



Photo: Still from *The Psychic Phenomenon*, Source Unknown

Rose Melville

Terre Haute, Vigo County

January 30, 1867 – October 8, 1946

Rose Smock was born on January 30, 1873, in Terre Haute, Indiana. Her three sisters, Josephine, Ida, and Maud, had adopted stage names and founded “The Melville Sisters Stock Company” while Rosa was attending Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and Franklin College. In 1889, while she was visiting her sisters, she replaced an actor who had become ill at the age of 16. She later joined the company as “Rose Melville.”

After two of her sisters married and started another theater company in California, Rose and her sister, Ida, remained together touring in a Vaudeville company and performing *Zeb*, a comedy about a southern Indiana hillbilly family, written by her sister’s husband. She played “Sis Hopkins,” an unsophisticated teenager. After her sister returned to Terre Haute to care for their ailing father, Rose was given the rights to the comedy and to the characters. In 1900, a three-act musical comedy, *Sis Hopkins*, was written and became a Broadway hit.

In 1916, she made the transition to the silent screen and portrayed Sis Hopkins in *She Came, She Saw, She Conquered* and in at least 19 “shorts.” The popularity of the Sis Hopkins character inspired humor magazines and a novel based on the play. *Motion Picture* magazine featured the character on its May 1916 cover; and the Sis Hopkins doll, with wired braided pigtails, became a collectible. The following year she retired, having appeared in the same role more than 5,000 times before more than five million people, a record still unmatched today.

Rose died on October 8, 1946, at age 79.

- For more information about Rose Melville, go to: <http://visions.indstate.edu:8888/cdm/ref/collection/vchs/id/561>.
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women’s History Month



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