



Marin Sais Rode to Fame in the Silent Film Era

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How fleeting is Fame! The lovely woman in the photograph was one of the biggest stars in the first decade of the emerging silent-film industry but is virtually unknown today. Known as the “Marin County beauty”, Marin Sais was born Mae Smith in San Rafael in 1890. She took her stage name from her home county and the name of the Mexican land-grant family of her great-uncle, Domingo Sais. After graduating from Notre Dame Academy in San Jose she moved to New York to pursue a career as an opera singer. Once there, Mae changed her name to Marin and began appearing on the vaudeville stage. In 1910, she first appeared on screen in a supporting role of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, produced by the Vitaphone Company of America. A year later she signed with The Kalem Company, which opened two studios in the Los Angeles area to take advantage of the mild, southern California weather and prime locations for filming western-style stories.

Sais’ career took off soon after relocating to Los Angeles. She appeared in several two-reel comedies, but it was her work and stunt riding in westerns that vaulted her into national stardom. Over the next ten years, Marin starred in more than 200 two-reel shorts, many of which were continuing adventure films. A few of the more popular series were *Bertha*, *The Girl Detective* a Nancy Drew style whodunnit, two western genre series, *Barbara Brent*, *The Girl from Frisco*, and *Ethel Porter*, *Stingaree’s Sweetheart* and “*The American Girl*” films with titles such as *The Desert Ghost* and *A Zeppelin Attack on New York*. Newspaper articles of the era dubbed her “the finest horsewoman in the world” for her daring stunts and riding ability, and called her, “the queen of the serials” for her many exciting portrayals. Other accounts complemented her on her “pluck, beauty and magnetic personality.” During this period, Japanese silent-film star Sessue Hayakawa chose Marin to star with him in three films that had more serious, romantic plots. In 1921 she married director and fellow

western actor, Jack Hoxie and the two made many longer, five-reel films in the western genre. At the time, Sais had a ranch in Glendale, California and another much larger near Lund, Utah where she raised horses that she rode in the movies. As Hoxie's career took off, Marin's began to wane, and she started playing supporting roles, vamps and villainesses. The two divorced 6 years later.

Sais' continued working in film through the 1940's in mostly low budget westerns, earning her the unflattering moniker of "Queen of the B-Movie oaters." She made an appearance on the *Lone Ranger* TV show in 1950 and had one uncredited role in a 1953 low-budget western. Like so many film stars and actors from the early 20th century, Marin spent her last few years as a resident at the Motion Picture & Television Country House and Hospital in Woodland Hills where she died of a stroke in 1971.

(February 7, 2022)