



# *The First Ambassador*

John Quincy Adams in St. Petersburg, 1809-1815

**On a brisk February day in 1810**, forty-two-year-old John Quincy Adams was out for his daily constitutional, strolling with an American colleague along St. Petersburg's Neva River. Adams, in his role as the first American minister to the Court of Alexander I, had spent the morning writing in his small hotel on the Nevsky Prospect. A creature of routine, he ventured out despite the cold, and, while passing under a bridge along the quay of the Neva, he and his companion were "overtaken by the Emperor, who stop'd and spoke to us about the weather." Adams remarked later in his diary – a diary of over 50 volumes he kept faithfully for 68 years – that the Emperor "walks entirely alone, and stops and speaks to many persons whom he meets." Tsar Alexander was just 32 years old, but after succeeding his murdered father to the throne in 1801, he became one of the most powerful men in the world – his influence and wealth challenged only by Napoleon.

Adams had been formally presented to Tsar Alexander the previous fall, and they saw each other often at diplomatic functions, but after the chance encounter on the Neva they met frequently for exercise. They shared a

Portrait of St. Petersburg in 1820  
by Angelo Toselli





COURTESY OF THE DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOMS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

John Quincy and Louis Catherine Adams, painted by Charles Robert Leslie in the fall of 1816. A year after assuming his post as minister to Great Britain, JQA and his wife sat for the young American painter. This likeness of JQA conveys a relaxed, confident manner befitting his recent diplomatic successes. Louisa, in her reclining pose, richly outfitted in the Regency style, reflects the poise and elegance of a worldly woman. Both portraits capture the Adamses at a particularly happy time. After six long years in St. Petersburg, they were finally reunited with their sons.

polite aversion to the endless parade of balls, festivals, feast days, soirées, and sleigh rides – even the tsar could not escape the ritualized “dissipation” of St. Petersburg – and found rejuvenation in the outdoors. In the five years Adams lived in St. Petersburg, he records thirty-three unofficial meetings with the Tsar, sometimes simply noting, “Met and spoke to the Emperor.” During these walks they rarely spoke about official business. They discussed the weather and the merits of flannel

underwear, and they debated when the ice on the Neva would break. While they avoided larger diplomatic issues of trade between neutral countries, the coming war between the United States and Great Britain, or Napoleon’s bellicose push across Europe, Alexander and John Quincy enjoyed a close familiarity that would foster a positive relationship between their countries for decades to come.

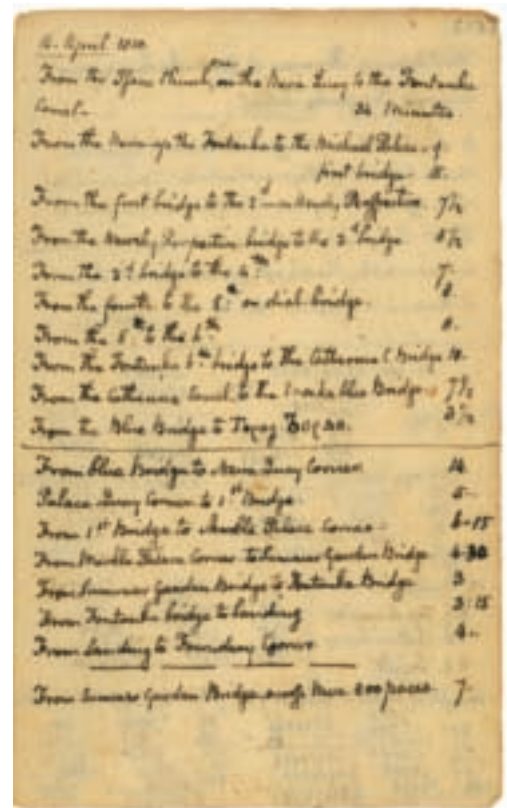
Appointed to his post by President James Madison on June 27, 1809, Adams quickly wrapped up his work as a lecturer of rhetoric at Harvard College, a position he had held for just under a year. The eldest son of John Adams, the nation’s second president, JQA (as he frequently signed his name) had already enjoyed a varied career when he received his appointment to Russia.

Although at the time he deemed it “the most important of any [enterprise] that I have ever in the course of my life been engaged in,” Adams was only at the halfway point of one of the most distinguished careers in public service in American history.

With an enviable resumé for any generation, John Quincy Adams’ diplomatic career began at the age of fourteen, when his father was minister to the Netherlands during the American Revolution. His affinity for languages and particularly his fluency in French, his maturity, and a naturally discreet nature made him an obvious choice to accompany Francis Dana to St. Petersburg in 1781 as secretary and translator. Dana had been appointed by the Continental Congress to negotiate a treaty with Empress Catherine, but was unsuccessful in gaining recognition from the Court and returned after fourteen months. John Quincy was just 16 when he returned to the Netherlands, traveling alone through Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. John Adams acknowledged that, while his son’s exposure to the world had been valuable, JQA needed to gain a formal education at Harvard. After following his father to The Hague, Paris, and London, John Quincy moved back to the small town of Cambridge, across the river from Boston, to complete his undergraduate degree and legal training.

After Harvard, John Quincy was rescued from a mediocre legal career when President George Washington appointed him minister to the Netherlands. His father subsequently sent him to the Court of Prussia

Emperor Alexander I



in 1797, an appointment he reluctantly accepted, wary of any appearance of nepotism. Early in his career, the charge was difficult to dismiss, but John Quincy proved to be a far better diplomat than his father. At this time, JQA met and courted 22-year-old Louisa Catherine Johnson. They married in London and left for Berlin three months later. After he was recalled to the United States, Adams waited only a year before running and winning a seat in the U.S. Senate.

JQA's appointment to St. Petersburg came at a pivotal point in American history, and his was an extremely successful mission that strengthened U.S.-Russian relations and further defined American commercial trade strategies. Adams capped off his diplomatic missions in Europe with the successful negotiation of the Treaty of Ghent (which ended the War of 1812), and his appointment as minister to Great Britain, the highest diplomatic post for an American. He returned to the United States in 1817 to serve as secretary of state under James Monroe, and he was elected president in 1825. After losing a bid for re-election, John Quincy returned to Congress and served eighteen years in the House of Representatives. He died after collapsing on the floor of the House in 1848, at the age of 81.

*Head-winds, calm, rain. Whales, Porpoises, and a Gannet, a bird accustomed to the neighbourhood of land in these regions.*

JQA Diary, September 5, 1809, aboard the *Horace*

As the church bells tolled noon on August 5, 1809, the Adams family sailed from Boston Harbor in a merchant ship outfitted for the journey. The *Horace* spent 80 days at sea and carried John Quincy, his wife Louisa, their youngest son Charles Francis, Louisa's sister Catherine, John Quincy's nephew William Steuben Smith, and two servants to Russia. They were also accompanied by two secretaries to the legation "but at their own expense." Adams' salary as minister was second only to the president's, but the expense of keeping even a modest household burdened them for their entire time abroad.

On their second day at sea, JQA reflected in his diary about his motives for accepting the commission – "That of serving my Country... stands foremost of them all; and though it neither suits my own inclination, nor my own private judgment, I deem it a duty to sacrifice them both to the public sense."

His wife Louisa bewailed her family's fate. She had packed up her life in just a month, leaving her two older children, eight-year-old George and six-year-old John, in the care of relatives in Massachusetts, not to see them again for six years. Louisa recorded in a memoir 30 years later, "Broken hearted miserable, alone in every feeling; my boy was my only comfort. I had passed the age when Courts are alluring. I had no vanity to gratify, and experience had taught me years before the

As part of his daily walks, JQA paced out the distances between bridges and buildings in St. Petersburg. Taking into account the length of his stride and the number of paces, he recorded in minutes the distances between key landmarks. He eventually measured nearly all of the pedestrian routes of St. Petersburg.

meanness of an American Minister's position at a European Court." Their disparate feelings about John Quincy's career opportunities would plague their marriage for many years.

Louisa Catherine, the daughter of an American merchant raised in England and France, was an

**"I had passed the age when Courts are alluring... and experience had taught me years before the meanness of an American Minister's position at a European Court."**

intelligent and witty woman who suffered from a delicate constitution and a shy nature. Just 34 when they sailed for Russia, Louisa struggled to keep up with John Quincy's rigorous schedule, with the exacting demands on a diplomat's wife, and with periodic depression. While he shone in St. Petersburg, she faded under the onslaught of parties, balls, and social obligations. Still, Louisa played the part. Her fluency in French, her musical and artistic skills, and a natural facility for the diplomatic dinner party – she excelled even when she despised it – made her a favorite among the diplomatic corps and the royal family.

For the Adamses, diplomacy was a family affair. Shortly after their arrival in Russia, even three-year-old Charles Francis was on display attending the Children's Ball, an annual event hosted by the French ambassador for the children of nobles and visiting dignitaries. Napoleon's emissary, the Duke de Vicence, was the most powerful ambassador at Court and lived almost as lavishly as the Tsar. "The Ambassador" – as the diplomatic corps always called him – set the tone for St. Petersburg's social events, spending one million rubles (about \$350,000) a year on entertainment alone.

Louisa described the Children's Ball: "We took Charles, who I had dressed as an Indian Chief to gratify the taste for Savages." As little Charles entered the dance floor, "there was a general burst of applause when he marched in, at which he was much surprised." Following the dances, the children were fed a sumptuous dinner late into the night with "oceans of Champagne." Mothers were all obliged to stand behind their children's chairs in full dress. Charles appeared dutifully at these events in a variety of costumes – as Bacchus or the Page from Beaumarchais' *Marriage of Figaro* – but at the end of the evening when a lottery for expensive toys was held, Charles was always dragged away. John Quincy – strictly adhering to U.S. government policy – would not allow any member of the family to accept gifts.

*...how congenial it is to my temper to find extravagance and dissipation a public duty.*

John Quincy Adams to Abigail Adams, February 8, 1810

During the summer of 1811, Louisa was nearing the final stages of pregnancy. It was her eleventh – she had suffered seven miscarriages and would have three more before her child-bearing years were over. Her anxiety was compounded by the news of her beloved sister's death in childbirth. Yet, despite their ever-dwindling finances and Louisa's tenuous health, the "dissipation" continued in St. Petersburg. Just a week before Louisa gave birth, John Quincy departed from Apothecaries Island in the Nevka River, where the family was spending the summer, and made his way to the annual Peterhof Fête. Arriving at about two in the afternoon, Adams wandered through the grounds, watching hundreds of servants and workers set up for the massive illumination and fireworks display. All of St. Petersburg attended the annual event. Thousands of peasants made their way on foot to watch the late summer festivities, while the nobles arrived in handsome carriages. JQA noted that some

Standing Monthly payments for March 1812		
April 15	Brought over	2
	Smith - W. S.	1421
	Lager - Beef @ 20 Pounds @ 20	400
	Sea from 16 at 20 per lb.	91
	Wages - 11 Men 240 five women 100	340
	Wine - 20 bottles of R. 12. and 4 bottles of R. 6	48
		2271
Easter presents 21 April 1812 3 May		
	Servants	
	Baker - Thomas	10
	Cook - Peter	
	Grogoff - Juniper	3 23
	Syreff - Bakhoff	3 24
	Syreff - Bakhoff	3 30
	Syreff - Bakhoff	
	Katloff - Amphibius - Marshal Cookman	3
	Quinn - Pierre - Postman	5
	Linnard - Jean Pierre - Cook	
	Shubloff - Agula - Marshal Postman	2
	Coles - Catherine	5
	Godfrey - Martha	13
	Klein - Juliana - Postman	5
	Longman - Maria - Janous - Postman	5
	Polina - Maria - Janous - maid	5
	John Postman at the House	10
	Paul's Child	5
	Hangpaper - Carriers	2
		85

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS MISCELLANY 14, MICROFILM REEL 211, ADAMS PAPERS, COURTESY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

even arrived in “imperial yachts, under full sail and dress’d out in a full suite of colours.”

After a dinner that included “fruits of all climates in profusion. Cherries, Strawberries, raspberries, Apricots, plums, peaches, Oranges, grapes and pine-apples,” the company proceeded outside to view the light displays. “There were three hundred thousand lamps, and sixteen hundred persons employed to light them,” followed by a 15-minute firework display. Adams recorded in detail the light displays, the food, the dancing, and the assortment of costumed nobles, but despite his attention he was not as impressed with the spectacle as he had once been. “I was present at this fête in the year 1782,” he wrote. But lacking recognition, JQA and Francis Dana could only observe the Court alongside thousands of Russian peasants. More than thirty years later, Adams’ familiarity with “all the principle individuals” dulled the glimmering spectacle. “The company then was, I think, more numerous, and from my impressions more splendid in dress,” but upon reflection, JQA concluded that “perhaps . . . their magnificence in dress was not so familiar and common an object to me as it now is.”

When Adams left at 1:30 in the morning, he “pass’d upwards of two thousand as I presume on the road; and during the first half of the way great multitudes of people returning on foot. The numbers of People who attended at this celebration, are asserted to be at least fifty thousand.” Walking through St. Petersburg in the early hours of the morning, JQA discovered that by custom all bridges were raised at two in the morning for several hours to let vessels pass through. He did not reach home until nearly five AM.

*There is something in these enquiries about weights and measures, singularly fascinating to me.*

JQA Diary, February 16, 1812

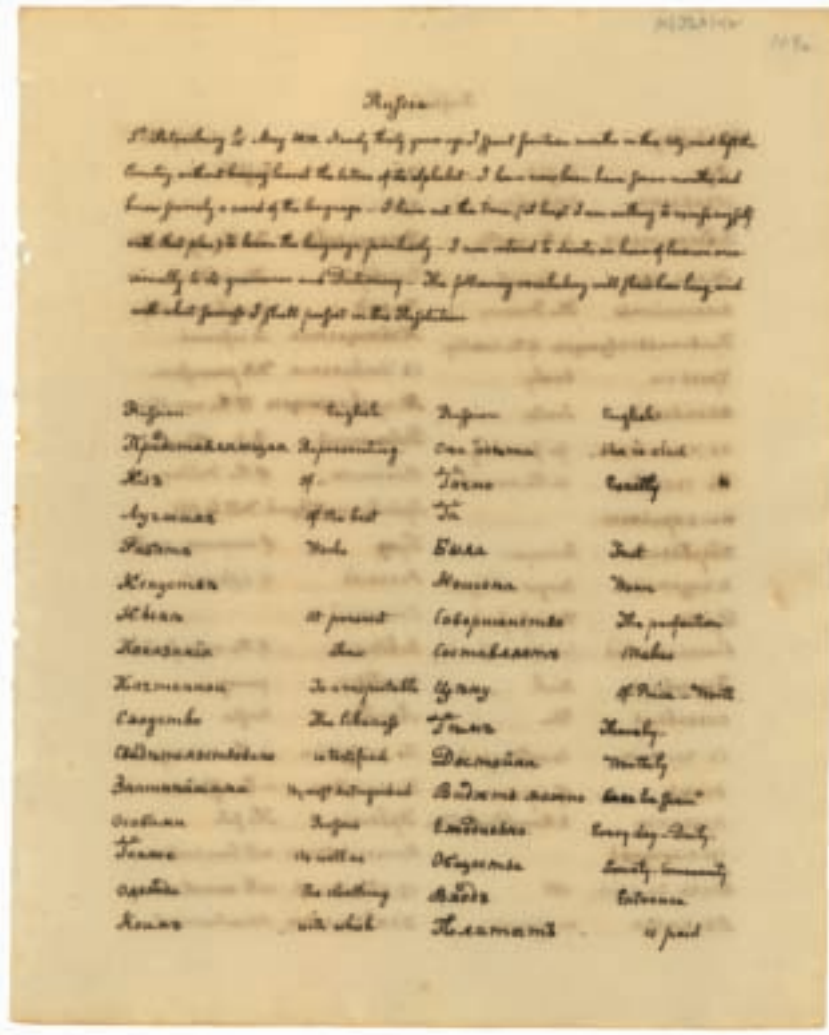
Adams’ diplomatic salary was excessive by American standards. But at \$9,000 a year, it barely covered the minimum standards for a diplomat in St. Petersburg, and every year John Quincy was forced to choose between gaining a reputation for parsimony or going into personal debt. He usually accomplished both. JQA wrote home to his parents to complain of the financial expectations for his household – they kept a frugal fourteen servants – causing his mother Abigail to send a letter to President Madison demanding his recall. As a testament to her influence, Madison sent recall papers to him the following spring, but Adams never acted on them.

Added to the cost of their household was the apparently routine practice of servants’ fleecing their employers. In January 1812, after moving twice to cut costs, Adams discovered that his steward had defrauded him. Just a day later, the Adamses were “obliged to dismiss the woman who furnished us with butter, milk and cream,” when they realized that she had been providing them with three pounds of dairy while charging them for five. Within two weeks, Adams found “573 bottles of wine missing!” Just after he dismissed the steward, JQA learned that 15 months of bills had been left unpaid.

John Quincy had a sharp temper, but he was widely known as a generous and forgiving employer, clearly tolerating much from untrustworthy servants. The following month, he records in his diary, “I continue to be engaged so great a portion of my time in the most insignificant trifles of household economy, that it has become irksome to me, in the extreme. The closer I make my inspection, the more and more I discover of imposition, and of pillage, in every shape.” As he kept closer watch on household goods, Adams became intrigued with another question, that of weights and measures. “This day I weighed some coffee sent from two different places and found it short weight, about

JQA kept meticulous accounts of his dwindling finances. In addition to the various household expenses, Adams was obliged to give holiday presents not only to his own servants and their children, but also to the domestics of the Emperor, his mother, and several high ranking diplomats.

Easter presents 1812		\$	C
Empress Domestic		25	
Count Romanzoff's Messenger		10	
in <sup>o</sup> Gounoff's d <sup>r</sup>		10	
Post Office Carriage		25	
Empress Mother's Domestic		25	
French Ambassador's Wife		10	
Prussian Minister's d <sup>r</sup>		10	
Grand Chamberlain's d <sup>r</sup>		10	
Card Carrier		45	
<hr/>		225	
1/5 May 1812		\$	C
Baker		62	48
Beer Porter 52 Bottles Strong Beer 60 Bottles 1/2 Wine		46	93
Butter 20 lb at 1-25 per lb		25	
Candles Wax 98 Tallow 297		43	76
Coffee 10 lb at 1-70 per lb		17	
Cook Bill 222-57 Hogs 20 Mashed Lentils 20		292	47
Haricots		285	
Milkman's 2, May inclusion		58	
Post Office Bill 20 Easter Presents 225		225	38
Print 250 Firwood 117		417	
Smith - W. S.		481	51
Sugar 25 lb 1/2 Powdered 2 1/2		46	30
Ten - firm 20 at 2 1/2 per lb		25	
Hogs - Mine Man 200 firm woman 100		240	
Wine 26 Bottles at 1-50 and 8 Bottles at 4		47	30
		2769	09



At the start of his Russian-English vocabulary list, John Quincy confessed, "I have now been here seven months, and know scarcely a word of the language— I have not the time, (at least I am willing to excuse myself with that plea) to learn the language familiarly. . . The following vocabulary will show how long, and with what success I shall persist in this Resolution." While fluent in seven languages, John Quincy never did learn to speak Russian. Fortunately, the official language of the Russian Court was French.

one pound to forty.... I called at an English Mathematical instrument makers' to enquire if he could make me an *arshine* [a Russian unit of length equal to 28 inches], with the English and French corresponding measures, but he could not. I went also to a tinman's to inquire if he had any measures of capacity, but he had none except a cup which he said would hold a pound of water."

Adams' humble inquiries – driven by thrift and a keen desire not to be cheated – began a decade-long investigation that concluded in a definitive scientific work, *Report on Weights and Measures*. Submitted to Congress in 1821, the report shows the depth of Adams' creativity. It was at the time the most complete survey of its kind. Drawing on his diplomatic experience, historical knowledge, and scientific inquiry, Adams came to believe that a uniform system of weights and measures would advance the cause of peace. He was struck by the sweeping uniformity in the weapons of war and the

continual disagreement about "the greatest *invention* of human ingenuity since that of printing," the French metric system. For JQA, the principle of uniformity as expressed in the metric system needed only transparency and cooperative endeavor to further peaceful human relations. It required no hard-fought legislation or treaties between warring nations; the goal of peace could only be won by peaceful measures. In the *Report*, Adams found it "strange" that mankind "should use the same artillery and musketry, and bayonets and swords and lances, for the wholesale trade of human slaughter" while refusing "to weigh by the same pound, to measure by the same rule, to drink from the same cup, to use in fine the same materials for ministering to the wants and contributing to the enjoyments of one another."

While few read his report, Adams considered it his finest work and adhered to its philosophy of uniformity and transparency in defining American foreign policy. What began as a modest attempt to reconcile household accounts grew into a deeply held conviction about peaceful commerce and the proper role of government. Adams saw the future in trade and commerce, and he understood that a uniform system of measurement would offer a kind of *lingua franca* much like that used to further diplomatic relations and amity among nations.

John Quincy Adams' enthusiasm for scientific inquiry was not limited to weights and measures. The man who would, years later, prove instrumental in the founding of the Smithsonian Institute, was thrilled by all things mechanical. In late October 1811, Adams visited a glass-making factory just behind the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevsky that manufactured looking glasses, decanters, wine glasses, tumblers, colored dishes, and vases. Adams declared their steam-powered polisher of looking glasses to be "an invention of prodigious effect" and lamented, "I wish I could visit a manufacture once a week, and spend three hours at every visit."

A few weeks later, Adams called on the Imperial Librarian, whose collection of curiosities included a number of manuscripts from England, even an annotated prayer book used by Mary Queen of Scots while she was in prison. JQA was unimpressed with the man's historical knowledge and recorded an incredible account of a "small Latin Bible written upon a soft and beautiful kind of vellum which he pretended was of human skin." Politely inquiring where such a book could be manufactured, the librarian could not say, but speculated that "it was done by the monks of the middle ages, and must be the kinds of infants who had died without baptism." Ever the diplomat, Adams only remarks, "I have yet some doubts with regard to this fact."

John Quincy kept to a rigorous schedule in his role as minister. Rising very early, he read the Bible, wrote voluminous correspondence to the U.S. State Department, walked three to seven miles, tutored his son Charles Francis, and attended with Louisa dinners

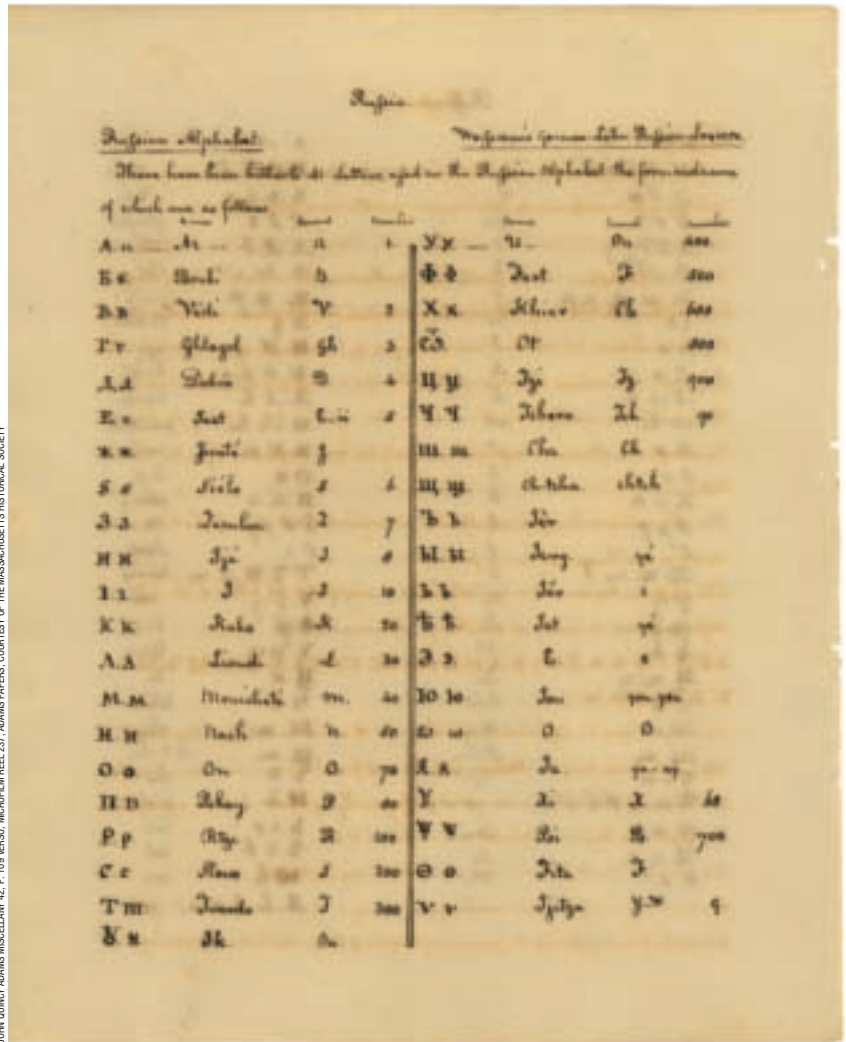
and balls into the late evening. But with every free moment, JQA prowled St. Petersburg's bookshops and museums, its factories and schools, and found every opportunity to explore the "city of princes."

*And thus accounted I appeared before the Gentlemen of our party who could not refrain from laughter at my appearance.*

LCA Diary, November 12, 1809

Mrs. Adams' life in St. Petersburg followed a different trajectory. As one of the only foreign women accompanying her husband, Louisa was an oddity to many. Tradition reigned at Court and, in her first week in Russia, Louisa and her sister Catherine were expected to appear in lavish attire to be presented to the Emperor, his wife, and his mother. Dressed "modestly" in a silver-tissue hoop dress, a crimson velvet robe, a fur cloak, and a single diamond arrow pin, Louisa appeared before the royal family with just her court sponsor, Countess Litta, a dowager bedecked in diamonds. John Quincy did not accompany her. Louisa's fluency in French saved her from an otherwise awkward event, for though "the Emperor and Empresses spoke very kindly to us. I did not know a creature in the room." When asked by the American consul to dance a polonaise, Louisa "was much afraid I should blunder but I soon fell into the step and made out without mortifying my fastidious partner." She continued in "tolerable spirits," rejoining her husband for dinner with the Emperor, who ate on solid gold plates while the rest of the diplomatic corps dined on silver. The party ended at one in the morning, but "no one was allowed to depart before the Emperor.... I was glad to get home – All this was too much like a fairy tale."

Louisa's life of expensive gowns and late night parties was happily put aside when she gave birth to her only daughter in the summer of 1811. "O she grows lovely. Such a pair of Eyes!! I fear I love her too well." Louisa's devotion to her baby girl was all-consuming, in part because she never forgave herself for leaving her older children in America. In January 1812, Louisa returned to her social obligations, but noted that "after a long protracted confinement by sickness and anxiety I once again take my Station in the world for which I care so little." Baby Louisa was sick throughout the winter, as were her mother and Charles Francis. When Louisa took the child out for walks, the "superstitious Russians" would stop her in the street: "they all say 'that She is born for Heaven'." In February, the youngest Adams developed a high fever and was sick throughout the spring. The doctors believed the cause was connected to her teething. In late summer, doctors lanced the baby's gums in an effort to relieve her symptoms, but the small, weak child – just past her first birthday – was immediately seized with convulsions. On September 14, Louisa noted that "Renewed blisters, warm baths, and injections of Laudanum and Digitalis have been tried



JOHN QUINCY ADAMS MISCELLANEA 42, P. 103 VERSO. MICROFILM REEL 227. ADAMS PAPERS. COURTESY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

... with no favourable effect." The following day the child died, "as lovely an infant ever breathed the air of heaven."

The death of the younger Louisa Catherine Adams marked a tragic turning point for John Quincy and Louisa. While JQA threw himself into his work, negotiating trade rights for American merchants and keeping abreast of Russia's war with France (Napoleon invaded Russia on June 24, 1812; he began his retreat in October and finally left Russian territory on December 14), Louisa simply shut down. She ended her journal with "My child gone to heaven" and retreated from society as much as she was able, going through the motions of her social obligations, always longing for America. When she finally left St. Petersburg two-and-a-half years later, she wrote: "I scarcely can define my feelings. Much as I wish to see my Children, my heart is torn at the idea of quitting for ever the spot where my darling lays." But Louisa would find strength when she thought she had none. Louisa's dramatic departure from

In November 1809, the American Consular Levett Harris sent John Quincy a Russian and French dictionary, with which Adams first tried "to learn the characters of the Russian Alphabet." It was a short-lived attempt, and Adams put his study of the Russian language aside until May 1810, when he began once again to practice the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet.



Russia and journey across Europe in the wake of Napoleon's army would become legendary in the Adams family, solidifying her reputation as a "well-traveled lady."

As early as the fall of 1810, JQA reported to the U.S. State Department that the Franco-Russian alliance

**In March 1812, John Quincy met a preoccupied tsar on the Neva. "War is coming which I have done so much to avoid," the tsar confided.**

would probably not last. When war finally broke out 18 months later, Europe was not surprised. In March 1812, John Quincy met a preoccupied tsar on the Neva – "*il avance toujours*" [*he keeps advancing*]. Breaking their usual silence regarding official business, Alexander confided, "war is coming which I have done so much to avoid." The tsar left soon after for the frontier, to bolster the assembled forces. Their numbers were immense on both sides. JQA wrote in his diary, "there was in history, scarcely anything like it. It was like Romance. What it would come to [Alexander] knew not." John Quincy wrote to his mother before the year was out that Napoleon's forces were conquered by the two harshest Russian generals, "General Famine and General Frost.... In all probability the career of Napoleon's conquest is at an end." While John Quincy reported regularly to the U.S. the status of the war in Russia, he continually sought news on the war in North America, his main source being the American merchant ships docked in St. Petersburg.

In the spring of 1814, John Quincy Adams left Russia for Göteborg, Sweden, where he was to be one of several representatives negotiating a peaceful resolution to the War of 1812 (the American, not the Russian one). Tsar Alexander had been instrumental in bringing Britain and the U.S. to the negotiating table, although the British spurned his offer to host the conference in

St. Petersburg. After arriving in Sweden, Adams learned that the British had moved the negotiations to Ghent, a medieval city in present-day Belgium. The contentious talks lasted from August 8 to December 24 and were further complicated by lengthy news delays from the battles in North America. Famously, though the Treaty of Ghent was signed on Christmas Eve, the news did not reach American shores in time to prevent the Battle of New Orleans. A crushing defeat for the British, the battle propelled General Andrew Jackson to national fame, and eventually to the White House – he defeated JQA in the presidential election of 1828.

Weeks before signing the treaty, Adams came to the conclusion that five years in Russia was enough and he requested a recall. Although he enjoyed his schedule of study and diplomacy, John Quincy felt that he had done all he could in Russia on behalf of the United States. His work in Ghent was very successful and he knew he would be well received by the Madison administration. Adams hoped to be given the most coveted diplomatic post for an American, that of minister to the Court of St. James [Great Britain]. While awaiting news from the United States, he sent word to Louisa: "break up altogether our establishment at St. Petersburg.... and come with Charles to me at Paris, where I shall be impatiently waiting for you." She was "astonished" at JQA's instructions to sell the furniture, pack up his library, and keep a detailed accounting of her expenditures, not least because he had never trusted her with so much responsibility. But Louisa rose to the challenge and on February 12, 1815, "at five o'clock in the evening of Sunday, I bade adieu to the splendid City of St. Petersburg" in company with eight-year-old Charles Francis; Babet, a French maid; and two manservants hired for the journey.

*In Petersburg for five long years I had lived a Stranger to all, but the kind regards of the Imperial family; and I quitted its gaudy loneliness without a sigh, except that which was wafted to the tomb of my lovely Babe.*

Louisa Adams "Narrative of a Journey from St. Petersburg to Paris," 1836

They began their journey in a carriage outfitted as a sleigh, but by the time they reached Riga on the Baltic coast they were "overtaken by a thaw, and I was under the necessity of staying four or five days, to get my Carriage fixed and to dispose of my Kibitka."

The party traveled east along the Baltic Sea coast, passing desolate villages and making extensive detours to avoid impassable roads. Aside from the near upset of the carriage while crossing over thawing ice, "no other incident occurred worth notice until we reached the frontier of Prussia." During the winter of 1815, rumor of Napoleon's return was everywhere and the battlefields of the previous winter could still be seen. All manner of hastily dug graves, shreds of clothing, piles of boots and even human remains lined the leveled roads. Louisa,

John Quincy Adams' complete diaries are available online at the Massachusetts Historical Society website: [masshist.org/jqadiaries](http://masshist.org/jqadiaries). The diary of his wife, Louisa Catherine Adams, is currently in production and will be published in a two-volume edition in 2011. Please visit [masshist.org](http://masshist.org) for the new Adams Papers Digital Editions, a full text presentation of all previously published volumes. The Adams Papers is a documentary editing project dedicated to publishing the correspondence and diaries of the Adams family, including John, Abigail, John Quincy, Louisa Catherine, and Charles Francis.



Louisa Catherine was a favorite at the Court of Tsar Alexander I. Upon his death in November 1825, she was given an engraved gold ring with his profile in relief.



decades later, vividly recalled that “the Season of the year at which I travelled; when Earth was chained in her dazzling, brittle but solid fetters of Ice . . . the ways were rendered deeply interesting by the fearful remnants of men’s fiery and vindictive passions; passively witnessing to tales of blood, and woes. Such are the graphic delineations of War’s unhallowed march.”

After stopping for a week in Berlin while the carriage underwent much-needed repairs, they continued across Prussia, passing “small straggling parties of disbanded Soldiers, loitering home.” Acutely aware of her vulnerabilities, Louisa would put on her son’s “Military Cap and tall Feather, and lay his Sword across the window of the Carriage; as I had been told, that any thing that *looked* military escaped from insult.” As they neared the French border, rumors of Napoleon’s return or possible demise met them at every inn. Unbeknownst to Louisa – or even to John Quincy – they were headed directly for Napoleon’s growing army and the last surge, later known as The Hundred Days. Fearful of impressment, Louisa’s manservants abandoned her in Frankfurt. The only servant she found willing to journey with her into Paris was a fourteen-year-old boy, Dupin, who had served in the Russian campaign.

Just outside of Epernay, France, Louisa encountered Imperial Guards on their way to meet Napoleon. Upon hearing “the most horrid curses, and dreadful Language” from a number of women following the troops, Louisa quickly realized that she might be in mortal danger. Spurred on by the cries of the women – “Tear them out of the Carriage! They are Russians, take them out kill them!” – the soldiers turned their guns on the drivers, at which Louisa hastily presented her passports. When they realized that she was an American lady trying to

reach her husband in Paris, they shouted, “*vive les Americains,*” at which Louisa waved her handkerchief and responded “*vive Napoleon!*” to the cheering shouts of the soldiers.

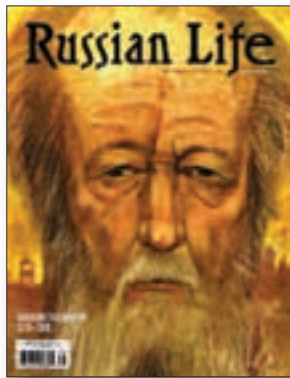
After five weeks on the road, Louisa, Charles Francis, Babet, and Dupin arrived at the gates of Paris at 11 in the evening. Upon checking into the Hôtel du Nord on the Rue de Richelieu, they found “Mr. Adams not returned from the Theatre.” He soon came home and was “astonished” at Louisa’s adventure; “as every thing in Paris was quiet, and it had never occurred to him, that it could have been otherwise in any other part of the Country.”

Louisa Catherine Adams had left Russia with a heavy heart. But as the years passed, she would regard her time in St. Petersburg, and particularly her departure, as formative. At JQA’s side, she relaxed into a gracious, intelligent, and worldly woman, becoming a favorite in Washington. In 1836, having reached a kind of retirement, Louisa wrote the narrative of her travels and hoped that “perhaps at some future day” it would “serve to recall the memory of one, *who was.*”

Distracted first by the negotiations and later by the pressing duties of a new post (he was indeed appointed ambassador to the Court at St. James in 1815), John Quincy did not immediately reflect upon leaving the “city of princes.” He did, however, follow with great interest the movements of the Sovereign Prince of Russia. In March 1814, just before JQA left St. Petersburg, Alexander led the coalition armies into Paris. After Napoleon’s forces ravaged Moscow, the tsar would have been forgiven had he exacted revenge on Paris. But his “moderation” and “humanity” impressed all of Europe. John Quincy wrote that he “may now truly be called the darling of the human race.”

By the time Adams reached Ghent in June, Alexander was passing through the city on his way to the Congress of Vienna. Standing shoulder to shoulder amid a cheering crowd, John Quincy saw him riding with a suite of officers, “distinguished from them only by the greater simplicity of his dress. . . very few in the crowd knew him as he passed.” Even after five years, Adams could not precisely call the tsar a friend – his access at Court did not extend that far. But the two men’s regard for one another was apparent to all at Court. Alexander’s easy manner and John Quincy’s unpretentious acceptance fostered a truly diplomatic relationship. Standing in the rain on that hot June day, JQA was struck by the tsar’s “affability” and proudly declared to Louisa that he “has shown himself as great by his forbearance and modesty in prosperity as by his firmness in the hour of his own trial.” Alexander did not see John Quincy in the crowd and Adams never saw the tsar again. They departed each other’s acquaintance, but their shared spirit of diplomacy and temperance brought peace and prosperity to their nations for generations to come. **RL**

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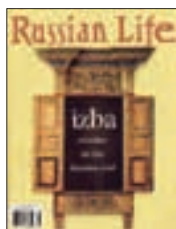
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