals you hold dear and organizations, whose missions are important to you. Leaving a legacy is a gift of financial security that we can leave to the next generations. The Lackawanna Historical Society meant a lot to my wife Nancy, and I felt the best way to acknowledge that passion was to establish a life insurance policy in her memory, and with the policy directed to sending the benefits to the LHS. It was easy to establish and allowed my son and I to preserve her memory, give back to the historical society, upon my passing, and with the added benefit of securing a tax break.*

-- John Farkas



John A. Farkas is currently the Director of Development at the Everhart Museum at 1901 Mulberry Street in Scranton, Pennsylvania.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

### Individual

Linda Hansen, Clarks Summit  
Paul Sable, Jim Thorpe

### Family

Brad & Janet Foley, Scranton  
Brian Kilcullen & Marguerite Nealon, Berwyn PA  
Thomas & Mary Ann Langan, Venice FL  
Edward Leahy, McLean VA  
Ray & Kaye Oman, Bethesda MD

### Sustaining

Jim Clark, Clarks Green

## MEMORIALS

### In Memory of JoAnn H. Castellino:

Robert & Mary Ann Savakinus

### In Memory of Jim Wert:

Robert & Mary Ann Savakinus

### In Memory of William Davis:

Robert & Mary Ann Savakinus

### In Memory of Anthony Rinaldi:

Joe Cimini

Robert & Mary Ann Savakinus

### In Memory of Deilsie Kulesa:

Juliana & Sarah Piccini

Robert & Mary Ann Savakinus

Contributions made in the name of individuals are placed in a Memorial Fund and are not used for general operations. To make a memorial donation, please send check payable to the Society with the name and address of person(s) for whom memorial is made.

All contributions to the Society are tax deductible to the fullest extent that the law provides.

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## Welcome NET Credit Union Members!

*LHS is proud to be a NET Credit Union Preferred Partner Group, allowing credit union members to become LHS members and LHS members to become credit unions members. Welcome to these new members:*

Chanel Addley, Scranton  
 Jenna Alunni, Jessup  
 Mariah Berry, Tunkhannock  
 Stephen Borick, Dunmore  
 Peter Brenkosh, Covington Twp.  
 Theresa Breutsch, Moscow  
 Christine Bruno, Mayfield  
 Frank Capozzi, Nanticoke  
 Marsha Carrubba, Carbondale  
 Scott Carter, Trucksville  
 Kimberly Cerreta, Tunkhannock  
 Auralee Collins, Old Forge  
 Luke Conner, Wyoming  
 Nikolas Corley, Jefferson Twp.  
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 Robert Davis, Covington Twp.  
 Paul Douglas, Honesdale  
 Brent Dyson, Springville  
 Janet Erickson, S. Abington Twp.  
 Christopher Fasano, Hawley  
 Casey Fitzpatrick, Duryea  
 Maria Fofi, Clarks Summit  
 Dana Fuentes, Carbondale  
 Cecelia Genova, Moscow  
 Heather Gensiak, Jessup  
 Mary Joe Glover, Susquehanna  
 Brandon Gumaer, Montrose  
 Dennis Hand, Archbald  
 Paul Hoffman, Tunkhannock  
 Brennon Horrcks, Exeter  
 Damien Howe, Madison Twp.  
 Jerome Hughes, Clifton Twp.  
 David Jake, Old Forge  
 Susan James, Olyphant  
 Amy Janzen, Beach Lake  
 James Kenosky, Spring Brook Twp.

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 Gerald Swift, Clarks Summit  
 Jill Tanana, Olyphant  
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 Jacob Thompson, Honesdale  
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 Timothy Williams, Luzerne  
 Kevin Wisniewski, Old Forge  
 John Wysocki, Dunmore  
 Edward Yablonski, Avoca  
 Joseph Yokavonis, Nanticoke

## ***In Appreciation...***

Thanks to everyone who donated items for our *Throwback Thursday* raffles at the Circle Drive-In this past summer including **Montage Mountain Resorts, Julie Esty, Wyoming Valley Ghost Tours, Laurie Cadden, On & On, Sidel's Restaurant, Dave Castelli, Terry's Diner, Chef Von & Mom, Kathy Nazar and City Limits Hair Salon.**





## Nancy's Corner

### Crystal Band Exemplifies Scranton's Enduring Musical Legacy

Although Scranton has a deep and rich arts and music legacy, from its impressive vaudeville roots to the many talented musicians, actors and songwriters who have found wider fame, there are few musical institutions that have consistently endured throughout the years. An exception to that, however, is the Crystal Band.

Formed in 1879 as a boys' brass band in the Petersburg section of Scranton, the band slowly grew in popularity before World War I drew many of the band's members enlist. The group became dormant for about two decades. Then in 1943 at the height of World War II, the band was revived by Edward Fries and George Schultz, two charter members of the band.

It regained its previously popularity almost immediately and quickly became a mainstay at all types of local social gatherings.

In a 1959 article celebrating the band's 80th anniversary, it noted: "The band has appeared in approximately 80% of all communities in an area bordered on the north by Hancock, NY and bordered on the south by Philadelphia. There has never been a period in the band's history when the organization has not been in de-

mand."

Always community-sponsored and always not-for-profit, the band welcomed musicians of all ages and became known for its Christmas and spring concerts, along with summer appearances at local picnics and church events.

Although the foundation of the Crystal Band is in its ties to the local community, they've also performed globally. In 1975, the band spent three weeks touring Romania, through the Ambassadors of Friendship program. They played 12 concerts across the country, and according to a 1983 Scrantonian Tribune profile of conductor H. Earl Brink, the trip was a huge success, and the band was even showered with flowers after many performances.

By 2003 it was the only remaining all-volunteer community band still in existence in Scranton, and still continues to perform today.

Although the number of years in which the Crystal Band has been active is impressive, what's more remarkable is the amount of people who have contributed time and passion to build and maintain this completely self-sustaining community organization, as well as the meaningful place that the



H. Earl Brink

band had in these people's lives.

In a 2003 Scranton Times article about the band, it noted that two of its current members at the time, Ralph and George Lutz were charter members from the band's revival in 1943.

"This kind of dedication to the band is the norm rather than the exception to the rule," the article stated. "In fact, it is a tribute to the important role the Crystal Band plays in the region that many of today's area musicians...have joined with the band to make music."

*The Lackawanna Historical Society is pleased to offer "Nancy's Corner" celebrating our musical history and dedicated in memory of LHS member and friend Nancy Farkas. Nancy was a true lover of the arts, especially music, and we hope that by sharing stories about our rich musical heritage, we will honor her memory and inspire others.*



## Trustee News...

by-law revisions on a motion by Trustee Linda Lynett, seconded by Member Rich Jenkins. Revisions included the addition of the *Platinum Membership category*; adding the *By-Laws Committee* to the standing committee list; revising *Article VII – Meetings* section to address meetings of the society; allowing meetings to be conducted virtually and allowing electronic voting when appropriate, re-inserting the dissolution clause into the by-laws, and providing for the disposition of items.

On Wednesday June 14 at 7 pm before the society's Winston Churchill program,

LHS members voted to accept recommended

by-law revisions on a motion by Trustee Linda Lynett, seconded by Member Rich Jenkins. Revisions included the addition of the *Platinum Membership category*;

adding the *By-Laws Committee* to the standing committee list; revising *Article VII – Meetings*

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allowing electronic voting when appropriate, re-inserting the dissolution clause into the by-laws,

and providing for the disposition of items.

*Cont. from pg. 1*

James A. Reed (D-MO) was established to investigate the irregularities. The committee found that money had corrupted the election process. Reed believed the investigation had actually found records documenting less than half of what was spent, primarily by Vare and Pepper. Pinchot's campaign provided detailed financial records showing all contributions and expenditures. Stymied by the lack of information from the other candidates, Reed took to the Senate floor. In a speech there he concluded "...that the political cancer has eaten its way into every part of the campaign and that money, not men, rules the state of Pennsylvania."

As expected, Vare easily won the general election against his Democratic opponent William B. Wilson, a former Secretary of Labor in Woodrow Wilson's administration. By law, the governor must subsequently certify the results of the election to the U.S. Senate. Pinchot took an unusual and controversial approach to this. The standard certification text the governor was supposed to use includes the phrase "duly chosen by the qualified electors." Instead, the certification read "this is to certify that on the face of the returns filed in the Office of the Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of the election held on the second day of November, 1926, William S. Vare *appears* to have been chosen by the qualified electors of the State of Pennsylvania." A change to one sentence started a tempest that tied the status of the Senate seat in a knot that would take years to unravel.

Pinchot explained clearly why he would not use the words "duly chosen." He wrote that "I cannot so certify because I do not believe that Mr. Vare has been duly chosen. On the contrary, I am convinced, and have repeatedly declared, that his nomination was partly bought and partly stolen, and that frauds committed in his interest have tainted both the primary and the general election. Therefore I have worded the certification required by law that I can sign without distorting the truth." Although incoming Governor Fisher issued an amended certification using the standard wording, the Senate refused to let Vare take the oath of office.

The outcome was not a good one for Vare. The legitimacy (or lack thereof) of Vare's election took years to resolve in the Senate and involved multiple committees. Beyond Pinchot's remarkable certification docu-

ment and his explanatory comments on the electoral fraud, the Democratic candidate, Wilson, filed a petition protesting any seating of Vare, claiming that if only the *legitimate* ballots had been counted, he would have won.

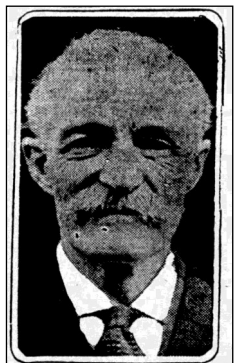
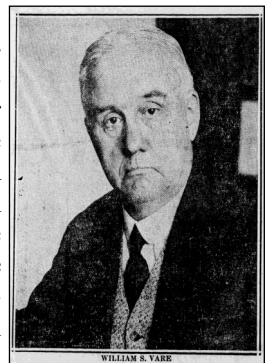
Having Governor Pinchot's certification as well as a revised version using the standard wording from his successor, Governor Fisher, who submitted it promptly upon taking office, the U.S. Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections ruled that the credentials submitted by

Governor Fisher were valid. However, it was left to the newly convened 70<sup>th</sup> Congress to make a final determination. In the Senate as a whole, there was strong opposition to accepting the conclusion of the committee that the credentials submitted by Governor Fisher were valid. Vare was blocked from taking the oath of office. Further investigation by the Reed Committee showed extensive fraud and corruption in the electoral process, particularly in Philadelphia. During this time, Vare suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, leaving him paralyzed on one side and unable to offer a defense while recuperating.

The committee's patience was exhausted by early 1929. Vare's representatives tried for a further delay but the committee was unsympathetic, pointing out that Vare had been well enough to participate at the Kansas City Republican National Convention. Vare's counsel then submitted a written response in an attempt to rebut the information discovered by the committee.

After evaluating the submission, the committee determined there was no evidence to refute their earlier determination of corruption. They reported to the Senate as a whole that Vare was not entitled to his seat. The process continued into the 71<sup>st</sup> Congress. Following a floor debate that considered the Reed committee report, that of the standing committee on Privileges and Elections, and Fisher and Pinchot's varying certifications, the Senate voted to deny William Vare his seat but also found that Wilson had not been elected. Within a week, on December 12, 1929, the Senate seated Joseph R. Grundy upon appointment by Governor Fisher. Grundy, another machine politician, was a major supporter and contributor to Fisher's campaign.

It was not the ending Gifford Pinchot would have written. But with a few words in one sentence, he changed an election and brought attention to voter fraud across the commonwealth.



*Clockwise from top left: George Pepper, John Fisher, Gifford Pinchot, William Vare*

*Quotations in this article are taken from Gifford Pinchot's unpublished manuscript held in the Library of Congress. Gary Ryman is the author of Gifford Pinchot: The People's Governor and four other books, all of which are available on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle formats.*

## Donation of Anthony Suraci Artifacts

Ella S. Rayburn, Curator

When the society receives artifact donations, I frequently ask, "What is the story? Why do we care about this donation? Why should the Historical Society accept and provide in-perpetuity care for this offering?" These questions were more than answered by Dominic Keating. Dominic is a nephew of Anthony "Tony" Suraci whose uniforms and military portrait were donated by another nephew Tommy Karam.

### Texted notes from Dominic Keating, April 18, 2023:

*Tony was Class of 1950 United States Naval Academy. He was immediately placed on the light carrier USS Bataan for Korea. Assigned to the ship were 35 WW2 Marine pilots flying gull wing propeller driven Corsairs against MIG jets. All 35 Marine pilots survived. They shot down several MIGs. But their primary goal was to give ground support to MacArthur's troops. After an assignment to the USS Missouri, Tony did 2 more Korean tours. He commanded ten five inch guns in 5 turrets and inflicted significant damage on North Korean railroads and ports.*

### Memories shared by Dominic Keating at Stirnas Restaurant, April 20, 2023:

*Dom noted that there was an incident at the Naval Academy that made him very proud of his uncle.*

*--When Tony was a sophomore at the US Naval Academy, a second classman, he played tennis and varsity squash. A Black student, last name Brown, possibly from New Jersey, asked Tony to play tennis with him after an evening meal. Brown was the only Black student at the school. Four students from the Deep South threatened Tony with "roughed up." Tony replied that he had a lot of friends from Brooklyn. They left Tony alone. The two midshipmen played tennis until Brown graduated in 1949.*

*--After the Andrea Doria was sunk off the coast of Nantucket on July 25, 1956, after being rammed starboard by the Stockholm, a ship with Swedish registry, the Suraci family was sitting around a card table discussing the accident. The Andrea Doria was a luxury transatlantic ocean liner of Italian registry. The Suracis came from Italy just as the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened. Tony's father, Anthony Suraci was the head of the family and all things Italian were promoted within the family. Tony's father asked a niece Gilda Tedesco to determine that the Stockholm was at fault. Tedesco, visiting from Brooklyn, was remarkably qualified to answer the question. Not only was she an early female lawyer she was a maritime lawyer. Tedesco said she could not speak about the accident as she was one of the lawyers working on the case. Tony's father then turned to him as a graduate of the Naval Academy and an experienced seaman. Tony said the Andrea Doria crossed over into the path of the Stockholm so was at fault. Father said, "Son, you must change your answer." Tony, "No."*

*Dom remembers the conversation as three generations of Suracis lived in the house on Jefferson Avenue, Dunmore. For a time, when he was a child, Dom and his Uncle Tony shared a room.*

*In relating the story, Dom gave Gilda the Italian pronunciation with a soft "G" coming out "Jilda."*

*A third brief story Dom shared involved heavy weight boxers: the Swede Ingmar Johansson and U.S. fighter Floyd Patterson, before their June 26, 1959, fight. When asked if he liked Patterson, Anthony said he did not because Patterson was Black. Tony countered that he was for Patterson -- the American over the Swede.*

Tony left the Navy in 1954 in order to operate the family owned business. In a tale of immigrant success, his Dominic, Anthony, Sr. and Frank Suraci left their hometown of Podogony, Calabria, Italy. Dominic in 1901, Anthony in 1903, and Frank in 1906 reuniting in New York City when they formed the Suraci Brothers Company, manufacturers of hand-rolled dry-cured cigars. In 1925 they purchased the Parodi family's New Jersey business doubling their output. Affected by the stock market crash in 1929, the now-called Parodi Cigar Company moved to Scranton where they set up their business and production. The Suracis reorganized the Parodi Company into the Avanti Cigar Company in 1982. Coming full-circle, the family sold the only remaining dry-cured cigar company in the United States to an Italian based company Manifatture Sigaro Toscano in 2015. In 2023 the company left Scranton for production in the Dominican Republic. The Italian owners continue to use the Dunmore factory site as its U.S. offices and distribution center. And, that's the story behind Tony Suraci's uniforms and portrait.





## Lackawanna Past Times Fall Schedule

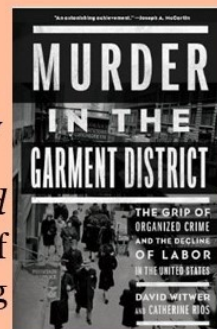
The Lackawanna Historical Society's monthly virtual lecture series continues!  
Email us at [lackawannahistory@gmail.com](mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com) to receive the Zoom link,  
or catch up on past episodes on our YouTube channel.



**Fri., Sept. 29 at 2 pm:** *Local History in Special Collections* with Michael Knies, Special Collections Librarian and Archivist at the University of Scranton

**Fri., Oct 27 at 2 pm:** *Stained Glass Treasures at the Albright Library* with reference librarian Alyssa Loney

**Fri., Nov. 17 at 2 pm:** *The Garment Industry and the Mafia* with David Witwer, Ph.D., professor of history at Penn State Harrisburg



## Fall Genealogy Workshop for Beginners

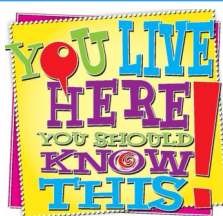
Are you just starting to trace your family genealogy? The experts from our Genealogy Forum are hosting a hands-on, small-group workshop on **Saturdays October 7, 14, 21, and 28** from 9:30 am to Noon. The workshop will be held in the Henkelman Room at the Scranton Public Library. Registration is required and participants must commit to all four sessions. The fee is \$25 for LHS Members and \$35 for Non-Members. Register by Friday September 29. Please call or email the Society for details.



### Local History Fair returns to the **VIEWMONT MALL**

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Stop at the Viewmont Mall on **Saturday, September 30** from **10 am to 4 pm** for this year's Local History Fair. Visit with more than 16 local history organizations who will be sharing information about membership, collections, and programs, as well as offering local history souvenirs and books for sale. Don't miss this great opportunity to discover our local treasures and learn more about our past!



### “You Live Here; You Should Know This!!”

Join us **Sunday, Sept. 24 at 4 pm** at the **Ritz Theater** for the return of our local history game show! Can last year's winners, Owen Worozbyt, Director of Operations for the Lackawanna Heritage Valley and Gerard Hetman Community Development Specialist at NeighborWorks, defend their title? Challengers are still coming to the table, but our students from Riverside and Valley View are working to stretch their knowledge to the limit. The games will continue in a fast-and-furious Jeopardy! style, testing contestants' knowledge of local people, places, and events. Winners will have exclusive bragging rights for one whole year as Local Lackawanna History Legends of Lore! Admission is \$10 adults, \$5 students and can be paid at the door. There are no advance tickets.



# DINE LACKAWANNA

Enjoy a night out & help support the Society by dining out at supporting locations!

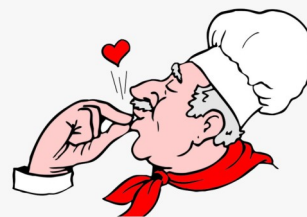


Thanks to Lamar Advertising for its ongoing support of this program.

Sept. 20: **Rosaliano's**  
209 Main St., Childs (570) 936-2668

Oct. 18: **Formosa**  
727 S State St., Clarks Summit (570) 585-1902

Nov. 15: **TBD** (check our website or call)



10 P.M., COURT HOUSE SQUARE, SCRANTON, PA.

## Scare Up Some History!

Celebrate Halloween in Scranton with a bit of history with the Lackawanna Historical Society's "Scranton After Dark" haunted walking tours this Halloween season!

Join the Society for a guided walking tour around Downtown Scranton for tales of mayhem and mysterious happenings at some of your favorite places. Tours will be given on Friday evenings: **September 29, October 6, October 13, October 20, and October 27.** Each tour begins at 7 p.m. and will meet at the Society's headquarters, the Catlin House, 232 Monroe Avenue, Scranton. The tour will take about two hours.

Join us to learn more about Scranton's perfidious past! Tours are \$15 per person; advance tickets are required.

Tickets can be purchased online here:

[lackawanna-historical-society.ticketleap.com/scranton-after-dark/](http://lackawanna-historical-society.ticketleap.com/scranton-after-dark/)



## A Night of Amusements

**NEW AND WONDERFUL  
ENTERTAINMENT**



Join us on Thursday evening, October 5 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm at Sidel's Restaurant for an evening of traditional Victorian entertainment including games of chance, fortune tellers, magical creatures, and more! Admission which includes non-games of chance activities and carnival themed refreshments is \$20 (\$15 for LHS members). Bring cash for games of chance and come dressed in period attire to help set the mood! We are excited to be trying something new and are sure it will be a wonderful night! Call or email the LHS to purchase tickets.

Thanks to Event Chair, Dalida Walton, and our sponsors,

**Toyota of Scranton (The Ringmaster),**

Posture Interactive, Sovereign Commercial Service, Doug Forrer and Ella Rayburn.

## **BEYOND THE CANVAS WITH RONNIE**

Not my usual "Beyond the Canvas" column. I'm taking a short break for a special guest author – my cousin and researcher extraordinaire, Ann Marie Castelgrande, who recently authored this most interesting article – this is part one of two parts being presented over the next two issues.

*-Ronnie Mead*

## **HANGINGS IN LACKAWANNA COUNTY (part 1)**

Between 1682 and 1834 approximately 252 people were hanged in Pennsylvania. During this period hangings mostly took place in open town squares. They were public affairs, attended by large crowds who came from miles around to observe. The earliest hangings were done on trees with a good strong limb on which to hang the rope – this manner of execution took on the term "gallows tree" or gallows, from the Proto-Germanic word "galgo" that refers to a "pole" or "tree branch". This later evolved into a crude crosspiece of strong timber nailed between two posts. A more sophisticated scaffold – a platform erected 9' from the ground - was first used in Lancaster, PA., on Oct 25, 1822. The floor of the platform was divided in the middle to allow it to swing open on hinges. A rope, tied around the person's neck, passed through a pulley. When the door swung open, the victim would fall and hang.

At the time, these public executions were often referred to as "ragtag and bobtail" events and were often "overwhelmingly emotional". All this was changed by the Act of April 10, 1834 when hangings were moved to local jails. In 1835 Pennsylvania was, in fact, the first state to eliminate the often-disruptive public hangings. NJ, NY and Massachusetts soon followed.

The legal responsibility of an execution rested with the county sheriff. Apparently, few officials wanted to step up to perform the actual execution duties, so a masked or charcoal smeared hired person would operate the gallows. Once hangings were held inside jails, the sheriff assumed the duties of the executioner. Witnesses were limited a few officials: ministers, physicians, and a dozen respectable citizens, often times the jury.

Between 1834 and June 9, 1913, (when the electric chair was introduced), over 400 persons from 67 counties were hanged in Pennsylvania jails. Only 6 were hanged during the period (1896 – 1913) in the Lackawanna County Jail (located at 1371 North Washing-

ton Avenue in Scranton). The Prison, first occupied in the fall of 1886, was completed to hold 110 inmates. It is still in operation today.



**LACKAWANNA COUNTY PRISON IN 1905**

The gallows used in the first two hangings at the Lackawanna County prison was borrowed from the Luzerne County prison. Scranton hired a professional hangman, James Van Hise from Newark, NJ, for the next three executions. He built his own patented gallows and transported it to the jail himself. His invention did away with the trap doors and steps to the gallows, instead using weights that were released, thus sending the man into the air. The hangman's rope, which was 25-30' long, was constructed of hemp. The knot was tied by the person who constructed the rope, so all the hangman had to do was place it properly around the victim's neck. (Ropes used in many PA hangings were made by Jacob Buff of Allegheny, who produced them for executions for over 20 years).

### **SIX HANGINGS IN LACKAWANNA COUNTY PRISON**

**Crescenzo Merola.** On July 1, 1896, Crescenzo Merola, of Old Forge, was the first person executed at the Lackawanna County jail, by then Sheriff Frank Clemons, Esq. Crescenzo had killed Emanuel Loro, a barber, over 15 cents Merola owed him. The barber and a friend were walking in Old Forge near E.J. Fallon's Hotel when he approached



Merola and demanded his money. Loro stated he "must buy bread as much as you". Merola then pulled out a revolver and shot Loro five times. He threatened to shoot the barber's friend too, but he then ran away instead. Merola was helped to escape to Italy and stayed there for 1 ½ years before returning to the United States, ending up in Boston. Scranton Detectives Barring and McSweeney tricked and caught Merola by placing an ad in a Boston newspaper for 500 Italian workers for a good paying job on the railroad. When Merola answered the ad, he was arrested. He denied his identity, using the alias, Francesco La Bracke. (He also had immigration papers on him when he was cap-



tured that said he was Vincenzo Lacosale). He was brought back to Scranton on Nov. 12, 1895.

Merola was arraigned before Judge H.M. Edwards, prosecuted by District Attorney Jones and Atty John J. Murphy and defended by Attorneys John J. Martin and Joseph U. Brown. He testified on the stand that he was not Merola. Several people, however, identified him as Crescenzo Merola, and he was convicted. Merola's attorney filed for another trial, which was denied. The date for his execution was set for May 26, 1896, but he was granted a stay by Governor Daniel H. Hastings and eventually hanged July 1, 1896.

Merola prayed the day and night before his hanging. He retired at 11:00 pm and slept soundly, waking at 5:45 am. When he woke, he dressed in the same clothes he was arrested in, a plain suit, light coat and brown pants, and then prepared for his fate. At 10:00 am, the corridor # 6 began to fill up with officials, the jury, newspaper reporters and other witnesses. Merola left his cell escorted by the sheriff, his deputies and two priests: Rev. Domenico Landro, Dunmore and Rev. Domenico Peruzzi, Hazelton. Merola was calm as he walked to the gallows and told Rev Landro he was ready to die. He was hanged at 10:06 am and declared dead at 10:27 am by Coroner Longstreet. The gallows used were the drop scaffold, modeled after one in Philadelphia and the rope was furnished free by a Philadelphia firm. Since this was the first hanging in the jail, a crowd gathered outside wanting to see any part of the execution. Sheriff Clemons planned every element of the execution stating, "my plans have carried out to the smallest detail". Clemons kept the details of the event secret until the hour before the execution. Merola's body was turned over the County Commissioners and he was buried in Cathedral Cemetery. He was 29 years old.

*The Times Tribune 1 July 1896*

*The Scranton Truth 23 January 1908*

**George Van Horn.** On May 4, 1899, George Van Horn, of Dunmore, aged 44, was the second person executed at the Lackawanna County Jail. Van Horn, originally a native of Monroe County, did not have an occupation, doing odd jobs to support himself. He was married in Iowa in 1876 and left his wife after a short time. He did not divorce his first wife before he married a second time in Michigan. The second wife filed for divorce in Lackawanna County for bigamy.

Van Horn murdered Mrs. Josephine Wescott at her boarding house on Linden Street and Franklin Avenue on August 26, 1896. Some newspaper articles say he was in love with Mrs. Wescott, but it is not clear if she shared those feelings. Other sources said he stole \$15

from her, and she had him charged with the crime. One night, while drunk, he entered her boarding house and hid in her cellar. When she entered the basement to get potatoes, Van Horn came up behind her and slashed Mrs. Wescott's neck with a razor. (He later claimed he never intended to kill her, saying he thought the dull side of the blade was on her neck and that he was just trying to scare her). Van Horn fled the scene, but Mrs. Wescott was still alive, and ran out of the cellar holding her neck. When witnesses tried to help her, she said: "My throat is cut; I have been murdered". They asked her who did this and she replied "George Van Horn". She died in the hospital the next morning. Van Horn left the area and ran away to a variety of locations, including Hawley, Troy, Buffalo, Chicago, Iowa and was finally arrested in Wadena, Iowa a year later. He was brought back to Scranton by Captain of Police, John Davis.

Van Horn was tried before Judge R. W. Archbald in 1896. His lawyers were Attorneys E. W. Thayer and Mr. Wedeman, who tried to fight the guilty verdict. To spare his life, his case was brought before the Supreme Court and board of pardons with a plea of insanity, claiming he fell and hit his head years before the murder. He claimed he was never the same after the fall. District Attorney Jones fought the appeals and the guilty plea stood. Van Horn was hanged during the administration of Sheriff Clarence Pryor.

The night before the execution, he retired about 10:00 pm and slept soundly. He woke to a "heartly breakfast", dressed in a new black suit, smoked some cigars and spoke to Rev. R. R. Bulgin who prayed with him. His brother John Van Horn came to say goodbye. George asked about his mother, showing some emotion, silently weeping after his brother left.

The gallows were inspected, and the jurors, news reporters and people holding passes were admitted to witness the hanging. His lawyer, E. W. Thayer, came to say goodbye but did not stay for the execution. Van Horn signed a statement he dictated to Rev. Bulgin which warned anyone to "leave the wine cup alone" and "to the young, I would beg them to shun evil company". He admitted his guilt and asked to be forgiven. Van Horn was somber when he went to the gallows but otherwise showed little emotion. He was hanged at 10:03 am and declared dead at 10:09 am. by Dr. Wehlau and Dr. Donne, the jail physician. The sheriff allowed the crowd outside the prison to view the drop scaffold before the hanging and the rope was burned after the execution. The funeral was held at his mother's home in Dunmore, and he was interred in the Dunmore cemetery.

*The Tribune: 05 May 1899*

*The Scranton Republican, 05 May 1899*

**"Hang around" for more in the next issue.**





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## **EVENTS & VIRTUAL HAPPENINGS**

**Fri., Sept. 8, 6 pm**

**WYOMING VALLEY GHOST TOURS** investigate Catlin House

**Sat., Sept. 9, 10 am GENEALOGY FORUM**

*Finding Records in Germany* at the Valley Community Library

**Sat., Sept. 9, 11 am**

**DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR** Lower Hill section

**Wed., Sept. 20 DINE LACKAWANNA** @ Rosaliano's (BYOB) (p. 9)

**Sun., Sept. 24, 4 pm (p. 8)**

**YOU LIVE HERE; YOU SHOULD KNOW THIS!**

*local history game show* at the Ritz

**Fri., Sept. 29, 2 pm (p.8)**

**PAST TIMES** via Zoom *Local History in Special Collections*

**Fri., Sept. 29, 7 pm (p.9)**

**SCRANTON AFTER DARK** *haunted walking tours* begin  
and run every Friday at 7 pm through October \$15

**Sat., Sept. 30, 10 am - 4 pm (p.8)**

**LOCAL HISTORY FAIR** at the Viewmont Mall

**Thurs., Oct. 5, 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm (p.9)**

**A NIGHT OF AMUSEMENT** at Sidel's Restaurant

**Saturdays in October, 9:30 am (p.8)**

**GENEALOGY WORKSHOP FOR BEGINNERS**

at the Albright Memorial Library \$35 (\$25 for LHS Members)

**Wed., Oct. 11 1pm GENEALOGY FORUM**

*Lackawanna County Deeds with Evie McNulty* via Zoom

**Wed., Oct. 18 DINE LACKAWANNA** @ Formosa (p. 9)

**Sat., Oct. 21, 2 pm E. G. W. DIETRICH**, at the Albright Library  
Chris Jend will present an overview of noted architect EGW Dietrich  
(1857-1924) and showcase the buildings he designed in Scranton.

**Fri., Oct. 27, 2 pm (p.8)**

**PAST TIMES** via Zoom *Stained Glass Treasures at the Albright*

**Fri., Nov. 17, 2 pm (p.8)**

**PAST TIMES** via Zoom *Garment Industry and the Mafia*

**SAVE THE DATE: Sat, Dec. 9, 11 am to 2 pm**

**HOLIDAY EMPORIUM AT THE CATLIN HOUSE**

With lecture by author Phil Mosley on his latest work,  
"Telling of the Anthracite" at 1 pm.

Email [lackawannahistory@gmail.com](mailto:lackawannahistory@gmail.com) to receive History BYTES

## **University of Scranton's *Scranton's Story, Our Nation's Story* FALL EVENTS**

### **Scranton Stories:**

#### **Oral History Portrait Photographs**

October 27 - November 17, Hope Horn Gallery

Over the past two years, the Scranton community has explored themes of history belonging, and identity through *Scranton's Story: Our Nation's Story*, a series of humanities-based lectures, discussions, community tours, story exchanges, and interviews funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This exhibition is part of the project's final phase, an oral history initiative called "Scranton Stories." It showcases portraits, personal statements, and interview links from more than thirty community members interviewed to give voice to a broad array of Scranton experiences and connect them to our national story.

### **Scranton Stories Exhibit Events:**

Friday, October 27

5 pm - 6 pm: Panel Discussion at Brennan Hall 228

6 pm - 8 pm: Public Reception at Hyland Hall 407

### **Who are We as a Nation? Educating for Democracy Humanities & Hoban Keynote lecture and book signing with Danielle Allen**

Thursday, November 16, 7 pm - 8: 30 pm  
DeNaples Center Ballroom

Danielle Allen, PhD, is the James Bryant Conant University Professor and Director of the Allen Lab for Renovating Democracy at the Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center, co-chaired the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship and is the author of numerous books including her most recent *Justice by Means of Democracy*. This keynote lecture with Q&A and discussion will conclude the *Scranton's Story, Our Nation's Story* project organized by the University and community partners and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and consider the question "who are we?" as members of the Scranton community and the nation and how can we how can we "educate for democracy" in the run-up to the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. The event is also a Hoban lecture, an esteemed lecture series hosted in collaboration with the Lackawanna Bar Association.