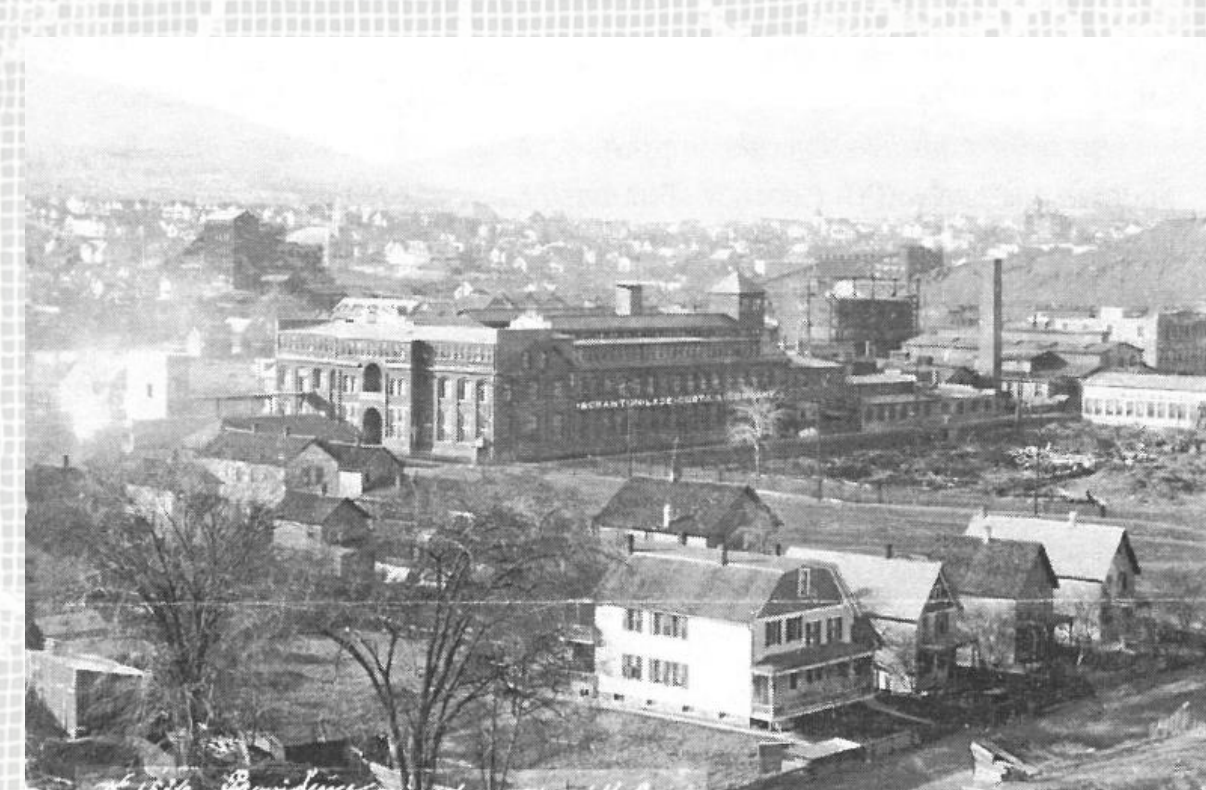


# History and Fortitude of the Scranton Lace Company

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## INTRODUCTION

This project seeks to provide a comprehensive history of the Scranton Lace Company (SLC). Building on previous research of Scranton's urbanization, industry, and immigration, "History and Fortitude of the Scranton Lace Company" places the company within the context of the area using first-hand accounts, primary archival material, and industrial histories. It was hypothesized that SLC was able to outlive its industrial predecessors through the economic advantages of Scranton, diversification of products, and prioritization of customer relationships.



The Scranton Lace Company, 1918

## BACKGROUND

In 1890, the British Nottingham lace firm looked to open a branch in the states, eventually settling on Scranton, Pennsylvania due to its industrial relevance spurred by iron, rail and coal. The growth of these three industries provided those factors crucial to economic growth: a labor force, transportation, fuel, and nearness to urban centers.

Officially opening in 1891, SLC produced a variety of luxury products such as curtains and home goods. Early management prioritized customer relationships, catering advertisements and product lines accordingly. This relationship was only solidified with the switch to war-time production during both world wars.

Despite risky investment and bankruptcy in the 1950s, coupled with the end of rail, iron, and coal, SLC managed to survive into the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2002, the company would abruptly end its operations mid-shift, leaving its memory intertwined within the Scranton community. Today, the building opens as a housing complex, a living reminder of the city's former prime.

## ADVERTISING

Much of the success of SLC was due to the relationship it created with its customers and the local community. After WWI, President Paul B. Belin saw the need to cater advertisements to appropriate audiences in order to make the viewer feel more connected to the company.



Paul B. Belin, President 1920 - 1930

**SCRANTON LACES AND LACE CURTAINS**

are today spreading the name and fame of Scranton the world over and proclaiming the city's industrial greatness to all mankind.

**The Home of Scranton Laces**

Where 2,000,000 Pair Curtains Are Produced Annually

The Wonderful Success of the Lace Company and Its Phenomenal Growth and Expansion in Less Than Thirty Years Is a Glowing Tribute to Scranton's Brains and Labor

Scranton Laces are sold not only in the best stores in every prominent city in the United States but can be found in the most exclusive shops in Europe, Asia and South America. Their advertisements are to be seen in the world's best periodicals—and like all of the company products these advertisements are a boon to the eye—body artistic masterpiece.

Here are a Few of the Products of the Scranton Lace Company:  
CURTAINS, COLORED DRAPERIES, BEDSPREADS

Right: An image published in SLC's own yearly advertising pamphlet, *The Art of Window Draping* (1918), continues the work of *Ladies' Home Journal* through internal tones of luxury. Now, however, a child is shown looking outside of the home, past luxurious lace curtains. The use of a child indicates youth and regrowth, suggesting that the company is still young. Drawings and décor within the room continue to imply luxury while the curtains providing access to the window (the outside) will give one new beginnings, perhaps through entry to another social class.



THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF SCRANTON LACE CURTAINS... And yet they are within reach of the most economical housewife... Not only are they economical in price but they launder beautifully and easily. Most good stores can show them to you.

**SCRANTON LACE CURTAINS AND DRAPERY LACES**

Above: An advertisement in *The Ladies' Home Journal* (1918) depicts a woman in the home looking past lace curtains to the exterior. A professional painting of a home interior suggests a sense of intimacy, linking the buyer to the product while playing into gender roles of the time. The nature of the house and décor imply that this product will bring luxury to any buyer.

Left: An advertisement featured in *The Scranton Times* (1920) tells a much simpler story. Black, bold text is meant to draw the readers' attention as opposed to the rather subdued *Ladies' Home Journal* that appeals to an already established customer base. Here, SLC exhibits the ability to understand customer tendencies, a business practice that would contribute to years of success.

## MEMORY

Shown through modern revitalization projects, numerous historical narratives, and museum exhibits, Scranton Lace remains very much alive in local memory. A perspective from inside the company's notorious clock tower overlooks the growth of the city. Frozen in time, a small crack provides a window to the outside world, paralleling early advertisement as the external future is understood from an interior, industrial perspective.



SLC Clock Tower, 2004

## CONCLUSION

From its inception, SLC quickly became the largest global producer of Nottingham lace. Yet this is only one of the many reasons that it continues to be honored and revered by Scranton locals. Understanding the culture and business practices that allowed the company to outlive older and larger Scranton industries provides a case study for the importance of local business in industrial America.

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