

John C. Gellatly (- 6 Nov 1931)

The Evening Star, November 10, 1931, p. A4

Gellatly Burial Will Be Simple Services Planned as Widow Fights \$5,000,000 Art Gift to U.S.

By the Associated Press

Simple arrangement prevailed for the burial this afternoon of John Gellatly, 78, picturesque New Yorker, who was sued for his estranged wife's rent after giving the Nation a \$5,000,000 art collection.

Those to pay tribute at Congressional Cemetery included officials of the National Museum, to which Gellatly's collection went by act of Congress in 1929.

Funds Gained From Estate

Gellatly's life scene was New York -- much of the money that went into his art collection came from the sale of the famous old Holland house he inherited from his first wife.

But death brought him to the National Capital for burial close to what will be the eventual home of the collection to which he devoted his life -- unless his widow, Charlyne Whitley, should succeed in her action to have his gift declared illegal.

Asks Collection's Return

She complained he did not even leave money enough to pay for his funeral expenses, and said she was going to try to persuade Congress to give back the collection.

Inasmuch as the gift was duly accepted. Dr. Alexander Wetmore, assistant secretary at the museum said he "assumed" the matter was closed.

The Evening Star, November 11, 1931, p. 20

Donor of \$5,000,000 in Art To Nation Given Plain Burial John Gellatly, Who Died Penniless, Leaving Wife Destitute, Is Interred in Congressional Cemetery, Attended by Dozen Friends

In a tiny chapel at the Congressional Cemetery, burial services were held yesterday for John Gellatly, 78 years old, who gave to the country \$5,000,000 in art treasures, and left his wife destitute.

Hardly a dozen persons attended the services. On one side of the chapel sat Charlyn Whitley Gellatly, his youthful widow, and a few of her friends. On the other side were a few curious art connoisseurs, who had been bound to Gellatly by the love of art.

On the plain gray casket were two bouquets of chrysanthemums. The Rev. Clyde Brown, of Pinkney Memorial Church, read the services from the Episcopal prayer book. The services were simple, with no suggestion of the ornateness of the Gellatly collection which was described when given to the country as "One hundred works of American art, some choice European paintings, and large collections of glass, jewels, tapestries, Oriental specimens and other valuable material--all provided with beautiful cases."

Although Mrs. Gellatly had been estranged from her husband, she said, she respected his wish that he be buried in her plot in Congressional Cemetery. Her burial plot is there, she said, because her grandfather, Richard Nash Whitely, was a senator.

After the services, Mrs. Gellatly announced that she would leave immediately for New York to pack up some household belongings, because she will have to vacate her apartment at the first of the month for nonpayment of rent.

Just a year after her marriage, in September, 1930, she sued her husband for nonpayment of rent, saying her reduced financial circumstances were caused by her husband's desire to live beyond his means.

"He was old" she said. "He wanted his name glorified. I gave up my career as an actress for him because I thought I'd have enough to take care of me always. I'm going to try to get a bill put through Congress to have them give me back the collection. If I can't do that, I shall take my case to the courts.

The Washington Post, November 11, 1931, p. 20

**Donor of \$5,000,000 in Art To Nation Given Plain Burial
John Gellatly, Who Died Penniless, Leaving Wife Destitute
Is Interred in Congressional Cemetery, Attended by Dozen Friends**

In a tiny chapel at the Congressional Cemetery, burial services were held yesterday for John Gellatly, 78 years old, who gave to the country \$5,000,000 in art treasures, and left his wife destitute.

Hardly a dozen persons attended the services. On one side of the chapel sat Charlyne Whitley Gellatly, his youthful widow, and a few of her friends. On the other side were a few curious art connoisseurs, who had been bound to Gellatly by the love of art.

On the plain gray casket were two bouquets of chrysanthemums. The Rev. Clyde Brown, of Pinkney Memorial Church, read the services from the Episcopal prayer book. The services were simple, with no suggestion of the ornateness of the Gellatly collection, which was described when given to the country as "one hundred works of American art, some choice European paintings, and large collections of glass, jewels, tapestries, Oriental specimens and other valuable material--all provided with beautiful cases."

Although Mrs. Gellatly had been estranged from her husband, she said, she respected his wish that he be buried in her plot in Congressional Cemetery. Her burial plot is there, she said because her grandfather, Richard Nash Whitely, was a senator.

After the services, Mrs. Gellatly announced that she would leave immediately for New York to pack up some household belongings, because she will have to vacate her apartment at the first of the month for nonpayment of rent.

Just a year after her marriage, in September, 1930 she sued her husband for nonpayment of rent, saying her reduced financial circumstances were caused by her husband's desire to live beyond his means.

"He was old," she said. "He wanted his name glorified. I gave up my career as an actress for him because I thought I'd have enough to take care of me always. I'm going to try to get a bill put through Congress to have them give me back the collection. If I can't do that, I shall take my case to the courts."

The Washington Post, June 18, 1978, p. H1

**The Wily Old Collector
John Gellatly Gave Away a Fortune in Art Objects, Leaving His Wife \$79, an Umbrella and an Empty Suitcase**

By Sarah Booth Conroy

The Scent of scandal and ruin and unrequited love still lingers round the multimillion-dollar collection of 1,640 paintings and art objects John Gellatly gave the Smithsonian Institution.

It tells of an old man who sought a beautiful young woman for his second wife, and of the young woman who thought she was marrying a wealthy husband and became bitter when she learned he had given his wealth away. It's also the story of how Gellatly's collection became a part of the National Collection of Fine Arts (NCFA).

A great selection of Gellatly's gifts to the Smithsonian is on view at the NCF's recently opened exhibit, "Past and Present, a Century and a Half of a National Collection." More of his decorative arts collection is installed in the Gellatly Gallery on the first floor of the building at 8th and G Streets N.W.

The paintings include a Rubens and many by the modern artists of his period who are just now being reevaluated -- Mary Cassatt, Frederick Church, Childe Hassam, Albert Pinkham Ryder Abbott Handerson Thayer.

The decorative objects are fiery, fearful and fantastic. An East Turkestan fresco from the 8th-9th centuries is one of the important pieces of the collection (hung in the gallery above curious fingers). An Italian coral-on-gilt-bronze holy water font is from the 17th-18th century. A tomb figurine, a mythical beast, is from the Tang dynasty (618-906) of China. Two dagger handles, both from 18th century India, are of jade and rock crystal.

The jewels are remarkable. There are boxes of beads and fetishes strung together without respect to origin and time, from ancient Egyptian, Roman Byzantine and Sassanian (ancient Persia) empires. Sets of pearl buttons have matching bracelets and necklaces. Pendants and other jewelry include shapes of a fish and a crucifix. The jewels are rock crystal, gold, diamonds, enamel, pearls, amethyst, garnet, quartz, agate and onyx.

A burial crown of filigree silver, enamel and pearls from the Ming dynasty of 17th-century China is one of the most beautiful objects you'll see anywhere. A cup, carved from a single piece of emerald, was said to have belonged to Jabangir, Mogul emperor of Delhi--a gift from his wife who hoped to limit his drinking

On the main floor, are other wonders. A bigger-than-life Bodhisattva (a form of Buddha) is protected by by the curving staircase. Nearby is a pair of gilt Italian candelabra. The twisted gilded posts they originally sat upon are upstairs in the new exhibit.

Inside the Gellatly Gallery are a bronze ritual vessel that comes from the late Shang dynasty (China, 11th century BC). A gold victor wreath was formed in Greece, 4th-3rd century B.C. A lindenwood miniature Christ crib from the 15th century is made of 15 pieces (when the Smithsonian got it the crib was covered with old varnish and the angel wings were upside down. The crib likely was a gift to a young girl taking holy orders.