

# The Drowsy Chaperone

## ***Who's Who of the 1920's?***

It was a time of social change. From the world of fashion to the world of politics, forces clashed to produce the most explosive decade of the century. It was the age of prohibition, it was the age of prosperity, and it was the age of downfall. So, as the Man in the Chair suggests, "Let's disappear for a while into the decadent world of the 1920's. When the champagne flowed while the caviar chilled and all the world was a party!" Check out some of the who's who of the 20's and learn more about the individuals who shaped this amazing decade.

### ***The Luminaries***

**Dorothy Rothschild Parker** was born in West End, New Jersey on August 22, 1893. She spent her career as an American theatre critic, satirical poet, short story writer and playwright. She is remembered as much for her sharp verbal exchanges and malicious wit as for the disenchanting stories and sketches in which she revealed her underlying pessimism. Starting her career as Vanity Fair's drama critic (1917-20) and continuing as the New Yorker's theater and book reviewer (1927-33), Parker enhanced her legend in the 1920s through membership in the Algonquin Hotel's famous Roundtable. Parker died of a heart attack in 1967. In her will, she bequeathed her estate to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. foundation. Following King's death, her estate was passed onto the NAACP.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** was born on Cathedral Hill in St. Paul, Minnesota to an upper-middle class Irish-Catholic family. Fitzgerald was named for his distant relative Francis Scott Key, but became commonly known as 'Scott'. The publication of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* on March 26, 1920 made the 24 year-old Fitzgerald an overnight sensation. One week later he married Zelda Sayre in New York. They embarked on an extravagant life as young celebrities. Fitzgerald endeavored to earn a solid literary reputation, but his playboy image prevented him from gaining proper assessment of his work. Scott's masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925. Fitzgerald made several excursions to Paris and the French Riviera, and became friends with many members of the American expatriate community, most notably Ernest Hemingway. In total, he finished four novels, left a fifth unfinished, and wrote dozens of short stories that focused on themes of youth, despair, and age. He died in 1940 after suffering from a heart attack.

### ***The Heroes***

**Charles Lindbergh** was born on February 4, 1902. He was an American pilot also known as "Lucky Lindy" and "The Lone Eagle". Lindbergh gained sudden international fame as the first pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. He flew from Roosevelt Airfield in Garden City, New York, to Paris on May 20 – 21, 1927 in 33.5 hours. His plane was a single-engine aircraft named *The Spirit of St. Louis*. The President of France bestowed him with the French Legion of Honor and, on his arrival back to the United States, a fleet of warships and aircraft escorted him to Washington, D.C., where President Calvin Coolidge awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross

on June 11, 1927. Lindbergh's son, Charles Augustus Lindbergh II, was abducted on March 1, 1932 from the Lindbergh home when he was only 20 months old. After a nationwide ten-week search and ransom negotiations with the kidnappers, an infant corpse, identified by Lindbergh as his son, was found on May 12, 1932 just 20 minutes from the Lindbergh's home.

**Amelia Earhart** was born on July 24, 1897 at her grandparents' home in Atchison, Kansas. Her flying career began in Los Angeles in 1921 when, at age 24, she bought her first airplane -- a Kinner Airstar. She became known as "Queen of the Air" by continually setting and breaking her own speed and distance records in competitive aviation events, as well as personal stunts promoted by her husband George Palmer Putnam. In 1937, as Earhart neared her 40th birthday, she was ready for a monumental, and final, challenge. She wanted to be the first woman to fly around the world. That year, she went to Miami to begin her destination. No one knows why, but she left behind important communication and navigation instruments. Some say it was to make room for additional fuel for the long flight. During the last leg of the trip, on July 2, 1937, Earhart communicated with a nearby Coast Guard ship. Soon after, she was never heard from again.

**George Herman Ruth, Jr.** (Babe Ruth) was born on February 6, 1895. He was also known as "The Great Bambino", "The Sultan of Swat", and "The Colossus of Clout." An American Major League baseball player, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest players in baseball history. In 1920, Red Sox owner Harry Frazee sold Ruth to the New York Yankees. The transaction spawned what is now known as "The Curse of the Bambino." Over his next 15 seasons in New York, Ruth led the league or placed in the top ten in batting average, slugging percentage, runs, total bases, home runs, RBI's, and walks. Ruth hit 59 home runs in 1921 and then beat his own single season home run record in 1927 with 60. It stood as the single season home run record for 34 years. With Ruth on the team, the Yankees won seven American League Pennants and four World Series titles. In 1936, Ruth became one of the first five players elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

### ***The Entertainers***

**Charlie Chaplin** was born on April 16, 1889. During the 1920's, Chaplin became one of the most well-known performers, as well as a notable director and musician. He is considered to be one of the finest mimes and clowns ever caught on film, and has greatly influenced performers in this field. In 1919, Chaplin co-founded the United Artists film distribution, as he was seeking to escape the growing power of film distributors and financiers in the developing Hollywood studio system. This move, along with achieving complete control of the film production through his studio, assured Chaplin's independence as a filmmaker. He served on the board of UA until the early 1950s. All of Chaplin's United Artists pictures were feature length films, beginning with *A Woman of Paris* (1923), which was followed by the classic *The Gold Rush* (1925), and *The Circus* (1928).

**Clara Bow**, considered to be THE flapper and silent movie actress of the 1920's, was born and raised in poverty in Brooklyn, New York, on July 29, 1905. Her family was plagued with violence; Clara's mother tried to slit her throat when she attempted to enter the film industry. In 1920, she won a photo beauty contest which launched her movie career that would eventually result in 58 films, from 1922 to 1933. Nicknamed the "It Girl" at the height of her popularity, she received over 45,000 fan letters a month. She was also probably the most overworked and underpaid star in the industry. With the coming of sound, which did not lend itself to her thick Brooklyn accent, her popularity waned. Clara was also involved in several court battles ranging from unpaid taxes to being in divorce court for "stealing" women's husbands. After the court trials, she made a couple of attempts to get back in the public eye. Haunted by a weight problem and mental imbalance, she never entered show business again. Clara was confined to a sanitarium from time to time and was not allowed access to her sons whom she very much adored. She died of a heart attack in West Los Angeles on September 26, 1965.

**Louis Armstrong** was born into a poor family in New Orleans, Louisiana. He first learned to play the cornet (his first of which was bought with money loaned to him by his neighbors, the

Karnofskys, a Russian-Jewish immigrant family) in the band of the New Orleans Home for Colored Waifs. To express gratitude towards the Karnofskys, Armstrong wore a Star of David pendant for the rest of his life. On March 19, 1918, Louis married Daisy Parker, a prostitute from Gretna, Louisiana. As with his trumpet playing, Armstrong's vocal abilities served as a foundation for the art of jazz vocal interpretation. The uniquely gritty quality of his voice became a musical archetype that continues to be imitated and impersonated. His scat singing style was enriched by his matchless experience as a trumpet soloist, and his resonant, lower-register tone and bubbling cadences on singles such as "Lazy River," exerted a huge influence on younger white singers such as Bing Crosby. Armstrong had many hit records including "Stardust", "What a Wonderful World", "When The Saints Go Marching In", "Dream a Little Dream of Me", "Ain't Misbehavin'", and "Stompin' at the Savoy". Louis Armstrong died of a heart attack on July 6, 1971 at age 69.

**Bessie Smith** was the most popular and successful female blues singer of the 1920s, and a strong influence on future generations of female vocalists including Billie Holiday, Mahalia Jackson, and Janis Joplin. As a way of earning money for her impoverished family, Bessie and her brother Andrew became street performers as singer/guitarist duo in Tennessee. By 1920, she gained a strong reputation in the South and along the Eastern Seaboard. Scoring a big hit with her first release, a coupling of "Gulf Coast Blues" and "Down Hearted Blues," Bessie's career blossomed. She soon became a headliner on the black Theater Owners Booking Association theater circuit and was its top entertainer in the 1920's. She made over 160 recordings for Columbia Records, often accompanied by the finest musicians of the day, most notably Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, Joe Smith, Charlie Green, and Fletcher Henderson. In 1937, Smith died as a result of injuries from a car accident.