

Florestine of Monaco Countess of Württemberg Duchess of Urach (1833–1897)

The daughter of Prince Florestan (1785–1856) and Princess Caroline (1793–1879), **Florestine Gabrielle Antoinette** was born 15 years after her elder brother, the future Prince Charles III (1818–1889). She grew up in Paris and received an education imbued with the literary sensibilities of her father, whose library she largely inherited.

In 1841, her uncle, Honoré V (1778–1841), the reigning prince, died without a legitimate descendant, and so Florestine's father acceded to the throne.

Alliance with a German royal family

In the early 1860s, as she approached her thirtieth birthday, Florestine met Count Wilhelm of Württemberg (1810–1869), who hailed from a non-dynastic branch of the Württemberg royal family, in Monaco. Already a widower and the father of four young girls, he was visiting the Riviera in the hope that the sea air would be beneficial to one of his daughters, Marie, who was consumptive. He was described by the *Journal de Monaco* as “one of the most distinguished generals of the German Confederation, he is also a learned archaeologist and an informed arts enthusiast.” Florestine married Wilhelm in 1863 at the Prince's Palace, enabling the Grimaldi family to forge a union with a royal house. This served Charles III's strategy of entering the society of European monarchies.

Florestine settled in Stuttgart, the capital of the Kingdom of Württemberg. She rapidly became part of the court, where she displayed exceptional social skills, though she retained a strong link with the Principality. It was in Monaco that her sick stepdaughter, Marie, died in 1864, and that the couple's first child, Wilhelm Charles Florestan Gero Crescentius, was born. A younger brother, Charles Joseph Florestan Gero Crescentius, was born at Ulm Palace in 1865. In 1867, Wilhelm and Florestine were given the title Duke and Duchess of Urach, which was created for them by King Charles I of Württemberg.

Florestine was not spared tragedy. Another stepdaughter, Eugenia, died prematurely in 1867. Her husband, who was also sick, then converted to Catholicism, and died two years later, in 1869.

An engaging, little-known figure

The widowed Duchess of Urach continued to split her time between Germany, the Château de Marchais and Monaco. When she was there, she assumed an important role in the life of the Monegasque court and assisted her brother, who had become increasingly blind due to severe attacks of neuralgia. Her two children, Wilhelm and Charles, were sent to board at the Collège de la Visitation in Monaco, where they received their first communions in 1875 and 1876.

The alliance between Florestine and the Count of Württemberg had significant political repercussions when, in the absence of a legitimate descendent of Prince Louis, Charles III's grandson, in the early twentieth century, Florestine's eldest son Wilhelm was the presumptive heir to the Throne of Monaco. This situation, which raised concerns in France due to the risk of Germany gaining control of the Principality, turned into a dynastic struggle. In 1911, Charlotte, the illegitimate daughter of Louis, was recognised as part of the line of succession, to the great displeasure of the Urachs. Having been legitimised by her grandfather Albert I, Charlotte was officially adopted by Louis in 1919, in the presence of the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré. Consequently, in 1924, Wilhem of Urach opted to officially renounce any claim to the Monegasque throne on behalf of himself and his descendants.

In the Condamine district of Monaco, Rue Princesse Florestine to this day pays tribute to this charming and little-known figure.