

Doris (Dibble) Deane

From a La Crosse saloon to Hollywood



(listal.com-doris-deane)

There seems to be an insatiable appetite for information about people who are in the spotlight of film, stage, screen, and music.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a young woman, born in La Crosse and an actress in Hollywood, was regularly the object of national attention.

Doris Dibble was born in the first month of a new century, on January 20, 1900, in La Crosse County.¹ Her parents, Carl and Martha Dibble, were natives of Minnesota, and Carl was a relatively old father of a first child at the age of 30. Her first home was a tavern in La Crosse because Carl Dibble was a saloon keeper at 322 Pearl Street.² The family lived above the saloon.³

Sometime before 1910, the Dibble family, including Martha's sister who had lived with them in La Crosse, moved to Dubuque, Iowa, where Charles operated another saloon on Main Street.⁴

Doris attended an elementary school in Dubuque, and then the family moved to California. Young Doris had dreams of becoming an actress. Hoping to blunt this ambition, her parents sent her to the [Orton Sisters' school](#) in Pasadena, California.⁵ But Doris would not be deterred, and after graduation she went to New York City to start her movie career. For one year, she took

dancing classes from the Morton Sisters, hoping she could break into movies as a dancer.⁶ Deane did become a dancer in the “[Ziegfeld Follies](#).”⁷

She made her film debut in 1919 at the age of 19, using the name Doris Deane, in a short comedy film entitled *His Vampy Ways*. The plot involved marital discord, and it would be an omen of things to come for the young actress.⁸

Silent films were first produced in the 1890s and were the staple through the late 1920s until voices and music could be added to motion pictures.⁹ The bulk of Doris Deane’s movie career was in the five-plus years before “talkies” hit the big screen.

In 1920, Doris returned to Pasadena and lived with her parents while pursuing more acting roles.¹⁰ From 1921 to 1925, Doris Deane would appear in 13 silent films, as well as another one with sound in 1931.¹¹ Early in her career, a California newspaper described her as an ambitious young woman “gifted with beauty, brains and real acting ability.”¹²

Although her film career was modest, her love life was juicy fodder for the Hollywood gossip columns.

In December 1922, newspapers were reporting that the “beautiful brunette” Deane was dating world heavyweight boxing champion [Jack Dempsey](#).¹³ It was even speculated that marriage was in the near future for the minor actress and one of the most famous athletes of the era.¹⁴

That rumored wedding never occurred, but two years later Deane was linked with star comedian [Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle](#), who was in the process of divorcing his first wife, actress [Minta Durfee](#). Arbuckle denied those reports at the beginning of December 1924.¹⁵ By the middle of the month, however, Arbuckle confirmed that he would be marrying Doris Deane once the divorce from his first wife was final.¹⁶

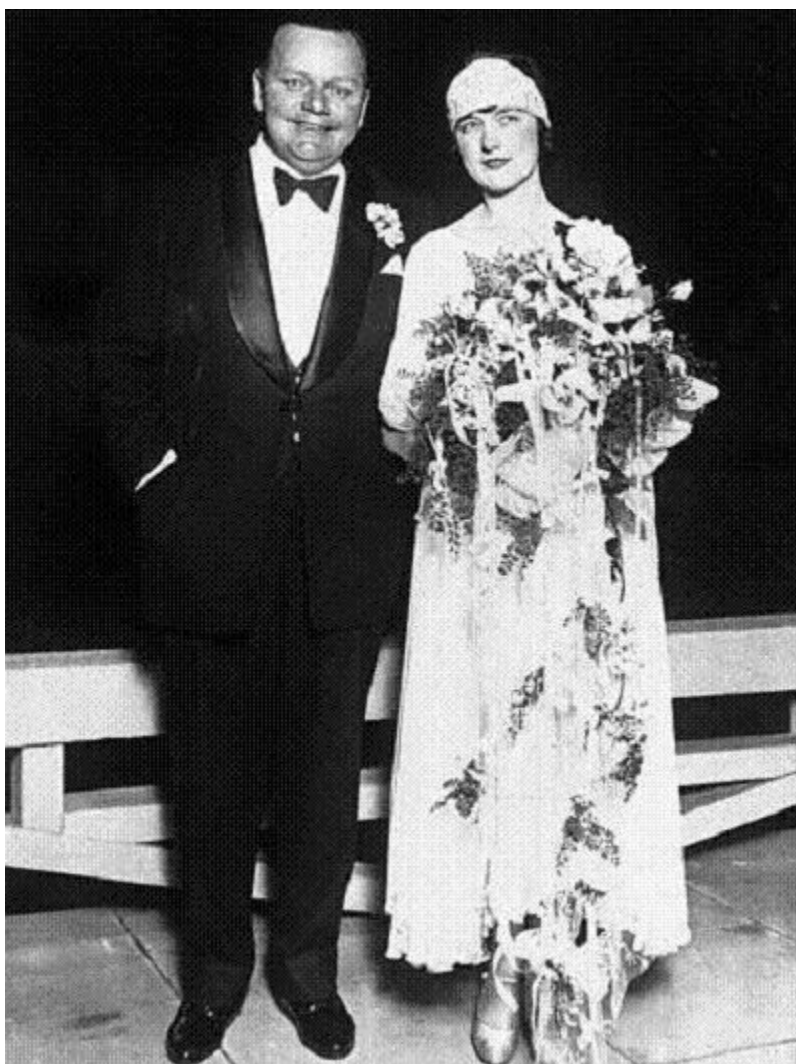
Arbuckle was notorious because of a 1921 party he hosted in San Francisco that resulted in the death of 25-year-old actress [Virginia Rappe](#). Arbuckle was at the height of his career when he was jailed. The first two trials ended in hung juries, but the third trial, after new testimony from witnesses about Rappe’s background, acquitted Arbuckle on April 12, 1922, after only five minutes of deliberation. Despite being exonerated in court, Hollywood’s hired censor, [Will Hays](#), prohibited Arbuckle from appearing in films for eight months. With his reputation tainted and acting roles not forthcoming, Arbuckle’s career was in shambles. He scraped by as a director under the assumed name of Will B. Good.¹⁷

Arbuckle and Deane intended to have their wedding on March 24, 1925, at Deane’s home.¹⁸ But there were multiple postponements of their nuptials. Arbuckle was granted a divorce in Paris, but his attorneys said he could not legally marry until 90 days after that decree.¹⁹ There was another delay in early April.²⁰

On May 16, 1925, Roscoe Arbuckle and Doris Deane were finally married by a judge in her mother’s home in San Marino, California.²¹ Guests included a few of the biggest names in Hollywood at the time: “Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Schenck ([Norma Talmadge](#)); Mr. and Mrs. [Buster Keaton](#); Mr. and Mrs. [Lou Anger](#) . . .”²²

The newlyweds had planned to take a honeymoon to New York, but that was canceled because of a convoluted blackmail scheme involving Arbuckle's own brother. Just before Roscoe Arbuckle and Doris Deane married, Arbuckle signed an agreement to pay \$12,500 to Mrs. J. H. Murphy of San Francisco to prevent his name and character from being defamed in women's clubs around the country. Murphy then gave the money to Arthur Arbuckle. This was not the first time that Arthur Arbuckle had asked his famous sibling for money, but it was the first time it was done in such a shady manner. Roscoe Arbuckle claimed to be so happy about his marriage to Doris Deane that he refused to press charges against his brother.²³

In what was called "a \$100,000 wedding present," motion picture producer [Roland West](#) offered Arbuckle a contract to direct and produce ten comedy films. Arbuckle hoped this would revive his career and ease his strained financial situation. Adjusted for inflation, that would be a \$1.5 million deal today.²⁴



Roscoe Arbuckle & Doris Deane

(famousfix.com)

Doris Deane was a star married to an even bigger star. In the 1927 Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade, she rode on top of a float with another motion picture star, [Madge Bellamy](#), accompanied by cowboy movie star [Hoot Gibson](#) riding alongside on his horse.²⁵

Roscoe Arbuckle directed motion pictures for five years before making his own screen comeback. After a vaudeville tour that reportedly paid \$3,000 per week, Arbuckle and his wife were to travel to Berlin, Germany, to make a film together in late 1928.²⁶ Marital issues, however, derailed those plans.

Arbuckle and Deane had developed a unique deterrent to divorce. Every year, they each deposited \$5,600 into a joint bank account. If one of them were to ever initiate divorce proceedings, that partner would forfeit their share of the money.²⁷

Despite the financial incentive to remain a couple, Doris Deane filed for divorce in August 1928 after three years of marriage. She cited infidelity and “extreme cruelty.”²⁸ Deane claimed that Arbuckle hit her in the face after she tried to make him stop making out with another woman on the floor during a party. When they were going home, Arbuckle supposedly drove on the wrong side of the road at 60 miles per hour and “made insulting remarks to her.”²⁹ During her testimony in front of a judge, Deane claimed that the famous comedian was “always morose, sulky and quarrelsome” when at home and not in the spotlight.³⁰ Deane requested \$750 per week alimony.³¹

Before her divorce was even final, rumor had it that Deane was engaged to her divorce attorney, Allan Lund.³² Deane and another woman had just left one of Lund’s house parties in Hollywood when two men robbed him of \$1,790 worth of cash and jewels.³³

Arbuckle did not remain in the dating pool very long either. In August 1931, with his divorce from Deane not yet final, the 44-year-old comedian announced he was heading toward his third attempt at marital bliss with a 24-year-old actress named Addie McPhail.³⁴

In March 1932, with the lawyer in her rear-view mirror, Deane announced her upcoming wedlock later that month to banker E. S. Hartz of Beverly Hills. Their wedding took place at the home of [Ernest Westmore](#), chief of make-up for RKO studios.³⁵ The 37-year-old Elmer Hartz had been married once before.³⁶

Roscoe Arbuckle’s marriage ended after just one year but for an unexpected reason. After a party celebrating his first anniversary with McPhail, Arbuckle died in his sleep of a heart attack on June 29, 1933.³⁷ On her former husband’s death, Doris Deane said, “I am terribly shocked, but I was not surprised, . . . I remember he often said to me that he would never live to be old. He simply thought his weight would cut off his life.”³⁸

Deane continued to make news. Several months after her marriage to Hartz, they were both sued by the First National Bank of Beverly Hills for repaying only \$25 of a \$1,550 loan.³⁹ Doris Deane Hartz filed for divorce in November 1934 claiming that Elmer Hartz had “deserted her a

year after they were married” in 1932.⁴⁰ That divorce was finalized in December 1934.⁴¹ Providing corroborating testimony for Deane in the divorce proceeding was Elsie Dempsey, sister of Jack Dempsey, who at one time had been romantically linked with Deane.⁴²

As a single woman with her film career on the wane, Doris Deane used her training as a dancer to keep earning a living. She performed in a floor show at a place called the Café de Paree,⁴³ and at the Casino Gardens in Ventura, California, along with the Columbia Broadcasting Orchestra, other dancing girls, and a comedy team.⁴⁴ By 1936, she was teaching ballet, acrobatic, and interpretive dancing at the Studio of Theatrical Arts in Hollywood.⁴⁵



(Long Beach Sun, Long Beach, California, 1934 November 26, page 6)

At the same time, Deane continued her acting career on stage. She played the lead in a production of “Madam Governor” written by [Lela Gidley](#), that had a two-week run.⁴⁶ Another role was in a three-act comedy called “Escapade, Detour,” that played at the Beethoven Society Studio Theater and the Franklin Avenue Theater in Hollywood.⁴⁷

Her last acting credit was in a 1950 episode of the television series [Robert Montgomery Presents](#).⁴⁸

According to one source, Deane was living “in near poverty in a small apartment in Los Angeles” the last years of her life.⁴⁹

Deane was found dead in her home on March 24, 1974. She was 73 years old and died of an apparent heart attack. The coroner’s office did not release her body to a Hollywood mortuary for over a month while attempts were made to contact relatives.⁵⁰

Doris (Dibble) Deane, the woman who spent the early years of her life in Midwestern taverns, pursued her dream of being a Hollywood star. Her stardom flickered briefly on the silver screen while her personal life provided fodder for the gossip columns. It all eventually ended in an unmarked grave in the [Hollywood Forever](#) cemetery.⁵¹

Jeff Rand
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Sources & Notes:

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