



## 2025 Education Honoree - John Marion Roynon

John Marion Roynon was born on July 7, 1900, in northwestern Minnesota. He was the fourth of nine children born to George and Nora Roynon. The land was farming country, and Marion's family grew nearly all their own food. They were poor, but Marion often recalled that there was always enough to eat. Everyone worked on the farm, and he quickly learned how to handle every chore that needed doing.

When Marion was 10 years old, his grandmother, Barbara Ann Moore, visited from Northern California. At the end of her stay, she took Marion back with her to California. Widowed and living in a rural community where she worked cooking for the men in a logging crew, Grandma Moore needed help with daily life. No one explained why Marion was chosen to go with his grandmother, but he remembered being heartbroken to leave his family at such a young age.

For five years, Marion lived with his grandmother in Macdoel, California. She was deeply religious and introduced him to church life, which had not been part of his upbringing in Minnesota. Marion worked hard—hauling water from a pump across the street, chopping firewood, tending chickens, helping with laundry, sweeping floors, repairing the cabin, and tending the garden. Those years taught him resilience, responsibility, and skill with tools.

From 1910 to 1915, Marion attended Public School No. 3 in Macdoel, completing fourth through eighth grade. His grandmother recognized both his strong work ethic and academic promise. Wanting him to have more opportunities, she arranged for him to attend Lordsburg Academy in Southern California. His uncle, J. B. Roynon of Chicago, covered the \$325 annual cost for tuition, room, and board at the Lordsburg Hotel, which also housed the Academy and Lordsburg College. (In 1917, the town changed its name from Lordsburg to La Verne, and so did the schools.)

Marion's high school and college years were filled with good times, good friends and lots of hard work. He always had a part time job after school and during the summer breaks. He sent every other paycheck to his mother to help support her and his younger siblings. His mother had moved the family to Northern California to help Grandma Moore in the logging camp. His father, an alcoholic, had abandoned the family, leaving them to fend for themselves. No one ever heard for him again after his wife and children moved to California.

During college, Marion met Rhoda Price, who attended the same church. Her brother, John, was his best friend. Marion and Rhoda married on September 2, 1924, just before his senior year. Their first

daughter, Jean Marian, was born the next year, followed a year and a half later by their second daughter, Helen Martha.

On May 26, 1926, Marion graduated from La Verne College with a degree in education. He was hired by the La Verne City School Board to teach seventh and eighth grade boys at Lincoln School. He taught academic classes, woodshop, and coached the athletic teams. He earned \$2,000 a year and to supplement his income he worked part-time as a janitor. By 1929, he was promoted to the position of Principal of Lincoln School while continuing with his same teaching duties.

Beyond school, Marion poured himself into community service. He served as Scoutmaster of La Verne's Boy Scout Troop and directed summer camps for boys at Camp La Verne in the San Bernardino Mountains. At home, he and Rhoda welcomed six daughters in all, and his daughters often joked that working with young men through teaching, camping, and scouting helped him keep his sanity.

Marion continued his education at the University of California and Pomona College, getting a Masters Degree. Then on April 25, 1945, the La Verne School Board selected Marion as Superintendent of La Verne City Schools. As Superintendent, Marion quickly confronted the issue of segregation. At the time, Lincoln School served Anglo students north of Arrow Highway, while Palomares School enrolled Mexican-American children whose families worked in the groves and packing houses. Palomares was overcrowded and poorly equipped. Many students spoke only Spanish, but their teachers knew only English. In one classroom of first-graders, 70 students struggled with a single teacher who could not communicate with them. Dropout rates were high with most students leaving school before they reached high school.

Deeply troubled, Marion urged the School Board in spring 1947 to desegregate the schools. But the decision to integrate the schools was met with resistance from many citizens in an era of open prejudice. Signs at local restaurants read "No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed," and Mexican children were barred from the public swimming pool. Yet Marion stood firm in his belief that all children deserved equal education. The Board agreed, and that fall, La Verne's schools were unified: all primary students attended Palomares, while grades 3–8 attended Lincoln.

By 1949, it was clear that both schools were inadequate for the growing population. Plans were made to build two new schools: a modern Lincoln School for grades 4–8, completed in 1951, and La Verne Primary School for kindergarten through 3rd grade which opened across the street in 1952. The old "D Street" Lincoln School was later demolished.

Desegregation had been achieved in La Verne and the new school facilities were thriving. Yet in December of 1956, Marion submitted his resignation and asked to be released from his contract one year before it expired. He had been struggling with headaches and memory lapses and felt that he was no longer able to do the quality of work that he expected of himself and was unable to meet his own standards.

The School Board accepted his resignation and on May 24, 1957, the community honored his 31 years of service with a retirement banquet, where it was announced that Lincoln School would be renamed J. M. Roynon School.

In retirement, Marion remained active in civic life. He was named La Verne College Alumnus of the Year, appointed to the college's Board of Trustees, and recognized as Citizen of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce in 1960. He held leadership roles in the Lions Club, Coordinating Council, Parks and Recreation Commission, Chamber of Commerce, and Boy Scouts.

Marion ended his career using his skills as a carpenter to help build the first residential units at the new retirement home in La Verne, called Hillcrest. When the first units were completed, he was asked to become the first administrator of Hillcrest. After serving four years as Administrator, he retired again and he and Rhoda became residents of Hillcrest for the rest of their lives.

Marion found joy in woodworking at the Hillcrest woodshop, carving and making toys for his 27 grandchildren. Sadly, during his years at Hillcrest, he was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease. Over the next two decades his health continued to decline and his memories faded, gradually remembering less and less about his past life. He died on June 27, 1984, just shy of his 84th birthday.

One of the cards received at his memorial service praised Marion's consideration of all others as human beings. He said "Marion gave up all thought of fame and fortune and was satisfied to render, without fanfare, service to his community throughout his life."