

THE LAMON V. HARKNESS MAUSOLEUM

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The Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum rests within a grassy plot of land, nestled amidst encroaching foliage in the Bronx's Woodlawn Cemetery. [Fig. 1.1] While seemingly discrete, those interred are of no small consequence to the fabric of Capitalist America. Standard Oil man, Lamon Vanderburgh (also recorded as Vernon) Harkness was one of the wealthiest men in America at the turn of the century. [Fig. 1.2] Characteristic of the owner's low-profile, his austere mausoleum symbolizes the need to follow certain customs of wealthy Americans. However, the lack of excessive ornament, and its distance from the main cemetery road speak to an American figure who seemed to care little about celebrity.



Fig. 1.1. Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, New York, Lindsay Papke, 2020

The mausoleum is comprised of eight catacombs, four of which are occupied first by his wife Martha Frances Johnson, then by Lamon himself, his son Harry S. Harkness, and finally followed by son-in-law A. Kingsley Macomber. Entering the mausoleum, Martha's catacomb is positioned on the north side, surrounded by two marble, Grecian urns. No other persons have been interred on the north side. Kingsley, Lamon, and Harry occupy the south catacombs. Lamon and Martha's daughters are buried elsewhere – Lela in Kentucky with her husband O. M. Edwards and Princess Myrtle Harkness Macomber Hussein in the South of France. Lamon's younger brother Charles William Harkness and cousin William Lamon Harkness were initially buried in Lamon's mausoleum but were later removed for various reasons. Charles had only been temporarily placed in his brother's mausoleum because "he and his wife were so ill with influenza services could not be done." His wife, Mary Warden Harkness, died a few months later

in 1916 and her family then had them both placed in her father's mausoleum in West Laurel Hill Cemetery.¹ William was removed in 1923 to Lamon's brother Edward Harkness' Mausoleum also located in Woodlawn just to the southwest of the Lamon Harkness Mausoleum.

Both Lamon and Martha were born in Ohio to white, privileged parents. However, Lamon's father Stephen Vanderburgh Harkness was orphaned at a relatively young age and thus taken in by an uncle who taught him the harness trade.² Stephen worked as a harness-maker then moved on to creating a distillery for crude oil in Monroeville, Ohio where Lamon was born. Through Stephen's work in the crude oil refinery business he became acquainted with John D. Rockefeller and by 1870 he was a 'silent stakeholder' in what is now known as the behemoth Standard Oil Company – one of the greatest monopolies of the American industrial era. The wealth Stephen amassed by getting in on the ground floor of such an enterprise set the stage for the rest of his life as well as the lives of his children's and grandchildren's.

Lamon demonstrated a similar, silent work ethic to his father's. At the age of 16, Lamon moved to Eureka, Kansas where he had purchased a ranch just outside of town. He then entered the cattle business when he was only nineteen. It is unclear when he and Martha married but it is

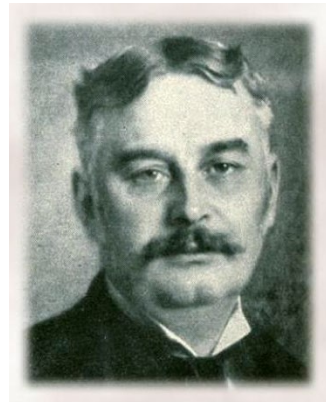


Fig. 1.2. Portrait of Lamon V. Harkness, c/o Harness Museum

likely they met while both lived in Ohio and possibly moved together to Kansas. Their marriage would have occurred prior to Stephen's status within the Standard Oil Company thus implying a union potentially out of love and admiration rather than for prestige and wealth. Although, since there is little to no documentation of Martha this is conjecture.

¹ "Charles William Harkness (1860-1916) - Find A...," accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24287707/charles-william-harkness>.

² H. K. J., "Stephen Vanderburgh Harkness. - ProQuest," *Magazine of Western History*, 1888, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/137852188/99DFE25015E04CBBPQ/1?accountid=10226>.

When Lamon was 38, his father died which suddenly left him and his three siblings each with substantial fortunes. Lamon – being the eldest – also earned the coveted business title as the newly minted Vice-President of Standard Oil. Over the next decade Lamon purchased multiple homes and estates for his family ranging from New York City to Pasadena, California. First, Lamon decided to move his wife and family of three (Lela, Myrtle, and Harry) to Kansas City, Missouri where they lived in an area known as Millionaire’s Row. Their wealth was no small secret as evidenced from their stone mansion built at 3125 Troost Avenue.³ [Fig. 1.3]



Fig. 1.3. The Harkness brownstone mansion, 3124 Troost Avenue, Kansas City, MO, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

They stayed in Kansas City for only three years, 1888-1891, then left for Kentucky where Lamon purchased a 400-acre ranch for breeding horses. [Fig. 1.4] He named the ranch ‘Walnut Hall Farm’ and swiftly became a notable figure among the

Kentucky horse breeding circuit, noted as a “strong factor in the development of the Kentucky Trotting Horse Breeders’ Association.”⁴ Clearly his father’s early business in the harness trade influenced Lamon in his ventures in Kentucky becoming a devotee of the harness horse tradition. Both Lela and Myrtle Harkness spent their formative teenage years on this farm and developed a love for both breeding horses and horse racing. This love carried throughout their lives resulting

³ Heather Scanlon, “Lamon Vernon (L.V.) Harkness,” *SqueezeBoxCity* (blog), January 5, 2017, <http://www.squeezeboxcity.com/lamon-vernon-l-v-harkness/>.

⁴ W. S. Williams, “Noted Horseman Has Passed Away: Lamon. V. Harkness, Wealthy and Noted Patron of the Harness Game - ProQuest,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, January 24, 1915.

in Lela purchasing the Walnut Hall Farm after her father's death and Myrtle marrying a renowned horse breeder.⁵ In 1899 the Harkness' spent the winter in Pasadena, California – a very fashionable winter retreat at the turn of the century, boasting grand hotels amidst the pastoral orange fields of southern California. It was quite common for the wealthy, east coast elites to winter “for their



Fig. 1.4. Walnut Hall, horse breeding farm in bluegrass region near Lexington, Kentucky. Library of Congress, HABS, July 1940

health” at the popular hotels built in the San Gabriel Valley including the Raymond Hotel, and the Hotel Green. Since the Raymond Hotel tragically burned in 1895 the only option for the Harkness' winter stay in 1899 was at the Hotel Green.⁶ It was while they wintered in Pasadena that Myrtle met her soon-to-be husband, A. Kingsley “King” Macomber of both Pasadena and Paris, France. Kingsley was a renowned horse-breeder himself and in the spring of 1899, he proposed to Myrtle Harkness.⁷ They wed in a private, intimate ceremony at the Harkness' New York home located at 933 Fifth Avenue.⁸ By 1900 the Harkness' spent their time between their home in New York, their horse farm in Kentucky, and a home in Pasadena. They also owned land in Easthampton, and Flushing, New York as well as William Vanderbilt's old mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut.⁹

The origin stories of wealth so often mythologized in American history are depicted in this outwardly fortunate family's story but Lamon does not appear to be quite as ostentatious

⁵ Mark Meredith, “Walnut Hall Farm - HouseHistree,” May 23, 2020, <https://househistree.com/houses/walnut-hall-farm>.

⁶ Nathan Masters, “Southern California's Lost Resort: The Raymond Hotel of South Pasadena,” KCET, November 15, 2012, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/southern-californias-lost-resort-the-raymond-hotel-of-south-pasadena>.

⁷ “Out ~of ~Town Society.: Pasadena. Santa Ana, Fullerton, Redlands, Santa Barbara. Soldiers' Home, I Ventura, - ProQuest,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1899, sec. Society Pages.

⁸ “Incidents In Society - ProQuest,” *New - York Tribune*, September 28, 1899, sec. Special.

⁹ “Greenwich Property Assessments Higher - ProQuest,” *The New York Times*, January 1, 1902.

with his earnings as his children would become. While the Harkness' owned various estates, they ultimately kept a low-profile in the papers for people of their status. There is scarce amount of documentation regarding Lamon, his wife Martha, and his children while Lamon and Martha were still alive. Indeed, even Martha's funeral announcement is kept to a minimum: "On Sunday, October 15, 1905. At her residence. No. 933-5th ave. Martha Frances, wife of L. V. Harkness. Funeral private."¹⁰ It is not made known what Martha died from, but it appears that she fell seriously ill in September of 1905. Lamon hired Collins Marsh, a general contractor in New York City, to construct the mausoleum and purchased the Harkness plot on Chestnut Hill in fashionable Woodlawn Cemetery. According to the specifications of the plan, the materials were all to be "first class."¹¹ The foundation plans were forwarded on October 11 and Martha died on October 15, 1905. Lamon carried on with his business for a year and then sold his land in Greenwich, Connecticut to fund the commission of his yacht, the SS Wakiva. He chartered the yacht to sail around the world for three years – an extensive period of time.¹² After his wife died and his youngest, Harry, married in 1906, Lamon no longer had family members living with him which allowed him the ability to travel.¹³ It is this same yacht that Lamon ended up sending to Europe in 1914 to retrieve Myrtle, her husband Kingsley and their friends who were fleeing the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁴

In 1915, Lamon's doctor instructed him to spend time in California because of his deteriorating health. Conveniently, Myrtle and Kingsley had built a rather grandiose ranch in San

¹⁰ "Died - ProQuest," *New - York Tribune*, October 16, 1905, sec. Obituary.

¹¹ "Specifications," September 18, 1905.

¹² "Harkness to Tour World.: Standard Oil Man Orders a Yacht and Sells Greenwich Property. - ProQuest," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1906.

¹³ "H.S. Harkness Weds Again, Wealthy Sportsman Marries Mrs. F. S. Gaines, Also a Divorcee.," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1917, sec. Marriage Announcement.

¹⁴ "Rush Yachts to Sea: Three at New York Are Going Abroad to Rescue Owners. Destinations Are Secret - ProQuest," *The Washington Post*, August 12, 1914.

Benito, California in 1912. They had the ranch styled after buildings they admired during their stays in the South of France and commissioned the architect Frank Delos Wolfe to design their California estate.¹⁵ [1.5] Lamon went to stay at the ranch in hopes that his health would improve. However, on January 17, 1915, Lamon died due to “diabetes and cirrhosis of the liver of many years’ standing.”¹⁶ A private funeral followed and Lamon was interred opposite his wife in the Harkness Mausoleum in the Bronx. Immediately following his death, a barrage of media publicity ensued as is customary whenever someone of significant wealth passes. His net worth was valued at a staggering \$100,000,000 (others reported \$150,000,000) and since he did not leave a will, the great problem of the transfer tax starkly came into question among the three states claiming to be his true residence: New York, Kentucky, and California. While they all made viable arguments to be the decedent’s true domicile, Kentucky ultimately won out after all three of his children claimed Kentucky as their father’s home. Furthermore, documentation from the Surrogate’s Court stated the residence of Lamon as Lexington, Kentucky.¹⁷ The case was settled by the Harkness estate paying Kentucky \$288,0000 instead of the originally estimated \$3,000,000 expected to go to New York.

After Lamon and Martha’s death, press grew surrounding their youngest child, Harry S. Harkness. A true gentleman sportsman of the day he raced cars and flew planes. As previously mentioned, he married shortly after his mother’s death, but this marriage ended nearly a year after his father’s death making headlines for the “second-highest alimony” to be paid to his ex-wife Mrs. Marie Marbeck Harkness at a sum of \$33,000.¹⁸ In 1917, he remarried Mrs. Florence

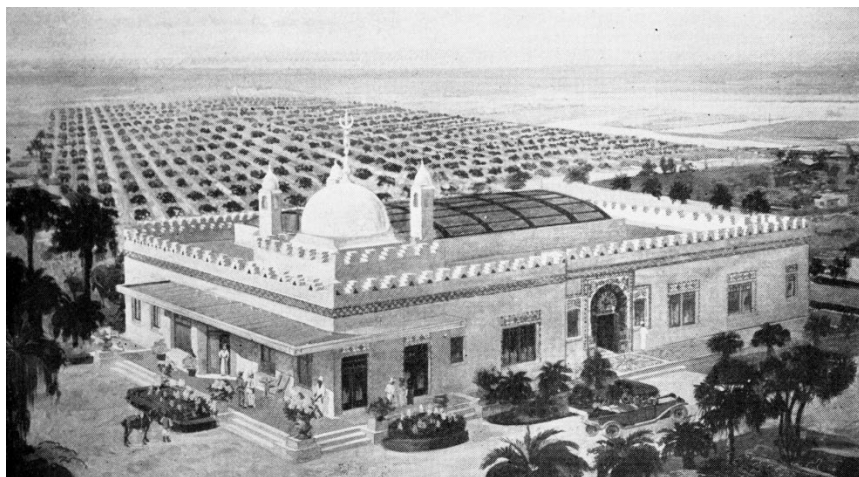
¹⁵ Mark Meredith, “Rancho Cienega de Los Paicines - HouseHistree,” May 23, 2020, <https://househistree.com/houses/rancho-cienega-de-los-paicines>.

¹⁶ “Lamon V. Harkness Dies in California: Standard Oil Official Succumbs on Daughter’s Ranch--Body To Be Sent Here - ProQuest,” *New - York Tribune*, January 18, 1915.

¹⁷ “From the Record - ProQuest,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, May 26, 1919.

¹⁸ “Wife Divorces H. S. Harkness: Son of Standard Oil Man Must Pay Her \$33,000 a Year Alimony - ProQuest,” *New - York Tribune*, October 19, 1916.

Steuber Gaines who had recently divorced her husband.¹⁹ Tragically, Harry died of influenza during the Spanish Flu epidemic on January 23, 1919 – only 38 years old – and is interred at the Harkness Mausoleum. The day he died he left a hasty will bequeathing the entirety of his estate to his most recent wife Florence. The estate initially was thought to be another small fortune like that of his father's; however, Harry's penchant for fast cars, planes and gifts for his wife (he died owing nearly \$400,000 to various merchants for gifts purchased for Florence) left a considerable amount of debt to be paid. However, even after these debts were settled, he was still valued at \$9,000,000 (note that this equates to around \$122,300,000 in 2020).²⁰



1.5. Myrtle and A. Kingsley Macomber's Rancho Cienega de los Paicines, San Benito, California. 15,000-square foot house designed by Frank Delos Wolfe, included an indoor pool, golf course and 12-car garage. Center of Myrtle and Kingsley's thoroughbred racehorse farm. Place of Lamon's death.

Myrtle also found herself in the spotlight on occasion.

She and her husband

Kingsley split their time

between their estates in

California and France. In

1916, Kingsley purchased

the racing stables of

William K. Vanderbilt in

Paris and established himself as “the undisputed head of American society in Europe.”²¹ The two became well-known figures in Deauville – a place described as the Monte Carlo of Paris and where the wealthy elite often vacationed. After Kingsley died in 1955, he is (perhaps surprisingly) interred at the Harkness Mausoleum. Myrtle eventually remarried to Prince Ilhamy

¹⁹ “H.S. Harkness Weds Again, Wealthy Sportsman Marries Mrs. F. S. Gaines, Also a Divorcee.”

²⁰ “Harkness Estate Shrinks \$11,000,000 - ProQuest,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1920.

²¹ “A K. Macomber, 78, Noted as Turfman - ProQuest,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1955.

Hussein of Egypt in 1960. Upon their marriage, Myrtle wrote a one-page note that bequeathed her estate to the Prince which went into effect a short three years later when she died in 1963. Myrtle left Ilhamy \$8,000,000 and died a Princess, buried in the South of France.²²

The significance of owning a mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery demonstrates an element of status for the owner within society. However, the relationship of those interred to that of the visible structure shed light on the characteristics of the owner. The Harkness mausoleum is neither heavily ornamented nor unnecessarily large. Similarly, Lamon maintained a distance from the public realm, evidenced in the lack of press during his lifetime. The treasures that seem to matter to him: his family and horses, continue to survive. While both Lela and Myrtle were not interred in their father's mausoleum, it was customary at the time for women to be buried with their husbands. Furthermore, Lela continued to run her father's Kentucky horse racing farm until her death when she in turn passed it on to her daughter. The matriarchal lineage continues today as evidenced by Lamon's great-granddaughter, Meg Jewett, who currently owns and operates Walnut Hall farm.²³ Overall, the Harkness mausoleum typifies a quiet American figure who had the fortune of spending his life doing what he enjoyed most alongside those he loved.

²² "Princess Hussein Leaves \$8,000,000 To Husband - ProQuest," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1963.

²³ "At Home in Lexington with Meg Jewett at Walnut Hall – Equestrian Living," accessed November 23, 2020, <https://eqliving.com/harkness/>.

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