

Florence La Badie: Silent Film Star and Presidential Courtesan?

By Ned Thanhouser with Bryan Smith



Video Introduction:

Florence La Badie was one of the most important and popular actresses of the early motion picture era. She appeared in over 166 silent films from 1911 through 1917 for the Thanhouser studio in New Rochelle, New York. A daredevil at heart, she was known as “Fearless Flo” for taking risks and performed many of her own stunts. She was a frequent subject for articles and letters in fan and trade magazines, and over a period of years, she was the most publicized and beloved of all Thanhouser players.

“Of all the various winning presences on screen in Thanhouser films, I think my favorite has to be Florence La Badie whose winning grace and gamine energy in *Cinderella*, and whose elegance of deportment and beautiful natural smile in *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, and whose commitment and resolution to see justice done in the *Evidence of the Film* where she rescues her little brother who had been wrongly indicted for a crime he didn’t commit, and then whose plucky energy and impish fun on camera in *Petticoat Camp* really testify to the very, very natural star that she was.”

– Judith Buchanan, Professor of English and Related Literature, University of York (2013)

Tragically, on October 13, 1917 at age 29, Florence succumbed to injuries suffered in an automobile accident, making her the first major “movie star” to die at the zenith of her popularity. She was buried in an unmarked grave in the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. Almost 100 years have passed since her untimely death, but her popularity is experiencing a revival; a Google search yields numerous articles, blogs, and videos published in the past several years about Florence.

Circumstances surrounding La Badie’s life and death, however, remain shrouded in mystery and intrigue.

In his book *Stardust and Shadows: Canadians in Early Hollywood*, author Charles Foster posits that besides being the most durable and popular star for the Thanhouser studio, Florence La Badie was impregnated by President Woodrow Wilson during a 1914 Christmas holiday visit to the White House in Washington, DC, and subsequently gave birth to his illegitimate child. Furthermore, Foster suggests that the brakes on the car she crashed on August 28, 1917 were sabotaged by government agents to keep her affair with Wilson out of the public eye.¹

¹ Foster, Charles, *Stardust and Shadows: Canadians in Early Hollywood*, Dundurn Press, Toronto & Oxford, 2000, Pages 123 - 142.

Charles Foster's Myth

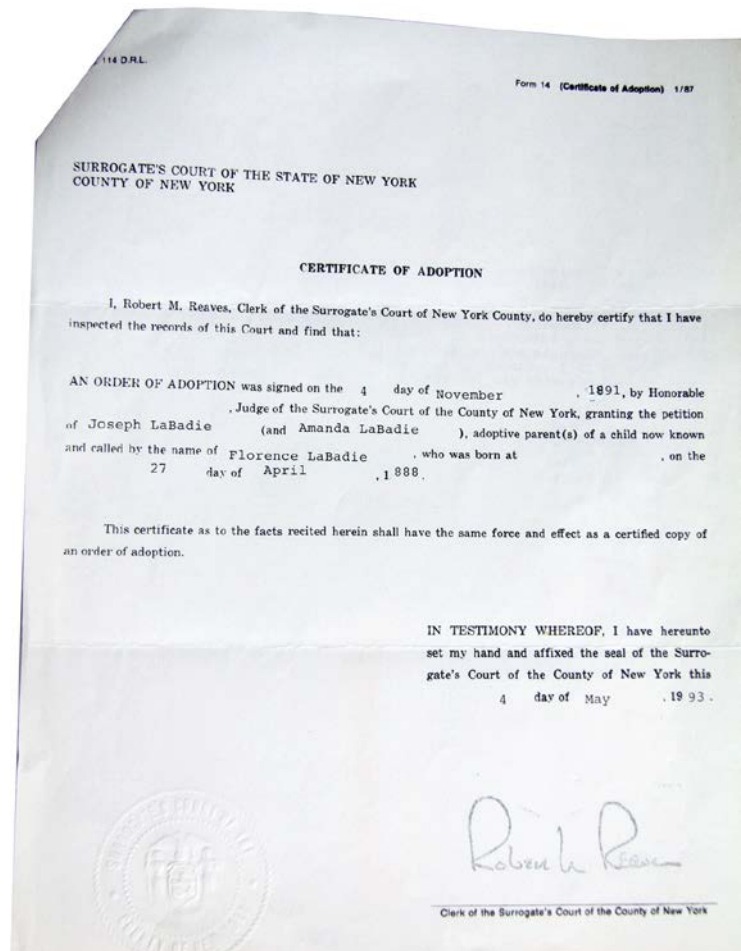
But when Florence La Badie died mysteriously at the age of twenty-four, six months after a "car accident" from which everyone thought she had recovered, the movie industry closed ranks and had few, if any, comments to make about the incident. Newspapers – despite being provided with information that her death was worthy of investigation – never printed a word to dispute the official report that said her fatal car accident was just that, an accident.²

Foster's account of Florence's birth, supposed affair with Wilson, birth of his illegitimate child, and the circumstances surrounding her death are fraught with factual errors fueled by hearsay and rumor. This paper will address Florence's birth, career, and her death to analyze Foster's story. By examining surviving documents, accounts of her career, and the circumstances surrounding her death, our hope is to set the record straight since the inconsistencies and factual errors in Foster's chapter have been propagated and amplified on the internet via various web sites and blogs (see Appendix 3 for links to various websites and blogs).

Her Birth

Multiple sources (including Charles' Foster's book, The Legion of Decency blog³, and Florence's Wikipedia entry⁴) contain factual errors regarding Florence's birth date, location, and parentage. It is irrefutable that Florence La Badie was born Florence Russ on April 27, 1888 to Horace B. and Marie C. Russ in New York City. After the death of her father and the inability of her mother to provide care, Florence, at age three, was adopted by Joseph E. and Amanda J. La Badie of Montreal, Canada. This is verified by surviving documents, including:

- 1) Florence's CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION, signed by Robert M. Reaves, Clerk of the Surrogate's Court of New York on May 4, 1993 confirming her date of birth was April 27, 1888 and that she was adopted by Joseph and Amanda La Badie on November 4, 1891.



² Foster, 125.

³ <http://the-legion-of-decency.blogspot.com/2011/08/mysterious-death-of-canadian-movie-icon.html>, accessed 5/18/15.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_La_Badie, accessed 5/18/15.

2) Marie C. Russ' deposition that was taken on October 8, 1917 in front of Jess Henderson, Commissioner of Deeds in and for the City of New York, declared that Florence La Badie was her daughter who was adopted by Joseph and Amanda La Badie:

3) Florence's death certificate, signed on October 13, 1917 by Dr. Charles Sweet, indicates her birth date as April 27, 1888 and her birthplace as "NY":

Page 3

4) In a notarized deposition by Francis L. Russ, grandfather to Florence, dated Sept. 16, 1890, Florence Russ was stated to be three years old (assuming her birth date of April 27, 1888, this would have made Florence actually 2 ½ years old):

4569 101

Heirs of Mrs Louisa Russ
Lot No. 17187

STATE OF NEW YORK, } ss. I Francis L. Russ of 309 W.
 City and County of New York. 118th St. New York City being duly sworn, do depose and say
 that Mrs Louisa Russ late owner of
 Lot Number 17187 in **THE GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY,**
 died on the 7th day of February 1890, leaving no
 will; that at the time of her death she left her surviving 4 children, as follows:
Horace L. Russ, Francis L. Russ (this deponent), Lillie Russ, and
Caroline D. Russ (Van Vleck). That said Horace L. Russ has since
deceased, leaving him surviving 2 children, viz: Horace Everett
Russ, aged 6 years, and Florence Russ, aged 3 years. That said 3 children and said 2
grandchildren now surviving are the sole heirs at law to said lot
then to be, no issue of any deceased child of said Mrs Louisa Russ
deceased, save as recited above, and further deponent saith, etc.

Francis L. Russ

HEIRSHIP OF MRS. LOUISA RUSS	
4 CHILDREN: HORACE RUSS ←	DECEASED, SURVIVING
FRANCIS RUSS	2 CHILDREN ARE:
LILLIE RUSS (DIXON)	HORACE EVERETT RUSS, 6 YRS
CAROLINE RUSS (VAN VLECK)	* FLORENCE RUSS, 3 YRS

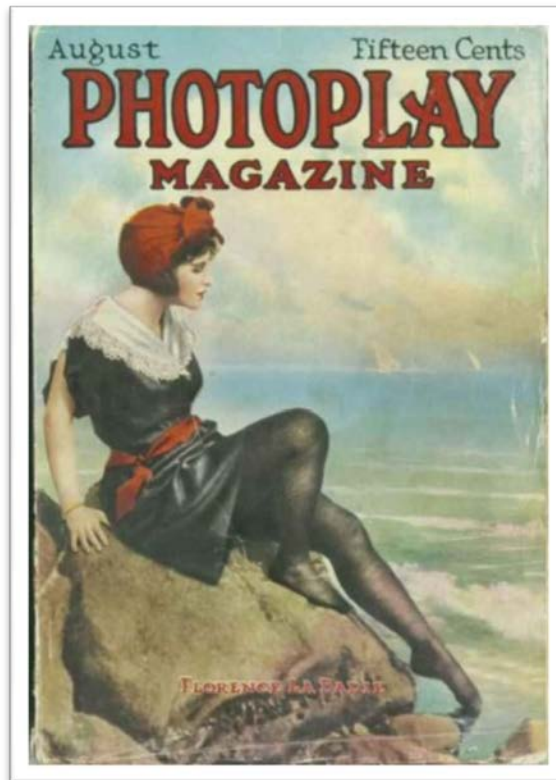
Sworn to before me this 16th day of Sept 1890
H. L. Coffey Notary Public,
 Kings County.
 Certificate filed in New York County.

Her Career

Part of Florence's youth was spent in Montreal where her adoptive father, Joseph E. LaBadie was a prominent attorney. Her adoptive mother, the former Amanda Victor, was born in Europe, possibly in Paris. Florence was educated in New York City schools and at the Convent of Notre Dame in Montreal. After her education was completed, she became a model for Penrhyn Stanlaws, one of America's best known illustrators at the turn of the century.⁵

Florence LaBadie appeared on the stage beginning in 1908, when, after she registered with a theatrical booking company, she was signed by Chauncey Olcott's company. She was on the road with Olcott in the autumn of that year, appearing as a scampering little fairy in *Ragged Robin*.⁶ She toured the East and on October 6, 1908 was seen at the Opera House in Lexington, Kentucky. In the autumn of 1910, she was before the footlights in a minor role in Winthrop Ames' presentation of *The Blue Bird* at the New Theatre in New York City.

In a 1914 interview, Florence recounted: "I posed for front covers of magazines before I went on the stage and afterward, between shows. That was what made me think I would fit into work for the screen. Mary Pickford is a dear friend of mine and it was Mary who suggested I try pictures."⁷



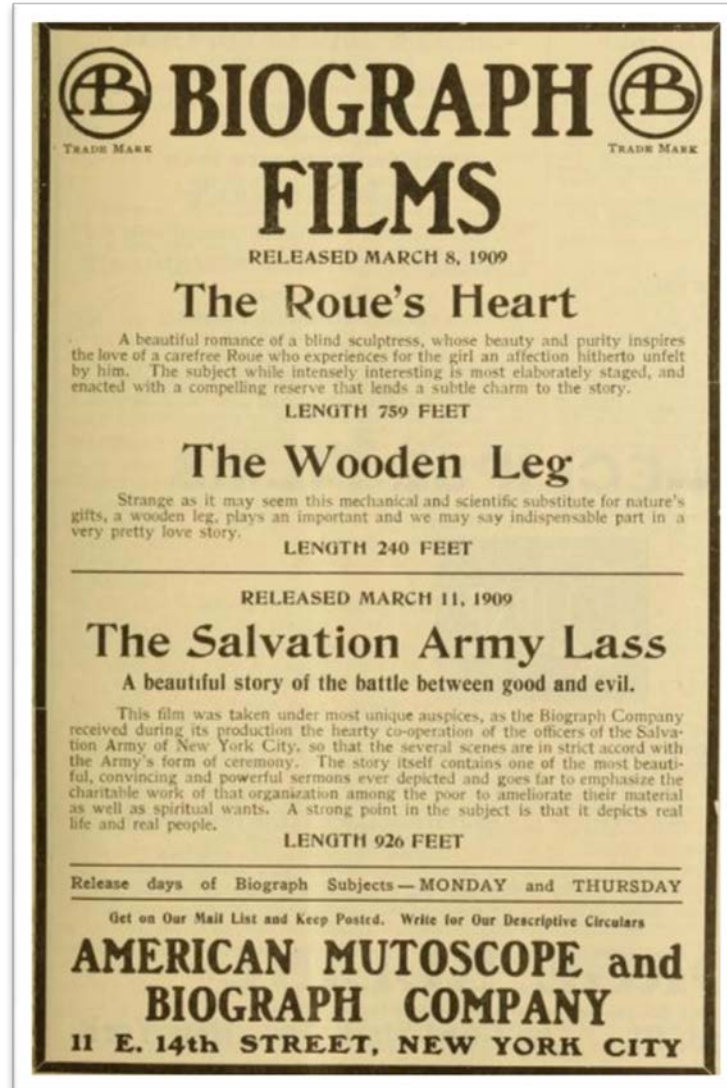
Florence posing for a 1914 Magazine Cover

⁵ Bowers, Q. David, http://www.thanhouser.org/tcocc/Biography_Files/indfdkind.htm, accessed 7/13/2015.

⁶ The Washington Post, Jan 19, 1909

⁷ "Sans Grease Paint and Wig," By Mabel Condon, *Motography*, April 1914.

In 1909 Florence accompanied her friend Mary Pickford to the Biograph studio at 11 East 14th Street in Manhattan to watch her act in a film that was released the following September under the title *Getting Even*. Florence was given a bit part, and is credited as appearing in the March 1909 release of *The Salvation Army Lass*.⁸ A year later she joined Biograph as an employee.



After playing in over 30 Biograph one-reelers, often under the direction of D. W. Griffith, she moved to the Thanhouser Company in the late spring of 1911.⁹ While the film industry expanded and her colleagues raced from company to company in pursuit of escalating financial rewards, Florence remained with Thanhouser until her death in 1917. During those six years at Thanhouser, she grew to become Thanhouser's most popular star, credited with appearing in at least 166 films.¹⁰ This included her most notable role as Florence Gray in Thanhouser's 1914 highly successful serial production, *The Million Dollar Mystery*. In 1916 she appeared in eight Thanhouser feature films that were five- and six-

⁸ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0001029/>, accessed 5/18/15.

⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0478359/>, accessed 5/18/15.

¹⁰ http://www.thanhouser.org/toccd/Biography_Files/indfdkind.htm, accessed 5/19/15.

reels in length. By 1917, she was unquestionably THE Thanhouser star – though the company itself, overshadowed by aggressive newcomers like Adolph Zukor and Lewis Selznick, was no longer an industry leader.



Florence La Badie as Florence Gray in *The Million Dollar Mystery*, Episode 9: *The Leap from an Ocean Liner*

Her Accident and Death

While Florence was driving an automobile near Ossining, New York on Tuesday August 28, 1917, with her fiancé, Daniel Carson Goodman as a passenger, the brakes failed, after which the car plunged down a hill causing it to overturn at the bottom. While Goodman escaped with a broken leg and minor injuries, Florence was thrown from the vehicle and suffered a compound fracture of the pelvis. An account of the accident was published the following week in *The Democratic Register*¹¹ (Note: Daniel Carson Goodman was erroneously reported as “Donnell Carson Goodman”):

Auto Upset on Soap Hill Sends Movie Star to Ossining Hospital.

Dr. Donnell Carson Goodman and Miss Florence LaBadie, the famous motion picture star, both of New York were taken to the Ossining Hospital Tuesday evening suffering from serious injuries received in an automobile accident as they were coming down Soap Hill above Croton about 6 o'clock.

In endeavoring to avoid a collision with two big machines ahead of them their car was overturned. A big brewery truck had caught fire on the hill and the Croton chemical fire apparatus was called to extinguish the blaze, and the road was blocked by them.

Dr. Goodman received a fractured rib, a fractured collar bone and severe lacerations of the leg which severed the Achilles tendon and blood vessels, causing a great loss of blood. Miss LaBadie suffered from a broken pelvis and internal injuries. They were attended by Dr. Miller of Croton, after which they were brought here to the hospital.

Miss LaBadie's injuries were found to be so serious that Dr. C. C. Sweet was called in consultation Wednesday morning and it was determined that an operation was necessary. This was performed and both of the injured parties are resting as comfortably as their conditions will permit, much thankful that they are alive after their experience.

¹¹ The Democratic Register was a weekly newspaper published in Ossining, New York from 1868 until 1931; copies of articles used in this paper were obtained from the Ossining Historical Society Museum, <http://ossininghistorical.org/wordpress/>.

Florence La Badie: Florence La Badie: Silent Film Star and Presidential Courtesan?

She was hospitalized in Ossining, under the care of Charles C. Sweet, M.D., of 13 Maple Street, who first attended her the day following the accident. Complications ensued, and her condition worsened. In anticipation of her death, *The Democratic Register* published a full account of her life and career on October 6, 1917:

OSSINING HOSPITAL

Miss Florence LaBadie of New York, the famous young movie actress who was seriously injured in an automobile accident on Soap Hill in Croton a few weeks ago with Dr. Goodman, also of New York, who had been on a vacation in the Adirondacks, is still at the Ossining Hospital where she was taken very badly hurt immediately after the accident.

Miss LaBadie had gone up by train to Albany to meet Dr. Goodman and they were on their way home when the accident occurred.

Dr. Goodman was able to leave the hospital the first part of last week. Two prominent New York specialists are now attending Miss LaBadie weekly. They are Prof. Young of the famous Polyclinic Hospital and Dr. Thomas Tobin.

So many Ossiningers want to know all about this real "queen of the movies," that it is an almost thankless task to try and condense within reasonable limits even the most salient features of her career, and to fill the necessary gaps the reader will have to excuse his or her imaginative powers and blame the limited space at the writer's disposal.

To begin at the beginning, Florence, whose full name is Florence Marie Louise de Latremouille LaBadie, was born in New York City just 24 years ago, that is, in 1893, of French parentage. She was named after her great-grandmother, the Comtesse de Latremouille. Her mother, Amanda Victor, of New York and New Orleans, is a descendant of Marechal Victor who made such a name for himself on the staff of the great Napoleon. Her father, Joseph Esdras Avia LaBadie, a broker of New York and Montreal, is a representative of one of the oldest and best known families of the Province of Quebec. His grandfather was the Hon. Joseph Augustin LaBadie, a magistrate, one of the leaders of the Liberals of Canada, and a great patriot. The family has an unbroken record of 113 years, five generations as lawyers and notaries in the same offices (LaBadie Building) in Montreal, Canada.

Naturally, Miss LaBadie is a Catholic. She was educated mainly at a convent, the Villa Maria in Montreal and at high school in New York City. She expresses herself readily in either English, French or German; but it is to her ancestry rather than her early training that she owes her perfect art of mimicry, for it is beyond question that the French have always lead as pantomimists. Her wide range of reading, her varied accomplishments—she plays, sings and paints, and does them all very well indeed. She is a lover of nature, swims, runs a motor boat and a motor car, is a good oarswoman, has a number of fine dogs, dances delightfully, rides, plays tennis, takes long walks cross country when the weather and her engagements permit, and withal is the ideal type of a charming, domestic, sunny natured "Angel Child," as they used to call her in the studios. She is extremely popular.

was with brush and oils the dream pictures she saw through those big blue eyes of hers. However, this was not to be, vastly to the satisfaction and pleasure of those who watch her pictured form and expressive features flit across the screen day and night in the thousands of motion picture theatres all over the land.

It may be interesting to know that Miss LaBadie did not start her public career as a motion-picture actress. Her first essay was in the legitimate. True, she had little to say and not much to do at the start, when she made her first public appearance with Chauncey Olcott, but it was not long before her undoubted talent brought her to the front. When Winthrop Ames made his wonderful production of Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird" Miss LaBadie was one of his personal selections for the cast, and in that play she made an instantaneous success.

Just why and how Florence came to join the motion-picture players can be best explained by the statement that she is essentially a home-body, and after two seasons with Chauncey Olcott her desire to spend the greater part of the forty weeks' season touring the country was completely satisfied. With the closing of the "Blue Bird," and the dearth of good parts for her in New York, the motion picture proposition appealed to her because of its domestic advantages—remaining at home with her parents to enjoy her beautiful home and working only in the daytime. At all events, when the Biograph Company made her an attractive offer, she accepted, and soon was busy studying and playing all sorts of roles—mainly ingenious parts—for the screen and plays.

It was a short while before the Thanhouser people discovered her value and became successful competitors for her services. The immediate success she made as Mary in "The Star of Bethlehem" settled her position with the public and that company, and the wisdom of her choice as their star player has been evidenced by her unvarying success in all sorts of roles. As Julie de Mortemar in "Cardinal Richelieu's Ward," Venus in "Tannhauser," Barbara in "East Lynne," Emily in "David Copperfield," the title roles in "Cymbeline," "Undine," "Cinderella," "Aurore," "Floyd," and hundreds of other high-class plays produced by the Thanhouser Studios, her complete mastery of the finest part of the actor's art—pantomime—has been demonstrated all over the North American continent and Europe and her admirers are legion.

It must not be forgotten that to achieve such continued success it is not alone sufficient to have talent or genius. Talent, as we have been told, is but another name for the ability to take infinite pains, and that Miss LaBadie works and works hard to perfect herself in her art will be at once clear when the statement is made that her repertoire numbers several hundred plays, to say nothing of innumerable sketches.

the success of both plays and player, has been proved by the great furore made over her work in the role of Florence Gray, the heroine of "The Million Dollar Mystery," a play written by Harold McGrath specially for her in an endeavor to present her many-sided genius in an appropriate garb. This play, which was really a complete novel and which required two reels film a week for six months to produce, ran the entire gamut from comedy to sensational melodrama, and no actress in the legitimate was ever asked to even pretend to take the chances of danger to life and limb that were almost a daily feature of the production of this play. It speaks volumes for Miss LaBadie's physical and mental vigor that she made the greatest hit of her career in this particular role, which resembled in its length the Chinese plays that run for months at a time rather than any form of drama that we are accustomed to.

It is hard to give in brief a statement anything like a fair presentation of Miss LaBadie's work and ability; but it may be said without fear of contradiction that there are many acknowledged stars who in their entire career have worked and studied far less and have been called upon for much less actual artistic effort than has been demanded of Miss LaBadie in this one role. That the presentation of "The Million Dollar Mystery" made hundreds of thousands of friends and admirers for her is true, and the end is not yet. Miss LaBadie receives an average of 100 letters a day.

Miss LaBadie makes her home with her parents at "The Garfield," 200 Claremont avenue, in the Riverside Drive district. She is 5 feet, 4 inches in height and weighs about 125 pounds. Her eyes are blue, and she is of fair complexion with light brown hair.

Her favorite flowers are roses, her motto, "courage and honesty"; pastimes, reading and music; color, pink; precious stone, diamond; exercises, riding and swimming; drinks, tea and buttermilk; food, good plain viands; animals, horses and dogs.

OCTOBER 6, 1917
THE DEMOCRATIC REGISTER

Florence LaBadie, 29 years of age, died of blood poisoning (septicemia) at 1:35 p.m. on Saturday, October 13, 1917. Services were held at 11 o'clock the following Wednesday, at the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Home, 1970 Broadway (at 66th Street), New York City, with interment at Green-Wood Cemetery on the same day. Dozens of floral arrangements were received, and the crowd of mourners included numerous Thanhouser and Pathé players.

The Democratic Register obituary notice stated that she was survived by her adoptive father and mother, Joseph and Amanda La Badie, although this notice erroneously stated her place of birth:



Final verification of Florence's age, place of birth, and date of death are contained in the burial order for her interment on October 17th at 1:00 pm in the Russ family plot at the Green-Wood Cemetery, purchased for her at age three by her Russ family.

Orders for burial will not be received by telephone.

To the Superintendent of THE GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY:

Please open a grave in Lot No. 17187 Section No. *172nd St & Bway, Manhattan*

Owned by *Russ*

For the remains of *Florence M. L. LaBadie*

Place of Birth, *New York City (Florence Russ)*

Married, Unmarried, Widow *Single* Date of Death, *Oct 13th 1917*

Age, *29* years, months, days.

Late Residence, No. *St Andrew Hotel*

Place of Death, *Ossining Hospital*

Cause of Death, *Sepsis due to compound fracture*

Undertaker, *Frank E Campbell*

Location of Grave, *In private lots by Diagram, stating if brick or concrete grave is desired and whether for new grave or re-opening. (In Single Grave Lots by Number)* *Evergreen Grave Living*

Exact size of outside case, *7 feet, 6 inches long, 33 inches wide.*

Funeral will arrive at Cemetery On *Wednesday* the *17* at *1 o'clock P.M.*

(OVER)

SPECIAL NOTICE—Owing to lack of space, boxes used in adult single graves must not exceed 7 feet 6 inches in length or 30 inches in width and in children's single graves 6 feet 6 inches in length or 22 inches in width.

The New York Times published an article the following day, Thursday October 18, 1917, reporting the throng of friends and fans attending her funeral:

Throng at Florence La Badie's Bier.

The Funeral Church, at Broadway and Sixty-sixth Street, was filled yesterday morning with people of the moving-picture industry, who came to attend the funeral services for Florence La Badie, the actress, who died on Saturday in Ossining. There were a large number of floral pieces from friends in the profession and the motion-picture companies, and several hundred persons viewed the body before it was taken for interment to Greenwood Cemetery.

Hearsay and Rumor: Setting the Record Straight

Foster's story is based on a 1943 tale told to him by Valentine Grant, wife of Sydney Olcott, 26 years after La Badie's death, which he relates in his book *Stardust and Shadows: Canadians in Early Hollywood*.¹² Grant claimed that President Wilson was rumored to have been infatuated with La Badie since visiting the Thanhouser Studio when he was Governor of New Jersey, and in December of 1914 invited Florence to Washington DC for a Christmas celebration. Foster's story continues that Florence reluctantly traveled with her mother to the White House at the insistence of the studio, specifically Edwin Thanhouser, and returned in January 1915 a "changed person." Foster claims that Florence was impregnated by Wilson during this visit, and subsequently gave birth to Wilson's illegitimate child in the fall of 1915. Foster goes on to state that Florence made "only four films in the first quarter of 1915 before requesting a six month leave of absence, which Thanhouser approved and announced in to the newspapers." Foster goes on to assert that to cover up his affair with La Badie, government agents cut the brake lines on the car Florence was driving on August 28, 1917 resulting in the accident that eventually led to her death.

Numerous factual errors are presented in Foster's chapter on Florence based on hearsay and rumor, lack of substantial research, and no documentation or verifiable resources; we address Foster's key assertions as follows:

- 1) **FOSTER CLAIM:** "Florence La Badie was born in Montreal, Canada on April 14, 1893."¹³

FACT: As documented in the first section of this paper, Florence La Badie was born in New York City on April 27, 1888 to Horace and Marie Russ.

¹² Foster, 123 – 142.

¹³ Foster, 126.

- 2) **FOSTER CLAIM:** “Early in December, Florence and her mother, Helene [sic], received invitations to spend Christmas in Washington at the White House. Ed Thanhouser told them the invitation could not be turned down.”¹⁴

FACT: Edwin Thanhouser was not living in the US in December 1914; he retired in November 1912 and was traveling in Europe and not present at the studio from December 1912 to February 1915. During this period, Charles Hite was president of the Thanhouser Film Corporation. Meanwhile, Woodrow Wilson spent Christmas 1914 at the White House with his family grieving over the loss of his wife Ellen who had died unexpectedly in August of Bright’s disease.¹⁵ A search of the Woodrow Wilson Papers held by the Library of Congress was conducted on August 17, 2015; no records were found documenting Florence or Amanda La Badie visiting the White House in December 1914 (see Appendix 1).

- 3) **FOSTER CLAIM:** “She only made four films in the first three months of the year [1915] before requesting a six-month leave of absence, which Thanhouser approved and was reported to the newspapers.”¹⁶

FACT: Notice of Florence’s six-month leave of absence has not been found. Florence was consistently hard at work before the camera in 1915 making 23 movies that produced 51 reels of film, the period in which she was allegedly absent due to her pregnancy and the birth of Wilson’s child. (See Appendix 2). One film *Crossed Wires* (released June 29, 1915) survives and we clearly see Florence in full profile with no visible signs of pregnancy although she should have been well along at this point:



Florence La Badie in *Crossed Wires* (June 29, 1915)

- 4) **FOSTER CLAIM:** As a result of the visit to Washington in December 1914, Foster states, “She was afraid of the President” and “...even a mention of Washington sent her into crying spells.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Foster, 137.

¹⁵ Berg, A. Scott, *Wilson*, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 2013, page 352.

¹⁶ Foster, 137.

¹⁷ Foster, 137.

FACT: Florence accompanied a contingent from the Thanhouser studio, including Edwin and Gertrude Thanhouser, to a banquet at the Biltmore Hotel on February 12, 1916 where they met President Wilson who gave a speech to assembled guest from the film industry.¹⁸ That Florence attended this event and met the president contradicts Foster's claim of her emotional state regarding Wilson.

- 5) **FOSTER CLAIM:** In April 1916, "Thanhouser officially announced La Badie's retirement." "Nothing more was heard from her until April 1917, when the New York papers printed details of a car accident in which she was involved."¹⁹

FACT: No contemporary newspapers or trade magazines have been found that report Florence's retirement as of April 1916, which would have been a significant story given her stature in the film industry. Furthermore, in 1916 she appeared for Thanhouser in eight feature films totaling 38 reels and in 1917 she appeared in five feature films totaling 26 reels.²⁰ Her last film, *The Man Without a Country* was released on September 9, 1917 shortly after her automobile accident.

- 6) **FOSTER CLAIM:** "And who was the unknown man who leaped to safety from La Badie's car just before it crashed?"²¹

FACT: The other man in the accident was documented in newspaper reports as "Dr. Donnell [sic] Carson Goodman," Florence's fiancée. He could hardly have run away because he suffered a significant leg injury as a result of the car crash.

- 7) **FOSTER CLAIM:** Foster quotes James Baird, a junior reporter for the *New York Telegraph* aged seventeen at the time of La Badie's death, as posing the final enigma: "Why would it take six months, until October, for her to die 'from the after-effects of an April accident' from which she had officially recovered?" he asked. "And how did she die? The death certificate said natural causes. At age twenty-four?"²²

FACT: Florence's death certificate clearly indicates that she was 29 years old and gives the specific cause of death accurately as "septicemia [blood poisoning] due to compound fracture of the pelvis as result of accident."

- 8) **FOSTER CLAIM:** Foster quotes Valentine Grant, "Newspaper friends in New York told us later that the funeral was a quite one, with only a few studio heads present, and with none of her contemporaries like Pickford or Lawrence attending."²³

FACT: The New York Times on October 18, 1917 reported that there was a "throng" of film industry figures at the funeral with numerous floral tributes in evidence.

¹⁸ The Moving Picture World, September 12, 1916, pages 930-931.

¹⁹ Foster, 138.

²⁰ By this time the industry has shifted from one and two reel films to feature films that typically ran five reels or more.

²¹ Foster, 141.

²² Foster, 142.

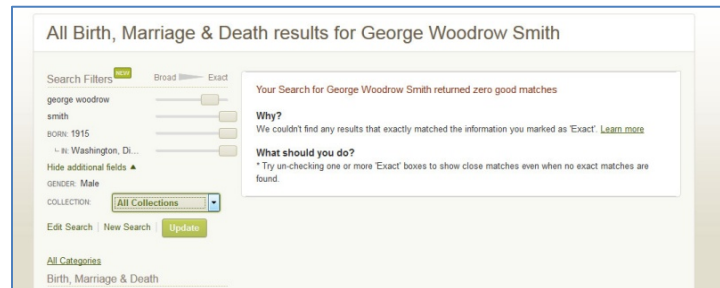
²³ Foster, 139.

- 9) **FOSTER CLAIM:** “James Baird, a junior reporter for the *New York Telegraph*, aged seventeen at the time of La Badie’s death and still living at the age of ninety-three in 1993, claimed that he had discovered shortly after the ‘accident’ that the break line on La Badie’s car had been cut through with a knife.”²⁴

FACT: No record for James Baird working for the *New York Telegraph* can be found. No published record can be found regarding cuts on the break lines on La Badie’s car.

- 10) **FOSTER CLAIM:** Foster goes on to quote Baird regarding La Badie and Wilson’s child, “I have tried for many years but have failed to discover what happened to George Woodrow Smith, for that was the name the baby was registered under...”²⁵

FACT: No birth certificate can be found on Ancestry.com for George Woodrow Smith in Washington, DC.



- 11) **FOSTER CLAIM:** “The plot in the Greenwood [sic] Cemetery was purchased jointly for Florence La Badie and her mother.”²⁶

FACT: Florence was buried in an unmarked grave site owned by her, purchased for her by the Russ family when she was age three. On April 27, 2014 on the 126th anniversary of her birth, a monument funded by her loyal fans was dedicated at the Green-Wood Cemetery.



²⁴ Foster, 140.

²⁵ Foster, 141.

²⁶ Foster, 141.

SUMMARY

Proving something didn't happen is an arduous task, in this case the accusations made by Charles Foster that Florence La Badie had an affair with Woodrow Wilson, bore his child, and the government was complicit in her death. We have documented facts that cast doubt upon Foster's accusations as itemized in this paper. We ask that this paper be scrutinized for any oversights or misinterpretations, and brought to our attention. It has been our goal to seek out documentable facts (vs. hearsay and rumor) to set the record straight on the life, career, and death of the beautiful and talented Florence La Badie. We feel confident to claim there is nothing in the record that supports Foster's claims in his book that Florence La Badie had an affair with President Woodrow Wilson, bore his illegitimate child, or that the automobile she was driving on August 28, 1917 was sabotaged by government agents. We hope this research will restore Florence's reputation to the status she rightfully earned as one of America's first true movie stars in the burgeoning motion picture industry, and the tragedy of her untimely death.

Appendix 1: Report from Jessica Kaplan, Research Associate, of Woodrow Wilson Papers held by the Library of Congress (August 17, 2015)

I began my research in the Entertainment files (Series 4, Executive Office Files, Reels #216-217). The documents basically consisted of letters from musicians and singers (and their friends and agents) who hoped to perform at the White House, not information regarding events or a visitor log. There was a December 2014 letter from Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's secretary, stating that there would be no performances at the White House during the winter of 1914-1915. The president was still in mourning over the loss of his wife. There wasn't anything about the La Badies. I read through Wilson's Appointment Books for Dec. 1914 (Series I, Diary and Diary Material, Reel #2). Wilson was at the White House during the month meeting regularly with cabinet members and legislators. He did not meet (formally) with any La Badie. I perused Receptions and Social Functions, March 1913-April 1915 (Series 10, Social Records, Reel #521). All official events at the White House were cancelled in the winter of 1914. Finally, I looked at Calling Cards, Invitations and Programs, Courtesy Cards on Reel #523 of Series 10 and came up empty.

Appendix 2: Florence La Badie – Film Credits for 1915 to 1917 (by quarter)

Q1-1915 (14 reels)

- 1) *Graft vs. Love* (1-19-1915) – 2 reels
- 2) *The Finger Prints of Fate* (1-26-1915) – 2 reels
- 3) *The Smuggled Diamond* (2-9-1915) – 2 reels
- 4) *The Million Dollar Mystery – Episode 23* (2-20-1915) – 2 reels
- 5) *The Adventure of Florence* (2-23-1915) – 2 reels
- 6) *The Final Reckoning* (3-9-1915) – 2 reels
- 7) *The Duel in the Dark* (3-23-1915) – 2 reels

Q2-1915 (17 reels)

- 1) *The Cycle of Hatred* (4-6-1915) – 2 reels
- 2) *Bianca Forgets* (4-27-1915) – 2 reels

- 3) *Monsieur Nikola Dupree* (5-4-1915) – 2 reels
- 4) *God's Witness* (5-20-1915) – 4 reels (Mutual Masterpicture)
- 5) *A Freight Car Honeymoon* (6-6-1915) – 1 reel
- 6) *The Six-Cent Loaf* (6-8-1915) – 2 reels
- 7) *The Country Girl* (6-15-1915) – 2 reels
- 8) *Crossed Wires* (6-29-1915) – 2 reels

Q3-1915 (15 reels)

- 1) *When the Fleet Sailed* (8-3-1915) – 2 reels
- 2) *M. Lecoq* (8-26-1915) – 4 reels (Mutual Masterpicture)
- 3) *Reincarnation* (8-31-1915) – 2 reels
- 4) *A Disciple of Nietzsche* (9-25-1915) – 3 reels (Than-O-Play)
- 5) *The Price of Her Silence* (9-30-1915) – 4 reels (Mutual Masterpicture)

Q4-1915 (5 reels)

- 1) *Mr. Meeson's Will* (11-6-1915) – 3 reels (Than-O-Play)
- 2) *All Aboard* (11-28-1915) – 1 reel
- 3) *Her Confession* (12-12-1915) – 1 reel

1916 (38 reels)

- 1) *The Five Faults of Flo* (1-20-1916) – 5 reels (Mutual Masterpicture)
- 2) *What Doris Did* (3-1-1916) – 3 reels (Than-O-Play)
- 3) *Master Shakespeare, Strolling Player* (4-20-1916) – 5 reels (Mutual Masterpicture)
- 4) *The Fugitive* (8-13-1916) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 5) *The Fear of Poverty* (9-10-1916) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 6) *Saint, Devil and Woman* (9-25-1916) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 7) *The Pillory* (10-8-1916) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 8) *Divorce and the Daughter* (12-3-1916) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)

1917 (26 reels)

- 1) *Her Life and His* (2-18-1917) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 2) *When Love Was Blind* (4-15-1917) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 3) *The Woman in White* (7-1-1917) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 4) *War and the Woman* (9-9-1917) – 5 reels (Pathé Gold Rooster Play)
- 5) *The Man Without a Country* (Jewel 9-9-1917) – 6 reels (Jewel Productions, Inc.)

Appendix 3: Web Resources for Articles on Florence La Badie

11 East 14th Street: <http://11east14thstreet.com/2013/08/02/florence-la-badie-becoming/>
and <http://11east14thstreet.com/2015/08/11/florence-la-badie-part-two-the-actress-unafraid/>

Film Bug: <http://www.filmbug.com/db/343305>

Find a Grave: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7688868>

Lilac Lane: <http://www.lilaclane.com/florence-labadie/biografy.htm>

The Legion of Decency: <http://the-legion-of-decency.blogspot.com/2011/08/mysterious-death-of-canadian-movie-icon.html>

Internet Movie Database (IMDb): <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0478359/>

Movies Silently: <http://moviessilently.com/2014/09/23/silent-movie-myth-6-president-woodrow-wilson-had-an-affair-with-florence-la-badie-and-then-had-her-murdered/>

<http://moviessilently.com/2015/07/21/the-silent-movie-debunk-o-matic-were-woodrow-wilson-and-florence-la-badie-an-item/>

Silent Stanzas: <http://silentstanzas.blogspot.com/2012/10/million-dollar-mystery-florence-la-badie.html>

Silents are Golden: <http://www.silentsaregolden.com/photos/florencelabadiephoto.html>

Silence is Platinum: <http://silenceisplatinum.blogspot.com/2010/02/miss-florence-la-badie.html>

Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.: www.thanhouser.org/people/labadie.htm

Thanhouser Films: An Encyclopedia and History by Q. David Bowers:
http://www.thanhouser.org/tcocd/Biography_Files/indfdkind.htm

Wikipedia Entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_La_Badie