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Belle Huntington - Part I

Lead: One of America's foremost collectors of art as an adult expended great energy concealing her roots. Belle Huntington spent her youth as a barmaid in Shockoe Bottom.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Collis Potter Huntington was one of the founders of the Central Pacific, the West Coast link of the first Transcontinental Railroad. With the completion of that line in 1869, Huntington began to seek other outlets for his restless energy. One logical

place to search was the South. Defeated and demoralized, Southerners were anxious to attract capital investment to help rebuild the region in the years following the Civil War. In 1868 Huntington came to Richmond, Virginia seeking to merge three ailing Virginia railroads into an effective southeastern network that could feed into his transcontinental lines. He secured an endorsement for the merger from Robert E. Lee and in 1870 he reorganized the Chesapeake and Ohio with himself as President.

While in Richmond he chanced to stay in the boardinghouse of Catherine Yarrington and there the already-married, forty-eight year old financier became infatuated with Catherine's

nineteen year old daughter and barmaid, Arabella. Until their marriage in 1884, ten months after the death of Huntington's first wife, Collis and Arabella, were locked in a highly secretive love affair. She moved to New York in 1870 posing as the widow of John Archer Worsham, who over the years owned several Richmond gambling houses. Worsham, who remained very much alive until 1878, helped his friend Arabella maintain her secret attachment to Huntington. To cover this relationship required increasingly creative fabrications, particularly after she bore Collis a son in 1870. After Archer was born, Huntington established mother and child in an affluent neighborhood on Lexington Avenue and frequently took

Arabella with him when he visited his properties in the south and west. Next time: Arabella comes into her own.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Evans, Cerinda. *Collis Potter Huntington*. Newport News, Virginia: Mariners' Museum, 1954.

Rouse, Parke, Jr. "Belle Huntington, Her Men and Her Muse," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 88 (4, October 1980): 387-400.

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