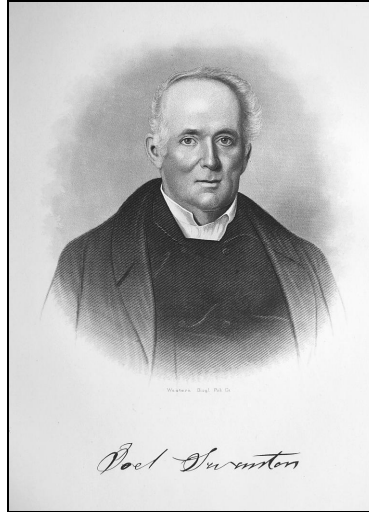


## Ambition and Contribution: The Scranton Family in Cleveland



From G.F. Cram & Co. "Atlas of Cuyahoga County & Cleveland, Ohio" (1892)

*By the Tremont History Project*

Scranton Avenue bears the namesake of one of the Tremont area's earliest and most important residents. The story of the Scranton Family parallels the story of Cleveland's emergence as a metropolis, and while explaining the development of the northernwest region of the Tremont area, also revisits characters whose benevolent ambitions may have influenced generations.

Joel Scranton was born April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1793, in Belchertown, Massachusetts, son of Stephen Scranton and Asenath Wright. Stephen Scranton was a successful industrialist in Otsego, New York, though eventually several disasters befell his factories, causing considerable economic strain on the family. In 1819, at the age of twenty-six, Joel decided to set out for the budding Great Lakes hamlet of 'Cleaveland' at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, then boasting roughly 150 in total population. Scranton, who has been described as "a strikingly rugged and thoroughly manly figure", invested all of his savings in a single schooner, loaded with leathers and furs to sell, and embarked on an arduous voyage that would take the thirty-days. Upon landing, quickly rented a shop at the corner of Superior St. and Water St. (now W.9<sup>th</sup> St.). His modest store grew to a highly successful dry-goods business—J. Scranton & Co.—and Scranton's growing success and presence in the heart of the burgeoning village positioned him well among Cleveland's commercial and civic leaders. Beyond his robust physical

appearance, Scranton became known for his gentle, reserved demeanor, kind heart, and well-calculated business decisions.

In June of 1828, Scranton married Irene P. Hickox, a significant figure in Cleveland's nascent educational scene. Hickox, daughter of a Revolutionary War veteran from Clinton, NY, attended a prominent seminary school in Connecticut, first settled in Warren, OH open to a boarding school for girls, and then came to the budding village of Cleveland to expand her endeavors, opening a select girls school in 'the American House', a popular meeting hall on Superior St.

In 1833, Joel Scranton sold his business and purchased a tremendous tract of land west of the Cuyahoga River, featuring a high bluff overlooking the river and rolling wooded terrains and meadows of the river lowlands, or 'flats' (172 acres, as per 1852 records). This area of then-Brooklyn Township, which soon became known as 'Scranton's Flats', featured only one built structure at the time—a defunct paper mill in the Walworth Run ravine. The Scranton's built a home near the bottom of the bluff (later known as 'Scranton's Hill'), established a farm with sprawling orchards and vast pastures for horses and sheep, and proceeded in bearing five children. Scranton also occasionally used portions of this land in the 1840's and 50's for large-scale sporting and entertainment events that drew spectators from across the region, including traveling circuses and shooting contests. This tranquil region would soon become surrounded by the development of land for Cleveland's burgeoning industries, and Scranton agreed to sell portions of his land for the construction of greatly-needed freight railroad lines in 1854. Later, larger tracts of land were sold for industrial use. As one author later quipped: "The flocks of sheep grazing in the pasture have been succeeded by the white fleeces of the busy stream, and the rasps of scythes by the roar of a thousand wheels".

The Scranton's became prominent members of the Cleveland civic and religious society, being founding members of the First Presbyterian Church (Old Stone Church), and later the Second Presbyterian Church in 1844. Joel established a successful commercial real-estate investment firm, while his wife Irene Hickox-Scranton became one of Cleveland's leaders in local social interests and charity, as founding member of the Cleveland Ladies' Temperance Union, the Ladies Tract Society of the Village of Cleveland, the Union Gospel Society, and the Young Ladies' Foreign Missionary Society. Her ambitious work was highly progressive for women in society at this time. She has been described as "a cultured Christian women whose society and friendship were sought and treasured alike by rich and poor".

Tragedy did strike the family deeply, unfortunately, as four of their five children died in childhood or early adulthood. Both Joel and Irene Scranton died in 1858 of natural causes, within one month of each other, and the sole-surviving child

Mary Scranton-Bradford inherited the family estate. Mary also inherited from her parents “an interest in everything related to the uplift of the people...not only in relation to their educational advantages but also their social betterment”. She carried on in her mother’s work of social causes and charity, establishing herself as one of Cleveland’s most important advocates and philanthropists. She founded the Trinity Church Home for the Sick and Friendless, and was a founding benefactor of the Cleveland School of the Arts, as well serving as president and trustee for the Cleveland Institute of Art, and was an active leader for the Western Reserve Historical Society as well. Mary also adopted and raised numerous orphan children. She died in 1918.

Please contact the Tremont History Project for further information on quotes and references.