

Cornelius Vanderbilt II

Cornelius Vanderbilt II (November 11, 1843 – September 12, 1899) was an American socialite, businessman, and a member of the prominent United States Vanderbilt family.^[1] He was the favorite grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, who bequeathed him \$5 million, and the eldest son of William Henry "Billy" Vanderbilt (who bequeathed him about \$70 million) and Maria Louisa Kissam. In his turn he succeeded them as the chairman and the president of the New York Central and related railroad lines in 1885.^[2]

Contents

Early life

Career

Personal life

Descendants

Legacy

See also

References

Further reading

Early life

Cornelius Vanderbilt II was born on November 27, 1843 on Staten Island, New York to William Henry Vanderbilt (1821–1885) and Maria Louisa Kissam.^{[1][3]}

Career

Vanderbilt established a reputation for a strong work ethic while clerking at the Shoe and Leather Bank in New York City. This endeared him to his grandfather, the 'Commodore', who was a strong believer in personal industry.^[4]

Vanderbilt was active in numerous organizations including the Saint Nicholas Society of the City of New York, YMCA, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Trinity Church, St. Bartholomew's Church, Sunday Breakfast Association, and the Newport Country Club.^[1]

Personal life

Cornelius Vanderbilt II



Portrait of Vanderbilt by John Singer Sargent

Born	November 11, 1843 <div><u>Staten Island, New York, U.S.</u></div>
Died	September 12, 1899 (aged 55) <div><u>New York City, New York</u></div>
Nationality	American
Employer	<u>New York Central Railroad</u>
Political party	<u>Republican</u>
Spouse(s)	<u>Alice Claypoole Vanderbilt</u> (m. 1867)
Children	<u>Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt</u> <u>William Henry Vanderbilt II</u> <u>Cornelius Vanderbilt III</u> <u>Gertrude Vanderbilt</u> <u>Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt</u>



Vanderbilt's Newport cottage, The Breakers, built in 1893 by Richard Morris Hunt

On February 4, 1867, he married Alice Claypoole Gwynne (1845–1934), daughter of Abraham Evan Gwynne and Rachel Moore Flagg.^[5] The two met at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church where both taught Sunday School.

Together, they had:^[2]

- Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt (1869–1874), was born in 1869 but died of a childhood illness in

1874 at the age of five.

- William Henry Vanderbilt II (1870–1892) died of typhoid fever while attending Yale University.
- Cornelius "Neily" Vanderbilt III (1873–1942), whom he disinherited for marrying Grace Graham Wilson (1870–1953) without his approval.^[6]
- Gertrude Vanderbilt (1875–1942), who married Harry Payne Whitney (1872–1930)^[7]
- Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt (1877–1915), who died aboard the RMS *Lusitania*, and who married Ellen French, and after their divorce, Margaret Emerson (1884–1960).^[8]
- Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt (1880–1925), who first married society debutante Cathleen Neilson, and later Gloria Morgan.^[9]
- Gladys Moore Vanderbilt (1886–1965), who married Count László Széchenyi (1879–1938).^[10]

A stroke in 1896 compelled him to reduce his active business involvement. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage shortly after 6 a.m. on September 12, 1899, at his home, West Fifty-seventh Street, in Manhattan, New York City.^[1] On his death in 1899, family leadership passed to his first brother, William Kissam Vanderbilt. His philanthropy had been such that he did not increase the wealth that had been left to him.^[2] His estate at the time of his death was appraised at \$72,999,867, \$20 million of which was real estate.^[11] \$73 million is equivalent to \$2.27 billion^[12] in 2020 dollars.^[12]

Descendants

Through his son, Reginald, he was the grandfather of Gloria Laura Vanderbilt, the socialite and fashion designer, and the great-grandfather of news anchor Anderson Hays Cooper.^[2]

Through his son, Alfred, he was the grandfather of William Henry Vanderbilt III, Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt Jr., and George Washington Vanderbilt III.^[2]

Legacy

Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt
Gladys Moore Vanderbilt

Parent(s) William Henry Vanderbilt
Maria Louisa Kissam

Relatives See *Vanderbilt family*

Signature

Vanderbilt



Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, II and her daughters, Gladys and Gertrude, having tea in the library at the Breakers Newport, Rhode Island, William Bruce Ellis Ranken, 1932

The Fifth Avenue mansions he, his brothers, and his sons lived in have been demolished, but the Newport, Rhode Island vacation home he built, *The Breakers*, still stands as a memory of his lifestyle.^[2]

See also

- The Breakers
- Vanderbilt Family

References

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- Vanderbilt, 173–185.
- "Wm. H. Vanderbilt Dead. He is Prostrated by Paralysis While Talking to Robert Jarrett, President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and Dies Without Speaking. His Vast Wealth Estimated at Two Hundred Millions" (https://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost_historical/access/277689512.html?dids=277689512:277689512&FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=DEC+09%2C+1885&author=&pub=The+Washington+Post&desc=WM.+H.+VANDERBILT+DEAD&pqatl=google). *The Washington Post*. December 9, 1885. Retrieved August 1, 2008. "William H. Vanderbilt died at his residence in this city, of paralysis, at half-past two o'clock this afternoon. He arose this morning at his usual hour, and at breakfast served to the members of the family, most of whom were present, he appeared to be in his usual health and in a more than usually happy frame of mind."
- Vanderbilt, 177-9.
- "Mrs. Vanderbilt Sr. Dies in Home at 89. Widow of Financier, Long Ill. Was A Leader in Brilliant Era of New York Society" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1934/04/23/archives/mrs-vanderbilt-sr-dies-in-home-at-89-widow-of-financier-long-iii.html>). *The New York Times*. April 23, 1934.
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Further reading

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