

Frank Luther Mott

Dr. Mott's Volume

IV

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN MAGAZINES (Vol. IV: 1885-1905). By Frank Luther Mott. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957. viii plus 858 pp. \$12.50.

When Frank Luther Mott published volumes II and III of his *History of American Magazines* in 1938, he foresaw a fourth and final volume. Now, nearly twenty years later, the fourth volume, dedicated to Elmer Ellis, president of the University, comes from the endowed Belknap Press of Harvard University. Last volume it is not, for we are brought up only through 1905. The historian has been caught by his story, and to predict now a fifth and final volume would be folly.

During the long interval between volumes, Dr. Mott has kept busy writing the standard history of American journalism, a best-selling study of American best-sellers, a study of the news, many articles, and at least one *Saturday Evening Post* short story. He was from 1941 until 1951 dean of Missouri's School of Journalism, has been dean emeritus since 1951 and professor emeritus since 1956, and now in his seventy-second year, twice emeritus, continues to teach on a limited service basis. Along the way he has received innumerable honors for his scholarship and devotion to the profession of journalism, among these being the Pulitzer Prize in History awarded him for his magazine history.

It was a vast and vague field Dean Mott entered some thirty-five years ago. Many thousands of magazines, important for a time, had been published, had died, and been forgotten. Files were poorly kept and difficult to locate. Though it is a rare business or calling that does not have its "trade" publication, the magazine industry had been, as it has continued



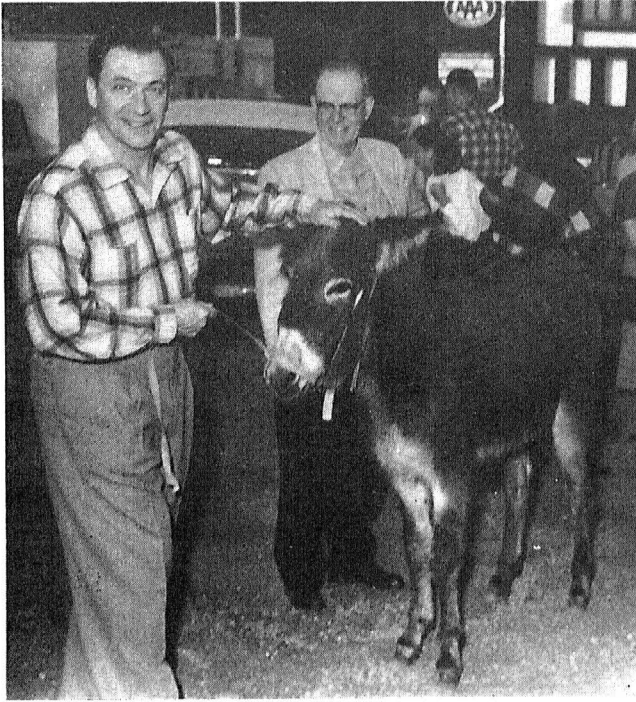
to be, very backward in keeping any record of its performance. What census reports there were oftentimes tended to lump magazine figures with those of newspapers. A less stubborn man than Dr. Mott would not have persevered.

A set of limitations would have been eminently pardonable. For example, the trade and religious periodicals might have been by-passed. So too might those of limited regional distribution. Dr. Mott, however, in seeking to tell the entire story of the American magazine from 1741 allowed himself none of the luxuries of limitation.

Volume IV is of the same solid, tight-knit fabric that distinguished its predecessors. Here again Dr. Mott is telling of the magazines important to the period. (They do not have to be of transcendent importance to be important to Dr. Mott.) Most valuable to many readers will be the analysis of the contents of the magazines. Some will be interested in the developing history of typographical and pictorial presentations. And all cannot fail to enjoy the warm-blooded interrelationship the author builds between the magazines and the social, economic, and political changes during twenty bumptious and strident years, the years of the immigrant, the "big stick," of corruption and Tarbell, Steffens, and Baker at *McClure's Magazine*.

As in earlier volumes, the running history of the period occupies about half the book and is followed by a supplement presenting the detailed sketches of

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Journalism Dean Earl English gets another present—a donkey, given him by members of the Central Missouri Press Association at their spring meeting at Kirkwood Lodge in the Ozarks. Looking on is publisher A. A. Steinbeck of Union, former Missouri Press Association president. The burro will be on display at the English farm home, at least until after Journalism Week, in case any of the visiting donors want to check on its fate. In recent years Dean English has received from Journalism School colleagues such birthday gifts as a pair of rabbits, a young alligator, and assorted poultry. Photo by Ted Hague, Missouri Division of Employment Security.

Campus items in brief

That talk of the Farmers' Fair folding for lack of support was unfounded; and the Ag College student event will go on as usual, May 10 and 11, for the fifty-second time. The Follies and the Horse Show, with many other features, are scheduled.

Governor James T. Blair, Jr., was initiated as an honorary member of Mystical Seven at Tap Day ceremonies held this month. Mystical Seven and QEBH each initiated seven students; Mortar Board conferred honorary membership on Miss Gladys Koepke, director of student affairs for women, and initiated twenty-one students.

The Law School Alumni Association presented a check for \$2,000 to Percy Hogan, Law Librarian, who is retiring after forty-two years of service.

This is the season when various University divisions observe traditional events, and several pages of this issue of the *Alumnus* are devoted to these activities. Student dinner meetings also are in vogue just now. Two of these outstanding affairs were the banquets of the Forestry Club and the graduating class of the School of Veterinary Medicine.

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the individual magazines that came to power during the 1885-1905 span. Among the thirty-four periodicals singled out for recognition are such items of the household as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *National Geographic*, and *Collier's* of late memory. Now gone from the scene but very important in their time and provocative of nostalgia for many of us are such titles as the old *Life*, the *Literary Digest*, and *Scribner's Magazine*. And, of course, *McClure's*, one of the important American magazines of all time.

To date the *History of American Magazines* numbers 2,681 pages. For most of us this would be altogether too many pages were the study purely a chronology of magazines, their editors and publishers, dates, circulations, and so forth. Justification of the bulk lies in the fact that the study goes beyond the listing of the straight magazine histories to tell what they printed, which is to say that it presents the popular movements of the various periods, what the men and women were doing and thinking and feeling. As recently as 1908, the American Historical Association debated the use of periodicals in historical studies. Surely, Dr. Mott has placed the value of American magazines to historians in the sundry fields beyond all debate.

In the introduction to his first volume, published in 1930 by D. Appleton & Company, Dr. Mott hoped that he had presented "a clearer and more trustworthy view of the course of periodical development in America than any attempted in the more or less fragmentary studies hitherto available." Since Dr. Mott's initial volume, at least two single volume studies of the magazine have appeared, James P. Wood's *Magazines in the U. S.* (Ronald, 1949) and Theodore Peterson's *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Illinois, 1956). Comparison simply shows that Dr. Mott's is the definitive history. It has been accepted as the clear and trustworthy view. As Howard Mumford Jones has said, ". . . the name of Frank Luther Mott is now synonymous with magazine history."

There is a wide disparity in size and appearance of the existing volumes, only the second and third, covering the 1850-1865 and 1865-1885 periods, being matched. None of the first three volumes is currently in print, but happily it is understood that these volumes are to be reprinted and boxed in the style and format of the latest volume.

At last report, the grand old man of education in American journalism was spending his Easter vacation in the Washington vicinity, visiting grandchildren, giving in marriage a former student, and, it may be safely presumed, dropping in at the Library of Congress to look into the matter of Volume V. P.F.