

First Ladies' Library honors Adams' birthday

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BY LANE LAMBERT

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Louisa Catherine Adams, the nation's only foreign-born first lady and wife of the sixth president, has been largely overlooked for her role in United States history.

But that is starting to change.

Today, the National First Ladies' Library will observe the anniversary of her birth 233 years ago, and the U.S. Mint will issue a First Spouse gold coin for her in May, the same month that a \$1 presidential coin will be issued for her husband, John Quincy Adams.

"Louisa has not been fairly treated by historians," said Adams family historian Paul Nagel of Minneapolis, author of the 1997 book "The Adams Women."

Louisa merits more attention, Nagel said, because of her social grace and courage and for making a place for herself in the strong-willed family of her husband and his parents, John and Abigail Adams, the second president and first lady.

She had a difficult early relationship with the Adams family but eventually won Abigail's admiration, along with the regard of the royal families of Russia and Prussia, when John Quincy Adams was ambassador there, Nagel said.

And Louisa proved her courage with a "heroic" trek in 1814, Nagel said. She made a six-week carriage journey from Russia to Paris amid the devastation of the Napoleonic war, with 4-year-old son Charles Francis and a servant as her only company, to join her husband in Paris.

She became a popular hostess in Washington in the 1830s and 1840s, when John Quincy was elected to Congress after an 1825-1829 term as president. Congress honored her when she died by having both the House and Senate adjourn, the first time it had ever done so for a first lady or other notable woman.

Born Louisa Catherine Johnson in London on Feb. 12, 1775, she met John Quincy Adams when she was 19. He was U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands at the time.

She suffered a stroke in 1849 and died in 1852. She is entombed at Quincy's United First Parish Unitarian Church, in the same basement crypt with her husband and her in-laws, John and Abigail Adams.

Lane Lambert may be reached at: llambert@ledger.com