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# Marion Leonard

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**Lived:**

June 9, 1881 - January 9, 1956

**Worked as:**

film actress, producer, screenwriter

**Worked In:**

United States

**by Sarah Delahousse**

It is well known that [Florence Lawrence](#), the first “Biograph Girl,” was frustrated in her desire to exploit her fame by the company that did not, in those years, advertise their players’ names. Lawrence is thought to have been made the first motion picture star by an ingenious ploy on the part of IMP, the studio that hired her after she left the Biograph Company. But the emphasis on the “first star” eclipses the number of popular female players who vied for stardom and the publicity gambles they took to achieve it. Eileen Bowser has argued that Lawrence was “tied with” the “Vitagraph Girl,” [Florence Turner](#), for the honorific, “first movie star” (1990, 112). In 1909, the year after Lawrence left Biograph, Marion Leonard replaced her as the “Biograph Girl.” At the end of 1911, Leonard would be part of the trend in which favorite players began to find ways to exploit their popularity, but she went further, establishing the first “star company,” according to Karen Mahar (62).

Leonard had joined the Biograph Company in 1908 after leaving the Kalem Company, where she had briefly replaced [Gene Gauntier](#) as its leading lady. Her Kalem films no longer exist nor are they included in any published filmography, and few sources touch on her pre-Biograph career. Thus it is difficult to assess her total career. However, Marion Leonard was most likely a talented player as indicated by her rapid ascension to the larger and more prominent studio. At Biograph, she immediately began working with D. W. Griffith, who directed the vast majority of the films in which she appeared, including *The Lonely Villa* (1909), until her departure in 1910 to join the Reliance Company. A year later, Leonard left Reliance to form an independent enterprise, the Gem Motion Picture Company, with her husband, Biograph writer-director Stanner E. V. Taylor. While Karen Mahar is certain that this was a move designed to promote Leonard’s career, she is not sure that the star name brand company gave actresses any new responsibilities or powers, although she notes that the films produced in the star companies often featured strong heroine roles and Leonard was no exception to this rule (62). An example of the way Leonard was featured

as a “star” just at the advent of stardom is an advertisement in the November 25 issue of *Moving Picture World* featuring a medium-sized photograph of her face circled by a diamond engagement ring. In an enthusiastic, signed letter addressed to her fans, she says that the Gem Motion Picture Company “captured” her heart: “People—I am engaged!” She assures her fans that the company will capture their hearts as well because Gem plans to produce “the bestest [sic] and brightest in pictorial art” (737).

Leonard’s star vehicles for Gem featured her playing not only strong, but brave and honorable heroines. For instance, in *The Defender of the Name* (1912) she plays the brave sister of a Confederate soldier who commits suicide and fails to complete his spying mission in Union territory. To preserve her family’s honor, Leonard’s character acquires the Union documents to complete her brother’s mission, and she places them on her brother’s body to make him look like a hero. The film capitalized on the popular Civil War girl spy genre of the time, popularized by Gauntier. Leonard’s self-reliant heroine succeeded with at least one reviewer, who praised her but faulted the story. The picture was “not a convincing story in spite of its being very well-acted,” wrote the *Moving Picture World* (690). Gem fell into bankruptcy in late 1911 even before it could exhibit *The Defender of the Name*, which was intended to be its inaugural release. The twenty-six negatives of films the company had shot but not released were, however, bought, and prints were distributed by the Rex Motion Picture Company (Mahar 63).

The following year, Leonard and Taylor started another venture, the Monopol Film Company, this time using her notoriety to take advantage of the new interest in feature films. They played up her star attraction value in a press release picked up by *Moving Picture World*. Note that it is the star’s own company that is claiming to have offered her “the largest salary ever paid to a moving picture star (... ) \$1,000 per week” (988). Bowser comments that although this number may have been inflated, the advertisement itself is important as a marker of the stage at which star publicity had arrived, publicly announcing the very salary inflation that Leonard’s former employer, the Biograph Company, most feared (1990, 118-119).

Leonard and Taylor moved to California to start filming. They left Monopol in 1913, however, to form yet another independent effort, the Mar-Leon Corporation (Mahar 70). However, Mar-Leon ceased production the following year, and Marion Leonard’s name no longer appeared in the trade presses after the studio’s demise. In 1921, looking back to 1909, a *Motion Picture Magazine* article, asking “What Are They Doing Now?” doesn’t have an answer to the question, but remembers Marion Leonard as a “favorite,” along with Florence Lawrence, Florence Turner, [Cleo Madison](#), and [Flora Finch](#) (32).

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## Filmography

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#### 1. Marion Leonard as Actress

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*The Bandit's Waterloo. The Outwitting of an Andalusian Brigand by a Pretty Senora*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1908) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*The Christmas Burglars*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1908) cas.: Florence Lawrence, Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Fatal Hour*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1908) cas.: George Gebhardt, Harry Solter, Linda Arvidson, Mack Sennett, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

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*Feud and the Turkey*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1908) Cas.: Marion Leonard, Mack Sennett, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

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*The Tavern-Keeper's Daughter*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1908) cas.: Florence Auer, Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

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*The Faded Lillies*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1909) cas.: David Miles, James Kirkwood, Owen Moore, Mary Pickford, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

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*Nursing A Viper*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1909) Cas.: Marion Leonard, Owen Moore, Mack Sennett, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*One Touch of Nature*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith, ph.: G.W. Bitzer, Arthur Marvin (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1909) cas.: Florence Lawrence, Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

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*An Affair of Hearts*. Dir.: Frank Powell (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Florence Barker, Billy Quirk, Francis J. Grandon, Jack Pickford, Jeanie Macpherson, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*As It Is in Life*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, Mary Pickford, Mack Sennett, si, b&w, 16mm and 35mm. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Call*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Florence Barker, Henry B. Walthall, James Kirkwood, Mack Sennett, Gladys Egan, Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Call to Arms*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, Mary Pickford, si, b&w, 16mm and 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Cloister's Touch*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Henry B. Walthall, Marion Leonard, Arthur Johnson, Edith Haldeman, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Converts*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Linda Arvidson, Henry B. Walthall, Anthony O'Sullivan, Mack Sennett, Charles West, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Duke's Plan*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Francis J. Grandon, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*Gold Is Not All*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Gold Seekers*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Henry B. Walthall, Florence Barker, Kate Bruce, Francis J. Grandon, Dell Henderston, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*His Last Dollar*. (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*In Old California*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, Frank Powell, Mack Sennett, si., b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*Love Among the Roses*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, Mary Pickford, si, b&w, 16mm and 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*On the Reef*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*Over Silent Paths*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16 and 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Oath and the Man*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Florence Barker, W. Chrystie Miller, Francis J. Grandon, Henry B. Walthall, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*The Rocky Road*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Frank Powell, Stephanie Longfellow, James Kirkwood, George Nichols, Blanche Sweet, W. Chrystie Miller, Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*Rose O'Salem Town*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Münchener Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*A Salutary Lesson*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Charles West, Stephanie Longfellow, Gladys Egan, Jeanie Macpherson, Alfred Paget, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Sorrows of the Unfaithful*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Mary Pickford, Edward Dillion, Henry B. Walthall, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Thou Shalt Not*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Kathlyn Williams, Henry B. Walthall, Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

*The Two Brothers*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas.: Arthur Johnson, Dell Henderson, Kate Bruce, Marion Leonard, Henry B. Walthall, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*Where the Sea and the Shore Doth Meet*. (Reliance US 1910) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Two Paths*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith (Biograph Co. US 1911) cas.: Grace Henderson, Dorothy Bernard, Wilfred Lucas, Adolph Lestina, Clara T. Bracy. Marion Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

*O'er Grim Fields Scarred*. (Reliance US 1911) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

## **2. Marion Leonard as Actress and Possible Producer (Monopol Films)**

*As in a Looking Glass*. Prod.: Marion Leonard, dir.: Stanner E.V. Taylor (Monopol Film Co. US 1913) cas.: Marion Leonard, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

## **3. Marion Leonard as Screenwriter and Actress**

*Those Little Flowers*. Dir.: Dell Henderson, sc.: Marion Leonard (Biograph Co. US 1913) cas.: Gus Pixley, Kate Toncray, Clarence Barr, Gertrude Bambrick, Dorothy Gish, Marion, Leonard, si, b&w. Archive: [Museum of Modern Aart \[USM\]](#).

## **4. Marion Leonard as Possible Director and Actress**

*Lucky Jim*. Dir.: D.W. Griffith, Marion Leonard (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co. US 1909) cas.: Florence Lawrence, Marion Leonard, Owen Moore, Mack Sennett, si, b&w, 16mm and 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

## **B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:**

## **1. Marion Leonard as Actress**

*The Armorer's Daughter*, 1910; *The Gray of the Dawn*, 1910; *The Refuge*, 1910; *The Thin Dark Line*, 1910; *The Command from Galilee*, 1911; *The Conflict*, 1911; *For His Sake*, 1911; *For Remembrance*, 1911; *From the Valley of Shadows*, 1911; *In Flowers Paled*, 1911; *In the Teepee's Light*, 1911; *A Left Hook*, 1911; *The Little Avenger*, 1911; *On Kentucky Soil*, 1911; *Over the Shading Edge*, 1911; *The Price of Vanity*, 1911; *Souls Courageous*, 1911; *Till Death Do Us Part*, 1911; *The Trump Card*, 1911; *The Vows*, 1911; *The Defender of the Name*, 1912; *The End of the Circle*, 1912; *In Honor Bound*, 1912; *In Payment Full*, 1912; *The Leader of the Band*, 1912; *The Light on the Way*, 1912; *Lost a Husband*, 1912; *The Seal of Time*, 1912; *So Speaks the Heart*, 1912; *Tears O'Peggy*, 1912; *Through Flaming Gates*, 1912; *Through Memory Blank*, 1912; *Thus Many Souls*, 1912; *Under Her Wing*, 1912; *The Unknown Bride*, 1912; *The Voice of the Millions*, 1912; *What Avails the Crown*, 1912; *The Seed of the Fathers*, 1913; *A Tender-Hearted Crook*, 1913; *Mother Love*, 1914; *The Rose of Yesteryear*, 1914; *The Dragon's Claw*, 1915; *The Vow*, 1915; *Her Actor Friend*, 1926.

## **2. Marion Leonard as Actress and Possible Producer (Monopol Films)**

*Carmen*, 1913; *The Dead Secret*, 1913; *Those Who Live in Glass Houses*, 1913.

## **3. Marion Leonard as Actress and Possible Producer (Mar-Leon Pictures)**

*Journey's Ending*, 1913, *A Leaf in the Storm*, 1913; *The Awakening of Donna Isolla*, 1914; *The Drift*, 1914; *The Light Unseen*, 1914.

## **C. DVD Sources:**

*Lucky Jim*. DVD (Grapevine Video US 2005)

*The Cord of Life*. DVD (Grapevine Video US 2004)

*D.W. Griffith Director, Vol. 2*. DVD (Grapevine Video US 2011)

*D.W. Griffith Director, Vol. 3*. DVD (Grapevine Video US 2011)

*D.W. Griffith Director, Vol. 4*. DVD (Grapevine Video US 2011)

*Biograph Shorts: Special Edition 1909-1913*. DVD (Kino Lorber US 2002)

*Christmas Past: Vintage Holiday Films 1901-1925*. DVD (Kino Lorber US 2001)

*Lonely Villa*. DVD (Blackhawk Films US 2016)

## **D. Streamed Media:**

Excerpt from *Lucky Jim* (1909):

Excerpt from *The Cord of Life* (1909)

*Rose O'Salem Town* (1910) (Dutch intertitles)

## Credit Report

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Marion Leonard appeared in hundreds of films. While every effort has been made to create a complete filmography, it is likely some titles are missing. Credits are collected primarily from Braff, FIAF and Spehr, however, there are still a few inconsistencies of note. The 1911 film *The Conflict* is listed in Braff and Spehr. The film may be extant on FIAF under the title *Conflict's End*, however that date is listed as 1912, the lead actress is listed as Maria Leonard and the director is Edwin S. Porter rather than Stanner E.V. Taylor. *The Hour of Fate* and *Tangled Lines* (both 1911) are listed online as being Reliance pictures starring Marion Leonard, but can't be confirmed in Braff, Spehr, FIAF or any published filmographies.

## Citation

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