

Student Handout 3-A Biographical Sketch of the Prince

Prince Demetrius Gallitzin was born on December 22, 1770, into one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Russia. His father was Prince Demetrius, Sr., a friend to some of the greatest minds of the enlightenment and the Russian ambassador to Holland. His birthplace was the Hague in Holland. His mother, Countess Amalie, was a catholic and deeply influenced her son. It was customary that young aristocrats in Russia at the age of 21 travel to see the world. The young Gallitzin, because of unrest in Europe, decided to see America. In 1792, he arrived in Baltimore, Maryland. After meeting Bishop John Carroll, Demetrius decided to enter the priesthood and to stay in the United States. Upon his ordination, Augustine Smith—the name Gallitzin assumed when he came to America--became the first priest to receive all his orders in the United States.

In 1796 while serving at Conewago, Pennsylvania, Father Smith was summoned to give last rites to a dying woman 150 miles to the west. The settlement was a 12,000-acre Catholic refuge started by Captain Michael McGuire in what is today Cambria County. When he arrived, Gallitzin fell in love with the small community of Catholics, mostly from Maryland, who had settled in the wilds of Pennsylvania. Here, in the following decades Smith would build the first Catholic Church in Pennsylvania west of the Alleghenies, then lead and financially support the town that he later named Loretto.

Using loans from eastern banks and businessmen and his own money, Gallitzin built the town by offering land at low prices to new settlers, financed mills, tanneries and businesses to help the people of Loretto thrive. He was personally responsible for the advancement of the Catholic Church all over Pennsylvania. In his lifetime he saw dioceses established in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Demetrius Gallitzin, born into wealth and position died in Loretto on May 6, 1840. He is buried in St. Michael's cemetery in the parish he founded and supported with his work and life.