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# Those Old Yellow Dog Days

FRONTIER JOURNALISM IN ARIZONA  
1859-1912



*by William H. Lyon*

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lyon, William Henry, 1926-

Those old yellow dog days : frontier journalism in Arizona,  
1859-1912 / by William H. Lyon.

p. cm

Includes bibliographical references ( p . ) and index.

ISBN 0-910037-32-9

1. Journalism—Arizona—History—20th century. 2. Frontier and  
pioneer life—Arizona. I. Title

PN4897.A7243L96 1994

071' .91'09034—dc20

93-49523

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Although modern newspapers are no longer the objects of pity that they were in frontier times, one characteristic has remained constant, at least in substance—the news. Pioneer editors published about the same kind of copy as their modern counterparts—current events (although in the early days it was not so current), short literary pieces, tips on better living, human-interest stories, and general information. In reporting the news, the size of the newspapers severely restricted the amount of news an editor could cram into its columns. Most papers consisted of four pages published weekly—although multipage dailies appeared toward the end of the frontier period.

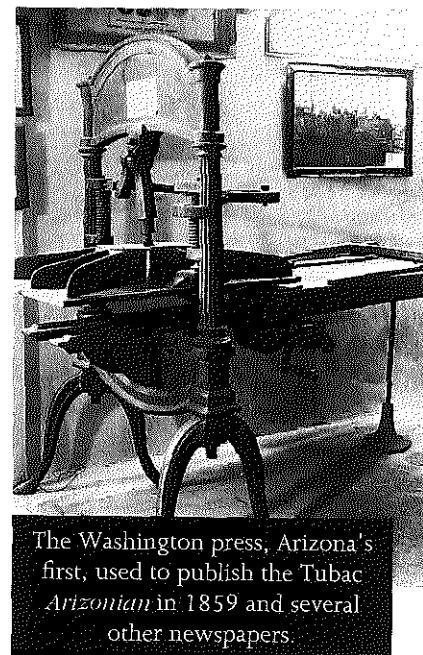
The end of frontier journalism occurred with the appearance of dailies, the use of power presses and linotypes, friendlier professional relationships and the decline of verbal combat, the adoption of sound business principles (adopting the old adage of “no pay, no service”), the lessening of competition, and the trend of one newspaper per town or city. The final step was the development of the “metropolitan syndrome”—mass circulation, reliance on revenues from advertisers and subscribers, use of high technology, division and narrowing of editorial responsibilities, greater reliance on national sources of news, and in the case of Arizona, ownership and control by large private corporations. None of this happened at once, but clearly by 1900 an era had passed.

Newspapering was an urban phenomenon. Editors joined the band of urban professionals (lawyers, doctors, preachers, teachers, army officers, merchants, and entrepreneurs) who acted as the driving forces in frontier communities. As a rule, a newspaper’s fortunes rose or fell with the success or failure of the town it served.

Like the first towns, Arizona’s first newspapers were chancy affairs. Neither Tubac nor La Paz lived up to the promises of their promoters, though their editors heralded them as coming metropolises. Tucson and Mesilla, strongholds of the provisional Territory of Arizona before the present north-south boundary separated New Mexico and Arizona, each published unsuccessful newspapers before either community had an adequate reading public. Only the Prescott and Arizona City (Yuma) journals survived the early tribulations of frontier development.<sup>1</sup>

In 1856, Charles Poston and William and Thomas Wrightson located the headquarters of the Sonora Exploring and Mining Company in Tubac, an abandoned Spanish and Mexican settlement. Two years later Phocion Way, an agent for the Santa Rita Silver Mining Company, found it a town of about 150 inhabitants (three-fourths of whom were Mexican). In 1859, the Santa Rita Silver Mining Company established Arizona’s first newspaper, the *Arizonian*, in Tubac. After only twenty issues and a duel, Sylvester Mowry and William Sanders Oury purchased the paper and moved it to Tucson.<sup>2</sup>

Comparing the two towns, Phocion Way pronounced Tubac a paradise. Other travelers left behind equally unflattering descriptions of “Tuxon,” mentioning its narrow streets obstructed by filth and dilapidated buildings. Of the 600 or 700 inhabitants, many of the Americans were murderers on the lam; only two of the corpses in the graveyard had died a natural death. Certainly plenty of grist existed for a pair of enterprising editors, but the *Arizonian* found the going tough. Although Mowry and Oury, avid Democrats and Southern sympathizers, hoped to protect their newspaper from the clutches of “Black Republicanism,” the Civil War interrupted their operations. Oury stored the press until the U.S. Army confiscated it and used it to print military orders. Sidney R. DeLong, a local businessman, revived the *Arizonian* in 1867. After several ups and downs over the next two years, Pierson W. Dooner assumed the editorship, dropped the “i,” and made it the *Arizonan*. When the paper failed in 1871, Arizona’s first printing press cranked out other newspapers in Tucson and Tombstone, until William Hattich finally donated it to the Arizona Pioneers’ Historical Society in 1913.<sup>3</sup>



The Washington press, Arizona’s first, used to publish the Tubac *Arizonian* in 1859 and several other newspapers.

Arizona's second paper, the Prescott *Miner*, actually predated the territorial capital whose name graced its masthead. Its owner, Territorial Secretary Richard McCormick, first published it at nearby Chino Valley, and in 1864 moved the operation to Prescott, where he purchased the first townsite lot. The *Miner* differed from the *Arizona* in that McCormick established it as the creature of the new territorial government. Nevertheless, it resembled the Tucson paper in its rapid succession of editors, many of whom came to Arizona as mining promoters. When their claims failed to "prove up," they turned instead to newspapering. In 1867 former prospector John Marion acquired the *Miner* property from McCormick. Arizona's most colorful pioneer editor took the helm at a time when Prescott boasted a permanent population of 600 and a floating population of several hundred. To accommodate this rambunctious citizenry, Prescott boasted two hotels, ten stores, eight saloons, two breweries, two livery stables, one drugstore, two bakeries, one butcher shop, two barber shops, two saddlery shops, two wagonmaster shops, one tinsmith shop, five carpenter shops, one shoe shop, one jewelry and watchmaker shop, two blacksmith shops, one internal revenue office, one U.S. Land Office, five lawyers, and two doctors—but no church.<sup>4</sup>

For a time it seemed that La Paz on the Colorado River would become Arizona's Cornstock. Not only did the placer boomtown possess great mineral riches, but its river location promised to make it more accessible than Tucson or Prescott should the Colorado become the great highway of commerce that its backers predicted. With high hopes, in 1866 Vincent Ryan founded the *Gazette* there. Unfortunately, the gold played out almost immediately, and the following year he attempted to salvage something of his enterprise by moving the newspaper to Prescott. Ryan quickly discovered that the territorial capital could only support one newspaper as his *Gazette* faltered, then failed. Even the efforts of a shadowy figure named Pierce to revive the paper under the shopworn title of *Arizona* were ineffectual. Richard McCormick, by now territorial governor, bought the press for job work and soon moved it to Tucson, where it printed the refurbished *Arizona*. When McCormick later attempted to quash the paper, he

repossessed the press to print his newly created Tucson *Arizona Citizen*, established in 1870 as the Republican organ under the able editorship of John Wasson, an experienced newspaperman, prospector, and territorial surveyor general.<sup>5</sup>

Like Tucson and Prescott, Yuma has a newspaper history dating back to territorial times. D. A. Gordon and C. L. Minor established the *Free Press* in 1871, changing the name to the *Sentinel* in 1872. Practical—and itinerant—editors, Gordon and Minor managed the newspaper in a competent but lackluster fashion until William J. Berry, one of Arizona's more colorful editors, succeeded the nondescript duo in 1873. Despite his frugality in personal and business affairs, Berry never was able to garner enough readers or advertisers to make a living from newspaper work.<sup>6</sup>

The year 1877 marks the dividing point in the history of Arizona's frontier newspapers. By then, the *Arizona* of Tubac, the Tucson *Arizona*, and the La Paz *Gazette* had all perished. The Yuma *Sentinel*, the Prescott *Miner*, and the Tucson *Citizen* suffered nearly fatal illnesses but survived, only to change hands in 1877. Soon after McCormick retired from Arizona politics that year, Wasson sold the *Citizen* to John P. Clum, just then retiring from a flamboyant and controversial career as Apache Indian agent. He moved the paper to Florence, but after ten months he returned to Tucson. Shortly thereafter he left the paper and moved to Tombstone. Over the next decade, Rollin C. Brown, George W. Brown, and Herbert Brown owned and edited the *Citizen* at one time or another. Still operating today, it is Arizona's oldest newspaper. Also in 1877 Marion gave up the *Miner* to undertake other ventures, and Berry turned over the *Sentinel* to George Tyng, who, like Berry, relied on contributions to keep the paper alive. The Yuma paper, however, struggled financially until the early 1880s, when capitalists J. F. Knapp and John Dorrington assumed nominal editorial responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

The late 1870s were the heyday of territorial journalism. Between 1877 and 1880 a flurry of newly established papers raised the total number to thirteen, a phenomenal increase in the space of three years. Mining and railroad developments sparked the expansion. Although it is impossible to examine in detail the history of each of these boomtime

sheets (early issues of many papers are no longer extant), a sampling survey of the newspapers and the prominent editors illustrates the excitement and turbulence of the era.

Globe acquired its newspaper, the *Silver Belt*, when Judge Aaron H. Hackney, the most beloved of all Arizona editors, emigrated in 1878 to the central Arizona mining town from Silver City, New Mexico. Its masthead carved out of wood, the Globe paper stood out among its territorial rivals. A kindly, bearded man confined to a wheelchair, Hackney seldom involved himself in the bitter contemps of other editors. He spent the remainder of his life, until 1891, publishing the *Silver Belt* in Globe.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to other communities, Phoenix waited at least eight years for its first newspaper. In 1878 Charles E. McClintock founded the *Salt River Herald*, and the following year he brought his younger brother James (who later achieved fame as a Rough Rider and a historian) into the establishment. The *Herald* soon had a rival, the *Gazette*, founded in 1880. Sadly, Charles McClintock died in 1881, just as he had gotten his newspaper on its feet.<sup>9</sup>

Tombstone acquired its first newspaper in 1879, even as the mining camp was being built. A. E. Fay and Carlos Tully printed the Tombstone *Nugget* on the old *Arizonian* press. Then, in 1880, John P. Clum established a competitor, which he named the *Epitaph*. He entitled his initial editorial "The First Trumpet," in which he extolled the virtues of his fledgling community and predicted that Tombstone would soon rival ancient Rome. Notwithstanding Clum's grandiose claims, the *Epitaph* was headquartered in a tent. The makeshift office collapsed during a windstorm, causing a week's delay in publication.<sup>10</sup> Although Tombstone flourished for less than a decade, it attracted a brilliant group of journalists, many of whom eventually migrated to other towns throughout the territory.

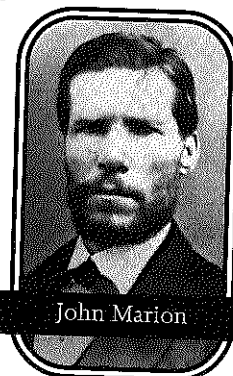
The number of Arizona newspapers continued to grow throughout the 1880s. In Florence and St. Johns, the arrival of newspapers indicated those communities' importance as farming and ranching centers. (See Appendix for more exact information.) Thomas Weedin,

editor of the Florence *Enterprise*, guided his newspaper through a long, stable period while serving in the territorial legislature. St. Johns's newspapers, on the other hand, came and went, victims of bitter Mormon-Gentile hostility.

Completion of the Southern Pacific and the Atlantic and Pacific railroads between 1880 and 1883 fostered new communities—Willcox, Benson, Holbrook, Winslow, Flagstaff, Kingman—and with them a host of newspapers. Elsewhere, in eastern Arizona, George Kelly purchased the Solomonville *Valley Bulletin* in 1890. By the early twentieth century he had acquired several other newspapers, creating a little empire.<sup>11</sup>

Many pioneer editors shared two common problems: they were itinerant, and they were usually broke. Some newspapermen changed jobs so frequently that they left few records. Others—perhaps the majority—led checkered careers, so that one can only draw a composite portrait. However, a few did manage to leave their mark on Arizona journalism. The pioneer editor who emerges is a man of a few large and many small faces.

John Marion, first among Arizona's notable pioneer editors, was cut from an uncommon mold. Openly irreligious and a prodigious imbibor, he probably considered it fortunate that the *Miner* office and the Prescott brewery were next door to each other. Moreover, he ran his newspaper solely for the benefit of the "white people" of Arizona. Marion best displayed his secularism and racism in 1868 with his scathing depiction of Sidney R. DeLong, the editor of the *Arizonian*. Noting that DeLong had recently joined the Catholic Church, Marion hoped that the padres would cure him of the low and vulgar habit of lying. Contemplating DeLong's portrait, Marion noted that "his head and face indicate he belongs to the Caucasian type of man; his forehead is well suited for flattening out tortillas; his nose projects some distance from his face, and is, we think, large enough to 'smell a mice'. His mouth appears to have been well cut with some dull



John Marion