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# UNTANGLING FATE: THE TITANIC AND LUSITANIA SAGA OF ASTOR & VANDERBILT

He was one of the wealthiest Vanderbilts alive when in April 1912 he found himself with a First Class ticket on Titanic's crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. The Vanderbilt Valet had a second class ticket.

**H**istory has a peculiar way of weaving unexpected twists and turns, often leaving us bewildered by its ironies. Such is the case of the renowned Vanderbilt family and their connection to the tragic sinking of the Titanic. Amidst the fog of historical confusion, recent revelations have shattered long-held beliefs, bringing to light a surprising twist of fate.

While it has long been assumed that an illustrious Vanderbilt set foot aboard the iconic Titanic in 1912, this is only misconception or perhaps confusion.

Astonishingly, it was not the renowned Vanderbilt scion, Alfred, who embarked on that ill-fated voyage, but rather his own uncle, George Washington Vanderbilt of the famed 250 room Biltmore Estate. Fate played a peculiar hand, as George Washington Vanderbilt, accompanied by his wife Edith and daughter Cornelia, had booked their passage on the Titanic, unaware of the impending tragedy that awaited them.

In a twist of fate that leaves us contemplating the mysteries of life, it was John Jacob Astor the Fourth ("JJ" as he was known), another prominent figure of wealth and influence, who found himself aboard the ill-fated Titanic. Astor, a man intertwined with the Vanderbilt family through marriage, met his tragic end on that fateful night, forever intertwining the legacies of these two prominent families in the annals of history.

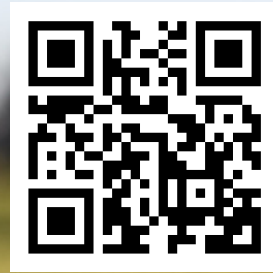
Only...George Washington Vanderbilt, his wife, and daughter never made it onto the ship. Rather, they left earlier on the Olympic (Titanic's sister ship). The Vanderbilt valet in second class however, was on board and went down with the ship. His name was Edwin Charles "Frederick" Wheeler; he was 24-year-old.

On May 7, 1915, Alfred Vanderbilt found himself aboard the ill-fated Lusitania, a British ocean liner that fell victim to a German submarine attack off the coast of Ireland. Despite his valiant efforts to save himself and others, Vanderbilt tragically perished in the disaster, alongside over 1,100 passengers and crew members.



The newspapers of 1912 faced a daunting task in reporting the Titanic's sinking accurately. Communication challenges, a rush to publish, and limited access to reliable information contributed to the spread of misleading headlines.

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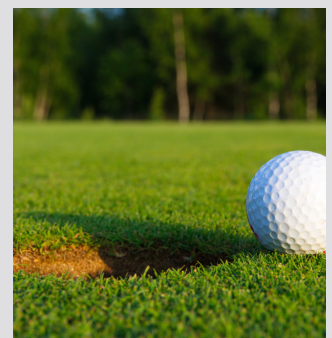
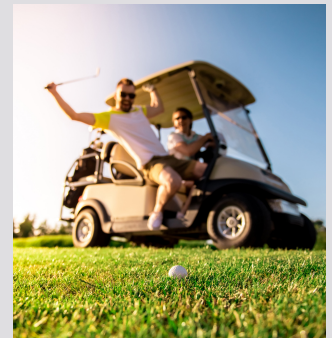
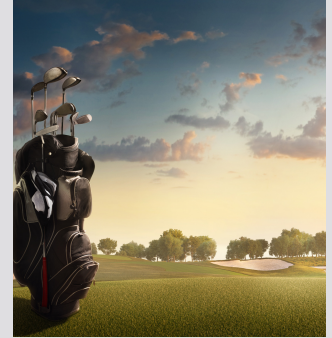
## Portable Personal Launch Monitor

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This Father's Day, show Dad your support for his passion for golf by giving him the FlightScope Mevo. Elevate his golf game and create lasting memories on the fairway. Get the FlightScope Mevo today and watch Dad's swing soar to new distances!

## Improve Dad's Swing



Alfred Vanderbilt's first wife received very little from his will, while his second younger wife inherited the majority of his estate. Similarly, John Jacob Astor's ex-wife received a small portion of his estate while the majority went to his young widow and unborn child.

Following his untimely demise, Vanderbilt's will allocated the majority of his fortune to his second wife, Margaret, and their son, Alfred Vanderbilt II. This left his first wife, Ellen French, and their children with limited financial support.

Though Ellen initially contested the will, she eventually settled for a smaller sum. Meanwhile, Margaret and Alfred II went on to live lives of luxury, while Ellen faced financial struggles, leading her to sell off many of her possessions.

The passing of Alfred Vanderbilt had dire financial implications for his ex-wife, Ellen French. Despite his status as one of America's wealthiest men, Vanderbilt had died without leaving a will, leading to a protracted legal process that tied up his assets in probate court for years. As a result, his family and ex-wives were unable to access his fortune.

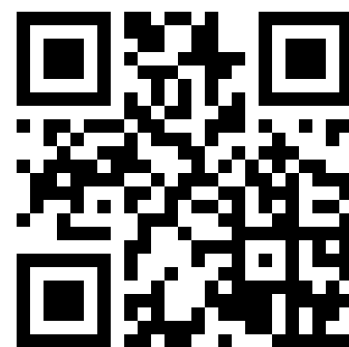
Ellen had already experienced the aftermath of a previous divorce, which left her with a generous settlement. However, her extravagant lifestyle had depleted much of those funds. With two young children to support and lacking Vanderbilt's financial assistance, she was compelled to drastically reduce her spending, selling off valuable possessions and downsizing her home.

In addition to the financial strain, Ellen grappled with the emotional aftermath of Vanderbilt's sudden demise. Having remained close to her ex-husband, his death devastated her. Vanderbilt had been traveling with his new wife, Margaret, and their young son, Alfred Vanderbilt II, aboard the ill-fated Lusitania. Although Margaret and Alfred Jr. survived the sinking, Vanderbilt was not as fortunate.

Ellen French eventually remarried, but her financial struggles persisted. She endured a protracted court battle to secure a settlement from Vanderbilt's estate, but even then, the amount she received fell far short of her expectations. Despite her wealth and social standing, the death of her ex-husband had left her vulnerable and exposed.



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*John Jacob Astor IV and his second wife Madeleine*

# *Timeless Elegance for* **Father's Day:**

Gift Your Father the **Mannes Braided Trilby**, an Icon of Classic Sophistication

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## **Mannes Braided Trilby by Bailey 1922**



**Bollman Hat Company**, established in 1868, is a renowned American hat manufacturer known for its commitment to quality and craftsmanship.

Step into timeless elegance with the Mannes Braided Trilby by Bailey 1922. Crafted with premium materials and featuring a distinctive braided band, this hat exudes sophistication and style.

Step into timeless elegance with the Mannes Braided Trilby by Bailey 1922. Crafted with premium materials and featuring a distinctive braided band, this hat exudes sophistication and style. Elevate your look with the Mannes Braided Trilby and make a lasting impression wherever you go. Whether you're strolling down city streets or attending a sophisticated soirée, this hat will effortlessly complement your outfit, leaving a lasting impression. Experience the unmatched sophistication of the Mannes Braided Trilby by Bailey 1922 and step into a world of timeless fashion. Embrace the elegance, embrace the legacy.



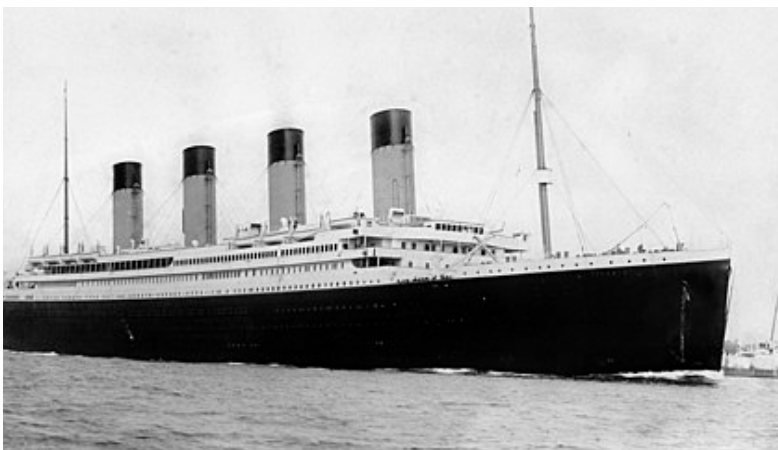
Born into a world of privilege and prestige on July 13, 1864, John Jacob Astor III seemed destined for a life that would surpass even his illustrious family's prodigious accomplishments. Astor's forefathers had amassed vast fortunes in the fur trade and real estate, establishing an empire that would come to define an era. However, young Astor was determined to forge his own legacy, venturing beyond the shadows of his family's towering reputation.

Astor's journey into matrimony began with his union to Ava Lowle Willing, a woman of equal social standing and allure. Their nuptials in 1891 caused ripples of fascination throughout high society, solidifying Astor's status as a figurehead of wealth and influence. Together, they seemed poised to conquer the world, their names synonymous with the American Dream.

Yet, as with many tales of fortune, a tempest of discord lay hidden beneath the veneer of perfection. Astor's marriage to Ava was not destined for eternity. In 1910, amidst swirling rumors and whispered secrets, the couple parted ways, the bonds of love shattered by irreconcilable differences. Their divorce reverberated through the social strata, leaving an indelible mark on both their lives.



*Lusitania First Class Dining Room*



*Titanic*

From the ashes of a failed marriage, a new chapter emerged in Astor's life. His path crossed with that of the captivating Madeleine Talmage Force, a young woman of enchanting beauty and spirit. Their courtship ignited the imaginations of the public, as they followed the whirlwind romance that culminated in their marriage on September 9, 1911. Madeleine, pregnant with their child, became the beacon of hope for Astor's dreams of a blissful union and a continuation of his legacy.

But fate, in its cruel irony, had other plans in store for the couple. On that fateful night of April 15, 1912, the Titanic, a symbol of mankind's audacity and hubris, met its watery grave in the frigid depths of the Atlantic Ocean. Astor, along with countless others, succumbed to the icy embrace of the sea, leaving behind a shattered world and a legacy yet to be realized.

In the wake of his untimely demise, the world turned its gaze to Astor's will, a testament to his enduring wealth and influence. Astonishingly, his unborn son, John Jacob Astor VI, would become the primary beneficiary of his estate. The future scion of the Astor empire, destined to carry the weight of his illustrious name, inherited the lion's share of his father's vast fortune.



Ava, Astor's former wife, found herself cast aside once more by the whims of destiny. While she received a modest settlement of \$10,000 per year (equivalent to approximately \$270,000 in today's terms), it paled in comparison to the vast trust fund bequeathed to Madeleine, amounting to a staggering \$5 million (equivalent to around \$135 million today). Astor's ex-wife, once a paragon of social standing, would

Alfred Vanderbilt and John Jacob Astor III, both hailing from prominent families with immense wealth and influence, shared remarkable similarities in their similarities



*Top: Alfred Vanderbilt, Right: Ellen French, Left, Lusitania First Class Lounge, Bottom: first wife Ava Astor*



in their lives. Vanderbilt, the great-grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the renowned railroad and shipping magnate, and Astor, belonging to the esteemed Astor family, known for their wealth and social standing, were destined for a life of privilege.

These ambitious individuals carved their own paths in the business and finance world, driven by a desire to leave their mark. Vanderbilt thrived as a successful investor and businessman, serving on the boards of esteemed corporations such as the New York Central Railroad and the United States Steel Corporation. Astor, too, made his mark in the business realm, skillfully managing the family's extensive real estate holdings and making astute investments in technology and communications.



Despite their shared background, there were notable differences in their business legacies. Vanderbilt's shrewd investments and keen business acumen shaped the course of American industry, particularly in the realms of railroads and steel. On the other hand, Astor's fortunes were tied to the vast real estate empire his family had built over the years, with lesser prominence in technology and communications ventures.

Unfortunately, both Vanderbilt and Astor's lives were tragically cut short, leaving behind grieving widows and children, and leaving a profound impact on their families and the public. Vanderbilt's untimely demise aboard the ill-fated Lusitania in 1915 shocked the nation, robbing them of one of the era's wealthiest and most influential businessmen. Likewise, Astor's tragic death on the Titanic in 1912 was a blow to society, as he was among the most affluent and prominent passengers aboard the ill-fated ship.

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Despite the immense sorrow brought by their deaths, Vanderbilt and Astor left behind significant legacies. Their vast estates and philanthropic foundations ensured their influence would endure. Alfred Vanderbilt II, son of Alfred Vanderbilt, continued his father's legacy as a notable businessman and philanthropist, while Vincent Astor, son of John Jacob Astor III, made his own mark as a prominent philanthropist and socialite. The Astor family's extensive real estate holdings continue to shape the iconic New York City skyline, while the Vanderbilt family's philanthropic endeavors have made significant contributions to the arts, education, and healthcare.

The lives of Alfred Vanderbilt and John Jacob Astor III were intertwined with wealth, influence, tragedy, and legacy. Their stories, though tinged with sorrow, continue to captivate and inspire us, reminding us of the enduring power of ambition and the profound impact even brief lives can have on the world.

written by Ari Newman

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**UNTANGLING  
THE THREADS  
OF DESTINY**

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