

## Recalling region's history

*LHVA shows region important in growth of nation*

**By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli**

Telling the story of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley presents special challenges. The designation of LHVA as a State and National Heritage Area as a place "significant in the history of the nation" is a great honor. Nonetheless, the task of educating the public about the complexity of this region can be daunting.

Unlike other National Heritage Areas that are noted for one thing, such as steel, (Pittsburgh's Rivers of Steel), oil (Oil City National Heritage Area), cars (Detroit's Motor City), or a wartime event (New Jersey's CrossRoads of the American Revolution), the Lackawanna Valley has more than one distinguishing characteristic for which it is or should be identified. In other words, while some might think we are known only for anthracite, others would think it is the railroads, textile manufacturing, iron furnaces, electric trolley, tee rails or ethnic food. Perhaps we could be categorized simply as Industry and Immigration. But then how about vaudeville, or architecture, or the beginnings of organized labor? The truth is that we are all of the above.....and more!

So how does one market the diverse history and heritage of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley simply and succinctly? Bill Withuhn, Curator of the History of Technology at the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian, has told me, "You have the beef....You need to add the sizzle!" Mr. Withuhn is a great fan of this area. He volunteers regularly as an engineer at Steamtown National Historic Site. He sees the big picture. As an historian, Bill knows that the importance of this area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century depended on the synergies created by the natural resource of anthracite coal, and the manufacture of tee rails that facilitated the construction of rails that attracted multiple railroads to Scranton. Those railroads transported the "black diamonds" to the major cities of the east and to Buffalo from where the coal was shipped across the Great Lakes to the Midwest.

Mr. Withuhn also understands that those activities created jobs in the mines and on the railroads for the European immigrants who flocked here; and that their wives and daughters provided a willing and cheap work force to the textile manufacturers. And that the rapidly growing population provided opportunity for commerce; and that newly affluent entrepreneurs built magnificent commercial, cultural and residential structures designed by renowned and talented architects. And that the influx of

immigrants developed ethnic communities where they replicated their native cultures, building beautiful churches and carrying on their traditions while learning to live with and care about their neighbors from other lands. All of this activity made Scranton one of top 20 cities in the United States that, at one point during the early 1900's, had the highest per capita income in the country!

Now that is a lot to compress into a few words or a small brochure! LHVA strives not only to tell the story, but also to attract visitors to the authentic sites that remain to illustrate that history, i.e., Steamtown National Historic Site, the Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour, the Everhart Museum, so that they can learn the about a proud past.

But it is important for everyone to appreciate, as Mr. Withuhn does, the whole story. So if a rail buff visits Steamtown, he needs to know that he must also visit the Anthracite Museum. Or if a family visits the Everhart and the Gorge, they ought to visit Steamtown, the Coal Mine and the Anthracite Museum to learn the rest of the story. Other historic and cultural and natural sites are integral pieces of the puzzle.

In meeting the challenge of connecting the parts, both thematically and geographically, LHVA is creating a system of kiosks to be located at various sites, including Steamtown, the Electric City Trolley Museum, the Lackawanna Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum, the Coal Mine Tour at McDade Park, Nay Aug Park, and the Scranton Cultural Center. Each kiosk not only will tell about the site itself, but also it will provide a map that will guide the visitor from one site to another. Each location will present a brief overview of the Heritage Valley to encourage the visitor to see the rest of the sites in order to understand the whole story.

LHVA is currently working on the development of the kiosks. These structures will be an important part of the work of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority in interpreting our history and promoting heritage tourism throughout the region. They will be physical representations that will symbolize and link the diverse people, land and industry that created the Lackawanna Heritage Valley.

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