

THE F. G. FAATZ INSCRIPTIONS

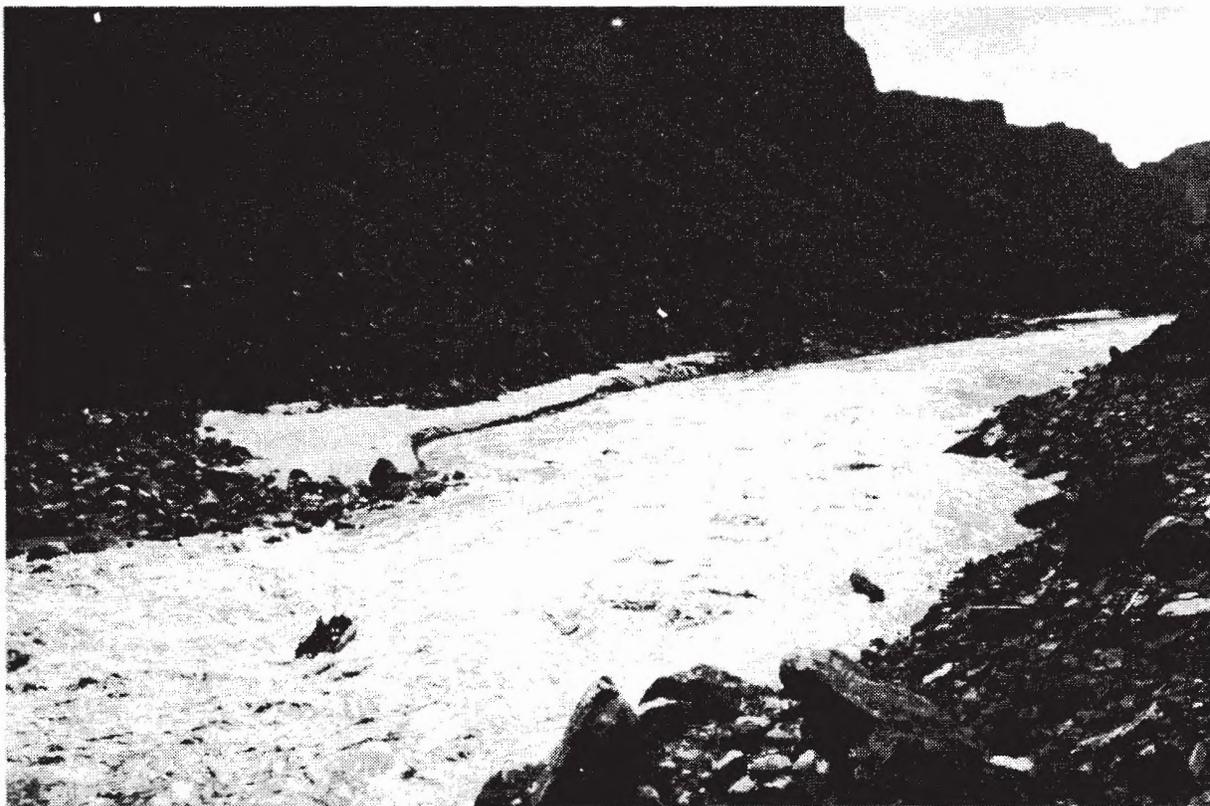
by Jim Knipmeyer

Not many people recognize the name Friend Grant Faatz, even river-runners of the Colorado in southern Utah and northern Arizona. But F. G., as he always signed his name, was one of the first persons on record to have successfully boated the treacherous rapids of notorious Cataract Canyon. This he accomplished in 1892. However, for decades little was known about either the man or his voyage.

Faatz left two inscriptions of his trip incised in the canyons of the Colorado River. The first is located in

stretches of whitewater in Cat, as other names and dates on surrounding boulders will attest. It was while doing just this sort of scouting that the Faatz inscription was first recorded for history. Charles Sharp, a member of the 1909 Julius Stone expedition down the canyons of the Green and Colorado rivers, briefly recorded in his journal the following statement in his entry for October 17: "At rapid No. 16 a number of names were cut on the rocks. One was Faate (sic) Aug. 27th 1892."

The second inscription, which proved that he did indeed survive the "Graveyard of the Colorado," while undoubtedly having been seen before, was not noted for posterity until the latter part of 1956. Lois Sanderson wrote to Colorado River historian Otis R. "Dock" Marston on August 29, informing him that her son Bill, a boatman for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, while doing survey



Looking downstream from F. G. Faatz inscription, Cataract Canyon. Photo by Jim Knipmeyer. This photo was taken during a USGS trip in October of 1993. The sport boat featured in this run of Rapid #15 was provided generously by Navtec Expeditions. In 1999 the USGS took a photo on the other side to record a new debris flow that altered the boulder fan on the left shore; the rapid did not really change much as a result of this debris flow.

mid-Cataract Canyon at what is sometimes referred to as Capsize Rapid, part of Mile-Long Rapid between river-miles 205 and 204. On a large talus boulder on the right bank, evidently using a metal punch or drill and hammer, his name, "F.G. FAATZ" and the date, "AUG. 27. 1892" are pecked into the rock. While the name remains easily readable, the date is now much fainter.

Other river-runners before and after Faatz also stopped at this point to look over one of the more difficult

work for the new Glen Canyon dam had found the following: "F. G. FAATZ NOV. 16. 1892." It was on the vertical canyon wall, a few feet above the sloping talus, at Mile-10.4, right bank. It is done in the same style as the earlier one farther upriver, but was this time literally chiseled into the rock, and remains very plain today.

A short article and photograph of this second inscription was published in the December 31, 1956, issue of *The Salt Lake Tribune*, and elicited a response

from descendants in the area of Manti, Utah. F. G. Faatz was born in Homestead, Pennsylvania, on June 3, 1864. He later spent much time "seeing the country," and subsequently established a home in Salina, Sevier County, Utah. Faatz married Sarah Jensen on August 29, 1894, in Manti, and the couple lived in Mayfield, Sanpete County, Utah, until his death March 4, 1948. He is said to have spent much of his later life selling wallpapers and painting house interiors.

But even the indefatigable Dock Marston, until his death in 1979, was unable to learn anything more concerning F.G. Faatz's life or his Colorado voyage of 1892. It remained for river-runner and writer P. T. "Pat" Reilly to fill in the story with the publication of his lengthy book on Lee's Ferry just this past year, 1999. In 1968 Reilly tracked down and communicated with Faatz's daughters and a son. They did not have a diary or journal of his river trip, but remembered quite vividly the stories he told them as children.

Faatz left Pennsylvania when he was "eighteen or twenty" years old. He wanted "to see the world," and traveled to many states before starting out "to conquer the West." For a while he worked for a mining company in Arizona. In 1891 Faatz's only sister died. He went back for her funeral, but then turned around to Arizona. He never returned to his home in Pennsylvania or saw any of his relatives for the remainder of his life.

One of his daughters described Faatz as "a small man, only 5 foot 5 inches tall, and weighing only 140 pounds. How such a small man could do all he did is quite unusual." Either before his river trip of 1892, or sometime in the two years following, he and a companion named Glover went all through southwestern Utah: Bryce, Cedar Breaks, Zion, and Grand Canyon, "any place they could get in and come out alive."

Evidently, during this period of his life Faatz was a prospector and miner, perhaps spurred on by the Glen Canyon gold rush of 1883-91 and the San Juan River "excitement" of 1892-93. His Colorado voyage, detailed in Reilly's book, was the result of being hired by a mining company in Salt Lake City, Utah, to "go down the river in search of gold." After ending the trip on November 17, he stayed in the lower Glen Canyon region around Lee's Ferry, Arizona, for the next year and a half. Reilly's last recorded mention of Faatz was a prospecting tour around that area in the spring of 1894.

His marriage in August of that year seems to have effectively ended Faatz's mining career, but not his memories of those days. He told his sons as they grew older that if he was younger he would go down the Colorado every summer and pan enough gold to live on each winter. One of his sons related his father asking, "Why don't you go down the river and pan gold? You could make more money in a few months than you can around here in a whole year!" I would say, "Dad, let's go," but he would always reply, "No, I'm too old."

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