

The Scandals of Jacob LeRoy's Millions

by Lynne Belluscio

First let me say that the scandals of Jacob LeRoy was not our Jacob LeRoy, although he was a descendant of our Jacob's grandfather. Bear with me, while I try to explain the relationship. There are a lot of Jacob LeRois in this story and we have to start with our Jacob's grandfather (whose name was Jacob).

He came to America in 1753. He and his first wife had eight children, including our Jacob's father, Herman, (who the town is named for) and he had two children by his second wife, including Robert LeRoy. So our Jacob had an uncle Robert.

Uncle Robert had a son, born in 1795, who he named Jacob Rudgers LeRoy. In the meantime, Robert's half brother Herman, had a son, born a year earlier, in 1794, who was named Jacob LeRoy. So if you followed me so far, we have two cousins named Jacob LeRoy. (To make matters worse, the cousins - Jacob LeRoy and Jacob R. LeRoy married sisters, but that's not part of this story.) I'm not going to follow our Jacob's lineage any further.

The story about the scandalous Jacob LeRoy is a descendant of Jacob R. LeRoy - actually his grandson who was born in 1852. He was the manager of William K. Vanderbilt's French racing stables and apparently was worth quite a bit of money. He became enamored with Mille. Marie-Delphine Van Baele, a beautiful Dutch woman born "on the kitchen side" of a wealthy family.

As a young woman, in the 1880s, she became the sweetheart of a Belgian financier and the Paris newspapers were "replete with accounts of her beauty, elegance and brilliance." She met and was courted by Jacob Rudgers LeRoy and in 1915 the couple moved to Monaco to live on his fortune, which was estimated at over \$25 million. They never married and in 1926, Jacob died while on a trip to America, leaving his entire fortune to Mille Van Baele.

This was only the beginning of the scandal. It seems that by this time Mille Van Baele was past her prime, had lost her beauty, and was described as "corpulent."

She was accompanied by a handsome young man with "all the earmarks of a professional gigolo." The newspaper account read: "The couple was very gay. The old girl drank liberally of champagne, danced with her partner and later the two gambled without restraint. It was quite obvious that she was paying the bill ... The old woman was getting the kick of her life ... She flung money around (obviously Jacob LeRoy's fortune). A few thousand more or less made no difference to a septuagenarian. It was her last fling and she knew it."

Into this scandalous affair, enter her two Italian nephews - who had their eye on her money and they had the gigolo thrown out and deported. The nephews, suggesting that the old lady had been drugged and was not long for this world. They even ordered a coffin with gold incrustations and arranged to have the only six horses in the Principality to draw the hearse. But the old lady rallied and as the newspaper reported - "she showed a brain well cleared of champagne fumes."

She demanded that her young gigolo be found. It turned out her "well meaning" nephews had hired a Monaco lawyer to cancel the deportation orders of her young paramour. The deportation case became a cause célèbre and when the case was examined, the Chief Surete of Monaco took his life.

But soon Mille Van Baele began to sicken again. "Whether it was too much whoopee, or drugs, or just old age, it is difficult to say." The old lady died. Three claimants for the LeRoy fortune came forward. The two Italian nephews reappeared as well as an English nephew of Jacob LeRoy, who claimed that Mille and Jacob had never married.

Another cousin, Mme. Melanie Brussel also turned up with a bevy of lawyers. Everyone was vying for Jacob LeRoy's fortune. It was said that the young gigolo spent thousands in order to get to LeRoy's millions. His lawyer summed up the morality of society in Monaco: "It is considered quite natural for a young man to



pass his time in the company of an old lady and to give the most of his time and the best of himself in return for financial remuneration. This might shock people elsewhere, but in the Principality it is a recognized situation and on which only arouses the jealousies of those less fortunate."

The first court ruling gave the fortunes to the gigolo, but the

decision was overturned, and the fortune was given to the Belgian heirs (which I think were the LeRois). The newspaper article which I took this story from, is undated and ends: "To be continued next week" so I'm not sure what really happened to Jacob Rudgers LeRoy's fortunes. I know for sure that it did not revert to our Jacob's decedents.

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