ALBERT GALLATIN OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

By Carman C. Johnson

The one hundredth anniversary of the famous visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to the United States of America in 1825 is rendered peculiarly significant to Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, not only because of the particularly happy circumstances of the reception accorded him in this the first great metropolis of the New West, but also because of the romantic features of his entertainment at Friendship Hill near New Geneva on the Monongahela River in Fayette County, by Albert Gallatin, one of the very greatest men in American annals, and, indeed, probably the very greatest man in American history ever to have lived in the region of Western Pennsylvania.

It is not so frequent that one's attention is called to the peculiarly broad international character of the Keystone State: Penn, the English Quaker of Eastern Pennsylvania; Prince Gallitzin, the Russian and yet Roman Catholic priest of Central Pennsylvania; and Albert Gallatin, the Swiss Calvinistic industrialist and statesman of Western Pennsylvania! But in this very fact of variety in nationalities and religions, one finds in the early story of Pennsylvania, as well as in her present populational complexes, some really significant explanations of some of this commonwealth's most unique characteristics. In Pennsylvania we are accustomed to unusually varied interracial adjustments.

European interests in the New World had crystallized for the Spanish on the borders of the Pacific, the Gulf, and the Carribean; for the French, along the far-flung line from Newfoundland to New Orleans; for the Dutch, on the Hudson; for the Swedes, on the Delaware; and for the English, along the Atlantic littoral and back to the Appalachians. But the wars, the French and Indian or the Seven Years War, and the American Revolution, had made tremendous changes; and right at this point we observe the arrival of the youthful Albert Gallatin, himself not a little interested in the idea of "lands in the West." He soon became familiar with the story that grew out of
the efforts by the Ohio Company to stake out claims to lands on the Kanawha nearly forty years before his arrival in America; the messenger-trip of George Washington in 1753; the struggles for possession of the Forks of the Ohio between the French and the English; the expedition of the ill-fated Braddock; the later and successful expedition of General Forbes and the establishment of the English Fort Pitt; the Indian flare-back under Pontiac in 1760-63, and the victory of Boquet at Bushy Run; the infiltration of English whites into the newly acquired West; the oncoming and the hardships, and the outcome of the Revolution; and then the renewed interest in Western settlements! Gallatin was responsive to the call of the West, finding himself, with the backing of a pretty fair Swiss fortune, on the eastern banks of the Upper Monongahela as early as 1784.

Gallatin’s family line, Savoyard in origin, dates back beyond the thirteenth century, in which period his people transferred their interests to Geneva in Switzerland. Always a prominent, if indeed not precisely a noble family, in Geneva, they played a prominent part in the civic program of John Calvin in the sixteenth century. Born in 1761, Albert soon became an orphan; and his grandparents, as also an important lady of Geneva, had much to do with directing his upbringing. At the age of eighteen he was graduated from the local academy; and, although he was steeped in the liberal political philosophy which then circulated freely in Europe, there was nothing of the “red” or the violent in his tendencies, in spite of a streak of personal independence. Military opportunity opened to him, but just enough of the quest of adventure was in him to save him from involvement in oncoming European catastrophes. He fled to America in 1780 with a young friend by the name of Seree.

Gallatin manifested little interest in the War of Independence, though he did participate in a little effort at “fighting for the cause” on the coast of Maine. Soon his folks in Geneva discovered his whereabouts and supplied him with funds. An investment in a cargo of tea to the extent of four hundred dollars was his first American venture. An instructorship in French at Harvard engaged
him for about two years, 1781-83; then he was off to New York and Philadelphia. Meeting here with the banker- envoy, Savary of Lyons, on his way to Virginia to look after interests of his clients in the Old Dominion, Gallatin hears of "The Washington Bottoms," beyond the mountains, and decides to cut loose from Geneva and invest in these Western lands to the extent of one thousand acres. Richmond becomes his headquarters now.

On Gallatin's first visit to the West he met General Washington, also interested in lands in these parts.

Gallatin, after conference with the General, chose to locate his lands north of the recently extended Mason and Dixon Line, taking what was then known as the Thomas Clare Farm on Georges Creek and the Monongahela, as his initial investment in Pennsylvania. This Clare Farm, soon developed into a trading post and a store, became an added feature of Gallatin's frontier land venture. Savary of Lyons joined him in the wilderness in 1785, and the young men about this time had a little scare from the Indians. In 1787 an old Geneveese friend by the name of Bandollet came on the scene, and "Friendship Hill" was added to the properties on the Monongahela. The original house was built for the youthful bride of Richmond in 1788-89. Her death followed in less than two years, and the young husband wrestled with discouragement in the wilderness.

In 1793 he re-married, this time the daughter of General Nicholson of New York; and the old enthusiasms for frontier enterprises took on new life. In 1794, with the residue of his patrimonial estate, Gallatin bought Wilson's lands on both sides of the mouth of Georges Creek and founded New Geneva at a point formerly called "Wilson's Post." New Geneva was presently laid out by L' Enfant, the engineer who about the same time laid out the city of Washington, D. C. The A. Gallatin Company, consisting of himself, of Nicholson, Bourdelon, Eizenove, and Bandollet, was formed about this time. A glass factory in 1796, a grist-mill in the same year, a gun factory in 1797—these were some of the early enterprises of the upper courses of a river that was starting to become world-famous for its industries. It is interesting to note paren-
thetically that the Gallatin and Baker Gun Works, at the time of the new American Republic's troubles with France, with anywhere from thirty to one hundred workmen, filled an order for twenty thousand "pieces" for the Pennsylvania legislature. This gun company was dissolved in 1801, mainly because Gallatin's sense of propriety with respect to business and political relations would not permit him longer to continue in the gun business.

And now we must introduce the thought that leads to Albert Gallatin's political career. Recall that he was of Swiss-French origin, steeped in the liberal doctrines of Montesquieu and all who followed in his train. The new Constitution of the United States of America was up for adoption before the people of Pennsylvania. Gallatin, from his seat of influence in the western end of the state, got the ear of Smilie and Brending as legislators from "Old Fayette" and urged them to insist upon adoption of the federal constitution, only on condition that in some way greater measures of personal liberty and local democracy should be guaranteed. This activity led to his own election to the Constitutional convention of the state of Pennsylvania in 1789. Under the new State Constitution of 1790, Gallatin served in the legislatures of 1790, 1791 and 1792.

Then came the so-called Whiskey Rebellion, an expression of western local democracy and independence against what was considered by many to be a tendency in the Federal Capital to "lord it" over the country as if "King Cong" had fallen heir to all the arbitrary show of authority once exercised by George III. In connection with this rebellion, Gallatin's name has been somewhat affected unfavorably; but, while he showed some political sympathy with his western neighbors, he would have none of their violence and assisted in suppressing the up-rising before the arrival of federal troops.

In 1793 he appeared in Washington as Senator-elect from Pennsylvania, but was thrown out by opposition to him from the Federalists, on the grounds of his insufficient residence in America. Immediately he was re-elected to the legislature of his adopted state.

Then followed his advent to a permanent place in national politics, this time as a Jeffersonian Demo-Republi-
can member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, 1793 to 1801; and now as the undisputed house leader of the opposition to Federalism. This was a page in American history probably more significant as to the future trend of American public policy than even the fairly well informed American citizen is likely to be aware of; for nothing was more certain than the final triumph of democratic as against aristocratic principles in the legislative and administrative branches of the new federal government, even if a measure of aristocracy may be admitted in the processes of the judiciary of that time. In this high conflict of opinion, no one, unless Jefferson himself, took a more active or effective part than Gallatin. While he is much more popularly known for his later service as Secretary of the Treasury under Jefferson and Madison until 1813, the minute records found in the Annals of Congress reveal the masterful qualities of Gallatin's legislative ability.

As Secretary of the Treasury, Gallatin proved himself, after an interval, not only a worthy successor of Hamilton, but in many ways quite as resourceful and constructive as the more famous first Secretary. In 1813-15 he went to Europe as a special Commissioner of The United States seeking favorable terms of settlement of our part in the Napoleonic wars of that period, the War of 1812. The treaty of Ghent resulted. A very special commission to Russia was an additional service at this time.

In 1816-23 Gallatin was Minister to France, where he and Lafayette developed a warm personal friendship. He returned to America for the period 1825-27, in which time, in 1825, having rebuilt his residence at Friendship Hill near New Geneva, he participated in the entertainment of Lafayette upon the occasion of the popular visitor's sojourn here. In 1827 Gallatin was Minister to the Court of St. James, leaving this post however very shortly and returning to New York, where he became President of The National Bank of New York, a founder of New York University, and a founder and important contributor to the vast research work of the American Ethnological Society. President Tyler offered him, even at his advanced age, the post of Secretary of the Treasury; but he declined and later opposed Pres-
ident Tyler in his admission of Texas into the Union.

It remains merely to say just a word by way of emphasis of Western Pennsylvania's justification in keeping alive the name of Albert Gallatin. He typifies the spirit of Western Pennsylvania, as "The First West," in the development of the commerce and the industry and the natural resources of this unusually rich region. He typifies the inherent democratic independence of the pioneers of Western Pennsylvania. He typifies the finest aspects of democracy writ large. He typifies and embodies an extremely high type of idealism and practical activity, such as has been and still may well be emulated by some of the most illustrious leaders of thought and industry in America; men universally known for their original identification with tremendous interests that centre in Western Pennsylvania. In all this galaxy of the great whose names we may now recall, Albert Gallatin occupies permanently no inconspicuous place.