

Heritage**Tourism**

Don't forget our rail heritage

Steamtown plans fascinating winter activities

By **Natalie Gelb Solfanelli**

Although most people identify anthracite coal as the main heritage of this region, the railroads are also an important component of our industrial history.

From the beautiful railroad stations, including the magnificent building that has been reincarnated as Radisson Hotel at Lackawanna Station and the former Central New Jersey Station on Lackawanna and 6th Avenues in Scranton, to the nostalgic stations in towns up and down the Lackawanna Valley and into the Poconos, we enjoy a legacy of architecture that reminds us of the historic railroading activities in this part of Pennsylvania.

Unlike some sites that replicate significant places in the nation's history, the Steamtown National Historic is authentic.

Scranton was a hub of railroading activity 100 years ago. The steam trains carried passengers, as well as the anthracite coal, textiles, and other commodities, from here to the cities of the east. Trains also carried coal from Scranton to Buffalo, which was the jumping off point for barges to transport anthracite across the Great Lakes to the Midwest.

The Steamtown trains continue to connect us to the past in many ways. The Santa train is a perfect example of collaboration among a variety of community minded individuals. Steamtown initiated the Santa Train after community leaders like Ken Propst of Archbald, railroad buffs like the late Allen Sweeney and Dominick Keating, and citizens from Carbondale, Jermy, Jessup, Olyphant and Dickson City, worked together to create "Christmas in a Small Town," an event that will celebrate its 13th year of bringing Santa and Mrs. Claus to the towns on Dec. 4.

This year, for the first time, the train will bring Santa to Scranton! Ken Propst provides buses for the entertainers and hoagies for the staff, performers and others who ride the train.

"Christmas in a Small Town" is sponsored by Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority in partnership with Steamtown National Historic Site, the Delaware and Lackawanna Railroad, and the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority, with great help from the City of Carbondale, Carbondale Business Association, Archbald Borough, Jessup Borough, Jessup 21st Century,



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Olyphant Borough, Dickson City Borough, the City of Scranton, the Lackawanna Historical Society, the Anthracite Heritage Museum, the Lackawanna County Council on Arts and Culture, and Propst Transportation.

For the next major event coming up, Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, will offer

a special mid-winter steam excursion to the annual Ice Harvest Demonstration in Tobyhanna. On Saturday, Jan. 15, a historic steam locomotive will travel to the Tobyhanna station, and excursionists will be transported to Mill Pond No. 1, courtesy of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority, where historic tools and equipment will be used to gather blocks of ice from the pond.

The replica icehouse stores enough ice to last well into the summer months.

The Tobyhanna Ice Harvest excursion is scheduled to depart at 10 a.m. and return at approximately 3 p.m. Tickets are \$31 for ages 16 to 61; \$26 for ages 62 and older; \$20 for ages 6 to 15 years old. Children to age 5 require a "no charge" ticket. The \$6 daily Park Entrance Fee is included in the ticket cost. Reservations may be made by phoning (570) 340-5204, between 9:15 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. daily (10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. after Jan. 2).

Steam-powered train excursions are rare in the winter months, and there is always the chance that the pond may not be frozen. In that event, tours of the village of Tobyhanna and the Mill Pond icehouse and restored 1908 boxcar will be conducted as an alternative. The 1908 Tobyhanna station will be open and light refreshments will be available for sale through the Pocono Mountains Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Located in downtown Scranton, Steamtown National Historic Site is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Dec. 31. It is closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Park winter hours are from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Jan. 2 through April 9. From Interstate 81, exit 185 (Central Scranton Expressway), follow signs to the main entrance at Lackawanna Avenue and Cliff Street. Call (570) 340-5200 or visit www.nps.gov/stea.

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