

Role of Clergy and Albert Gallatin

It is not very often that the identity of clergy in southwestern Pennsylvania are included in the chronicles of local history. However, such is the case in the late 18th century around the Chartiers Valley. The focus of their ministries was the earnest desire to maintain peace and prosperity in the midst of the 1790's threat of a civil war locally between pioneer farmers and the new federal government. The noteworthy clergy included Francis Reno at St. Luke's Church; John McMillan, Presbyterian at Chartiers and Pigeon Creek congregations; John Clark at the Bethel Presbyterian Church; and in contrast to the peace makers, two rebellious Baptist ministers, David Phillips and John Corbley. The peacemakers preached peace, asking the congregants to respect the new United States government, and to realize the need to put this country on a sound financial basis. The rebellious clergy represented the opposite point of view, even to the formation of the 14th state of the union.

Then there was Albert Gallatin, who was born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1761 to a prominent Duchy of Savoy family. As an orphan at age 9, he came to Massachusetts in 1780 seeking the adventure of being a free citizen. In 1784 he explored the Monongahela River area in Fayette County. At New Geneva, he built a home called "Friendship Hill" for his wife Sophia.. She died soon after taking residence.



Gallatin's political career started in 1788 when he tried to revise the new Constitution to weaken the national government. In 1790, he tried to revise the Pennsylvania Constitution and to eliminate debt. He married Hannah Nicholson in 1794 and they moved to Friendship Hill. In the debate about the Whiskey tax, he doubted its constitutionality. He preached submission to it at a meeting at Parkinson Ferry on August 14, 1794, at Brownsville on September 2 and around the County. His reasoned arguments moved moderate anti-federalists to urge the farmers to peacefully submit to the excise tax. Some radical rebels wanted to physically attack Gallatin. Yet he was elected later that year to the federal House of Representatives where he called for strict fiscal accounting.

He served under Presidents Jefferson and Madison as Secretary of the Treasury from 1801 to 1814, the longest of any Secretary. After several international assignments, in 1832 he sold Friendship Hill and went to live in New York where he led impressive public service assignments. A few months after his wife Hannah died, Albert died on August 12, 1849.

For both clergy and laity, there is validity in the ministry of guidance and exhortation, even though everyone will not heed your words.