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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S MAGAZINES

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Mississippi

by

ELAINE R. ABADIE

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## ABSTRACT

In an effort to illuminate a neglected field of study, this thesis will examine children's magazines in the United States and the forces shaping them. Children's magazines reflect the country's history and attitudes about youth and yet limited research about these important periodicals exists. This look at the development and publication of children's magazines from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries explores selected periodicals from the printing press to the World Wide Web. Significant aspects of research to be assessed are: (1) the status and role of children's magazines (2) changes in publishing and marketing from early times to present, and (3) the future of children's magazines. These periodicals are an important part of the written record of American civilization and an invaluable resource about the tastes, manners, habits, interests, and achievements of United States history. A major change in purpose occurred in the mid-nineteenth century when the tone lightened from "dreary moralizers" and religious conversion was changed to social conversion. "The child was still saved—but for this world not the next." The editorial objective of children's periodicals expanded from educating to include entertaining. Although children's magazine methods of educating and entertaining have changed to accommodate seismic shifts from the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Revolution these two missions have not. Children's magazines have existed in the United States since 1789 when George Washington became the first president and children were considered little adults, and research indicates these periodicals will continue to survive and thrive even with the fate of print in the hands of digital natives.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Dreary Moralizers.....	1
II. Print Playground.....	18
III. Epic Advances .....	40
IV. Digital Natives .....	55
ENDNOTES .....	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	76
VITA.....	80

## I. CHAPTER ONE: Dreary Moralizers

Children's magazines have existed in the United States for 222 years. The first periodical for children was published the year George Washington became the new nation's first president and over the next two centuries these publications were shaped by and recorded such happenings as geographic expansion, the Civil War, transportation and technological advancements including the invention of railroads, automobiles, radios, televisions, computers, and the Internet. Children's magazines are an important part of the written record of American civilization from the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Revolution and an invaluable resource about society's tastes, manners, habits, interests, and achievements.

The constantly evolving territory of children's magazine publishing in 2011 is almost as uncharted as that of the 1780s. The field of American children's periodicals has disappointingly little scholarship available.<sup>1</sup> Although serious analysis of children's literature began in the 1960s the investigation of magazines has attracted limited interest from researchers. "The study of the children's periodical in America, it must be concluded, is a neglected area within the relatively neglected field of children's literature, and although there may be differences in opinion about what is most worthy of study, few would deny that a wealth of opportunities for study exists," reported R. Gordon Kelly in *Children's Periodicals of the United States: Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers*.<sup>2</sup>

Two centuries of experience has not provided the world of children's periodical

publishing with any maps or easy to follow guides. As the planet turns and changes so do its inhabitants' interests, and children's tastes are even more difficult to predict than those of adults. As *Sports Illustrated Kids* marketing director Susan Alexander explained, "Probably more than with any other group of consumers, we have to do more research with kids for the simple reason that we are not kids and can't presume that we're totally on target all the time."<sup>3</sup> Children's magazines encounter the same problems as those for adults plus additional special obstacles.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In an effort to illuminate this neglected field of study, the purpose of this thesis is to examine magazines for children ages two to 12 in the United States from the eighteenth century to the present and the forces shaping them. Significant aspects of research to be assessed are: (1) the status and role of children's magazines (2) changes in publishing and marketing from early times to present, and (3) the future of children's magazines. This look at the development and publication of children's consumer magazines in the United States will explore selected periodicals, trends, and social changes shaping the world of periodicals for youth from the printing press to the World Wide Web. The examination will consider the ways children's magazines have changed and the reasons. What has happened and why?

### **Methodology**

A literature review identified articles, books, and blogs including important works by such noted scholars as Frank Luther Mott, Theodore Peterson, John Tebbel, and James Playsted Wood on the topic of children's magazines. The author of this thesis conducted telephone interviews with children's magazine publishers, editors, and other executives to gather additional insight about the purpose, content, design, marketing, circulation, distribution, competition, and

future predictions for children's periodical publishing. These interviews subjects include *Boys' Life* Editor J.D. Owen, *Girls' Life* Publisher and Founding Editor Karen Bokram, *National Geographic World* Editor Susan Fejada, *Nickelodeon* Editor in Chief Lynn Lehmkuhl, *Outside Kids'* John Alderman, *Sports Illustrated Kids* Publisher Cleary Simpson, Managing Editor Craig Neff, and Research Director Donna Sabino.

### **Review of Literature**

Children's magazines are an important part of the written record of American civilization from the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Revolution and yet a dearth of scholarship exists about their development and publication. The intent of this chronologically arranged literature review is to provide pertinent media research about the significant and neglected field of children's periodicals in the United States by analyzing status and role, changes in publishing and marketing, and predictions for the future. The literature reviewed here will show the need for additional investigation and scholarship about the subject of children's periodicals with particular emphasis on the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century.

### **Defining Words**

Definitions of the magazine abound. Pulitzer Prize winning historian Frank Luther Mott credited England's *The London Gentleman's Magazine* of 1731 as the first publication to use *magazine* in its title, a word derived from the French word *magasin*, meaning storehouse or warehouse of goods. Many American pioneer publications were called *miscellanies*, alluding to a storehouse with its collection of odds and ends designed to attract the entire family. Mott defined the magazine as a "bound pamphlet issued more or less regularly and containing a variety of



reading matter.”<sup>4</sup> Journalism scholar James Playsted Wood’s “perishable” magazine was “essentially a compromise between the newspaper and the book, [it] lacks the permanence of the book but has much more than the highly transient value of the newspapers.”<sup>5</sup>

The magazine is a conduit for communication among people and a medium for sharing facts, ideas, and fancies. Wood attributes to periodicals 200 years of affecting American social, political, and economic thought while disseminating information and opinions, and reporting commenting, advising, and entertaining.

Directly, through discussion of contemporary interests, and indirectly, through fiction and verse, they have influenced both the life of the nation and the lives of millions of individuals. They have made their influence felt in government, commerce, and industry. They have stimulated the minds and imaginations of American readers, formed many of their ideas, affected their actions, fashioned their ethical and social concepts, as well as their clothes and their homes.<sup>6</sup>

### **Beginnings**

The earliest children’s periodicals were an outgrowth of the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the shift away from the medieval conception of children as miniature adults who needed to have the devil beaten out of them.<sup>7</sup> In January 1789, a Hartford, Connecticut newspaper and Bible printer named Barzillai Hudson and his partner George Goodwin published *The Children’s Magazine*, the first periodical for youth in the United States 48 years after Andrew Bradford and Benjamin Franklin introduced the colonies’ first magazines. R. Gordon Kelly deemed the ultimately unsuccessful monthly as “the first effort to create a periodical expressly for children.”<sup>8</sup> *The Juvenile Olio* and *The Juvenile Magazine* both appeared in 1802 and existed 18 months. Moral lessons, sentimental verses, instructive tales, piety and deportment dominated children’s magazines until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

## Little Adults

*Children's Periodicals of the United States: Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers*, edited by R. Gordon Kelly, a thorough 591 page volume published in 1984 provides a general overview from 1789 to 1980 from birth to death of 423 periodicals. Interviews with editors and publishers, content summaries, analysis, bibliography, and chronological and geographical lists provide a wealth of information for magazine lovers.

Kelly, associate professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland, described his work as the “richest single source available for information about American periodicals for children. In many instances, these publication histories correct, clarify, or supplement existing sources of information.”<sup>10</sup>

Kelly noted that although children's magazines are obviously created for children, they are written and produced by adults. Adult editors, writers, and illustrators must consider and understand children's needs, interests, and level of reading ease.

Kelly must not have considered the unusual case of a youth dabbling in the world of children's publishing. Beginning in 1812 a 14-year-old Thomas G. Condie Jr. published a weekly aptly titled the *Juvenile Port-Folio* that survived an impressive four years. The publishers' youth was not reflected in the content. Historian Frank Luther Mott describes the writing in the *Juvenile Port-Folio* as “stilted as most of the adult writing of the time” and classifies pre-Civil War juvenile periodicals as “wooden and unnatural.”<sup>11</sup>

Any survey of the subject must include Mott's five volume *A History of American Magazines*, a comprehensive account of 1741 to 1930 for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in History. Eighty-one years after its publication in 1930 “you cannot think of the history

of the magazine in our country without thinking of Mott, the first book you turn to, the latest you consult.”<sup>12</sup>

Other indispensable general guides for this study are Algernon Tassin’s 1916 *The Magazine in America*, Lyon N. Richardson’s 1931 *A History of Early American Magazines 1741-1789*, Ronald E. Wolseley’s 1951 *The Magazine World: An Introduction to Magazine Journalism*, and James Playsted Wood’s 1956 *Magazines in the United States*.

Transportation and printing improvements begun in the early 1820s initiated such an astounding development of periodical publishing that by 1829 the New York *Mirror* noted that, “The mania for periodicals has extended itself to children.”<sup>13</sup> The growth was so great that children’s magazines began appearing beyond the traditional publishing hubs of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

John Tebbel’s *The American Magazine: A Compact History* provides a useful overview through the year 1969. He described the slowly developing medium of periodicals for children in the eighteenth century as humorless and devoted to teaching religion and morality. “The stilted, heavy-handed style in which most of these magazines were written must have been truly discouraging to any child looking for innocent amusement. ... There was no lack, however, of magazines concerned with how to educate them.”<sup>14</sup> By the nineteenth century the entertainment trend began to offer children options to “dreary moralizers.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Juvenile Miscellany and Lydia Maria Child’s Influence***

*Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*’s fifth chapter, “Lydia Maria Child and the *Juvenile Miscellany*: The Creation of an American Children’s Literature” by Carolyn L. Karcher, a professor of English at Temple University, described the development of children’s

magazines in the nineteenth century by analyzing the influential *Juvenile Miscellany*, its preeminent female editor Lydia Maria Child, and its chief competitor the *Youth's Companion*.

The wild success of author Lydia Maria Child's 1824 children's book, *Evenings in New England*, a mixture of enjoyable stories, informative articles, and moral precepts, gave publishers the idea of recruiting her to design and edit a magazine on the same model. With *Juvenile Miscellany*, Child quickly created a "sophisticated professional enterprise" commissioning works from most of the leading female writers of the time who usually used pseudonyms or initials.<sup>16</sup>

Although late eighteenth century British writers had used juvenile literature to socialize children, Child was the first to mold the genre to America's needs.

The birth of a genre aimed at socializing children occurred at a historical moment when several related developments were interacting to create a need for such a medium: first, the shift of economic production from the home to factories and the accompanying transmutation of homemaking and child rearing into full-time activities for married women of the middle class; second, the emergence of a new concept of childhood and a new concern for the moral edification of children; and third, the formation of a middle-class value system stressing hard work, productivity, usefulness, frugality, self-denial, sobriety, orderliness, and punctuality—a value system that the middle class wished to transmit both to its own youth and to other classes.<sup>17</sup>

Child utilized children's literature to instill the principles she believed vital to a democracy (as opposed to a monarchy): "a commitment to equal rights for all and the courage to stand by one's inner convictions, as well as the internalization of the middle-class work ethic."<sup>18</sup>

From 1826 to 1834 the 108 page bimonthly *Juvenile Miscellany* primer, storybook, "library of entertaining knowledge, and purveyor of moral values" for boys and girls of various ages contained a wide range of features with engraved illustrations, fiction and nonfiction, riddles, puzzles, poems, and verses. Combining amusement with instruction, as the magazine's subtitle proclaimed, fiction instilled moral principles, and whimsical sketches ('Letter from

Summer to Winter,' 'Complaint of the Letter H. to His Brother K.) imparted lessons in geography and spelling.

Other features were moral dialogues between mother and children, habits of insects, and scripture illustrations "explicating obscure biblical references by drawing on travelers' accounts of Middle Eastern customs." Child, known as the poet who wrote *Over the River and Through the Woods* about Thanksgiving, wrote a quarter of each issue of *Juvenile Miscellany*, specialized in biographical sketches of American heroes, dialogues on American history, translations of European fairy tales, and stories of Indians, blacks, and ethnic groups from other continents.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence of the degree to which Child's contemporaries and the cultural establishment valued the ideological work the *Juvenile Miscellany* performed is found in the prestigious *North American Review*, which while admitting that children's literature lay 'beyond our jurisdiction,' made a special point of recommending the *Miscellany*. Even the *Ladies' Magazine* reviewed several issues and urged "every family where there are children" to subscribe.<sup>20</sup>

Although the *Juvenile Miscellany* adhered to the conservative social mission of nineteenth century children's literature and reinforced society's class and gender rules, in its pages abolitionist Child subtly "undermined the ideology of the white middle class and advanced her own vision of racial equality."<sup>21</sup> Beginning in September 1830, readers found antislavery messages sprinkled among the entertaining educational features. By 1834 this controversial position had alienated enough adult subscribers that the magazine ceased publication.

Yet *Juvenile Miscellany's* influence did not end then. Young readers do not always share parents' opinions and, according to Karcher, a "sizable cadre of them grew up to share the passionate identification with slaves and the determination to fight for a multiracial egalitarian

America that inspired the editor of their beloved *Miscellany*.” *Juvenile Miscellany* is “oppressively didactic” by twenty-first century standards but liberal and innovative for its day.<sup>22</sup>

### *Youth’s Companion*

Although *Youth Companion’s* began life in Boston in 1827 as a clip and paste outgrowth of a religious weekly with the intent to “warn against the ways of transgression, error and ruin, and allure to those of virtue and piety” it became one of the most popular kids journals emphasizing action adventure, humor, and reader contributions until 1929.

Accomplished writers and illustrators contributed their talents. “The great juvenile of the period,” *The Youth’s Companion*, launched in Boston in 1827, offered its half million subscribers outdoor adventure and historical tales from Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Jack London, Louisa May Alcott, Washington Irving, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather and Oliver Wendell Holmes.<sup>23</sup> A typical issue contained an account of a grizzly bear hunt by Theodore Roosevelt, a short story by Winston S. Churchill about a young Afrikaner caught in the cross fire of the Boer War, and a poem by Alfred Tennyson. *Youth’s Companion* influenced generations for 102 years and became part of the national memory until 1929 when it was sold to its chief competitor *American Boy*.<sup>24</sup>

*Youth’s Companion* circulation methods were even more impressive than its content. It was the first magazine to effectively use the device of giving premiums for annual subscriptions, a practice it began in the late 1860s. For 50 years, October issues contained pictures and descriptions of the treasures recruiting subscribers. By the 1880s the 36-page prize list included rewards of everything from dolls to magic lanterns.

## **The Golden Age**

*Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith in 1995, is a collection of essays compiled to “reveal the ways in which literary analysis can be enriched when it encompasses social history, publishing contexts, the literary marketplace, and the relationships between authors and editors.”<sup>25</sup> Although only one chapter is devoted specifically to children’s magazines, the introduction, “Periodical Literature in Social and Historical Context,” provides a useful overview of periodicals from the 1830s until 1900.<sup>26</sup> During this time publications “soared” compared to the early years of 1741 to 1794 when sixty percent did not survive their first year.<sup>27</sup>

Factors spurring rapid development in the nineteenth century were improved mail distribution from the Postal Act of 1794 (100 magazines were in circulation by 1825), an increasingly literate population from the establishment of schools, economic growth allowing leisure time for entertainment, and the 1825 opening of the Erie Canal connecting the northeast to the west politically and economically.<sup>28</sup>

Periodicals’ major role in communicating, informing, and entertaining was reflected in circulation with the year 1840 and its 1,500 periodicals called the “golden age of periodicals.” By 1870, 4,295 weekly magazines had a combined circulation of 10.5 million, “a staggering figure” considering the fact that the United States population was only 30 million.<sup>29</sup>

## **Literature for Boys**

*Serialized Citizenships: Periodicals, Books, and American Boys, 1840-1911* by Lorinda B. Cohoom, assistant professor of English at the University of Memphis, examined boyhood and serialized texts in middle-class *Youth’s Companion* and *Our Young Folks* and the lesser known

*Young American's Magazine of Self-Improvement* and *Boys of New York*. In the first part of the nineteenth century periodical literature for boys began to be developed and was flourishing by the second half—both “good” literature and sensational pieces full of action, intrigue, and violence.

The chapter “Educating Boys for American Citizenship: Jacob Abbott’s Contributions to *Youth’s Companion*,” studied magazine fiction and advertisement influences on boyhood from 1827 to 1929 when the long running *Youth’s Companion* provided educational, “citizen-shaping,” and some religious material for northern middle-class Protestants. “Working Class Boys and Self-Improved Citizenship,” introduced *Young Americans Magazine for Self-Improvement*, a periodical for working class urban boys during the 1840s with articles connecting self-awareness, self-education, and self-improvement to work and labor unions.

“Necessary Badness: Reconstructing Postbellum Boyhood Citizenships in *Our Young Folks* and *The Story of a Bad Boy*” notes that *Our Young Folks*, 1865-1873, was one of the few children’s periodicals to begin production during the Civil War and its content reflected the time. (It eventually merged with *St. Nicholas Magazine*.) In 1869 *The Story of a Bad Boy*, a serialized piece published in *Our Young Folks* written by *Atlantic Monthly* Editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich “indirectly describes for his young readers the complexities of the Civil War as well as the intricate and inextricable links between North and South in both pre- and post-war years.”<sup>30</sup> The work is noted in American literary history due to its direct link to literary cousin Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Reconstructing prewar, peacetime boyhoods after the Civil War “in some ways contradicts the earlier, pre-Reconstruction abolitionist stance of the magazine,” Cohoom said.



*Our Young Folk's* mailbox feature for reader opinions and stories included carefully selected letters from the South.

The number of periodicals for boys increased rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s although there had been a few gender specific titles before the Civil War including *Boys Own* (1873) and *Boys of the World: A Story Paper for the Rising Generation* (1875) and six others. Writing stories for boys' magazines was a "lucrative and powerful business.... A favorite vehicle was the new children's magazine, which in the fifteen years after the war sprang into prominence and popularity and proved so formative an influence on a whole generation of Americans like Teddy Roosevelt. By the 1880s, magazines for boys were commonly available, and they provided forums for both men and women authors to tell a variety of stories about boys."<sup>31</sup>

Changes in portraying boyhood during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are noted in the "*Beeton's Boy's Own Magazine and Boys' Life: Serialized Directions for Boyhood Citizenships in the Twentieth Century*" chapter. "These shifts are apparent in the illustrations and in the scenes chosen for the adventures that serialize the moves from boyhood to manhood," Cohoom noted.<sup>32</sup> Content featured serialized survival stories, illustrations, career-based projects as readers were "given a prescription for surviving the change from young boyhood to young manhood: exercise, study, and reading for pleasure."<sup>33</sup> Titles included *Boys Brigade Bulletin* (1892), *Youth's Realm* (1896), *Young Knight* (1908), *Boys' Life* (1911), *Pioneer for Boys* (1915), *American Boy-Open Road* (1919). Of these, only *Boys Life*, associated with Boy Scouts of America, remains in publication in 2011.

Coom found that twenty-first century boys prefer reading about sports, biking or skateboarding in mainstream publications or non-national periodicals or underground 'zines with

“highly specific tastes” in music, comics or art. “These underground ‘zines,’ distributed through subscriber-initiated mailing list contacts or through independent book and music stores, explicitly reject national and mainstream culture in favor of stratified, local, and sometimes secretive, unreadable citizenships.”<sup>34</sup> As today, entertainment and enlightenment were the missions of most children’s magazines during this time of great change in nineteenth and early twentieth century America.

### **Postbellum Periodicals**

Published in 1974, ten years before his children’s periodical history guidebook, R. Gordon Kelly’s *Mother Was A Lady: Self and Society in Selected American Children’s Periodicals 1865-1890* examines the postbellum era. Brief histories of celebrated magazines such as *St. Nicholas*, *Our Young Folks*, and *Youth’s Companion* and narrative formulas used in children’s periodicals supplement this “study of cultural transmission and the difficulties faced—and the solutions proposed—by an American gentry class intent on perpetuating their definitions of self and society amid the turmoil and disorder—at times it seemed to them the disintegration—of American life in the Gilded Age.”<sup>35</sup>

### ***St. Nicholas* and Mary Mapes Dodge**

*St. Nicholas* represented a refreshing change of pace from the “dreary moralizers” and is still remembered as the paramount children’s journal of all time. Tebbel described it as “one of the freshest voices of all . . . beyond any doubt the best magazine for children ever published in America.”<sup>36</sup> Despite its beginning at the inauspicious time during the Panic of 1873, *St. Nicholas*’ attractive design and content captured an audience immediately. Editor Mary Mapes Dodge described her intentions for the magazine:

Its cheer must be the cheer of the bird-song; it must mean freshness and heartiness, life and joy.... Most children of the present day attend school. Their heads are strained and taxed with the day's lesson. They do not want to be bothered nor amused nor petted. They just want to have their own way over their own magazine. They want to enter one place where/ they can come and go as they please.... Of course, they expect to pick up odd bits and treasures.... A child's magazine is its playground.<sup>37</sup>

Among its contributors were Robert Louis Stevenson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Rudyard Kipling whose *The Jungle Book* was first published as a serial in *St. Nicholas*. Tebbel blamed the radio for *St. Nicholas*' demise in 1943. It "altered children's tastes in entertainment" and made magazines seem old fashioned.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to literary stars as writers, the early decades of children's magazines were highlighted by the significant role played by outstanding editors and publishers. For 32 years children's novelist Mary Mapes Dodge, author of *Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates*, edited *St. Nicholas: Scribner's Illustrated Magazine for Girls and Boys*, a monthly literary publication from 1873 until 1940, considered by many to be the paramount children's journal of all time that "seems to have inspired a loyalty bordering on fanaticism in its young readers," Tobbel explained that "it is easy to see why children who grew up with this magazines found it an experience they treasured all their lives."<sup>39</sup>

Like *The Youth's Companion*, Dodge published work by the country's foremost writers, including Louisa May Alcott, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Robert Louis Stevenson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Mark Twain and Rudyard Kipling, and illustrations by the same artists and wood engravers used by Scribner & Company's other magazine, *Scribner's Monthly*.<sup>40</sup> Young contributors who continued writing were William Faulkner, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ring Lardner, and Robert Benchley.<sup>41</sup> Through its writers and readers the influence of *St. Nicholas* stretches to the present. Some educators credit *Cricket*, a literary magazine launched in 1973,

with assuming the mantle of *St. Nicholas*, or at least shreds of it.<sup>42</sup>

### **Reaching/Retaining Readers**

In order to broaden the magazine's appeal and retain readers for many years, Dodge created departments for different age groups (a strategy that continues to the present day). For Very Little Folks was a page of simple stories printed in large type. The Puzzle Box contained riddles, math and word games. Young Contributors Department encouraged the writing skills of older children. The Agassiz Association was begun in 1885 to develop the awareness of nature, and the importance of conservation. Hundreds of Agassiz chapters were organized across the nation, and reports of activities were printed in the department.<sup>43</sup>

### **Twentieth Century**

Theodore Peterson brought the history to 1964 with his exploration of major trends and the social and economic forces that shape them in *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*. Changes occurred more quickly in the six years after 1956 than in any other time since the printing of the first magazine Peterson claimed. He praised the work of Mott and Wood while noting that these scholars' books were "silent about many of the developments in the industry since the turn of the century" that necessitated his own writings "to remedy the deficiency."<sup>44</sup>

Children's magazines encounter the same problems as those for adults plus additional obstacles and Peterson examined the reasons for their success and failure. He attributed the demise of magazines for older children from ages of nine to 16 to the arrival of radio and television and the rise of the market for younger readers between two and 12 to the fact that their publications did not depend upon advertising for support.

## To Market

Judith S. Duke's *Children's Books and Magazines: A Market Study* is a concise look at the state of children's publishing in 1979 with predictions for the future. Duke provided an analysis of demographic, economic, and social trends affecting the industry because "today as never before the juvenile industry is faced with questions about its future."<sup>45</sup> Writing six years before Kelly, Duke noted "there have been few, if any, books written on the business of publishing children's literature and the outlook for that business."<sup>46</sup>

Juvenile magazines of the 1970s targeted all ages and interests through varied circulation and marketing strategies. Then as now, most children's general magazines relied on subscription sales rather than advertising and newsstand sales. Subscription costs varied depending on the source—acquiring a subscriber was more expensive than retaining one.

Renewal rates are relatively meaningless in the children's magazine industry. Children's periodicals have lower renewals than the rest of the industry because children constantly outgrow publications. Most solicitations are conducted by direct mail and juvenile magazine promoters must study to know their market. Both Parents' Magazine Enterprises and Curtis Publishing have lines of juvenile magazines serving three- to 14-year-olds so that as a child outgrows one magazine, she can be promoted to the next.

The juvenile industry of the 1970s was beset by problems and change. Some were common to the publishing industry as a whole—such as rising costs and postage—while others were unique to the youth market. Despite the lower birth rate slowing the growth of juvenile magazines at that time, Duke predicated in 1979, "they will continue to have a market, and the future may be brightest for those catering to a specialized audience."<sup>47</sup>

## Specialization

Publisher Roy Reiman attempted to cater to the specialized market segment of farm kids between the ages of six and 12. He attributes the failure of *Country Kids* magazine after only three years to his lack of a marketing plan. Reiman explained in his *I Could Write a Book* released in 2005, that despite 12 publications with 16 million grown-up subscribers, one children's magazine was more than he could manage.

If you start a magazine for farmers, you can just secure a mailing list of farmers and make a sample mailing. Now, how on God's green earth would anyone know *which* of the farmers on any mailing list had children between the ages of six and 12? *That's* what I should have thought about in advance.

As a result, the marketing of this magazine was far too costly. If I sent it to 1,000 farm families, there *might* be 100 of those families...that would have kids in my target range for age. So, in effect, 90 percent of my mailings were *wasted*.

There was another problem I hadn't anticipated: Adult subscribers don't 'grow out' of their market. Kids do. Even if I got an avid subscriber to *Country Kids*, as soon as that child turned 13, there'd be *no way* he'd want to keep receiving a "kid's magazine."<sup>40</sup>

Existing scholarship about children's magazines in the United States offers a tantalizing taste of 1789 to 2005 and reveals the need for additional study of this overlooked subject to provide a valuable look at children and society through the ages.

## **CHAPTER II: Print Playground**

The history of children's magazines in the United States reflects the country's history. The year 1789 marks the publication of the first American children's magazine, the ratification of the United States constitution, and the inauguration of George Washington as the first president of the new nation. Both the country and juvenile periodicals began at the same time and are indelibly entwined.

Taft divided magazine history into titled slices of time: a period of beginning that lasted until 1794, the era of nationalism until 1825 was followed by a period of expansion until 1850. The 15 years before the Civil War is described as the period of politics and war. The 25 years from 1865 until 1890 were the golden era and the muckrakers' era lasted until 1914.<sup>1</sup>

### **Status and Role**

Magazines are an important part of the written record of American civilization and an invaluable resource about the tastes, manners, habits, interests, and achievements relating to United States history. The social historian has no richer source. "Our present will some day be the quaint past at which possible survivors of future wars can be amused or aghast, but which they cannot neglect, in the pages of our magazines," Wood wrote.<sup>2</sup>

### **Motivating Factors**

What is the motivation to publish children's magazines? The editorial objective of children's periodicals has changed little since their inception in 1789. "From the very beginning

of children's magazines in the eighteenth century...diversity of content and blending of purpose—informing while entertaining—has been the dual objective of an enormous quantity of children's magazines worldwide.”<sup>3</sup> Educating and entertaining have been the goals throughout American juvenile publishing history.

Changes occurred as the tastes of adults and children varied through the decades. From 1789 through the 1830s religious, educational, and reform interests shaped children's periodicals.<sup>4</sup> Early children's magazines of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries strived to guide young readers with moral lessons, sentimental verses and instructive tales.

“The first tentative forays into secular matters retained a sanctimonious flavor, with articles such as one explaining why it's OK with God for bees to work on the Sabbath.”<sup>5</sup> The period from the 1840s through the Civil War emphasized education and writing for children became regarded as requiring special skills.<sup>6</sup> After the Civil War until the early 1900s, entertainment was the goal and the best writers and illustrators were sought.

Adults create children's magazines and their editorial purpose changes with time. Betty L. Lyon categorized the missions of juvenile periodicals in her dissertation, “A History of Children's Secular Magazines Published in the United States from 1789-1899.” From 1789 to the 1830s religious, educational, and reform interests shaped content. Magazines with the goal of reform were *Slave's Friend*, 1836; *The Youth's Emancipator*; and *Youth's Temperance Advocate*, 1839. From the 1840s through the Civil War, education became the central concern, and writing for children increasingly came to be regarded as an activity requiring special skills. After the Civil War until the early 1900s entertainment was the goal and the best writers and illustrators were employed.<sup>7</sup>



Since the nineteenth century, magazines have helped bring social, economic, and political reform to America. According to Peterson, magazines place issues and events into perspective, foster a sense of national community, and serve as an educator of cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

The birth of a genre aimed at socializing children occurred at a historical moment when several related developments were interacting to create a need for such a medium: first, the shift of economic production from the home to factories and the accompanying transmutation of homemaking and child rearing into full-time activities for married women of the middle class; second, the emergence of a new concept of childhood and a new concern for the moral edification of children; and third, the formation of a middle-class value system stressing hard work, productivity, usefulness, frugality, self-denial, sobriety, orderliness, and punctuality—a value system that the middle class wished to transmit both to its own youth and to other classes.<sup>9</sup>

### **Publishing and Marketing Changes**

Although the first children's magazine in 1789 only produced three issues, it inspired others. Between 1802 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, at least 75 children's periodicals were introduced. Most of them were unsuccessful and fewer than one in five managed to continue publication for at least 10 years, and only about one in three was able to sustain itself for three years.<sup>45</sup> Magazines had to wait for high speed presses and improved transportation in the nineteenth century to reach larger audiences.

Political journalist and historian Theodore H. White considered the 1890s as “the time when all the elements merged to place the magazine in a position of dominance in this nation.”<sup>10</sup> These elements included the completion of the national railroad from coast to coast along with the high speed rotary press and the photoengraving process for reproducing inexpensive photographic to break up blocks of type on the printed page. Despite the great expense, magazines carried as much illustration as they could afford.<sup>11</sup>

The principal stages of magazine development in nineteenth century according to Kelly: The earliest efforts featured cheap printing, illustrations with coarse woodcuts, and anonymous

authors. In the 1840s appearances improved, the tone lightened and there were fewer stories about death. More than a dozen magazines were founded to publicize the cause of public education and provide supplementary material for reading, geography, and science. Finally, religious conversion was changed to social conversion.<sup>12</sup>

“The child was still saved—but for this world, not the next—and the agency of his social conversion was no longer a denominational creed but the code of the Christian gentleman.”<sup>13</sup>

Besides the obvious financial factor as an impetus for producing children’s periodical publications, publishers and editors stress delivering an important message, encouraging literacy, and building self-esteem for young readers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

“We try to teach without being preachy,” *Sports Illustrated for Kids* managing editor Craig Neff said.<sup>14</sup> This is a relatively recent goal and a major change from the dreary moralizers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **Specialization**

During the nineteenth century specialization of content became the main emphasis. Specialized magazines address particular reader interests and are edited for specific audiences.<sup>15</sup>

“All things considered, the magazine business had assumed by the 1850s/ much of the character it has today.... there were a growing number of specialists writing for the fast-increasing number of specialized magazines,” Tebbel noted. According to Kelly, the future belonged to juvenile periodicals allied with a movement such as scouting or addressed to an audience narrowly identified (increasingly for the benefit of advertisers) in terms of gender and age and later, ethnic identification, or specialized interest. Women writers began using their own names and rapidly become great favorites.<sup>16</sup>

## *Boy's Life*

*Boy's Life* editor J.D. Owen explained the longevity of his then 85-year-old Boy Scouts of America publication in 1995. Through the years, the specialized magazine has achieved its mission “to entertain and educate America’s youth, and to open their eyes to the joyous world of reading. We do that through a mix of news, nature, sports, history, fiction, science, comics, and Scouting.”<sup>17</sup>

The successful formula for “The Magazine for All Boys” is focusing on fun—making subject matter come to life with exciting colorful graphics, splashy photos and illustrations for a broad spectrum of interests with jokes, true hero stories, and condensed comic book forms of the classics such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Don Quixote*, and *Hans Brinker and His Silver Skates* (written by none other than *St. Nicholas* editor Mary Mapes Dodge). Legendary authors, artists and heroes including Norman Rockwell, Ansel Adams, Ray Bradbury, Pearl Buck, Alex Haley, and Orville Wright have contributed.<sup>18</sup>

In 1996 *Boys' Life* began including a special eight page section for seven- to 11-year-old readers that consists of highly visual editorial heavy on graphics and light on text. The other section for junior and high school readers has meaty outdoor skill information, serialized articles, and the opportunity to address issues for older youth. In addition to a successful formula and quality content, lack of competition may explain the publication’s longtime popularity.

“While there is a lot of competition at the younger end and for teenage girls, *Boys' Life* is the only magazine that has appeal for teenage boys,” Owen said. “Our reason for being is to encourage reading and promote literacy.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Sports Illustrated Kids*

Another publication promoting literacy under another pretext is *Sports Illustrated Kids*. Launched in 1989, the magazine for boys and girls who love sports “hooks kids on the pleasure of reading with sports, through invisible learning,” publisher Cleary Simpson explained. “Time Inc. feels that literacy is a big issue for our country and that boys tend to be more reluctant readers than girls.”<sup>20</sup>

Letters from 3,000 readers each month remind the publisher that staying fun and relevant are the first priorities to meeting educational goals. Award winning *Sports Illustrated Kids* presents sports the way adults think that kids want to read about them with action photos, easy-to-read stories about star athletes, helpful instructional tips from the pros, and humor, comics, and activities. Every issue comes with a two-sided pullout poster of two superstar athletes and nine sports cards.

“Use sports to motivate,” Craig Neff, managing editor elucidated. “The great thing about sports is almost all fields of study intersect with sports. Geography—where a player is from or history—the history of a sport.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Reaching Readers**

Children’s general magazines are primarily for children two to 12 years of age and these are the magazines most parents select for a child’s first subscription. A trend of magazines targeting pre-readers

“Even before children learn to read they have available specialized magazines created to arouse their interests, improve their knowledge, inform them . . . and help them pass a rainy afternoon when the television set is on the blink.”<sup>22</sup>

Most of these magazines accept little or no advertising, and most sales are by subscription rather

than newsstand.<sup>23</sup>

Identifying and reaching potential readers for specialized publications is one of the biggest problems for publishers. “High quality, subscriber-supported children’s magazines are often not easy to find, and it’s safe to say that many parents probably don’t realize they exist, unless they talk to school librarians or happen upon them at major bookstore chains or specialty stores,” wrote Ross Atkin in the *Christian Science Monitor*.<sup>24</sup>

*Hot Wheels* magazine, launched in 2007, succeeded where Reiman’s *Country Kids* did not. “Successfully reaching our target audience is our greatest achievement,” said *Hot Wheels* Publisher Steve Zepezauer.<sup>25</sup> Securing distribution in supermarkets and drugstores was a critical factor to reaching the publication’s targeted 12-year-old audience and increasing its presence on the newsstand is its biggest challenge. Some believe that readers of children’s magazines will graduate to reading the adult versions. Others do not. They speculate that the adult version’s price or content will deter prospective young readers.

Population, school enrollment, illiteracy, and economic conditions are among the factors affecting the market for children’s periodical literature. United States population is of significance to publishers because it determines market size.<sup>26</sup> The many children’s magazines with little or no advertising are not obligated to maintain a circulation base for their advertisers or publish their circulation figures except in the annual Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation required by the United States Postal Service. Some declines in circulation may be deliberate attempts to arrive at a more economical level of circulation.

Since many children’s magazines have little or no newsstand sales, publishers concentrate on acquiring subscribers at a sensible cost. This is a constant problem because as

subscribers outgrow a magazine, they must be replaced.

Subscriptions are solicited mainly by direct mail, but subscription agencies and advertisements in magazines—including adult titles owned by the publisher—are other marketing methods used.<sup>27</sup> The cost of acquiring a subscription varies according to the subscription source. It is more expensive to acquire new subscribers than to retain them. A publisher may even lose money on a cut-rate offer but depends on the renewal of the resulting subscription for profit.

Renewal rates are meaningless in the children's periodical industry. The rate varies according to many factors—the type of subscription, time of the year, type of promotion and the length of the original subscription. Some magazines, such as *Highlights* and *Humpty Dumpty*, emphasize three-year rather than one-year subscriptions. By the time a long-term subscription expires, the subscriber may have outgrown the magazine. Therefore, if a company places great emphasis on long-term subscriptions, it will be unlikely to emphasize renewals, and its renewal rate will be low.

### **Options**

Children become aware of magazines as early as their parents make them available. Every child enjoys receiving mail and having a magazine addressed to her appear regularly in the mailbox is a cause for great excitement. Children like magazines because they are topical, concise, and contain interesting subject matter with illustrations and photographs.

Juvenile magazines exist for every age and interest. Categories include: general interest magazines, entertainment-fan magazines, religious publications, and educational magazines. Each differs by type, audience, circulation, and marketing.

In 1992 the variety of periodicals available excited Children's Television Workshop Magazine Group Publisher Nina Link. "Publishing has finally recognized that "kids" is no one generic category, but that children have many interests, talents, and experiences," Link said.<sup>28</sup>

As children grow, their interests change. Many publishers have stables of magazines designed to capture audiences at age three and hold them until 14.<sup>29</sup> These include Parents' Magazine Enterprises (PME), Curtis, Carus, Highlights, World Wildlife Federation, and the National Geographic Society.

### **Spinning the 1970s**

Signs foreshadowing the kids' magazine explosion of the 1990s may be traced to the introduction in the 1970s of three publications: *Cricket*, *Ebony Jr!* and *National Geographic Kids*. *Cricket* assumed the literary role vacated in 1943 when the beloved *St. Nicholas* ceased publication. *Ebony Jr!* and *National Geographic Kids* were among the first spinoffs of magazines for adults targeting the youth market.

*Cricket: The Magazine for Children* is a literary monthly first published in 1973 to provide its six- to 12-year-old audience with original stories, poems, articles, and illustrations. The title alerts the reader to a special element of the magazine, an imaginatively used cricket appearing in margins and scattered among articles. The chirping insect shares a running commentary about page contents, authors, illustrations, and explains difficult words and concepts. Regular features are "Meet Your Author," art contests, book reviews, puzzles, letterbox, and a back cover foldout.

*Cricket's* strength is communication. "Without a hint of condescension, every word is directed to the children, whether it is a story or article, illustration or feature, and children, as

well as their parents and teachers, have loved every elegantly detailed issue and made *Cricket* their favorite magazine.”<sup>30</sup>

*Ebony Jr!*, a junior version of *Ebony* magazine for adults, focused on presenting positive images of blacks for its six- to 12-year-old audience of 90,000 from 1973 to 1985. Along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s magazine *The Brownies’ Book* published from 1921 to 1922, *Ebony Jr!* is one of the few publications with this mission for children in United States history.<sup>31</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, *Weekly Reader* creative director Jan Murray and others worked to diversify the pages of children’s magazines by deliberately and routinely placing images of children and adults from multicultural backgrounds.<sup>32</sup>

*Ebony Jr!*’s carefully written articles encouraged vocabulary growth with new words printed in bold type within articles and repeated on the page with definitions. A gallery of reader art decorated the back cover and the inside front calendar recorded births, deaths, accomplishments, events, and holidays. One section highlighted readers’ creative writing and included the author’s name and photograph while another provided art and craft activities, word puzzles, games, and music.<sup>33</sup>

In 2011, 26 years after its final print issue was published—it was discovered that the magazine’s target readers preferred the adult version—a version of *Ebony Jr!* exists with a Web site featuring talking cartoons, music, coloring sheets, and images of magazine covers.<sup>34</sup>

As the official junior publication of the National Geographic Society for members six- to 14-years-old, *National Geographic Kids*’ mission is to “inspire in young readers curiosity about our world and beyond and to encourage geographic awareness.”

Launched in 1975 and titled *National Geographic World* until 2001, the multi-topic,



photo-driven magazine empowers readers by making it fun to learn about the world. Published 10 times a year, the award-winning *National Geographic Kids* has a circulation of 1.2 million and is available by subscription and on newsstands.

“We have cracked the code to what kids want to read about, and what parents feel good about letting their kids read,” said editor in chief Melina Bellows.<sup>35</sup>

Introduced in 2007 targeting the popular pre-reading demographic, a spinoff’s spinoff aimed at preschool explorers ages three to six and their parents, *National Geographic Little Kids* is published six times a year and is packed with teaching tools to help parents inspire a love of learning in their children. The award winner is perfectly sized magazine for little hands, at approximately 6 1/2" by 7" and is available by subscription and on newsstands.<sup>36</sup> It accompanies a Web site, [www.littlekids.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.littlekids.nationalgeographic.com), with games, activities, and tips for parents.

Filled with photographs and stories to develop pre-reading and early reading skills, plus interactive picture games and puzzles to teach logic and counting, each 24-page issue contains instructional tools and a set of six wild animal cards. There are captivating animal stories, answers to questions on kids' favorite topics, features on different cultures to inspire a sense of understanding about the world, and experiments to introduce simple science.

The spinoff trend begun by *Ebony Jr!* in 1973 and *National Geographic World* in 1975 expanded over the next two decades to include other publications for adults dipping down for younger audiences such as *Outside Kids*, *Zillions (Consumer Reports) Money for Kids*, *Sports Illustrated Kids*, *Time for Kids*, and *PS4 Kids (Popular Science)*.

While all National Geographic products share the basic mission of disseminating knowledge, access to the photo library, and expertise, *National Geographic Kids* has its own

staff of editors, designers, and researchers because the ways of appealing to adults and kids are quite different.<sup>86</sup>

*Sports Illustrated Kids* is editorially independent with a separate staff located on different floors of the building yet remains part of the identity as the authoritative sports magazine for kids.<sup>87</sup> *Outside Kids* editor in 1994 Lisa Bessone described her publication as a “guerrilla unit.... We’ve got to make it on our own.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Stealth Learning: Content and Design for Kids**

Spinoffs utilize the adult magazine’s philosophy and theme, but have distinct content and design. “The eye bounces around to often a dozen or more items on a page. Typefaces may change on a word-by-word basis. Short articles are the standard. Cartoons are common,” David Clark Scott said in the *Christian Science Monitor*.<sup>38</sup>

Kids magazines are full of quizzes, mazes, riddles, contests, and other interactive features. Like *Outside* magazine, *Outside Kids* introduced the healthy, outdoor lifestyle, but with the twist of often being written “by and about teens.”<sup>39</sup>

“*National Geographic Kids* presents the subject matter from the kids’ point of view and we almost always try to work kids into the story,” editor Fejada said.<sup>40</sup> A typical feature might tell a story photographically through the eyes of Catholic and Protestant children performing in a circus in Northern Ireland.

*National Geographic Kids* does not feature is advertising.

“We have been steadfast in our belief that advertising takes away from the value of a magazine for children,” said Nancy White, special projects coordinator. “Our mission is to encourage geographic learning and we think advertising clouds the issue.”<sup>41</sup>

Children's magazine design may appear "frantic" to adults. Bold graphics, bright colors, and chopped up text are more accessible to young readers. Craig Neff, editor of *Sports Illustrated Kids* in 1994, designed pages with "wild presentations and lots of white space" because kids are "not eager to sit down to a lot of text."<sup>42</sup> By 2006, the Internet had impacted the publication's presentation.

"It's similar to what you find on the Internet, but done in a way where you can come back to it and linger," said Bob Der, *Sports Illustrated Kids* managing editor. "By having a quick read, lots of points of entry, stat grids, quick facts, places where readers get information without dedicating a lot of hard labor to reading."<sup>43</sup>

"This lively look may mask to adults that there is solid information in the stories," *National Geographic Kids* editor Fejada explained. "We cover the same points as in an adult article, but in a different way. The research for stories is just as painstaking."<sup>44</sup> *Sports Illustrated Kids*' design depends on editorial. "If Shaq is the subject, he has so much appeal you can have a plain page. To introduce logrolling or a less popular sport you have less liberty. It's a big balance. Kids are very conscious of the way people's faces look—if they are posed. Kids pay attention to detail. They are incredibly self-conscious of themselves and don't want to see posed, nerdy people."<sup>45</sup>

Editors and publishers agree that children's magazines must have a creative approach and speak in their voice.<sup>46</sup> "Write at a sophisticated level—you don't want to talk down to them," instructed *Outside Kids* associate editor John Alderman. "We don't edit kids much more than adults."<sup>47</sup>

Word choice is one of the main differences between adult magazines and their juvenile

versions. “Writing for children is no different from writing for adults, because both appreciate clear, concise writing....The only aspect that might be little trickier in writing for kids is to make certain that word selections fit their frame of reference....You don’t want to talk, or write, down to kids.”<sup>48</sup>

*Time for Kids* coverage is based on the hard news. “That’s how we distinguish ourselves from other kids magazines. We’re all about current events,” said editor Claudia Wallis. “*Time for Kids* is designed to make the world come alive for them in a way they can understand.” Breaking big science stories are a favorite while crime stories are ignored by the classroom publication for grades four to six without advertising launched in 1995.<sup>49</sup>

*Sports Illustrated Kids* hires real sports journalists and children’s writers because “kids can easily tell imposters dumbing down.”<sup>50</sup> “More writers have a sports background than a children’s background. We basically want good writers.”<sup>51</sup> In addition to good writers, *Sports Illustrated for Kids* has a panel of professors of reading and fifth grade reading teachers to advise on editorial copy.

### **Kids Input**

Kids are the ultimate editorial advisors. While some kids magazines include reader letters and art submissions inside the publication, *Stone Soup: The Magazine By Children*, is unique in taking reader creativity to another level.

Created in 1973, *Stone Soup* is the leading publication written and illustrated by children for children eight to 13 years old. Its circulation of 8,000 is vastly increased to 80,000 readers with multiple school and library readers and adults interested in children’s artistic work. “It offers support to children thinking of themselves as writers and artists; by printing such material

it shows its readers the lives and versions of life available to those who want them.”<sup>52</sup>

The magazine contains writing—letters to the editor, book reviews, jokes, poems, stories, autobiographical musings—as well as artwork—drawings in crayon and finger paint. In contrast to some magazines for children by adults who publish single-issue periodicals, *Stone Soup* offers a variety of subjects. The magazine’s contents reveal diversity with no single regional, political, economic, social, or intellectual bias predominating. Published by the nonprofit Children’s Art Foundation, an organization that collects children’s art from around the world and lends it to libraries and schools for a small amount of money, two editors direct this creative outlet for children and glimpse at children’s art for people of all ages.

### **Kids Guidance**

Children’s magazines are usually written and edited by adults to appeal to kids and those adults look for advice from their young audience. “The rule in working with kids: don’t presume to know what they’ll think,” instructed *Sports Illustrated Kids*’ publisher Cleary Simpson.<sup>53</sup>

Publishers need to know children’s frequently changing opinions about everything and techniques for obtaining reader input vary. Kids offer guidance by participating in focus groups and reader panels, answering reader surveys, personal interviews in shopping malls, lab schools (schools that allow magazine staff to watch children reading magazines), serving on advisory boards, and writing letters. One young advisor for *Zillions* magazine said of her role, “It’s fun, and you feel like you’re making a difference.”<sup>54</sup>

*National Geographic Kids* mails surveys about each issue to a random list of 800 readers in addition to receiving input from its 160 junior member advisory board.<sup>55</sup> *Boy’s Life* has a subscriber reader panel to answer questionnaires.

One of the juvenile publications with advertising, *Girls' Life* research methods are reader mail and focus groups with a party atmosphere. Publisher and founding editor Bokram described focus groups with 18 girls.

We hang out and talk about the magazine, movies, albums, and bring products for advertisers and give out samples as presents. One candy company who advertises with boys' magazines said that they couldn't advertise with *Girls' Life* because girls didn't eat this particular candy. We put the candy in bowls around the room during the focus group. The girls loved it. We took pictures of the bowls before, during and after the party, and pictures of the candy wrappers on the floor to prove that girls do too like this candy. We put out Bonne Bell Lip Smackers. The blueberry flavor was always left in the bowl.<sup>56</sup>

According to United States Census Bureau statistics, the number of kids attending preschool to eighth grade increased beginning in the mid 1980s. Statistics showed 33 million people aged four to 12 in the United States or 13 percent of the population. Income from allowance and part-time jobs provided children with money to spend or influence the spending of \$127 billion annually.<sup>57</sup> And children are savvy consumers.

### **Cobblestone and Carus Publishing**

Following the 1970s spinoffs and continuing the spinoff trend, in the 1980s magazines designed to stimulate children's thinking and learning instead of simply entertaining were introduced by Cobblestone Publishing Company of Peterborough, New Hampshire.<sup>58</sup>

*Cobblestone: The History Magazine for Young People* launched in 1980 with each issue devoted to a single historical theme of a person, event, institution, or an idea. Founders Hope M. Pettegrew and Frances Nankin, former elementary school teachers sought to revive interest in the subject of history, regularly voted by children as their most disliked and used the one-theme issue because they knew that children learn by reinforcement and that a mixture of articles is less meaningful. The magazine is also a mini-unit for teachers.<sup>59</sup>

*Cobblestone* and the other magazines from Carus Publishing popularize such disciplines as history without ‘dumbing down’ or trivializing them. Serious scholars write for these journals, which also carry lists of books, movies, and places to visit that encourage further learning experiences.<sup>60</sup>

“Our goal is to show kids that history has an important place in their lives because it defines who they are and where they came from,” explained *Cobblestone* editorial director Lou Waryncia in 2009.<sup>61</sup>

Within specialization is expansion. Although the topic is history, *Cobblestone* includes other subjects. “History is not simply a chronology of events that people happen to remember. It’s a discussion of all the disciplines—literature, art, science, politics.”<sup>62</sup>

Many *Cobblestone* articles are biographical investigations of famous or less-famous Americans, groups of people, places, or institutions with eyewitness accounts. Articles involving activities are frequent. “Let’s Draw a Buffalo” encourages imagination, skills, and culture. Regular departments include reader letters, quizzes and puzzles, book reviews and suggested places to visit. Just as *Cricket* and *Ladybug* magazines have creatures as guides, accompanying the reader throughout every issue are two magazine mascots, Ebenezer, a town crier, and Colonel Cracker, a crow. They help the editor speak to the reader with symbols that are easy to identify.

Perhaps the ultimate message is self-esteem. “You and I make history. People make history,” said editor Nankin.<sup>63</sup>

*Cobblestone* receives rave reviews. *Children’s Periodicals of the United States* critic Janet Diana Vine described the text as “carefully chosen and well-edited.”<sup>64</sup> This may be the result of *Cobblestone*’s advisory board, described by the editor as “people who share the same

basic interest in children and history but who come from different backgrounds.”<sup>64</sup> The advisory board helps generate themes and plan issues eighteen months in advance of publication by using three criteria of covering long timespans, different areas of the country, and a variety of human experiences.

Thirty-one years of success finds *Cobblestone* in 2011 part of Carus Publishing Company’s stable of 14 award-winning magazines for toddlers to teens. Carus Publishing magazines devoted to American and world history and world cultures are *Cobblestone* (American, grades five to nine), *AppleSeeds* (grades three to five), *Calliope* (grades five to nine), *Dig* (grades five to nine), and *Faces* (grades five to nine).

Carus’ science and ideas publications helping kids “discover the natural world and cutting-edge science topics with fascinating features and captivating characters” are *Click* (grades one and two, winner of the 2011 Teachers’ Choice Awards for the Family), *Ask* (grades three to five), *Muse* (grades five to nine), and *Odyssey* (grades five to nine).

Literacy and language arts periodicals helping kids “cultivate the love of reading with selections from the best children’s writers and illustrators from around the world” are *Babybug* (pre-K), *Ladybug* (pre-K to grade one), *Spider* (grades two to four), *Cicada* (grades nine to twelve), and *Cricket* (grades five to eight).

Carus Publishing’s circulation targets classrooms, libraries, and homes with teacher’s guides, comprehension questions and quizzes, contests, and activities for use in the home or classroom are available on its Web site, [www.cobblestonepub.com](http://www.cobblestonepub.com).<sup>65</sup>



## Contenders

Expansion of the magazine empire has not been easy. Twentieth century threats to time previously spent reading magazines included the automobile after World War I, radio in the mid-1920s, and television after World War II. “While these outside invasions moved through their novelty stages, magazines survived to reach new plateaus by adjusting to readers’ interests and desires, as well as their needs,” Taft explained.<sup>66</sup>

Radio seized the public imagination in the 1920s by creating huge national audiences through network broadcasting. This was serious competition for magazines that was felt from the late 1920s through the 1940s. But magazines retained the prime advantages of portability and the possibility of re-reading as often as desired. There were important things radio could not do at the time, Tebbell explained.<sup>67</sup>

“They were introducing magazines of a kind never seen before and winning audiences attracted by fresh approaches. The newcomers understood changing tastes; many of the old line entrepreneurs did not. With the innovators and the builders of new empires, magazines lived through a transition period that ended after 1945 with an unprecedented explosion of periodicals that is still going on today.”<sup>68</sup>

Of these invaders, television caused the most changes for magazines. Television influenced magazine content by forcing magazines to improve design and writing with more and better pictures and shortened and sharpened writing for greater reading ease. “Either imitation or accentuation of differences is discernible in periodical after periodical” Taft wrote. Historian Roland Wolseley observed that ‘it took years before advertisers were convinced that magazines might be weaker quantitatively but could prove considerable strength qualitatively.’<sup>69</sup> James Playsted Wood confirmed the resilience of magazines in 1956.

That magazine circulations have climbed to new heights during the period of television’s

expansion and arrival can be taken as proof enough that the appearance and use of the new and powerful medium has far from supplanted the older one. The public seems simply to have added television to newspapers, magazines, and radio, the various media complementing each other. There are even studies which seem to indicate that the people who watch television most are often the same people who spend the most time reading magazines.<sup>70</sup>

Noncommercial educational television combined quality children's programs with magazines. The first example is the legendary *Sesame Street*, a production of Sesame Workshop (formerly called the Children's Television Workshop) nonprofit educational organization. Within six months of its first season in 1969, Nielsen ratings indicated more than six million three- to five-year-olds had seen the television program.

Bright colorful *Sesame Street* magazine extended the goals of *Sesame Street* television encouraging literacy, inquisitiveness, and social skills, while teaching basic cognitive skills such as the alphabet and numbers. The preschool publication was an extension of the television program bringing the familiar friendly characters of Big Bird, Ernie and Bert, Oscar the Grouch, and Elmo into homes through print every month from 1970 until 2008 when it became available exclusively online.<sup>71</sup> *The Electric Company* followed the same television to magazine path with the goal of helping older children to read better.

Television continues as a major competitor for children's leisure time while offering occasional gifts to periodical publishers. Although television shocked the magazine industry in the early 1950s, a reversal of this trend appeared in the mid-70s with the emergence of a second revolution in print. The resurgence of magazines lies in the fact that television can only whet an interest for information.

## Future

Despite competition from a variety of sources, scholars across the generations seem confident of the future of children's magazines. Writing in 1979, Duke assured, "There is no danger of juvenile magazines disappearing. Publishers point out that magazine subscriptions are purchased on a family basis rather than for each individual child. Publishers feel parents will always be seeking good reading material for their children."<sup>72</sup> Three years later Taft followed Duke's reasoning with his predictions.

Juvenile publications have a promising future. They could, of course, be hurt by the same economic factors that affect other periodicals, such as cost increases in paper, postage, production and personnel. Nevertheless, they have a constant audience, one that continues to grow. Such publications will succeed if they can successfully compete with television [and the Internet] for the young folks' attention.<sup>73</sup>

Reaching back to 1956, Wood's description predates later scholars' optimism and makes the magazine appear ready for any challenge.

An improved vehicle now, it provides more efficient communication among more millions of people than it did over two centuries ago. It transmits more and different facts and more complicated ideas largely because the twentieth century has more of each to transmit than had the eighteenth century, and because people today wish and need more knowledge and information. Its social force is greater because it reaches more readers who through their education are more receptive to ideas in print and who have learned largely through magazines, to live in an extended social, political, and environment.

They do an imperfect but a useful job, and they have been doing it, continually better, for a long time.<sup>75</sup>

Fast forward half a century to an interview in 2007 with Dr. Samir Husni, Director of the Magazine Innovation Center at the University of Mississippi by Mark Glaser, a blogger for the Public Broadcast System's MediaShift that "tracks how new media—from weblogs to podcasts to citizen journalism—are changing society and culture," [www.pbs.org/mediashift](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift). Husni was optimistic about the future of print magazines in the age of the Internet and digital technologies:

As long as we have human beings, we are going to continue to have ink on paper . . . I know there are some things that print cannot compete with new technologies. But there are also ways that the new technology cannot compete with print. There will be room for everything . . . if we provide relevant content in the relevant medium to the relevant audience.

The beauty of that disposable medium, the beauty of print on paper that we are addicted to is not replaceable with any other media. Yes, we'll have all these other new media but it will have a different purpose, a different use, a different relationship.<sup>76</sup>

### **CHAPTER III: Epic Advances**

The final decade of the twentieth century began another era of progress for children's magazines in America and the first tangible evidence of the Digital Revolution. Epic advances in computer and communications technology "suggested that newly efficient ways of distributing greater quantities of needed information to readers would be both possible and profitable." Reading David Abrahamson's descriptions of the Digital Revolution written in 1996 from a vantage point of a mere 15 years, his words are not unlike those that an explorer might use to describe a new land.

By the decade's midpoint, it was evident that innovations in "new media" areas would be led by magazine firms. With their expertise at editing for and marketing to specific audiences, they were uniquely positioned to explore the potential of what has been termed electronic publishing. It was still mostly a matter of investigating possibilities, for it was not yet certain which technology—CD-ROM, interactive disc, proprietary online database, World Wide Web site on the Internet, or some as-yet-uninvented delivery system—would prove the most commercially attractive.

Though the commitment by magazine publishers large and small to the promise of new media was amply illustrated in the 1990s, much uncertainty still characterized the field.<sup>1</sup>

#### **New Media Transformation**

New media has been an influence on children's magazines since 1995. Although computer magazines for children existed as early as 1983, the Internet's influence began about 12 years later. One of the earliest children's magazines to have an online presence, *Sports Illustrated Kids* embraced the World Wide Web in 1995. The magazine's progressive publisher Cleary Simpson explained,

With kids you find a very different environment, edutainment. Online is beyond print and very complementary. But print magazines are always marketable, personable and portable. The way kids read magazines—they all save it and have every issue from the past five years and share it with friends. Seven or eight kids see each issue. Computer usage is very different.<sup>2</sup>

Simpson predicted the future for children's magazines as being everywhere kids are—online, television, other media, in school. “New media enhances what we can do for our audience. Kids don't only learn by reading, they learn by watching and interacting. The magazine has always been interactive—write letters, magazine activities, and posing questions to answer in the magazine or in their minds.”<sup>3</sup> “We change with the kids,” *Sports Illustrated Kids* research director Donna Sabino explained. “We talk to them to find out what appeals to them. If we hadn't changed since 1989 I doubt we'd be as popular as we are.”<sup>4</sup>

Abrahamson's 1996 predictions have proved accurate: “For the foreseeable future well into the twenty-first century, it is likely that the contemporary magazine, in its printed form, will continue to demonstrate its efficacy as a source of information and pleasure for its readers, its utility as a marketing vehicle for its advertisers, and its viability as a business enterprise for its publishers.”<sup>5</sup>

### **1990-2010**

Favorable demographics and economic clout made children “the hottest marketing trend” of the 1990s and this trend translated to the magazine industry. An “absolute explosion” of 81 new children's magazines introduced in five years during the 1990s increased the total to more than 150.<sup>6</sup>

“By introducing more magazines to the field, more marketers have stood up and paid notice to the kids, the kids' buying power and the kids' spending patterns” said Leigh Novog,

national marketing manager for *Boys' Life* in 1996.<sup>7</sup>

Publishers courted the “yuppie spawn” of the baby boomers and protected their bottom line by introducing niche publications.<sup>8</sup> *Girls' Life* publisher and founding editor Karen Bokram explained the trend in a 1995 interview.

Now is the first time a generation of kids have their own cable channel and own products. Like Crest, we used our parents' and now they have their own toothpaste. They demand high quality, interesting products. It's the first time—due to sheer mass numbers—kids are making decisions in households, kids are in control.<sup>9</sup>

Bokram launched *Girls' Life* in 1994 to fill the gap between *Highlights* and *Seventeen* and to create a place for girls between the ages of eight and 14 to learn, explore, and have fun with stories about cooking, entertainment, parties, and fiction.

Editorial quality and circulation of top tier kids magazines blossomed in the 1990s along with the increased number of publications. The category was transformed from virtually nonexistent to a marketing force with a combined circulation of 3.5 million—larger than *Newsweek* or *People* and equivalent to the entire category of parenting magazines.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1990s Kids' Magnet, a consortium of executives with 12 children' magazines with advertising, worked to prove the effectiveness of print versus television for reaching children. Conclusions from a Kids' Magnet commissioned study of 427 children ages seven to 14 in six cities in 1995 revealed that:

- Children repeatedly return to the same magazine, with each issue viewed multiple times. On average, kids look at the same issue of any magazine 3.7 times, and 5.9 times if it's their top choice.
- The importance of magazines in children's lives addresses their desires for fun, information, and control.
- Magazine ads are an effective vehicle for generating children's involvement with products. Unlike TV, they can pour over a product ad repeatedly.<sup>11</sup>

Kids Magnet predicted a combination of media consisting of television, radio, print

media, and books for the future. One example of this media combination during the 1990s was a multimedia literary project, *Ghostwriter*, featured print, outreach and software along with a 42-part mystery and adventure television program.<sup>12</sup> Copies of *Ghostwriter* magazine were given away at schools, libraries, Public Broadcast System stations, literacy, and youth groups.

The frenzy attracted publishers as diverse as the Burger King Corporation with its quarterly 32 page magazine mailed to the three million members of its Kids Club program in 1993; *Time for Kids* for schoolchildren launched in 1995; *Muse*, a nonfiction science bimonthly for children six to 14 created through a partnership between *Smithsonian* and Cricket Magazine Group in 1996; and Carus Publishing's advertising-free *Click* science magazine for readers age three to seven in 1998.<sup>13</sup>

Children's magazine trend observer Stoll found little originality in magazines of the 1990s boom. "Most are spin-offs—a number of which are outstanding—and some are rip-offs," he said, "which ultimately won't appeal to kids because they are being done by people without a commitment to children and education."<sup>14</sup>

### **Millennium Generation**

The Millennium Generation "will redefine society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as baby boomers shaped social, political and economic changes in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" predicted Gerald Celente, director of the Trends Research Institute in Rhinebeck, New York. Census Bureau statistics from 1998 showed that the generation of children younger than 18 was 70.2 million, surpassing the previous high of 69.9 million set in 1966. "And unlike the baby boom that began in 1946, this one shows no sign of ending."<sup>15</sup>

Also unlike the baby boom triggered by an increase in births after World War II, the



Millennium Generation's growth is fueled as much by immigration as by the offspring of baby boomers. Since 1980 when the first members of the Millennium Generation were born, childhood in America has become an increasingly diverse experience. The Census Bureau projected that children of immigrants will account for 88 percent of the increase in the under 18 population between 2000 and 2050. Without immigration the population of children would decrease slightly from 2000 to 2015.

Perhaps the most glaring reflection of the population trend is an explosion of marketing to children, particularly those six to 12, who have unusually strong influence on parental spending. Studies showed that children spent or influenced the spending of \$500 billion a year in 1998.<sup>16</sup>

### **New Media**

Changes in the media environment between 1995 and 2005 included multiple computers and broadband at home, along with more sophisticated game consoles, the arrival of DVD players and flat panel televisions. So while time spent reading print media did not decrease between 1999 and 2005, time *exclusively* spent reading did.<sup>17</sup>

The Millennium Generation's record-breaking birthrate and the booming 1990s children's market did not help the survival of children's magazines. Of the 12 publications participating in Kids' Magnet in 1995 only four exist in 2011: *Boys' Life*, *Girls' Life*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, and *U.S. Kids* (*Jack and Jill*, *Humpty Dumpty*, *Turtle*). Ultimately unsuccessful were *Nickelodeon Magazine*, *Disney Adventures*, *Popular Science for Kids*, *Soccer Junior*, *Children's Television Workshop*, *Delta Fantastic Flyer*, and *Outside for Kids*.<sup>18</sup>

Nickelodeon cited the downturn in the overall magazine business and a decision to

concentrate on Nickelodeon Web sites as its reasons for discontinuing the publication in 2009. “The switch to the Internet is understandable, economically, but reading a magazine . . . is clearly a different experience than going online, with all of the video options,” said Bob Der, managing editor of *Sports Illustrated Kids* in 2009.<sup>19</sup>

Launched in 1992, one survivor *New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams*, examined new media changes to the publishing world and decided technology “represented an unparalleled opportunity to reach more girls than ever before, and embarked on a bold growth plan.” In 2007 the renamed print publication, *New Moon Girls*, debuted with additional opportunities for self-discovery, creativity, and community at New Moon Girls Online. Parents, teachers, youth leaders, and other caring adults have a Web site, [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com), resource to help girls build healthy resistance to gender stereotypes and inequities. The award winning, ad free *New Moon* was created to empower girls eight and older by the parents of twins using an editorial board composed of the then 11-year-old daughters and 18 of their friends.<sup>20</sup>

### **New Ventures**

Despite the demise of some children’s publications and the move from print to the Internet of others, new ventures continue to appear. Magazine launches are one indication of the health of the children’s magazine industry and the numbers from the past 15 years are encouraging. The 2011 edition of *Samir Husni’s Guide to New Magazines* reported the following numbers of new publications for children from 1995 through 2010:<sup>21</sup>

1995-6	1996-15	1997-12	1998-16	1999-6	2000-10
2001-20	2002-17	2003-16	2004-8	2005-17	2006-17
2007-13	2008-9	2009-10	2010-15		

An explanation for children’s publishers’ optimism appeared in *Folio* magazine in February 2011:

While many media pundits purport that magazine readership is dropping or that printed magazines may soon be extinct, the truth emerges that year after year magazine readership continues to grow. In fact, magazine readership has increased for the past five years—right through the recession, according to MPA, which found that four out of five adults read magazines.<sup>22</sup>

And adults are usually the ones to subscribe to children’s magazines.

Print has faced hard times before and the right publications can still find success. Despite the odds, print still has a place for publishers with the right audience.

“Magazines are still a great way to declare community and build a bond between audience, author and advertisers,” Federated Media founder and chairman John Battelle told *Folio* in 2009. “But given the reality of the economics, only certain kinds of magazines make sense anymore.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Kid Power**

With estimates in 2008 that children under 12 spend more than \$30 billion annually and influence purchases worth \$500 billion, children’s magazines still make financial sense.<sup>24</sup> Kid power covers four age groups with flexible boundaries: toddlers 0 to 3, kids 4 to 8, tweens 9 to 12, and teens 13 to 16.

### **Pre-reader Preference**

The ultimate testament to publishers’ faith in the future of children’s magazines is their financial commitment launching new print publications in the twenty-first century. Since Pennsylvania educators Garry and Caroline Myers started *Highlights for Children* in 1946 it has provided “Fun with a Purpose” for millions of children while focusing on the importance of the

parent and child bond with early literacy and offering Hidden Pictures, Goofus (the selfish boy) and Gallant (the thoughtful boy), jokes, stories, drawings, crafts, poems, and the “Our Own Pages” feature for readers six to 10. In 2006 the nation’s number one juvenile periodical introduced a new magazine for preschoolers with 40 quality pages of read-aloud stories and age appropriate puzzles and activities titled *Highlights High Five*.<sup>25</sup>

*High Five* is intended to contribute to the emotional, social, physical and intellectual development of pre-readers.<sup>130</sup> The goal is to capture subscribers at age two with *High Five* and continue with *Highlights* until age 12. By 2010, the magazines combined paid circulation was two million copies a month covering the market for ages two through 12.<sup>27</sup>

Christine French Clark, editor in chief of both, explained the allure of print.

“For younger kids, each new issue is an invitation to snuggle with a parent or an older sibling to experience together the pleasure of turning the pages of an illustrated magazine. For older kids reading independently, their connection to a favorite magazine may be intensely personal.”<sup>28</sup>

Clark plans to supplement print publications with content delivered by new and emerging technology.

We’ll be where our readers want us to be. [Reader input is 3,000 to 4,000 monthly emails and letters] Already we know that the majority of our readers prefer to receive *Highlights* in magazine format. Some seem to have a greater appetite for finding *Highlights* content on HighlightsKids.com. But kids online seem to gravitate to the games and activities; they seem less interested in reading stories and articles online. I’ve heard other children’s magazine editors say the same thing about their Web sites. So it’s hard to imagine that kids will really want to see a full-issue version of a children’s magazine on their computer or mobile device any time soon.<sup>29</sup>

Following the *Highlights High Five* precedent of targeting the non-reader demographic, *National Geographic Little Kids* for explorers ages three to six arrived in 2007 to augment

*National Geographic Kids* with award winning photographs, colorful art, and pages of interactivity designed to excite young children about investigating their world. Not only did *Little Kids* prove that the subject could be kid friendly, but it exceeded paid circulation goals by more than 58,000 subscribers.<sup>30</sup>

“The good news is that those magazines are not only serving a market, they are insuring a future market for their adult versions.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Tweens**

New titles prove print continues to connect with young audiences. The tween category of kids between the ages of 6 to 12 has gained publisher and advertiser notice as potentially lucrative since the millennium. In 2003, an estimated 30 million tweens existed nationwide, a group bigger in numbers than past tween segments.<sup>32</sup>

World Wrestling Entertainment launched *WWE Kids* in April 2008 as a way to build its tween fan base.

“Research shows that the earlier the introduction to the brand, the more likely people are to stick with it,” said *WWE* publishing director Bob Lee “When we went to introduce the kids magazine, we spoke to some of our partners and the question wasn’t ‘Why?’ it was more like ‘Why have you been waiting so long?’”

The numbers are there with 2.6 million six to 14-year-olds watching the weekly television show. Initial circulation was 75,000 but *WWE* estimates 100,000 with a \$3.95 cover price for the bimonthly. Content ranges from fitness and nutrition to geography and esteem building.

“I feel as though the goal for launching a magazine in this climate is to try and break

even,” said Lee. “That was our goal but we were able to surpass it and we will make a profit on it in its first year.”<sup>32</sup>

### **New Audience**

In 2010 the editor-in-chief of a new food magazine for children of all economic levels, particularly those at and below poverty level (not the standard magazine target audience) noted, “Cooking is the one area where print beats digital for convenience. You want to be able to lay the pages displaying the recipe open next to where you’re working.” While low income families are much less likely to own a computer, *ChopChop* editor Steven Slon explained “even young children who have computers enjoy the tactile and visual pleasure of holding a book or magazine in their hands.”<sup>33</sup>

Founded by cookbook author and food writer Sally Sampson in April 2010, *ChopChop* is a quarterly magazine for kids aged five to 12 and their families dedicated to reversing and preventing childhood obesity published by Kid2Kid, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Massachusetts with a website, [www.chopchopmag.com](http://www.chopchopmag.com), Twitter @chopchopmag, and Facebook presence.<sup>34</sup>

Lively, engaging, and fun, this health and educational resource to teach kids to cook and be nutritionally curious and literate that just “happens to be in the form of a printed magazine” began with a marketing campaign targeting pediatricians. Pediatricians and family physicians “prescribe” the publication encouraging nutritional literacy and for families to cook and eat together.<sup>35</sup>

Editorial includes such features as author and staff writer for the *New Yorker* Susan Orlean’s profile of a 14-year-old chicken farmer. Veteran magazine reporters and designers

donate their work along with an advisory team from Harvard and other universities.

Creative thinking is necessary to succeed in the magazine business. While subscriptions are offered, most *ChopChop* revenue is from foundations, corporations, and the government with additional support from schools, hospitals, clubs, and pediatricians.

“I think the classic magazine revenue model is dead,” editor Slon said. Yet he plans to continue using the classic printed page to circulate the magazine’s message. “In the future, that model may shift as the tools for transmitting information change. But for now, we think it works best as a physical entity.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Television’s Reemergence**

Simpson’s predictions in 1995 of the future of kids magazines being everywhere seem to have been proven true. In this Internet era and reversing the *Sesame Street* model of a television show creating a magazine, the National Wildlife Federation’s *Wild Animal Baby* magazine expanded from the printed page to the television screen in 2010. Ten years after the debut of the print publication for two to four year olds, the evolution to a 360 brand *Wild Animal Baby Explorers* television show on Public Broadcast System complements the magazine’s goal of “giving children a foundation for a lifelong love of wildlife and wild places.”<sup>37</sup>

Money and access were the impetus for the move to include television. *Wild Animal Baby* Editor Lori Collins explained:

Historically, we’ve grown our subscription base via direct mail. But direct mail has become more expensive and less effective for today’s busy parents. The reach of television is far greater than anything we could achieve through traditional marketing means. By going where kids—and their parents—are, we hope to grow the *Wild Animal Baby* brand, including magazine sales.<sup>38</sup>

As these new subscribers get older, the plan is to graduate readers to the three other National

Wildlife print publications: *Your Big Backyard* (ages four-seven), *Ranger Rick* (ages seven–14), and *Just for Fun* (ages seven–14).

The United States Postal Service has regulated and delivered magazines for more than two centuries. Yet 222 years after the publication of the first children’s magazine, publishers such as *Wild Animal Baby* are finding the medium of television more financially feasible than the mail. Does increased postage, in combination with the ease and competition of the Internet, foreshadow the end of the print magazine for children?

Disney Publishing doesn’t think so. In March 2011 they announced the introduction of a cluster of new glossy 50 page subscription magazines featuring comics, games, posters and quizzes with advertising confined to Disney character franchises in an effort to replicate in the United States what is a robust business in Europe. The company’s hopes for its new magazines are based on demand for test issues in 2010 that substantially surpassed Disney’s expectations.

Forget marketplace analysis and business models, according to Disney’s general manager for American magazines, Aparna Pande, it boiled down to this reason, “Kids want them, and moms will pay for them.”<sup>39</sup>

Still, the subscription route is a tough one. Disney and other children’s publishers have had decent success with one-time sales of magazines at retailers. But the children’s magazine business in the United States pales in comparison with that of Europe, where many children subscribe. For various reasons, ranging from the decline in youth reading to the rise of video games, the subscription model has largely died in the United States—a situation not entirely unlike the one that comic book publishers have faced.



## Digital Natives

The first students who have never known a world without the Internet graduated from high school in 2010. These “digital natives” are good at skimming and scanning and like graphics, gadgets, convenience, and first-page results. They have mastered multi-tasking using a number of mediums—watching TV, talking on the phone and surfing the Web simultaneously.<sup>40</sup> They want content on all platforms, they want it to be searchable, and increasingly expect it to be supplied on demand.

“Every kid walking into school is so technologically sophisticated that they demand to be taught on new technology,” said Ira Wolfman, SVP of editorial at *Weekly Reader*.

*Weekly Reader* is paying attention to digital natives’ desires. The more than a century old publication for eight million pre-K to grade 12 students is still available in print but 250,000 teachers connect to the magazine Web site on interactive whiteboards to bring up a digitally optimized *Weekly Reader* to complement lesson plans. An educational game app based on one of the magazine’s popular science-trivia departments for the iPad and iPod Touch is in development for a summer 2011 launch and is viewed as an opportunity to expand *Weekly Reader*’s reach outside the classroom.

“We know we can make educational content engaging, but what we’re now doing is seeing if we can adapt material so that it’s not just for teachers in class,” Wolfman said. Following the current pre-reader trend in magazine publishing found in *National Geographic Little Kids* and *Highlights High Five*, *Weekly Reader* is planning educational apps for pre-schoolers.<sup>41</sup>

*Wild Baby Magazine* editor Lori Collins praises print for the shared, cozy reading experience it provides young children and parents and the excitement of receiving mail while admitting that “Both kids and adults love technology . . . they like the bells and whistles.”

Collins is keeping a close eye on where technology is headed and explained that “Like other children’s magazines, we’re dabbling with how our wildlife content can be applied to media such as phone apps, software games, and a more interactive website. But for us [in 2010], it’s a little too early to draw up a specific roadmap. We’re still trying to figure out how to make digital experiences that are necessary, sufficient, and relevant as the experiences kids already have reading our print magazines.”<sup>42</sup>

Consumers continue to engage magazines in the printed form, but they are also looking beyond print and accessing magazine content in very personal ways—Web sites, e-media, mobile and rich media, and various other content platforms are increasingly more relevant to today’s magazine and media consumer. The emerging diversity in how we encounter magazine content speaks to the complexity of how consumers engage the content they want—on their terms, in many formats and across multiple platforms—and again, only the content they want.<sup>43</sup>

Most kids magazines have an online presence where children can participate in polls and surveys about issues of interest; submit their own stories, art work, or science projects for online publication; email experts about questions on a broad range of topics; play interactive games; watch brief audio and video clips; or follow links to find additional information on a subject. online magazines can be accessed in the classroom, in the library or at home.<sup>44</sup>

Today’s media and advertising experts see a bright future for kids’ magazines.

“Particularly if they’re produced in conjunction with a Web site. Kids love new technology--- cellphones, computers, video games—but they still like reading magazines—just like adults, curling up on the couch and holding something tangible that’s new and bright and glossy.”<sup>45</sup>

Two important threats to children’s print magazines on the horizon identified by publishing technology consultant Gene Gable are these:

It’s clear from the statistics and surveys that kids under 18 don’t have the attachment to print by older generations, even if they still consider it in their media mix.

Secondly, if the green movement increases in importance with each year, in only a decade or two print media could become so unpopular and inefficient that it assumes its place as nostalgia beside the horse and buggy and film cameras. None of the projections for those technologies came close to predicting how quickly they would actually decline.<sup>46</sup>

The 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation study found a bright spot for the future of print: a connection between computer time and reading. The more time a child devoted to computer work, the more likely he or she was to read. In fact, children with their own computer had the highest daily level of media exposure to all media, not just print. Kids are reading more in short bursts instead of extended periods and are reading less literature.<sup>47</sup>

Whether both print and e-zines will exist in the future is a question many ponder and today’s children will decide. “I tell them you will be the generation that decides what happens to print,” said Kristen Scott, librarian at Eastmont Junior High in Wenatchee, Washington.<sup>48</sup>

## **CHAPTER IV: Digital Natives**

A look at 222 years of children’s magazine development and publication in the United States—from the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Revolution—reveals that the only constant is change. Supremely adaptable magazines for children meet the challenges of the day—whether that day is in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twenty-first century.

“Magazines keep up with the times. Magazines adapt to a changing world; they match what today’s kids need.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Status and Role**

Magazines are an important part of the written record of American civilization and an invaluable resource about the tastes, manners, habits, interests, and achievements of any period of United States history. The social historian has no richer source. “Our present will some day be the quaint past at which possible survivors of future wars can be amused or aghast, but which they cannot neglect, in the pages of our magazines,” Wood wrote.<sup>2</sup>

Through the centuries the role of children’s magazines has progressed from providing “dreary moralizers” for little adults to providing cheery “edutainment” for cosseted children. The earliest periodicals were an outgrowth of the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the shift away from the medieval conception of children as miniature adults who needed to have the devil beaten out of them.<sup>3</sup>

## **Eighteenth Century**

The written record of civilization shows that children's magazines of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries strived to guide young readers with moral lessons, sentimental verses and instructive tales. From 1789 through the 1830s, religious, educational, and reform interests shaped children's periodicals.<sup>4</sup>

## **Nineteenth Century**

In addition to encouraging morality and providing education and entertainment, socialization was a role of American children's magazines in the nineteenth century. Although late eighteenth century British writers had used juvenile literature to socialize children, Professor Karcher credits *Juvenile Miscellany* editor and writer Lydia Maria Child as the first to mold the genre to America's needs in 1826.

Child utilized children's literature to instill the principles she believed vital to a democracy (as opposed to a monarchy): "a commitment to equal rights for all and the courage to stand by one's inner convictions, as well as the internalization of the middle-class work ethic."<sup>5</sup>

The conservative social mission of nineteenth century children's literature reinforced society's class and gender rules of the middleclass work ethic that included the emergence of a new notion of childhood and value system. Child also shared her stand on racial equality that continued to reverberate for years after her courage and willingness to share abolitionist views with her young readers was responsible for the magazine's closing in 1834.<sup>6</sup>

Many grew up to share her beliefs.

Education was the emphasis from the 1840s through the Civil War. The magazine business had assumed by the 1850s much of the character it has today with a growing number of

specialists writing for the fast-increasing number of specialized magazines.<sup>7</sup>

After the Civil War entertainment joined education as a goal of children's magazines. Two especially beloved nineteenth century publications offering a refreshing change of pace from the "dreary moralizers" of the eighteenth century were *Juvenile Miscellany* (offering amusement with instruction from 1826 to 1834) and *St. Nicholas* (which started its 68 year run in 1873 and is still remembered as the paramount children's journal of all time).<sup>8</sup> *St. Nicholas'* acclaimed editor Mary Mapes Dodge viewed "A child's magazine is its playground" and hired such literary luminaries as Robert Louis Stevenson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Rudyard Kipling as contributing writers.<sup>9</sup>

### **Twentieth Century**

Expansion of the magazine empire has not been easy. Twentieth century threats to leisure time previously spent reading magazines included the radio in the mid-1920s, television after World War II, and the computer in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet magazines survived this competition and even improved because of it. (Television influenced publications to shorten, sharpen writing and enhance design with an increased number of improved images.)<sup>10</sup>

One of the earliest children's magazines to have an online presence, the spinoff *Sports Illustrated Kids* embraced the competitor with the launch of its Web site in 1995. Progressive publisher Cleary Simpson explained the draw of new media,

With kids you find a very different environment, edutainment. Online is beyond print and very complementary. But print magazines are always marketable, personable, and portable. The way kids read magazines—they all save it and have every issue from the past five years and share it with friends. Seven or eight kids see each issue. Computer usage is very different.<sup>11</sup>

The last decades of the twentieth century experienced an absolute explosion of new

magazines for children while their role to educate and entertain continued, specialized periodicals flourished, and spinoffs, junior versions of adult publications, became one of the biggest trends.

“Kids are among the world’s harshest critics, and if children’s magazines are hot items it is because kids like them,” said Lynn Lehmkuhl, media executive and former editor in chief of the now defunct *Nickelodeon* magazine. “Accustomed to living in a media-rich society, kids want quick, up-to-date information, short articles about interesting subjects—in an inviting format with an abundance of color photographs or illustrations.”<sup>12</sup>

All of this continues in the twenty-first century, although not all of the new magazines created during the exploding category of the 1990s have survived. Of the 12 members of the Kids MagNet consortium of children’s periodical publishers in 1995 only four exist in 2011.

### **The Present**

Children’s magazines in the twenty-first century appear to be on the cusp of great change with the Digital Revolution and yet current print publications remain similar to their predecessors. The editorial objective of children’s periodicals has changed little since their inception in 1789.

“From the very beginning of children’s magazines in the eighteenth century...diversity of content and blending of purpose—informing while entertaining—has been the dual objective of an enormous quantity of children’s magazines worldwide.”<sup>13</sup>

While educating and entertaining have been primary goals throughout American juvenile publishing history the ways of achieving those goals have differed greatly.

To say that changes in publishing have occurred during the last two centuries is an understatement. Seismic shifts from the Industrial Revolution to the Digital Revolution have impacted both the country and the magazine publishing industry. From the printing press and mail system with postage and print circulation and subscriptions to the invention of the radio, television, computer, Internet, and mobile device—changes in publishing and marketing from early times to the present have been remarkable.

The present seems to be the dawn of a new age. The first students who have never known a world without the Internet graduated from high school in 2010. These technologically sophisticated “digital natives” insist on new technology as a complement to their print diet. Will a generation that has now grown up completely in the Digital Age and will soon constitute the primary media audience abandon print media?

### **The Future**

There is no consensus yet on the impact of digital technology. It’s still in its infancy and the future of print seems to rest in our hands.

Cobblestone/Carus Publishing Editorial Director Lou Waryncia is optimistic about the future of print magazines for children.

I do not think the end is near for children’s magazines. I’m a firm believer that print will be around for a long time. Certainly technology is changing the magazine industry, and we’re all trying different ways to co-exist with these changes. But magazines still have a place with children (and adults).

Will there be changes, or interactions with technology? Definitely. We’re still trying to find our place on the Internet. And will we deliver content in different ways? Definitely. But I believe we’ll still be flipping through print magazine pages as well.<sup>14</sup>

Just as it did with the advent of television in the twentieth century, children’s magazine writing and presentation continues to change with the times to entertain, inform, and entice to a



wide audience. “There are just more choices today. I think magazines have the capacity to compete with the Internet and other digital devices because of the variety of content and due to great graphics and design” Waryncia explained.<sup>15</sup>

If circulation is any indication, children’s magazines are competing successfully. Subscriptions of Cobblestone/Carus Publication’s 14 non-advertising based publications remained steady as of 2009 and Waryncia attributes this success to readers’ parents, grandparents, teachers, and librarians.

“Adults will skimp on themselves, but they will still buy items, such as our magazines, that they believe are important for their children.”<sup>16</sup>

In the end, however, only one opinion counts. Although parents see magazines as an educational resource and publishers view them as profit vehicles, the final judgment belongs to the children.

Simpson predicts the future as being everywhere kids are—online, television, other media, in school. New media enhances what print can do for audiences. “Kids don’t only learn by reading, they learn by watching and interacting. The magazine has always been interactive—write letters, magazine activities, and posing questions to answer in the magazine or in their minds,” Simpson explained.<sup>17</sup>

The past 222 years of children’s magazines reveals that the audience is not an easy one to reach or retain. Successful publications have discovered the secret. “We change with kids,” said Donna Sabino, *Sports Illustrated Kids* Research Director. “We talk to them and find out what appeals to them. If we hadn’t changed since 1989 I doubt we’d be as popular as we are.” 142

The future appears bright for children’s magazines. Predictions in 2011 continue the

tradition of optimism. Throughout history, journalists and scholars speak of magazines' ability to not only survive, but to thrive. Obstacles evolve and the examination of more than two centuries of publications reveals that children's periodicals in the United States not only rise to meet challenges but improve because of them. This historical investigation and discourse with publishing experts strongly suggests that children's magazines will continue to exist.

Children's magazines have existed in the United States since George Washington became the new country's first president and children were considered little adults, and research indicates these adaptable periodicals will continue even with the fate of print in the hands of digital natives.

Will children's magazines exist in both print and on the Internet in the future? Only time will tell.

### **Recommendations**

A look at the history of children's magazine development and publication in the United States provides perspective of past publications and ideas for their future. One certainty is the need for additional research to illuminate this neglected field of study. In particular, the years of 1995 to 2010—the early period of the Digital Revolution—are overlooked and would benefit from scholarly attention.

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