

# DANIEL L. HART PLAYWRIGHT POLITICIAN

Mayor of Wilkes-Barre

WHEN?  
1866-1933

WHERE? Wilkes-Barre,  
PA



EVENT  
Wilkes-Barre mayor

VOCABULARY  
Progressive Reform  
speakeasy

Which mayor of Wilkes-Barre entertained national celebrities such as actress Ethel Barrymore and legendary baseball icon Babe Ruth at his Hazel St. home? His name was Daniel Llewellyn Hart. The very popular politician was elected four times to the mayor's office during the Progressive Era 1890-1920. Nominated by both Republicans and Democrats, Hart proved to be a charismatic leader who became the longest serving mayor in the city's history.

The Progressive Era had widespread support among the middle class who supported many reforms such as Prohibition. The Volstead Act, known as Prohibition, was the national ban on the manufacture and distribution of alcohol over 5%. Progressives also railed against gambling because of its effects on families. They saw saloons as places where local party bosses gained many of their votes to keep them in power. Some of their movement did not want baseball played on Sundays as they considered it to be sacrilegious.



Hart defied all three ideas. He opened a speakeasy called "the Attic Club" at his home where the visitors played poker and drank freely (Kashatus). There he entertained leaders of both political parties as well as celebrities when they came to town. He also felt that "baseball is one of the few diversions a coal miner can enjoy" so he pushed back against the drive to ban the weekly game (Kashatus). While he resisted

most of the Progressive trends and endured the criticism that followed, he became very popular among the hard-working miners.

Born to Irish immigrant parents John and Mary Hart in 1866, he showed early talent in writing. By the time he graduated from Wyoming Seminary, he had already published his own newspaper *The Merry World*. His writing talent and insight into politics led to work for the *Wilkes-Barre Leader*, *Wilkes-Barre Evening News*, and the *Scranton Times*. His writing was not limited to politics, however, as he turned to what would provide a good income from royalties--playwriting. From 1891 to 1906 he wrote numerous scripts from "melodramas to political farce and from societal manners to musicals" (Kashatus). Five of his scripts appeared on Broadway with "The Parish Priest" probably his most well-known.



In 1906, he decided to take a hiatus from New York City and run for political office in Wilkes-Barre as city treasurer. After being reelected several times, he used his success as a

steppingstone to the mayor's office. Though politics consumed much of his time, he stayed connected to writing. His comedic play "The Wish Bone" had its world premiere at the Savoy Theater in Wilkes-Barre in 1916. The one-reel film was the product of the newly formed United States Picture Corporation (UPMC) which used the comedy to launch itself as a film producer for Paramount pictures. The UPMC studio was in Forty Fort and headquartered in Wilkes-Barre.

A mysterious episode occurred on February 15, 1922, when eight barrels of illegal alcohol were taken by the Wilkes-Barre police from a delivery truck on North Washington Street. Valued at \$50,000, the alcohol went missing that night (Lewis). Many thought it was stolen by officials from the police station. Though many questioned what happened, no report had been made to Mayor Hart or the chief of police—no one knew anything including the patrolmen on duty.



While Hart pushed back on the reformers call against drinking, gambling, and baseball, he did develop a park system for the residents and trumpeted what was called the City Beautiful Movement which was sweeping the country. Kirby Park and the new concrete Market Street bridge which provided a grand entrance into the city became part of his legacy.

His mayoral career which began in 1919 ended on February 2, 1933, when he died in office. 50,000 people turned out for the funeral of the beloved playwright politician. Several buildings--Hart Lunch, the Hart Building, and the Hart Theater among others--were named in his honor. He is buried in St. Mary's cemetery in Hanover Township.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Daniel Hart Times Leader Dubitsky](#)

[Daniel Hart Playwright Kashatus](#)

[Daniel Hart Times Leader Ed Lewis](#)

[Wilkes-Barré Preservation Society's Post](#)

#### PRINT RESOURCES

Spear, Sheldon. *Wyoming Valley Revisited*. Shavertown, Pa: Jemags & Co. 1984