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# DREAMBOAT

## THE EXPO

Can it be so? **Rudolph Valentino**, legendary Latin lover and superstar of *The Sheik*, right here at the **Maine Expo**—home to high school hoop and pro-wrestling rumbles?

Now here's the stuff of romance—and a very public spat.

BY HERB ADAMS

**R**UDOLPH VALENTINO (1895–1926) was likely the most famous man in America when he rolled into Portland in April of 1923. Sex symbol of the young century, Valentino burst into fame as the first mega-star of the silent screen, when the movies were still an infant art.

Launched by luck and exotic good looks in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (released in 1921, the first silent film to make a million dollars) and *Blood And Sand* (1922), Valentino's iconic *The Sheik* (1921) cemented his legend as the ultimate Latin Lover—a stereotype he hated and yet could not escape.

Nor could Valentino escape a stormy marriage to **Winifred**

**Shaughnessy Hudnut**, an Irish-American perfume heiress famous for short-tempered tantrums about her husband's female fans.

An unhappy Hollywood husband, Valentino was adored by millions and in hot

water at home. During a studio dispute in 1922–1923, the Valentinos toured as promoters of Mineralava Beauty Clay, an awkwardly named cosmetic both Valentinos claimed to use. The tour was a tremendous success, with performances in 88 cities across the U.S. and Canada. In each, the couple judged tango competitions before Valentino himself chose the “Most Beautiful Example of American Womanhood,” dangling before each a place in the national Mineralava Beauty Pageant in New York City and a role in his next movie opposite the Latin Lover himself.

Who could resist? *The Portland Evening Express* beat the drums loudly as Valentino approached, opening a photo competition that drew hundreds of entrants, from which six Maine lovelies would be chosen for Valentino's expert eyes.

“Screen's Great Lover To Name The State's Most Beautiful Girl Tomorrow!” headlined the *Express*. “Little wonder that the hearts of Maine girls thrill at the prospect, and that they are tumbling over each other with eagerness to be the fortunate one.”

Among the eager hordes, amid



The Valentinos in gaucho garb for the tango, as they appeared at the Portland Expo. Note that even with built-up boots, Valentino is barely as tall as the temperamental Miss Hudnut.



The Portland Exposition Building was built in 1914 at a cost of roughly \$81,000. It is the second-oldest arena still in operation in the United States; (right) "Dark eyes, with dark curls down her neck," as the *Express* described her, Dorothy Appleby dazzled Hollywood in 1931, after she signed a contract with MGM; (left) Mineralava Beauty Clay.

apple-cheeked ingénues with bee-stung lips, was a photo of 17-year-old schoolgirl Dorothy M. Apple-

by, whose parents ran the Appleby Lunch Room at 265 St. John Street. Mature for her age, and a mix of Maine innocence with a vampish come-hither look, Appleby quickly made the editor's cut for the half dozen lucky ladies advanced to the finals.

**MAKING AN ENTRANCE**

As befitted Hollywood royalty, the Valentinos rolled into Portland in a luxury train once used by the King of Belgium and President Woodrow Wilson. From a roaring reception at Union Station they (and their dainty Pekinese pug) were whisked away in a new Auburn Silent Sedan on a whirlwind tour of the Western and Eastern Proms, past Monument Square and the Longfellow House, to The Expo. There, the custodians were still sweeping the floor when Valentino grabbed a broom and joined in. A regular guy, the janitors grinned.

Mrs. Valentino was something else. "Winifred Hudnut Shows Who's Boss at Rehearsal," said the *Express* when the actor missed a dance step. "Two tiny French slippers stamped [...] two slender hands slapped in irritation [...] Mrs. Valentino

told him that in penance for his stupidity he must practice alone until he could pass safely past the stumbling point."

Valentino "sweeps women to his feet, but does not play 'The Sheik' in his own home," the paper noted wryly. "Miss Hudnut rules that."

Promptly at 8 p.m., The Expo filled to the rafters with rapturous fans. The lights dimmed, and Valentino's traveling orchestra—all dressed as gauchos—crashed into the tango from *The Four Horsemen*.

"Miss Hudnut," reported the breathless paper, was "gorgeous in a long full gown of black velvet, with a brilliant red shawl draped about her. In her hair were two red flowers and the hem of her skirt was outlined in the same brilliant tone.

"Valentino, scarcely an inch taller than his beautiful wife, wore black velvet trousers bloused into his boot tops, a shirt of deep cream, and under the heavily studded leather belt, a knotted crimson scarf that

**"Valentino sweeps women to his feet, but does not play The Sheik in his own home—Miss Hudnut rules that."**  
*—The Portland Evening Express*



hung gracefully at his side.

"Adding atmosphere were the silver-mounted quirt hanging at his wrist and the heavy-handed knife stuck in his belt at the back, Spanish fashion."

Bowing to thunderous applause, Valentino then judged a competition of Portland's best tango couples (won by Miss Cora Dame and Albert Leavitt) and then, smoothly, turned to the bevy of blushing young beauties breathless before him.

"He spoke with but a slight accent," reported the paper. "His voice is deep and full. Swarthy of complexion with narrowed dark eyes, he looks off stage very much as he does on the screen."

**LAUNCHED TO STARDOM**

A hush fell over the huge hall. Valentino's dark eyes scanned the eager faces. A pause, and with a nod and a slight touch on her shoulder, fame suddenly fell on Dorothy Appleby.

Neither Valentino nor Appleby ever said why—perhaps it was cosmic—but in that instant, in an explosion of applause, delighted screams and swooning, the door to Dorothy's future swung open.

Valentino never spoke a word onscreen but had plenty to say at the Expo, pointedly, about the kind of films that had made him famous.

"I speak in behalf of the motion picture business, a new comer in the world of art," he declared. "Seventy-five percent or more of the pictures produced today are a brazen insult to the public intelligence."

"If I continued to appear in such travesties as *The Sheik*, I would feel that I betrayed the trust of the American public... I say this to you for I know I am speaking to a race of people not too proud to fight, and that quits when the job is finished and not before."

Valentino's appeal to Yankee pride was "enthusiastically received, and his dressing room was thronged by persons eager to get a last glimpse of the two dancers before they disappeared."

And into the night they did, Boston bound, trailing applause like a comet tail.

Alas, Valentino never returned to Maine. Divorced in 1925, he died tragically young in 1926. But Dorothy Appleby was just beginning. Although she did not win the 1924 Mineralava crown in New York City, Appleby had seen the bright lights and never turned back. Landing ingénue roles on the Gotham stage, she smoked in public, drove fast cars, survived one suicide attempt (perhaps staged) and three husbands. In Hollywood she found success of sorts, appearing in small roles in 60 films, including *Stagecoach* (1939), directed by Portland's own John Ford; and two-reel shorts with Buster Keaton (1940) and *The Three Stooges* (1941-1942). But her Valentino moment remained her longest and fondest memory.

Perhaps not the first official Miss Maine

"Landing **ingénue** roles on the Gotham stage, [Appleby] smoked in public, drove **fast cars**, survived one suicide attempt and **three husbands**."

—the modern scholarship pageant, preliminary to the Miss America competition, dates itself to 1935—Valentino's touch moved her out of mortal time. When Dorothy Appleby Drake passed on in 1990, aged 84, her proud obituary said it all: "Miss Maine of 1923...Valentino's choice!" ■

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