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# Marion Fairfax

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**Also Known As:**

Marion Marshall, Marion Tully Marshall, Marion Josephine Neiswanger, Mrs. Tully Marshall

**Lived:**

October 24, 1875 - October 2, 1970

**Worked as:**

company director, director, editor, editorial director, playwright, producer, screenwriter, theatre actress

**Worked In:**

United States

**by Tom Slater**

Between 1904 and 1915, Marion Fairfax wrote several successful Broadway plays before turning to screenwriting. Over the next eleven years, she achieved even greater success in her new field. In 1921, she formed her own production company that produced *The Lying Truth* (1922), which Fairfax wrote and directed. The most enduring film with which she was associated was *The Lost World* (1925), a science fiction picture about an isolated land of dinosaurs that featured tremendous special effects. A handwritten note attached to a First National Pictures legal department memo dated December 6, 1923, states: “Fairfax is always a winner—Don’t ever let her get away. Tom [unidentified] knows she is both restless and damn independent.” Three years later, however, Fairfax received her final credit for *The Blonde Saint* (1926) and then disappeared from filmmaking. She was married to actor Tully Marshall, who died in 1943, for forty-three years.

Like many women filmmakers of the silent era, Fairfax began her career as a stage actress. By 1901, she was appearing on Broadway. Shortly thereafter, her own plays began appearing. In 1915, Fairfax turned to screenwriting at the suggestion of William deMille, brother of Cecil B. DeMille. Over the next few years, she wrote several films directed by deMille. Another frequent artistic collaborator was director-producer Marshall Nielan, with whom Fairfax shared a long friendship dating back to her earliest years on Broadway. Together, they produced several films covering a large number of genres from 1920 to 1925. Perhaps their biggest hit was *Dinty* (1920) a comic melodrama starring Colleen Moore and child star Wesley Barry. Their other films included *The River’s End* (1920), a Royal Canadian Mounted Police adventure; *Don’t Ever Marry* (1920), a marriage comedy; *Bob Hampton of Placer* (1921), an epic Western; *Fools First* (1922), about a

reformed gangster; and *The Lotus Eater* (1921), an island romance starring John Barrymore. They also created an unusual science fiction comedy drama, *Go and Get It* (1920), about a murderer's brain getting transplanted into a chimpanzee.

Other directorial partners included Maurice Tourneur, with whom Fairfax created *Torment* (1924), a mystery; *Clothes Make the Pirate* (1925), a comedy with Leon Errol and Dorothy Gish; and *Old Loves and New* (1926), a romance set in Algeria. Other stars Fairfax wrote for included [Mary Pickford](#) (*Through the Back Door*, 1921) and [Norma Talmadge](#), for whom she wrote *The Eternal Flame* (1922), adapted from Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais*. Male stars for whom she created scripts included Sessue Hayakawa. These works included *Hashimura Togo* (1917) and *The Honor of His House* (1918), which considered the problems of assimilation in ways comic and tragic towards the Japanese; *The Secret Game* (1917), a spy film in which Hayakawa foils a German threat against US transport ships; and *The White Man's Law* (1918), a drama set in Sierra Leone about a corrupt English businessman who impregnates an African woman.

In 1919, Fairfax wrote two comedies for actor Wally Reid, *The Roaring Road* and *The Valley of the Giants*, both directed by James Cruze. Fairfax's familiarity with Reid, who died of morphine addiction in January 1923, may have influenced the one project she completed as writer and director for her own production company, Marion Fairfax Productions. That film, *The Lying Truth* (1922), now lost, involved an original story set in Ireland in which a drug pusher played by Noah Beery is responsible for an innocent man accused of murder nearly getting lynched. Unfortunately, as Karen Ward Mahar points out, social problem films had fallen out of favor in the early 1920s (2006, 7). Audiences were far more interested in the sexual comedies of Cecil B. DeMille than in moralizing tales. Today, Fairfax's achievements in this film are impossible to determine. Her entire effort may have been hampered by health problems, or the opposite may also be true. The strain of operating her own company, writing, and directing while also working on several other productions throughout 1922 may have taken a toll on her health. In any case, she was unable to work in 1923.

In 1926, *Photoplay* writer Ivan St. Johns stated: "Probably you didn't know that Marion Fairfax's opinion on a picture is considered the most valuable in Hollywood" (127). Strangely, in this same year Fairfax permanently retired from the motion picture business. Documents on file in the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences library indicate that *Photoplay's* statement was not simply fan magazine hyperbole. This evidence indicates that Marion Fairfax was certainly indispensable to the last company for which she worked. In 1924, Fairfax had signed a contract to work with First National Pictures, which would later become Warner Brothers Pictures. There, she became associated with the production unit under Earl J. Hudson, who worked her hard. A memo from Hudson asks if, in addition to all her other worries, she will check the daily rushes for *Sundown* (1924) as rapidly as possible to see if the acting is good and if they're capturing the theme. A letter from Fairfax to Hudson the next month provides her positive evaluation for the script of *The Woman on the Jury* (1924). Fairfax was apparently still struggling with health problems, as a September letter addressed to her from First National production manager Richard Rowland in New York expresses regret that her illness has made her unable to come East.

But he hopes she can work anyway “with whatever units may be working on the coast.” The next month, Rowland telegraphed he was glad Fairfax would be coming East to handle the editing, titling, and general editorial direction of *The Lost World*, for which she was also writing the script.

At the start of 1925, Hudson sent a telegram to Fairfax praising her contributions to *So Big* (1924), the adaptation of an Edna Ferber novel, which again starred Colleen Moore. That Fairfax’s health was still an issue is indicated by Hudson giving her time off until March 1. But the studio’s reliance on her may have overridden this offer. Another possibility is that Fairfax may have had larger goals that she wished to keep working towards. In any case, a February 2 telegram from Hudson indicates he is glad she is coming to New York to help relieve the pressure of a very heavy production schedule there and that he will begin discussing her own unit with her.

Throughout February, Hudson sent several undated “Radio Messages” from on location in Texas seeking Fairfax’s assurances about a variety of productions at various stages. On *Sundown*, he wrote, “I feel keenly that we will have a production of which we both may be mighty proud as one of the biggest if not the biggest thing with which [we] have ever been identified.” In relation to another script, Hudson wrote, “I have absolute and implicit confidence in you and your understanding of the degree of perfection entertainment value and naturalness I want in *Flapper For Sale*.” Finally, on *The Woman on the Jury*, being directed by Harry Hoyt (who would also direct *The Lost World*), Hudson stated, “If Miss Fairfax feels exterior masters [of the] home [are] necessary for *Jury*, instruct Hoyt [to] shoot it.” Similarly, Hudson also asked Fairfax to keep an eye on director John Dillon and the making of *If I Marry Again* (1925). Hudson liked Dillon, but worried that “his enthusiasm may carry him off on a piece of business that particularly appeals to him.”

Despite all these requests and the fact that Fairfax was struggling with health problems, Hudson playfully threatens her in the same message by writing, “Under no circumstances forget the absolute necessity to me you are and INCIDENTALLY AND OTHER WISE I WON’T LET YOU FINISH *Lost World* script.” The joke, in other words, is that while she needs to keep busy with five productions at once, she should not work too hard and get sick. One assumes that he is aware that the *Lost World* script is one of her own priorities. Hudson’s comments indicate that her opinions may have been considered more important than the official director’s on several other films. Fairfax, therefore, most likely shaped a good deal more of what appeared in silent films than anyone has before realized. Perhaps this heavy amount of work combined with her health problems contributed to Fairfax’s quiet retirement in 1926.

Careful study of Fairfax’s work might also reveal her as a progressive social thinker who put many positive ideas onto the silent screen. At a time of rampant Orientalism and warnings about “the Yellow Peril,” Fairfax’s scripts for Hayakawa continuously presented him as a hero. In *The Lying Truth*, she offered a plea for understanding the drug addict and a simultaneous warning against mob justice. Another fascinating Fairfax script was for *The Blacklist*, directed by William deMille in 1916, the first film to be shown at Cooper Union in New York. The film sided with a radical miners union whose members were being blacklisted so that they would be unable to find work

after leaving a job. Blanche Sweet played Vera Maroff, the daughter of union leader Sergus Maroff. A strike turns violent, and the mine president's son, Warren Harcourt, is unable to stop his guards from shooting the miners. Although Vera loves Warren, she accepts her assignment when she is selected to assassinate him. She fails at first, but then returns for a second attempt. This time, she wounds him in the shoulder and then turns the gun on herself. But Warren stops her and says, "Tear up the Black-List. We're going to run things differently—you and I." Thus, *The Blacklist* bent gender roles by having the heroine take up arms to end labor injustice. Another film gender bender was *The Widow's Might* (1918) starring Julian Eltinge, the leading female impersonator of the time. In it, Eltinge has to use his cross-dressing skills to help his neighbor stop a land grabber's attempt to claim her property.

Fairfax's personal struggles, ideals, and accomplishments deserve greater study. Specifically, careful study of her scripts in relation to the original sources could provide some understanding of her goals and values. However, a greater wealth of production documents and secondary sources related to the films she worked on is also needed to determine more about the nature of her collaboration and influence. Fairfax was born Marion Josephine Neiswanger in Richmond, Virginia, and died in Los Angeles.

**See also:** [Mary Pickford](#), [Norma Talmadge](#)

## Bibliography

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Fairfax, Marion. Letter to Earl J. Hudson. 19 April 1926. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

Hudson, Earl J. Memo to Marion Fairfax. 6 March 1924. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

Mahar, Karen Ward. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006.

"Marion Fairfax Forms Production Unit: First Offering to Be 'The Lying Truth.'" *Moving Picture World* (23 April 1921): 847.

"MARION FAIRFAX, WRITER OF PARAMOUNT PHOTOPLAYS, HAS BEEN SIGNALLY SUCCESSFUL AS A DRAMATIST." Famous Players-Lasky Corp. Press Release, n.d. 2 pages. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

Rowland, Richard. Letter to Marion Fairfax. 26 Sept. 1924. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.

St. Johns, Ivan. "Second Sight." *Photoplay* (Aug. 1926): 76, 127.

**Archival Paper Collections:**

Marion Fairfax papers, 1890-1967. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Marion Fairfax scripts. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Film and Television Scripts. [University of Southern California, Cinematic Arts Library](#).

# Filmography

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## A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

### 1. Marion Fairfax as Screenwriter or Editorial Director

*Common Ground*. Dir.: William C. deMille, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co., Inc. US 1916) cas.: Marie Doro, Thomas Meighan, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

*The Sowers*. Dir.: William C. deMille, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co., Inc. US 1916) cas.: Blanche Sweet, Thomas Meighan, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Tennessee's Pardner* Dir.: George H. Melford, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co. US 1916) cas.: Fannie Ward, Jack Dean, si, b&w/color (tints: clear, magenta, gold, and cyan), 35mm. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Secret Game*. Dir.: William C. deMille, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co., Inc. US 1917) cas.: Sessue Hayadawa, Jack Holt, Florence Vidor. 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The White Man's Law*. Dir.: James Young, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1918) cas.: Sessue Hayadawa, Jack Holt, Florence Vidor, si, b&w. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

*The Roaring Road*. Dir.: James Cruze, sc.: Marion Fairfax, at.: Byron Morgan (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1919) cas.: Wallace Reed, Ann Little, si, b&w. Archives: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

*Dinty*. Dir.: Marshall A. Neilan & John McDermott, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Marshall Neilan Productions US 1920) cas.: Colleen Moore, Tom Gallery, si, b&w. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

*The River's End*. Dir.: Marshall A. Neilan, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Marshall Neilan Productions US 1920) cas.: Lewis Stone, Marjorie Daw, Jane Novak, si, b&w. Archive: [Cinema Museum \[GBC\]](#).

*Sherlock Holmes*. Dir.: Albert Parker, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Goldwyn Pictures Corp. US 1922) cas.: John Barrymore, Roland Young, Carol Dempster, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [George Eastman](#)

## [Museum \[USR\]](#).

*The Snowshoe Trail*. Dir.: Chester Bennett, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Chester Bennett Productions US 1922) cas.: Jane Novak, Roy Stewart, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Perfect Flapper* [Trailer]. Dir.: John Francis (Jack) Dillon, sc.: Joseph Poland, editorial director: Marion Fairfax (First National Pictures, Inc. US 1924) cas.: Colleen Moore, Syd Chaplin, Phyllis Haver, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*Single Wives*. Dir.: George Archainbaud, sc. Marion Orth, editorial director: Marion Fairfax (Corinne Griffith Productions, Inc. US 1924) cas.: Corrine Griffith, Milton Sills, Kathlyn Williams, si, b&w. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

*The Knockout* [Trailer]. Dir.: Lambert Hillyer, sc.: Joseph Franklin Poland & Earle Snell, editorial director: Marion Fairfax (First National Pictures US 1925) cas.: Milton Sills, Lorna Duveen, John Kolb, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

*The Lost World*. Dir.: Harry O. Hoyt, sc.: Marion Fairfax (First National Pictures, Inc. US 1925) cas.: Bessie Love, Lewis Stone, Wallace Beery, si, b&w. Archives: [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive \[USB\]](#), [Filmoteca Española \[ESM\]](#).

*The Lost World* [Promo and Trailer], si, b&w. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*The Making of O'Malley*. Dir.: Lambert Hillyer, sc.: Eugene Clifford, editorial director: Marion Fairfax (First National Pictures US 1925) cas.: Milton Sills, Dorothy Mackaill, Helen Rowland, si, 35mm [incomplete]. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

*The Blonde Saint*. Dir.: Svend Gade, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Sam E. Rork Productions US 1926) cas.: Lewis Stone, Doris Kenyon, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

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

### **1. Marion Fairfax as Screenwriter**

*The Chorus Lady*, 1915; *The Immigrant*, 1915; *Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo*, 1915; *Anton the Terrible*, 1916; *The Blacklist*, 1916; *The Chaperon*, 1916; *The Clown*, 1916; *The Sowers*, 1916; *The Crystal Gazer*, 1917; *Freckles*, 1917; *Hashimura Togo*, 1917; *On the Level*, 1917; *The Primrose Ring*, 1917; *The Widow's Might*, 1918; *The Honor of His House*, 1918; *Less Than Kin*, 1918; *The Mystery Girl*, 1918; *A Daughter of the Wolf*, 1919; *Love Insurance*, 1919; *Putting It Over*, 1919; *The Secret Garden*, 1919; *The Valley of the Giants*, 1919; *You Never Saw Such a Girl*, 1919; *Don't Ever Marry*, 1920; *Go and Get It*, 1920; *Bob Hampton of Placer*, 1921; *The Lotus Eater*, 1921; *The Mad Marriage*, 1921; *Through the Back Door*, 1921; *Fools First*, 1922; *A Lady of Quality*, 1924; *Lilies of the Field*, 1924; *Torment*, 1924; *As Man Desires*, 1925; *Clothes Make the Pirate*, 1925; *The Talker*, 1925; *Old Loves and New*, 1926.

## **2. Marion Fairfax as Editorial Director**

*Flirting With Love*, 1924; *For Sale*, 1924; *Painted People, So Big*, 1924; 1924; *Sundown*, 1924; *The Woman on the Jury*, 1924; *If I Marry Again*, 1925; *The Knockout*, 1925.

## **3. Marion Fairfax as Editor**

*The Half-Way Girl*, 1925.

## **4. Marion Fairfax as Producer/Director (Marion Fairfax Productions)**

*The Lying Truth*, 1922.

## **C. DVD Sources:**

*The Lost World*. DVD. (Flicker Alley US 2017)

# **Credit Report**

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It is possible that Marion Fairfax worked on *The Eternal Flame* (1922), but this is unconfirmed.

# **Citation**

Slater, Tom. "Marion Fairfax." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013.  
<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-marion-fairfax/>>