

Magazines for Women and the Home

A monthly called *Fruit, Garden and Home* was begun by the Meredith Publishing Company, of Des Moines, in July, 1922. It was an attractive magazine of 52 quarto pages and a cover in color. Publisher E. T. Meredith's picture was on the editorial page; the editor was Chesla C. Sherlock. The first article in the first number was about a new variety of apple being developed in Iowa called the Delicious. But the contents were varied, as the title promised, and practical and helpful in every department. Illustration was copious from the beginning.

The magazine got off to a good start, with 150,000 circulation, and within two years it had passed the half-million circulation mark. It was the first home magazine ever to attain so large a circulation without using fiction. In 1924 it changed its title to *Better Homes and Gardens*. It has always maintained its policy of furnishing new ideas for home and family, with emphasis by the publishers and editors on building and home improvement, home furnishings and decorating, foods of all kinds, kitchens and equipment, gardening, travel, and family money management. Not that BH&G has not occasionally gone further

afield to exploit famous personalities and homes; one recalls a fine early series by Editor Sherlock entitled "Homes of Famous Americans" (1925).

In the Forties and Fifties the magazine, fat with advertising, became one of the nation's great mass-circulation publications. Under the imaginative editorship of Hugh Curtis, it kept pace with the developments in American living. Also the management engaged in a successful book publishing business, the greatest hit of which was the *Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book*, which sold nearly ten million copies. Then followed a *Handyman's Book*, a *Garden Book*, a *Baby Book*, a *Diet Book*, and so on, with their titles all including the magic prefatory *Better Homes and Gardens*. Also in recent years BH&G has been publishing annuals under its signet — *Garden Ideas*, *Home Furnishing Ideas*, *Home Building Ideas*, *Kitchen Ideas*, *Christmas Ideas*. And its most recent success is its Better Homes for All America program held in major cities with the cooperation of builders to discuss with the public ideas for house building. More than \$4,000,000 worth of houses have been sold in connection with a similar Idea Home program in the years 1959-1962.

By 1963 *Better Homes and Gardens* had reached a circulation of 6,000,000, at a basic subscription rate of \$3 — far and away the largest circulation ever reached by an Iowa-based periodical. A black-and-white page of advertising in one

issue sold for \$27,110, and the back cover in four colors for \$46,750. This was for the National edition. Merediths, with *BH&G*, *Successful Farming*, the annuals mentioned, and their book business, had become by far the largest publication house in Iowa.

Contemporary multi-million circulation magazines face a difficult situation, however. The tremendous cost of maintaining such circulations, with trial subscriptions slashed by 50%; the competition in large and beautiful productions, resplendent in color; the mounting costs of labor, materials, and postal rates — these factors and others have resulted in advertising rates at which advertisers not aiming at total mass audiences have balked. The answer has been found in split-run editions affording the opportunity to limit the circulation of a given advertisement regionally or otherwise, with a reduced rate. In 1963 *BH&G* is quoting rates on nine standard regional editions plus custom regionals, as well as on an every-other-issue insertion in its national edition.

Looking much further back into the history of Iowa publishing, we find several attempts to exploit the "mail order monthly" idea which had met with such success in Augusta, Maine, and had then spread to other Eastern cities and after that to cities and even villages all over the country. The pattern was to sell yearly subscriptions at 25 or 50 cents, to use cheap serial fiction and varied

but undistinguished household departments, and by a large circulation to attract a great quantity of small advertisements of cosmetics, medicines, jewelry, clothes, and agencies for house-to-house selling. As a matter of fact, all that was needed to start such a periodical was a list of mailing addresses good enough to satisfy an easy-going Postoffice Department, an editor equipped with scissors and a pastepot, a second-hand newspaper press, and credit for an initial supply of paper and ink. Examples of such periodicals in Iowa towns were *Tarp's Monthly* (1890-1891) at Solon, and *Happy Home* (1897-1901) at Columbus Junction. The latter was priced at 20 cents a year.

The *People's Popular Monthly*, at Des Moines, when it was begun by Carl C. Proper in 1896, gave some attention to current events and published original fiction. It belonged to the genre of "pulp magazines" for a time and then turned definitely to the household field, changing title first to *Household* and then to *Garden and Home*. When it perished in 1931, it had a guaranteed circulation of over a million copies at 25 cents a year.

Another Des Moines magazine was Carolyn M. Ogilvie's monthly *Midwestern* (1906-1920), which began as a distinctively literary periodical but later included family and home departments. At Shenandoah, Leanna F. Driftmier's modest *Kitchen Klatter* has appeared monthly since 1935.

An early woman suffrage journal was Mrs.

Netti Sanford's *Ladies' Bureau* (1875-1876), a 4-page newspaper-size semimonthly published for \$1 a year at Marshalltown. But Iowa's great woman suffrage paper was the *Woman's Standard*, begun by Mary J. Coggeshall in Des Moines in 1886. It was an 8-page, small-folio monthly at 50 cents a year. It was apparently not prosperous in its first phase, since it suspended publication in the hard times of 1894-1896. In 1904 it became the organ of the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association and was moved to Waterloo to be published by Sarah Ware Whitney as a 4-page paper until 1910.

The Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs has been represented by its periodical, of various frequencies and of various names — *The New Cycle*, *Mail and Times*, *Iowa Federation Bulletin*, *Iowa Federation News*, and finally *Iowa Clubwoman*. Mrs. F. W. Weitz served as editor (1919-1944), Mrs. Eugene Cutler (1944-1959), and Mrs. Elmer Taylor has edited the *Clubwoman* since 1960.

The *Iowa Colored Woman* was published 1907-1910 by the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs; Mrs. S. Joe Brown was its editor.

A few magazines for children have been published in Iowa — most of them short-lived. The *Gem* was a non-sectarian monthly issued by the Central Book Concern of the Christian Church

from Oskaloosa and Bedford, Indiana, 1876-1879; in its last year it was called *Little Christian*. The *Young Citizen* (1901-1909) was a monthly designed "for supplementary reading in the public schools." It was published in Cedar Rapids and edited by Charlotte Whitney Eastman.