

Major Publishers and the Magazine Market

Perhaps it's not surprising that some of the best known and most successful magazines of the 19th century were produced by leading book publishers. Established publishing companies had expertise, capital, and capacity, and for many of them magazines were a logical extension of the product line—a way to promote books, recruit writers and artists, and develop content.

In 1854 Harper & Brothers described their company as possessing “all the departments of labor necessary for the production of books in their perfected form,” including editing, composition, presswork, engraving, binding, storing, and marketing. (Allen, 26) These were far deeper resources than those of most contemporary independent magazine publishers, who often outsourced business functions in order to focus on content. When he announced his plans to launch *Putnam's Monthly* in 1852, George Putnam said much the same thing as the Harpers: “We believe that the facilities connected with an established publishing business will enable us to place the work at once on a high footing.” (in Putnam, 175) Access to such resources was one of the primary reasons why 19th-century book publishers succeeded in the magazine business. With capital and credit, existing infrastructure for art, design, manufacturing, distribution, sales, and accounting, and with existing relationships with established authors and artists, the publishers profiled in this section were able to produce attractive magazines with consistently outstanding content—highly influential magazines that prospered in many cases for decades, and in some cases are still going concerns.

Interestingly, most of these magazines profiled in this chapter were launched within a very narrow timeframe. Competitive spirit surely accounts for some of the coincidence. A stronger force may have been the scale on which *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* succeeded following its launch in 1850. Its popularity must have inspired many publishers to think that what worked for the Harpers could work just as well at their companies.

It's worth noting that the idea of producing magazines as an ancillary to other publishing activities was not new in the mid-19th century. For years publishers had occasionally supplemented their core businesses with magazines. Massachusetts publisher Isaiah Thomas launched two magazine titles:¹ the *Royal American* (1774), and *Massachusetts* (1789) and had investments in others, including the *Farmer's Weekly Museum*. Philadelphian Mathew Carey was part of the group that founded the *Columbian* in 1786 ; he left to launch the *American Museum* on his own in 1787. And in 1790 New York publishers and printers Thomas and James Swords launched *New-York Magazine*. It may not be coincidence that these were some of the best-written and most popular American magazines of the 18th century.

The expanding market for print in the first half of the 19th century gave publishers new opportunities to diversify with magazines and journals. To take one example, the publishing house founded by Charles Wiley became involved with a host of periodicals in the early decades of the 19th century, sometimes for brief periods as opportunity came and passed, sometimes for years. Here are some of the periodicals that Wiley's company published:

- 1820. The quarterly *Literary and Scientific Repository*, a showcase for Wiley's authors, including James Fennimore Cooper. Closed in 1822. (Jacobson, 42,44f)
- 1833. The *American Monthly Magazine*, which ran until 1838. (Jacobson, 62)
- 1834. The *Father's Magazine*, closed soon after launch. (Jacobson, 62)

¹ For a time Thomas produced his newspaper, the *Spy*, in a magazine format, and retitled it the *Worcester Weekly*. He did this to avoid a state tax on newspapers. When the tax was repealed, the *Spy* returned as a newspaper.

- 1843. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, published by Wiley for three issues, then sold and moved. (Jacobson, 79 ; Mott I, 739) Still published, *Bibliotheca Sacra* is America's longest-running journal of theology.
- 1843. The *American Book Circular*, a directory categorized by subject, listing titles from other publishers as well as Wiley. Through its "Notes" section the *Circular* actively promoted American authors to foreign readers. (Jacobson, 89)
- 1845. The *American Review: a Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science*, better known by its later title, the *American Whig Review*. The *Review* published Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, John Quincy Adams, and many prominent Whig party politicians. Although Wiley's involvement ended after six months, the *Whig Review* ran until 1852. (Jacobson, 80f ; Mott I, 750ff)
- 1847. The *Literary World*, a joint venture with Appleton. Editors included Evert and George Duyckinck and Charles Fenno Hoffman. Closed in 1853. (Jacobson, 88 ; Mott I, 766ff)
- Charles Wiley contracted to assist in the printing of the *Analectic Magazine* for Moses Thomas, as well as Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*, and Dana's *Idle Man*. (Jacobson, 46) His company later imported and retailed a line of British periodicals, including *Blackwood's*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *London Quarterly Review*. (Jacobson, 78)

Wiley's sporadic excursions into magazine publishing were typical of other large publishing firms in the first half of the 19th century. Philadelphia's largest publishing company, Carey & Lea, published the respected *American Journal of Medical Science* between 1827 and 1835. George Putnam, who was John Wiley's partner between 1836 and 1847, ran a periodical in 1832 and 1833 called the *Bookseller's Advertiser*. This turned out to be a warm-up act for *Putnam's Magazine*.

It's worth adding that in the world of book and magazine publishing, opportunity moved in both directions: magazine publishers could publish books just as easily as book publishers could publish magazines. Two magazines, *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World*, upended established book publishers in the 1840s by introducing several series of low-cost paperbacks—the first of America's several paperback revolutions.

It was the firm of Harper & Brothers that first demonstrated how large the opportunities in magazine publishing could be for an established publisher. The company produced four of the most popular and enduring magazines of the 19th century and established a standard for thoughtful, well-produced magazines targeting the growing American middle class. More importantly, the success of their first periodical, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, demonstrated the huge potential that a well-conducted magazine could offer an established book publisher.

Harper & Brothers

The founder and senior partner of Harper & Brothers was James Harper, who chose his career after reading Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. (Tebbel B, 24) Born in 1795, he signed on as a printer's apprentice in 1809, and in 1817 he and his brother John started their own company, taking on job printing and whatever other business came by. Within a few months bookseller and author Evert Duyckinck (who had earlier discouraged the Harpers by saying there were already enough printing firms in the city) placed an order for 2,000 copies of Seneca's *Morals*, the Harpers' first book.² (Tebbel B, 24f; Harper, 84)

Soon the two brothers began publishing books under their own imprint, approaching the business with care and deliberation. One of their sales methods was to obtain advance orders from among New York's 33 booksellers by promising to put the bookseller's name on the title page if he ordered 100 copies. (Tebbel B, 25) The two founders were joined by their two younger brothers, Wesley, in 1823, and Fletcher, in 1825. (Tebbel B, 25) With their arrival J. & J. Harper became Harper & Brothers. (Rowell, 169). The company developed a reputation for production quality, and expanded rapidly over the next several years.

The Harper brothers were well-suited to partnership: their complementary temperaments allowed them to specialize in their activities. One company historian said that they "exemplified diversity with unity." (Shackleton, 36) In his 1915 memoirs author and editor Lyman Abbott wrote, "None of the brothers worked for himself; all for the common welfare." (302)

James was the company's spokesperson and a natural leader; he later served a term as mayor of New York. John managed the company's finances and manufacturing. Wesley was refined and well-read, and ran the editorial department. Fletcher was charming, polished, bright, and ambitious. (Tebbel B, 25, 91f) Harper & Brothers was a conservative company, managed with prudence and with principle—as long as principle didn't conflict with business. James Harper said that the firm was founded on "character, and not capital." (in Tebbel B, 30) But company historian Eugene Exman said the brothers "respected economic records as much as they did the Bible." (171) Abbott referred to their "commingled caution and enterprise." (303) Once when George Putnam complained that Harper & Brothers had violated trade courtesy, Fletcher replied, in effect, that courtesy was courtesy but business was business. (Putnam, 145)

The Harpers were open to innovation, especially in marketing, and had a knack for building on success. Harper & Brothers was one of the first publishers to sell by mail, not only to customers throughout America, but also to Europe and India. (Tebbel B, 27) And the brothers' aggressive approach to public relations paid off in numerous positive reviews of their books. (Tebbel B, 27) With Henry Carey of Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, the brothers developed an agreement to reduce the escalating competition between American publishers for the works of British authors. The agreement was known as the "Harper Rule." (Tebbel B, 26)

Books in series and sets became a very profitable portion of Harper & Brothers' business. Among the company's first productions was a seven-volume set of Walter Scott's *Waverly* novels, and over time set after strong-selling set was added to their catalog, including the Harper's Family Library, the Classical Library, Harper's School District Library, and the Boys' and Girls' Library. (Tebbel B, 25f) Harper's Library of Select Novels reached 615 volumes. (Mott II, 383) Many of the sets were sold in bulk to schools and to libraries, which made them extremely profitable, and the predictable pace of one volume per month allowed for very efficient press scheduling. (Allen, 23)

² Interestingly, the last book published by Harper & Brothers while one of the founders was still alive was also Seneca's *Morals*, an edition of which was produced a few days before Fletcher Harper's death on May 29, 1877. (Exman, 135)

It must be noted that the Harper brothers, like many of their competitors, were shameless pirates, who based a significant portion of their business on a long roster of British authors whom they treated like an all-you-can-eat buffet. The company's authors included the Bronte sisters, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and William Thackeray—none of whom was paid fixed royalties and some of whom were paid nothing at all.

By mid-century Harper & Brothers employed 350 people, occupied seven buildings, produced four million books a year, and may have been the biggest publishing company in the world ; its closest rival was Brockhaus in Leipzig, Germany. (Tebbel B, 28 ; Allen, 26 ; Harper, 90f) The firm's business was divided between book publishing, bookselling, and printing, which was accomplished on 19 large and expensive steam presses as well as several hand presses. (Tebbel B, 28f) The idea of producing a magazine that would keep the presses occupied and promote the company's books as a "tender to our business," in Fletcher Harper's words, was attractive—and to a company known for its sets and "libraries," a magazine could be seen as just another set of monthly issues. (Allen, 23)

Harper's New Monthly Magazine

The first issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*,³ dated June, 1850, was a 144-page octavo with an initial press run of 7,500, a cover price of 25 cents, and an annual subscription price of \$3.00. (Exman, 69ff) Most of its content was lifted from British sources, including Dickens's magazine, *Household Words*. (Tebbel, 107) The debut issue contained more than 60 items, among them the opening chapters of two serial novels, several short stories (two by Dickens), biographical sketches, articles on science and travel, and three departments covering current events, literary notices, and fashion. Accompanying the text were eight pages of woodcut illustration. (Mott II, 384)

Harper's first issue also contained several pages of advertising for Harper & Brothers books, but no outside advertising. This was by choice: for more than 30 years Harper & Brothers excluded outside advertisers from the magazine's pages. (Mott II, 384)

The publishers called their new journal a compendium that placed "within the reach of the great mass of the American people, the unbounded treasures of the Periodical Literature of the present day."

The magazine will transfer to its pages as rapidly as they may be issued all the continuous tales of Dickens, Bulwer, Croly, Lever, Warren, and other distinguished contributors to British Periodicals. (in Mott II, 384)

By this they meant that their new magazine would help itself to all the material it wanted from popular writers who were left unprotected by the absence of an international copyright. Magazine historian Frank Luther Mott referred to *Harper's* so-called "transfer" of British literature into its pages as "the most delicious euphemism in all the apologetics of literary piracy." (Mott II, 384) One competitor, the *American Whig Review* for July, 1852, asked rhetorically, "Is such a publication calculated to benefit American literature? and secondly, is it just?" The author continued:

Your publication, gentlemen, with all others of the same nature, is simply a monstrosity ; and the more widely it is diffused, the more clearly is its moral ugliness revealed. It is an ever-present, ever-living insult to the brains of Americans and its indignity is every day increasing in intensity. (in Cairns, Cambridge, 308) ⁴

³ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* became *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1900, *Harper's Magazine* in 1925, and *Harper's* in 1976. (Mott II, 383 ; LOC)

⁴ Eventually Harper & Brothers began to pay its foreign authors for serialization and book rights, and by 1876 (according to J. H. Harper), had paid \$250,000 to its British contributors. (Mott II, 385) Harper said that all major American publishers regularly

These opinions were incidental to the new magazine's success, which was clear from the start. Within six months *Harper's* circulation had reached 50,000, "in those days a very creditable figure," as described by editor Frederick Lewis Allen 100 years later. (28) Rapid growth continued, and by 1860 circulation had reached 200,000. This made it one of the largest periodicals in the country, a position of prominence retained for decades. In 1857 rival *Putnam's* sighed, "Probably no magazine in the world was ever so popular or so profitable." (in Mott II, 391) *Putnam's* had pledged to publish only American writers and failed in that year's financial crash. (Exman, 71, 83)

By 1871 the Harper & Brothers was claiming total readership, including copies passed along, of 1.5 million people per issue. (Harper, 333)

There were multiple reasons for *Harper's* unprecedented success. To begin with, content was selected with an eye toward broad appeal. New material from authors like Bulwer, Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope was always eagerly awaited and happily received. (Mott II, 385) The magazine's stories and serial novels were balanced by a breadth of other material ranging from fashion to science, and by long-running humor and commentary departments such as the "Editor's Drawer," first conducted by *Knickerbocker* editor Lewis Gaylord Clark, and the "Editor's Easy Chair," written by George William Curtis until his death in 1892. (Mott II, 388f ; Exman, 71) George Ripley, who relocated to New York following the failure of Brook Farm, wrote the book reviews ; he worked at Harper & Brothers until he died in 1880. (Exman, 71 ; Harper, 102) His biographer, O. B. Frothingham, said that Ripley's judgments "were always well weighed and the opinions carefully expressed. A singular combination of literary sagacity and worldly wisdom characterized them all." (in Harper, 267) The magazine's bountiful illustration was provided by gifted artists, including Daniel H. Strothers, who wrote travel essays and illustrated them himself under the nom de plume of "Porte Crayon." (Exman, 73) And the volume of material was generous: 144 pages was half again as much content as competitors like *Graham's* or the *Knickerbocker* provided.

Of the four brothers, it was Fletcher who took greatest interest in the company's periodicals, and he acted as editor-publisher of Harper & Brothers' magazines until his retirement in 1875. Charles Nordhoff, who was hired to evaluate manuscripts, said that Fletcher was the "last and final sieve" through which all copy passed—the manager...

...who, modestly pretending to be no more than a printer, or at most a manufacturer, yet saw and examined, either in manuscript or proof, all that went into the *Magazine* and *Weekly*—except routine matters, and on these he kept a sharp eye. Mr. Harper had remarkably sound, popular judgment. In respect to magazine articles he often stood alone—I mean that his judgment differed from that of all who had previously read the articles, and of course his judgment was final. He knew his public because he had created it ; and to the tastes and wants of that large mass of American readers he knew by an infallible instinct how to cater. (in Harper, 169)

One of Fletcher's guiding principles was that *Harper's* should be written the average person with an average education. (in Harper, 405) Mott said this philosophy made *Harper's* "the great successful middle-class magazine" of its time. (II, 391) Allen called it the first "general national monthly magazine."

...To a family in a steeped town on the Erie Canal, or on a remote Ohio farm, the Magazine was a welcome messenger from the great world, bringing information and ideas and entertainment to be devoured eagerly. (28)

paid large sums for "the privilege of a few days' priority"—that is, advance sheets of books. Harper & Brothers also paid for advance sheets from British magazine publishers. (Harper, 114, 156)

At the turn of the 20th century, editor Henry Mills Alden described how *Harper's* had evolved in a different direction than more overtly intellectual magazines like the British *Blackwood's*.

... *Blackwood* would by choice appeal to a limited class of highly cultivated readers, proposing to meet special demands of that class, while *Harper* would be addressed to all readers of average intelligence, having for its purpose their entertainment and illumination, meeting in a general way the varied claims of their human intellect and sensibility, and in this accommodation following the lines of their aspiration. (Alden 1900, 950)

Since Fletcher Harper acted as editor-in-chief, it was the managing editor who ran the magazine's day-to-day editorial operations. The first managing editor was Henry J. Raymond, who worked at the New York *Courier and Enquirer* newspaper while handling his duties at *Harper's*. In 1851 he became the founding editor of *The New York Times*, and he ran both the *Times* and *Harper's* until 1856, when he left the magazine—still in his thirties. (Lapham, 59) Incidentally, Raymond did much of his editing work from Albany; he was a member of the New York State Assembly between 1851 and 1856, and helped draft the founding platform of the Republican Party in 1856. (Lapham, 59f) He had worked for Horace Greeley in the 1840s and Greeley once said of him, "A cleverer, readier, more generally efficient journalist I never saw." (in Lapham, 59f)

Over the years Raymond attracted several investors to the *Times*, one of whom was Fletcher Harper's son, Fletcher Jr., who purchased the shares of founder D. B. St. John. Owing to an "unpleasant complication between the partners," Harper later withdrew, and Raymond, Harper & Co. became Raymond, Wesley & Co. (Harper, 157)

Raymond's replacement at *Harper's* was Alfred H. Guernsey, who had risen within the company's ranks from compositor to editor. He was known as a gifted editorial craftsman, said to have the ability to turn a two-volume biography into a readable eight-page article. (Harper, 158) Guernsey led *Harper's* through the Civil War, a period of downturn at *Harper's*: the magazine lost large portions of its readership to secession, the draft, and to its sibling *Harper's Weekly*, which covered the war in detail. Wartime inflation eroded profitability as well. The brothers considered closing *Harper's*, and ended up increasing the subscription price to \$4.00. (Mott II, 393) But the magazine's fortunes revived after the war, helped by new serials from Dickens (*Our Mutual Friend*), Wilkie Collins (*Armandale*), Trollope, and Thomas Hardy. (Tebbel, 108)

When Henry Mills Alden became *Harper's* third editor in 1869 he was 33, and he died in office in 1919, almost 83. One of the most important and influential of all American magazine editors, he was as deeply respected by his employees as by his readers. One member of his staff called him a "sage among men" and wrote:

His kindness was as simple and frank as his pride, and pervaded every act of his daily life. I have never known and fear I shall never know, a being so genial, so beneficent. (in Mott II, 396)

One of Alden's strengths was an instinct for the ideal mixture of content—ultimately his taste helped define the popular general-interest magazine of the late 1800s. In fiction, essays, humor, and illustration he managed not only to "entertain and illuminate" but also to anticipate the direction his readers' interests would take. And he managed to run the magazine's editorial department "from an editorial sanctum so small that he could reach everything therein without moving from his chair," according to a contemporary. (in Tebbel, 109)

Both Fletcher Harper and Alden made illustration a high priority—in his memoirs J. Henry Harper said it was an essential component of the magazine. (89) Charles Parsons, head of the company's art department, engaged a number of highly-respected artists—including Edwin Abbey, George du Maurier, Winslow Homer, Howard Pyle, and Frederic Remington—to supply the magazine with graphics. *Harper's* liberal use of art is said to have influenced the profusion of illustration in late 19th-century magazines. (Cairns, Cambridge, 310)

The magazine once described its philosophy of graphics as belief that:

Education arises not alone from what a child or a man reads, but from what they see, and the lessons, though double, supplement one another. ("Making," 22)

Parsons also helped launch the careers of several artists. John White Alexander, later president of the National Academy of Design, said that his first education in art was sweeping out the Harper art room. (Shackleton, 50f) Alexander worked at Harper & Brothers for 10 years, then left to study in Europe.⁵

Alden believed that fiction, especially short stories, could often reflect life more accurately than nonfiction, saying, "Our story-writers, from Irving and Cooper to Mark Twain and his contemporaries, have best shown the atmosphere and conditions of our American life." This may be one reason why *Harper's* was more welcoming to American stories than to American novels. Among the American writers who had stories published in *Harper's* in its first 60 years were Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Rebecca Harding Davis (and her son Richard H. Davis, managing editor of *Harper's Weekly* from 1890 to 1984), Hamlin Garland, H. Rider Haggard, Joel Chandler Harris, Bret Harte, Lafcadio Hearn, Henry James, Sarah Orne Jewett, Jack London, Herman Melville, Twain, Edith Wharton, and Owen Wister. (Davis ; Exman, 93 ; Allen, 30) That this is a very small sampling underscores Mott's comment that *Harper's* was "an important factor in the development of the American short story." (II, 398) Harper & Brothers acknowledged this role proudly: in 1889, company literature asserted that the short story was "created in no small part by *Harper's*." ("Making," 10)

Through a longtime contributor, the magazine also had a significant effect on the direction of American fiction in the late 19th century. In 1885 former *Atlantic Monthly* editor William Dean Howells joined *Harper's* editorial staff and began a department of literary commentary called the "Editor's Study," which he conducted until 1894. In 1900 he moved to the "Editor's Easy Chair," Curtis's former column. In his battle against "the monstrous rag-baby of romanticism," Howells advocated the development of realistic fiction, a campaign that helped shift the attitudes of American readers and propel the careers of writers like Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and other realists and naturalists. (in Harper, 323) Howells's writing from *Harper's* was collected in an influential book called *Criticism and Fiction*. (Exman, 154)

Harper & Brothers had always promoted *Harper's* ability to keep readers up-to-date in all important topics. For example, in 1889 company promotion said:

As additional facts are discovered, either new books or new chapters must be written on former subjects. *Harper's Magazine* must then be abreast with modern thought, and keep the record of it. ("Making," 5)

Alden took that premise one step further: he believed that readers who were "abreast with modern thought" would be better able to improve society. His two guiding principles were that writing should be "vital" and avoid sensationalism. (Exman, 252). He also preferred what he called "the literature of power" over "the literature of information."⁶ By this he meant that writing could and should serve human progress toward a better world—as he defined it. On the magazine's 50th anniversary in 1900 he wrote:

...It seems to me that the change which has been going on during the last quarter of a century, more and more displacing the literature of information by the literature of power, is still to go on, showing more remarkable results than have yet been obtained, and offering to the pictorial art fresh fields of conquest. Always, of course, the drama of the present—the human conflicts

⁵ He and another man named J. W. Alexander, an executive at Equitable Life Insurance, sometimes received each other's mail by accident. The artist Alexander met and fell in love with the executive Alexander's daughter. When they were married both her husband and father were J. W. Alexander. (Harper, 209)

⁶ He credited the phrase to de Quincy. (Alden 1900, 959)

for every sort of earthly kingdom necessary to consummate Christendom—takes the foremost place, and there is in no other connection so great a prompting of the highest literary genius to instant service. (Alden 1900, 959)

If Alden were writing today he might call it the “literature of empowerment.” It’s clear that he was producing a journal with a much more narrow audience than the “plain people” Fletcher Harper had targeted. At the turn of the 20th century, Alden was editing a magazine for the educated ruling class.

One of his successors said that under Alden *Harper's* voice,

...was likely to be, unconsciously, the tone of an aristocrat reminding other aristocrats of the regrettable conditions among the unfortunate if picturesque members of the lower orders, people for whose unhappy state they had a measure of responsibility, but who were quite foreign to them. (Allen, 32)

Harper's perspective was also a reflection of its New York roots, its home in the country's capital of commerce and fashion. Accumulation of wealth and social prestige were frequent themes in the magazine's content during the period Twain and Charles Dudley Warner named *The Gilded Age* in their 1873 novel. Warner himself joined *Harper's* in 1884, first as editor of the “Editor's Drawer” department and then as Howells's replacement in the “Editor's Study.” (Mott II, 399)

Harper's into the 20th Century

By 1900 the magazine had dropped below its first high-water mark in circulation. Ayer's *American Newspaper Annual* listed *Harper's* circulation at 175,000 in 1890, 150,000 in 1900 and 125,000 in 1910—not necessarily a reflection of diminished influence, but of business conditions, which included dramatically increased competition from the “10-cent magazines” (*Harper's* cover price was 35 cents at the time) and a period of financial turmoil at Harper & Brothers. Advertising had become an important factor in the magazine's performance—by 1890 40 pages of outside advertising were running per month—and was subject to the same competitive forces as circulation. In 1917 *Harper's* claimed to run more “high-class advertising than any other high-priced magazine in the world,” but it was a qualified statement. (Shackleton, 59)

Alden's long term ended with his death in 1919, and he was succeeded his assistant, Thomas Bucklin Wells, a frank, deep-voiced, and commanding figure who in 12 years at the helm guided *Harper's* through a challenging transition—under his direction the magazine embraced the changing tastes and interests of the middle class, losing some of its literary gentility for a more public-spirited focus. (Payne, 82 ; Exman, 252f) A major redesign coincided with the magazine's 75th birthday in 1925. This included a reworking of the cover and elimination of almost all interior illustration. New editorial emphasis was placed on issues that appealed to readers whom Allen later described as,

...thoughtful and discriminating people, of whatever income bracket, who appreciated fine quality, felt a deep sense of responsibility in the general national well-being, and possessed genuine intellectual curiosity. (32)

Described as “a journalist fluent in arithmetic,” Wells had a stake in *Harper's* performance: in addition to his editorial duties he had also obtained a significant ownership interest in Harper & Brothers, and was instrumental in reorganizing the company after prolonged underperformance. (Lapham, 65 ; Mott II, 403) The financial reports must have underscored the need for change: *Harper's* circulation had declined to 108,000 in 1915 and 77,000 in 1921. (Lapham, 65) Fortunately, the renovations of 1925 had a quick, positive effect. By 1929 circulation had risen to 125,000, its highest level in almost 20 years, and the cover price had increased to 40 cents. (Lapham, 65)

It could be said that Wells managed the magazine into a third incarnation. In its first decades *Harper's* had started life as a popular magazine enjoyed broadly within the American middle class. Under Alden it evolved into the voice of a more narrow and elite segment of society. In its third phase, under Wells, *Harper's* targeted a readership more active in tackling social challenges. In 1950 Allen wrote,

Fletcher Harper was producing a popular family magazine, aimed at a pretty large common denominator of American readership. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, Henry Mills Alden was producing a select magazine for respectable and well-to-do gentlefolk of nice tastes. After the change which took place in 1925, Thomas B. Wells was pointing the Magazine less toward well-to-do gentle folk than toward readers who combined brains and taste with a concern over public affairs. (32)

Wells retired to Paris in 1931 at the age of 56. Assistant editor Lee Foster Hartman, who had joined the Harper & Brothers literary department in 1904, took his place, inheriting the challenge of steering *Harper's* through the Depression. (Exman, 199, 254)

Exman said that Hartman had a threefold gift for editorial management:

He sought out experts who could write articles of general interest out of their specialties ; he made the *Magazine* a forum for trusted authors ; he worked closely with authors until potentially significant articles could be brought up to his exacting standards. (254)

In 1935 Hartman hired E.B. White to write a column White called "One Man's Meat," and at roughly the same time commissioned Bernard A. DeVoto to write the "Editor's Easy Chair," Curtis and Howells's old column. DeVoto was a prolific author and a strong supporter of conservation and of human rights. (Payne, 133) He once explained his refusal to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee by saying, "I like a country where it's nobody's damned business what magazine anybody reads, what he thinks, whom he has cocktails with. I like a country where we do not have to stuff the chimney against listening ears." (Lapham, 66)

The Depression took a toll on *Harper's* financial performance: advertising declined and circulation dropped from 121,000 in 1931 to 102,000 in 1939. (Payne, 132) Staff salaries were cut by 10 percent across the board at Harper & Brothers. (Payne, 98) But there was no decline in editorial quality. The magazine's contributors in the 1930s included Charles Beard, Elmer Davis, G. K. Chesterton, William Faulkner, John Gunther, Reinhold Niebuhr, Marjorie Rawlings, and John Steinbeck. (Payne, 133f)

When Hartman died in 1941, Allen was promoted from associate editor to editor-in-chief. Allen's career bridged a period of dramatic change in publishing: born in Victorian Boston in 1890, and educated at Groton and Harvard, he traced his family roots to some of the same *Mayflower* Puritans as Alden. (Payne, 4fn) It fell to this gentleman of the old order to manage *Harper's* into the modern era. He became editor on the eve of America's entry into the Second World War, and was at the helm as the Cold War unfolded, television emerged as a mass medium, and the magazine turned 100.

Before joining *Harper's* in 1923 Allen had worked on the *Atlantic Monthly* under Ellery Sedgwick—he called himself Sedgwick's disciple—and had worked during World War I with the Council of National Defense, coordinating the efforts of George Creel's Committee on Public Information with its counterparts at the individual states. (Payne, 79, 44f, 158) With a lifelong interest in his times, Allen wrote several popular histories, including *Born Yesterday*, which covered the 1920s, *Since Yesterday*, a record of the 1930s, and *The Big Change*, which reviewed American social trends between 1900 and 1950.

In a thoughtful look at where *Harper's* stood after a century of publication, Allen acknowledged the difficulty of building a large audience at a time when the trends in media were pointing toward lighter entertainment:

It may be that no magazine which honestly tries to head for the goals that we have been defining can ever attract readers in vast numbers. It may be that even in Utopia the great majority of men and women will rather watch a television show than enjoy brilliant writing, however readable, or follow the tough logic of an article on "The Mirage of Pensions" or "Science, Secrecy, Security." But it is helpful nevertheless, we believe, if this tough logic comes home to what may be called the leaven of democracy—to those well-informed, clear-headed, thoughtful, public-spirited, and civilized men and women who, serving some as recognized leaders and others, however obscure, as a sort of balance-of-power element in the struggles between organized groups, are ready to think for themselves and act as that thinking directs them. And we believe that whoever serves those people serves America. This is the job we try to do at *Harper's*. (36)

Allen had five guiding principles for *Harper's*. He said that "first, of course, the magazine must be interesting," and that it should "provide news, in the widest sense... provide interpretation and discussion of the important issues before the public... provide a platform for original and inventive thinkers... [and] provide a vehicle for the artist in literature." (34ff)

The war was good for readership—issues often sold out on the newsstands—but paper rationing restrained circulation growth and forced a reduction in issue pages from 112 to 96. (Payne, 180f) Advertising slumped in 1942 but quickly recovered, reaching an all-time high in 1943 and continuing to rise in 1944 and 1945. *Harper's* had 145,000 circulation when it celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1950, and the cover price had increased again to 50 cents. (Lapham, 67) One year later *Harper's* had 159,000 circulation, of which single copy sales were about 15 percent. (Payne, 237)

Between the end of the war and 1953, the year Allen resigned, *Harper's* published a remarkable run of leading fiction writers, including Nelson Algren, Kay Boyle, Truman Capote, John Cheever, Roald Dahl, Mary McCarthy, Arthur Miller, Katherine Anne Porter, V. S. Prichett, J. D. Salinger, and Wallace Stegner. (Payne, 232)

Harper's great historical rival was the *Atlantic Monthly*, but the two magazines were friendlier than the public may have realized. Allen and *Atlantic* editor Edward Weeks were cordial correspondents, and Allen wrote two articles for the *Atlantic* while working at *Harper's*. (Payne, 237f) In 1951 the two magazines merged their advertising sales departments in a joint venture called Harper-Atlantic Sales. Salespeople represented both magazines to prospective advertisers, which allowed each magazine to sell a little harder against their mutual competitors: popular magazines with much larger circulations. (Payne, 238)

Associate editor John Fischer replaced Allen in 1953. Fischer had grown up on ranches in Texas and Oklahoma, and had worked at both the Agriculture Department and the intelligence services. Lewis Lapham, who served two terms as *Harper's* editor beginning in the 1970s, said that Fischer preferred "the man who could accomplish a number of different tasks with a high degree of competence to the virtuoso who could perform only one trick with exceptional brilliance." (67) Fischer hired writers like Arnold Toynbee, Barbara Tuchman, and James Baldwin, and his annual "Christmas List" praised people who had made Americans "a little more comfortable, civilized, or light-hearted." (in Lapham, 67)

In 1962 Harper & Brothers merged with Row, Peterson & Co. to become Harper & Row, and in 1965 *Harper's* was sold to the Cowles Media Co., ending 115 years of continuous ownership. The magazine was managed by John J. Cowles Jr., the company's principal stockholder, and post-acquisition optimism inspired him to boost the circulation over 400,000 (by folding in the subscription list of a discontinued magazine

called the *Reporter*). At the same time the cover price rose to 75 cents, and the company launched an aggressive promotional campaign. (Lapham, 68)

There was reason to be optimistic: the contents were vibrant. Fischer stayed on as a columnist but retired as editor-in-chief in 1967, and recommended as his replacement W. W. "Willie" Morris, "who transformed a stodgy magazine into an exhilarating one," according to the *Columbia Journalism Review*. (Sherman) Like Alden a century earlier, Morris was in his early 30s when he took the job, and was something of a literary prodigy, having published an engaging autobiography, *North Toward Home*, shortly before being named editor-in-chief. Morris commissioned a roster full of the day's most active journalists and acclaimed authors, including Marshall Frady, David Halberstam, Seymour Hersh, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Norman Mailer, William Styron, and Gay Talese.

Halberstam described how Morris handled writers:

He would try to find out what they wanted to cover, give them their head, and trust that writers directed by both their heart and their intellect would do their best work. He was almost always right. (xix)

Unfortunately, voices of challenge and dissent didn't play well everywhere in the late 1960s. Lapham wrote:

Morris enlisted a company of writers who regarded the society's principal institutions (schools as well as government) as their natural enemies, which was a brave and noble pose and maybe even true, but not one that sold a lot of copies in Detroit. The accounting at the end of 1970 showed an annual loss of what was then the impressive sum of \$700,000, the paid circulation well below 300,000. (69)

And, noting that financial hardship reflected the difficult battle that general interest magazines were facing, Halberstam said:

The same pressures that were destroying *Collier's*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, and *Look*, and eventually squeezed even *Esquire*, soon got to us. We had thought we were immune to those pressures because of benign ownership in Minneapolis, the fact that our editorial budget was so small—for we made about half of what our colleagues at the *Saturday Evening Post* had been making—and, we also thought, because the magazine was so good, but we were soon to be disillusioned. (xix)

Cowles retrenched, and in 1971 Morris was forced out, saying in his resignation letter, "It all boiled down to the money men and the literary men, and, as always, the money men won." But it was the literary men who made the news. Four staff writers resigned in support of Morris, and many of the writers that Morris had hired, including Bill Moyers and Tom Wicker, pledged to boycott the magazine for as long as Cowles owned it. (Sherman)

Three editors followed Morris in quick succession: Robert Schnayerson, Lewis H. Lapham, who began his first of two terms as editor in 1975, and Michael Kinsley, who replaced Lapham in 1981. The Cowles company retained ownership until 1980 but it was an unhappy stewardship: *Harper's* continued to lose money, at rates approaching \$2 million a year. (Lapham, 69)

By 1980 Cowles had decided there was no light at the end of the tunnel and in June announced that the magazine would be discontinued. An 11th-hour rescue was engineered by John R. MacArthur, grandson of the founders of the MacArthur Foundation. The MacArthur Foundation and the Atlantic Richfield Foundation purchased *Harper's* from Cowles, and two years later MacArthur organized the nonprofit Harper's Magazine Foundation and took over as publisher. (Lapham, 69)

In 1983 Lapham was hired back for a second term as editor-in-chief. It was a time, he wrote, when

...the marvels of postmodern communication were dividing the whole spectrum of the country's political, literary, scientific, and business enterprise into remote images receding from one another literally at the speed of light. To what the magazine's first editors had seen as the "multiplied and ephemeral pages" of a periodical press "intermingled with much that is of merely local and transient interest," the newer forms of media had added not only cable channels, CD-ROM, and the beginnings of the Internet but also little kingdoms of virtual reality posted on blimps and office buildings. How then to address what the brothers Harper had perceived as the "commonwealth of shared meaning?" (71)

The June, 2000 issue, in which Lapham raised this question, and in which Harper's celebrated its 150th anniversary, was the magazine's 1,801st, but the answer to the question may have been written back in the first issue. In its prospectus, *Harper's* promised its readers literature of "permanent value and commanding interest," and the first issue spelled out the publishers' goals:

They will seek to combine entertainment with instruction, and to enforce, through channels which attract rather than repel attention and favor, the best, the most important, lessons of morality and of practical life. They will spare neither labor nor expense in any department of work, freely lavishing both upon the editorial aid, the pictorial embellishments, the typography, and the general literary resources by which they hope to give the Magazine a popular circulation unequalled by that of any similar periodical ever published in the world.

The Magazine is not intended exclusively for any class of readers or any kind of reading, and they intend to publish it at so low a rate as to give it a value much beyond its price, so that it shall make its way into the hands of the family circle of every intelligent citizen of the United States. (in "Making," 26)

In an age in which unfulfilled promises and hyperbole were the basis of practically every prospectus, the Harpers' predictions proved remarkably accurate.

Whether a print magazine that has remained steadfast to these founding principles can remain in business indefinitely—let alone remain vital and relevant—in a world of screens and digits is unclear. *Harper's* is sui generis and, notably, no longer a for-profit business. But the magazine did indeed work its way into the "family circle of every intelligent citizen"—by contributing so much to American literature in its 150 years of publication. It would be very hard to find another publication that has brought more good reading to the hands of more Americans than *Harper's*, providing, in Frederick Lewis Allen's words, "the excitingly creative, the lustily energetic, the freshly amusing, the newly beautiful, the illuminating, the profound." (Payne, 223)

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