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Odds & Ends

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Information Resources

Special Collections

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ODDS & ENDS

Issues of this publication have, for the most part, discussed those things that people expect to find in a special collections: hand printed books, color plates, important manuscript collections, and the like. But there is another aspect, which will be featured in an upcoming exhibition in the permanent art gallery of

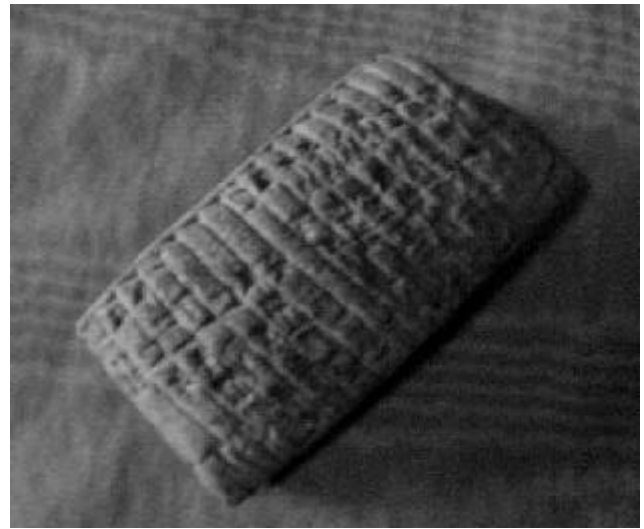


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the Zoellner Arts Center, and that is as a repository for some of the eclectic pieces – the odds and ends – that can probably be found in any special collections.

However, I hasten to add that, just because they're oddities doesn't mean they're frivolous. Often they can evoke a time past, or brighten up an exhibition. I'd be sorry to do without any of them.

Take for example the small envelope I found shortly after coming to work at Lehigh. The envelope contained a dozen or so brown and white rosettes made of ribbon and mounted in a sturdy metal holder obviously meant to be inserted in a buttonhole. Moreover, to judge from the dimensions of the metal, this



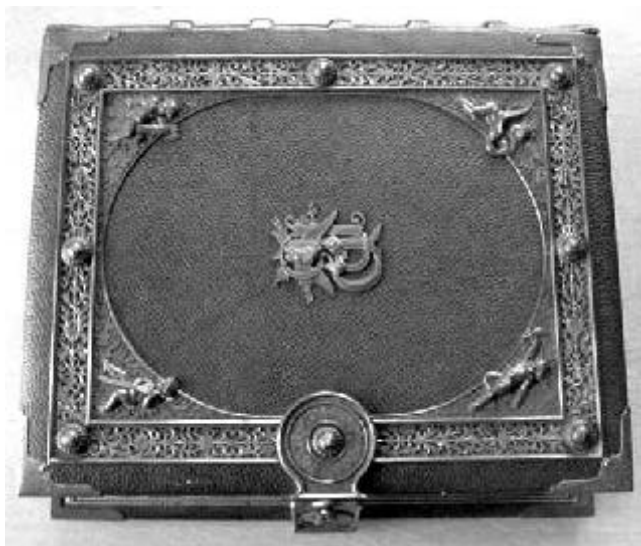
was a buttonhole in a heavy wollen suit, not a modern tropical worsted. It's no stretch of the imagination to picture Lehigh bigwigs at the turn of the century wearing one of these rosettes proudly.

Nearly all of the material, which we've gathered together in a collection called "Lehigh Memorabilia" – and most of it does pertain to the history of the University – has no information as to how it was acquired. It's safe to assume, however, that many of the objects in the collection, like to corncob pipes used by the class of 1970 during alumni weekend, came as occasional gifts over the years.

In other cases, skimming up the artifacts of a publicity campaign, like the t-shirt and buttons announcing Lehigh's first online library catalog in 1985, was the method of acquisition.

However, not all of our odds and ends pertain to Lehigh history. In fact, the somewhat facetious answer to the question "What's the oldest book in the library?" is provided by our collection of twenty-four Sumerian cuneiform tablets, dating from 2000 B.C.

I've never been asked what the smallest book in the collection is, but one of our collection of about a dozen miniature books from the 19th century to the present would fit the bill. This little book, printed in Cooperstown, N.Y., in 1829, purports to be a history



of the Bible, and measures 2 inches tall.

Other examples of interesting memorabilia include a handsome napkin ring, in the form of a boy hitting a drum, given to the unidentified winner of a hurdle race in 1879. If only such handsome and useful trophies were given out today.



As every schoolboy knows, Asa Packer, transportation and coal magnate, was the founder of Lehigh University. In 1878, he and his wife celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in their mansion in Mauch Chunk. As befitting an important personage, hundreds of their closest friends were invited to the celebration.

Not all could make it, but everyone sent carefully inscribed good wishes. These were gathered into a specially-designed, sterling-silver decorated, album, complete with the couples initials, and on the inside, their photographs.

Just to include something early, there is our mid-15th century scroll manuscript, an early example of interactive media. It's mounted in a box with knobs,

and a viewer can see the chronology of Britain, from Adam up to King Edward IV.

Finally, a quite fascinating example of an important aspect of Lehigh's early history, the "Calculus Cremation" ceremony.

From the 1880s until about 1910, the sophomore class staged an elaborate ceremony, including a parade, skits, music, costumes, etc., celebrating the end of the calculus requirement. The ceremony ended with the incineration of the calculus textbooks, whether one example or everyone's



is hard to determine.

These examples, suggest, I hope, the richness and variety of the memorabilia and other exceptional items in Special Collections. Whether its spicing up an exhibition, vivifying an aspect of Lehigh's history, or illustrating a curious byway in the history of communications, it's nice to be able to fall back on "Odds & Ends."

— P.A.M.

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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