

The Prince and the Debutante

The Prince was Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, or to be exact, His Royal Highness, Louis Ferdinand Victor Edward Albert Michael Hubert, Prince of Prussia (November 9, 1907 – September 26, 1994) and heir to the royal House of Hohenzollern. The headline in the *New Orleans States*, dated December 28, 1933, proclaimed, "GERMAN PRINCE KIDNAPED [sic] BY DEBUTANTE".



Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia

At the time, the prince was the 26-year-old would-be emperor of Germany if his family were ever to go back to the throne, in other words, the pretender to the abolished German Empire. He was the grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm II of World War I fame, who was the

grandson of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

The article announced that the "imperial German prince" was kidnapped the previous day by Miss Anne Dickinson Robertson, a New Orleans debutante that year - "and did he love it!"

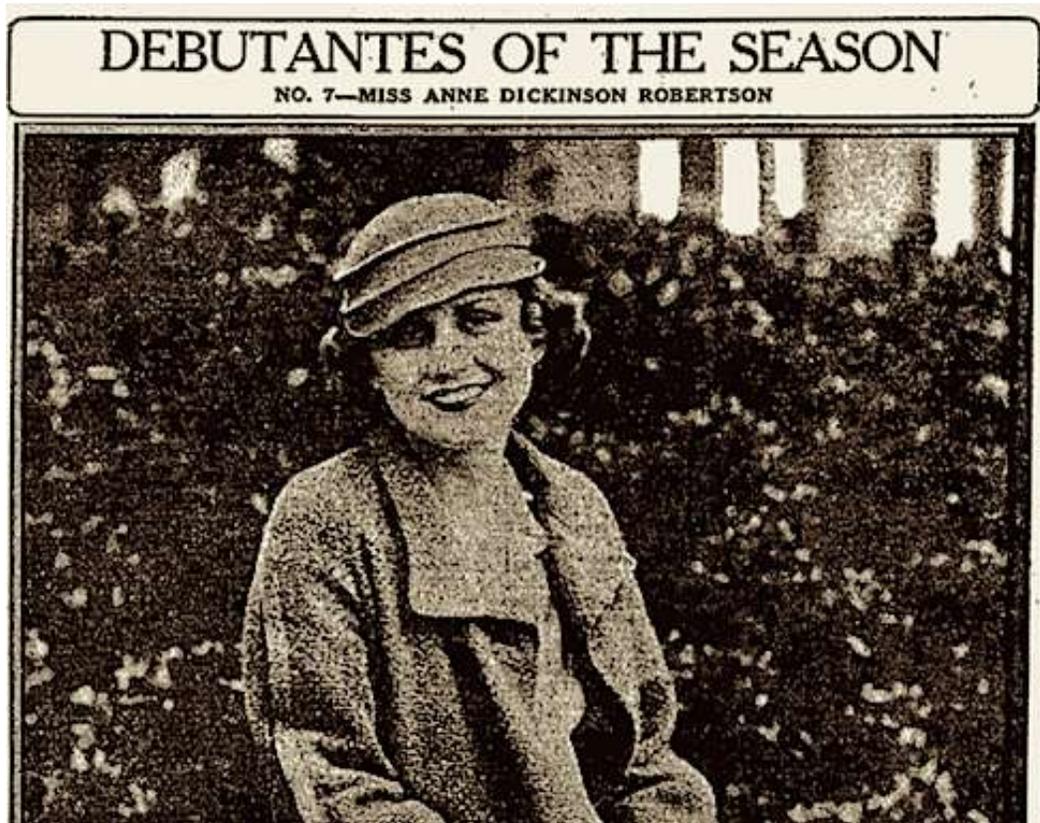


Anne Dickinson Robertson

All the while, "New Orleans matrons" and "society lionesses kept the

telephone at the royal suite of The Roosevelt ringing with calls for 'Mr. Hohenzollern' that kept a secretary busy."

Miss Robertson conquered the prince "with one smile" and completely disrupted "a society schedule" by making off with the young prince in a "shining new car they both borrowed from V.F. Cooper, New Orleans automobile executive" and headed for "a cocktail party at Mrs. Lillian Lewis'." Numerous debs were "trying their best to corner him at the Lewis cocktail party for Claudia Pipes and Elizabeth Eustis, but he had already set his eyes on pretty Anne Robertson," reported the *States* on December 29, 1933.



New Orleans States, November 15, 1933

A few weeks earlier, on November 15, 1933, the *States* described the young debutante as "blond and lovable, with big wistful blue eyes and the natural coquetry often attributed to 'the typical Southern girl.'" The paper prophetically announced, "She's going to be a contribution to many a debutante party this season and many a swain is going to be glad she decided on debuting."

"Although her "family is an old one here," said the paper, "she has

only recently come here to live. She is a daughter of Mrs. Eleanor Peterman Robertson and the niece of Miss Anne Robertson of the city zoning commission."



Prinz Louis Ferdinand von Preußen, 1934

Debutante Anne was born in Abbeville, Louisiana, but her family lived in Houma the past few years preceding her debut. It was there she graduated from high school. "When she was 12 years old she lived on the edge of a jungle in Nicaragua and played with pet monkeys and macaws," her father, John Gano Robertson, being "a civil engineer down there."

Anne "attended school in Maine ... is fond of traveling" and "has another accomplishment besides her sunny disposition – she can sing like Mae West."

At the time of the prince's visit to New Orleans, Anne was spending her days out at the Shushan (Lakefront) Airport as hostess, with her spare time divided between the debutante season and studying typing. It was at the airport that they met and "climbed the roof and looked out over Lake Pontchartrain and into each other's smiling eyes," so

reported the *States*.

Anne also had dinner with the Prince, who wanted to be called Louis. She found him to be "a grand person" with perfect English and just plain "fun". He was also quite the philosopher, having won his doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Berlin, majoring in economics.

The Latin phrase, "*Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus,*" the prince translated into "pure 1933 American: 'Throw a party while you're young enough to enjoy it.'" And he added in German, "Who loves not woman, wine and song, remains a fool his whole life long." At 26, the prince possessed a definite *joie de vivre*.

Louis Ferdinand came to America to study American business methods and spent some time in Detroit, where Henry Ford jokingly offered him a job on the assembly line. He went to work for \$5 a day. "And I earned it," he grinned, "believe me!" He also earned his wings while inspecting in the Argentine. He learned to fly and was granted an unlimited private license. He said he "was not educated primarily as a military man," and would not comment on European politics except "off the record," a phrase he borrowed from FDR, with whom he had become acquainted.

The Prince's fling with young Anne Robertson was fleeting. She was married two years later to Mr. L. Haden Kirkpatrick, who would become publisher of *The Thoroughbred Record* in Kentucky. They had one son, Arnold Haden Kirkpatrick. The couple divorced in 1955, after which time Anne married Mr. George Hackett.

Because Louis Ferdinand's older brother Prince Wilhelm renounced his succession rights to marry a non-royal from the lesser nobility earlier in 1933, Louis Ferdinand took his place as the second in the line of succession to the German throne after the Crown Prince. His brother was killed in action in France in 1940 fighting in the German army. Aware that he, too, could lose his place in the succession, Louis Ferdinand decided to break a love affair with a French-American Hollywood actress, Lily Damita.



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Alix Blader, Berlin phot.

Lily Damita

Actress Lily Damita

Born Liliame Marie-Madeleine Evans in Blaye, France, Lily Damita was educated in convents and ballet schools in several European countries, including France, Portugal and Spain. After being enrolled as a dancer at the *Opera de Paris* in her teens, she performed in music halls and worked as a model. Brought to Hollywood in 1928 by Samuel Goldwyn, she appeared in films with leading men such as Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, James Cagney and Maurice Chevalier.

But in 1938, Louis Ferdinand married instead a bona fide member of royalty - Grand Duchess Xenia Kirilovna Romanov, a cousin of the last Russian Czar and sister of the current pretender, Grand Duke Vladimir Kirilovich Romanov. They were married first in a Russian Orthodox ceremony in Potsdam, which was followed by a Lutheran ceremony at Huis Doorn, Netherlands, where his grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm II, was present.



Louis Ferdinand and his wife, the Grand Duchess, at their wedding

In 1935, Lili Damita married a virtual unknown who would become one of Hollywood's biggest box office attractions, the dashing Tasmanian-born Errol Flynn, known for his romantic swashbuckler roles. An actress five years Flynn's senior, Damita had Hollywood contacts that proved valuable when Flynn first landed in Los Angeles. Their son, Sean Flynn, was born in 1941, but their marriage only lasted until 1942.

Anne Robertson Kirkpatrick Hackett died September 18, 1966, at age 50, and was buried in Lexington, Kentucky. Her short-term prince lived a much longer life, becoming a businessman, a patron of the arts, and was known as a staunch opponent of the Nazi Party. Although the Prince was not involved in the assassination plot against Hitler in 1944, he was interrogated by the Gestapo immediately afterwards and was imprisoned at Dachau.



Prince Louis Ferdinand in 1968

An article in the *New York Times*, dated September 17, 1990, described the Prince as "A Very Happy Prussian," as he recalled "the day the Berlin wall broke open."

"It was a real miracle to me," said the scion of the Hohenzollern dynasty, whose 82 years span modern German history from empire to defeat, disgrace and division. "I would say I had the feeling that a new life was starting. Not only because Germany was, but all Europe was finally being brought together."

His "real happiness," then, was "in being close to his grandchildren and composing an occasional song on his grand piano."

As for the fall of the Berlin Wall, he said, "I thank the Creator that I lived to see this," he declared. "I never expected to."

"The Prince said his American years were among his happiest," continued the *New York Times* article. "He spent some years in Detroit as a young man, where Henry Ford took him under his wing, and

eventually persuaded the Prince to heed his grandfather and break off with Miss Damita. 'Ford was one of the greatest men of our time,' the Prince said."



Lili Damita and husband, Errol Flynn

The Prince and his wife were blessed with a large family. Their children are as follows: Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, Prince Michael, Princess Marie Cécile, Princess Kira, Prince Louis Ferdinand, Prince Christian-Sigismund and Princess Xenia.

Being head the House of Hohenzollern was a role Prince Louis Ferdinand took quite seriously, so much so that he barred two older sons from the succession because they broke the dynastical rule against marrying commoners. The third son and heir, Louis Ferdinand, was killed in an accident in the army in 1977, so his son, Georg Friedrich (born June 10, 1976) is the present Prince of Prussia and current head of the House of Hohenzollern.

Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia died September 26, 1994, at the age of 86.



Louis Ferdinand's grandson, Georg Friedrich, the present Prince of Prussia, with wife, Princess Sophie of Isenburg, married 2011

The Prince's "American years were among his happiest," and his trip to New Orleans may have been just a pleasant footnote, when he was "kidnapped" by a coquettish blond debutante with "wistful blue eyes." But for the people of New Orleans, it was truly an enchanted time.

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New Orleans Nostalgia
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