

Biographical/Historical Notes

A noted linguist, Peter Stephen Du Ponceau was born in St Martin de Ré, France, on June 3, 1760. He was a good student and gifted at languages, but after graduating from seminary he chose not to enter the priesthood. Instead, in 1777 he came to the American colonies as secretary to Prussian military officer Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus, Baron von Steuben (1730-1794) during the War of Independence. Du Ponceau served as a captain in the American army until 1781 when illness forced him to resign; afterward, he remained in America, eventually settling in Philadelphia and becoming a lawyer. He was an active member of the city's cultural organizations, eventually serving as president of three: the American Philosophical Society (elected to membership in 1791), the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. He was a founding member of the French Benevolent Society of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Bar Association. Du Ponceau's greatest scholarly contribution was to linguistics; encouraged by Thomas Jefferson, he studied and wrote on Native American languages, as well as Chinese. Peter Du Ponceau died in Philadelphia in 1844.

Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834), was a French aristocrat and military careerist who actively supported the colonists during the American Revolution. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1777, and joining the army as a volunteer, served as a distinguished troop leader through the war's end in 1781. Lafayette returned to France and was a prominent activist in the French Revolution and various political events throughout his life. Declared a traitor in 1792 by the Revolutionary Government, he was imprisoned in Prussia and Austria until 1797; he returned to France in 1799 and established a residence near Paris at Chateau La Grange, Seine et Marne.

Lafayette toured America between July 1824 and September 1825, where he received, as a gift from the United States government, a township of land (at what is now Tallahassee, Florida) and \$200,000. He returned to France and was active in public life as a deputy in the French Parliament until his death.

Auguste Levasseur was Lafayette's secretary and accompanied him on his tour of the United States in 1824-1825. Antoine Marie Peyre (1770-1843) was a French architect, and an associate of Lafayette from the time of his military career.

Joseph, Comte de Survilliers was the pseudonym of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain (1768-1844), and Napoleon's older brother. After the Bonaparte family was exiled from France, Joseph was smuggled to America under an assumed name and lived at an estate, Point Breeze, in New Jersey, and in Philadelphia. He returned to Europe in 1839 and died in Italy. Joseph Bonaparte was active in the Franco-American community and was an associate of Stephen Girard.