

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic ASA PACKER MANSION

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number Packer Road \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Jim Thorpe \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Carbon code 025

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Borough of Jim Thorpe

street & number

city, town Jim Thorpe \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Pennsylvania

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Carbon County Courthouse

street & number Broadway and Susquehanna Streets

city, town Jim Thorpe \_\_\_\_\_ state Pennsylvania

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records National Park Service

city, town Washington \_\_\_\_\_ state DC

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved      date

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

Jim Thorpe is a small town of about 5,000 on the southern rim of the Pocono Mountains. It was originally called Mauch Chunk, an Indian name that means "bear mountain."

Its location 60 miles from Philadelphia, in the mountain foothills made it a rich and fashionable 19th century summer resort. Paradoxically, because of a large vein of anthracite coal that ran under the region it was also an important mining center. The coal brought canals and railroads. Because fortunes came suddenly, there was a mid-century building boom and because the area declined just as suddenly there have been very few changes in what many called "Millionaires Row." The town is generally quiet for a county seat with 19th century structures arranged in tiers against the mountain.

The richest man in the town was Asa Packer, industrialist, politician, churchman, and philanthropist. It was quite fitting that such an important man would choose the latest architectural style. Both Andrew J. Downing and Samuel Sloan, publishers of architectural building books had advocated the Villa as appropriate especially in a rural setting.

The speculation that Packer may have designed his own house based on Sloan's books has some credance -- he was apprenticed to a carpenter in his early years. There is a subtle combination of Gothic and Tudor details on the exterior and vertical and horizontal elements are carefully designed -- the windows are compressed in each succeeding story. Balustraded walkways and porches are repeated on each level and finally at the cupola level, none alike, providing a visual richness. The arcading of the loggia is repeated in reverse order in the window caps of the upper floors, and the bracketing of the extended eaves serves as a stop for the upward movement of the facade. Originally the house was plain brick that has recently been painted pale yellow. Of the two original chimneys, one remains. Otherwise there have been no material changes, inside or out.

The plan is rectangular with a central stair hall. On either end of the plan is a rectangular one room extension with a bowed end. The stone window frames are ogee arches capped by a Gothic dripstone. The wood trim on the veranda is also ogee arched. The roof is Italianate (low-pitch broken gable) surmounted by an octagonal turret or Belvedere in the center of the roof.

The interior remains almost unchanged, maintained through the lifetime of Asa Packer's daughter, Mary Packer Cummings, upon whose death in 1912, the house and its contents was left to the Borough of Mauch Chunk to be preserved and maintained. In brief, the National Register form describes it:

The mansion contains seventeen rooms. The entire interior is in excellent condition: all furnishings, woodwork, draperies, wallpaper, and carpets, are original, with a very few exceptions. The fine, elaborately carved

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1852

Builder/Architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Asa Packer mansion is one of the most perfectly preserved mid-19th century Italian villas in America. The house still contains its original furniture, chandeliers, stained glass windows, china, and silver -- an invaluable research tool for scholars of Victorian life.

Asa Packer (1805-1879) was one of the most famous men of his day, he built the Lehigh Valley Railroad and founded Lehigh University. He also served two terms as United States congressman, served in the State Legislature, and served as Carbon County Judge for five years, ran for governor of Pennsylvania in 1869, and was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States in 1868, among other things.

In his early years, when Packer was apprenticed to a carpenter, he tried his hand at farming until 1833 he began to run coal boats on the Lehigh Canal starting at Mauch Chunk. Soon he owned a store and a boat yard, building coal boats and in time got involved in the mining and shipping of coal from Nesquehoning, Pennsylvania. It was then a logical step into railroading.

Prior to 1827, the coal was hauled by wagon from Summit Hill to Mauch Chunk, but because of the coal's weight and the extremely difficult grades this mode of transportation was not satisfactory. Therefore, in May 1827, one of the first railroads in the United States was begun, a road which has been called the "switchback" or gravity road. The distance to the Lehigh River from Summit Hill was around nine miles, the difference in elevation about 930 feet. At first the loaded cars descended the railroad, which was built essentially over the turnpike, by gravity with a special car attached for mules, who were used to haul the empty cars back to Summit Hill. It is said that some of the mules would balk at having to walk down the mountain, having become so accustomed to the ride in their special car. Eventually an inclined plane was built on Mount Pisgah. This invention hauled the cars up the steep slope with stationary steam engines winding an iron cable that would draw the empty cars to the top. From the top of Mount Pisgah, the cars descended through switchbacks to another "plane" so that they could complete the journey back to the mines by gravity. For years the plane and gravity railroad was a tourists attraction as well, with specially constructed passenger cars.<sup>1</sup>

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than an acre

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale Lehighton

### UTM References

A 

1	8	4	3	7	8	1	5	4	5	2	3	7	0	5
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

organization National Park Service

date August 10, 1984

street & number 1100 L Street, NW

telephone (202) 343-8166

city or town Washington

state DC 20240

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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woodwork on the first floor was done by imported Swiss and Italian craftsmen. The first floor of the mansion consists of parlors, a dining room, and kitchens. The second and the third floors contain guest and servants' quarters. During the summer, the mansion was air-conditioned; the source of the cool air was from the ice house close by the mansion. The installation of electricity in 1911 has been the only major interior change.

The original outbuildings on the property included a greenhouse, a playhouse, an ice house, an apple cellar, and a pumphouse. The playhouse is now the caretaker's house. It is a six-room, frame house, with a bargeboard in Gothic trim. Some trim on its porch has been removed. The ice house, a stone structure with wood trim, has recently been restored. The other outbuildings have been destroyed. The lawn around the mansion was carefully landscaped in its early years; at present, it is well maintained but does not retain all of the original landscape features.

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The high quality anthracite coal was brought to the canal, but the waterway froze just when coal was most needed. Railroads were the answer. Chartered in 1846, the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill and Susquehanna, later shortened to Lehigh Valley Railroad which would eventually connect Mauch Chunk, Easton, Buffalo, and New York City and the New Jersey seaboard to the west.

Asa Packer, world traveller and friend of Queen Victoria, was known as an "exceptionally kind" man in an age of robber barons. The large villa he constructed after the 1852 Model Architect by Samuel Shoan is in a remarkable state of preservation most especially the interior which retains almost all of its original furniture. The house was occupied by his daughter, Mary Packer Cummings, after her father's death. The Packers strove to carry out the principles proposed by Andrew J. Downing, in his Architecture of Country Houses, 1852.

A country house, where the conveniences are such that the establishment may be moderate, the living-rooms compact and well arranged, the facility of performing all household labors increased as much as possible, is the perfect villa for America.

According to Downing the true home is: beautiful, rural, unostentatious, moderate ....large enough to minister to all the wants, necessities, and luxuries of a republican, and not too large or too luxurious to warp the life or manners of his children.

There were some minor changes made by Mary but often the original system was left intact, for instance, the original speaking tubes and gas fixtures are there.

Today visitors enter the house through the office/library. It was in this room that Asa and his male secretary worked, and many of the necessities of this office work remain, such as a typewriter with wooden type and Asa's safe. The wall and ceiling coverings, similar to other patterns used throughout the house, produce a calm, stately feeling in the room. In the office are many interesting furnishings including an ornate chair, which is said to have come from the Robert E. Lee estate, and it may have been acquired when Asa Packer contributed a million dollars to Washington and Lee University. He also served as a commissioner of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, and the chandelier of Bronze blue glass is said to have won first prize at the 1876 International Exposition.

The elegant, crystal chandelier illuminates the cornices and coved ceiling with its geometric patterned moldings. The furnishings are fine examples of Victorian rosewood with original patterned fabric. The piano, a Steinway, was added by Mary Packer Cummings.

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Entry into the center hallway from the west parlor, introduces one to the fabulous carvings in wood carried out by European artisans. The woodwork, which includes the main hall, stairways, dining room, and sitting room, was executed at a cost of over \$75,000 in the 1870s. The gothic motif, used throughout, is done in oak in the hall, and contains some 5,000 rosettes, each with a slight difference. In keeping with the gothic motif is a grandfather clock with turrets and arches next to the west parlor entrance. The lattice-patterned rug of red wool, in the hall, is also used on the stairs, and it is this pattern that lifts the eye from the first level to the stained-glass windows at the stair landing.

Just off the hall to the east, the north light from the stained-glass windows of the dining room floods the room with an exciting, dramatic light. At night the gas chandeliers, now electrified, produce a pleasant alternative to the stained-glass window light. The bracketed ceiling woodwork, with its intricate carvings and moldings, is of the type recommended by A.J. Downing in his Architecture of Country Houses for Italian villas. The ceiling complements the built-in gothic furniture of primarily Honduras mahogany. Sliding doors separate the dining room from the adjacent sitting room, where the woodwork is similar to that in the dining room.<sup>2</sup>

A great deal of the furniture was ordered from George Henkels, the Philadelphia cabinetmaker whose work was well known through widely circulated publications such as Godey & Lady's Book and Magazine and even more importantly, Homestead Architecture, by Samuel Sloan, Philadelphia's leading architect in the middle of the nineteenth century. The ornate furnishing in the library are illustrated in the Henkels advertisements and are in the style called Renaissance (French Renaissance revival of the 1840s thought to be appropriate for libraries and dining rooms). The Asa Packer mansion probably has a collection of some of the finest furniture made in America around 1860.

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Footnotes

1 Fink, Daniel. Asa Packer's Lehigh Valley Railroad and Mauch Chunk Mansion. Nineteenth Century Victorian Society in America. Vol. 7, Number 3, Autumn 1981, p. 27.

2 Ibid, p. 30



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Antiques. Vol. CIV, Number 4. October 1973. p. 641-650.

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Henry, M.S. History of the Lehigh Valley. Bixler and Corwin, Easton, Pennsylvania,  
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Law, Robert W. Anthology of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. Delwood's Inc., San Jose,  
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VERBAL BOUNDARY

All that certain lot or piece of ground situate in Borough of Jim Thorpe, county of Carbon and state of Pennsylvania bounded and described to wit: as found, beginning at an iron bolt, as found, which iron bolt marking the southerly most corner of property herein after described, and shown on a plan of the survey of the Asa Packer Mansion in 1880 and recorded in deed book, Vol. 41, p. 315.

Thence from said point of beginning and along land described as Pipe Alley, (formerly Park Street), North 73 degrees, 9 minutes, 11 seconds, West 400 feet to an iron fence post as set. Thence by land of now or formerly, Pinning, Mitchell and Conrad. D.B.V. 344-50032, North 6 degrees, 30 minutes, 40 seconds, East 185.55 feet to an iron pin as set. Thence by land of the Jim Thorpe municipal authority, North 70 degrees, 19 minutes, 51 seconds, East 281 feet to a triangular iron fence post found in concrete, at the point of the plan called for a bolt. Thence by land of Bradley C. Oliver, D.B.V. 348-663, South 43 degrees, 17 minutes, 9 seconds, last 20,055.03 feet to an iron bolt as found.

Thence by the same, South 89 degrees, 54 minutes, 59 seconds, East 51.74 feet to a P.K. nail as set. Thence along the property line of Elk Street (now known as the Front Hill), South 31 degrees, 45 minutes, 0 seconds, West 245.93 feet to an iron bolt as found, a point of beginning.

Containing 2.85 acres as per survey as performed by Ralph Wade Clay, P.L.S., of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania in March 1981 and shown on a plan of the Survey of the same as recorded in the Office of Recorder of Deeds of Carbon County in Map Book 1, p. 1-533.