

## Early Philadelphia Magazines for Ladies

ANY mention of Philadelphia in connection with magazines for ladies at once suggests the widely known *Godey's Lady's Book*, which, as its publisher boasted, was, during its long life, a veritable "Book of the Nation." But *Godey's* was by no means the first periodical in the city to address women directly and to seek their cooperation as readers and contributors. A number of other publications came and went before 1830, the year in which the *Lady's Book* was established. None of these periodicals gained the fame of *Godey's*, but each played its small part in encouraging readers and in offering to women a share in the literary world both as writers and as editors. Insignificant as these magazines seem individually, taken as a group they tell a story of continuous effort not without its importance in the history of publication in the city.

Before the Revolution American ladies had to be content with English offerings if they wished a magazine of their own. From the first decade of the eighteenth century, when the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* courted feminine patronage, until the year 1760, a number of ephemeral essay-periodicals, modeled on the work of Steele and Addison, offered the fair sex of London amusement and instruction. Probably few of these publications found their way to America; but after 1760, more ambitious "magazines," or storehouses of literary material, captured new readers and may well have attracted a limited audience in the colonies. One of the most prosperous of these enterprizes was a monthly *Lady's Magazine* of London, which announced itself as "an entertaining companion for the fair sex, appropriated solely to their use and amusement." This periodical and many of its imitators sought the favor of readers by providing them with short narratives, poetry, travel sketches, patterns for embroidery, a page of music, some comment on fashion, and innumerable essays setting forth the conduct and education befitting the fair.

Influenced no doubt by the success of such ventures, publishers in America, as soon as business picked up after the Revolution, turned their attention to an audience that promised to be profitable, and offered American ladies periodicals of their own. In 1792 a "Society of Literary Characters" in Philadelphia announced their intention of providing "the fair daughters of Columbia" with a *Ladies' Magazine and Repertory of Entertaining Knowledge*. Their plan was to publish "a selection of miscellaneous pieces, taken from works of the most entertaining and instructive writers in Europe and America," and to present these offerings twice a year in a handsome volume made up of six monthly numbers. Such a compilation, the publisher of the work suggested, might well find favor with boarding schools for young ladies, as it was to "contain everything requisite to disseminate knowledge of real life, to portray virtue, inspire the Female mind with love of religion, patience, prudence, and fortitude—in short with whatever tends to form the accomplished Woman, the complete Economist, and that greatest of treasures—a Good Wife."

An "Address to the Ladies," which formed an introduction to the first volume (June–November, 1792), asked the support of all "female patronesses of literature" and assured them that no pains should be spared to render the magazine worthy of their encouragement. A similar address in volume two (December, 1792–June, 1793) acknowledged considerable support and declared that to some extent the paper was indebted to its fair friends for contributions. This was pleasing to the hearts of the editors, for, they declared, they had begun the work not altogether from motives of personal interest, but in the hope that they might "rescue the Fair Sex from that obscurity in which the timidity of female delicacy would hide itself," and animate them to seize the laurels due to their merits.

The general make up of the monthly numbers in the volume was similar to that of the English magazines, but money was apparently lacking for such additions as the engravings, patterns, and pages of music which made the London *Lady's Magazine* especially attractive to subscribers. Like this publication, however, the Philadelphia periodical consisted of many pages of prose, followed by a collection of verse, some foreign and domestic news, and a list of deaths and marriages. Most of the material was taken over, without acknowledge-

ment, from other publications, although some essays were written by the editors, and some verse by the ladies who were so flatteringly urged to assist in the creation of an American literature. The compilers of the miscellany undoubtedly had before them the London *Lady's Magazine* for 1788, as several selections were taken bodily from that volume—notably a series of “Letters from a Brother to his Sister at Boarding-School,”<sup>1</sup> in which a young lady was given copious advice on the subjects of civility, health, proper books, companions, and amusements. According to the pattern established in the English periodical, short narratives, sketches taken from books of travel, comments on love and marriage, anecdotes, and “Select Letters or Specimens of Female Literature” formed, with the ever present essays, the prose offering of the *Ladies' Magazine*. But there was no discussion of fashion, of needlework, or of household matters, such as found at least a small place in the London publication. The periodical was entirely “literary,” and not concerned with the details of domestic life.

One interesting feature in the American periodical had no counterpart in the London *Lady's Magazine*: new publications were announced for sale at the shop of W. Gibbins, the printer of the paper, and lady readers were obviously expected to be concerned with what was being written by their contemporaries. The September number contained an elaborate discussion of a new work which the reviewer believed should find favor among the women of Philadelphia—Mary Wollstonecraft's volume entitled *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London, 1792). Nine pages were given to an account of this work, with copious quotations from its chapters. The reviewer praised the author for employing her pen in behalf of women and hoped that her own sex would appreciate her attack on the false system of education under which they suffered. He summarized the writer's animadversions on those who treated women as objects of pity, and agreed with her general thesis: “Let women share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated.” This surprisingly favorable introduction of a book that was to be widely criticized as radical and extreme suggests not only that the

<sup>1</sup> The first number of the Philadelphia *Ladies' Magazine*, June, 1792, printed a *Letter* taken from the London *Lady's Magazine* of September, 1788; in September, 1792, a *Letter* from the Supplement to the *Lady's Magazine* for 1788; in October, 1792, one from the issue of May, 1788; in November, 1792, one from the issue of July, 1788.

American bookseller was eager to arouse interest in his wares, but that some member of the editorial group was especially interested in the position of woman. The engraved frontispiece that adorned the first volume of the *Ladies' Magazine* reinforced the emphasis placed upon Mary Wollstonecraft's work, for it represented the Genius of the Magazine, accompanied by the Genius of Emulation, kneeling before Liberty and presenting her with a copy of the *Rights of Woman*. No other new book received so much attention among the notices, although Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, the first edition of which appeared in 1791, was given considerable space and highly recommended.

It seems possible that had this first of the Philadelphia magazines for ladies survived long enough, it might have made the announcement and reviewing of new publications a valuable feature in the earliest periodicals for women, but with the summer of 1793, the paper ceased to exist, abandoned in all probability because of the scourge of yellow fever which was devastating the city at that time.

No other magazine definitely addressing the ladies of Philadelphia in its title appeared in the city before the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the *Philadelphia Minerva*, which ran from February, 1795, until July, 1798, contained many things that were directed to feminine readers. The editor announced to his patrons that his attention would be given "to the selection of the most admired and sentimental pieces in prose and verse, entertaining anecdotes, and affecting narratives." Some of these attractions took the form of brief tales, such as "Beauty in Distress, a Pathetic narrative addressed to the Ladies"; articles entitled "Advice to a Young Lady," "Sentiments for Ladies"; and selections from "Letters to Young Women," a work advertised as a "Valuable Guide to Correct Conduct." In addition to these items there were also references to and advertisements of schools for young ladies, and announcements of books that might attract feminine readers.

Poetry, according to the established fashion, had a special section called, in this magazine, the "Court of Apollo." Here aspiring poetesses might see their own verses in print and be encouraged to continue their literary labors. Well worn sentiments uttered in conventional form made up most of the contributions, but one surprising offering, "By a Lady," proclaimed the "Rights of Woman" in lively tones and

testified to the interest that Mary Wollstonecraft's book had aroused in Philadelphia. In ten seven-line stanzas the author of the poem demanded freedom for her own sex, declaring:<sup>2</sup>

Man boasts the noble cause  
Nor yields supine to laws  
Tyrants ordain;  
Let Woman have a sphere  
Nor yield to slavish fear,  
Her equal rights declare,  
And well maintain.

. . . .

Let snarling critics frown,  
Their maxims I disown,  
Their ways detest;  
By Man, your tyrant lord,  
Females, no more be aw'd  
Let Freedom's sacred word  
Inspire your breast.

She concluded with a compliment to the writer who had inspired her effusion:

Woman aloud rejoice,  
Exalt thy feeble voice  
In cheerful strain.  
See Wollstonecraft, a friend  
Your injured rights defend,  
Wisdom her step attend,  
The cause maintain.

The opening years of the nineteenth century saw several attempts to provide the ladies of Philadelphia with a periodical of their own. A *Ladies' Museum* made its appearance on March 8, 1800, and ran a weekly course for at least ten issues. The editor announced his intention of providing a small paper for the COLUMBIAN FAIR, hoping that the benefits to his readers might repay his arduous efforts in their behalf. He believed, he declared, that the spirit of literature which at the moment prevailed among noble-minded females ought to be encouraged. Though to "men of profound learning," such publications as the *Ladies' Museum* might appear trivial and insipid, he reminded them that "those of both sexes who have reached to the most exalted height of literary fame first roused the latent genius by read-

<sup>2</sup> *Philadelphia Minerva*, October 17, 1795.

ing, with the utmost avidity, and without the least discrimination, such books as most interested their hearts or imaginations." His object, therefore, was to select such pieces for his subscribers as should "at the same time amuse the fancy, enlarge the understanding, expand the heart, and instill into it that sensibility which may add a grace to the dignity of character." In addition, he hoped "to eradicate those propensities to weakness which are falsely supposed to be the attributes to sensibility, but are in reality only effeminacy and affectation, disgusting to all men of penetration." To what extent the ambitions of the editor were realized and how greatly he improved the ladies of Philadelphia by the reading matter he offered them, history fails to record. As the paper does not seem to have survived the summer months of 1800, its efforts to elevate the literary taste of the city must have met with little reward.

In the same year the *Philadelphia Repository and Weekly Register*, issued by a David Hogan, met with more success. It found favor among the young ladies of the city because the editor was willing to include their compositions among the tales, essays, poetry, theatrical comments, and announcements of marriages and deaths that made up the contents of the paper. Its mediocre wares, eked out with bits taken from the *Ladies' Monthly Museum* of London, found sufficient patronage to enable it to run until 1806, with several changes of editors.

Philadelphia had reached by 1810 a population of almost fifty thousand, and periodicals of all kinds were multiplying. Not, however, until November, 1814, did another offering particularly designed for women make its appearance in the city. This time the new enterprise was launched by a lady-editor, Mrs. Mary Clarke Carr, who, having secured two hundred subscribers, planned to address her own sex in a weekly magazine called *The Intellectual Regale, or Ladies' Tea-Tray*. Mrs. Carr confided to her readers that she was putting forth the first number of her paper, trusting in the efforts of female patronage to bring her subscription list up to at least five hundred, which number, at three dollars each, she thought might repay her exertions. She told them also that the fostering of native genius concerned her deeply, and that contributions from local writers willing to help rescue America from dependence upon foreign literature would be received gladly.

There were ill-disposed persons, she admitted, who predicted that the *Tea-Tray* would not stand long. But she assured her public that she had on hand a "stock of solid matter sufficient to fill its pages for five years—all the productions of her own pen." Therefore she felt able "to smile derision to malevolence," and to proceed with her work.<sup>3</sup>

*The Intellectual Regale* was similar in form and content to other weekly miscellanies. It offered little essays, anecdotes, sketches, a collection of verse, and regular installments of a romantic tale, marked "O" for "original" when it came from the pen of the editress. But in one respect the periodical differed from its predecessors—it was more personal in tone. Mrs. Carr chatted with her readers, and as the weeks went by commented freely on the difficulties that confronted a literary lady. There was trouble in getting the paper out regularly, and she was obliged to "take the printing into her own hands." This done, she pushed on into the year 1815 with fresh hopes of success. Subscribers did not increase to the number she had dreamed of, and many of those on her list did not pay punctually for their periodical. She urged her "fair patronesses," for the honor of the city, not to let the *Tea-Tray* fall to the ground. She told them that before she undertook to edit the paper she had often heard, in New York, conversations extolling that city for its liberal spirit and condemning Philadelphia for its deficiency in literary taste. One instance of this was the failure of the city to support any weekly miscellany after Mr. Hogan's was given up, while New York gave encouragement to three. She had determined, upon hearing such comments, to convince hostile critics that it was not lack of liberality that caused this condition of affairs.<sup>4</sup> But after issuing the periodical for several months, she began to be fearful of the future. She persevered, however, supplying the paper with her own productions, and offering readers an opportunity to subscribe to another work of her pen—an original comedy in five acts, called *The Fair Americans*.<sup>5</sup> The prologue to this play, printed in the *Intellectual Regale*, sounded the note of "native genius" dear to the heart of the author, and asked assistance for a helpless woman, enduring "a tempest of adversity":<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The Intellectual Regale, or Ladies' Tea-Tray*, December 3, 1814.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface to II, 1, May 20, 1815.

<sup>5</sup> May 20, 1815.

<sup>6</sup> November 4, 1815.

Could you capricious through proud Europe roam  
 In search of genius which you slight at home?

. . . .

Shall foreign flowers transplanted in our soil  
 Receive your culture and enjoy your smile?  
 If this your patriot boast, no notes of mine  
 Could teach your hearts, those stubborn hearts of steel  
 For human woes, for human ills to feel!  
 But no, Columbia's children should revere  
 The claims of worth, and dry the gushing tear;  
 In kindred sympathy their aid extend,  
 And bless the friendless author with a friend.

Although Mrs. Carr managed to keep her paper afloat for a year, the issue of December 30, 1815, seems to have concluded its life. In that number the editress saluted the new year with hopeful verses and announced the beginning of a new volume for the following week, but no evidence of further issues exists.

July, 1817, brought to the Philadelphia public an opportunity to support a new paper called the *Ladies' Literary Museum, or Weekly Repository*, edited by Henry C. Lewis. In introducing this periodical the editor expressly called upon the humane and charitable of the city to become subscribers, if but for the quarter of a year, and thus assist a fellow creature struggling with adversity to provide for himself, his wife, and his children. He hoped that the number of truly benevolent persons in Philadelphia was not small and, that being the case, a dollar from each one for a three-months subscription would relieve his immediate necessities. He explained that he had been reduced to want by the "cupidity of the vultures of the earth," and that he was one of the many who had been without employment "during the last distressful winter, when the wolf often appeared at the threshold and howled in the ears of his family." He now proposed to provide for "the highest circles in Philadelphia" a chaste miscellany of polite literature and amusement in which cultivated readers might find edification, and he a means of livelihood.<sup>7</sup>

For three months the paper appeared regularly, offering the usual array of tales, brief essays, largely "selected" from other periodicals, occasional news of the theatre, comments on London fashions, and a page of verse. At the end of the quarter, the editor reminded his

<sup>7</sup> *Ladies' Literary Museum, or Weekly Repository*, July 5, 1817.



patrons that the *Ladies' Museum* was the sole support of his family and begged them not to be implicated in depriving him of his only means of employment. His pleas were apparently successful, for the miscellany entered upon a second volume in January, and managed to carry on until July, 1818. This was not without mishaps, however. In June the editor found it necessary to apologize for the non-appearance of one issue, "owing to the accident of the pages of type falling out of the form just as it was ready for the press."<sup>8</sup>

At the conclusion of the second volume the editor felt obliged to make certain changes. He explained that on the day of its birth the *Ladies' Literary Museum* had thrown itself "into the fostering arms of female supporters," depending solely upon them for maintenance. He had trusted that the ladies of the city would cheerfully give their united aid to a paper of their own, "independent of the opposite taste of gentlemen."<sup>9</sup> Unhappily, this trust had not been justified, and he felt it necessary to re-name his miscellany and ask the support of the general public. On July 27, 1818, therefore, it became the *Lady's and Gentleman's Weekly Museum and Philadelphia Reporter*, devoted to "literature, piety, morals, arts, domestic economy, humor, pathos, criticism, poetry, news, &c." Amusement was still to find a place in its pages, but the editor hoped that his fair readers would readily dispense with a few flowers, for the sake of reaping a more useful harvest in the fields of edification and knowledge. By the first of the following year (1819) this offering had been metamorphosed into the *Lady's and Gentleman's Weekly Literary and Musical Magazine*. Henry C. Lewis was still printer and publisher, and he now added a page or two of music and some comments on composers. Advertisements for cheap editions of romances and plays as well as for pieces of music suggest that Lewis was using his talents as salesman in a somewhat widened sphere, and an increasing number of references to concerts and theatrical performances show the new direction of his interests. In March he abandoned his lady patronesses without a word of farewell, changing the name of his paper to the *Literary and Musical Magazine*, under which title it survived at least until August, 1819.

Several years passed before another attempt was made to provide the ladies of Philadelphia with a periodical. But when one did appear

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, 1818.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, July 13, 1818.

it achieved a wider circulation and a longer life than had any of its predecessors. On June 7, 1826, Thomas C. Clarke presented the *Album and Ladies' Weekly Gazette* to his "fair countrywomen and through them to the cause of virtue, knowledge, and amusement." The publication, he promised, was to be rich in tales, essays, sketches, and agreeably diversified with poetry of the most pure, liberal, and ennobling cast. Correspondents of taste and talent were invited to contribute to its columns, and all ladies who were interested in literature were urged to become subscribers. To make his work known at once, he printed between seven and eight thousand copies of the early issues for distribution in different sections of the country, and so well were they received that by the following January he was able to announce a circulation of three thousand copies—a distinct triumph for such a paper.

From the first the miscellany had more personality than its predecessors. There were the usual tales, verses, and essays, but to these were added "The Ladies' Monitor," a column of advice to the Fair; literary notices with some comment on the authors represented; a greenroom register, with theatrical notes from other cities; news items, and a page of original poetry, in which budding talent found a welcome. Some "original narratives," too, appeared, side by side with tales culled from *Blackwoods* and other publications. In order to stimulate contributions from American writers, the editor offered prizes for the best tale, essay, and poem,<sup>10</sup> and three months later announced that fifty-four tales had been submitted in the competition.

When volume one of the *Album* reached a successful conclusion in June, 1827, the event was marked by the issuing of a handsome full-page fashion plate, in color, of a lady's evening costume, designed as the frontispiece of the bound volume. English magazines for ladies had won admiration for such prints, and *Godey's* was to become famous for them by another decade, but the *Album and Ladies' Weekly Gazette* seems to have been the first American periodical for women to adorn itself with the brightness of the colored fashion plate.

In introducing the second volume of the magazine, Clarke announced a subscription list of "upwards of five thousand," and certain

<sup>10</sup> *The Album and Ladies' Weekly Gazette*, I, 14, September 6, 1826.

editorial changes. Mrs. Harriet Muzzy, a literary lady whose "fugitive pieces" were pronounced by the editor "not inferior to those of the celebrated Mrs. Hemans," had been secured to preside over a department featuring "essays on female education, morals, manners, conversations, fashion, and such other subjects as should claim particular attention in a gazette especially devoted to the ladies." A "distinguished literary gentleman" was to have charge of a department in which new publications, especially those from the American press, would be considered and frank opinion passed upon them. A slight change in name indicated this emphasis on the literary side of the paper, and the new volume appeared in June, 1827, with the title *Philadelphia Album and Ladies' Literary Gazette*. As the year went on both new editors gave valiant support to the paper. Mrs. Muzzy supplied for almost every issue a short tale, a poem, a letter to young ladies, or some good advice on such subjects as friendship, self-restraint, and the keeping of promises. The literary editor ranged widely over his field, providing many short notices of new books and periodicals, and an occasional long review. Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Mrs. Dumont's western novel, *Tecumseh*, William G. Simms' *Early Lays*, Cooper's *Red Rover*, Irving's *Life of Columbus*, all received prompt comments of some length, and readers were urged to acquaint themselves with all additions to native literature.

Before a third volume appeared, other changes took place in the magazine. Clarke disposed of it to the literary editor, Robert Morris, and to the printer, J. B. Kenney, under whose management the paper outdistanced all local competitors until *Godey's* began to forge ahead in the eighteen thirties. Rival publications arose only to fail promptly or to be absorbed by the *Album*. In November, 1827, a monthly *Amulet and Ladies' Literary Cabinet* was announced by an over-sanguine editor, Mr. George Siegfried, as adapted to the fair readers and designed "to draw forth the literary talents of American females." Prizes were offered for the best original tale and poem submitted to a jury of "competent females." Ladies were urged to enter the contest. Few had the opportunity to do so, however, for in December, Morris and Kenney gave notice that Mr. Siegfried had transferred his interest and influence to the *Album*, and the *Amulet* was heard of no more. In the same year the *Minerva*, edited by a "Lady highly qualified for the task," made an equally brief appearance in the city

as a fortnightly. It lived long enough to achieve a notice in the *Album* and then disappeared from view.<sup>11</sup>

During the progress of volume three, a longer lived competitor arose. Thomas Clarke, assisted by Mrs. Harriet Muzzy, who had ceased to contribute to the *Album* after Clarke left it, reentered the field (in December, 1828) with a very similar paper which he called the *Ladies' Literary Port Folio*. Like the *Album* it had much to say of books and authors, but its emphasis was more particularly on the writings of women. Mrs. Muzzy supplied a weekly contribution, and Mary Russell Mitford, the popular English author of *Our Village*, was drawn upon for many "selected" tales. There was praise for the work of American novelists, especially for that of Catharine Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child. Short articles on fashion, usually taken from some English paper, were a feature of the offering, and again the embellishment of a fashion plate was provided as a special attraction. On April 15, 1829, Clarke announced: "A plate of fashions, which we have been at some pains and expense in preparing, will be delivered this week to our patrons. Should there not be sufficient coloured in time to supply all, the deficiency will be made up with the ensuing number." The periodical ran for a year, more than keeping pace with the *Album*, which, during the later months of 1829, appeared very irregularly. But in January, 1830, the *Port Folio* capitulated to its rival, and the two publications were united, with Morris as editor, under the title, *Philadelphia Album and Ladies' Literary Port Folio*. After this combination the paper maintained its weekly course until 1834.

Morris continued to emphasize the literary aspect of the *Album*. He commented on other periodicals and their editors; welcomed and used the *Annuals* as they appeared; noted the new works of Irving, Paulding, Bryant, and Cooper; and offered praise to promising younger writers. He was especially enthusiastic about a young Quaker editor, John Greenleaf Whittier, whose poems and tales he copied from other papers and reprinted in the *Album*. For two years all went well; then the periodical began to lose its individuality and to become increasingly dependent upon other publications for its contents. The

<sup>11</sup> No copy of the *Amulet and Ladies' Literary Cabinet* or of the *Minerva* is known. Notices of each appear in the *Album*: the *Minerva* is mentioned on May 9, 1827; the *Amulet*, on October 31, and December 19, 1827.

words "taken from" were attached to a large number of its articles, the *New York Mirror* being drawn on extensively for material. Long excerpts from books and magazines took the place of editorial comment or "original" contributions, and the paper became largely a creation of scissors and paste. Although a volume was announced for 1834, none was published, and the *Album* came wearily to an end after seven years of life.

*Godey's* was by this time firmly established as a monthly magazine. Widely advertised from the first, it promptly won the attention of women readers in every part of the country. Its varied contents offered attractions superior to those of a weekly miscellany, and with its pages of music, its colored fashions and other "embellishments" it dominated the field until *Graham's*, *Peterson's*, *Miss Leslie's*, and *Arthur's* magazines came on the Philadelphia scene in the following decade. Only the cheaper weeklies, such as the *Ladies Garland*, begun in 1837, and the *Lady's Amaranth*, begun in 1838, offered any competition to *Godey's* during the eighteen thirties. But the success of the *Lady's Book*, it seems fair to point out, was not due entirely to the ingenuity and enterprise of its publisher, but in part, at least, to its humbler predecessors which from 1792 until 1830 had steadily built up a reading public among women.

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