

# The Original Mechanical Doll – Lady Blythe of Como, Park County, Colorado

## Fascinating Colorado Pioneer Families

Seven year old Blythe DILLER was “discovered“ by Mary ELITCH in 1897 as she was playing at being a mechanical doll, stiff jointed and all. Blythe soon appeared at Elitch Gardens in Denver and started her career. Fifty years later she did her last performance on June 28th 1958, once again at Elitch Gardens. She became known as “Lady Blythe-the Original Mechanical Doll” and performed in nearly every city all over the world, appearing at a worlds’ fair and before kings, queens and presidents. She was even described by Robert RIPLEY in “Believe It or Not”.

Looking back on her stage career, as reported in the Fairplay Flume, July 10, 1947, she reminisced about how she was worried about a little old lady who appeared in the audience for a solid week. In 1922 as she was making a personal appearance in the window of Bullock's Department Store in Los Angeles, just before Christmas. Blythe was afraid the lady would give the secret away, that she really was a person, not a doll, and the children would no longer be entranced. Turned out the little lady was as fooled as the children. She approached the store manager and offered him a thousand dollars if he would sell her the “doll” for her granddaughter.

Blythe Vastle DILLER was born in Colorado December 28, 1890. Her parents were Cora Ellen (TURNER) and Charles DILLER. Charles was born in Iowa. Cora was born in Golden, Colorado in 1871. She was the daughter of Hiram B. TURNER and his second wife Julia A. SNEIDER. Cora married Charles DILLER 22 May 1888 in Jefferson, Park County, CO when she was 16 years old. Blythe had 2 sisters, Hester Mae who died young and Myrtle Angeline born March 5, 1889 who became a chiropractor and lived some years in Los Angeles. A brother, George Myron DILLER was born in 1892 and died in 1918. George was buried in the Como, Park County cemetery as were his Grandparents Hiram & Julia TURNER.

Cora filed for divorce from Charles DILLER and a decree was issued 22 May, 1908. It was said she was enamored with her daughter Blythe’s career and found it more important than her marriage. She moved away with her daughter to Denver. The April 1910 census shows mother & daughter were living in a boarding house in the 2<sup>nd</sup> ward of Denver. Shortly after the census was taken, Blythe DILLER married her first husband Thomas JONES Jr. on May 8, 1910 in Jefferson, Park Co., CO. with license # 5047. On September 9, 1910, pg 1. of the Fairplay Flume Newspaper it was reported “Como. Mrs. Thos. JONES nee Blythe DILLER of Denver is visiting C. H. JONES [grandparents] and family”. By October 1910 Cora, her mother, was married to Frank A. PEABODY whose first wife Minnie had passed away in 1908. Cora’s daughters took on the name Peabody at that time, although her son George did not.

By the time the 1920 Federal census was taken in Oakland City, Alameda Co. CA, a Blythe MARVIN, aged 29, born about 1891 in Colorado, is listed as sis (In Law) to head of household Leslie FOSTER aged 34. Blythe has no occupation. Following her is brother-in-law Frank MARVIN who is listed as born in England, aged 32, and a house painter. Leslie FOSTER was born in Colorado and is listed as an auto machinist. His wife is next, Myrtle FOSTER, born Colorado, aged 32, is a chiropractor. Elmer FOSTER follows aged 17. Alice DILLER follows in the same household, aged 22, widow, a nurse born in Colorado as were her parents. (Possible wid. of Blythe and Myrtle’s brother George DILLER?? The Colorado marriage index shows - Diller, George to Gibbon, Alice 22 Feb 1918, Lake Co., #6010)

On 19 May 1925, The Oakland Tribune, Oakland CA reported "Lady Blythe of Oakland Circle No. 266, exhibited her "Mechanical Doll" and the Grand Manager, Anita TICHNOR spoke".

"Santa Claus' Great Big Beautiful Doll Is Broken This Year - Sorry!" a lengthy article from Long Beach Independent December 20, 1942, Long Beach, California, p. 23 by Jane REID reports: " For the first time in 43 years, Santa Claus will have to disappoint some of his very best customers when he fails to bring his "Original Mechanical Doll" with him from the North Pole this year. Something happened to his famous "doll's" arm and Santa just hasn't found time to mend it. He has therefore laid it away in his workshop and has announced that by next Christmas it will be repaired and ready to appear again. It was way back in 1897 that Santa first presented his "doll," under the name of Lady Blythe at the Elitch Gardens in Denver, Colorado. At that time she was just seven years of age. The applause that Lady Blythe received

that first night, 43 years ago, was a clear indication of the popularity she was bound to attain. The blond and beautiful "doll" was swamped with proposals of contracts to appear here and there, and before she knew it she was included right into the audiences of the crowned heads of Europe. Lady Blythe became popular among the nobles and high ranking officials of these countries and as she grew older she fell in love and married the late Lord Francis Arthur MARVIN of Bathe, England. This important step, however, did not put an end to her brilliant career for it was after this that she performed for two of our late presidents, Teddy ROOSEVELT and Woodrow WILSON.

Lady Blythe was sensational in her act as the "Original Mechanical Doll" and for seven years was a headliner with the Orpheum Circuit. With a company of nine, she traveled throughout the world in the play entitled "The Rube and the Doll" which only added to her ever increasing fame. Many such experiences have crossed the path of Lady Blythe, who with wax and other special make-up, has managed to "fool" the most intelligent and sophisticated persons in her audiences. So talented has she been that she has never in her 43 years disillusioned the children in her audiences, many of whom have whispered into Santa's ear that they want a "doll" just like Lady Blythe.

In 1933, a motion picture entitled the "Doll Shop" was shown here in Long Beach. It starred Lady Blythe. On the same bill, a newsreel was shown in which Lady Blythe, as herself, was shown as she inspected His Majesty's ship "The Dragon" which docked here that year. The real live Lady Blythe is now the wife of Myron Cook of Long Beach. Only recently did she return here from New York where she was employed by Uncle Sam in special war work.

But as I mentioned in the first portion of this story, Lady Blythe will be unable to appear at her scheduled engagements this year, the first time she has failed to "go on" in 13 years. Santa reports that she had injured her arm so severely that he couldn't possibly have it fixed on time and so today she is resting quietly in his workshop."

March 17, 1937 the Fairplay Flume announced "The Peabody ranch, near Como, has the pleasure of entertaining the following visitors: Mrs. Frank A. PEABODY [Lelon PEABODY son' wife Cora] and daughters Dr. Myrtle A. Peabody and Lady Blythe V. Marion Cook. The latter is known to the world as the Original Mechanical Doll. Lady Blythe has been under contract with a Hollywood film company and is widely known on screen and stage, having played two seasons at Elitch Gardens with such stars as May Buckley, Doris Keen, Henry Woodruff, Holbrook Blinn and Edwin Arden. She is the daughter of Cora Ellen Turner Peabody, known old timer of Park County. Her father was the founder of Turner's Gulch." (see earlier article "The Story of Hiram Beedy Turner Families.")

The 1940 census of Los Angeles shows Lady Blythe at home at 5346 La Mirada, Los Angeles, CA as sister-in-law to Ray M. COOK aged 55 with wife Cecile aged 50 and 3 children.

The Fairplay Flume newspaper of July 10, 1947 printed an article "Mechanical Doll back Where She Started in 1897." The final public appearance will be made Saturday at Elitch Gardens by Lady Blythe of Como, Colorado, who won fame a half century ago as the "Original Mechanical Doll." ... She will appear from 2 to 4 p.m., not as the doll but just to greet her old friends, under sponsorship of the Pioneer Men and Women of Colorado.... June 28<sup>th</sup> she gave her last public entertainment and autographed 75 "Doll" pictures and a hundred and forty scraps of paper for friends. She received many lovely gifts and flowers which made it a never to be forgotten day. She thanked all the grand folks for remembering a Doll."

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**"Lady Blythe's Performance Highlights Christmas Party at Odd Fellows Home"**

Wed. 27 December 1961 Canon City Daily Record.

(Here is another last performance reported by Sue Cockran of the Royal Gorge Museum in Canon City) Residents of the Odd Fellows Home enjoyed their annual Christmas party on Christmas Eve but there was a special treat for the party this year. For what she says is the final performance, Lady Blythe MARVIN put on her "living doll" show for some 150 residents of the home and guests. She made a real hit, demonstrating superb training that has not been relaxed through the years. Lady Blythe, 70, is a resident at the home.

As "The Doll" she appeared in the music room with Santa Claus in the person of Coy RODARMEL of Pueblo. The doll was gowned elegantly in a lavender satin dress trimmed in gold, fashioned from one of Queen Mary's (former queen of England) court dresses.

Santa wound her up, just like any “real” doll. First she moved one arm, then the other, then a leg. Then she almost “ran down.” Santa Claus wound her up again and finally she walked and performed other doll-like maneuvers. For a full 10-minute period Lady Blythe again was the French mechanical doll of worldwide stage and movie fame for more than 60 years.

While she performed she didn’t move a muscle not directly the doll antics. She didn’t blink an eye during the entire performance. “This demonstrates a tremendous amount of one spectator said. Lady Blythe’s face and arms were covered give a doll-like appearance. The climax came when the doll “was Santa Claus picked her up and carried her from the room.

Young people of the Odd Fellows Home appeared first on the program. They played piano and horns and took part in group singing. Announcer was Marion BRASIER. Alice SNODGRASS, FORD and Helen BRASIER performed piano numbers. There numbers by Larry FORD and cornet solos by Darrell BRASIER. Then the Christmas presents were handed out.

Lady Blythe MARVIN, Odd Fellows Home of Colorado, Canon Colorado was the header on a letter to Mrs. FREEZE from her residence. (No date) It was a personal letter now part of the Sibell WOLLE manuscript collection of Denver Public Library. about her meeting Mrs. FREEZE, her cabin burning with all her pictures and the book she was writing destroyed, how she started Automatic Doll but her manager changed her name to the Doll, a Canadian doll film in which she appeared, being honored anniversary of the Denver Coliseum etc. She mentioned that like to have a chair named for her at the Central City Opera although she never appeared there.

The social security death index names her as Blythe Marvin who Dec. 1890 with # 523-70-7149. The number was issued in her last residence was Fremont County, CO, 81212 and her death November 1969 at age 79. Blythe V.”Lady Marvin” died November 16, 1969 and was buried November 19, 1969 in section. 33, block 7, lot 1,

grave 2. Her sister Myrtle Childers died 30 September, 1975 and was buried 3 October 1975 in grave 1 next to her sister Blythe.

More family information and the picture of The Mechanical Doll are available at Denver Public Library in the Muriel Sibell WOLLE manuscript collection. Other sources are “Real Pioneers of Colorado”, Marie DAVIS, 1934; the Royal Gorge Regional Museum & History Center of Canon City; Lakeside Cemetery at Canon City Colorado; various US and CO Census reports; Fairplay Flume newspaper; Colorado marriages & divorce indexes; Park County Colorado Archives web page; and Bayou Salado by Virginia MC CONNELL and family researchers who have placed excellent information on the internet including Susan RITTER on Find a Grave at Como, Park County Colorado Cemetery; Kathleen LAWLESS and Cindy SUTTON at web page Roots Web, World connect project.



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Glenda were clarinet

City, last place of Muriel She wrote programs, out as the Mechanical at the 100<sup>th</sup> she would House –

was born 28 Colorado, date was in



Dr. Myrtle A. CHILDERS 1889 -- 1975  
"The Doll"

Lady Blythe V. MARVIN 1890 -- 1969  
THE DOLL Colo's International Star

Sister of

Burials & grave stones located at Lakeside Cemetery, Canon City, Freemont County, CO  
courtesy of Roger L. HUFFENBERGER, Canon City, Colorado

Pictures

#### A FAULTY OBITUARY

"Blythe Marvin Dies at 78. CANYON CITY, Colo. (AP) - A Colorado actress who won international fame under the billing the "Million Dollar Doll," Blythe V. Marvin died Monday. She was 78. She was the widow of British Lord Marvin, who died in the sinking of the Titanic. Born in Denver, she first appeared on the stage at Elitch Gardens at the age of seven. Her act was that of mimicry of a doll. She was featured in a glass enclosure at the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915. Lady Marvin appeared before a number of reigning monarchs in Europe and before President Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt." [Greeley Daily Tribune, Tuesday, November 18, 1969, p. 6]

Kathleen Lawless wrote : My understanding is that Blythe was married three times (Jones, Cook, Marvin). Her third (Second) husband was Frank Arthur Marvin, who was British, but was a neither a Lord, nor did he go down on the Titanic. Frank Marvin was a house painter, alive and well in January 1920, as the census shows. He and Blythe were living in Oakland, Calif. with her sister, Myrtle Foster and her husband.