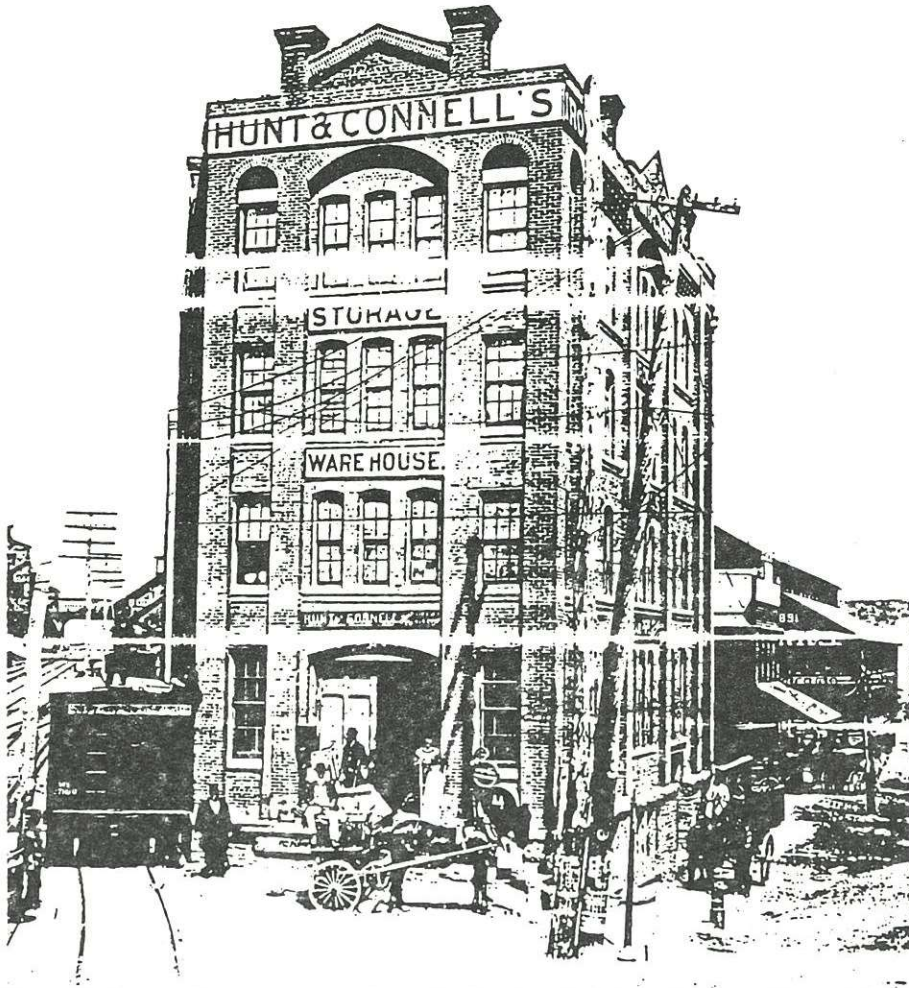


William Connell, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1827-1909

by Bob Guthrie and Cindy Hileman



Hunt & Connell warehouse from Sutherland; John H., The City of Scranton, PA & Vicinity & Their Resources.

in the mining of coal. It is said that he was an indefatigable worker both in his youth and later in life. Beginning as a driver in a coal mine, he worked his way up the ladder to become a “practical miner”.

It is said that “there is a tide in the affairs of men that, taken at the flood leads on to fortune.” For William Connell the tide came in 1856 when he was called to Scranton and placed in charge of mines operated by the Susquehanna & Wyoming Valley Railroad & Coal Company. When the charter of the company expired in 1870, he purchased the property with his savings. Actually a great portion of the purchase price was a promissory note which was accepted because he had been such a loyal and trusted employee. He formed William Connell & Co., a firm in which he held principal ownership for the rest of his life.

He married Annie Lawrence of Llewellyn, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania on January 2, 1852. They became the parents of eleven children, several of whom were associated with him in his many business ventures. He was a prominent member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and a delegate to their national convention in 1884. Educational matters, especially pertaining to the church, received his support and he served as trustee for Syracuse and Wesleyan Universities and Drew Theological Seminary.

William Connell is known to many of us as one of the owners of Hunt & Connell, a maker of miners’ lamps and other hardware, but he was much more!

He was born at Cape Breton, Nova Scotia on September 10, 1827, the son of James and Susan (Melville) Connell, natives of Scotland and Nova Scotia. In 1844 his parents moved to Luzerne County, Pennsyl-

vania, and later moved to Scranton, where they both died. Connell’s early opportunities were rather meager, he knew full well the meaning of poverty, as the family had little beyond the bare necessities. Thus he was obliged to win his own way in the world from an early age. He lived frugally and saved a large part of his weekly wage because he realized that to improve his station in life he had to improve his financial condition. Nearly all of his early life was spent in the employ of companies engaged

In 1896 he was nominated by the Republican Party for Congress. In the nominating speech he was described as “. . . one of the leading citizens of the great state of Pennsylvania. The wealth he has amassed he has not hoarded up or allowed to lie idle, but has gone into building up the varied industries of our valley, thus giving employment to the laboring man and his children.” William Connell won the election by the largest Republican majority ever given in the county. He went on to serve three terms in the Congress.

His business ventures were many and varied. In 1872, with others, he founded the Third National Bank of Scranton and served first as director and then president in 1879, a position he held for twenty five years. He was active in formation of the Scranton Safe Deposit & Trust Company and

became the first director. He was also the largest stockholder in the First National Bank.

William Connell was also president of the Connell Coal Co., the Lackawanna Knitting Mills Co., Scranton Button Mfg. Co., Weston Mill Co., Hunt & Connell Co., and Meadow Brook Land Co. He was at one time a director in the Lackawanna Iron & Steel Co., Dickinson Mfg Co., Clark & Snover Co., Lehigh Salt Mining Co., Scranton Packing Co., Scranton Forging Co., Lackawanna Lumber Co., Consumers' Ice Co., and the Scranton Tribune.

These companies and industries were some of the most important of the day in the Scranton area. The Hunt & Connell Co. was a leader in wholesale hardware. They employed about a hundred clerks, salesmen, and work-

men in the several departments. The goods handled included all kinds of iron and steel, heavy hardware, shelf and builders' hardware, railroad and mine supplies, mechanics' tools, garden and farm implements, guns and ammunition, hot water and warm air heaters, electric appliances, and a multitude of other appliances too numerous to mention.

William Connell died on March 21, 1909. In his obituary it is stated that he left two lasting memorials to the city of Scranton. The Connell Building was a stately office building in the heart of the business district. Connell Park became a municipal property and a place of natural beauty. “But the real medium through which the name of William Connell will be preserved in the region to which he dedicated so much of his toil and talents is not the building or the park which bears his name, but in the high place accorded to social, financial, and industrial Scranton among the other cities of the state.”

We collectors can be content with his lamps . . .

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Photograph of William Connell. From Stodder, Dwight J., Prominent Men of Scranton & Wilkes-Barre.