
Royalty in the Muskeg

Life of Prince Leo
Galitzine

Edson and District Historical
Society

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The Galitzine family, one of the oldest and most noble houses in Russia, dates back to 1554 and began with Mikhail Ivanovich Bulgakov. In 1514, Mikhail was involved in the Battle of Orsha, during which he wore an iron glove on one of his hands. This glove soon became his trademark and after the birth of his first child in 1554, the house of Galitsa (which translates into 'Iron Glove') was started. Over the years, the name became Galitzine. However, various spellings exist, including Galitsyn, Galytsyn and Galitsin.¹

Generations later, in 1893, Prince Aleksandr Mstislavich Galitzine (who also held the title of Count Osterman) married Evgenia Alexandrovna Komovskaya in St. Petersburg. She died the following year, and in 1896 he remarried, this time to her cousin, Anastasia Alexandrovna Komovskaya. Together, their children were Prince Mstislav Galitzine, Princess Ekaterina Galitzine, and Prince Leo Galitzine - who was born in 1905.²

Twelve years after his birth, Leo Galitzine's homeland was swept up in revolution against the Tsarist autocracy. In the early months of 1917, the ruling aristocrat family - the Romanovs - were put under house arrest at Alexandr Palace. With the tensions between the peasantry and the nobility increasing every day, many of the royal families of Russia fled to France for safety before they too were captured.³ The exact date Leo Galitzine's family left Russia is unknown. However, his home in Krasnoie, Riazan (near Moscow), was hit by the worst of the revolution in October of 1917.⁴

While Prince Leo was living in Paris, in 1927, he met Marguerite Therses Raynaud-Carcas. Born in Mansoura, Egypt, on December 5, 1906, she was also living in France after receiving her university education in England. Contrary to popular belief, she was not an Egyptian princess, but a commoner from a wealthy merchant family. Prince Leo and Marguerite were married in Paris in 1928.⁵

In 1929, the newlyweds arrived in Canada on the *Empress of Australia*, a Canadian Pacific Liner which landed in Quebec.⁶ Their original intention had been to settle in interior British Columbia and start an Airplane Company, but upon arriving in Edson, "they became so impressed with its climate and natural advantages" that they decided to stay in the area.⁷ They purchased a total of 420 acres of land, most of which bordered the McLeod River, and the properties of Neil Armstrong and M. Sliva. From this, 110 acres were converted into crop land, while the rest was used for their fur farm. In the beginning, the

¹ The Prince George Galitzine Memorial Library, "The Princes Galitzine," <http://www.galitzinelibrary.ru/?id=13&sub=11> (accessed April 30, 2014).

² The Almanache de Saxe Gotha, "The Almanache de Gotha, Volume III," last modified 2008, [://catoiredebioncourt.free.fr/telecharger/Almanach de Gotha 2008 p84.pdf](http://catoiredebioncourt.free.fr/telecharger/Almanach%20de%20Gotha%202008%20p84.pdf) (accessed April 30, 2014).

³ Roza Grant, (friend of Prince Leo Galitzine), interview by Madison Sharman, Edson, AB, March 14, 2014.

⁴ Grant, interview by Madison Sharman.

⁵ "Princess Galitzine Dead In Port Said, Says Report," *Edmonton Journal*, May 1934.

⁶ Government of Canada, "Library and Archives Canada," last modified November 29, 2013, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/passenger-lists-border-entry-1925-1935/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=193547&> (accessed April 30, 2014).

⁷ Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson 75*, (Winnipeg: Jostens, 1986), 45.

Galitzines had four pairs of red foxes and one pair of silver foxes, but unfortunately the fur farming did not last long. Prince Leo had also registered a brand from 1932 to 1973 for the right rib of his cattle which was in the shape of a crown with the letters *E* and *B* inside.⁸

In the meantime, Marguerite invested money with Grant McConachie to form Independent Airways, which served Northern Alberta, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories as a passenger airline.⁹ With the royal couple's investments, they were able to buy a CF-APE, as well as a Fokker Universal airplane. This was the beginning of Mr. McConachie's many airplane companies, which would also eventually include United Air Transport and Yukon Southern Transport.¹⁰ Mr. McConachie later became the president of Canadian Pacific Airways, and in 1945 he was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.¹¹

At the same time, Prince Leo, Marguerite, and D.M. Mathieson started Great Bear Lake Airways, which flew north as well and was based out of Edmonton. They used this company to stake mining claims in and around the Great Bear Lake area in the hopes of joining some of the hundreds of others who were made rich from the various mines in the Northwest Territories. Both Leo Galitzine and Mr. Mathieson took trips up to the Northwest Territories prospecting but this business venture did not prove fruitful.¹²

Shortly after the death of his father, Leo's mother, Anastasia, arrived in Edson for a visit in June of 1931. This was cause for much excitement, as yet another royal had come to town! She arrived on Canada's shores with the *S.S. Alaunia* and took the Canadian National Railway all the way to Edson. She was carrying a whopping \$740 on her person. In comparison to the other travelers on the vessel, this was a huge amount of money.¹³ Anastasia returned to Russia one month later, and died in 1937.¹⁴

Prior to his mother's death, tragedy struck for the prince in 1934 with the untimely death of his wife. Though several legends exist suggesting Marguerite's cause of death (the most popular indicating that she died from childbirth), further research reveals the true story. Marguerite Galitzine, along with her travel companion, Mrs. Arthur Emery, were aboard the tourist steamship *Vulcana* in the Mediterranean Ocean on their way to take a motor tour across Europe. After docking at Port Said, Egypt, she developed acute appendicitis and was immediately operated on at a British hospital in the city. The prince was telegraphed of her condition after the operation, and was told she was on the road to recovery. Unfortunately, her condition took a turn for the worse and another surgery was conducted, at which

⁸ Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, *From the Brand Files*, (Cochrane, AB: Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, 2008) [http://www.smflibrary.ca/Jan 2008.pdf](http://www.smflibrary.ca/Jan%202008.pdf) (accessed April 30, 2014).

⁹ Larry Evans, "Looking Back: Crash of Canadian Pacific Airlines Flight 21," *Alaska Highway News*, last modified April 15, 2011, <http://www.alaskahighwaynews.ca/looking-back-1.1154310> (accessed April 30, 2014).

¹⁰ Jack Bell to Edson Archives, March 31, 1997.

¹¹ John S. Goulet, *Virtual Horizons*, "Bush Pilot With A Briefcase," last modified March 5, 2006, <http://www.ebushpilot.com/mcconachie.htm> (accessed April 30, 2014).

¹² Minutes of meeting of the Directors of Great Bear Lake Airways, March 11, 1932, Elmer Fossheim Collection, Edson Archives.

¹³ Canadian Immigration Service, *Canadian Government Return*, volume 5: 140, sheet no. 4 for third class tourists on the *S.S. Alaunia*, June 6, 1931.

¹⁴ Geneall, "Aleksandr Mstislavich Galitzine, Prince Galitzine," <http://geneall.net/en/name/470389/aleksandr-mstislavich-galitzine-prince-galitzine/> (accessed April 30, 2014).

time she died due to heart failure. The next telegram Prince Leo received informed him of her death. He did not arrive in Europe in time for her funeral, as she was buried only 24 hours after her death. Her place of burial, Port Said, was just minutes away from her birthplace.¹⁵ The next time the prince returned to Egypt was a few years later, with a Mr. R. Speers of Edmonton, to file a civil court action for Princess Marguerite Galitzine's estate. Prince Leo was awarded 200 thousand dollars, which with today's inflation equals about 3.4 million dollars.¹⁶

In 1935, the Naturalization Act of Canada granted Leo Galitzine's certification as an alien in the country. On the form, his occupation was listed as a professional dancer, and his place of residence was Edmonton. The prince moved to California in the following year after having sold his airline companies. On his immigration papers for the United States of America, he listed his occupation as a newspaper writer. The journey south was completed on the *Empress of Australia* from Quebec, the same ship that had brought him and his new wife, so full of ambition, to Canada years before.¹⁷

After immigrating to the U.S.A., there is limited documentation of the prince's future travels, places of residence, and occupations. However, the next known record (a passenger manifest) indicates that Leo Galitzine travelled on the *S.S. Veragua* from Jamaica, at that time listing New York as his last permanent residence.¹⁸ The 1940, the U.S.A. federal census revealed that Leo Galitzine was living in east Los Angeles in a flat costing \$45 per month. His occupation was listed as a student and writer, though unfortunately no record has been found clarifying where he was receiving his education, or what paper he was writing for.¹⁹

A clearer indication of his occupation reemerged in 1941, when he was cast as an extra in the hit Hollywood film, *The Chocolate Soldier*. Although he was only part of the chorus, his aristocratic status drew attention which allowed him to meet the famous Eddy Nelson, who starred in the film. Leo Galitzine was mentioned as the "background prince."²⁰ Prince Leo was also in *The Razor's Edge*, where he played a footman, as well as the 1949 hit, *The Foxes of Harrow*. Between his time in major movies, he played an extra in various low budget films being shot in the Los Angeles area.²¹

While living in California, Leo Galitzine frequently returned to Edson to see the farm that he still owned, and to visit with the Hindle family, who were close friends of the Galitzines. Many people in town still remember Leo driving around in his baby blue convertible. In his later years, he was noticed on visits

¹⁵ "Princess Galitzine Dead In Port Said, Says Report," *Edmonton Journal*, May 1934.

¹⁶ "'Sheik' R. Speers and Staff," *Edmonton Journal*, 1935.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Manifest*, filled out for Prince Leo Galitzine, December 3, 1936.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States*, for passengers onboard the *S.S. Veragua*, April 26, 1939.

¹⁹ United States Federal Government, *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, (Los Angeles, 1940).

²⁰ David Ragan, *Who's Who in Hollywood: The Largest Cast of Personalities Ever Assembled*, (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 46.

²¹ Ragan, *Who's Who in Hollywood*, 46.

because of his completely bald head, which made him look very similar to Yul Brynner in *The King and I*.²²

Leo Galitzine eventually moved to Vancouver, where he continued to write and act in television shows. On December 19, 1969, Leo past away in Gibsons, B.C., and was buried in the Seaview Cemetery under the name Leo Galitzine-Osterman. Despite his royal heritage, Leo's obituary in the *Coastal Times* was very small and did not even mention his aristocratic lineage. His sister, Ekaterina, was his only surviving family member.²³

When Leo Galitzine's estate in Edson was auctioned off in 1970, the event attracted almost all residents of the town. The prince had brought much of his furniture over from Europe, and some of his unique and distinguished belongings included a beautiful, carved bedroom set (now owned by the Grant family), many daggers and swords, fine china, and an array of other fine household items.²⁴ Many of the items from his estate are still in town, treasured by the people who remember the story of Prince Leo Galitzine, a royal who chose to call Edson home.

²² Grant, interview by Madison Sharman.

²³ "Deaths," *Coastal Times*, December 23, 1969.

²⁴ Grant, interview by Madison Sharman.

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