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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

THE INTERESTING BIOGRAPHY that Mr. Cole has here contributed to illuminate the life of the founder of Lehigh University, Asa Packer, calls attention to the important role that has been played by Connecticut people in the development of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, especially the northeastern part of the state—the area within which Packer largely devoted his energies.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the teeming population of Connecticut, held within the narrow bounds of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Long Island Sound, and New York, began pushing into the unsettled area to the north of Massachusetts, west of the upper Connecticut River, and east of Lake Champlain—an area legally a part of the Province of New York but destined to become the State of Vermont as the result largely of the militant actions of Connecticut men. Connecticut Yankees also at this period fastened their hungry eyes on the unsettled northern part of the Province of Pennsylvania and, on the basis of the vague terms of a seventeenth-century royal charter that they interpreted as giving to

their colony all land west of Connecticut to the Pacific Ocean, organized the so-called "Susquehannah Company." The members of this company thereupon proceeded by force of arms—in the face of the protests of the outraged Penn family that their royal charter was clear and definite as to their proprietary rights—to colonize much of the area between the eastern branch of the Susquehanna River and the Hudson River as a part of Connecticut. Although the Trenton decree of 1782, handed down by a special commission appointed by the Continental Congress, disallowed the Connecticut claims and vindicated those of the Penn family, the individual rights to the soil of the thousands of Connecticut settlers were recognized by the revolutionary government of the state of Pennsylvania. Here in this region arose such populous centers as Scranton and Wilkes-Barre in the heart of the vast anthracite coal seams that largely underpinned their prosperity. So it was with the prosperity of Mauch Chunk on the upper Lehigh River—so intimately connected with the life of Asa Packer.

Today it is hard to realize that no one until after the middle of the eighteenth century apparently was aware that under the soil of Pennsylvania lay the most fabulous wealth in coal deposits. In fact, even in the middle of that century coal was carried to the port of Philadelphia from England. The Philadelphia surveyor and map-maker Lewis Evans, writing

of Pennsylvania in 1753, noted ". . . there is no Sea Coal (the name then used in England for coal) . . . yet discovered." Nevertheless, two years later Evans does record on his famous 1755 map of "The Middle British Colonies" (which included the Ohio Valley) the sites of certain coal outcroppings in the extreme western part of Pennsylvania and what was to become the state of Ohio, and by 1770 William Scull in his map of Pennsylvania, indicates the presence of coal in Mahoning Creek in northeastern Pennsylvania near where the present borough of Pottsville is located.

At the time the Scull map was published all of northeastern Pennsylvania was within the bounds of Northampton County (carved out of Bucks County in 1752). Then with the growing pressure of population in this vast area and after a pause of over thirty years, came the slow and steady birth from it of additional counties. It may be of interest to note that they came into existence from 1786 to 1878 in the following order: Luzerne, Lycoming, Wayne, Bradford, Susquehanna, Lehigh, Columbia, Pike, Monroe, Carbon, Sullivan and Lackawanna. While Bucks County was their grandmother, Northampton County was their mother.

Carbon County, created in 1843, was well named in view of the fact that underneath much of it were coal deposits. To its county-seat, Mauch Chunk, the Yankee Asa Packer came in 1833—peacefully, it is comforting to

realize—to make his permanent home and to become one of the greatest Pennsylvania industrialists of the nineteenth century. No place more strategically located within the commonwealth could have been chosen for a man with Packer's talents. Coal was discovered near the future town in 1791; in 1818 the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company was organized to exploit this resource by mining it and getting it to the market. Despite the great enterprise of such members of the Company as Josiah White, the most formidable obstacles faced it in meeting the demand for anthracite by the large consumers. It was to Asa Packer's foresight, business acumen generally, and dogged determination that these obstacles were overcome. As a result he was rewarded with great wealth. Happily, he destined it to benefit others. His most munificent contribution to the public welfare was, as indicated by Mr. Cole, the founding of Lehigh University. Could he return to visit the institution today I think he would rejoice to see its healthy condition and to be made aware of the extent to which it has for over a century in a variety of ways contributed to the growth of our country.

—Lawrence Henry Gipson

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
May, 1968

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LEHIGH OFTEN HAS been interpreted as a narrow technological school, an engineering factory, a university in name. There were times when critics holding that view could have pointed to a strong sentiment here for "slide-rules, right or wrong." But many erred in seeing Lehigh's founder, industrialist Asa Packer, as the source of that sentiment. His acts toward Lehigh speak for as balanced an education as is advocated today.

It was not Asa Packer's intent that Lehigh should be an industrial training school. He was no narrow man himself and it is evident that he did not plan to leave the nation a legacy of trained but uneducated technical graduates. It is evident that he did not want *that*, but it is not clear exactly what he did intend Lehigh to be—probably because he was not sure himself. He was searching for his ideal when he approached Episcopal Bishop William Bacon Stevens in 1864 and asked if the bishop would plan a university for him to endow: "I am not much acquainted

with these matters," Packer said, "but you are, and I want you if you will to devise a plan which I can put into effective operation." He still was searching for his ideal when he died fifteen years later.

Judge Packer founded his university in the midst of an educational revolution, and its experimental programs were greatly modified in the years in which he was alive to guide its destiny. These changes first tended to limit the scope of the university, but, in the six years before his death, liberalizing adjustments were made. The climax was his rejection of a plea by some engineering alumni that he abolish the School of General Literature.

Suggestive as these late changes are, their full implications remain to be explained. The influence of Lehigh's first two presidents, Henry Coppée—an Army engineer who wrote verse and logic textbooks, and was chosen because he "could . . . represent . . . the classical and the scientific"—and the Reverend John M. Leavitt, has yet to be determined. Nor do we know the roles of the two Episcopal bishops who were the first presidents of Lehigh's board of trustees, Bishop Stevens (1866-72) and Bishop Mark A. DeWolfe Howe (1872-90).

At the risk of too broadly interpreting a man's remarks on a politic occasion such as the first Founder's Day (1879), it can be said that Bishop Howe's major public statement in regard to Lehigh's purpose more clearly champions liberal education than does Bishop

Stevens's famous "Historical Discourse" on Lehigh in 1869. Perhaps it is significant that the liberalizing tendency during Judge Packer's last years came after Bishop Howe was president of the board.

Whatever were the influences on Judge Packer, they had to be convincing, for he kept a clear head until the last weeks before his death, and he had strong confidence in his own judgement. If his daring construction of the Lehigh Valley Railroad were not enough proof of that, President Coppée's remarks should be. He said the judge overruled an architect's plan to build Packer Hall of brick, and personally directed the landscaping of the campus—down to the digging of graceful grass gutters. Packer apparently was not a man to cross; he was tall, taciturn, and, like his wife, austere—although he could, among friends, loosen up for a few hands of euchre and a few shots of rye.

At any rate, the variety of statements and actions in the university's early days make it difficult to accept without qualification the intention stated in the university charter (1865), that this was to be a "polytechnic college."

The statement of purpose ("design") in the 1866 *Register* is more in line with Packer's actions toward Lehigh. It stresses the distinctive characteristic of the new university—the new instruction in science and engineering that was rapidly uprooting the dead classical

curriculum from European and American universities—but it also announces "preparatory instruction of two years . . . designed to fit a young man to pursue any professional course." One can, however, have too much of a new thing, and it seems Judge Packer had just that experience with Lehigh's original curriculum.

In the absence of a documented study of Packer's late-forming educational philosophy, the man's career might suggest what he intended, although a broad-gauge operator such as Asa Packer is susceptible to various interpretations.

Misguided Lehigh loyalty and regional prejudice have distorted the popular record of the man; this is understandable, since a prone position in front of an altar is an awkward position for writing. His munificence is remarkable, and deserves more explanation than is provided by the sketchy legend it has inspired. The difficulty is that most of his life was spent in the rough coal country around Mauch Chunk (now Jim Thorpe), Pennsylvania, where the arts of history and communication were not far advanced. Packer himself wrote almost nothing that has survived. He began his career as a carpenter, and he is not the first non-publishing carpenter to be misunderstood.

Enough is known, however, to qualify Judge Packer for commissioning as one of Thomas Carlyle's Captains of Industry. Packer

was thirty-seven years old and just filling out financially when the Scottish poet of history made his famous plea in 1843:

> The Leaders of Industry, if Industry is ever to be led, are virtually the Captains of the World; if there be no nobleness in them, there will never be an Aristocracy more. . . . Captains of Industry are the true Fighters, henceforth recognisable as the only true ones: Fighters against Chaos, Necessity and the Devils . . . and all Heaven and all Earth saying audibly, Well done! . . . Our world cannot live as it is. It will connect itself with a God again, or go down with nameless throes and fire-consummation to the Devils. Thou who feelest aught of such a Godlike stirring in thee . . . follow *it*, I conjure thee. Arise, save thyself, be one of those that save thy country.

Thank heaven Carlyle erected this standard for the rugged commercial individualists of that day—and thank Asa Packer for measuring up to it, whether or not he ever read it. Packer was a man of rare capitalistic insight, personal energy, and humanistic tendency. He had cinemascopic vision when most around him were glued to the diorama. He strode ragged out of the wilderness and ripped an anthracite fortune from the forbidding mountains of Carbon County. He opened a great valley by wedging a railroad down its throat. And he enshrined his achievement in the generous establishment of a university which he intended "for the benefit of the nation." Men like Asa Packer do not play for second place.

Asa (Hebrew for "healer" or "physician")

Packer was born December 29, 1805, in Mystic, Connecticut, one of the four children of a struggling farmer, Elisha Packer. Asa's first recorded business venture was in a tannery at nearby North Stonington, and failed for a reason beyond his control—the death of the owner. This set a pattern for the few failures of his life. He generally controlled the controllable; his visible burdens seem to have been the deaths of three of his children in infancy, the great financial panics of 1857 and 1873, and the losses in natural catastrophes that are the risks of men who try to take nature by the neck.

The North Stonington failure forced Asa back to the farm, an occupation at which he never did well in a decade. He escaped in 1822, following the family migratory path to Susquehanna County in northeast Pennsylvania—a hike that has been an irresistible knapsack fantasy of reconstruction for his biographers.

Asa eventually set up as a farmer-carpenter in Springville (also known as Hopbottom), supporting his bride, Sarah Minerva Blakslee. They were married January 23, 1828, in her sister's inn at Dimock Four Corners, after Asa had finished a carpenter's apprenticeship to his cousin, Edward Packer, and experienced a year in sinful New York City.

Asa and Sarah (Hebrew for "princess") fought that farm for five futile summers until 1833 he decided that his winter occupation—

building canal boats down at Tunkhannock—was the coming thing. The Lehigh Canal had been inched up to Mauch Chunk only in 1829, and help was needed to build and pilot the coal boats to downriver markets. So Asa, a strong but frustrated twenty-seven, hiked, sledded, and rafted to Mauch Chunk, a Lehigh River village founded in 1814 and owned by the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. Mauch Chunk was a wild place: 700 speculative and desperate frontier types seeking their fortunes at the foot of that newly-cracked anthracite vault, Mount Pisgah.

Gentle Asa found his. Within three years he was a wealthy man, having risen from canal boatman to boat-builder to canal-builder to merchant to landowner. He was quickly initiated into the community, becoming postmaster of nearby Lowrytown, and some of his first investments were in the founding (1835) of St. Mark's Protestant Episcopal Church, "the mother of all Episcopal churches in the Lehigh Valley." He was a churchwarden for fourteen years and a vestryman for forty-four, liberally supported the maintenance of the church, and helped rebuild it in 1867, donating an elaborate altar.

Packer's businesses thrived—friends say because of such practices as his decision not to allow his trains to disturb the Sabbath serenity of the valley—and in 1837 he bought a local landmark and mercantile monopoly, the "corner store." That same year he

started a boat-building firm in Pottsville with his brother, Robert. Packer then became the first through-carrier of coal from Carbon County to New York City. In the mid-1840's he became a coal owner, but reputedly gave up these interests in 1857 because he had gained a practical monopoly on coal transportation out of the valley.

He gained political power. A Democrat, he was elected to the state legislature in 1842 and 1843, and helped Carbon become a separate county in March, 1843. That December he was named associate judge of the first county court, thereby gaining his lifelong title.

In 1846 he assisted the mobilization of the Stockton Artillerists for the Mexican War, riding all over Pennsylvania with the soldiers until they found a larger military unit willing to take them to battle at Vera Cruz. Judge Packer's patriotism cost him more than $1,000 in stagecoach fares and other expenses. During the Civil War, Packer continued to pay full wages to employees of his railroad who enlisted in the service.

In 1847, at age forty-one, Packer was a cartographic fixture: a town (Packerton, where he had financed a school) and a township had been named for him. In 1849 he acquired the charter for Mauch Chunk's first water company, and helped found Carbon Lodge No. 242 of the Ancient York Masons. Even the great fire of July 15, 1849, did not long deter

his climb, although it cauterized the narrow valley town and took Packer's corner store and the foundations of two other stores he was building. He had fire insurance.

Having established himself as a key commercial connection between the anthracite mountains and the sea, Packer was in a position to oversee the current scene, and he quickly realized that the railroad would be a better vehicle for his coal than the canal. (Bishop Howe later said of him: "Judge Packer had the gift of forecast in no ordinary measure.")

Unfortunately, when Packer sought the assistance of men of larger purses, he found they had smaller imaginations. So he risked his own maturing fortune on one of the most visionary bridle paths ever built for the iron horse.

As an opener, he seized the nearly expired charter of the proposed carrier that was to become the Lehigh Valley Railroad, and shrewdly kept it alive by grading a mile of level land outside Allentown. Then he started pushing rail up the valley, along the face of sheer cliffs, under a couple of mountains, through storms, floods, and a cholera epidemic, and ahead of restless creditors.

He would not have made it without some ingenious engineering, and assistance from other railroad friends—and probably the influence of his stature as a Congressman. He was in Congress from 1853 until 1857, and built

the first stretch of his railroad (forty-six miles from Mauch Chunk to Easton) from 1852 through 1855. Running his railroad so occupied Packer that he did not seek public office again until 1868. He allowed himself only two major diversions in the interim: a trip to Europe in 1865, and the founding of Lehigh University the same year.

Packer's national political record is almost paradoxical, in view of his humanitarianism. He was a quiet Congressman, making only his maiden speech. (Bishop Howe observed: "Pleonasm was . . . distasteful to him.") He represented a controversial minority, as one of four "Nebraska Democrats" elected among twenty-five Pennsylvania Congressmen in 1854; this meant he supported Stephen Douglas's pro-slavery Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which repealed the Missouri Compromise and allowed residents of the Nebraska Territory to vote on whether they would own slaves.

Packer's unpopular position did not ruin him with the state Democratic Party. He was Pennsylvania's "favorite son" candidate for president at the 1868 Democratic party convention, and was Democratic candidate for governor in 1869. He lost the gubernatorial election to General John W. Geary by only 4,500 votes even though Republican President Grant had carried Pennsylvania by a 25,000-vote landslide in 1868. Bishop Howe insists that Packer really did not campaign hard, being loaded with work by the railroad and

university. Some said Packer won the election, but was defrauded in the vote-counting in key Philadelphia precincts. A friend writing commemorative verse for the Packers' golden wedding anniversary in 1878 tried to console the judge:

> Did loving hands and votive lips declare
> The stainless ermine thou unstained
> should'st wear
> Upright and just, from teeming plans
> of trade;
> They bade thee walk where Presidents
> are made.
> A shadow fell upon the Commonwealth
> When honor, fairly won, was robbed
> by stealth,
> And the dark chicane of a greedy Ring
> Filched the true name, and bade the
> ballot sting
> As doth the viper him that in his breast
> Chafes the cold ingrate; it is often best
> That Fraud should triumph, and aloft
> and seen,
> Filthy and spotted, wear its garb obscene;
> Thou has revered and honored God
> and he
> Hath blessed thee with prosperity.

This insistence upon Packer's goodness—seconded by even so cynical a contemporary commentator as *Puck*—sets him apart from other industrial titans who, while recognized as movers of nineteenth-century America,

have been chastized for abusing the privileges of individualism. No one has charged Asa Packer with inhumane or unethical exercise of economic power, but neither has anyone fully stated his relationship to the public personalities and movements of his time.

There are those, eager to praise his founding of Lehigh, who have tried to make his educational philosophy and philanthropy seem unique. Packer was in the avant garde of public-minded industrialists, but he was not quite the first. He fits well into the revolution in American education after 1850—the movement from the traditional liberal education of England to the more varied and practical German programs.

The coincidence of Packer's concepts with those popular in his day can be illustrated by the fact that Lehigh was founded the same year as another important technically-oriented university, Cornell, and shortly after MIT (1861). Also, the Morrill Act had just been passed (1862), setting aside land revenues for the support of state colleges that would teach "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts." Even Lafayette, a college in which Packer had lost interest because it was not scientific enough to suit him (and possibly because it was Presbyterian), announced a scientific curriculum in 1866.

In speculating on the sources of Packer's educational views, it seems safe to assume

first that commercial interests held his attention until mid-century. Since he was formally uneducated himself, and pursued his businesses in the primitive mountains, it is likely that his eventual concern for higher education was stimulated by forces outside his immediate areas of enterprise. Daniel Coit Gilman said the word "university" was "in the air" around 1850, but those breezes blew high above Mauch Chunk. The little town hardly was a pumping station for the circulation of new ideas.

However, in the twenty years preceding Packer's visit to Bishop Stevens to plan a university in South Bethlehem, the judge had ample opportunity to see colleges founded around his empire. The Pennsylvania system of state colleges was expanding greatly at this time, and colleges and universities were founded at Buffalo (1846), Lewisburg (Bucknell, 1846), Allentown (Muhlenberg, 1848), Syracuse (1849), Rochester (1850), College Park (Penn State, 1855), Reading (Albright, 1856), Selinsgrove (Susquehanna, 1858), Chester (Penn Military, 1862), and Swarthmore (1864).

Lehigh's stated goal of balanced humane and scientific education has been widely espoused in the first half of the century. It was implemented in Germany, and debated between "common sense" Edinburgh and classical Oxford. It was accepted in America, determining the formation of Norwich University (1820-35) and the reorganization of

Rensselaer Poly (1849). The new theory also influenced the establishment of scientific schools at leading universities in 1847 (Harvard's Lawrence School) and in 1854 (Yale's Scientific School, later named the Sheffield School).

"Practical" education was dramatically championed by Francis Wayland of Brown in 1850 and Henry P. Tappan of Michigan in 1851, and was debated in Congress as a result of a bill introduced by Justin S. Morrill of Vermont. Asa Packer was in Congress then, and had a good attendance record.

While a man as technically astute, socially sensitive, and generally farseeing as Packer likely would have been aware of this educational trend, he deserves some credit for originality in accepting it and acting on it from his own great resources. He had little example for such foresight and generosity among his contemporaries. The acts of Abbott Lawrence at Harvard, Joseph Sheffield at Yale, Peter Cooper in New York City, Ezra Cornell in Ithaca and George Peabody in the South were not yet typical of big businessmen.

In fact, Packer's founding of Lehigh closely preceded a number of such endowments by richer tycoons: Daniel Drew (Drew University, 1867), Cornelius Vanderbilt (Vanderbilt, 1875), Johns Hopkins (Johns Hopkins, 1876), Leland Stanford (Leland Stanford, 1885), John D. Rockefeller (University of Chicago, 1892), Andrew Carnegie (Carnegie Tech, 1900).

It will be noted that Packer and Rockefeller were unusual in their modesty.

So Asa Packer did not come to Bishop Stevens from out of nowhere. He was guided by the tendencies of the time and he had been shopping for a recipient of his philanthropy. He had rejected Mauch Chunk as a college town because it was too isolated, had lost interest in Lafayette College, and had resolved to form his own school, with the bishop's assistance.

The bishop did not consider his recommendations to be eternally binding—he called his outline "a roughly hewn plan"—and neither did the judge. But major modification did not come until 1872, when it was decided that the demands of the technical curriculum had been underestimated. Technical students were given another semester in which to specialize, cutting the general liberal arts program from two years to three semesters. The next year, Latin and Greek were made optional for technical students.

Then came four moves, mostly by Judge Packer, in the direction of increasing Lehigh's offerings in liberal arts. Each move was more emphatic than the preceding:

—In 1873, Judge Packer sanctioned a professorship of religion ("moral philosophy and Christian evidences") to widen the scope of instruction.

—In 1876, the Reverend Leavitt was hired as president, and professor of psychology and

Christian evidences—the only time a man without an engineering, scientific, or business background ever was named president of the university.

—In 1878, Packer established a department of classics to provide pre-professional work for students of law, medicine, and theology—an addition so foreign as to force reorganization of the university.

—In 1878 came the climatic rejection of the alumni proposal for an all-technical Lehigh.

Judge Packer died six months later, and Bishop Howe makes this tantalizing comment on what might have been:

> Plans for yet further expansion were favorably entertained, and put in the way of experiment. There is no room for doubt, that had the life of the Founder been prolonged, the structure of a true and complete University would have been developed. The munificent endowments which he has left to the institution indicate his design . . . his comprehensive purposes. . . . Three millions of dollars surely were intended for a larger use than the establishment of a school in any one department of learning.

Asa Packer had steadily fortified his university through his last years. His original endowment was $500,000 and fifty acres of land. He gave Lehigh $500,000 more in 1871 to compensate for his cancelling of fees to stimulate a sagging enrollment. He gave fifty-two acres in 1875, and left Lehigh $1.5-million of Lehigh Valley Railroad stock in his will. (He also left $300,000 to St. Luke's

Hospital in Bethlehem, and a total of $73,000 to four colleges other than Lehigh: Muhlenberg, Washington and Lee, Jefferson Medical, and the Protestant Episcopal Seminary.) He spared no resource in establishing his university, even building a railroad up South Mountain to haul uncut stone for the building of Packer Hall.

In 1873 he was moved to an admirable act of generosity and tribute. His oldest daughter, Lucy Packer Linderman, died at forty-one and Judge Packer resolved to build Lehigh a library in her name. It was completed in 1877, and according to Bishop Howe, it witnessed to "the intent of the Founder—that whatever line of study one would pursue at the University, he would find at his hand all the recorded lore of all ages . . . that might help his researches."

Lucy's death left Judge Packer four heirs: sons Robert (born 1842) and Harry (born 1850, one of Lehigh's first undergraduates), and daughters Mary Packer Cummings (1839-1912) and the adopted Marion Packer Skeer (1829-1888). But within five years of Packer's death in Philadelphia on May 18, 1879, both his sons had died without heirs. Packer's issue could extend his name no farther than the tombstones of the family plot on Mount Pisgah. Moreover, his estate was dissipated by trustee mismanagement that led to the decline of Lehigh Valley stock in the 1890's. The rapid peak and decline of his family's

fortunes would have made Asa Packer's story as dated as the decaying Packer mansion on the hill above Mauch Chunk—but it remains relevant in the effect of his charities and in the life of this University.

—Robert C. Cole

The Asa Packer biographies are inadequate, but insights into the man may be gained from the following: an anonymous outline of his career (1867); the *Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress* (1928); Catherine Drinker Bowen's history of the University (1924); Fred Brenckman's history of Carbon County (1913); the 1917 Founder's Day address of W. R. Butler '70; Henry Coppée's memorial address of June 19, 1879; a sketch by Professor Lawrence Henry Gipson in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1928; a reminiscence by H. S. Drinker '71 in the October, 1929, *Lehigh Alumni Bulletin.*

Also, M. S. Henry's history of the Lehigh Valley (1860); Horace Hollister's history of the Lackawanna Valley (1869); Bishop M. A. D. Howe's Founder's Day address, 1879; a thorough history of Lehigh and Carbon Counties (1884), by Alfred Mathews and Austin Hungerford (quite helpful); Alexander McClure's *Old-Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (1905); sources by Samuel Missimer '50 in the November 1959 *Lehigh Alumni Bulletin*; a tribute in *Puck*, June 4, 1879.

Also, a private gold-letter printing of an account of the Packers' golden wedding anniversary, from the account in the *Mauch Chunk (Pa.) Democrat* of January 26, 1878; Bishop Williams B. Stevens's "Historic Discourse" on Lehigh's founding and aims, June 24, 1869; the unedited papers of Milton C. Stuart, professor emeritus of mechanical engineering and devotée of Packer; C. C. Williams's foreword to *The Lehigh Story* (1946).