



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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**(California - Ned McGowan and the San Francisco Vigilance Committee) Phoenix
(No.6-20 and 24)**

Stock#: 69435
Map Maker: McGowan
Date: 1857 -1858
Place: Sacramento
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 12.5 x 18.5 inches
Price: \$8,500.00



Description:

A Nearly-Complete Run of One of the Great Rarities of California Newspaper Collecting - the Sacramento Phoenix. Ned McGowan's Initial Response to the San Francisco Vigilance Committee.

A substantially complete run of fifteen issues (numbers 6-20 and 24, of 25) of Ned McGowan's polemic newspaper the Sacramento *Phoenix*. Both of McGowan's Sacramento newspapers were intended to clear his name in the eyes of the public and turn public opinion against the San Francisco Vigilance Committee.

As a Judge on the San Francisco County Court of Quarter Sessions, McGowan had repeatedly clashed with the Vigilance Committee during its first incarnation. When the Committee of Vigilance was reconvened in 1856, McGowan again fell afoul of its membership. McGowan's position became acutely perilous after a



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pistol he had lent to James P. Casey was used by the latter to shoot James King of William, a political rival who had libeled him in the press. The Vigilance Committee stormed the local jail and seized both Casey and Charles Cora, a target from an 1855 incident, whom they summarily hanged. McGowan was then warned that he was next in the sites of the Committee.

McGowan escaped San Francisco, using a Mexican disguise, and hid out in various parts of California, narrowly escaping the Committee of Vigilance in Santa Barbara, by having himself rolled into a carpet. Eventually, his friends managed to have a special act passed in the California legislature to enable him to be tried in the Napa Valley, far enough away from San Francisco to ensure a fair jury. McGowan was acquitted by that jury and settled in Sacramento.

McGowan published a book, *Narrative of Edward McGowan*, and two newspapers in an effort to resuscitate his own reputation and undermine that of the Vigilance Committee. The first of these newspapers was the *Sacramento Phoenix*, published in the Fall of 1857 and replaced by the *Ubiquitous* in February of 1858.

Respected pioneer newspaper historian, Edward C. Kemble, in his colossal *A History of California Newspapers 1846-1858* that appeared as a supplement to the December 25, 1858 issue of the *Sacramento Union* touched on the curious history of *The Phoenix* and the checkered career of its editor, "Ned" McGowan.

Kemble opined:

Though scarcely deserving a name among our public prints, the sheet being a vehicle for the malignant abuse and indecency of a private individual, may be mentioned as a part of the typography of our city. It was vended by E. McGowan, from about the Fall of 1857, until the Summer's of '58. A few months previous to its discontinuance, it was called the Ubiquitous.

McGowan concluded publication in the Summer of 1858 when he decided to travel to Canada to participate in the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush. McGowan's route to British Columbia took him through San Francisco again, where he was shot at outside the city courthouse. He escaped the city despite a warrant for his arrest and made his way to Canada.

In Canada, McGowan again faced off against members of the Vigilance Committee who had likewise gone there in search of fortune in the goldfields. It was during this time that he was involved in what became known as McGowan's War. He eventually tired of the politics of the frontier and returned to the East Coast, working as Sargeant-at-Arms for the U.S. House of Representatives. He made his way out to



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Tombstone, Arizona, where he was a witness in a murder trial, and on to San Francisco where he died in relative poverty in 1892.

Rarity

Exceptionally rare on the market. We find runs of neither the *Ubiquitous* nor the *Phoenix* in auction records since the 1968 Streeter Sale where two numbers of the *Phoenix* sold for \$30.

Institutional holdings are somewhat difficult to parse, as most include no more than one or two issues. To the best of our understanding, the following are listed in OCLC: California State Library ("scattered issues lacking"); Indiana University (volume I, number 4); University of Wisconsin (volume I, number 4). The most complete institutional sets would appear to be at Yale University (a complete set, "100 p.", i.e., 25 issues of 4 pages each) and the Bancroft (also a complete set).

Provenance

C.K. McClatchy (of the McClatchy Newspapers family)

Detailed Condition:

Folio. Each number is 4 pages. The newspaper is housed in a protective ½ black leather over blue cloth boards clamshell case (backstrap defective).