

OLD NEWS

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Churchill Expects Trouble from Nazis

by Brenda Ralph Lewis

In July of 1932, Winston Spencer Churchill visited Bavaria in southern Germany to conduct historical research. Churchill, a British politician and author, was writing a biography of his ancestor the first Duke of Marlborough, who had led his forces to victory in Bavaria at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704.

During his visit Churchill became alarmed by events in Germany. Bavaria was the home of the Nazi Party, whose leader, Adolf Hitler, was promoting an agenda of militarism, autocracy, and racist violence towards minorities such as Jews and Gypsies.

To Churchill's dismay, Hitler had become very popular among Germans who were angry over the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which had ended the First World War in 1919. The treaty was forcing the Germans to pay crippling reparations that were harming their economy, causing widespread unemployment and poverty. At Nazi rallies, Hitler whipped up Germans to a frenzy with speeches in which he promised to avenge Versailles and to restore Germany to wealth and power. Churchill feared that if Hitler and the Nazis ever took control of Germany, they would not only terrorize many of their fellow Germans, but also launch military attacks against neighboring countries.

As a member of the British parliament, Churchill hoped to use his influence to weaken Hitler. He returned to London and began making speeches urging the British government to take immediate action to neutralize the Nazi threat. He advocated that Britain—which had reduced military spending after World War I—rebuild its forces to discourage German aggression. He also recommended that Britain undercut Hitler politically by softening the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

In November of 1932, Churchill

told Parliament: "The removal of the just grievances of . . . the vanquished [Germans] ought to precede the disarmament of the victors. . . . [To disarm] while those grievances remain undressed would be almost to appoint the day for another European war—to fix it as if it were a prize fight."

Churchill's recommendations were not popular in Britain, which was in a pacifist mood. Few people, including politicians, shared his belief that Hitler was a serious threat to peace, and they favored continuing reparations to punish Germany for the damage she had caused in the First World War.

At the end of January of 1933, Adolf Hitler succeeded in grasping national power, becoming chancellor of Germany. For Churchill, this turn of events made his warnings even more urgent, but he found himself a solitary voice in the political wilderness. He was dismissed as an alarmist warmonger by politicians from his own Conservative party, as well as by opponents in the Liberal and Labour parties.

Churchill's doom-laden message seemed preposterous to many Britons who thought that the chief threat to democracy in Europe came not from the Nazis, but from the Communist party that had seized power in Russia after a bloody revolution in 1917. There was a widespread belief in Britain that the virulently anti-communist Nazis would serve as a bastion against the spread of communism.

Churchill was unfazed by the enmity his anti-Nazi stance attracted. His character was well suited to fighting a lone battle and defying any brickbats that came his way in the course of it. He was a thoroughgoing maverick. Stubborn and self-assured, even arrogant, he was the sort of character who attracted either devotion and admiration or hatred and jealousy.

The handful of people who agreed with Churchill included members of the British intelligence service, whose agents discovered in 1933 that the Nazis were defying the ban on weapons imposed on them at Versailles. The Nazis were secretly building a new war machine, including an air force, which had been specifically forbidden under the treaty. The British government, committed to disarmament, did nothing to counter this threat.

Churchill was not supposed to

be privy to state secrets because he was not a cabinet minister—he had not headed any ministry since 1929. He nevertheless obtained a detailed analysis of the Nazis' plans for their air force when a British army intelligence officer, Major Desmond Morton, illegally gave him classified documents. Later, Churchill got more information about the German military buildup from other British civil servants and military officers who were so disturbed by their government's pacifist policies that



Winston Churchill as prime minister of the United Kingdom during World War II. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

they violated the Official Secrets Act that they had signed and that bound them to lifelong silence about the classified material they handled.

Churchill was appalled, because the leaders of the government were aware of this same information but were ignoring it. They were allowing Britain's existing armed forces to become outdated. The country's stock of weapons, ships, and other military equipment was falling far behind that being amassed by Germany. Most shocking of all, as far as Churchill was concerned, the government planned to cut spending on the Royal Air Force and to close one of the four RAF flying schools.

Churchill was aware that technological advances since World War had transformed military aircraft, especially bombers, into machines capable of wreaking dreadful destruction. He was particularly fearful of the effect that German bombers might have on civilian populations that would be exposed to direct bombardment for the first time in history. Churchill pressed hard for rearmament in the army and navy, but he concentrated his main effort on the need to build up Britain's air defenses.

On November 28, 1934, Churchill made a speech in Parliament that painted a terrifying picture of what could happen if London and other British cities were bombed from the air. He told the members of Parliament that a week of enemy air raids, in which hundreds of

German aircraft might be involved, could kill and injure as many as forty thousand people. Entire districts could be razed. Millions might have to flee to the countryside for safety.

Some members of Parliament were sufficiently impressed by Churchill's speech to cheer him when he sat down. But to Churchill's dismay, Stanley Baldwin, a Tory minister in the all-party National Government that then ruled Britain, rose to his feet and blandly dismissed everything Churchill had said. It was "extraordinarily difficult," Baldwin told the House of Commons, to give an accurate assessment of German air strength, but it was "not fifty percent" of the British. There was therefore "no ground at this moment for undue alarm and still less for panic." Baldwin said, "There is no immediate menace confronting us or anything in Europe at this moment, no actual emergency."

He concluded: "I cannot look further forward than the next two years. My Right Honorable Friend (Churchill) speaks of what may happen in 1937. Such investigations as I have been able to make lead me to believe that his figures are considerably exaggerated."

A few months later, on March 16, 1935, Churchill was vindicated when Adolf Hitler announced in public the truth about the Nazi rearmament program and the existence of the new German air force, or *Luftwaffe*. On April 7 Churchill received some

damning new information from a young Foreign Office official, Ralph Wigram—aircraft factories in Nazi Germany were stepping up production in preparation for war.

Far from being stronger than the *Luftwaffe*, as Baldwin had claimed, the British Royal Air Force had only 453 front-line aircraft to the Nazis' 800. On May 22 Baldwin was forced to make the humiliating admission that his estimate of *Luftwaffe* strength had been wrong.

It looked like an encouraging development for Churchill. Gradually, through his speeches in Parliament and his articles in the newspapers, he had been gaining support for his anti-Nazi campaign. The *Daily Express* newspaper had even printed an apology for persistently dismissing as fabrications his warnings about German air power.

But if Churchill thought he was getting somewhere at last, he was mistaken. He was sabotaged by Stanley Baldwin, who became prime minister in November of 1935 after the Conservative Party that he headed won a general election. Baldwin considered Churchill a nuisance and a troublemaker. He felt that Churchill had tried to humiliate him and he was determined to keep him isolated. To this end, Baldwin encouraged Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare to speak in Parliament against "those who seemed to take a morbid delight in alarms and excursions, in a psychology shall I say, of fear, perhaps of brutality." There was no doubt that Hoare was

referring to Churchill.

Baldwin, meanwhile, embarked on his own plan for dealing with Adolf Hitler by means of appeasement. Appeasement involved allowing Hitler to do whatever he wanted in the hope that he would be satisfied once his purpose was achieved. To Churchill and his growing army of supporters, appeasement was both foolish and cowardly, but the policy became popular in Britain and in France and was supported by the King of England, George VI.

Churchill thought that appeasement would merely encourage Hitler's militarism. He predicted that Hitler would present Europe with a series of "outrageous events and ever-growing military might" as a means of testing the resolve of Britain and France.

In 1936 Hitler violated the Treaty of Versailles by occupying the Rhineland, the demilitarized region between France and Germany. In keeping with their strategy of appeasement, neither Britain nor France retaliated.

In March of 1938, the *Anschluss*, the political union of Austria and Germany, also forbidden at Versailles, took place. Again, there was no reaction. Next, Hitler began to threaten the Czechs with punitive action over the alleged mistreatment of the German-speaking population in the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia.

By this time, Baldwin had been replaced as prime minister by another Conservative party member, Neville Chamberlain, who reacted by stepping up the appeasement. In September of



Churchill and his wife, Clementine, visiting the smoking remains of the Guildhall following a night of German bombing of the City of London, in December of 1940. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

1938, Chamberlain met Hitler at the Bavarian city of Munich and, without consulting the Czechs, agreed that Nazi forces could occupy the Sudetenland. Hitler assured Chamberlain that the Sudetenland represented his "last territorial demand," and Chamberlain assumed that Hitler's promise could be trusted.

Less than six months later, on March 15, 1939, Nazi troops occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. After another three months, Hitler began pressuring Poland with demands to return territories taken from Germany after the First World War, including the port of Danzig that provided the landlocked Poles with access to the Baltic Sea.

The hopes for "peace in our time," as Chamberlain had expressed it after meeting Hitler in Munich, were fading fast. In the summer of 1939, British newspapers mounted a campaign to "Bring Back Churchill" into the government. Churchill's name appeared on advertising billboards and was scrawled on walls. Meanwhile, junior government ministers were becoming restive. Many of them were disillusioned with Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement, and they wanted Churchill to be made war minister.

At first Chamberlain resisted. He hoped that the pro-Churchill campaign would fade and that the Poles would let Hitler have what he wanted; but the campaign continued and the Poles turned down Hitler's demands.

Then, on August 23, 1939, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia signed a treaty. It was an extraordinary development. Two ideological enemies, totally opposed to one another in almost every respect, had become allies. Though commonly termed a "mutual nonaggression pact," the treaty had another, much more sinister, aspect in the light

of Nazi threats against Poland: it enshrined a plan for the signatories to share Poland once the Nazis had conquered it.

All over Europe the pact was interpreted as a signal for imminent hostilities. Although there was still faint hope for a diplomatic solution, the British issued mobilization papers for the armed forces and the French called up their reservists. On August 25, Britain and France signed a treaty with Poland, promising military assistance should the Germans invade. It proved an empty promise. The German invasion took place on September 1, but no assistance reached Poland.

With aircraft and tanks in the lead, the German army launched an unstoppable *blitzkrieg*, or "lightning war." As the invaders scythed through Poland, scattering the valiant, but totally inadequate, Polish resistance, Britain and France together demanded that the Germans withdraw. If not, war would be declared.

There was no withdrawal, and, in fact, no reply. In a radio broadcast at 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, September 3, Neville Chamberlain told the British people that they were once again at war with Germany. In a debate held later that day in the House of Commons, Churchill told the assembled MPs:

"This is not a question of fighting for Danzig or fighting for Poland. We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny and in defense of all that is most sacred to Man. This is no war of domination or imperial aggrandizement or material gain; no war to shut any country out of its sunlight and means of progress. It is a war . . . to establish, on impregnable rocks, the rights of the individual and it is a war to establish and revive the stature of Man."

After the debate, Churchill went to the prime minister's office, where

Chamberlain bowed to the now-inevitable need to include him in his government: He offered him a post in his war cabinet, as first lord of the Admiralty.

Churchill's ten years out of office and in the political wilderness were over, but the challenge he faced at the Admiralty was formidable. As he soon discovered, Britain was unready for war to a dangerous degree. There were critical shortfalls in the supply of munitions, weaponry, aircraft, and capital ships.

In Poland, six armored and eight motorized divisions of the German army smashed Polish resistance, while the German air force destroyed the railway system and shot the antiquated Polish air force out of the sky. By the end of September, Poland had fallen. Hitler, emboldened by the success of his forces, offered Britain and France a negotiated peace in return for recognition of German dominance in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Some British ministers, still hoping to appease Hitler, were tempted to agree; Churchill, however, refused even to consider negotiations unless reparations were made to the Czechs and Poles and their "effective life and sovereignty" were restored. There were no reparations, and there was no negotiated peace.

At the Admiralty, Churchill quickly produced a stream of ideas for crippling the German war effort. On September 19, he proposed to the war cabinet that the Royal Navy disrupt the Germans' supply of Swedish iron ore, a vital element of their war production, by laying mines along the route to Germany through Norwegian waters. The Royal Navy would also preempt any German reaction by seizing control of the Norwegian coastline around Narvik and putting British troops ashore.

The initial response from

Churchill's colleagues in the War Cabinet was cautious. Neville Chamberlain shrank from taking offensive action in the territory of a neutral power like Norway. Others argued that the navy was not ready for such an ambitious enterprise. All this ambivalence led to delays that continued into the spring of 1940, when a date was finally set for April 8. The mining of Norwegian territorial waters went ahead, and British troops landed at Narvik, but the very next day, April 9, German forces landed at several places along the Norwegian coast. At the same time, German parachute assaults were made on the Norwegian capital of Oslo and on the port of Stavanger.

Instead of second-guessing the Germans, as Churchill had planned, the British became embroiled in the Norwegians' dogged, but doomed, efforts to expel the invaders. Indecision, timidity, and delay had ensured the failure of the British operation.

By this time, public support was rapidly falling away from Chamberlain's government, which had so dismally failed to avert war. The feisty, aggressive Churchill was gaining more and more adherents. Members of Parliament were also backing him in increasing numbers. On April 29, three weeks after the Norway fiasco, senior members of Parliament confronted Chamberlain's Foreign Secretary, Edward Wood, Lord Halifax, with a strong protest about the government's "want of initiative."

The mood of the House of Commons was so furious that even long-standing and loyal Conservative supporters of Neville Chamberlain were turning against him. On May 9, the prime minister managed to retain enough support to scrape out a narrow victory in the parliamentary

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debate on the situation in Norway, but the verdict proved unacceptable. There was an uproar in the House of Commons as the result of the vote was announced, and there were loud demonstrations against the prime minister by MPs of all parties—something without precedent in the British parliament. Loud cries of “Go! Go! Go! Go!” echoed around the Commons chamber and for a few moments, it looked as if Chamberlain was going to be physically attacked. Though he escaped without harm, he was badly shaken.

Chamberlain hoped that he could somehow remain in office, and he put out feelers to opposition Liberal and Labour MPs, suggesting an all-party coalition under his leadership. It was a desperate last throw of the dice, for

the feeling was fast growing across the country and in Parliament that it would be better for Chamberlain to resign and for Churchill to succeed him.

Then suddenly, dramatically, the picture changed. A fresh *blitzkrieg* exploded in western Europe as the forces of Nazi Germany invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France on the same day, May 10, 1940. Chamberlain decided, and Churchill loyally agreed, that in this new, even more dangerous, crisis, a change of government leadership was unwise.

But members of Parliament had other ideas. When the news got around that Chamberlain was going to remain in place, many Conservative MPs were outraged:

for them, the prime minister had to be Churchill and Churchill that very day.

Their work was done for them by the opposition Labour Party: during a cabinet meeting at which Chamberlain presided, he received a message that no member of the Labour Party was willing to serve under him in his planned coalition government if he remained prime minister. For Chamberlain, it was the end, for without the Labour MPs, the coalition was unworkable.

Within the hour, Chamberlain had tendered his resignation to King George VI at Buckingham Palace. That same evening, Churchill was summoned to the palace for an audience with the king, who invited him to form a new government. Churchill felt neither excitement nor

elation, only profound relief.

“At last I had authority to give directions over the whole scene,” he wrote later. “I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.”

In all of Britain’s history, there had never been a more dangerous hour or a more exacting trial. But in the five years of war that followed, Churchill’s pugnacious speeches in Parliament and in radio broadcasts roused British fighting spirit and morale to the point where the public’s belief in ultimate victory became as unswerving as his own. By the time victory was achieved and the war ended in 1945, Churchill had earned a unique place in British and world history: he was widely regarded as a savior of western civilization and its democracy.

Churchill died, aged ninety, in 1965, and was given the unusual honor of a state funeral, a ceremony normally accorded only to members of the British royal family. His fame and reputation have long outlived him. In 2002, in a poll organized by the British Broadcasting Corporation to choose the greatest Briton of all time, Winston Churchill was the runaway winner.

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During World War II Churchill’s government directed military operations from this underground War Cabinet Room, part of an extensive complex of subterranean bunkers in London. In February of 2005, an eleven-million-dollar Churchill Museum opened in London. The museum includes this room and the rest of the subterranean complex, as well as displays that chronicle Churchill’s life. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

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Dictionary Project Falls Behind Schedule

by David Vachon

James Murray was a scholar who wrote academic articles about the history of languages, particularly English. In the mid-1870s he was earning his living teaching at Mill Hill School, a private academy for boys, near London, England, where he lived with his wife, Ada, and their children. Murray was an active member of the Philological Society, and in the summer of 1876, he was approached by a senior member, Frederick Furnivall, who asked if he would become editor of a new dictionary.

Murray was aware that the Philological Society had been working on a new dictionary for twenty years and that Furnivall had become editor of the project in 1864. The society members wanted to publish a dictionary that would trace words to their origins, giving quotations from early and later works that would show how the meaning of each word had evolved. Furnivall had sent old books to volunteer readers, asking them to find quotations that indicated early usage of words. In the beginning, readers had been enthusiastic, but after ten years of sending in slips, with no news of how the overall project was progressing, many readers had lost interest. Furnivall had become bogged down with the immensity of the work and had never actually started compiling the dictionary.

Murray agreed to take over Furnivall's job as editor on condition that the society find a publisher.

The society hoped the new dictionary would compete favorably with the 1864 edition of Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, the best-selling dictionary on the market. The new dictionary would be seven thousand pages long—four times the size of Webster's, because its emphasis would be on explaining the history of words, whereas Webster's dictionary gave priority to their definitions.

In the late spring of 1878, the directors of the Oxford University Press agreed to publish the dictionary. They offered to provide a salary and expenses for the editor, pay for the costs of printing, and find subscribers who would commit themselves to buying each part as it was published over the ten years it was estimated necessary to complete the project.

Murray signed a contract with Oxford University Press to produce the dictionary in ten years for a total of £9,000. This figure was to include his salary, the salaries for assistants, and whatever other expenses he might incur, including the purchase of books, the rental of workspace, and the costs of postage. It was agreed that if he

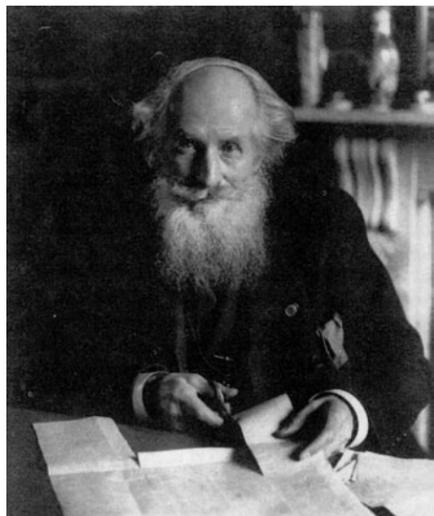
was unable to finish the dictionary in ten years, he would be given an extension of five years, but without any salary or expense money. Murray planned to split his time between the school and the dictionary. He did not expect to realize a big profit from the project but wanted only enough income to provide for himself and his growing family.

Murray began working under the impression that half of the material in Furnivall's possession had been edited and was ready for publication, and that the remainder was on slips of paper that had been sorted and were ready for editing. He had glimpsed the boxes and bundles of half-page-sized slips in Furnivall's home. Each slip contained one word with a sample quotation and information on the source of the quotation.

By Furnivall's reckoning there were over two million slips in his possession. Murray realized he could not keep that much paper in his home, which was barely large enough for his family. He would need a separate workshop. With his first advance he bought a corrugated-iron structure with skylights and had it erected in the backyard of the house he was renting on the campus at Mill Hill School. The inside walls were lined in pine boards with a thousand pigeonholes for the slips. He referred to the new building as his "Scriptorium."

In late March of 1879, Furnivall's material arrived at the Scriptorium in large bundles that Murray set in the middle of the floor. Along with the slips there were source books for distribution to readers, Furnivall's progress reports to the Philological Society, printed appeals to publishers from years before, and newspaper clippings about the project, all tied up with string or thrown into boxes and sacks.

Murray was shocked at the condition of the material. One sack contained a dead rat, and another held a live mouse and her offspring. A hamper full of slips seemed to



Frederick Furnivall.

have been stored in a damp location. The bottom fell out when Murray lifted it, and he found that many slips had been destroyed by mold. Furnivall had clearly misrepresented the material's state of readiness for publication.

Murray's first task was to alphabetize the slips. He used Furnivall's reports to the Philological Society as a guide to the contents of each bundle. When he opened the bundles, he realized that most of the sub-editors, who had been responsible for preparing and organizing the slips, had not completed their work.

After two weeks of sorting, Murray found that some packets were missing. According to Furnivall's reports, words beginning with *H* had been assigned to Horace Moule in 1862, but none of the slips had come in. *Pa* was also missing, although it had been reported as "part done." *Q* had been assigned to the Rev. T. H. Sheppard, but no reports had been received about his progress.

Murray wrote to Furnivall, "There are some cruel jokes in your reports: *G* 'done', 'nearly done', 'will be done in 1872—[it is] a mass of utter confusion which will take many weeks to put even in alphabetical order.'"

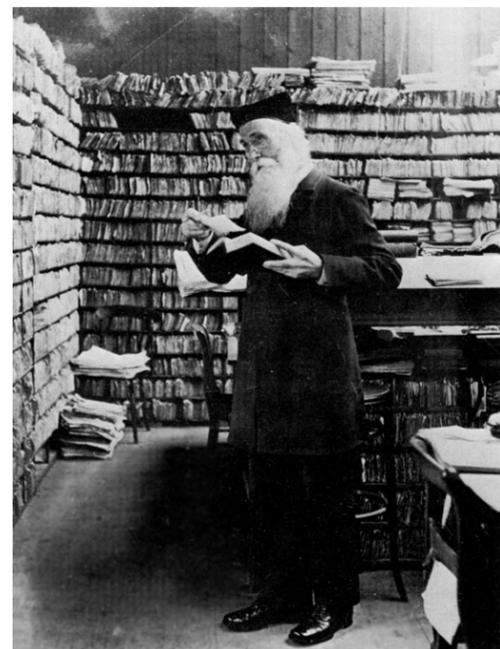
Furnivall replied, "*H* is perhaps, (I think, certainly) with the Hon. G. P. Marsh, U.S. legation, Rome. . . . *Q* & *Pa* I forget altogether. But doubtless W. Middleton at the old address'll tell you where *Q* is. Write at once to him." Furnivall found *X* that same day in a cupboard in his study.

G. P. Marsh sent a letter to the Philological Society in May, saying he had heard that the dictionary project had been revived. He had stopped working on his portion when his eyesight began failing, but

he had the slips for *H*—they were at his summer house in Florence, and he asked where he should send them.

Murray wrote to Middleton about *Q* and received a prompt reply that he had given up on it years ago, having assumed that the project had been abandoned. He had since moved, but the slips were at his old residence. He wrote: "Had I been present I think I [would have] destroyed the papers. Being absent, persons who were wiser, or less wise than I, preserved them in whole or in part. . . . You will find them, I suspect, in some disorder."

Late in May, Murray realized that many historically important books from which quotations were to be culled had never been assigned to readers. The material Furnivall had collected was nowhere near complete. A great deal more reading would have to be done, and the dictionary would take more than ten years to complete. Oxford agreed to allow Murray two



James Murray in the Scriptorium behind his house in Oxford. Packets of slips sent in by readers are seen in files behind him.



The Murray house in Oxford as seen from the backyard, with the Scriptorium on the right, circa 1887.

years to collect what was needed and scheduled another two years to publish *Part I* of the dictionary.

In the name of the Philological Society, Murray issued "An Appeal to the English-Speaking and English-Reading Public," in which he asked for a thousand volunteer readers to work on the project for the next three years. Copies were sent out in Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. "Anyone can help, especially with modern books," Murray wrote. "Make a quotation for every word that strikes you as rare, obsolete, old-fashioned, new, peculiar, or used in a peculiar way.... Make as many quotations as you can for ordinary words, especially when they are used significantly, and tend by the context to explain or suggest their own meaning."

Readers began responding to his appeal almost immediately. Within the first month, one hundred and sixty-five readers offered to help, and over the following year, the number of volunteers grew larger.

Murray's appeal recruited a large contingent of women, some of them with time on their hands because they were wealthy widows or spinsters looking after elderly parents. He spent hours each day writing letters to his new associates and sending out old books to be combed for useful quotations.

He hired a small staff to help him sort through the slips that began coming in to the Scriptorium at a rate of about one thousand per day. When

the slips had been sorted, Murray read all the quotations citing a particular word; then he revised the word's definition and wrote a few sentences that traced its history. He used the year 1150 as the starting point.

Oxford University Press, despite its partnership in the project, did not assist Murray in recruiting readers. Murray invited the publisher's representatives to visit the Scriptorium for a tour, but all declined. A progress report that he prepared in 1880 was received by the publisher's secretary, Bartholomew Price, who replied with only brief comments. "Having full confidence that you and your assistants are taking all possible care of the undertaking . . . I was not instructed to make any further enquiry," he explained.

Murray was surprised that so few academics took an interest in helping. In his report to the Philological Society in 1880 he wrote, "Only one or two Professors of English in this country have thought the matter of sufficient importance to talk to their students about it and advise them to help me."

Murray was convinced that the dictionary was going to be important, despite the lack of interest shown by university scholars. He wrote to the Philological Society, "If literary men and students of English in any department, had the faintest conception of the amazing and enormous light which the Dictionary is going to throw upon the history of words and idioms, they would work with enthusiasm to hasten its appearance."

As Murray moved ahead through the letter A, he realized that he simply could not write a dictionary that was only four times the size of Webster's dictionary. Tracing the history of interesting words like "alms" took ten times the space used per word by Webster. Murray asked Oxford University Press to increase the project's size to ten thousand pages. They agreed to 8,400 pages. Early in 1882, four years after the agreement with Oxford University Press had been signed, Murray realized that *Part I* (A to ANT) would not be finished on schedule that spring.

When he finally submitted *Part I* to the press almost a year later, he

expected it to be approved without much comment, but a change in personnel brought about a surprising response. In July of 1883, the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor Benjamin Jowett presented Murray with a document called "Suggestions for Guidance in Preparing Copy for the Press." It was a full-blown critique of *Part I*.

Jowett suggested that the editor and his assistants find suitable quotations themselves, quote only "great writers," and refrain from quoting newspaper articles. Murray thought that these suggestions contradicted the purpose of the new dictionary. Ignoring newspaper usages would be "silly," Murray complained. He wrote to the Philological Society that this suggestion represented "a most remarkable instance of the inability of men to acknowledge contemporary facts and read the signs of the times."

On October 19 Murray received a package that he thought would contain the corrected proofs for the introduction he had written for *Part I*. What he found instead was a new version of his introduction—his text had been completely rewritten, presumably by Jowett. Even the title had been changed. Rather than *A New English Dictionary on a Historical Basis*, it was now *A New Dictionary Showing the History of the Language from the Earliest Times*. Murray saw the new title as blatantly inaccurate. A dictionary could only show the history of words, not language; and his dictionary did not go back to "earliest times," but only to 1150.

Murray went to Oxford in early November to meet personally with the publishers. The meeting did not go well—Jowett insisted on having his way. Afterwards Murray wrote to his friend Alban Gibbs about the meeting: "It soon became evident to me that they were suggestions which he [Jowett] was simply determined that I should swallow willing or unwilling. We had to fight every word, my wishes going for nothing; and only when I could absolutely convince him that my words were better, would he yield anything . . . dead through every line I must go and I must be forced to accept either what he had written, or something else which he proposed instead, or something else which he concocted in lieu of that . . . the result of all this despicable squabbling over my English, as if it were a school boy's essay, has been to utterly chill and freeze me, and make me loathe the whole matter."

Murray decided to resign. He had been offered a professorship at an American college, and the position appealed to him. He wrote to Gibbs, "The future of English Scholarship lies in the United States, where the language is studied with an enthusiasm unknown here, and will soon leave us far behind."

When Jowett learned that Murray had decided to resign, he realized that he had gone too far. He sent a letter to Murray expressing gratitude for his efforts and asking him not to resign; then the directors at Oxford University Press passed a resolution that Murray should be free to write the preface

his own way. Jowett's "suggestions" were withdrawn. Murray won this battle but realized that the publishers were becoming impatient with the slow pace of the writing.

Part I was published on January 29, 1884, to the acclaim of philologists in the U.S. and Europe. Murray received a number of congratulatory letters, but none from Oxford.

One British scholar, Henry Bradley, wrote a critique in *Academy*, recognizing the work's importance, but pointing out a number of small errors. He mentioned that Murray had failed to include *free agent* and the phrase *alive and kicking*. Bradley also disagreed with Murray's remark that the first syllable of *alpaca* was Arabic.

Murray was delighted by Bradley's close scrutiny. He wrote to Bradley, inviting him to work on the dictionary. Bradley showed an interest, but Murray could not offer him enough money.

The publishers, under Jowett, were still eager to speed up the writing of the dictionary. They urged Murray to move to Oxford and work on it full time, but Murray was reluctant to give up his teaching job and the income it provided. His contract with the Oxford University Press did not give him enough money for his family to live on.

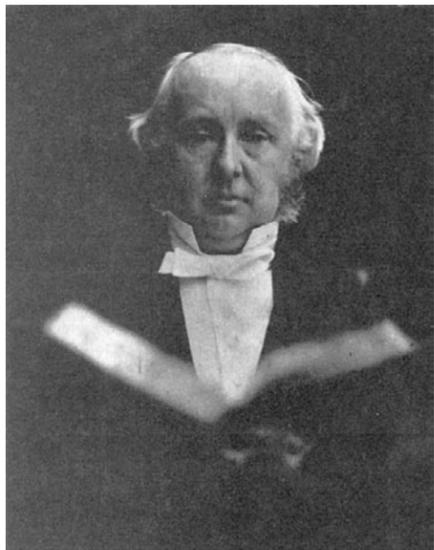
In 1885 Furnivall proposed to the British Prime Minister William Gladstone that Murray receive a stipend from the British government as recognition of the dictionary's importance. Parliament granted him an annual pension of £250. In the light of this official recognition, Oxford University Press agreed to increase Murray's salary to £500 per year.

Murray moved his family to Oxford in June of 1885. A new Scriptorium, a bit larger than the old one, was built in the backyard, and Murray became a full-time lexicographer.

In 1885 Jowett suffered ill health and withdrew from the dictionary project. The newly appointed secretary, Henry Littleton Gell, was more eager than Jowett to run the university press as a profit-making concern. The dictionary project had so far cost £45,000 more than it had earned by selling subscriptions. Gell was not as concerned as Jowett about what was written in the dictionary; he focused his attention on how efficiently the work progressed. His objective in dealing with Murray was to get the work published as quickly as possible so that revenues could start to flow.

Gell demanded weekly progress reports and pestered Murray to think of ways to speed up his operation. Murray replied that a good assistant might help.

In May of 1886, six months after the publication of *Part II, Anta to Battening*, Gell accepted Murray's recommendation to hire Henry Bradley to assist in editing words starting with the letter B. Bradley's efforts failed to dramatically increase the output. When Gell complained to Murray, he responded: "I wish from the bottom of my heart that I could do without your money. . . . It is an embittering consideration for me that



Benjamin Jowett.



James and Ada Murray with their children, about 1892.

while trying to do scholarly work in a way which scholars may be expected to appreciate, circumstances place me commercially in the position of the *bête noire* of the Clarendon Press.”

In February of 1887, *Part III* was published, bringing the letter *B* up to *bozzom*—still a long way from completion. Murray received a note from Gell expressing alarm at the slow progress of writing and asking him to suggest some way to achieve a “less vexatious discrepancy between expenditure and results.”

In November, Gell appointed Bradley as an independent second editor, insisting that the two men work in separate quarters. Gell increased both Murray’s and Bradley’s anxiety levels by pushing them and separating them, but the speed of writing did not appreciably increase.

Although the original plan had called for the dictionary to be completed in ten years, when that deadline passed in 1889, Murray was still working on the letter *C*. Sales were not good. The original subscribers, who had been promised a complete dictionary by this date, were disappointed, and new subscribers were reluctant to commit to buy a work that they feared might not be finished in their lifetime.

To sell subscriptions, Oxford University Press decided during the 1890s to publish quarterly sixty-four-page installments of the dictionary as they were completed and to sell them at a half crown each. This idea proved popular. People looked forward to receiving the magazine-sized increments of the dictionary, in which they could look up the history of English words. As the dictionary gained new readers, Murray’s work became a subject of increasing national pride in Great Britain.

But the dictionary was still losing money, and the publishers bickered constantly with Murray about how much information the dictionary should include. They periodically demanded that the finished work not exceed the original 8,400 words approved in 1882. Murray always replied that there was no point in making such a modest dictionary, which would merely duplicate the function of Webster’s dictionary. He insisted that the new dictionary would need to be much longer than Webster’s in order to fulfill its goal of providing a complete history of each word. For example, the etymology of the word *black*, to which Webster devoted five

lines, required twenty-three in the new dictionary. Similarly, Murray’s entry for the word *do* occupied sixteen times the space used by Webster.

In March of 1896, the publishers resolved that unless Murray and Bradley promised to keep the size down to a maximum of six times Webster’s dictionary, Oxford University Press would consider suspending publication. The editors and the Philological Society protested, but the publishers were adamant. They sent Murray and Bradley a list of “the principles on which the compilation should proceed,” instructing the editors, for example, to use no quotation after 1880, no slang terms unless they were in “general literary use,” and no Americanisms unless they were found in the works of notable American writers.

News of the possible suspension of publication reached British newspapers in April. The *London Saturday Review* wrote that suspending publication would be “nothing less than a national calamity and an indelible disgrace to the University.”

When the public learned that Oxford University Press was threatening to suspend publication, letters began streaming into Oxford supporting the dictionary and caused the publishers to reverse their decision. Murray was comforted by the support of the public. He suggested to Prime Minister Gladstone that the dictionary be dedicated to Queen Victoria. In 1897 she accepted, and this guaranteed that the work would continue.

In 1898 Gell was replaced as executive publisher. The new man in charge, Dr. J. R. Magraith, was a keen supporter of Murray. He accepted the obvious fact that the dictionary would be unprofitable for some time, but he felt that the project was worth the cost because it enhanced the reputation of the university.

In 1901 a third editor, William Alexander Craigie, was appointed,

with Murray’s title becoming editor-in-chief. Work went ahead smoothly.

In 1908 British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith offered Murray a knighthood for his efforts. Murray was not entirely comfortable with the proposal. He wrote to his son Oswyn, “My work . . . was so long so little appreciated, that I learned . . . not to care a scrap for either blame or praise.” To his son Harold he said, “I feel a great reluctance to come down from this position and accept the honor of this generation; I should prefer that my biographer should have to say, ‘. . . his country never recognized his work, but he worked on all the same, believing in his work and his duty.’” Nonetheless, Murray accepted the honor and was knighted by King Edward VII.

By 1914 Murray predicted that he would be finished in another two years. He was then seventy-eight. That year Oxford gave him an honorary doctorate in literature—an honor that several other universities had already bestowed on Murray. The timing seemed unusual to Murray, who speculated, “I suppose they were afraid I might die first.”

He was pleased with the award and continued working, completing the letter *T* and planning *U*. In July of 1915, he contracted a lung disease and died two weeks later, on July 26.

His death broke the momentum of progress on the dictionary. During World War I, production was further slowed down.

After Murray’s death, Henry Bradley became chief editor, working with editors William Craigie and Charles Onion. They completed the final entry for the letter *Z* in 1928. The completed dictionary contained 15,500 pages, each divided into three densely packed columns of type.

The announcement by Oxford University Press that accompanied the publication tacitly admitted that

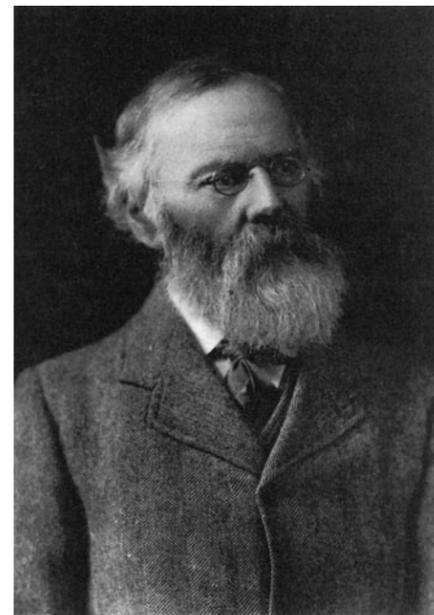
Murray’s vision had been profound and correct:

The *Oxford Dictionary* is the supreme authority and without a rival. It is perhaps less generally appreciated that what makes the dictionary unique is its historical method; it is a dictionary not of our English, but of all English: the English of Chaucer, of the Bible, and of Shakespeare is unfolded in it with the same wealth of illustration as is devoted to the most modern authors. When considered in this light, the fact that the first part of the dictionary was published in 1884 is seen to be relatively unimportant; 44 years is a small period in the life of a language.

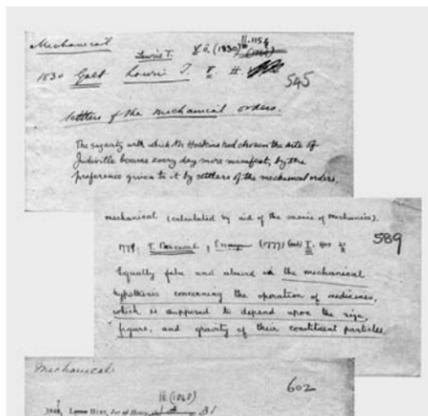
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Henry Bradley.



Readers sent in slips of paper, each with one word and a quotation from an early source that shed light on the word’s meaning.



Murray and his staff at work in the Scriptorium at Oxford.

Davis Sets Sail for the Far East

by Paul Chrastina

In June of 1585, English sea captain John Davis set sail from the port of Dartmouth to search for the Northwest Passage, a supposed waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans along the northern coastline of Canada. Such a passage, Davis believed, would decrease by two-thirds the time and distance it would take English merchant ships to reach the Far East. It would also allow them to avoid the attacks of Spanish and Portuguese warships that respectively controlled the Straits of Magellan at the southern tip of South America and the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, waypoints on the only known sea routes to the Far East.

English, French, and Italian explorers had been looking for the Northwest Passage in vain since the early 1500s. The captains of these expeditions had invariably reported that the seas along the northern coastline of the Americas were choked with ice during the winter months, but the allure of a lucrative trade route to the Far East was still strong enough to attract investors to finance new expeditions.

Davis, thirty-three, was a highly regarded mariner whose supporters included Secretary of State Sir Francis Walsingham, royal geographer Dr. John Dee, and influential courtiers Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Adrian Gilbert. The expedition was primarily financed by William Sanderson, a wealthy London

merchant who imported Eastern goods to England by way of the Middle East. Lesser investors included enterprising merchants in London, Dartmouth, and Exeter.

Davis's ships, the fifty-ton *Sunshine* and the thirty-five-ton *Moonshine*, were manned by a crew of twenty-eight sailors, four officers, four musicians, a carpenter, and a cabin boy. William Sanderson appointed one of his employees, John Jane, to chronicle the events of the voyage and to supervise business dealings if and when the ships reached the ports of the Far East.

On June 7 the expedition set out from Dartmouth harbor, but contrary west winds prevented Davis's ships from leaving British coastal waters until June 28. Three weeks later the ships were sailing through a dense fog when they heard a noise resembling the breaking of waves in shallow water.

John Jane wrote: "We heard a mighty great roaring of the sea, as if it had been the breach of some shore, [but] the air being so foggy and full of thick mist . . . we could not see the one ship from the other, [despite] being a very small distance asunder."

Davis, Jane, and the master of the *Sunshine* boarded a rowboat to probe ahead of the ships and take soundings for shallow water. Their three-hundred-fathom sounding line found no bottom, however, and they soon encountered "many islands of ice," according to Jane. "We went upon some of them,

and did perceive that all the roaring which we heard was caused only by the rolling of this ice together."

Returning to the ships with blocks of ice to replenish their supply of fresh water, Davis ordered that the ships proceed cautiously and he posted lookouts to watch for signs of land. The next morning, Jane wrote:

The fog broke up, and we discovered the land, which was the most deformed, rocky, and mountainous land that ever we saw . . . standing to our sight above the clouds . . . the tops altogether covered with snow, and the shore beset with ice a league off into the sea, making such irksome noise as that it seemed to be the true pattern of desolation, and after the same our captain named it the Land of Desolation.

The land was the east coast of Greenland, which had already been explored but never accurately mapped. Davis could not find the landmass on his charts, but he knew that it obstructed his desired path to the west, so he decided to sail southward to seek a route around it.

For the next six days Davis coasted south along Greenland's east coast. He was hoping to find a safe anchorage and go ashore to collect water and firewood; however, in Jane's words, "All was in vain. The water about this coast was very black and thick, like to a filthy standing pool; we sounded, and had ground in 120 fathoms."

On July 25 the *Sunshine* and *Moonshine* rounded Greenland's southern cape and turned northwest, hugging the west coast of Greenland. During the next four days, Jane wrote, they found "many fair sounds and good roads for shipping, and many great inlets into the land."

As soon as they had discovered a safe anchorage between two offshore islands, Davis, Jane, and the master of the *Sunshine* took a small boat to one of the islands to look for water and wood. "Upon this island we did perceive that there had been people," Jane recalled, "for we found a small shoe and pieces of leather." They then crossed to the other island, where they heard a sound that resembled the howling of wolves. Climbing to the top of a high rock, they caught sight of a crowd of people—native Inuit hunters—"some on the shore, and one rowing in a canoe" on the far side of the island. "We made a great noise," Jane wrote, "partly to allure them to us and partly to warn our company of them."

The captain of the *Sunshine* joined Davis on the island with a squad of armed sailors and the expedition's four musicians with their instruments, "either by force to rescue us, if needs should so require, or with courtesy to allure the people," Jane explained. The English party then walked down to the shore where the Inuit were waiting.

Jane wrote:

When they came unto us we caused our musicians to play, ourselves dancing and making many signs of friendship. At length there came ten canoes from the other islands, and two of them came so near the shore where we were that they talked with us, the others being in their boats a pretty way off. Their pronunciation was very hollow through the throat and their speech such as we could not understand; only we allured them by friendly embracings and signs of courtesy. . . . One of them came on shore, to whom we threw our caps, stockings, and gloves, and such other things as then we had about us, playing with our music, and making signs of joy, and dancing. So the night coming we bade them farewell, and went aboard our barques.

Early the next morning the ships were surrounded by dozens of Inuit in kayaks, calling out apparent invitations for the Englishmen to come ashore. On the tall rock in the middle of the island an Inuit shaman "leaped and danced as they had done the day before," waving a sealskin and striking a small tambourine.

Davis and Jane loaded a bundle of trade goods into a small boat and went to the island. They were warmly received by the Inuit, who traded with the explorers, selling them five canoes. Jane wrote, "They would give us whatsoever we asked of them, and would be satisfied with whatsoever we gave them."

The next day another trading session was conducted, and after obtaining waterproof sealskin clothing and other goods in return for knives and bundles of paper, Davis left Greenland on August 1, and sailed northwest, hoping that he was now on his way to the Far East.

A week later Davis found his westward progress blocked by another uncharted landmass. He had reached Baffin Island, a 950-mile-long barrier between Greenland and the mainland of Canada. English explorer Martin Frobisher had visited a southern peninsula of Baffin Island in 1576, but Davis was now farther north than Frobisher.

Davis decided to chart the newly discovered coast, taking the opportunity to name its outstanding features for friends back in England. He christened one chiseled peak "Mount Raleigh," and a prominent headland "Cape Walsingham."

"Under Mount Raleigh," Jane wrote, "we spied four white bears at the foot of the mount. . . . Supposing them to be goats or wolves, [we] manned our boats and went towards them, but when we came near the shore we found them to be white bears of a monstrous bigness."

Davis and his officers killed two polar bears to replenish their supply of food. Davis then decided to sail south, hoping to find an inlet that might lead him to the Northwest Passage. On



From left to right: Dr. John Dee, Captain John Davis, Sir Walter Raleigh and William Sanderson make plans to discover a new route to the Orient.



The Ellen trapped in ice during Davis's 1587 expedition.

August 11 he discovered an opening to the west that was thirty miles wide and later came to be known as Cumberland Sound. Jane wrote that the broad opening “gave us the greater hope of our passage.”

Davis ordered the *Sunshine* and *Moonshine* to enter this waterway, thinking that he had achieved his goal. For several reasons he was persuaded that the waterway was a strait leading northwest towards the Pacific Ocean. Its waters “remained of one color with the main ocean without altering,” Jane wrote, and the main channel grew increasingly deep to the northwest, ebbing and flowing with powerful tides.

During the next week the expedition sailed ninety miles into the waterway, but on August 19 a cold wind turned strongly against them. After battling with the wind for five days, Davis decided to return home to England, convinced that he had discovered the proper route and hoping that he could raise enough money to mount another expedition to continue his exploration.

The *Sunshine* and *Moonshine* returned to Dartmouth harbor on September 30. Davis hurried to London to meet with his patrons. He assured them that the existence of the Northwest Passage was “a matter nothing doubtful . . . the sea navigable, void of ice, the air tolerable, and the waters very deep.” He also showed them the trade goods he had obtained from the Inuit and pointed out that a potentially lucrative fur trade might be established in the lands he had discovered.

Sanderson, Walsingham, and the other investors were encouraged by Davis’s report and agreed to finance a second expedition. In addition to the *Sunshine* and the *Moonshine*, a larger ship, the 120-ton *Mermaid*, and a smaller pinnace, the *North Star*, were commissioned. On May 7, 1586, the flotilla sailed from Dartmouth harbor.

Davis headed for Greenland with instructions to set up a trading post among the Inuit before continuing his explorations. Arriving on June 29, he divided his company into two teams, dispatching the *Sunshine* and the *North Star* to survey the coast, while he established trade with the Inuit. The Greenland natives, he wrote, “came with their boats to our ships, making signs that they knew all those that the year before had been with them.”

Davis went ashore with a bundle of gifts. “I had no sooner landed, but they leapt out of their canoes and came running to me and the rest, and embraced us with many signs of hearty welcome.”

Davis remained among the Greenland Inuit for about two weeks, but the relationship soured when the natives began stealing items that the Englishmen were unwilling to trade. “They began through our lenity to show their vile nature,” Davis wrote. “They cut our cables; they cut away the *Moonlight’s* boat from her stern; they cut our cloth where it lay to air. . . . They stole our oars, a calliver [a small matchlock gun], a boat’s spear, a sword, with divers other things, whereat the company and masters . . . desired me to dissolve this new

friendship, and to leave the company of these thievish miscreants.”

Davis agreed that it had become pointless to try to establish trade with the Inuit. Having heard nothing from the *Sunshine* and *North Star*, he decided to continue his explorations. He headed west towards Baffin Island but was surprised to find that in contrast to the previous year, the sea was filled with enormous icebergs and shrouded by dense fogs. By the end of July, rations were running low, and his crews grew “sick and feeble.” They urged him to abandon the voyage and return to England.

Davis realized that the amount of ice in this region must vary from year to year and that there might also be ice in Cumberland Sound; nonetheless, he was unwilling to completely give up on the expedition. He allowed the *Mermaid* to turn back, but pressed on in the *Moonshine* and on August 15 reached the mouth of Cumberland Sound.

After anchoring off Cape Walsingham, he prepared to enter the supposed Northwest Passage when it began to snow and a fierce north wind buffeted the ship. For the next three days the weather grew steadily worse, preventing the ship from making progress into the channel. Davis decided to explore the more sheltered coastline to the south. He found three more broad inlets with strong westerly currents, suggesting to him that there might be more than one passage leading to the Far East.

By August 28, unrelenting bad weather offered little prospect of continuing the expedition to the northwest. Once again Davis realized he would have to turn back and try his luck the following year. Before his departure, however, he noticed large numbers of seabirds nesting along the rocky coastline, and he supposed that an equal abundance of fish must exist in the offshore waters to support them.

His guess proved correct. He later recalled that by using a bent nail and a length of sounding line, “the hook was no sooner overboard but presently a fish was taken.” Within a half-hour, one hundred codfish were caught and stored in the hold of the *Moonshine*.

The fishing continued for two weeks, until the ship’s supply of salt, used to dry and preserve the catch, was depleted. “Fishermen that were with me,” Davis wrote, “said that they never saw a greater abundance of fish in their lives.”

On September 11 Davis gave up on further exploration and headed back to England. Arriving in early October, he learned that the *Sunshine* and *Mermaid* had preceded him into port, but that the

North Star had been lost with all hands in a gale near the coast of Ireland.

Meeting with his sponsors, Davis now had the difficult task of convincing them to back a third attempt. He pointed out that another expedition might easily pay its own expenses if it was equipped with proper fishing gear, and he offered to take out a mortgage on his home to help fund the effort.

Many of the expeditions’ investors decided to cut their losses and declined the opportunity to advance Davis further funds, but Sanderson and Walsingham agreed to finance one more attempt. On May 19, 1587, Davis left Dartmouth again with two ships, the veteran *Sunshine* and the new *Elizabeth*, as well as a smaller vessel, the *Ellen*. Soon after setting sail, the mariners on the larger ships told Davis that they wanted to concentrate all of their efforts on fishing.

After lengthy arguments, Davis began to fear that the crews would mutiny if he insisted that they continue with him to the Far East. On June 21, off the west coast of Greenland, Davis agreed to allow the *Sunshine* and the *Elizabeth* to go fishing, while he and a few others took the *Ellen* in search of the Northwest Passage. Before they parted, Davis told the crew members that he was “determined rather to end his life with credit than to return with infamy and disgrace.”

Davis sailed north along the west coast of Greenland. Instead of sailing west as in previous years, he decided to continue north, curious as to whether he would find open waters north of Baffin Island, at the top of the world.

On June 30 the *Ellen* reached the latitude of 72° 12’ N—the most northerly point reached by any European to that date. The sea farther north appeared to be ice-choked, but there was still open water to the northwest. Davis wrote that he saw a “great sea, free, large, very salty, blue and of unsearchable depth.”

After naming a towering offshore island “Sanderson’s Hope,” Davis headed west into the open sea. He spent twelve days navigating around a massive ice floe, and then found himself once again off the rocky coast of Baffin Island. Sailing south, he recognized Mount Raleigh and other landmarks he had found on his first voyage.

For the next month the *Ellen* reconnoitered the island’s shores, briefly becoming trapped in the ice. The expedition members explored Cumberland Sound but failed to reach its end or learn that it was only an estuary. By August 15 the *Ellen* was running low on provisions, and Davis’s crew had no interest in continuing. Davis turned back for home.

The *Ellen* arrived in Dartmouth on September 15. As Davis had predicted, the expenses of the voyage were paid off by the cargoes of salted fish that had arrived aboard the *Sunshine* and the *Elizabeth* shortly before his own return.

Eight months later Spain declared war on England, and any possibility of a fourth expedition was set aside. Davis took part in the decisive English naval victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and went on to reach the Pacific Ocean for the first time in 1598 by way of the Straits of Magellan, which were no longer guarded by Spanish warships. In 1600 he led the first expedition of the East India trading company, and made three subsequent trips to the Far East. On December 27, 1605, Davis was killed by Japanese pirates whose ship he had captured off the coast of Sumatra.

Although Davis had failed in his attempts to find the Northwest Passage, his expeditions contributed to geographical knowledge of the Arctic and inspired later explorers to continue the search. The seaway between Greenland and Baffin Island was named Davis Strait in his honor. The first successful voyage linking the North Atlantic and North Pacific Oceans was not made until 1906, when Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen completed a three-year voyage from Greenland to Alaska in a converted herring boat, the *Gjøa*.

SOURCES:

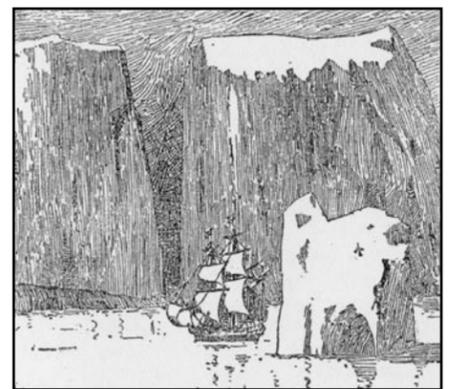
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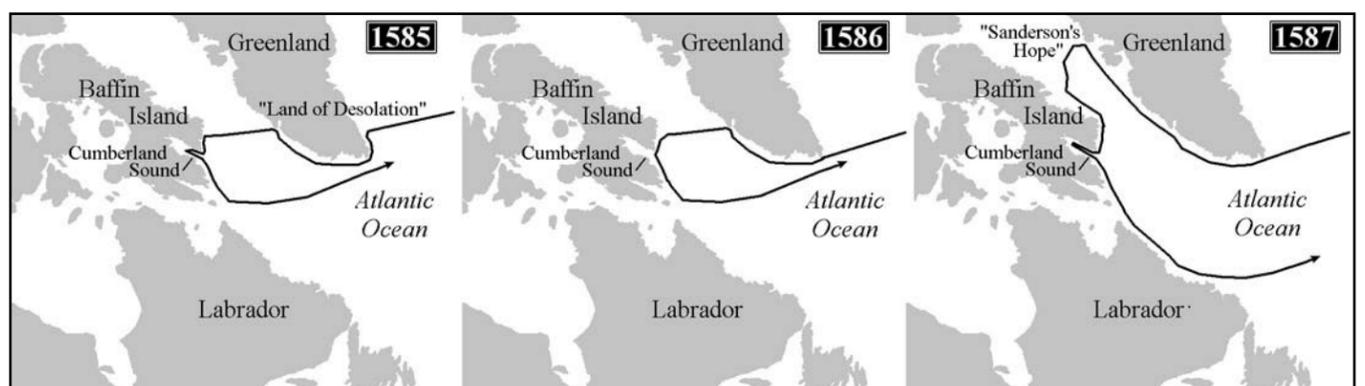
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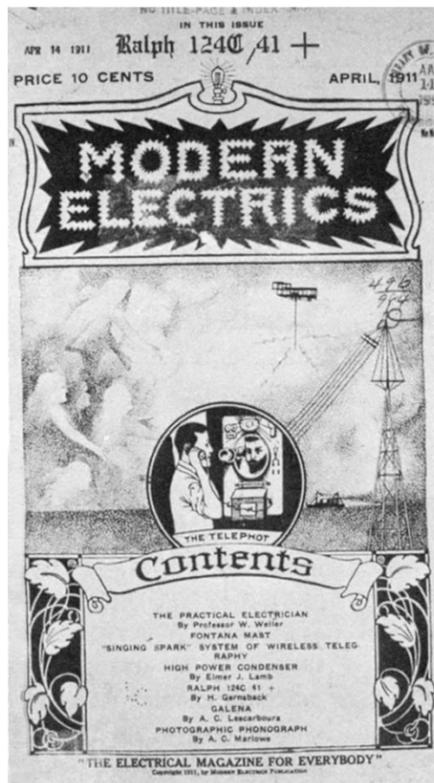


The Ellen at Sanderson’s Hope.

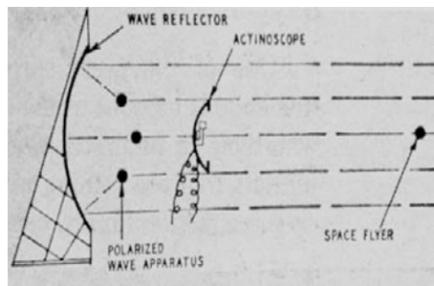


Davis’s voyages to the New World.

Magazines Promote New Kind of Fiction



The cover of the issue of *Modern Electrics* with the first installment of Gernsback's serial novel, *Ralph 124C41+*.



A diagram that accompanied a section of *Ralph 124C41+*, explaining one of the many futuristic devices in the novel. The diagram illustrates the principles behind radar, which was actually invented decades later.

by Matthew Surridge
As a child growing up in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg during the 1890s, Hugo Gernsback could not decide whether he wanted to become an inventor or a novelist.

He loved science and technology so much that by the time he was twelve, he had become an expert electrician and earned significant spending money after school by installing buzzers and intercoms in neighbors' homes.

Gernsback also loved fiction and in his teens decided to try to write a novel inspired by the work of his literary heroes—Victor Hugo, H. G. Wells, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, and Edgar Allan Poe. When he was a seventeen-year-old student at a technical college in Germany, he completed the novel,



The 1923 issue of Gernsback's magazine *Science and Invention*, which was dedicated entirely to "scientific fiction."

Ein Pechvogel ("The Bungler"), about an unlucky young man who tinkered with scientific gadgets. He was unable, however, to find a publisher.

Refocusing his energies on technology, Gernsback invented a new kind of electrical battery. After he was refused patents on the battery in both France and Germany, he borrowed one hundred dollars from his parents and moved to the United States in 1904, when he was nineteen years old.

He obtained an American patent for his battery, won a contract to manufacture batteries for the Packard Motor Car Company, and started his own battery-making business in New York City.

The battery business proved to be unprofitable, so in 1905 Gernsback established the Electric Importing Company to sell electrical equipment

by mail. The company also sold the first home radio set in history. This radio set had been designed by Gernsback and included both a transmitter and a receiver.

As well, Gernsback produced catalogues for the Electric Importing Company that included long editorials promoting his idealistic philosophy of the wonders of science. Gernsback wrote clearly and precisely in English, and his catalogues were fun to read.

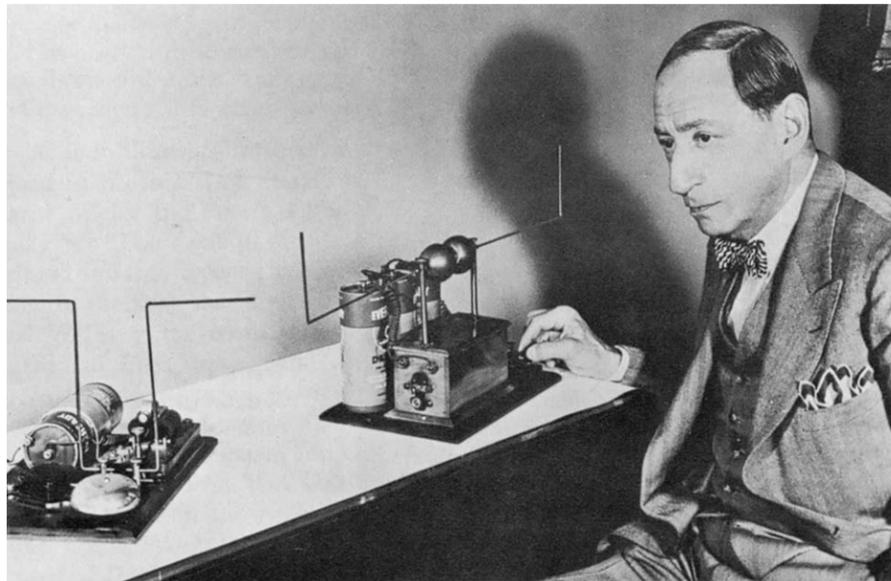
The mail-order business thrived, and Gernsback prospered after only a few months. Barely into his twenties, he wore tailored suits, ordered champagne in New York's finest restaurants, and escorted beautiful women to the Metropolitan Opera.

After three years in the catalogue business, Gernsback decided to use his experience to publish a magazine about radio. He called it *Modern Electrics*, and the first issue appeared in 1908. In an editorial, Gernsback proclaimed that the purpose of the magazine was to increase the popularity of science among the general public. *Modern Electrics* became profitable within a very short time.

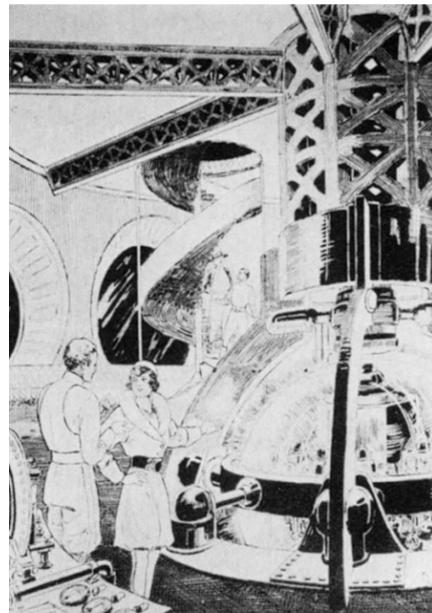
Early in 1911, Gernsback found himself approaching the deadline for an issue of *Modern Electrics* with several pages still to be filled. Rather than attempt to write a factual article on radio or scientific advances, he wrote the first chapter of a serial called *Ralph 124C41+*. The story was set in the future and filled with detailed descriptions of futuristic marvels. The plot was simple, and the characters were poorly developed, but Gernsback was less interested in traditional literary values than in using fiction to illustrate the potential of science.



The first *Amazing Stories* Annual, from 1927.



Hugo Gernsback, founder and editor of *Amazing Stories*.



An illustration from the August, 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*.

Gernsback's story proved popular with readers, and he continued the serial until March of 1912. In 1915 he published another serial, a satire describing life on Mars. It, too, was well received.

Gernsback realized that scientifically oriented fiction represented the device he was looking for to publicize the possibilities of science for a mass audience. He decided to work towards establishing scientific fiction as a major publishing and literary form. He began to publish works of this nature regularly, although the focus of his magazine continued to be factual science.

At first, Gernsback found it difficult to find writers and tales that fit his vision of the new fiction form. He

often reprinted older stories by writers he had enjoyed as a youth—stories that exemplified what he was looking for. The narrative could not simply be a fantasy, in which unreal things happened with no explanation, but had to include some form of scientific rationale for unusual events. At the same time, the tale had to be entertaining, with a basically logical plot and recognizable characters.

In August of 1920, Gernsback changed the title of his magazine to *Science and Invention* and began to publish two fiction pieces in every issue. He also published one per month in a second magazine he had begun, *Radio News*.

By providing additional paying outlets for the fiction form he was attempting to create, Gernsback encouraged more writers to try their hand at it. He developed a group of writers he could rely on to create scientifically oriented adventures that were often set in outer space or in the future. As well, established authors of other sorts of fiction began to write scientific fiction.

Letters to the magazines testified to the readers' appreciation of the tales they printed, and Gernsback began to wonder if a magazine that published scientific fiction, or "scientifiction," as he had begun to think of it, could succeed.

In August of 1923, he further tested his audience's receptivity to the genre he was developing by publishing a "Scientific Fiction Number" of *Science and Invention*. There were six fiction pieces in the issue, and the cover illustration, which depicted a man in a space suit, was more dramatic and fanciful than usual. The issue was so successful that competing magazines, including the established *Argosy* and the new *Weird Tales*, began to publish scientific fiction.

In 1924 Gernsback sent out twenty-five thousand circulars to readers of *Science and Invention*, soliciting subscriptions for a new magazine, to be titled *Scientifiction*. The circulars laid out Gernsback's ideas for the magazine to the prospective subscribers. *Scientifiction* would feature scientifically based fiction, including tales of the future and adventures set in outer space.

Although Gernsback was the first publisher to conceive of science-inspired fiction as a literary genre, various writers had previously published stories that fit his definition of "scientifiction." He intended to publish older works by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allen Poe, as well as modern ones that he and other contemporary writers had produced. Response to the circulars, however, was poor.

Gernsback, disappointed, turned to other endeavors. He oversaw the publication of various

other magazines, whose subjects ranged from radio and electricity to humor and health. He continued to patent inventions and in 1925 founded radio station WRNY in New York City. Over time, though, he found himself returning to the idea of a scientific fiction magazine.

Gernsback found it difficult to reconcile the cool response to his advertising circulars with the enthusiasm that subscribers to his other magazines displayed for scientific fiction. He came to believe that the reaction to his circulars was due to the unusual name he had chosen for his magazine.

Gernsback decided to try again to publish a magazine dedicated to scientific fiction. He hired as managing editor Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane, a scholar and inventor who was the son-in-law of Thomas Edison, and he selected as his main cover and interior artist Frank R. Paul, an illustrator who had worked for his radio magazines. When a secondhand book dealer introduced him to C.A. Brandt, a chemist who had a large library of fantastic fiction, Gernsback hired Brandt as a submissions editor and reprint editor.

Gernsback put a great deal of thought into the format for his magazine. He wanted it to be taken seriously, so he tried to make it look more respectable than the common pulp magazines of the day. Pulp magazines were printed on coarse, cheap paper and were usually 5 by 7 inches in size. Gernsback decided to make his magazine letter size, 8 1/2 by 11 inches, so that it would stand out on magazine racks. Also, while most pulps were printed on deckle-edged paper that disintegrated at the edges into confetti-like flakes, Gernsback's magazine would have paper with evenly trimmed edges.

Finally, Gernsback selected a name that he believed would catch the eye of readers who might be perplexed by the word "scientifiction," which he

continued to use to refer to the fiction genre he was publishing. He decided to call his new magazine *Amazing Stories*.

The first issue went on sale April 5, 1926. The magazine included reprints of works by Verne, Wells, and Poe. It also contained an editorial by Gernsback explaining his hopes for the magazine and for science fiction, or "scientifiction," in general. According to Gernsback, "Many great science stories destined to be of an historical interest are still being written, and *Amazing Stories* will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well."

The magazine sold briskly. Gernsback's office was flooded with letters from avid readers who suggested story ideas or titles of published tales that *Amazing Stories* might reprint. Within a year the magazine was routinely printing 150,000 copies per issue, and it had almost recouped all the costs Gernsback had invested in it.

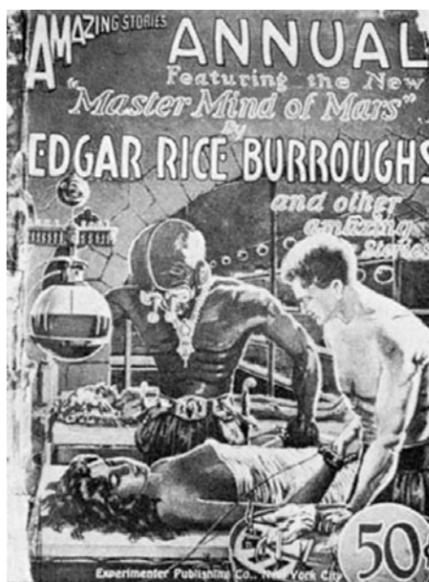
Demand was such that in 1927 Gernsback experimented with a more ambitious publication. He created the *Amazing Stories Annual* to accompany the regular magazine. The *Annual* was a half-inch thick, containing twice the pages of the regular magazine, and published a complete short novel, *The Master Mind of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. One hundred thousand copies were published, and although at fifty cents apiece they cost twice as much as the monthly magazine, the first edition nearly sold out.



The cover of *Amazing Stories* from September 1929, presenting Gernsback's emblem for the fiction form he called "Scientifiction." The emblem incorporates gears labelled "fact" and "theory," as well as a pen and astronomical imagery, all of which demonstrated Gernsback's view of scientifiction as a combination of literature and science.



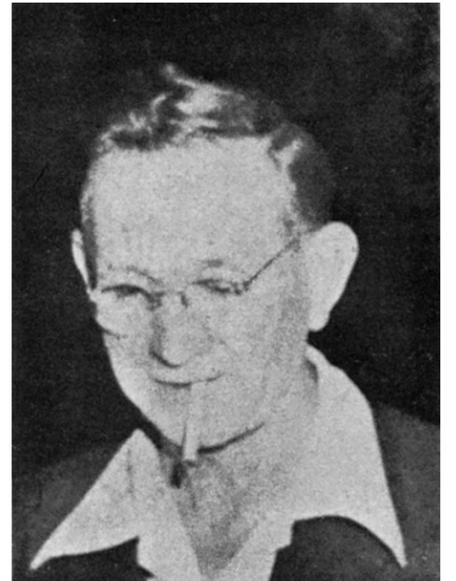
H.P. Lovecraft, a writer of science fiction and horror stories.



Gernsback's first *Amazing Stories Annual*.

Gernsback was investing heavily in other enterprises at this time, and despite the success of *Amazing Stories*, he often paid his writers tardily or at very low rates. Edgar Rice Burroughs grew irate with Gernsback, who paid him in "trade acceptances," IOUs promising repayment at a future date. Although Burroughs eventually agreed to this payment, he did not make any more submissions to Gernsback.

Several other popular pulp authors, such as H. P. Lovecraft, soon stopped sending him their work for



E.E. "Doc" Smith, a popular early science fiction author.



John W. Campbell in later life. He sold two stories to Gernsback while still under twenty years old. After Gernsback left science fiction, Campbell soon became the premier editor in the field.

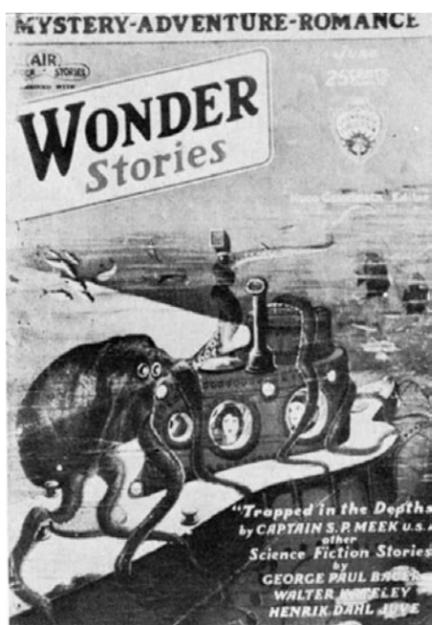


Edgar Rice Burroughs, author of the *Tarzan* and *John Carter* series of books and one of the most popular writers of his era.

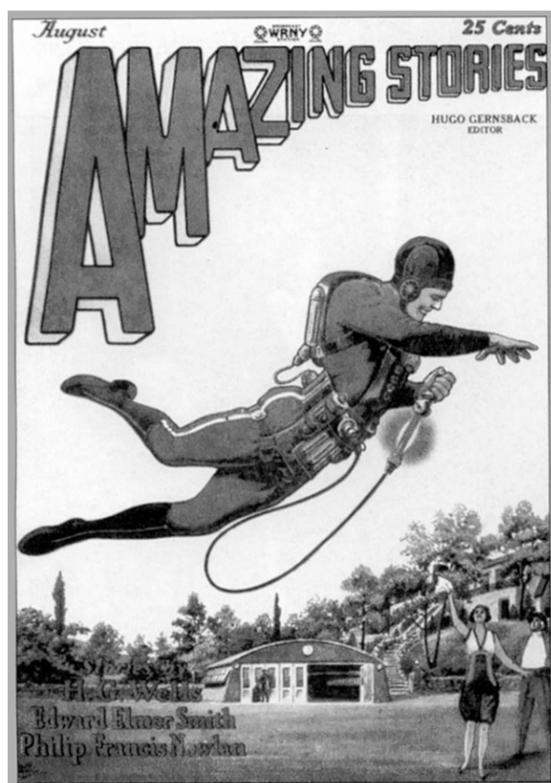
publication. Even Jack Williamson and John W. Campbell, who had begun their careers with Gernsback and who specialized in scientific fiction, quickly grew estranged from Gernsback.

At the same time, Gernsback found that his innovative fiction received no interest from the mainstream critical establishment. Despite its distinctive appearance, *Amazing Stories* was considered a pulp magazine, and pulp magazines were commonly disregarded by critics. It was believed that because the pulps were aimed at a wide and presumably poorly educated audience, the writing they published was lacking in literary value. Even H. G. Wells, some of whose earlier works Gernsback had reprinted, never responded to letters Gernsback sent to him soliciting new material, because he was attempting to establish himself as a “respectable” author.

But scientific fiction fans continued to support Gernsback’s endeavors. In 1928 Gernsback replaced the *Annual* with *Amazing Stories Quarterly*. It



The first issue of *Wonder Stories*, Gernsback’s replacement magazine for *Amazing Stories*. The cover advertises “science fiction,” a new term invented by Gernsback for the magazine.



The cover of *Amazing Stories*, August 1928. The issue was very popular, and the cover proved especially memorable. Many writers were inspired to begin writing science fiction by this issue.

continued to be priced at fifty cents but still sold briskly.

In August of 1928, Gernsback published a particularly successful issue of *Amazing Stories*. The cover, by Frank R. Paul, featured a memorable image of a flying man. Readers found that two of the tales inside were particularly satisfactory adventures. “The Skylark of Space” began a serial by a first-time professional writer, E. E. “Doc” Smith, who became a favorite writer among science fiction fans. “Armageddon—2419 AD,” by Philip Nowlan, introduced a character who was a contemporary American, Anthony “Buck” Rogers, who fell into suspended animation and awoke in the twenty-fifth century. The character of Buck Rogers became very popular across a range of media.

Gernsback decided to use profits from his magazines to promote the new technology of television transmission; various mechanical broadcast systems had recently been invented, and thousands of people were buying or building television receivers. In August of 1928, he broadcast television images of radio actors from his New York radio station, causing black-and-white images of the actors to appear on a few one-and-a-half-inch TV screens at distant locations.

With Gernsback’s money tied up in his radio and television projects, a competing magazine publisher named Bernarr Macfadden decided to try to take over Gernsback’s other businesses. Under the laws then in force, three or more creditors could force an indebted party into bankruptcy. Macfadden used his influence as a large magazine publisher to compel a number of the businesses Gernsback dealt with, such as distributors and paper suppliers, to take Gernsback to bankruptcy court. Gernsback felt that his business was fundamentally sound, but he was having cash-flow problems. Unable to raise the cash he needed quickly enough to pay his bills, he was declared bankrupt early in 1929. He lost control of his magazines, which were ultimately taken over by his creditors. Macfadden, however, was unable to buy the magazines himself due to other legal issues.

Amazing Stories continued to be published by its new owners, but its editorial policy became more conservative. Gernsback’s replacement as editor, T. O’Conner Sloane, considered scientific fiction to be a form of fantasy, and under his editorship the magazine lacked Gernsback’s scientific rigor, idealism, and concern with craftsmanship.

Gernsback, however, still had the list of subscribers to *Amazing Stories*. Despite his bankruptcy, he raised enough money to send out circulars to the magazine readers announcing the foundation of a new magazine, *Science*

Wonder Stories, which would reflect Gernsback’s optimism about future technological progress, including the exciting possibilities of space. When the first issue of the magazine was printed in June, it was enthusiastically received.

To replace the term “scientific,” associated with the old *Amazing Stories*, Gernsback coined the phrase “science fiction.” The expression appeared in print for the first time in the first issue of *Science Wonder Stories*. Gernsback’s readers approved, finding the new term easier to say. “Science fiction” quickly became much more commonly used than “scientifiction.”

Although *Science Wonder Stories* continued to be a leading seller in the magazine field, the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic depression led to a drop in sales. In order to stay in business, Gernsback tried various publishing strategies, including changing the format of the magazine and changing the title to *Wonder Stories*. However, sales continued to decline.

In 1934 he founded the Science Fiction League, an association of his magazine fans, in order to consolidate his hold over the readership. The association was remarkably successful, and other associations of science fiction fans emerged in North America. Nevertheless, magazine sales did not rise as much as Gernsback hoped.

In 1936 sales dropped to such a point that Gernsback had to sell *Wonder Stories*. He continued to publish other magazines, ranging in focus from radio and electronics to health. He briefly returned to science fiction in 1939 with a comic book called *Superworld Comics*, but when that failed, he turned away from publishing fiction. He continued to publish other successful magazines, including *Sexology*, which was devoted to the then-unusual scientific study of human sexuality.

Science fiction itself had taken firm hold in the magazine world. Other science fiction magazines appeared, including *Astounding Stories*, which became tremendously successful under the editorship of

one of Gernsback’s former writers, John W. Campbell. Fan organizations flourished and helped to stimulate the development of science fiction magazines, books, and films.

In 1953 Gernsback returned to science fiction publishing with a short-lived magazine named *Science Fiction Plus*. It failed after seven issues. But that same year, at the World Science Fiction Convention, an organization of fans began awarding achievement awards in science fiction named for Hugo Gernsback—the “Hugos.”

Gernsback died on August 19, 1967. His legacy, the Hugo awards, continue to be one of the premier annual awards for accomplishment in the field of science fiction.

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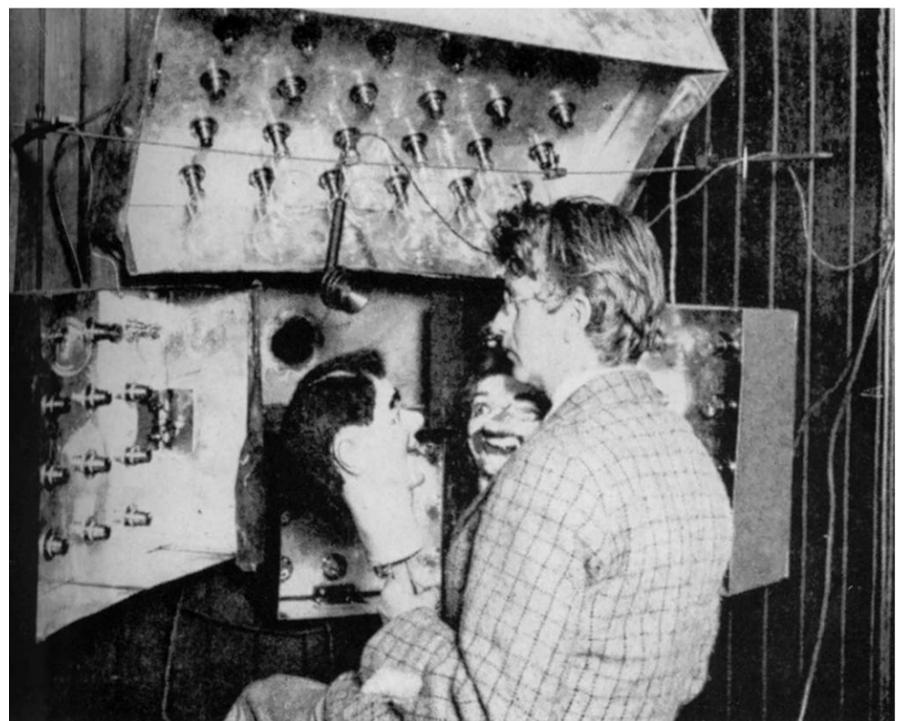
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The first issue of *Science Fiction Plus*, from 1953. The magazine was Gernsback’s final attempt at publishing science fiction.



A ventriloquist performs in an early television studio. Early mechanical televisions, which preceded contemporary electronic televisions, had a very crude resolution and required large banks of lights.