

The Cover Story

Ladies who became FIRST

Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams – a Sixth in a Series by Randall Priest

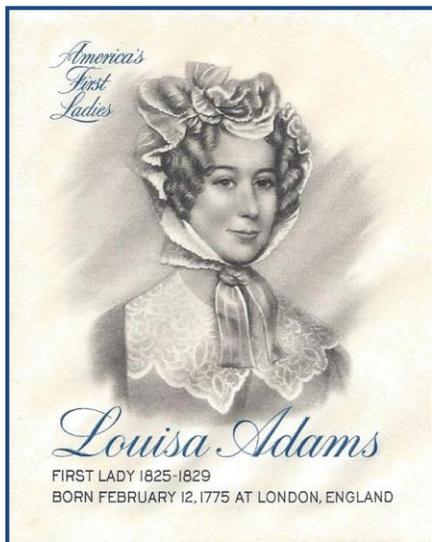


Figure 1

turned his attentions to Louisa. On July 26, 1797, John Quincy (age 30) married Louisa (age 22) at the All Hallows Barking parish in London. They would go on to have four children – three boys and a girl.

John Quincy's mother Abigail (as well as his father, John Adams) was not happy that her son had married a woman not born in the United States. She felt it would be detrimental for his future political career. She really never fully accepted her daughter-in-law. However, the President, John Adams, overcame his initial objections and welcomed his daughter-in-law into the family.

Louisa's parents came to the United States in 1797 leaving a lot of debt behind them in England. President John Adams appointed Joshua Johnson U.S. Director of Stamps. Joshua died in Frederick, Maryland, in 1803 of severe fever and some mental problems. Catherine, Louisa's mother, died in September 1811 in her mid-fifties.

For the next 28, years John Quincy's career as a diplomat had the Adams' family moving continually across Europe, the United States, and even to St. Petersburg, Russia. During some of this time, two of the sons were left with Abigail Adams (at her request.) In St. Petersburg, a long-awaited daughter was born in 1810; however she died the following year. From Russia, John Adams was then sent to Ghent, Belgium, to be involved in negotiations. When he bid her to close up their home and meet him in Paris, Louisa began one of the most extraordinary adventures of her life. With her son Charles and sister Kitty, Louisa Adams made a six-week excursion through Russia, Poland and Germany towards France in the middle of winter and war in a carriage on a sleigh bottom.

In 1817 James Monroe [Figure 6 & 7 on Front Cover] appointed John Quincy to the position of Secretary of State and the family moved to Washington D.C. This is where Louisa's drawing room became a center for the diplomatic corps and other notables to enjoy music enhanced by her Tuesday evenings at home. This and theater parties contributed to her reputation as an outstanding hostess. She would even entertain guests by playing the harp.

As John Quincy began his run for the White House, Louisa campaigned long and hard for her husband prior to the presidential election of 1824. She met with wives of congressmen, and hosted sixty-eight separate dinners for members of the House and Senate. In a shrewd public relations move, she even put together a ball in honor of her husband's opponent, General Andrew Jackson [Figure 8 & 9].



Figure 8

When John Quincy Adams won the presidency in a bitter political battle, Louisa found that what she had won were four years of the most trying years of her life. For this intelligent and talented woman, life as First Lady turned out to be confining and difficult. She felt her duty was to be a 'helpmate' to her husband, but John Quincy wasn't open to hearing a woman's opinion on things. Additionally, the Andrew Jackson supporters spread unfounded rumors about her, as well as calling her 'English.' Louisa responded directly to these stories in a



Figure 9

pro-Adams press, the first time a First Lady had done so. Also during this period, Louisa suffered from deep depression but she continued her weekly "drawing rooms." The necessary entertainments were always elegant, though she rarely attended the gatherings she arranged. She preferred quiet evenings - reading, composing music and verse, and playing the harp.

After losing the bid for re-election, the Adams retired to Massachusetts. Louisa thought this would be permanent, but in 1831 her husband began 17 years of notable service in the House of Representatives. These years were to be the most fruitful of their lives as John Quincy and Louisa found a common cause in the fight for the abolition of slavery. John Quincy worked toward the end of slavery as a member of the House of Representatives with Louisa as his zealous assistant. [Editor's note: John Quincy and Louisa worked to set the foundation for what was to come in 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Figure 10]



Figure 10

John Quincy suffered a stroke at the United States Capitol and died there in 1848. Louisa remained in Washington until her death of a heart attack on May 15, 1852, at the age of 77. Louisa is entombed by the side of her husband, along with President John Adams and First Lady Abigail Adams, in the United First Parish Church in Quincy, Massachusetts.

Reference: Postal Commemorative Society // First Ladies of the White House by Nancy J. Skarmearns
The Presidents of the U.S. of A. by Frank Freidel // www.whitehouse.gov/1600/first-ladies

David C. Allen Remembered

by The Editor

We have been made aware that a long time CFSC member passed away in the middle of August at the age of 81. David C. Allen who called Apopka home was a member of the club in the 1970s. He served as President from 1976-1977. He resigned in the very early 1980s according to a conversation I had with him. Work and extensive travel to South America caused him to not be involved again with the CFSC until retirement; he rejoined in November of 2008. While he infrequently attended a meeting or a local show, once again because of extended travel to South America, it was always strange to have two David Allens at a meeting when he did. I learned to qualify which David Allen I was talking about when both folks were in attendance. Rest easy David.