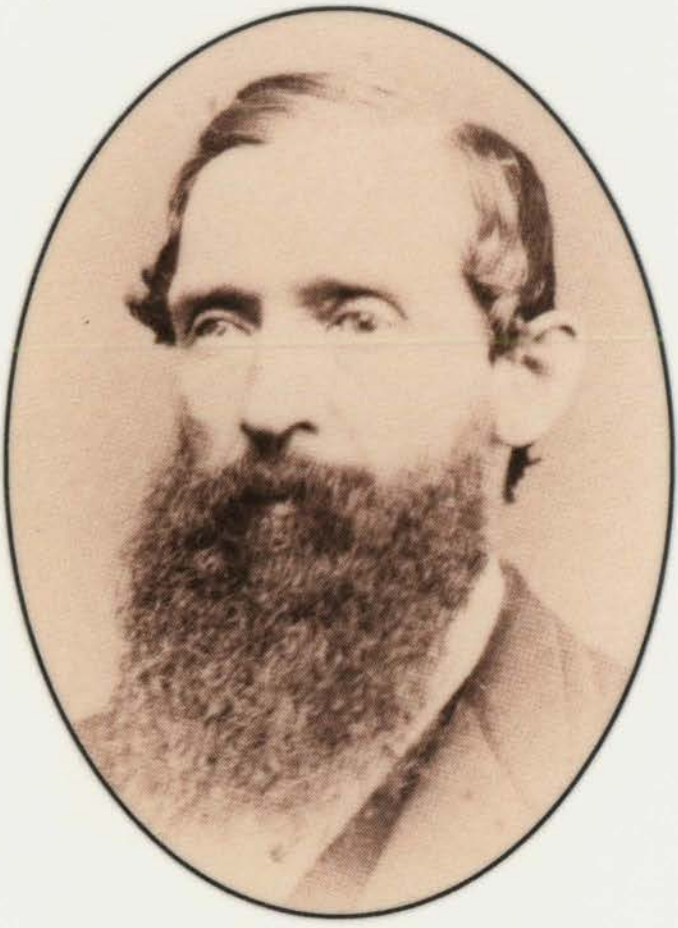
The Diaries of Robert Heysham Sayre



The Diaries of

Robert Heysham Sayre

By Frank Whelan
Lance Metz

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The story of the early days of Lehigh University has often been told. It is presented as the vision and dream of one man, Asa Packer. But while no one can deny Judge Packer's lead role in the establishment of the university, he delegated the execution of his dream to men he trusted and thus, in reality, was only part of the picture. For Lehigh had many fathers, and second only to Packer was Robert Heysham Sayre.

Sayre — industrialist, entrepreneur and humanist — was Packer's right-hand man. He not only carried out the great man's orders but presided over Packer's estate after his death. And it was Sayre, along with Packer's nephew, Elisha Packer Wilbur, who were to save Lehigh when it almost disappeared in the depression that followed the Panic of 1893. Lehigh was to be a monument to Sayre and the others who helped carry out Asa Packer's dream as much as to the founder, and this is their story.

The publishers wish to particularly thank Lance Metz, archivist of the Hugh Moore Parkway Commission, Easton, Pennsylvania, for his invaluable assistance and perspective. Also, special appreciation to Robert P. L. Frick of Bethlehem, John "Jack" Frick, and Ruth Cox.

A study of 19th Century Lehigh Valley businessman Robert Heysham Sayre is long overdue. This account of his life, and in particular his involvement with Lehigh University, covers just a small part of his interests. Living before the era of press agents and media hype, Sayre has been largely forgotten. His good works were done quietly. Sayre's surviving business papers are few and far between. And his mentor, Asa Packer, committed little to paper. If these were all we had to go on a biography of Robert Sayre would consist of a few paragraphs.

Fortunately, Sayre picked up the habit of keeping a diary. From 1854 to 1906, a remarkable period of 52 years, he ended each day with an account of the events of his business and private life.

Unlike 17th Century English diarist Samuel Pepys, Sayre's notes are usually terse and to the point. His journals were kept in pocket-size volumes designed for a man in a hurry. Written in pencil and often difficult to decipher, they offer fascinating insights into the development of the Lehigh Valley. The weather is recorded faithfully. Accounts of business meetings, notes on the state of coal tonnage and affairs of the Lehigh Valley Railroad are almost regular entries.

But there are wonderful moments in his diary when Sayre unbends enough to show us his feelings. After the death of his first wife, Mary, he pours his grief onto the pages. Sayre's dismissal from the Lehigh Valley Railroad by the sons of Asa Packer in the 1880s brings forth a rare display of anger. And at the

end of each year this devout Episcopalian frankly set down his shortcomings and spiritual failings. There are, among other asides, comments on a pretty actress he had seen on the stage in Philadelphia, memories of a regretted hangover, and the progress of his garden's asparagus crop.

After Robert Sayre's death in 1907 his diaries were passed down in his family. In the mid-1980s they were donated by a Sayre descendent to the Hugh Moore Park and Historic Museum, Inc. of Easton. Its historian, Lance Metz, who has read all of the Sayre diaries, regards them as the most significant documents that exist on the industrial history of the Lehigh Valley.

This work is the product of a joint effort between Lance Metz and myself. It was Metz who introduced me to Robert Sayre and his world. His help, insights and vast knowledge of the industrial history of the Lehigh Valley were invaluable in the writing of this book.

Frank Whelan
Allentown Pa.
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Asa Packer was never the most effusive of men. Although quite capable of getting his point across, the founder of the Lehigh Valley Railroad was a Connecticut Yankee. And for his stock a taciturn nature was the norm. Like the legendary New Englander Ezra Thayer, Packer felt the essential tragedy of life was that there were only 24 hours in a day to get things done. He believed in letting his works speak for him.

So it must have come as something of a surprise for the Episcopal Bishop of Bethlehem, William Bacon Stevens, that fall day in Philadelphia in 1864 when Packer told the clergyman he wanted to found a college in South Bethlehem.

Like many self-made men, Asa Packer respected a university education. It was something he could never have. Give this carpenter-turned-millionaire a gang of men and he could put together a canal boat better than most. In a high-stakes business deal, Asa Packer was in his element. And, when it came to sizing up the cut of a man's jib and recruiting him to join the ranks of his associates, there was no one better. But in a world of books and scholarship, the railroad baron was out of his depth and he knew it.

Bishop Stevens recalled the details of the day Lehigh was launched in a speech he gave at the university after Packer's death. Packer had told the clergyman that "he had long contemplated doing something for the benefit of his state, and especially of the Lehigh Valley." He promised to give $500,000 as the initial endowment for the university. Bishop Stevens asked Packer if he had thought at all about the kind of school he wanted. Packer replied, "I am

not much acquainted with these matters, but you are, and I want you, if you will, to devise a plan which I can put into effective operation."

It was vintage Packer. Get advice from the best men. Have them draw up a plan that you can work with. Then carry it forward with a will until you receive the desired result. Packer rejected the idea put forward by some that the school be called "Packer University." It was to be known as Lehigh, like that other apple of his eye, the railroad. He also wanted it to be an Episcopal school—one that reflected the heritage of a church that he joined after, or so the story goes, he was snubbed by some uppity Presbyterians of Mauch Chunk.

There was another point on which Asa Packer expressed himself quite clearly. In 1878, a group of the 12-year-old college's alumni came forward with the request that Lehigh be made strictly an engineering school. Literature and history were, in the language of another era, not "relevant" and the young men wanted them "lopped off." But, in the words of one Packer biographer, "the venerable Founder listened attentively, smiled—and—rejected their proposal."

Despite these ground rules, and his presence at major Lehigh functions, Asa Packer was soon to treat his college as he did his business enterprises. He turned it over to the men who had made him wealthy. And chief among them was the superintendent of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, Robert Heysham Sayre.

It was Sayre and a close-knit circle of South Bethlehem elite, tied to the Lehigh Valley Railroad, the Bethlehem Iron Company or both, who were to

take Asa Packer's vision of a university and create Lehigh. And it was Sayre and Asa's nephew and ultimate heir, Elisha Packer Wilbur, who risked their personal and business fortunes to save the college from closing following the collapse of the Lehigh Valley Railroad's stock in the late 1890s.

The Robert Sayre of the mid-1860s was a tall bearded man in his early 40s. He had been born in Columbia County, Pennsylvania on Oct. 13, 1824. Sayre's family roots were white Anglo-Saxon Protestant; his ancestors had first come to America as early as 1648. Among their ranks were Episcopal clergymen and merchants. By the late 1790s, the Sayres were prosperous members of Philadelphia's mercantile elite.

Robert Sayre probably would have followed in their footsteps if fate, in the form of the War of 1812, had not taken a hand. The conflict wreaked havoc on the nation's shipping and the firm of Cook & Sayre. Robert's father, William Sayre Sr., lost almost all of his investment. The only thing that was left for him was a small farming property in Columbia County. And it was there that William Sayre Sr. and his wife, Mary Elizabeth, relocated. They were to have 11 children, five of whom survived into adulthood.

Very little is known about Robert Sayre's early years. His family moved to Mauch Chunk when he was four. It was in this bustling town of Lehigh Coal and Navigation Co. canal builders Josiah White and Erskine Hazard that little Robert Sayre first got his understanding of men and things.

One tragic incident of that early life in Mauch Chunk that we do know of was recounted by Sayre's

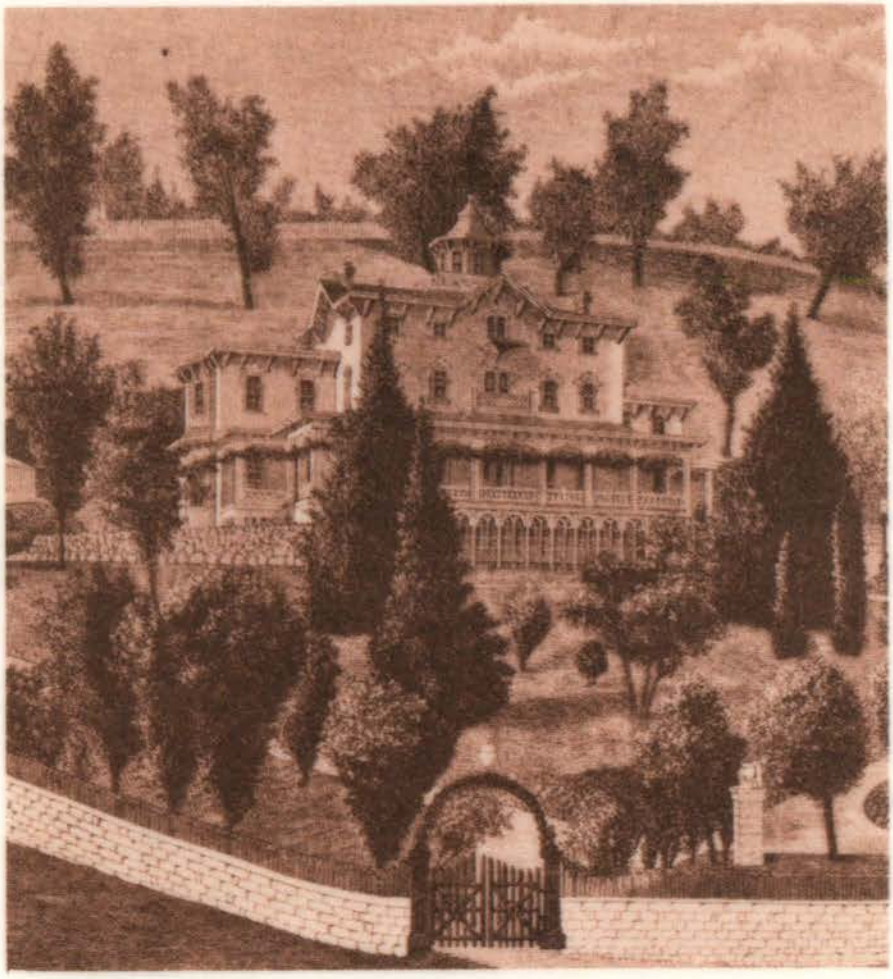
son, Francis, many years later. "When he was a boy of eight, whittling a stick, his knife slipped and the point pierced his eye, so that for the rest of his life he was blind in one eye." But, Robert Sayre's son noted, "he never let it curb him. In fact with one eye he saw more than anyone else that I knew."

William Sayre Sr. came to Mauch Chunk in 1828 to take a job as a boating clerk. It was his task to keep track of accounts and collect tolls. According to Hugh Moore Park and Canal Museum historian Lance Metz, this "situation" was given to William Sayre Sr. by friends who had sympathy for his lack of farming skills.

From the first, the senior Sayre became active in the local Episcopal church. It almost might be said that, in those early days, he **was** the local Episcopal church. Less than a year after arriving in Mauch Chunk, William Sayre Sr. was trying to form a congregation. If a passing Episcopal priest was in the neighborhood, he would organize a service in the local schoolhouse. If none could be found, Sayre himself would act as lay reader.

It was apparently during these years that William Sayre Sr. met a young man named Asa Packer. Packer arrived in Mauch Chunk in 1833, a 28-year-old, rough around the edges, from Mystic, Conn. Packer had left home at age 17 to live with his brother in the wilds of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. There he learned carpentry from his uncle, Edward Packer. In 1828 he married Sarah Blakslee.

Apparently ambitious to improve his lot, Packer moved to the booming community of Mauch Chunk and started building canal boats. Soon he was sailing



Asa Packer Mansion
1879

his own boat down the canal and then acquired another. In no time, Asa Packer was a large canal boating contractor, hauling coal from Pottsville to New York City. From that point, he went on to open a general store in Mauch Chunk in partnership with his brother.

Although honest and straight-forward, Packer was not a man to cross. But he met his match in 1843. That year some canal boat men went on strike for higher wages, blocking the waterway with boats that numbered in the hundreds. Packer, by then a former state assemblyman and serving a term as associate judge for Carbon County at the time, led a party of strikebreakers to Easton to break the blockade. When the strikers caught the crafty New Englander attempting to untie the knots that locked the boats together they threw him in the river. His dignity in tatters, Packer was forced to swim to the other side.

How the elder Sayre and Packer met is unknown. We do know that the future millionaire was a devout Episcopalian and that it was William Sayre Sr. who introduced him to that faith. The traditional story is that, when he first came to Mauch Chunk, Asa Packer wanted to follow in the Calvinist footsteps of his fathers. So he started to attend the Presbyterian Church. But the uneducated carpenter did not fit in with the somewhat straitlaced members of the congregation. So he broke from them and was welcomed by the modest, but no less respectable, Episcopal congregation.

Added evidence of this break is the story told in David Bishop Skillman's history of Lafayette College. One day, Easton coal baron Ario Pardee approached

Packer in connection with the addition of an engineering wing to Lafayette College. At first, the rail baron was willing and even eager. But when Pardee mentioned that the school would be under the control of the Presbyterian Church, a chill fell over the conversation. Packer let it be known he wanted nothing to do with any college run by Presbyterians.

All this is conjecture. What is known is that, in 1835, Asa Packer joined a group of men, including William Sayre Sr., who founded St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the mother church of all the Episcopal churches of the Lehigh Valley. This event also brought Asa Packer into close family contact with the Sayres, including young Robert.

The boy was attending public schools in Mauch Chunk in those years. At some point, he showed an interest in civil engineering. His first teacher in this field was an engineer named James Nowlin. In later years, Sayre would often talk of him as the first teacher who inspired his interest in mathematics. In 1840, at the tender age of 16, Robert Sayre left home to take a job with the Morris Canal and Banking Co. in Morris County, N.J. It was there that he first worked under engineer E. A. Douglass, the designer of Mauch Chunk's Switch Back railroad.

Two years later Sayre returned to Mauch Chunk to take a position with the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co. as a civil engineer. His first project was as an apprentice surveyor of a hand-powered rail line from the company's Summit Hill coal mines to Mauch Chunk. Douglas Sayre's mentor on the project, entrusted the 19-year-old with laying out part of the line. But Sayre's ability must have been such that the

largest company in America was willing to trust him. And, in an era in which professional education in engineering was limited to study with a skilled master and then employment, it was not unusual for a young man to be given such responsibilities.

Of course there were other tasks that were not nearly as professional. Sayre and a young man named Thomas Crelling were required to care for 141 canal mules, the chief motive power of the LC&N's canal boat fleet, during the winter of 1842-43. Isolated in the little town of Orewell, in Bradford County 85 miles north of Mauch Chunk, the pair braved everything from a scarlet fever outbreak to the generally chilly attitude of its New England Yankee inhabitants.

At this same time, Asa Packer was working on the idea of a railroad. He had come to believe that a system of transportation that did not have to be closed every winter, as was the case with the ice-choked canals, and was powered by something other than mules was the wave of the future. It flew in the face of the business wisdom of the day. Everybody told Packer that railroads were only good to haul coal to canal boats. But the crusty New Englander was willing to risk his capital to prove they were wrong.

Packer first took an interest in what was then the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill & Susquehanna Railroad in 1846. Impatient with the pace of railroad construction, he wanted action. In October, 1851 Packer bought up all the stock he could get his hands on and obtained a controlling interest in the railroad. On May 11, 1852 the board of the DLS&S approved the selection by Packer of Robert Sayre to be the new

chief engineer of the railroad. On Jan. 7, 1853, the railroad was renamed the Lehigh Valley.

Asa Packer was not the sort of man to let the destiny of his new railroad wait upon the whim of time and weather. First he had Sayre re-survey the railroad's route. The new route would follow the path of the Lehigh River. That winter Packer's crews were blasting away the rock cut at Easton. And in 1854 Sayre was constantly pushing both himself and the men to even greater labors. That same year the rising cost of material and labor caught them short and there were physical delays in the railroad's progress.

But progress was being made. On May 25, 1855, Robert Sayre mounted the cab of the locomotive, General Wall, at South Easton and drove it about four miles up the line. On June 6, track was laid in South Bethlehem. By June 9, an excursion train full of local big wigs traveled to Allentown on the ringing rails of the Lehigh Valley road. And on Sept. 15, 1855, the first trainload of coal rolled down from Mauch Chunk to Easton.

Despite this progress, Sayre knew they had a long way to go. Looking back on those days 13 years later, he told an audience at Lehigh University the true conditions of the railroad at that time. "A single track from Easton to Mauch Chunk; iron of an inferior quality—the best of which we could at that time avail ourselves; track laid without ballast; not a single coal, freight, or passenger car of our own; no shops, no depots worthy of the name—in fact, nothing but the track and four locomotives."

But Sayre, with the consent of Packer, was

about to make a decision that would shape not only their own fortunes but the future of the Lehigh Valley. It was in 1856 that they saw the need to establish an operational headquarters for the railroad. Mauch Chunk was too far from the center of activity. Philadelphia, where Packer was to eventually make his real home and where the company's corporate offices were located, was just as bad. What was needed was a site that would give the superintendent and chief engineer of the Lehigh Valley Railroad real contact with the day-to-day operation of the network. And Sayre decided that South Bethlehem filled that role. That year, he and his family moved into a small frame home on Market Street.

South Bethlehem, before the arrival of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, was a rural area. For years its vast lands had been used by the Moravian Church as a farming center to provide the community of Bethlehem across the Lehigh with inexpensive foodstuffs.

Old Bethlehem was in the doldrums. By the 1850s, secular influences had riven the communal settlement founded by Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians roughly 100 years before. Once the leader of the Lehigh Valley's three communities, Bethlehem of 1850 was still struggling to overcome the impact of the business depression of the 1840s. Its small group of business leaders had been hit hard by the collapse of a local businessman and community leader, Owen Rice III. There were some businessmen like Charles A. Luckenbach and Augustus Wolle, who looked to the future. But real change, if it was to come, had to be from the outside.

Rumors were spreading in Bethlehem as early

as 1852 that railroads were headed their way. Not only was the Lehigh Valley moving south from Mauch Chunk, but the North Pennsylvania Railroad, which would provide the vital link between the Quaker City and the coal regions, was coming. Luckenbach was already dividing his South Bethlehem farm property into building lots.

In 1853, the first industry spawned by the Lehigh Valley Railroad was being developed in South Bethlehem two years before the trains arrived. In 1845, an Allentown man, surveyor Andrew K. Wittman, discovered zinc ore in the Saucon Valley near Friedensville. But it could not be used until some way was found to get coal for the furnaces needed to smelt it.

Invention-businessman Samuel Wetherill of Bethlehem was convinced that the process he had discovered could be made workable if coal was available to power his furnaces. And when he heard that the railroad was coming to South Bethlehem, Wetherill knew he would be able to get all the fuel he needed. So he constructed his works and by 1855 they were sending clouds of thick black smoke over South Bethlehem.

Soon the whole region was abustling. The activity reached its peak in mid-1857. That year, the Lehigh Valley Railroad was joined in South Bethlehem to another line, the North Pennsylvania. The creation of a group of Philadelphia capitalists, the North Pennsylvania offered the link to the rich markets of the Quaker City. In time, it would make South Bethlehem the center of an industrial empire that included Bethlehem Steel.

Being the kind of man he was, Robert Sayre wanted to make sure that his new business flourished. To keep it under his eye, the chief engineer and superintendent of the Lehigh Valley Railroad set up a headquarters building in South Bethlehem. But Sayre wanted to have direct daily contact with the line. So in the spring of 1858, workers were busy putting up a Victorian Gothic home at the corner of Third and Wyandotte Streets. The Sayres moved there from Market Street late that June.

It was this location, 250 Wyandotte Street, that Robert Sayre and his family were to call home into the 20th century. Here was the real birthplace of the neighborhood known as Fountain Hill. (This neighborhood is not to be confused with the community next door, the Borough of Fountain Hill, which was not incorporated until 1904. The neighborhood was and remains completely within the borders of South Bethlehem.) It was also on this site that many of the Lehigh Valley's leading institutions, like Bethlehem Iron, later Bethlehem Steel, St. Luke's Hospital and Lehigh University were developed and grew.

By the early 1860s, Sayre had moved his father, William Sr., brother, William Jr., and their families into a rambling Victorian mansion across the street. Others who arrived during those early years were Tinsley Jeter, a Virginia-born investor in railroads and real estate and Elisha Packer Wilbur, Asa's favorite nephew and personal secretary.

Jeter suggested the name of Fountain Hill for the area and began selling off the parcels he controlled as building lots. In 1870, Dr. Garrett B. Linderman, a Mauch Chunk doctor who married Asa

Packer's daughter Lucy and gave up medicine to handle his father-in-law's investments, arrived.

It was from the three families—the Sayres, Wilburs and Lindermans—that Fountain Hill was to get its reputation for opulence mixed with good works. And, as in Mauch Chunk, it was the Episcopal Church that became the focal point of their religious and social life. As early as 1854, informal worship services were being held at the Temperance Hall at Broad and New Streets. The first Episcopal service conducted in South Bethlehem took place in Robert Sayre's parlor in 1861. Four years later, the Episcopal Church of the Nativity was consecrated by Philadelphia Bishop William Bacon Stevens.

At the same time the Church of the Nativity was going up, the Civil War was raging across America. It transformed the Lehigh Valley into an industrial power. And South Bethlehem became the focal point of that development.

By the close of the war, the Lehigh Valley Railroad was a major East Coast coal shipper. Canals were left in its dust. And the Bethlehem Iron Company was booming. Thanks to the services of master iron rail maker John Fritz, whom Robert Sayre had lured to the Lehigh Valley from Johnstown in 1861, it had blossomed into the focal point of the rail industry. And railroad expansion was to push it to greater heights in the postwar era.

All this made Asa Packer a very rich man. And Robert Sayre and the rest of Packer's associates had grown wealthy with him. It was at this point, as we have seen, that Packer decided to build Lehigh University. And on Friday, May 12, 1865, Asa Packer first

Asa Packer in Paris (right).

let Robert Sayre in on his plans.

According to Sayre's diary, he and "Judge Packer," the title always given to the railroad magnate since his stint on the Carbon County Court, had spent the day in Slatington conferring on railroad affairs. Then he dropped the big news. Writes Sayre, "Judge spoke to me of his design to build a college at Bethlehem South, proposing to appropriate $500,000 for that purpose."

For the next month, before the "Judge" left for his only trip to Europe, Sayre and Packer were in contact almost daily. The diary for those dates is spotted with references to meetings, dinners and teas. And it seems safe to assume that the subject of the future Lehigh University was a frequent one.

On Friday, June 9, 1865, Bishop Stevens came up from Philadelphia. "I drove him out to the proposed location of the College, thence to the iron works. Mr. and Mrs. Packer down, dined at my house," writes Sayre. It seems clear that already Packer was expecting Sayre to take on the active role in planning for the school.

On June 14, 1865, the steamer "Persia," the pride of the Samuel Cunard's growing fleet, pulled away from its berth in New York. Among those aboard were Asa Packer and his wife Sarah. But Robert Sayre was not at the pier to see them off. His father was suffering from a crippling attack of gout and his faithful son would not leave his side. But Packer knew of Sayre's complete loyalty to his affairs and didn't need to see him waving goodbye.

Packer's confidence was well rewarded. While the Judge was in Europe, planning moved forward at

a brisk pace. On Thursday July 27, 1865, Sayre noted in his dairy, the arrival of Bishop Stevens. "Went to call on the Bishop this morn. Got a carriage and took him and Mrs. Stevens over to the college. Spent day with Bishop and Robert Packer, organizing Board of Trustees etc." Its members were Bishop Stevens, Asa Packer, Charles Maynard, Robert Sayre, William H. Sayre, Robert A. Packer, Harry E. Packer, Garret B. Linderman, John Fritz and Joseph Harrison Jr. Of these men, only the Sayre brothers and Fritz would still be there when the 20th century dawned.

On Sept. 4, the newly formed Board of Trustees, meeting at the Sun Hotel (known today as the Sun Inn), ratified the choice by Sayre and Bishop Stevens of Edward Potter of New York as the architect of Lehigh University. Two days later, Potter came down from New York. Along with Sayre, Bishop Stevens and Robert Packer, the architect went over the grounds and made suggestions for the new buildings.

When Asa Packer returned from Europe in early October, he was quickly filled in by Sayre on the affairs of Lehigh. On Oct. 11, the board met again, at what Sayre calls the "Episcopal rooms" in Philadelphia to receive the architect's plans. Packer approved them. About a month later, Packer reported that he and Bishop Stevens had picked a president for Lehigh.

The choice was a belles lettres professor from the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Henry Coppee. A graduate of Yale and West Point, Coppee was a former military officer with engineering training. He had also held an assistant professorship in geography, history and ethics at West Point and had been a

professor at the University of Pennsylvania for 10 years.

Along with being president of Lehigh, Coppee was also to teach a course in history and English literature. He was also a member in good standing of the Episcopal church, a particular requirement of Packer and Sayre. For those who follow the stars, the fact that Coppee and Sayre shared the same birthday, Oct. 13, might also have been helpful.

It is understandable that, at year's end, Robert Sayre felt some sense of satisfaction. "We have been blessed in our community," he wrote in his diary, for Dec. 31, 1865, "by the princely munificence of Judge Packer in endowing a University for the education of our youth, he having set apart $500,000 for that purpose."

By 1866, plans for Lehigh continually cropped up in Sayre's diary. In January, he purchased property owned by the Moravian Church, a brick building known as Christmas Hall built for that church by Packer years before. Until Packer Hall was finished in 1868, it **was** Lehigh University.

At the Feb. 13 board meeting, after which Sayre initially referred in his diary to the college as Lehigh University, Bishop Stevens announced that because of illness he was going to Europe on an extended holiday. Sayre took over many of his tasks. A week later he called architect Potter down to Philadelphia.

On April 1, Potter arrived in Bethlehem for another meeting with Sayre. An extended board meeting, presided over by Sayre, took place in the vestry room of Nativity Church on April 13-14, 1866. Apparently, those meetings resulted in the decision

announced by Asa Packer on April 27 that stone, not brick, was the material that he wanted used for his college.

About a week before, Sayre had hired a "Captain Jenkins" to supervise construction. Throughout that summer, Sayre made numerous trips to the campus. Sometimes it was with Captain Jenkins; sometimes Judge Packer came along. But many times that summer, after a hard day of dealing with slow coal trains and a pile of paper work, Robert Sayre climbed over the South Mountain alone, watching over the creation Asa Packer's dream.

On Sept. 1, 1866, Lehigh University opened its doors for its first class of 40 students. Robert Sayre, who had walked up to the college from the Lehigh Valley Railroad's headquarters building, described it in his diary: "At 2 p.m. attended opening of the Lehigh University. Exercises very agreeable all passed off very pleasantly."

It would be wrong to assume that Asa Packer was not really involved in Lehigh after its founding. Minutes of the Board of Trustees meetings show that, until his death in 1879, the Founder, as he was known, attended almost all of them.

But Packer was usually silent. Even when he had something to say, he was a man of few words. An Episcopal bishop, who was present in 1871 when Packer told the board he was going to give the school another half million dollars in Lehigh Valley Railroad stock, making Lehigh tuition-free, recalled that the Judge did so "with that quietness which was characteristic of him."

The opening of Lehigh University was far from

the end of Sayre's involvement. From 1865 until his death in 1907, he was to regard the school almost as warmly as Packer did. One of his first actions in that regard came in 1868. That year Sayre picked Stanley Goodwin, a rising young civil engineer whom he had hired for the Lehigh Valley Railroad, to teach the first course in that subject ever given at Lehigh. Goodwin's title was Demonstrator in Civil Engineering. It was 1871 before the college got its first full professor in the subject, Charles McMillan.

Perhaps it would be useful to take a closer look at the man whom Asa Packer had decided was to preside over the welfare of Lehigh University. Except for his diaries, Sayre left no correspondence or other material to give us many clues. But reading closely the diaries can put together a picture of a man who was very much a part of his time.

The most important thing that can be said about Robert Sayre is that he was a devout Episcopalian. At the end of every year, he noted in long passages in his diary that, although his material growth was fine, his spiritual health was lacking. Some Sundays, Sayre would not take communion because he felt he had not prepared his soul for it by reflection and prayer. A great deal of this undoubtedly reflects his upbringing in the Episcopal Church influenced by John Henry Newman and other leaders of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement.

In his family life, Robert Sayre appears to have practiced the Victorian virtues he preached. He was to have four wives, three of whom he outlived. Of Sayre's 12 children—nine by his first marriage, three by his third—10 survived into adulthood. He often

noted their birthdays in his diary. In the early days, the family would often join Sayre if he was working in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton. When his first wife died in 1869, the normally unemotional Sayre released a flood of feeling covering several pages of his diary.

His faith seems to have given Sayre a quasi-religious feeling about his job. He came to regard work as a calling or vocation. In his job, Sayre was almost constantly on the move. Special trains carried him up and down the Lehigh Valley line. And, whether it was a derailed locomotive, some new property that Judge Packer had his eye on, or the wildcat strikes by the restive members of the Irish labor force, Robert Sayre was on top of it.

Sayre tried, by his lights, to deal fairly with the men under him. After an accident or mishap, he would often see to it that a worker, particularly a skilled laborer, was cared for. It was, after all, the desire to have a place for maimed Lehigh Valley Railroad workers that led to the creation of St. Luke's Hospital.

But Sayre had been raised in the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of early 19th century Pennsylvania. He had dealt with canal boat roughnecks and railroad huskies and saw unions as a conspiracy. If workers behaved, the Christian gentlemen they worked for would treat them fairly. But if they blocked what Sayre saw as the great work to which he had dedicated his life, workers got little sympathy. During the 1877 railroad strike, for example, Sayre let the locomotive engineers know the score. When their wages were cut and the men walked out, Sayre issued an ultimatum. Anyone who failed to show up for

work would be let go.

There was some tension around Wilkes-Barre and the state militia was called out to break up a blockade by strikers on the Lehigh Valley. But by and large, Asa Packer's railroad was spared the major violence that hit other lines. And Sayre was not vindictive. Many of the strikers were rehired, as long as they were willing to accept the wages they had been given. "At year's end," writes railroad historian Robert F. Archer, "(LV) management made the boast that, in spite of the brief employees' strike. The total tonnage that year was the highest ever, with transportation costs per ton mile at their lowest in 15 years—at the employees' expense, of course."

Throughout his long life, Robert Sayre was intellectually curious. Like the ancient Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, "he thought the hour wasted when he wasn't reading or hearing about something new." A library wing was added to his Fountain Hill home about 1900 to house Sayre's large collection of first editions. It contained volumes of history, literature, and travel by some of the best authors of the day. Sayre's prize piece was an original presentation copy of John James Audubon's "Birds of America." The copy contained 435 plates, three and a half feet by two and a half. According to an interview Sayre had with the Lehigh Valley Railroad's company magazine in 1900, "it was probably the only one in the United States."

Despite his religious beliefs and work ethic, Robert Sayre was far from a prig. To judge from his diary, he was an avid theater-goer. On his occasional overnight stays in Philadelphia or New York, there

are references in the diary to attending a play. He often noted the quality of the performance and at least twice commented on another actress he had seen in a similar role.

He could also over-indulge. In the dairy entry for Oct. 17, 1867, the 43-year-old Sayre noted his lack of temperance during a business trip to Wilkes-Barre. "Evening at Hotel and made a fool of myself....I drank too much wine in the eve, which caused many great mortifications and grief," Sayre wrote, describing the next day's hangover.

There were times when Sayre had to call on his experience as a man of the world when he was dealing with Lehigh students. Despite their somewhat stiff-looking portraits, not all college undergraduates in the Victorian era spent their spare time reading Horatio Alger. They had all of the normal drives that come with young adulthood. On Feb. 25, 1867, Sayre noted in his diary that he and Judge Packer were called on "to attend the trial of two students for intoxication and insubordination." The end result was to forgive the young men and give them a second chance.

In the spring of 1870, Robert Sayre had to handle an even more delicate situation. On a Tuesday night in May, he noted in his diary, a scion of a Fountain Hill family had left Lehigh "clandestinely." As the young man's father was dead, Sayre was asked by his widowed mother to intervene. It was two days later when Sayre found out the reason for the late night disappearance. "Heard of ————————'s miserable conduct in relation with a Miss ———————— of Easton, had to tell his mother. Poor woman, she

Lehigh Class of 1896

is feeling awful. The girl is enceinte (pregnant)."

To judge from the diary, in his role as surrogate father, Sayre sent the young woman to the Bradford County town of Towanda. Two days later, he noted that he took the boy's mother north "to see the young woman her son has ruined." A week later, Sayre was back up north with the widow. "Drove ——— out to find the girl," he noted cryptically. From there on, the Sayre diaries are silent on the affair.

This incident gives at least some indication of the type of close-knit institution Lehigh was in the early days of its existence. It was a small part of the Fountain Hill world that Sayre and his extended family had created. Even the physical environment was a part of it. In her "History of Lehigh University," Catherine Drinker Bowen, daughter of Lehigh graduate and professor Henry S. Drinker, points out that, as late as 1906, a year before Sayre's death, much of the campus behind Packer Hall was still undeveloped.

The Sayre diaries are full of references to the social interaction between Sayre and the faculty and administration at Lehigh. Coppee and Sayre, only three years apart in age, often celebrated their birthdays together. On April 24, 1867, Coppee joined Sayre family members who went up to Wilkes-Barre for a social visit.

The evening of May 10, 1867, Sayre returned home from a long business trip and "found small party of married people at my house and Mr. and Mrs. Coppee." On June 15, Coppee was mentioned as stopping in for a trout supper. And throughout that summer he joined the Sayres for what seemed like countless cups of tea. In the fall, Sayre got the Lehigh

faculty and their wives together for a train excursion to admire the autumn colors.

It was also in the late 1860s that Robert Sayre made his most important physical contribution to the University. On Sunday, Sept. 13, 1868, he noted in the diary a walk "up to the University and to the site of Sayre Observatory." The observatory, which he fully funded, was the pride of Lehigh in those days. Coppee called it "one of the finest astronomical observatories in the United States." At their meeting of Dec. 19, 1868, the Board of Trustees "recognized with pleasure and with sincere thanks the very handsome donation of Robert H. Sayre Esq. in founding an observatory for the University for instruction in Astronomy." When visitors to the campus, such as the Emperor of Brazil Dom Pedro II, came to town, it was one of the first things they asked to see.

For Robert Sayre and Lehigh, the years of the 1880s and 90s would not always be easy ones. With the death of Asa Packer in 1879, the responsibility for running the Lehigh Valley Railroad passed to his two sons, Robert and Harry. It would be nice to be able to report that these two young men respected the man who had done so much to help their father. But the truth was somewhat different. Sad to say, Asa Packer's sons were a perfect example of Otto von Bismark's observation that there are two generations in every family, the whipped and the unwhipped. Asa Packer had worked himself up from nothing, but his boys were raised in the lap of luxury.

Even before their father was dead, "the boys" as Sayre always referred to them, showed more aptitude for high living than for railroading. For ex-

ample, when steel maker John Fritz went to Europe in 1869 to study new techniques of the metals industry, young Harry Packer went along. But to judge from Fritz's diary, the young man was more interested in the Paris Art Students' Ball and chasing can-can girls of the Folies Bergere than in business techniques. And historian Lance Metz notes that Robert Packer was well known to indulge in the pleasures of the table.

For years, Sayre apparently had been trying to discipline the boys to their responsibilities. But now Dad was dead and Harry and Robert wanted to run his railroad. And it quickly became clear to Robert Sayre that Asa Packer's sons had little room for him. By early 1882, Sayre could read the handwriting on the wall. He noted in his diary, "The boys have come to scalp me and have brought the hatchet."

Robert Sayre was dismissed. Stunned by the callousness of this action, he wrote with understandable bitterness, "I commenced work on the Lehigh Valley Railroad on May 11, 1852, and after serving it faithfully for 30 years I was finally given evidence of the desires of Judge Packer's family to get rid of me. So I have arrived at the conclusion that honesty and faithfulness do not count for much in this world."

It must have been with something like relief that Robert Sayre took up new duties with the South Pennsylvania Railroad. The project was planned by the head of the Reading Railroad, Franklin Gowen, and financed by a group of investors headed by the millionaire owner of the New York Central Railroad, William K. Vanderbilt. Pittsburgh steel-maker Andrew Carnegie had been complaining to Vanderbilt

that the Pennsylvania Railroad was overcharging him. The South Penn was designed to break the hammerlock that the Pennsylvania Railroad had on cross-state rail traffic.

Despite his interest in the South Penn, Vanderbilt was careful at first. According to Gowen biographer Marvin W. Schlegel, he told the other investors that only if they could convince Robert Sayre, "a good practical railroad man" to head the operation as the South Penn's president would he join up. Once they got the South Bethlehemite aboard, Vanderbilt put up the first $5 million.

President Sayre quickly threw himself into the work with his old vigor. He launched what one source called "one of the most exhaustive railroad line location studies ever undertaken in the United States." It covered nearly 1,000 square miles with some 5,000 miles of survey lines. When the actual labor began, thousands of Italians, Hungarians and blacks headed for the mountains to do the digging. They were paid $1.25 a day for 10 hours of work.

Engineering News and American Contract Journal, a professional journal, praised the work of Sayre's civil engineers. "One of the striking features....presented to the mind of the engineer in considering the adopted location is that it is a `summit line' for a large portion of the way and, instead of following the devious windings of the mountain streams as does its old brother, the Pennsylvania Railroad, it cuts through the mountain ranges at right angles and seeks the crest of the watersheds....This simple fact speaks for itself as a measure of economy and locating skill." By early 1884, over 60 percent of

the line was completed. One of Sayre's tunnel crews reported that they could hear the voices of the men tunneling on the other side.

But the money men were about to undo the engineers' creation. Mega-investment banker J. P. Morgan had a little talk with William K. Vanderbilt. Morgan told Vanderbilt that word was that the London money markets, the chief source of railroad capital, saw the whole project as a threat. Rather than fight the Pennsylvania in a "cutthroat competition," Morgan told Vanderbilt, the Central should join forces with it to regulate the market. It wasn't long before Vanderbilt decided that Morgan was right. Although $10 million had already been invested, Vanderbilt let Gowen twist slowly in the wind and cut off funding for the South Penn.

The embattled Reading president, bankrupt and fearing disgrace, checked into a Washington, D.C. hotel room, clapped a pistol to his head and blew his brains out. When Sayre's diary was opened for the first time many years later, a carefully clipped newspaper article about Gowen's suicide fluttered out.

Once more thwarted in his work, Sayre would have had every right to feel depressed. But suddenly his fortunes took a turn for the better. In February, 1884, Robert Packer died. He was followed by Harry Packer in January, 1885. Although no known proof exists, some claim the brothers' overindulgence in the good life, Victorian style, did them in. Elisha Packer Wilbur was in charge now. And Asa Packer's favorite nephew and Fountain Hill neighbor of Robert Sayre wanted him back to take over the railroad and correct the neglect the line had suffered under "the boys"

reign.

So Sayre returned, undoubtedly glad to shake the dust of the South Penn from his feet. But the engineers who worked on the South Penn were bitter. They were convinced that what they called, "the best line of railroad between the Ohio Valley and the Atlantic" had been "smothered" by bankers. Yet their work was not for naught. In the 1930s, the route of the old railroad became the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Six of the nine tunnels designed and built by Robert Sayre's engineers for the South Penn railroad, enlarged for highway traffic, today serve a procession of trucks and cars between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

The 1880s and 90s were to be important ones for Sayre. The railroad network of America was pretty well built. So more and more of his time was devoted to the Bethlehem Iron Co. Years before, Sayre had overseen the company's transition from iron to steel rails. It had saved Bethlehem Iron from the general collapse that had stricken the rest of the Valley's metals industry after the Panic of 1873. Now, with the nation's rail network complete, Sayre was seeking other options for expansion.

He quickly focused on the growing world arms market. The late 19th century was witnessing a boom in naval weapons. Every up-to-date nation had to have a fleet, and Sayre and Fritz worked to convert the company into a major manufacturer of armor plate and naval guns.

At first, it was the American Navy, under both Democrat President Grover Cleveland and Republican William McKinley, that was the major customer

for Bethlehem Iron's wares. And the entire iron and steel industry was right there with them. Almost from the beginning, there were problems with the weapons procurement system. "Bid rigging, officers leaving the service for lucrative positions with defense contractors, and cost overruns were all around in the 19th century," says historian Lance Metz. "But it also laid the base for one of the world's strongest defense industries."

Sayre's role in the development of America's naval power was quickly recognized by the U.S. government. In 1893, he was President Cleveland's personal guest at a naval fleet review. On Aug. 20, 1898, the so-called "Great White Fleet," that humbled Spain in the Spanish-American War, steamed in victory review in New York. And Robert Sayre was there. The diary for that day reads, "Left Bethlehem at 7:49 a.m. via CRR of NJ for New York to see parade of (Rear Admiral William) Sampson's fleet. Went direct to office of Bethlehem Iron Co. where I met Patty (his wife) and the boys, who had come up from Atlantic Highlands. Had a fine view of the Ships as they came up the River, a grand sight to see the Ships that destroyed the Spanish fleet on July 3rd."

It did not take Bethlehem long to build a worldwide reputation as a weapons maker. By the mid-1890s, Sayre was spending a good part of his time traveling to Europe and Asia. Often the business of Bethlehem Iron brought the world to South Bethlehem. South American oligarchs, imperial Russian aristocrats and members of Japanese royalty all found their way to Fountain Hill.

When Sayre could not go himself, his agents

were drumming up business. An interesting item found in the diaries was a hotel bill from the one of Bethlehem's salesmen. At the top is an ornate engraving of the "Grand Hotel D'Europe," from St. Petersburg now Leningrad, Russia.

No matter how busy he was with Bethlehem Iron and the various railroads, Sayre did not forget Lehigh. He was always on hand for Board of Trustees meetings. Catherine Drinker Bowen gives an interesting look at those days when Robert Sayre and others would meet in her family's home:

When the writer was a little girl, and when on a certain evening the word would go round that the Trustees were coming, it meant clear off the supper things quick Mary; set extra chairs around the table and bring in the ink; shut the big sliding doors into the living room, and don't play the piano, anybody, or make a racket in the billiard room! The household would relapse into silence; no piano playing, no clicking of billiard balls, only from behind closed doors the low hum of men's voice—'Now gentlemen——the appropriation——approval——have I your sanction to——' And then tobacco smoke, and the pushing back of chairs, and Mary with the inevitable sponge cake, and if you stayed up long enough, a smile and good-night from the kind Bishop, and Mr. Cleaver, and Mr. Wilbur (with the white carnation in his buttonhole) and from Dr. Price. Of course everybody knew better than to ask what they had been doing in there, but next day, if your curiosity got the better of you, perhaps you might approach——not your father, because he is busy——but Dr. Price, because you know, as everyone knows, that Dr. Price

is approachable and nobody was every rebuffed by him. And Dr. Price will say 'Pooh——what do you want to know for! Anybody might think you were a Lehigh man yourself.' And if anybody knows what it is to be a Lehigh man it is Dr. Price. Because he has been one, and a very loyal one, ever since he entered college in 1866. In 1895 he was elected Alumni Trustee, in 1910 became a Trustee and in 1912 succeeded Mr. Lathrop as President of the Board.

Of course, as she admits, Catherine Drinker Bowen had no real idea what was actually going on at those long-winded meetings in the family home. But the world was changing in the 1890s and even the Victorian hillside of Lehigh was not immune to it. It began in 1893. A combination of tumbling farm prices, a contraction of business abroad and a shortage of gold in the treasury sparked a panic in the business community. With 15,000 business failures and 4 million people out of work, it was to be the worst economic crash until the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In the 1880s and 90s, anthracite coal revenues that had made the Lehigh Valley Railroad and Lehigh University possible were being eaten up by a series of rate wars. Other anthracite-carrying railroads were offering lower rates. But the Lehigh Valley Railroad was able to keep its head above water. Over the years, the line had gotten more and more of its revenue from hauling steel, cement, slate and other commodities.

But none of this was sufficient to counterbalance the Lehigh Valley's anthracite tonnage. There was no major problem as long as the economy was chugging along. But the Panic of 1893 forced the

railroad into a tailspin. And labor unrest, based around the Pullman workers' strike in Chicago, struck the Lehigh Valley hard. There was greater violence on the line than there had been since 1877. Then the Lehigh Valley had been strong enough to handle it, but now it took a toll. In 1894, a great deal of the railroad's rolling stock was destroyed in the strike violence.

By 1896, the panic was beginning to fade and America sent William McKinley and his Republicans to the White House. But, for the folks who had run the Lehigh Valley Railroad, the panic was not easy to forget. It was in 1896 that, for the first time in its history, the general freight ton-miles surpassed that of anthracite and bituminous coal. It was also quite clear that Wall Street stock speculators were forcing down the price of Lehigh Valley stock.

A crisis was coming for Lehigh University. It had depended for years on the generosity of Asa Packer's endowment of Lehigh Valley Railroad stock. But now there would have to be changes. At the start of 1897, Sayre, Wilbur and the Board of Trustees had some very important decisions to make.

On a clear, bright Jan. 12 morning, Robert Sayre headed for Philadelphia. That morning he attended a meeting of the boards of several subsidiaries of the Lehigh Valley Railroad. They included the trustees of the Asa Packer Estate and the full Lehigh Valley Board of Directors. "All proceeded very well, made a good showing for so bad a year. Earned about $405,000 above fixed charges, but lost a little over $500,000 on the operations of our coal company," he noted in his diary that night.

Sayre, just named president of Lehigh's Board of Trustees, was putting the best face possible on things. But the basic problem for the University remained. The stock could no longer support it. If Lehigh hoped to retain its pre-eminence as a university, it could no longer remain a private Episcopal school. It needed state aid. And it would have to change its status to get it. In many ways, this was the first admission that the splendid economic isolation that Fountain Hill and its elite had enjoyed for so long was coming to an end.

The day after his trip to Philadelphia, Robert Sayre was off again. "Mr. Williams, (University president Dr. Thomas M.) Drown and I left home at 8:30 a.m. in car #354 by regular train for Harrisburg. (Board member Henry S.) Drinker met us at Reading. Went directly to the executive chamber to see the Governor and Attorney General and enlisted them in favor of our application to the legislature for aid to Lehigh University."

Although Sayre does not say so in the diary, it must have already been clear to him that the price for the state bailing out Lehigh would be separation from the Episcopal church. This could not have been easy for any of the elite of Fountain Hill. In 1894, when Drown was being considered for the presidency of Lehigh, he was told in a letter by the board's go-between, iron maker B. F. Fackenthal, how important his membership in the Episcopal church was.

"(Pennsylvania) Governor Pattison's name has been talked of, but there is no possibility of his being selected, the fact that he belongs to the Methodist Church would alone be enough to debar him, for I

was told by the gentlemen that it is absolutely necessary, a sine qua non, that the president of the University belong to the Episcopal Church."

But 1894's sine qua non had become something less under the economic pressure of 1897. And Robert Sayre had gotten to know a lot about economic reality. On Saturday, Jan. 23, Lehigh's Board of Trustees gathered for a special meeting in the office of E.P. Wilbur. "Passed resolutions disestablishing any official connection between the University and the Church. We have made an application to the Legislature for financial aid. I spent the evening at Mr. Wilbur's playing Eucher." On Feb. 17, the board met and passed a resolution that, as of the start of the new term on Sept. 1, 1897, Episcopal services should not be recited.

Of course, the problems of Lehigh University were closely linked to those of the Lehigh Valley Railroad. On Feb. 18, Sayre, Wilbur and Drinker met in Sayre's Bethlehem office. It was not a pleasant occasion. Speculators were continuing their pressure to undercut the company on Wall Street. "Drinker a great deal exercised about the caprices of L.V. stock," Sayre noted in his diary.

All three were now aware that the only way the railroad could fight off the "sharks" was with an infusion of outside capital. According to Sayre, "Mr. Wilbur apprehensive that there would be difficulty in keeping our debt afloat at which event we might go into the hands of receivers." Wilbur declared there was only one thing to do. Writes Sayre, "He has promised to go to New York to see if he can arrange to borrow five million to tide over the slack season. I

have no doubt he can do it."

Sayre's confidence in Wilbur was not misplaced. The "white knight" that he found for the Lehigh Valley Railroad came in the portly form of J. P. Morgan, head of Drexel, Morgan & Co. But, as always, the investment banker had his terms.

On March 9, 1897, Robert Sayre, fighting a cold, laid those terms out at a Philadelphia meeting of the members of the board of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and the Packer Estate trust. Drexel Morgan would have voting control of the estate stock for two years or until their loan of $2,740,000 to the estate was repaid. The bankers also offered to buy $5 million worth of Lehigh Valley bonds at 9.5 percent. An additional $10 million would be available over the next 10 years should the railroad need it. This, wrote Sayre, "would pay off our floating debt and get us out of the crisis."

The offer was about the best the Lehigh Valley could hope for, so the boards agreed. Yet there was an even greater price that Sayre didn't mention. Morgan didn't like to own things he could not run. And he was not about to allow an independent-minded soul like Robert Sayre to remain in charge. In 1898, for the second and last time in his life, Sayre would leave the employ of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

But there still remained the immediate need of an appropriation from the state for Lehigh University. On Monday, March 29, Sayre, Wilbur and Drinker were in Sayre's office all day planning for the arrival of a legislative delegation later that week. In the afternoon, a Miss White, the Lehigh librarian, came by to plead the special needs of her library fund.

She must have made quite an impression on Sayre. He notes in his diary that the librarian was "pretty and spunky."

It was April 1, 1897, a little after 11:30 a.m. that a train carrying 50 members of the state legislature's committee on charities pulled into South Bethlehem from Harrisburg. The weather was calm and bright, perfect for a walking tour. Sayre, Wilbur and others greeted them at the railroad station.

First it was off to St. Luke's Hospital, which also was seeking state funds. Then the balance of the afternoon was spent at Lehigh, "where," Sayre wrote, "we gave them a good solid look at the buildings." After a brief meeting at the Sun Inn going over the books, the lawmakers from Harrisburg were on their way home. The day took a lot out of the 72-year-old Sayre. "Very tired and took cold. Home all evening took medicine and went to bed early."

Fortunately for Lehigh University, the end result was successful. Sayre and the board had asked the state for $200,000. They received $150,000—$75,000 for 1897 and $75,000 for 1898. Lehigh was saved. By the dawn of the 20th century, it had no more need of state funding. In 1900, the children of Robert Sayre gave $100,000 to Lehigh for the creation of Sayre Park. It was just another in a long series of gifts that the Sayres bestowed on Lehigh.

Robert Sayre was to serve as president of Lehigh's Board of Trustees until 1905. At 81 years of age, he had seen the university through its roughest times. But now he was tired and the years had taken their toll. Writing to Frank R. Dravo, president of the Pittsburgh alumni association, Sayre said, "Over forty

years—half of my life—has been enlisted in aiding the growth and contributing to the success of our University, and I desire now to give way to the younger, more vigorous and abler heads and hands."

But he would not have much time to enjoy his retirement. Two years after he wrote these words, Robert Sayre died. Born when James Monroe was in the White House and the fastest means of transportation was a horse, he lived into the era of automobiles, telephones and electric lights. And he was not afraid of change. For a man like Robert Sayre, it was progress and, like all good Victorians, he pretty much believed in it.

With the possible exception of Lehigh Canal builders Josiah White and Erskine Hazard, Robert Sayre had changed the Lehigh Valley more than any other man. His decision to locate the Lehigh Valley Railroad in South Bethlehem transformed what had become a sleepy little town into one of the industrial leaders of the nation. And bringing rail maker John Fritz from Johnstown to Bethlehem, pioneering in the production of steel rails and being a leader in American arms production insure the prosperity of the company he knew as Bethlehem Iron.

As a result, nearby communities also grew and prospered. Once a railroad brought links to the outside world, the Lehigh Valley was open to industry. A whole host of items—slate, silk and cement, to name just a few—were flowing out from the Valley. Commercial development had become possible.

But looked at today, 83 years after Sayre's death, Lehigh University may well be his greatest legacy. Unlike later industrialists, Robert Sayre left behind

no huge fortune or charitable trusts. And there is no army of publicists recounting his deeds. Sayre believed that his good works would speak for themselves.

It is quite possible that, without the willingness of Robert Sayre, E. P. Wilbur and others to work for its continued existence, Lehigh University might have disappeared in 1897. Few would have blamed them if they had sacrificed the school. Much of their own wealth was on the line. Why should they waste their time on an educational institution and risk losing it all?

As usual, Sayre does not tell us why. Loyalty to his old friend and mentor, Asa Packer, was surely part of it. And perhaps he thought of the many students who might continue to come out of Lehigh and keep the industrial empire he helped found running smoothly.

But beyond this, Robert Sayre may well have known something else in his heart. The God he believed in so deeply and faithfully, preached that all man's works are vain against time. Railroads and steel mills, however well built, do not last forever. But knowledge passed down through the generations endures. Perhaps Robert Sayre, with his love of books and learning, had come to understand this truth. Today, few people in the Valley remember his name, but Robert Sayre would have understood. Lehigh survived. That was enough.

Linderman and Packer Hall
1909