

## Anastasia and Anna Anderson: The Truth Revealed

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America's eighty-year fascination with Anastasia Nicholaievna Romanov, one of the last Grand Duchesses of Russia, has produced a myriad of myths and legends. What has made this woman survive in our memories for so long? One answer lies in her heritage. Anastasia was the daughter of Nicholas II, Tsar of all Russia. Having been born into the imperial family, she was royalty. Yet, it is more than royalty which draws us in; it is mystery. The details of her family's execution in 1918 were murky, hidden with many other secrets by the Communist regime in Soviet Russia. Did this woman escape? Was she alive and living in the United States? Was a former princess leading the life of a normal citizen? Americans tend to embrace these fantasies. Our democratic heritage does not provide us with a sovereign, leading us into an enchantment with royalty. Witness Princess Diana's death in 1997. Her funeral became one of the largest television events worldwide. In America, we could watch the coverage on any one of the major network stations. Diana connected with the common people; therefore, we embraced her. We have even sought to create our own form of royalty through the Kennedy family. The legend of Anastasia is rooted in this type of royal intrigue. Unfortunately, she did not survive the Romanov executions and Anna Anderson, the most prominent Anastasia claimant, was simply a pretender.

Anastasia Nicholaievna Romanov, Grand Duchess of Russia, was born on 5 June 1901.<sup>1</sup> She was the fourth daughter of Tsar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra. In addition to her sisters, Olga, Tatiana, and Maria, Anastasia had a younger brother, Alexei, who was the heir to the Russian throne. In 1913, the Romanovs celebrated the three-hundredth anniversary of their dynasty in Russia, but their prosperous rule was to last for only a few more years. Russia

would soon be engaged in World War I, which marked the beginning of the end for Nicholas and tsarism.

After many devastating setbacks in the war, the Provisional Government assumed responsibility for government operations in February 1917. Nicholas had no choice but to abdicate both his and his son's right to the throne. Concerned over the safety of the imperial family, the Provisional Government confined the Romanovs to Tsarskoe Selo, the retreat of the tsars located outside St. Petersburg. Due to the social unrest in western Russia, the Provisional Government moved the family to the Siberian town of Tobolsk in August 1917 for their own safety.<sup>2</sup> The Provisional Government, however, could not escape the social forces gaining momentum in Russia, and in October 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power. Bolshevik control spelled trouble for the tsar and his family. Within half a year, the Romanovs were moved again. This time, they were sent deep into the Ural Mountains to the city of Ekaterinburg. The family was held captive in the Ipatiev House, under the command of Yakov Yurovsky.<sup>3</sup> This house came to be known as the House of Special Purpose among the troops assigned to guard the family. Unbeknownst to the Romanovs, Yurovsky was planning their execution "on the orders of Lenin,"<sup>4</sup> leader of the Bolshevik Revolution. The firing squad for the seven Romanovs and four of their servants would consist of ten guards plus Yurovsky. The men were ordered to shoot for the heart, making the deaths as quick and bloodless as possible.<sup>5</sup>

At 1:15 AM on 17 July 1918, Yurovsky instructed the tsar's personal physician to awaken the family and servants. They were told that the military situation around Ekaterinburg was becoming dangerous and that they would need to be moved to a new location. Dressed in their traveling clothes, they were

guided into a basement room. At this point, the family did not suspect the fate which awaited them, but it must have seemed odd that Yurovsky was instructing them on the places in which they should stand. He aligned the Romanovs in the front row, with their servants behind them. Suddenly the ten guards entered the room, and Yurovsky began reading from a piece of paper, "Nikolai Aleksandrovich, . . . your relatives wanted to save you, but they did not succeed, and so we have to shoot you." The family had no time to react before the shooting began. While some members of the imperial party fell over dead, others lay writhing on the floor, still alive. The Grand Duchesses, having sewn the family jewels into their undergarments, survived the first attack by the gunmen. Yurovsky then ordered the men to use their bayonets and rifle butts to finish the girls. When Yurovsky was satisfied that everyone was dead, the bodies were loaded onto a waiting truck.

From the House of Special Purpose, the mangled remains of Russia's last imperial family were driven into the Koptiaki Woods to be buried. Their bodies were stripped naked and thrown into an old mine shaft. Their clothes were then burned in a bonfire to eliminate any possibility of recognizing them as the Romanovs. With their mission accomplished, the Ural Soviets sent a telegram to Moscow saying, "On the night of 16 July Nicholas Romanov was shot. His family has been evacuated to a safe place." This telegram was then used as a press release by the Soviets in Moscow. To the world, only Tsar Nicholas II was dead; his family remained alive. This misleading information would contribute to several rumors surrounding the whereabouts of the empress and her children, and certain stories began to focus on the escape of one daughter in particular: Grand Duchess Anastasia. Was Yurovsky mistaken; did Anastasia escape the brutal murders of her family?<sup>6</sup>

On 17 February 1920, a woman was dragged from the Landwehr Canal in Berlin after attempting to commit suicide by jumping into the frigid waters.<sup>7</sup> At the time, this woman did not have a known name or identity. Eventually, she would use the formal name Anna Anderson, but to many people, she came to be known as

Anastasia, daughter of Tsar Nicholas II.<sup>8</sup>

Anna Anderson came to believe that she was Anastasia, and as a result, she filed two petitions and two lawsuits in Germany, seeking legal recognition as the Tsar's heir. Her two petitions sought the revocation of a document issued in 1933, which named the family of Hesse as the tsar's heirs.<sup>9</sup> Her first petition, filed in 1938, was rejected in 1941. Anderson then appealed this ruling in 1942, but the case was suspended due to World War II.<sup>10</sup> The case resumed in 1956, and a year later, the judges again handed down a verdict which declared Anderson was not Anastasia.<sup>11</sup> In ruling on this second petition, the judges considered the key testimony of Hans Joachim Mayer. Mayer was an Austrian prisoner of war in Russia following World War I and had joined the Bolsheviki in 1918. He testified that "he had witnessed the Ekaterinburg executions, and saw Anastasia's dead body after the massacre."<sup>12</sup>

Anderson, however, was not finished; she again returned to court in 1958, asking for recognition as Anastasia. She filed her suit "on the ground that new evidence had been discovered."<sup>13</sup> While Anderson's lawyers demonstrated "that she was able to name correctly faces in photographs, describe specific events, [and] identify uniforms, buildings and locations" these things could not overshadow one crucial point: Anderson "spoke no Russian."<sup>14</sup> This fact was extremely important in attempting to establish her identity. Her detractors demanded to know how a woman claiming to be a Russian princess was not able to speak her native language. Anderson's lawyers provided no real explanation. The defense also questioned Anderson's actions when confronted by witnesses who challenged her alleged memories because she "has tended to be painfully shy, truculent or agitated to near-hysteria."<sup>15</sup> Anderson's responses seem to have been a ploy to evade the rejection of her legitimacy.

The most damaging testimony against Anderson came from this third trial when Doris Wingender took the witness stand. On 12 August 1922, Anderson, who had been staying with the Kleist family, disappeared from their residence. She reappeared three days later, but no one was able to account for her whereabouts

during this time<sup>16</sup> until Wingender took the stand.

Wingender was the daughter of a landlady, who had a tenant by the name of Franziska Schanzkowski. Schanzkowski, a Polish factory worker, had disappeared on 15 February 1920.<sup>17</sup> Her family and friends had not seen her since that day, but in the summer of 1922, Wingender saw Schanzkowski once again.<sup>18</sup> As Wingender testified in court on 21 May 1958, she identified Anderson as none other than the missing Franziski Schanzkowski.<sup>19</sup> As further evidence, when Anderson disappeared from the Kleist's house, she was "attired in a camel's-hair-colored coat, lilac dress and green felt hat, [yet reappearing] three days later [she was] in a dark blue dress and light blue hat." Wingender testified to giving Anderson the blue dress and hat and to turning over the coat, hat, and dress, which Anderson had previously worn, to a detective.<sup>20</sup> To illustrate her point, Wingender produced two photographs, one of herself in 1920, wearing a blue dress and one of Anderson taken in 1922, sporting the same blue dress.<sup>21</sup>

These revelations dealt a serious blow to Anderson's claims. The dates corresponded correctly to Schanzkowski's and Anderson's appearances and disappearances. Two days after Schanzkowski disappeared, Anderson was pulled from the canal; the three days, for which Anderson was missing and her lawyers could not account, were the same three days on which Wingender saw Schanzkowski. The judges weighed the evidence and returned with a ruling on 15 May 1961: Anna Anderson was not Anastasia, not was she Franziska Schanzkowski. In their verdict, the judges ruled that Anderson's claim to be Anastasia was "unfounded," and they deemed that the defense's counterclaim asserting that Anderson was Schanzkowski was "irrelevant." In their opinion, however, it was "eminently likely"<sup>22</sup> that Anderson was Schanzkowski.

Anderson was still not finished in her attempt to be recognized as Anastasia. Three defeats were not enough, and she brought her case before the courts for the fourth time in 1962.<sup>24</sup> Three important witnesses testified against Anderson. The first witness was Professor Karl Clauberg, who presented his testimony, "submitting that Anastasia's

[Anderson's] ear bore a certain curve and indentation that he had been unable to locate on any photograph of the Tsar's daughter."<sup>25</sup> Anderson had placed a strong emphasis on the physical similarities which she believed existed between herself and Anastasia. Clauberg's testimony struck at the center of one of Anderson's best arguments, further weakening her case.

The second witness, Erich Wollenberg, was a German Communist who, while in Siberia in 1929, was "assured . . . that all of the Russian imperial family was dead and that the 'Frau Tschaikovsky'<sup>26</sup> . . . was really the Polish factory worker, Franziska Schanzkowska."<sup>27</sup> Wollenberg's testimony reaffirms Mayer's report that the whole family had perished and Wingender's account that Anderson was actually Schanzkowski. The third witness, Rudolf Lacher, would corroborate both Mayer's and Wollenberg's stories that no members of the Imperial family survived the massacre. Lacher, an Austrian orderly who had been in the Ipatiev House on the night of the murders, described being able to see "from the window of his room, . . . 'eleven bloody bundles'" loaded onto a truck.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence, while circumstantial, mounted against Anderson and her claim. The judges returned for the fourth time and presented the same result. "Judge Edgar Peterson, in reading the court's verdict said, 'In German law the plaintiff Anna Anderson should herself have been able to prove that she is identical in person with the Grand Duchess Anastasia. This proof was not provided in these proceedings.'" The court, however, again refused to support the counterclaim that Anderson was Schanzkowski.<sup>29</sup>

The court had ruled on four different occasions that Anderson was not Anastasia, yet questions remained surrounding her claim. Did Anastasia really survive the executions and escape from Russia? Since circumstantial evidence alone linked Anderson as Schanzkowski, who was Anna Anderson? Even though the court cases were concluded, these questions continued to be asked.

In 1979, Russia was still under Soviet control, which restricted its citizens in both speech and action. Two men, Alexander

Avdonin, a geologist, and Geli Ryabov, a Moscow filmmaker, came into possession of a report written by Yurovsky after the murders. This report had been kept secret for over sixty years, but its contents were fascinating. Yurovsky's own record indicated that he moved the bodies of the Romanovs and their servants from the mine shaft two days after the executions out of fear that they would be discovered. Yurovsky then attempted to destroy the bodies with fire, but he only burned two of the corpses before he realized that this method would still leave evidence. His report stated that the bodies of the tsar's son and an unknown woman were burned. Yurovsky first believed that he had burned the body of Empress Alexandra. Then he changed his mind and decided that the corpse must have been the empress' maid.<sup>30</sup> Yurovsky's records, therefore, account for two of the bodies.

Avdonin and Ryabov, using Yurovsky's description of the burial site, dug up the remains of the Romanov family in 1979. With Russia under Soviet domination, the men could not publicize their findings and were forced to rebury the bones.<sup>31</sup> On 10 July 1991, Russia entered a new age; Communism had fallen and in its place democracy was rising. Boris Yeltsin was inaugurated on this day as the first President in the history of Russia. The very next day, "an exhumation party set out for a small clearing in the forest on the former Koptyaki Road."<sup>32</sup> The scientists, following Avdonin and Ryabov's directions, uncovered nine bodies in the grave. This find would correspond to Yurovsky's assertion that two of the bodies had been burned, since there were eleven members in the imperial entourage. The scientists' task was to determine whose remains were in the grave.

Russian scientists used a technique of video recording to capture the images of the skulls from the grave, and they graphically matched these skulls with photographs to identify the members of the royal family. "By the summer of 1992, Abramov and his colleagues were convinced that they had found Nicholas, Alexandra, Olga, Tatiana, Anastasia, [and the four servants]. . . . Everyone agreed that the Tsarevitch was missing." From these conclusions, Abramov and his team believed

that Maria was the missing daughter.<sup>33</sup> The Russian government, however, was not completely satisfied with the work of their scientists and requested the aid of American scientists in studying the remains.

Dr. William Maples, a forensic anthropologist from the University of Florida, put together a research team to travel to Russia to examine the Romanov remains. The researchers included Dr. Michael Baden, a forensic pathologist, Dr. Lowell Levine, a forensic dentist, and Dr. Cathryn Oakes, a hair-and-fiber specialist.<sup>34</sup> The American team conducted its own research, developing its own conclusions, which were very different from those of the Russian scientists. Maples believed that the bodies of Alexei, then 13, and Anastasia, then 17, were missing from the remains.<sup>35</sup> His deduction was based on age; "none of these three skeletons were young enough to have belonged to Anastasia."<sup>36</sup> Dr. Maples gave two other reasons for his decision that Anastasia's skeleton was not present: the first was height and the second was development of the third molars. Using photographs, Maples was able to show that Anastasia was the shortest of the four sisters. The length of the bones exhumed from the grave indicated that Anastasia's remains were not present. The second piece of evidence came from Dr. Levine's studies. Each of the skulls of the three girls had well developed third molars, which Anastasia could not have possessed at her age.<sup>37</sup>

According to Maples, the discrepancies between his and Abramov's conclusions can be explained by Abramov's questionable research practices. If certain bones were missing from the skull, Abramov guessed in order to match the skull with a face – an unacceptable practice from Maples' perspective. Maples returned instead to Yurovsky's secret document in his attempt to solve the mystery. His conclusion rested on the fact that Yurovsky must have burned the body of Anastasia, but "how could Yurovsky have mistaken the body of a seventeen-year-old girl for that of a mature woman?" Maples looked at the situation in which the family was killed. It was mid-July, temperatures were around seventy degrees Fahrenheit, their faces had been smashed in

with bayonets and rifle butts, and the blood "would have dried into a black, caked, impenetrable mass." The bodies had been stripped of their clothes; the only obvious feature would have been the sex of the corpse, because "the naked bodies would have bloated to unrecognizability." Also aiding the decomposition would have been the flies which laid their eggs in the mutilated faces and bodies. In the two days in which Yurovsky was gone, "the eggs would have hatched into maggots." Beyond knowing that he burned a female body, Yurovsky would have been unable to identify the victim.<sup>38</sup> Based on Yurovsky's records and Maples' research, experts have determined that the other burned body belonged to Anastasia. According to this premise, all eleven bodies are accounted for; Anastasia could not possibly have escaped to the West.

The final piece of the puzzle came when Peter Gill and Kevin Sullivan, researchers at the Forensic Science Service in England, received the Romanov bones in 1992 to perform DNA research. They were able to use "DNA from the cellis nuclei . . . to determine the sex of the individuals, to compare the nine skeletons' DNA, and eventually to establish that five of the bodies were from the same family."<sup>39</sup> Gill focused his research on a form of DNA called mitochondrial DNA.<sup>40</sup> With his knowledge of the hereditary match on the maternal side, Gill could begin comparing the Romanov's mitochondrial DNA with living relatives from both sides of the family. The mitochondrial DNA from the skeletons of the three daughters matched perfectly with Alexandra's DNA. The empress' mitochondrial DNA was then compared with Prince Philip, consort of Queen Elizabeth II of England, and relative of Alexandra's through Queen Victoria. The two were a match. Alexandra's remains had been positively identified.<sup>41</sup> Nicholas' DNA now remained to be tested against living relatives. When his mitochondrial DNA was tested, it "matched those of two descendants of Louis of Hesse-Lassel, wife of Denmark's King Christian IX and his maternal grandmother."<sup>42</sup> The tangible remains from the grave in the Koptiaki

Woods were now identified and Gill was "98.5 percent certain that this was Romanov DNA"<sup>43</sup>; the mystery of Russia's last royal family was solved... or was it?

While earlier evidence had established that Anastasia's body had been burned, what about Anna Anderson? Could this new testing finally determine the identity of the woman who sought for most of her life to obtain legal recognition as Anastasia? Anna Anderson had died, however, on 12 February 1984 in Charlottesville, Virginia, and her wish to be cremated was carried out the very same day.<sup>45</sup> Fortunately for the DNA researchers, a Virginia hospital had preserved a piece of Anderson's intestine from a surgery in 1979. "Peter Gill and his colleagues extracted DNA from a section of . . . [this] intestine." They found that Anderson's DNA was missing the "pivotal sequences" which had appeared in the DNA of the tsar and tsarina. This discovery confirmed that the court had ruled correctly in the four trials: Anna Anderson was not Anastasia. One test remained to be performed on a maternal relative of Franziska Schanzkowski. "Anderson's mitochondrial DNA . . . [was] compared . . . with those [sequences] of a maternally descended great-nephew of Schanzkowski. They were identical."<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the mystery of Anastasia and Anna Anderson is solved. Based on the body count of both the remains in the woods and the burned victims, Anastasia Nicholaievna Romanov did not escape from Ekaterinburg, but instead perished with her family. And Anna Anderson, who sought in life a title that was not hers, received in death her true identity: Franziska Schanzkowski. This theory, however, will not be accepted by everyone. Because two bodies are still missing, people will continue to believe that Anastasia was a survivor and that she did live the remainder of her life in the West. Popular culture loves a conspiracy theory, and just as Elvis continues to appear around the world many years after his death, the Anastasia legends will live until tangible evidence can be produced to end all speculation.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This date is given according to the Russian Orthodox (Julian) calendar, which is thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>2</sup> Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs: Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution*, trans. of Russian documents by Elizabeth Tucker (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1995), 117, 169-70.

<sup>3</sup> John Klier and Helen Mingay, *The Quest for Anastasia: Solving the Mystery of the Last Romanovs*, (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1997), 44.

<sup>4</sup> John Darton, "Scientists Confirm Identification of Bones as Czar's," *New York Times*, 10 July 1993, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Klier, 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-51, 57-59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> After Anderson was pulled from the canal, she was admitted to the Dalldorf Asylum, where her identity was unknown for two years. In 1922, a nurse at the hospital saw a picture of Tsar Nicholas' children. This woman believed that Anderson was Tatiana, the second daughter, and she asked Russian emigres living in Germany to look at the woman. When these people came, they said that Anderson was not the Tsar's daughter. The nurse decided that she must have been mistaken; this woman was Anastasia not Tatiana. Anderson was released from the asylum shortly thereafter, and she went to live with the Kleist family. It was in their care that she supposedly developed the story of her survival and escape from Russia.

<sup>9</sup> "Court in Berlin Rejects Suit of 'Czar's Daughter,'" *New York Times*, 30 January 1957, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Kurth, *Anastasia: The Riddle of Anna Anderson*, (Boston, Little Brown, 1986), 290-3.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, 30 January 1957, 31.

<sup>12</sup> "The Lady's No Duchess," *Newsweek*, 11 February 1957, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur J. Olsen, "German Court Starts New Effort to Settle Anastasia Controversy," *New York Times Magazine*, 2 April 1958, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur J. Olsen, "'Anastasia' Grand Duchess or Grand Hoax?," *New York Times* 24 August 1958, sec. 4, pg. 19, 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Kurth, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Olsen, "Anastasia," 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Kurth, 304.

<sup>20</sup> Olsen, "Anastasia," 22, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Kurth, 305.

<sup>22</sup> "Court Says Woman is Not Anastasia," *New York Times*, 16 May 1961, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Kurth, 316-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Anderson went by the name Anna Tschalvosky in the mid-1920s.

<sup>27</sup> Kurth, 336.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 349-50.

<sup>29</sup> "Appeal in Anastasia Mystery Is Rejected by Hamburg Court," *New York Times*, 1 March 1967, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Robert K. Massie, "The Last Romanov Mystery," *The New Yorker*, 1 & 28 August 1995, 83.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> Maddie, 77.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>35</sup> Anastasia Toufexis, "It's the Czar All Right, But Where's Anastasia?," *Time*, 14 September 1992, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Massie, 82.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Josie Glausiusz, "Royal D-Loops," *Discover*, January 1994, 90.

<sup>40</sup> "Mitochondrial DNA is passed only from mother to child, remaining unchanged for generations. . . . This means that our mitochondrial DNA is identical to that of our mother, our mother's mother and siblings, as well as to more distant maternal relatives." (Glausiusz, "D-Loops," 90.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Warren, "Tooth Sleuthing," *American Health*, June 1993, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Glausiusz, "D-Loops," 90.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> "Anna Manahan Dies; 'Anastasia' Claimant," *New York Times*, 14 February 1984, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Kurth, 455.

<sup>46</sup> Josie Glausiusz, "Anastasia, Nyet," *Discover*, January 1995, 99.

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