

### Later Colonial Magazines

The next magazine in the American colonies was in German, not English. Christopher Sauer (also spelled Saur and Sower), Jr., a Germantown, PA-based printer was its publisher.

Sauer inherited his business from his father, the Colonies' first German printer. The Sauers specialized in producing German newspapers, calendars, pamphlets, books, and Bibles for the large German population in southeastern Pennsylvania and neighboring states.<sup>1</sup> (Richardson, 141ff)

By 1764, nine German newspapers had been launched in America,<sup>2</sup> including the Sauers' *Hoch Deutsche Pennsylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber*, arguably the most successful of the 18th-century German-American papers. But although the German-speaking community was highly literate, Sauer realized that many members were too poor to buy books. His generous plan was to publish a magazine that would be freely distributed. Its contents would be religious and inspirational and, like the *New-England Magazine*, would be aimed at the whole family, parents and children alike, "to feed Christian faith and justify and emotionalize belief in the purposefulness of the work-a-day life." (Richardson, 143)

Accordingly, Sauer launched *Ein Geistliches Magazin* ("Religious Magazine"), produced in eight pages per issue and initially published weekly. Most contents—essays, sermons, poetry, songs, and catechisms—were taken from contemporary German Protestant writers, though Sauer himself occasionally contributed and called on other members of the community to contribute as well. Several prominent writers responded, including Ephrata PA's "Theophilus," whose poetry was greatly admired, and Christopher Dock, the Mennonite scholar. (Richardson, 142f)

Given that the project was a labor of love for Sauer, he eventually took liberties with the schedule, producing 50 issues in 1764, suspending publication altogether between 1765 and 1769 inclusive, and producing the magazine irregularly (mostly monthly) between 1770 and 1772. (Richardson, 366)

Sauer's *Ein Geistliches Magazin* was a trailblazing publication in three ways. As America's first free magazine it set a new course in circulation. As the Colonies' second purely religious magazine in 20 years, *Ein Geistliches Magazin* reaffirmed how viable and popular the market for religious publications could become. And it was first on the long and often illustrious list of foreign-language magazines in English-speaking America.

The first Southern magazine appeared at about the same time as *Ein Geistliches Magazin*, although it was a magazine more in name than form. James Davis, the first printer in North Carolina, had published the *North-Carolina Gazette* newspaper between 1751 and 1759, when it was suspended. In 1764 Davis launched the *North-Carolina Magazine*, a short (four- to eight-page) news journal which lasted into 1765.

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<sup>1</sup> At this time the German-speaking population in Pennsylvania was approximately 100,000, or one-third of the colony's total population; German population in Pennsylvania and neighboring states combined was roughly 140,000; and in all 13 colonies probably approached 200,000. Most German immigrants came to America seeking religious freedom, and most 18th-century American-German periodicals had a religious component. (Richardson 141)

<sup>2</sup> 1. *Philadelphische Zeitung* (1732), 2. *Hoch Deutsche Pennsylvanische Geschicht-Schreiber* (1739-1778), 3. *Hoch Deutsche Pennsylvanische Journal* (1743), 4. *Zeitung* (1748-1749), 5. *Teutsche Fama* (1749-1751), 6. *Die Hoch Teutsch und Englische Zeitung* (1751-1752), 7. *Lancastersche Zeitung* (1752-1753), 8. *Philadelphische Zeitung* (1755-1777), and 9. *Wochenliche Philadelphische Staatsbote* (1762-1779)

In appearance, the *North-Carolina Magazine* resembled a newspaper, and since its contents consisted mostly of news, essays from other publications, and advertisements, historians classify it as a newspaper. It was succeeded in 1768 by a revival of the *North-Carolina Gazette*. (Richardson, 148)

After an 11-year break from magazine publishing, Benjamin Mecom—now relocated to New York—gave the business a second try, this time with the *Penny Post*, another publication that challenges classification. It was a short (four pages per issue) periodical issued three times per week, smaller in size than the newspapers of the time. Its subtitle explains its contents: “containing fresh news, advertisements, useful hints, etc.” Mecom devoted most of its space to news, but reserved the first and second pages for supplemental material, including essays, epigrams, and poems. He tired of the idea quickly, apparently producing only nine numbers between January 9 and 27, 1769. The *Penny Post*'s title was a reference to the British mails, not a harbinger of the one-cent newspapers published in the 1830s by James Gordon Bennett, Benjamin Day, and others. (Richardson, 148f; cf. “penny” in OED)

Equally unique in format and contents, the *Royal Spiritual Magazine* was published in Philadelphia by John MacGibbons in 1771—although how frequently and how long are not known. Only the first two numbers survive. The contents consisted exclusively of an extended allegorical dialogue between Friendly and Truth. The editors, “Several Divines,” were committed Calvinists. (Richardson, 146ff)

In a different vein altogether was America's first scientific magazine, the *American Magazine, or General Repository*, established in January, 1769 with Lewis Nicola (also spelled Nichola) as editor.

Nicola practically embodied the Enlightenment temperament. Born in France, educated in Ireland, and freshly mustered from the British army officer corps, he emigrated in 1767 to Philadelphia, where he opened a bookstore and a general store, worked as a civil engineer, and considered starting a circulating library. In 1768 he joined the American Philosophical Society. (Richardson, 149ff; Nichola)

America's first organization devoted to science, the American Philosophical Society provided a forum for inquiry and discovery. It was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743 to pursue “all philosophical Experiments that let Light into the Nature of Things, tend to increase the Power of Man over Matter, and multiply the Conveniencies or Pleasures of Life.” (APS) Nicola was an active member and contributed to the *Transactions* of the Society.

As Nicola developed his plan for a monthly magazine, he saw opportunity for both the Society and himself, by binding the Society's *Transactions* into the magazine. Thus the *American Magazine, or General Repository*, when it first appeared in January, 1769, contained both its own unique contents and the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, with the pages of each portion numbered separately. This gave broader exposure to the Society's proceedings, and provided a kind of supplementary bonus to the magazine's readers. (Richardson, 150)

Nicola believed that news deserved only a small role in a successful magazine, and he devoted just a few pages to current events. He did provide very complete coverage of the growing discord between the Colonies and Great Britain, and essays on religion and government in general. He also included fiction, mostly romances, and poetry, both light and serious. Nicola's interest in science led him to reprint articles from other scientific societies, as well as original submissions from American scientists—this in addition to the *Transactions*. (Richardson, 151ff)

The *American Magazine, or General Repository* survived nine months, ending with the September, 1769 issue. Its contents were broad, varied, and useful. Nicola brought America's scientific innovations

and discoveries to a broader audience, and—like many of the preceding American magazines—his magazine helped reveal the common interests, and ultimately the common cause, that all 13 colonies shared.

That common cause was becoming more and more impassioned as the 1770s got underway. Impending events had begun to influence American publishing, and nowhere was this more apparent than in Boston, the epicenter of discord. The city was divided into Tory (Loyalist) and Whig (Patriot) camps, each increasingly strident in expressing its position. Among the city's newspapers, Edes and Gill's Boston *Gazette*, and Thomas's *Massachusetts Spy* were outspoken in support of the Whigs. The Boston *Chronicle*, the Boston *Post-Boy*, the *Massachusetts Gazette and News-Letter*, and the Boston *Evening-Post* were all Tory.

To the periodicals supporting the Tories was added the *Censor*, a weekly essay-paper whose first issue was November 23, 1771. The *Censor* was published by Ezekial Russell and edited (at least in part) by Andrew Oliver, lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts. Russell's main business was printing, and he probably had less interest in the *Censor's* politics than in its finances. On the other hand, Lieutenant-Governor Oliver's loyalties were obvious. (Richardson, 158ff)

The *Censor* contained one essay per four-page issue. Many of its contributors wrote in response to submissions in the Whig newspapers, and their tone varied between ironic humor and lawyerly political argument. How many minds the *Censor* changed can be guessed by the difficulties it encountered in obtaining circulation. After half a year of effort, it ceased publication with the May 2, 1772 issue. (Richardson, 162 ; Thomas, 285)

The citizens of Boston were offered one last general-interest magazine before the outbreak of the Revolution. Unlike the *Censor*, the new publication, the *Royal American Magazine*, provided a broad range of contents intended to entertain and inform as well as persuade. Its publisher was Isaiah Thomas, proprietor of the ardently Whig *Massachusetts Spy*.

Thomas announced his new monthly in June, 1773, saying that newspapers were not "fit to convey to posterity the labours of the learned." As it turned out, Thomas underestimated his own labors on the project—the first issue didn't appear until February, 1774, and by spring the production schedule had slipped badly. The June issue appeared in August.

Thomas's editorial formula was to provide both original contents and reprinted material from British sources, along with engraved illustrations. He also promised to serialize loyalist Governor Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay*, an extended work from an author whose family name is synonymous with outstanding writing and clear-headed scholarship.

In many of his goals the publisher succeeded. The *Royal American's* engravings (most by Revere) set a new graphical standard, and the Hutchinson *History* was well-received. Thomas was also innovative in publishing sheet music, and including "confessional and love stories heavily laden with sex, sorrow, and sentimentality," which he borrowed from British periodicals. He was unsuccessful, however, in soliciting much original material—about three quarters of the magazine's contents were reprinted. (Richardson, 168f).

After several months of struggling to do business in an occupied and blockaded city, Thomas decided he had gone about as far as he could. In August, 1774 he sold the *Royal American Magazine* to a friend and fellow Whig, Joseph Greenleaf, who continued the magazine on the same general plan, with about as much success. Greenleaf stuck with the magazine through the March, 1775 issue. The events at Lexington and Concord in April "put a period," as Thomas wrote, to the *Royal American*.

(Richardson, 166 ; Thomas, 286)

At about the same time that Thomas was getting underway with the *Royal American*, Robert Aitken, a Scottish immigrant printer, announced plans for a new Philadelphia monthly, the *Pennsylvania Magazine; or American Monthly Museum*. Like the *Royal American*, Aitken's magazine was designed to provide varied and general contents: essays ("excluding controversy") on science, politics, and religion, as well as poetry, news, vital statistics, prices current, and so on—a true miscellany. The *Pennsylvania Magazine's* first issue appeared in January, 1775.

Seeking assistance in his editorial department, Aitken was introduced to Thomas Paine, recently arrived from Britain and carrying letters of reference from Benjamin Franklin. Paine joined the magazine in time to work on its second issue.

Over the next 18 months, the *Pennsylvania Magazine* published some of the most influential writing in the Colonies. Richardson says it was "high in importance among its eighteenth-century kin. A general destiny swept it along." The magazine's contributors included (in addition to Paine) Francis Hopkinson, John Dickinson, John Hancock, Dr. John Witherspoon, and Charles Lee; and, from the opposing perspective, Generals Burgoyne and Gage. (Richardson, 197)

It's easy to imagine that Paine was a challenging employee.<sup>3</sup> He and Aitken quarreled over employment terms, and Paine left the *Pennsylvania Magazine* around September, 1775. When *Common Sense* was released the following month, Robert Bell, not Aitken, was its publisher. (Richardson, 177)

The *Pennsylvania Magazine* continued for another ten issues after Paine's departure, and the quality of its contents remained high. Notably, its last issue (July, 1776) contained the text of the newly-signed Declaration of Independence.

Before the end of the Revolution—and at a point when its outcome was by no means certain—another magazine was launched in Philadelphia, its title reflecting the hopes of its principals, Francis Bailey, publisher, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge, editor. Depending on your perspective, the *United States Magazine* was either America's last colonial magazine or the first magazine of an independent country. Given its name, there's no question where the magazine's editorial sympathies lay.

Brackenridge, as noted above, was a Princeton classmate of Philip Freneau and James Madison, and his enthusiasm for America—both country and continent—had been obvious since his school days. His commencement address (co-written with Freneau), "The Rising Glory of America," was an epic-length ode to the continent's limitless potential. In his adult years, Brackenridge remained a lifelong "booster" of his country.

Prior to becoming a magazine editor, Brackenridge had tried his hand at school teaching, preaching,

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas (450) writes: "Aitken contracted with Paine to furnish, monthly, for this work, a certain quantity of original material; but he often found it difficult to prevail on Paine to comply with his engagement. On one of the occasions, when Paine had neglected to supply the materials for the Magazine, within a short time of the day of publication, Aitken went to his lodgings, and complained of his neglecting to fulfil his contract. Paine heard him patiently, and coolly answered, 'You shall have them in time.' Aitken expressed some doubts on the subject, and insisted on Paine's accompanying him and proceeding immediately to business, as the workmen were waiting for copy. He accordingly went home with Aitken, and was soon seated at the table with the necessary apparatus, which always included a glass, and a decanter of brandy. Aitken remarked, 'he would never write without *that*.' The first glass put him in a train of thinking; Aitken feared the second would disqualify him, or render him untractable; but it only illuminated his intellectual system; and when he had swallowed the third glass, he wrote with great rapidity, intelligence, and precision; and his ideas appeared to flow faster than he could commit them to paper. What he penned from the inspiration of the brandy, was perfectly fit for the press without any alteration, or correction."

and writing for the stage. With his gift for eloquence and his appreciation of the writer's craft, he probably didn't hesitate long when offered the opportunity to launch a new magazine. Bailey had published a collection of Brackenridge's discourses in 1778, and their partnership continued at the *United States Magazine*, which launched in January, 1779.

Mott (I, 27) referred to the United States magazine as "probably the most brilliant performance of the whole period."

The *United States Magazine's* prospectus reflected Brackenridge's enthusiasm for the new country. He said the new magazine would prove that Americans were at least the equals of the British in the literary arts, and advanced in many other arts and sciences as well. He claimed that many British officers "have been forced to acknowledge, not without chagrin," that the Americans "had some *d-m'd* good writers on their side of the question, and that we had fought them no less successfully with the pen than with the sword." (Richardson, 199)

Brackenridge also raised the bar in terms of reader benefits. He represented his new magazine—we're still in the prospectus here—as a short cut to learning, a ladder to success. The reader, he said, "will be qualified to be a magistrate. He will appear a proper person to be appointed Sheriff in his county. He will be equal to the task of legislation. He will be capable of any office to which the gale of popularity amongst his countrymen may raise him." (Richardson, 200)

As it turned out, the *United States Magazine* did feature many good writers, including John Witherspoon (Princeton's president) and William Livingston, formerly of the *Independent Reflector* and now governor of New Jersey. He elicited some poetry as well from Freneau, recently returned from the Caribbean. To this Brackenridge added more than a few stories and poems of his own. (Richardson, 200)

Among Brackenridge's contributions was an allegory on currency, "The Adventures of a Continental Dollar," which may have been inspired by a similar Addison essay in the *Spectator*. Unintended irony turned out to be one of Brackenridge's gifts—currency depreciation was the cause of the *United States Magazine's* failure, which came in December, 1779. The magazine's single year of life preceded later success for its editor. After the war, Brackenridge encouraged the launch of the Pittsburgh *Gazette*, the first newspaper west of the Appalachians, became one of the leading citizens of western Pennsylvania, and focused his boosting on western expansion. (Richardson, 201 ; cf. Marder)