

A New England State of Mind:  
Identity and Commodification in *Yankee* Magazine, 1935-1942

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## APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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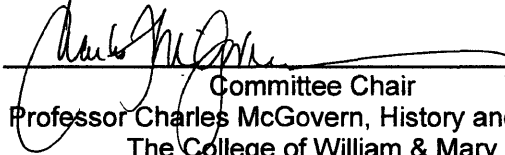
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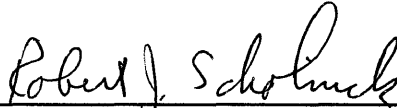
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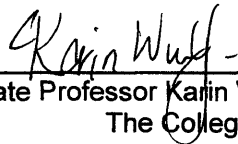
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## ABSTRACT PAGE

This thesis explores the process of reader commodification in Yankee Magazine from 1935-42. As a magazine dealing in the preservation of a folk culture, Yankee revealed the instability in yankeeness and a lack of fixity in the idea of Yankee. The magazine set out with the stated goal of expressing and preserving the best of a New England culture at risk of becoming extinct. It located that culture in older, pre-modern northern New England, but almost immediately recognized its appeal to readers across and outside of New England. Yankee responded by claiming that anyone could be a Yankee by engaging with the magazine, effectively detaching this "culture" from time and space. Yankee engaged this broader audience's nostalgia, prescribing a version of yankeeness based on a set of values perceived from New England folklore and providing a site for them to preserve their memories. However, Yankee also constituted a forum for readers to negotiate one another's authenticity by calling on them to constantly perform their "yankeeness." These performances revealed divisions between readers and their definitions of yankeeness. As the debates went on, the magazine proceeded with its commercial goals, marketing its audience of Yankees to advertisers and new readers.

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Thank you to my mother and late father for their guidance and support as I pursued a life very distinct from the dairy farm in New Hampshire I called home. It was my upbringing in this place and by these two wonderful people that instilled in me a desire to understand the connection between place and identity. Finally, thank you to my wife, Emily Chandler, for your unwavering support and encouragement. As places and people continue to dissolve into the haze of nostalgia, you remain.

The bird would cease and be as other birds  
But that he knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.<sup>1</sup>

Commodification lodges deep in the psyche, reinforced there by myriad quotidian acts and encounters that hum, ‘This is how things are, this is natural.’<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Robb Sagendorph, founder and president of *Yankee* magazine, seemed comfortable with contradictions. A frustrated freelance writer, in 1935 he created a little regional magazine dedicated to expressing and preserving the best of New England culture. His headquarters were his wife’s ancestral home in Dublin, NH, although he had grown up in Philadelphia and then Newton, MA, having moved there so that his father could run the family business, the Penn Metal Company. This magazine claimed the *Yankee* was a dying breed even while touting how it still flourished; it promoted an “authentic” New England people at the same time that it claimed anyone could become

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Frost, “The Oven Bird,” *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 120.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), 348.

one of those people;<sup>3</sup> the magazine celebrated thrift over materialism at the same time it relied on consumer culture for its success. In the process, *Yankee* was able to both reflect and project, and therefore package, an idea of New England that appealed to a broader swath of American people. *Yankee* found a formula that worked. It was subscribed to by old New Englanders and new New Englanders alike, city folk and country folk, people from inside and outside of New England.

In this thesis, I explore how *Yankee* magazine successfully collected a group of self-proclaimed Yankees and turned the idea of a people into a commodity that could be sold, not only to its advertisers, but back to its own readers. To date, there is only one scholarly study of *Yankee*. In *Imagining New England*, Joseph Conforti analyzes the magazine for its role in relocating the imagined center of New England to northern New England.<sup>4</sup> Conforti argues that *Yankee* was primarily a political and ideological endeavor. He focuses his analysis on Sagendorph's anti-nationalist rebellion against Roosevelt's New Deal and his readers' concerns about New England's rising non-native population. However, Conforti largely avoids analyzing *Yankee* as a commercial enterprise although

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<sup>3</sup> I have put quotes around authentic here to indicate that the term is itself questionable. To avoid needless distractions, I often do not put quotes around this or other contentious terms where extra emphasis is not warranted (e.g., "authentic," "folk," and "Yankee"). However, where I use the terms, I use them as ideals or constructions. Likewise, I use "Yankee" and "New England" interchangeably, except where I am clearly referring to physical geography.

<sup>4</sup> In *Imagining New England*, Joseph Conforti cites Stephen Nissenbaum's views on a shifting region. Joseph Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), ch. 6. The original source is Stephen Nissenbaum, "New England as Region and Nation," in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, edited by Edward L. Ayers et al. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

the language of the marketplace underlies much of his discussion. Where Sagendorph made decisions based on his ideology, they proved largely unsuccessful and were abandoned. Although arguments over politics and plurality consistently appear in the first years of *Yankee* and are vital to fully understanding the magazine, they were only part of its appeal and only partly explain *Yankee*'s cultural significance to scholars of modernity. Additionally, Conforti does not address the role readers played in the early years of *Yankee*. I contend that reader participation and the very form of the modern magazine were foundational to *Yankee*'s success as both a going concern and a cultural product. They allow for a more nuanced analysis of cultural identity, the process of commodification, and the opportunities for and limits of agency.

As a magazine dealing in the preservation of a folk culture, *Yankee* revealed the instability in yankeeness and a lack of fixity in the idea of Yankee. The magazine set out with the stated goal of expressing and preserving the best of a New England culture at risk of becoming extinct. It located that culture in older, pre-modern northern New England, but Sagendorph almost immediately recognized its appeal to readers across and outside of New England. When he responded by claiming that anyone could be a Yankee by engaging with the magazine, he detached this "culture" from time and space. *Yankee* engaged this broader audience's nostalgia, prescribing a version of yankeeness based on a set of values perceived from New England folklore and providing a site for them to preserve their memories. However, *Yankee* also constituted a forum for readers to negotiate one another's authenticity by calling on them to constantly perform their "yankeeness." These performances revealed divisions between readers and their definitions of yankeeness. As the debates went on, the magazine proceeded with its

commercial goals, marketing its audience of Yankees to advertisers and new readers. Ironically, in the endless loop of identity and commodification, the very malleability of yankeeness would be *Yankee's* greatest asset.

#### The Problem of Folk Culture, Region and Authenticity: Inventing *Yankee*

When Robb Sagendorph began publishing *Yankee* in September 1935, he immediately positioned it as the savior of a Yankee culture on the verge of extinction, threatened by rampant consumer culture and government intervention. In the first issue, Sagendorph stated his goal for the magazine: it was to be dedicated to “the expression and perhaps indirectly the preservation of that great culture in which every Yank is born and in which every real Yank must live.”<sup>5</sup> In its first years, *Yankee's* content was largely devoted to defining that “great culture” and the “real Yanks” while simultaneously establishing viable threats to both. Calling its readers to action, *Yankee* presented a traditional version of yankeeness tentatively located in northern New England of the past and in older residents of northern New England who, the magazine argued, embodied that past – a folk culture. By defining its purpose as preserving and promoting a folk culture, *Yankee* engaged in a search for authenticity, an unstable practice which essentialized the folk and led to a lack of fixity in the definition of Yankee.

*Yankee's* first editorial salvo from Sagendorph announced *Yankee's* birth not as a magazine, but metaphorically as an infant boy dropped on the doorstep of New Hampshire; the cover featured a young couple opening their front door to find a basket

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<sup>5</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, September 1935, 1. He signed this editorial, as he did many, “R.S.”

holding the infant.<sup>6</sup> Over the next months, Sagendorph returned to this infant, highlighting the challenges and rewards of raising the Yankee “child.” For Sagendorph, *Yankee*’s readers, not his editorial staff, were the parents. In the October 1935 issue, he noted a challenge to Yankee culture from a *New York Times Magazine* article:

“The real New England is a region that has known a prolonged twilight, a region whose high noon has passed before the emergence of modern America... But the plain fact is that politically and economically New England has become relatively unimportant... Throughout New England there is no deep thinking upon the problems of the nation. Instead the section draws upon its past to judge the issues of the present.”<sup>7</sup>

In response to this challenge to New England’s very relevance – a challenge that would surface repeatedly in *Yankee*’s early years – Sagendorph wrote, “Now such statements of fact as these ought to be answered, and it is the duty and pride of every New England man and woman to stand up and see that they are.” Lest his readers did not have an answer at the ready, he provided one:

The real New England is not something which is to be measured in dollars and cents, in factories and smokestacks, fish dinners, or even beautiful scenery. If New England has lost its independence, its wisdom, its humor, and its resourcefulness—if it has ceased to be industrious, kind hearted, upright, and

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this cover, see Conforti, 291-2. The couple were young and modern, suggesting that Sagendorph, from the beginning, envisioned his readers as younger New Englanders and not the older residents it often made the subjects of its content.

<sup>7</sup> “An Inquiry into the New England Mind,” quoted in Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, October 1935, 1. Ellipses in original.

honorable,—then it has lost its soul and it is knowing a “prolonged twilight.” But New England has not lost these things, and perhaps she has not lost them for the very reason that she has not accepted to the degree that certain other sections of the country have, the modern dogma of corporate economy existence.

By equating modern America to “the modern dogma of corporate economy existence,” Sagendorph challenged the notion that modern America had passed New England by. Instead, New England had better weathered the forces of modernity because it had held onto its past, not necessarily in tangible form, but in values. He continued his defense of New England by quoting Thoreau’s *Walden*:

Long ago, Thoreau wrote that “youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon or perchance a temple on earth and at length the middle aged man concludes to build a woodshed of them.” Possibly, New England’s woodsheds, filled as they are right now, ready for the coming winter, testify to a faith in self help and minding one’s own business, which gray haired and mellowed traditions as they are, nevertheless have served, and still serve, as pretty good providers after all.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas Thoreau’s analogy illustrates the idealism of youth compared to practicality of middle age, Sagendorph appropriated it to portray youth as wayward and greedy, engaged in a rampant capitalism that ultimately led nowhere (although the implication is that it led to the Great Depression). Conversely, the middle aged man, by acting practically and rejecting intervention, is prepared to weather the winter on his own. In this case, as in the previous editorial, Sagendorph called upon specific attributes – industriousness, kind

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<sup>8</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, October 1935, 2.

heartedness, independence, wisdom, humor, resourcefulness – that were worth saving.

*Yankee* would adopt this defensive posture throughout its first years, using outside threats to Yankee culture as a means to reiterate those aspects of the culture worth protecting and promoting. He also looked to the past, in Thoreau and in traditional values, to challenge those threats.

The third in this series of editorials took the form of a parable on the potential demise of Yankee culture at the hands of government intervention, specifically the New Deal. In the story, the editors take the “little feller” for his first walk in order for him to see “a little of this ‘cold and forbidding world’ which the weak are wont to style this land of opportunity.” They come across a man chopping down his trees because he had read in the papers that “‘this neck of the woods is goin’ ter be made inter goat pastures....all the northeastern states is goin’ ter be made that way....ain’t good fur nawthin’ else ‘cept ter provide bushes and the like fer them bearded critters ter chaw on...’.” As they walk away from the man, the Yankee child “was lost in thought, thinking about all these friends of his, wondering why it was they were content to sit back, and allow their land, their civilization, to go back into grazing fields, fit only for goats.” Sagendorph ended with another call to action:

But the gleam in the little feller’s eye as we put him to bed that night told us something. As he went on his way down that winding country road at some future date, and found men making his lands into grazing fields, he’d “scrap” for his future and his heritage, and the only goats there would be in his pastures would be

two legged ones, by heck, and they'd be standin' right up on their own hindlegs, too...and right proud of it.<sup>9</sup>

Sagendorph took an aggressive tone in this letter, warning even those within the fold – the older generation of northern New Englanders who came to represent the traditional Yankee – not to be duped by those who would tell them that Yankee culture was in decline. Instead, they must act. Whatever decline New England faced was being caused by outside influences and precipitated by those who would sit back and allow it to happen. Civilization, culture, heritage – these required upkeep. Ironically, New England's future depended on holding onto the past and rejecting rampant capitalism. Sagendorph and the editors of *Yankee* would repeatedly echo this sentiment in *Yankee's* first years, presenting the magazine as the means to sustain Yankee culture.

At the end of the second Yankee Child editorial, Sagendorph placed the care of the “little fellow” in the readers' hands: “Don't forget—*Yankee* should grow up to be the expression of a great Yankee culture. His future, still, belongs to you. It is your care, your friendship, and your criticisms he needs—even more than ours.”<sup>10</sup> The “little fellow,” as a metaphor for the magazine, forever conflated *Yankee* and Yankee culture, making one indistinguishable from the other. The responsibility for the magazine, and therefore, the responsibility for saving Yankee culture, rested with the readers. To fail to support *Yankee* would lead to the “prolonged twilight” of regional obscurity. However, Sagendorph was canny. The metaphor of child disguised both commerce and timeless tradition, two variables in the process of commodifying readers.

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<sup>9</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, November 1935, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, October 1935, 1.

Although Sagendorph clearly positioned *Yankee* as the source for protection and promotion of Yankee culture, the allegory of the Yankee child raises questions about who and what was being saved, as well as who was doing the saving. From its inception, *Yankee* clearly stated that it was imperative to preserve certain “Yankee values.” Myriad articles and editorials proclaimed that authentic Yankees displayed some combination of resourcefulness, ingenuity, individuality, frugality, honesty, humor, and wisdom.<sup>11</sup> These and similar values became both fungible and transferable characteristics of a Yankee. Furthermore, the magazine implied that these values resided in generations past and could still be found in northern New England’s older residents. These old New Englanders were featured regularly in *Yankee*’s first years and became the epitome of the authentic Yankee.<sup>12</sup> Yet, by identifying these older New Englanders as the embodiment of the Yankee past, the magazine also implied that these old Yankees were being lost to the past and needed preservation by a younger generation of Yankees. The way to preserve that past was to learn about and practice their timeless Yankee values before they disappeared forever.

Sagendorph did not conjure up the anxiety about New England’s decline. According to myriad sources, New England had been constantly declining, in various degrees and in various parts of New England, since as early as the mid-nineteenth century. As Dona Brown explains, much of the nineteenth century tourism industry

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<sup>11</sup> “The Value of Traditions,” Editorial Page, *Yankee*, May 1936, 2. See also, Paul F. Douglass, “We the Yankees,” *Yankee*, April 1941, 20-21, 32-33; “Some of the Traits,” Just Among Ourselves, *Yankee*, November 1942. These articles were like many others that clearly defined the values inherent in the traditional definition of yankeeness.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of how *Yankee* visually portrayed the traditional Yankee, see Conforti’s analysis of the August 1939 cover. Conforti, 291-295.

occurred in areas that had experienced the failure or decline of core industries, particularly whaling in Nantucket and agriculture in Vermont and New Hampshire. By the end of the nineteenth century, this sense of decline had become a popular topic in the media. It also led to a perception that rural northern New England, by losing its “best and brightest” to cities and the West, had decayed morally and spiritually.<sup>13</sup>

However, while northern New England had seen a Yankee diaspora, the sense that this decline was tragic was propagated mostly by outsiders, which we can see in the articles Sagendorph challenged in his early editorials. As Hal Barron argues, decreases in population did not necessarily lead to rural angst or melancholy. In fact, towns which had seen population decline may have reached an “equilibrium” that allowed for strengthened family and community ties.<sup>14</sup> There was no doubt, however, that Sagendorph relied on this idea of rural regional decline to fuel his revitalization project – that fear of loss gave the past its value.

Sagendorph certainly felt that he was in the midst of this decline. While he had been thinking about starting *Yankee* for several months prior to September 1935, he claimed to have been spurred to action by a visit from a local printer looking for business. He described the man as down on his luck, convinced he had been beaten by the depression but still containing an unflappable spirit and “decency.” Sagendorph described him in much the same way he described other “old Yankees” in his magazine. With the

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<sup>13</sup> Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 150-151.

<sup>14</sup> Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 37-50.

opportunity to launch his magazine, he decided to hire the man as his first printer.<sup>15</sup> Thus in one sense *Yankee's* effort to save a regional culture began with his effort to employ a single Yankee.

Because *Yankee* engaged in the preservation of a folk culture, its readers' relationship vis-à-vis *Yankee* was, at its heart, a search for authenticity. Folklore studies has traditionally concerned itself with identifying authentic folk culture, although in recent years, scholars have problematized the very term, arguing that authenticity is a fabrication born of observers' needs and not a description of cultural forms.<sup>16</sup> Becoming folk was, ironically, a process that obscured individual identity in favor of the group; the folk were part of an organic collective whose culture and behaviors were judged by outsiders. The actual people who satisfied the demographics of the targeted group, then, were essentialized. In her study of Appalachian folk culture, Jane Becker writes, "The worth of Southern Appalachian crafts, thus commodified, depended not on an understanding of the mountaineers as Americans living in a complex and changing contemporary world, but rather upon the invisibility of the Southern Appalachian people

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<sup>15</sup> Robb Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*" (1947), unpublished ms., *Yankee* archives, 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Regina Bendix argues that scholars need to move beyond this practice of searching out "authentic" cultures and instead seek to understand how this practice of authentication is an ideological and political process that says more about the desires and objectives of the authenticators than it does about the "folk." She calls it "commodification of the authentic." Jane Becker argues a similar point, calling it "commodification of tradition." Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folk Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 8-10.; Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7.

in the present.”<sup>17</sup> Folk cultures were attractive because “we access tradition through those who, we presume, enact it in their daily lives – the folk.”<sup>18</sup> The objective was rarely to confront an actual people on their own terms, but rather to find something that represented the folklorists’ own view of the past. In *Yankee*, the actual people were the older generation of northern New Englanders. The magazine relied on the idea of them. While readers were usually portrayed as New Englanders facing head-on the challenges of modern life, these older New Englanders were rarely featured beyond their narrowly defined role as living representatives of the past.

The search for folk cultures was especially active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as these cultures offered alternatives to a growing consumer culture. Those searching for folk cultures “often sought out people who, they imagined, lived in tightly knit societies, close to the soil, where life more closely resembled a preindustrial and precapitalist ideal.”<sup>19</sup> Later, during the 1930s depression, the impetus was not significantly different:

The folk and their traditions seemed to offer Americans the foundation for a way of life that did not rely on material wealth. Traditional practices, many believed, might be restorative, uniting body and spirit, nourishing the soul, encouraging self-reliance, and upholding the family. They might provide both a mythic source of collective identity, a mirror in which to view oneself, and a means to understand and come to grips with the contemporary world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Becker, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Those searching for authentic folk culture, as well as those purchasing the products of that culture, could be searching for an alternative to the lives they led, perhaps even constructing a new world on the backs of their ancestors.<sup>21</sup>

Here, the past and the traditions associated with the past became a powerful means to establish the authenticity of folk culture, as well as for making it attractive in the marketplace. Folk cultures came to represent an earlier way of life rather than a backwards culture, a prior version of America and American-ness, and “recasting cultural differences as temporal differences reshaped those distinctions as sources of unity rather than conflict, a transformation that served well the contemporary quest for defining a national identity in the midst of economic crisis.”<sup>22</sup> Seen as a force of unity rather than difference, folk culture became marketable. Yet, this process also essentialized the folk, relegating them to a static, historically locked position. While *Yankee* utilized this static view of the folk to emphasize the unity of Yankees – Sagendorph even suggested creating a Yankee political party as a reaction against New Dealism – it also exposed challenges to that dynamic: there were those who made it clear that differences still reigned.

So why is the authenticity of a people relevant in a marketplace? Bendix provides insight when she writes, “The transformation from felt or experienced authenticity to its textual or material representation harbors a basic paradox. Once a cultural good has been declared authentic, the demand for it rises, and it acquires a market value.”<sup>23</sup> Put another

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the regionalists’ utopian motivations, see Robert Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993), esp. xii-xiv, 250-73.

<sup>22</sup> Becker, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Bendix, 8.

way, once a folk culture has been deemed authentic, presumably because the folklorist has seen some aspect of a culture he or she wishes to promote, maintain, or resurrect, whatever that culture produces – music, food, crafts – embodies the value of that culture. Jean Baudrillard writes, “material goods are not the objects of consumption; they are merely the objects of need and satisfaction.”<sup>24</sup> He goes on to define consumption as “a systematic and *total idealist practice*, which far exceeds our relations to objects and relations among individuals, one that extends to all manifestations...of history, communication, and culture.”<sup>25</sup> In the case of a magazine for profit, that kind of value was desirable because it implied readers would purchase *things* in pursuit of *ideals*. If the magazine could establish authentic yankeeness, then it could market that essence as a commodity – the magazine – and in turn market its readers to advertisers.

When viewed in the marketplace, authenticity reveals its instability. The search for authentic folk cultures illuminates the needs of the searcher more than the essence of that which is sought. Therefore, when Sagendorph located authentic Yankee culture in a northern New England of the past threatened by outsiders, he created a subject that readers would seek to know in order to better cope with their contemporary worlds. They would be seeking a prior version of themselves, in the pages of a magazine.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 21. Italics in original.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. Italics in original.

## Magazines and the Therapeutic Ethos: Magazines as Space, Space and Region, Space and Publics

At the same time *Yankee* was defining authentic yankeeness as located in a northern New England of the past, Sagendorph claimed that “Yankeeland seems to have no borders” and encouraged readers to identify themselves as Yankees by defining yankeeness as a “state of mind,” compelling them to engage with the magazine in order to establish themselves as authentic.<sup>26</sup> Yet, by including all readers as Yankees while retaining a traditional definition, *Yankee* blurred that definition, creating instability. The very format of the modern magazine further complicated the search for stable definitions by detaching yankeeness from time and space. To fully understand how *Yankee* was able to effectively dislocate yankeeness and serve as a site to work out individual identity, we must understand *Yankee* and the concept of region as objects in a spatial framework; I rely on Henri Lefebvre’s and David Harvey’s theories for this argument.

In his investigation, Lefebvre addressed the relationship between physical and mental space, arguing that modernity is characterized by a shift from absolute space to abstract space and an accompanying shift to capitalist accumulation. We see accounts of this shift in the rise of the mass circulation magazine. As Richard Ohmann demonstrates in *Selling Culture*, only near the end of the nineteenth century did national mass circulation magazines begin to take on the form that we recognize as standard today: an assortment of stories, features, travel articles, letters, advertisements, photographs,

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<sup>26</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, December 1935, 2.

classifieds, etc.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the transition of the magazine into a compendium of loosely connected departments roughly mirrors Lefebvre's shift from absolute space to abstract space and the rise of mass culture. We see similar examples of this shift in Jackson Lears' account of how advertising worked to disconnect people from their "material world."<sup>28</sup>

Lefebvre argued that space is constructed socially as a means of reproducing society. He identified three different types of spaces: spatial practice, representation of space, and representational spaces (alternately called – and preferred by Harvey – experienced, conceptualized, and lived space). For Lefebvre, experienced space is the space of form, of objects. In this sense, to experience is to see, touch, and feel. Conceptualized space is the space of planning and thought that creates the experienced space. The building constructed to maximize the efficiency of its workers, or the school constructed to modify the behavior of its students, is the result of conceptualized space. Lefebvre claimed this space is dominant in society, since it influences (and often dictates) the actions and responses of individuals. Thus, his third category, lived space, is the space of the individual living within experienced and conceptualized spaces. Lefebvre argues that lived space is thus controlled, or dominated, space.<sup>29</sup> Magazines, as products created by publishers and editors that can shape views and behavior, are conceptualized spaces.

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<sup>27</sup> For the format of the modern magazine, see Ohmann, 223-225.

<sup>28</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 26; David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 119-148.

Another term for the individual is reader, who experiences the magazine in lived space and is thus controlled.

David Harvey expands Lefebvre's argument by privileging time and flexibility. First, while he acknowledges and generally supports Lefebvre's triad of experienced, conceptualized, and lived space, he emphasizes its temporality, devising his own "spatio-temporal" model of space. To illustrate this temporalized space, he identifies three new spaces: absolute (sometimes related to, but not to be confused with, Lefebvre's concept of absolute space), relative, and relational spaces. Absolute space is temporally and spatially situated: these are the items, ideas and feelings that seem to be located in a single time and a single location. Relative space puts items, ideas, and feelings in motion. Here, movement (either physical or mental) between absolute spaces is emphasized. Relational space is the space of perception and perspective – of the mind. In relational space, items, ideas, and feelings are individuated. Harvey aligns each of his spaces with Lefebvre's triad of experienced, conceptualized, and lived spaces, creating a more complex matrix of social space. In his second major expansion of Lefebvre's work, Harvey emphasizes that we constantly move between spaces (around the matrix). For example, the structure of any absolute space is often, if not always, determined by movement of items from another absolute space and by our perception of our absolute space vis-à-vis another absolute space.<sup>30</sup> While the magazine is a conceptualized space, it is also a relative space. It circulates and thus brings abstraction into the lives of readers as a relational space.

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey, esp. 130-132.

Since *Yankee*'s objective was the reclamation and maintenance of New England's culture, it had to position itself in response to the location of its readers and existing concepts of that regional culture. As part of this equation, it is important to understand that the very notion of a regional culture is itself fundamentally spatial. Edward Ayers argues that, while regions are made up of actual places, they are also imagined, and therefore, are representations framed in terms of space and time.<sup>31</sup> In one sense, a region is made up of absolute spaces – mountains, rivers, towns, buildings, people. We can visit these places. However, over time and through hegemonic processes (e.g., print, politics, and cultural products), they also take the form of a region – a mythic or idealized assembly of associations – thereby becoming abstract. Thus the magazine, as one of those forms of print, is hegemonic. However, in practice, *Yankee* was surprisingly dialogic. It repeatedly invited (even relied upon) its readers to supply content for the magazine and to participate in framing the magazine's content and tone.<sup>32</sup> While that participation was always subject to editorial control, *Yankee* proved surprisingly hands-off, even encouraging debate and dissent on many issues.

We can see the shift from absolute space to abstract space in the evolution of what constituted "New England" in response to the flows of people and capital as early as the mid-nineteenth century. People left the agriculturally dominated society of northern New

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<sup>31</sup> Edward L. Ayers and Peter S. Onuf, "Introduction," in Edward L. Ayers et al., *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1-10.

<sup>32</sup> As he attempted to grow the magazine in its first years, Sagendorph claimed he and his editors sought reader feedback wherever they could get it – reader letters, fairs, winter sports shows, the 1939 New York World's Fair, etc. Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*," 133, 354-55.

England for the West and industrial urban areas farther south (e.g., Boston, Springfield, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, and further) even as immigrants moved into these same cities.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, this exodus led to the perceived decline of northern New England as a relevant part of the nation, as we can see by Sagendorph's editorials. On the other hand, as Conforti and Nissenbaum both demonstrate, the perceived center of New England then shifted in response to this industrialization and the resulting higher non-native born population, from encompassing all of the six states to only Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.<sup>34</sup>

As an abstract space, regional cultures consist partly of traditions and memories. We can see this process of abstraction best in the so-called traditional New England village, an invention of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that has become central to the popular concept of the region. These villages of white houses around a town green, usually anchored by a congregational church with a tall, white steeple, have been the subject of myriad photographs and memories. They have taken on the guise of timelessness and have come to represent older, "pre-modern" New England and the values the regions' advocates associate with it: order, simplicity, community. Yet, these towns arose in the decades after the American Revolution as part of a new agricultural market economy. These town centers grew into commercial hubs containing all the support services necessary to sustain the farmers: bankers, lawyers, tradespeople, etc. The architectural aesthetic which we now consider quaint was actually rooted in commerce. White paint was chosen because it was associated with classical buildings and

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<sup>33</sup> Barron, 31-40.

<sup>34</sup> See Conforti, 263-65 and Nissenbaum, 38-61.

communicated stability, simplicity, and virtue. However, even that decision was linked to commerce: white paint “proclaimed the prosperity and even class consciousness that the new commercial order bestowed on New England villages.” It was also more expensive than colored paint, and so was the color of wealth.<sup>35</sup> The well-maintained and idyllic town greens that define so many of these villages today were usually reclaimed meetinghouse lots. Ironically, “a new commercialism and economic individualism transformed New England’s dispersed towns into compact white central villages that artists and writers then constructed as emblems of the region’s venerable communalism.”<sup>36</sup> Overall, “in its architecture and landscape design, the white central village seemed to embody New England’s classical republican and communal ways and to mask the dynamic commercialism that was its lifeblood.”<sup>37</sup> What we now see as traditional, a quaint respite from rampant consumer culture – strip malls and big-box stores – had its origins in modern and even in many places global commerce.<sup>38</sup> It was only through hegemonic processes – of which magazines were but one – that the “traditional” New England village achieved that quaintness.

Original sources of traditions and memories need not exist in the present. Take, for example, the Old Man on the Mountain, an outcropping of rock on the side of Cannon Mountain in northern New Hampshire that, from a certain angle, looked like an old man’s face. Millions of people, both tourists and locals, saw it firsthand and have memories of

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<sup>35</sup> Conforti, 129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of New England’s commercial infrastructure, see Conforti, 124-40, and Barron, chaps. 1-2, esp. 16-30. For the origins of the tourist industry in New England, see Brown, esp. chap. 2.

the event. These memories are locked in time and place for each individual and help form his or her concept of the region. Yet, in the mind of that individual, perhaps these memories combine with abstractions of the Old Man. Many people associate the Old Man with a tradition of individualism because it was made New Hampshire's state symbol and was placed on its highway signs and license plates, paired with the state slogan, "Live Free or Die." Imbued with social meaning and reified through such devices as newspapers, government agencies, and artists, the Old Man has become abstract. Although the Old Man crumbled in 2003, it still exists through the various representations and as memories.<sup>39</sup>

As a magazine and one of the cultural products that participated in producing region, *Yankee* can be understood in this spatial framework – as working both as a space and across space. In absolute space, *Yankee* served as a physical item in a specific location (a woman in December 1935 reading *Yankee* in her living room in Madison, Connecticut); as relative space, *Yankee* created movement between absolute spaces by carrying information and product (*Yankee* is mailed from its offices in Dublin, New Hampshire to the aforementioned woman and carries within it advertisements for products made in and articles about northern New England); and as relational space, readers approached *Yankee* from various perspectives (depending upon the individual locations, histories, and attitudes of the readers towards New England). Individual readers perceived and processed those definitions in relational space. Finally, *Yankee* was a

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<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the Old Man and its development as a tourist attraction, see Brown, 67-70.

conceptualized space; it was a magazine for profit with content, created and manipulated monthly by its editors, which masked its commercial motives. Ultimately, spatial theory helps us to understand that New England is a socially produced space – a continuous and always changing invention. *Yankee* was one of the products that helped produce that space. It engaged existing ideas about the New England region while working to shape those ideas. Readers, by participating in the magazine, were participating in the reinvention of New England.

*Yankee*, by engaging its readers in this process, became a public, another useful framework for looking at a magazine. Michael Warner defines a public as “the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.”<sup>40</sup> *Circulation* is critical since “it is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time.”<sup>41</sup> While a single pamphlet does not create a public, a monthly magazine does because of its repeatable, punctual circulation. Additionally, publics are not created in historical vacuums: “Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public.”<sup>42</sup> Publics are created in historical context. In *Yankee*’s case, that context included such factors as the Depression, ongoing debates about class and pluralism, as well as pre-existing concepts of New England as a region and the “Yankees” that inhabited it.

Warner defines the members of a public as its “addressees.” In *Yankee*, these addressees were readers. However, since a public only exists in space, it is a “relation

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

among strangers.”<sup>43</sup> Thus a public lacks a concrete, pre-defined “addressee.” Sagendorph, as creator of a public, may have had an idea of who would read *Yankee*, but he could not know definitively whom he would be addressing, or who would listen. Since publics are “volitional,” addressees only need tune in if the discourse “interests” them. If Sagendorph wanted to create a successful magazine, inasmuch as success is dictated by subscriptions, he needed to create a thriving public, which means he had to generate and hold his readers’ interest. He did this by appealing to his readers’ nostalgia and by making *Yankee* a participatory space. However, as I discuss later, Sagendorph also held his readers’ interest by encouraging debate. Thus content that generated a sense of unity among readers served the same purpose as content that exposed divisions.

Finally, we must consider that a public is both “personal” and “impersonal.” As Warner explains, public discourse “must be taken in two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers. The benefit in this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so.”<sup>44</sup> This aspect of publics has significant implications for *Yankee*. It is this duality of personal and impersonal speech that allowed readers to think that they could address identity in a magazine by engaging in its discourse.

Although *Yankee* had originally been published as primarily a New Hampshire magazine, with twenty-five hundred subscriptions “for Yankee readers, by Yankee writers, about Yankeedom,” it quickly became more inclusive as it received feedback

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 58.

from readers and sought new subscriptions throughout and outside of New England.<sup>45</sup> Recognizing the spread of his enterprise, Sagendorph remarked in one of the *Yankee* child editorials that “Yankeeland seems to have no borders.”<sup>46</sup> Sagendorph referred to this as having a Yankee “state of mind,” and the magazine’s tagline was changed to “For Yankees Everywhere.”<sup>47</sup> It naturally followed that, if yankeeness was a state of mind, anyone could become a Yankee. All the magazine’s non-native or generationally removed readers had to do to become Yankees was to self-identify as such. Like many early readers, Mrs. G. Herbert Taylor from Maplewood, NJ did just that with her letter to the magazine:

Dear *Yankee*:

May I tell you how much you have become a part of Me? I have never had a magazine wrap itself around my heart as you do. I am not New England born, but my ancestors all were, and my family tell me I should have been. And if I had been, I could not love it more. Thanks for bringing me New England cheer and hospitality.<sup>48</sup>

Mrs. Taylor may not have been in the right state, but she could try to prove that she was in the right state of mind. Throughout *Yankee*’s first years, these New England exiles demonstrated an anxious longing to belong to this public of Yankees. The magazine created the means to bring them into the fold and provided the space for them to express their longing. Almost monthly, *Yankee* published letters from readers professing their

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<sup>45</sup> *Yankee*, Contents, October 1935, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, October 1935, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Yankee*, October 1935, Front Cover.

<sup>48</sup> Mrs. G. Herbert Taylor, Letter to the Editor, *Yankee*, January 1939, 45.

homesickness for New England and their appreciation for the magazine that “reached deep into [their] hearts” and helped them “see and feel much of the New England [they] used to know.”<sup>49</sup> Yet, the validity of these claims was always in question because yankeeness itself was an abstract idea. Ironically, readers would engage with the source of this abstraction in an attempt to assuage their various anxieties. Readers seemed more than willing to do their homework, as well as to encourage others. As one reader noted, “*Yankee* to me means real joy. I intend to pass the magazine to some who have no money to buy good reading and who are interested in studying the Yankee.....You have started Yankee on his way. Keep him going and we will help in our small way....”<sup>50</sup>

*Yankee* existed in a spatial framework – as a space and in space. Harvey’s spatio-temporal model allows us to look at *Yankee* not just for what it was, but also for how it contributed to the ongoing concept of region and for how readers used it in their understanding of the region and themselves as New Englanders. *Yankee* became a public – a site of discourse for readers to practice and perform a never-ending ritual in an attempt to validate their authenticity as New Englanders.

Nostalgia, Invented Tradition, and the Creation of the Yankee Public: Becoming *Yankee*

Setting forth with the purpose of revitalizing Yankee culture, *Yankee* engaged its readers through a shared sense of nostalgia, becoming a purveyor of Yankee folklore and creating an invented tradition to address the modern world. On the surface, this folklore revealed certain values as timeless traditions. However, as with any effort to look at the

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<sup>49</sup> Emily S. Brown, Letter to the Editor, *Yankee*, May 1938, 3. This letter was one of a group of twenty *Yankee* published in this issue as “Letters from Homesick Yankees.”

<sup>50</sup> Susan T. Foster, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, December 1935, 55.

present through the prism of the past, *Yankee*'s efforts had a destabilizing effect. Set against a backdrop of loss and recovery, *Yankee*'s content prescribed behavior that was impractical, revealed inconsistencies in "Yankee values," and exposed anxieties in readers. The magazine framed these discourses of anxiety and encouraged readers to participate in the magazine. Thus, *Yankee* became a site to preserve memories and the locus of readers' efforts to stabilize their own sense of authenticity. In essence, readers' nostalgic desire to seek out a folk culture as a response to the abstractions of modernity fueled the magazine.

*Yankee* regularly provided folklore as a standard against which any aspiring Yankee could measure himself. In just its second issue, *Yankee* included "Yankee Facts and Dates" by J. Edwin Gott, a department that would run in various iterations throughout *Yankee*'s pre-war years. It included a calendar of events for the month and a column detailing interesting lore about the six New England states. The information ranged from the simple – the tallest elm tree in New England was in Conway, NH<sup>51</sup> – to the more unique and complex – "A small Connecticut town sold a factory valued at \$7,000 for a dollar. The only 'catch' was that the purchaser pay taxes on it and employ the townspeople."<sup>52</sup> Occasionally, Gott included the humorous:

The famous ship, "The Ranger," which was first commanded by the not less famous sea captain, John Paul Jones, was built at Badger's Island in the Piscataqua River opposite Portsmouth. John Paul Jones once went out to sea

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<sup>51</sup> J. Edwin Gott, Yankee Facts and Dates, *Yankee*, October 1935, 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

flying “his own stars and stripes” cut from the silk gowns of the girls of New Hampshire.<sup>53</sup>

While the items in Gott’s column included facts and dates from the twentieth century, many of the entries took the form of cultural narratives, or folklore, meant to impart core Yankee values of industry, frugality, and individualism. Perhaps most importantly, Gott’s entries were a thru line to Yankee roots, implying that the values they expressed were timeless traditions. Collected together and repeated, these items comprised an invented tradition. As Eric Hobsbawm explains, invented tradition “seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition,” attempting to “establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”<sup>54</sup> One of the wellsprings for this past is folklore, which, as Hobsbawm explains, “is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.”<sup>55</sup> Put more strongly, the “commodification of tradition depends upon...deceptions, along with a sort of deliberate amnesia.”<sup>56</sup> As author, Gott chose what became the folklore of the community and, in that way, exercised control of the space.

Seeking to involve its readers in the magazine, *Yankee* often ran quizzes on Yankee lore, implying that lore was a substitute for essence and challenging readers to confront their own sense of yankeeness. For example, in 1937 the magazine ran a series

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<sup>53</sup> J. Edwin Gott, Yankee Facts and Dates, *Yankee*, November 1935, 62.

<sup>54</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Becker, 236.

of quizzes cleverly positioned within yet apart from the modern trend of acronyms: “In this era of alphabets – PWA, IQ, CIO, NBC – *Yankee* herewith offers another contribution: the RUA’s. R U A Baystater? R U A Downeaster? R U A Green Mountain Yankee? These are the questions all good Yankees have been waiting for.”<sup>57</sup> Each “RUA” included between fifteen and sixteen questions for each of the six New England states. The questions, on the whole, were challenging, calling on obscure geographical, historical, and cultural knowledge. There were several other installments, each with the subtitle “All Right—Prove it!”<sup>58</sup> Like other forms of invented tradition, such as eating certain dishes, wearing certain clothing, or practicing certain rituals, facts established a sense of continuity with the past. However, unlike more actionable traditions, facts did not beget behavior; they could only be read. Furthermore, facts were easily “produced” by *Yankee*’s writers – and by its readers. Soon after the department began, Webster announced that *Yankee* would pay twenty-five cents for “any acceptable facts, with proof” submitted by readers.<sup>59</sup>

These titles, as well as the content of the quizzes, linked authenticity to knowledge of folklore and placed the burden of proof on the reader. If, as the magazine claimed, *Yankee* was a “state of mind,” then knowledge of the selective Yankee past was the mark of true statehood. If the reader knew the answers to these questions, then he was a Yankee because only someone who lived these facts would know them. However, the

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<sup>57</sup> Jason Almus Russell, “RUA Yankee?” *Yankee*, August 1937, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Jason Almus Russell, “Are You a Yankee Homeowner?” *Yankee*, May 1937, 6; “Are You a Yankee Schooma’am?” *Yankee*, June 1937, 12. New quizzes appeared frequently throughout *Yankee*’s first seven years.

<sup>59</sup> Clarence M. Webster, Yankee Facts and Dates, *Yankee*, January 1937, 30. Webster took over the column from Gott in 1937.

facts presented were so disparate and obscure that no one reader could have known them all. The emphasis, then, was on acquiring information, not on innate knowledge of it. If a reader did not know the answers, he could keep reading the magazine, hoping to gather enough information to become closer to that which he desired. However, there was no grading scale to indicate how many questions he needed to answer correctly in order to call himself a fully authentic Yankee or a semi-authentic Yankee. The answer to the title's question needed to be either yes or no, but paradoxically, no amount of right answers would enable the reader to become any more authentic.

The quizzes implied that lore was a substitute for essence and were meant to reveal that essence. However, most of the test items were arcane and not usable; they could not teach behavior, and they could not recreate the past. As practices in an invented tradition, they were "quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership" they fostered.<sup>60</sup> However, these facts and quizzes did foster a mix of nostalgia and anxiety which readers hoped *Yankee* would assuage. One reader, whose letter was included under the heading "Letters from Homesick Readers," lamented with "homesick tears" that she had "flunked" one of the quizzes, so was sending in her money for a subscription.<sup>61</sup> The "RUAs," like "Yankee Facts and Dates," could not resolve readers' anxieties about their authenticity, only contribute to the continuing instability of yankeeness.

*Yankee's* early and ongoing devotion to facts encouraged a consistent stream of participation in the form of readers' questions. While the magazine initially published

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<sup>60</sup> Hobsbawm, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Florence B. Hayes, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, May 1938, 36.

these queries in the letters department, in its editorial space, and in a department called “Dreams and Observations,” it eventually created departments specifically to answer these questions. In “I Want to Know...,” later renamed simply “Queries,” readers submitted questions ranging from how to prepare a barn floor for square dancing to how to make a traditional country Christmas box. Many of the questions asked *Yankee* to help identify the use of old objects, such as a trunk covered with deerskin with the hair left on and lined with hand-blocked paper. When stumped, *Yankee* put the question to other readers.<sup>62</sup> Thus, *Yankee* encouraged other readers to participate in the search to understand the past.

“Yankee Facts and Dates” and the “RUAs” emphasized Yankee folklore, but other articles encouraged readers to seek their own personal lore in the form of genealogy. In its first years, *Yankee* framed this search by providing both its purpose and practice. In one article, Margaret Skinner Rice provided some insight on the New Englander’s desire to know his ancestors: “there is something about this part of the country that instills an appreciation of the past”..., that “in spite of all the modern pish and tush to tradition, a ‘family’ gives us a feeling of attachment and security [and] there are very few Americans who could fail, with patience, to gain at least some small knowledge of their forefathers.” There was much at stake for aspiring Yankees: “It doesn’t matter whether one is a Yankee of the old stock or one of the new stock; whether one’s blood has been in America for three hundred years or for ten...the true New Englander is interested in family.” Here, she implied that authenticity had as much to do with sentiment as with bloodlines. While she straddled the line between definitions of

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<sup>62</sup> *Yankee*, I Want to Know..., November 1937, 23; *Yankee*, Queries, April 1941, 4.

authentic yankeeness based on lineage or affiliation, she argued that all New Englanders need to know their ancestry to establish and ensure their own existence. For readers with New England lineage, genealogy established and maintained New England bloodlines. For readers without New England ancestry, the important point was that they shared the same values as an authentic New Englander: in this case, that family and family history were important. However, most importantly, readers needed to act quickly to preserve evidence of their families' – and their own – existence. As she warned, “unless you step fast, your own name will not be on that chart one hundred years from now.”

Rice ended the article reminding readers that those ancestors they have never heard about were just as much their relations as those they did know: “each one is a part of you.”<sup>63</sup> Here, she implied that gaining some knowledge of ancestry helps to solidify a person's identity. However, as part of an invented tradition, facts gained from genealogy, like those from Facts and Dates and the RUA quizzes, were selective and unusable, except as tools to establish lineage and to express sentiment. Ancestors' stories are more complex than the facts that trickle down to later generations. Certainly we cannot know their values via these facts, except through leaps of assumption based on our own selective understanding of such social markers as geography, class, ethnicity, and race. Our ancestors are in the past and so our understanding of them is incomplete and, as such, akin to folklore. Like much of *Yankee*'s content, Rice's article showed that the past was

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<sup>63</sup> Margaret Skinner Rice, “Five Generations are Enough!” *Yankee*, August 1937, 20-21.

in some sense unknowable, yet it still emphasized the importance of seeking that knowledge so as not to lose it.<sup>64</sup>

*Yankee* provided space for readers to conduct these genealogical searches. It invited readers who had “misaid, or found, other Yankees, dead or alive, or who have been misaid themselves” to submit to a new department it called Lost and Found.<sup>65</sup> After early success, the column was discontinued for one month due to complaints of impropriety from some readers and advertisers. Their claims were not unfounded. While most of the “ads” sought lost relatives or information about family names, many were personals from readers seeking a certain someone they had sat next to at a concert or seen reading a book. Apparently, some readers feared that *Yankee* was playing matchmaker. When the column resumed in October, the ads were decidedly more familial.

Whereas genealogy addressed the readers’ own families, the magazine implied that Yankees shared a common set of ancestors. Throughout its early years, *Yankee* included a department for book reviews. In one iteration, “Book Talk: A Review of New England Books,” Robert P. Tristram Coffin and his wife Ruth wrote on various types of books – novels, poetry, cookbooks, travel guides – all on the subject of New England.<sup>66</sup> One of the staples of the reviews was to evaluate a book on its yankeeness, an implied formula which equated a book’s value to its references to New England traditions and

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Kammen discusses the marked increase in genealogical pursuits amongst the wide middle class in the 1930s. He calls it the “democratization” of genealogy. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991), 421.

<sup>65</sup> *Yankee*, Lost and Found, June 1938, 36, and recurring.

<sup>66</sup> Robert P. Tristram Coffin, Book Talk, *Yankee*, January 1939, 5-6, and recurring. The department changed names to “Books and Poetry” in April 1939.

their relevance to the present. As with other historical knowledge in *Yankee*, these reviews instructed readers about traditional values and the importance of keeping them alive in the present as talismans against the complexity of modern life. Coffin reviewed Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson's *The Puritans*, which he called "native" and useful for "anyone who wishes to know what the essence of New England really is," and he asserted that any true Yankee must read the book: "Thanks to these men of iron [the Puritans], who still run in our aunts' veins!" Coffin called upon his generational connectedness to an authentic past, the very blood of his ancestors, as a stay against "this vast and wider scientific universe" of the present. "No one will ever be able to rebuild" this past, he wrote, but he implied that a true Yankee contained within him the essence of the past and so could survive in the present by remembering that past.<sup>67</sup>

*Yankee* set these articles on ancestry against a backdrop of loss and recovery. Portraying the past as irrecoverable, the magazine demonstrated what happened when Yankees abandoned their core values. One such article, "Forgotten Industries," served as a pictorial tribute to old industries in New England displaced by industrial progress and mass production. Each picture showed the craft, the craftspeople, or the building that housed the craftspeople: a quilting bee; corn husk beds; the Old Match Factory in Boxford, Massachusetts; a blacksmith in Upper Waterford, Vermont.<sup>68</sup> It occasionally portrayed the "last words" of the Yankee dead. When, after running several epitaphs in earlier issues, *Yankee's* readers began sending in their own, the magazine put out a formal request. The resulting "Epitaphs from New England's Old Cemeteries" featured

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<sup>67</sup> Robert P. Tristram Coffin, "The Puritans," review of *The Puritans*, by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *Yankee*, February 1939, 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> "Forgotten Industries," *Yankee*, August 1940, 26-27.

photographs of old gravestones and several pages of epitaphs ranging from somber warnings of the inevitability of death to the humorous and witty.<sup>69</sup> In other articles, readers were asked to remember the past, but could not be blamed if they did not want to mourn its passing: “Lest Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot” featured photographs of decaying outhouses with tongue in cheek captions.<sup>70</sup> Such articles reminded readers of simpler times, yet made it clear that modern life had its advantages. Thus *Yankee* sought to allow readers to preserve an invented past because many aspects of the historical past were both irrecoverable *and* undesired. Readers could feel nostalgia while enjoying the trappings of modern life.

In other cases, *Yankee* showed that it could recover the past by featuring “authentic” Yankees keeping traditions alive. In “Little Wooden Figures,” Wayne Buxton featured the craftsman’s figures that were “Whittled out of white pine with a jackknife – occasionally for sale. A genuine art brought up to date.”<sup>71</sup> These wooden figurines acquired value by manufacture against the threat of losing them to the past.<sup>72</sup> In Buxton’s description, the long dash followed by “occasionally for sale” implied not that the craftsman produced the product expressly for sale, but rather that he whittled as a matter of course and only sold as an afterthought. This idea is critical to the integrity of the folk concept on which much of *Yankee* was based. Folk are not supposed to be savvy

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<sup>69</sup> “Epitaphs from New England’s Cemeteries,” *Yankee*, July 1938, 24-27, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Stella Drury, “Lest Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot,” *Yankee*, September 1939, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Wayne Buxton, “Little Wooden Figures,” *Yankee*, August 1940, 35.

<sup>72</sup> This valuation of arts and crafts parallels Becker’s discussion of the arts and crafts of Appalachia. She writes, “most efforts to promote mountain craft traditions...relied on the past to define the value and meaning of those traditions in both Appalachian and American culture.” Becker, 8.

marketers: marketing is a product of modern consumer culture. Folk are meant to reside outside of the mainstream of capitalist society, not promoting themselves but rather awaiting discovery by those seeking the authentic past. *Yankee* repeatedly made these types of discoveries for its readers.

However, *Yankee* did not intend its readers to live *in* the past. From the beginning, Sagendorph featured articles addressing current issues and concerns relevant to readers: forestry, the textiles industry, the shoe industry, agriculture. However, within months their numbers had dwindled, replaced by articles focused solely on the past or that melded the past with the present.<sup>73</sup> *Yankee* frequently ran articles discussing how Yankee values were useful in modern life, such as a series on “our precious New England heritage.” The title of the first article spoke to the overriding concern of many readers: “Making Our Traditions Work for Us.”<sup>74</sup> While modern readers might not whittle, they carried within them the timeless values to succeed in the modern world, as demonstrated by the subjects in “Six Smart Yanks.” Each article in this series featured six people, one from each New England state who had accomplished something impressive through their Yankee ingenuity – a young man saved someone’s life, an older woman became a world-class competitive woodchopper, another man invented a better ski rack.<sup>75</sup> *Yankee* implied that while many of the old crafts and industries were being lost, the values that created them lived on in modern Yankees. As it did with most departments, the magazine

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<sup>73</sup> While for the first four months, these articles on industry comprised a separate section, they were soon integrated into the magazine. Once split up, the magazine rarely included more than one article on industry, if any.

<sup>74</sup> Walter Prichard Eaton, “Making Our Traditions Work for Us,” *Yankee*, January 1938, 16-17, 37.

<sup>75</sup> *Yankee*, Six Smart Yanks, January 1938, 14.

eventually invited readers to participate in “Six Smart Yanks.” In October 1938, three years after it created the department, *Yankee* announced that it would pay five dollars for accepted copy, photograph, and a full typed page of facts on a “smart Yank.”<sup>76</sup>

The implication here, as with other articles promoting knowledge of Yankee traditions, was that knowing one’s ancestry was the spatial equivalent of becoming part of the Yankee tribe. The reader could not go back in time, but these articles implied that authentic Yankees contained within themselves the essence of yankeeness and could demonstrate that essence by participating in the magazine. *Yankee* relocated the essence of yankeeness into the bodies of its readers, claiming that a person could become authentic by acting like those in the past. However, this knowledge, this folklore, was temporally specific; it could not translate to the modern world of the readers. In fact, by privileging certain historical information, the magazine made that history “essential.” It was not asking readers if they had a fully rounded and complex understanding of their ancestors and how they lived; instead, the magazine directed readers to live according to a specifically chosen and narrowly defined set of values that the editors believed were relevant to the present.

*Yankee*’s readers showed an affinity for the past and its accompanying nostalgia and anxieties of loss. While readers outside of New England often wrote expressing their longing for the New England they had left, many readers had recently returned either by vacationing, summering, or relocating permanently. Addressed jointly as “summer people,” they became a steady source of content – and anxiety – for *Yankee*.

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<sup>76</sup> *Yankee*, Six Smart Yanks, October 1938, 35.

Dreams and Observations, one of the first departments to encourage reader participation, became an important site for addressing anxieties about the relationship between “summer people” and “natives.” As a result, it became an important site for prescribing Yankee identity. The department’s author, calling himself The Collector, set the expectations for both content and tone of the department as well as other departments that sought participation from *Yankee’s* readers.<sup>77</sup> Dreams and Observations established a standard of Yankee types by presenting a collection of characters who expressed some important traits of Yankee culture, notably frugality of speech and Yankee humor.

The magazine often portrayed “old Yankees” as traditional, almost archetypal characters apart from the modern world who demonstrated wisdom through reticence. When they spoke, they used few words, but all were pointed and efficient, what the Collector called frugality, often referred to in the magazine as “plain talk.” Prefacing one anecdote, the Collector observed that “New England is noted for great variety in climate, contour, and industry. These glimpses of the personalities of two old farmers born and bred in the hills show that the same variety runs through the people themselves.” The first farmer was known for his “kindly tact,” as his “strongest denunciation of his worst enemies would always be, ‘I like So-and-So, he’s a fine man; but I don’t like a darn thing he does!’” The second farmer was known for his “bluntness.” At a surprise birthday party thrown for him by his neighbors, his daughter expressed her embarrassment at having put out too few chairs. The farmer responded, “Now, now, there’s chairs enough...chairs a-plenty, but there’s a sight too many people for ‘em!” These and other characters

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<sup>77</sup> Although the magazine never revealed the identity of the Collector, Sagendorph identifies him in his unpublished manuscript as Newt Tolman, husband of Beth Tolman, an associate editor at the magazine. Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 111.

presented a paradox: plain talk implies honesty since we assume that fewer words leave less room for embellishment or doublespeak. Yet, within this paucity of language lay the possibility for deception. Readers could interpret these farmers either positively or negatively depending on their own opinion about tact and honesty, but the magazine made it clear through their frequent appearances that these characters were part of a Yankee tradition. Readers who considered themselves Yankees or who aspired to become Yankees needed to understand how to feel about these characters.

The magazine relied upon established Yankee archetypes, most notably Yankee trickster, to teach behavior. Readers proved themselves well-versed in the characteristics of the trickster, submitting anecdotes and poems featuring this type of character. Traditionally, the Yankee trickster could take two forms. One was of a more aggressive ilk, seeking out rubes and driving hard bargains through “sharp practice.” This type in part derived from the traditions of the Yankee peddler.<sup>78</sup> The other type was the more agreeable “native” and was the type preferred by *Yankee*. He did not seek out his marks. Instead, they blundered upon him. Those marks were usually portrayed as greedy or selfish, or simply naïve outsiders. Confronted with these people who did not understand country ways – usually summer people or vacationers – he would expose their lack of sentiment and local knowledge. In one story, a woman summering in a northern New Hampshire town complained to a native about the high price of groceries. She expected prices lower than in Boston and was offended that this town did not recognize how far away from the city it was. Hearing this, the native sent her to the next town over, twenty

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the Yankee peddler as trickster, see Conforti, 156-8 and Lears, 63.74, esp. 65.

minutes away, where she found slightly lower prices. Yet, when she returned to shop there, she found that they had raised their prices to the same level as the first town. Over the weeks, she drove back and forth between towns, seeking the better prices. Proud of herself, yet harried from her frequent trips, she revealed to the native how thrifty she had been. The native dryly told her that the two towns had been in league for years. To keep her from driving to the nearest small city to shop, each week, one town would raise its prices and the other would drop them. The next week, they would switch.<sup>79</sup>

“Summer people” who had become accepted over time presented models of conversion for anxious outsiders. For example, in “We Go Native,” Clarence Webster described his first winter spent in his summer home, including the difficulty of country living and how he had to rely on neighbors to make it through the winter.<sup>80</sup> In “You Can’t Eat the Natives,” David Graham made several suggestions for how to undertake moving to the country, including a stern warning against undertaking farming too quickly.<sup>81</sup> Often, “summer people” asked for things a certain way or made unreasonable demands while belittling the natives they employed. In a satirical piece called “How to Be Hated this Summer,” Webster provided some “hints to city people having homes in the country,” listing some of the more tactless things a recent transplant could do to raise natives’ ire, such as giving hand-me-downs to the people down the road because, “even if

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<sup>79</sup> *Yankee*, Dreams and Observations, February 1936, 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Clarence M. Webster, “We Go Native,” *Yankee*, July 1936, 26-30. See also Faith Baldwin, “I Move to New England,” *Yankee*, March 1937, 20-21, 40;

<sup>81</sup> David Graham, “You Can’t Eat the Natives,” *Yankee*, May 1941, 22, 34-35.

they do have a big farm, they must be poor.”<sup>82</sup> As a transplant, Webster addressed the anxieties of other “summer people.” As they read about summer people being tricked, they could share in the anxiety of their marginal status while also establishing a sense of community with others in their position. Readers responded, often at *Yankee*’s behest, by sending in their own “conversion narratives.”<sup>83</sup> Thus they demonstrated that they had learned how to act correctly towards natives, at least in the magazine. They addressed a potentially divisive issue through humor.

Many aspects of Yankee character presented in the magazine were positional. One of the core Yankee values was industry, an ethic for hard work. Yet, *Yankee* often exposed contradictions between core values, such as the conflict between industry and individualism. Take, for instance, Old Ed the fox-trapper, a trickster who hated work. For example, he left the cowbell on all winter so that he would not need to tie it on again in the spring. Ed’s disdain for work went as far as preferring to shoot rats off of his bureau rather than taking the time to set rat traps. Yet, as the Collector explained, “Old Ed lived before the summer folks had got around much and he never knew he was a ‘quaint character.’ But the rural Yankee is still as individual a fellow as ever, and being ‘made’ of by the summer folks has not yet turned his head. In fact he is sharp enough in many cases, to turn the tables on the city people, making them the butt of his own timeless

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<sup>82</sup> Clarence M. Webster, “How to Be Hated This Summer,” Rail Splitters, *Yankee*, March 1940, 33. See also, Clarence M. Webster, “Why Farmers Post Their Land,” *Yankee*, July 1936, 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Yankee* sponsored several “Cracker Barrel Prize Contests,” in which they invited readers to “send us your opinion on...how to create a better understanding between country and city Yankees.” “Cracker Barrel Prize Contest,” *Yankee*, July 1936, N, and recurring.

humor.”<sup>84</sup> Old Ed was outside of the marketplace, a relic of the past, but he had value to readers. He allowed them to see the inconsistencies and faults of modernity from the perspective of someone positioned as outside of modernity. Furthermore, as with learning folklore presented in the magazine, it was important to understand that Yankeeland had its complex characters and to be in on the jokes.

In practical terms, engaging archetypes allowed *Yankee* to create its public with little investment of time or effort. Readers, recognizing the archetype, could immediately participate by submitting stories they had been told, or in the case of some readers, stories about their older relatives. Dreams and Observations relied on them. In this way, readers became active folklorists, using the magazine as a site to engage in discourse that addressed anxieties while preserving those narratives and, by extension, contributing to the invented tradition. However, these archetypes were essentialist. The same qualities that made tricksters easily replicable in *Yankee* cast real people into pre-established roles. Tricksters were not people with legitimate concerns about the influx of outsiders buying up property and increasing the cost of living for locals while openly deriding those locals. Instead, they were caricatures easily laughed at to dismiss any sense of anxiety felt by the outsider.<sup>85</sup> “Lazy” Yankees were not people suffering from extreme poverty, alcoholism, or mental illness. Instead, they were types used to help readers feel connected to other readers through a shared joke.

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<sup>84</sup> *Yankee*, Dreams and Observations, October 1935, 49.

<sup>85</sup> Ellen C. Phillips, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, January 1938, 7. The reader complains of losing her long-term lease on a farm after it was sold to one of the “summer people” and her inability to find an affordable alternative.

In its first years, *Yankee* repeatedly used the strategy of framing reader participation, creating multiple departments that collected Yankees together for the purpose of supporting one another's interests and anxieties while promoting its own influence. The monthly department "Just Among Ourselves" featured news about Yankees out in the world, such as when it published a poem about New England found in a random notebook in Chicago or quoted a Chicago professor's lecture in which he praised two recent *Yankee, Inc.* publications, *Yankee Cookbook* and *Good Maine Foods*, as "literary contributions to American social history." Additionally, the department lauded the Yankee ingenuity of its readers, reporting new books they published and their entrepreneurship.<sup>86</sup>

These various departments and articles all extolled Yankee traditions of industry and individualism. In that way, *Yankee* served to educate readers like the national mass circulation magazines Richard Ohmann describes in *Selling Culture*. Ohmann claims that, while the late nineteenth century Professional-Managerial Class (PMC) had already partly defined itself as a group, "magazines helped shape [their] values and interests."<sup>87</sup> Like magazines such as *McClure's* and *Ladies Home Journal*, *Yankee* positioned itself to a wide middle-class. "Book Talk" reviewed traditional scholarly and literary achievements such as *The Puritans* and Robert Frost's poetry, but it also reviewed practical books, such as cookbooks, travel guides, and gardening manuals. The fiction and poetry included in the magazine, and there were usually one or two pieces of short fiction and at least a page of poems, was generally easily accessible and almost always on

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<sup>86</sup> *Yankee*, Just Among Ourselves, February 1939, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ohmann, 160.

the subject of New England. While Yankees, “as one result of the European war, were by the way of joining the dodo and the Indian,”<sup>88</sup> the magazine provided the means to resurrect the Yankee. If the PMCs of mass magazines sought their space in the suburbs separate from the urban working class, blacks, and immigrants, *Yankee*’s urban and suburban readers sought their space away from the same in northern New England; when they could not go there, or could not find it, they sought it in their own minds, in the past.<sup>89</sup>

*Yankee* devoted much of its effort to establishing a unified Yankee public built on a shared nostalgia for the past. Thus it engaged in what Warner calls, “poetic world-making,” the opportunity for a public to “characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize that world through address.”<sup>90</sup> Sagendorph envisioned a world of his own making separate from the conditions of the world in which he and his readers lived. In “Yankeeland,” people held tightly to the past as they faced the challenges of the present. However, nostalgia reveals anxieties of loss. While the magazine presented yankeeness as a set of values that could be transferred to the present and practiced in the modern

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<sup>88</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Introductory Letter for Collected Volumes 1-5, *Yankee*, 1939.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of 1930’s regionalism, see Becker, esp. Intro., Chaps. 1 and 7, and epilogue, and Dorman, esp. preface, intro., and chapters 4-5. Conforti makes a compelling argument that the imagined center of New England shifted north partly because of the influx of immigrants into the southern New England states (intro and chap. 6). Dona Brown identifies class a primary driver in nineteenth century tourism, including in the White Mountains (chap. 2), which partially explains the shift in region that Conforti analyzes. She attributes the rise in tourism in southern Maine to the concern over rising non-native populations (chap. 6).

<sup>90</sup> Warner, 81.

world, the realities of life in that world dictated something more than an invented tradition.

### Stranger Relations and Publics: Dissenting Yankees

Creating a public involves creating a space of discourse that attempts to unify a group of strangers. However, as with any effort to unify, there are bound to be outliers and resisters. Readers did not always subscribe to the definitions *Yankee* supplied; instead, they debated those definitions with other readers and *Yankee*'s editors. Readers, compelled by anxiety to assert their authenticity, performed their various and often conflicting versions of yankeeness in the magazine.<sup>91</sup> *Yankee* mediated these performances, pitting reader against reader, content to shape the debate without fully resolving it. In fact, it could not resolve the instability inherent in the idea of authentic yankeeness. But in the end, it would not need to.

In theory, a public “unites strangers through participation alone.”<sup>92</sup> Anyone who wished to could read *Yankee*. In this way, a public “sets its boundaries and its organization by its own discourse rather than by external frameworks only if it openly addresses people who are identified *primarily* through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance.”<sup>93</sup> However, Warner cautions that “the magic by which discourse conjures a public into being...remains imperfect because of how much it must presuppose.” A public appears to be open to anyone, but “in fact selects participants

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<sup>91</sup> As Warner reminds us, there is an inherent “performativity of public address” derived partly from the recognition that a public includes other addressees. Warner, 55.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. Italics in original.

by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects or speech genres.)”<sup>94</sup> As participants in the discourse of the magazine, *Yankee*’s readers were distinct from some pre-existing group of Yankees, another factor in the lack of fixity in the definition of yankeeness. However, when *Yankee* engaged in discourse that addressed readers not based solely on their participation in the magazine, but instead by existing social markers such as race, ethnicity, religion, wealth, and geography, it allowed for dissent as readers jockeyed for control of their social space.

Of course, any and every version of yankeeness peddled in the magazine remained open to debate and interpretation. Resolving disputes in the conceptualized space of the magazine further complicates matters. Magazines perform a “framing, agenda setting, gatekeeping role” tied to the marketplace: “the very form of magazines follows a cardinal rule of the consumer culture: they are disposable, replaced each month by a fresh set of images.”<sup>95</sup> Finally, we can no more claim that each reader experienced (or, in spatial terms, lived) *Yankee* similarly, then we can claim that every reader was demographically the same. As Harvey writes, “What we do as well as what we understand is integrally dependent upon the primary spatio-temporal frame within which we situate ourselves.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, the context of living and performance differs drastically from one individual to the next. In multiple ways, reader participation in the magazine merely perpetuated the instability of yankeeness, forestalling any definitive

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>95</sup> Ohmann, 359. See also Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender and the Promise of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8.

<sup>96</sup> Harvey, 128.

version and encouraging readers to constantly perform their yankeeness on the shifting stage of the magazine. In terms of a public, *Yankee* commanded constant attention.

While *Yankee* claimed that traditional definitions of yankeeness could transfer to any of its readers, it also established from the beginning that it would engage debate about who was and was not a Yankee. The magazine framed the debate, publishing articles and editorials that stirred up its readers. They responded in letters, and it is in these letters where we can see the most significant negotiations of the ongoing definitions. Letters were a discursive space in which readers negotiated yankeeness, exposing their biases and exclusive claims to authenticity. By looking at conversations that occurred over multiple issues, we can get a sense of how readers were dealing with the ongoing yet unstable question of true yankeeness. In the end, the debate meant to ease the insecurity simply replayed it on a broader scale.

Often, *Yankee* would highlight certain letters as examples of authentic yankeeness, consistent with its favored definition of a Yankee as an older resident of northern New England. Introducing one such letter, Sagendorph wrote, “No happier comment on the approach which *Yankee* is trying to make to its problem of representing Yankeeland could be made than the following letter we received from Charles S. Collins of Bristol, N.H.”<sup>97</sup> In the letter, Mr. Collins, having heard about *Yankee*’s existence from another publication, provided a short, list-like life history. He went into no detail as to why he chose to write into *Yankee*. Yet, he seemed to have felt compelled to share that he was born and raised in New Hampshire and had been loyal to both his wife and his

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<sup>97</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, January 1936, 2.

church for over fifty years. His wife descended from Colonel William Prescott killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and his father fought in the Civil War, refusing pay, as he felt it his duty to serve. At the end of the letter, Collins commented that “these are the annals of the poor.”<sup>98</sup> Mr. Collins founded his Yankee identity on lineal descent as well as an implicit nationalism, and setting up this letter as they did, the editors made it clear that readers such as Mr. Collins were “dyed-in-the-wool” Yankees. Letters such as these, combined with other such references to authentic Yankees, provided a standard of authenticity which readers were implicitly encouraged to mimic. If they did not share Mr. Collins long bloodlines personally, they could submit anecdotes, as we have seen with *Dreams and Observations*.

While the majority of letters can be characterized as promoting *Yankee's* traditional version of yankeeness, there were also more significant conversations taking place in readers' letters, all in pursuit of a definitive answer to the question, what is a Yankee. The magazine allowed dissenting voices to be heard, acknowledging that perhaps *Yankee* was merely, as one letter stated, “carrying coals to Newcastle.” The letter writer, possibly a librarian, planned to put the magazine in the library's historical section “to be kept for the edification of future generations and as an exhibit showing the attitude of certain of our summer folks toward the natives of New England.” The letter went on to

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<sup>98</sup> Charles S. Collins, Letter to the editor printed on Editorial Page, *Yankee*, January 1936, 2. The final quotation comes from Thomas Gray's “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” line 32. The stanza reads: “Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,/ Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;/ Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile/ The short and simple annals of the poor.”

question the relevance of *Yankee* to the supposedly authentic Yankees it made the subjects of its magazine:

Your discovery of such people as my friend Herb Nichols and such things as square dances, etc. and exploiting them as curios reminds one of the discovery by Theodore Roosevelt of the Ten Commandments and the discovery by the Rotary of the Golden Rule.... Those of your subscribers who are city people should be able to learn much from Yankees which, if properly utilized, should raise their standard of living and enable them to get much more out of life.<sup>99</sup>

Like Mr. Collins, this reader defined authentic yankeeness as lineal, generational and location-specific. However, whereas Mr. Collins seemed to accept *Yankee's* role as mouthpiece for Yankee culture, this reader rejected it, instead emphasizing the differences between non-resident “summer people” and those whom she, too, viewed as authentic Yankees. Troubled that *Yankee* and its readers – the strangers in her public – were “summer people,” she worried that the magazine was promoting itself by exploiting rather than revitalizing Yankee culture. Seeing *Yankee* as primarily modern, she worried that Nichols and those of his generation had been duped or taken advantage of. Rather

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<sup>99</sup> Letter to the editor printed on Editorial Page, *Yankee*, January 1936, 2. In her letter, she referred to two series of articles: one on country dancing and another a series of six “as told by” articles, beginning with the September 1935 issue, in which Herb Nichols reported his memories of neighbors and townspeople. These articles were evidently quite popular since Sagendorph included a note introducing the last article in the series in March 1936. The note apologized that, despite the articles’ popularity, *Yankee* had no more of Nichol’s “material” to publish. No records exist to explain if Nichol’s opted not to continue providing that material (for personal reasons or perhaps because, recognizing the worth of his stories, he did not feel he was being paid enough for them), ran out of stories, or perhaps passed away.

than subscribing to *Yankee's* “poetic” world, to borrow Warner’s term, she imagined a world in which the differences between New England and the modern reigned.

Concerns by native New Englanders about their exploitation were not new. As early as the 1870s, native Nantucketers had worried amongst themselves about being made “quaint” by the tourists they had come to rely on following the decline of the whaling industry. While tourists characterized the natives as hospitable and pleasant, those natives often bristled at the role they were required to play, although most found solace in the money they could earn – there were few other sources of capital on the island.<sup>100</sup> Natives in southeastern Maine around the turn of the century were no different in their roles vis-à-vis visitors, except they were characterized (and celebrated) as fiercely independent and conservative, even abrasive.<sup>101</sup>

Farmers in northern New England, particularly farm wives, faced a similar decision to “perform” for boarders at the close of the nineteenth century. Many of these women chose to take in boarders looking for the “farm experience” in order to earn extra money for the household (or for themselves). They often found, however, that the urban guests considered their farms too modern. Ironically, they often turned to the women’s section of farm magazines to learn how to make their houses (and themselves) look more “old fashioned” to cater to their boarders’ expectations. Although they recognized their performances as fabricated, they were willing to perform because it paid. Boarders were usually none the wiser. These how-to articles frequently appeared alongside articles that

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<sup>100</sup> Brown, 122, 126.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

taught these same farm women how to dress like city women, evidently only for after the boarders went home.<sup>102</sup>

Seen in context, we can approach this question of exploitation in a number of ways. The letter's writer spoke out for a fellow resident, worried that the magazine was exploiting him, which speaks to a concern for how her town and its residents were portrayed. She saw the magazine as both an internal and external entity: internal because she was most likely a reader, and so was part of the magazine's "public"; external because she saw it as having the potential to exploit and essentialize "natives." By invoking "summer people," she made it clear that she believed *Yankee* and its writers were in that group. Yet, if she relied on tourist dollars, and she believed that *Yankee* represented tourists, she might not have written in at all, choosing instead to simply let Nichols play the part of the quaint Yankee. By writing, she revealed that on some level she recognized *Yankee* as a dialogic space that would engage her complaint. Incidentally, she perhaps never considered the possibility that Nichols was well aware of how he might be viewed by *Yankee*'s readership and was willing to play the role – paid or unpaid. By assuming that Nichols was the victim in this scenario, she was guilty of the same essentializing process of which she accused *Yankee*.

Sagendorph responded to this charge that went to the very core of his magazine's purpose. Placing the letter in the context of an editorial – one of the spaces of control for a magazine – he responded by emphasizing *Yankee*'s position as the defender of New England culture:

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-163.

Well, if all native Yankees felt the way our correspondent does, our hopes for this enterprise would be dismal indeed. Our intention in the direction of “exploitations” is indeed a slight one—and our wishes, if any, would be found in an opposite direction, unless one would consider that the effort on our part of standing up for the best in New England might be considered exploitation. . . . If New Englanders, and Yankees in general, are to turn out literature worthy of the name, then a medium for that literature is perhaps essential to the cause—unless of course men talking to themselves are to be considered a valuable asset to our community.<sup>103</sup>

In his response, Sagendorph defended its promotion of Yankee culture to the masses, using its own success as proof of its relevance. Importantly, he was careful not to alienate the letter’s author, calling her a “native Yankee”; yet he remained generally vague on the question of authenticity, perhaps hinting at his own anxiety. Furthermore, he positioned the magazine as promoting Yankee culture to the world as a balm against the influences of modernity, a veiled act of salesmanship. By repositioning “exploitation” as expression and preservation, Sagendorph effectively turned the magazine’s gaze outward, distracting readers from the charge. He did not address what the letter’s writer meant by exploitation, and it is unclear whether she meant exploitation in terms of simply selling or abusing for profit. The magazine admits some slight exploitation, but we can assume it was simply referring to selling magazines.

The editorial drew at least one response that claimed a New England diaspora. This reader identified herself as an “exiled Yankee,” agreeing that those exiled as she was

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<sup>103</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, February 1936, 2.

needed *Yankee* in order to keep their connection to New England strong. The exiled Yankee suffered “repressions” living in locales “where rivers are a creek” and where “the baked bean is desecrated with bacon and tomato.” For this reader, *Yankee* provided the respite from these repressions. Yet, she was always anxious when returning to the homeland. Sitting over her first bowl of fish chowder, she always feared that it may have changed while she had been away. Fortunately, it never did change.<sup>104</sup>

In this short conversation, we can see the dynamic of Yankee authenticity played out within a spatial framework. The reader was located in the geographic center of Yankeedom and, despite the risk of doing so, we can call her an authentic Yankee. Despite her protests that *Yankee* exploited authentic Yankees, her complaint was quickly brushed aside by Sagendorph and supported by the exiled Yankee. Additionally, letters like the one by Mr. Collins, extolled by Sagendorph as representative of truly authentic Yankees, implied that many traditional Yankees took no offense at being the subject of the magazine. Rather, they invited it. Here, the magazine frames the conversation, hinting at its own anxieties about its public. Finally, we can sense the exiled Yankee’s anxiety. She feared that her concept of yankeedom was dubious, built as it was on a foundation of memories and supported by her monthly issue of *Yankee* – invented traditions and commodities. Yet importantly, her concept held. Both *Yankee* and the exiled Yankee credit the magazine for keeping Yankee culture alive, but it remained unstable throughout.

The Yankee vernacular drew criticism as well, proving itself yet another weak unifier of community. Despite *Yankee*’s claims to be a magazine of literary merit, that

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<sup>104</sup> Susan T. Foster, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, December 1935.

claim was challenged, turning into a debate about authenticity. In March 1937, Adeline R. Crouse of New York City wrote to *Yankee* asking for her subscription to be cancelled. It was, she claimed,

over-full of slang, profanity, and smart-aleck writing. Slapstick humor may appeal to low-brows, but I assure you the region of our country, which produced an Emerson and a Hawthorne ought to produce literature with a magazine which *boasts* “a true-to-Yankee type” of periodical. . . . My ancestor, Roger Williams, could not rest easily in his grave were he to read in a story, exclamations using the name of the Deity profanely. I do not like that sort of writing either. Please send no more copies of your moronic publication to me.<sup>105</sup>

Crouse established herself as an authentic Yankee by announcing her lineage to Roger Williams and proceeded to draw distinctions between Yankees along class lines. To her, authenticity meant upholding literary, intellectual, and moral standards. Crouse’s letter set off a heated conversation that would last for six months. Picking up on the classist sentiments in Crouse’s letter, Gordon Parker wrote that he agreed with Crouse, noting that “most of your writers are *not* Yankees!” Stating that he refused to read several of the magazine’s regular contributors because they lacked literary merit, he expressed his idea of what a true Yankee was: “You seem to forget that there are Yankees living in Boston and its suburbs—Yankees and small town hayshakers are not necessarily one and the same person.”<sup>106</sup> Yet in the same issue, *Yankee* had its defenders who positioned “highbrows” as outsiders:

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<sup>105</sup> Adeline R. Crouse, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, March 1937, 44. Italics in original.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon Parker, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, May 1937, 42-43.

Even though her Ladyship is descended from Roger William...it seems unlikely that many readers will accept this as a legitimate excuse for her assuming an air of lofty contempt.... What a pity Miss Crouse has determined not to read *Yankee* any more!...But take courage, fellow morons, for we shall manage somehow to struggle on without her.<sup>107</sup>

The writer of the letter, F. Wallace Patch, added a postscript in which he made it a point counter Crouse's claims to authenticity by establishing his own Yankee ancestry, noting that he was descended from a passenger on the *Mayflower*. Another letter in defense was published directly below Mr. Patch's:

Had Miss Crouse's ancestor been Ethan Allen instead of Roger Williams, maybe she would have missed less of human interest in life.... People who are so wrapped in their mantle of high intelligence as never to be able to get their feet on the bare ground lose all the finer instincts of common people....<sup>108</sup>

Three months later, Alma Capron chimed in: "...we find what we look for in reading as well as life. I have only pity for warped, prudish individuals who go snooping for things to criticize."<sup>109</sup>

Crouse and Parker compelled other Yankees to rally around their magazine in a battle of readers proclaiming their authenticity based on lineage. Yet, even established lineage did not ensure authenticity; within lineal descendents, readers distinguished themselves by class. Crouse and Parker portrayed themselves as authentic Yankees, but used an older, more erudite definition: Yankees who considered Yankee humor below

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<sup>107</sup> F. Wallace Patch, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, May 1937, 43.

<sup>108</sup> Amos J. Eaton, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, May 1937, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Alma Capron, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, August 1937, 45.

them and defacing of the New England's literary traditions.<sup>110</sup> Other readers called them out as prudish, aloof, and condescending – all upper class values lost in a middle class magazine. *Yankee*'s supporters even derided Crouse's ancestry while reinforcing the shift in the region, comparing southern New England's Roger Williams to northern New England's Ethan Allen, a representative of the "common people." In a battle of bloodlines, these New England descendents performed their own yankeeness in a debate over its essence.

Crouse exposed another fracture in the *Yankee* public. *Yankee* relied on humor and a northern New England vernacular for much of its content. However, as Warner points out, while in theory publics are open to anyone, in practice they are framed by the "style" of their discourse.<sup>111</sup> *Yankee*'s style placed Crouse outside the margins of its public. As with any public, its discourse spoke to certain addressees and not to others. Within this, we see other readers distinguish her as a stranger with whom they would prefer not to socialize. However, even Sagendorph worried about the risk of overusing vernacular in *Yankee*, noting that many readers and authors submitted stories bursting with poorly wrought dialect. He feared that stories overfull of dialect "gave an immediate impression that the writer and the magazine which carried it were putting on a 'hick' act

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of class in New England reflected in the tourism industry, see Brown, esp. chap. 1 and 2. She explains how the new tourism of the nineteenth century was not egalitarian, but "separated those who could pay from those who could not" and the "fashionable from the unfashionable" (35). Of course, "fashion" was partly a code for sentiment. Much of her discussion focuses on the role of sentiment in distinguishing between classes, a topic she applies to the Grand Tours of the White Mountains.

<sup>111</sup> Warner, 77.

which served no good purpose.” He maintained that a well-written story could capture the Yankee vernacular without resorting to dialect.<sup>112</sup>

Even those readers who identified as part of the “common people” engaged in divisive rhetoric. Readers squabbled over the propriety of *Yankee*’s content, explicitly linking non-lineal with non-Yankee. One reader who generally enjoyed *Yankee*’s content complained that the magazine published too many stories that “shout[ed] sex.” She asked the magazine to “leave this new indecent stuff to inferior magazines. Your reading audience numbers the old New England descendents, I know; not the new foreign element with no background.”<sup>113</sup> Gould explicitly linked indecency to foreign-born residents of New England; decency came under the purview of the “old New England descendents.” This woman identified as one of the old New England descendents – one of the people the magazine had worked hard to portray as authentic. Since she assumed that only American-born New Englanders read the magazine (or were the only readers that counted as its audience), Gould likely felt that she was talking to her peers. She could not comprehend that “the foreign element” might become Yankees because for her race and ethnicity were anathema to the “raceless” idea of Yankee. We can trace her unrest to the creation of “whiteness” during the nineteenth century, when personal “independence” became a core national value for whites. When an increase in manufacturing threatened this sense of independence, white workers positioned wage labor against slave labor, constructing black as “other.” Whites entrenched this construction by creating “a racial

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<sup>112</sup> Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 260.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Earle Gould, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, August 1937, 45.

folklore” that projected certain undesirable behaviors onto blacks.<sup>114</sup> Gould simply extended the idea to eastern European immigrants, as one of several “racialized minority groups.”<sup>115</sup> Gould, by linking “the foreign element” to sex, relied on this same type of racial folklore. Perhaps she felt that, although she had “lost” America to the “foreign element,” she could hold on to her New England. George Lipsitz describes this attitude as an “investment” in whiteness. For Gould, that was synonymous with investing in her yankeeness. Her just reward was a Yankee public which could inspire her confidence that it would remain free of the “foreign element.”<sup>116</sup> Of course, her brand of nostalgia and its accompanying anxieties were on full display.

Gould had forced *Yankee*’s hand. It published an editor’s note in response to her xenophobic remarks: “As far as we know we were all foreigners once except the Indians. The modern Yankee is a resident of New England or with New England roots no matter where he came from or when – sexed or sexless.”<sup>117</sup> Here, Sagendorph distinguished between old Yankees and modern Yankees. He confronted the naked bigotry of certain old New Englanders, positioning it as one tradition that could be left in the past. It was a moment of truth for the magazine. *Yankee* had been suspect on the question of nativism to this point, promoting the idea that Yankees were by definition conservative and suspect of outsiders. It had published an article by Claude Moore Fuess, president of

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<sup>114</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), esp. 13-14.

<sup>115</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the ‘White’ Problem in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 372.

<sup>116</sup> For a description of subsequent “investments” in whiteness, See Lipsitz, 373-379.

<sup>117</sup> *Yankee*, Editor’s note, August 1937, 45.

Phillips Andover Academy, in which he claimed that no “Latin or Slav, even in the second generation, can properly be called a Yankee.”<sup>118</sup> Yet we can speculate that Sagendorph did not want to alienate these “modern” readers – the reality of his public. Thus we see his anxiety over this issue. He had to confront the possibly growing plurality of his customer base.<sup>119</sup> This statement was the clearest *Yankee* had made on the definition of yankeeness up to this point.

*Yankee*'s remarks did not go unnoticed, and they continued the debate over Yankeeness. In support of Gould, one reader wrote that “your ‘Editor’s Note’ ...is not true and rather poor taste! I have been reading the *Yankee* for some months and am wondering if you are *kidding* real Yankees. There is something about your magazine that does not square with the word ‘Yankee’.”<sup>120</sup> This reader summarily rejected *Yankee*, stating that its “essence” did not correspond with his idea of yankeeness. Conversely, Ernest John Saigh wrote a long, eloquent letter supporting the editor’s note and *Yankee* in general. First, he credited *Yankee* for standing up to Gould, praising the magazine for not being a “bigoted, narrow-minded instrument” that kowtowed to “self-called true New Englanders who set up standards and set themselves apart and aloof whenever the foreign element is mentioned.” He went on to explain that, although he was a naturalized citizen

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<sup>118</sup> Claude Moore Fuess, “What is a Yankee?” *Yankee*, December 1935, 14-16, and quoted in Conforti, 300. For a discussion of this article and responses to pluralism in *Yankee*, see Conforti, 300-303

<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately, we are forced to speculate because *Yankee*'s archives provide no information on the plurality of its readership. Likely, they never formally collected this information.

<sup>120</sup> C. L. Kasson, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, November 1937, 46. Italics in original.

of the United States, he could not see any reason why he should concede the mantle of authenticity to the likes of Ms. Gould:

When an individual tells me that he should be considered a true Yankee because his family has been in New England for a hundred and fifty years or more, it makes my blood boil. His background, he claims, entitles him to the utmost consideration and respect.

Saigh then defines a “true New England Yankee” as a person who upholds “certain ideals, traditions, and habits that have been handed down through the years” and that the foreign born “can learn to love those traditions and follow them to the letter even though our names do not happen to be Smith, Brown, or Jones.”<sup>121</sup> For Saigh, authenticity was not simply a matter of blood but also behavior, not just “descent” but “consent.”<sup>122</sup> The magazine, as the site of yankeeness, could be a tool for readers to learn how to be a Yankee and to show that learning through participation. Saigh’s letter demonstrated *Yankee*’s success at relocating yankeeness to a “state of mind” that allowed readers of diverse backgrounds to identify as Yankees. Yet, in doing so, it exposed a fault line between xenophobic essentialist Yankee and Yankee by affiliation.

Saigh’s letter can be placed within the context of conflicting forces during the early twentieth century – another reminder that publics act historically. On the one side is what Gary Gerstle calls “civic nationalism,” the belief that “nation” was stronger than any

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<sup>121</sup> Ernest John Saigh, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, November 1937, 46.

<sup>122</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-7. Sollors identifies the conflict between “consent” and “descent” as “the central drama in American culture” (p. 6). His argument focuses on the United States as a whole. However, it applies equally to regions since they are positioned within (and often against) the concept of nation.

differences in ethnicity. By this creed, non-native residents could become “American” by learning and displaying American values and assimilating into American culture. Its antithesis was “racial nationalism,” the ideology that America was a white nation and no foreign-born person could become truly American.<sup>123</sup> We see these forces play out in the back and forth of articles and readers’ letters. *Yankee* had started the debate two years earlier, with Fuess’s article, which argued from the racial nationalist camp. Furthermore, by running his article, *Yankee* made it clear that it was a site that would entertain the issue – that is, the question of whether authentic yankeeness was based on “consent” or “descent” was in play.

Following this volley of letters, *Yankee* published a series of articles that addressed pluralism in New England. For example, in “Immigrants or Americans,” Chris Agrafiotis argued that foreigners could become Americans, but only by assimilating. In “Don’t Blame the Foreigners,” Clarence Webster spoke for the “old-stock Yankees” about tolerance for those foreigners trying to assimilate into Yankee culture.<sup>124</sup> While these and the other articles in the series simulated open debate on the issue, they in fact argued for a “civic regionalist” view of yankeeness. In the end, *Yankee* came down on the side of “consent.” Approximately three years later, *Yankee* published a short editorial in “Just Among Ourselves” denouncing Fuess for a speech that reaffirmed his nativist

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<sup>123</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 3-5.

<sup>124</sup> Chris J. Agrafiotis, “Immigrants or Americans?” *Yankee*, December 1937, 10-12; Clarence M. Webster, “Don’t Blame the Foreigners,” *Yankee*, April 1938, 10-11, 38. These articles often used “Yankee” and “American” interchangeably, as often happened in *Yankee*. There existed throughout *Yankee*’s first years the sense that Yankees were the first and best Americans. As the war approached, this “sense” became more overt, a topic I discuss in my conclusion.

views. Having settled the issue, at least in theory, *Yankee* parted ways with Dr. Fuess's brand of yankeeness. However, to the last, *Yankee* equivocated. A "handwritten" note beside the editorial read "They say Dr. Fuess' talk 'read' worse than it sounded."<sup>125</sup>

The magazine form, as a site of discourse, is a difficult place in which to reach resolution. It allows editors to ask many questions without providing definitive answers, and it allows readers to draw their own conclusions. In a single issue, *Yankee* ran articles that exhibited a range of claims: that the past was lost, that it could be found in the present, that summer people were insensitive, that they could learn how to act correctly, that natives are deceitful, that the foreign born cannot be Yankees, that they already are. Multiply this effect by the number of issues in a year, or two, or more, and we see how *Yankee* created a public as much through obfuscation as through shared interests. And we have not even fully considered the forces of the marketplace, a subject to which I now turn.

### The Paradox of Thrift and Consumption: Commodifying Yankees

Publics, while they exist as a site of discourse, are not outside of the marketplace. Capitalism runs as a current beneath a public. By offering this site that allowed readers a never-ending opportunity to address their Yankee identities, *Yankee* was able to create a market for itself and its products. However, from the beginning the magazine faced a

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<sup>125</sup> *Yankee*, Just Among Ourselves, February 1941, 13. As *Yankee*'s advertising increased and its format moved further away from its origins, it experimented with ways to make the magazine "homey." One method was to write handwritten notes on the side of copy that commented on those articles. These notes often asked readers if they read the articles.

paradox: consuming contradicted “Yankee thrift.” Within the magazine, *Yankee* negotiated this contradiction with overt salesmanship, including advertisers in the discourse of its Yankee public. Like readers, advertisers performed in *Yankee*, securing their own authenticity in order to more effectively appeal to *Yankee*’s readers. Furthermore, the magazine repositioned Yankee values to accommodate a consumption based on thrift. Outside the magazine, Sagendorph and his staff engaged in the standard modes of magazine publishing. Ironically, *Yankee*’s humble beginnings appeared consistent with – even reinforced – “Yankee values.” As it grew, the contradiction between thrift and consumption became more visible, requiring *Yankee* to “sell” more directly and more craftily to maintain the attention of its readers. Thus *Yankee* maintained dominance over the space of the magazine, achieving stability by commodifying its readers, disagreements and all.

How does a public of readers become an audience commodity? Commodities are “objects of economic value,”<sup>126</sup> but in addition to things, markets commodify groups of people as well. This process depends on eliminating individuality or distinctiveness within a group in order to create a unit that can be exchanged in the marketplace. People, thus commodified, have little or no agency in the process. As Arlene Dávila demonstrates in *Latinos, Inc.*, Spanish language advertisers and entertainment media packaged an essentialized version of those peoples labeled as Latinos. Blurring the distinctions among Spanish speaking ethnic groups and nationalities (e.g., Mexican, Dominican, Puerto

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<sup>126</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 3.

Rican, Cuban, etc.) within this super-group Latinos, these advertisers and media marketers created saleable units of stereotypes, selling the Spanish speakers to media and manufacturers, and selling supposed attributes of that group – stereotypes – back to Spanish speaking consumers.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, Kathy Newman discusses in *Radio Active* how radio stations in the 1930s packaged their audiences, selling radio time to consumer goods companies, who produced the programs as vehicles in which to embed their advertisements. Newman argues that some listeners resisted this marketing; nevertheless, the packaging and selling of audiences rather than goods became foundational for marketers and advertisers, and remains so today.<sup>128</sup>

Advertisers created the “Latino market” and the radio audiences of the 1930s on a national scale, but such commodification occurs at the regional level as well. Indeed, the New England region itself became a commodity, especially as stereotyped by distinctive attributes or peoples. However, that process often operates through tropes of authenticity. What makes a region saleable as a commodity is the distinctive “authentic” behavior (the culture) of its people. That was fundamentally the process that took place in *Yankee* from the beginning. *Yankee* collected its readers together, blurring their individual identities into a fabricated “Yankee” whole that could be sold back to its readers as well as to advertisers.

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<sup>127</sup> Arlene Dávila, *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2001), esp. 2-3, 39-49, 56-63.

<sup>128</sup> Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2004), esp. 4-5, 11-12, chap. 2. See also, Dávila, 49-55, 63-68. For the creation of an “audience commodity” in the Yankee Radio Network, see Alexander Russo, *Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio Beyond the Networks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), chap. 2, esp. 57-63.

While audiences are commodities, they are still made up of people. As Dallas Smythe cautions, “we must beware thinking of people and commodities as disconnected things and see them as relationships in a social process.”<sup>129</sup> Although individuals, commodified by mass media, may have little or no agency, they do have what Dallas Smythe calls “audience power.” Audiences do “work” in the marketplace by purchasing products. Thus, they create value for advertisers and, as such, for themselves.<sup>130</sup> Since *Yankee* was a participatory magazine, its readers also worked to commodify themselves by submitting material and thus adding to the magazine’s portrayal of “the Yankee.” This work had a value because *Yankee* could use its readers’ participation as part of its selling proposition. It could sell its audience to advertisers (as well as to potential subscribers) partly based on the behaviors of that audience in the magazine. Seen in this context, it was well worth *Yankee*’s efforts to promote participation.

Therefore, it is important to draw a distinction between publics and audiences. A public is only “constituted through mere attention.”<sup>131</sup> As such, it “commence[s] with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease[s] to exist when attention is no longer predicated. [It is a] virtual entity, not a voluntary association.”<sup>132</sup> That is, because publics exist in space, not in physical form, addressees in the public can drop in and out of the public at will. On the other hand, an *audience* can exist in a more tangible form because it is *produced* by the magazine. You may not be

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<sup>129</sup> Dallas Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* (Norwood, NJ: ALEX Publishing Corporation, 1981), 22.

<sup>130</sup> Smythe, 22-27.

<sup>131</sup> Warner, 60.

<sup>132</sup> Warner, 61.

paying attention to the discourse, but if you've been counted, your demographic information taken, and enough of the people in the audience purchase advertisers' products, that will do.

Consumer culture was never completely foreign to the pages of *Yankee*. However, the magazine appeared to approach it tentatively, as something to be faced with Yankee values of thrift and frugality at the ready. In "Yankee Family News," *Yankee* organized a group of one thousand New England families "to help *Yankee*'s editors answer questions about New England." Mostly, however, this group served as product testers, "an advanced guard in New England's progress, testing new ideas and new products"; the magazine could thus boast that it was "a book edited by a thousand editors!"<sup>133</sup> *Yankee* even involved its readers in packaging its most valuable commodity, the past, for consumption. Repeatedly, it asked readers to send in their "earliest memories." If they were published, that reader would receive "a crisp dollar bill."<sup>134</sup> In hard times, a resourceful Yankee could even sell his or her past for performing in accordance with accepted ideas of Yankee authenticity.

Barter, a traditional form of commerce, seemed to pose little risk to traditional definitions. The "Swopper's Column" was perhaps the most successful department in the magazine (it continues to this day) and featured advertisements by readers wanting to trade with other readers. In a nod to Yankee vernacular, when a reader was open to negotiating the trade, he or she would add, "or what have you" to the end of the

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<sup>133</sup> *Yankee*, Yankee Family News, January 1939, 45.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

advertisement.<sup>135</sup> Found sparingly in early installments of the “Swopper’s Column,” it would become standard fare within a year. *Yankee*’s editors considered the “Swopper’s Column” as a rebellion against corporate capitalism. As Sagendorph recalled, Beth Tolman, one of his editors, “steadfastly refused to print any swop which had the suspicion of a cash transaction. Cash, she said, cheapens the whole thing. Let ‘em pay for their ads if all they want is cash. We want color (meaning amusing phraseology) and swops that will oil the creaking capitalistic machinery.”<sup>136</sup> For many readers, “It was a game...from which all commercialism was left out.”<sup>137</sup>

Similarly, “Yankee’s Job Exchange” allowed readers and companies to post available jobs. However, even in this space, divisions remained, although more subtle and coded. Many of the jobs posted and sought were for nannies and maids. These readers would often use the term “protestant” or “protestant American” and more coded “pure American” or “pure Yankee” to indicate white and non-immigrant. Using this language was its own type of commodification. The person offering themselves up in the deal was trying to appeal to an audience they perceived as valuing this description.

Often, *Yankee*’s business conditions posed little direct conflict to its readers’ expectations for the magazine. Readers made it clear that they liked quaintness, and the magazine pursued that style from the beginning.<sup>138</sup> *Yankee* included few advertisements in the first several issues – usually two to three full-page ads and several quarter-page and

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<sup>135</sup> “Swop” is another nod to the vernacular, although it also happens to be the British variation.

<sup>136</sup> Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 171.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

one-eighth page ads. While readers might have found the lack of advertising refreshing and in keeping with Sagendorph's early rebukes of mass consumer culture, in reality *Yankee* was a fledgling business without the infrastructure and established audience to attract significant advertising. Thus the magazine looked quaint at least partly because it could not afford to look otherwise. As Sagendorph recalled, he spent much of these first years visiting potential advertisers and establishing advertising offices.<sup>139</sup> The magazine's appearance, necessary but not necessarily desirable, masked for a time the commercial aspects of the magazine business.

With this context, we can reframe reader participation in *Yankee*. Participation became a business strategy. We have already seen how participation maintained reader attention. Additionally, Sagendorph *needed* his readers to participate because *Yankee* needed content. When he was not out seeking advertising, he was visiting authors, trying to obtain stories or articles for the magazine. While Sagendorph claimed proudly that he paid only "one-tenth" what other magazines paid his authors, his limited budget meant that in the beginning, he had to work hard to secure quality material.<sup>140</sup> His readers, as a steady source of content, "worked" for him, and they worked cheaply.

Often, however, the business demands of running a magazine conflicted with reader interest and the style of the magazine. As Sagendorph explained, they sometimes regretted those decisions made for business reasons. In 1936, *Yankee* ran a promotion with the New England Council in which *Yankee* sent out 20,000 copies of its magazine to the Council's mailing list, along with a special subscription offer. As part of the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>140</sup> Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*, 122. Sagendorph details several trips he made in the first months to authors' homes to solicit articles. See Sagendorph, 120-23, 139-40.

promotion, *Yankee* acquired new advertisers. However, those advertisers complained that the paper *Yankee* used did not “give full value to the reproduction of photographs” and “bemoaned the use of woodcut and black and white drawings.” Sagendorph recalled that “Pressure from them shook our confidence in the format we were using. The issue led us to believe—and wrongly, I can say now—that *Yankee* was not on the right road.” In response to these complaints, *Yankee* improved its paper quality and went to a three-column format with smaller type to accommodate standard advertising sizes and improve photographic reproduction. Readers balked at the change.<sup>141</sup> As one protested, *Yankee* had become “merely a magazine” and lost “its distinction and much of its charm and quaintness.” Asking *Yankee* to return to its previous style, she explained that “I have looked forward to it as I would to an unusual box which would hold bits of memory for me. Now, the box isn’t there anymore. It has been replaced by a modern shining box without any allure because it’s ordinary.”<sup>142</sup> For this reader, *Yankee*, as a site to preserve her memories, had lost some of its essence and, thus, some of her attention.

The Swopper’s Column also experienced frequent changes as *Yankee* found a balance between reader and business interests. When *Yankee* began the column, it allowed each subscriber one free ad per month. However, it grew uncontrollably, becoming *Yankee*’s most popular department. *Yankee*’s staff acted as intermediaries in the trades – a type of post office for bartering – and the burden of handling hundreds of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 140. Although *Yankee* only printed one reader letter, Sagendorph revealed that there were many complaints from readers. We can only venture to guess how many since the letters no longer exist. In August 1941, *Yankee* adopted offset printing and received another volley of complaints, See Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 412.

<sup>142</sup> Verna E. Bean, Letter to the editor, *Yankee*, September 1937, 41.

correspondences a month drew too much attention away from publishing the magazine. Eventually, Sagendorph decided to limit readers to one ad per subscription. When the US Postal Service ruled that this limit violated *Yankee*'s second-class postal permit, Sagendorph began charging for these ads.<sup>143</sup>

As *Yankee* attempted to increase its circulation, it had to negotiate between readers' expectations for the "quaint" look and the demands of modern magazine publishing. *Yankee* featured advertisements promoting gift subscriptions each year. The first of these advertisements referenced a reader's letter published in the same issue. It noted that "copies [of *Yankee*] are following one subscriber to faraway Mosul, Iraq."<sup>144</sup> In the following year's Christmas ad, the magazine again used a reader's language: reading *Yankee* was "the next best thing to a trip back home."<sup>145</sup> *Yankee* addressed exiled Yankees in the following two years of Christmas advertisements, reusing readers' words each time. In a "Christmas Note," *Yankee* negotiated the fine line between Yankee thrift and modern capitalism. The letter complained that the holidays had become over-commercialized, but nevertheless pitched price-reduced subscriptions. However, *Yankee* asked the reader not to buy if he felt obligated to; instead, "if you honestly know of some relative or friend who comes to your mind as one who'd enjoy *Yankee*, regardless of

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<sup>143</sup> Robb Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*," 171-72. Before *Yankee* began charging for "swops," Sagendorph arranged for H.P. Hood's milk deliverers to hand out "Swopper's cards" to its customer in exchange for one year's advertising in *Yankee*. He lost money in the deal. When the Yankee Network proposed a Swopper's radio program, *Yankee* declined. He later made a deal with the Blue Network in New York to run a similar program. See Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*," 182-83.

<sup>144</sup> *Yankee*, "For Christmas this Year" (Advertisement), October 1935, 3.

<sup>145</sup> *Yankee*, "*Yankee* for Christmas" (Advertisement), December 1936, 46; *Yankee*, "For Full Weight, Honest Measure Give *Yankee* for Christmas this Year" (Advertisement), December 1937, 45.

whether or not he or she is sending you something, we know it will be appreciated.”<sup>146</sup>

By pitching price reduced subscriptions and appealing to readers’ choice, *Yankee* was able to deny its business basis and avoid contradicting the value of thrift.

In addition to adding advertising offices in major cities, it took over the subscriptions to failing magazines such as *Leisure* and *Yachting Magazine* and advertised for products and places outside New England. Usually, however, these advertisements merely extended the Yankee ideal. For example, an advertisement for second homes on the golf courses of Pinehurst, North Carolina looked like an editorial and appeared with the heading “Smart Yanks Outside New England,” mirroring the format of the “Six Smart Yanks” articles that ran throughout the first seven years of *Yankee*. It went on to describe the development of the Pinehurst resort by the Tufts family, “smart Yankee[s] making good way down yonder in the land of Cotton.”<sup>147</sup>

The most prevalent strategy was to position advertisers as helpful members of the *Yankee* family ready to help whenever they were needed. The magazine provided the space and assistance for advertisers to perform this bought form of yankeeness. As the magazine sought advertising in the first year, Sagendorph wrote “With the Yankee Craftsmen,” a column that promoted the usefulness and quality – the “yankeeness” – of the products advertised in the issue. Thus *Yankee* extended the ideals of yankeeness to its advertisers. Sagendorph continued this tradition in various iterations throughout *Yankee’s*

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<sup>146</sup> *Yankee*, “Christmas Note,” December 1939, 40.

<sup>147</sup> Pinehurst Resorts, “Smart Yanks Outside New England” (Advertisement), *Yankee*, January 1939, 39.

first years.<sup>148</sup> Often, the advertisers deferred to *Yankee's* and its readers' expertise. In one of a series of its advertisements, First National Store, Inc. pitched oysters. Its ad was positioned strategically next to "Twenty-One Tested Oyster Recipes."<sup>149</sup> It read, "We leave it to YANKEE to tell you how to prepare tempting oyster dishes, merely observing that we are ready throughout New England to serve you with everything necessary to make oyster feasting successful."<sup>150</sup> This ad, like many in *Yankee*, denied selling, much like thrift denies its basis in value. Positioning advertisements next to related articles was not unique in magazines of the time and even earlier, but *Yankee* used it religiously in order to present its advertisers as familiar and supportive of the magazine's readers.<sup>151</sup> A standard page would contain an article on some New England subject, such as "Protection from the Cold"; around the article *Yankee* placed advertising for products or places that supported the article, such as ski boots, ski racks, and snowshoes. The article gained credibility by quoting liberally from a Swiss Army Colonel, which translated directly to the manufacturer because of their advertisements' strategic location.

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<sup>148</sup> *Yankee*, With the Yankee Craftsmen, February 1936, n.p., and recurring. Later, the title was changed to "Grist for Your Idea Mill" and then, simply, "Grist." Both included the subtitle "Picked up from bashful advertisers, and some not so bashful." See *Yankee*, April 1941, 8-11; May, 1941, 47.

<sup>149</sup> "Twenty-One Tested Oyster Recipes," *Yankee*, January 1939, 36.

<sup>150</sup> First National Stores, Inc., Advertisement, *Yankee*, January 1939, 42.

<sup>151</sup> For a discussion of the familial, helpful voice of advertising, see Ohmann, 191-93, and Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 13-16, 286-87. *Yankee* seems to have avoided the "hardboiled" depression-era advertising Marchand describes in pages 300-04.

Incidentally, the article was continued on a new page in order to make room for more ads.<sup>152</sup>

*Yankee* frequently created content specifically to increase advertising. In 1938 and 1939, in partnership with a Northampton, MA bookstore owner and the American Booksellers Association, *Yankee* ran a six-article series titled “The New England Book Lovers’ Trail,” one article covering each New England state. Each article contained pictures of that state’s major writers, alive and dead, with brief biographies and accomplishments. At the end of each article, the magazine included a full-page map with important literary sites and a list of bookshops where readers could shop for the books.<sup>153</sup> For a bookstore to be listed, it needed to agree to stock *Yankee* while the series ran and allow the magazine to solicit subscriptions through its mailing list. Additionally, Sagendorph sought advertising from publishing houses, whose advertising business he had coveted but been unable to procure.<sup>154</sup> In a sales letter to these publishers, he wrote that the new subscriptions gained through the bookstores’ mailing lists would ensure that the advertising reached “*known* purchasers of books.”<sup>155</sup>

The line between editorial and advertising was often blurred, as was the case in an article titled “Winter, 1939.” It began with a description of books (with prices listed) about winter activities – figure skating and skiing – before imploring, “But lest we be too hasty about ringing out the old, it must be remembered that it has been a few years since

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<sup>152</sup> “Protection from the Cold,” *Yankee*, January 1939, 33-35.

<sup>153</sup> Marion Dodd, “The New England Book Lovers’ Trail,” *Yankee*, October 1938, 12-16, recurring through March 1939.

<sup>154</sup> Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 398.

<sup>155</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Sales memorandum, August 18, 1938, *Yankee* archives. Italics replace underlining in the original.

New England has really had snow...and there are literally hundreds of winter sport plants that haven't had half a chance to offer their true wares." It went on to mention various places for winter fun, all commercial, along with exuberant Yankees enjoying winter, with captions touting ski instruction, and the ski trains by Boston & Maine, Boston & Albany, and New Haven. Several of the photos were provided by the Maine Development Commission, hinting at the increasing role state tourism departments had assumed.<sup>156</sup> These advertisements positioned the reader as a thrifty consumer, but this version of thrift focused on expressing culture through consumption rather than in opposition to it.

In its advertisements aimed at businesses, *Yankee* took on a more capitalist tone, and it is in these advertisements where we can most clearly see the magazine's successful commodification of its readers. An advertisement for the pro-advertising film *Yankee Doodle Goes to Town* read, "*Yankee*, the magazine for Yankees everywhere, is proud of its place, too, in the magazine parade. YANKEE *means* BUSINESS."<sup>157</sup> In October 1936, *Yankee* ran a short series that called attention to its readers as validation of the magazine's advertising value. The advertisement reprinted reader letters anonymously, "pulled at random from our files, names furnished on request," and placed them alongside testimonials from satisfied advertisers, including the blown-up claim from one client that "Our Advertising in *Yankee* Brings Us the Best People."<sup>158</sup> In numerous

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<sup>156</sup> "Winter, 1939," *Yankee*, January 1939, 29-32.

<sup>157</sup> *Yankee*, "Yankee Doodle Goes to Town" (Advertisement), January 1939, 7. Capitalization and italics in original.

<sup>158</sup> *Yankee*, "A Page of Unsolicited Testimonials" (Advertisement), September 1936.

advertisements over the course of its first years, *Yankee* would use its readers as validation of its value to advertisers, treating them as commodities to sell to admen.

As might be suspected, *Yankee* was even more direct in its business-to-business advertising. Shed of the necessity to cater to readers' expectations, *Yankee* targeted potential advertisers with messages that sold its audience. For example, *Yankee* created an eleven by seventeen inch bi-fold mailer almost completely covered with readers' signatures, presumably cut from letters these readers had sent to the editor. *Yankee* attempted here to communicate the personal relationship it felt it had with its readers. The signatures communicated the extent to which readers participated in the magazine. Additionally, the signatures conveyed authenticity.<sup>159</sup>

Part of *Yankee's* job as a business was to decrease, as much as possible, the risk associated with purchasing its audience. Since advertisers engage in a calculated gamble that the audience power they purchase will act (i.e., buy) in a predicted way – an audience's value is calculated based on the likelihood of this.<sup>160</sup> *Yankee*, as broker of that audience, identified the demographics of its readers so that it could set a reasonable rate for its audience commodity. In the March 1937 issue, *Yankee* requested its readers complete a survey of their finances in order to discern the current economic conditions of New Englanders, asking simply "Where does the Yankee dollar go?"<sup>161</sup> Promising to report the findings in the magazine, it did so in August 1937, using the data to prove New Englanders' thrift.<sup>162</sup> In the fall of 1937, *Yankee* produced a mailer reporting this

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<sup>159</sup> Advertising mailer, date unknown, *Yankee* archives.

<sup>160</sup> Smythe, 29.

<sup>161</sup> "Where Does the Yankee Dollar Go?" *Yankee*, March 1937, 43.

<sup>162</sup> "Where Does the Yankee Dollar Go?" *Yankee*, August 1937, 24-28.

information out to potential advertisers. The mailer included the “average” *Yankee* reader’s “checkbook,” with an itemized list of yearly expenditures and a separate page with the headline, “88% of *Yankee* readers own year-round or summer homes.” With ten thousand subscribers spending an average of \$4368 per year, *Yankee* claimed that it represented a \$43,680,000 market for its advertisers. It listed forty of its advertisers, a portion of the 160 through the first five months of 1937 who, it claimed, used *Yankee* “to sell the seventh New England state,” the “State of Mind.”<sup>163</sup> Throughout its first years, *Yankee* used similar data to sell its audience. As *Yankee* increased its advertising pages, many of those pages were bought by northern New England’s burgeoning winter tourism industry. As it wrote in the “*Yankee Transcript*,” its short-lived advertising newsletter modeled after *Yankee*, “If you want winter business *Yankee* has the market!” Below several letters from advertisers lauding *Yankee* for helping to increase their sales, it read “90% of *Yankee* subscribers live in the Winter Zone.”<sup>164</sup>

The survey ultimately served multiple purposes. First, like many of *Yankee*’s activities, it enabled readers to participate, thereby continuing to engage their attention in the magazine. We can imagine readers sending in their surveys and awaiting the results, perhaps so that they could compare their station to other readers’. Second, the survey enabled *Yankee* to quantify its readers’ consuming power. By identifying the average expenditures of respondents, *Yankee* created an “average Yankee.” However, because the

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<sup>163</sup> “State of Mind” Advertising mailer, *Yankee* archives. The mailer is not dated, but the circulation figure is dated “as of Oct. 1, 1937,” so we can assume it was created sometime shortly thereafter.

<sup>164</sup> “*Yankee Transcript*,” October 26, 1939, 4, Advertising newsletter, *Yankee* archives. Sagendorph claimed that in 1939, *Yankee* included 252 different advertisers, of which 157 were new accounts. See Sagendorph, 398.

magazine needed to maintain its vernacular of thrift, Sagendorph had to position the survey differently to his readers than to his potential advertisers. To readers, it determined the real economic condition of New Englanders. To advertisers, it quantified *Yankee's* audience. In fact, as Sagendorph later recalled, advertisers who had yet to purchase advertising space in the magazine had asked him directly for this information.<sup>165</sup> They were not interested in a Yankee public. They wanted a Yankee audience.

Perhaps we can best see the commodification of *Yankee's* readers in a simple memorandum to prospective advertisers:

*Yankee* is reaching an ever-increasing number of enthusiastic readers. It has become a household fixture in many a New England family...It has fulfilled a need which all New Englanders knew was there. *Yankee* readers have a deep-rooted love of New England; they spend their vacations here...They have the money to pay for the best—we know that.<sup>166</sup>

Sagendorph had announced in *Yankee's* first issue that “the real New England is not something which is to be measured in dollars and cents,” but in values. However, readers, driven by their “deep-rooted love” and nostalgia for New England could be measured in dollars and cents.

Ultimately, this is the process of commodification. Like all conceptualized spaces, *Yankee* projected the appearance of transparency as a way to mask its commercial

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<sup>165</sup> Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 222. Additionally, Sagendorph claimed that the survey results “helped us editorially, too, serving as a measuring stick for articles in many issues to come.”

<sup>166</sup> Advertising sales memorandum, May 9, 1936, *Yankee* archives.

motives.<sup>167</sup> Put another way, “Commodification lodges deep in the psyche, reinforced there by myriad quotidian acts and encounters that hum, ‘This is how things are, this is natural.’”<sup>168</sup> *Yankee* created that hum through two types of constant salesmanship. In the first, *Yankee* sold consumption to its readers through nostalgia for the past. In the second, it sold its readers to advertisers. In the end, *Yankee* was never about finally determining the definition of yankeeness, but rather about keeping readers engaged by the need to define it and therefore willing to constantly purchase the magazine and its advertisers’ products in order to keep up with the debate. *Yankee* provided the space in which the debate could take place, but it was a space of commerce.

There is a coda to this story of commodifying readers. The process of commodification affects readers by distilling them into an audience. However, the same process can affect those wielding the means of commodification. Robb Sagendorph may have set out to make a living as a magazine publisher, but he also set out with an ideological vision which championed a conservative regionalism over a liberal nationalism. For him, a revitalized Yankee culture was a politically activated one. As such, he devoted a significant amount of space in the magazine to promoting his political ideology. Concurrently, he created out of a dialogic *public* this *audience* of Yankees that could be bought and sold. Yet the same commodifying processes his readers underwent acted on his vision of the magazine as a political activating force. In September 1937, he published an editorial announcing that *Yankee* was “going republican.” The following

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<sup>167</sup> For the “illusion of transparency,” see Lefebvre, 27-30; Ohmann, 349 and n. 7.

<sup>168</sup> Ohmann, 348.

month he published readers' letters supporting his announcement, as well as several against it. Approximately a year later, he asked in another editorial whether there were the roots of a "Yankee Party" in New England. For two months following this question, he ran readers's letters answering on both sides of the question.<sup>169</sup> He later said that he had overstepped his bounds and, realizing that "the most which would be accomplished was to antagonize, rather than convert" readers. At that point, he decided that, "even though our ideas may have been right, we completely forgot that readers buy magazines to be entertained and not to be shouted at." Thus, "having made our little speech, we got out fast and turned once again to the business of maintaining reader interest."<sup>170</sup> In this context, entertainment equals commerce. Since Sagendorph needed to maintain readers' attention (again, we speak of publics), and many of his readers eschewed his conservative politics, he had to choose between the demands of his business and his ideology. He chose his business. Thus we see the same forces that commodified his readers affected him. As Ohmann writes, "You may resent commodification, but you can't argue with it, and you can't help practicing it, short of heroic abstentions or retreats."<sup>171</sup> Sagendorph was simply unwilling, perhaps even unknowingly so, to retreat from commodification, so he was forced to retreat from his vision.

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<sup>169</sup> See Robb Sagendorph, "Yankee Goes Republican," Editorial, *Yankee*, September 1937, 9; "The Right Hand of Fellowship...", *Yankee*, October 1937, 21-22; Robb Sagendorph, "Is There a Yankee Party?" Editorial, *Yankee*, August 1938, 5; September 1938, 5-6; October 1938, 6-7.

<sup>170</sup> Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*," 227. He published close to one hundred letters in support of his republican politics and the "Yankee Party" and approximately twenty against them. There is no way of knowing how many complaints Sagendorph received, either verbally or in writing, but given his commitment to his conservative politics, we can speculate that enough readers complained to turn him away from the bully pulpit.

<sup>171</sup> Ohmann, 348.

## Conclusion: The Ambiguities of Agency and Markets

In the year following the United States' entrance into World War II, the tone of *Yankee* changed. It shifted its view outward, proclaiming, as one reader wrote, that New Englanders were the "backbone of this country." The magazine emphasized New England's status as America's birthplace, casting back to the past for the values that would enable the United States to win the War.<sup>172</sup> The old debates and divisions over authentic yankeeness did not immediately vanish, but they were tempered by messages of unity and nationalist feeling. In an editorial in *Just Among Ourselves*, *Yankee* positioned itself for the duration:

it's to be 'smiles...and something to stick to your ribs.' We figure we can serve best by bringing you each month relief from the news broadcasts and headlines...relief from the nerve-racking readjustments we must all face...not by hiding our heads with the ostriches, of course, but by pointing to the place of humor in all this, too.<sup>173</sup>

This editorial reflected the increasing sense of nationalism, and thus demonstrates the ultimate lack of control a magazine has over prevailing conditions. However, it also avoided politics and debates over patriotism in favor of commercialism. Sagendorph regretted this approach, but he felt that he had no choice since *Yankee* lacked the resources to report on the War.<sup>174</sup> When paper-rationing forced *Yankee* to change its

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<sup>172</sup> "Fortitude," *Yankee*, February 1942, inside cover; NP, letter to the editor, *Yankee*, February 1942, 10.

<sup>173</sup> *Yankee*, *Just Among Ourselves*, February 1942, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Sagendorph, "This is *Yankee*," 347.

format to digest size (approximately 5 ¼ by 8 ¼ inches), it presented the change as a practical improvement in keeping with Yankee thrift. It published reader letters praising the change. Little seems to have changed in its approach to advertising.

The War halted *Yankee's* publication in December 1942. Sagendorph had been away from the magazine for several months looking for and eventually obtaining a wartime position in the Office of Censorship. With most of his staff also swept up in the war, he leased the magazine to a Boston editor in order to hold the name.<sup>175</sup> It resumed publication in 1945 with Sagendorph back at the helm, but the war had changed New England and the magazine's prospects. It retained the digest format. However, its advertising pages increased and the number of reader letters decreased. As Conforti argues, "Regionalism as a category of identity confronted serious cultural challenges in the 1950s and 1960s," and we can see in *Yankee* a slow decline in reader participation, even as it slowly grew its subscriptions in the years after the war.<sup>176</sup> Reader letters occasionally took issue with *Yankee's* treatment of a subject, but they rarely engaged each other. The debates were either settled, or more likely, slowly gave way to the magazine's commercial imperatives and the prevailing post-war nationalism. As Sagendorph recalled in 1947, "Today, unfortunately, as the future of our world leans heavily upon a lively interest in subjects national and international, I find the old heavy 1939 blanket of nostalgic fog closing in again. As I struggle to keep just a few issues like labor, compulsory military service, alive, our readers write they'll have none of these—

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<sup>175</sup> Sagendorph, 513-14. Sagendorph leased *Yankee* to Courteney Guild of Boston. Irene Railsbeck became editor.

<sup>176</sup> Conforti, 308-309. For a discussion of regionalism's declining relevance on the eve of World War II, see Dorman, chap. 8 and Conforti, chap. 6 and epilogue.

leastwise in *Yankee*.”<sup>177</sup> The readers’ seemed content to follow the allure of consumer culture.

We are left with questions. What do we make of this brief period in which *Yankee* positioned itself as the voice of a region and its people? To what extent could readers negotiate their identities in *Yankee*’s pages? Perhaps *Yankee*’s most significant legacy was its potential to create from a group of readers a simulacra of a community and then to control or dismiss it when profits were taken. The magazine created a public of exiles, residents and aspirants, and channeled their emotions and responses into a specific product niche – all the while denying in true Yankee fashion the validity of the consumer system in which it participated. While it may appear that *Yankee* allowed for a variety of experiences, ultimately, as with any magazine, those experiences were limited by the medium. As Warner reminds us, a public “has no existence outside of the activity of its own discursive circulation.”<sup>178</sup> Perhaps *Yankee*’s hiatus most clearly demonstrates how it acted as a public. It simply went away because it did not exist as a group outside of its own “discursive circulation.”

Yet, while the magazine ran, it commanded its readers’ attention. Warner provides insight:

Our lives are minutely administered and recorded to a degree unprecedented in history; we navigate a world of corporate agents that do not respond or act as people do. Our personal capacities, such as credit, turn out on reflection to be expressions of corporate agency. Without a faith—justified or not—in self-

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<sup>177</sup> Sagendorph, “This is *Yankee*,” 372.

<sup>178</sup> Warner, 75.

organized publics, organically linked to our activity in their very existence, capable of being addressed, and capable of action, we would be nothing but the peasants of capital—which of course we might be, and some of us more than others.<sup>179</sup>

In one sense, *Yankee*'s readers gave their attention to this public because they saw it as an escape from the modern capitalist world which determined so much of their lives. As long as *Yankee* maintained their confidence in this fact, their faith could continue. Yet that faith always contained an element of anxiety. As Jennifer Scanlon explains, "In addition to carving out a limited definition of a mass audience, magazines also provide a fairly predictable emotional formula: a balance between the fostering of anxiety that draws readers to seek out advice and the offering of positive messages that encourage them to return the following month."<sup>180</sup> In *Yankee*, advice took the form of ideals and traditions; positive messages were the rallying cries of Sagendorph and his editors, such as the one in the editorial at the front of the July 1937 issue. In it, Sagendorph reported that the New England "state of mind no longer sleeps in a lethargy of indifference to what other people think.... New England has the very best of everything, right here within her borders, it says, and it's up to the *Yankee*, its own magazine, to express these things.... It's a big jump for conservative New England to take, perhaps. But she can do it. New England *is* awake."<sup>181</sup> Sagendorph echoed these sentiments repeatedly, perhaps to remind readers that they were succeeding in the modern world by holding onto their past – by "becoming Yankees."

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>180</sup> Scanlon, 5.

<sup>181</sup> Robb Sagendorph, Editorial, *Yankee*, July 1937, 1.

The anxious, uncomfortable relationship between identity and authenticity, while it may open up possibilities for building community, is also at the core of anxieties about modernity and allows for capitalism to wield its power over the individual. We are reminded that “*there are no limits to consumption,*” and furthermore, “At the heart of the project from which emerges the systematic and indefinite process of consumption is a frustrated desire for totality.”<sup>182</sup> Aspiring Yankees could never be satisfied because they could never really become Yankees; the definition was forever unstable because yankeeness was never more than an ideal created for them and by their interest in it. For anyone who seeks remedy in the past for current societal ills, we will find a corresponding “unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject.”<sup>183</sup> That anxiety partly explains *Yankee*’s success. However, if we burden the past with our sense of self, then questioning its authenticity poses a risk to that self. Authenticity always reveals its instability. *Yankee*, then, succeeded because it was a reflection of its readers’ fears as much as their honest interest in New England. As long as *Yankee* provided readers with a past that reflected their own experience, they would turn the page as part of their effort to maintain stability. Thus, identity begets commodification.

Readers were a commodity, but so was *Yankee*, and readers could find plenty of value in the magazine. It often published articles that residents of northern New Englanders could use, such as one on combating the Saw Fly. It published hundreds of recipes; no doubt many readers’ families benefitted from these recipes in the form of some delicious apple pies. The “Yankee Job Exchange” helped readers find jobs. The

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<sup>182</sup> Baudrillard, 24-25. Italics in the original.

<sup>183</sup> Bendix, 10.

“Swopper’s Column” enabled readers to trade rather than buy, and in the process, connect with other readers.<sup>184</sup> These articles and services may have improved readers’ lives financially or emotionally. It was also possible (and likely) that a reader living outside New England would purchase and cook Yankee foods and buy Yankee clothes and knick-knacks without ever stepping foot in northern New England – except perhaps as a tourist – thereby never having a full understanding of the location and the people on which *Yankee* based its definitions of authenticity. These readers were left to glean what they could from the magazine or the products it advertised. Had they sought out these Old New Englanders the magazine promoted as authentic, they might have found people much like themselves: people living in the present, trying to make sense of it, looking to the past for answers.

While readers sought themselves in pages of *Yankee*, most of the northern New Englanders on whom the ideal of yankeeness was based most likely remained unaware that they had been essentialized in the pages of the magazine. Perhaps they even made some money off of their commodification since “individuals all over the globe have been sufficiently savvy enough to alienate themselves far enough from their traditions to market them.”<sup>185</sup> New England commodity tourism existed long before *Yankee*, and many of the advertisements in the magazine were for small, family-run businesses selling “authentic Yankee” products. If on the one hand we conclude that the “authentic” New Englanders were rendered powerless by the process of commodification, we must also give them credit for their agency, or we fall into the trap of essentializing them a second

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<sup>184</sup> For a short time, *Yankee* reported within the column readers’ reports of “Swoppers’ parties.”

<sup>185</sup> Bendix, 8.

time by thinking them incapable of profiting in the modern consumer culture. The language of consumerism became our dominant language, but working-class people have always needed to work in order to live, and the marketplaces created by *Yankee* provided some means to make a living.

Revisiting Robert Frost's poem, "The Oven Bird," we find a range of answers to the question, "what to make of a diminished thing?" Perhaps, as *Yankee* showed its readers, it was merely a matter of redefining the past, idealizing it to the point that it was no longer a person or a group of people, but an essence that could only be sought but never obtained. In that way, we might keep on trying to reach it, and so never recognize that it does not exist. The marketplace tells us to keep striving and provides the means – the magazines, the products, the advice – to do so. The marketplace does not want us to answer the question, only to keep trying to answer it by trying to remake the past. There is an alternative answer, however, and that is to recognize that we can reframe the question to what should we make of a thing that tells us everything is diminishing. In asking this new question, we can recognize that a magazine is a resource – sometimes for information, sometimes for entertainment – and that we can choose to make nothing of a diminished thing and instead make something of the places we live and people we live with. Perhaps, however, there are other alternatives. As swoppers wrote in *Yankee* when open to other offers, what have you?

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