

1944

Paying Back Her Social Snubs

● By Joan Browder

LAURA MAE CORRIGAN has delivered the snub supreme—posthumously. The books have been balanced by the last will and testament of the one-time Chicago stenographer who married into society, was given the deep-freeze treatment by the swanky sets of Cleveland and New York, then went to England to become London's acknowledged social arbiter.

The list of legatees named by Mrs. Corrigan, who died in New York some weeks ago, reads like a page from *Burke's Peerage* or the *Almanach de Gotha*. Not a Cleveland or

New Yorker is mentioned. Which means, says Society, that Laura Mae Corrigan has snubbed last—and best.

The widow of James W. Corrigan, Jr., the Cleveland steel magnate, had a large estate to dispose of—her own millions and the income paid to her from her husband's estate, said to have been about \$400,000 annually—and, except for a sister and half-sister, most of it went to titled personages. Among those listed were Princess Rene de Bourbon-Parma of Denmark, sister-in-law of former Empress Zita of Austria-Hungary; Lady Milbanke of Berks, England; the Marchioness of Londonderry, of County Down, Ireland; Viscount Weymouth of Wilts, England; and

Princess Guy de Faucigny-Lucinge, the Comte Armand de la Rochefoucauld and the Comte Jean de Gaigneron, all of Paris. There were more than 100 bequests, most of them to European aristocrats who had helped Mrs. Corrigan in her social rise.

PRINCIPAL beneficiary is her sister, Mrs. Mabelle Florence Armstrong-Taylor of San Francisco, who also was named as residuary legatee. A half-sister, Clara Helen Andrews of Los Angeles, receives \$50,000. The petition listed another half-sister, Grace Parker Bassett of Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., but listed no legacy for her, as she was provided for in Mr. Corrigan's will.

Mrs. Corrigan's death automatically brought about the distribution of her husband's \$30,000,000 estate, which was divided into sixteenths under the terms of a will made in 1921, seven years before Mr. Corrigan died. Mrs. E. G. Gilbert of Lakewood, Ohio, a first cousin of Mr. Corrigan, and Mrs. Armstrong-Taylor are to receive four-sixteenths each. The three children of John A. Corrigan, a first cousin, will share three-sixteenths, while four other cousins and Mrs. Bassett will receive one-sixteenth each.

THE story of Laura Mae Corri-



Mrs. Laura Corrigan—she never forgot rebuffs.



though she never volunteered any information regarding her family or early life, it is known that she went to work as a stenographer in Chicago when she was quite young, and finally landed a job as reporter on a newspaper in that city.

The Corrigan-McKinney Steel Company later was to become a part of Republic Steel.

It was a sister of the Corrigans whom Laura met at White Sulphur Springs. She was invited to visit at the Corrigan home. In no time she had divorced Dr.

Philadelphia Inquire 1948

THE story of Laura Mae Corri-

gan was a fabulous one in international society, a story of her transformation from a vain social climber to a person whose work in behalf of soldiers and refugees in France and England during



World War II brought her decorations from the governments of both countries—and a story of a woman who apparently never was able to forget she had been snubbed out of the United States when she attempted to climb the social ladder here.

Born Laura Mae Whitlock in Waupaca, Wis., in 1879, daughter of a house painter, she early set her sights on a social career. Al-

though she never volunteered any information regarding her family or early life, it is known that she went to work as a stenographer in Chicago when she was quite young, and finally landed a job as reporter on a newspaper in that city.

Her work gave her a vision of society, fired her ambition. She married a hotel physician, Dr. Duncan R. McMartin, and so achieved some social standing. Then, according to one story, she

spent a vacation at White Sulphur Springs and met a woman from one of the most dramatic families in the United States—the Corrigans of Cleveland.

Back in 1870, two brothers, John and James Corrigan, came to Cleveland, labored in oil refineries, finally acquired a steel plant. They took into their firm an able, hard-working young man, Price McKinney.

In no time she had divorced Dr. McMartin, and was married to James W. Corrigan, Jr.

BUT when young Corrigan attempted to introduce his bride to Cleveland society, the Euclid Avenue set gave her a chilly reception. And when the young Corrigans went to New York, Laura was accorded similar treatment.

Shortly after World War I, the Corrigans moved to London. There, Laura met Mrs. George Keppel, famous as having been King Edward VII's favorite hostess. Mrs. Corrigan rented the Keppel mansion on Grosvenor Street, and began to climb. By 1923, Laura was acknowledged social leader. When her husband died suddenly in 1928, Mrs. Corrigan sold her interests in the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Company to Republic Steel for a reputed \$21,000,000 and continued to reside abroad. In Paris, as in London, she was a bright light of the social set.

Before the outbreak of World War II she was living in France. Upon the commencement of hostilities, she organized a group of French and other Allied women into "La Bienvenue," a group dedicated to supplying comforts for the soldiers. This contribution to the war effort won her the "Croix du Combattant".

After the Nazi occupation in 1940 she went to Southern France, where she specialized in work for refugees, at a cost of much of her personal fortune. She afterwards was decorated with the Croix de Guerre and made a member of the Legion of Honor for this work.

EVENTUALLY escaping through Portugal, she turned up in London in 1944, where she organized the "Wings Club," which became famous as a haven for Allied airmen. The King's Medal was bestowed upon her by Britain for her work.

Last December, she came to New York to visit her sister. Stricken ill January 21, she was taken to a hospital, where she died the following day.

Ironically, Laura Mae Corrigan finally got back to Cleveland. Her funeral services were held there.

The Pay-Off

Laura Mae Corrigan worked as a waitress in Chicago, where she met and married the president of a steel company. Their efforts to find a place in society, first in Cleveland and then in New York, were rebuffed. After World War I they found a welcome in the drawing rooms of London.

Surviving her husband by 20 years, Mrs. Corrigan remained abroad until shortly before Christmas. A few days ago she died, leaving millions.

Mrs. Corrigan made the usual handsome provisions for relatives, naming a sister her principal beneficiary. But with an irony that could not have been lost on those who snubbed her in the United States, she left legacies ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000 to an incredibly long list of names which could have been copied from the Almanach de Gotha and Burke's Peerage. Her legatees are knights and ladies, marchionesses and princesses, dukes and counts, living in England, France and Denmark.

An ex-waitress bestowing post-mortem largess on de la Rochefoucauld, Bourbon-Parma and the British gentry is a spectacle to reinforce one's faith in the opportunities of what some one has called the American free enterprise system.

To the numerous waitresses across this land Laura Mae Corrigan's success story should be an inspiration even if her wealth was not accumulated from tips. You do meet people with such interesting possibilities while waiting on table. When you strike it rich you have an opportunity to reward those who are kind, nor does it matter if their kindness is prompted by a knowing eye for the main chance, an attribute which European aristocracy possesses in abundance.

Mrs. Corrigan, Steel Leader's Widow, Dies

2 Nations Decorated Her for War II Work

New York, Jan. 23 (AP)—Mrs. Laura Mae Corrigan, widow of James W. Corrigan, one-time Cleveland steel magnate, died here yesterday.

Mrs. Corrigan, who had come here from Paris last December 24th, was the holder of medals from the French and British governments for her activities in World War II. Among these activities was the Wings Club she opened in London.

Her husband, who was president of the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Co. in Cleveland and later of the Corrigan Steel Co., died exactly 20 years before his wife, January 22, 1928, a family spokesman said. **Aided Many Americans**

Mrs. Corrigan had lived abroad, mostly in Paris, since shortly after World War I, the spokesman said. She was noted for lavish parties with lengthy lists of guests who received expensive presents.

After war broke out in 1939, Mrs. Corrigan organized La Bien Venue, a group of French women war workers who aided refugees and sent gifts to troops. She also aided hundreds of needy American citizens abroad.

Niagara Falls Gazette Feb 1946

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American Woman Reported Injured In Paris Car Crash

Vichy, France, Dec. 7 (UP)—Unconfirmed reports from Paris today said that Mrs. Corrigan, widow of a Cleveland steel magnate, had been gravely injured in a traffic accident.

(Mrs. Laura Mae Corrigan, widow of James W. Corrigan, has been living in France and donated several ambulances to the French after the war started.)

It was reported that both of Mrs. Corrigan's legs were broken. According to the message received here she was riding in a "cribs taxicab"—a small enclosed car pulled by a bicyclist—when it was run down by an automobile truck.

She was a noted contributor prior to the German occupation to French war relief funds, giving several million francs to provide sleeping bags for soldiers, sending to French reports. Since the armistice she has been reported distributing clothing to French prisoners in German camps. She was often under the white dove relief work before the armistice.

Syracuse Herald 1941

CORRIGAN, LAURA MAE

NP2140C

CORRIGAN, LAURA MAE (2 Jan. 1879-22 Jan. 1948), an international socialite, was born in Wisconsin, the daughter of **Charles and Emma Whitlock**. She married, then divorced, physician Duncan R. MacMartin in Chicago. In 1917 she married Jas. W. Corrigan, son of a founder of the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Co. Possibly because of her divorce, Laura was never really accepted into Cleveland society, so the Corrigans spent their time in Europe. Corrigan's lavish parties were covered in society columns in both Europe and the U.S., as her guests included the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of York. In 1925, Jas. Corrigan returned to Cleveland and took control of Corrigan-McKinney Steel, although Laura, except for visits, remained in Europe. James died in 1928.

After James' died, Corrigan resided in Europe. In Paris when **WORLD WAR II** broke out, she escaped to England via Portugal. During the war she worked for French soldiers and refugees, organizing the aid group of French women known as La Bien Venue. Corrigan also helped U.S. citizens financially stranded in Europe. In Buckinghamshire, England, she ran the popular officers' Wings Club. Before the war, Corrigan received an annual income of \$800,000. During the war, the U.S. State Dept. allowed her only \$500/month, so she sold her jewelry, tapestries, and furniture to finance her activities. After the war, she received the Croix de Guerre, Legion of Honor, and Croix de Combattant from the French government, and the King's Medal from the British government. Corrigan had no children by either marriage and was buried in **LAKE VIEW CEMETERY**.

3014



Mrs. D. R. MacMartin

Photo added by Angel_Love

Laura Mae Whitlock Corrigan

NP2140B

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BIRTH 2 Jan 1879
Wisconsin, USA

DEATH 22 Jan 1948 (aged 69)
New York, New York County (Manhattan), New York, USA

BURIAL Lake View Cemetery
Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, USA

MEMORIAL ID 19123092 · [View Source](#)

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MEMORIAL PHOTOS 5 FLOWERS 3

An international socialite, Laura was born in Wisconsin, the daughter of Charles and Emma Whitlock. She married, then divorced, physician Duncan R. MacMartin in Chicago. In 1917 she married Jas. W. Corrigan Jr., son of a founder of the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Co. Possibly because of her divorce, Laura was never really accepted into Cleveland society, so the Corrigans spent their time in Europe.



Photo added by Keith

Charles Whitrock

BIRTH 30 Mar 1850
Stockton, Portage County, Wisconsin, USA

DEATH 21 Mar 1881 (aged 30)
Grand Rapids, Wood County, Wisconsin, USA

BURIAL Forest Hill Cemetery
Wisconsin Rapids, Wood County, Wisconsin, USA [Show Map](#)

PLOT Block 110.

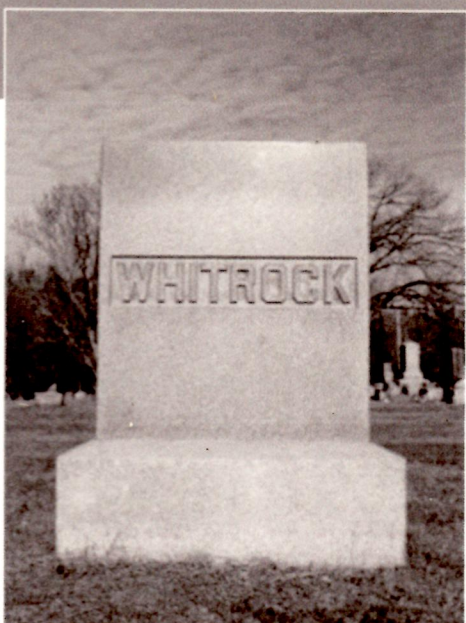
MEMORIAL ID 83174564 · [View Source](#)

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MEMORIAL PHOTOS 2 FLOWERS 0

Spouse: Emma Emily Sitherwood
Marriage: 1 Dec 1877 Wood County
Children: Clara; Laura; Mabelle
* Father: Mark/Max Whitrock *Born Germany*
Mother: Maria/Mary Wenn

1880 Census:
Name: Chas. Wittrock
Age: 29
Birth Date: 4ht 1851



OBITUARY FOR LAURA MAE CORRIGAN

New York Times, Saturday, January 24, 1948

Mrs. Laura Mae Corrigan, widow of James W. Corrigan, Cleveland steel company head, died on Thursday at Post Graduate Hospital here. Mrs. Corrigan was one of England's best known social leaders during the period after the First World War and in the recent war had won many decorations for her work in behalf of soldiers and refugees. She arrived in this country from Paris on Christmas Eve to visit her sister, Mrs. David Armstrong-Taylor of San Francisco. The two sisters had been staying at the Plaza Hotel since then. Mrs. Corrigan became ill on Wednesday and was taken to the hospital.

FABULOUS SOCIETY STORY—The story of Laura Mae Corrigan was a fabulous one in the annals of international society. She was born in Wisconsin. Her father was said to have been an "odd jobs" man and she, herself, to have once been a waitress in Chicago. These stories, despite the lack of any stigma pertaining to them, caused her exclusion from Cleveland society after her marriage to Mr. Corrigan, who was president of the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Company and a son of the founder of the business.

Snubbed on Euclid Avenue, the Corrigans came to New York, but met the same treatment here. According to the society writers of the period immediately after the First World War, Mrs. Corrigan vainly spent "hundreds of thousands" of dollars in attempts to get into Gotham's social swim. Shortly after the war she and her husband went to London, where in the course of time she met Mrs. George Keppel, famous as having been King Edward VII's favorite hostess. Mrs. Corrigan rented Mrs. Keppel's mansion on Grosvenor Street, which had been the scene of many a lavish party for the haute monde. She learned the secrets of success in entertaining royalty and was reputed to have hired Mrs. Keppel's coterie of butlers, footmen and other servants, whose drawing room manners were unmatched anywhere in the world.

MECCA FOR PRINCES, DUKES—Soon the Corrigan mansion was the Mecca of princes, ambassadors and dukes. By 1923, Mrs. Corrigan was virtually London's prime social arbiter. The only element lacking, strangely enough, was "the Knickerbocker crowd." No Astors, Vanderbilts or others bearing old New York—or Cleveland—names were ever invited. The climax came when the phenomenally wealthy prince of India turned down a previous invitation to attend a party at the home of a leading American family of the "Knickerbocker" set in order to accept one at Mrs. Corrigan's. When the Corrigans returned here, society columnists tried to make up to them by declaring in print that they "had not been deserted" by their friends here and had really just gone abroad to amuse themselves. But the breach with Cleveland society was never patched up. Euclid Avenue had become afraid of the Corrigans and Mrs. Corrigan no longer cared. Mr. Corrigan died on Jan. 22, 1928, exactly twenty years before his wife. He was then 47 years old. Later Mrs. Corrigan went abroad again and once more shone in London society, although she had a clash with the Mountbattens and once committed the error of showing the door to an uninvited guest, who, she afterwards discovered was a member of the British royal household.

ORGANIZED "LA BIENVENUE"—Before the outbreak of the recent war, she went to France

and immediately upon the commencement of hostilities organized a group of French and other Allied women into “La Bienvenue,” a group dedicated to supplying comforts for the soldiers. Her outstanding work in this respect led her to be later decorated with the “Croix du Combatant” by the French Government—one of the very few women ever so decorated because the award is only given for work in the front lines. After the Nazi victory of 1940 she went to Unoccupied France, where she specialized in work for refugees. She was afterwards decorated with the Croix de Guerre and made a member of the Legion of Honor for this work, in pursuit of which she liquidated much of her personal fortune, including her jewelry. Eventually escaping through Portugal, she turned up in London in 1944, where she organized the “Wings Club,” which became famous as a haven for Allied aviators. It was established in the former mansion of Lord Moyne, and the Duchess of Kent was chief patroness. ‘The King’s Medal was bestowed upon her by Britain for her work. Besides her sister, Mrs. Corrigan leaves a nephew, Duncan Armstrong-Taylor.

<https://archive.org/details/clevelandcuriosi0000schw/page/124/mode/2up?q=%22Laura+Mae+Corrigan%22>

Cleveland curiosities : Eliot Ness & his blundering raid, a busker's promise, the richest heiress who never lived, and more
by Schwarz, Ted, 1945-

Laura Mae Corrigan

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Laura Mae Corrigan (2 January 1879 – 22 January 1948) was a wealthy American socialite and philanthropist.[1][2][3] Her actions during the Second World War in supporting Allied troops and aiding refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe led to her being awarded the Croix de Guerre, Legion of Honour, Croix du Combattant, and the King's Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom.[1]

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Marriage & social prominence

Corrigan was born in Wisconsin in 1879 to Charles and Emma Whitlock. She first married a Chicago doctor named Duncan R. MacMartin, whom she met while working as a waitress. She later divorced MacMartin and on December 2, 1916 remarried James W. Corrigan, the son of one of the founders of the Corrigan-McKinney Steel Co. of Cleveland, Ohio.[1][4] The newlyweds were snubbed by Cleveland and New York society because of Laura's humble background and her record as a divorcée, so in 1919 they relocated to London. The Corrigans befriended Alice Keppel and rented her house on Grosvenor Street in Mayfair.[5] In time Mrs. Corrigan gained a reputation for her lavish parties, joining the ranks of other prominent society hostesses of American origin like Emerald Cunard, Elsa Maxwell, and Nancy Astor.[6] Although overall she was a great success, she still encountered prejudice because of her humble background (her rival Mrs. Ronnie Greville complained that she was "never hungry enough" to dine with Mrs. Corrigan).[3]

In 1925 her husband returned to Cleveland to take up management of his father's company. Mrs. Corrigan remained in Europe and upon James's death in 1928, inherited his shares in Corrigan-McKinney, which she eventually sold to Republic Steel for \$21 million.[5][7] The income she received from her investments amounted to \$800,000 per annum on the eve of the Second World War.[1] Ulf Aschan wrote, likely citing Elspeth Huxley's earlier (1985) description of Corrigan, in reference to her impact on the British East Africa community in Babati, "Famous for her wealth-which was derived from her husband's steel mills-and her lavish entertainment in a bid to ensnare the rich and titled, Laura also looked after her poorer, albeit titled, friends to uphold standards at all costs." [8] Her reputation in London suffered in the late 1930s as a result of the Edward VIII abdication crisis, due to her association with Wallis Simpson.[9]

Amongst her philanthropic activities, Corrigan supported the Cleveland Zoo and in 1933 made a

gift of 28 animals she had obtained on safari in Africa, which became the highlight of the Zoo's collection during the 1930s. Corrigan also donated \$5,000 to fund 4 years worth of food for the animals, since the Zoo was unable to afford their upkeep.[10] That same year she donated \$10,000 to a range of causes in her native Wisconsin, including the Wisconsin Rapids Unemployment Relief Fund, Riverview Hospital Association, and the South Wood County chapter of the Red Cross.[11]

World War II

When war broke out between France and Germany in September 1939, Corrigan chose to remain in Paris as a neutral American citizen at the Ritz Hotel, where she had long maintained a suite. She founded an aid group for Allied servicemen called "La Bienvenue" and cultivated high-ranking Nazi officials in Paris, including Hermann Goering. After France was invaded by Germany in 1940, Corrigan moved to the unoccupied Vichy, where she became known as the "American Angel" for helping to fund the French Resistance and aid refugees.[12][13][5] Her income was reduced to only \$500 a month by the State Department as part of wartime controls on the movement of money overseas, so she sold her furniture, jewelry, and other valuables in order to continue funding her refugee and resistance activities.[1] In 1942 she escaped to England via Portugal, and devoted herself to organizing relief for French refugees and soldiers. She ran a popular club for airmen called the Wing's Club near RAF Wing in Buckinghamshire. In recognition of her heroism, she was awarded the Croix de Guerre, the Legion of Honor and Croix du Combattant by the postwar French Republic, as well as the King's Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom from the British government.[1]

Death

Corrigan died on January 22, 1948 while she was in New York City visiting her sister. She was buried with her husband in Cleveland's Lake View Cemetery.[1]

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<http://wwwnews-heraldcom.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/lake-county-mini-profiles-laura-mae.html>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19123092/laura-mae-corrigan>

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Most info from the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History.

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/103960422/sophie-caroline_a-adams

Sophia was born May 22, 1849 at sea during voyage from Germany.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/106092829/marx-whitrock>

Marx (Max) Whitrock was born May 31, 1821 Germany