

Patterson and Bonaparte



How the passion between the daughter of a wealthy Baltimore merchant and Napoleon's younger brother threatened an empire.

After serving in the French Navy, Jérôme Bonaparte was enjoying a lavish lifestyle in the U.S. when he was told that the "most beautiful woman in America" was in Baltimore.

Elizabeth Patterson was eighteen and already in love with the French culture she learned about at Madame Lacombe's Academy.

They met in 1803 and fell passionately in love. They were married on Christmas Eve by the Archbishop of Baltimore. Napoleon was furious. He intended his siblings marry royalty in Europe to secure the Bonaparte legacy. He ordered his brother back to France immediately.

Jérôme and his pregnant wife crossed the Atlantic in the spring of 1805 to try to persuade Napoleon to accept the marriage. Elizabeth was not allowed to set foot in France by Napoleon's decree, so Jérôme proceeded alone – never to return. That summer, Elizabeth gave birth to their son in England.

In 1807 Jérôme was married off to Princess Catharina Frederica of Württemberg and became King of Westphalia. Elizabeth spent the rest of her life trying to secure a title for her son and when she died at the age of 94 she was one of the wealthiest landowners in Baltimore. Their grandchild, Charles Bonaparte, was Secretary of the Navy and Attorney General in the Theodore Roosevelt administration.