

Caroline Princess of Monaco (1793–1879)

Born into an old, bourgeois family from Champagne, **Marie-Louise-Charlotte-Gabrielle Gibert**, generally known as **Caroline**, spent her childhood at the Château de Lametz in the Ardennes. There, in 1814, she embarked on a love affair with Florestan Grimaldi, son of Prince Honoré IV of Monaco and the younger brother of Hereditary Prince Honoré, the future Honoré V. Caroline married Florestan in 1816. Contrary to the tradition in the great aristocratic families, this was not a marriage of convenience, but an alliance between two young people from different backgrounds that was genuinely based on love and celebrated privately. The union produced two children: Charles in 1818, the future Charles III, and Florestine in 1833.

Prince Honoré V died in 1841 without a legitimate descendent. His brother Florestan was called upon to succeed him, despite that fact that his temperament and tastes, which tended towards the arts, made exercising power difficult for him. Following restoration of the country's sovereignty in 1814, Monaco was a poor State, in the grip of social tension. In 1848, against the background of the Springtime of the Peoples, Florestan I and his wife had to deal with the secession of Menton and Roquebrune, which declared themselves "free cities". This meant the loss of nine tenths of the Principality's territory and the majority of its economy.

A significant political role

Caroline took on a key political role. A fierce advocate for the rights of her adopted family, she wrote to her son, Charles, in 1842: "brought up in simple, modest circumstances, I found myself called upon by your father's wishes to enter one of the most exalted families [...]. Having become, despite my sex, the head of the family, I have had to fulfil obligations and apologise for my elevation [...]. Your father gave me a wonderful name, a wonderful position and a fortune; in return, I must ensure that his position remains the same and that his fortune is well managed. As compensation for the advantages that I was not able to contribute to the marriage, I owe it to my children to maintain those belonging to their father; above all, I owe it to my son to ensure that he receives intact the cache that providence placed in the hands of his father, I owe him the fruit of my experience and my advice."

A sensible businesswoman

Gifted with remarkable intelligence and a keen business sense, Caroline devoted herself first of all to restoring the family's finances. She worked to modernise the country and improve the lot of its people. She created an early version of nursery schools, and took an interest in education, charitable institutions, hospices and the legal system. She helped to restore the palace and paid attention to urban development. It was under her influence that the first Société des Bains de Mer was formed and the casino founded, drawing on inspiration from the spa towns of Homburg and Baden-Baden.

Following Florestan's death in 1856, Caroline gradually withdrew from public affairs, preferring to focus on charity work. She nonetheless remained, until her death in 1879, a sensible advisor to whom her son listened, and an important member of the family, who was close to her two children, and liked and respected by Monegasque nationals.

In the Condamine district of Monaco, Rue Princesse Caroline to this day pays tribute to this significant figure in the Principality's history.