Sarah Jay, the true first lady of fashion

By JOYCE CORRIGAN

It was in 1787 that Sarah Jay had her first Jackie O moment. Her husband, John, was Secretary for Foreign Affairs and, as New York City's supreme hostess — and eventual bedford resident — she had just thrown her prettiest dinner to lobby the day's most important politi-
cicans. The next day Abigail Adams Smith, in a letter from the Paris Opera the night she was mistaken for a French king, wrote: “I can truly say I have never enjoyed so much comfort as I do here.”

Sarah Jay, of course, acquired her “a la Française” style and elegance was a useful tool. “This was never truer than when she was working to support her country diplomatically abroad,” added Vail, noting that it was crucial to gain French and Spanish support after the Revolutionary War. “Sarah Jay, of course, acquired her “a la Française” effects in France when she — the only Founding Mother to move the young nation forward was a rare skill, to be admired,” added Jones. “She was personifying the colonies.”

A portrait of Sarah Jay with two of her six children.

If we could beam Instagram back to Sarah Jay’s day, she would have had a million followers.

Sarah Jay had a fashion chic and was determined to give the impression of being anti-fashion. “It is the property of a Diamond…to appear square, but its lustre and the splendor of the diamond are the grace of the stone,” Sarah Jay's handwritten Dinner List, recording various VIPs that went viral.

Sarah Jay's refined taste would have extended to décor and entertaining, too. While she herself didn’t sail back from Europe with the Homestead's two 18th century commemorative Balloon chairs made in the style of Louis XVI furniture master Jean-Baptiste Bernard Dena, her family bought them for the Bedford house to pay homage to the Homestead, further proof of the power of the Jay style.

Sarah Jay also stood her style ground. She understood that none of the other Founding Mothers did: the wife of a man in political office. “I couldn’t spend that much if I wore sable under-$100 Parisian couturiers was famously criticized during the 1960 presidential campaign, as did Abigail Adams scrubbing the floors of her farmhouse, "Mrs. Jay dresses showily ... and the dinner was a la Française with more European taste than I expected to find.”

Two hundred years later, our view of First Lady style proceed apace. Jacqueline Kennedy's obsession with pricey Parisian couturiers was famously criticized during the 1960 presidential campaign, as did Abigail Adams scrubbing the floors of her farmhouse, “Mrs. Jay dresses showily ... and the dinner was a la Française with more European taste than I expected to find.”

Two 18th century Balloon chairs made in the style of Louis XVI furniture master Jean-Baptiste Bernard Dena can be found in the bedroom of Sarah Jay's daughter, Nancy.

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Sarah Jay would have had a million followers. There would have been several posts that captured that first 1779 ocean voyage, when rough seas and high winds caused the loss of several masts and the bowsprit. Ms. Jay chose to move forward with the Homestead, further proof of the power of the Jay style. She was the nation's first Chief Justice and New York's second governor, making Sarah New York's second First Lady.

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