# A Letter from Friendship Hill


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We don't have to invent a connection between conservation and preservation. We feel the same awe in the presence of both a grand natural landscape and the mighty achievements of our human predecessors. Of course, neither grandeur nor might are requisites to an intelligent diffidence toward our inheritance from nature or from humankind: just a prudent sense of trusteeship will do.

Sometimes the reasons for conservation of culturally significant places emerge more clearly when we examine afresh places we have considered primarily as important natural areas, and vice versa. I have had reason, lately, to be surprised and instructed anew by Yellowstone National Park, Isle Royale National Park, Friendship Hill National Historic Site, near Pittsburgh, and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site, in St. Louis.

The stress in this paper will be upon the reinterpretation of Friendship Hill, because it permits us to draw wisdom from Albert Gallatin, the heroic figure who built the house, as well as from a great document about the preservation of cultural sites: the "Report on the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology," prepared and largely written by the Bureau's director, Cyrus Thomas. That report, published in 1894, was the outgrowth of Gallatin's passionate enthusiasm for racial justice and for historic preservation.

It may not be immediately evident that Yellowstone, Isle Royale, Friendship Hill, and the Jefferson arch have much in common. But Cyrus Thomas and Gallatin instruct us that they do. It is a very good thing that all four of these places are now the responsibility of the U.S. National Park Service. Any one of them is a good place to rediscover an aspect of America's ancient past and the diversity of its peoples.

The building of popular support to preserve the wonders of Yellowstone commenced with John Colter's account, but it gained important impetus from an archaeologist, between 1810 and 1816. He was also a pirate, and his name was Bartholomy Lafon. Lafon wrote a report urging that Yellowstone be protected that may have had considerable circulation–there is a copy in the archives of the Spanish Secret Service. Lafon already had created a following: he laid out the Garden District in New Orleans, designed Jean Lafitte's headquarters on Galveston Island, advised Thomas Jefferson on routes for his explorers of the West, and proposed a very good idea–a great national atlas of American antiquity. He had also made the first systematic search for mounds in the lower Mississippi Valley.

Lafon should have a memorial somewhere, possibly along a new National Antiquities Trail in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Such a trail would link the sites later described by Thomas, but to which Lafon first called our attention, as he did to Yellowstone.

There is another archaeological association with Yellowstone: in the years between the time of Christ and the fall of Rome, the Indians of the Ohio Valley received obsidian from Yellowstone's obsidian cliff in large enough chunks to make some of their most beautiful sculpture. We do not always connect Yellowstone to the Hopewell culture, but the Hopewell Indians of Ohio did, as they brought into their exchange networks not only Yellowstone obsidian but also copper from Isle Royale and shark's teeth from the Atlantic Coast of Florida.

On the way to Friendship Hill, let's pause in the shadow of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial's great arch in St. Louis–or, better still, let's ascend to its apogee, to survey what might have been seen from that perch in 1779 and 1379. In 1779 we would be looking down at the center of the fortifications within which the Spanish garrison, with the town's French inhabitants and a few Americans provided by George Rogers Clark, stood off siege by 1,000 Sioux and British.

Thanks to some help from local geographers, we have now been able to place those fortifications upon a GIS map of St. Louis. The Revolutionary War in the West is part of the story of "expansion"–it considerably enriches the story of what we mean by Expansion–expansion by whom, at the expense of whom, and with help from whom? Conservationists and archaeologists might ask, in addition, at the expense of what?

Cyrus Thomas and the Bureau of Ethnology would be more interested in a second addition to a map of St. Louis: the placement, within its current grid of streets, of the mighty architecture present in St. Louis in the fourteenth century. Portions of the ruins of that architecture of earth, and portions of the ruins of the Spanish fort, were called to Gallatin's attention in 1819. So late as that, visitors to the hustling, bustling river port could recognize hanging gardens, platform mounds, cones, and two plazas. So late as that, one could go to St. Louis for a sense of the antiquity of human endeavor in the Mississippi Valley. From the arch one can still look across the

Mississippi and see, on a clear day, Monk's Mound–larger in extent than the great pyramid of Egypt, nine stories tall. Unlike the prehistoric city of St. Louis, the central plaza at Cahokia is protected by a park and interpreted in an excellent museum.

Cyrus Thomas admonished his fellow countrymen a century ago to give better attention to American antiquity. We know now that a good reason for doing so is to reinforce the lessons of our natural areas. In St. Louis, for example, we can learn that the great metropolis, thronged with people in 1300, was vacant by 1450. The reason for its evacuation is clear enough. Those people befouled their environment, depleted its resources, and had to straggle away, producing what archaeologists are calling the American "Vacant Quarter" a century or more before Europeans arrived there. There's a lesson there about conservation which was lost when, in the 19th century, we failed in the historic preservation of St. Louis.

Now let us turn to the lessons of Friendship Hill, surely one of the least-appreciated of all the National Historic Sites. Friendship Hill is related to ancient peoples too. It lies within a few miles of the Meadowcroft Shelter, where archaeologists have found evidence of human habitation for at least 12,000 years. But it is Friendship Hill's association with Albert Gallatin which makes it a national shrine.

In the 1780s, Gallatin became the first great American statesman to stake his political future west of the Appalachians. Swiss-born, he became a congressman and senator from Pennsylvania, Secretary of the Treasury, diplomat, abolitionist, and founder, in effect, of Cyrus Thomas's Bureau of Ethnology. Gallatin was for decades America's most eloquent sponsor of studies into its ancient past, especially the importance of the ancient West.

Let's look in on him sixty years after he arrived at Friendship Hill. It is 1844. Gallatin is in the midst of his last political battle, standing beside Abraham Lincoln, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Frederick Douglass, and Thomas Hart Benton, in opposition to the Mexican War.

What a story to be told at Friendship Hill! Here was a Founding Father who had been seeking emancipation of the slaves since 1790, going into battle beside Lincoln, who would become only two decades later a Great Emancipator! We all know how slowly Lincoln came to full participation in Gallatin's emancipationist views–only after Antietam, some would say. But they were together, in 1844, during an earlier, and a losing, struggle against the power of the slave-owners. Had the outcome been different in 1844, the balance of forces at Antietam would have been quite different.

It was, perhaps, a bitter memory of Gallatin's own acquiescence in the continued expansion of slavery into Louisiana in 1805, which led him in 1844 to oppose its continued expansion into Texas and northern Mexico. He said then, as he had not said on the earlier occasion, that the United States should not add "a foreign state, and a foreign slave-holding state, to the union" and urged that no new territories should become states with slave-owning recognized in their constitutions.

In 1844, the nation did not choose to depart from the course leading it toward civil war, a course upon which it had been set by the acquiescence to slavery in the terms of the Louisiana Purchase and the organization of the lands acquired. (That is another element worth reemphasis in St. Louis). That war was brought closer after the acquisition of Texas and the Mexican War. Old men such as Gallatin remembered: during the Louisiana debates of

1805-6 and the Missouri debate of 1819-20, the advocates of expanding slavery prevailed. On the other hand, they remembered precarious victories: how antislavery Virginians —such as Thomas Worthington and Edward Coles, governors of Ohio and Illinois—held the line against slavery, drawn by the Northwest Ordinance along the Ohio River.

In the 1840s, the advocates of the expansion of slavery had special interests in Texas and Mexico, and those advocates controlled the policies of the government of the United States. Spanish officers, commanding garrisons along the vague western frontier of that purchase, issued invitations to American slaves to climb aboard an early version of an underground railroad to find freedom in Texas. The Blacks were offered freedom, grants of land (anticipating the Freedman's Bureau), and instruction in the Roman Catholic Faith.

The Americans responded with diplomatic remonstrance and threats of invasion. The Spanish authorities withdrew their offers, but slaves continued to find refuge in Texas. One of the first acts of the Mexican government after independence from Spain in 1820-21 was to declare the abolition of slavery. Mexico still held Texas, and Texas became a sump, drawing off runaway slaves from the American plantations.

In the 1830s, the slaveowners of the South turned their attention to this threat to their interests, and, beyond Texas, to abolitionist Mexico. Texas was acquired in 1845. The Mexican War ensued, despite the opposition of Gallatin and the others. The president, James K. Polk, solicited a war, and lost no time in responding to a Mexican raid across the Rio Grande with a full-scale invasion, justified to the public as a war over yet another inferior people.

When Mr. Polk got his war, Gallatin set aside his studies of Native American archaeology at Friendship Hill. Buckling on the armor of righteousness, he set forth on the last campaign of his life. Lincoln and the other younger men were his allies, but his partner was John Quincy Adams, the former president who had returned to Washington as a member of the House of Representatives. They went into battle together, these old tellers of truths, full of that kind of idealism which is reduced to its essence by the heat of experience.

Their opponents were those who advocated a sort of American equivalent to the White Man's Burden. Military adventures abroad were being justified by a vaunted racial superiority over the victims. George Wilkins Kendall wrote that Mexicans displayed "few of the instincts which govern other races." Brantz Mayer colored things in: Mexicans were dark; though brave, theirs could only be berserk bravery, of "Mahomedan fatalism derived . . . from . . . Moorish kindred." Mexican cavalry were, he said, the "Arabs of the American continent."

Gallatin and Adams would have none of this borrowing of antipathy from Blacks to apply to Mexicans by way of Moors. They argued that a delusion of racial superiority over African-Americans and Native Americans was now determining the conduct of foreign affairs.

The two old patriots infuriated the jingoes—the believers in Manifest Destiny. Adams and Gallatin portrayed the triumphant advance against Chapultepec as slavery's triumph; when the Stars and Stripes was unfurled over the Halls of Montezuma, it was, they said, "Slavery's Flag."

In his essay *Slavery and the War*, Adams insisted that the slave-owning American nation, not the Mexican, required redemption. Thereafter he commenced voting against appropriations for the war while offering a stream of abolitionist resolutions, ceasing his labors only when he died

at his desk in the House of Representatives.

Nor did Gallatin permit the Polk Administration to go uncontested in what he called was "unjust aggrandizement by brutal force." He derided the claim that the war was fought to "enlighten the degraded Mexicans." As he had championed Indians as a people capable of great art and architecture, and as he had asserted the talent of African-Americans to be equal to those of the Whites, Gallatin rejected assertions of Mexican unworthiness as incompatible with the "principle of democracy, which rejects every . . . claim of . . . an hereditary superiority of races."

A steadfast adherence to that "principal of democracy" permitted Gallatin to develop an understanding of what was happening on the frontier fifty years before Cyrus Thomas issued his report. In the early decades of the 19th century, the architectural achievements of the Mound Builders had been rediscovered by a people engaged in imposing their rule upon the Great Valley. One of the benign consequences of the Mexican War was that Americans learned to make analogies among the antiquities they had found in the Ohio, Mississippi, and Ouachita valleys and what their soldiers saw in Mexico (Gallatin called their attention to New Mexico) and to what Napoleon had found in Egypt.

From those analogies and from a growing awareness that they were trespassing upon an ancient and admirable past came the naming of cities such as Cairo, Illinois, and Memphis, Tennessee, and Lincoln's reference to the Mississippi Valley as the Egypt of the West. Lincoln understood about cultural resources!

From 1780 until Lincoln's election in 1860, several million Americans made their homes in the shadow of large works of earthen architecture, and constructed cities upon the ruins of older cities. The Indians were still there, though much reduced in numbers and in condition, demoralized and sickened by European and African diseases. The newcomers were astonished at the evidence that Indians had been capable of monumental architecture—of making buildings far larger than any these invaders had ever seen before.

We have learned recently that some of the largest of these buildings are five thousand years old. At Frenchman's Bend and Hedgepeth in Louisiana, Americans were building very large complexes of structures before the first stepped pyramids were attempted in Egypt. These astonishing earthworks require protection, as does the old growth forest which surrounds some of them.

The architecture of Poverty Point is merely 3,500 years old, but it is seven times larger than its contemporary, Stonehenge. The great pyramid at Cahokia, as high as a nine-story building, occupies a larger area than the Great Pyramid at Gezah.

Anyone in Gallatin's time who came into St. Louis or Nashville, or the Ohio towns of Cincinnati, Newark, Portsmouth, or, certainly, Chillicothe, would find the ruins of ancient buildings dominating the landscape. By 1890, much had been lost. It was even possible for historians to treat the Mississippi Valley, with its thirty thousand or more ancient buildings, its cities built upon cities, as if it were open, vacant land— a "new" rather than a very old world.

The amnesia of this is largely explicable as a scar left by racial prejudice, in this case, a prejudice against Indians as having an architecture. Like Gallatin in the 1840s, Thomas in 1894 contested against the pervasive racism of nineteenth century America. Thomas was living among the Jim Crow generation; that generation had witnessed the final victory of American arms over the Indian nations of the West, and had

been directly and bitterly conditioned by the Civil War and its ugly, dispiriting aftermath. The bitterness for some arose from the corruption of Reconstruction, and for others from the failure of Reconstruction to achieve those war aims to which Lincoln called the nation.

When we visit Friendship Hill, we are induced to reflect again upon those war aims, because they are precisely the ideals of Albert Gallatin. And we can recapture two truths well known to him. The first is the central significance to the American story of slavery. The second is "an appreciative estimate of the importance" of the ancient West in the American story.

Cyrus Thomas insisted that his contemporaries should "register," that is, see as real *and* important, the evidences of the ancient West. Americans were reluctant to do that. At first, they insisted that Native American earthen architecture was not, in fact architecture—because it was made of earth. (Some people may still be heard making that assertion.) Others suggested that though perhaps architecture, the work was not Native American, but, instead, the creation of Hindus, Welsh, Egyptians, Lost Tribes of Israel, even Japanese.

People are still heard to argue that the Indians whose culture was under attack in the nineteenth century were not the sort of people who could have accomplished such things.

Fifty years earlier, Gallatin had pointed out that genealogical nonsense about a master race (Anglo-Saxons) was being coupled to the defense of *slavery* and to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. Slavery was gone by 1890, but not its economic or intellectual legacy. By 1904, the destiny having manifested was already surging outside the continental limits. Gallatin's "Saxon Race" has enjoyed itself, but not enough to be completely self-assured; its anxious insistence upon the racial superiority seems still to require a refusal to credit Indians with a grand history.

Who is an American? This is the question asked by Frederick Jackson Turner and by Alexis de Toqueville. Gallatin had given the answer in 1814, while representing the United States in the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Ghent. He was offered what Henry Goulburn, the British emissary, thought to be a compliment: Goulburn commented that Gallatin was still more European than American. Gallatin flared back that the only true Americans were "the Red Indians."

By this he meant, of course, that we are all becoming Americans, and that some have pride of place among us. Americans were—and are—a new people. We are not mere carriers of Europe's genes or Africa's or Asia's. In Gallatin's time, people still contended that the truest of all were what they called the "Anglo-Saxons." You can still hear that said at meetings of the Ku Klux Klan. Gallatin reminded his countrymen that the very term Anglo-Saxon was unscientific. The British in America were as much "Frenchified Normans, Angevins and Gascons" as Angles and Saxons. He doubted, as well, the virtue of "doubtful descent from men who lived one thousand years ago," who were, he added, a barbaric lot clearly "inferior to Goths."

Warming to his subject, Gallatin went on to say that "it is not [to] their Anglo-Saxon descent that the English are indebted for their superior institutions. In the progressive improvement of mankind much more has been due to religious and political institutions than to races." And, he might have added, to frontier conditions, as well.

The master of Friendship Hill hoped that America would embrace all races as co-equal partners. Then "there will be no trace left of the pre-

tended superiority of one of those races above the other. . . . [T]he claim is but a pretext for covering and justifying unjust usurpation and unbounded ambition."

Albert Gallatin was an authentic American hero. Perhaps more than any other of the Founding Fathers, Gallatin had words which may catch the conscience of our own time. The issue which he put in 1844 is still with us: how shall we achieve a society in which all Americans respect each other, and recognize the human achievements each represents?

At Yellowstone, obsidian cliff reminds us of Hopewell sculpture, and of an architect and archaeologist who called for a national atlas of antiquity. His other profession, piracy, merely makes Bartholomy Lafon easier to remember. The Hopewell lead us to recall copper from Isle Royale, and the other Indians who, eight or nine centuries after them, built the first great architecture in the shadow of the arch at St. Louis. At St. Louis, too, there are ecological lessons to be learned, just as there are at Friendship Hill, where the home of Albert Gallatin was barely rescued from the depredations of a mining company which would have denied us the only tangible reminder we retain of the life of this great man. That life and that place are full of lessons for today.

*(Portions of this essay are drawn from a forthcoming book by the author entitled* Found in the Valley. *After this essay was submitted, Roger Kennedy was appointed director of the U.S. National Park Service.)*