



Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Power in a Gilded Age (Hardcover)

Dr. Eric Homberger, Eric Homberger

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Mrs Astor, undisputed queen of New York society in the decades before World War I, used her prestige to create a social aristocracy in the city; an invitation to one of her parties was a coveted mark of social acceptance, and exclusion meant social banishment. Mrs Astor's story, which reads like a novel by Edith Wharton, sheds light on the origins, extravagant lifestyle, and social competitiveness of this aristocracy, and it is told here by Eric Homberger. Homberger argues that the arrival in New York of a tidal wave of new wealth after the Civil War pushed the city's old families into a redefinition of the practices and responsibilities of aristocracy. The public wanted to know more about the neighbourhoods, clothes, marriages, entertainments, scandals and divorces of the wealthy, so during the 1880s, Mrs Astor presided over a revolution in their social visibility. With Ward McAllister she created the Patriarchs, whose annual balls were the most sought-after social events of the time. She also established the "400", the definitive list of the socially acceptable, ordaining which families could be accepted and which must remain in social exclusion. Homberger describes the festivities of this social elite, their homes and environments, and their social struggles. His diverting account of lives of discreet and not-so-discreet excess recaptures New York's high society and shows how its members were transformed into America's first celebrities.

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