

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Wednesday, December 5, 1984, 8:00 P.M.

Plan to attend the Christmas Program of the Lackawanna Historical Society on Wednesday evening, December 5 at 8 o'clock at the Catlin House. The program will feature an evening of seasonal choral music presented by the Chamber Choir of the University of Scranton Singers under the direction of Cheryl Boga. The sixteen member Chamber Choir will perform selections by Handel, Mendelsohn, Britten, and Holst. There will be a social hour and refreshments following the music. Members are encouraged to bring a guest!

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMS - 1985

February 13 - Robert Schweitzer, curator of the Everhart Museum, will present a slide lecture on Dr. Isaiah Everhart and the Everhart Museum.

March 20 - The Folklore Society of Northeastern Pennsylvania will present a program of music featuring Irish and English folk songs, mining and labor songs, and contemporary music.

April 17 - Michael Washo, director of Historic Preservation, will speak about "Historic Preservation In Scranton."

May 8 - THE ANNUAL DINNER MEETING - will feature a lecture about the "Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company" by Dr. David Salay, Director of the Anthracite Museum Complex.

A TRIBUTE TO REV. WILLIAM LEWIS

— by Esther K. Friedmann and Janice P. Patterson

"He was eager to help people, not just willing, but eager- no matter how tired he was or how busy," declared one friend who had worked closely with Bill Lewis for many years. A family member remarked that this slight man with bushy brows, thick curly hair and intense, penetrating eyes "tried to do 100 years work in 50 years."

History, especially local history, was his first love and he pursued it here and abroad, tracking down his own ancestors and those of others. No inquiry made of him was ever too much. This consuming interest in history seems to have been fostered at an early age. His father recalls a visit to Mount Vernon with his own young family of six children. When it was time for him to leave for home, Bill was nowhere to be found. After a thorough search of the grounds, he was discovered in the garden holding an object wrapped in paper. Bill, then about nine or ten, had uncovered a loose hand-made brick he thought belonged to George Washington. Wishing to preserve it, he was carrying it home. Somewhere that old brick is incorporated into the Lewis homestead in Waverly.

One of his earliest pleasures was questioning older people. Although he began collecting local genealogies at the age of nine, the first notebook is dated much later. "Book No. I" was carefully inscribed "ABINGTON HISTORY - Notes on Visits to Abington Old People, 1942-43." Not a space was to be found among his carefully detailed accounts of family trees and migrations! During this period when Bill was meticulously compiling his notebooks, he joined the Lackawanna Historical Society. No doubt he was one of its youngest members. That was 1943.

Surely he "marched to a different drummer." As an old friend recalls, "Together we combed all the obscure cemeteries of the area, spending long afternoons reading markers and making rubbings. Other times we went to auctions and pooled our resources to buy a box of treasures."

With his knowledge of and love for local history, he was destined to be elected to the Board of the Lackawanna Historical Society in 1958. Ten years later he became its president. On November 10, 1976, while presiding at his first membership meeting following his appointment as executive director, Bill expressed his special feelings at that moment. He was delighted to be serving in his new post and he declared that his task would be "to preserve, interpret, and make known the history and culture of Lackawanna County and Northeastern Pennsylvania." How well he succeeded in fulfilling that goal!

Bill Lewis was generous with his time and ever willing to share his vast knowledge with the public. . . When asked a question. . . [he] would launch into a comprehensive historical tale, complete with characters, trends, inventions, and landmarks - all real and all, it seemed, committed to his memory.

— from an editorial in the *Abington Journal*, May 9, 1984

After his appointment as the first full-time director of the Lackawanna Historical Society, he inventoried and organized much of the collection. He was instrumental in persuading the Scrantons to hang the family portraits on the second floor landing of the Catlin House.

Local history excited him and he never researched a subject without gleaning some interesting facet of it which added a personal touch to his talks. He was truly a magician with history! By capturing the pulse of an era, he could re-create personalities, families, and even entire cities. He understood and narrated to his audiences sweeping trends in commerce, architecture, industry, and art. He sympathized with the problems and recognized the successes of ethnic groups, labor movements, even neighborhoods. Bill could take an old photograph or a slice of history and bring to life those scenes frozen by the shutter of the camera or imprinted upon the page.

As the recognized authority on local history, his byline was seen frequently on history articles in the regional newspapers. One of his most noteworthy accomplishments was to single-handedly rescue the Tripp Family homestead from demolition by the Scranton Redevelopment Authority in 1972. Not only a frequent lecturer at the Historical Society meetings, he was also sought after as a speaker for many different groups. Among his papers are the brief notes for his speeches. He rarely wrote out his speeches! Throughout them he repeated the same themes over and over again, always optimistic, always encouraging:

NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA - not the most historic, not the most affluent - but a beautiful, scenic part of America, that IS part of American History

THE PEOPLE - the area's greatest asset: friendly, warm, neighborly, caring

TIMES - difficult, always have been

PROBLEMS - yes: can be solved

ONE WAY TO GO - up

SELL AREA - [promote it]

SPIRIT HERE - won't die

The twinkle in his eyes, the warm smile, the limitless enthusiasm, the charm, and the flow and command of the English language - these are the characteristics which we shall miss so much. Arriving for a meeting at the Catlin House, one would be warmly greeted by Bill, who proudly assumed the role of Lord of the Manor, or Master of the House, if you will. He was characteristically late for other meetings, caught in the web of so many activities, so many places to be, and so many people to talk to. But once he arrived and took the helm, it was full steam ahead.

According to his family, he was in touch with hundreds of people and kept track of those who had moved from the area. One of his selfless acts which will be long remembered was to locate the last member of the Stevenson family of Waverly, an only sister among seven boys, who was in poor health. He arranged for her living quarters, looked after her affairs, and paid her debts without any thought of remuneration.

He was pastor of the Jackson Street Baptist Church for 20 years, and when he left, some of his parishoners openly wept. And at his funeral in the Waverly Baptist Church, which Bill had joined as a teenager after having been baptized an Episcopalian, the pews were filled with church people. His pastoral duties never ceased, and he was well-known in area hospitals and nursing homes. Visiting older people continued to be one of his greatest joys. The community's love for Bill knew no religious or ethnic bounds, as the many testimonials that poured in from near and far following his death confirm.

This quotation by Carl Sandburg found among Bill's papers seems to personify his spirit.

*A bell rings in the heart telling it
and the bell rings again. . . and again. . .
remembering what the first bell told,
the going away. . . the great heart still -
and they will go on remembering
and **they** is **you** and **you** and **me** and **me**.*



LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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