THE Frenchman, Peter Stephen Du Ponceau (1760-1844), became an important Pennsylvanian, with more than the Law Academy of Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania his debtors. Born on June 3, 1760, at the town of St. Martins on the Isle of Ré, he broke away at the age of fifteen from a future in the Catholic Church, with leanings that soon turned him to Protestantism. Very early he became a perfect Anglophil.1

With high family connections, he traveled in noble society, but always with a preference for the company of literary men. At six he began to learn English from the leaf of an old book: "Things being thus settled, God commanded Jacob." One of his first tasks was an English and French vocabulary for the Duke of Orleans for which he was not paid.

He honestly confesses that he came to the United States teased by the chance for travel and military service. He landed in the United States on December 1, 1777, with Baron von Steuben who thereafter watched carefully over him. His neglected writings are full of lively accounts of Revolutionary times and campaigns.

Du Ponceau became acutely devoted to the United States, and by the eventful year of 1781 had decided to try his fortunes for the future in America: "I never could bear the despotism and the superstitions of the Old World." In 1781 he became secre-

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1 My interest in Du Ponceau was first aroused by a group of letters to him, numbering about thirty-five items, in the interesting miscellaneous manuscript collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia. Other relevant manuscript letters, account books, and diaries have been examined at the Library Company of Philadelphia, in the Du Ponceau and the William Shaler Collections at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Fifty letters, 1795-1820, from Du Ponceau are at Girard College forming part of the Girard Collection. Additional material may be found at the American Philosophical Society.

Plans have been made by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to print much of the Du Ponceau material, a fine idea which had been projected, but dropped some fifty years ago.
tary to Mr. Robert R. Livingston. Because of rival candidates for the post, by a resolution of March 1, 1782, the offices of first and second Under Secretary of State were created, and he became the first (and only) second Under Secretary of State. Du Ponceau was incensed when Chevalier de la Luzerne wrote to Livingston, objecting to the resolution of Congress after the capture of Cornwallis which had mentioned the United States forces before those of France. But like a good lawyer, instead of following his personal desire to urge an honorable equality for the new state, he took Livingston's advice to look for citations in Vattel. The next resolution mentioned France first, and Du Ponceau thought our ministers never forgot the humiliation.

His language equipment (he had once served as secretary to the philologist, Count de Gebelin) and training aided him in his rise at the bar, and also kept him in close touch with foreign countries. In 1829 to C. P. Cooper in London, he expressed the belief that soon the United States would be paying back the contributions of civilization to England. He was always an insistent advocate of close relationship with the Republic of Central America, and so expressed himself to John Forsyth, Secretary of State, in 1836.

He did not, however, lose sight of affairs at home. In a letter to John Q. Adams, July 3, 1837, he felt that during the previous eight years there had been a fixed desire to prepare the country for a monarchical government; further, he believed that the country would lose honor by the suspension of specie. He urged that Congress should pass stricter bankruptcy laws. He was surprised when his suggestion found its way through a member of the opposite party into the Presidential message.

From 1829 to 1832 he was preoccupied with "the idea of procuring an immense source of riches to the Country which I love"—through the cultivating of silk. To him this was as practically important as Thomas Say's request to him to make solicitations at Washington for certain men to go on public vessels for Pacific exploration.

For many years he was eminent as a member of the Philadelphia bar. He wrote to John Pickering, in Boston, December 29, 1820: "Out of spirit of fair and honourable rivalship to your noble city, which I find is going too far ahead of us in literature
and the science and the arts, I have been exerting myself to institute in our own town a 'Law Academy.'” Four years later he wrote: “I have brought home something good from the visit I made to you, I mean something good for our State. For I have persuaded a small party to begin to imitate you by celebrating the landing of our great pilgrim William Penn.”

In his later years he was raised to the presidency of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, which according to him was established as a rival to the American Philosophical Society, but which he hoped to make an ally. He was pessimistic when he wrote: “I have been a Jack of all trades, and as they say, good at none.” He began serving as president of the American Philosophical Society in 1828.

Many of his published works may be easily noted from references in the Dictionary of American Biography. But what strikes the writer as being most important is Du Ponceau’s desire, beginning with a translation of Bynkershoek in 1810, to have American lawyers become familiar with important books on international law, especially those dealing with the doctrine of neutrality. He had translated the first volume of Hübner on the rights of neutrals, and gave it to Basil Hall who translated the second volume. He had in manuscript, translations of Rayneval on liberty of the seas and Galiani on the law of neutrality.

If one were to examine more minutely any unit of his correspondence, the frankness and awareness of the man would be felt. For example, his letters to William Shaler reveal his deep classical learning, his interest in the Berber language and the racial origins of that people, an interest which constantly encouraged Shaler. He had a keen knowledge of explorations, discussing with Shaler the sources of the Nile. To him he reveals his enjoyment of the comedies of Goldoni. And constantly Du Ponceau hoped much for the reciprocal benefits to be achieved by taking lessons from foreign nations—in one instance, our government might well take lessons from the Ecole pratique des langues Orientales. But America would do much teaching in her turn.

2He had suggested in 1825 to William Shaler that he hoped to write at length on William Penn.

3In this connection it is interesting to note Noah Webster’s letter, New Haven, March 29, 1843 in reply to Du Ponceau’s favorable opinion on Rights of Neutral Nations: “I find our government has adopted my views of the subject in regard to the right of search.”
His correspondence reveals him as a channel of cultural communication with England and the continent, and as an active legal representative for important foreigners. He was vitally concerned in the translation and early stages of travel books by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Lafayette's secretary, and Basil Hall.

Nicholas Biddle sent him a check for $476.25 with the following note, April 3, 1827: "... being the amount of your advances on account of Gen. Lafayette as stated in your letter to me of the 21st last which sum I shall deduct from the remittance of his quarterly dividend just received." Because of his interest in Lafayette, Bishop William White reminded him, July 22, 1834, that it was Lafayette who in 1783 had directed the Agent of Marine to recall all armed vessels. Joseph Correa de la Serra, January 12, 1822, wrote to him about European revolutions.

Important among his foreign correspondents were the Marquis de Marbois, Gen. Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, Jomard, Joseph Bonaparte, Du Pont de Nemours, Gebelin, D. B. Warden, Julien de Paris, and Basil Hall. Baron C. W. Humboldt was eager to have Du Ponceau's opinions of his labors. When Robert Vaux desired autographs of such men as Monroe and Jefferson, he wrote to Du Ponceau. He could likewise have learned much about Wm. B. Hodgson, John Pickering, Tench Cox, Thomas Keating, Benjamin Silliman, Robert Hare, Robert Walsh, Henry Wheaton, Josiah Quincy, Jared Sparks and a host of others.

His multitude of friends revealed his wide interests. E. Everett wrote, January 5, 1834, on the Iroquois origin of "Juniata," and the Asiatic origin of the American tribes. J. R. Poinsett wrote often from Mexico, describing, August 8, 1828, his stay as an "exile."

We find many evidences of the reception of his work. Dr. Francis Lieber wrote to him, October 6, 1839: "I assure you that I shall consider any contribution from your pen a real ornament of my work." De Witt Clinton sent him praise for his treatise on English phonology. Prescott sent him a copy of his Conquest of Mexico with these words:

I sincerely hope the work will have some interest for you, and especially that portion of it in which I have endeavoured to exhibit a full and faithful delineation of the Aztec civilization. There are few so well quali-
fied as yourself to estimate the difficulties and to decide on the success of such an attempt.

Judges commented on his learning and legal works. Peter A. Thacher felt great pleasure on reading his *Brief View of the Constitution of the United States*, which Du Ponceau always hoped to enlarge. A letter of July 27, 1824, from Chancellor Kent contains a high estimate of his abilities. Joseph Story wrote:

> To you and to Chancellor Kent I mainly owe whatever attainments I have made in foreign jurisprudence and the civil law.

Thomas Cooper, when drawing up plans for his course of law at the University of Virginia, desired to talk over the matter with Du Ponceau, and furnished him, August 11, 1819, with a crude outline of the proposed course which was to be “liberal” and was to avoid making “a country court quibbler as expeditiously as possible.”

There is a letter from John Marshall which we may quote in full, not particularly because of its information on Du Ponceau, but for its comments on one of his colleagues, William Tilghman:

> Richmond, 30 Oct. 1827
> To Peter Stephen Du Ponceau, esquire.
> I have had the pleasure of receiving your eloquent eulogium in commemoration of the Honourable William Tilghman and thank you for the gratification afforded me by its perusal. You have presented him to the world in lights in which he is equally respectable and amiable.
> If his decisions have accomplished a union between the civil and common law so as to enable the same tribunal to respect in its judgments the principles of both, he has certainly conferred a great benefit on his state, and in doing so, has achieved a work of real difficulty. He has improved your system at least as much as Lord Mansfield did that of England.
> You have displayed his private virtues and his domestic misfortunes in such a manner as chiefly to inter-

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4 Washington, January 30, 1841. Compare with the letter found in W. W. Story's *Life and Letters of Joseph Story*, I (Boston, 1851), 162, of February 16, 1808, where Story says, “He [Du Ponceau] has the reputation of great subtilty and acuteness, and is excessively minute in the display of his learning. . . . In short, he is a French advocate.”
est the reader, and to secure both his admiration and his sympathy.


From this brief analysis of manuscript material it can be seen that the career of Peter Stephen Du Ponceau will help to explain many phases of life in the United States and throw new light on the migration of ideas. It is pleasing to know that the modest observation in his last letter to Pickering, December 12, 1843, will soon be incorrect: "The lawyer's life is in the book of Reports."