

Princess Salm-Salm, an American Princess



As the journal referred to Princess Salm-Salm twice,

I did some research...

Princess Agnes Salm-Salm was described as being red-haired, strong willed, small, and dainty. Her Indian grandmother in Ohio named her "Winona" which means "Flame", and she appeared as a shining flame to the injured soldiers on the battlefields of both the new and the old world as she fought with all her means against human stupidity and slowness of heart.

In 1861, she left her home in Vermont on a social trip to visit her sister in Washington, Hannah Delilah Joy who was married to Captain Edmond Johnston.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln had been elected president. His wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, organized many receptions for the officers, one of whom was Captain Johnston. Because of the common ancestor between President Lincoln and the Joy sisters, they were able to attract the attention of the president.

Prince Felix zu Salm-Salm, left Europe because of his scandalous love affairs, duels, and enormous gambling debts, and came to America in 1861 to take part in the Civil War. He met General Blenker at Hotel Willard. The general wanted to make Felix a colonel and his chief of staff and, after a short meeting with Felix, Lincoln gave his approval.

In 1862, the German division of the Union was ordered to go from Rappanahock to Hunters Chapel to defend the crossing of the Potomac. The chief was General Blenker and his chief of staff was Prince Felix von Salm. General Blenker was famous for the parties he organised at Hotel Willard in Washington as well as picnics in Hunters Chapel.

Agnes was known for her daring morning rides through Washington, and for passing by the White House on her half-wild mustang, "Minnehaha". Felix noticed Agnes on one of these rides and took care to see she was invited to one of the parties at Hunters Chapel - and of course they met and fell in love. He proposed to her on the condition that they would marry as Catholics (she was Puritan). She quarrelled with her sister and brother-in-law over this issue, and then left their house and was married in a secret wedding ceremony without the approval of her family. The marriage took place on August 30th 1862 in St. Patricks Church in Washington DC. The best man was Mr. von Corvin-Wiersbitzki, (who was earlier interested in Agnes himself). She was called a "bareback circus rider" and "a circus performer" by unfriendly social connections after her somewhat scandalous marriage, but "beautiful, clever, and dashing" by others.

According to "Ten Years of My Life," Delilah later gave Agnes a son, Felix, to adopt, but the child did not fare well with the nurse, and had to return to his mother. She also mentioned that her mother had relatives in Andilucia Spain, but does not refer to any other family members.

Felix was appointed commander of the 8th New York regiment and sent to Antietam Creek in northwest Virginia where, on September 17th 1862, a fierce battle was fought. On November the 9th, 1862 Agnes left Washington to join Felix on the battlefield as she didn't like being without him. To reach Felix, she had to cross the old battlefield of Bull Run which was still in a horrible state. After she arrived at her husband's camp, she started to care for the sick and wounded soldiers although she had no previous knowledge of medical care.

For four years she rode with the troop as the only woman through the war-devastated state of Virginia, and over carrion and vulture besieged battlegrounds. At the age of 18, she rode like the wind and possessed more courage than ten men. Since there were no nurses, only a few

doctors, and almost no field hospitals, Agnes Salm stole like a magpie for the wounded. As the wife of a colonel, she attacked and plundered the supply wagons and luggage meant for the officers. She even took her husband's sheets and tore them into bandages. It was written that: "Whether the prince raged or not, he remained a gentleman, even when he had to sleep on an uncovered bag of straw!" Eventually she was brought before General Sherman who saw what she was doing, but instead of court-martialing her, he formed an alliance with her against the misery on the battlegrounds. However, her arbitrary behavior worried the War Ministry to such an extent that President Lincoln had to intervene. In his memorable calming speech before the committee, he closed with the words: "That which many people only use as a muscle, she uses as a heart." He personally stuck the captain's star on her. And surely she would have led that regiment as well as her husband, provided she had been allowed to do so.

In January, 1863 the troops were ordered to go to Aquia Creek, Virginia, and of course Agnes followed her husband. Here she made a bet that she would give Abraham Lincoln three kisses within the next few days on his visit to the camp, and she succeeded in doing so. Noah Brooks wrote about this saying: "it was this remarkable woman, who astonished the president on entering General Sikle's headquarters, by flying to him. "She kissed three him times - once right, once left and once on the mouth - amid considerable gaiety."

On February 29th, Ulysses S. Grant was appointed Chief General of the Union Army. Agnes met him in the White House and her description of him was very negative. Around May 4th or 5th, Felix received the order to move to Nashville, Tennessee. Agnes accompanied him to the railway station in Washington. She had to stay there, but hoped to get permission to follow him. In the meantime, she supported the work in the local hospital. At the end of that summer, Agnes wrote to Felix saying she had succeeded in getting a pass to go to Tennessee. He wrote back telling her to stay in Washington. However, on October 1st, she left Washington and arrived on the 8th in Nashville. It took her another 24 hours to reach Bridgeport and Felix. She visited the field hospital and took action to improve the health care there. After November 15th, Felix was ordered to leave his camp to join General Steedmans to defend the Bridgeport/Stevenson line, but Agnes had to stay behind.

Felix had achieved the level of brigadier general, but after the Civil War was over, he didn't feel at home in the army in peacetime. He hated the undisciplined behavior of the people and his own troops. In the autumn of 1864, he was appointed commander of Fort Pulsaki. Agnes planned to stay in Savannah, Georgia. It came as a surprise when, at the end of November 1864, Felix received the order to bring his regiment to New York where it would be dissolved.

Agnes wanted him to stay in Washington and wait for further instructions from the president, but

he didn't listen. In 1867 he discovered there was an opportunity to join Maximilian, the Austrian archduke who was invited by Mexican nobility in 1863 to become Emperor of Mexico. In 1864 Maximilian was escorted to Mexico by French soldiers to establish an empire for Napoleon III, but the Mexicans were hostile to him and loyal to President Juárez. Although the French managed to drive Juárez's army from the capital, the empire disintegrated when French troops withdrew and Maximilian ran out of money. Maximilian's wife, Carlotta, went to Europe to seek help from Napoleon III, but her pleas were in vain. Maximilian was captured and sentenced to death and northern Mexico was in hands of President Juárez once again.

On his way to Mexico City, Felix met the emperor for the first time. Despite lack of funds, Maximilian decided not to go back to Europe but to fight with Mexican troops. With those troops (and without his European officers), he left Mexico City. Felix joined the army and on February 14th, 1867 went off to join the emperor where he had the chance to show his fighting abilities. But before long the town was captured by the Juárezists, Maximilian and his staff - of which the Prince zu Salm-Salm was a member - were captured by Benito Juárez.

Agnes learned about the situation through Mr. Clark, a journalist from the New York Tribune, and made contact with Juárez' s troops near Mexico City. She managed to get a pass and travelled to Mexico in the hope of being able to spare the life of her husband and Maximilian von Habsburg who was sentenced to death for high treason. When she arrived in Vera Cruz, vultures were sitting on the rooftops. However she didn't turn back, even though the whole county was revolting. Before she got to her destination, she was imprisoned but in the end she was able to meet President Benito Juárez. Thanks to this meeting (and some more afterwards) with Juárez, Felix was spared.

Only flight could have saved Maximilian, but it still would have required bribery money to do so. In a Mexican diligence (a primitive coach) Agnes Salm hurried through the country which was filled with robbers, to approach the Austrian, Prussian, English, Italian and Belgium ambassadors to appeal for funds. Dead bodies were lying on the roads. Bloodless corpses, hanging head down in the trees, touched her shoulders as she rode along. Although she had a white handkerchief on her riding whip to show she was a member of parliament, Indian soldiers shot a dangerous well-aimed volley at her. She wrote: "I was more annoyed than frightened because it is far too stupid to shoot at a woman alone, as if I could have assaulted their battery. My first impulse was to ride into those cowards and to beat them with my riding whip on their long ears. Only what to do against stupidity?... In short, I turned, and my little Mexican horse flew off like an arrow as I bowed my head against his neck. Those cowards sent another volley after me, but luckily didn't hit me or my horse. At the end of the quest, all of the diplomatic promises resulted in only one ounce of gold, but not one lousy dollar, and it was this stinginess that murdered the emperor."

On the day before the execution, Agnes decided to beg Juárez for the lives of the prisoners. She went down on her knees on the ground before him and pleaded for a delay for the emperor. Her appeal is the subject of an historical painting by Manuel Ocaranza (1873). Juárez looked away over her and said in a low and sad voice: "I'm sorry Madame to see you on your knees before me; but even if all the queens and kings of Europe were in your place, I still wouldn't be able to save his life. I'm not the one who takes it, it's the people that rule his life and mine." Juárez rose and promised to save the life of her husband. This was all he could do for her. She thanked him and left.

The journey back was very difficult. Because the road was destroyed she had to walk for hours. She wrote: "In addition to this I was wearing a pair of very thin boots that were soon cut by the sharp rocks. My feet were bleeding." An American who visited the prisoners reported: "The heavy door was opened, a soldier said: 'La Senora', and in the a blink of an eye, Prince zu Salm-Salm held in his arms his wife who had just arrived from her visit to Juárez." Her face was burned and dirty, her shoes were cut up, and as she put her hands on the shoulders of her husband, her body trembled from fatigue. That evening the emperor said to her: "You are the only person who really did something for me." The next day, on July 19th, 1867, the emperor was executed. Felix was put on a ship to Europe. Agnes was put on a ship bound for Cuba and then to New York. The republican colonel who was ordered to do this, acknowledged he would rather be confronted with a battalion of the emperor than with the princess. She was enthusiastically received in New York, and was later reunited with Felix in Europe.

In 1868 they arrived in Berlin. Because of their attempts to free Maximilian, the prince was again accepted at court along with his wife. In Europe she was the star of all the social circles in the capital as well as in Karlsruhe where she lived. She was surrounded by a thousand whispered stories in the residential palaces of the grand dukes, in the foyers of the court theatre houses, and in the "Fürstenberg" Palace. In her lifetime, she was the heroine of many adventures and poetic fantasies, and although her adventures occurred many years ago, they are still exciting today.

Prince Felix zu Salm-Salm was attached as an officer to the Prussian Regiment "Queen Augusta". Two years later, in the unbearably hot month of August 1870, Agnes Salm was again on the battlefields during the Franco-Prussian War. In this war too there were not enough doctors and bandages although the staff had what the wounded needed. So again, against all Prussian prohibitions and directions, she delivered what was necessary.

The King of Prussia surprised her as she was carrying a bucketful of wine in each hand. She wrote: "Although I wasn't ashamed of the work I was doing, I was somehow embarrassed to be caught under these conditions, so I put the buckets behind me and tried to hide them behind my skirt. The king took my hand and directed some kind words to me that I will never forget. In the meantime he laughed as he looked around me to discover the reason for my embarrassment and found my buckets. When I told his majesty that I had stolen them from his kitchen for his brave dying soldiers, the expression on his face became kind, and he said that I had done well, and should plunder his kitchen as much as I liked."

On the 18th of August 1870, the prince fell at Saint Privat, so at the age of thirty, Agnes became a widow. Although the years between 1862 and 1870 - in which she experienced three wars - were the most painful in her life, she wrote: "The Almighty, who softens the wind for the shorn lamb, has given us through time and sense, the ability to blunt the sharpness of human pain." She eventually received the Prussian Medal of Honor (but was denied the German Iron Cross because it was limited to men) for army relief work.

According to one source, in 1881 she helped organize the American Red Cross in spite of vigorous U.S. government opposition.

Although she was a heroine of her time, she lived and died in poverty, still active to the last moment for justice in the world. She died alone in her Karlsruhe home on December 21st, 1912 and nobody was with her except an old maid servant and her memories. Today, located less than thirty meters from the house where she died, is the office of the high court.

Agnes Elisabeth Winona Leclerc Joy - known as Princess Salm-Salm, or Princess Agnes , was born in Franklin, Vermont on December 25th, 1844 and died on the 21st of December 1912, in Karlsruhe at the age of 68.

She was the daughter of the American General William Leclerc Joy (1793 - abt. 1886) and Julia Willard (- 1882). Her grandfather on her father's side was Mica Joy.(1753-1826) who married Mercy Terrill (1764-1843). Her grandmother was said to be an Indian from Ohio. As well she was the cousin of President Lincoln through her great grandmother Olive Kilby Lincoln who married Captain Melzar Joy. According to the genealogy of the Joy family, Agnes is a descendant of King Henry III and thus was also a very distant cousin of her husband Felix.

She married Prince Felix Constantin Alexander Johann Nepomuk Marie zu Salm-Salm, who was a soldier of fortune and who was descended from one of the oldest noble families in Europe. (b. December 25, 1828, Anholt). The couple were wed in St. Patrick's in Washington D.C. on August 30,1862. When Felix returned to Europe, he entered the Prussian Army as a major, and was killed in action on August 18,1870 at St. Privat at the battle of Gravelotte. He was 39 years old when he died. Felix was the son of Fürst Wilhelm Florentin Ludwig Karl zu Salm-Salm and Flaminia di Rossi.

Agnes' second marriage to the royal British diplomat Charles Heneage at the court of the Grand Duke of Baden, was dissolved.

Fortunately Princess Agnes kept dairies and she was the author of "Ten Years of My Life", (Ruchard Bentley & Sons, London (1876), which details her exploits with her husband.

References: "An Adventurous Lady of Her Time" Newspaper article. November 30, 1960 by Toni Peter Courtesy of Frau Saur, Stadtmuseum, Karlsruhe, translation by Hans Weeber "Princess Agnes zu Salm-Salm" obituary from 1912 Stadtchronik, courtesy of Frau Saur, Karlsruhe "Ten Years of My Life" by Agnes Salm-Salm Plus various sites on the web.

