

## Syndicated Sunday Movie Sections

### *The Highest-Circulation Fan Magazines (You've Never Heard Of)*

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What were the highest-circulation American movie fan magazines?

The answer depends on how you define a magazine. Frequency matters, and a magazine is generally neither a daily newspaper nor an annual yearbook. Illustration and layout matter, too, although the boundary can be blurred for periodicals that are better classified as journals or bulletins. A magazine certainly needs to have at least metropolitan reach in readership, not a purely local scope, although there are examples of neighborhood movie theater programs that looked and felt like fan magazines and contained a magazine's worth of boilerplate news and gossip. The Media History Digital Library (MHDL) includes all of these, as well as many other film publications such as pressbooks and catalogs that sit in between the seriality of periodicals and the uniqueness of archival documents. As the MHDL has grown, hybrid forms and unusual publication formats have been folded into the searchable mix among better-known titles. The globalization of collections has led to gathering examples of film publications that reflect the unique circumstances of their production across time and space, a key theme of this very book. But forgotten and liminal movie magazines exist at the very heart of Hollywood, too.

One such class of US movie magazine was weekly film fan magazines distributed as supplements to Sunday newspapers. These were not merely sections of the paper but had the form and feel of magazines, with their own mastheads and editors, printed tabloid or quarto-sized on fine paper in lithograph or in halftone color. At least one was also sold and distributed on newsstands by itself; at least one was listed under "motion pictures" in the class publications in the *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory*; at least one was often quoted

in 1930s Hollywood movie ads and cited by later movie star biographers. Two were syndicated to multiple Sunday papers circulated simultaneously on a national scale, and, summing circulations of newspapers known to have concurrently carried these supplements, I propose they were the highest-circulation movie magazines of their days. One printed more than a million and a half copies weekly for several years in the late 1930s, more than any other fan magazine ever did (although you've probably never heard of it, and fan magazine scholarship has almost entirely ignored it).<sup>1</sup>

Sunday newspaper supplements have a curious history distinct from the daily paper—a central concern of my book with Sandra Gabriele, *The Sunday Paper: A Media History*.<sup>2</sup> For mere pennies, an American Sunday edition was “more than a newspaper and better than a magazine.”<sup>3</sup> The word *better* flagged how turn-of-the-century newspapers were competing with magazines, movies, and other media for the mass public's imagination, but *more* signaled how the Sunday paper provided an excess in both form and content beyond weekday news reading, incorporating an experience (or several at once) more akin to the weekly or monthly routines of magazines. “Instead of paying twenty-five cents for a magazine, ten cents for a comic weekly and five cents for a newspaper, making a total of forty cents in all,” explained the leading New York paper, “get the three combined for five cents in *The Sunday World*.”<sup>4</sup> The Sunday paper truly had an ability to mobilize all the new forms of media, and modernity itself, as it unfolded. This chapter weighs its intersection with movie magazines.

In the 1890s, many US newspapers began to include lithographed posters and song sheets in their Sunday editions, as well as printed items like cardboard or paper cutout toys and fashion dolls. In the first years of the 1900s, syndicated color funny pages and fine paperbound and stapled syndicated magazines became a standard weekly part of dozens of metropolitan Sunday papers. In the 1920s and '30s, some of these newspaper supplements became movie fan magazines, as I will shortly recount in detail. Those of us who specialize in cinema's use of newspaper publicity, like myself and Richard Abel, have not engaged much with scholars from fan studies who know movie magazines best and who have in turn steered clear of Sunday magazine supplements.<sup>5</sup> This has left a small but important class of newspaper-magazines neglected. These were not simply bannered pages or sections of the paper; these were true magazines with their own titles that contained much more than Hollywood gossip columns and local theater advertising. Let me be clear: my point is to bring awareness to them, not to overinflate their significance. There are few enough examples of this hybrid, intermedial form—both fan magazine and newspaper section—that each one had its own unique relation to Hollywood and therefore only an idiosyncratic relation to the well-known canonical list of fan magazines. Nonetheless, they merit greater familiarity *as fan magazines*, and this brief overview flags them for inclusion in

the genre as important supplements to the periodicals catalogued and collected by the MHDL.

Hollywood studios, local movie theaters, and newspapers were tightly bound by mutually beneficial publicity and advertising. Expanded entertainment reporting increased news circulation in tandem with the popularity of moviegoing. Sometimes, in the pursuit of greater circulation, journalists and publishers would cross the line into muckraking celebrity gossip or moral castigation against the movies. One such moment in 1934, discussed in some detail below, spurred entire cities' exhibitors to boycott newspapers by withdrawing their advertising columns. Even in that exceptional case, however, theater owners had to weigh losses ascribed to public distaste for scandal against slowed box office due to missing advertising columns. As I have chronicled elsewhere, newspapers' movie directories followed a "paternal logic of mass consumption," providing a degree of "insurance against time wasted at a disappointing show."<sup>6</sup>

Between 1910 and 1914, the film business forged key partnerships with newspapers that were as important as the emerging class of fan magazines for the establishment of the industry. Movie news became an especially prominent and enduring part of the Sunday paper, where syndicated supplements allowed advertising campaigns and illustrated features to reach the entire national market. Such facets of fan magazines as motion picture stories, gossip columns, photos of film scenes, and posters of movie stars also became regular Sunday newspaper content. By November 1911, the *Cleveland Leader* had started a bannered page of news of "Photo-Plays and Players," edited by Ralph Stoddard, while a column "In the Moving Picture World" was pseudonymously penned by the Reel Observer (Gene Morgan) in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>7</sup> But the novelty was not limited to major metropolitan locations. A few months earlier in September 1911, Benjamin S. Gross, a budding local journalist for the *News* in Birmingham, Alabama (later radio editor at the *New York Daily News*), was briefly granted space for a weekly "Motion Picture Department." His columns stemmed from experience writing scenarios for Edison, Vitagraph, and Biograph, drawing upon insiders' knowledge that allowed him an unusually early use of the phrase "picture gossip" as the hook for his readers.<sup>8</sup>

Women film journalists were perhaps even more common, as Richard Abel's *Movie Mavens* compiles. An early example was Gertrude M. Price's column "The Movies" for the Scripps-McRae League of newspapers beginning in November 1912.<sup>9</sup> Price's expertise provided newspaper readers, who were also moviegoers, with the knowledge they needed to become *expert* moviegoers, skilled enthusiasts: "Read the first 'movie' story in today's paper—and keep your eyes open right along for the appearance of Your Favorites."<sup>10</sup> The call to read about the movies *first* in the paper before going to see them would be the central trope of metropolitan newspapers' embrace of the film industry. The link between newspapers' film columns and "movie-struck girls" was entrenched in 1914 when serial film stories began.<sup>11</sup> First to have wide syndication was Thanhouser Film Corporation's

*Adventures of Kathlyn*, accompanied by stories in a wide swath of newspapers across North America: the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Sun*, and dozens of others in smaller markets.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1914, hardly any metropolitan newspaper on the continent remained on the sidelines for the serial film craze in its first few faddish years.

In exactly these years, North American Sunday newspapers began also to include rotogravure sections of high-quality, full-toned photographs printed on high-gloss magazine paper. The public of film fans couldn't get enough pictures of its movie stars, and movie star photographs were as central to rotogravure sections as any other kind of picture, but the new printing technique was often used to circulate souvenir posters of movie stars, too. For a few months starting in February 1915, the *Chicago Tribune* offered "two big smashes," pairing an eight-page tabloid rotogravure weekly with a keepsake, "a photograph of one of the greatest motion picture stars, printed on the same Rotogravure Press, but printed by itself, on special paper, ready for framing."<sup>13</sup> Francis X. Bushman and Mary Pickford were among the first portraits (see figure 5.1). In June 1916, the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, for example, offered a poster of Theda Bara: "8 by 11 inches in size, loose in the folds of an inside section. . . . You can frame them and have a gallery of beautiful young women of the screen."<sup>14</sup> In May 1917, the *Chicago Tribune* again turned to movie stars as an anchor for its rotogravure section, where one full-page photograph of Charlie Chaplin filled the back page of the supplement, doubling as a poster. It proclaimed, "The movie stars are coming! . . . The movie stars will come to you—regularly, each Sunday—in your own home . . . handsome rotogravure portraits of your own movie favorites."<sup>15</sup>

To respond to the demands of newspaper-reading fans, between 1915 and 1917, several newspapers expanded their movie news and publicity to create special Sunday sections, heavily illustrated with magazine-style covers.<sup>16</sup> These supplements typically collected existing gossip columns, gravure portraits, serial stories, and local advertising, and were sometimes formatted tabloid-size to create a magazine experience. The *New York Evening Mail* began publishing the *Motion Picture Mail* in September 1915, "a Real Live Motion Picture Magazine . . . News pictures from all corners of the early by 'movie men.' Personalities of producers, stars, and writers. Up to the minute news about the moving picture world."<sup>17</sup> Since the *Mail* did not publish a Sunday edition, the movie magazine was offered at an extra cost of five cents with *any* daily edition of the paper. The additional cost permitted relatively lavish use of rotogravure process for the entire publication. "The New Photogravure *Motion Picture Mail* surpasses everything in beauty and news. Soft, brilliant, novel. Out to-morrow. Full-page portraits of beautiful motion picture stars, character pictures, personalities, and interesting special articles about the people of the films."<sup>18</sup>

Other papers followed the lead with free Sunday movie magazine supplements, sometimes in color, sometimes tabloid size. In Cleveland, the "Motion Picture



FIGURE 5.1. Mary Pickford rotogravure supplement, *Chicago Tribune*, February 28, 1915.

Leader” was a “magazine supplement to the *Leader* devoted entirely to the movies and movie people.”<sup>19</sup> In Chicago, Louella Parsons’s gossip columns anchored the *Herald*’s eight-page tabloid “Motion Pictures” magazine.<sup>20</sup> Publicity in St. Louis showed “Virginia Pearson, the famous motion picture star, reading her favorite newspaper, the *Sunday Globe-Democrat*. She likes it best because of the wonderful

pictures, bright stories, and up-to-the-minute news of the film world.”<sup>21</sup> In New Orleans, the “Moving Picture Item,” circulated free with the *Sunday Item*, spanned “8 Pages—56 Columns—Beautiful Pictures of Stars—ALL the Screen News and Views—Local & National.”<sup>22</sup> In the smaller city of Dayton, Ohio, Mabel Brown Martin edited the tabloid supplement “Motion Picture News,” included with the *News*, mixing the “latest developments, present activities and future events” both nationally and locally.<sup>23</sup> This garnered appreciation from a national film trade paper, which marveled at the “eight-page motion picture supplement issued Sundays by the *Dayton News*. An entire section devoted to nothing but picture news and advertising. Do you get that? And in a city by no means one of the country’s largest.”<sup>24</sup>

To be clear, general-interest magazine supplements had been offered in many Sunday papers for more than two decades already. Magazines of various sorts and sizes had been folded into the sections of North American Sunday newspapers since 1890, when the *New York Morning Journal* began including a quarto-size “complete novel” insert. Throughout the 1890s, all variety of “Junior Journal” and “Comic Weekly” supplements were inserted in metropolitan Sunday papers in more than a dozen cities across the US. By the late 1890s, several New York newspapers—the *Times*, the *Tribune*, the *Mail and Express*—began inserting “true” magazine supplements, stapled and printed in halftone on fine paper. Syndicated versions of these Sunday magazines proliferated between 1903 and 1912, so that nearly every major paper in the US (and not a few minor papers) offered a weekly magazine free with the purchase of every weekend edition. The first syndicated version, Associated Sunday Magazines, was published by Joseph P. Knapp’s American Lithographic Company, which dominated the market in color printing after amalgamating competitors in the 1890s. Identical magazines, exactly alike except for the mastheads of the papers, were inserted into the *Boston Post*, the *St. Louis Republic*, and a dozen others. Combined circulation exceeded four million copies weekly in 1907, about four times more copies than even the most popular magazines of the day. Syndicated magazines (and their advertisers) had the potential to reach every home in the US, almost simultaneously, every weekend, approximating the immediacy and range of later network radio broadcasting—at least on Sunday mornings.

Given the flurry of activity with rotogravure sections, movie magazine supplements, and syndicated moving picture stories, somebody was bound to attempt a combination of all those features—a syndicated, rotogravure Sunday fan magazine supplement. The new venture came in 1920 with *Motion-Play Magazine*, an expanded, syndicated expansion of a movie-themed rotogravure section that originated at the *Philadelphia Record* in 1919. It was, as stated in *Printer’s Ink*, “The First Rotogravure Section With an Idea! The *Philadelphia Record Motion-Play Magazine*. A complete magazine devoted exclusively to pictures and news of screen players and plays. In rich sepia rotogravure.”<sup>25</sup> While relatively short lived

(the movie features were folded into a general magazine in 1922), the magazine was a partnership between the Alco Gravure Company and distributor National Gravure Circuit Inc., which was soon reorganized as the Gravure Service Corporation.<sup>26</sup> As its name indicates, “A.L. Co.” Gravure was yet another outgrowth of the American Lithographic Company, which was never too far off stage when novelty Sunday supplements were introduced. The venture followed its forays into poster art supplements and magazine sections. This specific division was headed by G. H. Buek, who had pioneered cutout paper-doll supplements back in 1895. Alco Gravure were printers of magazines such as *Woman’s Home Companion* and rotogravure sections such as that in the *Indianapolis Star* (figure 5.2).

*Motion-Play Magazine* was one of many magazines for movie fans, but this one was unique by virtue of being a newspaper supplement distributed free with such Sunday papers as the *Washington Herald* and the *Indianapolis Star*, along with a half-dozen others in the Midwest and Northeast. Alco Gravure took the established *Motion-Play Magazine* from the *Philadelphia Record* and sold it wholesale as a syndicated supplement to papers of relatively modest circulation in midsize cities that could not otherwise afford to print their own pictorial section. In 1920, the hook of a movie fan magazine was a bonus novelty for news publishers to attract new readers—especially for papers in second-tier cities that did not already have a glossy entertainment section. Syndication tapped into economies of scale and lowered costs to make a glossy entertainment section affordable, licensing big-city metropolitan content and form with the added bonus of nationally networked advertising reach. A trade ad in *Editor and Publisher* suggested that local papers should “add the strength of Gravure, the recognized Circulation Builder, to your Sunday Edition. . . . The *Motion-Play Magazine*, used by Seven Big Newspapers for over seven months is an eight-page tabloid printed in Rotogravure.”<sup>27</sup> By 1920, movies were a major draw for mass readership and *Motion-Play* provided what the public wanted: “Its general make-up insures popular reading reception because it features Motion Pictures, Plays, Stars and Fashions—a combination of editorial subjects that appeal to the majority. Eighteen Million tickets sold daily to Motion Picture Fans.”<sup>28</sup>

*Motion-Play* had a fair amount of advertising—a total of about one of its eight pages—and the company attempted to appeal to makers of national products, as if they would be purchasing a spot in a syndicated magazine rather than a single newspaper: “Rotogravure sections of newspapers give national advertisers the equivalent of magazine attention value and fine printing, with the flexibility of usage, timeliness, dealer influence and local concentration of newspapers—at the lowest cost.”<sup>29</sup> Circulation reached nearly six hundred thousand by the end of 1921.<sup>30</sup> While this was a modest result compared to syndicated color comics, it gave *Motion-Play* a higher circulation than any fan magazine in the 1920s. In terms of its format, *Motion-Play* was comparable to a tabloid rotogravure section, a step beyond the earlier movie star posters rather than a fulsome magazine. Its slim

# THE INDIANAPOLIS SUNDAY STAR.

ROTAGRAVURE  
SECTION  
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## MOTION-PLAY MAGAZINE

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.  
NOVEMBER 20  
1921



### A LITTLE SONG OF THANKSGIVING

As a bird song, full, free, ingenuous, our thanks be given. For all the fine things of life, beauty, goodness and truth, for Art that makes these manifest, for all the cultural as well as material gifts and for the solace of friendship we join in gratitude.

FIGURE 5.2. *Motion-Play Magazine* rotogravure supplement, *The Indianapolis Sunday Star*, November 20, 1921.

eight pages certainly did not require staples or a glued spine. Nonetheless, its layout and content fit the form of other fan magazines of its day—a full-page poster cover of a movie star and other “portraits of the foremost cinema stars, together with interesting gossip about them and their work.”<sup>31</sup>

*Motion-Play* was presented as “a complete and fascinating moving picture entertainment” in its own right, intended “for all members of the family.”<sup>32</sup> When the supplement was launched in Indianapolis, Washington, and Omaha, the logic was spelled out for newspaper readers, asking them to think of themselves as part of the mass of moviegoers nationwide. “Are you a star gazer?—in other words, are you one of approximately 35,000,000 movie lovers who are said to live in the United States?”<sup>33</sup> In Omaha, as in Indianapolis and Washington, DC, Sunday papers would offer “a delightful treat, a special surprise, a novel innovation . . . in a series of specially photographed views, enlivened by scintillating captions . . . scenes from all the newest film productions with special personal glimpses of the home life, social activities and daily diversions of famous stars and near-stars of Filmland.”<sup>34</sup>

Just as *Motion-Play* ended its run, the *Los Angeles Times* launched another pictorial, tabloid-size newspaper-magazine to corral its existing film industry material and expand its coverage to take stewardship of news about Hollywood, published close to home. In June 1923, the *Times* announced the *Pre-View* was coming, a weekly tabloid magazine that “will deal with motion pictures, Los Angeles’s greatest industry, in a manner never before attempted by any magazine or newspaper. The *Pre-View*, which will be printed in rotogravure, will present an authoritative digest of the activities of the motion-picture producers here, and will be the first publication of its kind issued in the place where 90 per cent of all motion pictures are made. The *Pre-View* will be profusely illustrated and will be designed to inform and interest producers, exhibitors, exchanges and film patrons everywhere.”<sup>35</sup>

The *Times* defended the new venture for “departing somewhat from the sphere of a newspaper” and explained away potential allegations of veering into puffery by explaining how a Los Angeles-based film magazine was “part of its obligation of service to the public, not only of Los Angeles and the Southwest, but to the entire country. There are scores of film magazines, but 90 per cent of them are published in New York,” whereas the *Pre-View* would be written and edited in Hollywood by Hallett Abend, “intimately associated with the industry [but] who is not of it. Mr. Abend’s reviews of forthcoming releases will be written with the single purpose of telling the truth, expertly seen. In the end, it is the truth, uncolored by any extraneous consideration, which will best serve the public, the exhibitor, the producer, the actor and the industry as a whole.”<sup>36</sup>

The *Pre-View* “weekly film magazine section” was sold on its own for ten cents on newsstands, or included for free to subscribers of the *Times*, a smart option given the likely appeal to such a wide swath of public, business, and film industry players across Los Angeles.<sup>37</sup> It was issued every Wednesday for its first two years, becoming a Sunday broadsheet rotogravure section in 1925 that lasted until 1932.

“Printed in the film capital of the world, the *Pre-View* is unique among newspaper supplements, furnishing a weekly pictorial trip through the strange and fascinating realm of screenland,” the *Times* said in its announcement.<sup>38</sup> The *Pre-View* was such a success for the *Times* that it created a hefty souvenir special edition, *Annual Pre-View of the Motion Picture Industry*, in 1927.<sup>39</sup> The *Annual Pre-View* actually continued for many years as a special supplement to the *Times*, edited by Edwin Shallert for its entire quarter-century existence.<sup>40</sup>

Another byline in the *Los Angeles Times* in the 1920s was that of Grace Wilcox, an occasional writer of features who was also connected to Hollywood players. She had spent time in the 1910s working in the publicity departments at Mutual and Universal, then wrote for the *Los Angeles Express* in the late 1910s, *It Magazine* in the early 1920s, and the *Los Angeles Times* in the late 1920s, and again turned attention to the movies in the late 1920s, writing screenplays for Anna May Wong. It was newsworthy in May 1929 that Wilcox was in Europe with Wong when Wilcox’s husband, financier George Dietz, died back in California.<sup>41</sup> Born Edith Grace Wilcox and raised in Michigan, her bylines also often used her married name, Edith Dietz. She kept ties to Michigan, and her brother-in-law, Douglas Martin, was editor of the Sunday feature section at the *Detroit Free Press* in the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> This laid the groundwork for Wilcox to front another nationally syndicated movie fan newspaper-magazine.

*Screen & Radio Weekly* was launched by the *Detroit Free Press* in April 1934 and published until 1940. The sixteen-page tabloid magazine was printed in bold color blocking, featuring rainbow-bright portraits of movie stars on its front and back covers (see figure 5.3). There are indications it was available as a magazine in its own right, not only as a newspaper supplement. The first issues initially indicated that the magazine was available separately for “five cents on all news stands. Free with every *Sunday Free Press*.” The Sunday supplement offered “tasty morsels of Hollywood gossip, fashions from movieland and inside stories of radio and screen. . . . To each reader will be given an intimate study of the famous stars that grace America’s screen, radio personalities that provide entertainment daily.”<sup>43</sup> The weekly supplement was packed with illustrated features about movies and radio and all the entertainment stars of the 1930s. This Sunday movie fan magazine supplement was soon syndicated to dozens more newspapers across the entire United States.<sup>44</sup> Standardized advertising accompanied each paper’s launch of the new feature, repeating the publicity lines first published in Detroit in April 1934: “Popping over with hot news snatched from in front of the whirring cameras of Hollywood and the buzzing microphones of radioland, this new *Screen and Radio Weekly* will give you a week-end of gala reading enjoyment. Not just ‘another section,’ but a full size tabloid in brilliant colors and breezy pictorial, FREE with your *Sunday Free Press*,” or *Sunday Oakland Tribune*, or *Sunday Democrat and Chronicle*, or whichever location the novelty began in, separated by months and thousands of miles across the entire United States.<sup>45</sup>



FIGURE 5.3. *Screen & Radio Weekly* supplement, *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1934.

Over its six years of publication,<sup>46</sup> *Screen & Radio Weekly* was included in at least thirty-two papers, at least fifteen concurrently in 1937.<sup>47</sup> I estimate that its circulation approached 1.5 million copies weekly at the time, higher than *Photoplay's* mid-1950s watermark of 1.4 million.<sup>48</sup> The *Detroit Free Press* itself boasted this claim to celebrate the magazine's first anniversary. Alongside quotes from

congratulatory telegrams from Mae West, Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, James Cagney, and others, *Screen & Radio Weekly* was described as “an infant publication [that] has become the lustiest ‘adult’ of its kind on the American continent, for during the three hundred and sixty-five days of its existence, it has been honored with the Largest Circulation of Any Similar Publication in the United States.”<sup>49</sup>

Douglas Martin was editor and Grace Wilcox, his recently widowed sister-in-law, penned the main gossip column, “Hollywood Reporter” (apparently no relation to the fledgling magazine of the same name). Just before the first issue circulated with the *Detroit Free Press*, Wilcox introduced herself to readers as being from Michigan herself, noting that she “went to school and college there and think of it always as my home. Hollywood is my second home, and will never be anything more.”<sup>50</sup> She explained how all the big Hollywood studios were excited for the new magazine. “The opinion I hear expressed on every side is—‘A Sunday screen and radio magazine in colors—what a swell idea. It’s funny no one ever thought of that before.’ . . . After all, you see, it isn’t every screen magazine that starts with a circulation of a quarter of a million as ours does.”<sup>51</sup> Wilcox also colorfully boasted how she was personally welcomed—in the Hollywood cliché—to do lunch. “The studios take good care of your correspondent. . . . And how they feed me. It’s nothing for me to consume three luncheons a day; one at 11:30 at Paramount, another at RKO-Radio at 1:30, a snack at 3 at M-G-M’s restaurant and a substantial high tea with English kippers in Fox’s Café de Paris at 5 o’clock.”<sup>52</sup>

The Sunday fan magazine promoted itself as “written in newsy, breezy style by writers who are behind the scenes in Hollywood and the big radio studios.”<sup>53</sup> Besides the regular gossip column and features by Grace Wilcox (also writing weekly stories under her married name, Edith Dietz), the early years of *Screen & Radio Weekly* had a radio column, “They Tell Me,” by Bernes Robert (succeeded by Jack Sher’s “New York Reporter” in 1937), “Previews of the New Films” by Whitney Williams (replaced by Clarke Wales’s “Reviews of the New Films” in 1936), a page of “Fashions” by Sara Day, and a page on “Beauty” by Grace Grandville. Like a miniature, weekly capsule of “Entertainment Plus,” the magazine promised “a parade of loveliness in portraits of lavish color, latest fashions. Home decorations and beauty talks by stars.”<sup>54</sup>

Another near-weekly reporter in the magazine’s first year was Douglas W. Churchill, formerly a contemporary of Wilcox’s in Los Angeles with the *Illustrated Daily News*. In September 1934, Churchill became Hollywood correspondent for the *New York Times*, but his gig for the *Detroit Free Press* began earlier that year, in May, from nearly the first issue of *Screen & Radio Weekly*. But the highlight of every issue was Wilcox’s “Hollywood Reporter” gossip column, “a sparkling page of last-minute news from the capital of filmland . . . as colorful as it is interesting and authentic.”<sup>55</sup> The subtitle of Wilcox’s column seemed to counter aspersions of salacious or prurient gossip with the notably defensive tagline, “Personal But Not Confidential,” which was kept for its entire six-year run (see figure 5.4).

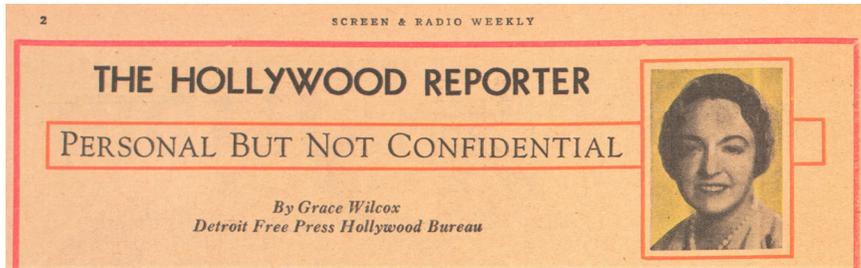


FIGURE 5.4. Grace Wilcox, “Hollywood Reporter,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1934.

Within a few months, other newspapers around the country began including copies of the color fan magazine with their own mastheads printed on the cover. To do this, the *Detroit Free Press* partnered with the Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate.<sup>56</sup> Out of its Midwest headquarters, the *Register and Tribune* had begun selling packages of comic strips, news pictures, and illustrated features in the 1920s, and was already largely focused on syndicating color comics and rotogravure material.<sup>57</sup> *Editor and Publisher* explained at the time how “increased demand for comic and magazine sections, both in color and black on white, has been tremendous. . . . Comic sections have risen from the class of non-revenue producing newspaper supplements until today they produce a very sizable revenue because of the success of color advertising.”<sup>58</sup> The economic constraints of the Great Depression, it was noted, meant “smaller home budgets for entertainment purposes and . . . greater demand for features and comics in Sunday issues.”<sup>59</sup> Since 1930, the Register and Tribune Syndicate, in particular, had introduced three new comic pages and a photo service for rotogravure sections as well as *Screen & Radio Weekly*, “which has put on thousands of circulation for its originator, *The Detroit Free Press*, and for other papers from coast to coast.”<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, *Screen & Radio Weekly* was just one of two Hollywood-focused syndicated features launched by the Iowa syndicate at the same time in 1934. The Des Moines paper’s own Sunday magazine editor, Vernon Pope, had reportedly gained access to multiple studios’ historic photo files, under the pretense of writing a nostalgic look back at the history of movie stars and moviemaking. Instead, when the series began in the July 1934 pictorial section, it had the lascivious heading “Hollywood Unvarnished” or “Hollywood Unmasked.”<sup>61</sup> The double-page layout was widely syndicated in major Sunday rotogravure sections across the country in the fall of 1934: “Pictures the Stars Don’t Want Published!”<sup>62</sup> Instead of paying homage to the movies, the feature focused on unflattering pictures, gossip about divorce, and revealing how the magic of makeup, sets, and trick photography covered up flaws and created fantasies. “Does your favorite Hollywood Star have . . . a double chin? bow legs? flat chest? . . . the truth without bunk from Hollywood publicity agents.”<sup>63</sup>

If the intent was to piggyback on the escalating controversy surrounding the introduction of the Production Code at the time, “Hollywood Unvarnished” backfired for many of the papers that ran it. In some local newspaper markets, the column sparked hostility from exhibitors, who organized boycotts and pulled advertising from the *Boston Globe* and led a protest against the *Kansas City Journal-Post*.<sup>64</sup> The fiasco allowed the competing *Kansas City Star* to announce “a policy of cooperation with the industry,” starting its own syndicated feature, “Unreeling Hollywood,” which celebrated the fantasy of the movies rather than unmasking it.<sup>65</sup> The acrimony between the studios, exhibitors, and various local papers did not quickly subside and spearheaded exhibitors’ local protests against unflattering news and scandal columns. Writing for *Editor and Publisher*, Douglas Churchill reported in 1935 how Sidney Skolsky’s “Hollywood” column in the *New York Daily News* was accused of having “destroyed the illusion of the screen,” leading to advertising boycotts in Boston and Detroit against other papers printing it. According to Churchill, the film industry had determined in 1934 “to impose censorship on news emanating from Hollywood[,] . . . the lid was clamped on fan magazines and since then no stories have appeared without submission to and approval by studios.”<sup>66</sup> Against the “anti-press faction [who] have consistently argued that the credentials of those who treat the business with candor should be revoked,” Churchill held up the success story of his own alma mater, *Screen & Radio Weekly*: “The nation’s readers have an acute interest in the cinema. . . . It is now being syndicated to a score of papers,” and had helped the *Detroit Free Press* increase Sunday circulation by forty-four thousand—perhaps 20 percent or more.<sup>67</sup> “Hollywood recognizes and is liberal in praising this act for it is declared that it has not only been good for the paper but has stimulated interest in pictures and theatre attendance,” Churchill wrote.<sup>68</sup> Of course, Churchill himself had been a weekly contributor to *Screen & Radio Weekly* for that entire first year—and a big part of its success, although he did not mention it in the article; only his current position at the *New York Times* was noted under his byline.

Many early syndicated versions of *Screen & Radio Weekly* followed a week behind the Detroit “original” version, but, when the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* added the supplement in April 1935, it was day-and-date identical with that of the *Free Press*, as were those of later adopters like the *Miami Herald*. Some syndicated publishers of *Screen & Radio Weekly* adapted the material—and even the format—to fit their own local purposes. The *Oakland Tribune* was an early adopter in November 1934 but spotlighted its own film correspondent, Wood Soanes, while the *Atlanta Constitution* featured its crossword and bridge columns in the magazine. The *Brooklyn Times-Union* and *South Bend Tribune*, on the other hand, had only eight-page abridged copies instead of the full sixteen-page *Free Press* version (see figure 5.5). The *Dayton Herald* issued it on Wednesdays as a “Mid-Week Screen and Radio Magazine.”<sup>69</sup> Some of the papers used its content for weekly programs on radio stations they owned and operated—these included



FIGURE 5.5. *Screen & Radio Weekly* supplement, *South Bend Tribune*, June 25, 1939.

WTMJ, the *Milwaukee Journal* station, and the *Oakland Tribune's* KLX.<sup>70</sup> In Oakland, the *Tribune's* adapted version of the supplement even had its radio page authored under the pseudonym “K. L. Ecksan.”

But why would 1934 be a good moment to start a newspaper-based fan magazine in the first place? To start, as is well known, the Hays Office Production

Code had finally settled into its oversight of risqué content by 1934, after the first few notorious years of talking pictures known as the “pre-code” era.<sup>71</sup> Specific to fan magazines, a slump in circulation had taken hold with the Great Depression. For example, there was a turn to cheaper titles distributed through five-and-dime stores instead of costly subscriptions—the ten-cent upstart *Modern Screen* had just overtaken the “thoroughly middle-class” twenty-five-cent *Photoplay* as the highest-circulation fan magazine.<sup>72</sup> *Screen & Radio Weekly* also began the same time as the *Hollywood Reporter* spotlighted the “flop” of subscriptions and ad sales in fan magazines generally. As Tamar Jeffers McDonald notes, the *Hollywood Reporter*’s “Reviewing the Fan Mags” column had just declared falling circulation was because a “low level” of gossip-mongering was the standard roster.<sup>73</sup> True enough, when the same syndicate that distributed *Screen & Radio Weekly* concurrently launched its own tawdry series, “Hollywood Unvarnished,” it backfired, as I reviewed above. Perhaps the *Detroit Free Press* thought its color magazine would attract major brand advertisers? Early issues had half-page ads from Lever Brothers for Rinso and Lifebuoy, but later issues of *Screen & Radio Weekly* ended up practically ad-free except for small items on its fan mail page. Certainly, an important factor was the Depression, which had eaten into household budgets, both for going out to the movies and for buying magazines—a cheap, free Sunday supplement would have seemed a bargain to provide a glimpse at the movie stars, even compared to one of the new cheaper, dime-priced fan magazines.

Let me briefly revisit my opening question to conclude: Does *Screen & Radio Weekly* fall within the definition of a magazine? Is it more than a newspaper section? In Tim Holmes’s efforts at “mapping the magazine,” he relies on the distinction that “the unique function of magazines, rather than newspapers or the broadcast media, [is] to bring high-value interpretive information to specifically defined yet national audiences.”<sup>74</sup> For Holmes, “a magazine will always target a precisely defined group of readers and will base its content on the needs, desires, hopes and fears of that defined group, thus creating a bond of trust with their readerships.”<sup>75</sup> Within that definition, the Sunday movie fan newspaper supplement was indeed a magazine precisely because its focus was the stars of screen and radio—not a collection of topical miscellany and general interest, nor an entertainment section with local advertising and a directory of nearby showtimes. The hybrid form and distribution—a magazine on its own, but normally circulated only with the paper—is a useful case to illustrate the need to interrogate accepted categories for our units of methodological analysis as media historians. Print ephemera and periodicals exist in a wide variety, sometimes resisting neat categorization into the usual pigeonholes. While the typical boundaries among journal, magazine, and newspaper are reliable, they are always contextual categories without firm ontological distinctions. In that sense, valorizing the newspaper fan supplement as also a magazine is a step toward justifying a swath of other print forms of periodicals in the MHD. Yearbooks, newsletters, catalogs, annuals,

pressbooks, circulars, pamphlets—all of those forms sit in the gray zone outside the clear definitions of magazines and books. None would be classified in an archive as a unique, one-of-a-kind document, even if only a single copy remained. Unsurprisingly, the MHDL already includes all of these, and more.

## NOTES

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2. Paul [S.] Moore and Sandra Gabriele, *The Sunday Paper: A Media History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022).
3. “The Literary Features,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, October 31, 1891, 12.
4. “The Sunday World,” *New York World*, August 8, 1896, 16.
5. Richard Abel, *Menus for Movieland: Newspapers and the Emergence of American Film Culture, 1913–1916* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Paul S. Moore, “Subscribing to Publicity: Syndicated Newspaper Features for Moviegoing in North America, 1911–15,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12, no. 2 (2014): 260–73.
6. Paul S. Moore, “‘It Pays to Plan ‘Em’: The Newspaper Movie Directory and the Paternal Logic of Mass Consumption,” in *Companion to New Cinema History*, ed. Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, 365–77 (New York: Routledge, 2019).
7. Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and Movie-Mad Audiences, 1910–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
8. Benjamin S. Gross, “Motion Picture Department,” *Birmingham News*, September 9, 1911, 15; September 23, 1911, 15; and September 23, 1911, 14. “Bright Birmingham Boy,” *Birmingham News*, July 8, 1911, 12, which claimed “he has made some hundreds of dollars writing moving picture stories for the Edison, Vitagraph and Biograph company.” See also “Ben Gross, Radio-TV’s Best Ear, Dead at 87,” *New York Daily News*, August 15, 1979, 47.
9. Abel, *Americanizing the Movies*, 223–26; Duane C. S. Stoltzfus, *Freedom from Advertising: E. W. Scripps’s Chicago Experiment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). See also Richard Abel, ed., *Movie Mavens: US Newspaper Women Take on the Movies, 1914–1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).
10. “Oh, There’s That Smiley Golden-Haired Girl Again,” *Sacramento (CA) Star*, November 18, 1912, 1, and others.
11. Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
12. Ilka Brasch, *Operational Detection: Film Serials and the American Cinema, 1910–1940* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Josh Lambert, “Wait for the Next Pictures: Intertextuality and Cliffhanger Continuity in Early Cinema and Comic Strips,” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 2 (2009): 3–25. Of course, radio serials continued in similar fashion in later years. Anne F. MacLennan, “Women, Radio, and the Depression: A ‘Captive’ Audience from Households to Story Time and Serials,” *Women’s Studies* 37, no. 6 (2008): 616–33. See also Roger Hagedorn, “Doubtless to Be Continued: A Brief History of Serial Narrative,” in Robert C. Allen, ed., *To Be Continued . . . : Soap Operas around the World*, 27–48 (New York: Routledge, 1995).
13. “Two Big Smashes,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 28, 1915, 12.
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15. “The Movie Stars Are Coming!,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1917, VII–11.
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17. “Motion Picture Mail,” *New York Sun*, September 6, 1915, 9.

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20. Louella O. Parsons, "Girls Win Screen Place and Big Future as Film Contenders," *Chicago Herald*, Motion Pictures, October 8, 1916, VII-1.
21. "Here Is Virginia Pearson," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 2, 1916, 10; "The World a Movie Pageant," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Motion Picture Section, May 7, 1916, 1.
22. "The Moving Picture Item," *New Orleans Item*, October 29, 1916, II-16.
23. "Motion Picture News," *Dayton News*, November 26, 1915, 26.
24. "News' Enterprise Commented on by Big Eastern Publication," *Dayton News*, December 22, 1915, 8, quoting "Live Wire Exhibitors," *Motion Picture News*, December 25, 1915, 73.
25. "The Philadelphia Record," *Printers' Ink*, May 1, 1919, 115.
26. "Rotogravure Companies Merge," *Editor and Publisher*, June 26, 1920, 18. The restructuring of the company sparked a lawsuit by the advertising manager, working on commission. See Lynn S. Abbott, Respondent, v. National Gravure Circuit, Inc., Gravure Service Corporation and Alco Gravure Printing Company, Appellants. Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, First Division, February 10, 1922.
27. "The Motion-Play Magazine," *Editor and Publisher*, April 30, 1921, 80.
28. *Ibid.*
29. "Motion-Play Magazine," *Printers' Ink*, February 16, 1922, 142.
30. "Motion-Play Magazine," *Printers' Ink*, December 8, 1921, 138.
31. "Gaze upon Stars in Sunday Star's Movie Supplement," *Indianapolis Star*, October 26, 1920.
32. "Something Very Special," *Indianapolis Star*, October 24, 1920, 12; also *Omaha World-Herald*, October 31, 1920, E-9; *Washington Herald*, November 8, 1920, 6.
33. "Gaze upon Stars in Sunday Star's Movie Supplement," *Indianapolis Star*, October 26, 1920.
34. "Something Very Special," *Indianapolis Star*, October 24, 1920, 12; also *Omaha World-Herald*, October 31, 1920, E-9; *Washington Herald*, November 8, 1920, 6.
35. "The 'Pre-View' Coming," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1923, 1.
36. "The Pre-View Announcement," *Los Angeles Times*, *Pre-View Magazine*, July 18, 1923, 3. Hallett Abend became Shanghai correspondent of the *New York Times* in 1927 and spent more than a decade in China as a reporter.
37. "The 'Pre-View' Out Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1923, 17.
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39. "Has the Motion Picture Created a Universal Language?," *Los Angeles Times*, *Pre-View Section*, April 3, 1927, 6.
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43. "Sunday D. & C. Readers Given New Feature," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, April 12, 1935, 20.
44. "12 Newspapers Now Using Screen-Radio Supplement," *Film Daily*, October 25, 1934, 10.
45. "Here It Is!," *Detroit Free Press*, April 27, 1934, 9; "Here It Is!," *Oakland Tribune*, October 24, 1934, 11; "Here It Is!," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, April 15, 1935, 6.
46. Edwin Fisher Forbes, "Newspapers: Detroit," *Writer's Digest*, July 1940, 36.
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50. "Goes behind Scenes in Filmland," *Detroit Free Press*, April 28, 1934, 3.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. "Who Are Radio's Four Matinee Idols?," *South Bend Tribune*, December 3, 1936, 12.
54. "Here It Is!," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 10, 1935, 4.
55. "Bing Crosby, His Life Story," *Detroit Free Press*, May 5, 1934, 8.
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59. *Ibid.*
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68. Churchill, "Hollywood Fighting Picture Censors," 5.
69. "New Supplement Part of *The Herald* Every Wednesday," *Dayton Herald*, July 20, 1934, 21.
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72. "Big Fan Magazine Drop," *Hollywood Reporter*, May 25, 1933, 1; Sarah Polley, "A Spectrum of Individuals: U.S. Fan Magazine Circulation Figures from 1914 to 1965," in *Star Attractions: Twentieth-Century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom*, ed. Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman, 61-80 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019). On the contrast between *Photoplay* and the cheap alternatives, see Anne Helen Petersen, "The Politics of Fan Magazine Research," *In Media Res*, November 13, 2013, <http://mediacommons.org/imr/2013/11/04/politics-fan-magazine-research>.
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