



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***DOWNTON ABBEY'S* ELIZABETH MCGOVERN HOSTS
MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES**

**3-PART SERIES TO PREMIERE JANUARY 4th, 11th & 18th AT 8PM ET/PT
ON SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL™**

New York, December 10, 2014 – Lady Cora was not alone. The fictional heroine of “Downton Abbey” was representative of hundreds of real American heiresses who wed British nobility at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, merging cash with class. Hosted by “Downton Abbey” star Elizabeth McGovern, **MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES**, premiering on January 4 at 8 p.m. ET/PT on Smithsonian Channel, chronicles the fascinating stories behind some of these celebrated unions. From Winston Churchill’s parents to Princess Diana’s great grandmother, the series examines arranged marriages that saved a fading British aristocracy and, in return, gave some American women a title and place in high society.

Between 1880 and 1920, as many as 350 British aristocrats married wealthy American brides—the so-called “Dollar Princesses.” This new series chronicles the true stories of how marriage, class, sex, ambition, power and money all converged during these four decades, as the sun began setting over the British Empire. Through sumptuous location filming, historical documents, interviews and dramatic re-enactments, **MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES** brings to life the stories of these extraordinary women – the romance, the heartbreak, the secrets, the scandals and their enduring legacy.

Elizabeth McGovern takes viewers into Highclere Castle, where “Downton Abbey” is shot. The three-part series reveals the lives of cosseted women whose families craved the social standing, breeding and respect a title would grant. They lived like nobility in America, in marble palaces with legions of staff, while their British counterparts lived in centuries-old family estates that were crumbling. The culture clash was often intense, and the result sometimes extraordinary. Some of these women became not just socialites but Members of Parliament and Suffragettes. They campaigned for enlightened causes and embraced sexual freedom – setting their mark on everything from the Royal Family and the British Empire to parliamentary democracy.

MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES makes an enthralling journey through

history to reveal the stories of some of the most charismatic and adventurous women of their day, and how they interacted with the great social changes that ushered in the 20th century.

MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES: CASH FOR CLASS

Premieres Sunday, January 4th at 8 p.m. ET/PT

The series begins with the gentility of the late Victorian period and a profile of America's Jennie Jerome, whose son, Winston Churchill, was arguably the most famous statesman of the 20th century. Beautiful, educated and headstrong, Jennie met Lord Randolph Churchill at a dance, and it reportedly was love at first sight for both. Jennie was a wonderful spirit, writing to her betrothed: "I won't marry you unless you let me do exactly as I like." A Brooklyn-born heiress, she grew up in a Manhattan mansion worth \$253 million (in today's dollars, accounting for inflation), but still was not accepted by Manhattan society. In England, it was not much better. No matter how much of her father's money was pumped into the family estate, Jennie was keenly aware of always being looked down upon by the gentry.

MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES: WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

Premieres Sunday, January 11th at 8 p.m. ET/PT

More than a century before paparazzi buzzed overhead in helicopters to take photos of celebrity weddings, people clamored for gossip about the unions of the fabulously rich and famous. Consuelo Vanderbilt – of those Vanderbilts – was reared to be a princess. As an American, she had no claim on title. Instead, her mother, who could give assertiveness training to any stage mother or tiger mom, groomed Consuelo for nobility. Once Consuelo was old enough, her mother sought a world stage for the girl, with no thought given to anything as superfluous as love. And so she was married off to the Duke of Marlborough on Nov. 6, 1895, at Manhattan's St. Thomas Episcopal Church, while throngs ringed the block, hoping for a glimpse of them. Tabloid press was salacious then, too, and there were even stories about her undergarments. Theirs, though, was hardly a fairy tale marriage; in fact, she was late to the church because she was crying. At the altar, the duke never even glanced at her, which was, unfortunately, a preview of their relationship.

MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES: Movers and Shakers

Premieres Sunday, January 18 at 8 p.m. ET/PT

In the final installment of the series, the Jazz Age is in full swing and the Depression sets in. Through news clips and interviews, viewers learn about an infamous romance between an American and a member of British royalty that is considered one of the greatest love affairs in history. What else could it be when a king abdicates his throne for a woman? Edward VIII loved the twice-divorced American Wallis Simpson more than his birthright. Historians acknowledge that his abdication may very well have been a boon for history. "I am perfectly sure that it is one of the best things that ever could have happened," says Viscount John Julius Norwich, "because I think he was so stupid, and I think he was completely unfit to be king of England, particularly with the war coming on, because he was at this time talking to everyone about what a wonderful chap he

thought Hitler was. So I think you could say Mrs. Simpson had saved the country, the empire, and quite possibly the world."

MILLION DOLLAR AMERICAN PRINCESSES is produced by Finestripe Productions for Smithsonian Channel. Executive Producer for Finestripe is Sue Summers. David Royle and Charles Poe serve as executive producers for Smithsonian Channel.

Smithsonian Channel™, owned by Showtime Networks Inc. and the Smithsonian Institution, is where curiosity lives, inspiration strikes and wonders never cease. This is the place for awe-inspiring stories, powerful documentaries and amazing entertainment across multiple platforms. Smithsonian Channel combines the storytelling prowess of SHOWTIME® with the unmatched resources and rich traditions of the Smithsonian, to create award-winning programming that shines new light on popular genres such as air and space, history, science, nature, and pop culture. Among the network's offerings are series including *Aerial America*, *L.A. Frock Stars*, *Secrets*, *Mighty Ships*, *Mighty Planes* and *Air Disasters*, as well as critically-acclaimed specials that include *Civil War 360*, *9/11: The Heartland Tapes*; *MLK: The Assassination Tapes* and *The Day Kennedy Died*. Find out more at www.smithsonianchannel.com.

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