

# Baby Doe Tabor

## Colorado's Silver Queen

### FABULOUS FAME AND FORTUNE

Elizabeth “Baby Doe” Tabor—wife of Colorado’s premier “Silver King,” Horace A.W. Tabor—enjoyed spectacular fame for her sparkling beauty. To the people who accepted her outgoing personality, Baby Doe was both lovely and admirable. To many members of Denver’s social elite, however, she was shocking, showy, and scandalous. As her marriage to Horace Tabor suggested, not just anyone dripping with diamonds and furs could join Denver’s exclusive high society. People all over the country called Elizabeth Tabor many names, some insulting and others kind. The wildly ambitious Baby Doe was hailed as the “Silver Queen of the West,” yet forever devoted to her husband H.A.W. Tabor, Denver’s “Grand Old Man.”



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### THE AMERICAN DREAM



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Baby Doe Tabor was not always a Tabor. She was born and baptized Elizabeth Bonduel McCourt to Irish Catholic parents in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1854. Her years in the frontier

boomtown of Oshkosh gave her the beginnings of a dream she would live to see come true.

The “American Dream” of going from rags to riches with hard work, perseverance, and a little luck was shared by many, especially miners. The rise from a small town shopkeeper’s daughter to wife of a wealthy silver mine owner was Baby Doe’s adventure of pulling herself up by the bootstraps. Ambition, ruthless dedication, a strong will to succeed, and perfect timing were necessary in Baby Doe’s climb to the top. Young men during the late nineteenth century were praised for having such traits, but young women? In the 1800s, it was rare for a young woman to strive for wealth and fame in a society run by men. Therefore, it was impossible for Baby Doe to accomplish the American Dream by herself.

## THE BELLE OF CENTRAL CITY

After marrying Harvey Doe of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the young couple moved to Central City, Colorado in 1877 to try their luck at gold mining. While in Central City, Elizabeth McCourt Doe acquired the name “Baby Doe.” Since the nickname implied beauty and charm, she grew to like it, and used it ever since. Meanwhile, Harvey fell into debt, their Fourth of July Mine paid less than hoped, and their three-year marriage started to falter. The future of the

marriage and mine operation started to grow bleak; Baby Doe needed more. Baby Doe sued for divorce on the grounds of “nonsupport.” Harvey’s hard drinking and lack of ambition did not match with Baby Doe’s high aspirations.

Was it fate? Or was it sheer determination that brought Baby Doe into the life of lieutenant governor Horace Austin Warner Tabor? The belle of Central City was about to become the wife of Colorado’s Silver King.

## TURBULENCE AT THE TOP

Baby Doe Tabor’s fame lies mostly in her dazzling beauty. Admirers wove poetry about her petal-soft complexion, lovely strawberry-blond curls, deep blue eyes, and sparkling personality. Baby Doe’s friends recognized her inner charms as well. Her beauty added to her sense of humor, sharp wit, and outgoing personality.

To the prim and proper dames of Capitol Hill’s wealthy elite, however, she was a social outcast. Once the Tabors were married in Washington D.C., the people of Denver inflated horrible rumors and gossip about Baby Doe’s “shameless” and “scandalous” past in Central City. The people who refused to accept her as one of their own (the wives of Denver’s richest men), thought H.A.W. Tabor and Baby Doe were socially improper.

After all, they *were* twenty-six years apart in age. This mathematical fact did nothing to wilt their blossoming marriage. In fact the Tabors shared a loving home life over the next ten years. The main obstacle in Baby Doe’s climb to the top ranks of Denver’s high society was the bitter aftershock of Horace Tabor’s divorce from his first wife, Augusta.



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## A DENVER SCANDAL

Long before Horace met Baby Doe, Horace and Augusta had built the foundations of the Tabor fortune. Horace was the risk-taker, the dreamer of big dreams, and the luckiest man in the silver mining business. In contrast, Augusta was the one who refused to let extravagant spending shatter her proper, simple lifestyle. It is said Augusta was a dour, “straight-laced” old matron who began to doubt Horace Tabor’s wild business investments. She questioned his grand aspirations for someday becoming Senator (which he finally did accomplish, but only for a month). If Augusta Tabor did not care for his enormous spending sprees and generous charity, his later wife (Baby Doe) did. Horace and Augusta’s divorce was considered improper, full of controversy, and out of the ordinary. Baby Doe shared Horace Tabor’s grand plans for the city of Denver, and beyond. Together, the Silver King and his Queen used his seemingly endless river of wealth to support charity projects, hold lavish parties, and to live in style.

## SILVER STORMS IN A GILDED AGE

For Horace and Baby Doe Tabor, the years following their marriage were a constant whirlwind. The Tabor mines were yielding millions of dollars in silver, especially the Chrysolite and Matchless Mines. The Tabors enjoyed expensive parties, distant travels, and lavish nights at the newly built Tabor Grand Opera house. And campaigns for political office (not to mention jewelry, furs, and gowns of the finest silk and lace for Baby Doe and their two young daughters) also occupied much of Tabor’s time and money. The Tabor fortune grew by the day and being too vast to count, allowed the Tabors to spend extravagantly. The generous H.A.W. Tabor opened his wallet for investments in more silver mines, new companies that



needed capital (that is, a lot of ready cash), and some risky deals that did not land a dime in profits. The ten golden years between 1883 and 1893 were filled with endless possibility for Horace and Baby Doe Tabor. With Baby Doe on his arm, H.A.W. Tabor’s plans to turn Denver into the “Paris of the West” seemed within reach. Baby Doe’s dreams matched her husband’s—an adventure of grand living and great civic accomplishments.

But like all good things, it came to an end all too soon.

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## THE SILVER EMPIRE COLLAPSES

The Baby Doe Tabor story is one of the greatest fairytale success stories Colorado History. The year 1893, however, marks the time when the fairytale turned into a nightmare. The Silver Crash of 1893 occurred when the United States Treasury lowered the value of silver. This changed everything. Because Tabor's wealth was anchored in silver mining interests, his holdings lost their worth and eventually crumbled beneath his feet. Baby Doe and Horace, along with their young daughters Elizabeth "Lilly" and Rose Mary "Silver Dollar" moved out of their Capitol Hill mansion and into a rented cottage. Baby Doe remained optimistic

about regaining Tabor's lost fortune, but it never panned out. Many people who disliked Baby Doe predicted that she would divorce Tabor if he ever lost his fortune.

It turned out, however, that Baby Doe's loyal devotion to her husband Horace went beyond fame and riches. Their loving home life carried the Tabor family through hard times until Horace Tabor died in 1899. Misery and rejection followed Baby Doe through decades of unsuccessful mining operations at the Matchless, where she spent the last days until her passing in 1935.

## BABY DOE'S LEGACY



Since she was a girl, Baby Doe Tabor had prepared herself to ride the powerful and dangerous waves of fame and fortune. The level of success she attained makes her a Colorado pioneer in her own spectacular way. Her desire to move in wealthy circles combined with her vivacious personality give Baby Doe a status all her own. Elizabeth "Baby Doe" Tabor made her mark on Colorado History as the bold girl from Oshkosh who ignored conventional Victorian attitudes of feminine modesty. How

Baby Doe made her dreams come true may have irked Denver's high society, but today she is celebrated for being an individualist—and a dreamer of the great American Dream.

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