



# Some Memories of a Long Life, 1854-1911 (Modern Library)

*Malvina Shanklin Harlan*

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## **Some Memories of a Long Life, 1854-1911 (Modern Library)** Malvina Shanklin Harlan

Like Abigail Adams, Malvina Shanklin Harlan witnessed—and gently influenced—national history from the unique perspective of a political leader’s wife. Her husband, Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan (1833–1911), played a central role in some of the most significant civil rights decisions of his era, including his lone dissenting opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the infamous case that endorsed separate but equal segregation. And for fifty-seven years he was married to a woman who was busy making a mental record of their eventful lives.

After Justice Harlan’s death in 1911, Malvina wrote *Some Memories of a Long Life, 1854–1911*, as a testament to her husband’s accomplishments and to her own. The memoir begins with Malvina, the daughter of passionate abolitionists, becoming the teenage bride of John Marshall Harlan, whose family owned more than a dozen slaves. Malvina depicts her life in antebellum Kentucky, and her courageous defense of the Harlan homestead during the Civil War. She writes of her husband’s ascent in legal circles and his eventual appointment to the Supreme Court in 1877, where he was the author of opinions that continued to influence American race relations deep into the twentieth century. Yet *Some Memories* is more than a wife’s account of a famous and powerful man. It chronicles the remarkable evolution of a young woman from Indiana who became a keen observer of both her family’s life and that of her nation.

When Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg began researching the history of the women associated with the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress sent her Malvina Harlan’s unpublished manuscript. Recalling Abigail Adams’s order to “remember the ladies,” Justice Ginsburg has guided its long journey from forgotten document to published book. *Some Memories of a Long Life* includes a Foreword by Justice Ginsburg, as well as an Afterword by historian Linda Przybyszewski and an Epilogue of the Harlan legacy by Amelia Newcomb. According to *Library Journal*, “This is the sort of book you call a publishing event.”

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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