

Jell-O and Mar a Largo

by Lynne Belluscio

President Trump's resort Mar a Largo is a National Historic Landmark in Palm Beach, Florida. It was built between 1924 and 1927 by cereal-company heiress and socialite Marjorie Merriweather Post, who at the time was married to E.F.Hutton. The house has 58 bedrooms, 33 bathrooms, a 29-foot marble top dining table, 12 fireplaces and three bomb shelters. Marion Sims Wyeth was the architect and Joseph Urban was the interior decorator. The palatial building cost \$7 million (\$90 million today.) Believe it or not I recently was told that there is a Jell-O connection to Mar A Largo. (This is not an April Fools Day story.)

In 1925, Jell-O merged with the Postum Cereal Company for 570,000 shares of stock. Because the stock prices varied, the estimates varied greatly. We tell visitors, it was about \$66 million. What is known is that the Jell-O stock holders - - mostly family - - controlled 41.6 percent of the total outstanding shares of the merger. And it was noted that the Postum Cereal Company's management was not too happy with the deal. And neither was the Jell-O Company's management. In fact, when the Postum management showed up in LeRoy, they were given a cold shoulder... "they found that the merger had been sprung on the Jell-O organization." Apparently, according to the book, "General Foods" by Hans Rolfes, the ice was broken with a poker game at Mr. Gilfillan's house. So the question has been, who negotiated the Postum-Jell-O deal? Generally it has been told that Ernest Woodward negotiated the deal. Rolfes writes that Er-



nest "after consulting his brothers and sisters, decided to visit New York for an exploratory discussion. He kept everything very confidential and excluded his staff. All meetings were held in New York and nobody went to LeRoy, at least not in any official capacity."

Recently, while reading through some of the papers in a "Woodward family Misc." file, I came across a story written by Jack Vietor. Jack was putting together notes for a book about his family "Instant Desserts." (As far as I can tell, the book was never published.) His mother was Eleanor, the oldest daughter of Cora and Orator's children. Jack wrote that Marjorie Merriweather Post in 1925 was married to E.F. Hutton. And that he was infatuated with Eleanor, who had a cabana across the highway from Mar A Largo. He even had a tunnel constructed beneath the highway, so Hutton could visit her. And it was E.F. Hutton who approached Eleanor about selling



Jell-O to his wife's company, Postum. And suggested that she talk with her brothers and sisters to make the deal. Who knows if it's true or not, but it makes a good story. And ultimately, Jell-O and Postum merged, and in 1929, they were the first subsidiaries of General Foods. Eventually General Foods would include Maxwell House Coffee, Birdseye Frozen Foods, and Baker's Chocolate. Marjorie Merriweather Post, was known for throwing lavish parties and dinners at Mar A Largo, and she frequently served food from the General Foods family

- - including Jell-O.

Post died in 1973, and bequeathed the property to the National Park Service, hoping it would be used for state visits or as a Winter White House. However, because of the costs of maintaining the property, it was returned to the Post Foundation by an Act of Congress in 1981. In 1985, Donald Trump and his wife Ivana purchased Mar A Largo. Somehow, I can't quite imagine Donald Trump - - for old times sake - - serving Jell-O.

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