

VON TRAPP FAMILY

Life in America: Family Rivalry

Von Trapp Family Argues Over \$3M

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MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Sixty years after they escaped Nazi-occupied Austria, the von Trapps are fighting another war — among themselves.

Lawyers representing two branches of the family appeared before the Vermont Supreme Court on Thursday to argue whether one branch shortchanged the other by \$3 million in a transaction involving the family business.

The court hasn't rendered a decision, but one thing is plain: The family whose courage and charm were memorialized in the musical "The Sound of Music" is deeply divided.

"It's sad," Johannes von Trapp, the youngest child of Maria von Trapp, said after the hearing. "Obviously it wouldn't have happened while my mother was alive."

Maria von Trapp, who was played by Julie Andrews in the movie, died in 1987. Von Trapp said the tensions surfaced after that, leading to a 1993 "blow-up" that resulted in family members' ousting him as president of the corporation running Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe.

Von Trapp won back control the next year and reorganized the company. Minority shareholders — including his sister and the children of two brothers — objected and cashed in their shares.

The business paid the dissenting family members about \$2.5 million. They challenged the payment in court, saying they were due roughly twice as much.

In May, a three-member panel of judges in Lamoille County Superior Court agreed. Presiding Judge John P. Meaker ordered Trapp Family Lodge Inc. to pay the higher value.

With interest, that comes to an additional \$3 million. Johannes von Trapp's lawyers appealed, setting the stage for the arguments Thursday.

If the Supreme Court upholds the award, Johannes von Trapp said, he will have to borrow the money — or sell the lodge, its restaurants, time-share units and surrounding 2,200 acres.