



About the Cover

Lillian Russell

By Leslie Przybylek, Senior Curator



The dramatic poster of Lillian Russell made by a legendary Cincinnati lithography company featured on the cover of this edition of *Western Pennsylvania History* is one of more than 50 loaned objects that appear in the new exhibition at the History Center, *Smithsonian's Portraits of Pittsburgh: Works from the National Portrait Gallery*. Made in 1906, the poster image resembled Russell's role as Lady Teazle, the young flirtatious wife of an older gentleman in the popular 18th-century comedy of manners, *School for Scandal*. The image played off Russell's flamboyant persona in real life.

Lillian Russell makes a fitting cover subject for this issue. Out of more than 100 individuals with Western Pennsylvania connections who have become part of the National Portrait Gallery's collection over the years, Russell was the first woman to be included in the new museum's opening exhibition in 1968. To audiences unfamiliar with Russell today, that fact might be surprising, but it reflects her position as one of the most famous stage performers of late 19th and early 20th century America, a woman who later turned her attention to other social causes, including women's suffrage, and whose life epitomizes the National Portrait Gallery's mission to "tell the story of America by portraying the people who shape the nation's history, development, and culture."

Lillian Russell became a Pittsburgher in 1912, when she married prominent local newspaperman Alexander P. Moore, owner of the *Pittsburgh Leader*. At the time of the marriage, Russell was by far the more nationally famous of the two; A.P. Moore was her fourth husband, and newspaper gossip hinted that their nuptials were impacted by financial matters. But Russell's career was in a moment of transition, and she soon largely retired from the stage to focus her energies on other causes. She started writing a newspaper column and by 1913 began more actively speaking out in support of women's suffrage, voicing her

opinion that denying women, taxpayers along with men, the right to vote was the equivalent of “taxation without representation.”¹ She once threatened to refuse to pay her income tax in protest of this double standard.

An outspoken advocate for women’s health and wellness, Russell also spoke on self-help topics, encouraged physical activity for women, and launched her own line of skincare products. However, her role as a social advocate was not without controversy. In 1922, she traveled to Europe at the request of President Warren Harding to examine the matter of increased foreign immigration and made recommendations on how to address the situation. Her suggestions, including a five-year moratorium on new immigrants, contributed to the regressive Immigration Act of 1924, and the return trip resulted in a shipboard injury that at first seemed minor but eventually cost Russell her life. Nonetheless, she gained a great deal of public appreciation during World War I by raising money and support for the U.S. Marines and was recognized as an honorary “gunnery sergeant of the marines.” After her death on June 6, 1922, a Marine detachment escorted her body to the funeral at Trinity Episcopal Church on Sixth Avenue and Downtown American Legion Post 231 played taps.

¹ “Lillian Russell believes in suffrage for women,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, April 25, 1913.

◀ As one of the most widely celebrated performers of her age, Russell represented the standard of beauty for women in the 1890s.

Lillian Russell, 1893, by William Morrison McKenzie, albumen print.

Library of Congress, Prints and photographs Division.



A.P. Moore was a prominent and wealthy Pittsburgh newspaper publisher, but his fame was no match for that of Russell, who also became a Pittsburgher when they wed in 1912.

Library of Congress, Prints and photographs Division.



Russell traveled to Europe as a “United States immigration inspector” on behalf of President Warren G. Harding in 1922. On March 28, 1922, after her return, she delivered the results of her fact-finding mission to Secretary of Labor James J. Davis in Washington, D.C. This news service photo probably documents that meeting. Russell died just a few months later.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Photo Company Collection.