

Louise Jane Smith Brandt Congdon, a Biographical Sketch

by

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Louise Jane Smith was born in San Francisco, California, on 21 May 1857¹.

She first appears in a Federal Census in 1860, at the age of three². She is living in a boarding house with her mother, Elizabeth H. Smith, twenty-four, and an infant sister, Martha C., age one. Her mother (maiden name unknown) was a native of Ireland, born in April 1835, and immigrated to San Francisco in 1852³. This 1860 census entry corroborates the family story that Louise Jane's birth father's last name was Smith and that he died when Louise Jane was very young⁴. Currently, nothing more is known of him.



Brandt was the surname of Louise Jane's step-father. The 1870 Census has this family group in San Francisco⁵:

- George E Brandt, 39, Works for a Sail Maker, born in Denmark
- Elizabeth Brandt, 34, Keeping House, born in Ireland.
- Louisa J. Brandt, 13
- John J. Brandt, 6
- Mary E. Brandt, 4
- George T. Brandt, 1.

The children all born in California. Louise and her brother John are listed as having attended school within the year.

The 1880 Federal Census⁶ has the Brandt family living at 2615 Clay Street, San Francisco. George E. Brandt is listed as a Sail Maker, age 49; his wife, Elizabeth, Keeping House, age 44. The entries for their children are:

- Louise, age 23, School Teacher
- John J., age 16, Sailor

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Mary, age 14, at School
Georgie, age 11, at School
Musetta, age 6, at School.

Mr. Brandt and his son John are listed as “can not write.” It’s indicated that the rest of the family could both read and write. (Curiously, the enumerator for this Census Sheet is “C. H. Congdon.” Was this the same C. H. Congdon that Louise Jane married 18 months later?)

Family legend is that Louise Jane was a graduate of the San Francisco State Normal School (which has now become San Francisco State University). Based on some history of SFSU⁷, she was more likely a graduate of San Francisco’s Girls High School. It included a program for teacher training during the years when she would have been a student there. (In 1895, this teacher training program did morph into the San Francisco Normal School, which several iterations later became SFSU.)

As a school teacher, prior to her marriage, Louise Jane saved enough from her wages to purchase a Steinway console piano from Sherman Clay. The piano (model #1-1876, serial # 34458, with a rosewood case) was manufactured in 1875 and shipped from New York to Sherman Clay, San Francisco, in 1876⁸. It is still in possession of the family.

Louise Jane was married to Charles Henry Congdon on 26 December 1881 at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco⁹. Mr. Congdon was a Civil Engineer, a graduate of the University of California (Berkeley), class of 1879. Their first child died as an infant. An obituary appeared in the 4 February 1886 issue of the Visalia Delta (Tulare County, California)¹⁰. Subsequently, they had two children: Charles Henry Congdon, Jr., born 5 April 1887, in San Francisco, and Hazel Martineau Congdon, born 1 October 1888, also in San Francisco¹¹. At the times of these children’s births, the Congdons’ home was either in Tulare County or Kern County. Louise Jane traveled to San Francisco in both instances so she could give birth at her mother’s home.

Louise Jane Brandt Congdon died on 13 June 1900¹². The family home was in Bakersfield, the seat of Kern County, where Mr. Congdon was the County Surveyor. Louise Jane had gone to Los Angeles for uterine cancer surgery and died there from surgical complications¹³. She is buried at the Union Cemetery in Bakersfield, California¹⁴.

Notes:

1. Birth place from: Letter from Charles H. Congdon, Jr. (2700 Brookdale Avenue, Oakland, CA) to Mr. J. C. Capt, Director, Bureau of the Census, 17 January 1942; a copy of a carbon held in 2009 by the author. The late Mr. Congdon was Louise Jane Brandt Congdon's son.

Birth date from: Louise J. Congdon tombstone, block 63, Union Cemetery, Bakersfield (Kern County), California; photograph, date unknown, verso stamped: "Dorman's Photo Shop, Bakersfield, Calif.;" in possession of the author.

2. 1860 U.S. Census, San Francisco County, California, population schedule, District 1 San Francisco, p. 338 (penned), p. 893 (stamped), dwelling 2727, family 3074, Elizabeth H. Smith; digital images, Ancestry.com (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 19 May 2009); from National Archives microfilm publication M653, roll 68.

3. Country of origin, birth month and year, and immigration year from:

1900 U.S. Census, San Francisco County, California, population schedule, Assembly District 43 San Francisco, Enumeration District [ED] 281, p. 325 (stamped), dwelling 18, family 25, Elizabeth H. Brandt household; digital images, Ancestry.com, (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 31 December 2008); from National Archives microfilm publication T623, roll 107.

Port of arrival: Interview with J. B. Leete, grandchild of Louise Jane Congdon, by the author, 31 December 2008.

4. Interview, J. B. Leete, 31 December 2008.

5. 1870 U.S. Census, San Francisco County, California, population schedule, Ward 2 San Francisco, p. 90 (penned), dwelling 164, family 164, Geo. E. Brandt household; digital images, Ancestry.com, (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 19 May 2009); from National Archives microfilm publication M593, roll 79.

6. 1880 U.S. Census, San Francisco County, California, population schedule, Supervisor's District 1 San Francisco, Enumeration District [ED] 207, p. 8 (penned), p. 150 (stamped), dwelling 66, family 70, George E. Brandt household; digital images, Ancestry.com, (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 31 December 2008); National Archives microfilm publication T9, roll 79.

7. Ligeia Polidora and Edward Wilkison, "Which Came First?: San Francisco State or San Jose State?" press release, Public Affairs Office at San Francisco State University, *SF State News Releases 1999*, (<http://www.sfsu.edu/~news/prsrelea/fy98/048.htm> : last modified 24 April 2007).

8. Interview, J. B. Leete, 31 December 2008.

9. Marriage date and city from: Letter, Charles H. Congdon, Jr. to J. C. Capt, 17 January 1942.

10. Sequoia Genealogical Society, *Tulare County Obituary Index*, (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~casgs/ObituaryIndex.htm> : accessed 17 May 2009).
11. Children's birth dates and places from: Letter, Charles H. Congdon, Jr. to J. C. Capt, 17 January 1942.
12. Death date from: Louise Jane Congdon tombstone, Union Cemetery, Bakersfield, California.
13. Cause and place of death from: Interview, J. B. Leete, 31 December 2008.
14. Cemetery location from: Letter: from E. J. Harvey, Supt. (Union Cemetery Association, Box 366, Station A, Bakersfield, Calif.) to Earle B. Bertz, 6 March 1947; in possession of the author. The late Mr. Bertz was the son-in-law of Louise Jane Congdon.