

JOHN MARION, FRONTIER EDITOR

By Claudette Simpson

John H. Marion made a lasting name for himself with his skills editing frontier newspapers in Territorial Arizona and especially for his flamboyant use of the English Language. He wielded words with force as he praised friends, heaped contempt on enemies, and entertained readers with wit and humor. In print his voice had great range. In person, he has been described as a lonely man who talked in a monotone.¹

Born in Louisiana in about 1835, Marion at age 16 left home for the California goldfields. To support himself he worked as a printer at the mining camp of Oroville and then at Marysville.² He picked up experience in the printing trade as he went along. After two years he returned to the South and worked for the St Louis Republican where he learned printer's cases and some journalistic technique. At age twenty he traveled back to California where he joined a party of men to explore Arizona.³

As Marion considered exploring central Arizona, it wasn't visions of newspapering that lured him—it was visions of prospecting for gold in the Big Bug Mining District. He and about fifty others left San Francisco on the ship Hidalgo to sail to the mouth of the Colorado River. There they boarded the steamboat Cocopah for Arizona City and Fort Yuma. Most of the party turned around at that point to return to California but Marion and three others made their way up the Gila River to its confluence with the Hassayampa. From Wickenburg, Marion and companions made it to the high country around Prescott, which was then no more than a camp.⁴

There is no evidence he struck it rich but he must have panned enough gold to stay in the area. In 1866, as treasurer of Yavapai County, he ran an ad in the *Arizona Miner* asking delinquent taxpayers to pay their taxes. Next year he paid for an ad touting his services as an auctioneer. Also in 1867, he and some other investors bought the *Miner*. Eight

months later, he became Prescott's postmaster. And, as though he wasn't busy enough, he also ran livestock on a ranch in the area that probably financed his other undertakings.⁵

In the beginning of both Prescott and its newspapers, Richard McCormick represented journalism. He was also the first secretary of the territory having come with the governor's party to set up a new territorial capital in the midst of mining activity. Along the way, he had picked up a well-worn press in Santa Fe.⁶ Even as the group camped at what would become Fort Whipple, he unlimbered the press and published the first issue of the *Miner* in March 1864.⁷ His office, print shop, and the government soon were settled in Prescott in a one-room log hut on Granite Street.⁸

Much happened in the next three years. McCormick moved up from secretary to territorial governor. He used his newspaper to print news and official acts of the territorial legislature. He also printed pamphlets ordered by the government. For a small newspaper, it seemed to be a guaranteed money-maker because of the government printing. Governor McCormick sold his Prescott newspaper to Marion in 1867, but when the Legislature moved the territorial capital to Tucson McCormick took the public printing with him.⁹

Perhaps Marion felt betrayed. He thought McCormick had removed the capital to southern Arizona by fraud and treachery. Even so,

Marion hunkered down to make his little newspaper viable. When he took it over, the paper had a circulation of 75 readers. Cost of a subscription was \$6.50 payable in advance. There were 16 columns of advertising, but only half of one column was paid for.¹⁰ In his first issue, Marion wrote that he would advocate the ancient and time-honored principles of the grand, liberty-defending Democratic party. Beyond politics, Marion intended to promote the resources of the territory, including mineral, agricultural and pastoral aspects.¹¹ He promised that, in the discussion of men and measures, to be “temperate, candid and just.”¹² That last part—temperate, candid, and just—went by the wayside within months.

He attacked McCormick as “his littleness” who, he said, was filled with “soft soap and flunkeyism.”¹³

Marion had more intemperate words for Negroes and Indians. In an 1872 issue, he began using a masthead that declared the paper as the “Organ of the White People of Arizona.”¹⁴ But his slant was evident even earlier. Referring to Radical Reconstruction policy in the South, he wrote: “Had we a few hundred niggers and a Ku Klux Klan in Arizona, Government would send lots of troops here, and Lo the poor Indian would get warmed up.”¹⁵

In general, scholars call Marion a bigot. A graduate student who wrote a paper for a western history seminar at the University of Arizona, seemed to disagree but with tongue

in cheek: “No bigot, he [Marion] gave wide publication to his belief that some Indians could be allied to the whites by treating them ‘squarely and honestly.’ Understanding Indian mistrust after treachery, he was constrained to ‘do justice to them by stating why they (the Apaches) are the worst on the continent.” Marion, she says, “simply saw that Arizona would not fulfill its potential until settlers came, and that settlers would not come to be killed, tortured, ravaged or burned out by the Indians. He nonetheless vigorously opposed a policy based on a misconception that the Indian was tractable.”¹⁶

In 1871 Marion published a petition to the President of the United States, hoping to show how hard and obstinate Indians really

were. In the petition he listed the names of 301 persons killed by Indians since establishment of the territory. He named the site and circumstances of each death and felt those in Washington were out of touch with those in the territories.¹⁷

In an editorial published in 1870 when word arrived of President Grant’s Indian Peace Policy, he wrote (in a style so typical that it is worth quoting in full):

“Congress—that most unfeeling, hypocritical assemblage of stall-fed cormorants—still sticks to its motto of ‘millions for the protection of Negroes, but not one cent more than the inadequate amount now paid out, from year to year, for the protection of white citi-



John and Flora Banghart Marion

zens of Territories,' or to aid in the development of these Territories. We of Arizona, have asked for better mail facilities, for a regiment or two more of troops, and for a small sum of money to be expended in building a wagon road from New Mexico to connect with other roads in the Territory, but instead of giving us better protection from Indians, troops have been withdrawn, and none have yet arrived to fill their places. Indeed peace men will be sent out among the peaceable Indians, re-ignite hell's passion in their bosoms, back them up in committing crime, and then screen the wretches from punishment."

He focused his ire on Vincent Colyer, the federal agent who was trying to implement the Peace Policy and protect the interests of the Apaches. Marion that wrote Colyer was a "cold-blooded scoundrel, a red-handed assassin and. . .we ought to dump the old devil in a mine shaft and pile rocks on him."¹⁸

Not all of Marion's prose was raucous. When cupid struck, after living ten years in Prescott, he elevated his emotion to the royal "we" in writing about his intended bride, Flora Banghart: "During all these long years we were not strictly happy; no, indeed. That something which the God of Nature has planted in every man's bosom made us yearn for a partner, a woman, if you please, 'God's best gift to man.' . . . With her we hope to glide down life's rugged pathway in a pleasant way."¹⁹ His glide down life's pathway ended abruptly ten years later when Flora ran off with Marion's good friend, Charles B. Rush, territorial district attorney.

In an editorial Marion scolded his former friend who not only ran away with Flora, leaving her two children behind, but deserted his own wife and two children. "For the semblance of a man who paraded his virtue before the community," wrote Marion, "while plotting the destruction of two families, we cannot find words in our vocabulary to express

our condemnation. Judas Iscariot or Benedict Arnold are models of human virtue when compared to this nefarious wretch." He concluded, "A man so lost to all honor and manly principals as Chas. B. Rush has shown himself within the past week, should have the brand of Cain stamped upon his forehead, and should be shunned alike by respectability and the slums of society as a creature too base, too low and entirely too contemptible for their notice."²⁰ John Marion divorced Flora on March 29, 1887, on grounds of desertion.²¹

Marion's editorial career spanned from 1867 to 1891. The flow of his thoughts and words appear seamless in hindsight. But they were delivered in different newspapers. He gave up the *Miner* in 1877, turning it over to Charles Beach. Sometimes he did other things and sometimes he edited other papers including the *Enterprise*, the *Arizonian*, and the *Democrat*.²² In 1882, he founded his legacy—the *Courier* of Prescott that is still being published today. He wrote his salutatory in the *Courier* on January 20, 1882: "For the fourth time, necessity has forced me before the people of Arizona as editor."²³ The *Courier* was a daily newspaper, unusual amongst the weeklies published in the territory.

Mary Huntington Abbott says, "The next years were those of his greatest public service to the people of Prescott and the Territory." He apparently was influential, for nearly everything he advocated came about: a waterworks and a good hotel for Prescott, a railroad for Central Arizona and recognition for the pioneers. He also made earnest pleas for range conservation and he battled for twenty years on behalf of the Democratic Party. Abbott concludes, "In no guise was John Marion more attractive than as a free lance in the cause of the public weal."

Editing the *Courier* not only brought Marion more influence, it also brought another woman into his life. This was announced, not in the *Courier* pages, but in the *Journal*

Miner: “J. H. Marion and his two sons left at 1 o’clock this afternoon, by private conveyance, for Williamson Valley. The former expects to return tomorrow with a wife, and the boys with a new mother. The lady in connection with the affair is Miss Ida Jones, a former typo [typographer] in the *Courier* office. The ceremony which will unite them as man and wife will take place at the residence of S. P. Behan this evening.”²⁴

The newspaper clipping from the *Courier* does not identify the writer but presumably was Marion who wrote: “Ida Jones, a long time compositor in the *Courier* office is a handsome and stylish lady, endowed with many noble qualities of head and heart.” The clipping is dated 1888; a year after Marion divorced his first wife.

The years passed but still it was a jolt to friends and foe alike when Marion suddenly died. The account of his death from an 1891 newspaper clipping, said he died “a few minutes after 7 a.m. after carrying a bucketful of water from an adjoining well. He was talking with members of household when he suddenly fell from steps at rear of house.” The article said it was probably heart disease that caused the death.

One paper reported, “The flag on the court house, as well as those on a number of private buildings, were placed at half-staff on account of the death of one of Arizona’s earliest pioneers.” Marion was said to be “between fifty and sixty years of age. . . . He leaves a “young wife and three children . . . to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband and kind father.”²⁵ A clip from the *Prescott Morning Courier* (Wednesday, July 29, 1891) adds: “The last sad funeral rites over the remains of Arizona’s dead editor, pioneer, and best friend, John H. Marion, were performed yesterday morning. The funeral procession was the largest ever seen in Northern Arizona: all business houses closed, private residences

were locked up and deserted as all turned out to honor the illustrious dead.”

Marion left his wife an estate valued at \$11,279, according to the probate record, which included cash on hand, the materials and stock in the *Courier*, accounts, homestead, household effects, a ranch on lower Granite Creek and 500 shares in Tiger Mine stock.²⁶

People did not soon forget John Marion. During World War II a ship was named after him. The *Courier* reported: “The name of John H. Marion, founder and pioneer editor of the Prescott Evening Courier has been emblazoned on the prow of a Liberty tanker launched at the California Shipbuilding corporation yards at Wilmington, Calif., yesterday.” The article listed some of Marion’s achievements including his influence in getting the railroad built from Ash Fork to Prescott.

The ship launching was not without controversy. It was christened by Mrs. Roy Wayland, of Phoenix, wife of the vice president of the Valley National Bank. The *Courier* wondered “Just why Prescott was ignored in the designation of a christener is difficult to understand, since the widow of the late Colonel Rogers, who succeeded Marion as editor, is now living in Southern California. It seems that the two local chambers of commerce might learn why the Phoenix resident was named the christener, since she is a woman in no way connected with Prescott or the newspaper profession in Arizona.” The article ends with the mild threat that the *Courier* intends to investigate and learn who was responsible for slighting Prescott in such a manner.

One wonders if John Marion, observing from a cloud, would be satisfied with such tame words to describe the final controversy about his life.



MARION ENDNOTES

Because of time constraints, the author has relied largely on secondary sources of newspaper clippings in files at Sharlot Hall Museum as well as articles and a book written by others. However, whenever they cited primary sources we have noted that in brackets.

1 William H. Lyon, Those Old Yellow Dog Days: Frontier Journalism in Arizona, 1859-1912 (Tucson, Arizona Historical Society). p. 11.

2 Mary H. Abbott, "John Huguenot Marion, Frontier Journalist," seminar paper for Western History (University of Arizona, Tucson: May 4, 1965). Paper in library of the Arizona Hist. Soc., Tucson. [Arizona Enterprise, August 8, 1891; Farish, History of Arizona, Vol. 5, p. 347]

3 Ibid., [St Louis Republican, May 12, 1887]

4 Dr. William H. Lyon, "John Marion: Frontier Democrat or Frontier Extremist?" Cactus & Pine (Annual publication of Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott, Nov. 1994), p. 2. [Arizona Miner, December 26, 1868, August 27, 1890; Farish, History of Arizona, V: 347-350].

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Abbott, p. 5. [Lutrell, Newspapers, 9, and Schmitt, Fighting Editors, 30. The Arizona Weekly Journal Miner recalled in its issue of March 11, 1895, "They obtained an antiquated press and a limited supply of well-worn type, the refuse of a Santa Fe newspaper office. . . . The suns of summer melted the rollers, the frosts of winter solidified the ink, and Indians raided to within a thousand yards of the office."]

9 Lyon, p. 3.

10 Abbott, p. 6. [Joseph Miller, Arizona: The Last Frontier (New York: Hastings House, 1940) 126; Lutrell, Newspapers, 104].

11 Abbott, p. 6.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Cactus & Pine. From a copy of the masthead at the end of footnotes.

15 Ibid., p. 4.

16 Abbott, p. 16. Marion has, in later years, gained an underserved reputation for bigotry. Will C. Barnes in Arizona Place Names quotes John G. Bourke: "Week after week in the columns of the Miner, John H. Marion fought out the battles of America for Americans. Not a word of Spanish, not so much as a Spanish advertisement could be found in its columns." It would seem that Bourke, if accurately quoted, did not see many copies of the Miner.

17 Abbott, p. 16. [Arizona Miner, October 14, 1871, quoted in Farish, Volume 8, Page 124.]

18 Editorial by John Marion, Arizona Miner, April 16, 1870, p. 2. Copy from a file at Sharlot Hall Museum.

19 Abbott, p. 17.

20 Cactus & Pine, p. 18. [Arizona Miner, September 6, 20, 1873].

21 Docket No. 1, p. 67 - Case No. 1422, Yavapai County District Court Records.

22 Clipping in scrapbook No. 1 dated November 19, 1884 at Sharlot Hall Museum.

23 Those Old Yellow Dog Days, p. 11.

24 Abbott, p. 15.

25 Newspaper clipping file at Sharlot Hall Museum. If others had doubts about Marion's age, it could be because he muddied the water. From an undated clipping in the Marion File at Sharlot Hall Museum: "In the Territorial census for 1876, he gives his age as 39. The Territorial census for 1870 says he was 34. The Territorial census for 1880 says he was 43. On his marriage license in 1888 he gives his age as 49."

26 Prescott Morning Courier, July 29, 1891.

