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“...I Danced With a Man who Danced with a Girl  
Who Danced with the Prince of Wales . . . .”

**OR**

“Bertie’s Long Vacation”

by

Ilana D. Miller

Americans love Royalty.

The last defamatory statement printed about a royal personage (apart from the constant digs at the present Prince of Wales’ personal life and ears) was back in 1776, when poor George III was labeled a tyrant and an oppressor by America’s Founding Fathers. Since then, there has been a very strange love affair going on between republican Americans and their former royal rulers.

Even in the midst of extreme national tensions, and in the middle of a cold peace between the two nations, Americans were overwrought with excitement at the prospect of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (“Bertie”), paying an official visit to Canada, and an unofficial one to the United States of America. This would be the first time that a royal person would cross the Atlantic to the New World, and naturally, the first visit to the United States. This is hardly surprising considering that only forty years earlier the United States had fought her second and last war with Britain, the War of 1812. Despite the end of hostilities, both countries continued in

adversarial positions regarding such major issues as the Monroe Doctrine and slavery.

Issues with the United States aside, during the Crimean War, Canada had sent divisions over to Turkey to fight alongside their British brethren. Afterwards, Canada warmly invited Queen Victoria to visit her colony. She, herself, was not inclined to make the trip, but promised that when the Prince of Wales was old enough, that he would do so.

When the proposed trip was finally announced, President James Buchanan of the United States was delighted. He had been Ambassador to Britain before his term of presidency (1856-60), and was well acquainted with the Queen and Prince Albert. He wrote a letter to Victoria asking her to let Bertie visit the United States during his proposed trip. He emphasized to her that such a

*Albert Edward, 1860*



trip could only improve relations between the two countries. The Queen initially hesitated. That was most likely due to the fact that she had little confidence in Bertie's powers of self-control. She, no doubt, imagined him running wild succumbing to any and all temptations in such a strange land populated by "red Indians".

Political Conservatives agreed that this wasn't a good idea but for different reasons. They were uninterested in a rapprochement with the United States. Prince Albert, a much saner head, especially when it came to Anglo-U.S. relations, prevailed. He agreed with the President and Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador to the United States, that this would indeed be an excellent opportunity. The Queen came around, though she stipulated that while in Canada,

Bertie would be present on an official basis as her deputy, conferring knighthoods and laying foundation stones, but when he crossed the border into the United States, he would be incognito. He was to travel as Baron Renfrew, and to stay in hotels not consulates, except in Washington, D.C., where he would stay in the Ambassadorial residence.

On July 10, 1860, Victoria and Albert came to Plymouth, along with Princess Alice and Prince Arthur, in order to see the young man off on the HMS Hero. He was accompanied by the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord St. Germans, General Bruce, and other worthies sent to keep a strict eye on the nineteen year old prince. The Duke, especially, was there to instruct Bertie on political situations (read the problems with the French Catholic Canadians and the British Protestant Canadians), and to write his speeches. One can only imagine that Bertie cared little who accompanied him as he anxiously anticipated this first stab at relative freedom.

The Royal party reached North America on July 23, landing in Newfoundland. From then on Bertie's visit was a whirlwind of receptions, levées, balls, official duties, speeches, and appearances. He stopped in Halifax, Prince Edward Island<sup>1</sup>, and Quebec, and sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Montreal.



*Halifax all dressed up for the Prince's visit*

It was here that the Prince was able to perform an official duty, when he drove the last rivet in the Victoria Railway Bridge and opened an Industrial Exhibition. It was also here that Bertie attended several balls, one in which he stayed up until five o'clock in the morning, dancing his elders under the table. From Montreal, he continued to Ottawa, the present capital, where he laid the foundation stone of the Federal Parliament Building. He continued to Lake Ontario, and thence saw the mighty Niagara Falls. As the New York Times later remarked: "no one can accuse the Prince of laziness."<sup>2</sup>

Everywhere the young Prince met with cheering people, and crowds of nearly riotous proportions. He was welcomed by all - Protestants, Catholics, and Indians - in every city he visited even when he made some minor gaffs. When speaking at the French University of Laval, he addressed the Roman Catholic Bishops as "Gentlemen" instead of "My Lords". Bertie was completely unaware that he had made an error. The speech was, after all, written for him by the

Duke of Newcastle who frankly, didn't care. This caused the always problematic Orangemen in Ontario, and other destinations, to make use of this opportunity for anti-Catholic demonstrations.

An interesting incident happened at Niagara Falls. Bertie and his entourage were treated to the sight of French acrobat, Charles B. Condin, walking across the falls on a tightrope, while pushing a man in a wheelbarrow. The Prince was amazed and gave the acrobat a purse of gold. Condin then offered to take the Prince back over to the United States side in the same wheelbarrow. It is most likely attributable to his tremendous sense of freedom that the Prince said that he was delighted and perfectly willing to be thus transported. However, some of his governors decided that it might not be a good idea. Instead, Condin went back on stilts.

By September 7th, the Prince had reached Toronto, and his minders were busily writing excellent reports of his conduct. The Duke of Newcastle wrote that "his manners with the people were frank and friendly without any mixture of assumed study to gain popularity by over-civility."<sup>3</sup> Another, not quite so complimentary, said that Bertie was pleased with everything "himself included".<sup>4</sup> He opened an Agricultural Exhibition at Hamilton, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, the Prince of Wales crossed over to United States soil.

The time that the Prince chose to visit was crucial in American history. The secession crisis<sup>5</sup> was at its height, and the Presidential election was in full swing. Tensions between the North and South were reaching a boiling point. Nevertheless, the Prince was extraordinarily well received in America. He was met with "...an ovation such as seldom been offered to any monarch in ancient or modern times. It was not a reception. It was the grand impressive welcome of a mighty people."<sup>6</sup>

Though he was incognito - referred to as the Prince, Baron or Lord Renfrew in most of the metropolitan newspapers - he traveled through the United States in special luxurious trains. The Prince's particular impressions had to do with his amusement at the amount of handshaking, at the time a uniquely American custom, the quantities of iced water, and the sensationalism of the American Press. He was thoroughly delighted to be traveling incognito, since he much enjoyed the informality. Less amusing to the Prince was the practice of chewing tobacco and spitting it out in, or less felicitously, near spittoons.

As he did in Canada, the Prince went through a whirlwind of travel and events taking him to Chicago, where he went on a Prairie Fowl shoot, and on to Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. The Prince eventually went as far west as St. Louis, Missouri where he had the pleasure of opening the Autumn Fair. Typical of the Prince's entire visit, a crowd of one hundred thousand showed up to welcome him. As gratifying as this welcome was, the Prince was shocked by the table manners of the St. Louisians, who "like ravenous animals, set upon the sides of beef and buffalo tongue with pocket knives."<sup>7</sup>

After his sojourn in the Midwest, the Prince and his party traveled back East, reaching Washington, D.C. on October 4th. He was met at the station by President Buchanan, and several other important personages. Together, they traveled to the White House in the Presidential carriage.

The President welcomed his guest in a fatherly manner. The Prince, in turn, presented President Buchanan with Winterhalter portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Being the only bachelor President, Mr. Buchanan's niece, Miss Harriet Lane, acted as hostess. The Prince

thought her very charming and attractive. For his first evening, the President gave a dinner which was attended by cabinet members and their wives. Afterwards, the young man was serenaded by the Marine Band before retiring.

The following day, in honor of the Prince, a fireworks exhibition was given the like of which, according to the New York Times, was never before seen in public.<sup>8</sup> He made stops in various parts of the city, and everywhere, it seems, was mobbed by young ladies. In fact, the Prince was quickly acquiring the reputation that would follow him the rest of his life – that of a ladies man. He, according to the New York Times “...made himself agreeable to many a fair dame, not alone by reason of his title...”. The President, however, was favorably impressed by the young man. He wrote a letter to the Queen extolling Bertie’s “noble and manly bearing.”<sup>9</sup>

After leaving Washington, Bertie made a stop in Richmond, Virginia. This was his only truly Southern destination. This was done because the South demanded that the Prince of Wales see how humanely slaves were treated. Bertie visited tobacco factories and African churches. Interestingly, he was generally jeered by Southerners, who believed he and his family favored the North.



From there, Bertie moved on to Philadelphia and thence to New York, the highlight of his trip. Possibly as much as three hundred thousand New Yorkers came to meet the Prince at the Battery.

*The Prince at his Fifth Avenue Hotel, with his entourage*

He was embraced by the crowds who welcomed him with applause, cheers, and white handkerchiefs fluttering in the wind. The British National Anthem was played while such dignitaries as Hamilton Fish, Judge Roosevelt, William Astor, John Jay, and the venerated Mexican War hero, General Winfield Scott received the Prince. Bertie rode up Broadway with the Mayor of New York, Fernando Wood, as the crowds continued to roar their approval. Arriving at his hotel suite, he continued to acknowledge the crowds from the balcony.

Bertie stayed in the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and was enormously impressed by its luxury. The hotel was, in turn, enormously impressed when the Prince insisted on paying the bill -

evidently, they were not used to European aristocrats being so fiscally responsible. He was guarded by what weren't yet called New York's finest, and everything regarding his stay was covered in minute detail by the New York Times. Amazingly, for the four days that the Prince was in New York, the Times devoted its entire front page to his every move.

The highlight of the New York visit was a grand ball to be held at the Academy of Music. Since the Prince's visit was announced, New York's Blue Ribbon Four Hundred, the cream of Gotham Society, had deliberated most seriously upon whom would be granted invitations to such an illustrious event. Solemnly, having declared that only the most socially eligible would be invited, they settled on three thousand of New York's elite. It was said that some that were left out, committed suicide in despair. Others, however, were not so self-conscious. An additional two thousand gate-crashers showed up. Thankfully, they did not all manage to actually get inside the building, standing outside most of the evening, making a tremendous crowd, and a tremendous noise.

Inside other problems were brewing. The Prince and his entourage arrived at ten o'clock in the evening, and were received by Mrs. Morgan, wife of the Governor. There was some difficulty in finding the dais on which the 5'7" Prince was to stand while receiving all of New York. A dais was necessary because of the Prince's "slight figure and low stature."<sup>10</sup> Eventually, this problem was remedied and with Mr. Hamilton Fish presenting the company, a procession of couples made up a long line to be received by the prince.

After about fifty or so couples were presented, a great cracking sound was heard. The floor directly in front of the Prince collapsed. He remained calm and retreated into the supper

room while the band played waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles. The floor was then fixed by a team of carpenters, sounding according to the Times, like the “anvil chorus”. After several hours, the repairs were done, though unfortunately one of the workmen was nailed underneath and then additional time was taken out to remove the hapless soul.

Finally, at 12:30 a.m., the dancing began. The entire order of dances, as well as the pieces of music and composers, was printed on the front page of the Times of the following day. Since the time in which it took to restore the floor eliminated six of the planned dances, there was no jealousy as to who would have the first dance with the Prince, because, simply, the first dance was never danced. The society matrons were happy about this since the Prince spent most of his evening dancing with them. For the Prince, however, this was less than delightful.

The supper, the entire menu of which was also printed in the Times, was ably marshaled by Lorenzo Delmonico of the restaurant fame.<sup>11</sup> He was not only in charge of the food, but also of the army of waiters present. The meal, which would be typical for a New York gala of the time, consisted of ham, beef, salmon, game, pâtés of all descriptions, salads, and every kind of dessert imaginable, including a great delicacy of the time, ice cream.

This evening did not give the Prince the pleasure that so many of the balls that he had attended had, since he was not able to dance with young pretty girls. The newspapers continually remarked upon it, as they remarked upon any notice that the Prince took of any young lady including the President’s niece, Miss Lane.

The following day, accompanied by General Winfield Scott, Bertie visited the Barnum Museum and Matthew Brady’s photographic gallery. After perusing Mr. Brady’s portraits, the

Prince and his entourage were photographed many times. That evening, New York's Fire Department arranged a Torchlight Parade. The firemen paraded their fire engines, with bells clanging, for review by the delighted Prince.

After he left New York, the New York Times published an incredibly pompous and self-congratulatory editorial. The writer maintained that the Prince could "see with his own eyes how easily the principles of order and the instincts of civilization can display themselves even under the pressure of a great popular excitement."<sup>12</sup> Even with no King to receive the Prince and no orders to welcome the visiting dignitary, all this was done "without the command of any central authority, quietly [!], cordially, successfully, as by one impulse."<sup>13</sup> Such a spontaneous greeting, he concluded, would never have happened in Europe.

On October 16, they proceeded up to West Point, and thence to Boston. It was in Boston that the Prince was presented to some of the intellectual elite of America: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth, Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes, as well as the Vice Presidential candidate running with Abraham Lincoln, Mr. Hannibal Hamelin. His Royal Highness remarked that the ball there was much more enjoyable, but his thoughts at visiting Bunker Hill, one of the first Revolutionary War battles, can only be imagined.<sup>14</sup>

When Bertie and his party embarked for home on the HMS Hero, the October 22, 1860 issue of the New York Times noted it only on the fourth page. The front page was filled with articles on the secession crisis.

Though he never returned to these shores, he made an incredibly positive impression. How much more acceptable can someone be to the nation than when a man shouted out to him,

“Come back in four years and run for President!”<sup>15</sup>

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1.whose Indian name was exchanged, not for Bertie, but for Prince Edward, the Duke of Kent, the father of Queen Victoria.

2.New York Times, October 4, 1860.

3.Richard Hough, Edward and Alexandra: Their Private and Public Lives (St. Martins Press: New York), 1992, p.41.

4.Ibid.

5.This crisis was the vociferous debate in which the Northern and Southern states of the Union engaged in the late 1850's into 1861, and one of the main reasons for the subsequent conflict. The question was whether it was Constitutional for the Southern states to leave the Union.

6.Giles St. Aubyn Edward VII (Atheneum: New York), 1979, p.47.

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7. Christopher Hibbert The Royal Victorians: King Edward VII, His Family and Friends (J.B. Lippincott Company: Philadelphia and New York), 1976, p.38.

8. New York Times, October 4, 1860.

9. St. Aubyn, Edward, p.49.

10. New York Times, October 13, 1860.

11. Delmonico's was one of New York's most famous and exclusive restaurants for much of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

12. New York Times, October 17, 1860.

13. Ibid.

14. That is presuming Bertie was paying attention during this particular history lesson.

15. Gordon Brook-Shepherd Uncle of Europe: The Social and Diplomatic Life of Edward VII (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York and London), 1975, p.34.