

“INTERESTING ALIKE TO OUR SIGHT AND PRIDE.” ART AND  
HISTORY RESEARCH AT THE SCRANTON IRON FURNACES

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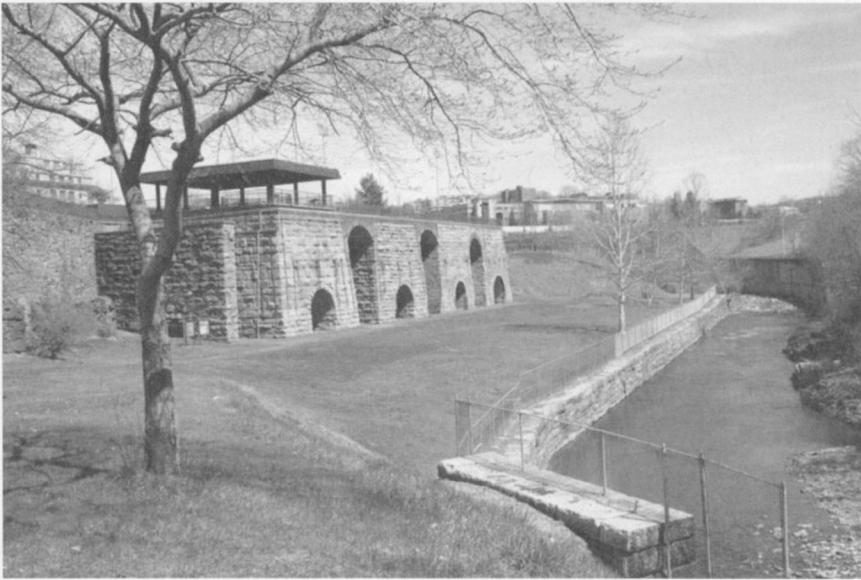


FIGURE 1: Scranton Iron Furnaces, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Photograph by Darlene Miller-Lanning

## Introduction

Pennsylvania's "Manufacture of Iron," wrote Eli Bowen in 1852, was one of the most "beautiful sights which the varied arts of civilized man" could afford. As they worked their useful metal, he declared, early ironmasters, in "a scene interesting alike to our sight and pride, and gratifying to contemplate," forged "thunderbolts against ignorance and oppression" to assert "the majesty of mind and the glory of labour."<sup>1</sup> Among the 330 furnaces estimated by Bowen to be in operation at the time of his commentary, surely the processes

he described were in effect at the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company (LI&CC), located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Initially known as Scrantons, Grant and Company (1840) and Scrantons and Platt (1846), the LI&CC (1853) was the third incarnation of a faltering forge along Roaring Brook that ultimately rose to prominence as an early center of T-rail production. Listed today on the National Register of Historic Places, vestiges of the company's four major blast furnaces, constructed between 1848 and 1857, are maintained by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) as the Scranton Iron Furnaces. While the furnaces' massive forty-foot stacks clearly dominate the grassy plain on which they stand, it is difficult for casual observers to imagine the park-like site as a busy industrial complex, where casting sheds, engine houses, blacksmith shops, and rail lines were filled with heat, workers, smoke, and noise. Fortunately, it is possible to more fully visualize these activities through the nineteenth-century archives and artifacts documenting the LI&CC at the height of its operations. As a PHMC Scholar-in-Residence at the Anthracite Heritage Museum and Scranton Iron Furnaces, it has been my pleasure to research early depictions of LI&CC, including maps, paintings, and photographs by Amdsen, Clough, and Johnson in the collection of the Lackawanna Historical Society, and to share my discoveries with diverse public audiences.

### Project Background

In Scranton, the past is present in vital and active ways. Throughout the city, cultural and historical organizations celebrate and commemorate the social and industrial development of northeastern Pennsylvania. For eighteen years I have served as Director of the Hope Horn Gallery and Adjunct Faculty in the Art and Music Program, History Department, at the University of Scranton. In this capacity, I have worked in partnership with federal, state, and county organizations including the Steamtown National Historic Site, Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority, Anthracite Heritage Museum, and Lackawanna Historical Society to develop and produce and programs highlighting regional art and history. As an artist and art historian, my doctoral studies at the State University of New York, Binghamton, New York, focused on depictions and interpretations of local

industrial landscapes, and, for purposes of comparison with American models of cultural resource management, included a research trip to the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site in Shropshire, England. Given these circumstances, my longstanding affinity for the Scranton Iron Furnaces is inevitable: of all the extant sites testifying to Scranton's nineteenth-century growth, as well as its twentieth-century decline, the Scranton Iron Furnaces are, for me, the most inextricably linked to the landscape and fortunes of the city that shares their name.

My first opportunity to formally consider the Scranton Iron Furnaces in terms of research and programming came in 2005, when the Hope Horn Gallery and Lackawanna Historical Society collaborated to present the exhibition *A History of Scranton: Selections from the Collection of the Lackawanna Historical Society*, on view at the University of Scranton from October 30 through December 16, 2005. Tracing Scranton's early settlement, industrial development, and community life through the presentation of seldom-seen artifacts, the exhibition, supported in part by a Lackawanna County Arts and Cultural Grant, was well publicized and community attendance was high. In conjunction with the exhibition, I coordinated gallery lectures, public receptions, and educational programs, including tours of the Scranton Estate, constructed in 1869 as the home of LI&CC president Joseph Hand Scranton (1813–1872), and donated in 1942 by his grandson, Worthington Scranton (1876–1955), to the University of Scranton. With coauthors Cheryl Kashuba and Alan Sweeney, I developed basic exhibition research into text for the Arcadia book *Scranton*, focusing, for my part, on the city's early settlement and iron industry. While the artifacts displayed in *A History of Scranton* ranged from portraits and postcards to building stones and bicycles, a core group of maps, paintings, and photographs depicting the LI&CC after 1857 most fired my imagination. Of these, it was not possible to complete focused research on George Clough's oil paintings of the *Lackawanna Valley* and *Lackawanna Iron Furnaces* (1859), or on Thomas Johnson's series of albumen prints documenting the blast furnaces, engine house, and rolling and puddling mills of the LI&CC (circa 1863), during the exhibition. A special project related to Joel Amsden's *Map of the Borough of Scranton* (1857), however, turned my attention in this direction.

Large and fragile, Amsden's map was kept in storage at the Lackawanna Historical Society, and was not accessible to public audiences. With funding from the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority, the map, prior to being

exhibited at the Hope Horn Gallery, was matted, framed, and digitally scanned. Twelve facsimile maps were printed on canvas and packaged with curriculum kits for use in the “Traveling Trunks” program of the Northeast Intermediate Unit #19, and loaned to area educators through the Scranton Public Library System. Amsden’s map, in its various physical and digital incarnations, became a shared obsession: designers at Lizza Studios in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, marveled over its intricate details, which took five hours to scan using sophisticated technology; gallery interns struggled to reclaim powerpoint presentations crashed by the mammoth resolution of its TIFF files; and students from the St. Stanislaus Elementary School, Scranton, Pennsylvania, delighted in rolling facsimiles out on the gallery floor, crawling on hands and knees to trace the routes of familiar streets with their fingers. Research for the “Map Project” allowed me to more closely examine related works by Clough and Johnson, and to note with interest that depictions of the LI&CC produced between 1857 and 1863 differed greatly, depending upon the medium in which they were represented. Company facilities neatly charted in Amsden’s schematic survey were painted by Clough using deep and illusionistic perspective; in turn, these picturesque renditions of brick and timber buildings were refuted by Johnson, whose stark photographs recorded the same sites as being cluttered with metal machinery and strewn with construction rubble. Both Chester Kulesa, Historic Site Administrator, Anthracite Heritage Museum and Scranton Iron Furnaces, and Mary Ann Moran-Savakinus, Executive Director, Lackawanna Historical Society, shared my expanding interest in these artifacts, and supported wholeheartedly a detailed consideration of them through my PHMC Scholars-in-Residence Project “Early Depictions of the Lackawanna Iron Furnaces, 1855–1865: Joel Amsden Maps, George Clough Paintings, and Thomas Johnson Photographs.”

## Research Overview

My evaluation of historical accounts and depictions of the LI&CC necessarily began with a consideration of the Scranton Iron Furnaces in terms of their current physical and administrative structures. As the first and best touchstone for scholarship and interpretation, the tangible remains of the furnaces, in conjunction with the urban fabric in which they exist, are complemented by essential documents, professionally maintained and disseminated through the

Anthracite Heritage Museum in consistent and orderly ways. From July 9 through August 5, 2006, these locations served as my base of operations for residency activities, as a careful examination of artifacts and records there provided a framework for further research. Useful among the *Anthracite Heritage Museum Record Group 13: Documentation and Restoration Files for the Lackawanna Iron Furnaces* were the site's *Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form* (1984) and *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (1988), with their accompanying reference notes based on the Scranton Family Papers at the Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware. These accepted state and federal documents were my standard for judging and coordinating the accuracy of other, earlier sources. Further, PHMC interpretive materials based on these documents, including signage at the Scranton Iron Furnaces and Daniel Perry's *A Fine Substantial Piece of Masonry: Scranton's Historic Furnaces* made fundamental elements of this data readily available to a wide audience.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the furnace site, information gained from these publications reinforced visitors' direct experiences of stacks, and encouraged greater public interest in the subject.

In addition to sites and documents maintained by the Anthracite Heritage Museum and Scranton Iron Furnaces, texts and artifacts held in the collection of the Lackawanna Historical Society were essential to my residency research. Primary texts available or referenced at the Lackawanna Historical Society library provided historical insights into attitudes and evaluations concerning the LI&CC. Horace Hollister's *History of the Lackawanna Valley*, in its first and second editions, outlined important political, industrial, and cultural developments in Scranton between 1855 and 1865.<sup>3</sup> Related literature from this period demonstrated local and national readers' broad and recurrent interest in Scranton subjects: Hollister's early text was adapted for publication in Andrew Galatian's *History of the City of Scranton*, while an image of "Scranton" appearing in Henry Alden's article "The Pennsylvania Coal Region" from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* was included among illustrations added to the revised edition of Hollister's work.<sup>4</sup> Other valuable though anecdotal sources published by the Lackawanna Institute of History and Science included Benjamin Throop's *Historical Notes* (reprinted from the *Saturday Argus*, 1887) and Joseph Platt's *Reminiscences of the Early History of "Dark Hollow," "Slocum Hollow," "Harrison," "Lackawanna Iron Works," "Scrantonia," and "Scranton, PA,"* (reprinted in 1896 from a lecture of 1886). The evolution of the LI&CC into the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company (1884), its subsequent merger with Scranton Steel (1891), and

its ultimate relocation to Buffalo, New York, (1902) were painfully detailed by Frederick Hitchcock in his two-volume *History of Scranton*.<sup>5</sup> “The achievements of this great enterprise,” he noted, “to which Scranton really owes its existence, is splendid history. The crime of its destruction beggars comment!”<sup>6</sup>

Within the collection of the Lackawanna Historical Society, the *Map of the Borough of Scranton*, published in 1857 by McKinney and Bonwill of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the oldest and largest artifact inspiring my residency. Measuring nearly six feet square, this magnificent lithograph featured a plan of the city developed by Joel Amsden (1812–1868). As stated in the *Portrait and Biographical Record of Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania*, Amsden was born in Hartland, Vermont, and trained as a civil engineer at the Norwich Military University in Norwich, New Hampshire.<sup>7</sup> Hired by George Scranton (1811–1861) in 1850 to survey portions of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad (DL&WR), a sister company of the LI&CC, Amsden subsequently worked as an urban planner and architect, organizing downtown Scranton into a grid of intersecting avenues and streets named for presidents and trees, and lined with public buildings and private residences of his own design. Vignettes of these structures, including the Wyoming House Hotel (1852), First Presbyterian Church (1853) and George Scranton Residence (1857), among others, appeared as “Views drawn from Nature” by C. E. H. Bonwill (active circa 1861–1882), a talented illustrator whose later images of the Civil War were published by *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. In its broad margins, the *Map of the Borough of Scranton* included historical statistics on both the furnaces and the city, while its schematic layout of LI&CC facilities clearly identified blast furnaces, an engine house, a company store and office, blacksmith shops, a railroad system, and a rolling mill. For all its spectacular features, however, the *Map* was not unique for its time. A similar work charting *Lewisburg, Union County, PA*, now in the collection of the Palmer Museum of Art at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, was also produced by Bonwill and McKinney in 1857.

In subsequent stages of my research, the *Map of the Borough of Scranton* served as an important key for understanding structures and landscapes represented less graphically in other artifacts of the period, including Clough’s paired oil paintings of the *Lackawanna Valley* and *Lackawanna Iron Furnaces* (1859), also housed at the Lackawanna Historical Society. Through the use of atmospheric perspective, George Clough (1824–1901), trained in the tradition of the Hudson River School, reconciled the contradictions of foundry smoke and hazy hills to produce idyllic scenes of nature and industry. Viewers of his

*Lackawanna Valley* were safely distanced from urban landmarks like the First Presbyterian Church spire and DL&WR trestle by a meandering river and fertile meadow prominently featured in the painting's foreground. Similarly, Clough idealized the harsh processes of iron production in the pendant *Lackawanna Iron Furnaces*, where only stacks and smoke suggested that small structures nestled among leafy groves represented the blast furnaces, engine house, and sawmill identified on Amsden's plans. Modes of transportation, too, were endowed with pastoral calm: Clough's small figures, nostalgically portrayed as fording or navigating Roaring Brook by wagon or boat, belied the fact that locomotives routinely moved between LI&CC facilities. In their selective presentation of Scranton's industrialized landscape, Clough's paintings were closely related to *The Lackawanna Valley*, painted by George Inness around 1855 or 1857, on commission for the DL&WR. Residency research included a trip to view this work at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In addition, telephone inquiries to the Cayuga Museum of History and Art, located in Clough's native city of Auburn, New York, yielded a citation for Brucia Witthoft's biographical essay "George Clough, Painter," in *The Magazine Antiques*, as well as the correct pronunciation of the artist's surname: "kluss" as opposed to "clow."<sup>8</sup>

As the final series of Lackawanna Historical Society holdings considered during my residency, Johnson's five large-scale albumen prints documenting the *Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company* provided a technology-based view of their subjects in terms of image and medium. Johnson's photographs marked a departure from the idealized landscapes of Clough. In them, horses and wagons stood near gondola cars and railroad tracks; machinery parts surrounded sheds strung with cable; and wood scraps accumulated outside the steam sawmill. Laborers also entered the picture, demonstrating both the intense physicality of their own jobs, and the practical limitations of the photographer's craft. A depiction of the LI&CC *Rolling and Puddling Mills (From the West)*, revealed small white objects in the water of Roaring Brook, which ran adjacent to the mills themselves. The objects appeared blurred, since they had moved during the photograph's extended exposure time, but stationary articles on the creek bank revealed their identities: workmen, seeking relief from the heat of the mill, had abandoned their clothes to swim. Bibliographic references for Thomas Johnson (active circa 1860–1870) were provided by the City Historian, Olean, New York; the Wayne County Historical Society, Honesdale, Pennsylvania; and National Canal Museum, Easton, Pennsylvania. An online entry from *Craig's Daguerreian Registry* indicated that the photographer was born in Philadelphia,



Pennsylvania, and maintained the Excelsior Sky-light Studio in Olean, New York, between 1860 and 1861, when it was destroyed by fire. Advertisements in the *Lackawanna Register*, dated June 1, 1863, and reprinted throughout the year, announced that Johnson operated a studio in Scranton at that time. The existence of a second series of Johnson photographs, showing thirty-two scenes along the Delaware and Hudson Canal (D&HC) between Rondout, New York, and Honesdale, Pennsylvania, provided further evidence of the photographer's involvement with interstate transportation and industrial initiatives. Initially owned by the Delaware and Hudson Canal Historical Society, Kingston, New York, this series sold for \$66,300 at a Sotheby's auction on April 7, 1998.

### Residency Outcomes

My PHMC residency project resulted in many positive outcomes. Of these, the most immediate was a group of community outreach initiatives sponsored by the Anthracite Heritage Museum and Scranton Iron Furnaces. On April 29, 2007, I presented an illustrated lecture on "Early Depictions of Scranton and the Lackawanna Iron Furnaces" at the Anthracite Heritage Museum, and published a related article in *The Miner's Lamp* newsletter (Volume 24, Number 2, April-June 2007).<sup>9</sup> These activities were followed by a special Father's Day event exploring Scranton's architectural spaces and industrial environments through a public lunch and tour at the Scranton Estate, University of Scranton, and a walking tour of the nearby Scranton Iron Furnaces on June 17, 2007. Following these programs, I was invited to speak about the Scranton Iron Furnaces at the Annual Dinner of the Cornwall Iron Furnace Associates, Cornwall, Pennsylvania, on June 17, 2008. I continue to use the tour strategies, lecture outlines, and powerpoint images developed for these events in ongoing educational workshops. Periodically, I provide presentations for the Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit #19's "Museums as Classrooms" Teacher Training Program, and collaborate with the Lackawanna Historical Society and Anthracite Heritage Museum to conduct local history activities for area elementary, high school, and college students. In the past, participants have included fourth graders from Newton-Ransom Elementary School, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, who completed a day-long session of tours and research exercises at the Scranton Iron Furnaces, Courthouse Square, Scranton Estate, and Lackawanna Historical



Society library, as well as English majors from Marywood University, Dunmore, Pennsylvania, who gathered at the Scranton Iron Furnaces for a tour and reading of poet and one-time Scranton resident W. S. Merwin's *The Drunk in the Furnace* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960).<sup>10</sup>

Beyond community programs, scholarly conference presentations and publications have also resulted from my residency. These included "Photographs by 'Johnson of Scranton'" and "A History of Scranton," delivered at the sessions *Eyewitness to the Changing Landscape*, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Scranton, Pennsylvania, April 19–21, 2007, and *Synagogues, Steelworks, and Suffragettes*, 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, State College, Pennsylvania, October 19–21, 2007. As a panelist for *The PHMC Scholars-in-Residence Program Annual Review: A Roundtable Assessment*, presented at the 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, October 16–18, 2008, I discussed the residency itself, and was pleased to have the opportunity to present my comments, as well, in this article for *Pennsylvania History*. Other scholarly articles I hope to develop and publish include an in-depth visual analysis of works by Amsden, Clough, and Johnson, illustrated in color, for *Pennsylvania Heritage*; and an art historical essay comparing George Inness's *The Lackawanna Valley* with works by these artists for the *American Art Journal*. While authors like Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* and Nicolai Cikovsky in "George Inness and the Hudson River School: 'The Lackawanna Valley,'" have located the painting within the broader framework of nineteenth-century American art, Inness's work has yet to be considered within the context of Scranton's local history and the collections of the Lackawanna Historical Society.<sup>11</sup>

On a personal level, my experience as a PHMC Scholar-in-Residence was deeply rewarding. Certainly, the modest yet generous funds granted in support of my project were much appreciated, as they helped to defray the practical costs of travel and office supplies routinely associated with research and writing. More relevant, meaningful, and far-reaching, however, were the encouragement and cooperation I received during the course of my work. My status as a PHMC Scholar-in-Residence afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the fields of history and art history; to gain access to archives and artifacts not known to the general public; and to format and present my research for and to community and academic

audiences. All parties involved graciously and enthusiastically shared with me their valuable time and information. Such validation is a true luxury for any historian.

## Conclusion

When speaking of the LI&CC in 1857, Horace Hollister observed “the business of the Company, so broad, so vast, so comprehensive in its character, and so beneficial in its influence, afforded throughout the county, and the Lackawanna Valley, where its benefits were more especially felt, a theme of great congratulation.”<sup>12</sup> In subsequent years, the fortunes of LI&CC, in its many manifestations, rose and fell with the greater cycles of economy and industry in the United States, yet, over a century-and-a-half later, the Scranton Iron Furnaces still maintain their monumental stature in the city they helped to establish. Since acquiring the furnaces in 1971, the PHMC has been instrumental in ensuring the continued use of this historic site, not only through the physical upkeep of grounds and structures, but through its support of research and interpretation initiatives, including the Scholars-in-Residence Program.

## NOTES

1. Eli Bowen, *The Pictorial Sketch-Book of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1852), 121–22.
2. Daniel Perry, *A Fine Substantial Piece of Masonry: Scranton's Historic Furnaces*, (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and Anthracite Heritage Museum and Iron Furnace Associates, 1994).
3. Horace Hollister, *History of the Lackawanna Valley*, (New York: W. H. Tinson, 1857, and C. A. Alvord, 1869).
4. Andrew Galatian, *History of the City of Scranton* (Scranton: The Republican Office, 1867); Henry Alden, “The Pennsylvania Coal Region,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Volume 27, September 1863), 455–67.
5. Frederick Hitchcock, *History of Scranton*, Volumes 1 and 2, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1914).
6. Frederick Hitchcock, *History of Scranton*, Volume 1, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1914), 32.
7. *Portrait and Biographical Record of Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania*, (New York and Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1857), 147–48.
8. Brucia Witthoft, “George Clough, Painter,” *The Magazine Antiques* (July 1982), 130–37.

9. Darlene Miller-Lanning, "Early Depictions of Scranton and the Lackawanna Iron Furnaces." *The Miner's Lamp*, (Volume 24, Number 2, April-June 2007).
10. W. S. Merwin, *The Drunk in the Furnace* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960).
11. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000); Nicolai Cikovsky, "George Inness and the Hudson River School: 'The Lackawanna Valley,'" (*American Art Journal*, Number 2, Autumn 1970), 36–57.
12. Horace Hollister, *History of the Lackawanna Valley*, (New York: W. H. Tinson, 1857), 124.

## "A VERY BUSY PART OF THE STATE LIBRARY:" GENEALOGY AT THE STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF PENNSYLVANIA

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While the number of family historians visiting archives has gone down in the past decade as a result of increasing resources available online, they still constitute the majority, or about 50–60 percent of archives patrons, says Jonathan Stayer, head of the reference section at the Pennsylvania State Archives. Before the advent of the internet, they made up about 80 percent of the patrons, estimates Stayer. Like at the Pennsylvania State Archives, genealogists comprise the majority of patrons in many archival facilities across the nation, including many NARA facilities. The observation by archivist Richard Cox that genealogy has emerged as "one of the most 'public' of all history"<sup>1</sup> forms remains accurate today.

During my Scholars in Residence project at the Pennsylvania State Archives in the summer of 2007, I researched how and why genealogy became such an important part of the work of the State Library of Pennsylvania and the State Archives. A particular focus was on the history of Pennsylvania German family history as facilitated by the Library and Archives. How and why have the State Library of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania State Archives facilitated and promoted research on family history from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century? In what ways have these institutions contributed to shaping and defining the popularity and public nature of genealogy over time? What were the personal, what were the institutional connections between the State Library and Archives and Pennsylvania State Archives and other historical and genealogical institutions in the state and beyond? What kind of historical narratives did the work of the Library and