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Bust of Lady Wallace by Charles-August Lebourg at the Wallace Collection

## Brief Biography – Lady Wallace

Julie Amélie Charlotte Castelnau, Lady Wallace

15 March 1819 – 16 February 1897

### Early Years

Lady Wallace was born in Paris on 15 March 1819 to parents who were unmarried at the time of her birth. She was named Julie Amélie Charlotte Castelnau. Her father, Bernard Castelnau, was a '*homme de confiance*' (an employee who does all kinds of work). Her mother, Sophie Elizabeth Knolt (or Knoth), was an *ouvrière en linge*, a linen maid.

Tradition maintains Julie was an assistant at a perfume shop in the Passage du Saumon. There she met Richard Wallace, who some suggest came into the shop to purchase perfume for another woman with whom he was having an amorous relationship.

On August 29, 1840, Julie gave birth to a son, Georges Henry Edmond Castelnau. The father was Richard Wallace, believed to be the illegitimate son of Richard Seymour-Conway, Lord Hertford from 1842.

### **Life as the Mistress of Richard Wallace**

Little is known about the life of Julie Castelnau during the years from 1840-1861. It is certain, however, that Wallace retained a strong relationship with Julie and their son, Georges, even though they did not live together. Julie may have been a dressmaker, and she was living with her son at 44 rue de Provence when Georges was baptized in 1849.

How frequently Wallace visited Julie and Georges during the period from 1848 to 1854 when he was living in Boulogne-sur-Mer with Lord Henry Seymour and Maria Emily Hertford, “Mie-Mie”, 3rd Marchioness of Hertford, is unknown. They had gone there to escape the mob violence, destruction and instability in Paris following the revolution ending the reign of Louis-Philippe.

Richard Wallace installed Julie in a Paris apartment at 29 boulevard des Italiens in the building he purchased in 1852. She also is listed as a tenant in Lord Hertford’s property at 1-3 rue Taitbout in 1861, 1863 and 1864, the address where Wallace, Henry Seymour and Mie-Mie had happily lived together as a family from Wallace’s early childhood until Mie-Mie’s death in 1856 and Henry’s death in 1859.

Julie remained in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris in 1870-71, in which Georges served with distinction as an army officer under General Vinoy.

### **Finally, Marriage to Wallace**

It has been suggested that Lord Hertford did not approve of the relationship Wallace had with Julie Castelnau and perhaps that is the reason their marriage did not take place until after the death of Lord Hertford. Wallace first married Julie in a ceremony performed by Edward Blount, acting British Ambassador, immediately following the end of the siege. That marriage was later declared illegal under British law by the returning Embassy staff, prompting Wallace to legalize the union through a civil marriage at the town hall of the 9th arrondissement on February 15, 1871.

Between these two marriage ceremonies, on February 11, 1871, Wallace legally recognized his thirty-year-old son, who took the name Edmond Richard Wallace.

Julie Castelnau became Lady Wallace in August 1871 when Richard Wallace was made a Baronet by Queen Victoria in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to the welfare of British nationals in France during the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris. Wallace promptly commissioned a marble bust of Lady Wallace by the sculptor Charles-August Lebourg, the artist who also created the model for the Wallace fountains.

In 1872, Lady Wallace and her husband moved to England and shipped to London the best pieces of the enormous and valuable art collection accumulated by the Hertfords and inherited by Wallace. Hertford House in London was their primary residence and a place to display much of the famed art collection. There she would spend the rest of her life.



## Her life as Lady Wallace



Lady Wallace at the beginning of her life in England, 1871-72.

Overall, Lady Wallace was never received graciously into British society. Many thought she was beneath the rank of Sir Richard, despite the controversy regarding his parentage and illegitimacy. Social and intellectual snobbery deeply rooted in British society played a role in how she was received. Many thought they made a strange couple, since the still handsome and very wealthy Wallace could have selected any partner he wanted from among available titled or beautiful women.

Time had removed any physical attractiveness Lady Wallace might have had in her youth and, probably due to a poor education, she was considered without intelligence. Although she lived many years in London, she did not speak English, which made participating in social events challenging. Ferdinand de Rothschild wrote that she was

“utterly lacking in taste and discernment.” Others made harsher comments, but not everyone. Lord Esher described her as a “very refined, shy and excellent lady.” For the most part, Lady Wallace fulfilled the duties expected of affluent women of Victorian Britain. Nevertheless, knowing she was regarded as inferior by the elite company in which her husband moved must have influenced her preference for being somewhat reclusive.

From 1880, Lady Wallace chose to go by her middle name, Amélie. She hosted many delightful parties at Hertford House and shooting parties at their country home at Sudbourne. She accompanied her husband to a wide range of events and engagements and often spent time at Château de Bagatelle in Paris. Moreover, her marriage seemed to be a strong union with the couple devoted to each other.



Richard and Lady Wallace entertaining at Bagatelle



## A Partnership in Art and Philanthropy

Richard Wallace was an art connoisseur and collector who significantly added to the collection he inherited from Lord Hertford. Lady Wallace shared her husband's interest in art and philanthropy to a greater extent than was previously acknowledged. She had a small art collection of her own and sometimes lent pieces to exhibitions in both the United Kingdom and in Paris. The couple often acted in partnership with their philanthropy, both giving gifts to the same organizations. But Lady Wallace also participated in a wide range of charitable activities on her own.

## Lady Wallace, the Widow

When Richard Wallace died in 1890, Lady Wallace quoted St. Paul in the formal death notice, "These three remain: faith, hope and charity; but the greatest of these is charity", perhaps signaling her strong approval and support of Wallace's philanthropy. Lady Wallace remained at Hertford House and took responsibility for the art collection, continuing her husband's practice of lending art to exhibitions in London and in Paris.

Maintaining their shared spirit of quiet philanthropy, Lady Wallace made gifts of art in memory of Wallace, including a stained glass window for Lisburn cathedral with the theme of the Good Samaritan, urging parishioners to 'Go and do thou likewise.' Her charitable giving also supported a variety of humanitarian causes, including a night shelter for the homeless in Paris and aid for the poor of both nations. She became very involved with the management and endowment of the Hertford British Hospital in Paris, founded and funded by Richard Wallace and which opened an advanced, state-of-the-art medical facility in 1879 to serve needy British nationals living in France. In addition, she continued her husband's substantial support of the British Charitable Fund, also in Paris.



Lady Wallace as a widow at Hertford House in London.

## Her Legacy

Upon her death in 1897, Lady Wallace gave about half of the art collection, accumulated over the years by Lord Hertford and Richard Wallace, to the British nation stipulating that it be called "The Wallace Collection". In 1900, Hertford House opened as a museum housing the artwork. At the opening ceremony, Lord Rosebery described the collection as "the greatest gift, I believe, that has ever been made by an individual to our country." The bequeathed portion of one of the finest private art collections ever assembled remains to this day at Hertford House and is available for public viewing free of charge.

In her will, Lady Wallace also made gifts to such organizations as the British Home for Incurables at Clapham, the National Lifeboat Institution, the Royal Cambridge Asylum for Soldiers' Widows, the Artists' General Benevolent Fund, L'Assistance Publique, Paris, La Société Hospitalité de Nuit in Paris and an endowment for St. George's Church in Paris.

Lady Wallace's life was extraordinary for a woman of her time. Transitioning from her humble, French working-class origin to her sudden elevated status among the privileged elite in Britain late in life must have been difficult. By choice, she remained in the shadow of her illustrious husband and she retained her dignity while being subject to relentless criticism of her appearance and personality and the social and cultural snobbery of the British aristocracy.

While the extent to which she may have influenced the generous good works of her husband is unknown, it is fair to say she made no attempt to limit them and very likely gave her full support and approval. Only recently have the many good works of her own become more widely known, making her a credit to the title "Lady Wallace."

In 2025, a square just outside the entrance to Château de Bagatelle was named in her honor and dedicated with a commemorative plaque.

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Photos: Courtesy of The Wallace Collection