

Henry F. "Doc" McFarlin

Henry "Doc" McFarlin was born in the small town of Juneau, Wisconsin in 1867. After his father's early death, his older brother Charles became a printer to support the family. Henry helped him in the print shop for several months before returning to school for a few years, then returned to learn more about the printing business.

The brothers went to work at several newspapers in Wisconsin, Iowa and finally at the *Minneapolis Tribune*. In 1882, Charles decided to try out the new town of Billings, and Doc joined him a few months later. They worked at the *Billings Herald*, and a few months later purchased an interest in the paper. By 1885, there were several papers in Billings, and a company organized to buy three of them – the *Herald*, the *Post* and the *Rustler* – and consolidate them. The McFarlin brothers owned half the company and ran the printing end of the new paper, now called the *Billings Gazette*, to be housed in the *Rustler*'s offices. The big news of their first day was a fire that started in a hotel, and ended up burning down their premises. The paper had to be printed on borrowed presses.

Doc was a noted musician, and he and his brother were among the founders of the first band in 1884. In 1886, he ordered a beautiful new silver cornet from Chicago, inspiring local wags to suggest the Billings Brass Band's name would have to change. He led as conductor for several years. In 1908, he and several members of their band also formed a saxophone quartet that performed around town.

In early spring of 1896, Doc visited Hunter's Hot Springs, the one-time resort that was located in the Springdale area between Livingston and Big Timber. He was there at the same time as city treasurer W.B. George, who loved long soaks in the hot water. One day, George stayed in the gentlemen's plunge too long, and fainted into the water. Doc witnessed his collapse and forgot he was naked, and ran out into the road in front of the hotel and yelled for help, before running back and pulling George out of the water. Doc then ran to his coat and pulled out a flask, using the whiskey to revive George, who seemed to appreciate the treatment. He and George had another encounter two years later as the Billings Bicycle Club held a series of races at a track in South Park, where McFarlin edged George out. George urged a rematch at the next race, but McFarlin declined to enter.

He married Jennie Staffek at her brother's home on First Avenue South in 1899. Jennie was described as having "many admirable qualities", while Doc was cited as a man of "sterling ability and worth." The pair had two sons.

Doc McFarlin was a sporting man. As well as bicycles, he loved baseball and helped report the local games. He enjoyed hunting, and game and wilderness were to be found just outside of town. He also was a member of the first gun club which had a practice area near the old Coulson site. He helped establish the Billings Rod and Gun Club.



Doc was a part-owner of the *Billings Gazette* until 1907, when he sold his holdings to P.B. Moss to open his own print shop. The *Gazette* threw an elaborate farewell banquet at the Grand Hotel in his honor. His brother joined him in 1913 until they sold the business in 1920. Doc went back to the *Gazette*, where he worked with printing and later as a proofreader. He remained there until just before his death in 1932, spanning the evolution from hand-set type to mechanical typesetting to linotype.

Sources:

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- *Billings Gazette*, "Curbstone and Corridor", March 4, 1896
- *Billings Gazette*, "Death Claims H.F. M'Farlin, Early Printer", December 12, 1932
- *Billings Gazette*, "Married; H.F. McFarlin and Miss Jennie Staffek United for Life", February 10, 1899
- *Billings Gazette*, "Pioneer Printers Recall Old-Time Newspapers Here", April 13, 1930
- "Biographical Facts of Henry F. 'Doc' McFarlin, Sr.", October 25, 1939, Collection of Billings Public Library

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