AT HOME: SHELTER MAGAZINES AND THE AMERICAN LIFE 1890-1930

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The four decades between 1890 and 1930 included an unprecedented wave of new American magazines that took full advantage of lower postal rates, affordable printing costs, skyrocketing advertising revenues, more literate audiences, and a nation rapidly transforming itself from a rural to an urban society. Media scholars have studied this era in significant detail, often labeling it a Golden Age of magazines, or a “magazine revolution.” By any label, it is clear the modern magazine emerged during this period with the advent of halftone photography, writers and editors who honed their skills as “magazinists” instead of newspaper journalists, and massive circulation numbers that made household names out of national publications.

Yet, within this larger context, a genre of magazines focused exclusively on the American home has received far less attention from researchers. Known as “shelter magazines,” these publications featured decorating, architecture, landscape gardening, and furnishings, and in doing so, often chronicled socio-economic shifts in the eras they covered. Historians have tended to include these publications only briefly in the far larger body of general magazine research, or alternatively grouped them almost invisibly into the genre of women’s magazines, despite their far more narrow focus on home interiors, decorating and gardening.

Today, shelter magazines are among the most popular publications in the United States — ranging from *House Beautiful, Architectural Digest, Better Homes and Gardens, Traditional Home, Elle Décor, Dwell* and *Country Living* — to influential regional publications such as *Southern Living, Sunset, and Midwest Living*. This thesis will examine the genre’s origin as a
specific and highly-influential niche within the context of the proliferation of new magazines and advancing technology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will further review how these magazines simultaneously mirrored and influenced the American home, and whether social network theory can help explain how they developed obsessively loyal subscribers long before today’s instant digital communications.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In my earlier career, I served as editor-in-chief of three shelter magazines, including one that is a primary subject of this thesis — *House Beautiful*. What I did not know then, perhaps too caught up in the rush to meet magazine deadlines, was anything of the fiery spirit and courage the founders of *House Beautiful* had in fighting back against the ostentation, bad taste, and sheer arrogance of the ruling class of their day. The early history of shelter magazines, including *House Beautiful, House & Garden, American Homes and Gardens, Country Life in America, Suburban Life, The Craftsman, Architectural Digest, and Better Homes and Gardens* is, in effect, the history of the American experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It has been both a challenge and a joy to research and write this thesis. I have had plenty of help along the way, beginning with Chris Roberts, the chair of my thesis committee. Dr. Roberts is an experienced journalist and professor who knows where the weaknesses are in a story and zeros in on them with the kind of careful editing and counsel that proved to be invaluable during this process. He pushed me to my academic limits, and I am forever grateful.

I must also thank two other University of Alabama professors who are members of my thesis committee and had a major influence on my master’s journey — Dianne Bragg and Rich Megraw. The idea for this thesis took form and shape in Dr. Bragg’s graduate History of Journalism course. I wrote a paper on this topic as part of my assignments in her class. It was Dr. Bragg who suggested it should become the focus of my thesis. I likely would never have made it this far without her enthusiasm and support.
One of the more interesting classes I took as part of my graduate work was an American Studies course called “The American Game: Baseball & American Culture.” It was an elective class and, as it turned out, I could not have chosen a better one. It was clear from the first lecture that the instructor, Dr. Megraw, was not simply focusing on the athletic nature of baseball but was, instead, giving us a far more comprehensive course on American society and history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was fascinating and further inspired my interest in this crucial time period in American history.

Thanks, as well, to my wife Monica for hanging in there with me during the long hours of this work, and serving as a voice of reason and counsel as I made my way through it. So, too, my four children and three grandchildren (yes, I’m an old grad student) have, as always, been an inspiration during this journey. Onward.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

We went at our job of abolishing the all-too-prevalent bad design of our day with the fervor of religious zealots, attacking fiercely whatever appeared to place hazards in the way of good taste. We harried the manufacturers of golden oak relentlessly, on the grounds that they were debasing the taste of the whole country by flooding the market with their atrocious claw-footed and be-griffined designs.¹

These words, written on the occasion of House Beautiful’s fiftieth anniversary by Virginia Robie, the magazine’s first paid staff writer, underscored what today’s readers might be surprised to know — that in the founding days of American home interior and architecture magazines in the 1890s and early twentieth century, editors went far beyond simply offering house plans or advice on furnishings. They were fearless in their condemnation of Victorian-era excesses and took particular offense at the period’s wealthy industrialists who could easily afford to build mansions but could not buy a sense of style. In essence, Robie wrote, the mantra was: “Taste goes farther than money.”²

To that extent, The House Beautiful, as it was originally titled, published a scathing series of essays in 1904 and 1905, entitled “The Poor Taste of the Rich,” that included photographs of rooms in mansions it deemed grotesquely furnished, and named the homeowners responsible for them. There was, predictably, a backlash from the targeted homeowners and from newspaper critics who thought the editors had gone too far. Herbert S. Stone, who became publisher of House Beautiful less than a year after it was founded in 1896 and assumed the role of editor a

¹ Virginia Robie, “How We Did It in the Old Days,” House Beautiful 88, no. 12, December 1946, 244.
² Ibid, 243.
year later, was quick to defend his magazine, noting that the intention was to show readers how not to decorate, and to educate the rich on good taste in the process. Besides, he noted, “There has been no hint that we have not told the truth.”

This sometimes controversial relationship between magazines and the social, economic and political world in which they exist has been examined as part of scholarly research on the periodical industry as a whole, beginning most notably with the first of five exhaustive volumes on American magazine history from Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Frank Luther Mott. Mott mentioned home magazines in his work and included chapters on two of them, Better Homes and Gardens and House Beautiful in his last volume, published posthumously in 1968.

Still, for such a vibrant publishing category, shelter magazines, as these publications have become known, have received relatively minor attention from scholars. Most often, if they have been included in research at all, it has been in the context of the far larger genre of women’s magazines. Yet, as researcher Kathleen L. Corbett argued in her 2010 dissertation, women’s and shelter magazines are separate genres:

A great deal of overlap in content between the genres has historically existed and still exists, but shelter magazines have a more narrow focus than women’s magazines, with content that more strongly emphasizes home style and decoration, as opposed to the broader range of topics presented in women’s magazines, such as fashion, health, beauty, child rearing, and marriage advice.

Today, House Beautiful is the oldest continuously published shelter magazine in America, and, as such, is a primary subject of this paper. Created just before the new century as

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3 Herbert S. Stone, “Notes: Poor Taste and Morals,” The House Beautiful 17, no. 3, February 1905, 35. The magazine was titled The House Beautiful from its inaugural issue in December 1896 until April 1922, when “The” was first dropped from the cover logo. Editors, however, continued to use the original name in interior pages until 1925, when all references were replaced with House Beautiful. For more details, see House Beautiful, “Making of America Project,” Hathi Trust Digital Library, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000640136.


5 Kathleen LaMoine Corbett, “Tilting at Modern: Elizabeth Gordon’s ‘The Threat to the Next America’” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 7.
America was moving from a rural to an urban nation, the magazine represented a fundamental change in a society: Homeowners now had choices in where and how they would live, and in the furnishings available to them to improve their homes and their standard of living.

*House & Garden*, founded by three Philadelphia architects in 1901, joined *House Beautiful* in what quickly became one of the magazine industry’s most competitive markets. Lavishly illustrated shelter monthlies proliferated throughout the first decade of the twentieth century — from *Country Life in America*, founded in New York in 1901, to *Suburban Life* in Boston in 1903, and the 1905 debut of *American Homes and Gardens* in New York.

They were followed over the next two decades by a wave of new shelter publications that most notably included *Architectural Digest* in 1920 and *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1922. Both *Architectural Digest* and *House & Garden* were published primarily in their early years as architectural journals, and their audiences reflected more of a balance between female and male readers than their competitors. Despite its Hollywood-centered reputation today, *Architectural Digest* did not regularly feature celebrity homes until the mid-1970s.6

This thesis examines the manner and method in which shelter magazines, through their articles and images, reflected American homes and, more broadly, the nation’s socio-economic and cultural life in the fin de siècle period of the 1800s and the early decades of the new century. In doing so, it examines how editors communicated with their audiences. In the first issue of *The House Beautiful* in December 1896, for instance, editors sought to create a bond with their middle class readers, taking their side in an article called “A Plea for the Amateur,” which argued that homeowners had every right, even a duty, to take an active role in the design of their houses rather than defer all decisions to architects or other professionals. It was a view that

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contrasted sharply with prevailing opinion in architecture and home building magazines targeted at middle- and upper-class audiences at the time, but in establishing the nation’s first magazine devoted entirely to decorating, architecture, and landscape gardening, editors of *The House Beautiful* seemed bent on taking a unique approach.\(^7\) Contributing writer Samuel Dauchy’s satirical tone in the magazine’s inaugural issue made that clear. He wrote:

> There are furnishers who decorate our houses complete ... select our rugs and etchings, our books and works of art. Companies for the suppression of thought, they will shortly enable us to live without the uncomfortable brain tax, like some absorbent protoplasm, while the professional performs our wonted functions. As so it has come to this, that to be amateurish is to be unworthy, and I may not even try my wings in simple flight within my own domain. It is not surprising that the professional should insist upon this view. Our ducats are the objects of his lure. But we are the weak ones, why do we submit?\(^8\)

Readers responded, sometimes with hundreds of letters in a month. In the November 1897 issue, less than a year after *House Beautiful’s* launch, a “Correspondence” column became a permanent fixture in the magazine. Herbert Stone went a step farther during his sixteen years as editor and publisher: Beginning with the January 1907 issue, he invited readers to submit stories about their own homes and published the first of them in December of that year. Later, as readers wrote by the thousands asking for decorating advice that was specific to their own homes, the magazine established *The House Beautiful* Reader’s Service, using editors and outside experts to respond free-of-charge to the inquiries. Editors also continued to find unique ways to include content from their readers. Just as World War I was ending, for instance, *House Beautiful* Editor Mabel Rollins noted to her readers (perhaps bizarrely, given the life-and-death stakes of battle) that, “Many of our soldiers have had the opportunity of spending their rest time studying the best

\(^7\) Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 4, 323-325. Preceding the launch of *The House Beautiful* were *American Architect* in 1876, *Architectural Record*, and *Architectural Review* in 1891, along with home building magazines that included *National Builder* and *Scientific American Building Monthly*, both established in 1885. The latter, a companion magazine to *Scientific America* magazine, was re-launched as *American Homes and Gardens* in 1905. It was purchased by the owners of *House & Garden* in 1915 and absorbed into that magazine; John Tebbel, and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America 1741-1990*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 87.

\(^8\) Dauchy, “A Plea for the Amateur,” 10.
architecture of France and England.” She later published photos of French cottages taken by an American architect-turned-soldier.⁹

These interactions with audiences have led scholars to argue that magazines have reached beyond basic reporting and coverage roles in their genres and had significant cultural and social impact in society. Carolyn Kitch, writing in 2015, noted that researchers over the past decade no longer conclude that magazines are simply “reflectors of an independent social reality” but have also accepted that “they play an important role in constructing that reality.”¹⁰

The question arises, then, over whether House Beautiful, House & Garden, and other shelter magazines not only served a growing market for home and gardening ideas and tips, but also have helped create that market. To that extent, this thesis examines whether social network analysis can help explain how shelter magazines grew their audiences while at the same time engaging in an energetic back-and-forth dialogue with them in an age long before the advent of today’s instant digital communications.

Defined simply as a study of how relationships between people, organizations, and groups can influence attitudes and behaviors, social network theory has been applied by scholars in recent decades to a wide range of subjects ranging from obesity, traffic patterns, and voting — or, as sociologist Charles Kadushin put it, from “train schedules in China to the HIV epidemic.”¹¹

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Applying the theory to the way shelter magazines first established their audiences may be unique, given there is little or no direct literature on the subject, but the massive amount of general research on social networks provides a roadmap. As Kadushin wrote: “Social networks evolve from individuals interacting with one another but produce extended structures that they had not imagined and in fact cannot see.”\textsuperscript{12} In the case of magazines generally, Kitch argued that the readership “may be a peer group, even if its members are not physically together.”\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, given the strong rapport shelter magazines had with their readers, the content of these magazines was far more about houses than the people who lived in them — a point Robie felt compelled to make in her aforementioned fiftieth anniversary column reminiscing about the early days of \textit{House Beautiful}:

It was strictly architectural and decorative. No people wandered through the rooms or appeared on the covers. There were no recipes, wine lists, no babies or dogs. And, it might be added, no competition, for the field was exclusively the magazine’s own.\textsuperscript{14}

Later versions of the magazine would, like nearly all other modern shelter publications, add recipes and wine lists to their pages, and feature pictures of homeowners, decorators and architects. After all, houses are inseparable from the families who call them home. Shelter, to put it simply, has always been part of the American story. Long before the United States existed as a nation, native Americans used natural materials — wood, grass, adobe bricks, woven birch bark, and sod — to construct dwellings that were often sturdier than historians have recorded. In 1620, the notion of shelter took on a new, urgent priority for the 101 Puritan settlers who stepped off a lone ship, the \textit{Mayflower}, and onto the Plymouth, Massachusetts, shore. Fully half of them perished in that brutal first New England winter. Shelter, then, meant the difference between life

\textsuperscript{12} Kadushin, \textit{Understanding Social Networks}, 11.
\textsuperscript{13} Kitch, “Models for Understanding Magazines,” 12.
\textsuperscript{14} Robie, “How We Did It,” 243.
and death. Over the next two centuries, these new Americans—many of them immigrants from Europe, and others, African-Americans in particular, here against their will—built the nation and its dwellings. They all contributed to the dramatic changes in the style of American houses, from the timber-frame, stone, and brick classical structures of the East, to sun-drenched, single-floor houses of the West.\textsuperscript{15}

Still, as magazines devoted entirely to residential interiors, architecture, and gardening first became part of this story 125 years ago, the nation remained largely rural, with more than 60 percent of Americans still living in towns of 2,500 people or less. That would change rapidly over the next three decades with a monumental demographic shift from rural to urban, and with it would come technological changes that not only improved the quality of life for Americans in everything from living conditions to communications, but would lead to the creation of modern magazines.\textsuperscript{16}

These publications would take full advantage of revolutionary advances in photography, printing, and distribution, and importantly, benefit from skyrocketing new advertising revenues, along with lower paper and mailing costs. This thesis, then, reviews the early history and impact of shelter magazines, and examine the communities of readers they served nationally, all in the context of this period that scholars have labeled the “Golden Age” of magazines.\textsuperscript{17}

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\item \textsuperscript{16} “Urban and Rural Population for the U.S. and All States: 1900 to 1990,” U.S. Census Bureau, 1995.
\end{itemize}
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CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

When Andrew Bradford and Benjamin Franklin launched the first two American magazines within three days of each other in Philadelphia in February 1741, neither of the two publishing rivals could have envisioned the soaring popularity and influence that this new phenomenon — the periodical — would have over the next two centuries. Bradford’s *American Magazine, or A Monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies* lasted just three months, and Franklin’s *General Magazine and Historical Chronicle, for All the British Plantations in America* didn’t fare much better, closing after six.¹

Nevertheless, they set in motion a bold new media platform that by the end of the nineteenth century included more than 6,000 magazines operating at any given time, led to the first million-copy sales for the most successful among them, and saw total periodical circulation rise nationally from four million just after the Civil War to a massive sixty-four million in 1905 — or three magazines for every four people in the United States at the time. There seemed to be little debate that as an industry, magazines were firmly established “as a national reading habit” by the 1890s.²

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These developments have been the subject of a significant body of research, most notably the seminal work from Frank Luther Mott, a University of Missouri journalism historian who won the 1939 Pulitzer Prize in History for two of five volumes (the fifth published posthumously) he authored on American magazines. In more than 3,600 total pages researched and written over a span of three decades, Mott examined every conceivable aspect of magazines published in the United States from 1741 to 1930.\(^3\)

In the process, Mott delivered what Henry Steele Commager, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, described as “a faithful and picturesque delineation of American society and a lively interpretation of the broadest social interests which seem to justify Mr. Mott’s assertion that ‘not even the newspapers present so effectively the veritable life of the times.’”\(^4\)

John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman noted in their 1991 book, *The Magazine in America 1741-1990*, that “Everyone who explores this period must begin with Dr. Mott, and we have done so, but we have also viewed his work through the eyes of research and the perspective provided by recent social and cultural historians.”\(^5\)


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**Shelter’s Place in a Golden Age of Magazines**

Most of these studies, along with peer-reviewed journal articles, and significant chapters in general media history books, have researched in some depth the enormous changes in technology and American culture that led to what is called the Golden Age of magazines in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. It is during this time that the expansion of railroads across the United States and lower postal fees made national distribution of magazines far more feasible. At the same time the development of high-speed rotary presses and linotype machines for typesetting revolutionized the print industry and lowered costs.6

However, if any one advancement led to the founding of the nation’s first shelter magazines during this period, it was likely the development of halftone photograph engraving, which brought unprecedented illustration options to the magazine industry. First developed in the 1880s, halftone photography images could now be published for less than $20 each compared to earlier fine-lined wood engravings that cost up to $300 each for a full-page.7

*House Beautiful* and other shelter periodicals relied from the beginning on halftone images of rooms and exteriors to show readers examples of well-designed houses. They published artist engravings, as well, but it was essential that shelter magazines be more visual

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than their more literary counterparts. Feature articles in some of the most popular general interest magazines in the 1890s such as Munsey’s and McClure’s were text-heavy and might run eight-to-ten pages, with the story itself more important than any scattered image or two. Shelter magazines, by contrast, published shorter stories and relied far more on images to give readers tips on decorating, architecture, and gardening.

Though Thomas Edison was never in the magazine business, his laboratory’s invention of Kinetoscope motion pictures — including the first public demonstrations in 1893 — may have raised audience expectations in this new visual media frontier at the turn of the twentieth century. House & Garden Editor Richardson Wright said as much in a story he wrote for the magazine’s twenty-fifth anniversary in 1926:

> While the accumulation of statistics means very little, it is interesting to discover that since its first issue until the last, House & Garden has used some 28,000 illustrations. It has become, in a manner of speaking, a picture book. And therein lies one of the many phases of its appeal to readers. Since the advent of the movies, we have become a picture-reading people. More can be grasped by one glance at an illustration than might be understood by reading half a page of text.

In a larger context, the westward movement of American citizens — made possible by easy railroad access and the 1862 Homestead Act’s offer of 160 acres of free unappropriated federal land to families that agreed to pay a small filing fee and cultivate the property — created widespread demand for mail-order products that could be used to furnish houses.

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8 Sumner, The Magazine Century, 10.
Aaron Montgomery Ward, a Chicago dry goods salesman, recognized this vast new market for home furnishings at low prices and published the first nationally-distributed catalog in 1872, a one-sheet offering 163 products. Almost immediately, Ward’s mail-order business became a runaway success, and by 1904 the catalog had grown to more than 600 pages and was mailed to three million households.\(^\text{12}\)

Another Chicago businessman, Richard Warren Sears, also found instant success with the first catalog from his Sears, Roebuck and Co. in 1894, two years before the founding of *House Beautiful*. Homeowners, even those in the farthest reaches of the nation, now had mail-order access to home furnishings that were either unavailable or too expensive in their own rural areas. Their interest in magazines devoted to interiors and gardening now seemed practical in a way that would have been inconceivable earlier in the century.\(^\text{13}\)

Nothing, however, had more impact on the growth of the print magazine industry than a decrease in postal rates that allowed publishers to mail their periodicals en masse across the country at a fraction of earlier costs. First, the Post Office Act of 1874 dropped the mailing rate for monthly and quarterly periodicals to three cents a pound, and two cents a pound for weeklies. Further, in 1885, Congress passed a law reducing the rate to one cent a pound for all second class mailings. The results were dramatic, especially when such cheap mailing rates were combined with what Mott labeled the “the Advent of the Great Ten Cent Magazine” in the 1890s. Nearly all major magazines reduced their single-copy price from twenty-five or thirty-five cents to ten cents, and new startups made their debut at that price.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

It was up to magazine owners to report their own distribution figures before the creation of the Audit Bureau of Circulation in 1914, but two major advertising agencies — N.W. Ayer & Son and George P. Rowell & Company — annually tracked periodical circulation and pressured publishers to accurately report their numbers with sworn statements.\textsuperscript{15}

Using this data, scholars tracked a remarkably steep increase in overall magazine circulation, from four million nationally just after the Civil War to eighteen million in 1890, and more than triple that amount, to the aforementioned sixty-four million in 1905. By contrast, during that same period, the circulation of daily newspapers and weekly periodicals rose from thirty-six million to fifty-seven million, and “by this measure, monthly magazines had become the major form of repeated cultural experience for the people of the United States.”\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, founded by publisher Cyrus H.K. Curtis and his wife Louisa Knapp in 1883, became the first major magazine to surpass a half-million subscriptions, with 600,000 in 1891. The \textit{Journal} topped one million in circulation in 1903. That same year, the weekly \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, which had been rescued from near-bankruptcy when Curtis bought it in 1897, reached 500,000 subscribers, and would in time, eclipse its rivals in circulation—rising to more than two million by 1913 and becoming one of the most important general interest magazines of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{17}

Much of the \textit{Post’s} success could be attributed to a critical decision editor George Lorimer and his staff made during the first decade of the twentieth century, to reposition the magazine from its predominantly male audience and target more women. By 1908, Lorimer

\textsuperscript{15} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 4, 16.
\textsuperscript{16} Ohmann, \textit{Selling Culture}, 29.
\textsuperscript{17} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 4, 671-716.
boasted in an editorial, “we number women readers not by the tens but by the hundreds of thousands.”\textsuperscript{18}

Like the Post and Ladies’ Home Journal, Collier’s Weekly also produced its own remarkable rise in readership. Jump-started with its breaking-news coverage of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Collier’s surpassed one million circulation just before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and two million by the time it was over in 1918.\textsuperscript{19}

Along with reader interest, advertising revenues skyrocketed in these publications — and with most magazines at ten cents or less per copy, publishers shifted their revenue models, which had earlier relied on subscription sales to cover costs, to ad-based models in which advertisers were more than eager to reach the larger circulation base now available through these publications.

Although federal Census reports tracked advertising revenue, they did not distinguish between newspapers and magazines. Overall, however, advertising revenue in newspapers and periodicals reached $140.5 million in 1905 (or roughly $4.1 billion in today’s dollars), more than double the figure twenty years earlier in 1890. Mott speculated that a fourth of the 1905 revenue went to magazines — “far more than they had enjoyed a decade earlier.”\textsuperscript{20}

If any one issue of a magazine could underscore the Golden Age boom in advertising, it might have been the October 1895 edition of Munsey’s, a popular general interest publication that claimed 600,000 subscribers that year, second only to Ladies’ Home Journal at the time. Among its 200 pages in this particular issue were 242 display ads, hawking everything from bicycles (a major craze in the 1890s) to typewriters, jewelry, cutlery, shoes, corsets, soap and

\begin{itemize}
\item Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 4, 692.
\item Tebbel and Zuckerman, \textit{The Magazine in America}, 69
\end{itemize}
pianos. Mott reported that the magazine, owned by Frank A. Munsey, was selling between $25,000 and $35,000 worth of advertising each month, an enormous amount of revenue for its time, comparable to between $750,000 and $1 million if adjusted for inflation in 2019.\textsuperscript{21}

All told, the number of magazines in America at the turn of the twentieth century jumped from 3,300 in 1885 to 6,000 in 1905 (see figure 1), despite a severe economic downturn in the 1890s, when 156 railroads with capital of $2.5 billion and twenty-eight percent of the nation’s track went bankrupt, and 800 banks failed. There seemed to be no question that the ubiquitous ten-cent-priced magazine came at the right time.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\end{figure}

**Women’s Magazines and the Rise of the Shelter Category**

From its start in Chicago in December 1896, \textit{House Beautiful}, along with \textit{House & Garden}, founded by three Philadelphia architects in 1901, became the nation’s first two national

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 4, 611; Ohmann, \textit{Selling Culture}, 7; CPI Inflation Calculator, 2019.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Oman, \textit{Selling Culture}, 54.
\end{itemize}
shelter magazines at the turn of the new century. Yet there were already many magazines that included home-related content, with predominantly female audiences. They most notably included *McCall’s* and *Woman’s Home Companion*, both founded in 1873, the aforementioned *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1883, and *Good Housekeeping*, founded in 1885. All featured a non-fiction blend of lifestyle, fashion, recipes, housekeeping advice, along with fiction and essays.

Three of these publications — *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and *McCall’s* — became the foundation of a group of magazines later known as the “Seven Sisters” (also including *Woman’s Day*, *Family Circle*, *Redbook*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*, a popular shelter magazine founded in 1922.)

It was *Ladies’ Home Journal* that not only led all major magazines in circulation for a time in the early 1900s but also produced home content that rivaled any of the shelter-only magazines. Edward Bok — hired by Cyrus H.K. Curtis as editor when the publisher’s wife, Louisa Knapp, stepped down in 1889 — ramped up the *Journal*’s coverage of homes, publishing house interior photographs in nearly every issue, and launching a series in 1898 called “Inside of One Hundred Homes” and another called “Outside of One Hundred Homes.”

Bok, who would serve thirty-nine years as editor, wanted the magazine to be known as “the monthly Bible of the American Home,” even as it continued to publish noteworthy contributions from authors that included Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, and presidents Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, and Theodore Roosevelt.

Given their far more niche audiences at the time, *House Beautiful* and *House & Garden* did not initially compete with *Ladies’ Home Journal* or other large-circulation women’s

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24 Ibid, 113.
magazines, and they were also distinctly different in their exclusive focus on decorating, gardens and architecture. However, they grew out of the same burgeoning American magazine culture that valued predominantly female audiences, even while stereotyping women into largely domestic roles. Women’s magazines were not new to the late nineteenth century; the first such publication, The Lady’s Magazine and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge, had been founded in 1792, and by the 1860, more than 100 women’s publications were in existence in varying forms of mail-order journals, or more expensive magazines. Chief among these was Philadelphia-based Godey’s Lady’s Book, in which women in even the most remote rural outposts could read about the latest fashions from across the globe.\(^{25}\)

It may seem surprising today, given the predominantly non-controversial lifestyle content of most national women’s magazines, but their predecessors in the mid-and-late nineteenth century repeatedly advocated political agendas, pushed social reform, demanded an end to child labor practices, called for better access to healthcare, and lobbied for orphanages to be replaced by a system of foster homes to improve the lives of abandoned children.\(^{26}\)

All the while, the women’s suffrage movement was gaining momentum in the United States at this time. The ultimate result was the national right to vote for women in 1920. Still, there remained an entrenched “Cult of Domesticity” surrounding women, particularly those in rural areas, in which job opportunities outside the home were scarce and women were confined to seemingly endless, repetitive work around the home on a daily basis.\(^{27}\) Though the twentieth


\(^{26}\) Ibid.

century would bring unprecedented new opportunities for women in the American workplace, ninety-five percent of married women worked at home in the nineteenth century.²⁸

Despite these struggles for social, economic, and political equality, women gained strength as consumers—particularly as decision makers in purchasing appliances and home furnishings such as stoves, sewing machines, sofas, chairs, and linens that became available through the Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs. Families found domestic life a little less arduous at the turn of the century.

Women were also targeted as readers by an increasing number of mail-order journals that focused on family life at home. One of the most popular publications of this kind was Comfort, a cheap monthly at just fifty cents a year or “four years for a dollar.” Founded in 1888 in Augusta, Maine, Comfort jumped to a million circulation by the turn of the century. Printed on a lower-quality paper stock than its competitors, Comfort also reached children in a way other mail-order journals did not by offering comics, puzzles, and kid-friendly drawings, while also giving mothers plenty of advice on cooking, sewing, and gardening.

Although Comfort offered farming content and equipment ads, as well, there were plenty of other publications targeted at farmers: The N.W. Ayer & Son directory listed 139 farm journals and 33 other livestock and dairy magazines in 1885. These magazines and others that followed, notably including Farm Journal and Farm and Fireside (both launched in 1877), The Progressive Farmer in 1886, National Farmer and Home Magazine in 1879, and Home and Farm in 1892, grew out of a strong market for tips, ideas, and advertising that catered to farmers and their families. Later, Successful Farming, founded in 1902 by Edwin T. Meredith, became

the early flagship of the Meredith Corporation, which in 1922 created what became the nation’s largest circulation shelter magazine — Better Homes and Gardens.29

**Stressing Simplicity**

Just as nineteenth-century women’s service magazines had not hesitated to advocate concerns over a flurry of issues involving women, children, and families, House Beautiful was launched with an agenda of its own, namely, to tackle the great disparity between the haves and have-nots in American society, and to attack the excesses of the rich that had so characterized the Victorian era. Founders Eugene Klapp and Henry Blodgett Harvey made it clear from the first issue that while House Beautiful catered to middle- and upper middle-class homeowners, it had far less regard for the wealthiest elite who could afford their own decorators and architects.

In December 1896, the magazine’s premiere issue stressed homemaking on a budget and moderation in design, telling its readers: “A little money spent with careful thought by people of keen artistic perception will achieve a result that is astonishing.”30

The issue included halftone images of rooms and residential exteriors. Like so many other magazines in the 1890s, it sold for ten cents, with a year-long subscription offered for a dollar. This first “number” (as magazine issues were commonly called well into the first half of the twentieth century) was printed in a compact 6-by-9-inch format, with fifty-two interior pages and a yellowish-brown paper cover wrap. Once Herbert S. Stone arrived as publisher with the September 1897 issue, the cover wraps were colored light green with darker green text and later white with green text (see figure 2).

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Labeling their new publication “The Only Magazine in America Devoted to Simplicity, Economy and Appropriateness in the Home,” the editors promoted restraint in an era in which wealthy homeowners opted for ornate Gilded Age furnishings, often filling rooms to excess.\textsuperscript{31} The first issue was such a hit with readers that it sold out immediately, depleting the magazine’s own in-house supply, and leading founders Klapp and Harvey to make an extraordinary offer to buy back copies from readers for twenty cents each, double the cover price.\textsuperscript{32}

Months after the first issue, Harvey and Klapp sold \textit{House Beautiful} to Stone, a Harvard graduate, son of the general manager of \textit{The Associated Press}, and owner of a book publishing company. By May 1898, the two founders had also resigned as editors. Klapp, who left the magazine to join U.S. military forces as a civil engineer in the Spanish-American War in Cuba in 1898, later returned to contribute articles under the pen name, Oliver Coleman.\textsuperscript{33} Klapp and Harvey had found a kindred spirit in Stone as the new publisher, evidenced by Stone’s

\textsuperscript{31} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 5, 155.
\textsuperscript{32} Eugene Klapp and Henry Blodgett Harvey, “Publishers’ Announcements,” \textit{The House Beautiful} 1, no. 4, March 1897.
\textsuperscript{33} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 5, 156.
aggressive support of appropriate and accessible architecture, and refusal to cater to rich homeowners. As preservationist and author Diane Maddex wrote:

Stone hewed out a progressive editorial policy favoring not just restrained architecture but also popular democracy, public health, better urban housing, city planning and women’s rights. He presumed that most of his readers could not afford their own architects, so he pushed for standardization and mass production as a way to guarantee appropriate dwellings.34

Under Stone’s ownership, the magazine’s “crusading spirit,” as Mott labeled it, was evident in its sometimes-virulent editorial attacks on the wealthy. These included a notorious series in 1904-1905 titled “The Poor Taste of the Rich.” In introducing the series, which named the homeowners along with photographs of their rooms, Stone wrote, “Some houses are so atrocious that they are valuable as warnings. Cheap ugliness is bad enough, but costly ugliness is a crime” (see figure 3).35

![Figure 3. Opening page of House Beautiful’s “The Poor Taste of the Rich” series. Source: Herbert Stone, “The Poor Taste of the Rich,” The House Beautiful 17, no. 1, December 1904, 20.](image)

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Reminiscing on those days for the magazine’s fiftieth anniversary issue in 1946, former staff writer Virginia Robie, who succeeded Stone as editor, wrote: “We were full of fight, caring not on whose toes we stepped on for the good of the cause.”

More common during this early period, however, were less controversial articles. Aiming for a broader reach, despite its largely upper-middle class audience, the magazine launched a contest in 1898 for the best design of a cottage costing no more than $3,000 or about $92,500 in today’s dollars. Seventy-two sets of drawings were received, though many “of considerable merit” were disqualified because the editors determined they could not be built within the budget. The winner, however, was Richard Philipp, a young Milwaukee, Wisconsin, architect who submitted drawings and a floor plan for a brick and half-timbered cottage he named “Halcyon.” Philipp received a $50 first prize for his efforts (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Milwaukee architect Richard Philipp’s winning plan for a $3,000 cottage in The House Beautiful in 1898. Source: “Prize Competition,” The House Beautiful 4, no. 3, August 1898, 74.

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36 Robie, “How We Did It,” 243.
37 “Prize Competition,” The House Beautiful 3, no. 2, January 1898, 64; “Prize Competition,” The House Beautiful 4, no. 3, August 1898, 75; CPI Inflation Calculator, 2019.
The cottage competition was an effort to appeal to readers with more moderate incomes, but another effort at economic restraint may have been less successful: The magazine published a two-part series in 1904 entitled, “Successful Furnishing and Decoration on an Income of $3,500 a Year.” Adjusted for inflation, $3,500 would translate to a household income of about $100,000 today, still beyond the reach of many Americans. The Pew Research Center estimated that the middle class income for an American household of three in 2014 ranged between $42,000 and $125,000, depending on location and cost-of-living expenses.\(^\text{38}\)

More appropriately, by 1904 standards, an annual income of $3,500 may have been four times the national average. The U.S. Bureau of Labor reported in July 1904 that, based on a study of 2,567 families in thirty-three states, the nation’s average annual household income at that time was $827, or comparable to $23,700 today.\(^\text{39}\)

Despite the income disparity, Klapp and Stone promoted an aspirational tone in *House Beautiful* with the goal of targeting readers who might not be able to afford houses featured in the magazine but could find advice in its pages for their own modest homes. Addressing readers in the January 1898 issue, Klapp wrote noted that a significant number of recent letters had expressed concern over the upscale content:

> Many of the communications have said, also, that the articles and illustrations in THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL are applied to too expensive dwellings . . . This criticism is well taken, and the editors in a measure are forced to admit its truth. Yet there are in each house so far described, many unique ideas which could be readily applied in an economical manner. Frequently the value of the publication of a particular house has been to indicate how, even in the most expensive of houses, the effort has been after simplicity, harmony and useableness, and not after show or mere ornament.\(^\text{40}\)

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The rapport with readers may have contributed to a quick rise in *House Beautiful’s* circulation from 7,000 in 1900 to 22,000 in 1904.\(^{41}\) By 1930, the magazine sold an average 100,000 copies per issue, and averaged 100 pages. That was still a long way from the 300-page issues and 700,000 circulation of the 1940s and 900,000 by 1964. In the early years, Stone also began publishing periodic fiction such as the serialization of George Barr McCutcheon’s *Castle Craneycrow* in 1902-1903, and Sidney Levett Yeats’ *The Devil’s Manuscript* in 1906.\(^{42}\)

The decision to publish these stories overlapped with traditional women’s magazines in that regard, but otherwise the focus remained on interiors, architecture and gardens. The magazine’s headquarters moved from Chicago to New York City in 1911, and Stone stayed on another couple of years as editor, though he had already sold a majority stake in the magazine’s ownership. He left for good in 1913 when the ownership changed again, this time sold to the Atlantic Monthly Company. Two years later, in 1915, Stone died in one of the most infamous ship tragedies in world history. A passenger aboard the British ocean liner, the *RMS Lusitania*, Stone drowned when a German submarine torpedoed and sank the ship.\(^{43}\)

Robie, in succeeding Stone, became the first of five consecutive women editors of *House Beautiful*. This was an accomplishment not entirely uncommon in the magazine industry — by one count, there were at least six hundred American women periodical editors in the nineteenth century — but was unique in the early shelter genre.\(^{44}\)


Social Network Theory

While scholars have dealt with the history of magazines, more study is needed on the relationship these publications have had with their community of readers and the resulting impact on society. Nevertheless, social network theory might be useful in helping explain the vast growth in circulation that resulted from the interaction these magazines had with their audiences. There is little among the vast amount of literature dealing with social networks that is specific to magazine circulation, but the existing research offers a roadmap. These studies often start with a definition of a network itself: Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust defined a network as the relationship or ties and interaction between actors or nodes (individuals, organizations or groups) in a social structure.45

Charles Kadushin defined it more broadly, writing, “A network is simply a set of relationships between objects which could be people, organizations, nations, items found on a Google search, brain cells, or electrical transformers.”46 However, as Kadushin argued, electrical transformers are inanimate objects and do not “network” socially with each other. Social network theory, therefore, focuses on the types of relationships people, organizations, or groups in networks have with each other and how these relationships influence behavior. However, Ronald Burt asserted that network structure itself does not predict behavior or attitudes, but instead “predicts similarity between attitudes and behaviors.”47 To this extent, a social network’s impact can be measurable but not predictive.

46 Kadushin, Understanding Social Networks, 3-4.
Most researchers agree that social networks attract like-minded individuals, and in this respect, the audience for shelter magazines — with an obsessive interest in their homes — seems to be no different. This was especially true for readers in smaller communities who were more likely to know each other and to discuss their share interest in decorating and gardening in person. As Burt noted:

People develop relations with people like themselves. Wealthy people develop ties with other wealthy people. Educated people develop ties with one another. Young people develop ties with one another. There are reasons for this. Socially similar people, even in the pursuit of independent interests, spend time in the same places. Relationships emerge.⁴⁸

Scholars define this trend toward people with similar interests interacting with each other as the “homophily principle” and consider it one of the most observable occurrences in society. These relationships are easily strengthened by geographical proximity, as well as memberships in groups or organizations. Homophily is similar, then, to what Mark S. Granovetter described as “strong ties,” in which the “strength of a tie is a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.”⁴⁹

Yet in the case of early shelter magazines, thousands of subscribers with shared interests in the design and decoration of their homes were nevertheless separated by distance, and most never met each other in person. The shelter magazines, then, provided the link between them — offering ideas and tips on decorating that readers might not get from their own friends and family, and also frequently answering their questions by the thousands through mailed

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⁴⁸ Burt, Structural Holes, 60.
correspondence. This often included referrals, in which editors passed along the names and addresses of architects, builders, decorators, and landscape designers to readers who sought local expertise. Editors and publishers also regularly met readers in person through model home and showhouse projects that were open to the public, through lectures, and in more rare cases, by serving as consultants on building and decorating projects for a fee (see chapter 6).

The closest thing in social network theory to this kind of social interaction may be what Granovetter described as “weak ties.” Weak ties could be as simple as two strangers with no prior relationship having a common “strong tie” acquaintance. The common friend or acquaintance can be a “bridge” between the two strangers, and “facilitate the flow of information from otherwise distant parts of a network.”

Essentially, Granovetter wrote, weak ties may become important new sources of support or information. “Weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation … are here seen as indispensable to individuals’ opportunities, and to their integration into communities.”

Though not discussing social networks, researcher Carolyn Kitch wrote that “A magazine’s readership may itself be a peer group, even if its members are not physically together.” Further, David Abrahamson has argued that an exceptional characteristic of magazines compared to other media is the homogeneity of their audiences, constituting social groups brought together by shared interests.

Whether or not social network theory can be applied directly to the origin of shelter magazines, the theory’s concept of social capital may explain circulation marketing efforts.

50 Kadushin, Understanding Social Networks, 31.
51 Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” 1378.
publishers made in the 1890s and early twentieth century. Kadushin, defining social capital based on earlier work by Robert Putnam, wrote:

   Social capital implies that ‘social networks have value.’ It brings us back to the fundamental premises of social networks, the tradeoff between the comfort and support individuals derive from dense networks of social relationships and the benefits achieved by going beyond local circles and forging bridges to wider universes.\footnote{Kadushin, Understanding Social Networks, 162; Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 15-24.}

   For shelter magazines, this wider universe meant providing the kind of interaction with readers they might not get elsewhere. In launching The House Beautiful Reader’s Service in 1916, for instance, the magazine’s editors addressed their audience much like a family member or friend might speak to them: “We urge you to let us help you solve your problems. Write us today—we will give you expert advice without charge—with no obligation whatever on your part and with a genuine spirit of helpfulness on ours.”\footnote{“Reader’s Service — The House Beautiful,” The House Beautiful 40, no. 2, July 1916, 121.}

   This kind of personal messaging in an increasingly impersonal, industrialized society was also adopted by magazine advertisers in what researcher Roland Marchand labeled a “culture of mass consumption.” Marchand wrote:

   Advertising not only propagandized for modern, urban civilization, it also offered compensation for its discontents. Adopting a therapeutic mission, advertising provided comforting reassurance to those who anxiously watched the institutions of their society assume a larger, more complex, and more impersonal scale.\footnote{Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 359.}

   A full-page ad from the New York-based Mahogany Association in the January 1922 issue of House Beautiful, for instance, urged readers to look for the “mellow red tone” and “open grain” of genuine mahogany wood when buying high-end furniture, and added: “Do not buy
furniture that is stained so dark that you cannot distinguish the true mahogany finish. Your dealer can further protect you.” The aim was to help the association’s member dealers sell more expensive mahogany furniture, but the helpful tone aligned perfectly with the magazine’s editorial mission of reader service, tips, and ideas.57

Content aimed at helping readers live better lives and solve problems — and advertising that seemed, at least, to complement the editorial mission — were among the practical ways, as Heather A. Haveman argued in *Magazines and the Making of America*, that these publications became central to the cultural, social, ethnic, political and religious communities in which they existed. She wrote that that magazines forged more social ties than newspapers because of their longer shelf lives, broader reach, and longer lead time in which to analyze issues instead of facing daily deadlines. “They are the social glue that brings together people who would otherwise never meet face-to-face, allowing readers to receive and react to the same cultural messages at the same time and, in many cases, encouraging readers to contribute to shared cultural projects.”58

Haveman’s research focused on early American magazines from 1741 to 1860, and therefore did not deal with the impact of the shelter magazine genre later in the nineteenth century. Clearly, however, the geographically-distant communities of readers brought together, at least through the mail, by shelter magazines at the turn of the twentieth century were part of a massive demographic shift as America moved from a rural to urban society. The nation’s population surged from 76.2 million in 1900 to 92.2 million in 1910, 106 million in 1920 and 123.2 million by 1930 — and much of that growth was in urban centers. More than 60 percent of

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Americans lived in towns of 2,500 or less in 1900, but by 1930, that percentage had shifted to 56 percent urban and 44 percent rural (see figure 5).59

![Figure 5. The United States' transition to a majority-urban society between 1900 and 1930. Source: “Rural and Urban Population for the U.S. and all States: 1900-2000,” Census Bureau, 1995, 1-4.](image)

Given the proliferation of magazines, and the political, economic, and social debates they covered and influenced between 1885 and 1905, Mott wrote that while newspapers and books also flourished in this time period, “of all the agencies of popular information, none experienced a more spectacular enlargement and increase in effectiveness than the magazines.” He also cautioned, however, that the influence magazines had on public opinion “must not be exaggerated.”60 Later media historians challenged this view and, as Tebbel and Zuckerman noted

in 1991, are more convinced than ever that magazines played an important role culturally and politically in the Golden Age.\footnote{Tebbel and Zuckerman, The Magazine in America, 66.}

The best case, perhaps, of how significant magazines have been to American culture might well be Mott’s own exhaustive work. As Bertha-Monica Stearns wrote in a 1939 review of Mott’s second and third volumes: “The History of American Magazines is much more, however, than a collection of valuable information and a standard reference work in its field. It is a spirited and vigorous account of human nature and popular movements as they are reflected in publications that are of necessity close to daily life.”\footnote{Bertha-Monica Stearns, “Review: A History of American Magazines by Frank Luther Mott,” The American Historical Review 44, no. 4 (July 1939): 937.}

The body of literature, then, is substantial on the history of the magazine industry, though less so regarding the shelter genre. This thesis relies heavily on early issues of the individual magazines, though there are significant contributions in the aforementioned work from Wood, Tebbel, Zuckerman, Ohmann, Sumner, Haveman, Peterson, Endres, Lueck, Corbett, and, of course, Mott. Some of these works also include in-depth chapters on House Beautiful, House & Garden, Better Homes and Gardens, and Architectural Digest.

Likewise, books on individual magazines and/or their parent companies have added historic insight into the shelter genre. They include Caroline Seebohm’s The Man Who Was Vogue: The Life and Times of Condé Nast (who purchased House & Garden in 1915), Paige Rense’s Architectural Digest: Autobiography of a Magazine 1920-2010, and Sunset Magazine: A Century of Western Living 1898-1998: Historical Portraits and Bibliography, a 1998 book of essays from four authors, including Tomas Jaehn, curator of the Stanford University Library at the time. Created in 1898 by the Southern Pacific Railroad as promotional publication, Sunset —
even as a regional magazine — became one of the largest shelter publications with an audited 1.5 million circulation by 1998. Adding to the shelter-specific literature have been peer-reviewed journal articles such as “Chelsa C. Sherlock as First Editor of Better Homes and Gardens” by Carol Reuss in 1972.63

Other works have dealt specifically with architects or decorators featured in these magazines, though none more prominent or researched more thoroughly than architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Two authors, Diane Maddex in 2000 and Monica Penick in 2017 wrote in detail about Wright’s on-and-off, sixty-year relationship with House Beautiful. As such, their research, along with House Beautiful’s coverage of his work, and his enormous impact on American architecture, are subjects of this thesis.64

Unlike the substantial amount of research concerning Wright, there is far less literature dealing with one key aspect of shelter magazines: the racial and ethnic makeup of their audiences. The readership of these magazines was predominantly white, middle class, and reflected a largely segregated society that would last well into the twentieth century and include the racially-charged suburbanization of the nation. The Levittown development on Long Island in 1947, for instance, not only ushered in a massive post-World War II housing boom, it also revealed widespread discrimination against black Americans in real estate markets. Later, shelter


magazines featured far more black-owned homes, black designers, and architects in their pages, and worked to overcome the stigma of white-only publications that was so clearly evident in this 1969 commentary by James L.C. Ford: “Southern Living has become such a voice—for the White South. You have to search to find any mention of the Negro. But the South, where the living is easy and affluent, has found a magazine to present this culture.”

CHAPTER 3

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL AND THE FIRST SHELTER MAGAZINISTS

It was Edgar Allan Poe who — with one odd-looking word — best defined the remarkable rise of the magazine industry in the nineteenth century. In an 1840 letter, Poe casually described himself as “essentially a magazinist” and the word stuck, at least among historians who have studied the era. For Poe, who contributed short stories, poems, reviews, and commentary to more than thirty magazines, and worked at five of them during a turbulent but brilliant career, the term “magazinist” referred to writers and editors who honed their literary skills predominantly through periodicals.¹ Poe wrote:

The whole tendency of the age is Magazineward. The magazine in the end will be the most influential of all departments of letters. … In a few years its importance will be found to have increased in geometrical ratio.²

Indeed, the landmark literary legacy left behind by Poe upon his death in 1849 had largely been built through his magazine contributions — from The Fall of the House of Usher in Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine in 1838, to The Murders in the Rue Morgue and The Masque of the Red Death, published, respectively, by Graham’s Magazine in 1841 and 1842, to The Raven in The American Review in 1844. But he operated in some tough economic times that had a direct effect on pay for writers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Poe was paid just $10,

an amount comparable to $342 today, for *The Raven*. He earned no more than $4 a page for his short stories, for instance, at Graham’s, which had a reputation for paying writers more than other magazines — and did pay some as high as $12 per page, but not Poe. This ostensibly may have been related to the fact that Poe worked off and on as an editor at *Graham’s*, earning a salary when he was employed. Yet Mott noted that Poe was, indeed, “low on the *Graham* schedule” compared to other writers, and the magazine’s owner, George Graham, once said, “The character of Poe’s mind was of such an order, as not to be very widely in demand.”

It should be noted that Mott, Mary Ellen McKamy, and other scholars have credited Graham with being more progressive than other male publishers in using women writers in the pages of his magazine. *Graham’s* included some of the best-known female writers and poets of the era, including Francis Osgood, Sheba Smith, Ann Stephens, and Lydia Huntley Sigourney.

In time, as the nation’s economy strengthened and the magazine industry headed toward the unprecedented wave of expansion it would experience in the late 1800s, the ranks of “magazinists” grew exponentially — no longer relying solely on former newspaper journalists, but others who, as Mott wrote, “had been schooled in editorial work in other magazine organizations. Thus a group of workers on the staffs of periodicals developed.”

This new field of magazinists, then, expanded beyond contributing writers and included editors, photographers, and designers who got their start not in newsrooms but in magazine offices. The shelter periodical genre, as it developed, would come to include its own contributors and editors.

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Eugene Klapp, Henry Blodgett Harvey, and Their *House Beautiful*

Eugene Klapp would not have been considered a magazinist before he and a business partner, Henry Blodgett Harvey, founded *House Beautiful* in Chicago in 1896 as the nation’s first national periodical devoted entirely to decorating, landscape gardening, and residential architecture. For a man who became one of the most prolific early shelter magazine writers, and created a monthly still being published 123 years later, Klapp seemed an unlikely candidate despite his “flair for architecture and literature.”

Klapp was a civil engineer who, as his *New York Times* obituary later described, contributed to the first elevated rapid transit railroad line in Chicago in 1892, served as an Army officer during the Spanish-American War in 1898 (and later World War I), played a pivotal role in the opening of New York City’s first subway system in 1900, and helped direct construction of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel connecting the U.S and Canada in 1930 (see figure 6).

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This was a time, however, when it was not unusual that an engineer such as Klapp could be drawn to the idea of a visually-driven new magazine that included residential architecture, and the elements of decorating and furnishings that were natural complements to it. Author Cecelia Tichi argued in her 1987 book, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*, that engineers between 1890 and 1920 created a world that “was remarkable for visual accessibility” and added that anyone who views photographs from the period today will instantly notice outstanding “design decisions of the engineers and architects.”

Klapp’s interest in literature and magazines may also have had something to do with his upbringing in Tarrytown, a picturesque village overlooking the Hudson River in Westchester County, New York. It was in a glen of Tarrytown where Poe’s literary contemporary, Washington Irving, based his famous story, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, in 1820. Irving eventually settled in Tarrytown permanently, purchasing an estate there called “Sunnyside” in 1838, where he lived for twenty-one years before his death in 1859 — eight years before Klapp was born.

The Klapp family had been ensconced in Tarrytown since the seventeenth century, but there is no indication whether Eugene’s parents, William H. and Elinor Evans Klapp, knew Irving. What is certain is that Eugene attended the Columbia School of Mines in New York City and graduated with an engineering degree in 1889. His first professional job, however, was a good indicator of his interests beyond engineering: He went to work for the Holabird & Roche

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architectural firm in Chicago, which used structural steel in designing some of the nation’s first skyscrapers in the 1880s and 90s.\textsuperscript{10}

Klapp left the architectural firm after a year to begin working as a maintenance engineer with the city’s first elevated rail track, the South Side Rapid Transit Railroad, which began operating in 1892. It was extended in time to provide service to the hundreds of thousands attending the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, more formally known as the World’s Columbian Exposition — so named for the 400\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ landing in the New World, though the actual anniversary was a year earlier. Klapp was working with the transit company when he and Harvey launched \textit{House Beautiful} as a monthly in December 1896.\textsuperscript{11}

In the 1946 fiftieth anniversary edition of \textit{House Beautiful}, former writer and editor Virginia Robie wrote affectionately about Klapp, making no mention of his engineering background but instead describing him as “a gifted, traveled, wide-read man, keenly interested in matters architectural and decorative.” She added that Harvey was his “kindred spirit in talent and enthusiasm.”\textsuperscript{12}

Nowhere in available records does there appear to be any mention of how long Klapp and Harvey, also an engineer by training, planned their new magazine, but judging by their plea months later to buy back copies from readers at double the ten-cent cover price, it was unmistakably a hit. Today, copies of the December 1896 issue are so rare that Steven Lomazow, a Belleville, New Jersey, neurologist who has one of the nation’s largest private collections of

\textsuperscript{11} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 5, 155; “Eugene Klapp,” 19.
\textsuperscript{12} Robie, “How We Did It,” 244.
American magazines, estimated its value at $1,000 and noted that a copy in his collection is the only one he has seen in thirty years of collecting.\textsuperscript{13}

The issue included fifty-two interior pages, though just twenty-eight of them, all text pages, were numbered. Mott, in a chapter he wrote about \textit{House Beautiful} that was published posthumously in 1968, correctly noted that the magazine’s “first monthly number carried twenty-eight royal octavo pages of text, illustrated by ten pages of good halftones representing houses and interiors, plus sixteen pages of advertising.” Nevertheless, even in the 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary issue of \textit{House Beautiful} in 1996, the issue was described as: “Only 28 pages long, printed on stationary-sized paper and illustrated with murky black-and-white photographs, the inaugural issue of \textit{House Beautiful} was still well worth the 10-cent price on its plainspoken cover.”\textsuperscript{14}

Klapp and Harvey chose a five-year-old, half-timbered house in the upscale Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, to showcase as the magazine’s first-ever featured home.\textsuperscript{15} It was owned by Charles F. Bradley, a professor at the Northwestern University-connected Garrett Biblical Institute, and designed by his brother-in-law, architect William Chase. A year earlier, two exterior images of the same house had been published in another publication, \textit{The Inland Architect and News Record}, but \textit{The House Beautiful} editors made it a point to concentrate on


\textsuperscript{15} Half-timbered refers to houses built with exposed wooden frames or beams, with the spaces between them completed with plaster, brick, or stone. Often, as with the first house featured in \textit{House Beautiful}, the exposed frame serves as a decorative element on the exterior. Harvey described the house as French Gothic with medieval features in interior rooms. Henry Blodgett Harvey, “Successful Houses,” \textit{The House Beautiful} 1, no. 1, December 1896, 1-5.
interiors in their illustrations — publishing four black-and-white halftones of rooms in the house to just one exterior.16

Harvey did not, however, ignore the architecture in a short feature story on the house, noting the home’s leaded window panes, painted escutcheons, and exposed oak beam-lined ceilings gave it a medieval appeal. He added, “Taking it all through, the house is a perfect demonstration of what can be done with thoughtfulness and care exercised constantly, and also the great value of money when controlled by good taste and a love of the beautiful. The only pity is that there are not more like it.”17 More than a century later, the home’s notoriety as the first house ever featured in House Beautiful became a selling point for Evanston real estate agents. It sold for $2.25 million in 2013 (see figure 7).18

Figure 7. The first house featured in House Beautiful. Left, the Evanston, Illinois house as it appeared in the December 1896 issue. Right, the same house when it sold for $2.25 million in 2013. Sources: Henry Harvey Blodgett, “Successful Houses,” The House Beautiful 1, no. 1, December 1896; “Evanston’s Medieval Fantasy House Sold in Just a Day,” Chicago magazine, June 3, 2013.

16 Harvey, “Successful Houses,” 1-5.
17 Ibid, 5.
Soon enough, the magazine would be improved with a higher-quality paper stock and larger format following the arrival of Herbert S. Stone as publisher in September 1897. In the beginning months, however, it was Klapp and Harvey who made the careful decisions that added to the quality of House Beautiful in its first year, and separated it from many of the other ten-cent magazines proliferating throughout the nation at the time. Even their choice of a more formal typeface for the text was likely no accident. Elegant with exceptional legibility, the font was similar to a serif typeface developed for The Century magazine just two years before the launch of House Beautiful. The two founders also chose to use the font for drop-cap letters embedded in small wood-cut engraved sketches to begin each of the stories. Larger, thin-lined sketches were also used to illustrate stories, along with halftoned photographs. The result was a magazine as artistic as editors wanted their readers’ homes to be (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Early artistry from House Beautiful. Left, the April 1896 opening story with a drop cap “M” embedded in a sketch. Right, a Spencer Roberts drawing of a doorway in the June 1897 issue. Sources: Robert Wendell, “Colonial Architectural,” The House Beautiful 2, no. 3, August 1897, 53; Eugene Klapp, “Notes,” The House Beautiful 2, no. 1, June 1897, 29.
Though Klapp and Harvey had an architectural bent, they expressed from the beginning that homeowners who could afford an architect should nevertheless take responsibility for their own decisions and spend their money wisely. Wrote Harvey in the first installment of the magazine’s “Successful Houses” series:

Too little thought is given to this, the idea of many being, that if enough money is spent a successful outcome is certain. A little money spent with careful thought by people of keen artistic perception will achieve a result that is astonishing. In these times, when good things can be had for so little, moderate circumstances are no longer an excuse for hopeless looking dwellings.¹⁹

*House & Garden*, taking advantage of advancing print technology when it made its debut five years later in Philadelphia, raised shelter magazine production standards even higher, with a first issue of thirty-two “richly-illustrated” pages in a large 9-by-12-inch format.²⁰ But for now, *The House Beautiful*, as it was formally called then, largely had this new shelter genre primarily to itself and “proved to be a voice crying in the wilderness” against the gaudiness of robber baron mansions with their heavily-draped dark rococo rooms, gilded furniture, and ubiquitous Victorian-era houses with gingerbread trim.²¹

There were other voices, however, preaching the same elegant simplicity gospel and *House Beautiful* promoted their work from the beginning. Among them were American and British practitioners of the Arts and Crafts movement such as furniture designer Gustav Stickley, glass designer Louis Comfort Tiffany, and architect and textile designer William Morris, who died less than three months before the inaugural issue. Klapp and Harvey paid homage to him in

²⁰ Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 4, 324.
the magazine’s first issue as “the greatest artisan of our time.” They included an artist’s sketch of his Kelmscott House in London in that first issue (see figure 9).  

Figure 9. A sketch of William Morris’ Kelmscott House in House Beautiful. Source: Eugene Klapp, “Notes,” The House Beautiful 1, no. 1, December 1896, 27.

House Beautiful and Frank Lloyd Wright

No one, however, would have more of an impact on the magazine or this new movement toward simplicity and organic, homegrown materials in architecture and furnishings than Frank Lloyd Wright. In time, Wright would become America’s most renowned architect, but in the 1890s, both his career and House Beautiful were just getting started. At the same time Klapp and Harvey launched the magazine in late 1896, Wright — at twenty-nine years old — designed, illustrated, and helped hand print a book of sermons entitled The House Beautiful that a Unitarian minister, William C. Gannett, had first published in booklet form a year earlier, in 1895.  

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Those Gannett sermons — along with a lecture also entitled *The House Beautiful* that Irish author and playwright Oscar Wilde repeatedly delivered during an 1882 tour of the United States and Canada, and a Robert Louis Stevenson poem of the same name published in 1887 — gave Klapp and Harvey all the inspiration they needed in naming their new magazine. It was Wright, however, who became most closely associated with *House Beautiful*. His work was repeatedly featured in the magazine’s first fifteen years, beginning with a story (with images) focusing on his home in Oak Park, Illinois, in the third issue in February 1897.24

Wrote Klapp of Wright’s work: “Here is a case where nothing has been done hastily or carelessly, and every room has been arranged with the intention of obtaining a complete composition.”25 The *House Beautiful* editor was particularly taken with the austerity with which Wright furnished his rooms — some including furniture he designed — and an upstairs playroom with a vaulted ceiling, natural light, and a fireplace that adults could gather around after the kids were in bed. This room was, Klapp wrote, “the most remarkable of all” (see figure 10).

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For a still-young nation bent on imitating the more classical architectural styles of Europe in the nineteenth century, Wright’s “Prairie Style” designs, devoid of ornamentation and pretense, sparked widespread criticism from more established architects, both American and foreign. Yet they were in perfect sync with *House Beautiful’s* full-fledged campaign to rid the nation of over-the-top, gilded Victorian fussiness.26 “I have called Mr. Wright a radical opponent of the use of ancient styles,” architectural critic Alfred H. Granger wrote in *House Beautiful* in the December 1899 issue. “While he carries his opposition to antiquity to a far greater extent than many of us can agree with, it is refreshing to come in contact with a genius so fresh, so truthful, and so full of vitality” (see figure 11).27

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26 Prairie Style, pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright and like-minded architects in Chicago in the early twentieth century, is characterized by linear, horizontal lines inspired by the flat Midwestern landscape. It includes low-slung roofs that extend past walls, along with open, spacious rooms, rows of windows to allow as much natural light in as possible, and a design that seemed to mesh with nature around it. This style was in sharp contrast to traditional European architecture that preceded it. For more information, visit the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust website at https://flwright.org/researchexplore/prairiestyle.

Following a brief mention in two photo credits in the October 1913 issue, Wright’s work disappeared from the magazine for thirty-three years, returning in 1946 under the leadership of editor Elizabeth Gordon. Wright’s mid-career hiatus from *House Beautiful* may have been related to well-publicized turmoil in the architect’s personal life, his bitter squabbles with other architects, and a shocking incident on August 15, 1914 at Taliesin, the house he designed and built in Spring Green, Wisconsin. That evening, seven people — including Wright’s mistress Martha “Mamah” Borthwick Cheney and her two children — were murdered with a hatchet and ax, and the house set on fire by a hired cook named Julian Carlton.28

Wright was away, working in Chicago on the design of the city’s Midway Gardens concert hall and arts center when the murders took place. Despite the tragedy, and Wright’s personal struggles, historian Peter Gay argues that the architect’s loss of clients, and magazine features during this time, was more likely a result of the “startling recovery of tradition-ridden fashions for Tudor mansions and neoclassical banks.”29

Wright’s arts and crafts style experienced a rebirth in the mid-twentieth century, not only within the pages of *House Beautiful*, but throughout the nation. He outlived most of his critics, and today his work is iconic, with houses and buildings that include Falling Water in

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28 In 1909, five years before the 1914 murders at Taliesin, Wright and Cheney touched off a highly-publicized scandal when both met up in Europe (living together for a year in Italy) before Wright returned and built Taliesin for them in 1911. “It was not just a local scandal, condemned from pulpits and on editorial pages, but a regional outrage and in some ways a national one,” wrote Paul Henrickson in the 2019 book, *Plagued by Fire: The Dreams and Furies of Frank Lloyd Wright*. “She had forsaken her spouse and two little children, as he had forsaken his spouse and six children, the youngest of whom was a five-year-old. He said he was on a ‘spiritual hegira.’” Cheney, an Oak Park, Illinois, neighbor and former Wright client, was soon granted a divorce from her husband, Edwin Cheney. Wright’s wife Catherine “Kitty” Wright, however, would not agree to a divorce until 1922 — eight years after the Taliesin murders. Paul Hendrickson, *Plagued by Fire: The Dreams and Furies of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Knopf, 2019), 5; William R. Drennan, *Death in a Prairie House: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Murders* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

Pennsylvania, Taliesin (which he rebuilt after the fire destroyed it in 1914) in Wisconsin, Taliesin West in Arizona, the Robie House in Chicago, and the swirling masterpiece that is the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Still, no matter his fame, Wright and the magazine that helped launch his career are linked forever in the history of shelter publications. As Louis Oliver Gropp, who served as editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful* in the 1990s and early 2000s, wrote in the foreword to *Frank Lloyd Wright’s House Beautiful*: “Both the man and the magazine started out in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in Chicago, at a time when the country was ready for a new architecture for a new century … The magazine that described its editorial mission as a ‘missionary business’ had found its prophet.”

This campaign to offer up an alternative to the pretention and excesses of the era was one the magazine would not take lightly, and indeed, it seemed to be a driving force in these first few years, even as the editors filled their pages with expertly written stories on American furniture, English silver, rugs, wood cuts, book bindings, fabrics, and pottery, and featured houses and rooms they considered to be tastefully designed and furnished.

Five years after *House Beautiful*’s launch, Herbert Stone (by then both editor and publisher) took a step beyond simply featuring images of well-appointed houses. He and his magazine published a controversial series beginning in late 1904 called “The Poor Taste of the Rich” that included images of gaudily furnished rooms and named names.

In the beginning, however, it was up to Klapp, Harvey, and their contributors to keep up the “crusade,” as Mott called it, for tasteful domestic design. On occasion, they did this by referring their readers to like-minded authors. In the March 1897 issue, an unsigned review

gushed over a new book, *The Art of the House* by Rosamund Marriott Watson, noting: “Miss Watson can hardly contain her sarcastic contempt for the furniture and decorations of that just past age which she calls ‘the Victorian,’ but which in America has humorously been dubbed ‘Early New Jersey’.” Watson’s book did not hide her contempt for members of her own profession — magazinists — who had little or no taste and style of their own:

There is, of course, nothing positively wrong in taking delight in uncomely, or even hideous surroundings; many estimable and talented persons have passed through life unconscious, and uncareful, of their singularly ugly material environment. Some of the most illustrious writers of today inhabit rooms and houses that, decoratively speaking, are a slur upon civilization.

Watson’s searing wit seemed a perfect match to the magazine’s own often-satirical tone, which was evident in this rant over Gilded Age architectural monstrosities from contributor Samuel Dauchy in *House Beautiful*’s second issue (January 1897):

I may not in these days of civic reformation, obtrude some noisome odor on my neighbor’s sense; but flat before his horror-stricken eyes I may erect some nerve-destroying freak, which leaves no way for his escape, nor promise of its speedy disappearance. For architecture, most ancient of the arts, is also the most permanent. One may send a picture to the garret chamber, one may hide a statue within the walls of a public gallery, but a dwelling, church or palace bulks large and actual before the eyes of man and will not be concealed.

As often as not, however, Dauchy, Klapp, Harvey, and others who contributed in the first year calmly challenged readers to a higher level of taste and style. Klapp set the tone in Issue 1, appealing to the “moral side of beauty” and, together with Harvey, told readers that the magazine would be directed toward the “intelligent amateur,” with advice on how to “make the interiors of houses attractive” and not just another periodical filled with condescending advice from professional architects.

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Though no one, including Klapp and Harvey, could have known it at the time, the magazine they had hoped to simply be “established” did far more than that: Today, in its 123rd year, *House Beautiful* is the oldest continuously published shelter magazine in the United States. Yet from the start there were signs this was no ordinary magazine. A critic for *The Indianapolis News*, commenting on the magazine after just three issues in 1897, wrote: “One of the handsomest of periodicals is *The House Beautiful*, published by Klapp & Co. It is devoted to architecture, decoration and kindred subjects. . . . Throughout, this magazine is governed by good taste to a degree which makes it almost unique.”

Klapp, in particular, took a more literary, artistic approach to coverage of home design, furnishings, decorating, gardening, and architecture. What he and Harvey needed, however, was someone who not only shared their editorial vision but also had the kind of publishing and marketing expertise needed to extend the reach of the magazine to a national audience. They found that person in Herbert Stuart Stone. He was just twenty-five years old when *House Beautiful* was launched and was already running a successful book publishing business.

**Book Publisher Turned Magazinist: Herbert Stuart Stone**

The son of *Chicago Daily News* founder Melville E. Stone, Herbert Stone had written, illustrated, and published his first work, a small stapled newsprint guidebook to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair while a student at Harvard College. That same year, in May 1893, he partnered with another Harvard student, Hannibal Ingalls Kimball, to publish *First Editions of American Authors*. The book was the first of a combined 306 works published by what initially was the firm of Stone & Kimball and later, Herbert S. Stone & Company. *First Editions* was a small bound volume, just 4 ¼-by-6 ½ inches in size, but it had a large impact in American

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36 “‘Literary and Art Notes,’” *The Indianapolis News*, February 25, 1897, 5.
literary circles and was credited with helping launch a collecting craze. It was, wrote historian Sidney Kramer, “a landmark in the increasing attention of American collectors to American literature” (see figure 12).  

In 1894, Stone and Kimball also made literary history by launching *The Chap-Book*, a journal that became the first of “American little magazines” — a sub-genre known more for serious literature than size, though *The Chap-Book* was just 7 ½ by 4 ½ inches with an equally small price, five cents. During its four-year run, the magazine published world-renowned authors, including Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and H.G. Wells.  

Wendy Clauson Schlereth, author of a history of *The Chap-Book*, wrote that Stone, who served as an editor and writer on *The Harvard Crimson*, the student newspaper, throughout most

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of his college years, had “fallen into the predictable pattern of preparing himself to follow in his father’s footsteps, anticipating a career in newspaper journalism.” Stone wrote a letter to his family in Chicago in May 1894 expressing that *The Chap-Book* was “no more or no less than a semi-monthly advertisement and regular prospectus for Stone & Kimball.”

Schlereth argued, however, that the letter was Stone’s way of downplaying a growing interest in magazines as a career, especially considering his father’s initial reluctance to sanction the launch of *The Chap-Book*. Wrote Schlereth:

> But the fact of the matter is, as is plainly evident from the magazine itself, *The Chap-Book* never functioned as merely an advertising medium for its publishers. It was from the beginning an independent literary journal: witty, brash, pleasing to the eye and provocative to the mind.”

Stone and Kimball withdrew from Harvard in 1894 and relocated their publishing business to Chicago, where Stone could rely on financial backing from his family if needed, though the company’s titles were beginning to sell. Among their books released soon after the move was *The Ebb Tide*, the first of four Robert Louis Stevenson books published by the firm, and the collected *Works of Edgar Allen Poe*, the original magazinist. For Stone, who briefly returned to Harvard in 1896 to complete his degree, the combination of publishing books and magazines was now a way of life.

Already, the founders of *House Beautiful* had noticed Stone’s work: In the July 1897 issue, writer Samuel Dauchy listed Stone & Kimball among four publishers who were known for high-quality, artistic books. Dauchy also singled out *The Jessamy Bride*, published separately by the newly formed Herbert S. Stone & Company, as “a conspicuous example of a well-made

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book, conservative, well proportioned and really a remarkable production.”

Published on March 15, 1897, The Jessamy Bride sold more than 62,000 copies by the summer of 1900, further cementing Stone’s decision to continue in the book publishing business alone after Kimball moved to New York in 1896 and the two partners closed their original company. Stone (see figure 13) became publisher of House Beautiful with the September 1897 issue, just ten months after the magazine’s launch. Author Sidney Kramer argued that Stone may well have fulfilled a childhood dream with House Beautiful:

As a boy, before he settled on publishing as a career, he had thought of becoming an architect. Now his work brought him into the closest touch with American and foreign architects and decorators, and he was able to turn to business ends the traveling of which he was so fond. Even on his wedding trip of 1901, Herbert Stone found time to collect material on American country homes and Italian palaces.


44 Kramer, A History of Stone & Kimball, 133.
45 Ibid.
Stone chose in his first issue as *House Beautiful*’s publisher to promote *The Jessamy Bride* in an inside back cover advertisement. On the back cover, in announcing his role, he told readers the magazine would soon be printed in a larger format, along with other improvements. He also wrote that, as Klapp and Harvey had established, “everything connected with the house will be treated in simple practical fashion, rather than from a technical point of view.”

Stone quickly made good on the format changes he promised. He increased the magazine’s trim size from 6-by-9 to 7-by-10 inches, beginning with the January 1898 issue. He also substituted the magazine’s “laid” paper — characterized by small, textured ridges that were used for text pages — with smooth, woven “calendared” paper throughout, making it easier to print halftone images and text together on the same pages.

The April 1898 issue is a typical example: It measured 7-by-10 inches and included fifty-six interior pages with text and halftones sharing the same pages on calendared paper. Fourteen of the pages were devoted to ads, ranging from furniture and fabrics, to tapestries, flooring, and bicycles.” Ads were also printed on the inside and back of the green cover wrap.

**Automobile Advertising and the Resulting Editorial Content**

Changes in transportation at the turn of the twentieth century were also clearly evident in *House Beautiful*: Ads for horse-drawn carriages were regularly published in the 1897 and 1898 issues, but in October 1905, the magazine published its first car ad (see figure 14). Automobile advertising became a major revenue source for *House Beautiful* and other shelter magazines.

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46 Herbert S. Stone, back cover advertisement, *The House Beautiful* 2, no. 4 September 1897.
48 *The House Beautiful* 3, no. 5, April 1898.
Figure 14. Advertising, from carriages to cars. **Left,** an 1897 carriage ad in *The House Beautiful.* **Right,** the magazine’s first automobile ad in 1905. **Sources:** *The House Beautiful* 1, no. 5, April 1897, 5; *The House Beautiful* 18, no. 5, October 1905, back cover.

The advertising support from car makers and the enormous impact the automobile had on American travel and culture led to an increasing number of car-related articles within *House Beautiful.* An August 1911 story introduced the garage as a new trend in home design and noted its evolution from “its old-fashioned prototype, the stable.” It included a design from Frank Lloyd Wright. In April 1912, a regular monthly “Automobile Notes” column was established (see figures 15 and 16).\(^{49}\)

\(^{49}\) Charles E. White, Jr., “Housing the Automobile,” *The House Beautiful* 30 no. 4, August 1911, 84.
HOUSING THE AUTOMOBILE

GARAGES AND GARAGE APPARATUS

By CHARLES E. WHITE, JR., A. I. A.

It has taken several years to evolve the modern garage from its old-fashioned prototype, the stable. But then, it has taken many years to develop the automobile itself, from the first model (a quite ordinary carriage with the horse eliminated) to the latest type of scientific, self-propelling vehicle. Models of cars last year and this year are so far away from early types one can hardly see more than the merest connection between them, but from this time on improvements will be less revolutionary. There isn't much left to perfect in the motor car, and future development will be more along lines of simplicity in manufacture, conserved cost, more economy in fuel consumption and greater efficiency.

Keeping pace with automobile growth, modern garages and garage apparatus are up to a very high standard of practical util-

Figure 15. From stables to garages: automobile-related content in House Beautiful. Source: Charles E. White, Jr., “Housing the Automobile,” The House Beautiful 30, no. 4, August 1911, 84.

Despite the auto-related articles and an earlier foray into fiction, Stone kept his magazine tightly focused on its primary subject areas of interior decorating, architecture, and gardening.

He seemed fully adept at understanding his readers and made it a point to be as interactive with them as possible. In just his third issue as publisher in 1897, he established a “Correspondence” column in *House Beautiful*. Notably, the column included — in an answer to a question about Favral glass — a mention of designer Louis Tiffany. In the same issue, the magazine also
published a friendly request for a correction from Tiffany regarding an unrelated article in the previous issue (see figure 17).\textsuperscript{50}

Figure 17. Early correspondence in \textit{House Beautiful}. Left, opening page of the magazine’s first “Correspondence” column in November 1897. Right, in the “Notes” section of the same issue, glass designer Louis Tiffany’s friendly request for a correction. \textit{Sources}: “Correspondence,” \textit{The House Beautiful}, vol. 2, November 1897, 161.

The correspondence column became a permanent monthly fixture, establishing a rapport with readers that would set the tone throughout Stone’s sixteen years with the magazine. It also helped him grow the magazine’s circulation nationally. Wrote Sidney Kramer:

One of the lessons Stone learned from the career of his first magazine was that advertising is built by guaranteed circulation and circulation by subscription rather than by newsstand sales. Using prize competitions, question and answer columns, and a varied content of illustrated articles on the history and practice of the applied arts, Stone in the years between 1900 and 1906 moved the monthly circulation of 7,000 (more than half over the counter), up to 40,000 copies, sold almost entirely by mail.\textsuperscript{51}

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\textsuperscript{50} “Correspondence,” \textit{The House Beautiful}, vol. 2, November 1897, 161.
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\textsuperscript{51} Kramer, \textit{A History of Stone & Kimball}, 134.
\end{flushright}
In addition to serving as publisher, Stone took on the editor’s role in 1898 after Klapp left to lead U.S. Army Engineering Corps operations at the Port of Havana, Cuba, during the Spanish-American War. Klapp later returned to *House Beautiful* as a prolific contributing writer, often using the pen name, Oliver Coleman, while also taking on a key engineering role in the development of New York City’s first subway system.52

All the while, Stone continued to make design improvements in the magazine, much of it dealing with more and better photography. Even before Klapp’s departure to Cuba, he and Stone published a halftone image on the cover, a bedroom interior from a Massachusetts house, for the first time in December 1897. Still, it would be several more years before photographs became regular fixtures on the magazine’s covers. Stone also began using three colors at various times on the cover and occasional full-color plates inside after the turn of the century (see figure 18).


**A Larger Format**

None of the changes, however, were as noticeable as the decision Stone made in June 1904 to further increase the magazine’s size from 7-by-10 inches to a supersized 9 ¾-by-13

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inches, exceeding the 9-by-12 size that competitor *House & Garden* had established in its 1901 debut. (See more on *House & Garden* in chapter 4.) In introducing what he termed the “new greatly and improved form,” Stone acknowledged that some readers, used to a far more compact magazine, might “find the new size cumbersome and unwieldy, but even they will be forced to admit the added attractiveness of the large pictures, and the dignity of the full-size page. THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL is, and must always be, a picture-paper. However practical the articles may be, however instructive the text, it is, after all, to the pictures that the subscriber turns for suggestions and help.”

In the larger format, the magazine commanded more of a newsstand presence and looked livelier than ever. The April 1906 issue might be considered typical for this period: it sold for twenty-five cents, included three spot colors on the cover, and forty pages inside with stories on interiors, gardening, and furniture. It also had eighty display ads. Among them were Quaker Rice, Tiffany & Co., Johnson’s Prepared Wax, various porcelain-lined ice boxes, and automobile ads, including one from Cadillac and, on the inside back cover, another from Decauville English Daimler. Later, as the first decade of the twentieth century came to a close, the magazine began featuring more full-color photos on the cover (see figure 19) and a few full-color plates inside. It would be the late 1930s and 1940s, however, before the use of color images became routine throughout the pages of *House Beautiful*.

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54 Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 5, 159
At the heart of what Virginia Robie affectionately labeled the “Stone Age” was a never-ending emphasis on accessible, practical advice and an obsession with reader interaction that constituted a wide-ranging social network, with the magazine at the center. Mott wrote that Stone “had an almost religious devotion to simple beauty, an abhorrence of display and blatancy in modern life, and a special interest in the development of new art forms and the revival of old ones as he found them within the framework of beauty and suitability.”\textsuperscript{55}

Stone’s allegiance to \textit{House Beautiful} was evident in the fact that he gave up everything else. He stopped publication of his first magazine, \textit{The Chap-Book}, in 1898 and published his last book — \textit{Historic Styles of Furniture}, authored by Robie — in 1905. Wrote Kramer, “The

\textsuperscript{55} Robie, “How We Did It in the Old Days,” 250; Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 5, 156.
transition of Herbert Stone from the publisher of general books into the publisher of one specialist periodical was complete.”

Though critics erupted when Stone began taking aim at the wealthy industrialists and their gaudy houses with his “Poor Taste of the Rich” series beginning in December 1904, his steady hand in adding departments focused on home economics, antiques, household appliances, fabrics, and gardening added as much or more to the magazine’s popularity as the crusading spirit that he had inherited, and expanded, from Klapp and Harvey.

Stone’s relationship with readers was always evident in the magazine, but never more so than in the January 1907 issue, when he invited them to submit stories about their own homes. “We deal chiefly with taste, and taste is a matter of personal opinion. . . . And so we have hit on the idea of a magazine written by its readers.” Stone made good on his promise, beginning with a first-person story from an Illinois subscriber identified only as “E.H.,” who described in detail her bungalow-style house designed from plans published earlier in *House Beautiful*. “It is a most livable, artistic place,” she wrote.

Another story, this one a text-heavy submission from Philadelphia subscriber Anne Lancaster, followed in the March 1908 issue. Lancaster described how she and her husband John Lancaster bought and refurbished a summer home in Maine for $2,000 total, or about $55,700 adjusting for inflation in 2019. Located in the foothills of the White Mountains, Lancaster poetically noted that at this new house, “The air is always fresh and sweet; the night is always still; it is never hot” (see figure 20).

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It was evening in late March, seven years ago, when John steered the old farm wagon to a halt on the country road near the hamlet of Green Valley. John is a teacher in Philadelphia. For two years we've lived in the country, and have found it the best place. Just the home-plies all really — mother, father, but with a generous livin' — the fresh air, the green violets, the flowers, the birds, the trees, and the tranquility. We had just moved into a new house a few miles from town. Our house is not grand, but it is a pleasant spot enough for a social event. Beyond, on every hand, lovely expanses of farmland, some of them splendid, with wheeling fields of grain and corn and wheat. And then there is the grandeur of the mountains, all of them lovely, and all of them quite near. We have started our own little farm, and we are proud of it. We are happy in our new home, and we are proud of it. We are happy in our new life, and we are proud of it. We are happy in our new world, and we are proud of it.

From Stone's reliance on these, and many other stories from subscribers during this era, was a significant part of his vision that if *House Beautiful* was going to have a future, it had to allow amateurs to routinely contribute to the content. In these years, wrote Kramer, "Herbert Stone was both happy and successful in his work as editor of *The House Beautiful.*"59

Even before Stone closed the book publishing part of his company, *House Beautiful* served as the firm's financial lifeline between 1903 and 1905, when books sales plummeted.

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Afterward, the magazine continued throughout Stone’s career to be, as Kramer noted, “a profitable enterprise.” Part of Stone’s strategy to keep up both advertiser and reader interest was the creation of themed issues, which proved to be so popular that they were annually locked into the editorial calendar. There was the “Gardening Number” each March, the “Country House” number in May, the “Building Number” in October, and the “Christmas Number” in December, among others such as a “Vacation Number” that were added in some years (see figure 21).


Throughout the early 1900s Stone remained editor but his management structure went through a series of changes. In 1906 Stone took on investors and the parent company changed from his name to the House Beautiful Company, though he remained president. Other changes were driven by mergers with other publications. *House Beautiful* absorbed Boston-based *Indoors and Outdoors* in 1908 and Memphis-based *Modern Homes* in 1909.

In 1911, Stone moved with his magazine from Chicago to New York, where a year later *House Beautiful* was purchased by G. Henry Stetson, owner of a Philadelphia-based monthly called *American Suburbs*. Stone retained a minority interest, stayed on as editor, and the two

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magazines merged with the March 1912 issue. The deal, Stone noted, pushed the circulation of *House Beautiful* to 65,000, or “more than double that of any other magazine along similar lines.”

Despite the mergers, *House Beautiful* continued to retain its name, though in each case, the other publication’s name appeared temporarily on the cover (see figure 22).

![Figure 21. Mergers and consolidation. Left, House Beautiful absorbed Indoors and Out and Modern Homes magazines in 1909, with the change noted in a line at the top of the cover. Right, American Suburbs is added temporarily to the title of the magazine in 1912. Source: Making of America Project, House Beautiful (New York: Hearst Corporation, 2018).](image)

Stetson’s ownership lasted only a year: *House Beautiful* was sold again in 1913 to the owners of the Atlantic Monthly Company, and Stone stepped down as editor following the March issue of that year. Though he retained a minority business interest in the magazine, his sixteen-year run at what would become the nation’s oldest shelter magazine was over. His longtime associate, Virginia Robie, succeeded him as editor.  

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Two years later, on May 1, 1915, Stone boarded the British ocean liner, *RMS Lusitania*, on a business trip to Europe. Robie later wrote that she talked to him just two days before the departure:

Like all magazine men, he wanted to get back in the old fascinating troublesome game. He told me of his plan to publish a new magazine in the fall of 1915. He felt there was place for a publication that would meet changing conditions yet maintain the old traditions of *The House Beautiful*.63

Stone, however, never got the chance. He was among 1,198 people who lost their lives on May 7, 1915, when the *Lusitania* was hit by a torpedo from a German U-boat and sank twelve miles off the southern coast of Ireland. Hours after the incident, Herbert C. Hoover, a London-based American businessman and envoy who would later become the thirty-first president of the United States, issued a statement naming Stone as one of three men who survivors said had given their life jackets to women who had none.64

Stone’s body washed ashore thirty-eight days later near the Irish town of Ballybunion, 150 miles from where the ship sank. Stone’s father, Melville E. Stone, general manager of the *Associated Press*, later wrote: “I learned from survivors that my son went to his death as I should have expected him to do. . . . He took off his own, put it on her, and went to his death unprotected and without a tremor.”65

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CHAPTER 4

HOUSE & GARDEN AND A NEW WAVE OF SHELTER MAGAZINES

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the arriving cultures vastly expanded the variety of home building, from the log cabins and tiled stove-warmed interiors of the Scandinavians in the northern Midwest, to the Italian-American row house parlor and kitchen in the East. And the homebuilders moving to the sunny West. The wide prairie invited the idea of single-level open-plan living, sparking the imagination of the young Frank Lloyd Wright and others.¹

Those words from architectural writer David Larkin in his book, *American Home*, accurately describe the housing boom that resulted from massive population growth and migration into every corner of the continental United States at the turn of the twentieth century. It is not surprising, then, as John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman wrote, that a “whole new field opened up with the arrival of magazines devoted entirely to house planning, interior decorating, furnishings, and landscape gardening,” beginning with the publication of *House Beautiful* in 1896.²

Yet there were precursors to *House Beautiful* that focused on home construction and architecture. Among them were the *Scientific American Building Monthly*, a well-illustrated publication launched in 1885 by *Scientific American* magazine owner Munn & Company in New York, and the *National Builder*, founded in 1885 by publisher and developer Thomas E. Hill in Chicago. Knoxville, Tennessee, architect George F. Barber launched a short-lived quarterly

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called *American Homes* in 1895, to market his Victorian-style house plans, but the magazine also offered tips on everything from city planning to how to negotiate a building contract.³

Architecture quarterlies, led by the *American Architect* of Boston (published from 1876 to 1938), were also part of the nation’s magazine landscape before the arrival of shelter magazines at the end of the nineteenth century. The Boston-based *Architectural Review* and the *Architectural Record* of New York were founded as quarterly journals in 1891 — five years before the launch of *House Beautiful*. *Architectural Record* became a monthly in 1902 and remains in publication today. *Architectural Review* ceased publication in 1921, although there is currently a London-based journal by the same name.⁴

Gardening magazines, as Mott noted, were also “plentiful in the nineties, and the appearance of gardening departments in many more general periodicals attests to the popularity of home cultivation of flowers and vegetables.” They included *Gardening* (1892-1925) in Chicago and *Horticulture*, which was founded in 1904 in Boston and continues in publication. Most of these magazines, however, were short-lived or absorbed into a series of other periodicals. The Buffalo, New York-based *Popular Gardening*, for instance, was founded in 1885 and absorbed into *American Garden* in 1891. *American Garden*, in turn, became part of *Western Fruit-Grower* in 1897, and the latter magazine was eventually consolidated with *American Fruit Grower*. Though these publications each had their own specialized interests in the American home, magazine historians such as Mott, Tebbel, and Waller-Zuckerman have considered *House Beautiful* to be the first national publication devoted entirely to residential decorating, gardening, and landscape architecture.⁵

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⁴ Ibid, 323.
⁵ Ibid, 341.
The Launch of *Sunset* Magazine

In May 1898, less than two years after *House Beautiful*’s debut, *Sunset* magazine was launched in San Francisco by the Southern Pacific Railroad to “lure travelers westward.” Not surprisingly, it was also used to promote the magazine’s namesake, the Sunset Limited train line, which ran from New Orleans to San Francisco. Nevertheless, *Sunset* did far more than promote the railroad. Over the next few decades, it published photography from Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham, artists such as Maynard Dixon and Ed Borein, and writers that included Jack London, John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair, and Dashiell Hammett.6

In the context of this thesis, however, *Sunset* is included because its general interest editorial mission changed significantly with new ownership in late 1928 to enter the shelter genre. Laurence W. Lane, who as advertising director of Meredith Publications played a major role in the startup of *Better Homes and Gardens* (originally named *Fruit, Garden and Home*) in 1922, led a group of seven investors who bought *Sunset* for $60,000 (comparable to $900,000 today) in September 1928 and immediately altered its focus.7

With the sale, Lane formed his own company, moved from Des Moines, Iowa, to San Francisco, and hired two former *Better Homes and Gardens* associate editors, Lou Richardson and Genevieve A. Callahan, as co-editors of *Sunset*. (See chapter 5 for more details on Richardson, Callahan, and other women editors in the shelter magazine genre.) In the January 1929 issue, Lane announced: “The new *Sunset* will cover the whole range of home-life and family interests with timely and practical suggestions on gardening, building, home-decorating

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and furnishing, cooking and home management, traveling, enjoying outdoor life and a host of other subjects of equal interest to men and women.”

The magazine’s covers reflected this change (see figure 23).

![Sunset magazine covers](image)

Figure 23. Sunset magazine covers. From left to right, the first issue in May 1989, and covers from the Lane era (November 1930 and November 1933). Sources: Sunset 1, no. 1, May 1989; Sunset 63, no. 11, November 1930; Sunset 66, no. 11, November 1933.

In essence, Sunset became one of the nation’s most widely circulated shelter magazines (at 1.5 million by 1998), despite its western regional bent. Like other magazines aimed in their earliest years at predominantly white middle- and upper-middle class audiences, Sunset’s promotion of the western lifestyle has drawn criticism from modern day scholars. Barbara Berglund, a University of South Florida historian who studied Sunset’s editorial content from the 1920s and 1930s, wrote in the peer-reviewed Western Historical Quarterly:

> Although initially targeted to a national middle-class audience, Sunset increasingly became oriented towards the white middle class of the American West and it was this West that Sunset represented in its pages. The homeowner, the decorator, the architect, and the reader were all implicitly represented as white in the text and literally as white in illustrations. Mexican Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African-Americans might make appearances in special feature stories or as ‘Interesting Westerners,’ but they stood outside the normative constructions of both American-ness and western-ness that Sunset prescribed.

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8 Starr, “Sunset Magazine and the Phenomenon of the Far West,” 44.
9 Barbara Bergland, “Western Living Sunset Style in the 1920 and 1930s: The Middlebrow, the Civilized, and the Modern,” Western Historical Quarterly 37, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 140.
Bergland added that “even in the its most sympathetic treatments, *Sunset* represented Native Americans as passive and acted upon—as a problem to be solved, not as architects of their own futures.”

Other scholars, however, have argued that while the magazine was targeted at a more affluent, predominantly white audience, it had been from the beginning one of the more progressive publications regarding ethnicity and race. California State Historian Kevin Starr wrote in 1998:

*Sunset* approached ethnicity not as part of the problem, but as part of the solution. Each ethnic group was frequently presented in terms of its food, traditions, and celebratory customs, in an effort to capture the poetry of heritage and identity. In the matter of Native Americans, moreover, *Sunset* from the start and continuing through its 100-year career has presented these nations with great sympathy. … *Sunset* paid attention to the diversity of Native American cultures from Alaska to New Mexico.

Despite its general interest beginnings, *Sunset*, now in its 121st year, might be considered the second oldest shelter magazine in the nation. Wrote Starr: “In 100 years it has never missed an issue, even when earthquake and fire destroyed its printing press in April 1906.”

Now, more than ninety years after Lane acquired the magazine, *Sunset* continues to adhere to the four primary areas of focus he and his editors set forth — travel, home, gardening, and food.

**The Rise of *House & Garden***

In July 1901, three years following *Sunset*’s debut in San Francisco and four and a half years after *House Beautiful*’s launch in Chicago, three Philadelphia architects founded *House & Garden* in what was considered an architectural lark of sorts. Richardson Wright, who later served for thirty-five years (1914-1949) as editor of *House & Garden*, looked back on the

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10 Barbara Bergland, “Western Living Sunset Style,” 145.
magazine’s earliest days with an almost whimsical take about the three founders — Wilson Eyre Jr., Frank Miles Day, and Herbert C. Wise. “It wasn’t their intention to appeal to anyone save their architectural friends and their architectural following. They were editing it to suit their own high and unyielding standards of good taste. The making of money was farthest from their thoughts.”

As Wright noted, the three architects developed their idea for the magazine while sitting around a drafting table in a Philadelphia office in April 1901. Wise, they decided, would serve as the chief editor and Eyre sketched what became the first cover. It was printed in black on a thick light-brown paper wrap (see figure 24).

Figure 24. The first House & Garden cover. Source: House & Garden 1, no. 1, June 1901.

House & Garden immediately set a new standard in production of specialty magazines, printing on upscale paper stock in a large 9-by-12-inch format. The issue included what Mott

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14 Ibid.
described as thirty-two “richly illustrated” pages, with a reproduction quality that, while in black-and-white, might have rivaled modern-day production values.\textsuperscript{15} Unlike \textit{House Beautiful}, which featured interior decorating from the beginning, the \textit{House & Garden} founders told their readers that their own point of view was “that of the architect; but of the architect to whom the house and its garden seem so intimately related that the attempt to design the one without duly considering the other is an attempt that can never reach the highest level of success.”\textsuperscript{16}

To that extent, the issue included thirty-six pictures and three illustrations, none of them of interiors, but all striking in their quality. Wise, Eyre, and Day chose to open the issue with a story on the Stratford Lodge near Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. It was designed by Philadelphia architects Charles Barton Keen and Frank Mead, both of whom had once worked for Day. The opening spread featured an image of the lodge’s pergola, and an overall plan showing the property’s garden design in relation to the lodge itself (see figure 25).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{house_garden_first_issue.jpg}
\caption{The opening spread of \textit{House & Garden}’s first issue. \textit{Source}: Wilson Eyre, Jr., Frank Miles Day, and Herbert C. Wise, \textit{House & Garden} 1, no. 1, June 1901.}
\end{figure}

\par\textsuperscript{15} Mott, \textit{American Magazines}, vol. 4, 324.
\par\textsuperscript{16} Wilson Eyre, Jr., Frank Miles Day, and Herbert C. Wise, “Editorial,” \textit{House & Garden} 1, no. 1, June 1901, 16.
The issue set the tone for how the magazine would be designed throughout the first year: interior advertising pages were divided in sections in the front and back — leaving the editorial content uninterrupted by ads (see figure 26).

Figure 26: A look inside House & Garden. Left, the inside front cover and first ad page in the September 1901 issue. Right, the beginning of the editorial content section of the same issue. Source: House & Garden 1, no. 4, September 1901.

House & Garden notably featured the sprawling and still-new Biltmore House near Ashville, North Carolina, and the gardens at the Palace of Versailles in France in the first year. Yet it was the production values and the three founders’ insistence on architectural integrity and great design that seemed to stand out. The price, too, at fifty cents each or $4 a year was far higher than House Beautiful’s ten cents per copy/$1 a year, and signaled that this new publication was not targeted at a mass audience. Wright, in a retrospective published on the magazine’s twenty-fifth anniversary, wrote, “Their standards of editorial taste were the highest of architectural taste. What they chose to put on the pages of their magazine could only interest people whose type of mind, culture and ambitions led them to be devoted to the architecture and
building of homes, their furnishing and decorating and the making and maintenance of
gardens.”

It was, Wright noted, as if “they built better than they dreamed, for they set standards of
taste and procedure that even the most ingenious could not improve.” One story, in particular,
underscored the attention to detail that the Wise, Day, and Eyre brought to their magazine that
first year. In their seventh issue, December 1901, they included a vellum page in the middle of an
opening feature story about Glencot House in Somerset, England. The vellum page allowed
readers to have a sepia-like view of either an exterior of the mansion on the left page or the lawn
on the right (see figure 27).

Figure 27. A vellum page bound into House & Garden’s December 1901 issue. Source: House & Garden
1, no. 7, December 1901, 1.

17 Wright, “How House & Garden Began,” 70.
18 Ibid.
Like *House Beautiful, House & Garden* urged restraint, simplicity, and good taste in home design. But the two magazines differed when it came to who should make the final decisions in the house. *House Beautiful*’s Klapp, Harvey, and Stone had made a case that the “intelligent amateur” should be heavily involved in the process. The *House & Garden* editors, each an architect, wrote that they were not urging that an owner’s “personality be suppressed,” but added:

> If as is the case nine times out of ten, the owner when left alone surrounds himself with the dreary furniture of commerce and the tasteless bric-a-brac of haphazard selection, how much better off he would have been if his house could have been set in decent order for him by someone who knows the value of restraint and the restfulness of plain surfaces.

These words from *House & Garden* represented the kind of lecture that *House Beautiful* usually reserved for wealthy Gilded Age industrialists. While *House & Garden*’s founders made no secret of the fact that they were speaking as architects, their tagline on the original covers seemed more expansive. It noted that the magazine was “A Journal Devoted to Architecture, Gardens and Decoration” (with the latter word changed to “Decorating” in 1903). But a look the archives of all issues through the first three years reveals very few room interior images.

The overwhelming majority of *House & Garden*’s halftones and illustrations, including an occasional color drawing, were of house and building exteriors, landscaped gardens, and lawns. This began to change in late 1904, when the architects agreed to sell the magazine — beginning with the January 1905 issue — to the John C. Winston Company, a Philadelphia book publisher. In a statement published in the December 1904 issue, the new owner wrote: “HOUSE

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AND GARDEN, under the former management, has attained a distinctive place and success of its own. It is felt, however, that a broader scope and more definite editorial policy is desirable.\footnote{“Announcement to Our Readers and Subscribers,” House & Garden 6, no. 6, December 1904, 1.}

Winston hired Charles Francis Osborne as editor, and began immediately repositioning House & Garden for a wider audience by focusing as much on decorating and furnishings as architecture. In reality, it became a shelter magazine in 1905. What remained constant, however, was the production quality of the magazine. It was, as Mott wrote, “a high-grade magazine.”\footnote{Mott, American Magazines, vol. 4, 324.}

Osborne launched a new “Series on Home Making” and established a popular correspondence column. Most importantly, he began publishing images of room interiors in each issue to go with the magazine’s high-quality exterior pictures of houses and gardens, and carefully-drawn sketches of garden plans. Covers also changed, first to sketches making use of spot color and then to photographs (see figure 28).

Figure 28. Two House & Garden covers from 1905. \textit{Left}, from April and \textit{right}, from October. \textit{Sources: House & Garden 7, no. 4, April 1905; House & Garden 8, no. 3, October 1905.}
In 1909, four years after the Winston Company acquired *House & Garden*, it moved the magazine from Philadelphia to New York, though Osborne did not go with it. A new editor, John H. Saylor was hired, and management was reorganized with a new investor, Robert M. McBride. The result was the McBride, Winston & Company. By then, the magazine’s circulation had tripled from about 10,000 when Winston acquired it, to 34,000.23

**Condé Nast: The Owner of Vogue and Vanity Fair Enters the Shelter Genre**

At thirty-four years old in 1907, Condé Nast was already one of the most successful magazine executives in the nation — earning an astounding $40,000 a year (comparable to $1 million today as business manager for *Collier’s* magazine. It was more than enough for Nast to move full-time that same year to a company he had started earlier, Home Pattern Company. Two years later, in 1909, Nast bought a “chic little journal called *Vogue,*” and he acquired *Vanity Fair* in 1913.24 Already, in 1911, Nast had bought an interest in *House & Garden*, partnering with Robert McBride in a deal that led to a management change at the magazine, from the McBride, Winston & Company to McBride, Nast & Company.

In August 1915, Nast took over ownership of *House & Garden* outright and, as biographer Caroline Seebohm wrote, “promoted a magazine of interior design and gardening to the ranks of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. … *House & Garden* was transformed by Nast into an interior-design authority that encouraged women to believe that decorating their houses expressed just as much about their taste and position as decorating their persons.”25

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Nast’s first major move with his new shelter magazine was to buy the New York City-based *American Homes and Gardens* magazine and consolidate it into *House & Garden*.

*American Homes and Gardens* was no ordinary monthly. In acquiring it, Nast was the beneficiary of a valuable list of 25,000 or more subscribers of a magazine that Mott labeled “a profusely illustrated high-grade magazine” that rivaled *House & Garden*’s production quality. With its inaugural issue in July 1905, *American Homes and Gardens* replaced *Scientific American Building Monthly*, which had been around since 1885.

In its first issue in 1905, *American Homes and Gardens* published images from the Kennebunkport, Massachusetts, home of George Herbert Walker and eight decades later the same estate became the “Summer White House” for his grandson, President George H.W. Bush. Throughout its ten-year run, *American Homes and Gardens* published colorful covers (see figure 29) and served as a competitor to *House Beautiful, House & Garden*, and other well-designed monthlies that were part of a wave of shelter magazines at the turn of the new century.²⁷

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²⁷ “Rock Ledge, the Summer House of George H. Walker, Esq.,” *American Homes and Gardens* 1, no. 1, July 1905, 17.
Among the most prominent of the new magazines was *County Life in America*, which as Mott wrote, “was not designed for farmers.” Instead, it was targeted largely at “city dwellers,” who even as the United States was transitioning from a rural to urban nation, were enthralled with the pastoral life. In praising the magazine’s first issue in November 1901, *The New York Times* wrote: “We may in a measure gravitate to the cities, but our country dwellers are not likely to be forgotten. Today there is then a return to the broad fields, the pleasant woods, the meadows, the old stone houses where dwelt our fathers and mothers.”28

*Country Life in America* was owned by Doubleday, Page & Co., in New York and edited in the beginning by Cornell University horticulturalist Liberty Hyde Bailey, who later chaired President Theodore Roosevelt’s federal Country Life Commission — designed to promote rural America. *Country Life in America* did not focus, however, on the poverty-stricken rural regions that Walker Evans, James Agee, and others later chronicled but, instead, featured the upscale suburban gardens and country homes of the middle and upper classes (see figure 30).29

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Like *House & Garden*, *Country Life in America* sold for fifty cents a copy and $4 a year. Another upscale shelter magazine — *Suburban Country Life* — was founded in Boston in 1903 at ten cents per copy, the same as *House Beautiful*’s original cover price, though it had doubled to twenty cents by then. Two years later, in February 1905, *Suburban Country Life* dropped the middle word from its title following a lawsuit from *Country Life in America*. In a statement published in the magazine, *Suburban Life*’s management wrote that attention from the lawsuit actually brought in more advertisers and subscribers, but added, “. . . we have our hands full without attending to lawsuits. We much prefer putting $10,000 into SUBURBAN COUNTRY LIFE rather than spending it in the courts.”

Furniture designer Gustav Stickley had no such legal troubles with a magazine he was publishing at the same time in Eastwood, New York, a Syracuse suburb that was later annexed into the city. Stickley’s publication, *The Craftsman*, was founded in October 1901 as an artisan magazine promoting the American and British Arts and Crafts movement. From the start the magazine included images and drawings of houses and interiors in that style (see figure 31).

![Figure 31. A sketch and image from the first issue of *The Craftsman*. Source: The Craftsman 1, no. 1, October 1901, 3-4, Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, University of Wisconsin.](image)

30 “Around the Office Desk,” *Suburban Life* 9, no. 2 February 1905, 2.
The magazine was, as Cleota Reed Gabriel wrote, “the most influential voice in forming and spreading the movement’s aesthetic in America.”\(^{31}\) By 1904, *The Craftsman* had expanded its coverage of home design and gardens but never wavered from what its most prolific writer, Irene Sargent, described as a mission to “to employ only those forms and materials which make for simplicity, individuality and dignity of effect.”\(^{32}\) Though it still had a last reported circulation of 22,500 in 1915, *The Craftsman* published its last issue in 1916.\(^{33}\)

By then, Condé Nast was already transforming *House & Garden* into one of the nation’s most influential interior design magazines. It became, as Caroline Seebohm wrote, “the third jewel in his crown,” along with *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. Nast cross-promoted his magazines: It was no accident that in the August 1915 issue of *House & Garden*, the first in which Condé Nast took over ownership, a full-page ad for *Vogue* was published on the magazine’s first interior page. A *Vanity Fair* ad appeared on the same page in the next issue (see figure 32).\(^{34}\)

![Figure 32. Advertisements for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* in the August 1915 and September 1915 issues, respectively, of *House & Garden*. Source: *House & Garden*, Hathi Trust Digital Library.](image)

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32 Irene Sargent, “Foreword,” *The Craftsman* 1, no. 1, October 1901, 1.
34 Seebohm, *The Man Who Was Vogue*, 120.
House & Garden’s circulation was just 24,000 in 1915, but within a decade under the leadership of Nast and editor Richardson Wright it would reach 120,000 and routinely publish more than 200 pages per issue. As Seebohm wrote: “From the end of the First World War until 1929, affluence, the postwar cultural explosion, and the urbanization of America nourished Nast’s magazines until they became as fat and sleek and glossy as cream-fed cats.”

During this time, the competition between House & Garden and House Beautiful grew more intense, and both magazines responded with large issues and expertly-drawn covers that seemed to leap off newsstands (see figure 33).

Figure 33. Artistic covers from House Beautiful and House & Garden. Left, House Beautiful’s December 1919 issue. Right, the February 1918 issue of House & Garden. Sources: The House Beautiful 46, no. 6, December 1919; House & Garden 33, no. 2, February 1918.

Before, during, and after this period, the editors of both magazines — like the rest of the nation and world — would be deeply impacted by the Great War (see chapter 5).

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The United States formally entered World War I in April 1917, nearly two years after a German submarine sank the *RMS Lusitania*, killing 1,198 people, including former *House Beautiful* publisher Herbert S. Stone. The deaths of Stone and 127 other U.S. citizens on the *Lusitania* — along with German attacks on American merchant ships and other vessels off European coasts — helped turn public opinion more favorably toward American intervention in a war that first erupted in 1914. As historian Garrett Peck wrote:

> The Great War was an enormously contentious issue in the United States. The country debated for more than two and a half years whether to intervene. A third of the American population was first- or second-generation American, the highest ratio of foreign-born citizens in the country’s history, and there were major divisions in America society over the question of the War.¹

With the American war effort at home requiring a massive mobilization of troops, transportation, materials, and money, shelter magazines — like other print publications — felt the strain. Paper costs went up, distribution problems arose, and printing plants lost workers to the war. *House Beautiful*, which had moved from New York to Boston beginning with the December 1914 issue, delayed a price increase throughout most of the war. A new editor, Mabel Rollins, wrote in September 1918 that it was with “deep regret” that she had to inform readers that paper prices and higher labor costs had forced the issue, The increase amounted to a fifty-

cent hike (equivalent to $8.30 today) in the annual subscription rate from $2.50 to $3 (or about $50 today), and no increase to the twenty-five-cent cover price.²

Given the upheaval in domestic shipping and transportation caused by the war effort, a house ad in the November 1917 issue of House & Garden was typical in asking for patience from readers. It noted:

This is war-time. Munitions, troops, supplies for our army and our Allies are being handled by every railroad in America. Employees of the railway and post office have been drafted; trains and mails are now re-scheduled. Because of these things, second-class mail is subject to unforeseen delays, and delivery dates of second-class matter can no longer be assured. We have taken every possible precaution to see that your copy of House & Garden shall reach you on its regular day. But in case it does not, don’t assume your copy is lost. Don’t write us at once. Give the United States mail a few days’ leeway. In nine cases out of ten, your copy will eventually arrive.³

These disruptions, however, were far outweighed by the war itself. House & Garden, House Beautiful, Country Life in America, Suburban Life, and other home-focused publications eagerly supported the war effort by urging their readers to make do with less at home, invest in bonds to support the troops, and even change their eating habits so more food could be sent to soldiers and support personnel in Europe. For instance, an unsigned editorial headlined “Thinking the War Through” in House & Garden’s April 1918 issue (most likely written by editor Richardson Wright) informed readers:

Saving a loaf of bread a week may seem insignificant, but that saving has made it possible for us to send hundreds of thousands of bushels of wheat to the other side. A meatless meal may appear a small contribution, yet the accumulation of these tiny contributions counted up mighty big when Mr. Hoover last made his report. A quarter here and a quarter there is a small sacrifice, but by March 1st the accumulated quarters of the nation invested in War Saving Stamps amounted to something over $70,000,000. . . . For months this magazine has been preaching the wisdom of wise spending, and it preaches it again. Spending wisely is the way you can think this war through.⁴

³ “Please Be Patient,” House & Garden 32, no. 5, November 1917, 12.
⁴ “Thinking the War Through,” House & Garden 33, no. 4, April 1918, 24.
House Beautiful regularly had its own take on conservation efforts at home. Some of it was as detailed as telling readers which cereals to eat, such as this advice from writer Irene Reed in the magazine’s January 1918 issue:

Use one less teaspoon of sugar in your coffee and on your cereal. Cultivate a taste for those cereals which do have the name of wheat in their makeup. At noon dispense with the usual bread unless perchance it is one of the war variety, that is, one in which there is a minimum of wheat and a maximum for the whole or darker grains. Eat more potatoes and vegetables and less of the meats.5

House & Garden, in at least one instance, relied on the federal government to urge restraint at home. The magazine noted that an opinion column headlined “Twenty Million Fuel Savers in America,” published in the October 1918 issue, was “Prepared for House & Garden by the United States Fuel Administration. The column urged readers to “conserve every commodity our fighting men in the fields and trenches require of us,” and singled out coal in particular.”6

Of all the commodities our country needs now to provision its fighting men, none is so vital as coal. In times of peace, it has been an axiom that coal moves the world: in war times it is unanswerably true that coal is the motive power which moves ships and trains transporting supplies and soldiers, that it turns up almost every wheel of industry producing supplies.7

Though it was rare for a shelter magazine to publish a column written by a federal agency, it is clear there was a coordinated governmental effort to pressure magazine and newspaper editors and publishers into supporting the war. Much of it, as historians have documented, came from the federal Committee on Public Information (CPI) in Washington, D.C., established by executive order from President Woodrow Wilson in April 1917. Scholars

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6 United States Fuel Administration, “Twenty Million Fuel-Savers in America,” House & Garden 34 no. 4, October 1918, 40.
7 Ibid.
such as political scientist Erika G. King have since labeled the committee “the world’s greatest propaganda machine.”

George Creel, chairman of the committee, candidly wrote in a 1920 bestseller, *How We Advertised America*, that the committee was ruthless in its mission to “weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination.” There was, he added, “no part of the great war machinery that we did not touch, no medium of appeal that we did not employ.”

As King noted, Creel’s book — along with memoirs from propagandists in Britain and Germany disclosing their own governments’ attempt to manipulate American public opinion — drew widespread contempt in the United States. King wrote:

Americans were certainly dismayed to learn of the extent to which our enemies and our allies engaged in propaganda activities on both sides of the Atlantic. But they were far more dismayed to discover that the most massive and comprehensive propaganda campaign aimed at the American homefront was waged not by foreign governments but by our own.

During the war, however, any criticism or questions about propaganda were overshadowed by full-fledged support in the pages of shelter magazines. Routine coverage, such as gardening, took on a war footing. At *House & Garden*, editors established a “War Garden Department,” urging readers to grow more produce at home, given that farms had lost thousands of workers who joined the military. Supplying the nation and its soldiers with food was viewed as a priority for anyone with the ability to grow crops (see figure 34).

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10 Ibid.
11 King, “Exposing the ‘Age of Lies’,” 35.
WAR GARDEN ACTIVITIES in the SMALL TOWN
A Practical Program Whereby Garden Clubs Can
Raise the Food to Win the War
CLOVE HYDE FOSTER

The possibilities of our garden activities
as a small town can be realized only when
those who, like myself, can least afford it
are enthusiastic about their greens and
vegetables. There is no better form of
training in the care of plants than the
experience of taking care of a garden.
I have a garden plot in a country school
which is leased to me for a small
amount of money. I have found that
this not only helps me to support my
family, but also provides a source of
income for the school. I have used this
money to buy seeds and plants, and
have been able to grow enough food
to feed my family and to sell some of
it at the local market.

In addition to the garden, I have
organized a community garden club,
which has been very successful. I
have found that the key to success is
organization and teamwork. We have
formulated a plan to divide the
plot into smaller sections, each
managed by one of the members of
the club. This way, we can ensure
that everyone is using the space
efficiently and maximizing our
production.

We have also organized a
workshop on canning and preserv¬
ing, which has been well attended.
I have found that canning is a
great way to preserve the foods
that we grow and to reduce waste.
We have been able to sell our
productions at a fair price and have
been able to support our families.

One of the biggest challenges
we face is pests and diseases.
I have found that the best way to
prevent problems is to keep
our garden clean and
organized. We have
implemented a rotational
system, which helps
us to manage the
diversity of our
plants and
reduce the risk of
pests.

We have been able to
raise enough food
to feed our families and
have even been able to
sell some of our
productions at
the local market.
This has been a
great way to
support our
families and
be part of
our community.

I believe that everyone can
benefit from the experience of
growing their own food.
By taking care of a garden,
we can learn valuable
lessons about
nature and
sustainability.
We can also
be part of
our community and
help support
others.

Figure 34. Raising food to help win the war was among the themes House & Garden and other magazines repeated throughout the conflict. Source: “War Garden Activities in the Small Town,” House & Garden 33, no. 2, February 1918, 36, Hathi Trust Digital Library, Condé Nast Publications.

Some of the usual stories about vacations and second homes in the summer issues of these magazines were replaced by stories on volunteerism and charity. Rollins, editor of House Beautiful from 1918-1920, praised families who were forgoing their usual summer getaways for a more important cause. In the July 1918 issue, she noted that 6,000 boys enlisted for farm work in Colorado as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s new Boys’ Working Reserve, and in Maryland, the Woman’s Land Army signed up teenage girls to go to farms to help harvest berries and crops. “We’ll be glad to hear of the ways you are helping to win the war—whether it is by farming or some other way,” Rollins added.12

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During the war years, *Country Life in America*’s name changed to *The New Country Life* and was then shortened to *Country Life*. By any name, it was a staunch supporter of the war, routinely devoting much of its content to the American involvement. This included three full issues focused entirely on American soldiers as the fighting came to an end in late 1918. For these issues, the magazine’s cover logo was temporarily changed again, this time to *Country Life in War*, and the editorial content was filled with high praise for American soldiers. For instance, in the November 1918 issue, one writer identified only as “An Eye Witness” lauded the “fighting spirit of the American soldier, his splendid spirit of attack.” Together, the story noted, these soldiers represented a “tremendous, efficient, modern fighting machine” (see figure 35).\(^{13}\)

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**Figure 35.** *Country Life*’s tribute to American soldiers. *Source: Country Life 35, no. 1, November 1918, Hathi Trust Digital Library, Doubleday, Page & Co.*

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\(^{13}\)“The American Spirit in France,” *Country Life* 35, no. 1, November 1918, 25.
Like *House & Garden* and *House Beautiful*, the editors and writers of *Country Life* implored readers to get their hands dirty growing as many crops as they could, or hire someone to do it for them, despite the labor shortages. *Country Life* sounded the alarm in a May 1918 story that began:

> World-wide food shortages strongly bring home to American estate owners the need for doing their utmost to relieve the situation. Yet, in endeavoring to make the land yield its full quota, most people find themselves seriously handicapped by unparalleled conditions. Labor is scarcer than ever before. Seed of America’s greatest food crop—corn—is alarmingly short, and the vitality of stock on hand is often unreliable.14

Throughout the nineteen months that American soldiers were overseas, shelter magazines tried to balance the genre’s usual home-related content with the far more serious issues the nation faced while at war. Grace Atkinson Kimball, editor of *House Beautiful* for two years (1916-1918), addressed this issue months after the U.S. entered the war, making a plea for as much normalcy as possible at home while also supporting the troops:

> We run across a good many people nowadays who seem to think that because we are in the Great War, life ought to cease to go on as usual; that to eat, sleep and conduct our business shows a callous heart and a foolish head. . . . If we were really “up against it” good and hard, we should find out that the most pressing duty is to keep life going on as usual.15

Shelter magazines, along with other specialized and general interest publications, cooperated with the U.S. Postal Service in 1918 by printing notices on their covers that encouraged readers — once done with the issues — to forward them along for the good of the soldiers. This statement printed at the bottom of the March issue of *House Beautiful* was typical:

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“NOTICE TO READER

When you finish reading this magazine place a 1-cent stamp on this notice, hand same to any postal employee, and it will be placed in the hands of our soldiers or sailors at the front.

NO WRAPPING—NO ADDRESS

– A.S. Burleson, Postmaster-General” (see figure 36).

Figure 36. A notice at the bottom of House Beautiful’s March 1918 cover urged readers to forward the magazine to the Postal Service so it could be delivered to U.S. soldiers “at the front.” Source: The House Beautiful 43, no. 4, March 1918.

In all, 4.7 million Americans served in the war — two million of them fought in Europe — and by the time it ended, 116,516 were dead and 204,002 injured. Germany’s surrender on November 11, 1918, ended the fighting, and shelter magazines — depending on their lead times (most were already working on 1919 issues) — celebrated in their pages, along with the rest of the nation. In the hindsight of a century since the end of the Great War, some of the comments from shelter editors now seem almost too flippant, given the casualty numbers. For instance, in introducing the “Spring Gardening Guide” theme of its February 1919 issue, House & Garden told readers: “Americans have learned one thing, at least, from the war. They have learned the value and enjoyment of kitchen gardening. And it is reasonable to suppose that, having known
the fun and the refreshment and the money-saving joy of raising their own vegetables, they will continue it.”

There were, of course, far more serious lessons that Americans learned from the war than the enjoyment of gardening. Nevertheless, this story was well intended. Like other shelter magazines, *House & Garden* urged its readers throughout the war to grow their own vegetables. Celebrating that fact at the end did not appear to be out of line with the magazine’s mission.

Mabel Rollins, in her “Talks with Our Readers” column in the January 1919 issue of *House Beautiful*, was so excited about the end of the fighting in Europe that she did what experienced editors rarely do: she used an exclamation point: “The restrictions on non-war construction have now been removed! All building operations may go on—new houses may be built; old ones remodeled. The only problem now is to find the right home to build.”

Doubleday, Page & Co., went so far as to buy advertising in competing publications to announce *Country Life*’s return to its non-war footing. Their ad in the February 1919 issue of *House & Garden* touted: “*Country Life* goes back to a peace basis with the February issue, and the editors announce a series of color manuals that will be guides to good taste in everything that pertains to the country home.”

**Women Editors**

It is important to note that before, during and after the war — and in 1920, when American women gained the right to vote — *House Beautiful* was led by five consecutive female editors. They included: Robie (1913-1915), Mabel Kent (1915-1916), Grace Atkinson Kimball

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(1916-1918), Mabel Rollins (1918-1920), and Charlotte Lewis (1921). Ellery Sedgewick, a former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, interrupted the successive line of women editors with a one-year stint at *House Beautiful* in 1922. Sedgewick was followed by another female editor, Ethel B. Power, an architect who led *House Beautiful* for next eleven years (1923-1934) until Hearst bought the magazine and moved it from Boston to New York.\(^{19}\)

Though shelter magazines such as *House & Garden*, *Country Life in America*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* were led by male editors in the early decades of the twentieth century, the succession of women as editors at *House Beautiful* may not have been so unusual relative to other genres. Patricia Okker, an English professor and dean of the University of Missouri’s College of Arts and Sciences, identified more than six hundred women who worked in editorial positions at magazines in the nineteenth century. In a 1995 book, Okker rejected any assumption that men alone were solely responsible for the growth and influence of the magazine industry:

> Indeed, the number of women editing periodicals during the last part of the nineteenth century suggests the extent to which men’s so-called dominance of the periodical industry is a construct of an incomplete literary history.\(^ {20}\)

Okker focused much of her work on Sarah Josepha Hale, whose career as editor at *Ladies’ Magazine* in Boston and *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in Philadelphia spanned more fifty years. As a literary editor, she wrote both fiction and poetry and also published the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Harriett Beecher Stowe, and Nathanial Hawthorne, among many others. Authors John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman described Hale as “the most famous editor of women’s magazines in the nineteenth century.”\(^ {21}\)

\(^{19}\) Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 5, 154.
It is unfortunate, researchers claim, that despite her literary accomplishments and career-long support of women’s education, Hale is most known as the author of the nursery rhyme, “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” and as the person who convinced President Abraham Lincoln to declare Thanksgiving a national holiday.22

As Okker, Tebbel, Zuckerman, and Mott point out, there were many other female-led magazines in the nineteenth century, including one — Central Magazine in St. Louis — in which an all-female staff wrote the articles, set the type, and printed and mailed the magazine (see figure 37).23

Figure 37. The all-women staff in the Central Magazine composing room in St. Louis, Missouri, circa 1875. Source: Central Magazine advertisement, Geo. P Rowell & Co’s American Newspaper and Periodical Directory (New York: Geo P. Rowell & Co., 1875), 497.

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However, the women editors-in-chief at *House Beautiful* were rare in the shelter genre in the early twentieth century. Notable exceptions included Irene Sargent, who edited Gustav Stickley’s *The Craftsman* magazine and wrote most of the stories in the earliest issues, beginning in 1901, and Lou Richardson and Genevieve A. Callahan, hired by publisher Laurence W. Lane as co-editors of *Sunset* magazine in 1929.\(^{24}\)

There were many female associate editors, writers, and contributors at shelter magazines in the early 1900s, but it was not until much later that women were named to the top editor roles at most of these publications. *House & Garden* — led by Richardson Wright’s thirty-five-year tenure from 1914-1946 — had far less turnover among editors-in-chief than most other magazines. Yet *House & Garden* did not hire a woman as its top editor until Harriet Burket in 1958. *Architectural Digest*, founded in Los Angeles in 1920 and today one of the most influential home design publications, named Paige Rense as the magazine’s first woman editor-in-chief in 1975. *Better Homes and Gardens*, launched as *Fruit, Garden and Home* in 1922 and today the nation’s most widely-circulated shelter magazine at 7.6 million, did not hire a female editor-in-chief — Jean LemMon — until 1993.\(^{25}\)\(^{26}\)

**The Magazine Boom of the Twenties**

As Frank Luther Mott wrote, *House & Garden* and *House Beautiful* entered the twentieth century as “the most important” of an expanding group of periodicals “devoted to house

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\(^{24}\) Cleota Reed Gabriel, “Irene Sargent: Rediscovering a Lost Legend,” *The Courier* 16, no. 2, Summer 1979, 8; Starr, “*Sunset* Magazine and the Phenomenon of the Far West,” 45.


\(^{26}\) Though *Better Homes and Gardens* did not hire a woman as editor-in-chief until 1993, it should be noted that Lou Richardson and Genevieve A. Callahan, hired as co-editors of *Sunset* magazine in 1929, both served earlier as senior editors at *Better Homes and Gardens*. For more details, see: Kevin Starr, “*Sunset* Magazine and the Phenomenon of the Far West,” in *Sunset Magazine: A Century of Western Living* 1898-1998: Historical Portraits and Bibliography (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Libraries, 1998).
planning, interior decorating, furnishings, and landscape gardening.”

With the war behind them, the competition between the two magazines grew more intense, though it was *House & Garden* — a major part of Condé Nast’s glamorous new publication empire in New York — that took the lead in the 1920s.

Nast started by insisting on better quality control in printing, despite the fact that *House & Garden* was already published on high-end paper stock. When Nast bought *Vogue, Vanity Fair,* and *House & Garden,* all three were printed by separate commercial printers. In 1921, he invested in a small printing plant in Greenwich, Connecticut, expanded it to a massive 300,000 square feet, bought thirty-three acres of adjacent property, and asked two well-known landscape architects — Guy Lowell and Ferruccio Vitale — to make it all work. The result was a series of formal gardens, fountains, semicircular driveways, and sixty newly-planted, full-grown elm trees. This was a landscape as worthy as any featured in *House & Garden.* Outfitted with newly acquired presses, the plant began printing all of Nast’s publications and contracted with other publishers to print their magazines, as well.

All the while, *House & Garden* outdistanced *House Beautiful* in readership in the 1920s. Back in 1914, the Audit Bureau of Circulations (now the Alliance for Audited Media) was formed by advertisers, ad agencies, and publishers to bring verification and transparency to circulation data for newspapers and periodicals. By 1923, the ABC-audited circulation of *House & Garden* stood at 98,669, compared to 52,185 for *House Beautiful.* *House Beautiful* closed much of the gap by 1930 (105,374 to 122,824), and with the support of a major new owner — Hearst Magazines — nearly doubled its circulation by 1940 to 207,763 — surpassing *House &

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28 Ibid, 248.
Garden’s 172,448. Readership numbers aside, both magazines thrived editorially after the Great War, pressing each other competitively with redesigns and covers that took full advantage of their large format trim size (see figure 38).  

Figure 38: Covers of House & Garden and House Beautiful following the Great War. Source: Clockwise from top, House & Garden 36 no. 1 July 1919; House & Garden 36, no. 6, December 1919; The House Beautiful 46, no. 3, September 1919; The House Beautiful 51, no. 2, February 1922.

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The 1920s, with a booming economy and the nation in peacetime, proved to be a pivotal one for magazine startups, turning out some of the most successful and influential magazines of the twentieth century. They included *Time* and *Reader’s Digest*, both launched in 1923, and *The New Yorker* in 1925. These magazines reached millions of readers each month over the following decades but so, too, did *Architectural Digest* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, the two major new shelter publications launched during the 1920s. For scholars Anna Hinnant and Berkley Hudson, the years from 1880 to 1920 represented a “Golden Age” in magazine development, but both also acknowledged that, “Even a partial list of magazines that started in the 1920s and 1930s suggests a time ripe for the creation and growth of magazines that built upon the previous successes.”

*Architectural Digest* and *Better Homes and Gardens*

By the time *Architectural Digest* started quietly as a trade quarterly in 1920 in Los Angeles, the West Coast was already getting its due in terms of shelter magazine coverage. By then, *Sunset* magazine was promoting the Western lifestyle on a monthly basis, and both *House Beautiful* and *House & Garden* regularly featured California homes (see figure 39).

![Image](image.png)

Figure 39: *House Beautiful*’s 1919 “Western Number.” *Source: The House Beautiful* 46, no. 1, July 1919.

Architectural Digest (see figure 40) was not originally intended to compete with House Beautiful, House & Garden, Sunset, or any other national or regional publications. From the start, founder John C. Brasfield, a native Tennessean who relocated to Los Angeles at the turn of the century, made it clear that his magazine would be devoted solely to California residential and commercial architecture. At 12-by-15 inches, Architectural Digest debuted as a decidedly-upscale magazine with a price to match at $3 per issue, or $38 in 2019 currency.32

The Los Angeles Times noted in 2005 that, although the magazine was launched as a quarterly, it “was published whenever the publisher found enough quality estates in Southern California worthy of displaying, according to the magazine. Sometimes that happened only twice a year.”33 Nevertheless, John Brasfield wrote in a house ad in a 1925 issue:

The Architectural Digest is published every three months and contains illustrations of the best architecture as practiced in California. Every style of Architecture can be found: English, French, Italian, Spanish, etc. Houses, large and small, floor plans, gardens, churches, theatres, schools, hotels, apartments, city and country clubs.34

Figure 40. The cover of a 1925 issue of The Architectural Digest. Source: The Architectural Digest, California State Library, Condé Nast Publications.

33 Janet Eastman, “Inspired to Turn Over an Old Leaf,” The Los Angeles Times, July 7, 2005.
The birth of *Architectural Digest* was so quiet in 1920 that Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Frank Luther Mott, in 3,600 pages spanning five volumes on the history of American magazines, never mentioned it. Produced in downtown Los Angeles, the heavily illustrated magazine had little need for contributing writers in its earliest years: the text was nearly all captions that accompanied large black-and-white photos of houses, office buildings, and hotels. This was decades before Paige Rense, editor of *Architectural Digest* for thirty-five years (1975-2010), and new owners (first Knapp Communications and later Condé Nast Publications) transformed it from a trade journal to a glamorous, highly influential shelter publication that, as scholars Kathleen Endres and Therese Lueck wrote, was essentially “the top home magazine for the affluent.”

In its first couple of decades *Architectural Digest* regularly featured the work of renowned architects that included Wallace Neff and Gordon Kaufman, but it was also not opposed to featuring celebrity homes when Brasfield considered the design worthy of publication. As Rense noted: “In 1927 the magazine published the Beverly Hills home of silent film comedian Buster Keaton, followed by celebrity homes like Pickfair, built by Neff for Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks (the house was razed in the early 1980s), and the Bel-Air home of movie mogul Louis B. Meyer.”

Far from Hollywood, forty-five-year-old Edwin Thomas Meredith returned to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1922 after a year-long stint as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, and started working on new magazine: *Fruit, Garden and Home*. Back in 1902 Meredith had launched what

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became a popular agricultural monthly, *Successful Farming*. Using his *Successful Farming* staff, Meredith created *Fruit, Garden and Home* as a monthly in July 1922.\(^{37}\)

From the beginning, Meredith targeted the magazine for a mass audience — estimating a start-up circulation of 150,000, with plans to expand to 500,000 by the end of the year, and more than a million within four years. To help achieve such lofty numbers, the first two issues — though they had a ten-cent cover price — were sent free to the company’s subscriber lists, then offered for a cut-rate price of thirty-cents per year or three years for $1. It worked, though advertising revenue lagged behind. In 1923, two years after the launch, *Fruit, Garden and Home* had 300,000 circulation but was still struggling to turn a profit.\(^{38}\)

Part of the problem for advertisers was the name. As Endres and Lueck wrote, “Just what kind of magazine was this? It was not clear from its name.” The solution came in August 1924 when the name was changed to *Better Homes and Gardens*, more clearly reflecting the magazine’s editorial focus and instantly giving it a successful second launch (see figure 41).\(^{39}\)

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Chelsa Sherlock, who became editor of the magazine beginning with the second issue of *Fruit, Garden and Home*, told an audience in Boston:

We started with a definite ideal in mind and, generally speaking, that was to do what we could to interest people in better homemaking. … We had a definite field in mind and that was the homemakers living in houses in cities, towns and suburbs.40

If it sounded as if Sherlock was speaking too broadly, he made it clear that he wasn’t. The magazine had no interest, he said, in fashion, fiction, and sex. By the time the name changed, *Better Homes and Gardens* was, Mott noted, a “handsome periodical of fifty pages or more, with larger illustrations, carrying liberal advertising, and boasting a circulation of half a million.”41 It reached one million in circulation and averaged 150 pages in each issue by 1928, the year its founder, E.T. Meredith, died. Part of the magazine’s extraordinary appeal was its service-oriented “how to” content. Sherlock, editor from 1922 to 1927, told the Boston group in 1925:

We actually show people how to succeed in their garden work . . . how to decorate the house . . . select a new furnace or kitchen cabinet . . . what kind of a house to build; how to build it; how to cook and preserve the bounty of the garden and berry patch. In short, we touched them in their everyday problems at more points than any other magazine ever had before.42

*Better Homes and Gardens* was also an innovator in setting up test kitchens for recipes in 1928 — a move that other shelter publications such as *Sunset and Southern Living* would also establish with great success well into the twentieth century and beyond. The Depression years of the 1930s would bring severe financial challenges to every sector of American life, including

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42 Reuss, “Chelsa A. Sherlock,” 30.
shelter magazines. Still, *Better Homes and Gardens* reached two million circulation by 1940, more than three and a half million by 1950, and eight million in 1990.43

In December 1933, the International Magazine Company, the magazine division of William Randolph Hearst’s media empire, bought *House Beautiful* and merged it with *Home & Field*, another shelter publication that Hearst acquired in 1929. In 1934, Hearst relocated the magazine from Boston, its home for nineteen of its thirty-eight years in existence, back to New York. As it always had throughout previous mergers and acquisitions, *House Beautiful* retained its name, although its cover logo included *Home & Field* in smaller print for the next nine years (see figure 42).44

![House Beautiful cover](image)

Figure 42. The December 1934 cover of *House Beautiful* combined with *Home & Field*. Source: *House Beautiful* 76, no. 6, December 1934.

Mott summed it up more than fifty years ago:

“The essential vitality of *House Beautiful* is attested by the fact that, though it changed hands repeatedly and three of its purchasers consolidated their own house-and-home periodicals with it, it kept its own name; and through its vicissitudes of changing owners, editors, and places of publication, it maintained a reasonable consistency in editorial policy.”

The acquisition by Hearst was the last time *House Beautiful* would undergo an ownership change. Hearst has now owned the magazine for more than eighty-five years. With Hearst’s backing, the magazine survived the financial crisis of the 1930s and thrived throughout the twentieth century, averaging just over one million in the 1990s. Though the numbers have declined with the downturn in print media in the past decade, *House Beautiful*’s circulation remains at about 860,000 today. In its latest media kit, the magazine reported an online audience that averaged about 4.8 million unique visitors in October 2018.

The long-term outcome was not as fortunate for *House & Garden*. As Endres and Lueck noted, *House & Garden* reached its summit in circulation at one million in 1980 but dropped back to almost half that number five years later before recovering to a circulation of nearly 700,000 in 1992. Through it all, *House & Garden* was among the leaders among shelter categories in advertising revenue, with 760 advertising pages and $23 million in revenue in 1992. Nevertheless, in 1993, Condé Nast Publications bought *Architectural Digest* — which carried 1,155 advertising pages and $33 million revenue in 1992 — and shut down *House & Garden* after ninety-two years of publication.

Three years later, in 1996, *House & Garden* was relaunched and was around to celebrate its 100th birthday in 2001. With a strong editorial staff led by editor Dominique Browning, the

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45 Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 5, 162.
46 “Affluent Adult Demographics,” *House Beautiful* Media Kit, October 18, 2018.
magazine seemed once again to be among the most healthy publications in the shelter category. It had a paid circulation of nearly one million and more than 800 advertising pages through the first eleven months of 2007 — “better numbers than many of its competitors,” *The New York Times* reported. Condé Nast, however, known as the *Times* reported for “high operating costs” in a crowded shelter market, closed the magazine again late that year.48

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The list of home-related magazines launched between 1890 and 1925 includes at least four major titles that are still in publication today: *House Beautiful*, *Sunset*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Others that began in the early twentieth century have come and gone over the past 100 years, either merged into other magazines or shuttered completely. They notably included *House & Garden*, *American Homes and Gardens*, *Country Life in America*, *Suburban Life*, *Home & Field*, and *The Craftsman*. All, in their own way, laid the groundwork for currently published home-related magazines that would follow such as *Traditional Home*, *Elle Décor*, *Dwell*, *Country Living*, *Southern Living*, *Veranda*, *Midwest Living*, *This Old House*, and *Coastal Living*.

Still others, including *Metropolitan Home*, *Southern Accents*, *Country Homes*, *Colonial Homes*, *Cottage Living*, and *Domino*, came and went over the last few decades, collectively drawing large audiences but eventually lost in the shakeout that gripped the print industry in a new digital age. Among them, *Domino*, founded by Condé Nast in 2004 and closed in 2009, was relaunched in both print and online with new investors in 2013.¹

All of these publications were or continue to be part of the shelter genre, but an examination by this thesis reveals that historians have given the category relatively little

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attention compared to the magazine industry as a whole and women’s periodicals in particular. As Kathleen Corbett noted, shelter publications were and are more narrowly focused on decorating, home style, and furnishings compared to the broader content areas of fashion, health, beauty, relationship advice, and lifestyle in women’s periodicals.\(^2\)

Nevertheless, there were many areas of overlap in home-related articles between shelter and women’s service magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*. This crossover might be why scholars have not felt it necessary to study shelter magazines as a separate genre. Mott, however, made a clear distinction in his fourth volume of *A History of American Magazines*. Referring to the 1890s and the turn of the twentieth century, he wrote:

> Much is to be found about home building in the magazines that served women and the home in the nineties, and in a group of periodicals developed in that decade and the next few years that were devoted to house planning, interior decorating, furnishings, and landscape gardening. The most important of this group were *House Beautiful* and *House & Garden*.\(^3\)

The rise of shelter magazines did not happen in a vacuum. In the larger context, their origin was part of a series of events taking place in American life as the 1890s gave way to the 1900s. Scholars Anna Hinnant and Berkley Hudson defined it this way:

> A merging of social, political, economic, and cultural forces helped to foster a ‘Magazine Revolution’ of 1880 to 1920 in the United States. Industrialization, rates of improving literacy, transportation advances, and beneficial postal regulations combined with a burgeoning, middle-class readership with a growing diversity of interests and a desire to participate more in an awareness of national life. Advertisers capitalized on this growing audience by promoting in magazines a new generation of mass-produced products and creating nationally known brands. The development of half-tone photo engraving further revolutionized publishing by reducing the costs of illustrations and photographs.\(^4\)

\(^3\) Mott, *American Magazines*, vol. 4, 324.
That last sentence, regarding the development of halftoned photographic images, cannot be underestimated when it comes to the origin of shelter publications. As longtime *House & Garden* editor Richardson Wright wrote in a twenty-fifth anniversary reminiscence of his magazine in 1926, Americans had “become a picture-reading people. More can be grasped by one glance at an illustration than might be understood by reading half a page of text.”

More than images, however, led to the shelter genre. As Hinnant and Hudson noted, a combination of enormous technological advances and societal changes in the nineteenth century played major roles in magazine development between 1880 and 1920. At the same time, skyrocketing population growth — from a majority rural 76.2 million in 1900 to a majority urban 123.2 million by 1930 — led to migration into every corner of the nation. This mobility, spurred by the expansion of railroads and fueled by the 1862 Homestead Act’s offer of 160 acres of free unappropriated federal land to families, led to what writer David Larkin termed a “vastly expanded” housing market.

**Lasting Legacies**

The times, then, were right for two civil engineers, Eugene Klapp and Henry Blodgett Harvey, to launch a landmark shelter magazine, *House Beautiful*, in 1896. What Klapp and Harvey could not have known was that in 2019 *House Beautiful* would still be going strong as the oldest continuously published shelter publication in the United States.

Other shelter magazinists would soon follow, including Herbert S. Stone, a Harvard-educated young book publisher who became editor and publisher of *House Beautiful* and spent sixteen years on a mission to bring elegance, simplicity, and practical advice to homeowners

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across the nation. Three Philadelphia architects — Herbert Wise, Frank Day, and Wilson Eyre — founded *House & Garden* in 1901, but it was a visionary advertising executive, Condé Nast, who bought the magazine in 1915 and gave it the same attention to detail and quality that he infused in two of his other magazines — *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* — on his way to building a magazine empire that still stands today.

Others also made enormous impacts in the early years of these publications. They included Virginia Robie, a longtime *House Beautiful* writer who succeeded Stone as editor in 1913, becoming the first of five consecutive women editors of that magazine. Robie authored at least ten books, wrote children’s plays, and taught art history as an associate professor at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, from the late 1920s until she retired in 1944 (see figure 43).  

![Figure 43. Former *House Beautiful* editor Virginia Robie, third from the right, after receiving the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award for dedicated service to Rollins College on June 3, 1935. Robie taught art at Rollins for sixteen years and was named art professor emeritus upon her retirement in 1944. Source: Courtesy of Rollins College Archives.](image)

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Robie was chief editor of *House Beautiful* for just two of the fifteen years she worked with the magazine, but her legacy as a woman leading a national shelter magazine continued with the next four editors-in-chief, all of whom were women — Mabel Kent (1915-1916), Grace Atkinson Kimball (1916-1918), Mabel Rollins (1918-1920), and Charlotte Lewis (1921). Kimball and Rollins led the magazine through the war years before Lewis, described by *Publishers Weekly* as “one of the leading authorities on home building and furnishings in the country, being a lecturer of note,” was hired for a single year in 1921. Former *Atlantic Monthly* editor Ellery Sedgewick interrupted the run of women editors, taking over the *House Beautiful* job in 1922. But a year later, in 1923, it was Ethel B. Power — the sixth female among the last seven editors-in-chief hired by the magazine — who would bring some closure to what had been a revolving door of top editors since the departure of Herbert S. Stone in 1913.

Power, an architect who had been an active proponent of women’s suffrage, was editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful* for the next eleven years (1923-1934), until Hearst bought the magazine and moved it from Boston to New York. Power resigned rather than make the move so she could stay in Boston with her lifelong partner, architect Eleanor Agnes Raymond, according to art historian Nancy Gruskin in a 2003 book, *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*. “As a fifty-three-year-old woman in an industry hit hard by the Depression, Power must have known the ramifications of her decision. Such sacrifices were a telling sign of a deep and abiding love.”

Both Power (see figure 44) and Raymond earned their degrees at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, and throughout their careers championed the work

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8 “Periodical Notes,” *Publisher’s Weekly* 99, no. 1, January 1, 1921, 29.
of fellow female architects at a time when less than 2 percent of American architects were women, according to U.S. Census statistics spanning the first three decades of the twentieth century. Power’s 1927 book, *The Smaller American Home*, has been reprinted repeatedly and remains on sale today.\(^\text{11}\)

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As mentioned in chapter 5, the string of female editors at *House Beautiful* was unusual for its time in the shelter genre, though perhaps not as rare in other magazine categories. Scholar Patricia Okker identified more than 600 women who worked on magazine editorial staffs in the nineteenth century. Two women, Lou Richardson and Genevieve A. Callahan, were hired as co-editors of *Sunset* in 1929, helping publisher Laurence W. Lane expand the magazine from its travel and literary mission to an overwhelmingly popular western home and lifestyle in the

\(^{11}\) Gruskin, “Designing Woman,” 159.
1930s. Nevertheless, the editorial staffs of most shelter magazines were led by men until decades later. *House & Garden* did not hire a female editor-in-chief (Harriet Burket) until 1958. *Architectural Digest* promoted associate editor Paige Rense to executive editor in 1971 and named her as the magazine’s first female editor-in-chief in 1975. It was 1993 before *Better Homes and Gardens* hired a woman, Jean LemMon, as its first female editor-in-chief.\(^\text{12}\)

In taking over her magazine’s top editor’s role, LemMon continued a legacy of success at *Better Homes and Gardens* that had been established by Edwin T. Meredith in Des Moines, Iowa. Meredith’s vision for a shelter magazine for the masses continues to shape the shelter genre and to a large extent, American media in general. He created the most widely circulated shelter magazine in the world — *Better Homes and Gardens* — and the company bearing his name, the Meredith Corporation, bought Time Inc., for $2.8 billion in 2018 to become one of the nation’s largest media firms.\(^\text{13}\) After selling off some of the Time Inc., properties, including *Time* and *Sports Illustrated*, the Meredith Corporation still owns more than thirty magazines and seventeen television stations. Among other highly influential pioneers was Richardson Wright, a horticulturist who was editor-in-chief of *House & Garden* for thirty-five years. As the *Associated Press* reported in his 1961 obituary, Wright had “been in great demand in New York as a lecturer” throughout his career.\(^\text{14}\)

**Shelter Magazine Communities**

These individuals and their magazines chronicled the American home at the turn of the twentieth century, but they also did something else: They created their own communities of

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readers and influenced their decisions in everything from furniture choices to the architectural style of their houses and rooms, and the paint color on their walls. In this regard, shelter publications, like magazines of all genres, had some advantages over newspapers when it came to influence. Heather A. Haveman noted that magazines had longer shelf lives than newspapers, a broader reach in terms of circulation far beyond their own cities, and because they were not on daily deadlines, could be more in-depth and thoughtful in their content.\textsuperscript{15}

Shelter magazines, in establishing popular correspondence and reader’s service pages — in which they offered specific tips and advice in question-and-answer formats — built a strong rapport with thousands of readers, and in essence, were at the center of their own social networks long before the age of instant digital communications. Increasingly, the contact between editors and publishers and their readers went beyond the printed pages. House Beautiful announced in 1919 that it had added staff to its Reader’s Service Department and, using its own house plans, offered to supervise construction of homes for its readers who lived within a 100-mile radius of the magazine’s Boston location. Further, it also offered decorating and garden design services.

We are ready at the present time to decorate or furnish any of our readers’ homes within a radius of one hundred miles of Boston. We will, of course, continue with our regular correspondence service in addition to this new one, but will be able, also with our larger staff, to attend to all the details of this decorating and furnishing — the original planning, the purchasing of materials and the very last placing of the furniture.\textsuperscript{16}

This new face-to-face building and decorating consulting service between the magazine’s editors and its readers marked a bold new departure — and a new revenue stream— for shelter publications (see figure 45).

\textsuperscript{15} Haveman, Magazines and the Making of America, 5.
\textsuperscript{16} “Three New Features of Our Readers’ Service,” The House Beautiful 46, no. 6, 353.
Figure 45. *House Beautiful* launched its own building, decorating, and landscape gardening service in 1919. *Source: The House Beautiful* 46, no. 6, December 1919, 353.

No longer were these magazines confined to offering house plans or decorating advice in their pages or through the mail. They could now dispatch their own experts to oversee construction and decorate readers’ homes. *House Beautiful* launched this program after building its first model house (“*House Beautiful* Home No. 1”) in Newton, Massachusetts a year earlier, in 1918. The magazine chronicled the construction progress in a series of articles published in eight consecutive issues (see figure 46).  

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17 “We Build a House Ourselves,” *The House Beautiful* 46, no. 1, July 1919, inside front cover.
Figure 46. *House Beautiful* Home No. 1, the magazine’s first model house, completed in 1918 in the Boston suburb of Newton, Massachusetts. *Source:* P.A. Cooper, “*House Beautiful* Home No. 1,” *The House Beautiful* 47, no. 2, February 1920, 104.

The project included sponsors who provided products, materials, equipment and services for the house, ranging from wooden and slate shingles to electrical wiring, and a coal-fired furnace in the basement. Some also bought advertising in the magazine (see figure 47).

Figure 47. An ad for the furnace sponsor in *House Beautiful* Home No. 1, built by the magazine and opened to the public in 1918. *Source:* *The House Beautiful* 44, no. 2, August 1918, 161.
The *House Beautiful* home was a precursor to showhouse projects that would earn shelter magazines millions of dollars in the decades to follow. It would be up to editors, then and now, to transparently inform their readers that some of the materials and furnishings in these homes were provided by sponsors. Editor Mabel Rollins and her *House Beautiful* editorial staff did exactly that in their coverage of the first model home.

The magazine continued to offer its in-person consulting services to those building *House Beautiful* homes within a short distance of Boston, and received so many requests that it established a Home Builders’ Service Bureau in 1923 to handle the volume and to showcase “new houses which have been designed, or old houses which been remodeled by this department.” Nationally, however, it was the publication’s complete house plans, drawings, and specifications — selling for $50 (equivalent to $740 in 2019) or more — that provided a long-term revenue stream and a continual source of interaction between the magazine and its and audience that went beyond the questions and answers in the printed pages.  

Whether it was through the sale of house plans, actual face-to-face meetings, letters, lectures, referral services, or the question-and-answer format of correspondence pages, the editors and publishers of shelter magazines interacted with their readers on a daily basis as an integral part of their jobs. *House & Garden*’s Richardson Wright noted in 1926 that his magazine’s Reader Service department was set up to “solve personal problems of gardening,

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home designing and interior decoration. Thousands of letters are answered yearly by the department.”

In communicating with his magazine’s audience, Wright also had the use of something that would have been unthinkable decades earlier: the telephone. In 1920, 35 percent of American households had telephones and by 1940, 40.9 percent had them, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Wright mentioned his use of the phone in a 1920 column in *House & Garden*: “It is a prerogative of magazine-making—a necessity, even—to deal in futures. We have to do it. Working today and thinking months ahead come to be as natural to an editor as answering his office telephone or smoking his deliberative pipe over a doubtful piece of ‘copy.’”

Still, most calls were local. Tolls placed on long-distance calls made them far more expensive, and almost prohibitively so in the case of coast-to-coast calls. For instance, a regional, three-minute daytime telephone call from New York to Philadelphia in 1919 cost fifty-five cents, equivalent to about $8 today, while a similar duration call from New York to San Francisco cost $16.50, equivalent to $240 today, according to federal Census data. By the 1930s, those prices dropped substantially.

At the same time communication technology was advancing, the number of shelter magazine readers grew significantly. The circulation of *Better Homes and Gardens* was nearly 1.4 million in 1930, while *House & Garden* and *House Beautiful*, both aimed at a more affluent

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21 Richardson Wright, “Dealing in Futures,” *House & Garden* 37, no. 2, February 1920, 17.
audience, topped 100,000 each. Despite the Great Depression years of the 1930s, Better Homes and Gardens reached two million circulation in 1940, while House Beautiful nearly doubled its circulation to 207,763 that same year. House & Garden’s audience increased by 40 percent during the 1930s, to a paid circulation of 172,448 in 1940.²³

These were dynamic communities of readers who shared a deep interest in their homes and looked to magazines to provide guidance and advice. Together, they were part of local and geographically-distant networks with their favorite shelter magazines at the center.

As Wright noted, thousands of these readers had interaction with these magazines through correspondence. Others met magazine editors and publishers in person, as was the case with the first and subsequent House Beautiful model home projects, which were opened to the public for as long as a year at a time. Still others took the magazine up on its offer to provide building and decorating consulting service in the Boston area.

In these instances, social network theory might help explain why magazine readership expanded significantly at a time without modern digital communications. More study is needed, but it’s not a stretch to consider this scenario as an example: Two friends representing what Granovetter described as a “strong tie” acquaintance might attend a magazine-sponsored open house or event together, and while there, meet other individuals (or “weak ties) they had not previously known. The meeting between friends and strangers in this instance would have been made possible — or bridged — by the magazine editors and publishers who hosted the event and invited them. In turn, these readers would likely later share what they had learned at the event with others who did not attend, and by doing so, promote the magazine and locally expand the network.²⁴

²³ Sumner, The Magazine Century, 77.
²⁴ Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” 1378.
More broadly, these magazines — whether in direct interaction or in responding to the thousands of reader inquiries they received — facilitated the expansion of networks across the nation. As Kadushin noted: “Social networks evolve from individuals interacting with one another but produce extended structures that they had not imagined and in fact cannot see. These networks are constantly emerging and as a result affect and change the very institutions and organizations from which they emerged.”^{25}

Further, as mentioned earlier in chapter two, social capital within networks may be useful in explaining circulation marketing efforts made by publishers in the 1890s and early twentieth century. The concept of social capital, as sociologists Robert Putnam and Charles Kadushin noted, points to the value these networks may have, and represents “a tradeoff between the comfort and support individuals derive from dense networks of social relationships and the benefits achieved by going beyond local circles and forging bridges to wider universes.”^{26}

Shelter magazines provided this wider universe for their audiences by offering them an outlet in which to interact through correspondence and, in some cases, face-to-face with like-minded individuals. Publishers were able to use this capital in marketing efforts to both raise their circulation numbers and, as a consequence, draw more advertising.

In January 1907, when *House Beautiful* editor and publisher Herbert S. Stone asked readers to write and submit stories about their own homes for possible publication, the result was not only content for his publication, but also more social capital in the process. In effect, he was asking readers to become contributors to the magazine — in other words, part of the club. In

^{25} Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 11.

^{26} Ibid, 162.
doing this, there is little doubt that Stone knew these readers would tell their neighbors, friends, and family about the magazine, further expanding the network.

Overall, as Carolyn Kitch wrote: “A magazine’s readership may itself be a peer group, even if its members are not physically together.” David Abrahamson argued, as well, that an exceptional characteristic of magazines compared to other media is the homogeneity of their audiences, constituting social groups brought together by shared interests. Shelter publication subscribers reflected such homogeneity.27

Looking back at these magazines a century later, it becomes clear, however, that their audiences were not only middle- and upper-middle class, they were also predominantly white. African-American and other minority designers, decorators, architects, and homeowners were largely excluded from their pages until well into the twentieth century. From their earliest days, magazines such as Sunset and House Beautiful often featured the artistry, work, and culture of Native Americans. Yet Florida State University scholar Barbara Bergland argued Sunset’s content in the 1920s and 1930s revealed the magazine usually represented Native Americans “as passive and acted upon—as a problem to be solved, not as architects of their own futures.”28 However, other scholars such as California State Historian Kevin Starr asserted that Sunset has been one of the more progressive publications regarding ethnicity and race.29

Despite concerns over a lack of diversity within their pages, home design magazines served a vital role in featuring many of the technological and social changes that took place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A notable example is their own unique take on the development of the automobile. These publications gave substantial space to the

28 Bergland, “Western Living Sunset Style in the 1920 and 1930s,” 145.
design of the garage and its evolution from what *House Beautiful* called “its old-fashioned prototype, the stable,” and they also established “Automobile” and “Motoring” columns. Even their advertising reflected this new form of transportation: horse-drawn carriage ads from the late 1890s were replaced by motor vehicle ads as early as 1905.\(^{30}\)

**An American History**

The history of early shelter magazines is a part of the history of the American experience at a time of great innovation, a time when the nation transitioned from a rural to an urban society and began to embrace the kind of modern technology that would lead to remarkable advances in travel, communications, healthcare, and living conditions.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, railroads had made it possible to travel across the country with relative ease. This mobility and freedom to relocate was overwhelmingly enhanced as automobiles replaced horse-drawn carriages at the turn of the new century. At the same time, electricity replaced gas lighting, subways first opened in Boston and New York, telephones soon made instant communication possible, and motion pictures first began to enthrall large audiences.

It was a time of possibilities, but not shared by everyone: The 1890s, for instance, were marked by widespread labor unrest and an economic collapse that led to the failure of 800 banks and the bankruptcy of 156 railroads.\(^{31}\) Through it all, however, magazines remained at the center of American life, skyrocketing from 3,300 publications in 1885 to 6,000 by 1905.\(^{32}\) Into this transitional mix of old and new centuries came the first shelter magazines, beginning with *House Beautiful* in 1896. The magazine was aimed at an educated, upper-middle class audience.

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\(^{30}\) Charles E. White, Jr., “Housing the Automobile,” *The House Beautiful* 30 no. 4, August 1911, 84.

\(^{31}\) Oman, *Selling Culture*, 54.

Nevertheless, its founders did something unexpected for a publication that had no political or hard news slant: They took on the wealthy elite, scolding them for their over-the-top ornate houses and decadent spending in an era of gilded excess.

This call for calm restraint and simplicity has been the most remarkable finding of this thesis, and one, with more than a century of hindsight, that looks even more courageous today. It would be a rare event, indeed, for contemporary shelter magazine editors and publishers to take such a fiery, aggressive tone. They might likely refrain out of fear of losing advertisers, alienating influential, wealthy readers, or simply because they do not consider it their mission.

In the earliest days of *House Beautiful*, however, the “crusading spirit,” as Mott called it, actually meant good business. The magazine’s readership kept growing, along with its advertising pages. It may not be that much of a stretch to conclude that such an aggressive beginning is one reason the magazine survived so many mergers and acquisitions early on, and continues in publication today — 123 years after its founding.

Of all the quotes in this thesis, one from *House Beautiful* editor and publisher Herbert S. Stone, written in defense of his magazine in 1905, stands out: “There has been no hint that we have not told the truth.”

It is worth noting that a search for the truth is a basic tenant of journalism. Stone, whose father founded the *Chicago Daily News* and became general manager of the *Associated Press*, clearly knew something about good journalism, and practiced it in his own way for sixteen years at *House Beautiful*. Others who followed him at the magazine, such as Virginia Robie and Ethel B. Power, were courageous in their own right, as were editors and publishers at other shelter magazines who joined in the good fight against the leftover excesses of the Victorian era.

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33 Herbert S. Stone, “Notes: Poor Taste and Morals,” *The House Beautiful* 17, no. 3, February 1905, 35.
Together, they led these highly influential publications at a time when readers by the thousands from every corner of the United States looked to them for guidance and reassurance in planning, building, and furnishing their homes. In return, these audiences received something even more important: a sense of place and belonging in a rapidly changing and increasingly impersonal world around them.
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