

Jennie Jerome
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There have been many requests for information about Jennie Jerome's, (mother of Winston Churchill) connection to Pompey and many misconceptions. Pompey is the home of her father and grandparents. Jennie herself, never visited her upstate roots nor did Winston Churchill. However he did express on several occasions that he would have liked to have done so.

Most of the following information came from Ralph G. Martin's *Jennie: The Life of Lady Randolph Churchill*. Volume one was completed in 1969 and volume 2 in 1971. The story is as much about her father, Leonard as it is about Jennie. It is an American success story starting with Leonard Jerome, Pompey born and bred. America had no hereditary aristocracy, except for the closed society of the old colonist families and the founding fathers., But about the middle of the 1850's, new money was being made and that wealth opened the doors to a new society. There was a quote about Jerome and his new money making friends, "They do not enter society; they create it as they go along."

It was at this time that there were a number of new rich American women who brought their much needed wealth and verve to England and married titles. Jennie was a forerunner of these women.

The first Jerome to come to this country was Timothy Jerome, from the Isle of Wight, to Meriden CT in 1710 with royal grant for a monopoly on the salt-making in the area. Biographer, Ralph G Martin noted the coincidence that it was on the Isle of Wight 164 years later his great great-granddaughter, Jennie , was take her first step toward becoming an Englishwoman. It was at a ball arranged to meet the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Imperia Russian Highnesses. Jennie later wrote between the lines on the invitation, ""To Meet -Randolph" (Churchill)

During the Revolutionary War, Timothy's son, Samual fought alongside his 5 sons. One of them , Aaron, married a cousin of George Washington. Since Washington had no lineal decendents, Leonard Jerome road from Seneca Turnpike south to Fabius. Aaron , great-grandfather of Jennie, estab, future father of Jennie Jerome, would claim,:We are the closest of kin."

Eventually the brothers settled along the lished his roots near the corner of Henneberry ad Broadfield Road in the hill country of Pompey. He was the father of Issac.

Issac was a farmer, a quiet, conservative man. He married Aurora Murray, , a young Scotswoman. They had nine sons and three daughters. The fifth son was Leonard, born in 1817, who later was to become the grandfather of Winston Churchill.

Issac wanted to keep his sons on the farm, but his bright and ambitious wife, Aurora, had other plans and insisted they go on to college , leave and seek their fortunes. Like his brothers, Leonard first worked at his farm chores and later got a job in the village store for

a dollar a week and learned to dicker with the shrewd farmers -who came to exchange their produce for store products.

Two of the older brothers had gone to the College of New Jersey (later named Princeton) and Leonard followed in 1836. Family financial pressure forced him to transfer to the less expensive Union College in Schenectady, New York. He sang in the chorus, music was one of his many interests, and graduated near the top of his class.

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Leonard and his younger brother, Lawrence moved to Palmyra and then to Rochester to work in their uncle Hiram's law office. While living in Rochester, Leonard became involved in local politics and the newspaper business, founding the "Rochester *Daily American*". The brothers double-dated the Hall sisters, Clara (called Clara) and Catherine. The sisters had been orphaned early and lived with their aunts. Both had substantial inheritances. Lawrence soon married Catherine Hall.

It was five years before Leonard proposed to Clara.: They were married on April 5, 1849, he was thirty-two and Clara was twenty-four. With Leonard's success in business and Clara's money, they fit in well in the Rochester upper-crust society. He became involved in a telegraph line company in New York and wanted to move closer to his new business, so he sold his interest in the Rochester *Daily American* in 1850 and moved to Brooklyn.

There he became a prominent figure in New York Society. He was a notable and flamboyant stock market speculator who could make and lose millions and then make them again. His successes earned him the nickname, "The King of Wall Street". He was a patron of the arts who founded the American Academy of Music. His private passion was music and he financed the careers of many promising young singers -particularly if they were female and pretty. The famous Jenny Lind was one of his favorites. Hence the origin of the name of his second daughter, Jennie.

He was an avid sportsman: he enjoyed yachting with William Vanderbilt, He had an interest in thoroughbred horse racing and helped found the American Jockey Club. With his brothers and financier, August Belmont Sr. He also earned another name, "The Father of the American Turf." because he was credited in raising the social status of the horse race in the United States. The first Belmont Stakes was held at Jerome Park in the Bronx built by Leonard and financed by Belmont. The Belmont Stakes is the oldest of the triple crown races.

When the Civil War broke out, Leonard was unwavering in his support of maintaining the Union. With a 1/5 interest in the New York Times, the paper reflected his opinions. He was Treasurer of the Union Defense Committee and paid for many of their activities. He subscribed more than \$35,000 towards the construction of the vessel, *Meteor*, designed to capture the *Alabama*. He was the founder of the "Riot Relief Fund" to aid those killed or wounded in the NY Draft riots in 1863. The non-profit fund exists at the present time to give financial relief to families of NY policemen and firemen who have fallen in the line of duty. It also gives grants to law students who show interest favorable to their causes. After the War, Leonard left politics, but his involvements led to political favors in his life.

Between 1851 and 1858, the Jerome's had four daughters, Clarita, Jennie, (born in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn on the 9th of January , 1854), Camille (who died at age six from a sudden fever and Leonie. They enjoyed the luxuries of wealth; there were three homes: a mansion in Manhattan, at the corner of Madison Ave. and 26th street, complete with a full theatre, horse stables, a ballroom with the capacity for 300 persons and a breakfast room that could seat 70. (It was torn down in 1867), the Bathgate Mansion in the Bronx which served as a summer home for family and friends and a home in Newport RI. Named in his honor are a Jerome Ave. in Brooklyn and a Ave in the in the Bronx

Leonard's wealth afforded his daughters the opportunity to spend much time in Europe, particularly in Napoleon III'S France where they associated with the aristocratic elite of the day. Leonard lived a high life on both continents. When Jennie was 13, tired of the publicity of her husband's escapades, Clara announced she was moving to Paris permanently. They moved into an elegant apartment in the most fashionable section of Paris and moved easily into the Imperial social life. Her oldest sister, Clarita made her debut at the Imperial Court but before Jennie could enjoy her own "coming out, Leonard moved his family to London. The Prussian army was moving towards Paris and it would soon be under siege..

After settling his family in England,, the government of the United States sent Leonard Jerome had a mission to forward special proposals to Bismarck concerning an easing of the siege. They gave him a diplomatic passport and assigned the famous Civil War Generals Sheridan and Burnside to accompany him. The American group accomplished nothing, but that did not matter as soon the siege was over and a peace was signed at Versailles.

After a year, the Jeromes were established socially with the Prince of Wales, the Marlborough House Set,. They enjoyed a steady round of opera, ballet, theatre and parties. Jennie, now 17, spent her days riding, studying music and languages. She was an accomplished pianist. The family summered at Cowes, a tiny village on the Isle of Wight and the home of the most exclusive Yacht club in the world. It was here , in August 1873, that Jennie met Lord Randolph Churchill at a ball aboard the yacht *Adriadne*. (He had been a Lord since he was 8 years old when his father became the Duke of Marlborough.)

They were attracted to each other immediately, they danced most of the evening and talked a long time. Within three days, Randolph proposed and Jennie accepted. This did not meet with favor with either family. The Marlboroughs knew nothing of the Jeromes and they were Americans with no long social history. Jennie's mother felt she was too young to know her mind and besides she had hopes for Jennie aiming higher than a mere Lord. In New York, Leonard Jerome also had qualms. He had strong opinions against the inbreeding and overbreeding within the British aristocracy.

It took months while the parents argued over settlements .Marriage then was arranged by contract making marriage an economic union as well as a physical one. The dowry negotiations were long and messy. Their wedding was a morning, wedding.. After a hearty breakfast the couple left in a beautiful coach for their French honeymoon, The Duke and

Duchess of Marlborough did not attend. Jennie would now be forever referred to as Lady Randolph.

The marriage between Randolph and Jennie was a love match, but over the years they grew apart. He seemed to withdraw and there was speculation that he had a disease that slowly took a toll on his body and his mind. (the nature of that health problem is in question) He immersed himself in politics. A brilliant speaker, but he did not mince words. He was elected to Parliament and rose rapidly, becoming leader of the House and chancellor of the Exchequer. With three others he moved to form a 4th party. He looked to create a new and more liberal Conservatism that did not sit well with the old guard. He died early at age 45. His last year was painful.

Though they seemed distant, Jennie was a devoted political wife. She supported his causes, campaigned for him and even helped to write several of his speeches. She was incredibly beautiful, intelligent with a quick wit, personable. She not only brought money to the marriage, but important social contacts.

Like modern Victorian mothers of the aristocracy, Jennie left the raising of her sons mainly to nannies and governesses. Winston adored his beautiful mother, but she appeared to be one of those mothers who were uninterested in children until they were old enough to hold a conversation. Winston wrote about her in *My Early Life*: 'She shone for me like the evening star. I loved her dearly, but at a distance.'

After he became an adult, they became great friends and allies. She became his political mentor. His adoration of his mother never wavered and he was as proud of being half American as he was being a member of the Marlborough family.

Widowed at 40, she would marry again. Five years later, she caused a scandal by marrying George Cornwallis-West, who was the same age as her son, Winston. She had been kept busy helping Winston with his career and volunteering in many causes, She became well known for chartering a hospital ship to care for those wounded in the Boer War and for also working for the Royal Red Cross. Along the way she met George a member of the Scot Guards.

She went on to write her memoirs, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill* and a play, *His Borrowed Plumes*. George, however, fell in love with the leading lady and he and Jennie were divorced in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War.. She already had a new admirer, Montagu Porch, three years Winston's junior, who was working for the Foreign Office in Nigeria. Jennie had become involved in raising money for the American Women's War Relief Fund to finance a hospital. In 1916, she organized buffets at railroad stations for the thousands of traveling troops, set out on a series of morale boosting concerts around the country and she volunteered at Lancaster Gate Hospital keeping wounded men cheerful. Having opposed women's rights at one time, she took up the cause.

In 1918 she married Montagu Porch. Three years later, he was on a boat to Nigeria when she fell at a friend's house and fractured her leg near her ankle. The bones were set, but in

just a few weeks, gangrene has set in and her leg had to be amputated. She suffered a hemorrhage and slipped into unconsciousness.

The *New York Times* obituary summed up her life:

Jennie was destined to play a brilliant, and almost unchallenged – prominent and influential life – in the London court and political life for generation

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