

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S PERIODICALS: LATE 18TH CENTURY TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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Historical women's periodicals provide an important resource to scholars interested in the lives of women, the role of women in society and, in particular, the development of the public lives of women as the push for women's rights--woman suffrage, fair pay, better working conditions, for example--grew in the United States and England. In their work on women's periodicals dealing with social and political issues, Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck highlight the difficulty in locating complete holdings for many of the titles they might have liked to include ¹. There are, and continue to be, many good candidates for preservation and digitization among women's historical periodicals. This Web site provides access to the full text of some of the most significant and least-widely held women's periodicals produced from the middle of the nineteenth century through the 1920s.

Some of these titles were conceived and published by men, for women; others, conceived and published by male editors with strong input from female assistant editors or managers; others were conceived and published by women, for women. The strongest suffrage and anti-suffrage writing was done by women for women's periodicals. Thus a variety of viewpoints, based both on beliefs about women's proper sphere, and on the goals of the editor, are here presented for study.

It may be helpful to consider these periodicals in the context of the history of magazine publishing, the history of women's magazines, and the role of women through the period.

EARLY MAGAZINE PUBLISHING

The word "magazine" was not coined until 1731 ², although magazines were published in Europe, Great Britain, and the American Colonies earlier than this. The first magazines to be published in the Colonies came out in 1741 ³. Two of these were published in Philadelphia. One was created by Benjamin Franklin, running for six issues before folding. Editors faced difficulties in developing quality content, in printing, and in distributing these early titles. Most early American periodicals counted their subscribers in the hundreds ⁴, and all were financially supported solely by subscriptions. It was common practice to create whole issues by pasting up clippings (articles, poetry, stories) from English and European magazines, which were considered superior to their American cousins. The serialized novel was also an important component of many magazines. Novels by such British writers as Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott were published in this manner, as were those of American novelist James Fenimore Cooper.

Improvements in printing technology and the simultaneous rise of cities in the United States in the early 1800s permitted faster, better printing and mass distribution. John Tebbel estimates that about 600 American magazines were published in 1850, compared to fewer than a hundred in 1825: in that 25 year period, four to five thousand were published ⁵. From this time onward, magazine publishing gained momentum, with new titles appearing annually (and many

disappearing just as quickly). The growth of advertising as a method for financing periodicals, combined with a growing middle class possessing the time and money for leisure reading, also fueled this increase in publication throughout Europe and the United States.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Brian Braithwaite cites the *Ladies Mercury*, begun in London in 1693, as "the first-ever women's magazine⁶." *The Lady's Magazine* (1792) was the first to be published in the United States⁷. Almanacs, diaries, and gift books, all issued as annuals, dominated the women's periodical press in the eighteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth. These contained calendars, facts, and, increasingly in the nineteenth century, collections of poetry and prose of varying quality. Fashion was the number one topic of women's magazines and also the inspiration for much scolding and teasing in general magazines of the time. The extravagances of ladies was a frequent topic. Frank Luther Mott cites an anonymous writer, signing himself "The Competitor," as saying that extravagance "furnishes matter inexhaustible for essayists in Gazettes⁸." According to Endres and Lueck⁹, fashion magazines were among the most widely subscribed women's periodicals following the American Civil War.

Much of the literature published for women through the 1800s was prescriptive in nature. According to Mott, "women were being advised how to be perfect ladies so continually that at least some of them must have grown weary of it¹⁰." One such serial was *The Pharos*, published in London in 1786 and 1787. Subtitled *A Collection of Periodical Essays*, by the anonymous "Author of Constance," it promises in its first issue "to avoid every danger it imitates," and adds "to the many amusing and instructive books this age has furnished." Further, "Whatever is amusing or instructive, gay or serious, elegant or simple, if it be innocent, shall find a place in my papers." The tone throughout is uplifting. Mary Beth Norton describes these advice books as "expressions of social norms formulated largely by men, outlining ideal types of female behavior¹¹." She suggests that this literature may be merely an attempt to cope with the fact that women's roles were changing, and were in question¹². Certainly, there are many examples of women from the period who did not conform to these norms. This is, after all, the century that "saw the founding of the women's rights movement, the burgeoning of higher education for women, and the entry of women into professional occupations like teaching and librarianship. Furthermore, the experience of females from racial and ethnic minorities bore little or no relationship to the established norms¹³."

Sarah Josepha Hale's *Ladies' Magazine* was begun early in this period, in 1828. This periodical has been called "the first really successful women's magazine¹⁴." It included entertainment, but also spoke in favor of advanced education for women. Hale strongly believed in the education for women, and used her magazine to further this cause. She treated women as intelligent individuals. She took a positive approach towards meeting the needs of women in society, receiving a certain amount of scorn from male editors and writers in the process. The *Ladies' Magazine* was a portent of women's periodicals to come. Hale took the title of literary editor of *Godey's Lady's Book* after it merged with *Ladies' Magazine*, but Tebbel credits her with running the combined publication¹⁵.

Mary Ellen Zuckerman notes that pre-Civil War women's journals "were read primarily by ladies of leisure ¹⁶." Typical of magazines of their period, these magazines survived on their subscription rates, contained no advertising, and were limited by the same printing and distribution problems as any other periodical. But these magazines, published explicitly for women, "played an important role in developing an audience for women's journals, inculcating the reading habit in women as well as offering opportunities for female writings and editors ¹⁷."

This "reading habit" had far reaching impact. When mass production and distribution arrived in the middle of the 1800s, coincidental with the rise of a large middle class, women's reading habits and money spending made them a potentially lucrative market for publishers. "Women readers were buying gift books such as Sarah Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* or *The Ladies Wreath*, at the rate of sixty new titles a year. By the 1850s, *Harper's Magazine* estimated that four-fifths of the reading public were women--to whom culture had been relegated, along with religion, morality, child care, and other nonprofit activities. Vast profits were available, however, to those who could capitalize on the female market . . . ¹⁸." With women's assigned role as the keepers of the culture, new women's magazines supported American literature and art as well as providing helpful household hints.

Not all publishers were pleased with the increasing numbers of magazines for women. General magazines were facing stiff competition from these new titles. The newspaper publisher, Charles A. Dana, questioned the statements these magazines "constantly put forth of being designed for ladies, and of representing in some way the women of the country," concluding, "Heaven protect us from such literature ¹⁹!" But the magazines continued to sell, and women continued to read them.

The increase in magazine publishing generally in this period allowed the emergence of the writer as a professional. It was now possible to support oneself on magazine writing, and women writers were among those who availed themselves of the opportunity. Nancy Woloch, in *Women and the American Experience*, notes that women writers were in a position to claim (and frequently did claim) that they were not invading men's sphere. "While denying that they had invaded the male preserve of commercial enterprise, however, women authors succeeded in popularizing feminine values, celebrating domestic influence, and feminizing the literary marketplace. They were also able to earn an income without appearing to leave the home, to adhere to the limits of women's sphere while capitalizing on it ²⁰."

As the output of the periodical presses increased from the middle 1800s on, many specialized magazines for women developed. Some spoke to traditional female interests. Magazines on homemaking (cooking, laundry, child-rearing) and family life in general flourished. *Woman*, published in New York from 1887 to 1888, focused on home economics. Regional publications with this home-making focus were common in this period. *Southern Woman's Magazine* (1904-1905), published in Atlanta, is one example. As a general women's magazine, it included short stories, poetry, articles, and short features, as well as the usual domestic topics ("Some Hints about Bedrooms," on the proper airing of beds, was one such piece). It frequently included a column titled "Wits and Seers on the Subject of Woman," with generally negative quotations about women, and included features and puzzles for children. Contemporary improvements in

engraving techniques allowed *Southern Woman's Magazine*, and many others, to include detailed fashion information, with many plates and full descriptions of the styles represented.

Another American regional woman's publication was *Everyday Housekeeping*, which began as *The New England Kitchen Magazine* in 1894. In this case, the magazine began as a regional cooking magazine, but expanded its scope both regionally and topically over a period of years to appeal to a broader audience. It eventually included a column on the achievements of women and women's clubs amongst its recipes, menus, and household tips.

Religion, as one of the areas of acceptable womanly attention, was represented in periodicals of this period. The *Woman's Missionary Advocate* (1880-1910) was one such title. Through its pages, the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church reported on the progress of Christian missionary work in China, South America, and Indian Territory, and the work of women missionaries. The editors' decision to start a magazine was defended in the first issue by reference to the New Testament: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise . . ."

Familyculture, published from March 1896 to February 1897, drew on traditional female domestic goals while expressing many newer ideas about women and family life. The title is an unusual one. "Familyculture" was likened to horticulture--the science of growing healthy families. Its editors advocated for the formation of strong families through careful choice of marriage partner, purposeful courtship, and education about sexuality. They wrote in favor of chastity outside of marriage, but against treating sexuality as something shameful. Showing the growth of women's education and role in society, *Familyculture* stated firmly: "Familyculture stands for the republican home with two heads instead of one. Familyculture stands for absolute equality between man and woman in the marriage relation."

Bibliothek der Frauenfrage, published from 1888 to 1893 in Germany and running to a number of editions, opened with the poignant question, "Was wird aus unsern Töchtern?" ("What about our daughters?") The essay noted that there are a million more women than men in Germany, and that preparing daughters to be wives only was not realistic. How would these women support themselves? *Bibliothek der Frauenfrage* defended in strong terms the right of women to work and, in particular, the right of women to be prepared for professional work. Like Sarah Josepha Hale in the United States, Frau J. Kettler (editor and chief author) took a practical approach to the real problems in the lives of her nation's women. This magazine reflected the concerns of the women's movement in Germany as described by James C. Albisetti: "From . . . the mid-1860s until 1914, a major focus of the organized women's movement in Germany was the improvement of the condition of unmarried daughters of the middle classes by obtaining employment opportunities for them [21](#)."

Many other new women's periodicals were established. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, published by Cyrus Curtis, is an important example. Originally titled the *Ladies' Journal* (1883), with an engraving titled "The Home" appearing in the middle of the masthead, the magazine was renamed in a bow to popular usage. "Entrepreneurial publishers created and sold magazines of low price in large numbers, subsidized by advertising dollars. Started as money-makers, these journals eventually evolved into useful guides for homemakers, serving their readers with both

instructions and entertainment . . .²² " The middle-class woman, with her primary responsibility for the home, was glad to purchase periodicals that gave practical advice on all aspects of homemaking.

Braithwaite describes the turn of the century in Great Britain as "an encouraging and stimulating time for magazine publishers. Women were emerging as a political and social force--they were getting jobs, traveling, motoring, cycling, joining clubs for their hobbies and becoming avid readers of magazines. . .²³." By the start of World War I, he estimates that there were about fifty magazines for women on the British market.

A range of British and American pro-suffrage magazines dealt with woman suffrage and other women's rights issues; likewise, anti-suffrage magazines on both sides of the Atlantic explicated their opposition to woman suffrage and suggested their own positive views on the appropriate contributions of women to the life of their respective countries. Most of the best suffrage writing and publishing was done by women.

In London, the *Women's Suffrage Journal* raised suffrage and women's rights issues from 1870 to 1890. It provided near-transcripts of debate in the English Parliament on any and all matters that affected the status and lives of women. It tracked the votes of individual members of Parliament, regularly publishing a record of each member's vote on women's rights issues. The journal also published news accounts documenting specific cases where existing laws rendered women vulnerable, with such titles as "The Shocking Treatment of a Wife" and "Baby Farming."

The Freewoman, another British publication, argued a case for feminism and equal treatment of women from 1911 to 1912. *The Freewoman* differed from many suffrage and feminist magazines of the time in that it presented both the case for women's rights and direct criticism of the more radical suffrage advocates. One writer declares that Mr. Asquith and Miss Pankhurst "bore me²⁴." The magazine had a distinctly spiritual tone: "Our interest is in the Freewoman herself, her psychology, philosophy, morality, and achievements, and only in a secondary degree with her politics and economics. It will be our business to make clear that woman's freedom rests upon spiritual considerations . . ." This emphasis on spirituality is not to be confused with prescriptive or religious emphases of earlier publications. Rather, *The Freewoman* argued that inward reform, resulting in individual women claiming an inner, spiritual freedom, was the only way for women to move into outer freedom from oppression.

In the United States, *The New Voter*, a publication of the Equal Suffrage League of Baltimore edited by Anne M. Wagner, kept subscribers informed of local, national, and international suffrage work, beginning in 1910. The alliance of this magazine with working women was brought out clearly in an article calling on all women to do their Christmas shopping before 5 p.m. and complete it no later than December 15, so as to give the women who staffed the shops an easier holiday season.

The Anti-Suffragist, published by the Albany Branch of the New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (1908-1912), presented the views of anti-suffrage women. It was edited by Mrs. William Winslow Crannell, a member of the Executive Committee of the Association. Here, as in other publications opposing woman suffrage, writers went beyond

raising anti-suffrage arguments. They also carefully delineated what they saw as a positive role for women in contemporary society. Many writers were proponents of domestic feminism. Domestic feminists treated the home as women's domain, to be completely under the woman's management, and saw complete freedom for women within the household. Norton describes this viewpoint as follows: "although women were confined to the home, it was nonetheless *theirs* (her italics). Women's presumed expertise in homemaking and child rearing made the domestic sphere wholly feminine, a realm upon which men were not supposed to intrude . . . As a result, women gained more control over their own lives and those of their children . . . ²⁵."

A periodical with many similarities to *The Anti-Suffragist* is *The Reply*. Published from 1913 to 1915, with the subtitle, "An Anti-Suffrage Magazine," it was edited by Helen S. Harman-Brown. She was the secretary of the New Canaan Branch of the Connecticut Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. *The Reply* was founded in response to the militant wing of the woman suffrage movement, and missed no opportunity to insist that militancy was merely the logical result of a woman's taking the pro-suffrage position.

Industrialization and urbanization were the major trends affecting American women between the Civil War and World War I. The economy was growing. "During the half-century following the [American Civil] war, the increased clip of industrialization shifted ever larger portions of work from farm and household to factory and office, and in the process, technology opened new options . . . By 1920, a majority of American women lived within range of paying jobs ²⁶." The increased numbers of working women led to publications such as *Far and Near* (1890-1894), which was published by the Association of Working Girls' Societies of New York Auxiliary Society and the National League of Women Workers. *Woman's Welfare* (1903-1905), a magazine published by a group of woman employees of the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio, focused on workplace betterment and betterment of working women. It was particularly concerned with the impact of working conditions on women's health: ". . . a woman is not a machine, and to her, surroundings make all the difference in the world." *Woman's Welfare* was targeted not only to women, but to the "Proprietor, Pedagogue, Preacher, Press, Politician," with the hope that those with the power to improve the workplace for women would take action.

The growing professionalism of women was reflected in periodicals such as *Business Woman's Magazine* (1914-1915), providing business and financial advice for women in a range of professions. The premier issue suggested, "The business woman has usurped in large measure, we are told, the place of the business man. Yet, while the market is flooded with publications for the man of affairs we find none which espouses the cause of the wage-earning woman." *Business Woman's Magazine* provided information about money management, careers for women, and how to start a business.

At the same time, women were becoming more and more visible in public life: "women's culture began to assume a public shape ²⁷." Benevolent associations, many of which originated in the first half of the century, blossomed into women's clubs and associations working for public betterment.

The General Federation of Women's Clubs briefly published *Women's Cycle*, which was absorbed into *The Home-Maker* in 1890. The journalist Jane Cunningham Croly edited the *The Home-Maker* from that point. *The Women's International Quarterly* (1912-1920) was issued by the World's Young Women's Christian Association in London and addressed women's lives in general, and feminism in particular. Other women's club publications, such as *Women and the City's Work* published from 1915 to 1923 in New York City, campaigned for improved public education, purer food, safer streets, and civic education. When the women's vote arrived in the United States in 1920, it brought with it the need to educate women on how to most effectively use their franchise. This role was adopted by the American women's club periodicals of the time.

The so-called "new woman" arrived in this period, and no magazine in this collection better presents this new woman than *Judy*. It had a definite attitude about women being true to themselves and their abilities. The initial issue specifically distinguishes *Judy* from "so-called 'women's magazines'--in which women are told what they ought to think." The editors continue, "But what are women really thinking? Maybe you think they don't think. Wrong." The first story in the first issue has a young woman character who is unable to force herself to behave in traditional female ways and ends up engaging the interest of the intelligent young male narrator as a result.

WOMEN AS EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS

By the early 1900s, for the first time, large numbers of women's magazines were being created and published by women themselves. While women had long contributed to the women's periodicals edited and published by men, some women wanted more direct outlets for communication and discussion. Susan B. Anthony believed that, "just as long as newspapers and magazines are controlled by men, every woman upon them must write articles which are reflections of men's ideas. As long as that continues, women's ideas and deepest convictions will never go before the public ²⁸."

Many of the periodicals on this Web site were, in fact, founded, edited and published by women. The monumental nature of this task should not be underestimated. Women of the late 19th century were not in a position to easily raise money for business ventures, and were rarely educated or experienced in the conduct of business. In order to get a new magazine off the ground, a woman (or, more likely, a group of women) would need to obtain capital, material, and access to a distribution system. (The advent of special, low postage rates for periodicals in the early 1900s was helpful to those publishers struggling to break even.) Many periodicals published by men failed. It should be no surprise that woman-published magazines frequently had short lives as well. Nonetheless, these publications allow a unique opportunity to hear the stories of women's lives, their concerns and achievements, in their own voices. While we know something about some of these women, the myriad of women editors and women writers from this period remain largely unresearched. One hope in making these publications available is that more information about these women may be explored, analyzed and published.

EndNotes

¹Endres, Kathleen L. and Therese L. Lueck, editors. *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. (*Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers*), p. viii.

²Braithwaite, Brian. *Women's Magazines: The First 300 Years*. London: P. Owen, 1995, p. 10.

³Tebbel, John. *The American Magazine: A Compact History*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1969, p. 7.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶Braithwaite, *op. cit.*

⁷Mott, Frank Luther. *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1850 (v. 1)*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 65.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹Endres and Lueck, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

¹⁰Mott, *op. cit.*

¹¹Norton, Mary Beth. "The Paradox of 'Women's Sphere.'" In Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America: A History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979, p. 141.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁴Tebbel, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁶Zuckerman, Mary Ellen. *Sources on the History of Women's Magazines, 1792-1960: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. (*Bibliographies and Indexes in Women's Studies*, no. 12), p. x.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁸Woloch, Nancy. *Women and the American Experience*. New York: A. Knopf, 1984, p. 131-132.

¹⁹Tebbel, *op. cit.*, p. 50; this was published in the *Harbinger* on August 8, 1846.

²⁰Woloch, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²¹Albisetti, James C. "Women and the Professions in Imperial Germany." In Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes, editors. *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social and Literary History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 94.

²²Zuckerman, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

²³Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

²⁴Miss Pankhurst was a militant suffrage activist, and Herbert Asquith, prime minister during this time.

²⁵Norton, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

²⁶Woloch, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

²⁷Woloch, *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁸ Endres, Kathleen L. and Therese L. Lueck, editors. *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. (*Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers*), p. xii.