

ANDREW J. SORDONI ENTREPRENEUR

WHEN?
1887-1963

EVENT

Though Sordoni was best known as head of a construction company, he was involved in government, politics, philanthropy.



WHERE? Began in
Wyoming Valley

VOCABULARY

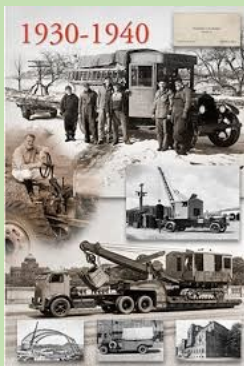
push cart
mule tender
supplement

Horatio Alger wrote a series of books based on the idea that with hard work and foresight, one could make his way in America to great wealth though he started with very little. His series of books written with the theme “rags to riches” could have used Andrew J. Sordoni as one of his models.

Andrew grew up as the youngest child of Nicholas and Maria Sordoni. The family had traveled from Italy to the U.S. after the Civil War ended in 1865. Nicholas ran an ice cream business from his pushcart first in New York City and then in Nanticoke where Andrew was born the youngest of 12. Andrew’s mother, Maria, worked as an interpreter at the Luzerne County Courthouse for 33 years.

After third grade, Andrew went to work in the mines as a mule tender. It was not unusual for a youngster at that tender age to seek work to supplement the family income. Due to the grinding environment underground, long hours, dangerous conditions and an injury, Andrew left the mines. He wanted little to do with anthracite for the rest of his life (Spear 84).

He joined the U.S. Army in 1904 serving in the Coast Artillery until 1907 (Sordoni 1957). Three years later Ruth Ann Speece became his wife; that is also the year he borrowed a team of horses from his father. According to the Sordoni website, he spent \$22.00 for a second-hand set of harnesses, \$35.00 for a coal wagon, and \$50.00 for a dump wagon (Sordoni 1957). His work-days were twelve to sixteen hours long hauling coal, ashes, or digging cellars, or pouring concrete. Spear cites one example of Andrew’s hard work when digging a cellar normally considered to be a two-person job over two days. Working by himself Andrew did the work in one day thus saving the wages of another man and another day (Spear 84). He also screened the dirt he dug so that he could later sell it as topsoil.



By 1914 he had his first truck and his construction company continued to grow. He ventured into erecting electric power and telephone lines which became a specialty. He purchased the Harvey’s Lake Light Company followed by Commonwealth Telephone Company in 1928. Although Commonwealth needed upgrading and rebuilding, he was able to turn the company into one of the finest in the state.

He seemed to be everywhere when the construction company ran jobs. It was not unheard of for him to show up during the nightshift to see how his employees were progressing. He knew them by name. The Great

Depression in the 1930s that wreaked havoc on businesses and families also impacted his business. However, Andrew kept his crews working as much as possible by retrofitting his trucks to haul coal, digging and pouring concrete sidewalks, selling lumber to the coal mines. He also got involved in buying hotels which would prove profitable once the financial crisis eased.

As the depression gave way to war production, Andrew found himself as one of the leaders in business in the state. Spear writes that when Andrew's son Jack returned from the war where he served as a fighter pilot, the two worked well together propelling the company through the late 1940's into the 1950's and 1960's.

Andrew's willingness to work hard and his sharp insight served him well in another field of endeavor--politics. He became a Forty Fort Borough councilman in 1914 serving in that capacity until 1924. Two years later, he successfully ran for state senator. He stayed as a Pennsylvania state senator until 1939 carrying the title of Senator with him for the rest of his life. That experience provided a strong foundation for his appointment as the Pennsylvania Commerce Secretary from 1951-1954 (Sordoni 1957). According to the Sordoni website, he accepted \$1.00 per year though the annual salary was \$15,000. He felt that was a way to repay the state for the opportunities he had been given.



combined wisdom, sympathy and generosity to become a leader of men in every sense of the word and Bucknell considers it a privilege to honor you."



As a way to describing a life well-lived, the Sordoni website quotes the remarks of Bucknell University's former president Horace Hildreth when giving Andrew an honorary doctorate degree: "Well deserved indeed is the recognition which you have received for your significant effort in spheres of business, civic affairs, social and religious work and education. You have

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Andrew Sordoni](#)

[Sordoni History](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Spear, Sheldon. *Chapters in Wyoming Valley History*. Jemags & Co. Shavertown. 1989.