

Crowning Glory



JENNIE JEROME, who married Lord Randolph Churchill in 1874, was the first American bride to be widely accepted in society, mainly due to her friendship with the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. Her acceptance opened the floodgates and, in 1895, nine of these 'Dollar Princesses' married into the British aristocracy. As one commentator wrote, 'All Americans were more or less equally unacceptable. One might therefore pick the richest without compunction.' At a dinner in 1910, nine of the eighteen guests were American women with titled husbands. 'Another Prince in luck,' ran the headline of one engagement announcement in the *New York Times*.

One of the few love matches occurred between May Goelet and Henry Innes-Ker, 8th Duke of Roxburghe. May was the daughter of property magnate Ogden Goelet and, with her \$20 million dowry, was such a good catch that another impecunious duke announced their engagement without even meeting her, just to ward off his creditors. After her 1903 wedding, May used her fortune to restore Floors Castle, the Roxburghe family seat, where Prince Andrew proposed to Sarah Ferguson in 1986.

In contrast, the wedding of heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt was arranged by her socially ambitious mother Alva, who had

groomed her carefully for a spectacular marriage. Alas, Consuelo fell in love with the handsome but penniless Winthrop Rutherford. The couple were kept apart and his letters to her were confiscated. Instead, Consuelo's mother forced her into marriage with the impecunious Charles Spencer-Churchill, 9th Duke of Marlborough.

In the social event of the year, they were married in New York in November 1895. The bride arrived late, her eyes red and swollen from crying. She brought a total dowry of around \$15 million, which included money for major repairs to Blenheim Palace. After the birth of two sons, they separated in 1906 and divorced in 1920. Consuelo later found happiness with the French aviator Jacques Balsan.

Eleanor 'Peggy' Green, daughter of the president of Western Union Telegraph, was more fortunate. In Copenhagen in 1923 she met Prince Viggo of Denmark (grandson of King Christian IX and nephew of Queen Alexandra), an officer in the Danish army. They married the following June and, as a wedding gift from her father, Peggy received a massive diamond choker. Viggo renounced his rights to the throne and became Prince Viggo, Count of Rosenborg. 'There has probably never been recorded a marriage in the history of New York society of such importance,' wrote the *New York Times*, 'and it is the first time that a person of royal birth has taken an American bride in this city.' ➤



From Victorian times onwards, marriages between wealthy American heiresses and impoverished, titled Europeans became a feature of society. Some were purely business arrangements, by which a title was exchanged for a substantial dowry to replenish the family coffers but, as CORYNE HALL discovered, a few were genuine love matches. Some were happy, many ended in divorce



TOP LEFT: The American public kept abreast of which heiress was rumoured for which titles and popular cartoonists made great fun of the many exchanges

ABOVE: The former Consuelo Vanderbilt produced two sons, 'the heir and the spare', in a marriage that disintegrated over a quarter of a century

LEFT: The 9th Duke of Marlborough went on to marry Gladys Deacon, a close friend of his long-suffering wife



ABOVE: Prince Viggo of Denmark renounced his rights to marry American Eleanor Green

ABOVE RIGHT: The larger-than-life Princess Peggy was greatly loved in her adopted country



'Princess Peggy', as she affectionately became known, was greatly loved in Denmark. She spoke Danish fluently and, with her husband, became actively involved in charity work. She was a keen equestrian and also enjoyed bicycling through the countryside with her husband. In 1961, Frederik IX awarded her the Order of the Elephant. She died in 1966 and was buried with the Danish royal family in Roskilde Cathedral.

Another royal bride was Audrey Emery, daughter of multi-millionaire developer John J. Emery of Cincinnati. In 1926 she married Tsar Nicholas II's cousin, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, who had been banished from Russia in 1916 for his part in the murder of Gregory Rasputin. Once extremely wealthy, Dmitri had lost everything in the Russian revolution. After their marriage in Biarritz, Audrey was created Her Serene Highness Princess Romanovsky-Ilyinsky by Grand Duke Cyril, pretender to the throne. They bought a French chateau and had a son, Paul (for many years, Mayor of Palm Beach) before divorcing in 1937.

Alice Heine became a duchess and a princess. The daughter of a successful financier whose banking firm, A. & M. Heine, helped finance Napoleon III's war with Prussia, Alice married the 7th Duke of Richelieu. After his death, she became the second wife of Albert I of Monaco in 1889. The Prince, an oceanographer, was often away at sea, so Princess Alice became a generous patron of the arts. She was devoted to the Monte Carlo Opera House and engaged Raoul Gunsbourg as director. The composer Isidore de Lara became her lover, a relationship which resulted in Prince Albert slapping her face in full public view at the opera. Within days Alice moved to London; a judicial separation was granted in 1902, although the couple never divorced.

Alice was childless but, in 1956, her magnificent drop pearl pendant, encircled with rubies and surmounted by a diamond crown, was given to the second American Princess of Monaco, Hollywood screen icon Grace Kelly, on her marriage to Albert's great-grandson, Prince Rainier.

Beautiful Anita Rhinelanders Stewart brought a \$2 million dowry to her 1909 marriage with Prince Miguel of Braganza, a member of the Portuguese royal house. Miguel was barred from Portugal; his grandfather, King Miguel I, had usurped the throne and plunged the country into civil war before going into exile and renouncing all rights to the throne for himself and his descendants.

Unlike other American brides, when the cash-strapped Prince Miguel proposed, Anita refused to accept a morganatic marriage. Miguel's father created him Duke of Vizeu and Emperor Franz Joseph conferred on Anita the rank of princess in her own right. Anita also refused to become a Roman Catholic. The question of religion was quickly settled when her wealthy mother paid Miguel's substantial gambling debts. ➤



ABOVE: Anita Stewart refused to accept a morganatic marriage and thus Emperor Franz Joseph made her 'Princess de Braganza' in her own right

LEFT: The Dowager Queen Olga of Greece, born a Russian grand duchess, with her youngest son Prince Christopher and his bride, Nancy Stewart Leeds

BELOW LEFT: Grand Duke Dmitri was a first cousin of Tsar Nicholas II and the two were reared almost as brothers

BELOW: The former Audrey Emery's son would eventually serve as Mayor of Palm Beach, Florida



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ABOVE: Prince Albert of Monaco struck his wife at the opera because of her long-standing affair

LEFT: Alice Heine was a duchess at 17, and then became the first American-born Princess of Monaco

'It seems easier than we thought for an emperor to transform a plain American miss into a princess, when no principality goes with the title and no pecuniary endowment,' commented the *New York Times*. 'Miss Stewart is buying her own principality, and is expected to endow rather than be endowed.' The ceremony at Tulloch Castle was the first royal wedding in Scotland since that of Mary, Queen of Scots.

In Vienna, Anita was presented to the Emperor but, despite the birth of three children, the marriage was unhappy. They lived for a while in England but, as Austrian nationals, had to move to neutral Switzerland on the outbreak of war, where Miguel abandoned his family to serve in the Austrian army. They were eventually reunited in America, where he renounced his rights to the now non-existent Portuguese throne and died in 1923. Anita also renounced her title and regained American citizenship. After remarrying, she died aged 91 on 15 September 1977,

coincidentally the 68th anniversary of her marriage to Prince Miguel.

In 1920, Prince Christopher of Greece (uncle of the Duke of Edinburgh) married wealthy widow Nancy Stewart Leeds, who was created Princess Anastasia of Greece by Christopher's nephew, King George II. Her jewels alone fetched over \$4 million after her death from cancer in 1923. The 1995 marriage of Crown Prince Pavlos and Marie-Chantal Miller brought more American blood into the Greek royal family.

Thanks to this mingling of new wealth and old titles, the heirs to several European thrones, both reigning and non-reigning, now carry American blood in their veins.

Based on the book 'Crowning Glory' by Richard Jay Hutto, which can be purchased in the UK from Piccadilly Rare Books on +44 (0)1580 201221 or e-mail: picrare@btinternet.com. North American readers should telephone 866-311-9578 or visit www.americanprincesses.com

