



LancasterHistory

For Immediate Release

Contact: Emily Miller
Director of Marketing & Communications
717-392-4633 ext. 133
emily.miller@lancasterhistory.org

Lydia Hamilton Smith the focus of Lancaster author's new book, *An Uncommon Woman*

Co-published by Penn State University Press and LancasterHistory, Mark Kelley's book charts the trailblazing career and life of Lydia Hamilton Smith

LANCASTER, PA — LancasterHistory is proud to announce the arrival of the highly anticipated biography ***An Uncommon Woman: The Life of Lydia Hamilton Smith***, written by **Dr. Mark Kelley** and co-published by Penn State University Press and LancasterHistory.

An Uncommon Woman explores the life of **Lydia Hamilton Smith** (1813-1884), a prominent mixed-race businesswoman in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A figure of resilience and progressive action, Smith was instrumental to Thaddeus Stevens' success as he led the drive to end slavery, impeach Andrew Johnson, and push for the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. In his biography of this remarkable woman, Mark Kelley reveals how Smith served the cause of abolition, managed Stevens' household, acquired property, and crossed racialized social boundaries.

"Mark Kelley has combed through hundreds of pages of previously unexplored archival material

to assemble a compelling portrait of a powerful woman,” said LancasterHistory President & CEO **Dr. Tom Ryan**. “Lydia Smith, often seen as a sideshow to a national figure—when seen at all—emerges as a gritty fighter challenging a world which, until the passage of the Reconstruction amendments, did not even consider her a citizen of the United States.”

Lydia Hamilton Smith

Born a free woman near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Smith began working for Stevens in 1844 in Lancaster, PA. Her relationship with Stevens fascinated and infuriated many, and it made Smith a highly recognizable figure both locally and nationally. An accomplished businesswoman in her own right, Smith oversaw Stevens’ household and was his confidante for 24 years, managing the intimate details of his familial and personal life, as well as granting or denying access to the increasingly important politician. In the last decade of Stevens’ life, as his declining health threatened to short-circuit his important work, Smith risked her own well-being to keep him alive. Following Stevens’ death, Mrs. Smith purchased his home and law office and prospered as an entrepreneurial woman with successful hotels and boarding houses in three cities.

Dr. Mark Kelley

Mark Kelley holds a Ph.D. in journalism from Syracuse University. He worked for twenty-five years as a broadcast journalist and has taught journalism and mass communications at Goshen College, Syracuse University, the University of Maine, and the New England School of Communications. *An Uncommon Woman* is his fourth book. Kelley currently serves on the Scholarly Advisory Committee for the [Thaddeus Stevens & Lydia Hamilton Smith Center for History and Democracy](#), a museum under development by LancasterHistory. He resides in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Marty.

Book Sales & Upcoming Event

Copies of *An Uncommon Woman* are now available at LancasterHistory’s Museum Store, 230 N. President Avenue in Lancaster, and [LancasterHistory’s online Museum Store](#).

LancasterHistory also invites the community to a reception and author talk on Thursday, December 14, 2023, from 5-7pm, featuring *An Uncommon Woman: The Life of Lydia Hamilton Smith*. The event schedule includes a reception at 5pm, followed by an author talk and book signing.

The event is free to the public but requires advance registration. Interested parties are

encouraged to register [online](#) or call 717-392-4633.

Don't miss the chance to delve into the life of a woman who not only shared her life with one of the most prominent abolitionists of her time but also carved her own path of influence and success.

Note to Editors:

- Dr. Mark Kelley is available for interviews.
- High-resolution images of the book cover, Lydia Hamilton Smith, and Mark Kelley are available. Please contact [Emily Miller](#) for specific requests.

About LancasterHistory

LancasterHistory is a community-based, not-for-profit organization established to educate the public on the history of Lancaster County and its place in the history of Pennsylvania and the United States, to advance the missions of regional historical organizations, and to promote the acquisition, preservation, and interpretation of resources representing the history of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania within the broader context of state and national history, including the homes of 15th US President James Buchanan and Congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith.

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