

Napoleonaea

Lecythidaceae

[*Napoleonaeaceae*]

Napoleonaea commemorates a Corsican soldier and statesman, Napoleon I (1769-1821) not least because of the flowers' appearance which is described as reminiscent of the royal crowns of France and Italy. Napoleon's political path probably began when he quelled the royalist uprising in Paris in October 1795 after which he commanded the French army of the interior and devised an Italian campaign – for which he was made commander-in-chief of the army in Italy. Before leaving for Italy in March 1796 he married Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1814) and, after success in Italy, returned to France one year later. In May 1798 he again left France this time to occupy Egypt. (While the Napoleonic campaigns were in progress the Directory also fought the Revolutionary Wars against European coalitions of countries opposed to the French Revolution.) Back in France in 1799 Napoleon was involved in the coup which overturned the Directory in the November and upon the immediate establishment of the Consulate became, in his civilian capacity, first Consul of the French Republic. He centralised and reformed the administration (as also the legal system) appointing officers from all sections of society to execute the changes. The Roman Catholic Church (bereft of ownership of its property) was re-established in the Country, and in 1800 Napoleon also set up the Bank of France. Many of his reforms continue to this day (the beginning of the 21st Century). In 1801 he signed the Treaty of Lunéville with Austria and in 1802 the Treaty of Amiens with Britain which brought the Revolutionary Wars to an end. Then in August 1802 his role as Consul was confirmed for life. His ambitions were not sated however and Britain, appreciating this, declared war on France in 1803. Many more battles in Europe (some of them briefly referred to below) occurred in the following years. In December 1804, after an unsuccessful plot to assassinate him, Napoleon was crowned Emperor of France and in 1805 he absorbed the Italian crown too. Meanwhile that year Britain, Russia, Austria and Sweden threw down the gauntlet against the French Empire and by 1809 he had defeated all coalition partners except for the British. His childless marriage to Joséphine was annulled and he married again in 1810 this time Marie Louise (1791-1847), daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II (1768-1835), and the following year she gave birth to François Charles Joseph Bonaparte (1811-1832). In June 1812 with about 500,000 men (from France and allied states) he invaded Russia and reached Moscow in September, having lost many men and having ravaged the countryside in his path. Within a few days the many fires that broke out made the city uninhabitable and with Winter approaching he began a retreat in mid-October – one which finally became a rout. New European alliances formed to defeat him at Leipzig in 1813 and then to take Paris in 1814. Napoleon abdicated and retired to Elba and exile. But in 1815 he returned to France, rallying supporters around him, and entered Paris on 20th March for what is referred to as the Hundred Days. His last memorable battle, this time against Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia, occurred on 18th June 1815, the Battle of Waterloo when he was defeated outright. After Napoleon's death positive and negative legends sprang up and swirled around him and influenced much more serious material written about him while they were rife. It is difficult therefore to know the credibility of some records today which

suggest that after Waterloo, when he had been picked up by the British, he had anticipated the possibility of asylum in England. Instead he was shipped by the British to the island of St. Helena, their South Atlantic colony, where he was interned until his death.

Records declare that this tree is one of two plants introduced to France and grown at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris where they languished for many years without flowering. Then coincidentally both species produced blooms for the first time in their new home on the day in 1849 (20th December) when Prince Louis Napoleon became President of the Republic and Napoleon III. This plant was given the family name in honour of Prince Louis' uncle, Napoleon and the other (*Lapageria*) was named for his aunt, the Empress Joséphine (1763-1814).