THOMAS JEFFERSON AND PENNSYLVANIA

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PENNSYLVANIANS have particular reasons for remembering Jefferson, in addition to those which they share with all Americans and with all lovers of human freedom the world over. The illustrious son of the Old Dominion was a frequent sojourner within our Commonwealth, and here performed some of his most celebrated official acts.

Of the three outstanding achievements which Jefferson wished to be chronicled on his tombstone, the first was his authorship of the Declaration of Independence. That memorable task was performed on Pennsylvania soil. Much has been written about the house in which Jefferson lived at the time he was drafting that immortal document.²

Desirous also of being remembered by posterity as author of the statute of Virginia for religious freedom, it was only natural that Jefferson should recognize that it was "the laws of Pennsylvania, which set us the first example of the wholesome and happy effects of religious freedom,"³ and should speak of "Pennsylvania, the cradle of toleration and freedom of religion."⁴ Likewise he recorded with satisfaction the fact that "Pennsylvania rejected a proposition to make the belief in God a necessary qualification for office."⁵

¹Delivered before the Pennsylvania Society of Washington, D. C., meeting at the Willard Hotel on April 27, 1937.
³Thomas Jefferson to N. G. Dufief, April 19, 1814, Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Memorial Edition (Washington, 1903-1904), XIV, 126, 129.
⁴Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, Nov. 2, 1822, Ibid., XV, 403.
Although he took pride in being "Father of the University of Virginia," Jefferson sent his own grandson to Pennsylvania to complete his education because "there are particular branches of science, which are not so advantageously taught anywhere else in the United States as in Philadelphia." In a letter of benevolent admonition to the young man Jefferson wrote: "Look steadily to the pursuits which have carried you to Philadelphia, be very select in the society you attach yourself to, avoid taverns, drinkers, smokers, idlers, and dissipated persons generally; for it is with such that broils and contentions arise; and you will find your path more easy and tranquil." In similar strain he wrote to the mother of Jack Eppes, who later married Jefferson's younger daughter Polly: "As soon as I am fixed in Philadelphia, I shall be in hopes of receiving Jack. Load him, on his departure, with charges not to give his heart to any object he will find there. I know no such useless bauble in a house as a girl of mere city education. She would finish by fixing him there and ruining him." Because of analogous reasons, doubtless, the prudent parent, though desirous of taking Polly with him to Philadelphia for a time, declared that "I would not choose to have her there after fourteen years of age."

His elder daughter Martha had likewise been sent to the Pennsylvania metropolis to enjoy its educational advantages. "Her time in Philadelphia will be chiefly occupied in acquiring a little taste and execution in such of the fine arts as she could not prosecute to equal advantage in a more retired station," Jefferson declared. However, he desired his daughter to be familiar with "the graver sciences" and with such accomplishments as music, dancing, drawing and belles lettres, inasmuch as "the chance that in marriage she will draw a blockhead I calculate at about fourteen to one" and accordingly "the education of her family will probably rest on her."

Jefferson himself first viewed Philadelphia in 1766 as a young man of twenty-three. He came to be inoculated against smallpox

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7 Thomas Jefferson to T. J. Randolph, Nov. 24, 1808, Ibid., XII, 196, 201.
9 Jefferson to Marbois, Annapolis, December 5, 1783, American Historical Review (1906), XII, 76-77.
by the celebrated Dr. Shippen. In 1775 and 1776 as a member of the Continental Congress Jefferson made trips to Philadelphia, on two occasions following a route which took him as far west as Lancaster and York. Between 1782 and 1784, when he had returned to public life after the death of his wife, these visits were renewed. In 1790, as Secretary of State in the administration of George Washington, Jefferson was in Philadelphia en route to and from New York, then the capital of the nation. In the fall of that year the seat of government was transferred to Philadelphia, and until he returned to private life in 1794 the Sage of Monticello there transacted his official business as head of the Department of State. In the winter of 1793, Congress met in Germantown, the city of Philadelphia having been ravaged by an epidemic of yellow fever. The letters written by Jefferson during his stay at Germantown have been published. Momentous matters were at issue then. While France and England warred, American neutrality was at stake. The foundations of this government's foreign policy were established, and the law of nations was enriched, by notable state papers penned by Jefferson.

During his term as Vice President from 1797 to 1800, in the administration of John Adams, Jefferson was once more a familiar figure in Philadelphia. It was during this period, immediately preceding his election to the Presidency in 1800, that Jefferson suffered most acutely by reason of the fact that political antagonisms were allowed to embitter personal relations and social intercourse; although at no time, apparently, did Jefferson particularly enjoy living in Philadelphia.

"Party animosities here," he wrote, "have raised a wall of separation between those who differ in political sentiments. They must love misery indeed who would rather at the sight of an honest man feel the torment of hatred and aversion than the benign spasms of benevolence and esteem." One historian states that, "There is a tradition to this day in Philadelphia that so strongly ran the

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class feeling against Jefferson that Logan, Thomson, and Rittenhouse were his only social equals who did not exclude him from the hospitality of their homes."\textsuperscript{14}

To some extent Jefferson may have been himself to blame for the fact that Philadelphians found him an uncongenial companion. In later years, imparting paternal admonition to a shy daughter, he declared: "From 1793 to 1797 I remained closely at home, saw none but those who came there, and at length became very sensible of the ill effect it had on my mind, and of its direct and irresistible tendency to render me unfit for society and uneasy when necessarily engaged in it. I felt enough of the effect of withdrawing from the world then to see that it led to an anti-social and misanthropic state of mind, which severely punishes him who gives in to it; and it will be a lesson I never shall forget as to myself."\textsuperscript{15}

Nevertheless Jefferson deplored as ridiculous the fact that "Men who have been intimate all their lives, cross the streets to avoid meeting, and turn their heads another way, lest they should be obliged to touch their hats."\textsuperscript{16} He longed for something "to relieve the dreariness of this scene, where not one single occurrence is calculated to produce pleasing sensations."\textsuperscript{17} There was no public business upon which the energies of Congress might be usefully employed, Jefferson complained; "Nor are we relieved by the pleasures of society here; for, partly from bankruptcies, partly from party dissentions, society is torn up by the roots. I envy those who stay at home enjoying the society of their friendly neighbors."\textsuperscript{18} Unburdening himself to his family, the unhappy Virginian exclaimed: "I never was more homesick or heartsick. The life of this place is peculiarly hateful to me, and nothing but a sense of duty and respect to the public could keep me here a moment."\textsuperscript{19}

Again he wrote: "There is really no business which ought to keep us a fortnight. I am therefore looking forward with antici-

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., VI, 116.
\textsuperscript{16} Thomas Jefferson to Edward Rutledge, June 24, 1797, Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Memorial Edition, IX, 408, 411.
\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, Dec. 27, 1797, Ibid., Randall, Life of Thomas Jefferson, II, 481.
\textsuperscript{18} Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, Dec. 27, 1797, Ibid., II, 379.
\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Jefferson to John W. Eppes, May 6, 1798, Ibid., II, 385.
pation of the joy of seeing you again ere long, and tasting true happiness in the midst of my family. My absence from you teaches me how essential your society is to my happiness. Politics are such a torment that I would advise every one I love not to mix with them. I have changed my circle here according to my wish, abandoning the rich, and declining their dinners and parties, and associating entirely with the class of science, of whom there is a valuable society here. Still my wish is to be in the midst of our own families at home.”

Jefferson had been chosen on January 6, 1797, as president of the American Philosophical Society to succeed Rittenhouse. In accepting the honor, he professed as his sole qualification for the post “an ardent desire to see knowledge so disseminated through the mass of mankind that it may at last reach the extremes of society, beggars and kings.” He held this office until 1814, although after his removal from Philadelphia he could not concern himself so actively with the functioning of the organization.

Likewise “in the evenings of 1798-99” Jefferson enjoyed “delightful conversations” with Dr. Benjamin Rush, in which “the Christian religion was sometimes our topic” and which “served as an anodyne to the afflictions of the crisis through which our country was then laboring.”

On the whole, Jefferson did not find life in Philadelphia very pleasant. As Claude Bowers has pictured it: “Under these conditions he dropped out of the social life of the capital. In the evenings he consulted with his political associates; during the day he presented a calm, unruffled complacency to his enemies in the Senate over whom he presided with scrupulous impartiality. Driven from society, he found consolation in the little rooms of the Philosophical Society, among the relics of his friends Rittenhouse and Franklin.”

Moreover, although there is no evidence that he himself ever

21 Nicholas Biddle, Eulogium on Thomas Jefferson, delivered before the American Philosophical Society, on the 11th day of April, 1827 (Philadelphia, 1827), p. 29.
22 Thomas Jefferson to Robt. M. Patterson, Nov. 23, 1814, Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Memorial Edition, XIV, 210-211.
23 Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803, Ibid., X, 379.
traveled any further west than York, it must not be supposed that Jefferson was unacquainted with the people and the problems of western Pennsylvania. When Secretary of State, his attention was drawn to the region later famed for the Whiskey Rebellion by the occurrence of certain irregular "proceedings against the laws for raising a revenue on distilled spirits." Jefferson was "sincerely sorry that such proceedings have taken place," and expressed the hope that President Washington's proclamation might result "either in an amendment of the law, if it needs it, or in their conviction that it is right." On another occasion questions were referred to him regarding the sale to Pennsylvania of lands belonging to the United States situated on Lake Erie.

During Jefferson's term as governor of Virginia in 1781 arrangements were made to determine "by celestial observation" the boundary between Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Rev. James Madison of William and Mary College and the Rev. Robert Andrews were appointed commissioners on the part of Virginia. One set of observers was to be stationed at Philadelphia, another at Pittsburgh. Adequate instruments could be provided by Pennsylvania at the former spot, but Jefferson was very insistent that William and Mary College lend their time piece for use at Fort Pitt, under Bishop Madison's supervision, "for a purpose important to the public interest and in no small degree to geographical science." Apparently successful in this request, Jefferson advised President Reed of Pennsylvania that: "We will send to the westward the most necessary Instruments which we suppose to be a good time piece and a transit Instrument and hope it will be convenient for you to furnish what may be necessary at the Eastern End." Unfortunately, operations were interrupted by the movement of enemy troops and had to be postponed. The Monongalia County Sur-

27 In 1776 Jefferson had made a memorandum regarding the establishment of a satisfactory frontier. Ibid., II, 65-66.
veyor was instructed by the chief executive of Virginia: "It having become impracticable to settle the boundary between this State and Pennsylvania by astronomical observations during the present season, it is referred by mutual consent till the next year. In the meantime it is agreed that Mason's and Dixon's line shall be extended twenty-three miles with a surveyor's compass, only in the usual manner, marking the trees very slightly. I am, therefore, to desire you to undertake to do this in connection with such person as shall be appointed by his Excellency President Reid, and report your work to the executive." Ultimately, it seems the work was performed by a renowned Philadelphia astronomer: "The continuation of Mason and Dixon's line and the meridian from its termination to the Ohio, was done by Mr. Rittenhouse and others. . . . What has been done by Rittenhouse can be better done by no one."32

During Jefferson's Presidency, on March 29, 1806, he signed the act providing for construction of the National Pike, a highway to connect the newly-admitted state of Ohio with the Atlantic seaboard. At the close of that year, commissioners appointed to designate a route made their report. Not until April 9, 1807, did Pennsylvania give its assent to the project, as required by the act of Congress. Even then, the Pennsylvania Legislature appended a proviso urging that the route recommended by the commissioners be changed so as to pass through Uniontown and Washington, the county seats of Fayette and Washington counties.33

After considering the question whether the road should be built through Uniontown, or through Brownsville as originally proposed by the commissioners, Jefferson wrote to Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin, himself a resident of western Pennsylvania, that "we should consider the question of whether the road should pass through Uniontown, as now decided affirmatively, & I referred to the Comrs. to reconsider the question whether it should also pass through Brownsville & decide it according to their judgment."34 After the inclusion of both Uniontown and Brownsville,

31 Thomas Jefferson to the surveyor of the County of Monongalia, June 3, 1781, Ibid., XIX, 356.
32 Thomas Jefferson to Governor Wilson C. Nicholas, April 19, 1816, Ibid., XIV, 471, 481.
33 T. B. Searight, The Old Pike: A History of the National Road (Uniontown, 1904). Chapters III-IV.
it had to be determined whether the route should pass through Washington or Wheeling. Here again both towns were ultimately included. In another letter to Gallatin during the course of this business, Jefferson complained of the conduct of the Pennsylvania Legislature in seeking to dictate "the direction of a road made at the national expense and for national purposes" and threatened, if need be, to adopt a route "which shall not enter the State of Pennsylvania" at all.35

Moreover, Jefferson was duly mindful of Pennsylvania's political importance. Frequently in need of a "clue" when "confounded in the labyrinth of politics of Pennsylvania,"36 Jefferson was constantly on the alert to keep from being involved in or taking sides in the "jumble of subdivision"37 resulting from the political "schisms" of the state.38

In a letter prepared, but not sent,39 in reply to an address of the ward committee of Philadelphia on the subject of removals from office, Jefferson asserted the impropriety of petitions, intended to influence his exercise of the appointive power, emanating from groups not recognized by the Constitution. He was desirous, however, of obtaining the advice and opinions of individuals respecting such matters. Proceeding to state his approval of the policy of the governor of Pennsylvania in making removals, he said: "I dare say too that the extensive removals from office in Pennsylvania may have contributed to the great conversion which has been manifested among its citizens. But I respect them too much to believe it has been the exclusive or even the principal motive."

On another occasion he declared: "The spirit of 1776 is not dead. It has only been slumbering. The body of the American people . . . have been the dupes of artful manoeuvres, and made for a moment to be willing instruments in forging chains for themselves. But time and truth have dissipated the delusion, and opened their eyes. . . . Pennsylvania, Jersey and New York are

35 Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, April 22, 1808, Ibid., XII, 31-32.
37 Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Leiper, June 11, 1804, Ibid., VIII, 304-305.
38 Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, March 28, 1803, Ibid., VIII, 222; to Joseph Scott, March 9, 1804, Ibid., VIII, 305; to Thomas Leib, August 12, 1805, Ibid., VIII, 353-354.
coming majestically round to the true principles." In the electoral college, said Jefferson: "Pennsylvania really spoke in a voice of thunder."

The stability of the nation, Jefferson believed, was assured if the two historic Commonwealths stood side by side. "It has ever been my creed that the continuance of our union depends entirely on Pennsylva and Virginia, if they hold together nothing North or South will fly off."

There is much wisdom in his admonition to Madison: "Let us cultivate Pennsylvania, and we need not fear the universe."

41 Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Elijah Griffith, May 28, 1809, Ibid., XII, 285.