

Preface

The Annotated Marion takes its cue from books like *The Annotated Alice*, first published in 1960. In that instance Martin Gardner worked with two of Lewis Carroll's classics of decades long past—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as well as *Through the Looking-Glass*. The idea behind this new book of 2013 owes much to editors like Gardner, a genius among polymaths and a grandly prolific man of letters who died in 2010.

By itself, meanwhile, the title *The Annotated Marion* has an agreeable sound, an appealing rhythm and cadence that does right by Marion Davies (1897-1961), a woman every bit as winning as those melodious words. She was indeed the “delightful and very considerable person” saluted by Orson Welles in his Foreword to *The Times We Had: Life with William Randolph Hearst*.

The assumption has often been that Marion didn't mean to compile such a book, an eventual product of 1975. And yet nearly a quarter-century earlier, in 1951, while she made the tape recordings on which *The Times We Had* is based, her statements included, “We'll have to go over everything before it's printed.” The book has to be read closely for that telling passage to emerge (it falls in Chapter 11). Few if any have seized upon it, the two editors who preceded me included. “That'll be the next chapter,” Marion also said near the end of the book, alluding to a subject she meant to touch on further.

Be those enticing clues as they may, the editors in question were a young husband-and-wife team, Pamela Pfau and Kenneth S. Marx (her name precedes his in the credits). But don't get me wrong. Pfau and Marx—the “PP/KSM” in the pages that follow—did a competent job. Nonetheless, Ken Marx recounted years later that although they “listened to and transcribed all the tapes, probably less than half the contents were used in the text.” Divorce lay ahead for Pam and Ken, but their efforts

endure in a book that has always sold well, especially at the Hearst Castle Gift Shop.

Couched in memoir and recollections, Marion's part of things is what stands out the most. She was in her mid-fifties when she made the strategic tapes with a young journalist named Stanley Flink. Despite alcoholism's grip on her by 1951 (the same year that W. R. Hearst died), she still had a goodly amount of mental sharpness. True, she made mistakes while reminiscing, at times some egregious ones. However, her musings were notably spot-on overall, too frequently to be dismissed as mere luck or chance. She knew much of what she recounted, of what she told and revealed. My working and reworking the material here—and reworking it still more—have changed my views of Marion Davies, almost entirely for the better. What as a young Hearst scholar I scoffed at, I now more often marvel at, some belated wisdom having sunk in now that I'm reaching the age Marion was—sixty-four—when she died in 1961. I'd already been through such a rite of passage, such a transformation with Hearst's authorized biographer of 1936, the overly maligned Mrs. Fremont Older. I should have sensed sooner that a similar thing would happen in Marion's case.

I began work on *The Annotated Marion* in 2010. This was soon after I completed *Hearst and Marion: The Santa Monica Connection* and was readying that book for Internet posting through Joanne Aasen, my website designer on several Hearst projects. My transcriptions from the printed book of 1975 were inspiring. Numerous first-stage notations were also taking shape. But then I ground to a halt. I frankly got too impatient with Marion's flawed accounts when they muddied her waters, epitomized by her obliqueness on the Japanese attack in Hawaii that clinched the American entry into World War II. As I went on to recall a bit harshly in 2012 in my reflective *Hearst and Pearl Harbor: A Memoir in 41 Parts*, my work on the Marion project had become "terribly frustrating":

I shelved the whole thing and turned to other work. I was just plain disgusted with all the fibbing and the improbabilities, stemming from her rotten memory. I realized I had much more satisfying work to do, focused on truthful material rather than lies.

I've come a long way since then, and I've done so in fairly short order. Why the change? More than one factor can be cited, but for now I'll emphasize my interactions with a fellow Hearst aficionado, Thomas Brown. He's the author of an unusual book called *The Illustrated History of Hearst Castle*, dated 2012. Tom and I launched a series of in-depth discussions that year, discussions that continue. I hadn't realized how starved for such company I was, working mostly in isolation for as long as I had. Tom not only took a keen interest in my back-burnered *Annotated Marion* project, he also assured me that a reappraisal of Marion was overdue—and that I could well be the best person for the job.

I began toying anew with the “revisited” book early in 2013. It wasn't long before I made a big push toward bringing this challenging subject to suitable heel. In the meantime, Tom took some decisive action of his own. In 2012 he'd made a choice acquisition through eBay of the original Pfau-Marx manuscript, the very pages from 1975 that the publisher Bobbs-Merrill had converted to *The Times We Had*. This led to Tom's tracking down Ken Marx; correspondence ensued between them (such as Ken's saying that only part of the taped material from 1951 got into print). There was much else that Tom delved into. He learned, for instance, that the recordings are known to insiders as “the Lederer tapes,” as in Charles Lederer (1911-1976), the nephew of Marion Davies who figures prominently in any research of this kind. Julie Payne, a stepdaughter of Charlie Lederer's, came into important focus for Tom, the same as she had for me earlier. Tom's files include an e-mail from her that vouched for Ken Marx's veracity.

There's more to all this, more that could be aligned and made a narrative all its own. It's a complex story, complete with rumors, involving Ken Marx, Julie Payne, and Tom Brown, to mention only three among the living. Among other questions that have long gone begging: What about the tapes themselves? Do they still exist? The answer may well prove beyond everyone's reach, now and forever more.

Topping things off in the meantime—along with my becoming a born-again Marionite—Tom entrusted to me the Pfau-Marx manuscript of

1975, the one that passed through Bobbs-Merrill's hands and, especially, those of its wordsmith Gladys Moore. Brackets were already in place, *The Annotated Marion* being an edited work in the best sense (and thus it warrants my own coinage: "editioned"). Now there were still more brackets for me to add, often aimed at restoring Marion's words to their rightful place. Some of these insertions figure in my initialed TC entries. Most of them, though, plus related details, will appear in the forthcoming endnotes.

To people like Ken and Julie and Tom, and to my designer, Joanne Aasen—and above all to Marion herself and of course to W. R. Hearst—my hat will always be off.

—Taylor Coffman
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