

THE
ADVENTUROUS
LIFE OF

ISABEL

ANDERSON



ISABEL ANDERSON REMAINS ONE OF THE SOCIETY'S MOST IMPORTANT BENEFACTORS



Philanthropist. War nurse. Political commentator. World traveler. Patriot. Author. Arts patron. Isabel Anderson filled her life — spanning the centennial of the American Revolution and World War II — with pursuits that both fulfilled and challenged the expectations of a woman of her generation. She valued history and tradition, but refused to follow what she considered outdated customs. She embraced the duties of a society wife and hostess, but sought more meaningful work outside the home. And while she maintained that women's suffrage was not necessary, she supported other Progressive causes, including public health and prison reform.

Isabel Anderson's story and personality have remained hidden behind the glamour of her roles as a wealthy heiress and society wife. She was an important philanthropist, giving to churches, hospitals, universities, and museums. She was active in humanitarian causes, including World War I relief and education for the poor. She followed national politics and participated in political life, even before women could vote. She traveled the world, exploring majestic, exotic, and rugged destinations on five continents. And she wrote more than forty books, delighting children with fantastical tales, and adults with accounts of her many adventures.

A defining moment in her life came in the spring of 1937, when her beloved husband, Larz, died. In the months that followed, Isabel Anderson made arrangements to donate her Washington mansion, Anderson House, to the Society of the Cincinnati to become its headquarters and museum. When the gift was finalized in May 1938, the Society's leaders declared it to be the most important event in the history of the organization since George Washington signed its founding document. Isabel Anderson remains one of the Society's most important benefactors. Her donation of Anderson House gave the organization a prominent home in the nation's capital and spurred the Society's growth as a public institution.

The Adventurous Life of Isabel Anderson is on view from March 24 through September 18, 2016, at Anderson House. The exhibition features nearly fifty paintings, photographs, documents, and other artifacts that illuminate the life of Isabel Anderson. These objects are drawn from the museum and library collections of the Society of the Cincinnati, as well as lenders including the Larz Anderson Auto Museum in Brookline, Massachusetts, and the New Hampshire Historical Society.

ISABEL WAS “THE EMBODIMENT OF
YOUTH AND GAIETY” —MAUD HOWE ELLIOT

NEW ENGLAND ROOTS

Isabel Anderson was descended from prominent families with strong ties to America’s founding generations. She was born Isabel Weld Perkins in Boston in 1876. Her father, George Hamilton Perkins, was a career U.S. Navy officer who distinguished himself in the Civil War. Her mother, Anna Minot Weld, came from one of the oldest and wealthiest families in New England. Both the Perkins and Weld families had settled in Massachusetts by the 1630s.

Isabel counted among her ancestors at least eight men who fought for American independence. Eleazer Weld, one of her great-great grandfathers on her mother’s side and a native of Roxbury, Massachusetts, was a lieutenant colonel of the Suffolk County militia from 1776 to 1780 and helped take Dorchester Heights, overlooking Boston, in March 1776. Benjamin Emery, one of her great-great-great grandfathers on her father’s side, was captain of a New Hampshire militia company and fought at the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776. Isabel was proud of the service of her ancestors and represented them in the Daughters of the American Revolution and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America.

Isabel had a privileged upbringing. She spent summers at Weld homes in Newport, winters at her parents’ townhouse in the Back Bay neighborhood of Boston, and spring and fall on the Perkins estate in the mountains of New Hampshire. She was educated at home by governesses before attending Miss Winsor’s School in Boston. In 1895, at the age of nineteen, Isabel was introduced to Boston society and embarked on her grand tour. The yearlong trip through Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East was her first adventure abroad. It had a profound influence on Isabel, particularly her love of travel, curiosity about other cultures, and appreciation for art and artists. Isabel was chaperoned and tutored by Maud Howe Elliott, an author and art historian who became a lifelong friend.

Isabel and Maud spent the first three months of 1896 in Rome, where Maud lived with her husband, the artist John Elliott. Isabel was “the embodiment of youth and gaiety,” Maud wrote, and “her joyous temperament was like the breath of springtime.” During this time, a Norwegian-born artist, Christian M. Ross, captured Isabel’s youth and charm in a pastel portrait, painted when she was almost twenty years old.

Portrait of Isabel Anderson by Christian M. Ross, 1896. Larz Anderson Auto Museum, Brookline, Massachusetts.





Isabel Anderson's wedding dress, made by the House of Worth, Paris, 1897. Larz Anderson Auto Museum, Brookline, Massachusetts. Background: Detail of the pulpit of the Arlington Street Church, Boston. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



Terrace Garden, Rome
by John Elliott, ca. 1897.
Collection of Mr. and
Mrs. Christopher Colby.

It was also during this time in Rome that Isabel met her future husband, Larz Anderson. Ten years her senior, Larz Anderson was a diplomat at the American embassy. Isabel and Larz met in January 1896 through their mutual friends John and Maud Howe Elliott, on their terrace garden at the Palazzo Rusticucci in Rome. Overlooking St. Peter's Square, the "enchanted garden," as Maud described it, was

the setting for lively gatherings of artists, poets, journalists, and diplomats — which Isabel frequented. The Andersons later commissioned a painting of the terrace from John Elliott as a reminder of the start of their romance.

Isabel and Larz were married in Boston at noon on June 10, 1897. Their wedding was attended by Boston luminaries, including Massachusetts governor Roger Wolcott and art collector Isabella Stewart Gardner. For the occasion, Isabel ordered two dresses: one for the ceremony at the Arlington Street Church and one for the reception at her parents' townhouse a few blocks away. Both dresses were made by the House of Worth, the venerable Parisian firm that produced the finest and most fashionable couture garments for wealthy American women and European aristocrats. Isabel's wedding dresses were designed by Jean-Philippe Worth, son of the firm's founder. The bodice and skirt she wore for the afternoon reception — primarily made of ivory silk duchesse satin — are adorned with artificial orange blossoms to symbolize purity and fertility. Although Isabel and Larz's partnership never produced children, it helped shape the rest of her life.

Opposite: "A Book of Dinner lists and Plans ...," 1915-1929.
The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.
Background: Photograph of the Anderson House Dining Room by Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1910. The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 1977.

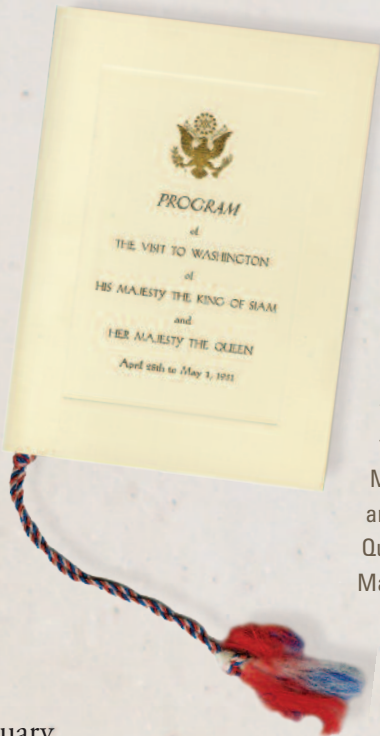
THE FIRST LADY OF
MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

The primary expectation for a woman of Isabel Anderson's wealth and status was to be a proper hostess. She embraced this role and became a leader of high society in Washington and Boston. Isabel and Larz Anderson's two primary residences were Anderson House, their urban mansion in the nation's capital, and Weld, their sprawling estate in Brookline, Massachusetts. They typically used Anderson House during Washington's winter social season, which was in full swing from December through February. In the spring and fall, the Andersons lived at Weld. They also owned a summer retreat, named the Box, in Contoocook, New Hampshire.

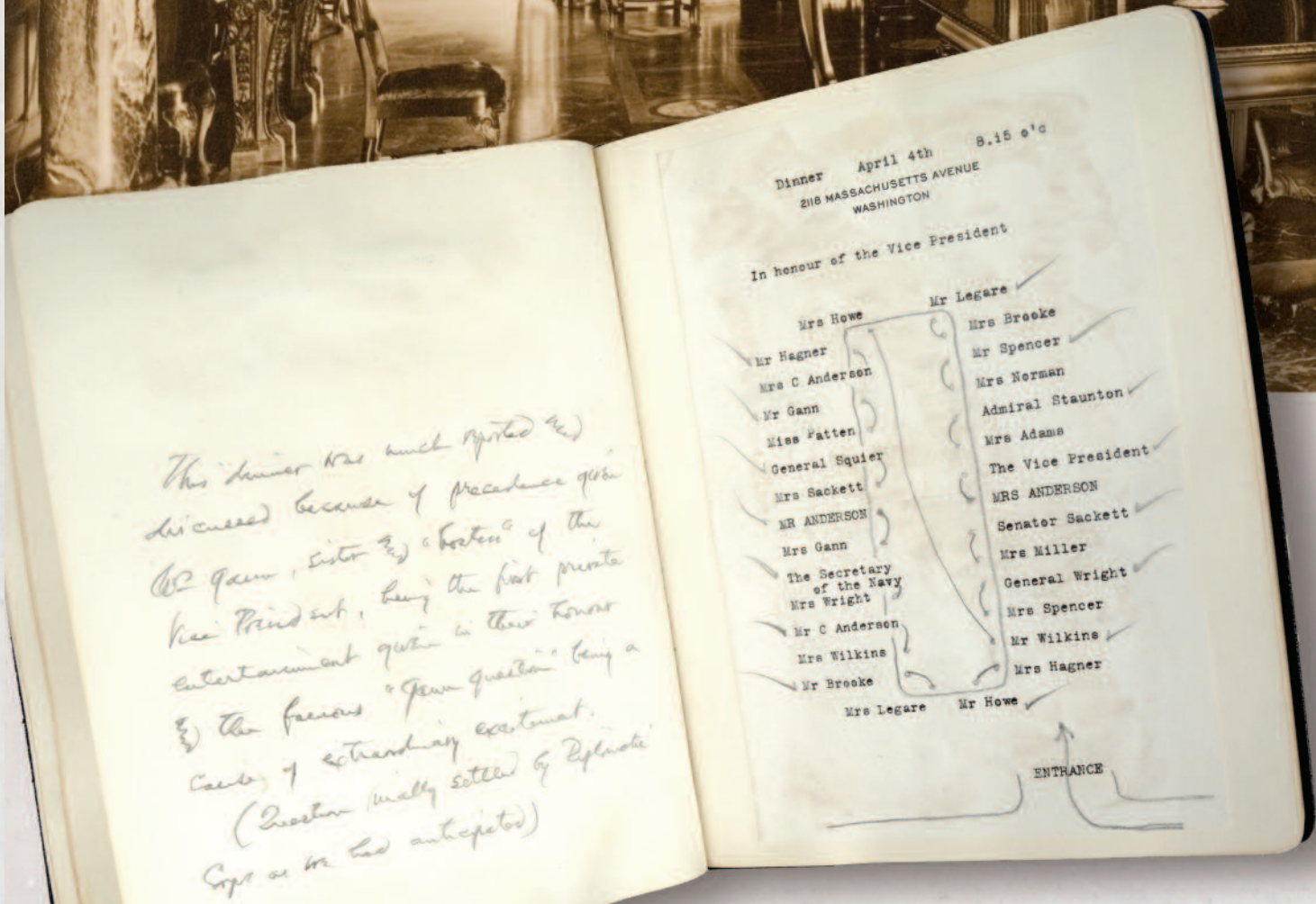
Isabel orchestrated all aspects of the couple's social entertaining, which ranged from formal dinners, receptions and luncheons to musical performances, garden parties and after-theater gatherings. These events required Isabel to assemble the right mix of engaging and compatible guests, welcome them with intellect and charm, set guests from abroad at ease with her knowledge of foreign languages, follow the latest trends and proper protocol, and direct the household staff. To support their entertaining, the Andersons employed more than twenty servants in Washington — one of the largest household staffs in the city.

The Andersons entertained in European fashion, sitting across from one other at the center of the table as the host and hostess, with the most important guests seated nearest to them. At a dinner held on April 4, 1929, in honor of Vice President Charles Curtis, Isabel placed his sister, Mrs. Dolly Gann, to the right of Larz, granting Mrs. Gann the status the vice president's late wife would have held. This break in protocol "was much reported and discussed" in high society, according to Isabel, but the diplomatic corps ultimately supported the Andersons' approach. Isabel kept the seating plan and an account of the controversy in a book she assembled of guest lists and seating arrangements for dozens of events at Anderson House.

Private entertaining took on greater significance in Washington, where politics and socializing overlapped in the drawing rooms of the city's wealthy and well-connected residents. The Andersons frequently entertained diplomats and other foreign dignitaries, as well as American government and military officials, intellectuals and artists, and fellow members of high society. In April 1931, Isabel and Larz lent their mansion to the government for the use of the king and queen of Siam (now Thailand) during their official visit to the United States. The Andersons, who were abroad at the time, spared no expense in providing for the royal group's five-day stay at the house, including hiring one of the best chefs in Washington to assist their cook and turning out their servants in full dress livery — with white stockings to indicate the presence of royalty. The king and queen took their meals at the house privately, with menu cards written on Larz Anderson's Society of the Cincinnati stationery.



"Program of the Visit to Washington of His Majesty the King of Siam and Her Majesty the Queen, April 28th to May 1, 1931."





Anderson House, Isabel and Larz's winter home, was designed by architects Herbert Browne and Arthur Little and was completed in 1905 in the Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1910. The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 1977.



The main house at Weld, the Andersons' estate in Brookline, Massachusetts, was renovated and expanded by architects Herbert Browne and Arthur Little shortly after the couple bought the property in 1899. Photograph by Thomas E. Marr, 1905. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.

Below: "Scrap Book of the Presidential Campaign of 1912" kept by Isabel Anderson, containing the program of the Republican National Convention and her press badge made by Whitehead & Hoag Co., Newark, N.J. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of the family of Alice Churchill Meeks, 2012.

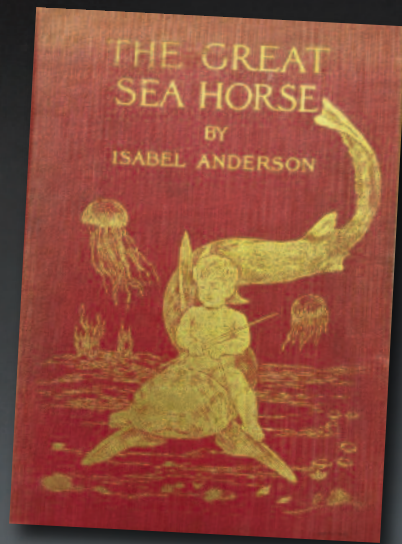
A WOMAN IN POLITICAL LIFE

Even before American women won the right to vote in 1919, Isabel Anderson and her peers found ways to participate in political life. Living in Washington — where politics touched nearly every aspect of private life — inspired Isabel to immerse herself in the issues of the day. She visited the Capitol to hear speeches and debates in Congress, attended political conventions and presidential inaugurations, studied accounts of the issues in newspapers and magazines, and engaged friends and dinner guests in discussions of government and world affairs.

The contentious campaign for president in 1912 spurred her to become more involved in politics. A staunch Republican, she witnessed the party's contested convention between former president Theodore Roosevelt and President William H. Taft, the eventual nominee, from the press section on the main floor of the Chicago Coliseum. After the convention, Isabel joined the party's Committee on Women's Work to campaign for Taft. She led the committee's operation in Massachusetts, where she organized rallies, gave speeches and distributed pamphlets. Isabel documented the campaign in a scrapbook, in which she assembled newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets, political cartoons, correspondence and transcripts of her speeches.

Despite her intense interest in politics, Isabel was not a suffragette. She believed that women did not need the vote and could instead influence their husbands, sons, and other men. She also feared that such vast numbers of Americans casting ballots would make the process unwieldy and jeopardize a proper election. Nonetheless, she educated herself on the subject and kept books such as *How it Feels to be the Husband of a Suffragette* in her library. That light-hearted case for women's suffrage argued that the American Revolution and Civil War established the equality of all Americans and that women should be granted the vote to fulfill that promise.





The Great Sea Horse by Isabel Anderson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1909). The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 2007.

Sculpture of the Great Sea Horse made by Edward F. Caldwell and Company, New York, ca. 1912. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Caroline Story Reed, 1974.

THE “GOOD FAIRY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE”

Isabel Anderson was drawn to writing. At one time she expressed interest in a career as a newspaper reporter or magazine editor. Instead, she became an independent author — a more socially acceptable pursuit for a woman of her status. She wrote nearly fifty books and articles over a span of almost forty years. Her works ranged from children’s literature, drama and poetry to travelogues and family history. She chose her topics “to march with the times,” drawing on her experiences to produce stories she hoped would delight, instruct and inspire the public. Some of her books were published more because of her wealth and prominence than her prose, but they attracted readers among middle and upper class families, especially on the East Coast. Today, Isabel’s works are a valuable record of the age in which they were written and document some of the interests and ideals of both their readers and author.

Isabel was inspired to begin writing while sailing in Florida around 1907. “While my husband angled,” she later wrote, “I looked down into the water and studied the fish and became so interested in them that I started some fairy stories about them.” Her friend Maud Howe Elliott encouraged Isabel to publish what she had written and introduced her to Little, Brown and Company, the Boston firm that had published several of Maud’s books. These initial stories became part of Isabel’s first book, *The Great Sea Horse*, a compilation of fantastical tales for children published in 1909. Maud’s husband, John Elliott, supplied the enchanting pastel illustrations, which showed the influence of Maxfield Parrish, with whom Elliott worked at the Cornish Art Colony. Larz Anderson commissioned small gilt bronze sculptures based on several of these illustrations, which became gifts for Isabel and close family and friends.

Left: Frontispiece illustration by DeWitt M. Lockman from Isabel Anderson’s novel *Polly the Pagan: Her Lost Love Letters* (Boston: Page Company, 1922). The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.

Right: Nearly one-third of the books Isabel Anderson published were travelogues. This cover is from *The Spell of Japan* (Boston: The Page Company, 1914). The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.





EXPLORING THE WORLD

Isabel and Larz Anderson were world travelers of remarkable importance. At the turn of the twentieth century, few Americans traveled abroad, and fewer still ventured beyond the comfortable bounds of Western Europe. Isabel explored five continents over her lifetime — North America, Asia, Europe, Africa and South America — and etched the paths of some of these adventures on her globe. Some of these journeys were official trips on behalf of the United States government, including Larz's diplomatic posts and a tour through Asia with the secretary of war in 1910. Isabel was especially taken by the Far East, which she visited on at least five separate trips. She published more than ten accounts of her travels, contributing to the growing American interest in foreign countries and exotic cultures.

The Andersons mostly traveled by ocean liners, private train cars and automobiles. They also owned two boats — a yacht, *Virginia*, and a steam-powered houseboat, *Roxana* — with which they explored the East Coast of the United States. While Isabel was abroad, she filled her time touring cities, visiting cultural and religious sites, exploring the countryside by car or on horseback, taking in the theater and other entertainments, dining with friends and dignitaries, and shopping for art and antiques. She embraced unfamiliar lands and customs, seemingly unafraid of the possible dangers of the world. In 1899, the Andersons hired a carriage to explore the city of Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka): “the driver ... pretended to lose his way and took us into the wilds, evidently to rob us ... My husband tried to make him turn, but he wouldn't, so finally L. climbed up onto the box and they had a fight, which ended in the man falling off and L. driving back to town. It was quite exciting.”

The Andersons explored the United States with as much vigor and curiosity as they did the rest of the world. Over the years, they visited American Indian nations in the Southwest, camped in the Rocky Mountains, went sail fishing off the coast of Florida, watched the Wright Brothers fly a plane at Fort Myer, attended a boxing match in Los Angeles, observed the filming of a motion picture in Hollywood, and took in other sites at major cities and rural destinations across the country. In 1915, the Andersons rented a private train car, the *Federal*, for a cross-country journey that included horseback riding in Glacier National Park in Montana.



Terrestrial globe made by Gilman Joslin, Boston, 1890s. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.

Opposite: Isabel and Larz Anderson on board *La France* in New York Harbor about to embark on a trip to Africa, January 1928. The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 2008.

Isabel and Larz Anderson in Glacier National Park, September 1915. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Larz K. Anderson and Mary Lou Anderson, 2004.

“HASN'T A WOMAN JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO DIE FOR HER COUNTRY AS A MAN?” ISABEL ASKED.

GOING TO WAR

As war overtook Western Europe in 1914, Isabel Anderson joined American efforts to relieve suffering in occupied Belgium, France and Italy. She and Larz opened Anderson House for the use of relief commissions and the American Red Cross. After the United States entered the war in April 1917, the Andersons hosted war missions from Belgium and Japan, seeking to advance the allied cause.

Intent on doing more, Isabel threw herself into the work of the Red Cross. She had been a member of the organization's District of Columbia chapter since it was founded in 1905. In 1917 she organized the Washington Refreshment Corps, the first emergency canteen in the Red Cross, which provided meals and other assistance to soldiers at Fort Myer and at St. Elizabeths and Walter Reed hospitals. She also answered the call for Red Cross volunteers to serve on the Western Front.

In September 1917, Isabel sailed for Europe. She and many of her fellow nurses bristled at being “coddled in comparative safety at the bases” and sought work in front-line hospitals. For eight months, she cared for sick and wounded soldiers at canteens and military hospitals in France and Belgium. “Hasn't a woman just as much right to die for her country as a man?” she asked. Her work exposed her to some of the dangers of war, as she assisted in amputations, dodged air raids, and walked the trenches with her gas mask. One respite came in January 1918, when King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium invited Isabel to visit them at La Panne.

When Isabel returned to Washington in May 1918, she found the city ravaged by the Spanish influenza pandemic. She volunteered to investigate cases of influenza and treat those she could help. On these visits, Isabel witnessed the chaos the epidemic caused: “Hospitals all filled, few nurses, few doctors, drugstores mostly sold out; rumors that aspirin had been tampered with by the Germans; wild rumors — four doctors in camp found to be traitors, poisoned sweaters given to the army ... So many people died they couldn't be buried; the bodies couldn't be shipped; the simplest funeral cost a fortune.”

In late 1925, as Isabel was approaching her fiftieth birthday, she asked Hungarian-born artist Philip de László to memorialize her war service in a portrait. She wears a light blue uniform with a white apron, collar and veil — the attire she wore while working in clinics on the Western Front. On the apron she wears the Croix de Guerre, Medal of Queen Elisabeth of Belgium with Red Cross, and two ribbon bars representing the Commemorative War Medal of France and her Japanese decorations — all awarded for her World War I service. At her neck she wears an American Red Cross pin given to her by the employees at Weld upon her return home from war.

Portrait of Isabel Anderson by Philip de László (1869-1937), 1925.
Larz Anderson Auto Museum, Brookline, Massachusetts.





Portrait of Isabel Anderson
attributed to DeWitt M. Lockman
(1870-1957), ca. 1920. New Hampshire
Historical Society.

PATRON OF THE ARTS

Isabel Anderson's appreciation for the arts began during her upbringing in Boston's Back Bay, which was home to the Museum of Fine Arts and Boston Public Library, as well as some of the most important private collections in the city. Her grand tour expanded Isabel's knowledge of European art and antiques. But the most influential force on her view of the arts was her husband, Larz, who encouraged her to explore the world, study the cultures they encountered, and bring home reminders of their journeys. Isabel was a full partner with her husband in amassing an eclectic collection of European and Asian fine and decorative arts to furnish their homes and reflect their interests.

Unlike some of their peers, the Andersons were not enthusiastic collectors of European paintings, especially the outrageously expensive Old Masters. Instead, Isabel and her husband patronized contemporary artists, purchasing works for their collection and for museums. One of the first works the couple commissioned was a full-length portrait of Isabel painted in 1900-1901 by Cecilia Beaux, a well-known Philadelphia artist. Twenty years later, New York City painter DeWitt M. Lockman captured a mature and confident Isabel Anderson in another full-length portrait, painted when she was in her mid-forties. She wears a fashionable evening dress and large sapphire pendant and shares the composition with her pet parrot, Anna.

The Andersons commissioned other works by society painters José Villegas and Philip de László and muralist H. Siddons Mowbray. In 1909, Isabel and Larz purchased John Elliott's mural *Diana of the Tides* for the Smithsonian Institution, hoping to inspire others to support the nation's art collection. They also lent pieces from their collection to the Corcoran Gallery of Art and traveling exhibitions. After Isabel's death, some of their artworks were donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Washington National Cathedral and Boston University.

The Andersons commissioned H. Siddons Mowbray to paint wall and ceiling murals for the Key Room of their Washington mansion. He completed the murals in 1909 and used Isabel's likeness for the figure Peace, visible over the doorway to the right of the scene commemorating the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati.



Society of the Cincinnati Eagle insignia owned by Larz Anderson, made by Tiffany & Co., New York, ca. 1910. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Isabel Anderson, 1938.

A PHILANTHROPIC LIFE

Later in life, Isabel Anderson was asked, “What were the happiest years of your life?” She replied, “The busiest years.” Her philanthropic pursuits took up much of her time. She donated to churches, hospitals, universities, museums and humanitarian charities in Washington and New England. Isabel and Larz contributed \$500,000 to Washington National Cathedral to construct St. Mary’s Chapel in 1927. Over the next decade, the couple also gave religious artifacts to decorate the chapel, including their sixteenth-century tapestry series of David and Goliath. In recognition of her contributions and achievements, Isabel received honorary doctorates from the George Washington University in 1918 — the first woman so honored by the school — and Boston University in 1930. Following the George Washington University ceremony, she posed for a photograph in a local Dupont Circle studio wearing her academic regalia.



As the 1930s drew to a close, Isabel began planning for the disposition of her two primary residences. After Larz Anderson died in April 1937, she began the process of donating their Washington mansion to the Society of the Cincinnati. Larz was a dedicated member of the Society, and Anderson House was adorned with symbols of their patriotism and devotion to the Society’s principles. In May 1938, Isabel finalized the gift of the house, which became the Society’s headquarters and museum. The Society expressed its appreciation by naming her an honorary associate with the right of wearing her late husband’s Eagle insignia — the only woman ever granted that privilege. She wore it on at least one occasion, when a plaque commemorating her gift was unveiled in the Entrance Hall of Anderson House in 1939.

Isabel returned to her native New England by 1941. She bequeathed the Weld estate to the town of Brookline, Massachusetts. Although the house was destroyed in a fire in the mid-1950s, the carriage house and gardens remain, where the Larz Anderson Auto Museum is located today. Isabel Anderson died on November 3, 1948, at the age of seventy-two. “I like to think of death,” she wrote, “as a kind mother, folding a tired and suffering child in her arms to comfort into sleep. It is, after all, the spirit going home to the region whence it came, after a hard day’s work, to be at peace with friends.” She was entombed in St. Mary’s Chapel at Washington National Cathedral, next to her beloved husband and surrounded by their gifts.



Opposite: Photograph of Isabel Anderson by William H. Towles, 1918. The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Herbert H. Wright, 1992.

The Adventurous Life of Isabel Anderson

will be on view to the public from March 24–September 18, 2016.

Front, oval: Detail of a photograph of Isabel Anderson
by Frances Benjamin Johnston, ca. 1910.

Front, background: Detail of the mural of driving routes
in Washington, D.C., and Maryland by H. Siddons Mowbray,
ca. 1908-1909, in the Anderson House Winter Garden.



The American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati promotes knowledge and appreciation of the achievement of American independence, fulfilling the aim of the Continental Army officers who founded the Society of the Cincinnati in 1783 to perpetuate the memory of that vast event. The Institute supports advanced study, presents exhibitions and other public programs, advocates preservation and provides resources to teachers and students to enrich understanding of our War for Independence and the principles of the men and women who secured the liberty of the American people.

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