



The Vanderbilt Women: Dynasty of Wealth, Glamour, and Tragedy

Clarice Stasz

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Lucius Beebe said that "The nearest thing to a royal family that has ever appeared on the American scene was the Vanderbilts ... their vendettas, their armies of servitors, partisans and sycophants, their love affairs, scandals, and shortcomings, all were the stuff of an imperial routine." Stasz reveals new facts and insights into the fascinating lives of three generations of Vanderbilt women who dominated New York society from the middle of the eighteenth century through the twentieth. Of special interest are the discovery of unpublished letters and a pseudonymous lesbian novel that shed light on the complex character of the most currently famous Vanderbilt woman, Gloria Vanderbilt.

The Vanderbilt Women: Dynasty of Wealth, Glamour, and Tragedy Details

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Author : Clarice Stasz

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Jill Hutchinson says

The Vanderbilt dynasty makes for an interesting saga and this book pretty much covers the women of that family who were influential in their own realm. It does, however, get bogged down in two areas with more detail than the reader needs to know.....the decor of the mansions and the woman's movement at the turn of the century. It slows down the narrative and the readers might find themselves skipping through those sections.

That weakness aside, it is a fascinating look at American royalty and how wealth often tainted the lives of the Vanderbilt women. The attitudes of the time of the "robber barons" is something to which it is hard to relate in the 21st century and the excess is unbelievable.....how many homes does one family need? It's a window on the Gilded Age of America and the attitudes of the rich and famous.

Sharon says

Great book. I'm a bit slanted in my opinion as I'm a real lover of biographies: especially well written biographies. This is a well written book and keeps your interest. Not enough biographers know how to keep you glued to your seat and this one does. The only negative about it is that on occasion the way it's organized has you flipping to the chart in the front to remember which Vanderbilt cousin, father, etc. is who: but that's not too much of a challenge!

Lisa says

The author did a nice job making the Vanderbilt women come to life. It was interesting learning about the powerful impacts they had on society, as well as most of their sad marriages. I only ended up reading up until the 1920s though because that was what I was most interested in and this was not a quick read!

Judy says

An interesting multiple biography of some of the more interesting and colorful women members of the Vanderbilt family. Includes information on Gertude Vanderbilt Whitney who was a noted sculptor and who established the Whitney Museum of American Art, Alva Smith Vanderbilt who played a significant role in the women's suffrage movement in the United States, and numerous others. A family tree would have helped to keep the relationships in perspective--especially since many of the women shared the same names.

Paula says

interesting book about a group of women that have been under the radar

Laurel says

Fascinated about the Vanderbilt's family after viewing George Vanderbilt's Biltmore in Asheville, NC, On July 13 and 14, 2017, I began reading everything about them. In this book the two most fascinating characters the were Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt (1853-1933) and Gloria Laura Vanderbilt (1924).

Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt was the wife of Wm Kissam Vanderbilt I (1849-1920), the grandson of Vanderbilt Patriarch, Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877). and the grandson of Cornelius's favorite son, William Henry Vanderbilt (1821-1885). This lady, socially ambitious Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt, wanted nothing more than to be known as "the Social Queen of High Society". Her husband, Wm Kissam Vanderbilt I grew up in a 5th avenue NYC and had summered in the famous "Breakers" mansion in Newport, Rhode Island. They built the famous "Marble House" in Newport Rhode Island to show off to high society and especially to show up her sister-in-law, Alice Claypoole Gwynn Vanderbilt (1845-1934), who had married Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1843-1899).

The other fascinating character was Gloria Laura Vanderbilt, who is still alive today as of July, 2017. Gloria was the only child born to Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt (1880-1925) and Gloria Morgan (1905-1965). Reggie urged Gloria to get pregnant as soon as possible after their May-September wedding-- (He was 43; she was 18!!) to ensure inheritance to his \$500M fortune. So she did get pregnant, but when her daughter, Gloria Laura Vanderbilt was 18 months old, Reggie died. And what a family tragedy ensued after this. The book goes in detail describing what a "mess" her natural mother was, and how her Aunt Gertrude Vanderbilt managed to get custody. This portion was absolutely fascinating reading...but much of the book gets bogged down in others' stories.

Rebecca says

This book was interesting but overall too slow moving. It also would have benefited from a family tree in the beginning, given that everyone had the same names.

Simon says

Interesting for the most part (especially when dealing with Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney), but the narrative falls apart when Stasz discusses Gloria Vanderbilt Cooper in the final chapters. Ms. Cooper sensibly declined to turn over her memories to Ms. Stasz, preferring to write them out herself.

Stasz spends a lot of time in psychohistory, although she is generally pretty open about her conclusions on certain matters being conjectural. I do wish she had left out the twee chapter headings, which provide smirky tags to what she is actually discussing. And the methodology makes for a scattered storyline as Stasz jumps around amongst the lives of the three major figures --- Alva, Consuelo and Gertrude.

Decent read.

Dawn says

This book was the most detailed book I have read to date. I liked this because it included a lot of the current history with each chapter and that made it more interesting for me.

Lisa Michele says

I am still blazing through all my Vanderbilt books. I like this one because it focused on the women - who are compelling, but not necessarily Vanderbilts by blood. Did you know Anderson Cooper is a Vanderbilt? I didn't.
