

# A "Lovely Exile" Thrilled—and Scandalized—U. S. 100 Years Ago

She Claimed to Be a Descendant of the Man for Whom America Was Named, She Set Statesmen's Hearts A-Flutter and She Almost Succeeded in Obtaining American Citizenship and a Grant of Land Before Gossips' Tongues Began to Wag. Then . . .

© Western Newspaper Union.

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

IN THE city of Ogdensburg, N. Y., stands a stately old three-storied brick house embowered in a grove of the trees which give Ogdensburg the name of the "Maple City." They call it the "Parrish Mansion" and from its wide verandas you look out over the blue waters of the St. Lawrence river.

A surprise awaits you as you enter the house. The walls of its rooms are covered with paintings—stirring, colorful scenes of the Old West: Indians chasing buffalo or attacking stage-coaches and wagon trains; fur traders cordelling their boats up the Missouri; galloping cavalymen charging across the plains or through an Indian village; cowboys roping long-horn steers, "busting" broncos or "shooting up" a one-street frontier cow town.

Here and there stand bronze statues of men and horses vibrant with action. In cases along the

In saying that her arrival in Washington caused a "decided sensation," Ben:Perley was guilty of understatement. Social life under the previous administration of "Old Hickory" Jackson had been inexpressibly crude. It was becoming more refined under the administration of the "Duke of Kinderhook," Martin Van Buren. The coming of a foreigner—and one so beautiful—who had been the toast of princes in Paris would lend it glamor. So Society in Washington welcomed America with open arms.

Ex-President John Quincy Adams became a special friend of the beautiful Italian and even the "god-like" Daniel Webster was not immune to her charms. President Van Buren was so attentive to her that the gossips speculated upon the possibility of the widower-President making her the First Lady of the Land.

It soon became apparent that America wanted something else besides social position. She needed an income. So she drew up a petition to congress asking, first, to be admitted to the rights of citizenship; and second, to be given "a corner of land" out of the public domain, on which to live. Senator Benton presented the petition to the senate and it was immediately referred to the committee on public lands.

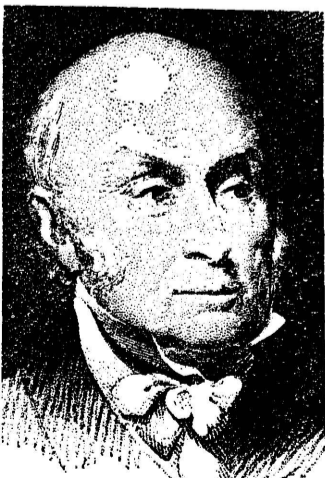
The committee's reply eulogized the petitioner as "a young, dignified, and graceful lady, with a mind of the highest intellectual culture, and a heart beating with all of our own enthusiasm in the cause of America and human liberty." Then it went on to give the reasons why the petition could not be granted and commended the lovely Italiane to the generosity of the American people—"The name of America—our country's name—should be honored, respected, and cherished in the person of the interesting exile from whose ancestor we derive the great and glorious title."

All of which was very flattering, indeed, but it didn't pay America's bills. She needed money and she resorted to tears to get it. Thereupon, so Ben:Perley tells us, "a subscription was immediately opened by Mr. Haight, the sergeant-at-arms of the senate, and judges, congressmen, and citizens vied with one another in their contributions."

## America Returns.

America accepted the subscription gratefully and departed with it for Paris where she went to live with her sister, the Vicomtesse Solen. Washington society heard nothing more of her for two years. It was busy with its own affairs under changing administrations. But some of her friends did not neglect to write to her that under a new administration her petition might now have a better chance of being granted. So she immediately sailed again for the Land of Promise.

When she arrived in Boston, she found that city preparing to give a magnificent ball in celebration of the visit of Prince de Joinville, a younger brother of her lover, the Duc d'Orleans. Accounts differ as to what followed.



John Quincy Adams

Ben:Perley, with his characteristic delicacy, says that "it was whispered that Madame Vespucci had borne an unenviable reputation at Florence and Paris and had been induced by a pecuniary consideration to break off an intimacy with the Duke of Orleans" and because of this "the Prince de Joinville refused to recognize her, which virtually excluded her from reputable society."

Later historians, however, tell a different story. For instance, Carl Carmer, in his book, "Lis-



America Vespucci

ten for a Lonesome Drum," says: "Ameriga Vespucci entered the ball-room at Faneuil hall on the arm of the prince himself. Boston saw and worshiped, and all might have gone well with her and her plans had not a guest recognized her as the former mistress of the prince's brother."

At any rate, it meant the end of her social ambitions. All of her snobbish American friends deserted her—all except one. That was John Van Buren, the son of Ex-President Van Buren, a hard-drinking, gambling spendthrift, who was known as "Prince John." Evidently America decided that an American "prince" was better than nothing. So she went to live with him—again without benefit of clergy.

## She Comes to Ogdensburg.

It was through her association with John Van Buren that she came at last to Ogdensburg. According to local tradition Van Buren and America met George Parrish, a rich merchant of Ogdensburg, at a hotel in Evans Mills. Van Buren challenged Parrish to a poker game. When he lost all his money, he put up as a final stake his last possession—and lost her, too. So when George Parrish returned to Ogdensburg, America Vespucci accompanied him.

One account says that Parrish was a Belgian; another that he was an Austrian. Whichever he was, he had carried to this country regal ideas. The house to which he brought America was a veritable castle, compared to the humbler Ogdensburg homes.

Of course, "there was talk" among the Puritanical residents of Ogdensburg. They called her a "fancy lady" or the "Floren-



tinine Fancy." But she didn't care. All her social ambitions were in the past now. George Parrish gave her every luxury she desired and she was happier than she had ever been before. So for 20 years the "interesting exile" enjoyed an idyllic life in her American castle with her merchant prince.

But, as Carmer records, "it ended with merciful suddenness. . . . One day George Parrish told her he must return to his lands in Europe. He was giving up his holdings in America—and her. She met his decision bravely, thanked him for his settlement of \$3,000 a year, told him she would go again to live with her sister, the vicomtesse."

So back to Paris again went America Vespucci and there she remained until her death a few years later. She has become something of a legend in Ogdensburg, albeit one of the most interesting in that interesting little city. The relics of this exotic foreigner strike a strange note in an art museum which perpetuates the memory of an artist so thoroughly and distinctly American as Frederic Remington was. However, as Carl Carmer says, "If in some ghostly state she has found a way to return across the ocean to her American home, I know she must be puzzled by all the rearing bronze bronchos, and the paintings of cowboys galloping over the endless yellow desert. But I am quite sure she is not afraid."

The paradox of the Ogdensburg museum housing relics of two such widely different characters as the American painter and the Italian adventurer is no stranger, however, than the paradox which gave the name of her ancestor to a continent which he did not discover. For while history gives credit to Christopher Columbus for discovering the two continents in the New world, neither of them bears the appropriate name of "Columbia." Instead, both are named for an Italian explorer who never set foot on the soil of North America and did not visit South America until several years after Columbus had. He was Amerigo, or Americus, Vespucci, born in Florence, Italy, in March, 1452, who grew up to become a merchant engaged in trade for the Florentine house of the Medici.

When Columbus in 1498 made his third voyage across the Atlantic and reached the mainland of South America, he sent back to Spain five ships laden with pearls and with them a chart of the new discoveries of this mainland and its rich pearl fisheries. Bishop Fonseca, who was in charge of all matters relating to the new discoveries, showed Columbus' chart to a certain Alonso de Hojeda and gave him a license to go to South America to exploit its riches. With Hojeda sailed the merchant, Vespucci, who, incidentally, had supplied provisions for Columbus' two previous voyages.

The Hojeda-Vespucci expedition left Cadiz, Spain, in May, 1499, and landed on the coast of South America 200 leagues south of the Gulf of Paria, the center of the pearl fishing industry.

Towards the close of 1500 Vespucci was induced to transfer his



Amerigo Vespucci

services to the king of Portugal, who, in 1501 sent him to explore farther this new southern continent. Vespucci's three ships, crossing from Cape Verde, reached Cape St. Roque August 17 and proceeding southward, arrived at Bahia on November 1 and at Rio de Janeiro January 1, 1502. They appear to have advanced as far south as latitude 32 degrees, although Vespucci maintains that they actually proceeded a good deal farther.

Two accounts of these voyages were shortly afterwards issued by Vespucci. In the first he gave an account to his fellow-countryman, Lorenzo Pietro de Medici, of these new regions he had visited which "we may rightly call a new world." His second account, sent to the same person, he entitled "Mundus Novus." In it he describes how in these southern parts they had "found a continent more densely peopled than Europe, Asia or Africa. We knew that land to be a continent and not an island both because of its long extension of coast and because of its many inhabitants."

In 1504 Amerigo published a second account in the form of an Italian plaque addressed to Pleri Soderini, gonfalonier of Florence, who had been a schoolfellow of his, wherein his two voyages are expanded into four. It has not been difficult, however, to note the many discrepancies in this account and to bring the details back to the two voyages.

These booklets had a tremendous vogue, and when compared with the labored attempt of Columbus to describe the site of the "Garden of Eden" and the "Earthly Paradise," showed a much greater sense of what the public understood. It is not at all surprising, therefore, to understand what took place in 1507.

It so happened that at St. Die in the Vosges mountains of France there was a little collegiate institution which was both a center of geographical learning and the owner of a new printing press, which was then something of a novelty in France. Two of its faculty members, Mathias Ringman and Martin Waldseemuller, were busy with a new edition of Ptolemy's "Geographia." Before publishing it, however, they printed an essay called "Cosmographiae Introductio" or an "Introductory Geography," to which they added Vespucci's letter. In this essay, published in May, 1507, Waldseemuller wrote: "And the fourth part of the world having been discovered by Americus, it may be called Amerige, that is, the land of Americus, or America." The name came into general use, being applied first to the southern continent, and later to both continents.



Martin Van Buren

walls hang Indian scalp shirts, feathered war-bonnets, bows, arrows, shields; frontiersmen's fringed buckskin shirts and leggings; army uniforms, carbines, revolvers, sabers. It's an amazing bit of the Wild West transplanted to this peaceful little city in upstate New York, but you understand why when they tell you that this is the Frederic Remington Memorial museum.

This article, however, is not about this greatest of all painters of Western life. It will tell the story of a woman, one of the most romantic characters in American history, who once lived in this house and the memory of whom still lingers there in an upstairs room. For if you enter this room you will see her portable writing desk, exquisite with its delicate inlay work, some of the dainty toilet articles which she used and miniatures of her and of the man whose name is perpetuated in the "Parrish Mansion."

## A Gossipy Chronicler.

A decided sensation was created at Washington during the Van Buren administration by the appearance there of a handsome and well-educated Italian lady, who called herself America Vespucci and claimed descent from the navigator who gave his name to this continent." So writes Ben:Perley Poore, a gossipy journalist, whose two-volume work called "Perley's Reminiscence of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis" was published half a century ago. In calling it "a decided sensation," this historian was writing somewhat less than accurately, as he was when he called her a "lady."

Also he omitted certain details concerning her, in deference to the mid-Victorian morality of the period in which he wrote. Later historians, however, have not been hampered by such inhibitions and from the evidence which they have collected, the story of the lovely America (or Ameriga) Vespucci can be told as follows:

It begins with a "boy-meets-girl" incident in the Italian city of Florence some time in the early 1830s. The boy was Ferdinand, Duc d'Orleans, son of King Louis Philippe of France. The girl was America Vespucci. They immediately fell in love and, of course, America said "yes" when Ferdinand proposed. But the king of France had other plans for his son and forbade the marriage.

But their love was not to be denied and when Ferdinand returned to Paris, America accompanied him and lived with him without benefit of clergy. Within a short time, however, the love of the Duc d'Orleans waned and America, too proud to return to her disapproving family in Florence, set out for the country which bore the name of her illustrious explorer-ancestor.