

## HISTORICAL NOTES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS EXCERPT

Although *Under a Gilded Moon* is, of course, a work of fiction, many of its characters either represent or were inspired by historical figures, many of whom would now be considered obscure but who influenced the course of history—Madison Grant, for example. Below is a bit of background readers may find intriguing. The author will also be adding historical photos and background regularly to the Behind the Scenes section of her website, [www.joyjordanlake.com](http://www.joyjordanlake.com).

George Washington Vanderbilt II was the first owner and, along with Richard Morris Hunt and Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the visionaries of Biltmore. The character Emily Vanderbilt Sloane is based on one of his nieces who, like her uncle, became an ardent philanthropist.

Though he's little known now, Madison Grant was a prominent name in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century eugenics movement, as well as in land and wildlife conservation. While there's no evidence that he ever visited Biltmore, he knew the Vanderbilt family, some of whom contributed to his Bronx Zoo project, and was close to George Vanderbilt's age. They shared a common interest in the natural world, as well as prominent friends in New York, including Theodore Roosevelt. While Grant's conservation efforts did, as the novel suggests, contribute to national parks and to saving the American bison, his other legacy was an incredibly toxic view of

racial superiority that would later help fuel the Holocaust. During the years of this novel's setting, 1895–96, Grant was apparently known at least in some circles for his carousing, while publicly he was praised for his nature preservation leadership. He was also just beginning to formulate the white supremacist ideology that he would later pour into his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, which was translated into German and became a kind of model for the race-hygiene arguments that would be embraced by the Third Reich. Prior to World War II, Adolf Hitler wrote Grant a fan letter referring to *The Passing of the Great Race* as “my bible.”

A number of the household staff characters are based on actual people. The head of stables in Biltmore's early days was Italian, and while Salvatore Catalfamo and his contribution to Richard Morris Hunt's architectural drawings are fictional, the surname comes from the author's husband's family. The violence against Italians in New Orleans in 1890–91 is, sadly, historical, although Maurice Barthélemy as the instigator of it is a product of the author's imagination (fueled by the fact that some merchants did apparently benefit from the Italian community's being blamed for the police chief's death). As in this novel, the head chef at Biltmore was French, and other members of the staff included the forestry expert Carl Schenck and Vanderbilt's manager, Charles McNamee. Biltmore's first head housekeeper of note—and long tenure—was an Englishwoman named Emily King, but since Mrs. King didn't arrive until 1897, the author invented a fictional Mrs. Smythe.

The character Lilli Barthélemy was inspired, as fans of Edith Wharton will no doubt have guessed, by the protagonist Lily Bart in Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. Mentioned as Lilli's aunt in this novel, Wharton was a close friend of George Vanderbilt and a visitor to Biltmore.

Sol Lipinsky, briefly mentioned, was an early Jewish resident of Asheville whose Patton Avenue department store, Bon Marché, was an elegant addition to the town, which began its boom with the arrival of the railroad and visitors arriving from the North.

Annie Lizzie Hopson is named after and loosely based on the author's great-grandmother, who arrived in the Southern Appalachian Mountains as a young woman to teach in a one-room schoolhouse.

Ling Yong (listed also as Ling Gunn, which the author surmised was a mishearing of the Chinese name) is based on an actual man who lived in Asheville in 1895–96. Clippings referring to his existence and apparently brutal death after this novel's time period were deep in the city archives.

Robert Bratchett is based on an African American man who lived in the region at the time. His life ended tragically at Biltmore Junction in 1897, the year after this story stops, in racial violence. He is also commemorated at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, founded by Bryan Stevenson.

Other historically based groups and events mentioned in the novel include the Ligue Nationale Antisémitique de France, as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1880s and the lynchings of Italians in New Orleans in 1891. The Center for Peace and Justice has documented that the 1890s saw more lynchings of African Americans and all groups in the United States than any other single decade.

The Biltmore Estate, still owned by George Vanderbilt's descendants, remains the largest private residence in the United States and has become one of the largest employers and tourist destinations in the Asheville, North Carolina, area.

Just for fun, as a kind of shared wink with the savvy reader, I included some addresses with historical and literary significance. The boardinghouse where Kerry visits Dearg Tate at 48 Spruce Street, for example, was indeed owned at the time by Mrs. Alice Reynolds but was later where the writer Thomas Wolfe lived as a boy, and is the boardinghouse at the center of his novel *Look Homeward, Angel*. Ling's fictional shop at 55 Haywood Street is the address of what is now the much-loved Malaprop's Bookstore/Café.

Dog-loving readers will be pleased to learn that the four-legged character Cedric, the faithful, drooling Saint Bernard, is based on the historical canine, and was beloved by George Vanderbilt. A pub in Antler Village on Biltmore Estate is named in Cedric's honor.

Sometimes as an author, you look back—way back—and realize you were doing research on a book long before that novel ever came to be plotted or pitched. In my early twenties—quite some time ago now—I was able to spend several summers working for two different and equally beautiful summer camps in western North Carolina, Camp Rockmont in Black Mountain and Camp Gwynn Valley in Brevard. Those long, lovely summers helped solidify my enthusiasm for the Blue Ridge Mountains and my respect for the culture that has grown and evolved there.

One of the summers I worked for Camp Rockmont, some of us on camp staff—all of us sunburned and sweaty—were invited to a home on the grounds of Biltmore Estate belonging to a young woman my age, Dini Cecil (later Pickering), who was connected to Rockmont through a young man she was dating and would eventually marry. Dini, whom I remember as gracious, down-to-earth, and unassuming, turned out to be the person, along with her brother Bill, who would later inherit Biltmore. This seemed a fitting place to thank her again after all these years for

the hospitality and pizza that night, and to thank the current staff of Biltmore Estate, who've unfailingly responded to all my questions with patience and interest.

I should admit that I began research on George Vanderbilt fully prepared to depict him as merely a background, one-dimensional character, nothing more than the privileged benefactor of his robber baron relatives. But the more I read, the more intrigued I became by the actual man's complexity: his love for art and the outdoors, his voracious reading, his desire early in life to become an Episcopal priest, his ongoing interest in matters of faith, his contributions to forestry and sustainability, his hospitality, his generosity, and his commitment to bring hundreds of new jobs, as well as training and schools, to western North Carolina.

Thank you to the owners and staff of Parnassus Books, my local independent bookstore, so committed to writers and readers alike.

Thank you to Bryan Stevenson and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. It was through your work that I discovered the historical Robert Bratchett of North Carolina and created the character in his honor.

Thank you to the keepers of the Asheville Public Library Archives, where, close to closing time one night, I found Ling Yong (or Gunn) in one of the thick stacks of newspaper clipping folders an uncomplaining archivist brought, even though I looked like just the sort of scatterbrained researcher who loses all track of time and stays up till the last nanoseconds of closing.

Like all historical novels, a significant amount of research went into the writing of this book.

I'd particularly like to thank the following authors for their books, which were among the most helpful: Denise Kiernan for *The Last Castle: The Epic Story of Love, Loss, and American Royalty in the Nation's Largest Home*; Ellen Erwin Rickman for *Biltmore Estate* (Images of America); Emma Bell Miles for *The Spirit of the Mountains*; Drema Hall Berkheimer for *Running on Red Dog Road and Other Perils of an Appalachian Childhood*; Jerry E. Patterson for *The Vanderbilts*; Witold Rybczynski for *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century*; John Alexander Williams for *Appalachia: A History*; Arthur T. Vanderbilt II for *Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt*; Sean Dennis Cashman for *America in the Gilded Age*; and last, but decidedly not least, the Foxfire series on Southern Appalachian life. Jonathan Peter Spiro's biography *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* was enormously helpful in sparking my imagination about the complex and appalling Grant. (More on him in Historical Notes.)

