

**LYDIE MILLER  
ROBERTS  
MARLAND  
1900-1987**



**GRAND  
DAME  
OF  
PONCA CITY**

In true Great Gatsby fashion, her life read like an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, revealing the lifestyle of American upper crust society in the early part of the 20th century. The rags-to-riches story of Lydie Marland continues to fascinate.

Lydie Miller Roberts was born in Flourtown, Pennsylvania in April 1900. Her parents gave 16-year-old Lydie and 19-year-old George to Margaret's sister and her husband E. W. Marland to adopt because they were childless and better off financially. The family lived in a 22-room home with formal, terraced gardens at 10<sup>th</sup> and Grand near downtown Ponca City.

E. W. always wanted to be a financial titan, and live in a big castle so, in 1925, construction began on an Italianate mansion – Palace on the Prairie – at a cost of \$5.5 million. He commissioned three statues, of Lydie, George, and E. W. Virginia was excluded because she had been cancer-stricken since 1920 and was isolated from her family. The statues were placed in the Garden.

After Virginia died in June 1926 at age 50 and the Mansion was completed, Marland took Lydie back to Pennsylvania, where he had her adoption annulled and they married in July 1928; she was 28, he was 54. While on a two-month Canadian-train honeymoon, Marland was unaware his oil empire was in a hostile takeover by New York banker J. P. Morgan, Jr.

By 1928, Marland Oil became Continental Oil but Marland's red triangle logo remained. Eighteen months after moving into the mansion, the Marlands couldn't afford the upkeep so they moved into a cottage on the grounds. The painfully-shy Lydie was thrust into politics in 1932 when Marland became a U. S. Congressman and Governor of Oklahoma in 1934. Returning home in 1941, they were forced to sell the Mansion to an order of monks for \$66,000. Marland died six months later, leaving Lydie a widow at 41.

In 1950, Lydie ordered Glen Gilchrist to destroy her statue. Three years later, she packed her 1948 green Studebaker with some paintings and tapestries, personal belongings, and \$10,000 in cash and disappeared into anonymity. For the next 22 years, people wondered what happened to Lydie, thanks to Washington Post and the Saturday Evening Post articles. Locals assumed she was still alive because each year the taxes were always paid on the Cottage.

In 1975, she finally responded to a letter from childhood friend and Ponca City lawyer C.D. Northcutt, who convinced her to return. Her worn appearance shocked him. When he told her the Mansion was about to change hands again, Lydie wrote a letter in support. Voters passed a two-year sales tax and bought the estate and grounds, with Conoco matching the amount raised. Lydie remained in her Cottage until she died in July 1987 at age 87.

The next month, Gilchrist's family informed the Mansion curators that Lydie's statue had not been completely destroyed. After a long search, it was located. The face, hands, and the upper body had been shattered, but the bottom half was intact. Using old photographs for accuracy, the Pryse Monument Company restored the statue, which was placed in the lobby next to George's.

Lydie would be astounded by the continued interest in her life, since she didn't think herself especially interesting. Marland would also be thrilled to see the saga of the House of Marland live on.