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E.C. Allen and the emergence of the modern magazine

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E.C. ALLEN AND THE EMERGENCE
OF THE MODERN MAGAZINE

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of
The School of Journalism and Mass Communications
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by

Peter Hutchinson

May 2005

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ABSTRACT

E.C. ALLEN AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN MAGAZINE

By Peter Hutchinson

During the 19th century, social change transformed magazine publishing. Growth in the literate population, improvements in printing and papermaking, reduction of distribution cost, and the emergence of national advertising as a significant source of revenue allowed publishers to adopt a new business model in which advertising sales underwrote large scale circulation growth—a model followed by publishers (and other media) ever since.

The first publisher to offer 1 million circulation in a single advertising purchase was E.C. Allen, whose magazines were supported by a growing community of mail order advertisers. His magazines targeted a rural, modestly educated audience, and served formulaic content modeled on “story papers,” the popular literary magazines of the day. Allen was a mentor to Frank Munsey, who transformed magazine publishing when he applied Allen’s model to his own business. The archives of Allen’s business provide an insightful look at an influential 19th-century publisher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
---------------------	----

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. POPULATION.....	10
3. LITERACY.....	18
4. PRODUCTION CAPACITY.....	33
5. PERIODICAL DISTRIBUTION.....	49
6. ADVERTISING TRENDS IN THE 19TH CENTURY.....	66
7. THE PENNY PRESS AND ADVERTISING AGENCIES.....	74
8. DEVELOPMENT OF MAIL ORDER ADVERTISING.....	89
9. MAMMOTHS.....	99
10. THE STORY PAPERS.....	109
11. E.C. ALLEN.....	128
12. OTHER MAIL ORDER JOURNALS.....	166
13. FRANK MUNSEY AND THE MODERN MAGAZINE.....	185
REFERENCES.....	191
APPENDIX: PAPER AND PRODUCTION COST.....	199

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. SELECTED CIRCULATIONS.....	6
2. U.S. POPULATION: 1800-1900.....	10
3. MOVEMENT FROM FARM TO CITY: 1870-1900.....	11
4. PER CAPITA INCOME: 1850-1900.....	12
5. PRICE INDICES: 1860-1900.....	13
6. FARM WORKERS: AVERAGE MONTHLY EARNINGS.....	14
7. UNSKILLED LABOR: DAILY WAGE RATES ON THE ERIE CANAL...	15
8. UNSKILLED LABOR: AVERAGE DAILY WAGES.....	15
9. SKILLED LABOR: DAILY WAGE RATES ON THE ERIE CANAL.....	16
10. SKILLED LABOR: AVERAGE DAILY WAGES.....	17
11. LITERACY RATES: U.S. ARMY INDUCTEES, 1789-1894.....	20
12. PERCENT LITERATE: U.S. CENSUS, AGES 10 AND OLDER.....	21
13. ESTIMATED U.S. LITERACY RATES: 1800-1830.....	26
14. ESTIMATED U.S. LITERACY RATES: 1820-1850.....	27
15. ESTIMATED U.S. LITERACY RATES: 1850-1880.....	28
16. ESTIMATED U.S. LITERACY RATES: 1870-1900.....	29
17. U.S. LITERACY RATES: 1860-1900.....	30
18. SCHOOL ENROLLMENT RATES PER 100 CHILDREN.....	32
19. INCREASED PRESS CAPACITY: 1798-1902.....	38
20. POSTAGE PER PIECE SENT 500 MILES: 1784-1863.....	51

21. ADVERTISING REVENUE IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY.....	73
22. NEW YORK HERALD ADVERTISING RATES: 1835-1836.....	78

1. INTRODUCTION

The United States entered the 19th century with 16 states and a population of 5.3 million (*Historical Statistics of the United States*, 1975). It's debatable whether half of the country's population was literate (Soltow & Stevens, 1981).

Describing the state of the media in America at the turn of the 19th century, Ohmann (1996) wrote:

Newspapers and magazines were a negligible part of this culture. There were but ninety-two of the former in 1790, and no more than seven of the latter. Their circulations were small, and they tended to be unstable enterprises, especially magazines. Books were another matter: by the end of the eighteenth century, well over a thousand new titles (books and pamphlets) appeared each year. (p. 18)

Nevertheless, only 11 books in the decade prior to 1800 achieved sales of 40,000 or more copies. Those titles encompass an interesting blend of instructive nonfiction and disposable fiction, and include Franklin's *Autobiography*, Paine's *The Age of Reason*, Fox's enduring *Book of Martyrs*, Foster's *The Coquette*, and Roche's *Children of the Abbey*. Weems's *Life of Washington* (1800) was the first American best seller of the 19th century (Mott, 1947).

Newspapers had been published in English-speaking North America since the late 17th century, but started slowly and gathered momentum only as time passed. At the start of the Revolution there were 24 active newspapers in the colonies (Barber, 2004). In aggregate those 24 newspapers produced approximately 15,000 copies per week, or about one copy for every 130 citizens (Presbrey, 1929).

By 1783, the end of the war, 43 newspapers were in print (Barber, 2004). In the final decade of the 18th century, 466 newspapers were launched—though many of these failed to survive beyond a few issues. In 1810, 360 newspapers and other periodicals were active (Thomas, 1820; Presbrey, 1929). By 1816, the 125,000 inhabitants of New York City supported seven daily papers, with combined circulations of 9,420—about one copy for every 13 people (Presbrey, 1929). According to Starr (2004), there was one newspaper subscription for every two inhabitants of the country by the 1820s and 1,258 active newspapers in the United States by 1835.

Outside the largest cities, weeklies far outnumbered dailies throughout the 19th century. It wasn't until the *Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser* was launched in 1784 that any American newspaper attempted daily frequency (Presbrey, 1929). The *Packet* was supported to a great extent by advertising: 60% of its first issue was devoted to ad space (Starr, 2004).

Although 80 other magazines had been launched since the first American magazine appeared in 1741 (Bradford's *American Magazine*, which focused largely on political issues), only three survived long enough to see the new century (Mott, 1930).

The average lifespan of an American magazine in the 18th century was about 18 months. According to Mott (1930), 60% “did not outlast the first year, and only four reached the ripe age of three and a half years. Four died a-borning at one month” (p. 21).

There is no evidence that any American magazine of the 18th century achieved more than 1,600 subscribers (Mott, 1930). The break-even point seems to have been around 400; many would have been happy to reach circulations of three figures (Mott, 1930).

American Museum launched with 20 subscribers. Its editor, Mathew Carey, wrote of the shoals on which other periodicals had been wrecked:

I am in dread of only one—which I am almost afraid to intimate. This shoal is a want of due punctuality in paying the subscriptions. These being small, each individual is but too apt to suppose it a matter of great indifference whether he pays his quota at the time appointed or in six or twelve months afterward. This is a great mistake. It is further to be observed that the expense of sending twice or thrice, or, as is often the case, four times for the amount of a subscription, bears no small proportion to the sum received. (Quoted in Mott, 1930, p. 19)

In fairness to Carey's readers, the cost of subscriptions in the 18th century was not insignificant in an age when cash was scarce and reading materials were luxuries. Subscriptions were the equivalent of three or four days' wages for a skilled worker—comparable to several hundred dollars today. It's no wonder that paying subscribers were hard to find. Isaiah Thomas, one of America's earliest magazine publishers, was willing to accept butter in trade for subscriptions—and advertised to that effect when his family ran short of groceries (Mott, 1930).

Delinquency continued to haunt publishers throughout the first half of the 19th century. The editor of the *Methodist Protestant*, a religious weekly, felt compelled to address his readers in 1856, the year after Longfellow completed "The Song of Hiawatha:"

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

Should you ask us why this dunning,
Why these sad complaints and murmurs,
Murmurs loud about delinquents
Who have read the paper weekly,
Read what they have never paid for,
Read with pleasure and with profit,
Read of church affairs and prospects . . .

We should answer, we should tell you:

From the printer, from the mailer,
 From the kind old paper-maker,
 From the landlord, from the carrier,
 From the man who taxes letters
 With a stamp from Uncle Samuel—
 “Uncle Sam,” the rowdies call him—
 From them all there comes a message,
 “Please to pay us what you owe us” . . .

Sad it is to turn the ledger,
 Turn the leaves of this old ledger,
 Turn and see what sums are due us . . .

Send us money — send us money —
SEND THE MONEY THAT YOU OWE US!

(Quoted in Mott, 1938, vol. 2, p. 12)

Mott (1938, vol. 2) noted that the verse was widely reprinted—an indication of how common delinquency had become.

In 1800, the fastest way to go anywhere was to ride a horse. This remained the case until the first successful American steamboat, Fulton’s *Clermont*, went into service in 1807. The U.S. Post Office first used steamboats to deliver mail in 1813, and in 1823 waterways were declared by law to be “post roads,” sanctioned for carrying the mail (United States Postal Service, 2003).

In 1831 the Post Office used railroads to carry mail for the first time, and in 1836 issued the first contracts to carry mail by train. Rail lines were declared post roads in 1838 (United States Postal Service, 2003).

The Post Office Department’s adoption of emerging technology was a reflection of the country’s rapidly-expanding industrial base. Both printing and transportation capacities began to grow dramatically prior to the Civil War.

In the first half of the 19th century, demand for reading material—and inexpensive reading material in particular—also grew dramatically. Regardless of their prospects, magazines sprouted everywhere. The *Cincinnati Literary Gazette* wrote in 1824:

This is the age of magazines—
Even skeptics must confess it.
Where is the town of much renown
That has not one to bless it?

(Quoted in Mott, 1930, p. 126)

In the magazine publishing industry, conditions permitting significant nationwide circulation growth began to emerge prior to the Civil War. By the start of the war, a few publications had obtained impressive audience support.

The 1860 census provided a snapshot of where audience development for periodicals stood just prior to the Civil War (Quoted in Mott, 1938, vol. 2):

Circulation of the average quarterly: 3,370

Circulation of the average monthly: 12,000

Circulation of the average weekly (including newspapers): 2,400

As Table 1 shows, seven magazines of the time had achieved circulations higher than 100,000.

Table 1

Selected Circulations: 1860

Periodical	Claimed circulation
New York Ledger	400,000
Frank Leslie's Illustrated (special issue)	347,000
Country Gentleman	250,000
Frank Leslie's Illustrated	164,000
Godey's Lady's Book	150,000
Sunday Mercury	145,000
Harper's New Monthly	110,000
American Agriculturist	45,000
Ladies' Repository	35,000
Scientific American	30,000
The Atlantic Monthly	30,000

Note: From Mott, 1938, vol. 2

These figures were self-reported by publishers in a time well before the development of circulation auditing, and aren't precise. But even allowing for exaggeration, circulation at these levels was impressive, considering the challenges facing mid-19th century publishers.

Manufacturing and distribution expenses were high. Steep postage rates discouraged subscribers. Limited press capacities, the scarcity and price of paper, and the time involved in manual typesetting combined to make production a significantly higher portion of the publisher's operating budget than it is now. It was not apparent how cost to the reader could be reduced.

It was equally unclear to publishers how large their potential audiences might be. Circulation development was constrained by some obvious limitations: the size of the overall population, literacy rates within the populace, and the extent to which readers had convenient access to periodicals. Magazine publishers had only a few ways to market their publications to potential readers.

In other words, in the mid-19th century the following factors governed the rate at which the magazine industry could expand:

- Population size and rate of growth
- Literacy rates and their change over time
- The cost of distribution, and the ability to achieve timely delivery
- Production cost, production capacity, and paper availability
- The size of the national advertising market

As these factors changed, the foundations of publishing shifted. Over the course of about 50 years—approximately 1840 to 1890—an enormous, nationwide market of readers emerged. This was demonstrated first by popular literary magazines, which began to achieve unprecedented circulations. The earliest advertisers to take advantage of these large audiences were mail order marketers, eager to reach prospective customers across the country and able to measure the effects of their advertising.

By 1890 a handful of magazine publishers had developed audiences over 1 million and were supporting their businesses by selling advertising. They had found the business model which most modern magazines, and subsequent media, such as radio and television, have followed for the past century.

Without realizing they had done so, these highly influential publishers paved the way for major change in American culture.

Because they built audiences of rural and modestly-educated readers, their business achievements have been somewhat overshadowed by other publishers such as Curtis, Munsey, McClure, and Walker, who later followed the same model and built audiences of better-educated, middle class readers. Nevertheless, there is a direct connection between the first magazine publishers to employ the mass audience, ad-supported model and the publishers who later applied that model in middle class markets.

This thesis examines the social trends that made it possible for magazine publishers to build circulations to unprecedented levels, and profiles some of the first periodicals whose owners recognized that the market for popular literature was significantly larger

than previously imagined: the “mammoth” weeklies and “story papers.” The emergence of a community of mail order advertisers seeking national reach made it possible for publishers to develop circulation at a loss and still profit from advertising. This thesis looks in depth at E.C. Allen, the first publisher to offer 1 million circulation in a single ad buy, and at other publishers who followed his lead and built on his achievements.

2. POPULATION

As Table 2 shows, the 19th century was a time of dramatic population growth. In 1850 the United States had 23 million residents, including slaves. Over the next 50 years, the growth rate averaged 27% per decade. By 1900, the total population had grown to 76 million, more than three times larger than in 1850 (*Historical statistics of the United States*, 1975).

Table 2

U.S. Population: 1800-1900

	1800 (thousands)	1850 (thousands)	1900 (thousands)	Growth	
				1800- 1850	1850- 1900
Total population	5,308	23,192	76,294	337%	229%
Children under 10	1,168	6,738	18,045	477%	168%
Total men	2,104	8,357	29,610	297%	254%
Total women	2,037	8,097	28,639	297%	254%

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States*, 1975

Approximately 20% of the country's increase in population between the end of the Civil War and the end of the century can be attributed to immigration (Norris, 1990). The balance of the increase resulted from a high birth rate and a declining death rate.

Table 3 indicates that as the 19th century progressed, an increasing portion of the U.S. population lived in cities, and a decreasing portion engaged in agriculture.

Table 3

Movement from Farm to City: 1870 - 1900

Year	Percentage of population urban	Percentage of workforce engaged in agriculture
1870	26%	53%
1880	28%	51%
1890	35%	43%
1900	40%	40%

Note : From Norris (1990)

Absolute numbers of farm workers continued to increase annually well into the 20th century, because the country's rate of expansion was greater than the rate of migration from farm to city. For example, the percentage of Americans living west of the Mississippi increased from 14% to 27% between 1861 and 1890 (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950). Although an increasingly higher percentage of the populace lived in urban areas as the 19th century progressed, the lines of supply reaching rural residents lengthened. The country's center of population continued to move farther and farther away from large

eastern cities, as population density rose from 27.5 persons per km² in 1860 to 66.3 in 1900 (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950).

Per capita income more than doubled in the second half of the 19th century, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Per Capita Income 1850 - 1900

Year	Total income (billions)	Per capita
1850	\$ 2.2	\$ 95
1860	3.6	115
1870	6.7	174
1880	7.4	147
1890	12.1	192
1900	18.0	236

Note: From Norris (1990)

This increase in earnings came at a time when costs generally declined, despite a period of inflation around the Civil War, shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Price Indices: 1860-1900 (1914 = 100)

Year	Consumer price index	Wholesale price index
1860	79.5	93.0
1865	155.9	185.0
1870	124.9	135.0
1875	105.0	118.0
1880	97.8	100.0
1885	90.7	85.0
1890	91.5	82.0
1895	84.3	82.5
1900	84.3	71.7

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

Individual incomes, naturally, varied widely depending on profession. Table 6 demonstrates that the average farm worker earned significantly less than a dollar per day throughout the 19th century, including board.

Table 6

Farm Workers: Average Monthly Earnings (Including Board)

Year	Monthly earnings
1830	\$ 8.85
1850	10.85
1860	13.66
1870	16.57
1880	11.70
1890	13.93
1899	14.56

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

Table 7 and Table 8 show that, off the farm, unskilled laborers earned substantially more than farm workers, but of course had to house and feed their families on the difference. Table 7 lists the wages of common laborers on the Erie Canal. Table 8 lists average wages for unskilled laborers in factories.

Table 7

Unskilled Labor: Daily Wage Rates on the Erie Canal, 1830-1880

Year	Daily wage
1830	\$.75
1840	.88
1850	.88
1860	1.00
1870	1.75
1880	1.25

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

Table 8

Unskilled Labor: Average Daily Wages in Manufacturing Establishments, 1860-1880

Year	Daily wage
1860	\$ 1.33
1865	1.48
1870	1.52
1875	1.39
1880	1.32

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

More wage data from the Erie Canal show in Table 9 that skilled workers earned approximately twice as much as common laborers.

Table 9

Skilled Labor: Daily Wage Rates on the Erie Canal, 1830-1880

Year	Daily wage		
	Carpenter	Mason	Teamster
1830	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.31	\$ 1.75
1840	1.50	1.75	2.40
1850	1.50	1.50	2.00
1860	1.75	2.00	3.00
1870	2.50	3.00	5.00
1880	2.50	2.25	3.00

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

Likewise, Table 10 shows that skilled factory workers commanded a significant premium over their unskilled counterparts.

Table 10

Skilled Labor: Average Daily Wages in Manufacturing Establishments, 1860-1880

Year	Daily wage					Average
	Blacksmith	Carpenter	Engineer	Machinist	Painter	
1860	\$ 1.64	\$ 1.65	\$ 1.61	\$ 1.61	\$ 1.62	\$ 1.62
1865	2.61	2.68	2.33	2.56	2.31	2.50
1870	2.68	2.64	2.47	2.67	2.67	2.61
1875	2.41	2.42	2.33	2.47	2.35	2.39
1880	2.31	2.15	2.17	2.45	2.21	2.26

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

As was the case with prices, wages for both skilled and unskilled workers peaked at the time of the Civil War and declined afterward. Decline in wages was significantly less than decline in prices, however, and the average worker's purchasing power increased during the last quarter of the 19th century. Ohmann (1996) describes the archetype middle class professional, "Mr. Johnson," as earning \$680 a year in 1880, \$1,200 by 1895. Ohmann estimated that approximately 10% of the country's population were families like the "Johnsons" in 1895, indicating the emergence of a significant middle class market at the very close of the 19th century.

3. LITERACY

Literacy Rates

There is no cut-and-dried definition of literacy. People who can read well, poorly, and barely are all literate. Graff (1986) wrote that “it is depressing but instructive to note how rarely debates and discussions about literacy levels pause to consider what is meant by ‘literacy’” (p. 64).

Perhaps the best working definition of literacy as we look at the market for reading material in the second half of the 19th century is Solomon’s (1986). She wrote that literacy is among

. . . the skills that everyone in this society must learn if they are to have any possible chance at decent jobs and fair treatment and protection. This is “functional” literacy. . . . Its practical importance is unquestionable. (p. 41)

The “skills that everyone in this society must learn”—the tools most members of a population share—form a common denominator, in a manner of speaking.

From the publisher’s perspective, functional literacy in the second half of the 19th century meant the ability to read popular periodicals with the least challenging content. People with at least this “common denominator” of reading ability formed the potential audience universe for books, periodicals, and other printed matter.

American literacy metrics are inconsistent, making it difficult to track trends over time. For example, the United States Census began recording literacy rates in 1840, but phrased questions about literacy differently in each census until 1870. But enlistment

records for soldiers and sailors provide one of the few consistent measurements of literacy.

As Table 11 demonstrates, 19th-century U.S. Army enlistment records show ongoing overall increase in literacy between the 1820s and the 1880s. However, this rate of increase was not universal. Of enlistees from Northern states between 1799 and 1829, an average of 66% were literate. By 1895, the average had increased to 83%. About half of the enlistees from Southern states were literate in the period between 1799 and 1829, and 69% were literate in 1895. In other words, throughout the 19th century literacy was higher for Northerners than for Southerners, and increased at a faster rate in the North.

• (Soltow & Stevens, 1981)

Table 11

Literacy Rates: U.S. Army Inductees, 1799-1894

Years	Percent literate
1799-1809	58%
1810-1819	58%
1820-1839	61%
1840-1849	65%
1850-1859	75%
1860-1869	76%
1870-1879	83%
1880-1889	93%
1890-1894	93%

Note: From Soltow & Stevens (1981)

The Army data show two periods in which literacy rose fastest: first between the 1840s and the 1850s, and later between the 1870s and the 1880s.

Stevens's examination of merchant seamen's enlistment records yields identical data, 58% literacy, in the period from 1810-1820 inclusive, though higher literacy (an average of 70%) in the period 1800-1840 (Quoted in Kaestle, 1988). Regarding both sources, soldiers and sailors, Stevens (1987) wrote: "These figures are probably biased upward for illiteracy, since enlistees and seamen included a disproportionate share of those in lower

socioeconomic groups” (p. 100). In each case, however, literacy was defined as the ability to sign one’s name, which is the loosest possible definition.

Although information from the Census is more inclusive, it suffers (as noted above) from inconsistency prior to the 1870 Census, and has other drawbacks: it is self-reported and isn’t tested. In other words, census-takers simply asked how many members of a family could read and write, and accepted what they were told.

Census data shown in Table 12 reflect the growth in literacy noted already. The rate of growth is different than the U.S. Army data indicate, most likely because army enlistees didn’t represent a random sample of the population, by race, age, or gender. Nevertheless, both sources arrive at approximately the same point by the end of the century.

Table 12

Percent Literate: U.S. Census, Ages 10 and Older

Year	White	African-American	Total
1870	88.5%	20.1%	80.0%
1880	90.6%	30.0%	83.0%
1890	92.3%	43.2%	86.7%
1900	93.8%	45.5%	89.3%

Note: From Soltow & Stevens (1981)

Stevens (1987) noted that the gender gap had narrowed among the native-born, nonfarm population by 1870. “In 1870, the female-male literacy ratio was 1.26. Thus, for every four male illiterates there were five female illiterates” (p.102).

Literacy rates varied widely based on a large number of factors. A quick review of each:

Education: Literacy rises with education.

Social status: Literacy rises with social status. “[I]lliterates were found in proportionately greater numbers at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale” (Stevens, 1987, p. 103).

Urbanity: Literacy rates were higher in urban areas, although Graff identified a cap: “. . . an upper limit (20,000-30,000) to density’s positive contribution” (Graff, 1987, p. 88).

North vs. South: Army enlistment data demonstrated that literacy was higher in Northern states (Soltow & Stevens, 1981).

Gender: In the 19th century, men were more likely to be literate than women, although this gap diminished as the century progressed (Stevens, 1987).

Race: There were dramatic differences between White and African-American literacy rates, as illustrated by Census data.

Age: Children naturally have lower literacy levels than adults. Because of the trend of rising literacy, however, older adults were less likely to be literate than younger adults at any point in the 19th century.

Institutions: Access to schools, libraries, churches, and similar institutions increased the likelihood of literacy (Graff, 1987).

Access to printed materials: As the amount of printed material increased, so did the likelihood of literacy. Soltow and Stevens (1981) demonstrated that areas of the country where a higher percentage of people were employed in publishing enjoyed higher literacy rates.

Nativity. With some exceptions, literacy was generally higher among native-born Americans than immigrants (Graff, 1987).

Although any calculation of literacy in this period will be an approximation, the preceding information sets the stage for a reasonably accurate estimate of America's literate population during the 19th century, using the following guidelines:

1. Children under 10 are not considered part of the literate population.
2. African-American literacy is estimated at 5% from 1800 through 1820, rising to 15% by 1860, then factored as reported in the 1870 and subsequent Censuses. In Censuses through 1860, slaves constituted between 86% and 89% of the total African-American population, and it seems reasonable to estimate that literacy among slaves was minimal.
3. Army enlistment literacy data are broadly representative of literacy rates for White men.
4. Literacy rates for White women are factored lower than the rates of White men through the period, beginning with a 10-point differential in 1800 which narrows to a 2-point differential in 1900. This conforms to Stevens's (1987) 1.26 female-male ratio in 1870 noted above.

Taken together, the estimates in Tables 13, 14, 15, and 16 show that growth in total population and increases in literacy rates compounded to create conditions throughout the 19th century in which the literate population grew significantly faster than the overall population. For example, the total population grew by a factor of 2.4 between 1860 and 1900. The literate population increased more than 3.5 times in the same period.

The data in Table 13 indicate that the first quarter of the 19th century was a period of slow growth in literacy.

Table 13

Estimated U.S. Literacy Rates: 1800-1830

Population segment	1800	1810	1820	1830
Total population	5,308	7,240	9,639	12,866
Children under 10	1,168	2,485	3,170	4,225
Population 10 and over	4,140	4,755	6,469	8,641
African-Americans	1,002	1,378	1,772	2,328
Literate African-American men	20	23	31	55
<i>Percent literate</i>	5%	5%	5%	7%
Literate African-American women	20	23	30	55
<i>Percent literate</i>	5%	5%	5%	7%
Whites (races other than African-American)	4,306	5,862	7,867	10,538
Literate White men	993	1,138	1,550	2,202
<i>Percent literate</i>	58%	58%	58%	61%
Literate White women	790	923	1,284	1,873
<i>Percent literate</i>	48%	49%	50%	54%
Total literate population	1,822	2,107	2,896	4,184
<i>Percent of total population literate</i>	34%	29%	30%	33%
<i>Percent of population 10 and over literate</i>	44%	44%	45%	48%

Note: In thousands

As shown in Table 14, literacy growth began to accelerate as the middle of the century approached, especially between 1840 and 1850.

Table 14

Estimated U.S. Literacy Rates: 1820-1850

Population segment	1820	1830	1840	1850
Total population	9,639	12,866	17,069	23,192
Children under 10	3,170	4,225	5,440	6,738
Population 10 and over	6,469	8,641	11,629	16,454
African-Americans	1,772	2,328	2,874	3,639
Literate African-American men	31	55	98	192
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>15%</i>
Literate African-American women	30	55	98	195
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>15%</i>
Whites (races other than African-American)	7,867	10,538	14,195	19,553
Literate White men	1,550	2,202	3,206	5,306
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>61%</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>75%</i>
Literate White women	1,284	1,873	2,796	4,758
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>59%</i>	<i>70%</i>
Total literate population	2,896	4,184	6,198	10,452
<i>Percent of total population literate</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>36%</i>	<i>45%</i>
<i>Percent of population 10 and over literate</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>64%</i>

Note: In thousands

Table 15 shows that by 1870 more than half of the total population was literate.

Table 15

Estimated U.S. Literacy Rates: 1850-1880

Population segment	1850	1860	1870	1880
Total population	23,192	31,443	38,559	50,156
Children under 10	6,738	9,013	10,329	13,394
Population 10 and over	16,454	22,430	28,230	36,762
African-Americans	3,639	4,442	4,880	6,581
Literate African-American men	192	237	348	712
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>30%</i>
Literate African-American women	195	238	367	735
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>30%</i>
Whites (races other than African-American)	19,553	27,001	33,679	43,575
Literate White men	5,306	7,466	10,437	15,148
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>76%</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>93%</i>
Literate White women	4,758	6,795	9,666	14,085
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>90%</i>
Total literate population	10,452	14,736	20,818	30,680
<i>Percent of total population literate</i>	<i>45%</i>	<i>47%</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>61%</i>
<i>Percent of population 10 and over literate</i>	<i>64%</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>83%</i>

Note: In thousands

Table 16 shows that by the end of the century, nine out of 10 adults could read.

Table 16

Estimated U.S. Literacy Rates: 1870-1900

Population segment	1870	1880	1890	1900
Total population	38,559	50,156	62,948	76,294
Children under 10	10,329	13,394	15,209	18,045
Population 10 and over	28,230	36,762	47,739	58,249
African-Americans	4,880	6,581	7,189	8,834
Literate African-American men	348	712	1,233	1,838
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>55%</i>
Literate African-American women	367	735	1,240	1,871
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>55%</i>
Whites (races other than African-American)	33,679	43,575	55,759	67,460
Literate White men	10,437	15,148	20,272	24,954
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>94%</i>	<i>95%</i>
Literate White women	9,666	14,085	18,856	23,471
<i>Percent literate</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>91%</i>	<i>93%</i>
Total literate population	20,818	30,680	41,601	52,134
<i>Percent of total population literate</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>61%</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>68%</i>
<i>Percent of population 10 and over literate</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>87%</i>	<i>90%</i>

Note: In thousands

Table 17 demonstrates the dramatic growth of the literate population 1860 and 1900.

Table 17

U.S. literacy rates: 1860-1900

Year	Total Population	Literate Population	Percent Literate
1860	31,443	14,736	47%
1870	38,559	20,818	54%
1880	50,156	30,680	61%
1890	62,948	41,601	66%
1900	76,294	52,134	68%

From a publisher's perspective, this represents unprecedented market expansion to a degree that has not repeated itself since, at least not in the United States, and an opportunity to which the publishers of the day were not blind. As the literate population doubled between 1870 and 1890, publishers enjoyed a period of dramatic growth and innovation.

The Common School

Increase in the literacy rate is attributable to several factors, but the most important was the common school movement, which began to gain momentum in the 1830s.

Kaestle (1985) wrote that “the big story in 19th-century American literacy is the development of common-school systems” (p. 113).

In the same vein, Stevens wrote (1987):

One of the basic features of the literacy campaigns after 1830 was their focus on the public school as the chosen instrument of reform. . . It is extremely difficult, then, to disentangle the effects of literacy from the effects of schooling, at least at the elementary level. (p. 100)

Throughout the 19th century, increasingly higher numbers of children attended school, for increasingly longer periods, and reached increasingly higher grades.

Table 18 shows that enrollment rates peaked in 1880 and declined between 1880 and 1900. Absolute numbers of students increased throughout the second half of the century, however, due to population growth.

Table 18

School Enrollment Rates per 100 Children 10 and Under: 1850-1900

Year	Male and female			Male			Female		
	Total	White	Non-White	Total	White	Non-White	Total	White	Non-White
1850	47.2	56.2	1.8	49.6	59.0	2.0	44.8	53.3	1.8
1860	50.6	59.6	1.9	52.6	62.0	1.9	48.5	57.2	1.8
1870	48.4	54.4	9.9	49.8	56.0	9.6	46.9	52.7	10.0
1880	57.8	62.0	33.8	59.2	63.5	34.1	56.5	60.5	33.5
1890	54.3	57.9	32.9	54.7	58.5	31.8	53.8	57.2	33.9
1900	50.5	53.6	31.1	50.1	53.4	29.4	50.9	53.9	32.8

Note: From *Historical statistics of the United States* (1975)

In the same period the school year expanded significantly for most pupils. The average elementary or secondary student attended school 78.4 days in 1870. This rose to 99.0 days by 1900 (*Historical statistics of the United States*, 1975).

Between 1870 and 1900, the number of institutions of higher education in the United States almost doubled, from 563 to 977. Faculty at these institutions more than quadrupled, from 5,553 in 1870 to 23,868 in 1900. Enrollment increased from 52,000 (1.1% of the population between 18 and 24) to 238,000 (2.3% of the population between 18 and 24) (*Historical statistics of the United States*, 1975)

4. PRODUCTION CAPACITY

During the 19th century, industrial capacity grew exponentially in every category of manufacturing, and print production was very much a part of the expansion. Steinberg (1959) observed:

The turn of the 18th to the 19th centuries marks a decisive stage in the history of printing. It was not a break but rather a sudden leap forward. It affected the technique of printing, the methods of publication and distribution, and the habit of reading. . . technical progress, rationalized organization, and compulsory education interacted upon one another. New inventions lowered the cost of production; mass literacy created further demands. (p. 197)

At the close of the 18th century, presses had changed very little since the days of Gutenberg. An experienced pressman could produce between 200 and 300 sheets per hour, printing each sheet individually, and performing every operation by hand, from inking the plate to stacking the sheets (Chappell, 1970; Steinberg, 1959). By the close of the 19th century, presses could deliver 100,000 complete newspapers in an hour (Comparato, 1979)—each at a cost exponentially lower than the cheapest sheet in 1800.

Printing

The revolution in print production began when Friedrich Koenig developed a steam-powered press on which a revolving impression cylinder substituted for the hand press's flat platen. This was first used in regular production by the London *Times* in 1814 (North, 1884). According to Steinberg (1959), Koenig's press delivered 1,100 sheets per hour.

Use of additional impression cylinders could multiply a press's capacity. This principle was harnessed in 1828 when a four-cylinder press, developed by Augustus Applegath and Edward Cowper for the *Times*, quadrupled the speed of Koenig's earlier steam press (Steinberg, 1959).

According to North (1884), steam power was not used in American printing until 1835. Prior to the emergence of the penny press, press runs were small enough to be filled by hand-cranked presses. The New York *Sun*, however, found it impossible to produce enough copies by hand, and installed a steam-powered press designed by a British inventor named Napier, and constructed under contract by R. Hoe & Co.

For a time, the Napier represented state of the art in long-run printing. In 1835 the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* apologized for the blurred lines of an engraving with a boast, saying the illustration demanded to be

...more carefully printed that was found possible on so powerful a Napier press as the SATURDAY COURIER is worked upon, and which being set in motion by the irresistible agency of steam, "goes-a-head" with a velocity that would amaze even Crockett himself. The immense edition which we are compelled to print every week renders this rattling speed a matter of absolute necessity. (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 13)

The *Courier's* claims notwithstanding, the ultimate speed of a press was limited by having to print on one side of one sheet at a time. Printing on both sides—perfecting, in printers' terminology—which eliminated the need to handle single sheets twice, was the goal of every press manufacturer in the mid-19th century.

An important step in the process that moved printing from production of one sheet at a time to production in a continuous stream was the development of the type-revolving rotary press, first patented in New York in 1846 by Richard Hoe. On this press a curved printing plate allowed significant improvements in speed (Chappell, 1970).

The largest working press in 1850 (a 10-cylinder Hoe press) printed 20,000 single-sided sheets per hour (Chappell, 1970; Comparato, 1979).

In 1865 William Bullock married the rotary press to the paper web, or roll, for the first time, printing onto both sides of a continuous roll of paper, which was trimmed into separate sheets after printing (Comparato, 1979).

Bullock's innovation revolutionized the printing industry by demonstrating that dramatic increases in yield were possible, but it was the Hoe company that came to dominate the high-speed press market during the remainder of the 19th century. Hoe's first web-fed perfecting press, introduced later in 1865, achieved more than twice the production speed of Bullock's.

At this point, printing speeds began to exceed the speeds of mechanized folders, which were limited to about 8,000 sheets per hour. The resourceful Hoe developed a new high-speed inline folder in 1874, and Hoe presses began producing complete folded

newspapers at unprecedented rates. By the turn of the century, Hoe presses were producing more than 100,000 folded and bound 16-page signatures per hour (Comparato, 1979).

Newspapers were the primary customers of presses that operated at these speeds, and not every printing job required production in the tens of thousands per hour—although every type of printing benefited from mechanization and other improvements in printing technology. For example, in 1821 Treadwell introduced a donkey-powered press, capable of 600 impressions per hour. This was less than one third the capacity of Cowper and Applegath’s steam-powered press of 1818, and one tenth the capacity of Applegath’s steam-powered press of 1827—but steam power was expensive to generate, and usually impractical in the 1820s, whereas donkeys were ubiquitous (Comparato, 1979).

Similarly, Hoe’s “Little Astonisher” stop-cylinder press, introduced in 1851, could produce 3,500 single-sided sheets per hour, little more than one sixth the capacity of the “Lightning” press the company had brought to market two years earlier. But the “Little Astonisher” was designed for high quality, “fine” presswork, which until its introduction could be accomplished only on hand presses. At 3,500 impressions per hour, the new press delivered quantum productivity gains in this specialized market (Comparato, 1979).

In the early 1880s, photographs were reproduced on rotary presses for the first time, at higher resolution and dramatically lowered cost compared to previous methods of illustration. Before Frederick Ives developed and refined the process of reproduction via halftones, magazines had been illustrated primarily by woodcuts or engravings, a time-consuming, expensive process (Presbrey, 1929). The *Century* spent as much as \$5,000

per issue for illustrations (Norris, 1990), and *Godey's Lady's Book* employed up to 150 female “colorists” to hand-tint its illustrations (Mott, 1930).

In 1893, Hoe constructed the first multicolored rotary press (Norris, 1990), which was purchased by *Comfort* magazine (Sayward, 1960).

By the end of the 19th century, presses capable of printing, folding, and counting 96,000 8-page newspapers per hour were in widespread operation (Chappell, 1970). Table 19 illustrates gains in capacity throughout the 19th century. The breakthrough innovations were mechanization in the teens, development of the web-fed perfecting press in the mid-1860s, improvements to the folding mechanism in the mid-1870s, printed halftones in the 1880s, and the introduction of rapid color printing in the 1890s.

Table 19

Increased Press Capacity: 1798-1902

Year	Manufacturer	Capacity per hour	Unit	Single- sided or perfecting
1798	Stanhope	250	Impressions	S
1810	Koenig	400	Impressions	S
1814	Koenig	1,000	Impressions	S
1818	Cowper & Applegath	2,000	Impressions	S
1823	Applegath	4,200	Impressions	S
1824	Napier	2,000	Impressions	P
1827	Applegath	6,000	Impressions	S
1838	Hoe	6,000	Impressions	S
1847	Hoe	9,000	Impressions	S
1847	Hoe	12,000	Impressions	S
1848	Applegath	12,000	Impressions	S
1849	Hoe	20,000	Impressions	S
1865	Bullock	20,000	Impressions	P
1865	Hoe	45,000	Impressions	P
1874	Hoe	15,000	Folded 8 pp.	P
1879	Bullock	28,000	Folded 8 pp.	P
1879	Hoe	30,000	Bound 8 pp.	P
1882	Hoe	24,000	Bound 12 pp.	P
1889	Hoe	48,000	Bound 24 pp.	P
1902	Hoe	144,000	Bound 16 pp.	P

Note: From Comparato (1979)

Paper

Prior to the Civil War, technical innovation moved faster in printing technology than in papermaking, and consequently demand for paper continually outstripped its availability throughout the first half of the 19th century. This influenced the graphic design of American periodicals, and their price. Printed material was dense and dark in the early 19th century, as publishers shrank type and eliminated illustration in an effort to get as much information as possible into limited space. Noel (1954) described a typical issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1830s:

The front page hit the reader with eight deadly columns of close black print, covering a far more appalling stretch than the modern newspaper presents to the eye. This stretch was practically unbroken—no attractive spacing, no spread heads, no variety in the print. (p. 11)

Until the Civil War, printing paper was sold by the ream. (In the 19th century, a ream was measured as 20 quires at 24 sheets per quire, for a total of 480 sheets per ream (Tryon & Charvat, 1949).) As web-based printing became more common after the Civil War, pricing by the pound became more practical.

Prices per ream rose somewhat between 1810 and 1830, and then declined until about 1840. Allowing for the paper market's characteristic cycles of over- and under-production, prices per ream appear to have held steady from about 1840 to about 1860. Then the Civil War drove up the price of paper dramatically.

Steinberg (1959) noted that paper represented about 20% of a publisher's production cost in 1800, a time when Weeks (1916) estimated there were "a few more than one hundred" paper mills in the United States. (pp. 104-105)

A decade later, the 1810 Census listed 202 mills, whose annual output of 426,000 reams of paper of all types was valued at about \$1.7 million, or roughly \$4.00 per ream on average (Weeks, 1916). Writing independently in 1810, Isaiah Thomas estimated that the country annually consumed about 50,000 reams of newsprint at an average price of \$3.00 per ream, and about 70,000 reams of book paper at an average price of \$3.50 per ream.

The Markle company of western Pennsylvania offered news grades for \$3.25 and \$3.50 per ream in 1815. A manufacturers' committee reporting to Congress in 1821 listed news grades at \$3.50 and \$4.00 per ream (Weeks, 1916). According to Weeks, total U.S. newsprint consumption in 1828 was approximately 104,000 reams, valued at \$500,000, or \$4.81 per ream. Likewise, Presbrey (1929) wrote that a ream of newsprint was \$5.00 in 1827, but that "five years afterward improvements in paper making had been so great that a sheet a quarter larger cost 25 per cent. less" (p. 186).

We can see these later trends illustrated in the ledgers of publishers Carey and Lea, who published the *American Journal of Medical Science* in Philadelphia for nine years between 1827 and 1835. Their average ream costs per year fluctuated somewhat, although they paid the same price per ream in the *Journal's* last year as they did in its first (Kaser, 1963).

1827: \$5.00 per ream

1828: 5.00

1829: 5.00

1830: 6.00

1831: 6.00

1832: 6.00

1833: 5.76

1834: 5.75

1835: 5.00

Usage varied more dramatically, however.

The issue of May, 1826 required 97 reams to produce a run of 2,500 copies at 256 pages each. Total cost of paper for this issue was \$485.00, or \$.76 per thousand pages.

The issue of May, 1835 required only 56 reams—41 fewer—to produce a run of 2,000 copies at 284 pages each. Total cost of paper for this issue was \$280.00, or \$.49 per thousand pages (Kaser, 1963).

Although the price of a ream was the same in both years, there was a 35% decline in cost per page when the issues of 1835 are compared to the issues of 1827. This is almost certainly because, as Presbrey (1929) noted above, reams bought in the 1830s were larger: as mills' capacities gradually expanded, paper manufacturers preferred to sell larger sheets rather than cut their prices. Presbrey added that some publishers adopted the same strategy:

Reduction in newsprint cost had not, however, up to this time [1827] resulted in a lessened price to the reader. Instead the publisher gave more for the same money by enlarging the size of his sheet. From four columns the papers widened to six, and the depth also increased. Competition took the form of larger paper size, which was regarded as giving prestige. (p. 186)

This demonstrates an increase in paper supply between the mid-1820s and the mid-1830s. Ticknor & Fields of Boston, who began publishing in 1837, paid roughly \$3.00 to \$4.00 per ream for the paper used in their less expensive pocket books, pamphlets, and other ephemera. Their cost per ream and cost per thousand pages remained stable from the late 1830s through the late 1850s (Tryon & Charvat, 1949). Some representative Ticknor & Fields production costs from this period are listed in Appendix A.

For the most part, supply of paper was governed by the supply of rags. In the first half of the 19th century, the cost of rags to the papermaker represented about one third of the retail cost of paper to the printer (Weeks, 1916). Papermakers searched everywhere for supplies of raw materials. Tons of rags were imported from Europe (primarily Italy) and elsewhere. Imports grew rapidly, from 954,000 kg in 1843, to 5.0 million kg in 1845, and 9.4 million kg in 1850, at an average price of 3.61 cents per pound (7.94 cents per kg). In 1850, almost a quarter of all American paper was made from imported rags (Weeks, 1916).

Imaginative sources of raw materials were considered. Baker (2001) wrote that lack of rags led to an 1855 proposal to import mummies in bulk from Egypt. The mummies' shrouds were high quality linen, excellent for papermaking, and it was rumored that there might be as many as 500 million mummies in Egypt. In 1856, the *New York Tribune*

reported that 2.25 million pounds (1.02 million kg) of rags had been imported to the United States from Alexandria. Noting this, Baker commented, “Some of these imports may have come from living people, but many, it seems fairly certain, came from the long dead” (p. 61).

More practical ways were found to improve the productivity of 19th-century American papermaking.

First of these developments was increased mechanization. Until about 1820, all paper in the United States was made by hand in rectangular frames. In 1816 Thomas Gilpin, working near Wilmington, DE, patented a machine that manufactured paper in a continuous sheet using a cylinder instead of a frame. A similar method was employed by John Ames, of Springfield MA, and patented in 1822. Fourdrinier paper-making machinery, first introduced in the United States from France in 1827, was more advanced than these homegrown methods, and produced paper in webs more efficiently and in much larger quantities. Eventually most paper in the United States in the 19th century was manufactured using the Fourdrinier method (Weeks, 1916).

The discovery of chlorine in the mid-1830s allowed rags of all colors to be used in paper manufacturing (Chappell, 1970). This enabled an increase in supply and a decrease in price roughly coincident with the emergence of the penny press and growth in periodicals generally. Weeks (1916) quoted James M. Wilcox, a veteran Pennsylvania papermaker:

The interval from 1830 to 1840, was important for the vast improvements made in the manufacture, by the application of machinery, and, also, by the introduction of the use of chlorine in the form of gas, of chloride of lime, and the alkalies, lime, and soda-ash in bleaching, cleansing, and discharging the colors from calicoes, worn-out sail, refuse tarred-rope, hemp, bagging, and cotton-waste. (pp. 191-192)

It was clear, however, that supply of paper could not increase substantially until a substitute for rags was found, and throughout the first half of the 19th century this was the papermaker's consuming quest. Weeks (1916) wrote that 19th-century papermakers experimented with more than 100 different raw materials, including algae, aloe, asbestos, asparagus, banana, beet root, cabbage stalks, corn husks, ferns, fish, garbage, grape vines, ivory, manure, marshmallow, seaweed, thistles, and a water plant known as frog spittle.

Describing these trials and errors, Weeks (1916) wrote that "the customary prediction of a paper-making revolution was followed by the customary failure" (p. 216).

Straw was the first rag substitute that proved economically viable. Rye straw-based wrapping paper and cardboard were first manufactured in the United States in 1828, and continued to find a market into the 20th century. Straw made a serviceable, but not a good, printing paper, and some books, and several issues of *Niles' Weekly Register* magazine, were printed experimentally on straw paper. There was a boom in straw paper between 1862 and 1870, with prices reaching as high as 11 cents per pound (five cents per kg), but demand declined after 1870 (Weeks, 1916).

Wood, of course, provided the lasting breakthrough. Several methods of producing wood pulp were developed in the 1860s, including chemical methods using sulphite and alkalies. A mechanical process—making pulp by grinding the wood—proved more

efficient. Ground-wood pulp paper came to market in volume in the United States shortly after the Civil War when three brothers named Pagenstrecher imported pulp-grinding equipment from Germany and established a mill near Stockbridge, MA in 1867. The Smith paper company was soon taking the mill's entire output of pulp (Weeks, 1916).

Despite initial skepticism, ground-wood pulp paper was in widespread use by the 1870s (Chappell, 1970). This brought a dramatic increase in supply, particularly in cheaper periodical grades, and a significant decrease in cost.

The introduction of ground-wood paper made the post-Civil War market entirely different than the antebellum market.

Before the Civil War, the price of paper does not appear to have declined below 14 cents per pound (31 cents per kg). According to Weeks (1916), newsprint was approximately 19 cents per pound (42 cents per kg) in 1821. Presbrey (1929) wrote that in 1853 newsprint was available at 14 cents per pound (31 cents per kg), but during the Civil War the price rose to more than 20 cents per pound (44 cents per kg) (Smith, 2000).

The subsequent appearance of ground-wood newsprint had an immediate effect. In 1875, barely eight years after the Pagenstreichers opened their pulp mill, newsprint was selling for nine cents per pound (20 cents per kg) (Weeks, 1916). In 1880 newsprint averaged eight cents per pound (18 cents per kg)—a 60% reduction in the 15 years since the end of the Civil War—and could be purchased in volume under contract for 6.5 cents per pound (14.3 cents per kg) (North, 1884). In 1889, newsprint was 3.25 cents per pound (7.15 cents per kg)—less under contract. By 1900, the price had dropped below

two cents per pound (4.4 cents per kg) to 1.7 cents per pound (3.7 cents per kg) in rolls (Weeks, 1916).

Weeks (1916) lists sales of paper of all types in the United States as follows:

1870: \$ 48.8 million

1880: 57.4 million

1890: 78.9 million

1900: 127.3 million

North (1884) noted that periodical publishers spent approximately 17% of their revenue on paper in 1880. Steinberg (1959) reported that by 1900 the cost of paper had shrunk to 7% of the publisher's total production cost.

In 1884 North wrote:

The remarkable reduction in the cost of printing paper has been spoken of elsewhere as one of the chief causes of the rapid growth of the newspaper and periodical press of the United States during the census year [1880] and the census decade [1871-1880]. An annual circulation like that reported in 1880 would have been impossible ten years ago, because there were not in the country mills enough to produce the paper now annually consumed. (p. 82)

Composition

Observing in 1884 that the average daily newspaper hand set the equivalent of 29 book pages in each issue, North noted that “the total amount of reading matter contained in one issue of all of the newspapers and periodicals published in the United States is equal to the contents of a library of from 1,000 to 1,200 volumes” (p. 85). Despite achieving the ability to print in enormous volume, the publishing industry’s productivity was badly constrained by the need to set type by hand.

One of the first significant advances in composition was the development of stereotyping, which allowed composed type forms to be duplicated so that material could be reprinted without having to be reset. The process was first attempted with papier-mâché in the late 18th century, but did not become practical until the 1820s (Chappell, 1970). A process known as electrotyping, in which plates were duplicated using electroplating, made stereotyping significantly easier, and was in widespread use by the late 19th century.

Ottmar Mergenthaler, a German-American working in Baltimore, developed the first practical method of mechanized typesetting, the Linotype. Mergenthaler’s machine produced a complete typecast page in a fraction of the time it would take to set the page by hand. The Linotype operator used a typewriter-style keyboard. Through a series of complex mechanisms, the machine assembled molds for the characters, automatically added spaces to justify the line of type, cast the type, and returned the molds to a storage

magazine. The individual lines were assembled as they were cast, and delivered as a single page (Chappell, 1970).

The Linotype machine was first used at the New York *Tribune* in 1886, and by 1890 had reached the form in which it would endure well into the 20th century as the workhorse of periodical typesetting (Chappell, 1970).

Taken together, developments in printing, papermaking, and typesetting allowed ongoing reduction in production expense, and ongoing expansion of capacity. They coincided with dramatic reduction in the cost of postage, first in 1879 and again in 1885. Between 1860 and 1890, magazine publishers saw the single largest obstacle to their growth, the cost of manufacturing and distribution, virtually removed—at a time when their potential reader market almost tripled, from 15 to 42 million people.

5. PERIODICAL DISTRIBUTION

Growth of the Railroads

In 19th-century America, periodical distribution evolved in a context of continuously expanding capacity and continuously declining costs. This was due to the dramatic expansion of the railroads between 1830 and 1900.

According to Presbrey (1929), there were 37 km of railroad in the United States in 1830, 4,509 km by 1840, and approximately 14,400 km by 1850. Norris wrote (1990) that the United States had 49,000 km of railway track in 1860. By 1870 this increased to 84,662 km, growth of 73% despite the intervening Civil War. Railway mileage grew another 76%, to 149,282 km in 1880. By 1890, the United States had 207,638 km of track, an increase of 39% in 10 years. According to Ohmann (1996), there were 320,000 km of track in the United States by the turn of the 20th century.

Overall, railway track in the United States more than quadrupled between 1860 and 1890. There was 14 times as much track in 1890 as there was in 1850.

Freight capacity increased commensurately. In 1840, mails were carried 6,222,400 km by rail and steamboat. By 1859, that figure had grown to 50,940,800 km (Presbrey, 1929). Railroads carried 67.3 million kg of freight in 1870. By 1890, railroad freight had grown four-fold, to 269 million kg (Norris, 1990).

Postal Issues

In the years preceding the Civil War, different types of printed matter had been handled in different ways by the Post Office. Newspapers had always been recognized for their value in promoting democratic discourse, and this implicit recognition of their social benefits led to preferential postal handling and subsidized postage rates. Books, on the other hand, were heavy and expensive to carry, and were prohibited from the mail altogether in 1814 by Postmaster R.J. Meigs who explained that the post was “overcrowded with novels and the lighter kinds of books for amusement” (Quoted in Fuller, 1972, p. 119).

As a sort of hybrid between books and newspapers, magazines received inconsistent treatment. For a short time after the Revolution, magazines weren’t accepted by the Post Office, and when they were accepted, in 1792, magazine postage was priced dramatically higher than newspaper postage. Magazine postage was subsequently reduced, in 1794, but not by much. In 1800 it cost eight cents per copy to mail a magazine more than 160 km (Mott, 1930)—more than five times the cost of a newspaper sent the same distance.

Postal reform came in stages throughout the 19th century, as various Postal Acts revised costs and policy. Eight of these—those of 1825, 1845, 1851, 1852, 1863, 1874, 1879, and 1885—had significant impact on magazine publishers. The most important was the Act of 1879, which shaped second-class postage into its present form, which has remained consistent for more than 125 years.

As Table 20 indicates, the overall trend in the first half of the 19th century was toward postage decreases in all categories of mail and a general convergence of rates as

well. Of course, the 60-year trend did not necessarily mean that a magazine's publisher or subscribers were happy with the cost of postage at any given point.

Table 20

Postage per Piece Sent 500 Miles: 1784-1863

Act Of	Letters ^A	Newspapers	Magazines ^B
1794	\$ 0.2500	\$ 0.0150	\$ 0.0800
1825	0.2500	0.0150	0.1750
1845	0.1000	0.0150	0.0750
1851 ^C	0.0600	0.0058	0.0300
1852 ^C	0.0600	0.0050	0.0200
1863	0.0300	0.0038	0.0200

Notes:

A: Until 1845, priced per sheet. After 1845, priced per half ounce

B: Based on six ounces per copy

C: Rates listed for newspapers and magazines in 1851 and 1852 required prepayment

From Kielbowicz (1986)

In addition to receiving preferential rates, newspapers were entitled to exchange privileges; that is, editors were permitted to send copies to one another postage-free. This gave even the smallest rural newspapers the opportunity to receive (and transmit) news—

a simple method of ensuring widespread dispersal of information in the days before telegraphs or syndicates.

The cost advantages that the Postal Act of 1825 gave newspapers over magazines, however, made it inevitable that publishers would go to great lengths to have their products classified as newspapers. A 16-cent per copy differential was too big to ignore. *Niles' Weekly Register*, for example, managed to obtain classification as a newspaper because it covered news, despite the fact that anyone other than a cost-conscious publisher or an agreeable postmaster would have called it a magazine (Kielbowicz, 1986).

Magazines that didn't make political news the central point of their contents sometimes added a few columns of news or commentary to bolster their case for lower rates (Kielbowicz, 1986). Other magazines altered their appearance to look like newspapers, despite the fact that their contents were largely literary (Kielbowicz, 1989). The subterfuge was clear to postal authorities and Congress. One legislator referred to *Brother Jonathan* magazine as a "specimen of the abuse in relation to newspaper transmission" (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1989, p. 129).

The issue was debated repeatedly in Congress between 1842 and 1845, and the resulting Postal Reform Act of 1845 was intended in large part to prevent one type of periodical from masquerading as another. Literary weeklies were reclassified as magazines (Fuller, 1972), and increased distribution cost put several out of business. Magazine publishers were compensated somewhat, however, with significantly lower rates.

As long as newspapers and magazines paid different postage rates, distinguishing one from the other for classification purposes continued to be a critical challenge. Ultimately, this was like counting angels on a pin. Despite years of effort, a satisfactory distinction was never reached. The Act of 1845 based classification on format; that is, postal authorities defined newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets by their appearance and type of contents. The 1847 Postal Laws and Regulations stated:

A newspaper is defined to be any printed publication issued in numbers, and published at stated intervals of not more than a month, conveying intelligence of passing events. It generally consists of a sheet, but may be composed of two sheets, of paper. In such case, it is chargeable with only single newspaper postage; provided the two sheets, in the aggregate, do not exceed nineteen hundred square inches. If it exceed that superficial amount, it is to be rated as a pamphlet. . . .

A pamphlet is a small unbound printed book. A magazine is a pamphlet published periodically, in numbers, containing articles on science, literature, politics, news, &c, &c. (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1989, p. 137)

The distinction in rates implied that newspapers were more important and more deserving of subsidy than other periodicals. Naturally, magazine publishers questioned this premise. Following the Postal Act of 1845, they continued to argue that the rate distinction between newspapers and magazines was arbitrary in principle and application. The *New Englander* asked in 1845, “Are newspapers exclusively useful in their way? Are they more useful than books? Or more useful than periodicals in other forms? . . . What good reason is there for giving these privileges to the publishers of the *Courier* and *Inquirer* and withholding them from the *American Review*?” (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1989, p. 130).

By the mid-19th century, postmasters were struggling with more than 300 different rates for printed matter (Kielbowicz, 1986). In the Postal Acts of 1851 and 1852, and

over the next 11 years, Congress and administrators in the Post Office Department worked to simplify and consolidate the rate structure (Fuller, 1972).

The Act of 1845 had left the Post Office with three unresolved problems in handling printed matter.

First was collection of postage for subscriptions, which was traditionally paid by subscribers. The rules required subscribers to prepay on a quarterly basis. This meant that local postmasters were asked to keep accounts, administer regulations, and generally bear the burden of enforcement. In reality, enforcement was sporadic. The majority of subscribers never paid, and most subscription postage went uncollected, despite incentives that allowed local postmasters to keep as much as half of what they could collect (Kielbowicz, 1986).

This challenge of postage collection had plagued the Post Office since the 1790s: the Department's 1798 instructions noted that many postmasters "scarcely collected fifty per cent of the postage of newspapers" (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1986, p. 4). As the 19th century progressed, not much changed. In 1972, Fuller wrote:

Postal officials discovered that collecting postage on these publications was like dipping water with a sieve. Somehow the postage due on second-class matter never found its way back to the department. An estimate made in 1874, for example, showed that more than 500,000,000 copies of the 5,871 newspapers and periodicals published in the nation in 1870 passed through the mails from 1869 to 1870. The total postage on these publications, even taking into account the papers that went free, should have been something over \$2,000,000. Instead, the department had collected just slightly more than \$800,000. (p. 131)

The solution, obviously, was to collect postage at the time periodicals were entered into the mail. The difficulty here was that publishers were understandably reluctant to

absorb a cost hitherto born by their readers. Despite the incentive of a significant prepayment discount granted in the Post Office Acts of 1851 and 1852, most publishers preferred to leave postage payment to their subscribers.

The Post Office's second problem was the number of advertising circulars—direct mail, in modern parlance—that were entered into the mail at magazine rates. The large number of advertising circulars that were mailed as periodicals suggests that magazine publishers were not the only businessmen in antebellum America who tried to disguise printed matter in order to qualify for a lower rate.

The Post Office's third problem was that rate reform was complicated by the large number of rural newspapers whose congressional representatives would fight any change that positioned rural publishers at a disadvantage to the larger urban papers.

The Post Office Act of 1863 was intended to simplify the rate structure for printed matter, clearly define the difference between periodicals and circulars, enhance collection of periodical postage, and protect the rural press from urban competition.

The 1863 Act introduced several innovations. Foremost was organization of the mail into classes, which still exist today in modified form (Scheele, 1970). First class included letters and other personal correspondence. Second class included newspapers and magazines. Third class was a catch-all category for books and circulars.

The 1863 Act defined second-class mail as “allailable matter exclusively in print, and regularly issued at stated periods” (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1986, p. 6). This requirement of stated frequency precluded advertising circulars, and the volume of

advertising circulars declined significantly—at least for the time being—following passage of the Act (Kielbowicz, 1986).

Discounts for prepayment were increased in the Act of 1863.

Magazine publishers were divided in their reception of the new regulations, largely because the Act of 1863, seeking a better way to differentiate between newspapers and magazines, used frequency instead of format or contents as the basis of distinguishing between them. Periodicals issued weekly or more often enjoyed lower rates than those issued less frequently. Consequently, publishers of semi-monthlies, monthlies, quarterlies, and so forth saw no change in their postage costs. Publishers of weekly magazines were well served by the new act, however, as their costs declined by about 25% in many cases, and significantly more in some. Periodicals of all frequencies were charged more if their weight exceeded four ounces (114 g), a penalty that affected magazines more often than newspapers (Kielbowicz, 1986).

Total circulation of all U.S. periodicals issued weekly or less frequently in 1870 was roughly 650 million copies. Of these, almost 400 million—60%—were entered into the mail (Kielbowicz, 1986). Yet despite all this business, the Post Office—to put it kindly—was taking a beating on second-class mail. As Fuller noted in the quote above, the Post Office should have received more than \$2.25 million in revenue on those 400 million copies. In fact, the department collected about \$800,000, slightly more than a third of the total due (Fuller, 1972; Kielbowicz, 1986). The more volume increased, the worse the problem grew. In 1873, the Post Office collected less than \$1 million of almost \$3 million in periodical postage owed (Kielbowicz, 1986).

If collection was the Post Office's primary goal, cost reduction was the publisher's. These objectives were not irreconcilable. So little money was being collected that the Post Office could gain revenue by requiring prepayment at almost any rate. One postmaster general, John W. Munday, argued to Congress that administrative costs associated with collecting postage from subscribers, and the fact that so little postage was actually collected, made it likely that the Post Office could actually save money by transporting second-class mail for free. Kielbowicz (1986) wrote:

Munday's message to Congress underscored the severity of the problem: so much periodical postage was going uncollected that he could seriously argue for the abolition of postage as an option that would not drastically cut the department's revenues. (p. 9)

A complete overhaul of the second-class system was begun in 1873 and completed in 1879. Success came in fits and starts.

In 1873, Congress adopted several postal reforms, but stopped short of requiring publishers to prepay postage. The new regulations did, however, eliminate editorial exchange privileges and free delivery of newspapers in their counties of publication, a policy that had helped protect rural papers from urban competitors. Eliminating free delivery of local newspapers brought readers into the debate to a greater extent than before. Now that they were required to pay to receive their local papers, readers began to see the benefit of having all publishers prepay postage. Citizens from more than a dozen states petitioned Congress to require that publishers pay for delivery.

With a collection problem of enormous proportions on one hand, and an increasing number of citizens advocating publisher prepayment on the other hand, Congressman

Joseph Cannon of Illinois introduced a bill requiring publisher prepayment. He later wrote:

[Publishers] brought pressure to bear to defeat my bill and complained that it was a great injustice to them. They did not like having the cost transferred from the subscriber to the publisher. They said they could not increase the cost of their publications to the subscribers, and if they paid the postage they would lose money. I was satisfied that when the subscribers were relieved of the petty annoyance of paying postage every quarter they would not object to having the postage added to the subscription price. It has worked out that way. (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1986, p. 10)

It worked out in large part because Congress granted to publishers a concession that publishers had wanted for some time: postage rates based on weight, not on a cost per piece. Charging by the pound greatly reduced costs to publishers. Passed on June 23, 1874, the Postal Act of 1874 set costs at two cents per pound (4.4 cents per kg) for newspapers (which continued to be defined as periodicals published weekly or more often) and three cents per pound (6.6 cents per kg) for magazines. The free in-county privilege was reinstated.

The new regulations required that periodicals register with the local postmaster, obtain the postmaster's approval for second-class privileges, prepay postage, and pay new postage rates based on weight.

While the Act of 1874 solved the problem of collection for the Post Office, and provided publishers with significantly lower rates, it did not prevent advertisers from continuing to take advantage of every opportunity to disguise their promotion as second-class mail.

With remarkable thoroughness and an uncommon knack for consensus-building, a postal administrator named Arthur H. Bissell set out to classify printed matter in a clear and systematic way that was acceptable to the publishing industry. He did this by holding meetings in 1878 with representatives from influential New York and Philadelphia publishing companies, including executives from *Scribner's* magazine, *The Grocer*, the American News Company, the *New York Times*, Harper Bros. (J.W. Harper was chairman of the New York committee), Lippincott, and the *Printer's Circular*. Bissell incorporated comments from these publishers into his recommendations to Congress (Kielbowicz, 1986).

The most important of these was elimination of the distinction between newspapers and magazines. Bissell recommended that all “legitimate” periodicals should pay the same rates, regardless of frequency, format, or contents.

To Bissell, a “legitimate” periodical had four distinguishing characteristics. First, it was issued at regular, stated intervals. Second, it was sent from a known office of publication. Third, it was printed on paper without substantial, book-like, binding. Finally, it was “originated and published for the dissemination of information of a public character, or devoted to literature, the sciences, arts, or some special industry, and having a legitimate list of subscribers” (Quoted in Kielbowicz, 1986, p. 15).

As adopted by Congress on March 3, 1879, the Postal Act of 1879 used those four characteristics to define second-class mail, and offered the same two cents per pound (4.4 cents per kg) rate to all qualifying publications, including both magazines and newspapers.

The Act of 1879 also created a fourth class of mail, which did much to clear up lingering confusion. This four-class system reserved first class for letters, second class for periodicals, third class for bulk mail, including circulars, and fourth class for books and other parcels.

It can hardly be overstated how important the relatively simple changes brought about by the Postal Act of 1879 proved to be. First, the act made formal a principle that had been implicit in postal policy up to that point: that social benefits resulting from the dissemination of knowledge were a key part of the Post Office's charter, and that this charter embraced magazines as well as newspapers. Fuller (1972) wrote:

The postal service was now referred to again and again as the great educator of the nation, and as the terms of the legislation suggested, an educator not only of political affairs but of science, literature, art, and industry as well. (p. 134)

More importantly, reduced rates created new opportunity for the periodical industry—not surprisingly, considering the dramatic decline in cost delivered by the new rate structure. A typical 175 g magazine would have cost four cents to mail at the 1852 rates if not prepaid, or two cents if prepaid. At the new rates, the cost was three quarters of a cent. Publishers who had been prepaying received a 67% reduction in postage costs. Those who hadn't been prepaying were now obliged to eliminate a significant cost to their readers: a beneficial change that lowered price barriers dramatically; made subscriptions affordable to a much larger potential audience and more convenient to receive; and eliminated a major obstacle to circulation growth.

Involvement of industry representatives as the 1879 proposals were developed set an enduring precedent. This pattern was retained in future postal acts, and expanded as

lobbying groups like the American Society of Newspaper Editors emerged later in the 19th century (Kielbowicz, 1986).

Periodical rates were further reduced, to one cent per pound (2.2 cents per kg), in 1885 (Fuller, 1972).

This came at a time when the Post Office was showing its first surpluses since the Civil War. While the overall trend was toward increasing deficits, the Post Office showed a \$1.2 million surplus in 1882 and a \$2.1 million surplus in 1883 (Scheele, 1968). This undoubtedly made rate reduction more agreeable to Congress. The 1885 postage reductions were made across the board in all classes: first-class postage was reduced from three cents to two cents per letter, and the weight limitation on letters was raised from a half ounce (14.3 g) to an ounce (28.6 g) (Scheele, 1968). This undoubtedly made the reductions more agreeable to the public.

The results of the 50% reduction in 1885 were a virtual explosion of mail in all classes, not least in second class. Total weight of periodicals transported in 1881 was about 32 million kg; the total weight of second-class mail in 1895 was 4.5 times higher: 143 million kg (Fuller, 1972). This unprecedented increase allowed Postmaster T. L. James to proclaim:

The constant tendency of our postal system has been toward the extension of privileges of the mails in every branch of correspondence and every form of literary production. Its facilities made possible the cheap publication of newspapers, and later on standard works of literature by placing upon all periodical popular reading the lowest rate of postage ever known in a civilized land. (Quoted in Fuller, 1972, p. 147)

Newsstand Distribution

Postmaster James's justifiable pride notwithstanding, many readers—the majority, in fact—chose not to receive periodicals via subscription. Beginning around mid-century, single copy sales accounted for significant circulation volume. Kielbowicz (1986) noted that in 1870 approximately 1.5 billion periodicals were printed in the United States. Of these, 500 million were mailed. Of the balance, approximately 726 million were daily newspapers, delivered primarily via carriers and newsdealers. The remaining 280 million periodicals were sold as single copies at newsdealers and other retailers.

Newsdealers existed throughout the 19th century. In 1804 Charles Brockden Brown was able to find dealers in 11 American cities—Boston, Hartford, New Haven, Albany, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, Alexandria, Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah—for his *Literary Magazine and American Register* (Tassin, 1916).

According to Noel (1954), the Dexter agency was able to sort its entire stock of periodicals on a single ordinary pine table as late as 1843. But 14 years later, in 1857, there were an estimated 1,500 newsstands in the United States.

As the middle of the century approached, periodical distributors found that efficiency and economies of scale favored consolidation. Mott (1938, vol. 2) mentioned that one company, A. S. Tuttle, acquired and combined several smaller newsstand agencies in 1856, and was in turn acquired by a larger newsstand conglomerate, the American News Company. Kielbowicz (1989) wrote:

Express companies specializing in carrying publications began to appear in the 1850s and 1860s, heightening competition with the post office. . . . In 1864, several newspaper wholesale firms merged to form the American News Company, which remained the giant in its field for many years. (p. 102)

The American News Company was formed when two large periodical distributors, Ross & Tousey; and Dexter, Hamilton & Co., joined forces, with Sinclair Tousey as president, and Henry Dexter as vice-president.

Tousey was born in 1816. He worked as a farmer, a clerk, a newspaper carrier, and a publisher until 1853, when he became partner in, and eventually sole proprietor of, Ross & Tousey. In four years, Tousey succeeded in increasing his firm's revenue from \$150,000 to \$1 million (Wilson & Fiske, 1887). By 1859 Ross & Tousey were handling 800,000 copies per week (Noel, 1954).

After the American News Company was founded in 1864, Tousey was elected its first president. Tousey was an ardent abolitionist and Republican, and took an active interest in philanthropic schemes and organizations (Wilson & Fiske, 1887).

During the Civil War Tousey had no difficulty reconciling his patriotism with his corporate interests. Writing to protest a surcharge levied on periodicals sold within the army, Tousey (1865) said:

General, don't you think that the loyal, moneyed, and producing classes of our people can support the Government, without "taxing" the poor soldier for his newspaper? We incline to that opinion. (p. 61)

The "poor soldier" provided Tousey and his company with a windfall: enlistees bought periodicals and cheap books by the thousands.

Henry Dexter (1813-1910) eventually became the second president of the company, and, like Tousey, was noted for his philanthropy (Chatterbox, 2004).

Within 14 years of the company's 1864 founding, the American News Company had established branches in more than 20 cities, including San Francisco, New Orleans, and Montreal. The company's first year revenues were \$2 million (American News Company, 1944); by the end of the century their annual sales were about \$15 million, and they served approximately 13,000 individual dealers, booksellers, and stationers in the United States and Canada (Norris, 1990).

The company's motto was, "The American News Company takes the whole edition of nearly all the leading periodicals," which was an exaggeration, though in some cases not a large one. The company exercised a dominant position, if not a virtual monopoly, in newsstand distribution by performing at a national level the functions handled by periodical wholesalers today: that is, they received magazines from different publishers, sorted and prepared shipments of mixed magazines to retailers, and dispatched those shipments to their destinations. American News also made partial payment in advance of sales, a service greatly appreciated by publishers, then as now.

Among the periodicals distributed by the American News Company or its predecessors were *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Scientific American*, *Harper's*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Scribner's*. The company had exclusive distribution rights to *New York Weekly*, *Family Story Paper*, *Fireside Companion*, and the *New York Ledger* (American News Company, 1930). According to Noel (1954), many publishers blamed the *Ledger's* publisher, Robert Bonner, for enabling creation of the monopoly by agreeing to an

exclusive contract. It is true that the period of the *Ledger's* greatest circulation growth, 1857-1859, coincided with an increase in the number of American newsstands from 1,500 to 3,000 (Noel, 1954). American News also distributed dime novels for most of the major publishers.

American News profited by purchasing magazines and books at wholesale prices, which were negotiated with each publisher, and selling them to retailers at a higher price, leaving enough margin between the retailer's cost and the cover price for the retailer's profit. Smaller magazines usually sold to American News for 50% of the cover price (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). Magazines with larger sales were able to charge a higher percentage of the cover price. Unsold copies were returned or destroyed, and deducted from the publisher's total receivable.

To some extent, the economics of the system were revealed in the well-publicized conflict between American News and *Munsey's* magazine in 1893. When Munsey lowered the cover price of his magazine to 10 cents, American News declined to pay 6.5 cents per copy, offering 4.5 cents per copy instead (Norris, 1990). Munsey prevailed in the end, which suggests that 3.5 cents per copy, or 35% of the cover price, was sufficient to cover distribution costs and retailer profits, and perhaps even leave some margin for American News.

American News survived the incident, and continued to dominate the U.S. newsstand well into the 20th century (American News Company, 1944).

6. ADVERTISING TRENDS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Advertising Prior to the Civil War

Judged by its advertising, the first quarter of the 19th century was a time in which consumer demand outstripped supply. The hard sell was unusual: advertisers generally found it sufficient to announce the availability of products and unnecessary to cajole the prospect. Attempts to predispose or convince readers to buy were rare, and when employed were often rather muted. Presbrey (1929) wrote:

It is difficult for the modern business man to picture results from a five-line merchandise advertisement. But in 1810 there was less to read. In a four-page paper, the invariable size of that day, the attention an advertisement received from an individual reader gave the advertiser more than he got a half century later from larger copy in an eight- or twelve-page paper. It was not then so necessary to “hit the reader in the eye.” Money was scarce, people were slow in buying, shopped around, and were more likely to look through columns of small advertisements and compare offers of the article they wanted. (p.181)

Laird (1998) wrote that prior to 1820 most items offered for sale were generic staples, such as cloth or ribbons.

The public did not have to be taught to distinguish between goods within most categories: consumers judged products by inspection and by merchants’ reputations, not by brand names. Common understanding in America—more than in Britain or Europe—assumed that demand typically exceeded supply, obviating expenditures to generate interest in goods. Merchants in the United States deemed it necessary only to announce the availability, quality, and affordability of their offerings to market them. (p. 17)

In the early 19th century, Americans made a high proportion of their own food, clothing, furniture, and other provisions. People were more likely to create an end product from commodity raw materials than they were to purchase it. For example, nearly every family baked its own bread from flour purchased in bulk. Only a few bought bread from bakers.

Outside large cities, this independence from merchants continued well into mid-century, and has become part of America's pioneer mythology. The theme of self-sufficiency is familiar to any reader of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books, to mention one well-known example. Many other writers have described the self-reliant spirit of rural 19th-century Americans. In a memoir of his boyhood in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, Culbertson (1966) described life in the Amberson Valley in the 1840s.

The inhabitants of the valley were largely self-supporting. There was a sawmill that supplied all the lumber needed; a tannery that furnished an abundance of the best quality of leather for shoes, harnesses, and saddles; and there was a fuller in the valley who washed and whitened wool for weaving and spinning. The family looms wove quantities of cloth, called "linsey-woolsey." Maple sugar was in plenty; barley and rye were parched and used as a substitute for coffee. Almost every farmer cultivated a small patch of flax, in addition to corn, wheat, rye, and oats, and kept a few sheep; every housewife had her hackle for preparing flax for weaving, and a spinning wheel for transforming the beautiful fleecy wool into hanks of yarn. Many of the larger homes had looms on which the coarser fabrics called homespun were woven. . . .

In those days newspapers had limited circulation in rural districts, and as our valley was not on the line of general travel, news was at a premium. So, when in the early spring, the peddler with his pack would appear bringing news from the outside world and racy neighborhood gossip, which he would enlarge and decorate to suit his hearers' taste, his arrival was warmly greeted. . . . [My mother] made frocks for the girls, pants and coats for the boys, spun the yarn, and knit the socks and mittens for her family. . . . Prepared, precooked, predigested breakfast foods were not yet invented. (p.81)

It's hard to imagine what nationally-distributed branded product could have been sold into this community, or how it could have been effectively marketed. Outside large towns and cities, consumers shopped sparingly and carefully, and in many cases the availability of a product was its strongest selling point.

Because more advertising was available to urban newspapers, the emergence of New York's penny press in the 1830s (described in further detail below) was the first indication that periodicals could be supported primarily by advertising. Elsewhere prior to the Civil War, advertising made up a relatively small proportion of periodical revenue, though it was a portion that began to grow.

The advantages of developing a second stream of revenue through advertising were obvious to most publishers, even those who resisted advertising for some time. The conservative *Southern Literary Messenger* accepted its first ad in 1844. The wholesome *Youth's Companion* began to take advertising in 1857 (Norris, 1990).

Presbrey (1929) wrote:

Eleven million advertisements appeared in some 2,000 American newspapers in 1847, according to an estimate made the following year. . . . By 1854, with the population only 25 per cent. larger, the estimated number of publications in the United States had grown 100 per cent., or to 4,000. These figures present a quick index to the increasing interest in newspaper advertising which made it possible to maintain so many papers. (p. 210)

Mott wrote (1938, vol. 2, p. 14) that magazine ad rates in the decade before the Civil War were flexible. "\$20 an octavo page, or fifteen cents a line for smaller advertisements was a not uncommon charge. The smaller literary and religious weeklies usually asked

ten cents a line, and considerable reductions were generally made for yearly contracts”

(p. 14).

Advertising After the Civil War

During the Civil War, ad revenue in periodicals averaged about \$6.5 million per year. This included heavy placement of war bond advertising by the government. By 1867, two years after the war ended and the government stopped advertising, ad revenue totaled \$9.6 million (Presbrey, 1929).

Magazines of all types began to carry more advertising after the Civil War—even the most respectable magazines. The *Atlantic Monthly* ran 14 ad pages in December, 1865 (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). According to Ohmann (1996), *Harper's Weekly*, which had averaged about a half page of advertising per issue in 1857, and one page per issue in 1862, averaged two pages of ads per issue in 1867, and three pages per issue in 1872. The June 1, 1872 issue of *Harper's Weekly* included illustrated ads for lawn mowers, corsets, furniture, jewelry, a toy engine, statuary, a freezer, a carriage, roofing, shotguns, engines, and sewing machines (Ohmann, 1996).

Display advertising was a rarity prior to the Civil War, but after the war financial advertisers and department stores were among the first to use it. Macy's and Lord & Taylor were pioneers in the use of display type. Sapolio soap was one of the first branded products to combine display type and human-interest illustration in its advertising (Presbrey, 1929).

Among the first magazines to depend heavily on advertising revenue were the religious magazines. In 1870 they formed the largest single category of magazines, with

more than 400 individual titles and combined circulations approaching 5 million (Norris, 1990). The Carlton & Smith advertising agency, based in New York, specialized in religious publications, and did a brisk trade placing advertisements for a wide range of products, including patent medicine, tooth powder, bankers and brokers, and insurance agencies (Norris, 1990, p. 29)

Farm magazines were also pioneers in attracting advertising. Norris (1990, p. 30) estimated that in 1870 there were 93 agricultural magazines, with combined circulations of more than 750,000. Farm periodicals carried advertisements for products that would be hard to find or expensive in a country store, such as sewing machines, watches, books, and patent medicine, as well as ads for agricultural products, such as tools, seeds, plants, land, and livestock.

Advertising played an increasingly important role in the financial performance of American newspapers and magazines. In 1880, advertising represented 44% of publishers' revenue; that is, \$39 million of the \$89 million in total revenue that publishers of all types of periodicals received. In the aggregate, daily newspapers received 49% of their revenue from advertising and 51% from readers. Weeklies and other frequencies were much less reliant on advertisers: 39% of their revenue came from advertising (North, 1884).

The overall trend, however, was toward reliance on advertising. Ohmann (1996) counted ads in October issues of *Harper's* from 1882 to 1900 and found a steeply rising curve:

Average, 1882-1885: seven pages per issue

Average, 1886-1890: 47 pages per issue

Average, 1891-1895: 85 pages per issue

Average, 1896-1900: 92 pages per issue

According to Ohmann (1996), *Harper's* averaged 10 pages of ads per issue in the full year 1880, and 75 pages of ads per issue in 1890.

Noting that estimates of advertising revenue in the late 19th century vary widely, Pope (1983) calculated that total advertising expenditures in the United States were \$104 million in 1880, \$190 million in 1890, and \$256 million in 1900. Table 21 shows that magazines and newspapers received slightly more than one third of the country's total spending on advertising.

Table 21

Advertising Revenue in the Late 19th Century

Year	National advertising expenditures (millions)	Publications' advertising revenue (millions)	Publications' share of total
1880	\$104	\$39	38%
1890	190	71	37%
1900	256	96	37%

Note: From Pope (1983)

In 1890 publishers' \$71 million of advertising revenue represented about half of publishers' total revenue: \$143 million. By 1900 advertising represented almost 55% of publishers' \$176 million total revenue (Norris, 1990).

More impressive than its volume were the social changes that advertising caused.

Norris (1990) wrote:

Perhaps the most significant trend discernible during the last two decades of the nineteenth century was not the raw growth of advertising, as impressive as it was; rather, it was the utilization of advertising to introduce new products, to homogenize tastes, and to create demand. The last decade also witnessed the growth of national, as opposed to regional, advertising campaigns. (p. 50)

7. THE PENNY PRESS AND THE EMERGENCE OF ADVERTISING AGENCIES

The emergence of advertising-supported mass media with national reach was anticipated in 19th-century America by two phenomena.

First was the penny press, which began to emerge in the 1830s. The penny press proved that the size of an audience could be expanded dramatically if reducing reader cost eliminated price resistance. The corollary to this premise, of course, was that advertising sales became central to the business, and consequently, the process of selling advertising received closer attention in the penny press than at any time previous.

The second phenomenon was the emergence of advertising agencies around the time of the Civil War. The pioneer advertising agencies made it possible for the first time for an advertiser's reach to extend across the country.

The Penny Press

The penny press has a long history: the first penny newspaper in English, the *Orange Postman*, was established in England in 1706 (North, 1884). The *Illustrated Penny Magazine* was launched in London in 1830, and, according to North, met with “phenomenal success” (p. 89). It was imported to New York and sold briskly. At the same time, other penny newspapers with significantly large circulations were competing strongly against the established, more expensive London dailies.

Several American publishers, including Horace Greeley, attempted to launch one-cent newspapers in 1833 (Presbrey, 1929), but only Benjamin H. Day was successful. Greeley’s *Morning Post* debuted on New Year’s Day, 1833, and lasted about a month (North, 1884). Day launched the New York *Sun* in September, and found a formula that worked, apparently to his own surprise. North quoted a speech Day made in 1851:

It was in 1832 that I first projected the enterprise, during the first cholera, when my business as a job printer scarcely afforded a living. I must say I had very little faith in its success at that time, and from various causes it was put off. In August, 1833, I finally made up my mind to venture the experiment, and I issued the first number of the *Sun* September 3. It is not necessary to speak of the wonderful success of the paper. (p. 89)

Day was flattered by a number of imitators. Within two years New York had five penny papers competing with seven six-cent morning newspapers and four six-cent evening papers—16 in all (North, 1884). Between 1834 and 1839, 35 penny papers were launched in New York, although most failed quickly. Horace Greeley commented,

“Nearly every mechanic in America takes a newspaper.” (Quoted in Presbrey, 1929, p. 228)

Day’s New York *Sun* was based from the start on the premise that advertising sales could make up for reduced reader revenues—in other words, that the paper could afford to price itself cheaply to the reader if it sold enough advertising. The *Sun*’s prospectus said:

The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of everyone, ALL THE NEWS OF THE DAY, and at the same time afford an advantageous medium for advertising. (Quoted in Presbrey, 1929, p. 188)

This premise could not have succeeded without two important enabling factors.

The first was a supply of reasonably-priced paper. This was made possible by improved manufacturing efficiencies which increased supply in the early 1830s and lowered paper cost.

The second and more important factor behind Day’s success was the emergence of a large audience for popular reading material. Until the *Sun* lit the way, so to speak, no one knew how large the largest possible audience might be. Consequently, the success of the penny press was the first tangible proof that an American mass audience existed, at least in large cities. Day found that audience by setting his price as low as possible and (short of giving the *Sun* away) removed price resistance as an obstacle to audience development. Of course, this meant that advertising would be the primary source of profit for the *Sun* and its competitors, and this reliance on ad sales affected the focus of the business.

Like most newspapers of the time, the *Sun* sold advertising by the “square.” Squares were one column wide and, depending on the publisher’s policy, could be anywhere from 10 to 16 agate lines long. In the early days of the *Sun* they were 10 lines long. Day offered advertisers a year’s worth of squares for \$30, a price equivalent to his competitors’. Day was unlike his competitors, however, in the size of the audience he provided. The *Sun* achieved 10,000 circulation in its first year, and 20,000 in its second, making it the largest daily paper in the world (Presbrey, 1929).

Day sold advertising in a wide range of categories, including help wanted ads, notices from theaters and museums, ads for excursions, and marriage and death notices. By 1839, advertising filled about two thirds of the *Sun* (Presbrey, 1929).

In 1839, Day reduced the size of his square to six lines, and priced ads as follows:

One day	\$.50
Two days	.75
Three days	1.00
One week	1.75
Two weeks	2.50
One month	3.00
Three months	8.00
Six months	15.00
One year	30.00

Day’s closest competitor was James Gordon Bennett’s *Herald*, launched in 1835. In its first year, the *Herald* offered a 16-line square for \$30 a year. In its second year, the *Herald* raised its prices, and reduced the size of its square to 12 lines for shorter terms and eight lines for longer terms. Table 22 illustrates Bennett’s changes.

Table 22

New York *Herald* Advertising Rates: 1835 - 1836

Frequency	16-line square (1835)	12 lines or less (1836)	8 lines or less (1836)	Change in cost	Change in size
1 day	\$0.50	\$0.52		4%	-25%
2 days	1.00	0.75		-25%	-25%
1 week	1.25	1.87		50%	-25%
2 weeks	2.25		\$2.50	11%	-50%
1 month	3.00		3.00	0%	-50%
6 months	8.00		5.00	-38%	-50%

Note: From Presbrey (1929)

What makes the comparison interesting is the thought and analysis that Bennett gave to his rate structure when adjusting rates between 1835 and 1836.

Measured by the line, almost all of the ads at the new rates are more expensive, since advertisers were allowed fewer lines. But the rates themselves—the out-of-pocket cost to advertisers—changed in ways that encouraged use of certain frequencies and made it less efficient to choose others.

To take one example: the one-day (what modern publishers would call the “open”) rate, which a prospective advertiser would have used to compare the old and new rates,

moved very little—just two cents. Thus a cursory glance at the one-day rate suggested that the *Herald's* rates had increased only 4% between 1835 and 1836.

The two-day rate, which in 1835 was double the one-day rate, actually declined by 25% in 1836. This gave advertisers real incentive to place two ads rather than one, since they would get the second at half price. Note that there was no discount at all between the one- and two-day rates in 1835.

The same principle applies when comparing the six-month rates, where the price dropped by 38%. Apparently Bennett decided that long-term, steady business was worth attracting through significant cost reduction—although his long-term advertisers had to make do with fewer lines, freeing space for more-profitable short term advertisers.

The *Herald's* rate structure was a selling tool: it provided incentives in frequencies that were most beneficial to Bennett, and discouraged the purchase of frequencies that were less important to him. Presbrey (1929) noted, “The study and change in space-selling methods was another important feature of the birth of the new era in journalism and advertising.” (p. 198)

Advertising Agencies

In the first decades of the 19th century, freelance solicitors sold and accepted advertisements for newspapers, and some enterprising newsdealers would accept advertisements for a variety of papers. Both the freelancers and the newsdealers worked on commission (Presbrey, 1929). Full-time agencies were their successors.

At the beginning of the Civil War there were about twenty advertising agents in New York, and perhaps ten more in other locations (Presbrey, 1929). By the end of the war, agencies had begun to exert a significant influence on American marketing.

In late 1841, Volney B. Palmer became the first full-time advertising agent in the United States. He came from a family of newspaper publishers, and although he also sold coal and brokered real estate, Palmer was eventually successful enough as an advertising agent to establish offices in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York (Pope, 1983).

Palmer announced the official opening of his Philadelphia business in 1842:

ADVERTISEMENTS and subscriptions received for some of the best and most widely circulated Newspapers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and in many of the principal cities throughout the United States, for which he has the agency, affording an excellent opportunity for Merchants, Mechanics, Professional Men, Hotel and Boardinghouse keepers, Railroad, Insurance, and Transportation Companies, and the enterprising business portion of the community generally, to publish abroad their respective pursuits—to learn the terms of subscription and advertising, and accomplish their object here without the trouble of perplexing and fruitless inquiries, the expense and labour of letter writing, the risk of making enclosures of money &c, &c. (Quoted in Pope, 1983, pp. 114-115)

Palmer was closely followed in this line by John L. Hooper, New York's first advertising agent. Hooper, who had worked in the advertising department of Greeley's New York *Tribune*, improved on Palmer's services by assuming the full risk of bad debt and paying publishers even when he failed to collect from advertisers (Pope, 1983).

Mason & Tuttle opened their agency in New York around 1844, and were among the first agents to promote the benefits to New York companies of advertising in out-of-town newspapers (Presbrey, 1929).

S.M. Pettengill & Company prospered in New York during the 1850s and '60s. Pettengill was a former employee in Palmer's Boston office. Like Hooper, Pettengill saw that by assuming credit risk he could negotiate substantially reduced rates from publishers, and thus secure an advantage for advertisers (Pope, 1983). From 1851 to 1859, Pettengill promoted his business through a house organ, *Pettengill's Reporter*, which, according to Mott (1938, vol. 2), was probably the first periodical devoted to the subject of advertising.

In 1864 William James Carlton opened the Carlton & Smith brokerage in New York. When he decided to sell out 13 years later, the company's bookkeeper purchased the business for \$1,300 (of which \$800 was for the furniture). The bookkeeper painted his own name, James Walter Thompson, on the door and went on to further success. Making allowance for the name change, J. Walter Thompson is America's oldest surviving ad agency, and was one of the first to include "creative"—writing and design of the ads—as part of its service to clients. When Thompson sold his business for \$500,000 in 1916 to a

former employee, Stanley B. Resor (Pope, 1983), he netted a 999% margin on his original investment, not counting the furniture.

After Palmer's death in the mid-1850s, S.R. Niles assumed ownership of his Boston office (Rowell, 1906). Joy, Coe & Co., later renamed Coe, Wetherell & Smith, took over Palmer's Philadelphia and New York operations (Rowell, 1906).

Francis Wayland Ayer opened an agency in Philadelphia in 1868 and named it after his father, N.W. Ayer, to give it the appearance of longevity and stability (Laird, 1998). Ayer, a former salesperson for the *National Baptist* magazine, later became a publisher like Pettengill, producing a directory of periodicals listing their circulations and rates, and a quarterly magazine, the *Advertiser's Guide*, which promoted the benefits of continual advertising (Pope, 1983). The company's motto was "Keeping everlastingly at it brings success." N.W. Ayer & Son is still keeping at it. The agency bought out Coe, Wetherell & Smith (Rowell, 1906), and thus can lay claim to a bloodline stretching back to Palmer and the first American ad agency.

Rowell (1906) noted some other advertising agencies from the industry's earliest days, including Evans & Lincoln of Boston, founded in 1865, S. H. Parvin (Cincinnati), N.M. Sheffield (St. Louis), C.H. Scriven (Chicago), Cook, Coburn & Mack (Chicago), and L.P. Fisher (San Francisco). He also listed Peaslee & Co., L.P. Fontaine & Co., Mather & Abbott, W.W. Sharpe, Lawrence Burke, and James H. Bates (principal of Bates & Locke and Bates & Morse) as among New York's earliest agencies.

Of all the pioneering agents, Rowell himself may have been the most influential. He opened his first agency in Boston in 1865. Rowell and his partner, Horace Dodd,

recognized the emerging market for national advertising, and saw that there was significant potential in finding a way to deliver an extended audience at a time when media were predominantly local. Rowell and Dodd offered a “list,” or network of recommended newspapers in New England. Advertisers could place an ad in each publication on the list for a single, combined rate, which was lower than published rates. Later Rowell expanded his list system to include other regions and categories.

In any list of recommended publications, a few publishers were more or less strict about adhering to their rate cards, most were willing to allow agents a 25% commission on paid business—the majority of publishers had a 25% bad debt allowance—and many were willing to discount significantly. Presbrey (1929) wrote: “Newspapers were so unaccustomed to getting cash that Mr. Rowell was able to induce them to accept almost any rate. Results of the bargaining as shown in the agency’s business for the first month was a billing of \$2,000 to advertisers and payment of \$600 to newspapers” (pp. 266-267).

Rowell began to buy space in bulk and sell it to advertisers at retail, initiating a practice that endured throughout the 19th century (Presbrey, 1929). Rowell found that rural publishers were generally willing to sell him a column of space for a year for \$100, and rebate a \$25 commission. In turn, Rowell sold the space to advertisers for \$100 a month for a one-inch (2.5 cm) ad in 100 papers. At these rates he could afford to sell only half the space he had purchased and still net \$5,500 profit on an investment of \$7,500, a 73% margin (Pope, 1983).

This success led Rowell to sell the Boston business to his partner, Dodd, move to New York, and open the George P. Rowell & Co. agency in 1867.

Rowell was thorough in his research. By the late 1860s he had a file of all the newspapers and magazines in the United States and Canada, listing rates, frequencies, and circulations. He began publishing this information in an annual volume, the *Directory of American Newspapers*, first issued in 1869. Rowell's *Directory* was the first independent source of circulation data, and provided such a competitive advantage that other agencies began to compile their own rate and circulation data. N.W. Ayer's directory was developed to compete with Rowell's. Many publishers objected to Rowell's appraisal of their circulations, and complained that companies advertising in the directories seemed to be the beneficiaries of more generous circulation estimates than non-advertisers received (Pope, 1993). Rowell left no evidence to disabuse this notion.

Ever enterprising, Rowell started one of the earliest independent magazines devoted to advertising as a subject, *Printer's Ink*. He even searched for proprietary products to advertise, dabbling a bit with patent medicines (Rowell, 1906).

Rowell's agency was also the first to operate on the "open contract" plan, in which the advertiser contracted to a single agency exclusively for a fixed period, using the agency for creative, strategic planning, and media recommendation, but reserving the final decision on ad space purchases. This has been the basic structure of advertiser-agency relations ever since.

Many of the most successful agencies specialized in certain media. Beginning in 1867, the Carlton & Smith agency was able to obtain exclusive rights to the advertising space in a number of religious periodicals. As noted above, this was not an insignificant market: in 1870 there were about four hundred religious weeklies with a combined

circulation of five million (Pope, 1983). According to Presbrey (1929), the Carleton & Kissam agency specialized in streetcar advertising. J. Walter Thompson's great success at the end of the 19th century came from the agency's focus on magazines. Rowell specialized in newspapers, and apparently never grew comfortable with other media.

Even in its infancy, the agency business was potentially lucrative. Rowell (1906) estimated that Pettengill's agency handled about \$400,000 of business in 1867 and claimed that by 1870 his own agency was billing between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per month. Ayer achieved about 15% net profit on its 1879 billings (Pope, 1983), and was billing \$1.38 million per year by 1900 (Ohmann, 1996).

In 1884 North wrote:

The business of newspaper advertising has grown to be so enormous that its negotiation has become a separate and profitable business. There are more than fifty firms in the United States engaged in the advertising agency business, and these agencies secure a basis of discount from the regular rates of many newspapers all over the country. With this advantage they are able to negotiate the business of large and systematic advertisers to the profit of the latter as well as themselves, and frequently carry out contracts involving an expenditure of a million dollars in printers' ink. (p. 88)

The functions of advertising agencies evolved in stages throughout the 19th century. Ohmann (1996) wrote, "Through forty and more years after the founding of the first U. S. agency in 1841, this business was a hodgepodge of contradictory and sharp practices" (p. 94). Roughly speaking, advertising agencies were allied more closely with publishers until about 1880. At that point, agencies began to shift their allegiances and grew increasingly attentive to advertisers.

Between the 1840s, when the earliest agencies opened, and the 1890s, when they began to take on their current form, agencies performed five different functions, sometimes performing several at once depending on circumstances, sometimes moving from one to the other.

1. The first advertising agencies—such as Palmer’s and Hooper’s—were essentially publishers’ sales representatives, soliciting space from advertisers outside a publisher’s hometown, and earning a commission from publishers.
2. Next, agencies began to accept business from advertisers, trusting (or gambling on) their ability to negotiate ad space from publishers at a lower cost than the cost they had quoted to the advertiser. In this phase the agent moved from being the publisher’s representative to being the publisher’s customer—and potentially, a high-volume purchaser.
3. This led some agents, such as Rowell, to buy space in bulk from publishers at the lowest rates that could be negotiated, then resell it to advertisers in smaller units at a higher price. In this phase the agent functioned as a wholesaler.
4. As the climate grew more competitive, innovative agencies like Thompson began to supply additional services to advertisers, such as design, copywriting, and market

research. Increasingly, these came to be expected. In this phase, value added by the agency was a competitive differentiator.

5. Finally, agencies negotiated exclusive arrangements with advertisers, working on the “open contract” plan for a fixed commission. In this final phase, agencies’ services became their *raison d’être*, especially after 1917, when agency commissions were standardized at 15% (Pope, 1983).

The earliest advertising agencies filled two fundamental needs.

First, they made it convenient for advertisers to place ads outside their hometowns.

Until advertising agencies began to gather data and establish relationships with publishers, it was hard for a prospective advertiser to determine which towns had newspapers, or what those papers’ rates and circulations might be. And advertisers who didn’t have a personal relationship with a publisher had no way of knowing whether they were getting a good rate or whether they were being fleeced.

Second, agencies significantly reduced the publisher’s risk of bad debt. From the publisher’s perspective, out-of-town advertisers were a dangerous credit risk—how could a publisher in Burlington hope to collect from an advertiser in Boston?

Hence early agents came to play the same role that wholesalers or “jobbers” played between retail merchants and manufacturers: they were middlemen who provided service and assurance on both sides of the transaction.

But as the business grew, filling these two simple needs grew into something larger and more important—the ability of an advertiser to speak with a voice that reached all parts of the nation.

Agents played the dominant role in establishing a national market for advertising, by making it possible for an advertiser to reach prospects in distant regions of the United States at a time when the vast majority of available media were local. Early agents sensed the need for extended reach before that need was widely apparent. In this way their vision was more advanced than the media's, and the pioneers of the field can take full credit for demonstrating the demand for national advertising media.

8. DEVELOPMENT OF MAIL ORDER ADVERTISING

National advertising developed along two parallel paths in the late 19th century. On one track was the national brand advertising that emerged in the last decade or so of the century: the earliest examples of the brand-building ads that surround us today. On the second track was direct marketing. Brand advertising bloomed in the 1890s. Direct marketing began to reach significant levels about a decade earlier.

The two categories of advertising are very different. Generally speaking, brand-building is based on the principle that predisposition will create demand. In a branding campaign, it's very difficult to quantify the results of a single advertisement. Direct marketing is conducted on the principle that scientific measurement of response allows ongoing refinement of technique, and direct marketers count the response from each of their efforts very carefully.

Today the term *mail order* refers to a method of response: that is, how an order reaches the seller. But in the 19th century *mail order* was used to describe the direct marketing industry as a whole.

Direct marketing in print has been around at least since the 15th century; in fact, printing was one of the first industries to develop a trade in mail order: In 1498 Venice, Aldus Mantius produced what may be the first printed catalog, in which he listed 15 of his own publications for sale (European Mail Order and Distance Selling Trade Association [EMOTA], 2003).

Americans have bought and sold goods through the mail since colonial times. Like Aldus, Benjamin Franklin produced a book catalog, in which he promoted his 1744 line (Hoge, 1988). Prior to the Revolution, Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and many other colonists ordered British products by mail (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950; McCullough, 2001).

Other American retailers began issuing catalogs in the early 19th century. Orvis first sold fishing tackle via catalog in 1844, and Tiffany & Co. produced its first catalog of “useful and fancy articles” in the following year (EMOTA, 2003). Book (and eventually magazine) publisher Harper Bros. developed a catalog in 1844. The first Ferry Seeds catalog came out in 1856. The first catalog from E. Remington & Sons appeared in 1858. By the start of the Civil War, Americans could purchase thousands of products through the mail, including carriages, shoes, flour mills, sewing machines, hats, candles, safes, clocks, plows, jewelry, musical instruments, toys, and pigs (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950; Hoge, 1988; Norris, 1990).

In addition to selling their products directly to consumers through advertising, many 19th-century manufacturers used advertising to solicit agents for their products. Respondents to these ads ordered products in bulk and sold to their friends and neighbors. Some magazine publishers used this scheme to sell subscriptions: readers who submitted a certain number of paid subscriptions were allowed to keep a percentage of the subscription price. Rowell (1906) describes a similar program conducted by book publishers, who sold deluxe editions of popular books through agents. The books cost \$3.00 or \$3.50, and agents were allowed to keep 40% of the sales. Hundreds of companies, in a wide range of businesses, used mail order advertising to find agents.

In the 10 years following the end of the Civil War, the direct marketing industry grew dramatically, though without attracting the same level of attention that new giant department stores like Macy's, Wanamaker, and Marshall Fields received. Direct marketing operated in what we call virtual space today: less visible than a city full of crowded shops, but no less dynamic, and no less profitable.

Margins on mail order were roughly equivalent to store margins. In 1889, the average mail order business produced a 24.4% profit, compared to 22.2% for department stores and 19.2% for dry goods stores. In 1899, margins on mail order had grown to 25%, compared to 25.6% for department stores, and 21.4% for dry goods stores (Norris, 1990).

Despite equivalent margins, the retail price for a product sold through the mail was often lower than the same product would cost in stores—especially country stores, where prices included wholesalers' markup and most items were purchased on extended credit. Mail order sales bypassed wholesalers, and large mail order companies could order in large enough quantities to command the lowest cost.

Prior to the 1880s, direct marketing was a business populated largely by establishments that sold only one category of product, such as Orvis or Remington, though there were exceptions. Macy's began a mail order business in 1874, and by 1881 was producing a 127-page catalog (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950). In the 1880s other major retailers, such as Wanamaker; Marshall Field; Carson, Pirie, Scott; Strawbridge & Clothier; and Jordan Marsh solicited business through the mail, as a sideline to their rapidly expanding department stores (Hoge, 1988). None succeeded in building as much

business through the mail as through the store—although when store owner John Wanamaker was postmaster general he contributed immensely to the continued expansion of the mail order industry by proposing the creation of rural free delivery service (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950).

Companies selling products through the mail had a limited range of promotional vehicles at their disposal.

Direct mail—circulars, solicitation letters, and so forth—was a growing business in the second half of the 19th century, with various specialists handling different aspects of the process. Letter brokers compiled and sold address lists by location, occupation, or social class. Addressing companies, the forerunners of today's lettershops, would obtain lists, stuff and address envelopes—all by hand, of course—and deliver material to the post office (Norris, 1990).

Popular magazines such as *Peterson's Magazine*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and *Harper's Weekly* received mail order advertising, but in relatively small doses prior to the 1870s: four to five pages per issue was typical (Norris, 1990).

Until the 1880s, the lion's share of mail order advertising went to farm publications. Shopping by mail had greatest appeal to people living outside cities, and America's rural population was expanding westward, away from the largest cities and manufacturing centers. Farmers were at a disadvantage when shopping locally, because prices were high at country stores, and selection was limited. As the nation's transportation system expanded, however, it became more and more convenient to purchase through the mail. As a result, farm publications such as *Prairie Farmer*, *Farmer's Review*, *American*

Agriculturist, Cultivator and Country Gentleman, and *Farmer's Voice* began to receive significant amounts of direct mail advertising in the 1870s (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950).

Wanamaker, in fact, was a principal investor in *Farm Journal*, through which he promoted products from his department store (Presbrey, 1929).

The Patrons of Husbandry (known more commonly as the National Grange), launched by Oliver Hudson Kelley in 1867, gave farmers the means to negotiate collectively for better prices and bulk shipping. By 1873 the National Grange had 858,000 members (Gilliam, 1999) at 8,600 individual local Granges (Hoge, 1988).

The Grange's 1874 *Declaration of Purposes* proclaimed: "We propose meeting together, talking together, working together, buying together, selling together, and, in general, acting together for our mutual protection and advancement, as occasion may require" (Quoted in Gilliam, 1999).

In 1872, an entrepreneur named Aaron Montgomery Ward obtained a mailing list of 40 Grange members and, with the help of his wife, mailed out a small two-page circular which he hoped would be well-enough received to provide his new business—Montgomery Ward and Company—with some growth capital.

At the Earnest Solicitation of Many Granges we have consented to open a House devoted to furnishing Farmers and Mechanics throughout the Northwest with all kinds of Merchandise at Wholesale prices (Quoted in Hoge, 1988, p. 12).

Later in 1872, Ward was appointed purchasing agent for the Illinois Grange, a position that allowed him a little more leverage with suppliers. With the help of a partner, George Thorne, and a great deal of patience, Ward began to build his business by refining practices that worked well and discarding what didn't.

Ward targeted farmers for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most compelling one from his perspective was that they could be identified and reached individually via the Grange membership list.

And it quickly became evident that what could be sold to Grange members could be sold to other farmers as well. As a result, advertising in farm periodicals played a large role in establishing his business. The first Montgomery Ward advertisement ran on September 27, 1873 in the *Prairie Farmer*. It was followed by thousands more, in a wide variety of publications, in subsequent years. The company didn't sell merchandise through its advertisements—it only solicited requests for catalogs and editorialized about the advantages of doing business with Montgomery Ward (Hoge, 1988), as in this 1893 ad in *Farmer's Voice*:

How many know that more than ten million people buy the bulk of their household supplies by mail? How many know that this has come about since we originated the Mail Order Business, twenty-one years ago? How many can foresee what the mail order business is destined to become? . . . How many know that Montgomery Ward & Co., of Chicago, have grown up from a small beginning to one of the largest commercial houses in the country; that they lead far and away in the mail business and cater to no other trade? (Quoted in Hoge, 1988, p. 25).

By 1884 the readers of *Farmer's Voice* had proved so responsive that Ward and Thorne purchased a majority share of the magazine's ownership. This provided their company with free advertising in a journal that reached their target market directly.

Within five years of its two-page start in 1872, the Montgomery Ward catalog had developed real heft. Hoge (1988) shows that pages grew from two in 1872 and four in 1873, to 100 in 1874, and 152 in 1875. The 1884 Montgomery Ward catalog listed almost 10,000 items in 240 pages. Before another decade passed, the catalog had more

than doubled: by the early 1890s it contained 540 pages and listed 24,000 items (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950).

This growth reflects not only Ward's skills as a business manager and copywriter, but also the rapid expansion of direct marketing as an industry. Despite Ward's claim to dominate the mail order business, his company was only one of many players. He was successful in creating a mail order department store for people who lived too far from the city to visit the real thing. But in the same way that department stores in cities were surrounded by hundreds of smaller retailers, Ward's magazine advertisements were surrounded by ads from hundreds of other mail order marketers. Direct marketing grew dramatically after 1880, and Montgomery Ward—as large as it became—represented only a portion of the revenue generated by mail order sales in the United States.

To meet the competition from smaller mail order retailers (and to counter the intense opposition of rural merchants), Ward expanded his advertising into magazines that served markets other than farming. He also mailed almanacs containing advertisements for Montgomery Ward's products, and sponsored a minstrel-style traveling variety show (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950). But he didn't face head-on competition until a mail order marketer of watches named Richard Sears and his partner, Alvah Roebuck, began selling general merchandise by catalog in late 1893.

In the course of building his watch business, Sears had earned a reputation for offering decent merchandise with an ironclad guarantee, a reputation which proved valuable as the company expanded into general merchandise. Roebuck contributed stability and good business judgment to the enterprise. But the principal factors behind

the company's growth were Sears's boundless enthusiasm and his gift for writing clear copy that spoke to customers in familiar terms. Weil (1977) wrote, "He talked to farmers in their own language, which was simple, earthy, and direct. Even the hyperbole was designed to cater to their dreams of the greater world that most of them would never see" (p. 11).

Like Ward, Sears positioned his company as the farmer's friend, but he did so in a style that was more subtle and less bombastic than Ward's. Weil (1977) contrasted one of Ward's attacks on rural retailers with one of Sears's:

Montgomery Ward decided that the best defense was good offense. . . "We believe the farmers of today are tyrannized over by the country merchants to a far worse extent than they realize. . . . Mail-order business has solved the problem for the farmer and released him from serfdom."

Richard Sears agreed, but his pen dripped with sarcasm and charm rather than venom. . . . He said: "As a rule, the merchant from whom you buy adds as little profit to the cost of goods as he possibly can afford to add; for example: if a certain article in our catalog is quoted at \$1.00 and your hardware merchant asks you \$1.50 for the same article, we wish to say in defense of your hardware dealer that this difference of 50 cents does not represent an excessive profit he is charging you. . . ." because he could not buy in as large lots as the giant Sears, Roebuck. The point was neatly made. (p. 63)

Emmet and Jeuck (1950) noted that Sears "violated every rule in the book" (p. 64) in his ads. Sears abhorred white space, and "believed devoutly in belaboring even the obvious, in emphasis through repetition and paraphrase" (p. 62).

Emmet and Jeuck (1950) described a typical Sears, Roebuck ad from 1894, run on the back cover of *Vickery's Fireside Visitor* magazine. The top of the ad featured illustrations of the company's Chicago and Minneapolis offices and a large globe, encircled by the headline, "Cheapest Supply House on Earth—Our Trade Reaches around

the World.” The company’s catalog is described as “The Grandest Book of Information to BUYERS Ever Printed. It Costs Nothing!” Below were testimonials from Vickery (the publisher), a “city official” (P.W. McAllister, alderman of the 10th Ward in Augusta, ME), and a “railroad man.” At the bottom of the ad, a pointing hand draws the eye to a “Grand Offer to Readers:” premiums “to all who send in an order, no matter how small” (p. 62). The ad promoted 25 separate items, each reminding customers of the premium and the value of haste in ordering.

When buying ad space, Sears negotiated as aggressively as he advertised. Emmet and Jeuck (1950) wrote that Sears “usually demanded a rate of one quarter of a cent per agate line per 1,000 of circulation,” (p. 61) and that by buying in large volume Sears sometimes paid as little as one tenth of a cent per line per thousand readers.

At a quarter cent per line per thousand readers, a 16-line “square” ad in a 25,000 circulation magazine would have cost \$1.00. Assuming 175 lines per column, or 700 lines per four-column page, a full page ad in the same 25,000 circulation magazine would have cost roughly \$20.00 (an 80-cent cost per thousand in modern terms) at one tenth of a cent per line per thousand readers. Even at a quarter cent per line per thousand readers it would have cost only \$50.00 (a \$2.00 CPM).

This buying-in-bulk approach to advertising allowed Sears to run large amounts of space in single issues of magazines, often combinations of full page ads, spreads, and fractionals.

Sears measured the performance of all marketing vehicles carefully, and used his catalog as a benchmark of advertising performance. Taking an 1897-1900 Sears

campaign to sell sewing machines as an example, Emmet and Jeuck (1950) reported that orders cost approximately 38 cents to secure through the Sears, Roebuck catalog in 1897. Through Vickery's publications, orders could be obtained for a cost of 25 cents each—at least until the market became saturated. But even by 1900, three years into the campaign, the average cost of orders from magazines was less than \$1.00, an 8% advertising expense on a \$12.50 sewing machine.

By the mid-1890s, Sears's aggressive advertising had built significant name recognition, and by 1900 Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward were neck-and-neck in sales (Weil, 1977). Both companies continued to grow and prosper through the first half of the 20th century. To what extent their boats were lifted by the rising tide of a growing industry can't be quantified. But it's safe to say that the hundreds of other mail order companies that advertised in the late 1800s were buoyed by the same forces that helped Sears and Ward. Weil (1977) wrote:

The lure of mail order to young entrepreneurs was obvious. . . . It was hard to miss finding a market when there were millions of Americans too far from the big cities to have any real choice about what they purchased and openly unhappy about their domination by the local general store operator." (p. 62)

9. MAMMOTHS

Of the social trends that changed 19th-century publishing, growth in the number of literate readers was the first to alter the business significantly. Publishers discovered a more robust market for printed material than previously experienced, but it was a market with a fundamentally new and different aspect: Its fastest growth came from the more modestly-educated. This created much greater demand for popular literature than for erudition.

By the late 1830s, success of the one-cent newspapers had shown that there was a large audience of readers that was revealed when price was removed as an obstacle to circulation growth. The emergence of the penny press coincided as well with an increase in the supply of paper, which manufacturers began to sell in larger sizes to avoid reducing price (Presbrey, 1929).

In July, 1839, two New York journalists named Park Benjamin and Rufus W. Griswold, previously associated with Horace Greeley's *New-Yorker* magazine, launched a weekly periodical called *Brother Jonathan*. (At the time *Brother Jonathan* was a colloquial personification of the United States, like Uncle Sam.)

Brother Jonathan was original in a number of ways—both “sensational and very much given to serial fiction,” as Mott (1930, p. 359) described it. Its publisher called *Brother Jonathan* a newspaper, and produced it on large newsprint. This was a ruse, intended to take advantage of postal rates that favored newspapers over magazines. For content, *Brother Jonathan* provided an occasional news article, to support the subterfuge,

but, as Mott (1947) wrote, “Its real purpose was to pirate the popular English novels of the day—the works of Dickens, Lever, Marryat. . .” et al. (p. 76).

This was not a new concept at all: American publishers had been pillaging the British press for years. Perhaps the most brazen was Nathaniel Parker Willis, whose *Corsair* (1839) provided as its mission a restatement of its title: “to take advantage, in short, of the privilege assured to us by our piratical law of copyright” (Quoted in Mott, 1930, p. 356), meaning, to exploit the absence of an international copyright treaty between the U.S. and Great Britain.

Six months into its first year, *Brother Jonathan*’s founding editors parted with their publisher, Wilson & Co., and joined a rival company owned by Jonas Winchester. There they launched a weekly competitor, the *New World*, similar to *Brother Jonathan* in appearance, and identical in aim (Mott, 1947). Benjamin Day had invested in Wilson & Co., and Winchester was Horace Greeley’s partner (Mott, 1947). The vigorous competition that ensued was predictable.

It brought success to both publications. Presbrey (1929) wrote that *Brother Jonathan* had 5,000 circulation in 1842 and that the *New World* had 8,000. This compared favorably with the 1.5-cent daily New York *Tribune*, which had circulation of 9,500, and the largest 6-cent daily newspaper in New York, the *Courier and Enquirer*, which had 7,000.

The two competitors ran their pirated content as serials in regular issues, but, once established, also began offering complete novels in special issues, which they called supplements or extras. First of these was an edition of Charles Lever’s *Charles*

O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon published by the *New World* in July, 1841, and offered for 50 cents. *Brother Jonathan* immediately responded with an edition of the same novel priced at 25 cents, and a price war began. Before long the *New World* had issued Bulwer's *Zanoni* for 12.5 cents. This was followed by numerous other titles at the same price, issued by both publications. By 1843 shorter books were being sold for as little as 6.25 cents (Mott, 1947). Mott noted that both *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* were issuing their "supplements" twice a month during 1842 and 1843.

In the 1840s, a time when a dollar would buy five loaves of bread, 5.5 kg of beef, or a liter of brandy (Stevens, 1987), books were commonly priced at \$1.00 or \$2.00 (Mott, 1947). The ability to buy them at a fraction of their traditional cost had the same dramatic effect on book publishing that the emergence of the penny press had on the newspaper business: A substantial market, previously hidden by price resistance, suddenly made its existence known.

The books produced by these two magazines were not of the same quality as the \$2.00 books from established book publishers, but this did not deter large numbers of people from buying them. Copies sold by street vendors in New York had bright paper covers, but copies sent through the mail were left uncovered to bolster their claim to be newspapers (Mott, 1947).

Thus was America's paperback book industry born, launched by magazine publishers who disguised books as newspapers. Soon even the more prestigious book publishers followed suit by cutting price: Harper & Brothers started a line of brown paper-covered volumes that sold for 25 cents each (Weathersby, 1986).

Both *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* were noteworthy for their size. “I have written to Park Benjamin to send you his new paper, a monstrous sheet, full of all that is going on here; by far the best paper I see,” wrote Longfellow in 1840 (Quoted in Tassin, 1916, p. 139). Printed on some of the largest sheets of newsprint available, *Brother Jonathan*, the *New World*, and their competitors came to be called *mammoths*. Some issues were produced on pages 1.2 m long and 11 columns wide. More manageable quarto editions were also published (fortunately, because fewer of the larger sizes survive), but the novelty of the mammoth size was what captured the public’s fancy. Other publications adopted the same tactic.

One of the first to do so was the *Boston Notion*, edited and published by George Roberts, publisher of the *Boston Daily Times* penny newspaper (Weathersby, 1986). Technically speaking, the *Boston Notion* was the second mammoth, since its first issue, September 29, 1839, preceded the *New World* by a few months.

Roberts produced the folio edition of the *Boston Notion* on sheets about 92 x 130 cm, roughly twice the size of today’s broadsheet newspapers. Each weekly issue had four 10-column pages in this size, and, according to Roberts, contained as much reading material as the average novel (Weathersby, 1986).

Roberts soon felt constrained by such limited space, however, and began to distribute bonus issues which he called the *Double Notion* or *Quadruple Notion*. Weathersby (1986) described these encyclopedic productions as being typically 168 x 225 cm and 16 pages long. A quick calculation indicates that one issue on this scale would contain more than 60 m² of content.

Roberts was perhaps more astute in business matters than many contemporary publishers, and insisted on cash in advance for subscriptions, which were \$3.00 per year. He was apparently a talented marketer as well. The *Notion's* first issue sold 9,000 copies, and by the early 1840s the publication was selling nearly 25,000 copies a week, "a testimony to the increasing appetite for reading matter by the increasingly literate masses," as Weathersby (1986, p. 75) noted.

Roberts fed his literate masses a mixed diet of American fare obtained in large part through exchange with other editors, and British material obtained through piracy, such as, for example, Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which Roberts serialized. Other contributors of note included Edgar Allen Poe, John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Eugene Sué, George Sand, and William Cullen Bryant (Weathersby, 1986).

Mott (1947) attributed the increasing appetite for reading material to advances in the means of production:

The chief factor in the "revolution" which now came on apace was the new printing technology, utilizing rapid Napier and Hoe cylinder presses and paper produced by fast Fourdrinier machines. This was what made the cheap penny press possible in the preceding decade, and it was now turned to the uses of the cheap book. (p. 77)

While the impact of improved technology on the supply side is indisputable, growth in the size of the literate population should probably not be overlooked as an enabling factor. During the decade of the 1840s, the number of literate Americans increased at a faster rate than at any other time in the 19th century, growing 69%, from 6.2 to 10.5 million, a result of both increase in the overall population size and the compounding effect of expanding public education. This created rising demand for reading material at

a time when improving production processes enabled that demand to be met. And this in turn, of course, provided a rapidly growing market for publishers.

Naturally, as the literate population expanded, the number of people with a rudimentary education increased faster than the number of people who became highly educated. In other words, schools produced more people with a few years of education and minimal reading skills than with eight or more years of education and advanced reading skills. This meant that publishers had increasing opportunity at the lower end of the market, among potential readers of modest education.

Some publishers had already tapped into this audience, as early as the 1830s. The *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, for example, was founded in 1831 and, by clipping liberally from other papers around (and outside) the country, fed a steady diet of serials to a growing audience that reached 24,000 in the early 1830s, and 32,000 by 1839 (Noel, 1954). In 1954 Noel wrote that the *Saturday Evening Post*, founded in 1821, relied in the 1840s on “various secondhand news items, mostly clipped outright from other papers” (p. 12). Noel continued:

That such papers survived—and they did, by the dozens—was touching testimony to the growing eagerness of a poor people, in out-of-the-way places of an out-of-the-way country, to get anything at all to read. (p. 12)

Noel (1954) noted that the *Saturday Evening Post* claimed 90,000 circulation in 1851. Although Mott (1938, vol. 2) more cautiously estimated 42,000 in 1850, either figure made it the largest Philadelphia weekly. The change of fortune came when Henry Peterson was named editor in 1849 (Noel, 1954).

Success of *Brother Jonathan*, the *New World*, and the *Boston Notion* must have suggested to other publishers that, while mammoth size was a very effective attention-getter, the greatest opportunity was among the less-educated classes—especially since *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* already carried off the best British fiction that could be plundered, and other magazines, among them the *Boston Notion*, had a secure grip on the better American authors. Accordingly, subsequent mammoths of the early 1840s targeted readers who wanted to be entertained, not challenged. Editors satisfied their audiences by providing escapist fiction, sentimental poetry, editorials on comfortably noncontroversial topics, and a bit of diversion in the form of light news.

Soon Boston became home to a second mammoth, the *Universal Yankee Nation* (“The Largest Paper in All Creation”), which pirated from lower-quality British sources (Noel, 1954), making up in marketing hyperbole what it may have lacked in integrity. It described itself, “Wonder of the World! The Mammoth of all Mammoths! . . . The largest newspaper, by 500 square inches, ever published in this or any other country” (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 15).

Yankee, launched in Boston in 1843, added a third to the city’s roster of mammoths. Noel (1954) described it as “a handsome as well as a huge sheet” (p. 20). Its publishers, the Williams brothers, produced a couple of other mammoths as the decade progressed, including the *Flag of the Free* and the *News of the World*.

The Williamses’ first magazine, *Uncle Sam* (1841), was a standard broadsheet, not a mammoth, but its larger siblings cut their content from the same cloth. “Professor” Joseph Holt Ingraham made his name in *Uncle Sam* and went on to become a featured

author in *Yankee*, *Flag of the Free*, and the *News of the World* as well. Ingraham was one of the first star hacks: He churned out story after story (“The Silver Ship of Mexico,” “Emily Mansfield; or the Gambler’s Fate,” “Distiller’s Daughter,” etc.), each tale of seduction and suicide eagerly devoured by the magazines’ growing audiences (Noel, 1954). In 1847, *Uncle Sam* claimed to have achieved circulation of 30,000 (Noel, 1954).

Perhaps the most successful of all the Boston mammoths was the *Flag of Our Union*, launched in 1846 by Frederick Gleason. The *Flag* was about 10 cm wider than a modern newspaper, and proportionately longer (Noel, 1954)—only a modest mammoth by the standards of the *Boston Notion* or the *Universal Yankee Nation*. But although he may not have produced the paper with the largest physical dimensions, Gleason had his eye on the largest audience. He knew that his greatest potential was not among the well-educated:

It will be the object of the proprietor rather to make a paper that shall please the million, than one loaded with critical essays and reviews of the market. (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 31)

The *Flag* didn’t quite reach a million, but claimed to have achieved circulation of 40,000 in 1849 (Noel, 1954), and Mott (1938, vol. 2) credits it with 100,000 distribution in 1851, strong performance for the times. The *Flag*’s popularity was enhanced by a new author who began a long and illustrious career in its pages: Ned Buntline (nom de plume of Edward Z.C. Judson). His first story for the *Flag*, published in 1846, was “The King of the Sea; A Tale of the Fearless and Free.” This was followed by “The Black Avenger of the Spanish Main,” “The Volunteer, or The Maid of Monterey,” and “The Red Revenger, or the Pirate King of the Floridas” (Noel, 1954). Other *Flag* contributors included Sylvanus Cobb and Horatio Alger (Mott, 1938, vol. 2).

Back in the hometown of *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World*, an entrepreneur named Amor J. Williamson, publisher of the weekly *Dispatch*, launched the *Universe* in 1847. Noel (1954) described it as “the cheapest bargain in printing acreage available:”

For one dollar a year a reader could have some 208 huge ten-column pages of the smallest black print: secondhand news, driveling editorials, anonymous and pirated short stories, and occasionally an anonymous serial of an oddly familiar type such as “The Orphan Seamstress; A Narrative of Innocence and Guilt, Mystery, Love, and Crime.” (p. 107)

Philadelphia witnessed some jostling on the question of size, as the *Saturday Courier* feuded with Louis Godey’s *Philadelphia Saturday News and Literary Gazette* and Neal’s *Saturday Gazette*. The *Courier* claimed to be the “Largest and Cheapest Newspaper in the United States,” (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 14), a claim the other two disputed.

The era of the mammoths came and went fairly quickly. The Post Office was a principal cause of their passing: The Postal Reform Act of 1845 was designed specifically to end the masquerade of magazines disguised as newspapers (Fuller, 1972; Kielbowicz, 1989). Perhaps more to the point, the novelty had undoubtedly run its course by 1845. The oversized sheets were cumbersome to handle and difficult to read. *Brother Jonathan* folded its tent in 1845; the *New World* passed away in the same year. The *Boston Notion* struggled along until 1847. Others, like the *Saturday Courier* and *Flag of Our Union*, changed formats to suit the changing fashions. At least one publisher refused to let the dream fade away: George Roberts continued to produce special holiday issues in mammoth size. His *Constellation* of July 4, 1859 measured 125 x 225 cm, and achieved 50,000 circulation (Mott, 1938, vol. 2).

The mammoths did not lumber into extinction without leaving a legacy, however. Their greatest lasting contribution was the introduction of paperback book publishing to the United States: The rivalry between *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* revealed the existence of a large market for low cost books. Similarly, the mammoths—especially those catering to the popular market, such as *Flag of Our Union*, *Yankee*, and the *Universe*—demonstrated that there was a much larger market for light weekly entertainment than previously imagined.

10. THE STORY PAPERS

The mammoths came and went in about six years, but in that relatively short period they successfully mixed serial fiction, poetry, advice, and commentary, demonstrating the public's appetite for light weekly entertainment. Beginning around mid-century and continuing for about 40 years, a class of literary weeklies known as *story papers* stuck to the same formula and flourished like weeds.

There was practically no end to the story papers. Dozens were launched between 1850 and 1890, sharing similar titles in many cases, and similar content in every case. Mott (1938, vol. 2) wrote despairingly, "To find one's way around the weeklies of the mid-century is impossible" (p. 33).

Describing the *Flag of Our Union*, Noel (1954) provided as good a definition of a mid-19th century story paper as can be found:

By the end of 1847 the *Flag* had all the qualifications of a full-fledged family story paper. It was cheap and weekly. It was dependent for its earnings on circulation rather than on advertising. Almost all of its matter was "original" and paid for. It avoided politics and sectarianism. It was boasting of its high moral tone and appealing to the whole family, young and old. It was devoted entirely to entertainment, or in the words of the publisher, "to Domestic and Foreign Literature, News, Science, the Arts and Amusement." . . . Its literature ran to sensational serials, a short humorous sketch, a moral sketch, a short love story or adventure. Sentimental poems and humorous anecdotes filled up odd spaces. It had certain set departments that went on year after year . . . There was nothing very original in all this. But then, lack of originality is not only the essence of popular literature but its definition. (pp. 32-33)

What made the story papers of the mid-19th century different from earlier literary weeklies was their consistency in targeting the modestly educated as opposed to the well

educated, and their consistency in delivering the same kind of content, over and over. Once established, the formula—serials surrounded by sketches, verse, anecdotes, columns, and the occasional current events section—was used by all subsequent story papers.

Most story papers were launched during or after the craze for mammoths, but there were a few that predated the mammoths, and some went back quite a way. One of the earliest popular literary weeklies was the Boston *Saturday Evening Gazette*, launched around 1814. It mixed stories with theatrical reviews, and local gossip, and ran until 1906 (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). The *Saturday Evening Post* played much the same role for antebellum Philadelphians, as did *Neal's Saturday Gazette*, founded in 1836 by J.C. Neal and managed successfully by his wife Alice for another six years after his death in 1847. In New York the *Dispatch*, published by the same A.J. Williamson who later launched the *Universe*, ran from 1845 to 1900, “full of crime stories and sensation fiction, with a few woodcuts; it was badly printed and published the advertising of contraceptives and abortion drugs,” as described by Mott (1938, vol. 2, p. 37). The *National Police Gazette*, founded in 1845, developed a reputation for sensationalism even worse than the *Dispatch's*. George Rowell (1906) describes his grandmother's reaction of “wonder and horror” after seeing a copy: “George! What—sort—of—a—paper—is—this?” (p. 26). More respectable was the *Sunday Mercury*, launched in 1838 by William Caudwell, who built its circulation up to 145,000 by the Civil War (Mott, 1938, vol. 2), though circulation declined after Caudwell quarreled with both Ross & Tousey and Dexter, Hamilton & Co. (Noel, 1954), the large distributors who merged in 1864 to form the

American News Co. The *Olive Branch*, which was launched in Boston in 1836 to promote the Methodist Protestant Church, had lapsed with success into secular stories and verse by 1843 (Noel, 1954). Several writers who later went on to great popularity got their start at Boston's *American Union* (founded in 1828), including Oliver Optic and Emma Garrison Jones (Noel, 1954; Mott, 1938, vol. 2).

The *American Union* was not the only training ground for writers of note. Ann S. Stephens, one of the most popular and prolific 19th century writers, had her first serials published in *Neal's Saturday Gazette* (Noel, 1954). "Fanny Fern" (nom de plume of Sara P. Willis Parton) was first published in the *Olive Branch* (Noel, 1954). The *Mercury* was an early Ned Buntline supporter (Noel, 1954).

The Ledger

In the end, it was the New York *Ledger* that defined the story paper genre. Quite simply, the *Ledger* was so successful that after 1855 no publisher was willing to risk a different approach than the one taken by its publisher, Robert Bonner. Noel (1954) wrote, “All the old story papers went down before the *Ledger*. All the new ones were started in deliberate and acknowledged imitation of the *Ledger*” (p. 59).

Bonner emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1839, when he was 15 (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). He began his career in publishing as a compositor on the Hartford *Courant*, moved to New York and became assistant foreman at the New York *Mirror*. He went into business for himself, doing composition work as a freelancer, and among his customers was the *Merchant’s Ledger and Statistical Record*, a struggling price-current with about 3,000 circulation (Mott, 1938, vol. 2; Presbrey, 1929).

Bonner acquired the *Merchant’s Ledger* for \$900 in 1851 (Mott, 1938, vol. 2), and began adding fiction, verse, and other non-business content. By 1855 the transformation from business magazine to story paper was complete, and the paper became, simply, the *Ledger* (Presbrey, 1929).

Bonner revolutionized advertising not by selling space in his own publication—the *Ledger* never accepted advertising, despite the fact that it would have made an outstanding ad medium—but by using advertising to increase the *Ledger’s* circulation. Perhaps Bonner’s background in composition gave him insight into how typography

could be used in more imaginative and effective ways than was customary at the time.

Presbrey (1929) wrote:

As an advertiser he broke down the newspaper bars against display and demonstrated to publishers of the penny papers that their rules had been a mistake and that there was more revenue for them in permitting a greater latitude. The examples he set in expenditure, and in copy and typography, resulted in a bigger idea of the uses of newspaper advertising. (p. 236)

Bonner was one of the first advertisers to make a serious effort to circumvent rules against display advertising in newspapers. Prior to the Civil War, publishers believed that large advertisers would have an “unfair” advantage over smaller advertisers if they were allowed to use display (headline size) typefaces. But as a student of typography, Bonner had noted how some advertisers in the London *Times* repeated phrases in a series of short ads, such as an auctioneer who began each ad in a column of advertisements with the same phrase in capital letters: “DANIEL SMITH & SONS WILL SELL AT AUCTION. . .” (Presbrey, 1929). The overall effect was very eye-catching. Bonner applied the same principle in his own advertising. In one of his earliest advertising feats, Bonner took 93 advertisements in the New York *Herald*, each with the same two lines:

ORION THE GOLD-BEATER is the title of Cobb’s sensation
story in the New York Ledger

The 93 ads filled a full column. Although Bennett protested, Bonner insisted that he was simply playing by the rules Bennett had established (Presbrey, 1929).

Bonner found that another way of surmounting this obstacle was by repeating lines:

THE NEW YORK LEDGER
 THE NEW YORK LEDGER
 THE NEW YORK LEDGER
 WILL BE FOR SALE
 WILL BE FOR SALE
 WILL BE FOR SALE
 TOMORROW MORNING
 TOMORROW MORNING
 TOMORROW MORNING
 THROUGHOUT THE
 THROUGHOUT THE
 THROUGHOUT THE
 UNITED STATES
 UNITED STATES
 UNITED STATES
 AND NEW JERSEY
 AND NEW JERSEY
 AND NEW JERSEY

(Quoted in Mott, 1938, vol. 2, p. 16)

Bonner also promoted the *Ledger* by purchasing ad space from other periodicals and publishing portions of the serial cliffhangers that were a standard component of the *Ledger's* contents. The story would end at a suspenseful moment, followed by a line to the effect of, "The tale will continue in next week's New York *Ledger*, on sale Monday."

Presbrey (1929) wrote that Bonner spent as much as \$27,000 per week in advertising, and was the first advertiser outside the patent medicine field to spend \$150,000 in a year.

The *Ledger* was distributed by the American News Company, and initially sold on newsstands for four cents a copy, though the price was later raised to six cents, which was the usual single-copy price for story papers (Brooks et al., n.d.). Bonner encouraged

newsstand sales and discouraged subscriptions, going so far as to refuse subscriptions from readers in towns served by a newsdealer (Noel, 1954).

At a time when the average skilled laborer earned about \$1.62 per day and the average unskilled laborer earned about \$1.33 per day, a six-cent investment represented roughly 3.5% to 5.0% of a worker's daily wage—an affordable but not insignificant sum. It was enough to produce significant profit for Bonner, because he sold in big volume. One issue achieved circulation of 377,438, with documented single copy sales of 330,438, and 47,000 claimed subscriptions. Noel (1954) wrote, “No other story paper ever seems to have presented an authenticated claim to a circulation as high as this” (p. 138).

It's not difficult to sketch a rough estimate of the *Ledger's* revenue. At six cents per copy, Bonner's 330,000 newsstand copies would have grossed \$19,800. Assuming that American News acquired copies at 4.5 cents each, as Noel (1954, p. 128) asserted, Bonner would have netted about \$14,850 on single copy sales. Cash flow from 47,000 subscriptions at \$2.00 each would have added approximately \$1,800 in an average week, for a net total of about \$16,700 on circulation of 377,000. Of course, this calculation is based on Bonner's largest issue, but even reducing the estimate by a third leads to the conclusion that the *Ledger* was producing close to \$600,000 annually.

Bonner himself prospered lavishly, consistently earning \$200,000 per year from the *Ledger*, according to his friend and contributor Henry Ward Beecher. Bonner reported \$238,780 income in 1868, which put him among the richest people in New York (Noel,

1954). He began to pursue an interest in trotting horses, and gained additional publicity by promoting his trotters' performances.

Bonner paid high wages to writers, but only when he expected the value of subsequent publicity to exceed the editorial expenditure. Among his investments in high-profile content were \$30,000 to Beecher for the novel *Norwood*, \$5,000 to Tennyson for a single poem, and \$5,000 to Dickens for a short story. Bonner published William Cullen Bryant, Henry Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Edward Everett, former ambassador to the U.K., whose "Mount Vernon" series proved very popular among *Ledger* readers (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). Horace Greeley contributed some autobiographical sketches, and Bonner subsequently encouraged Greeley to write his autobiography, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (Greeley, 1869). Bonner spent high to bring popular authors into the *Ledger's* pages, too. Fanny Fern received \$1,000 for a ten-column story (Presbrey, 1929).

These were unprecedented payments at a time when authors often went unpaid. Bonner's special gift was the ability to recover his costs by promoting his profligacy. Fueled by liberal and imaginative advertising, the publicity that the *Ledger* received from these payments boosted sales.

Mott (1938, vol. 2) describes the contents of a typical issue of the *Ledger* from 1859:

Front page: a sentimental poem and a chapter of Emma D.E.N. Southworth's "The Hidden Hand," illustrated by a woodcut.

Second page: "Hidden Hand" continued, and some miscellany for children.

Third page: a poem, "leaves" from Seaton's journal, a short piece by John G. Saxe, and a chapter from a serial history of Plymouth.

Page four, the editorial page: "Fortune Telling and Spiritualism," the value of patience, and "grand parties" rejected in favor of simpler entertainments.

Page five: Edward Everett's "Mount Vernon Papers," followed by verses by Alice Cary and a moral essay by Ritchie. Chapter I of Cobb's popular "Gun Maker of Moscow."

Page six: more of "Gun Maker."

Page seven: a poem; the final installment of another Cobb romance, a ballad by George P. Morris, and a column of "Wit and Wisdom."

Page eight: a poem, a short story of adventure, and two columns of "Notices to Correspondents."

The *Ledger*, though promoted as a paper for the whole family, was written more for women than for men. It added several columns devoted to love, marriage, and baby care, and its serials focused heavily on romance (Brooks et al., n.d.).

What this material may have lacked in enduring artistic value it more than made up for in popularity. Bonner proved that a publication with contents aimed at the masses could achieve and sustain a high readership. This pointed the way for several magazines that also began to develop unprecedented circulations in the years following the Civil War.

The New York Weekly

In 1857 Amor Williamson, publisher of the *Sunday Dispatch*, launched a companion story paper, which he named the *New York Weekly Dispatch*. Within a year he dropped *Dispatch* from the title. A reporter and writer named Francis S. Smith worked his way into the editor's chair, and in 1859, in partnership with the firm's business manager, Francis S. Street, borrowed \$40,000 and bought the *Weekly*. Within five years the two Francis S.es had paid off their debt (Noel, 1954).

The *New York Weekly* was the base on which Street and Smith built a significantly larger publishing enterprise—one still conducting business almost 150 years later—but the *Weekly* itself was no small potatoes. Its circulation reached 150,000 by 1860 (Noel, 1954), 200,000 by 1870 (Mott, 1938, vol. 2), 300,000 shortly thereafter, and hit a peak of 350,000 in 1877 (Noel, 1954).

The *Weekly* provided a home to many of the mid-19th century's most popular writers, including Harry Hazel (nom de plume of Justin Jones), Lucy Randall Comfort, Ann S. Stephens, Ned Buntline, and Horatio Alger, who by 1871 had become a steady contributor. The first author promoted heavily by the new owners was Mary J. Holmes, the "QUEEN OF THE HUMAN HEART," as she was modestly described in the *Weekly's* advertising (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 111). The Queen wrote unadorned love stories, with "no abductions, no violence, no villains at all" (Noel, 1954, p. 112), a somewhat new type of tale for the story papers. If Holmes was queen, then Alger must have been the king contributor, at least from the owners' perspective. With 200 million

copies of his books sold to date (Kanfer, 2000), it's hard to dispute the long-term value of Alger to the fortunes of Street & Smith.

Saturday Night

In 1865 Robert S. Davis and James Elverson gathered together \$5,000, and launched *Saturday Night*, ultimately one of Philadelphia's most successful story papers. *Saturday Night* was a virtual clone of the *Ledger*, but the formula was infinitely extensible. Although *Saturday Night* specialized in serials of love and marriage (Brooks et al., n.d.), each of the other story papers did too, to one degree or another. Noel (1954) wrote, "*Saturday Night* was in all respects the least original and most mechanical of the story papers. This is saying a great deal" (p. 119).

Saturday Night did show some originality in its marketing, however, at one point hiring a brass band to march through Philadelphia to promote the magazine.

Saturday Night's highest claimed circulation was 250,000, but was rated at 150,000 in 1880 (*Ayer & sons manual for advertisers*, 1881). By 1892 circulation was down to 100,000 (Brooks et al., n.d.). Elverson bought out Davis in 1879, and went on to found *Golden Days*, a story paper for children.

The Beadles and Munros

No account of American story papers should neglect two interlinked tales of fraternal rivalry: the first involving the Beadle brothers, Erastus and Irwin; the second involving the Munro brothers, George and Norman.

Erastus F. and Irwin P. Beadle were natives of Buffalo, NY, who went into partnership under the name of Beadle & Co. and began publishing dime novels in 1860. George and Norman Munro were native Nova Scotians who immigrated to New York.

In 1861 George Munro was hired as a bundle-wrapper and bookkeeper at Beadle & Co. (Johannsen, 1950; Mott, 1938, vol. 3). In 1863 he, Irwin Beadle, and a third partner, Samuel Greenwood, with \$600 of capital among them, started a competing publishing company, to be called the Irwin P. Beadle Co.

After Irwin left Beadle & Co. in 1863, Robert Adams replaced him as partner to Erastus, and the company became Beadle & Adams. Beadle & Adams sued Irwin and his partners, fruitlessly (Johannsen, 1950).

The new company had issued 10 dime novels by the end of 1863, but in the following year Irwin Beadle left the company. Munro continued doing business under his own name (Johannsen, 1950).

In 1867 what was now the George Munro Co. launched a story paper called the *Fireside Companion*, which showed no particular promise in its early years, except as a vehicle to promote the company's dime novel authors. In 1871, however, the paper published the first in a long series of "Old Sleuth" stories (Noel, 1954), and Old Sleuth

eventually became the franchise that made the magazine, if not the company. A popular singer named Tony Pastor was given author's credit for the first Old Sleuth story—Munro was promoting a Tony Pastor songbook at the time—but the Old Sleuth's real creator was Harlan Halsey, a former member of the Brooklyn Board of Education (Brooks et al., n.d.).

Old Sleuth grew to be so popular that Beadle & Adams began producing a detective series of their own under the Old Sleuth name. Now Munro sued. Not surprisingly, the New York Supreme Court awarded exclusive rights to Munro in 1889 (Brooks et al., n.d.).

The public couldn't seem to get enough of Old Sleuth, so, in addition to stuffing the *Fireside Companion* with as much Old Sleuth as its pages would hold, Munro launched the *Old Sleuth Library* as a monthly serial, complete with volume and number. Each issue was a single complete book. This was not uncommon among the dime novel publishers: Mott (1938, vol. 3) noted that Beadle's *Dime Library* and *Half-Dime Library* were dated and numbered in volumes.

Meanwhile, Munro's brother Norman, who had been working at the George Munro Co., decided to go into publishing himself, setting up offices across the street, under the name of Ornum & Co. In 1873 Norman launched the *Family Story Paper*, which gradually attracted a number of popular authors, and achieved a self-reported circulation of 250,000 in 1876 and 300,000 in 1878. One of the *Family Story Paper's* most popular recurring characters was Old Cap Collier, a frank imitation of the Old Sleuth. Old Cap was created and sustained by W.I. James, a very adaptable staff hack who churned out

other serials for the *Family Story Paper* in addition to his prolific Old Cap Collier stories (Noel, 1954).

Norman Munro had a gift for publicity similar to Bonner's. One event that caught the public's attention was establishment of a free coach route, using "one of the most magnificent vehicles ever built. . . drawn by a splendid team of ten horses" (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 127) to take passengers from Brooklyn to Coney Island.

Norman Munro was also among the first publishers to use circulation premiums aggressively. To boost newsstand sales he gave away color lithographs, sheet music, fashion supplements, novels, and even a series of Shakespeare plays (Noel, 1954).

Back at the house of Beadle & Adams, the story paper phenomenon had not escaped notice, and in 1870 Beadle & Adams launched the *Star Journal*, which struggled for position in this growing market. It changed its size, name, and price several times and failed in 1872. The company tried again in 1886 with *Beadle's Weekly*, which changed its name to *Banner Weekly* in 1886. Despite achieving some popularity with the stories of Prentiss Ingraham, it seems never to have exceeded circulation of 30,000 (Noel, 1954).

Dime Novels

Beadle & Co. published its first book in 1860: *Malaeska; the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, by Ann S. Stephens, a 128-page paperback with a yellow-orange cover on which the price, 10 cents, was prominently displayed. This introduced the dime novel to a receptive market: The book sold 65,000 copies within a few months (Brooks et al., n.d.).

With this success under their belts, the Beadles quickly published six more novels, and began an advertising campaign for number eight: *Seth Jones; or, the Captives of the Frontier*, by Edward Ellis, which was released in the summer of 1860. Like *Malaeska*, *Seth Jones* proved to be extremely popular, ultimately selling more than 600,000 copies. Abraham Lincoln said it was one of his favorite stories. The Beadles began to release novels on a rapid schedule, first every two weeks, then once a week, and finally in “libraries” or sets of books released serially (Brooks et al., n.d.; Mott, 1947).

The Civil War played an important role in the Beadle brothers’ early fortunes. Mott (1947) writes:

The times were propitious, for hundreds of thousands of soldier boys in the field wanted reading material, and here was just the thing for them. So bales of yellow-backs were shipped out to the Union armies in camps, barracks, and hospitals; and Erastus [Beadle] had the satisfaction of knowing that he was maintaining military morale at the same time that he was making a mint of money. (p. 149)

Mott (1947) awards both *Malaeska* and *Seth Jones* best seller status—eventually 500,000 copies of *Malaeska* were sold—but the real success story for Beadle & Co. was

the combined sale of all their titles: four million copies in their first five years in business.

With the publication of *Malaeska*, the Beadles launched the second wave of American paperback book publishing. Soon they faced brisk competition from Munro; Street & Smith; Robert M. DeWitt & Co; Elliot, Thomes, & Talbot; and other publishers.

With the introduction of Beadle & Adams's *Half-Dime Library*, prices dropped to five cents for some lines. These five- and 10-cent libraries were made possible primarily by the widespread availability and declining cost of ground wood paper, which first came to market in the 1860s. Comparing the dime novel phenomenon with the cheap novels released by the mammoths in the 1840s, Mott (1947) wrote:

Just as faster presses and papermaking machines had made the 1842 incident possible, so declining prices of paper and improved presses made the cheap "libraries" a logical development of the seventies. (p. 151)

Dime novels were tied to the story papers in the same way that the first wave of paperbacks was tied to the mammoths. Story papers and dime novels became inseparable businesses because the serials published by the story papers made excellent short novels, and because the customer base was the same in both cases: Readers were willing, sometimes anxious, to purchase a dime novel containing the same tale they had read in a story paper.

In this respect, the dime novels extended the life of material from the story papers, and extended the reputations and audiences of the story paper authors. In addition to Ellis and Stephens, several frequent contributors to the story papers went on to produce best sellers, including Horatio Alger, T.S. Arthur, J.H. Ingraham, Eugene Sué, and

Emma D.E.N Southworth, whom Mott (1947) called “the most popular authoress in the annals of American publishing” (p.136). Thanks in large part to her publishers, Bonner and Peterson, Southworth became the best-selling author of the 19th century, with 50 romance novels to her credit, each of which sold more than 100,000 copies, according to Ohmann (1996).

Many other authors of dime novels and story paper serials sold multiple titles by the thousands, including Ned Buntline, Sylvanus Cobb, William R. Eyster, May Agnes Fleming, Harlan Halsey, Prentiss Ingraham, and W.I. James.

Noting the success of the dime novel publishers, several other established publishers began to issue low-cost libraries, including Harper & Bros.; Dodd, Mead; Scribners; and Appleton. Donnelley, Lloyd & Co. launched their extremely popular Lakeside Press after noting that “dime novels are issued by the millions” but that good books were overpriced (Quoted in Mott, 1947, p. 151).

By 1890 the story paper phenomenon had begun to fade. Their formula was aging, and new magazines, targeting more specialized interests, were emerging in large numbers. But the story papers left behind a significant legacy. They demonstrated convincingly how large the potential audience for reading material had grown in America, and how it could be tapped.

Their popularity made development of the American newsstand system possible. Bonner and several of his competitors played a large role in making American advertising more engaging and effective, and showed that creative marketing could have a dramatic effect on building circulation. And like the mammoths before them, the story papers helped create a market for low-cost books.

But more important than any of these was the story papers' refinement and exploitation of the literary conventions that built and held large American audiences. Mott (1947) wrote that someone who wanted to know why Emma D.E.N. Southworth was so popular. . .

. . . must forget his own repugnance for her excesses and artificialities. Equipped with the gas mask of tolerance he must penetrate into her long and involved romances. He will then be able to discern an indefatigable story-telling talent, a strong feeling for blatant and primitive melodrama, a love for sensational effects in both incidents and characterization, and a faculty for passionate declamation. . . . It may be said of her that she had great gifts but that they were undisciplined either by the restraints of sense or the subtleties of sensibility. (p. 142)

Blatant melodrama, sensational effects, and passionate declamation were not unique to Southworth: They appeared over and over again in the story papers, which succeeded, despite their repeated reliance on cliché and stereotype, in drawing hundreds of thousands of Americans back to their pages, week after week.

11. E.C. ALLEN

In his 1906 memoirs, George Rowell described his first encounter with an unusual entrepreneur. One day in 1869 his advertising agency received a request for information from Augusta, ME: How much would it cost to insert an advertisement in all the best newspapers in the country? Assuming the request to be idle curiosity and not a genuine business inquiry, the agency responded by quoting the price for an ad in every paper in their list system—\$1,800. The answer came back: “I want what I said I wanted when I wrote my first letter;” that is, every newspaper and not just those on the agency’s lists (p. 194).

The agency responded that a matter of such complexity required a personal meeting, but that \$1,800 would serve as earnest money. If the \$1,800 was received, a representative would be sent.

When an \$1,800 check arrived a few days later, Rowell himself set out for Augusta, despite the snow storm then in progress.

I started out that evening, stopped over in Boston to learn if the check was sure enough good, and finding that it was, proceeded to Portland, and to Augusta, at which point I arrived in time for breakfast at the hotel, after which I waded through the deep snow to find my impatient client. (p. 195)

The “impatient client” turned out to be a young man who had started in business by selling berries to the soldiers camped in Augusta during the Civil War. Later, he had responded to several periodical advertisements from book publishers seeking agents (Lovett, 1950). Although he made money selling the books he represented, it occurred to

him that the publishers made quite a bit more than their agents. He managed to secure a few products of his own, advertised for agents, and enjoyed some success.

What had led him to the Rowell agency was a formula that allowed anyone to make an excellent soap powder from common, inexpensive ingredients. The young man didn't have enough capital to manufacture the soap powder, but found that for less than \$1.00 per thousand he could print cards containing the formula.

He priced the cards at \$1.00 each retail, 10 cents each wholesale. Given the low cost of printing and mailing the cards, the profit potential was attractive, both for him and his agents. Rowell wrote:

Of course, the secret of the recipe was his stock in trade. The buyer of a copy could commit its words to memory in five minutes, and would forever after be a perennial fountain from which unlimited numbers of the recipe could be taken, or he could invoke the services of a printer; but our friend knew how to get around all that. Whoever bought a recipe, or became an agent, received with the invoice a printed statement which plainly said in effect, "You solemnly promise and agree not to divulge or make known the formula and to exact the same promise from every one to whom you sell the valuable secret."

All this goes to show that there is an unsuspected amount of honesty and good faith in the world. (p. 197)

The recipe sold briskly in the local papers the young man had advertised in, and he wanted to see if a nationwide campaign would work equally well. Although Rowell had doubts about the scheme, the advertising agent labored through the balance of the day and developed a media plan that delivered the requested national reach for \$11,000. With \$1,800 already in hand, Rowell asked for an additional \$3,200, to be followed by 12 weekly payments of \$500 each.

The young man provided a \$3,200 cashier's check the next morning, and Rowell headed back to New York.

I came away with the conviction that if the \$500 weekly remittances did not come I could stop the advertising without incurring any actual loss, and a deep feeling that, however unwilling, I had been made the instrument of bringing to an inglorious end the Agents Wanted campaign of this one time dealer in berries about the military camps at Augusta. I was confident that the transaction would ruin him. (p. 199)

Despite his skepticism, Rowell was indeed paid in full—though with boxes stuffed with money orders for small sums.

Mott commented (1938, vol. 3): "It seems incredible, but the system worked. We must remember that the years immediately following the war were easy-money years" (p. 38).

The following September, the young man appeared at the agency's New York office, asking the cost of running an ad for three months in every paper in America. Rowell estimated \$30,000, with a \$10,000 deposit required to get started. The young man wrote a check for \$10,000, and then asked if Rowell would grant a discount if the remaining \$20,000 were paid in advance. Offered 5%, the young man wrote a second check for \$19,000 on the spot. It has been claimed (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950) that this was the first (and for many years the only) time an advertisement ran in every daily and weekly paper in the U.S.

The young man's name was Edward Allen, and although he spent another \$60,000 in advertising through the Rowell agency over the next few years (Rowell, 1906), and

maintained cordial relations with Rowell for decades, Allen soon found many other ways to expand and promote his business.

Allen's Life

Allen was born on June 12, 1849 in Readfield (now Manchester), ME, on a farm eight miles outside Augusta that had been in his family since 1714 (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950). He was christened simply Edward Allen, with no middle name, but later adopted the initial *C* as a signing convenience (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950). Apparently he picked Charles as an adopted middle name when he felt the *C* should stand for something.

From an early age ambition was part of his personality: He announced his intention to become a millionaire when he was eight (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892).

Various writers have noted that Allen's first business was selling fruit to soldiers in the Civil War, but no two agree on what kind. To Rowell (1906), he was simply a berry dealer. Noel (1954) specifies that they were wild huckleberries. The Lewiston, ME *Journal* claimed he sold apples (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891). The Portland, ME *Press* (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891) said they were raspberries. Of course, Allen himself originated the story, and consistency may not have been his point.

He gave up on produce at the close of the Civil War in 1865 and moved briefly to Cincinnati, OH (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950) before returning to Augusta.

According to company documents (E.C. Allen Collection, General statement, 1891), E.C. Allen & Co. was founded in 1868. Allen was just 19 when Rowell first met him in 1869, and the business was already thriving.

Allen was a “strong, substantial, able man,” (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892, p. 14), with a large frame, a broad chest, dark hair, and blue-gray eyes. He had a “nervous, sanguine temperament, and a calm but sleepless energy” (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892, p. 15). A photograph of Allen in Rowell’s memoirs (1906) shows a rather slender man whose dark and luxurious handlebar mustache only partially hides a very youthful face.

Allen remained single his entire life. He was devoted to his businesses, active in politics as a dedicated Democrat, was a confirmed Mason, and a strong civic booster, but felt “precluded” from social life by his business engagements (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892, p. 16). A clipping Allen saved from the January 15, 1888 issue of the *Boston Globe* was succinct in its description of him: “Married? No. In love? No, except with his business. How much is he worth? Well, enough.” (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891)

Allen lived at a hotel, the Augusta House (Britt, 1935), which was near his Augusta offices, and he traveled extensively, often to Europe, where he commissioned painters for his prints and bought goods from several suppliers.

Although Allen never attended college, and may not have received much in the way of secondary education, given that he was running an active business by the age of 15 and left home at 16, he clearly coupled strong market instincts with enough business skill to run a varied and complex collection of profitable enterprises. As Noel commented in 1954, “Everything made money for Allen” (p. 137).

Allen also had a natural gift for writing. He contributed a pair of serials to early issues of his first magazine, the *People's Literary Companion*: "Light and Darkness, or the Plots and Works of the Tempter," (October 1871) and "Lillian Ainsley, or, Which Shall Triumph—Right or Might? A Story of New York Life in High and Low Places" (November 1870) by "Edward Charles Allen, Managing Editor of E.C. Allen's Publications."

He also wrote a large quantity of marketing material for his company, in a unique, whimsical style. In one promotion piece (E.C. Allen Collection, General statement, June 1890) Allen declared that his magazines are

NOT CHEAP PUBLICATIONS.

Mine are not cheap, catch-penny, gutter-snipe publications, with a nominal subscription price, and worth less than nothing; mine are standard publications, at a fair price, such as are taken up by the respectable, intelligent masses, who stick to them. My circulation is

NOT WAY UP AND THEN WAY DOWN,

I hold my readers, constantly making a moderate, but steady and solid gain...

In other promotion (E.C. Allen Collection, Annual pass, ca. 1891), a competitor was described as,

A notorious Circulation Liar, the publisher of a gutter-snipe monthly. . . . Experienced advertisers can plainly see the imprint, Fraud, on the misty cloud-banks from whence this counterfeit thunder feebly emanates. Probably no one will be deceived.

In the same piece, Allen added punctuating sound effects to "emanate" some thunder of his own:

BOOM!

It is assured that my advertising space will be crowded all summer; watch and see.

BOOM.

Surviving manuscripts reveal Allen's other promotional ideas. One was a fictional testimonial: "The World Is Mine! I make my money by persistent advertising in Allen's lists" (E.C. Allen Collection, Manuscripts, ca. 1890). Another was a variation on the self-congratulatory theme to which he often returned:

Our magazines and other periodicals are the largest, best and cheapest in America; our premium pictures are the most artistic, elegant, and marvelous; our circulation is the largest in the world. Agents for our publications are coining money. (E.C. Allen Collection, Manuscripts, ca. 1890)

Allen was recognized as an Augusta community leader. Town boosters posthumously called him "America's greatest publisher" in 1897 (Quoted in Noel, 1954, p. 134). He was selected as the first president of the Augusta Board of Trade in May, 1887 (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook 1869-1891). The Maine Press Association said that Allen's

. . . unparalleled business success and his accumulation of great wealth in such a comparatively brief space and by methods before untried, entitle him to a place among the distinguished characters of the century. (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892, p. 5)

Allen acted as an industry spokesperson for several causes. One was fractional currency: He lobbied hard for creation of paper currency in denominations of less than a dollar, which would have allowed people to mail cash for small purchases, instead of

using postage stamps. Another issue which Allen championed was breaking the so-called “envelope trust.” When envelope manufacturers banded together in 1888 to raise prices, Allen took to the court of public opinion, actively criticizing the manufacturers in newspapers (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook 1869-1891). Allen was hardly disinterested in his chosen crusades. He was swamped by postage stamps and had to sell them at a discount to get rid of them (E.C. Allen Collection, Incoming letters, 1884). And as the purchaser of four to five million envelopes each year (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook 1869-1891), he was keenly affected by cost increases.

Not all of Allen’s personal causes were business-related, however. When he acquired True & Co., after the death of its founder, he agreed to become the guardian of True’s children (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950).

Allen's Businesses

In the 23 years between 1868 and 1891, Allen bought four companies, took a controlling interest in at least two others, and invested in several more. In modern terms, he diversified both horizontally and vertically.

He owned four companies outright: E.C. Allen & Co. and True & Co., both of Augusta; and George Stinson & Co. and H. Hallett & Co., both of Portland. He held a controlling interest in the Kennebec Steamboat Co., which transported freight and passengers between Boston and Augusta (Lovett, 1950). Allen was a director of the Augusta National Bank and president of the Augusta Loan and Building Association. He held an interest in the Laurentide and Richards paper companies (Lovett, 1950).

His companies sold four major product lines.

First were color prints and engravings. Allen's Stinson & Co. subsidiary produced the color prints using a process called chromolithography. "Chromos" were the first colored illustrations to be printed in large volume, and were very popular as wall art in homes in the later 19th century. They were printed on heavy stock, sometimes called "plate" paper, and were poster-sized: commonly about 50 by 65 cm.

Allen was one of the first publishers to use chromos as circulation premiums, a practice later adopted by hundreds of other publishers. By 1870, Allen had begun to trade chromos for advertising space in other magazines (Rowell, 1906), and by the 1880s

had also begun to barter larger and more elaborate 75 x 100 cm engravings to other publishers—mostly small town newspapers—in exchange for mailing lists and advertising space (E.C. Allen Collection, Letterbook, 1892). This last proposition netted the names and addresses of thousands of people who were subsequently mailed unsolicited samples of Allen's magazines.

Allen was the Thomas Kincaid of his day: His chromos, if sentimental, were sometimes big sellers. Referring to one in particular, entitled "From Shore to Shore," Rowell (1906) wrote:

I rarely go into houses in a remote district, whether in Florida or Alaska, without seeing the small engraving of the boatman and his living freight; the boy and girl, children in the bow, looking forward, with merry faces; the youth and maid on the next seat, looking at each other; then the young man and his wife, sober with thought and care; and last of all the old couple, looking backward to the shore they have left and will never see again. Mr. Allen told me at one time, before the sale was at its height, that he had already disposed of one million seven hundred and fifty thousand copies of this picture. (p. 203)

The nature of other prints in Allen's line can be sensed from their titles: "Angels Guard Thy Bed," "Calla Lilies," "Mother of Our Lord," "Pompeii Scene," "Empty Sleeve," "Holy Family," "Niagara Falls by Moonlight," and so on. Here is the subject of "Morning Prayer," as described in the August, 1871 issue of the *People's Literary Companion*:

A little girl with a wonderfully sweet expression, kneeling with clasped hands where the warm sunlight enters through the rich curtains and tenderly rests upon the fair head like an answering benediction. . . (p. 4)

Because his customers were generally of modest means and lightly educated, Allen found that the young female employees in his company made good judges of the popular

taste. When he needed to add to his product line, he invited groups of them to select new pictures (Rowell, 1906).

In addition to using chromos as subscription premiums, and trading engravings for names and ad space, Allen sold prints through agents. These he enlisted via advertisements in his magazines. New agents were offered portfolios (called “outfits” in company parlance), at a special low cost. Each outfit contained a small assortment of popular prints. When their initial supply of prints sold out, agents could re-order at wholesale prices, ranging from 30 to 60 cents each, from the company’s long list of titles. Agents received regular mailings that brought a bit of news, a smattering of useful sales tips, and a great deal of repetitive exhortation. Keeping agents motivated seems to have been an ongoing challenge. In one flyer Allen wrote,

I can offer advantages that are very important to those who are endeavoring to make a start in the world. I can teach any fairly intelligent person how to straightaway commence to earn a good income, which can largely be increased as he goes on, and learns better what to do, and how to do it. Women, as well as men, make first-class agents. . . . I shall not fail to make a first-class agent of every fairly intelligent person who takes an agency, and who is willing to work. If the agent will work steadily, I will do the rest. It is not talent or genius that is required; it is the purpose to work. (E.C. Allen Collection, Agent flyer, ca.1890)

By the mid-1880s, Allen was producing most of his color prints through oleography, a chromolithographic process that imitated oil painting. From this time until 1894, his Stinson subsidiary appears to have been among the country’s largest publisher of oleographs.

Allen’s second major line was books. Initially the company offered a hodgepodge of titles that included self-improvement in a variety of categories, songbooks, information

for farmers, puzzles, and a handful of classics with expired or foreign copyrights—almost anything that looked like it might sell a few copies. This list expanded without apparent focus until Allen hit onto a couple of perennial best-sellers, according to Lovett (1950). One was a compilation called *Lives of the Presidents*, which could be updated every four years, thus ensuring consistently strong sales. Another compilation, *Guests of the Heart*, also performed well. The volume of which Allen himself was proudest was a “parallel” Bible, which juxtaposed the King James and Revised versions on two-column pages, apparently the first time this design was produced in America.

Like his chromos, Allen’s books were sold through agents, some titles on the subscription plan. Agents pre-sold special “luxury” editions in fancy bindings, which were then produced to order and delivered. Company ledgers suggest that Allen’s books were printed on Allen’s own presses but sent out for special binding. In the 1890s bookbinding expense averaged about \$975 per month (E.C. Allen Collection, Office ledger, 1892; E.C. Allen Collection, Office ledger, 1894). According to Lovett (1950) Allen claimed that his book business was bigger than his magazines.

Allen’s third major product line was mail order merchandise. Beginning in 1870 with a relatively small assortment of games, puzzles, and knick-knacks, Allen gradually expanded his offerings to include jewelry, watches, telescopes, ribbons, buttons, needlework accessories, and a plethora of other novelties and oddities.

In early 1873, Allen seems to have sold his stock of merchandise to a former Allen & Co. clerk, Peleg O. Vickery, whose firm, P.O. Vickery & Co., replaced E.C. Allen & Co. in advertisements. Beginning in 1874, Vickery went on to launch several publications

that competed with Allen's magazines (Mott, 1938, vol. 2). Allen went on to rebuild his own merchandise line. By 1879 he had produced a "Mammoth Illustrated Catalog" containing more than 700 items.

One very popular merchandise category for Allen was photograph albums, which he imported from Berlin, Germany (Lovett, 1950). Whitney (1950) credits Allen with having introduced the photograph album to the United States. Allen certainly caught a rising trend. Keeping scrapbooks was a prevalent hobby in the late 19th century (Garvey, 1996), and the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888 (Eastman Kodak Co., n.d.) popularized amateur photography, creating a market for albums practically overnight.

Emmet and Jeuck (1950) place Allen in the vanguard of mail order merchandisers:

The earliest known effort to promote sales exclusively by mail, aggressively and on a broad scale, appears to have been made by E. C. Allen of Augusta, Maine. (p. 19)

This is probably a bit generous. It is true that Allen began advertising aggressively in the late 1860s, but his limited line at the time, mostly books and games, hardly constituted mail order sales on a "broad scale." More to the point, Allen was seeking agents, not selling directly. Ward's efforts in the 1870s and early retailer catalogs have just as strong a claim to being pioneers of the field. The mail order industry as a whole was expanding rapidly at this time, and Allen was one of many players.

Allen's fourth line of business was magazines, of which his earliest effort was the *People's Literary Companion* (1869), profiled below in more detail. The *People's Literary Companion* may have been Allen's first venture into magazine publishing, but it

was far from his last. He launched or acquired many more magazines in the next two decades, including:

Our Home and Fireside Magazine (1873), H. Hallett & Co.

The Illustrated Family Herald (1877), True & Co.

The People's Illustrated Journal (1877), George Stinson & Co.

The National Farmer and Home Magazine (1879), E.C. Allen & Co.

Golden Moments (1880), True & Co.

True's Farming World and Household Magazine (1883), True & Co.

Hallett's American Farmer and Family Magazine (1884) H. Hallett & Co.

The Thrifty Farmer and Fireside Magazine (1885) George Stinson & Co.

Sunshine (1886) E.C. Allen & Co.

Daughters of America (1886) True & Co.

Practical Housekeeper and Ladies' Fireside Companion (1886), H. Hallett & Co.

These, along with the *People's Literary Companion*, formed Allen's active list of publications as of 1890. Beginning in 1871, when he launched *Our Young Folks' Illustrated Paper*, Allen started, combined, and folded a number of others, including *American Home*, *True's Illustrated Magazine and Home Companion*, and *Illustrated Household Magazine*.

Allen owned his own presses, which were housed in two buildings across the street from one another in downtown Augusta. The Augusta Board of Trade described the facilities:

The printing department has cost more than \$150,000, and the expense was in a great measure for machinery, as may be easily understood when it is stated that the pressrooms of the establishment contain twenty-one presses of all kinds, which are run steadily ten hours a day all the year round, and for a great part of the time nights also. Of these presses eleven are the latest improved Hoe two revolution cylinders, the largest and best presses made, each weighing over 25,000 pounds, and costing some \$6,000 or \$7,000 each. Eight more presses are but little smaller than these, and others still are employed on general work. (Quoted in E.C. Allen Collection, Agent flyer, ca.1890)

Owning the presses gave Allen great flexibility in volume and timing: He could print as much of any item as he wanted, and could go back to press as he chose. He was a large investor in electrotyping, and claimed to run the only electrotypes foundry east of Boston (E.C. Allen Collection, Agent flyer, ca.1890). This allowed him to duplicate content from one magazine to another, and easily run the same advertisement in more than one publication.

Allen's companies were prodigious consumers of paper. As noted, Allen was a major investor in the Richards paper company, and was described as America's largest importer of "fine" paper for his engravings and chromos (E.C. Allen Collection, Agent flyer, ca.1890). In 1880 and 1881 his four publishing companies were buying about 6,800 kg of newsprint per month from Richards & Co. (E.C. Allen Collection, Suppliers ledger 1880-1881).

Postage was, of course, a significant expense. Overall, Allen claimed to be spending \$144,000 per year in postage in the early 1890s (E.C. Allen Collection, Agent flyer, ca.

1890), but this is a hard figure to verify. In any event, second-class postage was a relatively small portion of his companies' total postage expenditure, which would have included postage for prints, books, merchandise, and form letters. In 1890, the cost to mail more than 12 million copies of his magazines was \$12,373: about one tenth of a cent per copy (E.C. Allen Collection, Circular, 1891).

Until 1885 Allen obtained circulation through any means that were cost-justifiable. In every issue, readers were urged at length to subscribe or renew. Form letters were used to solicit renewals and collect bills (E.C. Allen Collection, Circulation letter, 1893), and these appear to have been the company's largest single circulation expense outside of personnel costs. Allen aggressively promoted subscription clubs, in which costs per subscription declined as the number of subscribers in the club increased. He also sold subscriptions through agents, who earned premiums from the company's merchandise catalog as they signed up subscribers. According to notices in their mastheads, Allen's magazines were available on newsstands, but the total number of single copies sold must have been small, since Allen made no effort to identify newsstand sales in his circulation claims.

Allen was reluctant to lose readers, and would not allow subscribers to cancel if they weren't fully paid-up (E.C. Allen Collection, Circulation letter, 1893).

These various channels brought paid readers in respectable but not overwhelming quantities. The *People's Literary Companion*, for example—Allen's oldest publication and originally the flagship of the business—doesn't appear ever to have obtained more

than 44,000 paid readers, achieved in 1891, and was below 2,400 in 1885 (E.C. Allen Collection, Editions ledger, 1883-1894).

Allen had no reason to extend circulation past the point of profitability until 1885, when he began to accept advertising in earnest and needed to justify his advertising rates. In November of 1885, Allen's companies produced eight magazines with combined circulation of 282,110, all paid. The following November, 1886, they produced 12 magazines with circulation of 314,080, all paid. A year later, in November of 1887, the count had grown to 16 and aggregate circulation was 800,200, of which 57% was non-paid. Within two years, Allen had combined several magazines and was producing 12 titles with combined circulation over one million, of which 60% was non-paid (E.C. Allen Collection, Editions ledger, 1883-1894).

Almost all (86%) of the growth between 1886 and 1889—a circulation increase of roughly 700,000—came from non-paid recipients. These were so-called “sample” readers: people whose names and addresses were usually obtained in exchanges with other publishers and mail order companies, and to whom copies were mailed by the hundreds of thousands. Postal regulations permitted publishers to send samples at second-class rates, and if Allen didn't abuse the privilege, he certainly stretched it as far as he could.

Allen sold advertising using the list system, which he became familiar with in his dealings with the Rowell agency, its originator. In this system an advertiser paid one combined rate to insert an ad in a group, or list, of magazines. By 1890, Allen had gathered his publications into two lists: Allen's Special List, which contained five

publications offering combined circulation of 500,000, and his Giant List, also offering 500,000 circulation, which contained his seven other magazines. Allen was pretty frank in describing his circulation strategy to advertisers—allowing for the usual hyperbole:

Do not confound the system by which the periodicals of Allen's Lists is run with any other. My system is not only original, but is the most comprehensive and far-reaching of any in the world. My periodicals always reach the better classes of the masses in the country and villages. My circulation in the large cities is small. Millionaires, beggars and dead men are avoided in sending out sample copies. . . .

The quality of the circulation of the periodicals of Allen's lists is unequaled by any other great circulation, my system being such that only the livest of the live people in the rural districts and villages are reached.

Whenever I send out sample copies I use only fresh names and all duplicates are sorted out. Those who send out large quantities of sample copies, who do not sort out duplicates, actually send two copies of the same issue to from 30 to 40 per cent, and three or four copies to many. (E.C. Allen Collection, General statement, 1890)

In another promotional circular, also from 1890, Allen wrote:

During the past few months I have purchased over 1,700,000 fresh names of people who have proved that they are reaching out and anxious for enterprise by replying to advertisements. From these names all duplicates, (fully 30%) and names of all from big cities have been carefully and faithfully sorted out. . .

Allen's lists will send out over 1 million sample copies for the purpose of securing subscribers. . . (E.C. Allen Collection, Circular, 1890)

Allen did indeed devote a great deal of time and energy to managing his lists, which were stored in dozens of permanent ledger books, all maintained by hand. He took names from any source available, including exchanges with other publishers (as noted above), exchanges with other mail order vendors, lists of customers and prospects canvassed by his agents, and mail order customers who ordered directly from his company. He claimed to spend \$15,000 annually "purchasing and assorting" names (E.C. Allen Collection, Circular, 1890).

Allen targeted rural readers because they were more responsive to mail order advertising than urban readers. This helped Allen sell advertising to mail order vendors, and probably helped his companies sell more of their own merchandise through advertising in his magazines, a useful benefit, since Allen had to cover the additional production and distribution cost of non-paid circulation with revenue from other sources.

This is not to say that circulation revenue was insignificant: Even steeply discounted, the annual income from 400,000 paid subscriptions would have approached \$100,000. But increased advertising revenue was clearly Allen's goal as he pushed circulation aggressively between 1885 and 1890.

Allen priced his advertising at \$3.00 per agate line for a single list, and \$5.40 per agate line for both lists. He offered frequency discounts of 5% for 3 months, 10% for 6 months, and 20% for 12 months. A line of advertising in both lists was \$4.80 at the six-month rate—or less than half a cent per thousand readers.

At 175 lines per column and four columns per page, the average page of advertising would have yielded roughly \$3,360 gross, not including agency discounts. At one million circulation, the cost per thousand on a \$3,360 yield would have been \$3.36.

These are very rough calculations, built on the assumption that every advertiser paid rate card prices and that the average frequency discount was 10%. The reality was probably different. For example, Allen's CPM was almost double what Richard Sears was accustomed to paying, according to Emmet and Jeuck (1950).

But Allen struggled to avoid discounting. In an 1890 letter to the Rowell agency, he took a tough stand against opportunistic ad agencies:

I am determined to consistently and constantly maintain my advertising rates under all circumstances and conditions. Experience has taught me, that, for the future I must decline to allow a commission to advertising agents who slaughter my rates. (E.C. Allen Collection, Letter to George P. Rowell & Co., 1890)

The agency may have wondered how the bite could have been worse than the bark.

Whether he discounted or not, Allen was very successful in increasing advertising revenue. From 1887 through 1891, his advertising receipts almost quadrupled:

1887:	\$ 40,804
1888:	68,484
1889:	93,361
1890:	128,591
1891:	154,175

(E.C. Allen Collection, Cash receipts from advertising, 1886-1891)

Part of the revenue growth can be attributed to a rate increase effective with October, 1889 issues, when guaranteed circulation grew 25% from 800,000 to 1,000,000. Allen increased his one-time cost per agate line 20%, from \$4.50 to \$5.40 (E.C. Allen Collection, Letter to Advance Courier Pub. Co., 1889). The fact that the rate increase was proportionately smaller than the circulation growth may indicate that Allen saw more potential profit in ad volume than in CPM growth.

He was successful in at least one case. In July, 1890, Richard Sears placed an order which Allen claimed was the largest advertising purchase ever made by a single advertiser from a single publisher: 5,000 lines for \$21,600, to be used over 12 issues starting in September, 1890. The cost per line is suspiciously identical to Allen's published rates, and it seems more likely that Sears would have negotiated aggressively for a discount than that he would have paid rate card prices. But whatever the price, the order was enormous for its time, and Allen lost no time in producing a testimonial that quoted Sears:

This heavy amount of advertising of five thousand lines in twelve issues, will be given to no other publisher and will appear in no other mediums, for the reason that my experience has demonstrated that there exist no other mediums good enough and strong enough to carry it. (Quoted in E.C. Allen Collection, Sears testimonial, 1890)

In 1890 there may have been a few advertising agencies, including Rowell's and possibly J. Walter Thompson, capable of putting together an ad buy that reached a million homes in a single purchase. But it would appear that Allen was the first publisher to offer coverage of one million circulation from his own publications. He was certainly the first publisher willing to lose money on circulation of this size with the expectation of making up the loss in advertising sales.

One of the most interesting aspects of Allen's magazines was the interchangeability of their parts. Allen took the principle of standardized mass production to a new level.

In 1890, for example, Allen published 12 titles, each listed separately in directories, promotion, official documents like postal forms, and so on. But instead of producing 12 truly distinct publications, Allen produced only four "sections." Section 1 included the

People's Literary Companion, Illustrated Family Herald, Golden Moments, the People's Illustrated Journal, and Our Home and Fireside. These magazines were all printed from the same forms, with only minor changes, such as logos and page headings. Section 2 included the *Practical Housekeeper and Ladies' Fireside Companion* and *Daughters of America*. These two magazines also shared the same forms. Section 3 was *Sunshine for Youth*, the only Allen magazine that was fully unique. Section 4 included *National Farmer and Home Magazine, True's Farming World and Household Magazine, The Thrifty Farmer and Fireside Magazine, and Hallett's American Farmer and Family Magazine*. Again, all of these magazines were printed from the same forms. In describing each section, Allen's promotion said, "These publications are largely printed from the same forms, but they occupy distinct and separate fields, and in their general businesses are little more connected than the Boston Herald and New York Herald" (E.C. Allen Collection, General statement, 1891).

Within 10 years of the company's founding Allen had more than 100 people on payroll, not including managers (E.C. Allen Collection, Time sheets, 1875-1892). Many names appear year after year.

Employees worked 10-hour days and 6-day weeks. The average wage for an Allen employee in the early 1890s was about \$1.35 per day (E.C. Allen Collection, Time sheets, 1875-1892). About half were women (VonHerrlich, 2002). The most labor-intensive activities in Allen's companies would have been clerical work, such as list maintenance and bookkeeping, and work in the pressrooms and composing department.

Several of Allen's colleagues and competitors played important roles in this corner of the publishing world.

Samuel W. Lane, who ran the E.C. Allen & Co. editorial department for a number of years, went on to become mayor of Augusta and a state legislator (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891). He purchased Allen's magazines in 1894.

Peleg O. Vickery, as noted above, worked as a clerk for Allen, may have had Allen's encouragement to go into business for himself, and became a vigorous competitor with a number of publications of his own, all in the same mold as Allen's. Vickery's partner, his son-in-law, John F. Hill, later became governor of Maine (VonHerrlich, 2002; Rowell, 1906).

A.W. Whitney, advertising and business manager of E.C. Allen & Co. for 15 years, eventually married Allen's sister. Their son, Edward A. Whitney, inherited the company archives and donated them to the Harvard Business School in 1950.

Allen lured away one of George Rowell's best employees, a clerk named George H. Pierce, so it can be said that Allen got a bonus on his early investment in advertising (Rowell, 1906).

Allen's chief competitor, William H. Gannett (whose magazine *Comfort* is profiled below), bequeathed his publishing company to his son, Guy Gannett. When Guy Gannett Communications was sold to the Seattle Times Company in 1998 for \$200 million, the company owned three daily newspapers, a weekly, seven television stations, a direct-marketing firm, and a new-media group.

Allen's own business developed rapidly and opportunistically. It was never incorporated or taken public, and as sole proprietor, Allen was free to organize things (or not) as he saw fit.

By 1890, Allen had structured his four principal companies so that they shared equitably in the overall revenue. E.C. Allen & Co. was the administrative core. The other three companies, True, Hallett, and Stinson, specialized in books, merchandise, and prints. All four businesses were listed as publishers of the Allen's List magazines. Overall the four businesses produced combined annual revenue of about \$1 million (E.C. Allen Collection, Whitney, 1950).

A closer look at the finances of the core business shows the dynamics of a large publishing company near the turn of the 20th century. Using surviving ledgers from 1890 through 1894, it's possible to sketch a budget for one of the four companies, E.C. Allen & Co. as it operated at its peak.

E.C. Allen & Co. had 11 general areas of financial activity.

1. *Revenue.* All receipts were deposited daily and recorded in total, not allocated to any specific product such as publications or merchandise. Deposits for 1893 totaled about \$224,000. Allen would rebill internally for some services rendered to other companies such as True or Stinson, and in this period E.C. Allen & Co. was rebilling its sibling companies about \$15,000 per year.

2. *Payroll.* Wages paid through E.C. Allen & Co. for 1893 totaled about \$54,000, or about \$4,500 per month on average. This paid approximately 140 employees, most likely the entire clerical staff. Compensation to managers was not included.

3. *Composing.* E.C. Allen's composition costs totaled almost \$12,000 annually. The two largest expenses were electrotyping, at about \$2,500 per year, and "steel plate printing," presumably plate making, at \$7,200 per year.

4. *Printing and finishing.* On Allen's own presses, ongoing printing costs were simply materials (ink, paste, varnish, belts, and rollers) and repairs. The company bought about \$24,000 of external specialty printing annually. Bookbinding was also purchased externally, at about \$12,000 per year. The annual total for printing and finishing was approximately \$43,000.

5. *Packaging and distribution.* Second-class postage was the largest single expense in this category, at approximately \$12,000 per year. In total, packaging and distribution expense was about \$26,000 annually.

6. *Paper.* E.C. Allen & Co. paid about \$49,000 per year for newsprint and about \$17,000 per year for chromo paper, an annual total of about \$66,000.

7. *Editorial.* The company spent less than \$2,000 annually for content, paying about \$1,800 for manuscripts and about \$150 to secure copyrights.

8. *Variety goods and watches.* E.C. Allen & Co. purchased about \$2,800 worth of merchandise per year to sell and to use as premiums.

9. *Advertising.* The company's annual expenditure for advertising in this period was about \$1,500 per year. Since so much advertising was obtained through exchange, this relatively small expenditure is probably not a good reflection of the company's actual activity.

10. General and administrative. The company spent almost \$17,000 per year in G&A. The largest expenditures were customs duties, at about \$5,000 per year, “letters” (presumably subscription renewals and other form correspondence) at \$3,000 per year, and “notes and checks” (presumably interest or other banking fees) at \$2,500 per year.

11. Overhead. Allen owned his own buildings, so overhead was limited. Total expenditures, including taxes and insurance, were about \$10,000 per year.

During this period E.C. Allen & Co. ran at a narrow margin: about 2%. Deducting expenses from revenue leaves only about \$5,000. It’s worth keeping in mind, however, that E.C. Allen & Co. shouldered the full burden for several activities from which its three sister companies benefited, including production, postage, and G&A. This indicates that the margins of the other three companies, whose revenues were roughly equivalent to E.C. Allen & Co., must have been considerably higher.

Allen's Death

Allen returned from one of his periodic trips to Europe in July, 1891, and checked into the Parker House hotel in Boston. A cold he had caught on the trip turned into pneumonia, and he died at the hotel on July 28, 1891, at the age of 42. At Allen's funeral on August 9, flags flew at half staff at the state capitol and the Augusta post office. Pallbearers included the current governor of Maine and an ex-governor (E.C. Allen Collection, *In memoriam*, 1892).

Allen's mother and two sisters inherited the firm, and ran it until 1894. Apparently none had the same enthusiasm for the business as Allen himself. The publications were sold on August 22, 1894 to S.W. Lane, Allen's former editor, who combined several titles. He continued the publishing business in Augusta under the name of Lane's List. The other lines—albums, books, pictures, etc.—were sold at the same time to R.W. Soule, also of Augusta.

At least one advertiser expressed regrets at the passing of the Allen concern. Dr. C.E. Batdorf, a “clairvoyant doctor and magnetic healer,” sent a note on August 6, 1894:

I am really sorry. I have used your lists for several years, & although my space was small & in a pecuniary way could not benefit you very much, yet the results to me have been quite gratifying and I am at a loss to know what mediums to use. . . (E.C. Allen Collection, Letter from C.E. Batdorf, 1894)

Dr. Batdorf eventually took his business to *Comfort*, Allen's biggest competitor.

Allen left a significant legacy. For a time he was one of America's largest advertisers. He was a visionary in the mail order industry. He may have originated the

use of premiums, which still play a significant role in building magazine circulation, and he was certainly one of the first publishers to use chromos as premiums. He introduced photograph albums and parallel Bibles to the U.S. He was the first American publisher to offer circulation of one million in a single purchase: Pope (1983) called him “America’s largest publisher at his death in 1891” (p. 121). Most importantly, he was the first to show that it was possible to achieve circulation on this scale at a loss, and still profit from advertising—a business model that came to dominate American media as it was adopted by other publishers.

The People's Literary Companion

At some point in late 1868 or early 1869, Allen began producing a one-sheet circular that he distributed locally for free (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891), as a promotion for his business. This was a precursor to the *People's Literary Companion*, which Allen began planning in mid-1869. The *Companion* was a full-blown story paper with paid national circulation. With his chromos to promote, and his line of books, games, toys, and novelties, for which he needed agents, Allen used his new magazine as a vehicle from which he could market his other products. He certainly didn't have his eye on advertising sales when he launched the *People's Literary Companion*: Early issues prominently displayed the notice "No Advertisements Inserted" in the masthead.

Although Gregory's *Union List of Serials* (1943) and the Library of Congress both list the first issue as April, 1870, Mott's assertion (1938, vol. 3) that publication began in September 1869 seems more likely, since the April, 1870 issue contains serial stories continued from an earlier issue. Allen's own marketing materials (E.C. Allen Collection, General statement, 1890) dated the magazine to 1869.

In its early days, there wasn't much to distinguish the *People's Literary Companion* from other popular story papers. It had a typical 32.5 x 50 cm trim size. Each page contained five columns, approximately 44 cm high and 175 lines long. Eight pages long, each issue was illustrated by a woodcut on the front cover, and lavishly adorned in Victorian style with an elaborate garlanded logo on the title page and decorative frames on succeeding pages.

Initially, subscriptions were 75 cents per year (postage, owed by the subscriber on receipt, added 12 cents per year for those who paid the postmaster), and single copies were six cents each.

The *People's Literary Companion* was launched as a monthly, but converted to weekly frequency with the October 7, 1871 issue, at which point the subscription price rose to \$2.00, annual postage increased to 20 cents, and the first advertising was accepted. A small notice ran above a smattering of grouped ads:

A single column of advertisements will hereafter be inserted in the *People's Literary Companion* at ten dollars per line (agate type) each insertion. Our readers may have full confidence in our advertisers as no advertisements will be inserted except from parties whom we know to be reliable and whose integrity is not to be doubted. (p. 6)

Allen was splitting hairs, since he had been promoting his own products in the *Companion* all along. Previous issues had contained listings of products for which agents were wanted—all products of E.C. Allen & Co. The listings typically ran under headings like “Interesting and Useful Items,” “Amusement and Instruction for the Home Circle,” or “Useful Articles, Interesting Toys, &c.” Products included a “Chinese” target air pistol, numerous games for children and adults, opera glasses, meerschaum pipes, Waltham watches, and books (such as *Chesterfield's Letter-Writing*, *Courtship Made Easy*, *Five Hundred Curious Puzzles*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*).

Allen's line of chromos had also been promoted extensively in all issues, usually as subscription premiums. In early issues, the popular “Shore to Shore” chromo was free to subscribers who paid the 75-cent subscription price. A notice in the July, 1870 issue

made readers think that Allen was practically throwing away money in order to give them a bargain.

\$3.50 FOR SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

Engravings similar in size and workmanship, but inferior in design and artistic beauty are sold at picture stores at \$2.50 each. . . . We claim our paper is worth at least a dollar. Thus for seventy-five cents each of our subscribers gets that which is sold elsewhere for three dollars and fifty cents. (p. 4)

In 1871, the *Companion's* first advertising patrons included Allen's Stinson & Co. subsidiary, Armstrong's Universal Blood Purifying Stomach Bitters, and Peterson Publishers of Philadelphia, promoting books from their roster of popular authors, including Emma D.E.N. Southworth and Ann S. Stephens.

The George P. Rowell Co. advertised several times in late 1873 and early 1874. This was probably an exchange arrangement in which Allen gave Rowell ad space in the *Companion* and Rowell gave Allen advertising space in newspapers on Rowell's lists.

Some of Stinson & Co.'s ads were in the echoing "Bonner" style, with each line repeated several times.

Ad volume grew slowly, with most issues containing one column or less until mid-April, 1872, when the ads wrapped into a second column for the first time.

In the masthead, the April, 1870 issue claimed "over 260,000" subscribers. By the November, 1870 issue the claim had risen to 600,000 subscribers. Throughout 1871, mastheads boasted that the *Companion* was "two times," "three times," and "four times" larger than its competitors. By the time the *Companion* converted to weekly frequency, in October, 1871, Allen trumpeted a claim of 1.25 million readers in a banner above the logo on the front cover.

These are almost certainly outrageous exaggerations, and it is not immediately clear why Allen felt the need to make such inflated claims, especially since he hadn't yet begun to sell advertising when he made them. Perhaps he felt that such popularity would make more people want to subscribe. Perhaps he was laying the groundwork for aggressive ad sales. Perhaps he simply wanted the *Companion* to be as much like the *Ledger* and the other successful story papers as possible. This would help explain his decision to convert to weekly frequency, which must have eroded profit.

As noted above, Allen solicited readership through subscription clubs, and he often gave generous space to the club promotions. In the February, 1871 issue, for example, he promised premiums to subscribers who established clubs:

2 subscriptions: pocket knife

5 subscriptions: *Life of George Peabody* book

6 subscriptions: gold pencil

7 subscriptions: gold pen

8 subscriptions: "Morning Prayer" chromo

(p. 4)

Over the years, Allen experimented with different variations on this theme. In 1879 club organizers were offered a sliding scale of credit in Allen's "Mammoth Illustrated Catalog," which featured 700 items. For \$4.00 in subscriptions, they could choose \$1.50 worth of merchandise from the catalog. For \$7.00 in subscriptions, they earned credit of

\$2.62. For \$25.00 in subscriptions, club organizers were granted \$12.00 worth of catalog merchandise.

By this time the *Companion* had given up selling paid advertising and was running one page of house ads in each issue, exclusively from Allen's companies. Ads in the September 27, 1879 issue, for example, featured a cow-milker (which rated a full column), a stencil-maker, a cigar lighter, a trick deck of cards, a combination telephone-telegraph, scales, hair curlers, needlework accessories, and a number of other items.

Allen rotated exposure for his different product lines. The next issue featured one page of jewelry advertising. The following week's issue contained two pages of advertising: one page of jewelry and one page of books.

The appearance of the *Companion* changed throughout the 1870s. By 1879 the magazine had expanded and redesigned. Each issue now had 16 pages, with four columns per page. It was still a weekly, but the subscription price dropped to \$1.00, effective with the December 20, 1879 issue, and the single copy price dropped to three cents.

The *Companion's* contents were arguably as good as any other story paper's at this point. Allen's focus on rural readers demanded a "Farm and Household" column, and the "Children's Department" was also de rigueur, and neither was anything other than ordinary. But the *Companion's* main attraction was its stories, many of which were first class by story paper standards.

Among the authors in the late 1870s were Mattie Dyer Britts, who was at the outset of her career (Wilson & Fiske, 1887) and extremely prolific in her contributions to the

Companion. William R. Eyster, who at this point was also beginning his career (Johannsen, 1950), contributed a number of adventure stories.

No one could approach the torrent of contributions submitted by Col. Prentiss Ingraham. Ingraham, who once had four stories in a single issue of *Vickery's Fireside Visitor* (Johannsen, 1950), contributed a story per week to the *Companion*—sometimes two—over a long stretch in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Some have estimated that Ingraham wrote 1,000 novels in his lifetime, although he himself modestly claimed only 600 (Johannsen, 1950). He seems to have had a genuine friendship with Allen. He named his daughter Ivy Allen Ingraham, and asked Allen to be her godfather (E.C. Allen Collection, Ingraham photograph and note, 1889).

After 1885, when Allen began soliciting advertising in earnest, the appearance and the nature of the *People's Literary Companion* changed again. By 1889, Allen had his list system in full swing, and had been aggressively promoting ad sales. In October, 1889, combined circulations of Allen's magazines increased from 800,000 to one million. In November 1889, the *Companion* mailed a total of 11,830 copies, all paid, which made it the third-smallest of Allen's 12 magazines.

By then, the *People's Literary Companion* had grown to 20 pages, with an elaborate "art" cover, featuring the logo entwined above a happy young woman (presumably a reader) in an ornately decorated setting that included a flag, eagle, and flowers. The *Companion* had adopted a subhead: "Progress, Useful Information, Entertainment, Science, Art, Development, Pure Literature, etc., etc." Illustration, logo, and subhead filled the page.

Subscriptions in 1889 were listed at \$1.00 per year.

Inner pages maintained the four-column format established in the late 1870s. The contents of the September, 1889 issue were typical:

Page 1: Full cover

Page 2: Ads from True and Hallett seeking agents and promoting sewing machines, watches, stamping kits (with endorsement from the editors), tricks, and a “trunk of treasures.”

Page 3: The regular front page, including logo and woodcut. Feature story by Prentiss Ingraham: “What Nellie Dared Do.”

Page 4: 1.5 columns: “Leslie Yorke” story. 2.5 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including several “agents wanted” listings, electric belt, watches, etc.

Page 5: 2 columns of “Leslie Yorke” continued. 2 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including Hood’s sarsaparilla, Ingall’s *Home Magazine*, deafness cure, etc,

Page 6: 4 columns of “Married in Haste,” by Herbert M. Ford.

Page 7: “Married in Haste” concluded. Opening of “Myra’s Sacrifice” by H.L. Cameron.

Page 8: 1.5 columns: “Myra” continued. 2.5 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including several more “agents wanted” listings, cigars, silk cloth, more watches, etc.

Page 9: 1.5 columns: “Myra” concluded and “Answers to Correspondents.” 2.5 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including guns, shirt collars, farm wagons, etc.

Page 10: 1.5 columns: masthead, subscription offers featuring chromo premiums, etc. 2.5 columns of assorted short matter, including “Interesting Facts.”

Page 11: Illustrations of the latest women’s fashions.

Page 12: .5 column discussing fashions on opposite page. 3.5 columns: “How Lord Roland Met His Wife” story.

Page 13: 2 columns: “Lord Roland” continued. 2 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including asthma cure, detective stories, self-wringing mop, etc.

Page 14: “Mrs. Blakesley’s Boys,” by Minnie Merle.

Page 15: “Farm and Household” advice column. Short poem. 3 illustrations.

Page 16: “Items of Interest” column. “On the Cliff Road” story. “How Susie Proposed” story.

Page 17: 2 columns: “Susie” concluded. 2 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including Gelanoid photography, *The Life and Adventures of Stanley* book, etc.

Page 18: 1.5 columns: “Items of Interest” concluded. 2.5 columns of paid ads plus house filler ads, including rings, obesity cure, razors, and knives.

Page 19: Sheet music for song: “Novelette,” by F. Johnstone.

Page 20: Paid ads plus house filler ads, including music box, stamping kit (again), “agents wanted,” songbooks, etc.

With 20 columns of ads, this issue contained five pages of paid advertising in total. At the six-time frequency on the Allen’s Lists rate card, the five pages would have yielded about \$16,800 gross. Deducting 10% for the nonpaid filler ads, and allowing a 20% agency commission (commissions were higher then than now), leaves about \$12,100 net.

A year of 12 issues at \$12,100 would add up to \$145,200. Allen’s actual ad receipts for 1890—the first full year at these rates—were \$128,591, or only about 11% less than the \$145,200 estimate. Given that volume and frequencies were highly variable, this suggests that Allen was sticking pretty close to his published rates.

Including the house ads on page two, this issue was 30% advertising and 70% editorial, a much more generous ad-edit ratio than most of today’s magazines offer.

Advertising aside, the contents conform remarkably closely to Noel's 1954 definition of a story paper (quoted in full above), originally applied to a magazine from 1847:

Matter was "original" . . . avoided politics and sectarianism. . . appealing to the whole family, young and old. . . devoted entirely to entertainment. . . literature ran to sensational serials, a short humorous sketch, a moral sketch, a short love story or adventure. Sentimental poems and humorous anecdotes filled up odd spaces. . . certain set departments that went on year after year . . . (pp. 32-33)

It's safe to say that this formula was beginning to age after four decades, and that the overall appearance of the *Companion* made it look a little dated and perhaps a little hucksterish to the better educated. Mixing advertising and editorial on the same page was not a universal practice for magazines in the 19th century, and the more respectable magazines did so reluctantly. That, and the nature of the ads themselves (some of which must have looked suspiciously fraudulent even at the time), would have seemed crass and garish to a well educated reader of the 1890s—"common," in Victorian vernacular.

This did not prevent the advertisers from continuing to place the ads, or the readers from responding to them, which was the only measure of success that Allen used.

12. OTHER MAIL ORDER JOURNALS

It's not immediately obvious what it was about Augusta, ME that caused this small city of approximately 7,800 people in 1870 (Walker, 1872) to become one of America's largest publishing centers of the late 19th century, with the seventh-largest post office for second-class mail in the United States (E.C. Allen Collection, Scrapbook, 1869-1891). Perhaps living in a village-sized state capital allowed Augusta's residents to combine an urban outlook with a good view of their neighbors' businesses. The population was certainly small enough so that the ways and means of large scale success were difficult to hide.

Allen inspired lively competition in a very short period of time, and Mott (1938, vol. 3) referred to the *People's Literary Companion* as the "mother of the whole brood of mail-order papers" (p. 37).

Allen's first major competitor was his former clerk, Peleg O. Vickery, who apparently started in business by taking on Allen's stock of mail order merchandise: As noted above, Vickery's name began appearing on the merchandise advertising in the *People's Literary Companion* in 1873, but he launched his own magazine, *Vickery's Fireside Visitor*, in the following year as a direct competitor to the *Companion*. Rowell's directory credits *Vickery's Fireside Visitor* with circulation of 66,687 in 1875 (*Geo. P. Rowell & co's American newspaper directory*, 1876). Ten years later, Ayer's directory estimates 100,000 (*Ayer & son's manual for advertisers*, 1886).

Vickery acquired a son-in-law named John F. Hill, who also went into the publishing business, and eventually became Vickery's partner. Hill was publisher of *Happy Hours*, a story paper designed for "family reading," which Ayer's directory credits with 75,000 circulation in 1885 (*Ayer & son's manual for advertisers*, 1886). Soon Vickery & Hill had a full complement of similar periodicals, sold to advertisers on the list system (Mott, 1938, vol. 3) in direct competition with Allen's Lists. In addition to *Vickery's Fireside Visitor* and *Happy Hours*, Vickery & Hill published *Hearth and Home*, *Good Stories*, *American Woman*, *Needlecraft*, *Farm and Hearth*, and *Farm World* (Varney, 1886; VonHerrlich, 2002). According to Emmet and Jeuck (1950), Vickery & Hill claimed in the mid-1890s that the combined circulation of all their titles was around 2.5 million, though this is at least double what a reasonable estimate would suggest.

Hill was elected governor several times, and, according to Rowell (1906), built an appropriately palatial home in Augusta, though he had to rough it in the house of former governor and Presidential candidate James G. Blaine while waiting for his own residence to be built.

Rowell (1906) passed along a rumor which, if true, might help account for Augusta's remarkable achievements as a publishing center. Apparently Blaine had a nephew who worked for Allen in a comfortable position. Given Blaine's considerable influence in the community,

. . .the postoffice has generally found it advisable to deal gently with infringements of what they call the law whenever they happen to originate in Augusta. (p. 202)

The largest and most successful of all of the Augusta mail order journals was *Comfort*, published by Gannett & Morse and profiled in more detail below.

Other Augusta magazines of the late 19th century included the venerable *Gospel Banner*, a religious (Universalist) weekly established in 1835, which predated the mail order journals and had no connection to them, and two agricultural weeklies, *Home Farm*, from S.L. Boardman & Co., and *Maine Farmer*, from Badger & Manley (Varney, 1886).

The large amount of advertising the mail order journals were attracting did not go unnoticed outside Augusta. Mott (1938, vol. 3) listed the following mail order journals. This is by no means a comprehensive list:

In New York: Both the *Fireside Companion* and *New York Weekly* began to sell mail order ads aggressively in the 1870s. Other New York mail order journals included *Ladies' World*, *People's Home Journal*, *Hearthstone*, and *Good Literature*. *Leisure Hours* (later *Leisure*) was published out of New York from 1877 to 1883. *The Cherub*, originally launched by J. Latham & Co. to promote their patent medicine, changed its name to the *Illustrated Home Guest* in 1876 and began soliciting mail order advertising

In Boston: Local mail order journals included *Social Visitor*, *Home*, *Woman's Home Journal*, *Household Monthly*, *Cottage Hearth*, and *Modern Women*.

In Chicago: Mail order journals included the Chicago *Ledger*, *Woman's World*, *Home Life*, and Chicago *Fireside Friend*.

Elsewhere: Zeigler, McCurdie & Co. published the *People's Journal* from Philadelphia from 1867 to 1875. Another *People's Journal* was published by J.T. Latham from 1885 to 1901 in Washington, DC. Other mail order journals were published in Lynn, MA; Greenfield, MA; Minneapolis, MN; Des Moines, IA; and St. Louis, MO (Mott, 1957). *Grit*, published in Williamsport, PA, has a reasonable claim to being the last surviving mail order journal.

Comfort Magazine

Of all the publishers who competed with Allen for mail order advertising, his chief rival was a neighbor, William Howard Gannett (1854-1948), a native of Augusta, ME, who got into the publishing business in the hope that owning his own magazine would reduce the cost of marketing a patent medicine he sold through the mail, Giant Oxien.

Gannett left school when he was eight, but made up in ambition what he lacked in education. By the late 1880s, he had owned several businesses with varying success, some in partnership with Wallace W. Morse, including a variety store, a skating rink, a sawmill, and a mail order novelty business similar to Allen's, (Sayward, 1960).

Gannett sensed opportunity in the rising popularity of Moxie, the soft drink developed and first sold in 1884 by Dr. Augustin Thompson of Union, ME. Thompson marketed Moxie as "nerve food" that could cure "loss of manhood, paralysis, and softening of the brain" (Quoted in Moxie Collectors Page, n.d.). In 1887 Gannett found a druggist who had developed a drink similar to Moxie. As he later recalled:

A young chemist in Boston had gotten out a beverage on that order with the addition of more medicinal ingredients and an extract of beef added. He was having it bottled at a mineral spring near Boston and getting numerous testimonials of its efficacy in restoring tired nerves and building up the general health, curing dyspepsia and even being helpful for lung trouble and rheumatism. (Quoted in Sayward, 1960)

Gannett believed that the product could be sold successfully in tablet form, and although the chemist resisted selling his formula, Gannett convinced him to cooperate, recollecting, "I got after him hard one day" (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, p. 7).

Gannett's new product, which he named Giant Oxien, owed more than just inspiration to Moxie. The *oxie* in both products' names, the fact that both beverages were bottled near Boston, and claims both made to aid the nerves suggest that Gannett was imitating rather than innovating.

Mail order advertising had driven the growth of Gannett's novelty firm, the Knoxum Novelty Company, and Gannett applied his direct marketing skills to his new line of business. With an initial investment of \$32.00, he advertised Oxien through Allen's Lists (Sayward, 1960). Gannett's motto for Giant Oxien was "Up-to-date pills for present-day ills" (Toner, 1998).

Over the next several months, Oxien grew into a prosperous business. Gannett reinvested his profits in further advertising, and began to believe it might be more economical to publish his own magazine than to continue to buy advertising from other publishers, given the cost of ads for both Knoxum Novelty and Oxien. He was discouraged in this line of thought by his acquaintance, Frank Munsey, publisher of *Munsey's* magazine, but was not dissuaded (Sayward, 1960).

According to Sayward (1960), Gannett believed that the other Augusta mail order magazines from Allen and Vickery & Hill flourished because of the premiums that they and their advertisers gave to readers who helped them sell their products. Gannett hoped to apply the premium system to his own products, targeting prospective customers "of average education in rural areas, particularly in the Far West" (Sayward, 1960, p. 9).

When it came time to name his magazine, Gannett decided that "everybody wants comfort" (Quoted in Sayward, 1960). He borrowed some woodcuts from Vickery & Hill,

and wrote three stories around the illustrations: “A Farmer’s Comfort,” “Then and Now,” and a three-installment serial, “Farmer Tompkins’ Wrath.” He had 13,000 copies of his first issue, dated November 1888, printed by the local newspaper, the *Kennebec Journal*. It contained eight pages, 3.5 of which were ads for Giant Oxien (Sayward, 1960).

Judging by the rapid growth *Comfort* achieved, it appears that Gannett was right about everybody wanting it—advertisers and readers both. Gannett doubled its folio to 16 pages in the fourth issue. Within a year the magazine was claiming 500,000 circulation, and Gannett announced in January 1892 that he had achieved 1 million. In the following months, circulation was variously listed at 1.1 million (November, 1892), 1.2 million (December, 1892), 1.22 million (February, 1894), and 1.25 million (December, 1895). In 1895, *Comfort* grew by another 8 pages to 24, and added a color cover, on which the “Comfort” logo was intertwined around a large key, above the subhead, “The key to a million and a quarter homes.”

During the same period, 1888 to 1894, Allen’s Lists increased guaranteed circulation from 800,000 to one million, Allen himself died, and the company was sold. In other words, following a period of intense competition Gannett found himself, if not triumphant, at least alone at the top.

At this point Gannett was calculating pass-along at four readers per copy, and declared, over *Comfort*’s masthead, “It requires twelve [box]cars every month or one hundred and forty-four cars in twelve months to transport these papers to the six million readers living in all parts of the country” (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, pp. 13-14). If his pass-along estimates were correct, *Comfort* was read by about 11% of the literate

population of the United States. A century later no more than a handful of magazines came close to achieving that level of coverage.

Even allowing for some exaggeration, *Comfort* was the first American magazine to achieve circulation over one million and it remained the largest magazine in the country well into the 20th century.

The same techniques that worked for Allen and the *People's Literary Companion* helped Gannett build paid circulation. Starting with *Comfort's* first issue, Gannett offered premiums to readers who sold subscriptions to their friends and neighbors. Female readers were offered clothes and dressmaking instructions in exchange for two dozen subscriptions. In the second issue, Gannett told readers that they could keep \$5.00 for every hundred subscriptions they sold at 25 cents each. Women could receive the *Complete Book of Etiquette and Letter Writing* for two subscriptions. Men could receive a combination chisel-and-awl hand tool. Children were tempted with grab bags of toys. Readers could also earn guns, violins, pens, carpets, sets of books, and hammocks by selling subscriptions (Sayward, 1960).

All of these items came from the stock of Knoxum Novelty. In addition to being used as premiums, Knoxum's products were advertised and sold through ads in *Comfort's* pages (Sayward, 1960).

It's likely that Gannett employed Allen's strategy of mailing large numbers of "sample" copies in order to hit his circulation target. Quite probably, Gannett added subscribers to his rolls whether they paid or not. When the second-class sample privilege

was revoked in 1907, *Comfort* survived by discounting subscriptions aggressively (Mott, 1938, vol. 2).

In *Comfort's* early days, Gannett probably made more money from Oxien than he made from readers or paying advertisers. His strategy for Oxien, copied from advertisers in the other mail order journals, was to solicit agents by sending “free” samples to anyone who would send a dime for postage (Sayward, 1960). Since his total costs were less than a dime, there was a small profit in the samples. Larger profits were made from sample recipients who decided to become agents: They ordered boxes of tablets at wholesale prices which they in turn sold at retail. It was not a complicated scheme, and it was used by hundreds of other mail order marketers, but it worked.

Obviously, Gannett also accepted paying advertisers, and they spanned a wide range, including marketers of patent medicines, faith healers, and the Magnetic Institute of Dr. C. E. Batdorf, the “clairvoyant doctor and magnetic healer.” Household items such as washing machines and carpets were often advertised in *Comfort*, as were foods, including Quaker Oats and Nonesuch mincemeat. Even automobile manufacturers periodically bought space in *Comfort*: The Overland Six was advertised at \$1,475 in 1915 (Sayward, 1960).

After the turn of the 20th century, *Comfort* began to attract a number of large mail order companies who advertised both products and catalogues. Sears, Roebuck placed 70 advertisements in the January, 1901 issue—three quarters of the issue’s total advertising (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950; Weil, 1977). Sears dropped only three ads from the next issue—it contained 67 (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950). Montgomery Ward; Spiegel; and the May, Stern

Co. were among *Comfort's* other catalog advertisers (Emmet & Jeuck, 1950; Sayward, 1960).

In December 1893, with claimed circulation of about 1.2 million, *Comfort's* advertising rates were listed as \$5.00 per line, \$70.00 per column inch, or \$3,000 per page at the one-time rates (Sayward, 1960). These are quite competitive with the Allen's List rates for the same period.

The two publishers apparently went at it hammer and tongs in pursuit of advertising, and judging from the marketing materials surviving from one incident, no love was lost between them.

In 1891 *Art in Advertising*, a trade magazine for advertisers, published a short comparative analysis indicating that an advertisement in Allen's Lists which cost \$420.16 produced \$200.00 worth of orders, and that an ad in *Comfort* which cost \$65.50 produced \$154.00 worth of orders. Other publications were included in the analysis, but it was clear that the difference in performance between *Comfort* and Allen's Lists was the central point of the story (E.C. Allen Collection, Circular rebutting *Comfort*, 1891).

Allen naturally dug into the facts and discovered that the advertisement in *Comfort* was significantly larger than the ad in Allen's Lists, had better position, and was heavily discounted. He believed that Gannett had rigged the article.

A man who had no compunctions about calling his competitors gutter-snipes, Allen cranked out several circulars in which he referred to his competitor as a "liar," a "cowardly lying publisher," and a "reptile," and said the article in *Art in Advertising* was

a “silly, abortive attempt to defraud advertisers” (E.C. Allen Collection, Circular rebutting *Comfort*, 1891).

There is no record of response from Gannett, who, as it turned out, got the last word anyway.

Gannett often used his magazine’s contents to promote advertised products, directly and indirectly. Sometimes tales of romance or adventure were helped along or resolved by the timely use of an advertiser’s product. For example, a virtuous widow, protagonist of Mary Mayflower’s feature story “A Good Way to Do It,” contributes a \$1.00 box of Oxien to help a poor person. Sometimes ads surrounded stories about related activities. When several companies that sold traps and bought pelts began to advertise in *Comfort*, Gannett accommodatingly introduced a series of trapping and hunting tales, with the ads carefully positioned around the stories (Sayward, 1960).

Comfort was marketed as a family magazine, but its content skewed heavily toward the female reader. In June 1903 the editor wrote, “As we figure that ninety per cent of our readers are women, it is only fair that ninety per cent of the matter in *Comfort* should appeal to women” (Quoted in Triage, 1999, p. 45). This seems to have been central to Gannett’s strategy from the start: *Comfort* as his choice of title, for example, suggests a homemaker’s goal—a typically feminine value in the late 19th century.

In the magazine itself, very few opportunities to make punning use of *comfort* were allowed to slip by. “Crumbs of Merry Comfort” was a long-running humor column. “Comfortable Resolutions” was a short feature story in the first issue. Gannett appealed to readers for “short articles from our subscribers setting forth their manner of *taking*

comfort in this life” (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, p. 34). Hobbies were called comforts, and children were admonished, “There is no comfort in being lazy” (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, p. 34). Marlton Downing’s “A Waif of the Sea” ended with a wedding: “The ceremony was performed and ever after COMFORT reigned supreme in the hearts and homes of all our characters.” This single-minded wordplay went on ad nauseam.

Gannett also employed the unusual device of addressing his readers and writers as relatives. Readers were *cousins*, and many of the magazine’s writers were *aunts* and *uncles*. Occasionally this made *Comfort* sound more like a family reunion than a national magazine. One columnist, for example, was “Cousin Ceres,” writer of “Cousin Ceres and Her Serious Comments on Cooking,” a column that later changed its name first to “Kitchen Chats” and then to “Domestic and Fancy Cooking” (Sayward, 1960). Another columnist was “Cousin Marion.” A typical reader would end a request for advice by asking, “Can any of the cousins give me information?” (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, p. 39). The prolific Charles Noel Douglas, who wrote songs, poems, stories, articles, editorials, and columns for *Comfort*, grew so accustomed to being “Uncle Charlie” that he used the nom de plume in some of his books, including *Uncle Charlie’s Poems* and *Uncle Charlie’s Story Book*.

Like the middle class service magazines of the same period, such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall’s*, and *Delineator*, *Comfort* provided guidance as well as entertainment. Over the years, *Comfort* ran heavy on columns. In addition to Cousin Ceres, *Comfort* offered homemakers “The Work Basket,” “The Embroidery Basket,” “In and Around the Home,” and “The Pretty Girls Club.”

New parents could turn to “The Little Stranger” column for advice. For the children themselves, *Comfort* provided “The Children’s Corner” and “Children’s Circle of Comfort,” along with puzzles and games, although Sayward (1960) commented, “Gannett did not do as well for the children as he did for the adults” (p. 37).

Professionals dispensed advice through *Comfort*’s pages. The “At Home Lawyer” answered legal questions, and a realtor’s “Home Finders Column” described alluring qualities of various regions of the country. Dr. Braddon provided medical advice in his column, “How to Live One Hundred Years”—some of it rather dubious. The doctor told readers that sunstroke was contagious, that a mixture of horseradish and gin made an effective remedy for stomach trouble, and (repeatedly) that Oxien aided the nerves (Sayward, 1960).

Comfort ran columns about hobbies and other popular interests, among them ventriloquism, playing the cornet, recitation, and astrology. The cycling column refocused on automobiles and gas engines when reader interest shifted from bicycles to cars.

Comfort’s nonfiction features often provided lessons for various activities, among them flower arranging and crayon drawing. “Hats and How to Make Them,” and “Hints on Home Dressmaking” were typically instructive (Sayward, 1960).

Comfort included several advice columns. “Chats with Aunt Minerva and Her Owls,” which printed both letters and replies from readers, and “Comfort’s League of Cousins,” edited by “Uncle Charlie” Douglas, ran for decades. “Talks with Girls,” by

Cousin Marion, may have been the most popular. Cousin Marion was both droll and (presumably) helpful. A sample:

Q. Emma reads novels. Her mother is opposed to this. Should Emma continue to read them?

A. She should not. There are good novels—novels that should be read by all, but Emma should mind her mother first.

Q. A Texas girl wants to know if a girl without money or friends and only a common school education could do anything in the city.

A. She could indeed, Louise, dear. She could cry her eyes out to be home, and that's where she had better stay.

Q. Should a girl of 17 have a beau?

A. No, dear, a girl of 17 has no earthly business with a beau. School books are much more to her advantage. What the mischief do you want to be bothering about the men for now? You'll have enough to worry on their account before you have done with life.

(Quoted in Sayward, 1960, pp. 42-43)

A writer who played the role of Cousin Marion from 1912 to 1942 said that she received between 7,000 and 10,000 letters a year—"sincere letters from good, solid people. . . . It was strongly impressed upon me that I must never deviate from Mother-knows-best" (Quoted in Sayward, 1960, p. 43).

Like the other mail order journals, *Comfort's* core was its fiction—short stories and serials—constructed in fine story paper tradition from maudlin sentiment, melodramatic suspense, and implausible coincidence. Some stories were contributed by established writers; most were by authors who remain obscure.

Many of *Comfort's* contributors were readers themselves. Gannett encouraged reader submissions by holding ongoing story-writing contests, conducted as the "Nutshell

Story Club.” Sayward (1960) noted that some of the prize-winning stories had previously appeared in other publications.

Among *Comfort*’s better-known contributors were Edward Everett Hale, whose short story “A Safe Deposit” appeared in June, 1891; Sarah Orne Jewett, who was published in the September, 1891 issue; “Buffalo Bill” Cody (whose ghostwriter at the time was Prentiss Ingraham), who contributed “A Knight in Buckskin;” Katherine Lee Bates, who contributed “An August Idyll;” and several popular writers of the late 19th century, including Ingraham writing under his own name, and Holman F. Day.

In early issues of *Comfort*, tales of adventure and mystery predominated. Representative titles include “For Gold and Revenge,” “Hunted for Their Money,” “Ned Todd, the Oklahoma Detective,” and “Jack Harkaway: Out West Among the Indians,” by Bracebridge Hemming, one of the few dime novelists whose real name was less believable than a nom de plume.

Around the turn of the century, romance—specifically, tales of sentimental love—began to outnumber the adventure stories. *St. Elmo*, a popular novel by Augusta J. Evans Wilson, was the first long romance serialized in *Comfort*, and was followed by numerous similar stories.

Other themes more frequent in *Comfort*’s fiction than in real life were the reform of drunkards, noble sacrifice in matters of the heart, epiphany or repentance on the deathbed, and the unexpected discovery that an adopted child was the lost heir to a British title or fortune.

In 1960, Sayward summed up *Comfort*’s fiction:

In sentimental tales of struggles between characters who were all good or all evil, in the end good always triumphed. Coincidences, miracles, inexplicable good fortune—all flourished. Fate often brought about an arbitrary accident. Poetic justice presided over the lives of the good and the bad, always teaching an edifying lesson. (p.58)

That lesson often reinforced the message that women of all social classes, including the working class, had natural and inescapable responsibilities to their families, among them loyalty, devotion, and both financial and emotional sustenance. The magazine's columns and other nonfiction amplified this repeatedly. As Tiece noted in 1999,

Comfort's contents

. . . confronted and resolved the double-bind facing working class women. While the income may be limited, the love and nurturance "characteristic of her sex" provided the antidote. In these spaces devoted to hints and shortcuts, the working class woman was also instructed as a consumer, in effect, communicating that even those with limited means could exercise the domestic duties of consumption. (pp. 48-49)

Thus with its unique, embracing tone, its instructive columns, and its escapist stories, *Comfort* bridged the gap between story papers in the tradition of the New York *Ledger* and the new mass circulation women's magazines that adopted *Comfort's* business model while aiming their editorial contents and their advertisements at an emerging middle class market of educated consumers with disposable income.

The Passing of the Mail Order Journals

The footsteps that Allen, Vickery, and Gannett heard behind them as they acquired their audiences of millions in the late 1880s were those of Cyrus H.K. Curtis and a growing set of new competitors.

A native of Portland, ME, Curtis and his wife Louisa Knapp Curtis launched the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1883 as a supplement to the *Tribune and Farmer*, an agricultural magazine that Curtis published (Zuckerman, 1998).

Under Louisa's extremely effective editorial direction, the *Ladies' Home Journal* achieved 25,000 circulation within its first its year, which encouraged Curtis and his wife to sell the *Tribune and Farmer* in 1884 and devote their energies to the *Journal* (Zuckerman, 1998).

Curtis believed in the ability of advertising his magazine to build circulation, and he formed a business relationship with N.W. Ayer that lasted for several decades. Ayer provided Curtis with enough credit to promote the magazine aggressively, while a strategy of low pricing made the *Ladies' Home Journal* more affordable than its established competitors. At a time when a subscription to *Peterson's* was \$1.50, *Godey's* was \$3.00 per year, and *Harper's Bazar* was \$4.00, Curtis set the price of the *Ladies' Home Journal* at 50 cents—and only a quarter when bought through a subscription club (Zuckerman, 1998).

Circulation rose rapidly. By 1886 it had reached 270,000, and by 1889 it reached 440,000. In 1891 the *Ladies' Home Journal* achieved 600,000 circulation (Zuckerman, 1998).

Curtis pursued ad sales with more enthusiasm than many of his competitors. Zuckerman (1998) wrote, "Curtis recognized women's new role as purchasing agents for the home, as well as advertisers' need to reach these female consumers" (p.7).

The *Woman's Home Companion* and *Good Housekeeping*, both upstarts in the women's category, adopted the same strategy and grew at a pace almost equivalent to the *Ladies' Home Journal's*.

The business strategy that Curtis adopted was essentially the same as Allen's: increase the audience to the largest size achievable by reducing price as far as possible, covering circulation losses with profits from ad sales. But there were two major differences between Curtis's philosophy and Allen's. First, Louisa Knapp Curtis aimed the *Ladies' Home Journal's* content at a more affluent, better educated audience than the mail order journals'. Second, at least some of the advertisers that Cyrus Curtis solicited were advertising to build brand awareness and preference. Over time, these national brand advertisers helped set the *Ladies' Home Journal* apart from the mail order journals.

There were areas of overlap. Mott (1957) wrote:

It is not always easy to draw the line between the "mail-order journals" and the more "legitimate" magazines for the home. The best of the women's magazines used advertising that solicited mail orders. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, undisputed leader of the better group, carried many small advertisements of cosmetics, medicines, jewelry, and clothes, to be delivered by mail on receipt of price, as well as calls for agents. The characteristics of the paper that was issued chiefly for the use of such advertisers came to be clear, however. (p. 364)

One critical difference between *Ladies' Home Journal* (and similar magazines) and the mail order journals was in circulation strategy. The *Ladies' Home Journal's* circulation was made up of middle class readers who may have been price sensitive, but who paid in advance. The editorial contents, written for readers with a better education and higher spending power, attracted an audience that did not need to be maintained with hundreds of thousands of sample copies.

In the end, it was the U.S. Post Office that put the mail order magazines out of business. Concluding years of dispute, the Post Office Department tightened its regulations in 1907 and strengthened its enforcement. In order to qualify for second-class rates, publishers now had to show that subscriptions were paid for, and the sampling privilege was restricted (Mott, 1957). This killed most mail order magazines, including the *People's Literary Companion* and the other Allen titles. *Comfort* survived by dropping its price drastically, and stayed in business until 1942.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* and its competitors, with their large, fully paid circulations, continued to thrive, and grew as rapidly after 1907 as before.

13. FRANK MUNSEY AND THE MODERN MAGAZINE: AN EPILOGUE

On Monday, October 2, 1893, the New York *Sun* carried an unusual ad, Quoted by Britt (1935):

Reduced

From 25 cts. Down to 10 cts.

Munsey's Magazine

Beginning with the October issue—now ready

Why we can do it

Because we deal direct with news dealers and save two profits you pay on other magazines.

Yearly subscriptions reduced from \$3 down to \$1. No middlemen; no monopoly.
(p. 84)

Frank Munsey had arrived in New York 11 years earlier with only \$40.00 in capital, and launched a magazine he had been planning for several years: *Golden Argosy*, a children's magazine derivative of Allen's *Golden Moments* and Elverson's *Golden Days*. Writing stories himself, selling ads, and keeping his own books, Munsey single-handedly ran *Golden Argosy* on a shoestring. It was always a challenge. *Golden Argosy* repositioned several times, and in 1887 became simply *Argosy*, an adventure magazine for adults (Britt, 1935).

With modest financial support from friends in the Republican Party, he had started a second magazine, *Munsey's Illustrated Weekly*, during the election of 1884, supporting James G. Blaine's candidacy for President. In 1891, *Munsey's* became a monthly (Britt, 1935).

After more than a decade of struggle, Munsey owned two magazines and had parlayed his \$40.00 into a debt of \$100,000 (Britt, 1935).

Now, in a year of financial panic, he was faced with two competitors: S.S. McClure, whose new magazine, priced at 15 cents, had first gone on sale on May 28, and John Brisben Walker, publisher of the *Cosmopolitan*, who had recently reduced the price of his magazine from 25 cents to 12.5 cents (Britt, 1935; Garvey, 1996). Faced on one hand with far more debt than he could pay back, and on the other with price-cutting that threatened to put him out of business, Munsey took what seemed at the time to be a bold gamble. Using credit from the *Sun*'s publisher, Charles A. Dana, he advertised *Munsey's* October issue at a lower price than any other "respectable" magazine's, hoping that American News Co.'s refusal to distribute *Munsey's* at a dime would change if enough people asked for it at their newsdealers (Britt, 1935).

Contrary to the expectations of many of his creditors, the plan worked. Faced with rising demand from retailers, American News agreed to carry *Munsey's*, and the magazine's print order began to rise, month after month. He sold 40,000 copies of his October, 1893 issue; 60,000 copies of November, 1893; 200,000 copies of February, 1894; 275,000 copies of October, 1894; 500,000 copies of April, 1895, and 800,000 copies of March, 1898 (Britt, 1935).

By removing price objection as an obstacle to audience growth, Munsey was able to acquire a large circulation in a relatively short time. His profit came from advertising revenue, most of it from brand advertising aimed at the emerging market of middle class consumers.

Munsey's strategy was quickly matched by many other publishers, including *Godey's* and *Peterson's* (Tebbel, 1969). McClure and Walker reduced their prices further, to match Munsey's. Eventually, even the most refined magazines, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and the *Century*, lowered their cover prices and subscription rates, and began pursuing advertising aggressively. Garvey (1996) wrote:

The big change in magazine economics has usually been pinned to 1893, the year that three monthlies—*Munsey's*, *McClure's*, and the *Cosmopolitan*—dropped their prices to ten cents, shifted the basis of their enterprise from sales to advertising, and began to achieve circulations in the hundreds of thousands. (p. 9)

Within a decade newsstands were filled with 10-cent magazines whose circulations approached a million, and whose audiences consisted of middle class consumers, prime targets for the growing number of brand manufacturers whose products were coming into the market in increasing volume. Included were the popular women's magazines, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, which had begun to adopt a strategy of circulation growth a few years earlier.

This was a dramatic shift in the relationship between media and society. Ohmann (1996) dates the origins of American popular culture to 1893.

None of these magazines—*Munsey's* or those that followed Munsey's strategy—could have succeeded without the emergence of mass-produced, branded products made possible by advances in manufacturing and distribution, and marketed aggressively by increasingly sophisticated vendors and their advertising agencies. Munsey's timing was perfect: The potential for dramatic ad growth coincided with his decision to pursue a large audience by reducing his magazine's price.

Munsey's later accomplishments in newspaper publishing were summarized in the obituary William Allen White wrote when he died:

Frank Munsey contributed to the journalism of his day the talent of a meat packer, the morals of a money-changer and the manners of an undertaker. He and his kind have about succeeded in transforming a once-noble profession into an 8 per cent security.

May he rest in trust. (Quoted in Britt, 1935, p. 17)

But regardless of his track record in the newspaper business, Munsey's bold stroke in 1893 transformed the magazine industry, and popularized a business principle which most modern media have followed since: Development of a broad audience at a loss can be offset by profit from advertising.

A look at Munsey's youth suggests where he may have first heard of this strategy.

Munsey was born on August 21, 1854 in Mercer, ME, about 48 km from Augusta. He left school at 16, worked in a grocery, spent a few months at a business college in Poughkeepsie, visited the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, and returned to Maine to work for Western Union. When he was 23, the company appointed him manager of their Augusta office. With "ambition to make money, a ruling passion of his life," as a friend described him at the time (Quoted in Britt, 1935, p. 50), Munsey moved into the Augusta House hotel, where he developed an acquaintance with Edward Allen (Britt, 1935; Rowell, 1906). He also developed a friendship with William H. Gannett (Sayward, 1960). The relationship with Allen was clearly meaningful to Munsey. It was from talking with Allen that Munsey began to dream of becoming a publisher. He later wrote:

The publishing germ gradually got into my blood. . . . My thoughts focussed more and more on the publishing business, until at last I lived and breathed in the publishing world. I did my work at the office mechanically meanwhile, dreaming great dreams to the tune of the printing press. (Quoted in Britt, 1935, p. 54)

A photograph of Munsey at about this time shows a tall, slender young man, with a large handlebar mustache, just like Allen's, prominent on a narrow face. His eyes have a dreamy cast (Britt, 1935).

Munsey, like Allen, was a lifelong bachelor. Both men made their businesses their lives.

Rowell (1906) was straightforward in his opinion of Allen's influence:

Incidentally, Mr. Allen may be said to have been the original cause of the ten cent magazine, for Mr. Frank A. Munsey was a Maine boy and in his youth acquired ideas from his familiar acquaintance with Mr. Allen and his methods. (p. 202)

Augusta in the late 1870s was a small city, where only one kind of publishing dominated—story papers supported by mail order marketers—run by Allen and a relative handful of active competitors. This was publishing as Munsey learned it, the business model which shaped his plans and ambitions.

Munsey lived in Augusta from 1877 until 1882. During those five years Allen certainly developed some plans and ambitions of his own, many of which were taking form as he talked with Munsey. Allen was in the process of expanding the scope of his business, diversifying vertically, seeking larger circulations, and planning to pursue advertising aggressively.

When Munsey left for New York, Allen was within three years of launching his list system and dramatically expanding his advertising sales efforts. Audience development,

market analysis, and advertising pricing would certainly have been among the business concerns that he shared with Munsey.

As Munsey struggled in the early days of *Golden Argosy* and *Munsey's* magazine, he learned of Allen's success in establishing Allen's Lists and acquiring first 800,000 and then 1 million guaranteed circulation. He would have noted that Vickery and Gannett matched or exceeded Allen's achievements.

Allen was surely not the only person who influenced Munsey, and Munsey must have adopted many business strategies as necessity or opportunity demanded. Nevertheless, Munsey learned by example that success was possible for a publisher who found two critical keys: a community of advertisers who sought national circulation on an uncommonly large scale, and the ability to acquire that circulation by removing price as an obstacle.

In 1898 Munsey summed up his magazine strategy succinctly:

There never was anything deader in this world than the old idea of big profits and small volume. Small profits and big volume have driven this antiquated theory to the wall. (Quoted in Mott, 1957, p. 17)

There couldn't be a better summary of the business model that he learned from Allen.

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APPENDIX: PAPER AND PRODUCTION COST

A selection of representative production expense for pocket books, pamphlets, and ephemera between 1837 and 1858, from the cost books of Ticknor & Fields (Tryon & Charvat, 1949).

Hoare on the Vine, 1837 (8vo), book. 134 pages: 500 copies.

Paper cost: \$4.00 per ream: \$.56 per thousand pages

Paper as portion of total production cost: 27%

Massachusetts Baptist Convention, 1839 (8vo), annual report. 36 pages: 456 copies.

Paper cost: \$3.75 per ream: \$.46 per thousand pages

Paper as portion of total production cost: 17%

Voyages and Adventures of Halliard, 1839 (16mo), book. 130 pages: 500 copies.

Paper cost: \$4.00 per ream: \$.31 per thousand pages

Paper as portion of total production cost: 29%

A Letter in Response, etc., 1840 (8vo), pamphlet. 36 pages: 709 copies.

Paper cost: \$4.00 per ream: \$.53 per thousand pages

Paper as portion of total production cost: 30%

Fatherless and Widowed Society, 1845 (16mo), pamphlet. 22 pages: 500 copies.

Paper cost: \$2.75 per ream: \$.41 per thousand pages.

Paper as portion of total production cost: 20%.

Parallels, etc., 1850 (8vo), pamphlet. 64 pages: 1,000 copies.

Paper cost: \$4.50 per ream: \$.47 per thousand pages.

Paper as portion of total production cost: 30%.

Walden, or, a Life in the Woods, 1854 (16mo), book. 358 pages: 2,000 copies.

Paper cost: \$6.72 per ream: \$.31 per thousand pages.

Paper as portion of total production cost: 29%.

Massachusetts Baptist Society, etc., 1857 (12mo), report. 58 pages: 500 copies.

Paper cost: \$3.50 per ream: \$.48 per thousand pages.

Paper as portion of total production cost: 15%.

American Institute of Instruction, etc., 1858 (12mo), book. 96 pages: 500 copies.

Paper cost: \$3.50 per ream: \$.62 per thousand pages.

Paper as portion of total production cost: 18%.