



# THE HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION

# NEWSBOY



*Horatio Alger, Jr.*

1832 — 1899

A magazine devoted to the study of Horatio Alger, Jr.,  
his life, works, and influence on the culture of America.

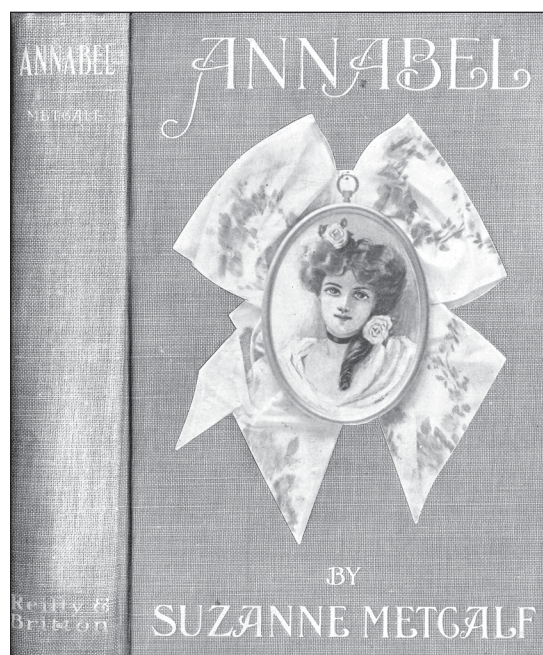
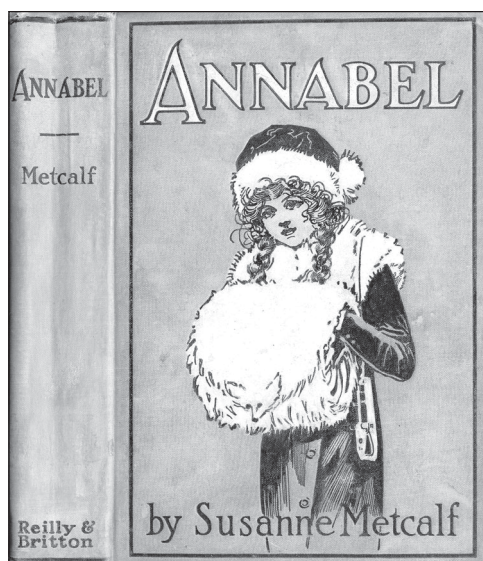
VOLUME XLVI

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2008

NUMBER 5

## Odd One Out

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## President's column

As we enter the season of snow and ice in the Northeast I am reminded of the things to be grateful for. We are thankful for our family and friends, including our Horatio Alger Society friends.

I was recently asked what my goals and objectives were for the coming two years.

I guess mine are about the same as those who have gone before me. I would hope to maintain and hopefully increase our membership, but you cannot force someone to join any organization. To join our Society one must have to have an interest in collecting Alger and other youth books.

We can, however, provide them with an interesting and informative **Newsboy** publication six times a year. I believe our editor, Bill Gowen, has done and continues to do a remarkable job. I feel **Newsboy** is the stronghold of our society. It is what I continually look forward to.

Vivian and I recently returned from a weekend in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Each year, the Saturday nearest the 21st of November is "Remembrance Day." It is celebrated by day-long festivities, with the highlight being a gigantic parade starting in the middle of town and proceeding to the National Cemetery.

The several thousand participants, or as they are called, "re-enactors," are men, women and children of all ages. They are dressed in the authentic uniforms and costumes of that time. Included are fife and drum corps providing the period music. The first part of the parade has the Blue regiments followed by the Gray regiments.

We viewed the parade from across the street from The American Civil War Museum. President Lincoln and Mrs. Lincoln were introduced, as were confederate President Jefferson Davis and Mrs. Davis. The officers then stepped forward and introduced themselves. The first to do so was our next-door neighbor here in Maine, Don Van Hart, saying "Robert E. Lee, General." He made a very impressive general. President Lincoln later recited the Gettysburg Address.

It's not too early to start making your plans for our 2009 H.A.S. Convention in Charlottesville, Virginia, on April 30-May 3. This is a very historic part of our country. It might be a good time to expand your plans to include a visit to our nation's capital and possibly a side

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## HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

*To further the philosophy of Horatio Alger, Jr. and to encourage the spirit of Strive and Succeed that for half a century guided Alger's undaunted heroes — youngsters whose struggles epitomized the Great American Dream and inspired hero ideals in countless millions of young Americans for generations to come.*

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**Newsboy**, the official newsletter of the Horatio Alger Society, is published bi-monthly (six issues per year). Membership fee for any 12-month period is \$25 (\$20 for seniors), with single issues of **Newsboy** \$4.00. Please make remittance payable to the Horatio Alger Society.

Membership applications, renewals, changes of address and other correspondence should be sent to **Horatio Alger Society, P.O. Box 70361, Richmond, VA 23255.**

**Newsboy** is indexed in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography. You are invited to visit the Horatio Alger Society's official Internet site at **[www.thehoratioalgersociety.org](http://www.thehoratioalgersociety.org)**

**Newsboy** ad rates: Full page, \$32.00; one-half page, \$17.00; one-quarter page, \$9.00; per column inch (1 inch deep by approx. 3 1/2 inches wide), \$2.00. Send ads, with check payable to Horatio Alger Society, P.O. Box 70361, Richmond, VA 23255.

The above rates apply to all want ads, along with ads offering non-Alger books for sale. However, it is the policy of the Horatio Alger Society to promote the exchange of Alger books and related Alger materials by providing space **free of charge** to our members for the **sale only** of such material. Send ads or "Letters to the Editor" to **Newsboy** editor William R. Gowen (PF-706) at 23726 N. Overhill Dr., Lake Zurich, IL 60047. E-mail: [hasnewsboy@aol.com](mailto:hasnewsboy@aol.com)



# Odd One Out

*Annabel*; or, Suzanne Metcalf's  
unexpected homage  
to Horatio Alger

By Sean P. Duffley

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(First of two parts)

The August 11, 1906 issue of the trade journal *The Publishers' Weekly* included a notice and a full-page promotional item for two new books from the Reilly & Britton Company by two hitherto unknown authors that, the latter assured, were "to be thoroughly advertised during the fall trade season in leading newspapers and periodicals."

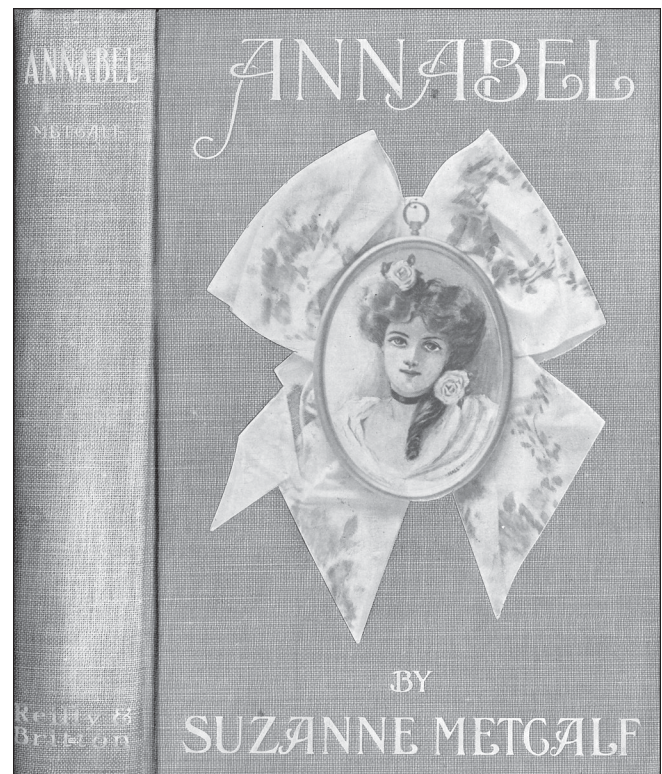
The first book, *Aunt Jane's Nieces* by Edith Van Dyne, was described as "a fascinating character story about real girls" and "the best girl's story to appear since 'Little Women.'" The second title, *Annabel* by Suzanne Metcalf, was billed as "the first novel for young folks." The blurb asserted that the book "breathes the purest thoughts and impulses of a girl blossoming into womanhood and portrays her gentle influence on the life of a struggling boy."<sup>1</sup>

Critics warmly received *Aunt Jane's Nieces*, which proved a financial success for author and publisher. Indeed, *Aunt Jane's Nieces* was the forerunner of a best-selling series that would ultimately span ten titles, one issued each year over the next decade.

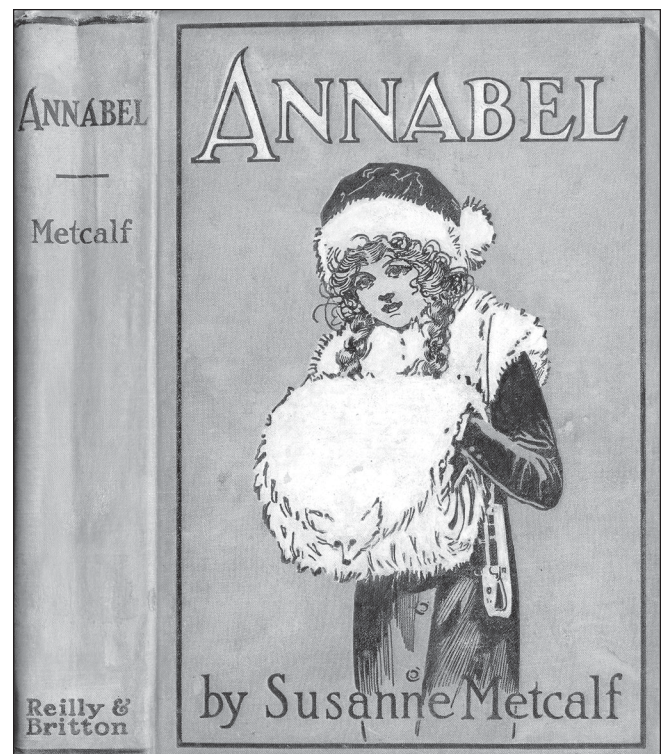
*Annabel*, on the other hand, apparently did not fare so well with critics, parents, or even youthful readers. A contemporary review from a major Chicago daily may provide some clues on the reasons for the failure of this work. The *Chicago Record-Herald's* critic found little to distinguish this "'first novel' ... from the less pretentious 'story' for girls" — making clear that notwithstanding its subtitle, the critic assumed the book was intended for girls.<sup>2</sup> The reviewer effectively dismissed *Annabel* as old-fashioned, likening its protagonist to something out of Horatio Alger, "such a hero as our grandmothers knew in books like [Alger's] *Up the Ladder*."

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An earlier version of this article appeared in the *International Wizard of Oz Club's* official journal, *The Baum Bugle* 51:1 (Spring 2007): 32. Reproduced with permission.



H. Putnam Hall's cover design for Reilly & Britton's 1906 first edition of *Annabel*.



Joseph Pierre Nyuttens provided a new cover and internal plates for the 1912 second edition.

Images courtesy Bill Thompson, for *The Baum Bugle*

## Editor's notebook

It was sad news indeed when I learned of the death of Edward T. LeBlanc (PF-015) on Sept. 29 at his Fall River, Massachusetts home at age 88. Of course, none in the series book and dime novel world ever addressed him as Edward — he was “Eddie” to all of us.

I was introduced to Eddie LeBlanc in the mid-1970s by fellow collector John Dizer, who first told me about **Dime Novel Round-Up**, of which LeBlanc was editor.

For the April and August 1979 issues, I provided Eddie with articles describing the formats for the Tom Swift and Tom Swift, Jr. Series. Eddie accepted my offer for writing the first of the two articles in a letter dated Oct. 7, 1978. His remarks included the following:



**Edward T. LeBlanc**

Reference is made to your letter of Sept. 27 regarding your becoming a member of the Dime Novel Round-Up and writing an article on Tom Swift.

The answer is yes to both. I've enrolled you as a member and am enclosing the latest issue. An article on the chronology of Tom Swift would be very much appreciated. There is no deadline for any article....

No doubt you realize that the Round-Up is not self-sustaining. I try to break even by manipulating the number of pages used and supplements issued in an attempt to break even. I hope you will accept two years subscription as gratis as a small recompense for your article.

I subsequently made several visits to Eddie's home on School Street in Fall River and went on to write an article on the Rover Boys Series for the Round-Up.

In the early days (starting in 1936, five years after the Round-Up's first issue) the magazine was printed in Lawrence, Kansas, by Miller Print Shop, until that business closed in the late 1980s, a run of 50-plus years.

“Harlan Miller could give you something without charging an arm and a leg,” said Randy Cox (PF-598), the current DNRU editor and publisher. “Miller did a number of other little hobby-oriented magazines. He

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## Letter of thanks from Mike Morley

Dear Partic'lar Friends:

I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support that I received from the H.A.S. following Janice's sudden death. Thank you all — I'm a fortunate man to have such friends.

Janice loved traveling to, and attending H.A.S. conventions. We always had a good time seeing new parts of the country and socializing with our new and old Partic'lar friends.

We were privileged and pleased to host the 2008 convention in our adopted home town, and this really was Janice's finest hour. She was an expert in handling organizational logistics and she really enjoyed putting on a party for all of you.

My sister and I held Janice's Remembrance at my family's house in Menlo Park, California on October 4th. I was expecting 30 attendees, but we got 60. Had to go out and get more food (Janice wanted a wake, so my sister and I made sure nobody went away hungry).

Rob Kasper made the trip from Virginia and stayed on afterward to get acquainted with my family. John A. Biberdorf (Bernie's brother) also attended. John is a grand gentleman, and his presence was very welcome. Alex Codeglia, our 2008 **Strive and Succeed Award** winner also attended. This is Alex's third major loss in two years, but he was more concerned about how I was holding up. Alex sends his regards to all of you that he met at the 2008 convention and reports that his classes are going well.

Thank you again for your love and support. My blessings to you all.

Best,  
Mike Morley (PF-934)  
1891 Colt Lane  
Gardnerville, NV 89410

## President's column

*(Continued from Page 2)*

trip to Gettysburg and other nearby battlefields if you are a Civil War buff. I am looking forward to a very eventful time, and we'll provide more convention information in the next issue of **Newsboy**.

Your Partic'lar Friend,  
Larry Rice (PF-757)  
P.O. Box 181  
36 Church Street  
Maine, NY 13802-0181  
E-mail: lrice5@stny.rr.com



# Odd One Out

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der." The reviewer then concluded with the blunt observation:

The young often show greater acumen in the reading of character than their elders. So we need have no fear that they will be hoodwinked into thinking this the real thing. They will discern the sham and shun it.<sup>3</sup>

The *Record-Herald's* prediction proved correct: unlike its *Aunt Jane's Nieces* contemporary, *Annabel* did not spawn a series and sales apparently were sufficient only to justify one immediate reprinting around 1907. In 1912, the publisher attempted a new edition, but thereafter *Annabel* faded into oblivion along with its author.

The *Record-Herald's* dismissal of *Annabel* as a "sham" was apt for several reasons. First, although this work ostensibly depicts the title character's "blossoming into womanhood," it actually centers on a humble boy hero named Will Carden, in whose story Annabel Williams is merely a supporting player. Secondly, then unknown to the public, author Suzanne Metcalf was none other than one of the many pseudonyms of Reilly & Britton's leading author, L. Frank Baum. And lastly, the peculiar disconnect between the publisher's ad campaign and the actual novel suggests that what Reilly & Britton received from Baum was not quite what they had envisioned. Indeed, *Annabel* represents the awkward marriage of a rags-to-riches story in the vein of Horatio Alger with a domestic drama of youthful courtship. *Annabel* suffers from its very schizophrenia: in trying to reach two distinct audiences, it failed to satisfy either.

## The not-quite-novel "First Novel for Young Folks"

The period 1905-1906 was a busy one for author Baum. By contract with Reilly & Britton dated October 1905, he had committed himself to a remarkable schedule of producing six different works (to be published under six different names so as not to compete with himself) in the span of some seven months. In particular, among the contemplated works was a "Novel for Young Folks, the title to be later determined on, but the authorship to be ascribed to Maud Gage Baum [L. Frank's wife], or to 'Helen Leslie' [Maud's sister] or to some other female she, as may be mutually agreed upon," to be completed by January 1, 1906. In the same document, Baum also wryly agreed to pen a "book for young girls on the style of the Louisa M. Alcott stories, but not so good" by March 1, 1906.<sup>4</sup>


The "Novel for Young Folks" became what we now

Aug. 11, 1906 [No. 1802] *The Publishers' Weekly.*

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The first novel for young folks. ANNABEL, and the best girl's story in recent years. AUNT JANE'S NIECES—both ready August 15th—are to be thoroughly advertised during the fall trade season in leading newspapers and periodicals. Below are samples of advertisements to be used. FOR SALE BY ALL JOBBERS.

Publishers THE REILLY & BRITTON CO. Chicago




**ANNABEL**  
BY  
SUZANNE METCALF

**The  
First  
Novel for  
Young Folks**

Little men and women of today are reading selected novels with the consent of parents. ANNABEL breathes the purest thoughts and impulses of a girl blossoming into womanhood and portrays her gentle influence on the life of a struggling boy. The love thread has "no beginning and no ending," but its subtle existence between the lines appeals to the noblest instincts of boy or girl. Parents enjoy and recommend this book.

Dainty cloth binding with inlaid picture and six splendid duo-tone illustrations by H. Putnam Hall. - Price \$1.25

For Sale by Dealers Everywhere or sent prepaid on receipt of price by THE REILLY & BRITTON CO. Publishers - 84 Adams Street - Chicago "The Book Crier" free on request



**AUNT JANE'S  
NIECES**  
BY  
EDITH VAN DYNE

**A Fascinating  
Character Story  
About Real Girls**

This is the best girl's story to appear since "Little Women." It is about a rich aunt, hitherto neglectful, who desires to leave her large estate to one of her kin. Three nieces are invited to stay a month with her. The visit is full of real girl doings. Interest never lags, as the author cleverly conceals until the very last what everyone wants to know.

English cloth binding; unique cover design and six half-tone illustrations by E. A. Nelson. - Price \$1.00

For Sale by Dealers Everywhere or sent prepaid on receipt of price by THE REILLY & BRITTON CO. Publishers - 84 Adams Street - Chicago "The Book Crier" free on request

know as *Annabel*, which bears that descriptor as a subtitle and ended up credited to one Suzanne Metcalf. The Alcott-styled story was published as *Aunt Jane's Nieces*. Two key points are apparent from the contractual provisions. First, Baum was familiar with at least some of the works of Alcott, who was most famous for *Little Women* (1868) and other family-centered dramas primarily directed at girl readers. Secondly, the audiences for *Annabel* and *Aunt Jane's Nieces* were anticipated to be sufficiently distinct so as to warrant different personae as their respective authors. Interestingly, while the contract flexibly did not specify titles for these works, it was particular about their authorship being female.

The contractual specification of what would become the subtitle for *Annabel* and the use of capital letters ("Novel for Young Folks") to describe it suggests that publisher and author had something particular in mind—

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# Odd One Out

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namely, a work that would reach an adolescent audience (through a grown-up “novel” rather than a mere “story”) composed of male as well as female readers (“young folks” rather than “children”). While the *Record-Herald’s* reviewer chafed at what it viewed as obvious pretension in billing the new work a “novel,” Reilly & Britton would confront several issues in marketing *Annabel* because of this designation. For one, the term “novel” carried with it significant baggage; for much of the preceding century, critics often used it pejoratively to suggest frivolous fare lacking in artistic or redeeming social value.<sup>5</sup>

As late as 1906, the journal *Education* lamented: “there is no doubt that with some people ‘novel reading’ has become simply a disease of the mind. People demand on the whole nothing but fiction.”<sup>6</sup> Where children were concerned, educators warned of the pernicious effects that the reading of fiction, and novels in particular, could have on impressionable young minds.<sup>7</sup> The copy for Reilly & Britton’s advertisement of *Annabel* tacitly acknowledges this lingering prejudice in asserting that “Little men and women of today are reading selected novels with the consent of parents” (*Publishers’ Weekly*, 305). This suggests that novel reading remained an activity primarily reserved for adults — akin to the consumption of alcohol or tobacco — yet one which retained a certain allure because it was forbidden. The ad seems to woo parents as allies in chaperoning youth through the consumption (reading) of material (novels) that might otherwise be hazardous for their moral health if partaken of illicitly.

Another challenge faced by Reilly & Britton concerned the attempt to reach a mixed gender audience with a realistic work of fiction. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, there was an increasing bifurcation of juvenile literature into distinct bodies of books targeted at boys and girls, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Anne Scott MacLeod has described this phenomenon:

Where the boys’ books increasingly revolved around a young man’s encounter with the outside world — in the army, in the West, in the city — and around active, extroverted adventure, girls’ novels focused on character and relationships, as, of course, girls’ lives did as they approached womanhood.<sup>9</sup>

This gap continued to grow into the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, there was a willingness among girls — if not an appetite — to read boys’ books

(Wadsworth, 57).<sup>11</sup> The reverse generally was not true.

With the increasing gender segmentation of the children’s book marketplace, it was perhaps inevitable that individual writers became identified as either boys’ authors or girls’ authors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, children also tended to identify their favorite writers along gender lines, with boys preferring books by male authors and girls preferring books by female authors.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the title *Annabel* — derived from a female character — and designation of a fictitious female author seem odd choices if Reilly & Britton’s goal was to

appeal to a mixed audience; a sexually ambiguous name (e.g., “E. Nesbit” or “P. L. Travers”) might have served the purpose better.

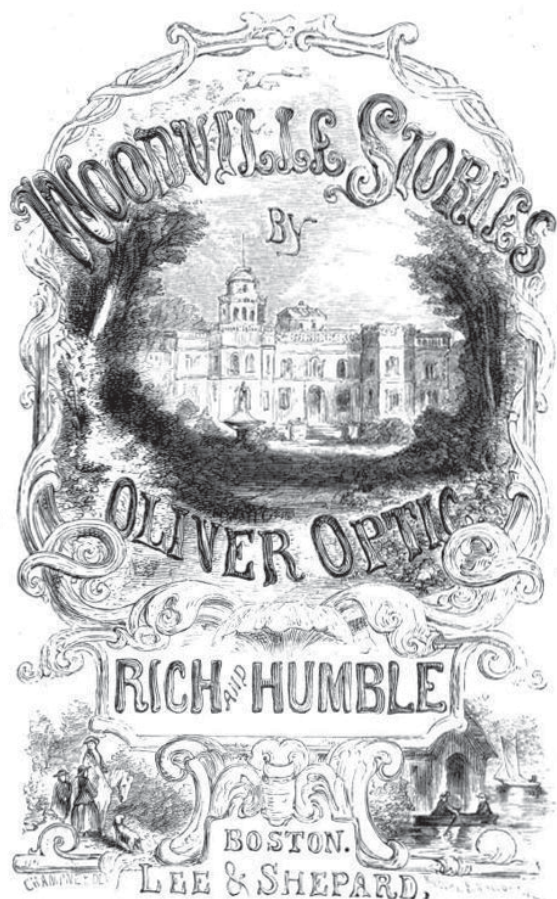
The clumsy subtitle notwithstanding, *Annabel* was not the first attempt by an author or publisher of a realistic work of juvenile fiction to reach a mixed audience. Decades earlier, Lee and Shepard of Boston (the leading pub-



L. Frank Baum (1856-1919)

lisher of juveniles during the 1860s through 1880s) had called in their primary boys’ author, William T. Adams, and asked him to produce a series under his highly saleable Oliver Optic pseudonym targeting girls — but one which could also be read by boys (Wadsworth, 52). Adams reluctantly complied. The resulting work, *Rich and Humble; or, The Mission of Bertha Grant* (1863), carried the additional subtitle, “A Story for Young People.”<sup>13</sup> As Sarah Wadsworth has suggested, in some ways *Rich and Humble* anticipates the sort of rags-to-riches plotline for which Horatio Alger would later become famous.

In a departure from Optic’s earlier adventure tales for boys, *Rich and Humble* is primarily a domestic-centered melodrama that follows a virtuous young girl’s descent into poverty and back. A certain tension is apparent in the author’s effort to appeal to what had become two distinct audiences: Adams’ preface takes pains to point, in turn, to specific aspects of the story he thought would be of particular interest to girls, and other aspects that would be of interest to boys (Wadsworth, 52-53). Although long term sales figures for *Rich and Humble* exceeded those of many of Adams’



**RICH AND HUMBLE;**  
OR,  
**THE MISSION OF BERTHA GRANT.**

**A Story for Young People.**

BY  
**OLIVER OPTIC,**  
AUTHOR OF "THE BOAT CLUB," "ALL ABOARD," "NOW OR NEVER,"  
"TRY AGAIN," "POOR AND PROUD," "LITTLE BY LITTLE,"  
"THE RIVERDALE STORY BOOKS," ETC.

BOSTON:  
**LEE AND SHEPARD,**  
SUCCESSORS TO PHILLIPS, SAMPSON & CO.  
1863.

In 1863, Lee and Shepard attempted to reach a mixed-gender audience with Oliver Optic's *Rich and Humble*, subtitled "A Story for Young People."

earlier works, the author himself appears to have been dissatisfied with the result; thereafter he concentrated, as he had before, on books for boys (Wadsworth, 56).

Reilly & Britton's decision to publish a "Novel for Young Folks" in 1906 thus was not without precedent — and also not without some risk given the growing divide between boys' books versus girls' books. Certainly, Reilly & Britton's leading author already had enjoyed considerable success appealing to younger children of both sexes with his fantasy works. But reaching out to a slightly older, mixed audience with a realistic work of fiction definitely posed a challenge — one to which Baum, without the clout of his own name on the cover to back it up, ultimately proved unequal.

#### **Strive and Succeed**

As noted at the outset of this article, the contemporary reviewer in the *Record-Herald* likened Will Carden, the hero of *Annabel*, to a typical Alger hero. More recently, Baum biographer Katharine M. Rogers made the

same comparison in describing *Annabel* as a "flat, Horatio Alger-type story."<sup>14</sup>

The name Horatio Alger, Jr., today is synonymous with the rags-to-riches mythos of American success. Ironically, even though the phrase "Horatio Alger hero" is firmly entrenched in the American lexicon, virtually no one reads Alger these days. Although the two were separated by a generation, Alger's career as a writer shares a number of similarities with that of L. Frank Baum. As Baum would do later, Alger turned to writing juveniles in middle-age after failure in other endeavors, scoring a critical and commercial success with one of his earliest efforts. Like Baum, he would become one of the most prolific and popular children's authors of his day, publishing under numerous pseudonyms and enjoying a wide readership that cut across class lines and included adults as well as children.

The eldest son of a Boston Brahmin family subsisting on the fringes of middle class respectability, Horatio  
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# Odd One Out

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Alger, Jr. (1832-1899) received a classical education, including an undergraduate degree from Harvard. Although he aspired to be a poet in the vein of Longfellow (one of his professors), Alger initially followed his father's footsteps by enrolling (albeit briefly) in the Cambridge Theological School.<sup>15</sup> He next served a stint as an assistant editor for a Boston newspaper before becoming a schoolmaster, an occupation that afforded him sufficient leisure to write and publish stories and poems in various Boston weeklies.

This effort culminated in the publication of his first book (a collection of items first published elsewhere) in 1855 (Scharnhorst, 29-30). Though he did not abandon his authorial ambitions, Alger ultimately returned to the Theological School in 1857 and graduated three years later (Scharnhorst, 38).

Becoming resigned to his inability to earn a living through artistic efforts aimed at adults, Alger turned to writing juveniles. In 1864, he published *Frank's Campaign; or, What Boys can do on the Farm for the Camp*, primarily to make money. Despite favorable notices for his book, Alger nonetheless accepted a post as minister to a Unitarian congregation in Brewster, Massachusetts that same year (Scharnhorst, 63-64). He would resign under a cloud and flee to New York City in early 1866 when allegations surfaced that he had molested two local boys — information which Alger somehow was able to keep hidden from the public during his lifetime (Scharnhorst, 1 & 66). As if to atone for these transgressions, Alger would spend the next decades championing the plight of New York's legions of impoverished street waifs, befriending and even adopting some of them in the process. The cynical might suspect that more than mere philanthropy accounted for his continued preference for the company of youths.

Alger rose to prominence as a boys' author with *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York With the Boot-blacks*, which was serialized in 1867 and published in book form by A. K. Loring of Boston in 1868. *Ragged Dick* provides a sympathetic look into the lives of New York's vast army of homeless youth through the prism of a street-wise, enterprising Artful Dodger-type who, the narrator repeatedly assures us, is essentially a noble boy. *Ragged Dick* was an immediate hit, the first edition selling out in the span of a few weeks (Scharnhorst, 86). Alger and his publishers quickly capitalized on the success of this book, issuing five sequels as part of the "Ragged Dick" series about resourceful newsboys and bootblacks.

In the period 1865 through 1872, Alger's work was

RAGGED DICK SERIES  
BY  
HORATIO ALGER JR.



FAME & FORTUNE

TATTERED TOM SERIES  
BY  
HORATIO ALGER JR.



TATTERED TOM.

Alger's *Ragged Dick* Series (1868-70) and his two *Tattered Tom* Series (1871-72; 1874-79) focused on indigent boot-blacks and newsboys in New York City.





The first and second Luck and Pluck Series (1869-72; 1873-75) and Brave & Bold Series (1874-77) told stories of young boys living in small-town America.

regularly serialized in one of the leading children's periodicals of the day, *Student and Schoolmate*.<sup>16</sup> As Carol Nackenoff has demonstrated in her study of Alger readers, during this same period Alger generally enjoyed critical approval and was commonly available in libraries and through subscription services. Based on sales figures alone, during the late 1860s and early 1870s, several of Alger's books placed him alongside Dickens and English author Charles Reade in popularity (Nackenoff, 187-188).

L. Frank Baum was born in 1856 to a genteel family living in central New York. As a boy, Baum suffered from a weak heart. As a result, with the exception of two unfortunate years spent at a military academy, he was primarily educated at home by tutors. We know that Baum was familiar with the works of many popular writers of the day, admiring Dickens and ranking Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) as one of his favorite works.<sup>17</sup> Even as Baum navigated adolescence, Alger's popularity reached its zenith. Given Alger's ubiquity during this period and L. Frank's literary tendencies, it hardly seems a stretch to imagine that young L. Frank was familiar with Alger's work.

As an adult, L. Frank was father to four sons born from 1883 through 1891, who would have reached adolescence in the late 1890s and early 1900s, a period in which Alger enjoyed renewed popularity courtesy of a veritable flood of cheap reprints (Scharnhorst, 151; Nackenoff, 194).<sup>18</sup> This may have afforded Baum the opportunity to become reacquainted with a writer from his boyhood. Even though Alger's work had come under attack as morally suspect by this point, it nonetheless remained a favorite for furtive reading by middle class boys (Nackenoff, 220).

The uneven course of Alger's critical reception would also be mirrored later by Baum. Alger's early works generally were well received. As Alger's output increased (he churned out a remarkable eighteen juveniles in the period 1867-1873 alone), the charge was leveled that there was a concomitant decrease in the quality of his writing (Scharnhorst, 87). Beginning in the late 1870s and early 1880s, critics began lumping Alger in with the dime novelists and purveyors of sensational fiction, faulting the supposed lack of literary realism in Alger's works and deeming them harmful to children because they promoted an unrealistic view of the world (Nackenoff, 251; Scharnhorst, 117-118).

Finally, the American Library Association jumped on the bandwagon, including Alger among a list of writers for children whose works were no longer welcome on library shelves. The purge had begun. Decades later, Baum's Oz books would suffer similar charges from librarians.

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# Odd One Out

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## Ingredients for Success

While the particular socioeconomic circumstances in which Baum was born and raised suggest that he likely was familiar with Alger's work, myriad clues throughout the text of *Annabel* make clear that Baum/Metcalf's "Novel for Young Folks" owes much of its inspiration to Alger. Indeed, the basic plot structure, major incidents of the story, principal characters as well as predominant themes of *Annabel* all are straight out of vintage Alger.

As already noted, Alger enjoyed his greatest success with one of his earliest juvenile works, *Ragged Dick*, whose popularity he immediately tried to clone in a number of sequels and which he further mined in two successive series of "Tattered Tom" stories. At his publisher's suggestion, Alger eventually left behind the bleak urban landscape populated by boot-blacks and newsboys and turned to writing about poor (or recently impoverished) boys in small-town America. His biographer has described the appeal of such stories as "fundamentally nostalgic," as Alger depicted a vanishing way of life in a succession of tales centering on village life where the advent of industrialization was only just beginning to leave its mark (Scharnhorst, 127).

During this period Alger, under pressure to earn a living and to meet the deadlines imposed by his publishers, increasingly resorted to certain tried-and-true narrative structures, characters (he especially favored heroes named Herbert and Robert), and themes. Formula writing might well be the trademark of a hack, but at least one modern critic suggests that the repetition apparent in Alger's works itself provided his readers with a source of reassurance — through the reassertion of traditional values — in the face of a rapidly changing world.<sup>19</sup>

Critics have long accused Alger of literally writing and re-writing the identical story. A contemporary reviewer's weary reception of the book publication of *Five Hundred Dollars* (1891) is typical of this vein of criticism:

It is surprising how many variations Mr. Horatio Alger, Jr., has contrived to play on the well-worn theme of an honest, hard-working boy, the only son of an industrious mother, who conquers the obstacles of poverty and misfortune, and is opportunely assisted by some wonderful dispensation of Fortune to gain wealth and position.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, it is overly simplistic to suggest that all of Alger's more than 100 novels can be neatly shoe-horned into a single narrative framework. Nonetheless, Daniel T. Rodgers has identified four recurring

plotlines in the body of Alger's work:

- (1) A morality tale in which a poor boy steadily makes his way in the world through thrift and industry;
- (2) A story of nurture and guardianship, usually involving an orphaned waif who is assisted by an older boy or young man;
- (3) A variation on the Cinderella tale in which the hero is richly rewarded (usually with a career in business) for an act of heroism or kindness, with the role of fairy godfather played by a merchant-capitalist or millionaire disguised as a tramp;
- (4) A quest for a lost legacy of which the hero has been wrongly deprived.<sup>21</sup>

In *Annabel*, Baum employs a synthesis of the first, third, and fourth of these plotlines, with the latter most prominent. The twist presented by this fourth structure is, in effect, a riches-to-rags-to-riches plotline, where the protagonist's work ethic is scarcely relevant. Rather, success (in the form of reassertion of the status quo) is achieved as much by perseverance and dumb luck as any admirable traits of the hero.

The formula may be broken down into three main elements consisting of a number of stock ingredients:

- **Characters:** Hero, Fop, Villain, Patron;
- **Events:** Reversal of Fortune; Persecution; Rescue; Invitation; Receipt of New Clothes; Journey; Restoration/Vindication;
- **Themes:** Industry, Education, Modesty, Ambition, Money/Investment, Chance.

As John A. Geck notes in his own distillation of a number of Alger novels, the major characters in Alger's works tend to fit one of several archetypes.<sup>22</sup> As such, the characters are one-dimensional embodiments of specific virtues and vices; lacking in depth, they remain relatively static over the course of the narrative. These archetypes act out virtually the same situations in book after book, albeit with some variation in the temporal sequence of events. The characters — and the events they enact — serve to illustrate a number of themes related to the Protestant work ethic.

An analysis of the text of *Annabel* reveals each of these Alger ingredients at play. Of course, Baum was not a slavish imitator; rather, he adapted to suit his own purposes. Thus, there are several significant departures from the typical Alger work, which will also be addressed.

## Struggling Upward

Virtually every Alger novel centers on an adolescent hero, with the story depicting his rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. With a few exceptions, the Alger



hero is always of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant lineage.<sup>23</sup> For Alger, facial features are invariably indicators of character.

Thus, the hero has a frank and honest face that makes people trust him, or, as Carol Nackenoff has observed, “[t]he boy of good character was, in the parlance of the age, manly” (Nackenoff, 45). Such manliness also extends to the body, for Alger heroes are strongly built (as opposed to waifish, dissolute and effeminate, characteristics typical of the hero’s foil, the fop).

In the opening chapter of *Annabel*, we meet enterprising and kind-hearted fifteen-year-old Will Carden, who is scolded by the snobbish Mrs. Williams when she catches him playing with her children after delivering vegetables to their estate. Significantly, Baum studiously avoids any description of Will Carden’s face, even though he provides detailed descriptions of the wealthy Williams children. (Baum similarly refrains from ever providing a physical description of Dorothy, heroine of the Oz books, who remains a child Everyman with whom any boy or girl may identify). However, the reader does learn that Will’s shoes are “worn” and the “same color as the earth” and his clothes are patched, obvious evidence of his poverty (Baum, 20). Will Carden describes himself as “pretty husky, for my age” (41) a remark echoed later by the narrator stating that he is “strong and manly in build” (84).

In a significant departure from Alger, Baum’s hero responds to Mrs. Williams’ rebuke with tears. Will quickly wipes away the “unmanly drops” (23) when he encounters Doctor Meigs, who exhorts Will to “speak the truth boldly and fearlessly” (24). Such a scene would never occur in Alger, where the hero responds manfully to all insults and never needs reminding to stick up for himself.

The Alger hero is naturally industrious and eager to learn. One notable Alger hero, Harry Walton (the protagonist of *Bound to Rise* and its sequel *Risen from the Ranks*), even models himself on Benjamin Franklin, privately pursuing his studies even as he sets forth into the world in order to help out his impoverished family. In *Annabel*, Will attends high school full-time, tends a thriving garden business part-time, and later enters into partnership with Doctor Meigs to grow and sell mushrooms (echoing the hero of *Herbert Carter’s Legacy* [1875] who enters into a partnership with a neighbor to grow and sell vegetables). Will eagerly studies the books provided by Doctor Meigs, and dreams of attending college. In fine Alger tradition, Will quickly internalizes capitalist principles, recognizing the value of growing his savings. Money, savings and capitalism in general are ubiquitous themes in Alger. Baum follows the model here even though his works otherwise do not specifically focus on such worldly matters as finance.

A key incident in the life of Alger’s hero occurs before the curtains rises: the death (or apparent death) of a

parent, most often the father. Deprived of the main breadwinner, the family loses its social and economic position, thus forcing the young hero to shoulder the responsibilities of an adult as he strives to support himself and his family.

In *Annabel*, Will Carden is the scion of a family that, in the words of Nora the cook (in an unfortunate ethnic dialect), “has come down in the wurruul” (10). Will’s father, John Carden, the inventor of a special process for improving steel, reportedly was aboard a ship that sank eight years earlier on the way to England, leaving his family nearly destitute. In Alger, fathers are similarly lost at sea (*Ragged Dick*; *Brave and Bold* [1874]), perish in foreign lands (*Shifting for Himself* [1876]), or long missing and presumed dead (*Five Hundred Dollars*).

### Persecution Complex

To emphasize the hero’s precarious economic position, early in the typical Alger novel the hero suffers the first of many indignities at the hands of a nemesis, the fop. The fop is about the same age as the hero, and serves as a foil embodying an array of negative character traits that serve further to illuminate the hero’s innate goodness. As the son of the wealthiest man in a small town, the fop is unduly concerned with social position and class distinction, even though his own parents are often themselves of humble origins. In contrast to the hero, the fop is usually thin and weak, his physical limitations evidence of an impoverished character.

The early chapters of an Alger novel present a series of incidents in which the fop spurns or snubs the hero, usually to little effect. Increasingly irritated at the hero’s ability to bounce back from adversity, the fop raises the stakes by falsely accusing the hero of some petty crime: for the



**The fop James Leech repeatedly taunts the hero for his poverty and lack of social standing in *Herbert Carter’s Legacy*. (Illustration by J. Watson Davis for the A.L. Burt reprint edition).**

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# Odd One Out

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hero, persecution becomes actual prosecution, with the stigma of arrest and even jail. Ultimately, however, the hero is vindicated. The conclusion of an Alger novel invariably sees the settling of scores, with the fop and his family losing their wealth even as the hero rises in the world.

The fop is surprisingly absent in *Annabel*: neither of the Williams boys gives any credence to social distinctions separating them from their chum Will. Instead, their mother Mrs. Williams fills this void quite nicely. In the process, she serves as the target of several authorial jokes as Baum displays evident contempt for those who pay more attention to rank than to good character.

In the opening chapter of *Annabel*, Mrs. Williams reproaches her children for playing with the “vegetable boy”: “I won’t have you mixing with every low character in the town. If you haven’t any respect for yourselves, you must respect your father’s wealth and position and me” (17). Mrs. Williams has precursors in Alger: in *Shifting for Himself* (1876), the haughty Mrs. Briggs objects to her husband bringing his ward, the recently impoverished Gilbert, to live in their New York home because he is “not a fit companion for [their son] Randolph” (50). At the end of the novel, Mrs. Briggs’s chilly condescension evaporates when Gilbert is revealed to be the heir to a fortune, and she even invites him to live with her family.

In a departure from the typical Alger novel, in *Annabel* Will Carden does not confront a false accusation levied by the fop. Nonetheless, Mrs. Williams plays a pivotal role in *Annabel*, as it is her later invitation to Will to join her for a fancy dinner that unleashes a chain of events that restores his family’s fortunes. Unsurprisingly, just like Mrs. Briggs in *Shifting for Himself*, Mrs. Williams does an about-face and happily welcomes Will into her family when she learns about his new-found wealth.

## The Bad Man

Alger’s villains typically fall into two camps. The most common villain is the “squire,” the wealthiest and most influential citizen of the town or village where the hero resides. The squire’s wealth usually is ill-gotten through fraud or deceit (Nackenoff, 57). The squire lords his economic power over others, selfishly seeking to increase his wealth even if it means depriving the hero of a home or livelihood. Often, this villain has embezzled or squandered away money entrusted to him by the hero’s father. Some particularly black-hearted villains manage to accomplish a combination of all these



The Alger villain menaces the hero's family with the loss of their home in *Tom Turner's Legacy*. (Illustration by J. Watson Davis; A.L. Burt, 1902).

nefarious deeds. In *Struggling Upward* (1890), Squire Duncan first speculates using bonds deposited at his bank; then deprives hero Luke of his job as a school janitor; later threatens Luke’s family with loss of their home (on which he holds the mortgage); and finally frames Luke with the theft, forcing him to stand trial — with Duncan himself serving as magistrate!

The second typical Alger villain is actually a family member (or, more precisely, a distant relative or new family member) who seeks to disinherit the hero. In *Hector's Inheritance* (1885), the hero’s uncle forges documents indicating that Hector was a foundling and therefore not entitled to inherit his father’s estate, while in *Luck and Pluck* (1869), a wicked housekeeper worms her way into marriage with the hero’s ailing father in order to claim the entire estate on his death by substituting wills.

Another stock character frequently appearing in Alger is the miser. Occasionally an outright villain (such as Squire Green in *Bound to Rise*, who finances the hero’s father’s purchase of a cow at usurious rates), the miser often is merely a recluse who lives in squalor rather than



spend the money he carefully hoards (miser Paul Nichols in *Brave and Bold* and farmer Lovett in *The Young Musician* [1906], each rewards the hero for saving him from a robber). Even though Alger's works generally read as paeans to capitalism, the miser serves as a reminder that when appropriation becomes the exclusive end in itself, it is both unnatural and destructive (Nackenoff, 152-153).

In *Annabel*, the villain is a cross between the second type of Alger villain (the family interloper) and the miser. Ezra Jordan has inserted himself directly into the family's home and, in the process, driven a wedge between them and the father (as well as a fortune). The secretary at the local steel mill and "friend" of Will's late father, Jordan has boarded with the Carden family ever since the mysterious disappearance of John Carden. He is rumored to be a man of means, yet lives modestly, ostensibly helping to support the hero's family. Nicknamed "the Automaton" (32) because of his stiffness and clockwork-like efficiency, the reclusive Jordan follows the peculiar routine of always taking an evening walk along the same path through a grove. Will happens to follow him, and catches Jordan in the bizarre act of rubbing the trunk of a tree. Will witnesses this behavior yet another time, but even then the dunderheaded hero fails to investigate. Instead, it requires the intercession of the hero's benefactors, Doctor Meigs and Mr. Williams, to piece together the mystery and then to prod the hero on the path to its resolution.

In its 1906 review of *Annabel*, the *Record-Herald* found Ezra Jordan to be "a villain of so dark a color that we are surprised the author did not fear his influence on the delicate minds of her readers." This remark seems exaggerated, as Jordan pales in comparison to the villains in many of Alger's novels, who generally pose a very significant threat to the hero's livelihood (e.g., causing the hero to lose employment just at the moment a crucial mortgage payment is due), if not his very life (especially true of Alger's later works, which increasingly veered toward the then-popular sensation novel). In contrast, Mr. Jordan's villainy in *Annabel* never rises above an indirect threat to the family's financial condition. There is never a direct confrontation between hero and villain, nor physical threat, false accusation resulting in arrest, murder or mayhem.

(To be concluded in next issue)

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*Special thanks to Peter E. Hanff and Angelica Carpenter for their assistance in preparation of this article.*

Sean P. Duffley is Editor-in-Chief of *The Baum Bugle*. An attorney specializing in corporate taxation with the IRS Office of Chief Counsel in Washington, D.C., he resides in Kensington, Maryland.

## NOTES

1. *Publishers' Weekly*, 11 August 1906, 305 (hereafter cited in text).

2. According to Paul Bienvenue, the dust jacket accompanying the first edition, first printing reads, "Annabel/A SPLENDID STORY/FOR GIRLS." The publisher apparently did not consider that this characterization conflicts with the work's subtitle.

3. "In[the] Realm of Books," *Chicago Record-Herald*, 3 December 1906. *Up the Ladder* was the original serialization title for the Horatio Alger, Jr. story that was published in book form as *Risen from the Ranks* (1874). *Risen from the Ranks* was itself a sequel to Alger's *Bound to Rise* (1873).

4. Contract with Reilly & Britton, 6 October 1905.

5. Pat Pflieger provides an excellent overview of this period, along with selections from articles warning of the dire effects novel reading posed for adults, at [www.merrycos.org/voices/NOVELS.HTM](http://www.merrycos.org/voices/NOVELS.HTM). Pflieger ironically notes the assertion by the Rev. J. T. Crane (whose son Stephen Crane would rise to fame as author of such novels as *The Red Badge of Courage* [1895]) that "novel reading has become one of the great vices of our age."

6. James E. Rogers, "Juvenile Literature," 601.

7. Moses, *Children's Books and Reading*, 171; James E. Rogers, 601-602.

8. Wadsworth, *Company of Books*, 44 (hereafter cited in text).

9. MacLeod, *American Childhood*, 14.

10. One contemporary survey confirms this segmentation, and also reflects children's different tastes in the types of books they preferred to read: boys indicated that they preferred fiction about adventurers such as scouts, explorers, soldiers, or the "young man making his way in the world." In contrast, girls preferred stories about "home life and every-day thought and emotion" with older girls particularly interested in love stories. Wissler, "Interests of Children," 28-29.

11. Baum himself seemed to recognize this point: the heroine of *Annabel* is receptive to Will Carden's offer to lend her an "Indian book" about Dick Onslow. Baum, *Annabel*, 82 (hereafter cited in text). This reference is to an actual book, *The Adventures of Dick Onslow Among the Redskins* (Boston: J. E. Tilton, 1864), "edited" by W. H. G. Kingston.

12. A contemporary study of children's readings  
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habits bears out this point. Asked to identify their favorite authors, the top seven mentioned by boys in Stockton, California, included six men with the seventh being Louisa May Alcott. Among girls, the top six favorites were five women and Horatio Alger, who ranked fourth. Only Alcott and Alger figured on both lists. "Study of Children's Reading," *Library Journal*, 171. A 1901 survey of Indiana schoolchildren drew similar conclusions. Wissler, "Interests of Children," 30-31.

13. At least two of W.T. Adams' other works carried the somewhat similar subtitle, "A Story for Young Folks" even though they were directed at a specific gender. These included *Now or Never; or, The Adventures of Bobby Bright* (1857), a boys' story, and *Poor and Proud; or, The Fortunes of Katy Redburn* (1859), one of Adams' sole efforts directed at girls. A half century later, L. Frank Baum would employ virtually the identical subtitle (although it became a singular "Folk") for a later non-fantasy series aimed at a mixed audience: *The Daring Twins: A Story for Young Folk* (1911) and its sequel, *Phoebe Daring: A Story for Young Folk* (1912). (The dust jacket design for *The Daring Twins* is even more specific on the intended audience, bearing the line, "A Story for Young Folk/12 to 18.") Even at that date, Baum and his publishers appeared to be concerned about appealing to a mixed audience without alienating either sex in the process.

14. Katharine M. Rogers, *L. Frank Baum*, 138.

15. Gary Scharnhorst with Jack Bales, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 26-27 (hereafter cited in text).

16. Carol Nackenoff, *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse.*, 184 (hereafter cited in text).

17. Baum and MacFall, *To Please a Child*, 23-24.

18. A contemporary periodical notes that "[i]nquiry at the public libraries always brings out the statement that no juvenile books are more persistently read than those of Horatio Alger." "Review of *Five Hundred Dollars*," 495. See also Tomlinson, "Perpetual 'Best-Sellers,'" 13045.

19. "With only a few basic plots, part of the comfort and hope in these works may come from the mere repetition of the formula. Formulas and stereotyped, one-dimensional characters help simplify a complex world. The pattern reassures fears: trials can be over-

come, fortuitous accidents can happen, virtue can triumph, and quick and clever boys can outwit evil antagonists" (Nackenoff, 54).

20. "Review of *Five Hundred Dollars*," 495.

21. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Work Ethic in Industrial America*, 140-141.

22. John A. Geck identifies many of these same elements in his own synthesis of a dozen Alger novels, which is available online at [www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cinder/horatiomain.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cinder/horatiomain.htm).

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## Editor's notebook

(Continued from Page 4)

would do everything on his end. Ralph Cummings and later, Eddie, would send him the typescript and photos for the articles, everything he wanted to use for an issue, and Miller would put it together. Miller also had the mailing list, and he'd mail it out from Lawrence."

LeBlanc became editor of *Dime Novel Round-Up* in July 1952, following the 21 years of Cummings' stewardship. Cummings assisted LeBlanc for several years, and LeBlanc remained in the editor's chair until mid-1994, when Cox took over.

"Eddie had been a subscriber and member of the 'Happy Hours Brotherhood' — a bunch of guys who got together once in a while and who wanted to keep in touch because they shared an interest in collecting dime novels," Cox recalled. "Eddie became interested because his father had been a dime novel collector before he was. Eddie just kept going for 42 years, and at the Hess Symposium at the University of Minnesota in 1991, he announced he was going to retire in five years. Nobody stepped up to the plate and said 'I'll take it over,' and it took me about three years before it suddenly occurred to me that I could do it. If I hadn't taken over in 1994, I don't think the *Round-Up* would have survived."

Cox believes one of LeBlanc's greatest achievements during his 42 years as editor was getting a handle on the full scope of the vast dime novel publishing history dating back to around 1860.

"I'm sure collectors were doing this all along, making lists of different titles and series and so forth," Cox said. "Eddie started out with his famous bibliographic listings. His favorite paper at the time was *Pluck & Luck*, so he sat down with a typewriter that he'd gotten from his folks for Christmas and started typing a list. The rest is history."

LeBlanc's many Bibliographic Listings for various dime novel and story paper series were contributed by many of the *Round-Up*'s leading researchers of the day. LeBlanc would edit and send them on to Kansas for printing. Contributors included Capt. Chester G. Mayo for *Good News*, Donald L. Steinhauer for *Golden Days*, Ross Craufurd for *Our Boys* and *New York Boys Weekly*, J. Edward Leithead for *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* and his collaboration with LeBlanc on *Rough Rider Weekly* and the *Ted Strong Saga*; plus series bibliographies on the *Nick Carter Library* and related Nick Carter serial publications, all compiled by Cox.

The list goes on and on. One of Eddie LeBlanc's later bibliographic efforts was his two-part *Street & Smith magnum opus*, Part I, titled *The Black and White Era*,



**Eddie LeBlanc receives a certificate of appreciation in 1994 from Randy Cox upon LeBlanc's retirement after 42 years as editor of *Dime Novel Round-Up*.**

and Part II, *The Merriwells*. Both, in 8½ x 11 typed format, were reproduced at his expense in Fall River and sold to collectors and libraries on request.

In 1990, the same year he produced the Merriwell bibliography, he and fellow scholar Victor Berch produced *The Alger Short Stories*, also published out of Fall River. The softbound 8½ x 11 book remains a major resource for Alger scholars and collectors.

"Eddie had a great interest in Alger, and he really enjoyed being a member of the Horatio Alger Society," Cox said. "He had a goal of attending every Alger convention. Until he had his first stroke, he was doing pretty well there."

LeBlanc also edited the famous "Dime Novel Sketches" that appeared on each *Round-Up* cover, including a photo. His first was published in February 1959, and his last, No. 304, appeared in June 2001.

"After I took over as editor in 1994, he told me he would like to continue the sketches because it was a way he could keep a hand in the business," Cox said.

LeBlanc was slowed by the first of series of strokes shortly after retiring as editor. His next-to-last H.A.S. convention came in 1999 at Northern Illinois University, which now holds his dime novel collection. LeBlanc's final convention was in 2000 at West Chester, Pa.

"He just loved to travel and drive around the area," Cox said. "He knew all the back roads, and he always said that editing the *Round-Up* put a damper on that, because he'd be away on a trip, then look at the calendar and realize he had to cut it short to put the *Round-Up* together. Eddie never missed an issue."

No finer tribute could be paid.