

HISTORY

SENTINEL STORIES

Secretary to 3 Sentinel publishers was reserved, caring – and the ‘dragon lady’

Marion Fletcher, who served as private secretary to three 20th century Daily Sentinel publishers, may have been the world's most perfect editorial assistant.

Some people described her as the steely-eyed “dragon lady,” the person who zealously



MARY LOUISE GIBLIN HENDERSON

guarded her boss from unwelcome interlopers and didn't seem

too friendly. Others, who were usually political and business friends of her publishers, knew her as the highly efficient and unruffled employee who greeted them with a smile and small talk before leading them unobtrusively into the inner sanctum.

The third group, those who were welcomed into her circle of long-time friends, knew her as a caring, warm individual — a little on the reserved side, but a woman with a quiet sense of humor who didn't mind being teased and who retained an unbelievable sense of loyalty to her boss and the company for which she worked.

Fletcher was an only child, born in Grand Junction in the late 19th century and probably growing up a bit on the shy side. She once recalled to a friend that, when she was walking down the street as a little girl, she had sometimes crossed onto the other side to avoid meeting unknown children.

Her first Sentinel job was as Walter Walker's secretary, a post she held from around the late 1920s until his death in 1956. She continued in that capacity with his son, Preston Walker, until he died in 1970, when she became secretary for



THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO/Loyd Files Research Library

Marion Fletcher sits at her desk in The Daily Sentinel office at 634 Main Street when she was secretary to Walter Walker. Fletcher served as the longtime secretary to Walter Walker, Preston Walker and then Ken Johnson.

Kenneth Johnson, who held the post until The Sentinel was sold to Cox Newspapers in 1979.

Fletcher's desk at the old Daily Sentinel building at 634 Main St. was just inside the door and to the right, and it guarded the two entrances to Walter Walker's office. In the mid-20th century, Marion, a petite, slender woman with prematurely graying dark hair and an elegant wardrobe of tailored suits and two-piece knit dresses, was a powerful figure. She was the visible link to a man who kept himself largely isolated from the public in an office with a private alleyway entrance.

Although Fletcher's official title during the Walter

Walker era was secretary to the publisher, new women staff members understood quickly that she was the boss of the female employees. And male workers also understood that contact with Walter Walker could be established only by going through her.

Walter Walker occasionally sauntered through the newsroom, stopping to chat with the city editor or one of the reporters or ad men. But it was Fletcher who delivered the little notes of praise or criticism or who stopped by a desk to say “Mr. Walker would like to see you in his office.”

Fletcher retained a sense of old-fashioned correctness throughout her life. While she

often accompanied Walter Walker and his wife, Kathy, to the city's social and political events, she always referred to them personally and professionally as “Mr. and Mrs. Walker.”

However, she had watched Preston Walker grow to manhood and had known Ken Johnson since he had worked as a teenager in the Sentinel's mailroom. They had always been “Pres” and “Kenny” to her, and she usually referred to them that way after they became her publishers and bosses. If she considered a visitor to be a dignitary, she reverted to “Mr. Walker” and “Mr. Johnson.”

Fletcher loved the intricacies of politics, which included

meeting the many prominent politicians who came in and out of the offices of the Sentinel's publishers. She was routinely a delegate to county and state Democratic conventions, although she took no leadership role. In return, she quietly won the respect and friendship of many political bigwigs.

When Colorado Supreme Court Justice James K. Groves knew that his death was imminent, the former Grand Junction lawyer chose Fletcher as one of a handful of friends to whom he sent brief letters of farewell from his Denver-area hospital bed.

After Walter Walker's death, then-Congressman Wayne N. Aspinall of Palisade invited her to join his Washington staff. Fletcher thought briefly — extremely briefly — about the invitation, then declined after deciding that she belonged in Grand Junction and at The Daily Sentinel.

Fletcher always had a check ready for a charitable cause, but her major donations were played down at her own request.

When she gave “a substantial sum” to the Mesa College theater department, college officials decided to name a room for her at the W.W. Campbell College Center. It took considerable persuasion from friends before she agreed to appear at the dinner in her honor, and she was visibly embarrassed at the attention she received. When the center was demolished a few years ago, the plaque bearing her name was removed and placed in storage.

A life-long member of the Presbyterian church, Fletcher quietly made a large contribution toward a new building that was erected in northeast Grand Junction. In another instance demonstrating her generosity, one woman friend received a new car after the Sentinel

had been sold to Cox Newspapers, simply because Fletcher decided that her friend needed a new vehicle.

Fletcher made a handsome sum from her Sentinel stock in the newspaper sale to Cox, and she was quick to explain to friends that her stock was not an inheritance but had been purchased with her own money whenever Walter Walker made stock available.

Fletcher retired from the Sentinel soon after it was sold to Cox. However, a few years later, then-Publisher James Kennedy decided to put together a sort of historical tape, with information from Fletcher as a kind of pivot-point. She balked at being interviewed, but finally agreed that I, a long-time friend and former Sentinel reporter, could do the job while I was visiting Grand Junction.

It may have been the most unsatisfactory interview I have ever conducted. She simply did not want to talk about anything related to the Sentinel. Her long-held practice of not revealing information about the newspaper's inner workings meant that she talked around my questions without giving any real answers. As I viewed the finished tape, I felt that I had failed as an interviewer.

Finally concluded that she had been the perfect invisible secretary for so many years that she was unable to visualize herself as the focus of an interview. And I decided that, during those years, she had picked up from all those governors, congressmen and other political visitors to the Sentinel, the politician's art of saying nothing while appearing to say a great deal.

Mary Louise Giblin Henderson is a former political reporter for The Daily Sentinel. She is retired and now lives in California.

PEOPLE

SENTINEL WIRE SERVICES

Timberlake, Macklemore lead with 6 MTV nods

NEW YORK — The man in the suit and tie and the duo who buys clothes at thrift shops are the leaders at this year's MTV Video Music Awards.

MTV announced Wednesday that Justin Timberlake and Macklemore & Ryan Lewis have six nominations each. Bruno Mars has four nominations.

Timberlake's “Mirrors,” Macklemore & Ryan Lewis' “Thrift Shop” and Mars' “Locked Out of Heaven” will battle Robin Thicke's “Blurred Lines” and Taylor Swift's “I Knew You Were Trouble” for video of the year.

Timberlake's “Mirrors” and “Suit & Tie” are up for best male video, pop video and collaboration, among others. Macklemore & Ryan Lewis' nominations include hip-hop video and collaboration.

Thicke, Miley Cyrus, Pink and Thirty Seconds to Mars have three nominations each.

The VMAs will air live Aug. 25 from Brooklyn's Barclays Center.

Adam Levine engaged to model

NEW YORK — Sorry, ladies, but Adam Levine is off the market.

The Maroon 5 singer's representative confirmed Tuesday he's engaged to model Behati Prinsloo.

Levine proposed to Prinsloo over the weekend in Los Angeles. The couple started dating last year. The singer's rep says the 34-year-old Levine and the 24-year-old Prinsloo recently reunited.

Prinsloo is from Namibia and models for Victoria's Secret. Levine also is a judge on the NBC singing series “The Voice.”

The Grammy Award-winning Maroon 5 last year released its fourth album, “Overexposed.” It features the hits “Payphone,” “One More Night,” “Daylight” and “Love Somebody.”

People magazine first reported the engagement.

MESA COUNTY FAIR

JULY 16 - 20

WORKING RANCH RODEO!

encana natural gas

The Mouse in 2

Mutton Bustin' before the Rodeo!

Mesa County Fair

Presented by Sutherlands®

FREE music & entertainment all week long for you & your family with your ticket.

Music, Magic, Laughs every day on the Celebration Stage!

Catch Pineapple Crackers tonight

Coming Tomorrow!

DEMOLITION DERBY

- SATURDAY NIGHT!

(separate ticket required)

Brought to you by

Mesa ★ County ★ Fairgrounds