The History of the Legation: ***excerpts from the introduction to Enchantment: Stories from the Tangier American Legation***

[The Legation] complex housed American diplomats for exactly 140 years, from 1821 to 1961. [The] site honors a cluster of 'firsts': Morocco was the first country to recognize the independence of the United States (in 1777); this property was among the first diplomatic missions ever acquired by the young United States (in 1821); the US Department of the Interior chose the site as its first and, to date, only historic landmark in a foreign state (in 1982). The building thus stands as an architectural monument to an ironic fact: in all the world, the ancient North African monarchy of Morocco is the country with which the staunchly republican United States has had its longest unbroken relationship.

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Pirates

Piracy was the chief reason why the young United States required a consul in Tangier in the late 18th century. Even though trade between the two countries was minimal, American merchants hoped to profit from Mediterranean markets, if they could just avoid being robbed on the high seas…US envoys were desperate to protect their shipping from these attacks and expenses. They wanted the sultan's implicit recognition of the US in 1777 to be followed by a much more significant document, a coveted 'friendship' treaty. Signing the treaty in 1786 set up the basis for the two countries to settle any future disputes peacefully. Because there was no international or maritime law, the treaty seemed the best way – apart from a Navy, which the US didn't yet have – to protect against piracy. …. Most important, in terms of the work conducted in this building over the following two centuries, the 1786 treaty assured the Americans that their economic opportunities in Morocco would equal those of any other nation.

In the very last years of the eighteenth century, the US began to send consuls to reside in Tangier, the one city in the Sharifian empire of Morocco where the sultan allowed foreign diplomats to live. Twenty-four years would pass between the 1797 appointment of the first US consul – a Scot from Gibraltar named James Simpson – and the sultan's gift in 1821 of a rent-free building to serve as his office.

A Young Nation Tries its Hand at Diplomacy

In the nineteenth century the US consulate looked poor compared to those of the three big powers – England, Spain, France – vying for control of the Straits…. The appearance of consular offices mattered, too. The low status of the US mission was immediately apparent to anyone visiting the consulate. It was located far from the other consulates on a dead-end lane in a stone structure, only one story high. The sultan's rent-free gift was anything but luxurious. The consuls tended not to be happy with the building where they lived and worked. Throughout the nineteenth century they complained to Washington about the shabbiness of their quarters. In 1861, for example, the exasperated new consul, James DeLong, wrote that the dispatch and letter

books were mutilated, the house dilapidated and leaking, the furniture broken, the books rotten, and the documents mildewed, if not eaten by mice. Pleas to live in decent housing yielded nothing.

The Builder: Maxwell Blake

The Legation you see today looks spacious and glamorous largely because of efforts begun as recently as the late 1920s. That's when its footprint assumed its present shape, and money for restoration finally arrived. In response to the State Department's effort to upgrade all foreign service posts, the US Congress allocated in 1926 about $25,000 toward this particular renovation at the request of Consul Maxwell Blake, a man whose taste and private means set him apart from most of his predecessors.

Blake served as Consul General in Tangier for an unusually long period, from roughly 1910 to 1940. In the late twenties, he added more property to the original stone building, including a former (or projected) brothel. He set about making the place splendid. He added an 'Arab Pavilion' with antique doors, carved ceilings, and tiles from Fez. Overseeing local workers and master builder Ahmed El Bokori, Blake supervised not only the demolition of the decrepit parts of the old Legation but also the tasteful placement of items he bought in Europe and Morocco: antique sconces and grilles from Seville, a marble fountain from Fez, a staircase of waxed Spanish bricks, marble mantle pieces from Italy. He planted the two courtyards with stunted cypress and orange trees, as well as bougainvillea. Some credited Blake with creating a 'Mediterranean revival' consulate in the style of newspaper magnate W.R. Hearst's California castle San Simeon.

Maxwell Blake was a dedicated consul. His job was to serve American business interests, and he did. He continually demanded that the Spanish and especially the French protectorate governments in Morocco respond fairly to American claims for equal treatment, both in law courts and in market transactions. (In 1914, for example, he was still arguing that Vacuum Oil Company should be compensated $1000 for goods and cash stolen from company stores three years earlier.) By lobbying for true Open Door access, he hoped to boost the very low level of American imports and exports. Blake was particularly caustic on the subject of the International Zone, whose convention he had advised the US not to sign. He argued that the Zone denied residents the rights of citizenship, ruined and paralyzed trade, and caused poverty and hunger by failing to develop the local economy. He found the Mixed Tribunal, on which the US did not sit, "cumbersome, corrupt, and politics-ridden."

In his dispatches to the State Department, Blake defended Moroccan rights. He criticized the French treatment of Moroccans as "oft-times arrogant and harsh." He was particularly exercised by "French colonialist farmers" stealing water and land from local peasants. Reporting to the Secretary of State on his annual tours throughout Morocco, he argued for the "just and impartial treatment of the natives" and "a proper system of education for Moroccans within the framework of Eastern and Mohammedan culture."

Blake was followed in office by a man whose character was radically different in almost all ways, as were his challenges. The role of the US in the world was changing and, with it, American involvement in Morocco, and thus the use of this building.

War-time Consul: J. Rives Childs

James Rives Childs arrived in Tangier in 1941. As a young man fresh out of Randolph-Macon (BA) and Harvard (MA), he had worked to supply food to the famine-stricken Soviet Union (1921-3) and then served as an American consul in the Middle East, experiences that shaped his entire career…. As a man without inherited wealth, he wrote scathingly about "ridiculously inadequate" State Department salaries that limited foreign service careers to people like the wealthy Maxwell Blake. (Childs found Foreign Service pay too low to support having children.) Until 1924, he felt, "far too many" US diplomats were "dilettantes," "more interested in the social entré the service gave them in the European capitals than in the little work which then fell to American diplomats." He called this first phase of American diplomacy its "Dark Age." Only after the US slowly began to emerge as a great power following the Spanish American War (1898), and when Foreign Service advancement became increasingly guided by examination and merit, did it begin to include more "hardworking Americans from all walks of life." Despite the democratizing efforts of Franklin Roosevelt, the process hadn't been completed by the end of World War Two.

As a foreign service officer, Childs scrupulously committed himself above all to the service of American interests, rather than to any abstract ideology. He firmly believed the diplomat's job was to report and execute laws and policies, not to create them. People commonly failed to understand, he cautioned, that the president alone determined policy. State Department staff could do no more than write reports that might play a role in shaping policy. Nevertheless, Childs was not afraid to bombard President Roosevelt and his secretary of state with unpopular reports and vehement outbursts when he believed they were going astray by, for example, failing to support General Charles de Gaulle above more conservative French wartime leaders.

Childs enjoyed one of his proudest moments as consul in Tangier when he stepped over the line in 1944 and took independent initiative. A locally resident Hungarian Jewish refugee named Renée Reichmann had asked him to convince General Luis Orgaz, governor of the Spanish protectorate, to issue Spanish Moroccan visas and thus rescue over a thousand Jews trapped in a Hungarian concentration camp. Once they received the visas, they would be allowed to move to a Red Cross building in Budapest, protected by the Spanish consulate, and eventually to a place of safety elsewhere. Childs balked at first. What were the American interests in this case? he asked. When Reichmann replied that those interests were simply humanitarian, he agreed to persuade Orgaz. Childs preserved Reichmann's letter of thanks as a precious relic. Because he had approached Orgaz "personally and unofficially," he argued he had never crossed the line to create policy.

Childs was proud of influencing events in wartime Tangier by subtle means. He used American economic clout as his point of leverage. By slowing down the issue of American export licenses, for example, he could make Spain wait for the US petroleum and grain it

desperately needed. But he would speed up their delivery if the Spanish authorities promised not to fire on the American planes and blimps patrolling the Straits for German submarines.

There were close calls even inside the wartime Legation. Childs learned there was a spy within its walls by bribing an employee to reveal that a Spanish charwoman, paid by the Germans, photographed documents in a locked filing cabinet to which she had somehow obtained the master key. He was also aware German agents followed him throughout his North African travels, so he always checked his car for explosives before setting out.

Childs saluted the valiant labors of his expanded wartime staff. His team had swelled from 6 to 65 because of the influx of naval and military attachés, sent ostensibly as 'control officers' or 'vice-consuls' to ensure American imports didn't end up in Axis hands. Most were spies. They moved to a city already teeming with people willing to buy and sell information, especially in its bars and cabarets. "From 1940 to 1944," Childs observed, "there were probably few spots on the globe where there were concentrated more intense espionage and counter-espionage activities on the part of the warring powers than in Tangier."

Operation Torch and the OSS

The biggest secret of all was Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa from November 8 to 16, 1942, that changed the course of the Second World War. After making staggered departures from Atlantic ports, over one hundred ships – battleships, carriers, destroyers, minesweepers, tankers – had zigzagged across the ocean to avoid being detected by German submarines. Without using radios or signals, they achieved the impossible: they managed to unite with British ships mid-sea. Then they went on to land at points in Morocco (Safi, Casablanca/Mehdia, Port Lyautey) and Algeria (Oran, Algiers). By opening the way for Allied Forces to push east across North Africa and move up through Italy, this invasion would help bring down the Third Reich.

The Legation contributed to the Allied victory by serving as a 'listening post' or center for collecting and rapidly telegraphing to command centers the intelligence that allowed the invasion to take place at all. The invaders needed precise data: where were German military personnel moving? where were French anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes located? To transmit this precious information, the spies were constantly scrambling to find and recharge the batteries that powered the wireless telegraphs. Only then could their findings be sent throughout the strategic network linking Gibraltar, Malta, London, Washington.

As Childs observed, the whole city was rife with spies. (The film *Casablanca* should probably have been titled *Tangier* instead.) But how accurate was their intelligence? For his part, Childs found American spy reports filled with rumor and hearsay. The Café Central in the Petit Socco was a notorious marketplace for buying secrets, whose accuracy was difficult to check. One spy dismissed it as "the rumor center of North Africa," perhaps because the more outlandish tales tended to fetch the highest prices.

The Legation had to serve the war effort clandestinely. Before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor led the US to enter the war in December, 1941, the public face of the Legation had been limited to ensuring the International Zone government was truly neutral: under no circumstances should American products destined for North Africa – petroleum, grain, vehicles - be sent north to aid the Axis powers. Beneath the surface, though, new Legation employees were already secretly working. From June, 1941, vice-consuls acting as 'control officers' had begun arriving in Tangier, as if their work was simply to ensure US imports like food and oil were not "transshipped or misused." Undercover, they did far more than that.

In fact, the new vice-consuls were military and naval attachés charged with discovering and transmitting intelligence: ship movements, the size of armed units, road conditions, the location of bridges, tunnels, beaches. Directed by a North Africa-wide group sometimes called 'Roosevelt's twelve apostles', they tapped wires and shared what they learned in coded language, sometimes based on US slang. Thanks to their work, when Churchill and Roosevelt approved Operation Torch in June, 1942, the North African terrain was known to the invaders.

One of the new attachés, Col. William Eddy, was working secretly as the Tangier head of the brand-new Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the wartime centralized intelligence agency whose North African headquarters was located in Tangier. Within the Legation's walls, Eddy recruited agents and established wireless links with vice-consuls elsewhere in North Africa. He also established radio communication between Casablanca and Gibraltar where General Dwight Eisenhower, Torch's supreme commander, was based, allowing him to follow the course of the eventual landings. Meanwhile, the new air attaché, Col. William C. Bentley, used his small Legation office to summarize local maps – based on pacing off potential landing strips – which he then sent to Air Force Command in Washington.

Eddy had two "special assistants" working undercover for him inside the Legation, as if they were State Department employees: Carleton S. Coon, an anthropologist, and Gordon Browne, a businessman, both familiar with the Rif and both trained in "communications, explosives, and weapons." The two men aimed above all to prevent the Germans moving into Morocco from either Libya or Spain.

That Browne and Coon were generally sympathetic with the dreams of the nationalists shines forth from their pamphlet, co-authored with Mrs. Eleanor Browne, *Pocket Guide to North Africa*. Their fieldwork and languages allowed them to advise American soldiers on duty in North Africa to be sensitive to "the nine-tenths of the population whose ancestors have lived along this coast for centuries." Winning their friendship was, of course, a step toward winning the war. The Brownes and Coon went on to counsel the soldiers to treat local people with respect and dignity by praising local culture. Muslims were very democratic, they wrote, kind to their servants, and without color prejudice. The trio helpfully concluded their pamphlet with a list of Do's and Don'ts, including "Use common sense on all occasions. These people are basically no different from anyone else."

Browne and Coon and all the other 'vice-consuls' had forged ahead despite the many 'snafus,' as they would probably have called them, plaguing their work, like their constant need to shift the site of their secret radio station both inside and outside the Legation. Nevertheless, on

the eve of November 7, 1942, Tangier's OSS chief Eddy and his men – plus at least one unaware American military observer in his pajamas – had the satisfaction of gathering in a military attaché's office at the Legation to eat ham sandwiches, drink beer, and hear the fateful words pronounced on the French-language BBC, "Ecoute…, Robert arrive" or "Attention…, Operation Torch is beginning." Eight days later the Allies declared victory over Vichy North Africa.

The arrival of over one hundred thousand American soldiers following Operation Torch expanded the American profile in North Africa far beyond its previously skimpy economic limits. From 1942 onwards, American cultural influence – initially in the form of commodities like chewing gum and Coca-Cola – would grow. In addition to the chewing gum, Yahia Benslimane remembers, "We saw amazing vehicles: cars on water, jeeps – instead of mules – and well-dressed soldiers. The Americans arrived in an explosion – with modern fabrics, sugar, and flour. The upheaval was extraordinary."

American political influence would also grow. In 1945 the US finally agreed to participate in the International Zone government. The Cold War and Morocco's independence would usher in a whole new era in Moroccan-American relations, one whose diplomats needed more modern quarters.

Enchanted Volunteers Rescue a White Elephant

The Legation's descent into White Elephant status began in 1956 when the independent country of Morocco established its capital in Rabat, and the US opened its embassy there. The Tangier Legation building became a Consulate General until 1961 when the consular functions were transferred to a new building outside the old medina. Though the facility was no longer needed, it couldn't be sold. Before it could be put on the market, a written record had to be found, proving that the sultan had indeed given the building to the United States in 1821. The process of documenting the gift took ten years. Biding its time prior to the hoped-for sale, the State Department made the building into a language school for diplomats to learn Darija or Western Arabic (1961-1970).

In 1970, when the language institute moved its school to Tunis, the American Peace Corps established a language and skills training site at the Legation (1970-73). Young Americans prepared here to move mainly into rural areas where they would help with local development projects like educational clubs for women and schools. Under the supervision of local Peace Corps director, Richard Holbrooke (1970-1972), they cleaned up the building, repaired the plumbing, and painted most of the rooms Prussian blue. In a high-spirited effusion of youthful energy, the volunteers created a hidden nightclub in an underground cistern they dubbed the Cistern Chapel. They painted the cistern's walls with what they probably considered psychedelic colors – pink and chartreuse -- and enigmatic symbols like disembodied hands and humanoid worms. By 1975 the Legation stood empty and neglected, the roof was leaking again, and the facility was becoming a white elephant.

Volunteers -- not US government employees serving in their official capacity -- took the initiative to create this museum. What led to the restoration was a birthday. A message came through from the United States Information Agency that Tangier should prepare to celebrate the

bicentennial of American independence. Carleton Coon Jr., the deputy chief of mission in Rabat and son of the anthropologist-spy, thought that making the old Legation into a museum was a perfect way to celebrate. Two other equally enthusiastic American diplomats – Harland Eastman, Consul General in Tangier, and James Tull, head of the USIS agency in Rabat – agreed. A consultant, John Slocumb, was sent from Washington to investigate. He, too, got caught up in the idea and carried the torch back to the State Department where Ben Dixon, a former Consul General in Tangier, now sat at the Moroccan desk. Dixon did the legal work to establish the Tangier American Legation Museum Society which would lease the building from the State Department by paying a low, purely symbolic, rent and scrape together contributions for the renovation. The task of restoring the Legation fell to Consul General Eastman. He set about using his native ingenuity to compensate for the lack of funds.

Eastman managed to restore twenty-five rooms between May 1975 and July 1976 by cobbling together labor and supplies. Even military personnel from the US naval base in Kenitra were persuaded to spend several weekends working alongside consulate staff members. When a portion of the cornice in today's Zanka Gallery fell to the floor in June 1976, Eastman had to find nearly a thousand dollars to replicate it immediately. He did so by rescuing cast-off Peace Corps furniture before it was sent to the dump, selling it instead in the Grand Socco. When the grand opening took place as scheduled on the fourth of July 1976, the cornice was up, and the walls of the twenty-five rooms were blanketed with paintings, maps, and prints belonging to an American named Donald Angus.

Donald Angus (1908-2001) was a wealthy Hawaiian who had worked occasionally in London and Honolulu as an antique dealer. (As a young man, he was said to resemble John Wayne and worked briefly as a model; as an old man, he looked somewhat like Santa Claus.) He mainly collected books, pictures, and maps about places he had fallen in love with. Tangier was one of them. He first visited Tangier in 1931 but didn't make it his home until 1954 when writer Paul Bowles suggested he return; it was less crowded with tourists, Bowles said, than Positano, Italy, where he was then living. Angus stayed in Tangier for the next twenty years, becoming an avid gardener as well as collector of Moroccan memorabilia. A large proportion of the material in the museum comes from his collection. When he was preparing to move to Spain in 1973, he left some items on loan at the new consulate general.

In 1976 Eastman went to Spain to meet Angus, then living in a rented house while preparing to move back to Hawaii. The house contained Louis XV gold framed mirrors and fine rugs. Eastman looked at them longingly, mentioning they would grace the new museum. Angus agreed. Eastman went back to Morocco, borrowed from the Embassy a van with diplomatic plates, loaded it onto the ferry to Algeciras, and filled it with Angus' books, rugs, and paintings. All these items were still on loan. They belonged neither to the Legation nor to the US government. In May 1979 Angus stayed in Tangier for a month and formally transferred to the museum ownership of 317 items, including maps, prints, and paintings.

Angus had intended to sell the rest of his Moroccan collection to an art dealer: mirrors, a grandfather clock, furniture, glass negatives, more books, paintings, engravings, and maps. When the dealer who promised to buy them missed his appointment, Angus was livid. He refused to sell any of the material to the man, and instead donated the lot to the museum. The

loan became a gift officially in 1990 when Elena Prentice, Carleton Coon Jr.'s cousin and then director of the museum (1989-90), flew to Hawaii to arrange the legal transfer of ownership.

The development of the museum was somewhat stymied during its first decade by the challenges that typically plague generous and energetic grassroots efforts: a very small and untrained staff and the lack of a reliable income. Its revenue consisted largely of gifts of carpets, books, and paintings. Marguerite McBey gave works by her husband, Scottish etcher James McBey, and other artists. Joseph Verner Reed, a former ambassador to Morocco (1981-4), gave his Moroccan library, plus paintings and rugs, as well as numerous photographs of himself with Republican presidents and Moroccan notables. In addition, the children of Malcolm Forbes offered their father's Tangier collection of books, photos, and historical documents including two dioramas of miniature battle scenes. American anthropologist David Montgomery Hart, famed for his studies of Rifi society based on his long residence in the Rif mountains, donated his personal library. An author of authoritative books about Moroccan rugs, William Russell Pickering, presented the museum with splendid carpets from his personal collection.

Building the Museum

From these gifts the museum was developed further by Thor and Elizabeth Kuniholm when they served as director and associate director from 1991 to 2010. Their backgrounds had primed them for the task. After retiring from the Foreign Service in 1987, Thor studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Elizabeth had long dreamt of bringing back to life a large, rundown, and notoriously damp building, which the Legation was by the time they arrived. Both admired high quality craftsmanship, whether from their native New England or from Morocco.

The Kuniholms set about redecorating each room by painting walls, replacing fluorescent lighting, and refinishing wooden floors. They hired and trained a new staff. In the United States Elizabeth bought and carried back to Morocco fine fabric for use by an excellent Moroccan upholsterer; she herself sewed the curtains for every room in the museum. The skills of local craftsmen contributed to their efforts. Their crowning achievement, literally and figuratively, was to have a Moroccan sitting room built on the roof of the museum overlooking the harbor, the hills of Spain, and the Rock of Gibraltar. The Minzah Room, as they named it, took final shape with the assistance of skilled Moroccans –an engineer, a builder, and an architect, Hanae Bekkari, who added a dome.

Director Gerald Loftus (2010-14) writes that the hallmark of his tenure at the Legation was bringing out from the research library the history of the US and Morocco – told through Legation stories over the centuries - and putting it onto the walls, the internet and into print. The rich histories of diplomats, spies, adventurers, and scoundrels made for a narrative that brought a human connection to the art and map collection. Through his establishment of the director's blog and the 2018 publication of his book *Lions at the Legation* (richly illustrated by Lawrence Mynott), he led a wider public to appreciate the meaning of the Legation and its role over the years. Loftus is proud, too, of digitizing, with the help of the Library of Congress, the historic Paul Bowles recordings of Morocco's traditional music. He is particularly delighted to have

discovered the diplomatic "sword cane" given to Rives Childs by his staff when he retired in 1945.

While historic preservation was Loftus' sworn forte, his successor John Davison (2014-21), aimed to extend the Legation's outreach, especially to local youth. He was particularly anxious to target young people recently arrived from rural areas to live in the new neighborhoods springing up all around the city. In the form of small grants, publicity, and sometimes performance space, Davison offered Legation support to several local associations engaged in social service. Momkin, for example, offers training in circus arts to disadvantaged youth, so the offices where spies coded their data in the 1940s now see youth learning to fly through the air. In the same rooms, another local Legation partner, Fondation Tanger-Al Madina, helps provide neighborhood women with classes in Arabic literacy, embroidery, baking. After landscape architect Madison Cox suggested the Arab Pavilion serve as a space for temporary art exhibitions, Davison took pleasure in hosting shows of photography (Jamal Odedra), Sephardic costumes (Sonia Cohen), painting (Mohamed Hamri), and interior design (Charles Sevigny).

Davison brought to the directorship the linguistic and cultural knowledge he had gained as a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching high school English in Berkane (1983-5) before serving as a US Foreign Service officer for 25 years. He prides himself on turning the museum into an "inclusive" space.

Davison's successor, Jennifer Rasamimanana (2021-), came to the directorship after over twenty years in the Foreign Service, mainly in the Arabic-speaking world, including a stint as Consul General in Casablanca. She remembers being fascinated by the building from her very first visit. As she considered retirement, she was drawn to the opportunity to continue there what she had enjoyed most in the Foreign Service -- building bridges between people – and to shepherd a place that represented "the best of America." She wanted to build on the hard work of the previous directors, each with his own particular strength, by providing "something for everyone": designing programs and exhibits to welcome a wide variety of people, from multi-lingual world travelers to first time museum visitors who read only Arabic.

Rasamimanana's arrival coincided with the beginning of a two-year capacity-building partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, funded by the U.S. Embassy. The consultancy, designed to help professionalize a museum that had never been run by museum experts, provided the structure for her first few years as she worked through their recommendations. The Smithsonian prompted fresh answers to the question: how could the museum's stories be told even more compellingly? The time was ripe to provide them because enchanted volunteers had succeeded in laying such firm foundations.