

LUCIA CHASE

"She was a wonderful, valiant, steadfast woman dedicated to making ballet happen in America. Without her, the development of dance in America would be unimaginably poorer."

— Jerome Robbins

Lucia Chase was born in Waterbury on March 24, 1897, the daughter of Irving Hall and Elizabeth Hosmer Chase. Her family, which settled in Waterbury in 1850, was descended from the earliest Puritan settlers. Her grandfather, Augustus S. Chase, served as president of the Waterbury Bank, the Waterbury Watch Company, Benedict and Burnham, the Waterbury Buckle, and the Waterbury Manufacturing Co. which later became the Chase Co. Her father was president and treasurer of the Waterbury Clock Company. She lived at Rose Hill, 63 Prospect Street, Waterbury, which she maintained until her death on January 9, 1986.

An American ballet dancer and impresario, she was educated at St. Margaret's School in Waterbury and Bryn Mawr College. In 1926 she married industrialist Thomas Ewing, Jr. She studied ballet with Mikhail Mordkin and danced in such productions as *Giselle* and *La Fille Mal Gardée* with his company. In 1940 she helped found the Ballet Theatre (later the American Ballet Theatre) and became one of its chief financial supporters. Conceived as a rival to the European companies and as a platform for American choreography, the American Ballet Theatre was an outgrowth of the Mordkin Ballet. It has always been innovative, at times experimental and is recognized as one of the world's leading ballet companies. Chase served as co-director from 1945 to 1980 and rarely missed a performance.

As a dancer, Chase was noted for her performances in such classical ballets as *Les Sylphides*, *Petrouchka*, and *Pas de Quatre* and in such modern works as *Bluebeard*, *Judgment of Paris*, *Pillar of Fire* and *Fall River Legend*. She was acclaimed for the credibility of her dance-acting. Her career as a principal dancer ended in 1960, but she continued to make brief appearances until the 1970s.

Chase held an international reputation and had articles written about her in many national magazines and newspapers. She was the recipient of the Handel Medallion (New York City's highest cultural citation), the President's Medal of Freedom (highest civilian award), the Capezio Award, the Dance Magazine Award, the Connecticut Arts Award and honorary degrees from Long Island University in 1979 and Yale University in 1980. She was the first non-British member elected to the Royal Academy of Dance and has the rare distinction of having two entries in *Current Biography* (1947 and 1975). "This fairy godmother of American dance" was succeeded as artistic director of the American Ballet Theatre by a person whom she introduced to American audiences: Mikhail Baryshnikov.

