NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN CHILDREN & WHAT THEY READ: Some of Their Magazines

Over 350 periodicals for children were founded in the U. S. before 1873. Learn more about them at "American Children's Periodicals, 1789-1872," an ever-growing descriptive bibliography.

Works on pre-1873 American children's periodicals are listed or transcribed in a separate bibliography.

Puzzles appeared in most nineteenth-century American magazines for children. The Puzzle Drawer is a selection of puzzles printed in Woodworth's Youth's Cabinet and Robert Merry's Museum. They range from the easy to one designed to be impossible. Try your wits! (And your patience!)

ROBERT MERRY'S MUSEUM (1841-1872)

The Juvenile Magazine (England)
Children's Magazine (1789)
Youth's Companion
Juvenile Gazette (Providence, RI)
Juvenile Rambler
Parley's Magazine
Youth's Magazine (Cincinnati, OH)
The Slave's Friend
Youth's Cabinet
Robert Merry's Museum
Young People's Magazine
The Young People's Mirror
The Student
The Schoolmate
Student and Schoolmate
Our Young Folks
The Little Corporal
Magazine covers
Robert Merry -- a retired traveler with a peg leg -- in 1841

One of the premiere U.S. children's magazines of its day, the Museum published the work of the most important authors for children.

See the graphics-heavy gallery of covers for covers enjoyed by the Museum's subscribers.

Images from the cover are featured in a wallpaper for your desktop.

I've compiled a bibliography of works on the Museum. Several papers on aspects of the Museum are archived here: they include "A Visit to Merry's Museum; or, Social Values in a Nineteenth-Century American Periodical for Children" (1987, 2001), my analysis of this fascinating and lively magazine; and "An 'Online Community' of the Nineteenth Century" (2001), a discussion of the dynamics of the magazine's unique letters column.

Fifteen years of research have culminated in Letters from Nineteenth-Century American Children to Robert Merry's Museum Magazine, a collection of several hundred letters selected from the Museum's monthly letters column.

INDEX: I've indexed all 32 years of the Museum by author and by title. The author index identifies most of the authors who wrote under pseudonyms.

The Business of Robert Merry's Museum is a collection of bits and pieces of information pertaining to the business end of the magazine, including its advertising.

Like most early 19th-century American magazines -- for children or for adults -- the Museum shared illustrations with other periodicals. "Double Vision: Recycling Illustrations in 19th-Century American Magazines" is a little gallery of examples.

"Address to the Reader" (January 1841) was "Robert Merry's" welcome to the readers of his new magazine.

Hand-colored natural history plates were included in issues of the magazine in 1841. They include a rhinoceros, a crocodile, a Newfoundland dog, and a hyena.

My Own Life and Adventures (1841-1842), by "Robert Merry" (Samuel Goodrich), describes the harum-scarum boyhood of the magazine's imaginary editor, growing up in early-19th-century New York. Details of village life mix with
moralistic adventures and incidents from Goodrich's own childhood in 22 delightful parts. The serial was reprinted well into the 19th century, as *Wit Bought; or, The Adventures of Robert Merry*. I've included some of the incidents as related in Goodrich's *Recollections of a Lifetime*, in 1856. 

**Parts 1-11** (1841) (158kb); parts are drawn from Goodrich's memories of *his own first day at school* and of *Sarah Bishop*, who lived as a Connecticut hermit

**Parts 12-22** (1842) (152kb)

"*Story of Philip Brusque*" (1841-1842), by Samuel Goodrich, is a 13-part exploration of the necessity for law, as a group stranded on an island reinvents government. The serial was reprinted with a few changes in 1845 as *A Home in the Sea*.

"*My First Whistle*" (January 1841), by Samuel Goodrich, is perhaps his best-known poem; it certainly was his favorite.

"*About Labor and Property*" (January 1841) explains that wealth is the result of work, and that it's important that people can keep what they earn.

"*Death of the President*" (April 1841) memorializes William Henry Harrison, who died a month after his inauguration, and reminds readers that death can occur suddenly.

"*The Horse and the Bells*" (June 1841) cautions that recreation is good -- but not to overindulge.

"*The Moon*" (June 1841) wanders from lyricism to science to speculation as it explores the effects of the moon on the earth and, evidently, on the human imagination.

"*Yankee Energy*" (September 1841) praises the perseverance of a teenager taking his family from Ohio back to Connecticut via the canal system.

"*The Mammoth*" (November 1841) actually describes a mastodon and includes an illustration of its skeleton, one of the few early American works for children to publish *works on fossils*.

"*The Squirrel*" (December 1841) delightedly explores the way that squirrels are perfectly adapted for their place in nature. Goodrich probably wrote the piece after a subscriber sent him a live squirrel as a gift; the December issue also contained a picture of a squirrel, to be used as a frontispiece when subscribers bound their issues for 1841.

"*The New Year*" (January 1842) launched the magazine's
New Year's addresses to its readers. Genial "Robert Merry" gives readers a model to follow as they read the magazine, and reminds them that life isn't always easy.

"Wonders of Geology" (January 1842) includes an early illustration of an iguanodon. From title to illustrations, much of the material is from other sources.

"The War in Florida" (February 1842) describes the war between the Seminole and the United States government as a conflict between the oppressed and their oppressors.

"Names of Different Kinds of Type" (March 1842) gets into the technical aspects of producing the Museum, as 30 fonts are used to show the variety of styles available for printing (and to advertise a couple of printers!)

"Liberty" (December 1842), by Samuel Goodrich, is a discussion of the limits of natural liberty, apparently from Goodrich's The Young American (1840).

"A New-Year's Bow" (January 1843) advises readers to enjoy the day, but also to review the past year and decide whether or not they are adhering to their duty.

Three little poems for little readers were published in June 1843, in "Little Leaves for Little Readers," a heavily-illustrated section intended for "the A b c darians--those who have just begun to read."

"Jumping Rabbit's Story" (1843) is a six-part combination adventure/cultural study, as a white boy reared by the Kickapoo describes his early life. The framework apparently comes from Memoirs of a Captivity, John Dunn Hunter's memoirs about being reared by the Osage. Samuel Goodrich, who'd met Hunter when the two were in London in the early 1820s, included Hunter in his Curiosities of Human Nature. "Jumping Rabbit's Story" was reprinted in 1854 in Faggots for the Fireside.

"Pictures of Various Nations" (1844) is a seven-part discussion of race which focuses on the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. It is expectedly ethnocentric, containing the rather startling information that blacks and Native Americans literally can become whites, if they live like whites.

"The Lottery Ticket" (1844) is a four-part satire of early American life. When humble peddler Tom Trudge wins the
lottery, his status-seeking wife balks at nothing in her pursuit of "jinnysyquaw." It was reprinted in 1845 with some changes in wording, in *A Tale of the Revolution, and Other Sketches*.

"**Dirk Heldriver**" (1844) is a three-part tale of greed and revenge. Set in the Hudson River Highlands, it's surprisingly gothic for the *Museum*. It was reprinted in 1845 with some changes in wording as "Dirk Hieldover," in *A Tale of the Revolution, and Other Sketches*.

"**Reminiscences of a Rag**" (1844) is purportedly by "The Old Man in the Corner," a mysterious old man who left a manuscript collection of stories in Robert Merry's office. This three-part combination of fact and fiction includes a description of paper making, some words about slavery, and a hopeless romance. It was reprinted in 1845 with some changes in wording as "The Old Man's Story," in *A Tale of the Revolution, and Other Sketches*.

"**January**" (January 1844) extolls the benefits of education, and defines "civilization" pretty much as the ability to produce a city like Boston.

"**A Story of the Revolution**" (August 1844) was intended to emphasize the strength and determination of average New Englanders during the American Revolution.

"**Prognostications of the Weather**" (November 1844) describes a number of folk methods of predicting the weather, through everything from the flight of beetles to nightmares.

"**Alfred Poole**" (May 1845) not only glorified its young subject, it provided him -- and other young readers -- with an etiquette code and with incentive to do well in school.

"**A New Year's Address**" (January 1846) is a poem summing up the last year, looking ahead to the next one, and reminding readers to shun evil.

A **poem** (January 1846) describes the perfect world, as Goodrich described it in many works.

"**Nursery Rhymes: A Dialogue**" (August 1846) is Samuel Goodrich's scathing review of a collection of nursery rhymes, which he felt were not only useless clutter in a child's brain, but could be downright dangerous because of their crude subjects and language. Ironically, his parody nursery rhyme, "Higgletry, Pigglety Pop!," is now a standard in American nursery rhyme collections!
"Adventures of Billy Bump" (1848-1850) is a mixture of comedy, adventure, social satire, and etiquette lessons: Billy, a yokel from "Sundown," goes to live with relatives in Boston, with humorous results. Young readers quickly became Billy's champions, resenting the author's sometimes-satiric tone. When gold was found in California in 1848, Billy went west to restore his family's fortunes. Billy's adventures were published in book form in 1857.

- **Part one**, Billy's adventures in Boston (August 1848-August 1849) (101 kb)
- **Part two**, Billy's journey to California (September 1849-December 1850) (91 kb)

"The Snow-Bird" (February 1848), a cheerful celebration of winter and the birds which love it.

"Good Night" (October 1848), by Peter Parley, is a sometimes-lyrical nature poem with a moral.

"Wonders of Geology" (December 1848), reprinted from a work by William Buckland, briefly focuses on some astonishing statistics, repeating information found in other works on fossils in early American works for children.

"A New Year's Salutation" (January 1849) mixes sobering thoughts into a cheery greeting.

"The Indian's Story" (January 1850) is an "Indian legend" that provides justification for white supremacy, at a time when whites were pushing westward.

"The King of Ashantee" (March 1850) explains exploitation by whites, in a "Ashantee legend."

"Deer Hunting" (May 1850), by "Simon Sassafras," describes a Native American hunting method as "cheating."

"Caspar Hauser" (October 1850) is about the young man reared in solitude, 17 years after his death. It retells his story and concludes that he was an imposter motivated by publicity -- a very different interpretation from that in a Parley's article published not long before his death. The Museum's article seems to be a reprint of the chapter on Hauser in Goodrich's Curiosities of Human Nature.

"The Change of the Seasons" (November 1850) uses geography to "prove" that civilization can develop only in a temperate climate.
"Left-Handed Billy" (December 1850) treats left-handedness as the "habit" of the stubborn and disobedient.

"The Adventures of Gilbert Go-ahead" (1851-1856) was, at 42 parts, the longest-running serial ever printed in the Museum. The quintessential Yankee, Gilbert relies on his wits and a collection of homely aphorisms to get him through adventures that verge on being tall tales. His travels through Singapore, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Cambodia, Siam, southern China, Tibet, Iran, and Persia combine geography, adventure, humor, and anthropology in a way typical of the magazine.

"January" (January 1851) brackets a "hymn to the New Year" with paragraphs pointing up that prose can rhyme, too.

"Distant Worlds" (July 1852) takes a poetic trip through the solar system.

"A Very Odd Grandfather" (November 1852), by Robert Merry, is a dialog between a boy and a grandfather who may not -- or, rather, may -- have all the right answers.

"Fossil Tree in the Coal Rocks" (December 1852) describes a large tree section found in a Pennsylvania coal mine. It's one of a number of pieces on fossils published in early American works for children.

"Riddle" (June 1853), by Samuel Goodrich, is a riddle in the form of a poem. (Thanks to Hal Johnson for pointing out the answer!)

"A Visit from St. Nicholas" (December 1853) reprints a poem already well known to young readers.

"Curious Rhymes" (March 1854) is a poem emphasizing that meaning is relative.

"Carrier's Address" (January 1855) recaps 1854 in rhyme.

"Carrier's Address" (January 1856) recaps 1855 in rhyme, with a special greeting from editors "Robert Merry" and "Hiram Hatchet".

"Uncle Hiram's Pilgrimage" (1857-1860), by William C. Cutter as "Hiram Hatchet," is a 30-part look at 19th-century New York City. "Uncle Hiram" narrates his journey down Broadway to representative subscribers to the Museum -- a journey through a world as exotic as any Gilbert Go-ahead ever encountered. Humorous encounters with "the natives" punctuate heavily illustrated descriptions of New York City.
landmarks which include Barnum's American Museum and the Five Points area. Every landmark mentioned is illustrated in the magazine, though only a few illustrations are reproduced here.

Parts 1-8 (1857) (59 kb)
Parts 9-19 (1858) (57 kb)
Parts 20-28 (1859) (46 kb)
Parts 29-30 (1860) (13 kb)

"The Sewing-Machine" (January 1857) celebrates the new invention, which freed women from the "never-ending, monotonous tasks of the needle."

"A Crooked Tree" (February 1857) espouses a method of child-rearing that didn't crush the child's spirit.

"Skating--Woman's Rights" (February 1857), by William C. Cutter as "Hiram Hatchet," explores reasons why girls should learn to skate, at a time when ice skating was growing in popularity.

An advertisement for the New York Tribune (October 1857) is an amazing example of cramming an implausible amount of information onto a 6-inch by 9-inch page.

"The Elves of the Forest Centre" (January 1858), by Pansy, one of the Museum's subscribers, who was about 13 years old when this story appeared. Maia's gentleness and kindness are rewarded by the elves.

"The Song of the-Snow Bird" (January 1858), by Francis C. Woodworth, a popular song, is a cheerful celebration of winter and the birds which love it. Appearing originally in the Sunday School Advocate, it was reprinted in The Youth's Companion (18 February 1847, p. 167).

"Pukkwana" (April 1858), by Susanna Newbould, retells a popular 19th-century plot involving Native Americans.

"Of What is the Alphabet Composed?" (July 1858), by Mattie Bell, a subscriber to the Museum. Puns galore make up the English alphabet.

"Old Times and New" (August 1858), by Margaret, moves from a nostalgic comparison of "the good old days" with the "artificial age" of 1858, to a paean to the newly patented sewing machine.

"The Atlantic Telegraph" (October 1858) celebrates the
laying of the telegraph cable across the Atlantic ocean, with
details of the achievement and a glimpse of the celebrations
in New York City afterward.

"The Comet" (October 1858) alerts readers to Comet Donati,
then visible in the sky; it was followed by a longer, illustrated
article in November.

"The Telegraph Cable--A Dialogue" (November 1858), by
Laura Elmer, touches on many aspects of the Atlantic
Telegraph Cable, from its political meaning, to the souvenirs
made of it.

"The Comet" (November 1858) discusses Comet Donati, and
other early-19th-century comets, with illustrations of Donati
and of the comet of 1811.

"New Year's Morning" (January 1859) explores the joy
readers should feel each morning (and develops the metaphor
of sleep as death in surprising depth).

"Dr. Kane's Boat--the Faith" (January 1859), by William
Hoyt Coleman, a Museum subscriber who was about 19 at the
time; he later worked for a newspaper and a magazine. Willie
meets with some artifacts of Elisha Kane's Arctic expedition.

"How the Boston Boys Talk" (February 1859), by Oliver
Onley, a subscriber to the Museum. A saucy letter in the form
of a poem, to "Hiram Hatchet," who answers in kind.

"Signers of the Declaration of Independence" (March 1859),
by Ralph Wilson, a Museum subscriber. Number-crunching
the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

"The Cold Snap of January 10th" (March 1859), by William
Hoyt Coleman, a Museum subscriber (see above). New York
City in the grip of winter.

"Letter to My Daughter Margaretta, with a Set of Merry's
Museum" (April 1860), by William Ross Wallace, an
enthusiastic paean to the Museum.

"Why Have the Indians Disappeared?" (January 1862) puts
the blame squarely on Native Americans, whose fate should
serve as an object lesson to whites.

"Who Needs $4 a Day?" (March 1862) figures what an
education was worth in 1862 -- literally.

"Renny's Uniform" (1862) a two-part story about boys
playing war and learning charity during the American Civil War.

"The Grateful Indian" (August 1862), by Martha G., probably one of the Museum's subscribers. Emily Martin saves a Native American chief from death and is rewarded; it is an example of the way Native Americans were romanticized in 19th-century popular literature.

"What is a Darling?" (October 1862) describes the ideal 19th-century innocent -- who may be a bit hyperactive for modern tastes.

"To the Boy Who Will Be President of the United States A.D. 1900" (April 1863), by Samuel Wilson, jr, wonders about and gives advice to the one who will be president, who was, it had been pointed out, then living. (The president in 1900 was William McKinley, b. 1843, elected in 1897.)

"Blessings of Work" (May 1863), by Julia E. McConaughy, extolls the spiritual value of even the most minor chores.

"Independence Day" (July 1863), a stirring combination of war and Northern patriotism.

"Working Girls" (October 1863) takes simplicity as the best model for girls.

"Gardening for Ladies" (November 1863) takes a metaphor just about as far as it should go, in a piece of domestic advice.

"Dreaming and Doing" (December 1863), by Mrs. N. McConaughy, emphasizes many of the character traits considered desirable for 19th-century American children.

"A New-Year's Welcome" (January 1864) extolls the cheery sports of winter.

"Elva Seeking Her Fortune" (1865), by Sophie May, the 12-part story of Elva Newell, an abused child adopted by a farm couple. Caught in the spell of novels and of an imaginative friend, she runs away to seek her "real" parents. "Sophie May" was the pen-name of Rebecca Clarke; read more about her at 19th Century Girls' Series, maintained by Dr. Deidre Johnson.

"Adventures of a 'Merry' Boy" (February 1865) concerns the military adventures of the Museum's office boy, Eugene H. Fales (b. 1840/1843; d. 1868). Enlisting as a Union soldier,
he was captured and spent 18 months in a Confederate prison before escaping.

"The Veteran's Farewell" (February 1865), by "Blue-Eyed Lora," one of the magazine's subscribers. A romantic and patriotic Northerner's view of the Civil War.

"Allie's Christmas Eve" (February 1865), by "Lillie Linden," one of the magazine's subscribers. A sentimental poem in Victorian mode.

This memorial page for Adelbert Older (February 1865) honored a popular subscriber to the Museum. The page contains the last of his poems to be published in the magazine; with a poem perhaps by another subscriber. While Adelbert wasn't the only subscriber to die in the Civil War, he was the only one mourned in this way.

"Unella" (June 1865), by Madge, one of the magazine's subscribers; she was probably in her twenties when this story was published. A white child is adopted by Native Americans; this story is an even more overt example of romanticism than is "The Grateful Indian," which had appeared in 1862 (see above).

It's a cradle! It's a footstool! "Brown's Patent Baby-Tender" was one of the stranger multi-purpose contraptions advertised in the Museum. (Did anyone ever buy one?)

Two poems for July 4, 1865 celebrate the end of the Civil War and honor its Union veterans.

"Victory at Last" (July 1865), by C. C., honors Union veterans. C. C. likely was a subscriber to the Museum.

An editorial (July 1865), probably by John N. Stearns, is a joyous expression of patriotism on a memorial Independence Day.

"Living in an Omnibus" (October 1867), an unsigned piece by Louisa May Alcott, her first appearance in the pages of the Museum. The homeless Hummels find an unusual place to live.

"The Two Burials" (November 1867), by Julia Perkins Ballard, contrasts the burials of Abraham Lincoln and his mother, in a poem by an author popular in the Museum.

"Two Ways of Being Manly" (1868), by F. W. A. P., a two-part contrast of a boy whose parents believe that "boys will
be boys," with a quiet boy who understands real heroism.

_Cousin Tribulation's story_ (January 1868), the earliest appearance of a famous episode in Louisa May Alcott's _Little Women_; it was printed in the _Museum_’s letters column and marked a new direction for that section. One family helps another on New Year's day. Alcott was by this time editing the _Museum_; "Tribulation Periwinkle" was the pseudonym she used in publishing _Hospital Sketches_, her popular work for adults.

"_The Doctor's Little Girl_" (1870), by C. Alice Baker, the 10-part story of Ailie, whose father decides to rear her to be as independent as any boy. She grows up to be a 19th-century-style charmer, in a tale that seems to back off its original theme and tapers off into a description of Ailie's adventures. The story also explores a theme popular after the Civil War: that children were growing up far faster than they should.

"_Young Italy in Boston_" (January 1870), by "Stella," is a sentimental piece on young Italian immigrants that seems to imply that they don't belong in Boston.

"_The Chinese in California_" (February 1870), by Lucy St. John, is a condescending portrait of immigrants from China that reveals a lot about prejudices against them.

"_A Young Savage_" (November 1870), by A. Perry, describes a young Native American boy's terror during his first day at a white school and offers a snapshot of white prejudices.

"_The Spendthrift Doll_" (February 1871), by Sarah O. Sweet (pseudonym of Sarah Orne Jewett), one of two pieces by her to appear in the _Museum_. The high style in which a doll lives shocks the poet.

_A handful of planets_ appeared at one time in the skies around May 1, 1871, as described by "Robert Merry" in June 1871.

"_Declamation--Relief for Chicago_" (November 1872), by Edward Everett Hale, focuses on the strength of Chicago's citizens and on the need for charity, after the Chicago Fire.

An _editorial on the Chicago Fire_ (November 1871) emphasizes charitable impulses inspired by the devastation.

"_What Ben and the Twins Did for Chicago_" (December 1871), by Sara Conant, follows three fictional children organizing a benefit for Chicago after the Fire in October 1871. Conant subscribed to the _Museum_ as a child.
"The Voyage of the Salt Mackerel" (1872), by Charles Barnard, a two-part serial in which two boys inspired by a story paper build a raft and sail to the ocean. To some extent it parodies the stories the boys enjoyed. In its slightly condescending tone, the story is in striking contrast to adventure tales early in the Museum's career; it also highlights the magazine's increased insistence that venturing from home was a bad idea.

This editorial (November 1872) -- the last piece to appear in the Museum -- uses Henry Morton Stanley's search for David Livingstone to warn young readers that "such achievements are going out of fashion," and that it was best to simply stay home.

The announcement of the merger of the Museum with The Youth's Companion in November 1872 was stitched into the magazine itself.

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To "Nineteenth-Century Children & What They Read"
Some of the children | Some of their books

To "Voices from 19th-Century America"
Some works for adults, 1800-1872

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