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# Leah Baird

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**Also Known As:**

Mrs. Arthur Beck

**Lived:**

June 20, 1883 - October 3, 1971

**Worked as:**

extra, film actress, producer, screenwriter, theatre actress

**Worked In:**

United States

**by Robin Blaetz**

In marking the death of Leah Baird, known chiefly as an actor in the silent period, *Variety* stated that she “was reputed to have written some of her own films” (55). With less sense of incredulity, production notes for a later film (*Caged*, 1950), in which Baird worked as an extra, refer to her as “a silent day star [who] once owned her own production company.” Although most references to Baird in the silent period in newspapers and trade journals stress her screen performances and her relation to the theatrical stage, she remains an intriguing figure for the sheer number of films on which she worked, for her interest in writing throughout her professional life, and for the length of her career, which spanned from 1911 to 1956.

Billy Doyle’s necrology of “lost” performers of the silent period says that Leah Baird was born in Chicago to German parents, was educated in a convent, and attended business school to train as a secretary before becoming an actor. She worked in stock theatre in Toronto, Buffalo, and with the Morton Snow Stock Company in Troy, New York. In 1907, Baird performed in a play called “The Mummy and Hummingbird,” which garnered the attention of producer, director, and sometime actor William A. Brady, who founded World Film Corporation in 1915. Brady cast her opposite Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., in “The Gentleman from Mississippi,” which ran from 1908 through 1910 (Doyle 1995, 1). In 1911, Baird signed a contract with the Vitagraph Company and appeared in her first film, the comedy *The Wooing of Winifred*. She continued making comedies through 1913, when she joined Independent Motion Picture, newly part of the consolidation of independents as Universal Film Manufacturing, and began working with director Herbert Brenon. By 1914, Baird returned to Vitagraph, where she worked in a number of two-reel domestic dramas through 1916 (Doyle 1995, 2). A 1915 issue of *Photoplay* notes her marriage to Arthur F. Beck, the man who would later produce some of her films (n.p.). In late 1916, [Lois Weber](#), who may have been a

model for her as a woman with something to say in the film industry, directed Baird in Universal's *The People vs. John Doe*. Although a 1919 *New York Times* article does not refer to Baird as anything but an actor, her presence as one of the four stars in the first "Four Star" production by the independent W. W. Hodkinson Corporation (started after the distributor had been deposed from Paramount Pictures) indicates her importance as a box office draw (46).

Baird continued acting through 1920 and in 1921 started with Arthur Beck, Leah Baird Productions, Inc., in Cliffside, New Jersey, making her part of what Karen Mahar has called the second star-producer movement of 1917–1923 (2006, 158–59). Baird's marriage to Beck, like that of other actress-writers to their producers, allowed her options besides remaining in front of the camera. Between 1920 and 1925, she wrote as well as starred in a serial titled *Cynthia of the Minute*, taken from the work of popular novelist Louis Joseph Vance (Doyle 1995, 2). *Variety* reviews indicate that the films she wrote and produced independently in the 1920s were released by the independent Associated Exhibitors through Pathé Exchange. Doyle notes that Baird also continued acting for Pathé at the same time that she was writing and producing on her own through this period (1995, 3). A 1922 *Variety* review of *When Husbands Deceive* notes that "women stars who write their own scenarios invite disaster" (97). But an *Exhibitors Herald* article in 1922 suggests that Baird's films in this period were successful. This positive article describes the composite narrative of her work as "a woman jilted by the man she hoped to marry, who after bitterness passes, reforms her mode of living, finds happiness in the love of another man and assists her former sweetheart to right himself with the 'other woman.'" Considering that the negative reviews of Baird's films usually begin with expressions of indignation that they were written by a woman, it would be important to study how her melodramas might or might not have differed from similar stories written by men in the period.

Like director-writer-producer Weber, Baird was interested in bringing women's issues to the screen, a commitment exemplified by such Leah Baird Productions, Inc. titles as *The Bride's Confession* (1921), *Don't Doubt Your Wife* (1922), *When Husbands Deceive* (1922), *Destroying Angel* (1923), and *Is Divorce a Failure?* (1923). A *Morning Telegraph* article of 1923 reported that Baird traveled to Texas to present *Is Divorce a Failure?* to the Women's Club of Houston (n. p.). She shrewdly used the power of celebrity to gain access to the governor and the mayor and at the same time force the discussion of the difficult issue of divorce reform. In 1925, she began to concentrate on writing and producing full time, being at the time one of the few women, including [Dorothy Davenport Reid](#), producing in these years. *The Primrose Path*, from Baird's original story, was produced by Beck in 1925 and received an excellent review in *Variety* (43), while the following films received fair to good *Variety* reviews for Baird's writing: *The Shadow of the Law* (1926), *Devil's Island* (1926), *The False Alarm* (1926), and *Spangles* (1926). Baird retired in 1934, but appeared at a 1940 symposium to defend the double feature, referenced in the *New York Times* as "Mrs. Arthur Beck, housewife" (108). Just after this appearance she began in 1941 to take small, often uncredited parts in Warner Brothers films, including *Mildred Pierce* (1945), ending her career in 1956 with *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

**See also:** [Dorothy Davenport Reid](#), [Lois Weber](#)

# Bibliography

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*Caged*. Production Notes (John Cromwell, 1950). Leah Baird papers. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

“Devil’s Island.” Rev. *Variety* (4 Aug. 1926): 12.

“The False Alarm.” Rev. *Variety* (1 Dec. 1926): n.p.

“In the News Net.” *New York Times* (16 Mar. 1919): 46.

“Leah Baird.” Obit. *Variety* (13 Oct. 1971): 55.

“Leah Baird in *When the Devil Drives*.” *Exhibitors Herald* (24 June 1922): 97

“Leah Baird Touring Texas.” *Morning Telegraph* (8 Apr. 1923): n.p. Leah Baird papers. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

Mahar, Karen Ward. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

“More About the Gallup Double-Feature Survey and Sundry Other Items.” *New York Times* (18 Aug. 1940): 108.

“Primrose Path.” Rev. *Variety* (9 Dec. 1925): 43.

Pryor, Thomas M. “The Shadow of the Law.” Rev. *Variety* (21 April 1926): 35.

“Spangles.” Rev. *Variety* (19 Jan. 1927): 18.

*Photoplay* (1915): n.p. Leah Baird papers. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

“When Husbands Deceive.” Rev. *Variety* (24 June 1922): 97.

## Archival Paper Collections:

Leah Baird papers. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library](#).

# Filmography

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## A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

### 1. Leah Baird as Actress

*The Wooing of Winifred*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1911) cas.: Leah Baird, Maurice Costello, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Adventure of the Italian Model*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke, sc.: B.R. Brookes (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Leah Baird, Maurice Costello, si, b&w. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*All for a Girl*. Dir.: Frederick A. Thomson, sc.: Wallace Reid (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Leah Baird, Dorothy Kelly, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*A Cure for Pokeritis*. Dir.: Lawrence Trimble (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: John Bunny, Flora Finch, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*A Leap Year Proposal*. Dir.: Albert W. Hale (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Leah Baird, Tefft Johnson, si, b&w. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#).

*Mrs. Carter's Necklace*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Florence Turner, Maurice Costello, Leah Baird, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Night Before Christmas*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Maurice Costello, Leah Baird, Helene Costello, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*The Old Silver Watch*. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Maurice Costello, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Red Barrier*. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Leah Baird, Harry T. Morey, si, b&w. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*The Sphinx/Mrs. Carter's Necklace*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke, sc.: George H. Plympton. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: Leah Baird, Florence Turner, si, b&w. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Stenographers Wanted*. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1912) cas.: John Bunny, Flora Finch, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*Bunny and the Bunny Hug/Bunny Dips Into Society*. Dir.: Wilfrid North. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: John Bunny, Earle Williams, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*Cutey and the Chorus Girls*. Dir.: James Young, sc.: Bertha Breuil (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: Leah Baird, Wally Van, Flora Finch, si, b&w. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*The Dawning*. Sc.: Leah Baird (Vitagraph Co. of America, US 1914) cas.: Leah Baird, Earle Williams, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*Ivanhoe*. Dir.: Herbert Brenon (IMP US 1913) cas.: Leah Baird, King Baggot, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

*The Locket/When She Was 20*. Dir.: Frederick A. Thomson (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: John Bunny, Flora Finch, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*Lord Browning and Cinderella*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke, sc.: Josephine W. Crawford (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: Clara Kimball Young, Leah Baird, Maurice Costello, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*My Lady of Idleness*. Dir.: William Humphrey, sc.: Eliza G. Harral. (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: Leah Baird, Dorothy Kelley, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*Red and White Roses*. Dir.: William Humphrey and Ralph Ince (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: William Humphrey, Julia Swayne Gordon, Leah Baird, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*A Soul in Bandage*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1913) cas.: Leah Baird, Earle Williams, si, b&w. Archive: [Cinema Museum \[GBC\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*Absinthe*. Dir.: Herbert Brenon (IMP US 1914) cas.: Leah Baird, King Baggot, si, b&w. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*The Man That Might Have Been*. Dir.: William Humphrey (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1914) cas.: Leah Baird, William Humphrey, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Man Who Knew*. Dir.: William Humphrey (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1914) cas.: Leah Baird, William Humphrey, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*Neptune's Daughter*. Dir.: Herbert Brenon (Universal Film Manufacturing Co. US 1914) cas.: Annette Kellerman, Leah Baird, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Upper Hand*. Dir.: William Humphrey (Vitagraph Co. of America US 1914) cas.: Leah Baird, Rex Hitchcock, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Gods Redeem*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke (Vitagraph Co. of America, US 1915) cas.: Leah Baird, Maurice Costello, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Romance of A Handkerchief*. Dir.: Van Dyke Brooke, sc.: William A. Tremayne (Vitagraph Co. of America, US 1915) cas.: Maurice Costello, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée \[FRB\]](#).

*One Law for Both*. Dir.: Ivan Abramson (Ivan Film Productions, Inc. US 1917) cas.: Rita Jolivet, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Cinema Museum \[GBC\]](#).

*Sins of Ambition*. Dir./sc.: Ivan Abramson (Ivan Film Productions, Inc. US 1917) cas.: James Morrison, Leah Baird, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Wolves of Kultur*. (Unidentified Chapters) Dir.: Joseph A. Golden. (Western Photoplays, Inc. US 1918) cas.: Leah Baird, Charles Hutchison, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

## **2. Leah Baird as Screenwriter**

*The Primrose Path*. Dir.: Harry O. Hoyt, sc.: Leah Baird (Arrow Pictures US 1925) cas.: Clara Bow, Wallace MacDonald, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*Devil's Island*. Dir.: Frank O'Connor, sc.: Leah Baird (Chadwick Pictures US 1926) cas.: Pauline Frederick, Marian Nixon, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*Spangles*. Dir.: Frank O'Connor, sc.: Leah Baird (Universal-Jewel US 1926) cas.: Marian Nixon, Pat O'Malley, Hobart Bosworth, si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Return of Boston Blackie*. Sc.: Leah Baird (US 1927) cas.: Corliss Palmer, Strongheart the Dog, si/sd, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

## **B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:**

### **1. Leah Baird as Actress**

*Adam and Eve*, 1912; *An Adamless Eden*, 1912; *The Black Sheep*, 1912; *Chumps*, 1912; *Counsel for the Defense*, 1912; *Days of Terror*, 1912; *The Extention Table*, 1912; *The Foster Child*, 1912; *The Gamblers*, 1912; *The Face or the Voice*, 1912; *The Miracle*, 1912; *The Nipper's Lullaby*, 1912; *The Reformation of Mary*, 1912; *The Spider's Web*, 1912; *Sue Simpkin's Ambition*, 1912; *Way of A Man with A Maid*, 1912; *Working for Hubby*, 1912; *The Anarchist*, 1913; *The Birthday Gift*, 1913; *The Child Stealers of Paris*, 1913; *The Diamond Mystery*, 1913; *The Heart of Mrs. Robins*, 1913; *Hearts of the First Empire*, 1913; *The House in Suburbia*, 1913; *Love or a Throne*, 1913; *Mr. and Mrs. Innocence Abroad*, 1913; *That College Life*, 1913; *There's Music in the Hair*, 1913; *Time Is Money*, 1913; *His House in Order*, 1913; *The Two Purses*, 1913; *Two Sets of Furs*, 1913; *The Vampire of the Desert*, 1913; *Across the Atlantic*, 1914; *An Affair for the Police*, 1914; *Fine Feathers Make Fine Birds*, 1914; *The Flaming Diagram*, 1914; *His Dominant Passion*, 1914; *His Last Chance*, 1914; *His Wedded Wife*, 1914; *Jim Webb, Senator*, 1914; *Love and A Lottery Ticket*, 1914; *An Old Rag Doll*, 1914; *On the Chess Board of Fate*, 1914; *Out of the Far East*, 1914; *The Price of Sacrilege*, 1914; *The Senator's Brother*, 1914; *The Silver Loving Cup*, 1914; *The Watch Dog of the Deep*, 1914; *When the World Was Silent*, 1914; *The Dawn of Understanding*, 1915; *Dorothy*, 1915; *The Eyes of Love*, 1915; *For Another's Crime*, 1915; *The Gods Redeem*, 1915; *Hearts to Let*, 1915; *The Millionaire's Hundred Dollar Bill*, 1915; *A Question of Right or Wrong*, 1915; *The Radium Thieves*, 1915; *The Return of Maurice Donnelly*, 1915; *The Ruling Power*, 1915; *Saints and Sinners*, 1915; *The Slightly Worn Gown*, 1915; *Tried for His Own Murder*, 1915; *The*

*Way of the Transgressor*, 1915; *When Lizzie Went to Sea*, 1915; *The Bond of Blood*, 1916; *A Caliph of the New Bagdad*, 1916; *The Harbor of Happiness*, 1916; *The Lights of New York*, 1916; *Love or an Empire*, 1916; *The People vs. John Doe*, 1916; *The Primal Instinct*, 1916; *So This Is Paris*, 1916; *The Voice Upstairs*, 1916; *Would You Forgive Her?* 1916; *The Blazing Secret*, 1917; *The Devil's Pay Day*, 1917; *The Doctor's Deception*, 1917; *The Eyes in the Dark*, 1917; *Lost in the Streets of Paris*, 1917; *Old Faithful*, 1917; *The Old Toymaker*, 1917; *A Sunset*, 1917; *A Woman of Clay*, 1917; *The Fringe of Society*, 1918; *Life or Honor?* 1918; *Moral Suicide*, 1918; *As a Man Thinks*, 1919; *The Echo of Youth*, 1919; *The Volcano*, 1919; *The Window Opposite*, 1919; *The Capitol*, 1920; *Cynthia-of-the-Minute*, 1920; *The Heart Line*, 1921; *The Bride's Confession*, 1921; *Fangs of the Wolf*, 1924; *The Law Demands*, 1924; *The Radio Flyer*, 1924; *King Harold*, 1927; *Should a Mason Tell?* 1927; *Their Second Honeymoon*, 1927.

## **2. Leah Baird as Screenwriter**

*The Moulding*, 1913; *Barriers Burned Away*, 1925.

## **3. Leah Baird as Screenwriter and Actress**

*A Humble Hero*, 1912; *A Woman*, 1912; *The Kiss of Retribution*, 1913; *The Stronger Sex*, 1913; *The Road of Many Turnings*, 1916.

## **4. Leah Baird as Screenwriter, Actress, Producer (Leah Baird Productions, Inc.)**

*The Bride's Confession*, 1921; *Don't Doubt Your Wife*, 1922; *When the Devil Drives*, 1922; *When Husbands Deceive*, 1922; *The Destroying Angel*, 1923; *Is Divorce a Failure?* 1923; *The Miracle Makers*, 1923; *The Unnamed Woman*, 1925.

## **5. Leah Baird as Screenwriter and Producer with Arthur Beck**

*The Shadow of the Law*, 1926.

# **Credit Report**

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Leah Baird's filmography was compiled using the AFI and FIAF catalogues, the Braff Papers, Denise Lowe's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Women in Early American Film* and the Spehr credit reports. A few inconsistencies remain. Spehr lists the 1910 film *Jean and the Waif* as a Baird film, however most sources agree that her first film was *Wooing Winnifred* in 1911. Many short films are not listed in the AFI catalogue, but can be found in the Braff Papers. Two films, *The Golden Hoard/Buried Alive* and *The Only Veteran in Town* (both 1913) are attributed to Baird in some online sources, but cannot be confirmed in any published text. The archived prints of *Red and White Roses* (Library of Congress) and *Neptune's Daughter* (MoMA) are incomplete.

# **Citation**

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-leah-baird/>>