

DAKOTA IMAGES

Striving for perfection in herself and expecting the same from others, Vera Way Marghab helped to build a company whose handmade embroidered linens graced the tables of embassies, palaces, and the homes of the wealthy during the mid-1900s.

Vera Way was born in 1900 in Wesley, Iowa, to Stitzel X. and Kathryn Bacon Way. She grew up in Watertown, South Dakota, where her father owned the local newspaper, the *Watertown Public Opinion*. Following her junior year at Watertown High School, Way left for boarding school in New York City, where she studied piano and voice in hopes of pursuing a professional music career. While in New York, Way met Emile Marghab, a British subject who had grown up on Cyprus, and the pair began an extended courtship.

In 1931, after Emile Marghab had converted to Way's Christian Science faith, the couple was married in Cheltenham, England. They divided their time between New York and Madeira, a small island off the coast of Portugal where embroidery was an established cottage industry. Emile Marghab had begun his own embroidery firm in Madeira, and in 1933 Vera joined him as his business partner. Together they established Emile Marghab and Company, a firm specializing in producing embroidered table linens for a wealthy clientele. The following year, they expanded to the United States, incorporating in New York as Emil Marghab, Inc.

Vera Marghab oversaw all aspects of production, from selecting the company's "embroideresses" to choosing fabric and floss to creating elaborate designs for placemats, napkins, goblet rounds, and tablecloths. She also selected the shops in which to market the company's products and trained the salespeople herself. Following her husband's death in 1947, Marghab ran the business alone. Her handmade Marghab linens became widely known for their exquisite quality and made their way onto the tables of the rich and famous throughout Europe and the United States.

Vera Marghab continued to run the company until political unrest in Madeira forced her to close in 1984. She then returned to Watertown, moving back into her childhood home on Lake Kampeska and remaining active in business affairs, charity work, and the Christian Science church. She died in Watertown on 22 May 1995.

Today, the most complete collection of Marghab linens—more than two thousand pieces and designs—is housed at the South Dakota Art Museum in Brookings.

—Taya M. Dockter



Vera Way Marghab

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