

The Imperial Family of Austria

THE ROYAL HAPSBURG FAMILY

No event in the college's early history stands out more in the memories of those sisters living at Marian College during Holy Week, April 1943, than the visit of the nine members of the exiled Imperial Family of Austria (the Hapsburgs). Their family reunion at the college was kept so secret that their Indianapolis chauffeur, Allison Estate and Marian College caretaker, Otis J. Clemens, was unaware of their identities until they had left. The imperial guests occupied then vacationing students' rooms in Alverna Hall (now the Ruth Lilly Center), and a returning senior was so awe-struck to learn that an empress had slept in her bedroom that she seriously considered charging her dorm mates admission.



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Heading the family was the always black-clad Empress Zita, widow of the last Austrian Emperor, Charles I (also known as King Charles IV of Hungary), who had died in 1922. Although neither he nor Zita ever abdicated, they had in fact lost any claims to the thrones of Austria and Hungary at the close of World War I. In 1919, the new republican Austrian government passed a law banishing them and their children from Austrian territory until they renounced all intentions of regaining the throne and accepted the status of private citizens; in Hungary Charles was officially dethroned in 1921. Zita and her oldest son, the Crown Prince Otto, had continued their efforts to restore the Hapsburg monarchy in Austria until the Nazis annexed that country in 1938. Threatened with death by the Nazi regime, the family managed (with U.S. assistance) to flee Europe in 1940.

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At the time of their reunion, the Empress and her three daughters were living in Quebec, while the five sons were living in the U.S. The choice of Indianapolis as the location of their first family reunion since before fleeing Europe stems from the fact that two of the sons were part of a U.S. Army Austrian unit then stationed near-by at Camp Atterbury. Marian College afforded the Hapsburgs comfort, convenience, and privacy. A number of the sisters spoke or understood German, and for the devoutly Catholic family, there was the opportunity to attend Holy Week services in the small, beautiful chapel located in what is now the music room of the Allison Mansion. Family members visited, took long walks in the lake area, prayed, and, on one memorable occasion, the Empress sat with the assembled sisters and recounted the story of her exile from Austria and the harrowing circumstances of her flight from the Nazis.

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Sister Joannes Pardo, now residing in Oldenburg, served as assistant cook at Marian College in April 1943, and at the request of then college president Mother Clarissa Dillhoff, took pictures of the family members (with the exception of the Archduke Felix, who arrived later). Until quite recently, Sister Joannes had seen only one of the developed pictures—that published in the May 1943 issue of the college newspaper, *The Phoenix*. The snapshots and negatives, each carefully identified, were stored for many years in a vault in Marian Hall; they were eventually rediscovered in files transferred from there to the current archives in the library. After their discovery they were shown to Sister Joannes, to her quite obvious delight.

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L. to R. - Archdukes Otto, Charles Louis,
Archduchess Adelaide, Empress Zita, Arch-
duchess Elizabeth, Archduke Rudolf, Arch-
duchess Charlotte.
Marian College April 25, 1943

After the war, Zita returned to Europe, but because of her refusal to renounce her claims to the throne, was unable to return to Austria until 1982, when restrictions were eased. She died in Switzerland in 1989, at the age of 96. Her activities in her declining years included working for the canonization of her beloved husband, Charles. Although she did not live to see the fruit of these efforts, at Charles's beatification by Pope John Paul II in 2004, four of the children did attend the ceremonies in Rome, including the eldest, the Archduke Otto. Otto eventually did renounce his claims to the throne "for practical reasons," and for many years was prominent in efforts for European unification and for establishing friendly relations among the three Abrahamic faiths. Now 96, Otto is living in Bavaria. The three Archduchesses, Adelheid, Charlotte, and Elizabeth are deceased, as are the Archdukes Robert and Carl Louis. The Archdukes Felix and Rudolf, together with Otto survive.