

# Mr. Rockefellers "Chocolate Venus" and her 2500 Years of Trouble

The Interesting Rockefeller Venus Pronounced by Some Experts to Be the Work of Praxiteles and by Others to Be a Well-Meant Effort to Copy the "Venus de Medici."



Worshipped in Ancient Athens.

Buried in Ancient Roman Times to Save It from the Goths.

**Extraordinary Adventures of a Famous Marble Lady Carved by the Great Praxiteles Who Has Been Worshipped, Stolen, Burned, Boiled and Stained and at Last Finds Temporary Peace as the Guest of America's Greatest Multi-Millionaire**

WHEN John D. Rockefeller entered the ranks of the art collectors, he naturally wanted something fit to be owned by the richest man in the world, and so he purchased a little statue that purports to be carved by Praxiteles, who was, of course, the most distinguished sculptor that ever lived.

After nearly 2,500 years of the most exciting and romantic adventures ever experienced by a statue the alleged Venus of Praxiteles now stands in the Temple of Love in the midst of the sunken garden of the Rockefeller house at Pocantico Hills, N. Y.

Mr. Rockefeller is understood to have paid \$60,000 for his statue, since that is the price mentioned in the invoice furnished the New York Custom House. Considering the prices that have been paid for works by more recent artists of less fame, Mr. Rockefeller appears to have got a bargain, provided, of course, that the statue is really by Praxiteles.

This work is not proved beyond all question to be by Praxiteles, but a number of distinguished experts have looked at it long and wisely and declared that they were certain they recognized the hand of the Athenian master. As a matter of fact, there are no statues that could be proved in a court of law to be

the work of Praxiteles, but there are some like the celebrated "Hermes and Bacchus" that have a somewhat more convincing pedigree than the Rockefeller Venus.

Whatever the artistic merits of this statue, it has probably a more entertaining and interesting history than any of its more authentic rivals. Not the least interesting peculiarity of the lady is her yellowish-brown tint, which has caused her to be called "The Chocolate Venus."

The theory of the origin of this remarkable color is that she was burned as a witch when dug up in the middle ages, which gave her a brown color, and that in modern time she received a bath of acid to remove the burns, and thus produced her yellowish tinge. But connected with the color scheme is a most complicated story.

The statue attracted much attention once before in the United States. That was when it was exhibited at the National Arts Club in New York in 1905. There was then a most excited discussion about its authenticity. Some maintained that it bore all the evidences of being an original Grecian work of the age of Praxiteles, while others asserted that it was clearly a clumsy attempt to copy the Praxitelean style.

The statue then belonged to Charles



Burned as a Witch in the Middle Ages.

Stewart Linton, an art connoisseur. While it was on exhibition a curious controversy other than artistic arose over it. Charles Edward Cookman, an artist, declared that the statue was exactly like one bought at a sale by a friend of his years previously and boiled in chemicals to remove marks of charring upon it.

From another source it was learned that a few years before the exhibition at the National Arts Club there was a collection of art objects valued at \$1,500,000 stored in a New York storage warehouse in the name of Adolphus F. Linton, commonly called "Lord Adolphus Linton," although the peerage recognizes no person with that title. The existence of this art collection became known when an Omaha lawyer obtained a judgment for \$6,000 against Linton and seized the collection to satisfy it. Reference was then made to the romantic marriage of "Lord Adolphus" with an Ohio heiress, and it was said that the reason he could not satisfy the judgment was that he was travelling in Italy. The mysterious "Lord Adolphus" has disappeared from view since then, and it has been suggested that Charles Stewart Linton is his son.

Among the art objects in the storage warehouse was a statue described as "certified to be the work of Praxiteles." There were also what purported to be a portrait of the Duchess of Kent, by Gainsborough, and other works in the collection that should have had great value. The collection was put up at auction and brought \$100, and after all expenses were paid there remained \$30 for the claimant.

Still another complication in the history of the Venus occurred while it was on exhibition at the Arts Club. George H. Story, acting director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, declared that the statue had been offered for loan to the museum twelve years before—in 1892—and rejected by him as not authentic.

Mr. Linton then defended his statue warmly against Mr. Cookman and other critics.

"The suggestion of Mr. Cookman is absurd so far as it tends to identify this marble figure with the one he describes," he said. "I bought it in 1891 from the deck of an Italian vessel lying in the Thames.

Found in a Stable and Secretly Sent to England.

Boiled in Acid in Jersey City to Remove the Burns.

"My attention was first called to the Aphrodite by Signor Orselli, a painter, who called upon me in London and said there was aboard a ship then lying in the Thames a great work of art. I went there and saw the Aphrodite. The owner of it was an Englishman, resident in Italy, who said he dared not tell the place from which he had brought the statue. The vessel had cruised about in the Mediterranean.

"Many experts examined the Aphrodite before I finally bought it, in 1891."

After its original creation by the hand of Praxiteles at Athens, the statue had presumably been taken to Italy, like so many Greek masterpieces, during the period when Rome conquered Greece. Centuries passed and then came the era of barbarian invasions of Italy, when works of art were frequently buried to save them. Venus was hidden beneath the earth to save her from the Goths.

Then more centuries passed and the forgotten statue was dug up in Italy in the middle ages. Classical statues unearthed in this manner were commonly regarded as witches or creations of the devil by mediaeval peasants, because they could not understand their fairy-like beauty. The mediaevals then solemnly burned the statues as witches until they were charred beyond recognition.

Thus the color of the "Chocolate Venus" may be explained. It may also be true that it was subsequently cleaned with acids as described by Mr. Cookman.

The most flippant contradictory views were expressed by connoisseurs who viewed the Venus or Aphrodite. Some declared that the smooth, perfect condition of the marble proved clearly that it could not possibly have been made 2,300 years ago, which was about the time Praxiteles lived.

On the other hand, a brilliant expert asserted that it was clearly a portrait statue of Phryne, Praxiteles's favorite model, made when she was about to step into the sea at the feast of Poseidon to symbolize the gratitude of mankind for the gift of womanly beauty.

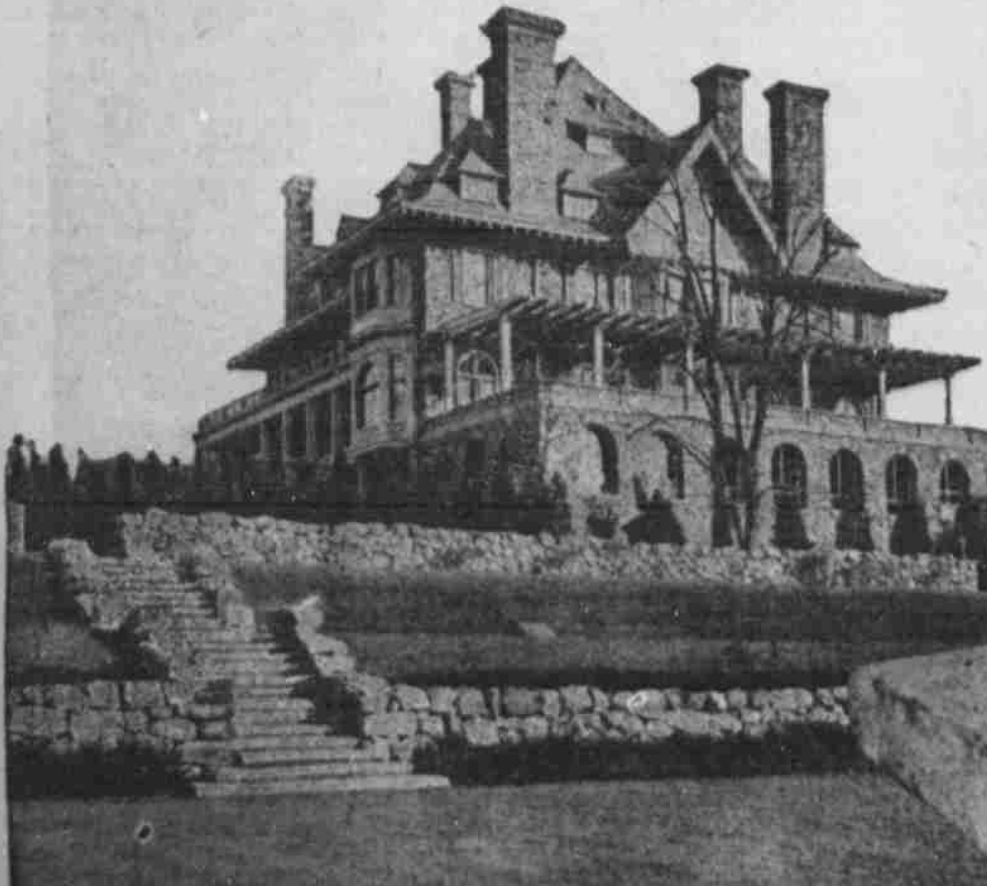
Another said that it was a clumsy imitation of the Venus de Medici, now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and generally regarded as an early Greek original. A particularly acute critic pointed out that the "Chocolate Venus" showed the remains of a "cestus," or girdle, supposed by the Romans to inspire love, and that no Greek originals by Praxiteles's time had this.

The statue left New York after its famous exhibition and became the property of Sir Algernon Freeman Thirch, an art connoisseur, in England. He sold it recently and it was returned to New York to become the property of Mr. Rockefeller.

The Custom House experts the other day examined it and pronounced it a genuine antique work of art, entitled as such to enter the country free, whereas a modern copy would have to pay a duty of 15 per cent ad valorem.

The "Chocolate Venus" has now become the chief ornament of the gayly named "Temple of Love," which is one of the attractive features of Mr. Rockefeller's magnificent mansion and estate at Pocantico Hills, N. Y. The Temple is a Greek structure with roof and supporting columns, but otherwise open to the air. It is a delightful retreat in hot weather. It stands in a sunken garden and is connected with the house by an underground passage. The whole arrangement has been planned so that Mr. Rockefeller's family and grandchildren can play in the open air without observation or intrusion by strangers.

Put Up at Auction in New York to Pay a Lord's Debts.



The Magnificent Rockefeller Mansion at Pocantico Hills, N. Y. with its Sunken Gardens and "Temple of Love" of Which the Venus is Now the Chief Ornament.