

**THE FOUNDING OF THE
MUNSEY PUBLISHING-
HOUSE, QUARTER OF A
CENTURY OLD**

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The Founding of the Munsey Publishing-house, Quarter of a Century Old by Frank A. Munsey

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FRANK A. MUNSEY

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**Quarter of
A Century Old**

**THE STORY OF THE ARGOSY, OUR FIRST PUB-
LICATION, AND INCIDENTALY THE
STORY OF MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE**

**BY
FRANK A. MUNSEY**



NEW YORK: DECEMBER, 1907

The Munsey Publishing-House



QUARTER-CENTURY milestones are important alike in the lives of men and magazines. With men there are rarely more than three such milestones, and few magazines ever reach the first one. *THE ARGOSY* is one of these few. The issue for the present month (December, 1907) completes the twenty-fifth year of its life of continuous publication. There have been no breaks, no missing numbers, and each issue has come out on time.

Not many magazine readers realize that *THE ARGOSY*, with its quarter century of life, is to-day one of the three oldest magazines of

any considerable circulation. The two that antedate it are *Harper's* and *The Century*, and, in a way, THE ARGOSY is much older than either of these. That is to say, it is older in the blood that flows in its veins, as it absorbed and amalgamated with itself the two oldest magazines in America—*Godey's* and *Peterson's*—both of which were issued in Philadelphia, and which, in their day, occupied an important place in the periodical literature of the country. *Godey's* was known as *Godey's Lady's Book*, but was in form and substance a magazine, and later on was changed to *Godey's Magazine*. Much that would be interesting might be said of these two publications, but their history, further than that they were absorbed by THE ARGOSY, does not properly belong in this sketch.

To talk of the early days of THE ARGOSY and to say anything worth the saying, must be to talk of myself, because THE ARGOSY, in its inception and development, grew out of my very life. This statement must serve as an apology for talking of myself as I talk of THE ARGOSY in this reminiscence, for it is a reminiscence—just a fireside talk of the old

days, and of some of those in between, that bridge over to the present time.

Many of those who are now readers of THE ARGOSY know nothing of its early history. This is particularly true of the younger generation, as the old ARGOSY or rather THE ARGOSY in its weekly form, has been so long out of print that few of them have ever seen it.

THE ARGOSY has not always been a magazine. It was started as an illustrated weekly paper for boys and girls, and consisted of eight pages, the size of page being the same as that of the *Youth's Companion*. The first issue came out on Saturday, December 2, 1882, bearing date of December 9—one week ahead of the day of issue. This method of dating ahead was in vogue with the weeklies of that period, and to a modified extent is in vogue with the magazines of to-day.

In the first issue there were two serial stories—one by that delightful writer for boys and girls, Horatio Alger, Jr., and a second by another well-known and popular juvenile author, Edward S. Ellis. Mr. Ellis had recently retired from the editorship of *Golden*

Days, which I believe he inspired, and which, under his guidance and the clever handling of its publisher, Mr. James Elverson of Philadelphia, became a great favorite with the boys and girls of that day.

Mr. Alger, who had long been before the public as a popular author, was at that time in his prime, and I want to record here in his memory, for it is now some years since he passed out of life, that he was one of the most human men I have ever known—a man with the simplicity of a child and the sweet, pure soul of God's best type of woman. He left behind him many books, which delighted the youth of our land, and which still delight the boys and girls of the present generation. My own interest in *THE ARGOSY* was scarcely more than Mr. Alger's, and from the first issue of the publication to the end of his life he gave it the best work of his pen.

This little tribute to Mr. Alger is not in the way of invidious comparison between him and Mr. Ellis, or any of the other writers of the early days of *THE ARGOSY*, or the writers who have since contributed their best thought to its pages. Mr. Ellis is still in the

harness, though he has switched away from the creative work of his earlier days. His Indian stories, in particular, many of which ran in *THE ARGOSY*, were among the most fascinating tales ever written for boys and girls.

Associated with Alger and Ellis as contributors to *THE ARGOSY* at that period were Oliver Optic, Harry Castlemon, Frank H. Converse, D. O. S. Lowell, Edgar L. Warren, George H. Coomer, Malcolm Douglas, Annie Ashmore, W. H. W. Campbell, Mary A. Denison, J. L. Harbour, Richard H. Titherington, and Matthew White, Jr., who for many years has been, and still is, the editor of *THE ARGOSY*.

So far I have been talking chiefly of *THE ARGOSY*, to the neglect of myself. It might be well to go back a little farther, however, because the foundation, the germ thought of *THE ARGOSY*, had its origin with me. And in this little talk we want to get at the beginning of things, the reason why.

It is probable that I never should have found myself in the publishing business but for the fact that the general manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company sent

me to Augusta, Maine, to take the management of their office in that city. I was a youngster at that time, with life before me, and with an insatiable ambition. I had picked up telegraphy and was using it as a stepping-stone to something better, as a means to an end. But to get out of one kind of activity and into another, for which one has no special training, is not easy. I learned this fact through bitter disappointment and many heartaches. The four walls of a telegraph-office were to me as a cage to a tiger yearning for the boundless freedom of the jungle.

As Augusta was the capital of the State, and as I lived at the hotel where most of the legislative and other State officers stayed, I very soon acquired a pretty good knowledge of the strong men of the entire commonwealth. Their lives had scope; mine had none. I chafed bitterly under the limited possibilities of my environment, where ambition, and energy, and aspiration, counted for little. My very soul cried out for an opportunity to carve out for myself a bigger life.

I lost no chance to make the acquaintance