



The Travel Journals of Henrietta Marchant Liston: North America and Lower Canada, 1796- 1800

Louise V. North

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Travel writing has a long history, the accounts as varied as the reasons why people travel. Although most travel publications of the eighteenth century were written by men, those by women, perhaps most famously Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, were also widely read.

The Travel Journals of Henrietta Marchant Liston: North America & Lower Canada, 1796–1800 consists of the nine journals that Mrs. Liston kept while she and her husband Robert Liston, the minister from Great Britain (1796-1800), resided in Philadelphia, at that time the capital of the United States. Mrs. Liston wrote her journals (which, with one exception, have never been published) for her personal use as an aide-memoire to share with family and friends. To experience this middle-aged woman's adventurous spirit as she and her husband travel as far south as Charleston, South Carolina and as far north as Quebec, Canada—long before the transportation conveniences and superhighways of modern-day travel—can only be termed amazing. Full of zest, her writing abounds with “you-are-there” moments. Mrs. Liston was genuinely curious about the New World: she wanted to learn about the different regions, to interact with the people who lived there, and to visit its natural wonders. She was astonished by the variety of the North American landscape, particularly its flora.

Each journal has an introduction to put Mrs. Liston's narrative in historical context. She is an intelligent and discerning guide to the eastern part of North America at a time of territorial expansion, of dispossession of Indian Nations from their territories by settlers, and of international upheavals. She and Robert Liston, a seasoned diplomat, observed and participated in the tumultuous events of the last years of the eighteenth century: the resignation of President George Washington and the orderly transfer of power to the next elected president; the “Quasi War” with France; and the rise of the political party system, to name but a few. Mrs. Liston's description of their friendship with President and Mrs. Washington is clear-eyed as well as deeply appreciative, bringing those historical figures to life. Mrs. Liston's engaging writing will win the hearts of all readers.

For more on this topic, please visit the author's website at www.inthewordsofwomen.com.

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