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Looking Back

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**Lehigh University
Library & Technology Services**

Special Collections

Flyer

rescued from imminent destruction. With the able hard work of my new assistant Marie Boltz, these papers were brought into a usable order and a finding aid created.

At the same time file folders of material on Lehigh history were given a more precise organization, and photographs in the folders were organized and housed separately, and indexed in a database. This index now includes more than 15,000 photographic items.

All material on the history of Lehigh is now easily accessible and usable.

In 1988 alumnus James Bliss Austin unexpectedly bequeathed an extensive collection of Sherlock Holmes collectibles to the University. These items were sold to provide an endowment for special collections, which has been a crucial source of support as it developed collections and adapted to new and changing technologies.

At about the same time professor of art and architecture Tom Peters arrived on campus. As a historian of building technology he recognized the underpinnings of a significant collection in the history of civil engineering in Lehigh's holdings.

LOOKING BACK

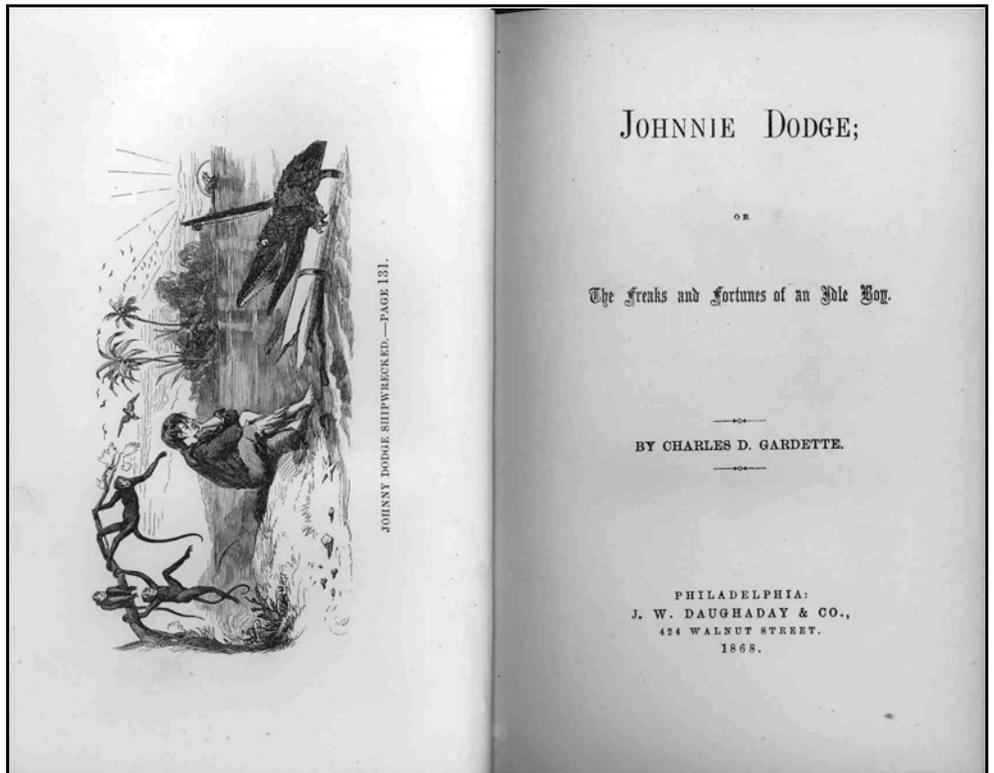
This will be the last Special Collections Flyer I write or edit; as of January 1, 2006 I will have retired from Lehigh. For that reason it seems like an appropriate time to take a look back at what's been accomplished and what I'm most proud of.

First of all let me say that the collections of historical materials, both printed and manuscript, present at Lehigh when I arrived in the fall of 1985 proved to be quite remarkable in scope and variety.

Subject matter ranged from 18th and 19th century American and British literature, to natural history, to exploration of the South Seas, and much more.

In addition there were a great number of photographs and manuscripts, mostly having to do with the history of Lehigh.

The most important collection consisted of papers of Lehigh presidents from Coppée to Drinker. These were in poor order, and had been



Charles D. Gardette, a "Pfaff's" author

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The result of this determination, and subsequent discussions, was that Special Collections embarked on a program to add to these materials. The University now has a collection in this area, particularly in the history of bridge construction which, in breadth and depth, is of national if not international significance.

Although little was said about this when I arrived at Lehigh, it seemed clear to me that Special Collections should collect manuscripts in a serious way. There were already two Congressional collections, Walter and Rooney, and Congressman Ritter's papers have since been added.

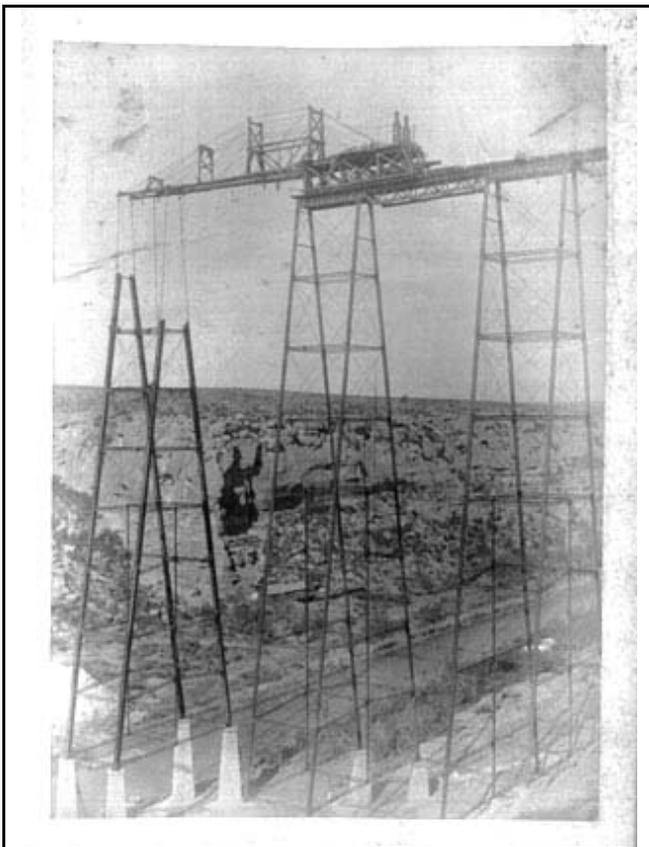
In addition, we've been fortunate to obtain the papers of the Philadelphia engineering firm of John Birkinbine, which was active from the 1840s to just before World War II. This has been a significant addition to our holdings on the history of engineering.

Over the last few years the papers of a prominent husband and wife pair of Allentown philanthropists and art collectors have come to Lehigh. They will soon be available to the public, and will provide research possibilities on a number of topics.

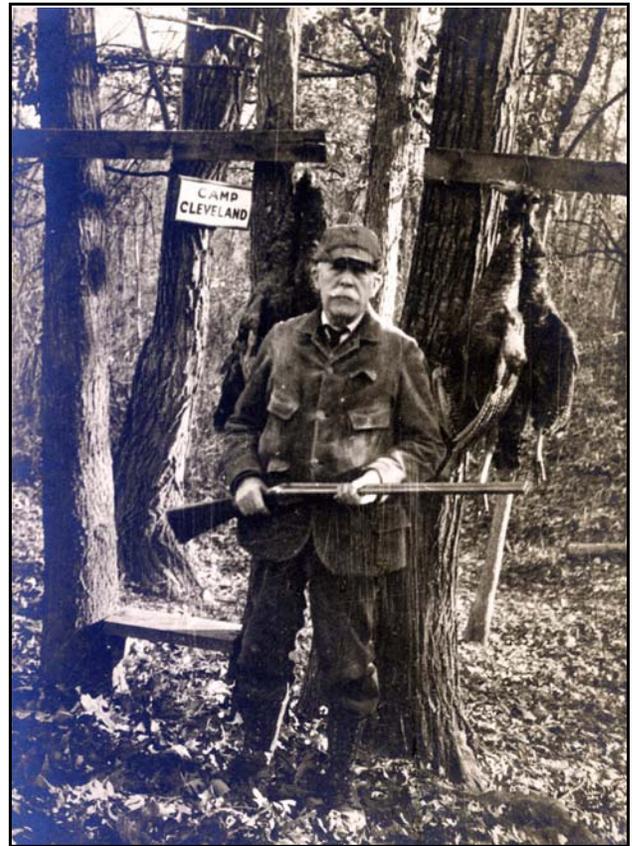
In the last few years, as well, materials in Special Collections have provided the basis for exciting and useful digital projects.

One set of papers which has received extensive interest is that of Les Whitten, '50. These papers reflect, among other things, his life as premier Watergate investigative reporter and successful novelist.

In particular I would mention Lehigh's pioneering "Digital Bridges" site (<http://bridges.lib.lehigh.edu>), which made use of our holdings on 19th century bridge engineering to create a varied library of about 30 volumes.



From Phoenix Bridge Co. *Pecos viaduct* 1892



President Henry S. Drinker (1905-1920)

The site is intended for the teaching of the history of bridge building, but also for the use of modern engineers faced with the task of restoring old structures. To judge from the unsolicited emails received from practicing engineers, it is a resource both used and appreciated.

Special Collections and the new digital projects team continue to create new sites.

Of particular interest is one called "The Vault at Pfaff's" which explores an 1850s New York beer hall frequented by poet Walt Whitman and numerous incipient bohemian literati, artists, and actors. When completed, the site will reveal this obscure part of American literary history. As part of the project, Special Collections is developing a comprehensive collections of the writings of this group.

What of the future? Special Collections is presently in temporary quarters in Fairchild/Martindale Library, and will return to new quarters in the renovated Linderman Library.

My able assistant Ilhan Citak is ready, as any who have met and worked with him know, to provide excellent public service to our collections. And a new curator, whoever that may be, will offer new and exciting ideas, not only in traditional collecting areas, but also in new subjects, and in new topics for digital projects.

—PHILIP A. METZGER

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