



A Forbidden Marriage

By Caitlin Shayda Jones

Published: September 27, 2012 | Last modified: July 4, 2013

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/09/27/a-forbidden-marriage/>

IT WAS A FALL day in New York. A light rain blurred the windows of the parsonage where the wedding was about to take place. Christians, Jews, Bahá'ís, as well as whites and blacks from both England and America were represented in the small group. For the duration of the ceremony, the divides of the world were held at bay.

The groom was Louis Gregory, a prominent African-American lawyer; the bride, Louise Mathew, a white, educated woman born in England. Their marriage was illegal in twenty-five of America's forty-eight states, and by popular opinion, unacceptable everywhere. The wedding was kept quiet; the guest list few. As the groom put it, "We do not wish any sensational newspaper articles written."

The marriage was initially set in motion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. His intervention was anything but subtle. "Do you love him?" he had asked Louise several months earlier in Chicago. If she did, he told her, then the two should marry. That same day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá informed Mr. Gregory: "It would give me much pleasure if you and Miss Mathew were to marry." Louis reported that after hearing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, he froze and his hands went stone cold. He left 'Abdu'l-Bahá's suite and wandered about the streets of Chicago for two hours before regaining his composure.

Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promptings were integral to their union, it was not an arranged marriage. The couple had first met in 1911 in Ramleh, Egypt, where they had travelled to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was here that they had first become friends.

On August 4, 1912, in Dublin, New Hampshire, 'Abdu'l-Bahá announced in front of an astonished group that Louis and Louise were to be married. On September 27, 1912, the marriage took place in New York, performed by a sympathetic minister in the parsonage of an Episcopal church, since Bahá'í marriages were not yet recognized in the state.

As the couple said their vows, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was halfway across the country, bound for Salt Lake City. A letter he had written to Louis Gregory in 1909 was read during the ceremony: "I hope that thou mayest become the herald of the

Kingdom, become the means by which the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences, and behold the reality of humanity.” When Louis had first read those words, he had no idea that his personal life would someday become one of the foremost testimonies of his beliefs.

The marriage of Louis and Louise was by no means an easy one — even finding a place to live proved difficult. They were discouraged from traveling together by nervous but well-meaning friends. The couple spent long periods apart, since Louis’s race amity work took him regularly to the South, where her presence was impossible. During these times there were speculations that they had split, often by those who hoped the marriage would fail. Yet Louis and Louise Gregory remained happily married until his death nearly forty years later. Throughout their lives, Louis once commented, they shared “one spirit, one purpose. . . .”

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Caitlin Shayda Jones, “A Forbidden Marriage,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, September 27, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/09/27/a-forbidden-marriage/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Jones, Caitlin Shayda. “A Forbidden Marriage.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. September 27, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/09/27/a-forbidden-marriage/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.