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**Lehigh University
Library & Technology Services**

Special Collections

Flyer

Asa Packer's 200th

Asa Packer, whose 200th birthday is this December 29th, left a legacy far more than that of carpenter, canal boat builder, businessman, entrepreneur, iron-maker, and president of the Lehigh Valley Railroad. For us, his primary meaning is as founder of Lehigh University. The man who traveled on foot from Mystic, Conn. to Hop Bottom, Pa. at the age of 17 with scarcely a dime in his pocket, to be a few decades later the richest man in Pennsylvania, could scarcely have imagined this achievement.

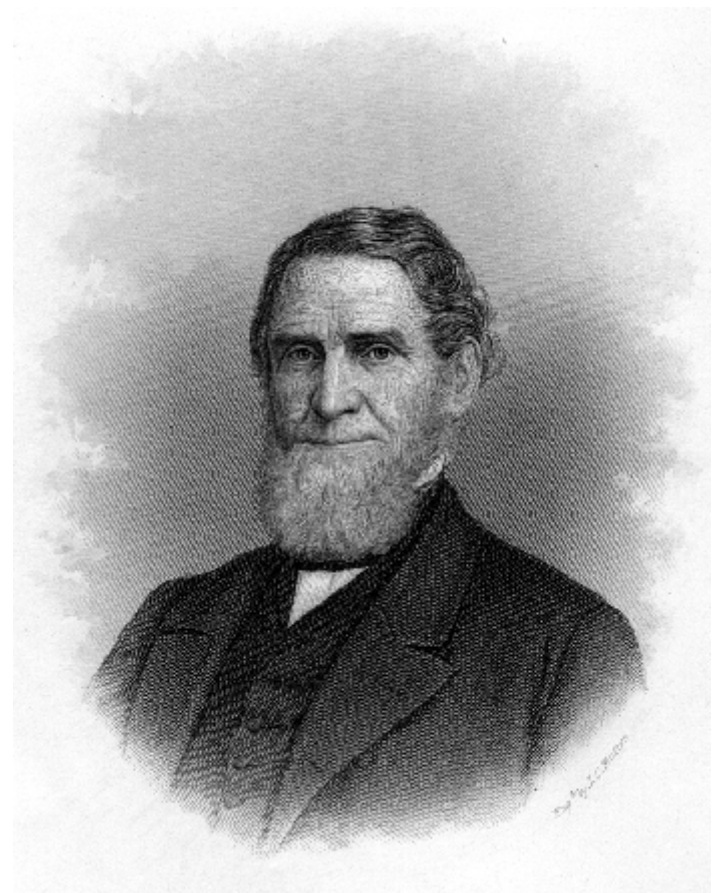
Since the beginning of the fall semester in 2003, students in Prof Thom Lepley's Graphical Design III class have been looking for answers to questions about Asa Packer's life and meaning, such as what is the history of Asa Packer's residence in Mauch Chunk; why Asa Packer chose Bethlehem to build Lehigh University and why he didn't want the school to be called Packer College; whether Judge Packer was ever nomi-

nated for the Supreme Court; if Congressman Packer ever ran for Governor of Pennsylvania; how close he got to being the President of the U.S.; what the infamous Colorado cannibal Alfred Packer's relation to Asa was; and many more.

In the beginning of the fall 2003 semester, Prof. Thom Lepley, of the University's Design Program, visited Special Collections to investigate resources for student projects for the design class he would be teaching. As a result, he assigned the students to research the artifacts and evidence of Asa Packer's life in order to create a story in a book they would design and construct themselves.

To complete the project, students first were to embark on a fact-finding mission to uncover as much information as possible to develop a specific topic about Asa Packer and his legacy. In the second step, they evolved their most compelling idea into a creative writing form that would accommodate the content.

After writing their text, they explored the processes of page design and layout, and the basics of bookmaking, including ideas for cover, title page,

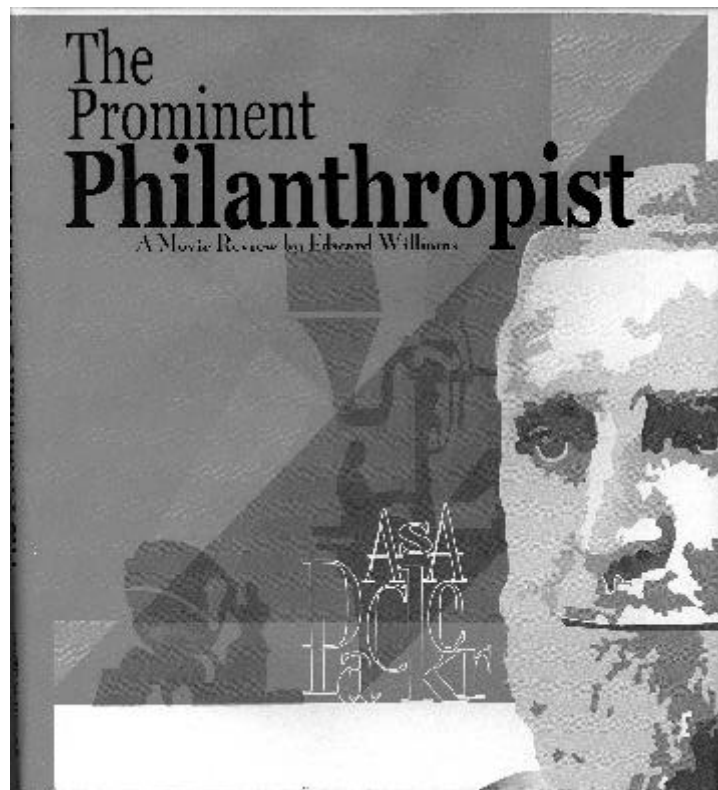


The Birthday Boy

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binding, etc. The main goal of this project was, while thinking visually, to discover interesting facts, connections, and contemporary insights from Asa Packer's extraordinary life.

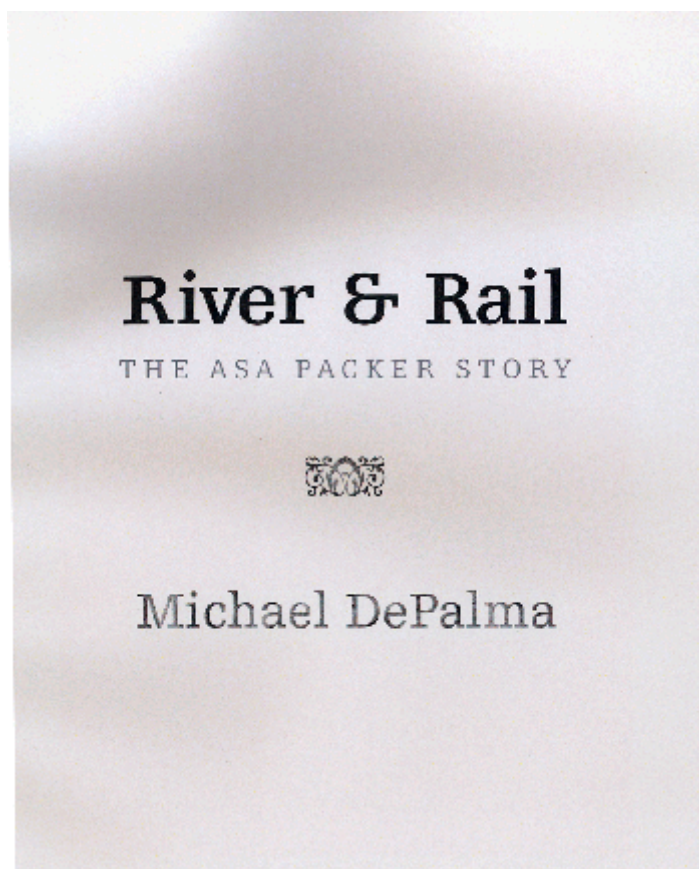
Asa Packer collection and Packer Family Memorabilia in Special Collections provided textual and visual information about who Asa Packer was, and a trip to visit the Packer Mansion in Jim Thorpe added a personal dimension. After their trip to the mansion, many students in the class were surprised to find out how humbly the Packers lived. In creating their books, some students stuck closely to the facts of Asa Packer's life and legacy. Others, however, combined their imaginations with the facts they gathered, resulting in, for example, a pop-up book, an accordion book, a hip-hop poetry book where Asa is the "home boy," reviews of imaginary Asa Packer films where he is the leading actor playing himself, a comic book where young Asa is a superhero, and a collection of imaginary correspondence of Asa Packer. So far fifteen of these books have been presented to the Special Collections archive as an ongoing project within the graphic design program.



What would be better than celebrating Asa Packer's birthday with an exhibition which consists of books solely written about him? Special Collections selected (due to the limited exhibition space) only six titles from the Asa Packer Books and arranged an exhibition for public view. The physical exhibition can be viewed at Special Collections' temporary location during the Linderman renovation at Room 625, Fairchild-Martindale Library, 3rd Floor through October 1, 2005. An online exhibition also has been prepared for remote users and can be accessed at: <http://dig.lib.lehigh.edu/projects/exhibits.asp>

This experience proved one more time how rich Lehigh's history is and how much more there is to be explored by faculty and students. Special Collections always welcomes this kind of collaboration. Our efforts are dedicated to support the curriculum and research at Lehigh. We encourage all ideas and questions concerning the use of Special Collections materials in classrooms.

—ILHAN CITAK



Special Collections materials are available for research and consultation without restriction. For further information contact Philip A. Metzger, Curator of Special Collections, or Ilhan Citak, Special Collections Assistant. Reading room hours are Monday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment. Telephone: (610) 758-4506; fax (610) 758-6091; e-mail: inspc@lehigh.edu

