

Female Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson Performers  
The Original Baker Street Babes  
by  
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Part One

News Bulletin....Lucy Liu is playing Dr. Watson in the new CBS series "Elementary".

Why is this news, other women have played Dr. Watson before. There was even a Dr. Joan Watson before Lucy Liu's Dr. Joan Watson. Women have even played Holmes. Women have directed Holmes films, penned his radio shows, and have been influential in bringing Holmes to stage. I can't tell you all inclusive for sure who these women were, but I'll at least enlighten you to those I'm aware of.

**Alice Guy** (1873 - 1968) was the first female film maker. Her Sherlock



Holmes connection is that in 1913 she directed Fraunie Fraunholz, as Burstup Holmes, in a series of silent film shorts, which included "The Case of the Missing Girl", "The Mystery of the Lost Cat", "Burstup Holmes' Murder Case", and of course "Burstup Holmes". Alice Guy-Blaché's career of 24 years of directing, writing and producing films is the longest career of any of the cinema pioneers. From 1896 to 1920, Guy directed over 1,000 films, some 350 of which survive, and 22 of

which are feature-length films. Guy was and still is the only woman to ever manage and own her own studio, The Solax Company. Despite these accomplishments, she is rarely, if ever, mentioned among her peers in the history of cinema, and most professionals in the industry are completely unaware of her work.<sup>1</sup>

**Adrienne Herndon** (1869 -1910), although not a Holmes performer, she did serve a major part in bringing a serious Holmes production to the Afro-American community at the turn of the century. Adrienne was



an important African American woman in Atlanta, Georgia. She married Alonzo Herndon, who was born a slave, and became the first black millionaire in Atlanta. Denied being the actress she wanted to be by racism, "she brought Shakespeare to the South, presenting the University's first Shakespearean production; Herndon directed the Atlanta University's theater offerings and gave Atlanta's black community access to serious drama with professional stage sets and costumes. Moreover, she opened the university community to the American theater world, hosting the William Gillette Theater Company of New York in a performance of Sherlock Holmes in the Adventure of the Second Stain. She engaged others at the University in her work W. E. B. Du Bois, her colleague on the faculty, served as the stage manager for the Gillette production."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice\\_Guy-Blaché](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Guy-Blaché)

<sup>2</sup> [www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/adrienne-herndon-actress-and-designer](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/adrienne-herndon-actress-and-designer)

The Silent Film Era of the early 1900's had Sherlock Holmes-related actresses a-plenty. The earliest I am aware of was Florence Turner.

**Florence Turner** (1885 - 1946), was often referred to as 'The Vitagraph Girl', due to her many roles for Vitagraph Film Company. Yes, the Vitagraph Film Company which gave us the "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (aka "Held for Ransom") (1905), starring G.M. 'Broncho Billy' Anderson as Sherlock Holmes.<sup>3</sup> Coincidentally, Miss Turner was oft paired in films with Maurice Costello, who is frequently cited mistakenly as the actor playing Holmes in that film of 1905. In 1908 Florence Turner is credited as starring in the film "Miss Sherlock Holmes". Two references I found to that film describe it thus:



"Miss Sherlock Holmes" - "An interesting detective story in which the little girl plays the part of Sherlock Holmes and succeeds in convincing her father that she ought to marry the man she loves, and she does it in a unique way. Perhaps the real criminal had a chance to figure out what he gained before he was released from the vault. The photography and filming are good and the film works smoothly."<sup>4</sup>

"Miss Sherlock Holmes" (Edison Mfg. Co.) Length 800 feet - Jack Rose & Jim Dalton are both employed in the same broker's office, are

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<sup>3</sup> <http://bakerstreetbabes.com/guest-article-the-case-of-the-vitagraph-holmes-or-cowboy-in-a-deerstalker-by-howard-ostrom/>

<sup>4</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine July - Dec 1908 Page 484 - Comments on Film Subject

both in love with daughter. Nell favors Jack. Learning that Dalton is planning mischief, Nell disguises as a boy and gets employed in same office. Long story short, Dalton speculates loses and tries to frame Jack. Nell's Sherlock Holmes' detective work saves the day, Jack is exonerated, and Nell's Dad agrees she can marry Jack. Florence Turner, as Nell.<sup>5</sup>

**Elsie Albert** (1888 - 1981) made a series of detective films for Yankee Film Company in 1910-1911, which dubbed her "The Yankee Girl Detective". In the first film of the series, Nell Pierce's father, Nat Pierce, a Sherlock Holmes type of crime investigator, gets killed. Nell, played by Elsie Albert, with the greatest of Holmesian skills takes over the case and solves the crime from some very slim pieces of evidence. Here are some of the story lines I've found for this series of films:



"The Monogrammed Cigarette" - (Yankee) 1910 - "The cigarette has been credited with being the cause of a great many crimes. ....Nat Pierce, a Sherlock Holmes type of crime investigator, was retained by Sloan to ferret out the theft, there being important reasons why Sloan did not desire publicity, and therefore kept the loss of the jewels from the police." Long story - short - Nat Pierce ends up getting killed, his daughter, Nell Pierce, "The Yankee Girl Detective", with only a cigarette

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<sup>5</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine July - Dec 1908 Page 458 - Stories of the Films

butt and only halve-obliterated monogram, and the use of disguises, avenges her father's death and solves the Waldo jewel theft case.<sup>6</sup>

"The Cat Came Back" - (Atlas) - Nell Pierce the girl detective once again solves a case of a missing jeweled bracelet, by saving a cat tossed in a bag in a pond by a tramp, and the cat had the bracelet around it's neck. "Nell was a sharp shrewd and well read young miss and had a literary acquaintance with every detective from Nick Carter to Sherlock Holmes."<sup>7</sup>

"The Case of the Missing Heir" - (Yankee) - Nov. 14, 1910 - "Tells a story more hair-raising than the exploits of Sherlock Holmes, a plot more intensely interesting than Arsine Lupin's most daring achievement." Another Nell Pierce "The Yankee Girl Detective" story.<sup>8</sup>

"The Counting House Mystery" (Yankee) - 'Yes the money disappeared while every member of the counting room was present. ... Nell Pierce did not accept the popular verdict, however, but unerringly hit upon a solution of the problem, which proved her wonderful power of deduction. ....Nell "The Yankee Girl Detective" finally brought her man to bay, and saved an innocent boy from prison...."<sup>9</sup>

Due to copyrights, the character name was changed from Sherlock Holmes to Nell Pierce, but Elsie Albert was, without a doubt, a female Sherlock Holmes.

**Helen Anderson** played Sherlock Holmes Jr., in a 1911 film aptly named "Sherlock Holmes Jr." If you read this plot summary from a movie magazine, you would guess a boy had played the part, but no it was child actress Helen Anderson.

"Sherlock Holmes, Jr." - (Rex) - "Little Sherlock Holmes, Jr., reads the doughty doings of his hero-god, and at once determines to become a detective himself. Providence at once favors him by giving him a

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<sup>6</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine July - Dec 1910 Page 832 - Independent Film Stories

<sup>7</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine July - Dec 1910 Page 893 - Independent Film Stories

<sup>8</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine July - Dec 1910 Page 1901 - Yankee Film Co. Ad

<sup>9</sup> "The Moving Picture World " Jan. - July, 1911 Page 206 - Independent Film Stories

mystery to solve. His father has noticed that in some weird, unaccountable fashion the whiskey in the decanter is ever vanishing, and father swears he drink it as fast as all that. So Sherlock Holmes, Jr. assigns himself the task of discovering who tampers with his father's soothing beverage. Concealed behind a table, he sees Bridget, the cook, come in and at once proceed to get on the outside of a man's size pull on the flask. At once the embryo detective makes his report to his father, with the astounding solution of the mystery. The father decides to use Dr. Brown's Sure Cure for the Liquor Habit on the cook, and obtains a bottle of the fluid. This he puts in the room near the whiskey, intending to pour some in the bottle a little later. Sherlock



Holmes, Jr., discovers the bottle and follows the 'Do it Now' maxim. There are friends visiting the house at the time, who are sitting on the lawn with his parents, awaiting tea, which the maid is going to bring them. Sherlock Holmes, Jr. pours a goodly amount of the fluid into the tea. One of the results of taking the liquid is falling into a deep slumber, and in a few moments the host, the hostess, and the guests are fast asleep. Then happen's along Bridget's beau, the policeman, for whose particular benefit Bridget essays to go inside and procure a glass of 'buttermilk.' After imbibing, the policeman forgets all about everything except that he is awful drowsy, and the next thing, he, too, is asleep. It must have been contagious - or could Bridget not have forgotten herself? - but at any rate, she, too, wanders off into the Land of Nod. Then Sherlock dons the policeman's clothes and club, and marches through the house, monarch of all he surveys. At this opportune moment, two burglars arrive at the scene, and seeking the sleepers, think they have been transferred to Burglar's Paradise. They sneak upstairs, fill their bags with silverware and then fall for the whiskey on the table, little Sherlock watching eagerly. At last they get

themselves off, followed by the creator of all the mischief, but they have not gone far when they are overcome by the liquor cure and fall in their tracks to sleep. Little Sherlock now takes the manacles from the policeman's coat pocket, and ties both legs of the burglars together. In due time the household awakes, they seek the boy, and eventually find him covering the two burglars, prisoners of Sherlock Holmes, Jr."<sup>10</sup>

**Marie Elaine** (1902 - 1981) played Edna Robinson, a juvenile Sherlock Holmes, in "A Twenty-Nine Cent Robbery" (1910) for Thanhouser Film Co. It was Marie's very first role and she had the starring role.



Thanhouser Notes column - "Tiny Marie Eline, who made a hit as the juvenile Sherlock Holmes in "A 29-Cent Robbery" (1910)...."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 9 July - Sep. 1911 page 64 - Independent Film Stories

<sup>11</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 6 Jan. - June 1910 pg. 644



**Mae Marsh** (1884 - 1968) played Jane Ridgeway, described as “a



captivating little Sherlock Holmes...”<sup>12</sup>, in Goldwyn’s “The Face in The Dark” (1918)

End Part One

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<sup>12</sup> “Motion Picture Magazine”, Vol. 15.2-16 Mar - Jul. 1918 pg.93