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# A Plethora of Publications

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## A Plethora of Publications

How many magazines are published in Iowa today? How many have been published within the state's limits since the beginning of printing in the Territory of Michigan at Dubuque in 1836?

These are hard questions to answer, first, because the definition of "magazine" is often imprecise; second, because many of these old publications have sunk completely beneath the waters of oblivion, with no fragment of a file to be found by the most patient diver; and third, because the sources of information, aside from the files, such as the directories and county histories, are more or less undependable.

We shall here consider any non-newspaper serial published weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly a magazine. "Periodical" would be a more exact word, but that is a librarian's term, and the more popular word will be used here. But even with that matter settled, we often find it difficult to separate newspapers from magazines or periodicals. Although the chief em-

phasis was not upon general news, a publication might use the newspaper format; indeed, in the earlier years this was nearly always the case, because the miscellanies and special-interest magazines were commonly issued from local newspaper shops which were not equipped to produce publications in any other form. Another difficulty that we encounter in separating out the non-newspaper publications is that many special-interest journals and literary miscellanies contain varying proportions of general news.

But without further grumbling about the treacherous ground on which we tread, let us take our courage in both hands and hazard the estimate that at least 800 magazines and special-interest journals have been published in Iowa — some for only a year or less and at least three for a full century or more.

The first three directories compiled — Kennedy (1852), Coggeshall (1856) and Kenny (1861) — included only a very few non-newspaper periodicals; but with the appearance of the first of Rowell's annual directories in 1869, we find 18 such journals listed. During the difficult 1870's the number grew but slowly to 29 in 1880; but in the next decade Iowa boomed in agriculture, in trade and industry, and in journalism. By 1890 the Ayer directory was listing some 90 special journals and miscellanies, generally serving limited audiences; but the "hard times" of the 1890's

were hard indeed for these publications, and by 1900 the figure had dropped to 70. Recovery was rapid, however, and 91 were listed in 1910.

The life expectancy of such magazines is illustrated by the fact that in the decade ending in 1920, 44 of the 91 in the course of publication in 1910 perished, though 42 new ones were begun. Only 47 of the 91 continued without interruption through the decade to 1920. It was easy in those days to start a periodical, often with the aid of a local newspaper publisher or some association or other; but it was not so easy to keep it going.

Since 1920 the totals have remained in the neighborhood of 80. A count of the 1960 Ayer list turns up 86 (though Ayer's own "Summary," including college newspapers and other news media serving special audiences as "periodicals," puts the figure at 126).

Examination of the annual directories over 95 years shows a gradual concentration of the non-newspaper publications in the larger cities. In 1880 some 29 such journals were issued from 22 towns; in 1960 fully 35 out of 86 were published in Des Moines, 22 of them organs of associations, official agencies, and special-interest groups.

Some of the more interesting and important of this plethora of publications will be discussed in ensuing articles.