

Francois C. Labbe (- 25 Sep 1848)

The National Intelligencer, September 25, 1848

On the 23d instant, in this city, Francis Corday Labbe, in the 64th year of his age. The deceased was extensively known as a successful teacher of dancing. As such he has stood in relations of no inconsiderable interest to our city circles, especially the juvenile portion, for the last fourteen years. All will remember with delight those brilliant May-day spectacles in which the accomplishments of his pupils were displayed with such agreeable taste and effect. His associations and pursuits in early life were of a far different character. He was a native of L'Orient, in France, a nephew of that extraordinary woman, Charlotte Corday, whose daring hand relieved her country of one of its bloodiest scourges, Jean Paul Marat, a leader of the "Mountain" party in 1793. He was a midshipman in the French navy, and a prisoner of war to the English. Over forty years he has been a citizen of the United States. The aims of his early life appear to have given an elevation to his manners and character, and in a pursuit much humbler than that of his youth he has earned probably as much competence and contentment, and sustained his various relations in life with respectability and usefulness.

The friends of the deceased are invited to attend the funeral today at 11 1/2 o'clock a.m., from his late residence on Pennsylvania avenue, opposite Willard's Hotel.

The National Intelligencer, May 7, 1849

Mr. Labbe's May Ball is announced to take place at Jackson Hall next Thursday night, the 10th instant. Mr. Labbe, as well as Mr. Carusi, is one of the most popular matrics de danse among us. We have no doubt the pageant of Mr. Labbe's May Ball will be splendid, and that it will be conducted in such a manner as to gratify his public, their parents, and all others who may be present at the entertainment.

Will of Francis C. Labbe, of City of Washington, D.C. (dtd. May 19, 1846, probated Nov. 14, 1848; Book 6, pp. 195-196; Box 19)

To daughter Emily Labbe, all property, without any control of her husband should she marry; at her death, all estate to two sons Faanser R. Labbe and Alphonse Thos. Crosly Labbe.

Wit.: Nicholas Callan

Geannie Tree Rives, **Greenleaf's Point**, CHS Vol 5, pp. 54-63, Jan. 7, 1901

Francois Labbe emigrated from France in 1812. He settled in Philadelphia, and began the printing of calicoes. Not being successful he next started a dancing school, which succeeded well. I do not know when they moved to Washington, but they opened a dancing school opposite Willard's about where Cornwell's grocery now stands. His two children succeeded him in the dancing school, Miss Emily, the daughter, being a most refined gentle person, and a great favorite. Frank Labbe, the son, was the "Turvey drop" of his day, a perfect "Master of Deportment." I remember the stocks where the children had to stand until they learned to "turn out their toes properly," and the old colored man who played the violin for children.

The Washington Post, April 10, 1921, p. 52

Mr. Labbe's Dancing School

It was about 1834 that I had my first experience at dancing school. I was chosen by the May queen, Marion Cross, to be Flora, one of her little attendants. My cousins, the Hamilton girls were the maids of honor. Marion was the daughter of Col. Truman Cross, one of the heroes who died in the Mexican war. I have recently heard that the flags captured by this brave officer are being preserved at Annapolis.

It was seven years later, when I was 13 years old, that I once more joined Mr. Francis Labbe's dancing school. He was a delightful French gentleman, one of the emigres who had sought refuge in America after one of the political upheavals in France.

Adele Cutts, who became Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas, was just budding into womanhood and already beginning to show that wonderful beauty that afterward made her famous. There were the Randall girls, who were my schoolmates at Madame Michard's; Helen Hill, married to Judge John B. Brooke, of Prince Georges county, Maryland; her cousin Lizzie Hill, who became the wife of Richard S. Hill, of Maryland. The Wilkes boys were sons of Admiral Wilkes. One of the Hagner boys and Manning Force were there.

Josephine Hellen, who married Hamilton N. Fant, had the distinction, because of her beauty, of being chosen to pose as one of the little children playing at the knee of Mrs. Van Ness in the celebrated portrait of that lady. There was Lou Adams, the granddaughter of President John Adams; she was also a cousin of Josephine Hellen. Florence Greenhow was younger than I; she was a pretty little girl, but frail and delicate. Her mother, Mrs. Rose O. Greenhow, identified herself very conspicuously with the Confederacy. She was a cousin of Adele Cutts, and both were relatives of the Hamilton family. Delia Stewart, the daughter of Commodore Stewart, became the mother of Charles Stewart, Parnell, the great Irish leader. I must not forget Lucy and Emily Andrews. A monument has recently been erected to their brother, Col. Snowden Andrews, by his daughter, Mrs. Gibson Fahnstock, of Washington.

Mr. Labbe taught dancing for 30 or 40 years, and among those of later days who were proud to be his pupils are F. Sowden Hill, the lawyer; a nephew of those first scholars, Mrs. John B. Brooke and Mrs. Richard S. Hill.

Many years ago I read an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* which claimed that Charlotte Corday was the great great niece of Corneille, the dramatic poet. Charlotte Corday was also an aunt of my dear instructor, Mr. Labbe, and it is a pleasure for me to weave the web of both romance and history about this delightful old gentleman who helped train so many of the children of Washington.

His dancing school was near the southeast corner of Fifteenth street and Pennsylvania avenue. I think the Randall family owned the building. Miss Emilie Labbe chaperoned the children, while her brother Francis played the violin. Mr. Labbe is buried at the Congressional cemetery.

(Written by Mrs. Elizabeth H. Du Hamel, 92 years old, who died in Washington, January 21, 1921. Submitted by her daughter, Elizabeth Du Hamel, Olympia apartments.)