



Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal (Gender Relations in the American Experience)

Anya Jabour

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William Wirt practiced law in Virginia and Maryland in the early national period and served as attorney general under James Monroe and John Quincy Adams. Elizabeth Wirt managed the household and cared for the Wirts' large family during her husband's frequent work-related absences. For more than three decades, the couple struggled to reconcile different daily pursuits with a commitment to marriage as a partnership of equals. In *Marriage in the Early Republic*, Anya Jabour provides detailed analysis of a marital relationship so thoroughly documented that it illuminates gender relations in nineteenth-century America.

On one level, this is a story—a rich narrative full of the joys, sorrows, tensions, and the give-and-take of an American marriage. But because changing gender roles and expectations in this period caused discordance and forced adjustments, Jabour also provides a microhistorical analysis of a broad pattern. Placing the Wirts' marriage in a larger context, she shows how problematic marriage—and the balancing of domestic and childcare responsibilities—could be as well-to-do Americans developed their own cultural and social expectations. By examining patterns of love and marriage in a formative era, *Marriage in the Early Republic* offers insights into romance and relationships in our own time as well.

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