

Anastasia and Anna Anderson

Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicholaevna



Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicholaevna was born on June 18, 1901. Her parents were Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, and his wife Alexandra. Anastasia had three elder sisters: Olga, Tatiana, and Maria. Her only brother, Alexei (often translated as "Alexis"), was born in 1904.

For years Russia had been in upheaval. Anastasia's great-grandfather, Tsar Alexander II, freed the serfs and was known as the Tsar-Liberator, but in 1881 his carriage was bombed by a terrorist group called People's Will. Alexander was carried unconscious to the Winter Palace, where family members, including his thirteen-year-old grandson Nicholas, watched him die. Alexander II was succeeded by his son, Alexander III, Nicholas's father. Unlike his father, Alexander III believed in autocracy and opposed liberal reforms. He persecuted minorities, especially Jews.

Nicholas grew up to be a kind and gentle young man. He spoke French, English, and German, and was an excellent dancer and horseman. But he was given little training for his future role as tsar. His father was still in his forties when Nicholas reached adulthood, and no one expected Nicholas to inherit the throne for many years.

Nicholas's wife Alexandra was born Alix, Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt, the daughter of Princess Alice of England and Grand Duke Louis of Hesse. Alexandra was seen by many as cold and remote, but she had started life as a warm, happy child nicknamed Sunny. When Alix was six her mother died and Alix became withdrawn. For the rest of her life she appeared cool and aloof to those who didn't know her well.

Alix was 12 and Nicholas 16 when they first met. Nicholas was smitten with Alix right away. When they were older they met again and fell in love, and in 1894 they became engaged.

Soon after their engagement Alexander III died and 26-year old Nicholas became tsar. He said at the time, "I am not prepared to be a tsar. I never wanted to become one." His first decree proclaimed Alix's new name, Alexandra Feodorovna. A week after Alexander III's funeral, Nicholas and Alexandra married.

Nicholas and Alexandra were caring parents who spent a lot of time with their children. Anastasia and her sisters were close, and sometimes signed themselves collectively OTMA (their initials). The family lived quietly in the Alexander Palace at Tsarkoe Selo. This "simple" palace had over 100 rooms but was smaller than the nearby Catherine Palace, built by Catherine the Great to outshine Versailles.

Anastasia as a Girl



Anastasia was the youngest, most intelligent and most mischievous of the tsar's daughters. She was an excellent mimic and enjoyed pranks and practical jokes. Anastasia's childhood playmate Tatiana

Botkin described her as "lively and rough . . . roguish." Her cousin Princess Xenia described her as "frightfully temperamental, wild and rough." Years later Tatiana Botkin and Princess Xenia met Anna Anderson. Both believed that Anderson was Anastasia.

But Anastasia had a gentle side. She was kind to her dogs: Shipka, who died of a brain disease, and Jemmy, a spaniel who died with the imperial family. And she was loving toward her sick brother. Few people outside the family knew that Alexei suffered from hemophilia, a disorder in which blood doesn't clot properly, causing internal bleeding. The smallest bump could cause Alexei agony, so he wasn't permitted play active games. Alexandra spent much of her time worrying about her son, who was unlikely to survive to adulthood.

Anastasia had light brown hair (sometimes described as reddish blonde) and blue eyes. Like her mother and sisters she was a beauty, although as a teen she became rather fat. She shared a bedroom with her sister Maria, whom she dominated. Their room adjoined Olga and Tatiana's. The girls' quarters were separate from their parents'. They were raised relatively simply, bathing in cold water, sleeping on hard camp beds. The beds went with them everywhere, even to Germany when the girls visited their Uncle Ernst. They slept in these same beds until the night they died.

Like her sisters, Anastasia spoke English and Russian. Because of their isolation from the outside world, the girls' Russian was somewhat childish.

Rasputin and the Revolution

Nicholas II's reign lasted for over 22 years. He continued his father's policies of suppressing reform and persecuting minorities. His critics said that he listened too much to his advisors. Socialist groups agitated for the overthrow of the tsar's regime and the

creation of a classless society. The Revolution of 1905 began when government troops fired on a crowd of workers who were marching to petition the tsar. This "bloody Sunday" caused peasant revolts, workers' strikes and naval mutinies. The Duma, a national parliament, was established, but it was hostile toward Nicholas and he dissolved it after 10 weeks. Later Duma conventions met the same fate.

Meanwhile Alexandra was preoccupied with her attempts to help her sick son. She turned to Rasputin, a controversial holy man. Rasputin (1872-1916) had been born Grigori Yefimovich, the son of a Siberian farmer. As a young man Grigori was a drunken rake, so fellow villagers nicknamed him Rasputin, or "dissolute." One day Rasputin claimed to have received a vision from God. He became a wandering monk, apparently adept at healing.

Rasputin did seem to have the power to help Alexei. One on occasion in 1912, when the tsarevich was on the verge of death, Rasputin sent a telegram saying, "The Little One will not die," and Alexei recovered. Rumors circulated about Rasputin's wild life when he was away from the imperial family, but Nicholas, Alexandra and their children trusted him completely, and he was always on his best behavior with them. Few people knew about Alexei's illness, so few understood why the imperial family chose to associate with the dirty, disreputable "mad monk."

World War I began in 1914, and Nicholas personally took command of the Russian army the following year. In his absence Alexandra ran the government with Rasputin as her advisor. Many ministers resigned or were fired, and their posts filled by supporters of Rasputin. The government started to crumble. In 1916 a band of conspirators, including members of the imperial family, invited Rasputin to supper. According to the conspirators, they gave Rasputin poison, but it had no effect. They shot him and still he did not die. At last they tied him up and threw him into a

river, where he drowned. Rasputin was gone, but the damage he had done to image of the imperial family was irreparable.

Disgusted by war losses and food shortages, workers in Petrograd and Moscow rioted. Mutiny spread through the military. On March 15, 1917 Nicholas was forced to abdicate.

Captivity and Execution

At the time of the abdication Anastasia and her siblings were suffering from measles. While they were confined to their beds the palace was taken over by soldiers. The imperial family were now prisoners. When the children recovered they went outside each day with their parents to walk in the park, where they were harassed and jeered.

The imperial family had little peace during their months of captivity. Once, while sewing, Anastasia leaned repeatedly over a table. As she did so she moved back in forth in front of two colored lamps. Soldiers outside the window saw the lights flicker and thought she was sending signals to some outside accomplice. They burst in and searched the room, but of course found nothing.

Eventually the imperial family was moved to Siberia. Their guards were rude and threatening. Anastasia and her sisters were not permitted to lock their bedroom door at night. Guards even followed the girls into the bathroom.

The imperial family lived at Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg for 78 days. Their last day was July 16, 1918. Late that night, the family was awakened and told to get dressed. After midnight they were taken to the cellar where, believing they were to be photographed, they stood in two rows. Anastasia, carrying her dog Jemmy, stood with her sisters, their doctor, and three servants.

Suddenly armed men burst into the room and began firing. Anastasia's parents and sister Olga died at once, as did Dr. Botkin and two servants. But bullets bounced off Anastasia, Tatiana and Maria and ricocheted around the room. Unbeknownst to the men, the girls had sewn diamonds into their clothes so that they could smuggle them from place to place. This was what caused the bullets to bounce off them, but to the soldiers it appeared miraculous. Astounded and scared, they kept firing. Tsarevich Alexei was on the floor, groaning but alive, so one soldier shot him in the head.

It was a chaotic scene. The cellar was filled with smoke. Anastasia was seen huddled against the wall, covering her head with her arms. Eventually Tatiana and Maria died. A maid who did not die from the gunshots was bayoneted. By some accounts, Anastasia was also bayoneted many times. There is much confusion about how Anastasia died. Some people refuse to believe that she died at all.

Anna Anderson



The assassins did their best to destroy the bodies of the last imperial family and their attendants. First they were thrown down a mine shaft and grenades were tossed in after them. Later the corpses were removed from the mine shaft; some were burned, and others were doused with acid. The remains were thrown into a pit and buried.

For decades, those who knew the location of the grave kept quiet for fear of the Soviet government, and rumors arose that one or more of the children had survived. Several supposed Anastasias surfaced over the years. One, Eugenia Smith, was still alive in the 1990s. The most famous Anastasia was Anna Anderson.

On the night of February 17, 1920, less than two years after the murders in Ipatiev House, a woman jumped off a bridge in Berlin. She was rescued and taken to a hospital. She had no ID and refused to give her identity. She was sent to a mental asylum. There someone recognized her as Grand Duchess Tatiana. She didn't deny this right away, but eventually said, "I never said I was Tatiana." When she was given a list of the tsar's daughters' names,

she crossed out all except Anastasia. When one of Alexandra's ladies-in-waiting visited her, the woman hid beneath a blanket. The lady-in-waiting called her an imposter and stormed off. But there were some who believed the woman's tale, and after her release in 1922 she lived on the charity of various sympathizers.

Eventually she explained her escape from the imperial family's assassins. She had been bayoneted, she said, but survived because the soldiers' weapons were blunt. After the murders a soldier named Tschaikovsky saw that she was still moving. During the chaos of that night he rescued her. Anderson said Tschaikovsky took her to Romania. Her story was confused, but it seems that at some point she may have married Tschaikovsky. After he was killed in a street fight she gave birth to his son, who was placed in an orphanage.

The woman walked to Berlin to seek out "her" aunt, Princess Irene. (Scoffers asked why she hadn't sought out her parents' cousin, Queen Marie, while she was in Romania.) She reached the palace where Irene lived, but, fearing no one would recognize her, didn't try to enter. Instead she decided to commit suicide by jumping off the bridge.

Princess Irene did meet the woman eventually and denied that she resembled Anastasia. Yet Irene later cried about the meeting and admitted, "She is similar, she is similar." Irene's son Prince Sigismund, a childhood friend of Anastasia, sent the woman a list of questions. Her answers convinced him that she was Anastasia.

The woman, who began calling herself Anna Anderson in the 1920s, attracted many supporters and many deniers. Crown Princess Cecilie, the daughter-in-law of the former kaiser and a relative of Anastasia, came to believe that Anderson was the lost grand duchess. Cecilie's son Prince Louis Ferdinand and his wife, Princess Kyra, did not believe. One of Anastasia's aunts, Grand

Duchess Olga, met Anderson several times. Her opinion wavered, but finally she declared Anderson was not Anastasia.

Anastasia's tutor, Pierre Gilliard, also met Anderson and thought she might be Anastasia. Later he changed his mind and called her "a first rate actress." Former ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska, who had been Nicholas's mistress before his marriage, and who later married Nicholas's cousin, Grand Duke Andrew, believed Anderson was Anastasia. She said Anderson had Nicholas's eyes, and looked at her with "the emperor's look."

After spending two days with Anderson, Nicholas II's cousin Grand Duke Alexander exclaimed, "I have seen Nicky's daughter! I have seen Nicky's daughter!" Other staunch supporters included Anastasia's cousin Princess Xenia, and Gleb and Tatiana Botkin, whose father was murdered with the imperial family. Gleb's childhood drawings of animals in court dress had delighted Anastasia. When he first met Anderson she asked about his "funny animals," convincing Gleb that she was Anastasia.

Anderson also claimed to have startling knowledge about Anastasia's uncle, Grand Duke Ernst of Hesse. She said he had visited Russia in 1916, when his country and Russia were at war. Ernst angrily denied making the visit, but the kaiser's stepson testified in court in 1966 that he had been told Ernst did secretly made the trip. If this was true, how did Anna Anderson know about it?

Determined to prove that Anderson was an imposter, Ernst backed an investigation that suggested Anderson was a Polish factory worker, Franziska Schanzkowska, who disappeared right before Anna Anderson surfaced. Some believe the investigation was tainted because the woman who identified Anderson as Schanzkowska was paid for her testimony.

Although she depended on the good-will of her supporters, Anna Anderson was haughty and demanding, often arguing with her hosts. At times she attacked people or ran around naked. Her supporters pointed out it was not surprising Anastasia would have mental problems after watching her family die and being nearly murdered herself.

Her detractors pointed out that she never spoke Russian. However, when she was addressed in Russian she understood and answered in other languages. She said she wouldn't speak Russian because it was the language spoken by those who had killed her family. She spoke good English, German and French - unusual for a Polish factory worker. She had scars that she said came from being shot and bayoneted. Her detractors said that the scars came from dropping a grenade when she worked in a munitions factory.

Anderson and Anastasia had other physical similarities. Anderson had a foot deformity like Anastasia's. Anthropologists who studied their photographs found their faces to be very similar. One famous anthropologist, Dr. Otto Reche, testified in court that Anastasia and Anna Anderson had to be either the same person or identical twins.

Anderson brought suit in a German court in 1938 to prove her identity and claim part of an inheritance. The case dragged on until 1970. Reche's testimony, made after examining photographs of Anastasia and Anna Anderson, came in 1964. A handwriting expert, who was not paid for her testimony, also swore that Anderson was Anastasia. Anderson even tried to obtain samples of Anastasia's fingerprints for comparison, although this proved impossible. Finally the court ruled, not that Anderson wasn't Anastasia, but that she hadn't proved it. But experts continued to take Anderson's side. In 1977 a prominent forensic expert, Dr. Moritz Furtmayr, identified Anderson as Anastasia.

For the last 15 years of her life Anderson was married to wealthy American John Manahan. She died of pneumonia in 1984 and was cremated at her own request. Her husband carried out her wishes and saw to it that her ashes were scattered in the cemetery at Castle Seon in Germany, which was owned by distant relatives of the Romanov family.

Recent DNA analysis of hair and tissue samples from Anderson seemed to prove that she was not Anastasia, but Franziska Schanzkowska. But some of Anderson's supporters cling to hope, saying that the tissue tested was not really Anderson's. They believe Anna Anderson - Anastasia - was swindled out of her true name and inheritance.

The Romanovs Remembered

The remains of the imperial family were exhumed in 1991. Portions of nine skeletons were found, and DNA testing confirmed they included Nicholas, Alexandra, and three of their daughters. Two bodies remain missing. The consensus is that they are those of Alexei and one of his sisters, possibly Anastasia.

On July 17, 1998, eighty years after the assassination, the imperial family and those who died with them were buried in the St. Catherine Chapel of St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg. Russian president Boris Yeltsin and members of the Romanov family attended the funeral, but senior members of the Russian Orthodox Church refused to attend due to lingering doubts over the identity of the remains.

As tsar, and even after he abdicated, Nicholas II was the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. After the assassination, he and his family were revered by many as martyrs and numerous miracles were attributed to them. The family was canonized as royal martyrs by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1981. In 2000,

the Archbishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church voted unanimously to canonize Nicholas, Alexandra, and all of their children as passion bearers, a minor form of sainthood that recognizes the Christian humility and patience with which they endured their captivity.