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Mayo Heritage Newsletter

The North Mayo Heritage Centre

We profile

SCRANTON
and its links to Co. Mayo

Birth place of President Joe Biden

Are you interested in tracing your Mayo roots?

If you are interested in professional help to research your family history or are curious about your ancestry, why not contact us? All research can be done remotely. *Perhaps we can help you!*

Tel: 096 31809 Email: northmayo@gmail.com
or visit northmayogenealogy.com

Cover image: Postcard image of Scranton, Pennsylvania, dated 1905, shows both the newer electric trolleys and the older horse-drawn trolleys. *(Courtesy of Jerry Loeffler from scrantonhistory.wordpress.com)*

We thank President Biden for taking time to call to the North Mayo Heritage Centre during his visit to Mayo.

We are proud to have assisted him with part of his ancestry.

FEATURE ARTICLE

SCRANTON

President Joe Biden was born in Scranton. His family connections in the local area there stretch back to the 1850s. Scranton is also Ballina's twin town.

The city lies in north eastern Pennsylvania, about 120 miles northwest of New York City. It has a population of about 75,000. The city and surrounding districts such as Wilkes-Barre which are in the valley of the Lackawanna and Susquehanna Rivers are central to the story of emigration and family history in north Co. Mayo. In the period between 1850 and 1950, most of the Irish in Scranton came from Co. Mayo. Most of those people came from north Mayo, with concentrations from Belmullet and around Bangor Erris, but a very large proportion with origins in the Ballina, Knockmore, Crossmolina and Killala areas.

The people from Mayo who made this part of Pennsylvania their home began to arrive in the years following the famine period of 1845-49. The area's coal mines were beginning to be developed. Among the minerals being mined was a type of anthracite which was very suitable for industrial furnaces. These mines needed more and more labour. As one generation of Mayo immigrants settled, they saved their money and sent for their family and friends. Successive waves of Mayo immigrants added to the Irish population. Of course, Scranton was not an exclusively 'Irish' city. There were large populations of Italian, Polish, German and other immigrants. The area even had a weekly German newspaper, the *Wochenblatt*, which was published with gothic script.

Most of the Mayo immigrants worked in the coal mining industry. This was an exceptionally tough life. Children began working about the age of nine. They sorted rocks on outdoor conveyor belts. By their teens, they were working underground. In the mid-19th century, mining families often lived in houses owned by the mining companies, and shopped in stores also owned by their employers. The work was extremely dangerous, and accidents, often fatal, were common.

A man who survived this would almost certainly have some respiratory disease as a result of a life spent breathing in the dust.

As elsewhere in America, for example that other 'Irish' mining city, Butte, Montana, the turn of the 20th century saw labour rights come to the fore, and unions began to take a foothold in the mines. This had been for many decades previously, and would continue to be, a bloody struggle, with mining companies often resorting to drastic and violent tactics to keep the unions at bay.

By the 1930s and 40s, the wind was beginning to change direction for Scranton and its hinterland. Other fuels were beginning to take the place of coal. By the 1960s, the area's traditional industries were in decline. One thing that never declined was the connection back to Ireland and to Mayo.

Today, the North Mayo Heritage Centre helps clients from all over the United States whose ancestor's first home in America was this part of north eastern Pennsylvania. Our Irish clients frequently have someone in their family tree who emigrated to the same location.

The contribution these emigrants made to the fabric and society of Scranton can never be overlooked. The day labourers and coal miners worked brutally hard for their money. Many of their children joined the police force or the military, or became teachers. Some others managed to open a small business, a shop, a pub or a small hotel.

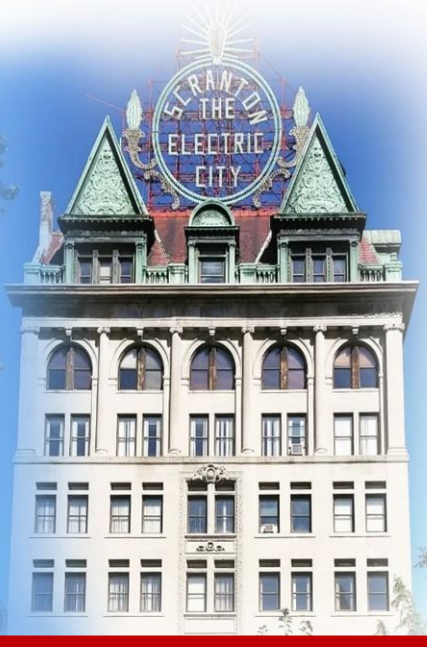
Even today, Scranton and its surrounds is a part of the world shaped by its links back to north Co. Mayo.

From Electric City Trolley Museum – Scranton, Pennsylvania

The Electric City

One of Scranton's most famous landmarks is the 'Electric City' sign on Linden Street. The city earned the nickname because in 1880, it became one of the first cities in America to use electricity as a power source. By 1886, the city was running electric streetcars, known as trolleys, the first machines of their type seen in America.

Just as the coal mining which powered the local economy declined in the mid-20th century, so the sign too was powered off and lay dormant for many years. It was re-lit in 2004.



Introducing our new initiative

FRIENDS OF THE NORTH MAYO HERITAGE CENTRE

The Friends of the North Mayo Heritage Centre is an annual subscription.

We have launched this scheme to provide support to our ongoing work in genealogical research and the digitisation of records, as well as the continued delivery of a diverse programme of events and exhibitions throughout the year.

There are several levels of membership, including one for our overseas friends, and all friends enjoy many benefits including discounts on our goods and services, free books and even free tickets to our family events (for family members).

More details and an application form can be found on our website www.northmayogenealogy.com

We look forward to welcoming many new friends.