

Félix Lacoste

In 1815, following Napoleon's abdication, Félix Lacoste left France to start a business in Santo Domingo. In 1821, he returns to France, meets and marries the beautiful Emilie Hémart, born in Paris in 1798 and takes her back to Philadelphia where he settles, travelling often to Santo Domingo for his business.

Emilie meets Charlotte Bonaparte, Prince Joseph Bonaparte's daughter. Prince Joseph, Napoleon's elder brother, former king of Naples and of Spain, divided his time between Philadelphia and Point Breeze, his country estate near Bordentown, N.J. overlooking the Delaware River. In Philadelphia, Prince Joseph mostly went by the name Comte de Survilliers. Emilie becomes close to Charlotte and the Bonaparte household where she can often be found while Félix is away.

In 1824, Prince Joseph shipped off Charlotte to Europe to get married and in his vast estate he is bored. Taking advantage of Félix's numerous business trips (plus ça change plus c'est la même chose) Joseph seduces young Emilie. The affair is known to many: in September 1824, during La Fayette's return voyage to the United States, Prince Joseph invited him to a formal dinner at Point Breeze and none other than Emilie acted as the hostess. In March 1825 Emily gives birth to twin boys, only one of whom will survive and every one knows Prince Joseph is the father.

In 1827, the Lacoste return to France and Emilie promptly falls into Prosper Mérimée's arms and bed. Discovering his conjugal misfortune, Félix seeks reparation from the author of *Carmen* by provoking him into a duel. Mérimée accepts but requests that Félix aim for the left arm as he needs his right arm to write. Félix accedes, the duel takes place in early 1828, Mérimée is slightly wounded in the left arm and takes his revenge by taking George Sand as his mistress and by writing *The Etruscan Vase* where the fickle Mathilda is Emilie's portrait.

In spite of, or, perhaps, because of, the history between the two families, when Félix decides to launch *Le Courrier des Etats-Unis* none other than Joseph bankrolls him. When Joseph leaves to return to Europe in 1839, he gives Félix, by now France's Consul General in New York, the armchair that was used by the Emperor in the *Salle du Conseil* at his castle of Malmaison. Upon Félix's death, his vice-consul Louis Borg purchased the armchair from the Lacoste and, in 1867,

donated it to the New York Historical Society where it has been cared for since.

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