Beaumont, physician and physiologist of Mackinac. By a stroke of luck, Beaumont was able to do the original work on gastric function and the mechanics of the digestive process. By the accident of a bullet wound in the stomach of his patient, Alexis St. Martin, Beaumont was actually able to observe digestive processes and introduce various foods and note the time required for and the manner of digestion. This was the forerunner of modern physiology and paved the way for a more factual and scientific approach to human physiology and medicine as a whole. The trials, emotions and frustrations of Beaumont and his temperamental patient are presented almost in novel form and make the reading much easier than the usual biographical work.

Finally, it fell to the lot of a village medical practitioner, Crawford Long, and an obscure dentist in Hartford, Connecticut, William T. G. Morton, to discover and promote the use of ether for anesthesia. This again paved the way for modern surgery. The story around the discovery and use of ether to alleviate pain and permit the relaxation needed for surgery is brilliantly presented again. The dispute as to who was first matters little. The overwhelming gratitude of mankind for the blessings of painless surgery can be shared by both men.

Herein then is a book of medical lore, well written, revealing, interesting as a novel, yet historical and biographical in nature. It is well worth reading.

Homestead, Pennsylvania

Robert W. McDermott, M.D.


Before the reader discovers the fact for himself, I hasten to note that this report on Robert Alberts' new biography is just that — not a professional historian's review but the enthusiastic reaction of an antiquarian to a most pleasant adventure in colonial history.

The "golden" theme of the book's title was chosen well. Here is the fascinating story of a young man gifted with the Midas touch, who married the current golden girl of Philadelphia, built two great mansions, traveled widely in Europe, knew everyone who mattered, both in America and abroad, served his country well and made a fortune at the same time! His whole career was golden in most respects except for longevity — but that is all in the back of the book!
William Bingham was born into a rising Philadelphia family in 1752, graduated with honor from the College of Philadelphia in 1768, and received the master of arts degree in 1771 at the age of nineteen.

Young Bingham’s postgraduate education included the Grand Tour of Europe as well as an opportunity to learn the mercantile arts in the counting house of the wealthy Quaker merchant, Thomas Wharton — where he used his time and some family capital so well that while still a Wharton clerk he was operating two small trading ships of his own. It seems clear that at an early age he “understood money.”

When, in 1775, American relations with Great Britain became seriously strained, Bingham was made secretary of the Congressional Committee of Secret Correspondence, where he worked with the chairman, Benjamin Franklin, and the banker, William Morris, and many other colonial notables. He was on his way. Diplomat, merchant prince, banker and United States Senator, he was at forty the richest man in America, and friend to Washington, Hamilton, Gallatin, John Jay, and Dr. Benjamin Rush.

At twenty-eight Bingham married Anne Willing, the daughter of a wealthy banker, Thomas Willing. She was sixteen years of age, and already possessed of a most unusual combination of beauty, graciousness, and intelligence. Women who envied her social success nevertheless wrote touching tributes to her character and her loveliness. Even Abigail Adams called her “the finest woman I ever saw.” The girl must have been irresistible.

The combination of the author’s verbal portrait of Anne Bingham, the comments of her contemporaries, and the handsome portrait sketch by Gilbert Stuart affect even today’s reader with a feeling of regret at having missed knowing such an enchanting personality!

The book is spiced with innumerable quotations from letters preserved from an age which, lacking the telephone, confided to paper-and-ink not only the necessary communications of business and government, but torrents of political and social gossip that today are communicated verbally. The author, writing of them with humor as well as grace, evidently enjoyed his researches among the letters of the colonial ladies almost as much as the letters of merchants, bankers, politicians, and statesmen.

If I were a professional historian I should point to 119 pages of Appendices, Notes and Sources, Bibliography, and Index — including whole letters, diary items, and documents as interesting as the text itself. No scholar could fault the book on this score.
As to style, I content myself by quoting that here is "a fascinating style combined with a scrupulous regard for fact." Good history and good writing join to make this an outstanding book.

The reader should be warned that this biography will not be read at a gallop. It's a browser's book, good for many quiet hours of pleasant reading in the late evening. And the enticingly written chapter and section titles make it difficult for even an insomniac to lay it down!

As to the book itself: It is a credit to its publishers as well as to its author. (As a lifelong enthusiast for good typography I here restrain myself!) Beautifully and readably designed and bound, carefully printed in type large enough for bi-focals, and handsomely illustrated with twenty-four pages of portraits and sketches by the best artists of Bingham's day, this volume is a pleasure to hold in the hand, and even better, to read. It would make an excellent present for your spouse, best friend, boss, or a wealthy relative; and the price, impressive but not exorbitant, is right — even if you weaken and decide to keep The Golden Voyage for your own bedside shelf, as you are very likely to do.

Robert Alberts may well be in line for another book club award.

Pittsburgh C. V. Starrett


A handsome and invaluable book written by Pittsburgh resident Rebecca J. Beal has just been published by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Beyond the pleasure imparted by the very existence of a well-made book — and this book is beautiful in every detail — the special value of Jacob Eichholtz 1776-1842, Portrait Painter of Pennsylvania is that it illuminates territory in early nineteenth century American art that has been until now terra incognita. Prior to its publication scant information on Eichholtz was available in even the best stocked library. Mrs. Beal's thorough monograph now becomes, and undoubtedly will remain, the standard Eichholtz reference work.