



Jill  
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Books



Aloha!

Welcome to this excerpt from my book *Haleakala: A History of the Maui Mountain*. I spent a decade researching this book, learning about Maui's magical mountain and the people who have loved it. I dug through Haleakala National Park files and picture collections, interviewed old timers, read historical accounts of crater trips and characters, and wandered the park and its trails in person. All this on top of living on the slopes of Haleakala for many years, hearing the stories and enjoying the view of that beautiful mountain.

This excerpt includes stories and vintage photos of the Louis von Tempsky family, famous for their colorful lifestyle, gracious hospitality and *malama* (care) for the land.

Jill Engledow



# A Ranch in Paradise

The von Tempsky family of Haleakala



This story of legendary Haleakala Ranch manager Louis von Tempsky and his family is an excerpt from *Haleakala: A History of the Maui Mountain*, by Jill Engledow, award-winning journalist and author who specializes in the history of Maui.

For more information on this and other books by Jill, please visit [www.jillengledow.com](http://www.jillengledow.com).

# A Ranch in Paradise

One of the most colorful families ever to live on the slopes of Haleakalā was that headed by Louis von Tempsky. Immortalized in books written by his daughter Armine, the life they lived on the sprawling Haleakalā Ranch was a daily adventure led by the dashing Louis, also sometimes called Von. “There are people who seem to move through life with an invisible spotlight focused on them,” Armine wrote in her classic *Born in Paradise*. “The way he moved, spoke, and held himself, the way he entered a room, printed itself on the memory of everyone he met. His gay eyes, filled with intense glee of living, the flash of his smile—which made a person feel braver and stronger—the quick ease with which he swung onto a horse or bent to pet a dog set him apart.”



Louis von Tempsky and friends.

*Hawaii State Archives photo*

Von Tempsky himself came of colorful roots. He was the son of Gustav Ferdinand von Tempsky, a Prussian adventurer, soldier, writer, and artist who left Poland at age eighteen for the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. Over the next few years, Gustav harvested mahogany, went to California for the Gold Rush, and rode horseback from San Diego to Mexico City, where he fought for a while under Maximilian. A talented water colorist, he published an illustrated book, *Mitla*, about his adventures. Gustav married Emelia Bell in Bluefields, Nicaragua, and the couple's first son, Randal, was born in 1856 at Bluefields. Louis was born during a trip to Scotland (Emilia's birthplace) in 1858. The family moved to New Zealand in 1862. There, Gustav put his early Prussian military training to use in the Maori Wars, obtaining the rank of major before being killed in battle at age forty.

Louis arrived in Hawai'i in 1879. With few resources, the young man turned his hand to whatever he could find, including a spell of work at Maui's 'Ulupalakua Ranch. In 1884, he went into partnership with his brother, Randal, to purchase a ranch in Kula they called Erewhon—"nowhere" spelled backward. He also enjoyed the lively society of Hawai'i monarchy days, and in 1891 married Amy Wodehouse, daughter of Major James Hay Wodehouse, British ambassador to the Court of Hawai'i. In 1896, von Tempsky was named manager of Haleakalā Ranch, and brought his aristocratic young wife to live amid its green pastures.

The home they established there became a magnet for guests, a place of gaiety and sophistication uncommon in the staid agricultural community of Maui. "We had permanent guests, semipermanent guests, weekend guests, drop-in guests—guests for dinner, wild-cattle hunting, Christmas, polo, and the Fourth of July. There were social guests, business guests, and all the in betweens," Armine wrote.

Along with Louis, the ranch's *paniolo* (cowboys), and the family's growing children, these visitors would spend the day galloping across lava fields in pursuit of wild cattle or branding tame herds, then return to dress formally for dinner served on fine china lit by candles in elegant silver holders. Louis was equally at home in these settings as at a *lū'au*, where he would join in singing and dancing Hawaiian *hula*. His children had their first horseback rides while still infants, each made the responsibility of a *paniolo* who treasured his little charge and taught the child about horses, ranching, and the ways of Hawai'i.



Authors Jack and Charmian London were among the famous guests of the Von Tempsky family.

Louis, meanwhile, was turning Haleakalā Ranch into a profit-making operation, planting thousands of trees and upgrading the stock. At Christmas in 1886, he had introduced the game of polo to Hawai‘i, and now he bred polo ponies and trained horses to win the races that were a favorite pastime of horse-crazy Maui.

Ranching was a rough game in those days. Wild cattle still roamed the mountainside, ravaging crops and raising havoc with the purity of registered breeding stock. These longhorns, descendants of those first landed in Hawai‘i in 1793 by Captain George Vancouver, weighed as much as sixteen hundred pounds, with horns spanning up to five feet. Cowboys worked doggedly to clear the wild animals, roping and tying them, then taming those they could and slaughtering the rest.

Even the ordinary business of ranching was extraordinarily difficult, as cattle had to be herded across the rugged mountain and down to the shoreline at Mākena for shipping. Once the critters had been safely corralled at the beach, cowboys moved them one at a time, with a rope tied around the horns, to a whaleboat in shallow water. With cattle tied to each side of the whaleboat, it was drawn on a long rope out to the steamer that would carry the cattle to market. Each of the cattle would have a sling put around it and be hoisted aboard.

Another regular trip was to the summit of the mountain and down into the crater valley, which at that time belonged to Haleakalā Ranch. When summer parched the pastures below, Louis von Tempsky and a half-dozen *paniolo* would drive surplus steers through the crater to Palikū and then up the Lau‘ulu Trail to a lush plateau eighteen hundred feet above. Guests often accompanied them to camp at Palikū and hunt for goats. Among them were Louis’ longtime friend Lorrin A. Thurston and famous author Jack London and his wife, Charmian, who visited the von Tempskys several times. Both Thurston, publisher of the Honolulu *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, and London encouraged young Armine in her fledgling efforts at writing.

By this time, Louis was a widower, rearing four children alone. Amy died in 1909, leaving Armine, as the eldest, to help her father and adopted sister, Aina, run the household and care for younger sisters Gwen and Lorna (nicknamed “Hauki” after her guardian cowboy) and little brother Errol (nicknamed “Poli.”) In *Born in Paradise*, Armine tells of the cloistered rearing of the two youngest after Lorna began to suffer from asthma attacks. When Amy died, Louis established a new child-care regime which included lots of time outdoors and on horseback, cold baths every morning and wardrobes of britches rather than frilly frocks. From now on, the youngsters would follow their father on trips up and around the mountain, experiencing ranch life at his side.

“After Amy died, Uncle Von used to take the children with him everywhere, so they'd be safe,” Inez MacPhee Ashdown remembered decades later. As a youngster, she spent much time in the household of Louis von Tempsky, who was a great friend of her father, rancher Angus MacPhee. “Even when the children had asthma, he'd wrap them up in their sleeping bags and lean them against a pillow on the side of the cliff at Palikū, if that's where his ranch work happened to take him. He took them along because he loved them dearly, and he'd been a lonely man since his wife died. With his aristocratic background, he was not a rough man, and everyone at the ranch worshiped him. He just didn't consider seeing that we wore dresses all the time to be very important in the overall scheme of things.”



When Armine von Tempsky became a novelist, she changed her name to von Tempski. Her books are classic tales of Maui in the early 20th century.

This unconventional rearing arose from the eccentric lifestyle and personality of Louis himself, who was known to drive his horse and buggy through Makawao in his pajamas on a Sunday morning, according to family stories passed down to Mary Cameron Sanford, a descendant of the Baldwin family who founded and still own Haleakalā Ranch. After all, it was his day to relax, and he didn't care that he scandalized the proper ladies on their way to church. Another tale recalls the time the family was crossing to Palikū, and little Errol, about five years old, complained to his father, “Daddy, I'm damn hung-wy.” His father answered, “Poor little devil, it's hell, ain't it,” and kept on riding.

The children thrived under this regimen, growing up tough and self-reliant, skilled riders and hard workers. These characteristics came to their aid when Louis was injured in a riding accident. Accounts vary about how this expert horseman was hurt—whether the horse fell into a lava hole while chasing a wild bull or whether von Tempsky simply fell from his horse—but at any rate, his hip was seriously injured. He never recovered from this injury, and the ranch built the family a new house and put Louis in charge of the breeding stables, a job he could handle without having to ride so much. His disability and pain grew worse, exacerbated by attacks of asthma and bronchitis, and in 1922, he chose to end his life with two pistol shots to the chest. In Armine's telling of the story, she quotes the note her father wrote:

*“I'm spavined, broken-winded, and have stringhalt. Just another old horse sent on his way before life's a curse instead of a joy. You kids understand. Dad.”*

Alas, the old cowboy who had put many an injured animal out of its misery was less than accurate in his own coup de grâce; it took him two days to die, surrounded by family and friends.

By this time, daughter Gwen and adopted daughter Aina were married, leaving only Armine, Lorna, and Errol at Kilohana, the home the ranch had provided for them after von Tempsky's retirement. As the friends who had gathered to bid farewell to Louis drifted back to their work and homes, Lorrin Thurston remained for a while to advise them, and Sam Baldwin, the new manager of the ranch, told them they could stay in the house for a year or so. Other friends—one source says it was Sam's brother Frank—gave them money and told them to go somewhere for a few months for a complete change until they could figure out what to do next.

In her book *Aloha: My Love to You*, Armine describes that time, and their trip to the Navajo desert in Colorado, where they met and stayed with the Wetherill family, whose members included early white discoverers of the Cliff Houses of Mesa Verde, named a national park in 1906. The Wetherills ran a dude ranch, and the experience sparked an idea among the “kids from Hawai'i.” After they returned from their exploration of the West, they set out to establish a dude ranch at



A couple of early tourists enjoy the view from the crater rim.  
*U.S. Geological Survey photo by W. C. Mendenhall.*

Kilohana. Errol was off to work at the Parker Ranch on Hawai‘i Island, so the new venture would be carried out by Armine and Lorna.

“Instead of feeding sandwiches and weak coffee to the tourists we took up Haleakalā, we intended to give them fine steaks and all the trimmings, sheets and pillows to sleep on, everything we could devise to make the jaunt an adventure de luxe. The guides already established in the field charged five dollars a trip. We would charge twenty-five and give full value and courtesy, comfort, and luxury,” Armine wrote.

Though conservative naysayers did not think that visitors would want to go on such a strenuous journey with “girls” for guides, the venture was a success. It helped that Lorrin Thurston gave them free advertising in his paper as well as word-of-mouth recommendations. Their whole lives had trained them for this job, from welcoming guests with elegant hospitality to setting up a comfortable camp beneath the cliffs of Palikū. Armine ran the house, handled reservations and went down to pick up the “dudes” at the dock, while Lorna guided the trips of the mountain.

And while their bank account grew, both had dreams beyond what was really a temporary survival tactic. Both fulfilled those dreams. Armine kept writing and rewriting, submitting her manuscripts until at last, in 1926, her novel *Hula* was accepted for publication under the slightly modified name Armine von Tempski. The next year, she sold the movie rights, and Clara Bow starred in the resulting film. The first native-born Hawai‘i author to hit the best-seller lists, she poured out ten more books for adults and three for juveniles, the most famous being *Born in Paradise*. Lorna went on to manage the stables of the Makawao Polo Club of Maui, a most unusual job for a woman of her time, but one which she handled with all the grace and horse wisdom she had learned from a famous ranching father, the very man who had introduced the sport of polo to Hawai‘i.



Armine von Tempski grew up to be a famous and sophisticated author. *Hawaii State Archives photo*

# Jill Engledow Books

Look for more stories and pictures from Maui's fascinating past in these books. And if you're new to Hawaii, check out *Island Life 101* for insights into the history, culture and community life of the Islands.

