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THE FOUNDERS OF
SCRANTON

—
By E. MERRIFIELD

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THE FOUNDERS OF SCRANTON

By E. MERRIFIELD

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In 1742 when Count Zinzendorf, a Moravian Missionary came to the Wyoming region, there was an Indian village situate on the lowlands between the Central City and Providence. This is the first evidence we have of human habitations in the territory embraced in the City of Scranton. They belonged to the tribe of Munseys, of which Capoose later became the chief. Every indication of the settlement was long since obliterated, except traces of their burial places nearby and the old apple tree where they held their councils. This decayed and was blown down in 1885.

The City of Scranton occupies the territory of Providence Township, excepting the part taken up by the Borough of Dunmore. Providence was one of the six townships established in 1770 by the Susquehanna Land Company, chartered by the colony of Connecticut. There was a conflict between this colony and Pennsylvania as to jurisdiction, about which it is unnecessary now to inquire. Suffice it to say, Providence was the first municipal organization in this territory. Towards the northerly section, Isaac Tripp came in 1771 and built a house on the flats where had been the Indian village. In 1786, Enoch Holmes came and built the first house on land which subsequently came to be the village of Providence. This was incorporated into a borough in 1849, the second municipality within the old township limits. In 1794-5 William Bishop and Joseph Fellows, respectively, in the order named, settled in the westerly section of the township, which subsequently became Hyde Park. They were, in fact, founders of this village. It was incorporated into a borough in 1852, being the third municipal organization within the township.

In 1788, Philip Abbott took up land and made improvements on Roaring Brook in the southeasterly section. He disposed of his interest to John and Seth Howe who, in turn, sold to Ebenezer Slocum in 1798, who was soon after joined by his brother, Benjamin Slocum. This locality was from the beginning favorably looked upon for manufacturing purposes. Former owners had erected a sawmill and grist mill and the Slocums added an iron manufactory and a distillery, so it will be noted that they were the first to make iron in this locality. In 1826, Ebenezer purchased the interest of his brother and carried on the business alone. He died in 1832, leaving about 1,800 acres of land, which embraces the greater part of the Central City of Scranton. There was no village, only four or five residences and the mills. The property was partitioned into four parts to be sold for the benefit of the heirs. One of these parts containing about 504 acres, running from the river to the town line and taking in the most densely improved part of the present city, came into the possession of Alva Heermans, a son-in-law of Ebenezer Slocum. He was holding it for sale, and in 1838 William Merrifield, William Ricketson and Zeno Albro became the purchasers. Recognizing that its principal value was the anthracite coal, which showed on the banks of the creek, and the evident water-power, hence its great advantages as a manufacturing locality, at once began efforts to find a purchaser of means who would improve the same and utilize the property. After nearly two years of effort, through correspondence and otherwise, they came in contact with William Henry. He came and made extensive examinations, which finally led to an option sale to William Armstrong, a capitalist residing near New York. He had accepted a draft of \$500, drawn by Mr. Henry, to bind the agreement. A day was fixed for him to come and complete the purchase and a deed was prepared for the transfer. His country home was on the Hudson, near Newburg. On his way to the boat landing his horse was

frightened and ran away. He was thrown out and killed. His heirs were unwilling to complete the purchase and forfeited the \$500.

Mr. Henry at once got in communication with the grantors, asking whether they would allow the \$500 to apply in case he could find another purchaser. This was assented to and Henry went to Seldon T. Scranton, his son-in-law, and his brother, George W. Scranton, who in turn induced Sanford Grant to join them in the enterprise and they came on and completed the purchase. The deed that had been executed for Armstrong is in my possession. It was the intention of Mr. Armstrong to establish a large manufacturing plant with anthracite coal as the fuel. If he had lived and succeeded this place would not have been known as Scranton. It shows how quickly the proposals of men and the destiny of localities may be changed by the interposition of Providence.

Well do I recollect the warm August day when George W. Scranton, Seldon T. Scranton and Sanford Grant came to my father's place in Hyde Park to take the deed. George W. was the principal spokesman. Everything went smoothly until the married women objected to signing without the promise of a dress pattern. It was a Pennsylvania custom and these Jersey men did not seem to understand the force of it. Parleying at once ceased, however, when George W. said it would be done even if at his own expense. They immediately organized a company under the name of Scrantons & Grant and commenced operations. They began the erection of the blast furnace in September, 1840, with William Henry as superintendent. In about three months Philip H. Mattes purchased an interest and the firm was reorganized as Scrantons, Grant & Co. Mattes did not come to reside here but sent his son, Charles F., to represent him, who in later years became a potent factor in the success of the business.

During the incipency of the undertaking William

Henry came to Hyde Park to live and was locally in charge, George W. and Seldon T. Scranton going back and forth to and from their homes in New Jersey as circumstances might require. The place began to assume the dimensions of a village and Mr. Henry gave it the name of Harrison in honor of the president-elect. In the fall of 1841 George W. Scranton came to reside in Harrison, assuming the management of the business of the firm. Here he remained until March, 1844, when he exchanged places with his brother Selden and went back to Oxford Furnace. He returned to reside in Harrison in the early part of 1846, but all the time he had kept in close touch with the business of Scrantons, Grant & Co. It was in November of this year that Joseph H. Scranton, a cousin of George and Selden, came permanently upon the scene and with his brother-in-law, Joseph C. Platt, purchased the interest of Sanford Grant. The new firm was organized as Scrantons & Platt. Joseph came to reside at Harrison in 1847 and was made general manager of the business.

A postoffice was established in 1850 under the name of Scranton and on January 27, 1851, the name was changed to Scranton. On the 14th of February, 1856, the Borough of Scranton was incorporated, so at that time there were four municipal organizations in the old town of Providence—Hyde Park embracing the southwestern section, Providence taking in the northwestern, Scranton the southeastern and the balance remaining under the township organization.

1840, the time when Scrantons & Grant began operations for the manufacture of iron, dates the beginning of the prosperity of this section. At that time the township contained a population of about six hundred and fifty. There were four shoemakers, three blacksmiths, three wagonmakers, one cooper shop, one axe factory, one grain cradle, two cabinet factories, one fulling mill, one gunmaking and repair shop, one for wood turning, two for tailoring,

four sawmills, three grist mills, one tanning and currying establishment. Coal for domestic use was mined and sold by William Merrifield, the Tripps and Von Storchs. There were six general merchandise stores and two millinery shops, five licensed hotels, six schoolhouses, a Providence Union Library and one church edifice; religious meetings mostly being held in the school houses.

The company began manufacturing iron in 1841. After five years of varying success and misfortunes it became apparent that there must be some more feasible way established of getting to market and to this purpose George W. Scranton directed his efforts. Joseph H. had relieved him of the burden connected with the manufacturing end and he went at the work with all of his energy and tact. Various schemes were considered. At one time there was considerable agitation about slackwatering the Lackawanna. But the two gaps in the mountains, the one east and the other west, were natural outlets for a railroad and to this purpose every effort was directed. There were already separate charters in existence. To get control of them and to get legislation necessary to subserve the interest of this section was a herculean task. That accomplished, then how to get the money was an obstacle still more difficult. Joseph H. Scranton had established the manufacturing enterprise on a firm basis, with a credit unimpeachable, and these two giant men went into the New York money market only to come out with success. The result was the building of the northern division of the Lackawanna and Western Railroad from Scranton, connecting with the New York and Erie at Great Bend. George W. Scranton was made general manager, at all times having the active aid of Scrantons & Platt. The road was opened for traffic on October 20, 1851. This was the second important enterprise that gave an impetus to the growth and population of this section. The third was the building of the southern division to reach New York. An organization had been effected on the 26th of

December, 1850, with George W. Scranton as president. Among the directors were Selden T. Scranton, Joseph H. Scranton and Joseph C. Platt. The name of the road was changed to the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad and on the 27th of May, 1856; it was formally opened and connection was made with the New Jersey Central for New York.

With these improvements the population of Scranton Borough increased rapidly as well as that of Hyde Park and Providence. The foundation of a populous city was assured—all this under the controlling management of the men I have referred to. In 1866, through the efforts of prominent citizens, the three boroughs and the balance of the township were consolidated, and the City of Scranton incorporated, with a provision establishing a mayor's court with jurisdiction measurably coextensive with the county courts. This had much to do with giving the town a permanence which it had not heretofore enjoyed. The crowning act, however, was the establishment of Lackawanna County in 1878, and making Scranton the county seat. This settled the future of Scranton and the population thereafter went forward with leaps and bounds.

We now come to the inquiry as to who were the founders of Scranton and in considering it we must, in a measure, base conclusions as to how we find the word defined. If it means to originate, to establish, in that light we must accord to William Henry his proper place. He came at first and devoted much time in studying the general topography of the country, in making mineralogical investigations, and we have seen what trouble he had in securing a purchaser for the property. It has been mentioned to me that credit is due to William Merrifield. That is not for me to claim or suggest. It is true that he became a purchaser of the property for the sole purpose of trying to induce men of means to come and invest with the view of starting improvements and did succeed after nearly two

years of effort in getting in touch with William Henry. He was very active in trying to secure slackwater navigation on the Lackawanna. While a member of the legislature, and afterward, he was indefatigable in his efforts to assist the Scranton Company in obtaining legislation necessary for its success. In the early forties when their credit was at the lowest ebb he did what he could to sustain it. He was among the first to lay out his lands into building lots and in all movements looking to local improvements he was a potent advocate. It is for others to suggest his place.

It was George W. Scranton, Selden T. Scranton and Sanford Grant who climbed over that great Pocono mountain, came into the wilderness, paid their money and devoted their time towards the development of a great manufacturing industry, to whom special credit is due. In a very short time Philip H. Mattes, of Easton, put in his money and sent his son, Charles F., to represent him, who through all the years of the activity of the Scranton Company was its active and zealous assistant. He, too, is entitled to honorable mention.

The onerous duties thrown upon George W. Scranton, by giving attention to the concern at Oxford Furnace and here at the same time, were wearing upon him and he began to look about for more help. He went to his cousin, Joseph H. Scranton, then residing in the south, and appealed to him to come to his aid. After much persuasion Joseph consented and in 1846 allied himself with the Scranton Company. The next year he came to reside and assumed all the duties incident to the management of the iron manufactory. His brother-in-law, Joseph C. Platt, was already on the ground. The company was reorganized and no more fortunate thing could have occurred, not only to the parties directly interested, but to the whole community. The advent of two such men as Joseph H. Scranton and Joseph C. Platt was of such importance that it infused new life into all their transactions and was so potent in stimulating the

growth of the town as to put them in the category of founders of the place which soon began to grow into a city. It too relieved George W. Scranton so that he could give necessary attention to outside matters which were crowding upon them, the proper disposition of which was becoming imperative considering the welfare of the concern and the community.

Before and when I came to manhood I knew all these men. With William Henry I was particularly acquainted, and often talked with him; how he had tramped these mountains in search of minerals, of the difficulties with which he had to contend, his successes and disappointments. He was an accomplished mineralogist, but his knowledge of the manufacture of iron by the use of anthracite was rather theoretical than practical. He was a man of fine presence, affable and considerate in his dealings with men. He well deserves the distinction of being an important agent in the establishment of this city. Selden T. Scranton was his son-in-law and that is perhaps the reason why Mr. Henry got the ear of the Scrantons after failing to complete the sale to Armstrong.

Selden had not the affability of his brother George, nor had he the benevolent temperament. He had a wonderful faculty for bridging over troubles by getting the company into debt and that had much to do with the final success of the concern. The company became largely involved with several rich New York merchants and George W. with his great persuasive powers would go down and get them to take their pay in stock of the company. Selden was full of resources and many were the stories told suggesting the fertility of his brain in getting out of a dilemma—how he met the allegation of the brittle quality of their nails by becoming an expert and driving them into an oak plank without a miss—how he could meet creditors who came for the return of borrowed money, who would not only leave without it, but would actually open their pocketbooks and

hand out more. That such a man was invaluable in the concern goes without saying. He had great business capacity and was an exemplary citizen. It is well that he is one of the parties from whom our city takes its name. When prominent men of the village got together to discuss the question of changing the name from Harrison, and Scranton was suggested, there was not a dissenting voice. The three Scrantons, George W., Joseph H. and Selden T., had been at the front through success and adversity, they assumed the responsibilities, to them the honor of the name belonged, and they got it.

Sanford Grant, who left a comfortable home in New Jersey and came to Slocum Hollow to live, placing his money in the enterprise, deserves great credit for making the sacrifices incident to such a move. He took charge of the mercantile department and right well he performed his duties. He was a very careful man—a man of good common sense, and no doubt was in constant consultation in the business transactions of the company.

I have heretofore noted that Joseph C. Platt came about the same time with Joseph H. Scranton. Here was a man of extraordinary business qualifications; particularly was he safe as a counselor. Quiet and unobtrusive, he brought into their consultations a profound judgment that carried weight, and to him is due much of the success that from that time attended their efforts. He it was who superintended the plotting of the real estate into lots and had charge of the disposition of them. That it was well done and with an eye to the future is now, after having grown to a large city, quite apparent. On a few occasions I met him with others in consultation about matters of public utility and could not but admire the intelligent views expressed and the potency of the reasons advanced. He was a man of integrity, who knew how to treat his neighbor justly, and did it. He was a good man in all that the word implies. His attention to civic duties, his moral deportment and his benevolent

impulses made him loved and honored. That such a man helped to complete the foundation of our city is a matter of pride.

George W. Scranton, whom we have seen had been so intimately connected with all the operations and movements concerning this industry and the building of the railroads, was a remarkable man—large and fine looking, with a benevolent countenance, he attracted attention wherever he went. He was a man whom, if a stranger passed on the street, would more than likely turn around and wonder who he was. But it was his genial ways, his dignified deportment, yet always approachable, that attracted most attention. He drew men to him as with a magnet. His business ability was good and his intellectuality of the first order. He was not a great moneymaker, but in the field of finance, in the comprehension of great undertakings, he had no superior. Thus it was, that after he came to have the strong arm of his cousin, Joseph, to lean upon, he could and did go out into the business world and become a potent factor in the building of these railroads. It was the possession of great ability that attracted the attention of the people. When they saw the necessity of changes in our economic laws that manufacturing interests might properly be protected, they turned to him and sent him to Congress. He was industrious and an incessant worker—too much so, as the sequel proved. For fifteen years he and his cousin Joseph worked harmoniously for the good of the firm and this community. They had implicit confidence in each other, born of intimate association and affection. The congressional duties thrust upon George added much to his labors and his health gave way. It obliged him to come home and seek needed rest. It was too late. On the 24th of March, 1861, at the age of fifty years, he peacefully passed to his eternal rest. It cast a gloom over the county and state. A great man had fallen in the midst of his most urgent usefulness. Eulogiums and panegyrics came from the press

of the town and county, the state and the seat of the National Government. Our community was stricken—grief was depicted on every countenance. When it came to escorting him to his last resting place the procession was immense. It was made up of five divisions, represented by different organizations, and the representative men of all this section.

Rev. M. J. Hickok preached the funeral sermon. Among other things he said: "I do no injustice to the living or dead when I affirm of Colonel Scranton that this young city—the giant of the woods—these roaring furnaces, shrieking engines, busy collieries and outflowing wealth are all his appropriate monuments."

The leading paper of this place concluded its editorial thus: "Patient worker, public-spirited citizen, generous friend, affectionate husband, beloved father, farewell. We shall miss thee evermore among the haunts of the living, but shall hold thy memory precious among the honored dead."

The Philadelphia Press concluded an editorial saying: "He was in truth a model man—generous, magnanimous and self-sacrificing. * * * If the district he represented has lost a benefactor, the great state to which he was an ornament has lost a defender."

At a meeting held in Philadelphia, Senator Ketcham said: "He found the region in which he settled a wilderness, but his mind soon mapped out its field of work, and under his creative energies and active influence the forest passed away, the railroad track was laid over mountain and through gorge, and the light of civilization and human progress beamed upon our land and blessed it. Scranton sprang into existence. * * * Vice fled from his presence and a mean man could not be mean where he was, for the hand and nobility of his soul radiated and warmed other men's hearts. He was great in his conceptions, in his creative energies and in his executive power." There were other addresses equally laudatory, but these quotations will suffice.

Allowing that George W. Scranton laid the foundation

stone, so it may be truthfully said that Joseph H. Scranton laid the corner stone of the superstructure on which our city was built. He came when needed most. He was a man of intense energy, of fruitful resources and of wonderful business capacity. He looked into a proposition—studied it with assiduity, acted quickly and with power. His physique was in his favor and with a large brain with plenty of gray matter, he entered into an enterprise with an indomitable will that knew no such word as fail. He came at the opportune time, when clouds were hanging over. He acquainted himself with the possibilities and went to work. In due time enlarged furnaces appeared with their lurid flames shooting skyward, lighting up the heavens and sending cheer and hope to the down-hearted. Joseph H. Scranton was a broad-gauged and liberal-minded man. He had wonderful command over men. He liked a joke and could perpetrate one, thus becoming a very genial associate. He was industrious, a hard and unceasing worker. When the men under him were clamoring for eight hours a day he was working fourteen hours to keep them busy. The amount of work he could accomplish in a given time was simply amazing. He worked too hard and thus undermined his health. With the view of rest and restoration he went to Europe in 1872. He had waited too long. He died at Baden Baden on the 6th of June of that year, in his fifty-ninth year, at the very zenith of his intellectual power and usefulness. When the news came flashing over the ocean it cast a pall over this community. Business was mostly suspended and men went about with bowed heads and tearful eyes. It seemed like an irreparable blow. A short quotation from the memorial sermon of Doctor Cattell tells the sad story.

"He was a man whose success in all the things that men most desire and for which they strive and toil was conspicuous. I need not dwell upon the events of his busy life. The honorable record is known to all. Scarcely had the ocean cable throbbed with the sad message of his death,

when the public press hastened to pay well-deserved tributes to his memory, and today this entire city—hushed in all its busy activities—no less by the spontaneous impulses of the citizens than by the proclamation of the mayor—this silent city is filled with the thronging multitudes that follow him to the grave; and men speak to each other of the purity of his private life, on which there is no stain; of his integrity, that knew no dishonor; of the public spirit and enterprise that placed him in the front rank of all the great movements which have given to this region its unprecedented prosperity; of the rare business sagacity and executive ability which amassed a fortune; of all these things do men speak today, and by the great loss which has fallen upon the whole city in the death of such a man, while they are not unmindful of that more sacred sorrow which mourns a devoted husband and father and brother."

I have been speaking of the founders of this city. They came here to establish a business and necessarily to make it their home. They were public-spirited men and took pride in surrounding themselves with all accessories necessary to convenience and safety. How well they builded is shown upon every side. It would be an invidious distinction to attempt to say who did the most in this great work. They worked together harmoniously, with but one end in view, and that the good of the whole. To no one man is due more credit than to Joseph H. Scranton for his labor and foresight resulting in a city with its hundred spires pointing heavenward, its great school houses, its immense business blocks and elegant homes. Let us be thankful that he lived and devoted the best years of his life to the establishment of the city which bears the name of himself and kinsmen.

I will not let this opportunity pass without alluding to the son who has been a helpmate through many of the struggling years of this great enterprise. From boyhood he plodded and worked for the success of the Lackawanna

Iron and Coal Company. Whenever trouble came and the integrity of the city was threatened, he stood manfully forth as its defender. William W. Scranton, manifestly our first citizen, looking forward with a prophetic eye for the wants of a great cityful, stepped forward and gave his talents toward the establishment of a water system that stands without a peer, and for all time the people are protected against the elements of nature. Those lakes dotted over the eastern hills—gems of the mountains—not only represent utility, but add beauty to the scene. I will speak of the one rightly named Lake Scranton. God had made a natural basin there, and Scranton's artistic eye saw the possibility. The result was one of the most beautiful sheets of water the eye needs to rest upon. On one side the native forest comes to the water's edge. On the other huge ledges of rock add grandeur to the scene. Not satisfied with this work for utility, he wanted the people to enjoy its beauties, and he builds a permanent roadway that affords a drive and walk of unparelled beauty. Not only that, he made practicable the reaching of two mountain peaks that display magnificent views; where the tired and weary townsman may go and feast his eyes on nature's entrancing landscapes and find rest, recreation and health. These generous acts of Mr. Scranton should be fully appreciated. He gratuitously expended tens of thousands of dollars that the people might be made happy. It adds prosperity and renown to the city, and I am glad to give testimony to the worth of these philanthropic acts. I am here to speak a just modicum of praise. In honoring him we are honoring ourselves. May gentle zephyrs fan the evening of his life. He has won the gratitude of our people.



