

## HARVARD CLUB BARS PRINCESS

Russian Portrait Artist Not Permitted  
to Enter Its Doors.

The Princess Lewoff Parililagney of Russia, who stays at the Plaza and paints portraits, met with a rebuff yesterday from the Harvard Club in West Forty-fourth Street. She made a sensation when, in her landau with its gilded and colored crests, she drew up in front of the club in the early afternoon. The young men coming to the windows saw her epauletted and cockaded footman jump from the box and approach the door. He was met by a bellboy, who, after much expostulation, sent in for a member of the House Committee.

This member took from the hands of the Princess the visiting card of a club member, on which was written:

Please allow the Princess to inspect the portraits in Harvard Hall.

The House Committee member said that was impossible. "If you will come on a ladies' day, Princess," he began.

"But," she said, "I have come to-day, and I am introduced by the card of a member."

"This is a man's club," said the member. "There are only men here."

"I understand," returned the Princess, "but I have not come to see the—I have come to examine your portraits."

By this time people had stopped on the other side of the street to watch the incident. Children were gazing in wonder at the brilliant coachman and footman, and people were looking from all the windows, so the Princess gave the word to her coachman and the glittering landau wheeled about and rolled off up the avenue.

This article appeared in the *New York Times* on December 6, 1909. Evidently the reporter didn't think it was necessary to describe a landau, probably because the word, and the thing itself was more familiar to the reader of 1909 than readers today. A landau is defined as a four-wheel carriage with a top divided into two sections that can be folded away or removed and with a raised seat outside for the driver.



*The landau used in the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011*

The Princess in the story, Elizabeth Vilma Parlaghy, was born in Hadju Dorog, an old city in eastern Hungary, in 1863. She showed an early talent for drawing and was sent to study in Paris where she was found to be especially skillful at portraiture. Before she was twenty years old she had painted a portrait of Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian revolutionary leader, and the painting immediately established her reputation. She studied in Munich with Franz von Lenbach, the “painter prince” of prominent nobility. Soon after she opened her own studio in Berlin where European aristocracy and prominent members of society flocked to her. Over the next ten years she painted portraits of the crowned heads of Europe, including Kaiser Wilhelm II, King Leopold of Belgium, the Czar and Czarina of Russia, the Shah of Persia, Chancellor von Bismarck, and many others. Also, she received gold medals from exhibitions in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris, as well as Chicago at the World's Fair of 1893. She spoke English, French, and German fluently. The extensive press coverage she received usually described her physical appearance—graceful and beautiful, and added that she was an animated and amusing conversationalist. The amounts paid for a portrait by Parlaghy rose to \$7,000, an extremely high price at that time.

It was also noted that she was an animal lover who belonged to many societies devoted to animal welfare, and had a collection of birds, thoroughbred horses, and dozens of dogs.





*Lajos Kossuth, 1885*



*Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1895*



*1895 Baden Salon, Vilma Parlaghy in center*



*Lwoff-Parlaghy paints King Peter I of Serbia, 1903*

In 1899 Elizabeth Parlaghy married the Russian Prince Lwoff. The marriage lasted only a short time, but she kept the title, and thereafter called herself Princess Lwoff-Parlaghy. After several visits to the United States, she moved permanently to New York City in 1909 and installed herself in a suite of thirteen rooms on the third floor of the Plaza Hotel facing Central Park, bringing with her a large retinue of attendants. She welcomed New York

society there, in rooms decorated with Old Master paintings, Gobelin tapestries, and antiques, as well as her sizable menagerie of animals, which included Goldfleck, the famous lion cub she had rescued from the Ringling Bros. Circus. She declared her intention to paint the hundred most prominent American men, and they came to her luxurious studio to sit for her. They included Andrew Carnegie, William Taft, Admiral George Dewey, Theodore Roosevelt, Joseph H. Choate, John Burroughs, and Seth Low -- and dozens of others. In a 1913 article in *Form* magazine her portrait of Choate in the collection of the Museum of Natural History is described as superior to the portrait of him by John Singer Sargent, in the Harvard Club's collection. It was during this highly productive and golden period of her life that she made her spectacular visit to the Harvard Club.



*Joseph H. Choate, 1911*

Besides her suite and studio at the Plaza, the princess maintained a lodge in the Catskills and spent summers at her villa on the Riviera. Her luxurious lifestyle began to diminish with her fortune after 1914, and she was asked to leave the Plaza, with her paintings held as security for unpaid bills, but she was allowed to take her animals—said to be a pet bear, an alligator, an ibis, two falcons, two dogs, and two Angora cats. A New York diamond dealer lent her \$12,000 to buy a townhouse on East 39<sup>th</sup> Street, where, in much smaller quarters, she continued to paint and entertain. In 1916 the scientist Nikola Tesla sat for her under electric lights of his own design, lights that were filtered through blue glass, which replicated north light. This work, known as *The Blue Portrait*, is the only known painting of Tesla and has gained cult status. After being lost for many years it was rediscovered in the Nordsee -Museum in Husum, Germany.



*Nikola Tesla, 1916*

By 1923 her fortunes had plummeted. On August 30 the Deputy Sheriff of New York came to her door with writs to seize property to meet various mortgages. He found that she had died that morning – she was sixty years old.

An auction of the princess's estate was held in New York the following April and included over 350 items, among them Gothic sculptures, altarpieces, Oriental rugs and tapestries, pieces of jewelry, and a large number of paintings of celebrities. Not on the auction list is the portrait she did of Thomas W. Slocum C'1890, Harvard Club member and President of the Club from 1924-1927. This pastel and charcoal sketch was given to the Club by his brother, William Slocum C'1886, after Slocum's death in 1937. It hung for many years in the Slocum Room on the third floor until a painted portrait of him was acquired. The portrait, signed by Princess Lwoff-Parlaghy, is now outside guestroom 429 which is also dedicated to Slocum's memory.



*Thomas W. Slocum C'1890*

While we cannot be sure, Slocum may well have been the member who invited the princess to the Club in 1909—the member who is mentioned in the *New York Times* article at the beginning of this story. There will be more about Slocum in a future article.

Comments and question are always welcome. [msaunders@hcnyc.com](mailto:msaunders@hcnyc.com)

Mary Saunders  
Curator