

= Louise of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz =

Duchess Louise of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz (Luise Auguste Wilhelmine Amalie ; 10 March 1776 ? 19 July 1810) was Queen consort of Prussia as the wife of King Frederick William III . The couple 's happy , though short @-@ lived , marriage produced nine children , including the future monarchs Frederick William IV of Prussia and German Emperor Wilhelm I.

Her legacy became cemented after her extraordinary 1807 meeting with French Emperor Napoleon I at Tilsit ? she met with the emperor to plead unsuccessfully for favorable terms after Prussia 's disastrous losses in the Napoleonic Wars . She was already well loved by her subjects , but her meeting with Napoleon led Louise to become revered as " the soul of national virtue " . Her early death at the age of thirty @-@ four " preserved her youth in the memory of posterity " , and caused Napoleon to reportedly remark the king " has lost his best minister " . The Order of Louise was founded by her grieving husband four years later as a female counterpart to the Iron Cross . In the 1920s conservative German women founded the Queen Louise League , and Louise herself would be used in Nazi propaganda as an example of the ideal German woman .

= = Duchess of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz 1776 ? 1793 = =

Duchess Luise Auguste Wilhelmine Amalie of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz (Louise in English) was born on 10 March 1776 in a one story villa , just outside the capital in Hanover . She was the fourth daughter and sixth child of Duke Charles of Mecklenburg and his wife Landgravine Friederike of Hesse @-@ Darmstadt , a granddaughter of Louis VIII , Landgrave of Hesse @-@ Darmstadt . Her maternal grandmother , Landgravine Marie Louise of Hesse @-@ Darmstadt , and her paternal first @-@ cousin Princess Augusta Sophia of the United Kingdom served as sponsors at her baptism ; her second given name came from Princess Augusta Sophie .

At the time of her birth , Louise 's father was not yet the ruler of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz (he would not succeed his brother as Duke until 1794) , and consequently she was not born in a court , but rather in a less formal home . Charles was field marshal of the household brigade in Hanover , and soon after Louise 's birth he was made Governor @-@ General of that territory by his brother @-@ in @-@ law George III , king of the United Kingdom and Hanover (husband of his sister , Queen Charlotte) . The family subsequently moved to Leineschloss , the residence of Hanoverian kings , though during the summer they usually lived at Herrenhausen .

Louise was particularly close to her sister Frederica , who was two years younger , as well as with their only brother George . Louise and her siblings were under the care of their governess Fraulein von Wolzogen , a friend of their mother 's . When Louise was only six years old , her mother died in childbirth , leaving a permanent mark on the young duchess ; she would often give away pocket change to other children who experienced similar losses , stating " she is like me , she has no mother " . After Duchess Charles ' death , the family left Leineschloss for Herrenhausen , sometimes called a " miniature Versailles " . Duke Charles remarried two years later to his first wife 's younger sister Charlotte , producing a son , Charles . Louise and her new stepmother became close until Charlotte 's early death the year after their marriage . The twice widowed and grieving duke went to Darmstadt , where he gave the children into the care of his mother @-@ in @-@ law and Louise 's godmother , the widowed Landgravine Marie Louise .

= = = Education = = =

Their grandmother preferred to raise them simply , and they made their own clothes . A new governess from Switzerland , Madame Gelieux , was appointed , giving the children lessons in French ; as was common for royal and aristocratic children of the time , Louise became fluent and literate in the language , while neglecting her own native German . She received religious instruction from a clergyman of the Lutheran Church . Complementary to her lessons was an emphasis on charitable acts , and Louise would often accompany her governess when visiting the houses of the poor and needy . Louise was encouraged to give out as much as was in her means , although she

often got into trouble with her grandmother for donating too much for charity . From the age of ten until her marriage at 17 , Louise spent most of her time in the presence of her grandmother and governess , both well @-@ educated and refined . When only nine years old , Louise was present when the poet Friedrich Schiller read from the first act of " Don Carlos " for the entertainment of the assembled court , thus sparking her love for German as a literary language , especially works of Schiller . Louise loved history and poetry , and not only enjoyed reading Schiller , but also came to like the works of Goethe , Paul , Herder and Shakespeare , as well as ancient Greek tragedies .

In 1793 , Marie Louise took the two youngest duchesses with her to Frankfurt , where she paid her respects to her nephew King Frederick William II . Louise had grown up into a beautiful young woman , possessing " an exquisite complexion " and " large blue eyes , " and was naturally graceful . Louise 's uncle , the Duke of Mecklenburg , hoped to strengthen ties between his house and Prussia . Consequently , on one evening carefully planned by the Duke , seventeen @-@ year @-@ old Louise met the king 's son and heir , Crown Prince Frederick William . The crown prince was twenty @-@ three , serious @-@ minded , and religious . She made such a charming impression on Frederick William that he immediately made his choice , desiring to marry her . Frederica caught the eye of his younger brother Prince Louis Charles , and the two families began planning a double betrothal , celebrating a month later , on 24 April 1793 in Darmstadt . Frederick and Louise were subsequently married on 24 December that same year , with Louis and Frederica marrying two days later .

= = Crown Princess of Prussia 1793 ? 1797 = =

In the events leading up to her marriage , Louise 's arrival in Berlin , the Prussian capital , caused quite a sensation , and she was greeted with a grand reception by the city 's joyful citizens . When she broke protocol and stooped to pick up and kiss a child , Prussian writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué remarked that " The arrival of the angelic Princess spreads over these days a noble splendor . All hearts go out to meet her , and her grace and goodness leaves no one unblessed . " Another wrote " The more perfectly one becomes acquainted with the Princess the more one is captivated by the inner nobility , and the angelic goodness of her heart . "

Louise 's father @-@ in @-@ law King Frederick William II gave the couple Charlottenburg Palace , but the crown prince and his new wife preferred to live at Paretz Palace , just outside Potsdam , where Louise kept herself busy with household affairs . Paretz was far from the bustle of court , as the couple were most content in the " rural retirement " of a country life . The marriage was happy , and Louise was well @-@ beloved by the king , who called her " the princess of princesses " and gave her a palace in Oranienburg . The crown princess saw it as her duty to support her husband in all his pursuits , and the couple enjoyed singing together and reading from Shakespeare and Goethe . Louise soon became pregnant , disappointingly giving birth to a stillborn girl on 1 October 1794 . Nine healthy children would follow in quick succession , though two died in childhood : Crown Prince Frederick William (1795) , Prince William (1797) , Princess Charlotte (1798) , Princess Frederica (1799) , Prince Charles (1801) , Princess Alexandrine (1803) , Prince Ferdinand (1804) , Princess Louise (1808) , and Prince Albert (1809) . The couple also used the Crown Prince 's Palace in the capital .

Louise 's charitable giving continued throughout her life , and on one occasion , while attending a harvest festival , she purchased presents and distributed them to local children . On her first birthday after her marriage in Berlin , when King Frederick William II asked his daughter @-@ in @-@ law what she desired for a present , Louise replied she wanted a handful of money to let the city 's people share her joy ; he smilingly gave her a large quantity for the task .

= = Queen consort of Prussia 1797 ? 1810 = =

On 16 November 1797 , her husband succeeded to the throne of Prussia as King Frederick William III after the death of his father . Louise wrote to her grandmother , " I am now queen , and what rejoices me most is the hope that now I need no longer count my benefactions so carefully . " The

couple had to abandon their solitude at Paretz and begin living under the restraints of a royal court . They began a tour of the country 's eastern provinces for two purposes : the king wanted to acquaint himself with their new subjects , and despite the unusualness of a consort accompanying the king further than the capital , Frederick William wanted to introduce the queen as well to their people . Louise was received everywhere with festivities . For the first time in Prussian history , the queen emerged as a celebrated public personality in her own right , as she occupied a much more prominent role than her predecessors . Louise 's presence on her husband 's eastern journey was a break from the traditional role of the consort ? importantly however the queen 's power and enduring legacy did not stem from holding a separate court and policy than her husband 's , but rather the opposite : she subordinated her formidable intelligence and skill for her husband 's sole advantage . She also became a fashion icon , for instance starting a trend by wearing a neckerchief to keep from getting ill .

After her husband 's accession , Louise developed many ties to senior ministers and became a powerful figure within the government as she began to command universal respect and affection . The queen went out of her way to stay informed about political developments at court , and from the very beginning of his reign the new king consulted Louise on matters of state . Frederick William was hesitant and cautious , and hated war , stating in 1798 , " I abhor war and ... know of nothing greater on earth than the preservation of peace and tranquility as the only system suited to the happiness of human kind " . In keeping with the later foreign policy of his father 's , Frederick William favored neutrality during the early years of the conflict with the revolutionary French First Republic , which evolved into the Napoleonic Wars (1803 ? 15) ; he refused the various pressures to pick a side in the War of the Second Coalition . Louise supported this view , warning that if Prussia were to side with the coalition powers of Austria , Great Britain , and Russia , it would lead to dependence on the latter power for military support . She foresaw that because Prussia was by far the weakest of the great powers , and it would not have been able to ensure it benefited from the results of such an alliance . French aggression caused the king to eventually consider entering the wars , but his indecision prevented him from choosing a side , either France or the coalition powers . He consulted the many differing opinions of Queen Louise and his ministers , and was eventually compelled into an alliance with Napoleon , who was recently victorious from the Battle of Austerlitz (1805) .

Baron vom Stein , a member of the bureaucracy , having abhorred the country 's former neutrality , sought to reform the organization of the government from favor @-@ based cronyism into a responsible ministerial government . He prepared a document for the king detailing in strong language what administrative reforms were needed , such as establishing clearer lines of responsibility among ministers ; this work however never reached Frederick William , as Stein passed it first to General Ernst von Rüchel , who in turn passed it onto the queen in the spring of 1806 . Though Louise agreed with its contents , she thought it " too violent and passionate " for the king , and consequently helped suppress it .

= = = War with France = = =

Among the king 's advisers , members of his family , such as the queen (an open advocate of war) and Prince Louis Ferdinand , led the militaristic faction in favor of war against France ; those against neutrality but in favor of reform were led by Baron vom Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg . Knowing the temperament of the king , Hardenberg appealed directly to the queen for desired reform ? wisely as it turned out , as Frederick William viewed the demands to remove his trusted advisers in the Kabinett as a " mutiny " similar to the Fronde .

Though Prussia had not fought in a war since 1795 , its military leaders confidently expected that they could win against Napoleon 's troops . After a small incident concerning an anti @-@ French pamphlet occurred , King Frederick William was finally pressured by his wife and family to break off his uneasy peace and enter the war against the French emperor . Prussian troops began mobilizing , culminating in the October 1806 Battle of Jena @-@ Auerstedt , which was a disaster for Prussia , as the ability of its armed forces to continue the war were effectively wiped out . The king and queen had accompanied their troops into battle at Jena (with Louise apparently dressed " like an Amazon ")

), but had to flee from French troops .

Napoleon himself occupied Berlin , causing the king , queen and the rest of the royal family to flee , despite Louise 's illness , in the dead of winter to Memel in the easternmost part of the kingdom . On the journey there , there was no food or clean water , and the king and queen were forced to share the same sleeping arrangements in " one of the wretched barns they call houses " , according to one witness traveling with them .

After various events took place , Napoleon demanded , from a highly superior position , peace terms in what was to be called the Peace of Tilsit (1807) . In the midst of these negotiations , the emperor agreed to keep half of Prussia intact . The men were joined by Queen Louise ; Frederick William had sent for his pregnant wife to beg for a better settlement for Prussia , with Louise advising her husband , " For God 's sake no shameful peace ... [Prussia] should at least not go down without honor . " As the king felt that her presence might put Napoleon in a " more relaxed mood " ; Louise reluctantly agreed to meet the emperor at Tilsit , but only to save " her Prussia " . Napoleon had previously attempted to destroy her reputation by questioning Louise 's marital fidelity , but the queen met him anyway , attempting to use her beauty and charm to flatter him into more favorable terms . Formerly Louise had regularly referred to him as " the Monster " , but nevertheless made a request for a private interview with the emperor , whereon she threw herself at his feet ; though he was impressed by her grace and determination , Napoleon refused to make any concessions , writing back to his wife Empress Joséphine that Louise " is really charming and full of coquettishness toward me . But don 't be jealous ... it would cost me too dearly to play the gallant . " Napoleon 's attempts to destroy Louise 's reputation failed however , and they only made her more beloved in Prussia . Queen Louise 's efforts to protect her adopted country from French aggression secured for her the admiration of future generations .

= = = Remaining years = = =

Harsh restrictions were imposed on Prussia , such as a massive indemnity of one hundred and twenty million francs and the quartering of troops . At the time , one hundred and twenty million francs was equivalent to the entire yearly budget of Prussia . As the perceived symbol of Prussia 's former grandeur and pride , the French occupation of Prussia had a particularly devastating effect upon Louise , as the queen endured personal insults ? Napoleon himself callously called her " the only real man in Prussia " . The queen recognized that her adopted country depended on her for moral strength , and as a consequence Louise regained her old sense of optimism , often taking time to prepare their eldest son for his future role as king . In the following few years Louise supported the reforming efforts of government carried out by Stein and Hardenberg , as well as those of Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August Neidhardt von Gneisenau , to reorganize the army . After the disaster at Tilsit , Louise was instrumental in Stein 's reappointment (the king had previously dismissed him) , telling Frederick William " [Stein] is my last hope . A great heart , an encompassing mind , perhaps he knows remedies that are hidden to us . "

By 1808 it was still considered unsafe to return to Berlin , and the royal family consequently spent the summer near Königsberg ; Louise believed that the hard trials of her children 's early lives would be good for them : " If they had been reared in luxury and prosperity they might think that so it must always be . " In the winter of 1808 , Tsar Alexander I invited the king and queen to St. Petersburg , where she was treated to sumptuously decorated rooms ; " Nothing dazzles me anymore " , she exclaimed on her return to Germany . Near the birth of her youngest child Princess Louise in 1809 , Louise wrote to her father , " Gladly ... the calamities which have befallen us have not forced their way into our wedded and home life , rather have strengthened the same , and made it even more precious to us . " Louise was sick for much of that year , but returned with the king to Berlin near the end of it after an absence of three years ; the queen arrived in a carriage accompanied by her two daughters Charlotte and Alexandrine and younger son Charles , and was greeted by her father at Charlottenburg Palace ? the residence was ransacked however , as Napoleon and his commanders had stripped its rooms of paintings , statues , manuscripts , and antiquities . Returning to a much different Prussia than she left , a preacher observed that " our dear queen is far from joyful , but her

seriousness has a quiet serenity ... her eyes have lost their former sparkle , and one sees that they have wept much , and still weep " .

On 19 July 1810 , while visiting her father in Strelitz , the Queen died in her husband 's arms from an unidentified illness . The queen 's subjects attributed the French occupation as the cause of her early death . " Our saint is in heaven " , exclaimed Prussian general Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher . Louise 's untimely death left her husband alone during a period of great difficulty , as the Napoleonic Wars and need for reform continued . Napoleon reportedly remarked the king " has lost his best minister . "

Louise was buried in the garden of Charlottenburg Palace , where a mausoleum , containing a fine recumbent statue by Christian Daniel Rauch , was built over her grave . Frederick William did not remarry until 1824 , when he entered into a morganatic marriage with his mistress Auguste von Harrach , explaining " Womanly companionship and sympathy have become necessary to me , therefore I must marry again . " After his death on 7 June 1840 , Frederick William was buried by her side .

= = Legacy = =

Queen Louise was revered by her subjects as the " soul of national virtue " , and some historians have written that Louise was " Prussian nationalism personified . " According to Christopher Clark , Louise was " a female celebrity who in the mind of the public combined virtue , modesty , and sovereign grace with kindness and sex appeal , and whose early death in 1810 at the age of only thirty @-@ four preserved her youth in the memory of posterity . " Her reputation as a loving and loyal supporter of her husband became crucial to her enduring legacy ; the cult that eventually surrounded Louise became associated with the " ideal " feminine attributes : prettiness , sweet nature , maternal kindness , and wifely virtue .

On the anniversary of her birth , in 1814 , the widowed King Frederick William instituted the Order of Louise (Luisenorden) as a complementary decoration for the Iron Cross . Its purpose was to be given to those women who had made a significant contribution to the war effort against Napoleon , though it was subsequently awarded to future members of the House of Hohenzollern unrelated to the French emperor , such as her granddaughter @-@ in @-@ law , Empress Victoria of Germany , and her great @-@ granddaughter , Queen Sophia of Greece . In 1880 a statue of Queen Louise was erected in the Tiergarten in Berlin .

Louise inspired the establishment of a conservative women 's organization known as Königin @-@ Luise @-@ Bund , often shortened to Luisenbund (" Queen Louise League ") in which her person achieved an almost cult @-@ like status . The group 's main purpose was to promote patriotic feelings among German women , and it emphasized the family and German morality . The Königin @-@ Luise @-@ Bund was active during the time of the Weimar Republic and the first years of the Third Reich . Despite having actively supported the National Socialist movement since its early stages all through their accession to power in 1933 , the Queen Louise League was nonetheless disbanded by the Nazis in 1934 , as they viewed it as a hostile organization .

Significantly , Louise and Maria Theresa of Austria were the only two historical women used in Nazi propaganda , as the regime felt Louise was the " personification of womanly qualities , " which the government was trying to integrate into German schools . While the queen 's resistance and defiance of the French kept the " Prussian spirit " alive , her husband was cast as a " pathetically embarrassing " king who would rather have lived in peace than revenge himself on Napoleon .

= = = Popular culture = = =

The character of Queen Louise was the popular subject of countless films released in German cinema . These included *Der Film von der Königin Luise* (1913) , *Die elf schillschen Offiziere* (1926) , and *Vivat ? Königin Luise im Fichtelgebirge* (2005) , *Luise ? Königin der Herzen* (2010 documentary) . She was played by Mady Christians in the 1927 silent film *Queen Louise* , by Henny Porten in *Louise , Queen of Prussia* (1931) and by Ruth Leuwerik in the 1957 film *Queen Louise* .

She was also briefly portrayed in an extremely reverential manner in the 1945 propaganda film Kolberg . The German warship sunk in Lake Victoria in the film The African Queen is called the Königin Luise (the " Queen Louise ") .

Louise became the subject of a series of novels by nineteenth century German historical fiction writer Luise Mühlbach , which included Louisa of Prussia and her Times and Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia .

= = Titles , styles , honours and arms = =

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10 March 1776 ? 24 December 1793 : Her Serene Highness Duchess Louise of Mecklenburg , Princess of Mecklenburg @-@ Strelitz

24 December 1793 ? 16 November 1797 : Her Royal Highness The Crown Princess of Prussia

16 November 1797 ? 19 July 1810 : Her Majesty The Queen of Prussia

= = Issue = =

By Frederick William III of Prussia (3 August 1770 ? 7 June 1840) ; married on 24 December 1793 .

= = Ancestry = =