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Empress Josephine, 1763-1814

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Other Events on this Day:

1750: Jonathan Edwards was forced to resign as pastor by his congregation. (Please see the guide on October 25.)

1802: The First Factory Act was passed in Great Britain. (Please see the guide on August 29.)

1897: Stanislavski formed the Moscow Art Theater, with Vladimir I. Nemirovich-Danchenko. (Please see the guide on August 7.)

1933: The Social Democratic and Communist parties were forbidden in Germany. (Please see the guide on March 23.)

1975: Name changed from British Solomon Islands Protectorate to Solomon Islands. (Please see the guide on July 7.)

June 23

(225 years ago)

Empress Josephine, 1763-1814

by Paul R. Hanson

On 23 June 1763, Marie-Joséphé-Rose de Tascher de la Pagerie, who became the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, was born in Martinique, the daughter of an aristocratic sugar planter. Her father arranged her marriage on 13 December 1779 to Alexandre, Vicomte de Beauharnais, a French nobleman whose family had lived in Martinique during Josephine's youth. Although they had two children, Eugène, born 1781, and Hortense, born 1783, their marriage soon ended in formal separation. They were brought together again, if only briefly, during the French Revolution. Alexandre was arrested in March 1794, charged with treason, and executed on July 24. Josephine, too, was arrested, one month after Alexandre, but escaped execution, saved perhaps by the intervention of the future Madame de Tallien, or perhaps by Delperch de la Bussière, a clerk for the Committee of Public Safety who was reportedly in the habit of eating the dossiers of prisoners for whom he felt sympathy! This last version of Josephine's good fortune has been memorably captured by Abel Gance in his film, *Napoleon*.

In the relaxed Parisian atmosphere after the Terror, Josephine frequented the salon of Madame de Tallien, where she met Napoleon Bonaparte. They were married in a civil ceremony on 9 March 1796, two days before Napoleon left for the Army of Italy. In his absence she kept the company of other men, including the Director Paul Barras, who had been her lover before her marriage to Napoleon, and Hippolyte Charles, a captain in the army. In this period Josephine reportedly also used her influence to secure war supply contracts for the Bodin Company, in which Barras and Charles apparently also had interests. All of this displeased Napoleon, but their marriage seems to have been

a happy one after his return from Egypt in 1799. At his own coronation as Emperor on 2 December 1804, Napoleon crowned Josephine as Empress of France. She was the only Frenchwoman ever to hold this title. Less than six years later, however, in January 1810, their marriage ended in divorce. Josephine had failed to produce an heir for Napoleon, who by that time was anxious to secure his alliance with Austria. Josephine retired in comfort to her home at Malmaison, West of Paris, where she died on 29 May 1814. Even after the divorce Josephine continued to influence imperial affairs. Her son, Eugène, became Viceroy of Italy and her daughter, Hortense, married Napoleon's brother, Louis, and became queen of Holland.

Reference Sources:

• *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789-1799*, edited by Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus. 2 vols. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Excellent resource tool, arranged alphabetically for all topics relating to the Revolution.

• *Napoleon: From Eighteen Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799-1807 and Napoleon: From Tilsit to Waterloo, 1807-1815*, by Georges Lefebvre. 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Thorough history of Napoleon and the period by the most respected modern historian of revolutionary France.

• *French Revolution, Napoleonic Era*, by Owen Connelly. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.

Good introductory text with frequent reference to Josephine.

Adult Works about the Subject:

• *Empress Josephine*, by Ernest John Knapton. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963. Reprint. 1982.

The most balanced and thorough biography in English.

• *Josephine and Napoleon*, by Margaret Laing. New York: Mason/Charter, 1974.

Focuses on the marriage years, with illustrations.

• *Letters of Napoleon to Josephine*, by Napoleon Bonaparte. Edited by Leon Cerf. Translated by Henry W. Bunn. New York: Brentano's 1931.

Claims to be a complete collection of the known letters.

Young Adult Works about the Subject:

• *Josephine: The Empress and her Children*, by Nina Epton. New York: Norton, 1976.

More information on Eugène and Hortense than other biographies.

• *Josephine: Portrait of a Woman*, by R. McNair Wilson. New York: Gordon Press, 19?

A new edition of a 1930 publication.

• *Napoleon*, by Manfred Weidhorn. New York: Macmillan, 1986.

Grade 12 and up, with illustrations.

Children's Works about the Subject:

• *More than a Queen: The Story of Josephine Bonaparte*, by Frances Mossiker; illustrated by Michael Eagle. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

A romantic treatment.

• *Napoleon*, by Manuel Komroff. New York: Julian Messner, 1954.

An entertaining biography of Napoleon, carefully researched, with extensive references to Josephine.

Recordings:

- *Napoleon*. (CBS Records).
Soundtrack of Carmine Coppola's original music for Francis Ford Coppola's reissue of the 1927 Abel Gance film.
- *Napoleon: 1812*, by Nigel Nicolsen. (Books on Tape, 1904). 8 cassettes. 60 min. each.

Feature Films:

- *Napoleon*. (WESTI, 1926). Black & white 16mm available from EmGee Film Library. 240 min. Videotape available from Image Film. Silent
Abel Gance's monumental epic covering Napoleon's early life and the first years of the Revolution. Includes scenes depicting Josephine in Paris society and Napoleon's courtship of Josephine.

Other Audio-Visual Resources:

- *Napoleon: The Making of a Dictator*, directed by Victor Vicas. (Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Color 16mm and videotape available from Learning Corporation of America. 27 min.
Principally focuses on Napoleon and his rise to power.
- *The Napoleonic Era*. (Coronet, 1957). Color and black & white 16mm and videotape available from Coronet Films. 14 min.
- *Napoleon: The End of a Dictator*, directed by Victor Vicas. (Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Color and black & white 16mm and videotape available from Learning Corporation of America. 26 min.

Discussion and Project Suggestions:

- 1) Show a slide of Jacques-Louis David's painting of Napoleon's coronation and discuss the importance of the imperial aura and symbolism.
- 2) Discuss the role a spouse can play in political affairs. Would a husband of a ruler or political leader play a different role than a wife?
- 3) Write your own letters from Josephine to Napoleon.

Sources of Further Information:

Harry Bache Smith Collection &
W. H. Hoyt Collection
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Contains 6000 volumes on the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. Also personal correspondence of Napoleon.

Norton Napoleon Collection
Western Reserve Historical Society
10825 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106

One of the largest Napoleon collections in the United States.

Napoleon Collection
Seattle University

Seattle, WA 98122

Most items are 18th and 19th century.

Cross-Reference Dates:

- 13 December 1779: Josephine married Viscount Alexandre de Beauharnais.
- 9 March 1796: Josephine married Napoleon.
- 2 December 1804: Josephine was crowned Empress.
- 29 May 1814: Josephine died at Malmaison, France.

This resource guide has been prepared by Paul R. Hanson, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

June 24

(40 years ago)

The Berlin Blockade

by Ronald A. Francisco

On 24 June 1948, the USSR sealed all land routes between Berlin and West Germany. Germany was resolutely divided and West Berlin grimly isolated in the spring of that year. The weapon of division was currency reform, but the Soviet blockade of the "island" city underscored with searing intensity the political importance of the West's decision to replace the monetary system. The euphoria that followed the defeat of Hitler had in three years given way to bitter divisions between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Berlin became a crucible of the resulting cold war, since only in Berlin did the Soviets rule cooperatively with the Western powers. When it became clear that the USSR would not permit a unified Germany with a Western political system, the United States, United Kingdom, and France introduced a new currency in their zones of Germany, effectively cutting them off from the East. The Soviets responded in kind, but sought additionally to integrate West Berlin into the emerging East German economic system. Heeding pleas from Berlin, the Western powers introduced the new Western currency in West Berlin. The USSR responded by blockading Berlin—sealing all land routes between Berlin and West Germany. Stalin threatened to starve 2 million Berliners in order to gain control of the city.

The West was perplexed. How could the blockade be run without direct military conflict with the USSR? It is doubtful that Stalin had ever envisioned the West's bold and ingenious response: the Berlin airlift. US General Lucius D. Clay persuaded a skeptical group of superiors in Washington and London that West Berlin could be supplied by air alone. President Truman rejected the advice of his advisers and decided to back Clay's bold scheme, tentatively at first, but by July 12 with full commitment. The British had been resolute from the outset. For the duration of the