



THE NEW YORKER

The Harold Ross and William Shawn Eras

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Harold Ross (1892-1951)

- Born in Aspen, CO, and worked as a journalist in 'the West' in his youth, primarily in San Francisco
- Moved to NYC in 1913; couldn't get a job in Manhattan and decided New York was not for him
- Served in First World War and then worked as a journalist for various Veteran-aimed publications
- Met and married Jane Gant (a singer/writer), who convinced him to move to New York city with her in 1919
- Ross was considered a "hayseed" by many intellectuals; one of the common criticisms of his style was that he couldn't escape being "a provincial"



The Algonquin Set



The Birth of the Magazine...

- Fleischmann joins the Algonquin Round Table
- New York is growing and its status as a cultural center is increasing
- Economic factors meant magazines were in their heyday
- There were simply no existing publications comparable to Ross's vision

...And Ross's Influence

- Ross seeks a 'fun' job as compared to working for a Veteran newsletter
- He and many others consider humor to be the 'new' marker of sophistication
- He wants to replicate and represent the kind of wit and fun present in the Algonquin set

A response from 'the little old lady in Dubuque'

"The editors of the periodical...are, I understand, members of a literary clique. They should learn there is no provincialism so blatant as that of the metropolitan who lacks urbanity."

Mr. Eustace Tilley, as
dubbed by humorist
Corey Ford, who satirized
the making of the
magazine within the
magazine itself



Shaping the Magazine (1925-1934)

- Initial years are “improvisationally chaotic”, resulting from “revolving door” of contributors among Ross’ circle
- Ross was resistant to certain changes, and let the early years shape precedent; early success reinforced his stubborn refusal to change formatting and content
 - Appearance of names at end of piece
 - Table of Contents/Index not introduced until 1969
- Ross wanted the ‘institution’ of the magazine to transcend individual contribution
- He was exacting, often fired and hired new editors, but was self-aware and self-deprecating, and magazine was often meta-referential
- He had a specific vision for the magazine’s identity but was “restlessly” shifting directions in trying to execute his vision
- His journalistic background showed in his obsession with “facts” and his disdain for “bunk”
- Though editors like Katherine Angell (White) solicited and published more serious fiction and poetry, the perception of the magazine was largely one of humor and ‘serious’ writers found it hard to write with the New Yorker in mind, due to the nebulous identity

The Golden Age (1930s-1940s)

- By 1930, a full 30% of subscribers are not New York residents, climbing to 73% in 1945
- Though the magazine was linked forever to the word 'sophistication,' it survived the death of 'Society' (with a capital S) because it was willing to discuss the changing of New York's classes and demographics, and thrived on the social ambiguity and flux of these decades
- Ross sought to elevate the prose to the level of the cartoons, which were recognized for their liveliness and unpretentious captions
- Though Ross had a reputation for being gruff, EB White characterized his main contribution to the magazine as an innate sense of direction and a willingness to invest in writers in whom he spotted talent, alongside a commitment to lingual brevity and correctness
- Ross also ensured both the readers and contributors were not male-centric and WASPish, and helped promote people like Katherine White, Dorothy Parker, Irwin Shaw, etc.
- Ross' disdain for sex and 'bodily' references shows through not just in the literary pieces, but in the advertising (avoided medical ads); he was not seeking to moralize so much as to maintain an air of sophistication and accessibility, thus language had to be more subtle; he characterized his own profanity as provincial and for practical reasons wanted to feel the magazine could be left out in the open in the homes of its readers
- He maintained a strict line between the editing and advertising/business departments of the magazine, thinking the realities of the business would 'taint' the purity of the editors' directives

William Shawn (1907-1992)

- Shawn's period of work on the magazine overlapped Ross' by about 20 years
- His wife worked as a fact-checker and he as an editor
- Like Ross, he loved facts and focused on integrating journalistic information into the New Yorker's style
- Ross admired his dedication and work ethic and relied on Shawn heavily in the years before his death, despite being a personality-opposite to him; they shared high standards which grew respect despite their differences
- Unlike Ross, he was willing to give writers for the magazine more freedom in pursuit of good narrative and fiction, and was much less boisterous in his editing and correspondence with the magazine's writers – he was very shy
- He did not become Editor in Chief until Ross' death in 1952, and remained in that position until 1987





A REPORTER AT LARGE

HIROSHIMA

I—A NOISELESS FLASH

AT exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning, on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiko Sasaki, died. Each of them counts many small items of chance or volition—a step taken in time, a decision to go indoors, catching one streetcar instead of the next—that spared him. And now kuni, Tokuyama, and other nearby towns; he was sure Hiroshima's turn would come soon. He had slept badly the night before, because there had been several air-raid warnings. Hiroshima

A Magazine for the Modern Age (1952-1987)

- Shawn viewed editing as an art, and had great respect for writers whose works he felt he could leave alone if it meant maintaining the story's integrity
- Nonetheless he was strong-willed and a perfectionist
- Contributors of the magazine during his tenure include Salinger, Capote, etc.
- He broadened the magazine's scope, and allowed the fiction to become longer, more serious, and engage with the less humorous aspects of current events and social upheaval in post-War America
 - In Cold Blood, Silent Spring, etc.
 - This presented its own problems as people began to criticize the magazine as 'unfunny' or 'bloated'
- Under Shawn's Era the magazine took the form of what we would better recognize as the New Yorker today – funny, but not frothy
- He was much more fondly remembered by contributors (compared to Ross) as someone who was willing to help writers hone pieces through his meticulous but gentle editing
- Shawn was eventually forced into retirement in 1987 at age 80 after the magazine was purchased by Advance Publishing, which sought to introduce new blood to the magazine