The Youth's Companion Encyclopedia Article

The Youth's Companion

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The Youth's Companion

For just over a century, from 1827 to 1929, a monthly periodical called *The Youth's Companion* dispensed moral education, information, and fiction to generations of young people. By 1885, the periodical was claiming 385,000 copies were printed each week, making it the most widely circulated journal of its day, largely due to the premiums and prizes it offered for new subscriptions. *The Youth's Companion* was founded in Boston in 1827 by Nathaniel Willis and Asa Rand as a Sunday-School organ in the tradition of Boston Congregationalism, one that would "warn against the ways of transgression, error and ruin, and allure to those of virtue and piety." The classic children's bedtime prayer "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" appeared in its first issue. Rand left the venture after three years and Willis remained as editor until he sold the paper in 1857 to John W. Olmstead and Daniel Sharp Ford. Ford, who was known to his readers as "Perry Mason," after the name he gave to his business, remained as editor until his death in 1899. During his editorship, he completely revamped its content and format, making *The Youth's Companion* into a well-respected publication of high literary merit. By publishing serial and scientific articles and puzzles, by soliciting articles from readers, and by including contributions from notable writers such as Harriett Beecher Stowe, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, and Jack London, Ford was able to increase the circulation tenfold within a decade, and to nearly half a million by 1899. The magazine survived until it finally folded at the onset of the Great Depression, when it merged with *American Boy*, a victim of financial woes and changing tastes.

Further Reading:

Tebbel, John. *The American Magazine: A Compact History.* New York, Hawthorn Books, 1969.

Tebbel, John, and Mary Ellen Zuckerman. *The Magazine in America: 1741-1990.* New York, Oxford University Press, 1991.