

Charlotte

Hereditary Princess of Monaco (1898–1977)

The illegitimate daughter of Hereditary Prince Louis of Monaco, who was then a lieutenant in the 3rd Chasseurs d’Afrique cavalry corps and posted to Algeria, and of Marie-Juliette Louvet, Charlotte-Louise-Juliette Grimaldi spent part of her childhood at Luzarches, to the north of Paris, in the Villa Charlotte.

A young woman at the centre of controversy

Charlotte was, from a very young age, at the centre of a controversy surrounding the devolution of the Monegasque crown. In the absence of a legitimate descendant of Prince Louis, a German national, Wilhelm of Urach, who was the eldest son of Princess Florestine, Prince Albert I’s aunt, was the presumptive heir to the Monegasque throne. The prospect of Germany gaining control over the Principality aroused concerns in France. On 15 November 1911, Prince Albert I approved Prince Louis’ recognition of Charlotte before the civil registrar, thus admitting her to the Royal Family and authorising her to succeed to the throne and bear the title of Mademoiselle of Valentinois. On 16 May 1919, Charlotte was officially adopted by Louis, in the presence of the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré, as a means of guaranteeing the succession. She then took the title Duchess of Valentinois. The new Franco-Monegasque Treaty of 17 July 1918, inserted into the Versailles Peace Treaty, removed any possibility for Wilhelm of Urach to succeed to the throne. He renounced the crown on behalf of himself and his descendants in 1924.

In 1920, Charlotte married Count Pierre de Polignac, who adopted the Grimaldi name and coat of arms, and became Prince Pierre of Monaco. This union resulted in two children: Antoinette in 1920 and Rainier in 1923. The couple separated in 1930 and were divorced in February 1933. On the death of her grandfather, Prince Albert I, in 1922, when her father, Louis, acceded the throne as Louis II, Charlotte became the hereditary princess, a title she retained until 30 May 1944, the day before her son Rainier reached his majority, when she renounced her claim to the Throne of Monaco in his favour.

A woman committed to the war effort

During the First World War, while Prince Louis, a foreign volunteer with the French Army, took up a role as a staff officer for the Fifth Army, his daughter Charlotte worked as a nurse in the temporary hospital set up at the Riviera Palace in Beausoleil. In this large hospital with 450 beds, she had contact with gravely injured and sometimes contagious patients. The work earned her the Medal of French Gratitude and the Medal of Epidemics.

In 1939, Charlotte reprised her role as a nurse in a field hospital, which was subjected to enemy shelling in May 1940. In 1947, she was awarded the Red Cross Silver Medal in the Cour des Invalides. A charitable soul, Princess Charlotte devoted her entire life to helping others. She came to the aid of Russian refugees in the 1920s, soldiers on the frontlines and prisoners of war during the Second World War, and, after the war, worked to recover freed prisoners. Having become a prison visitor, she received the Penitentiary Medal in 1952, proof of the value attached to such work by the Ministry of Justice.

In accordance with her final wishes, she was buried in the estate at the Château de Marchais, to which she was very attached and where she lived out her last years. She was a great lover of dogs, and liked to surround herself with them. In Monte-Carlo, Boulevard Princesse Charlotte is named in her honour.