

Introduction

To the *New Masses* digital archive on Marxists Internet Archive

By *Marty Goodman* for the Riazanov Library

Introduction: *New Masses* 1926 - 1948

The Riazanov Library, partnered with Marxists.org, is delighted to present here every issue and every page of *New Masses* 1926 - 1948, scanned in relatively high resolution, art-preserving fashion. This project took me six years to complete. It's one of the biggest of the Riazanov Library digital archive projects.

The scans here I made from my personal collection, from the personal collection of Tim Davenport, from the personal collection of Ted Watts, and from the holdings of Holt Labor Library of San Francisco.

Early on in this project, Stanford's Hoover Library gave us very kind assistance in supplying color scans of color covers of two issues (July 1926 and May 1927) and with a color 2 page center graphic art work in May 1927 where we did not have access to the original paper. May 1927 is an exceptionally rare issue: neither Tamiment Library nor Hatcher Labadie library had a copy of it. Two weeks after I received those scans, a copy of May 1927 became available from Lorne Bair rare books, enabling me to make scans of it entirely from the original paper I remain very grateful for the extremely kind and generous assistance provided by Stanford University's Hoover Library in this (and in some other) project(s).

I also could not have made this digital archive without the help of John Durham of Bolerium Books of San Francisco, Daryl Van Fleet of Bibliomania books of Oakland, and Eugene Povirk of Southpaw Books of Massachusetts, who supplied me with large numbers of the issues I scanned.

I began this archive project in late 2014. I originally intended to provide digital images of only the early, monthly *New Masses* issues of 1926 - 1933. But as time went by, and original paper complete runs of subsequent issues became available to me, the project gradually expanded, and now it is done. Complete through the last issue of *New Masses* in January of 1948.

[Of the over 800 issues (approx 25,000 pages) presented here, there are five issues (about 160 pages total) for which I never was able to obtain

original paper issues to scan. One in 1941, three in 1942, and one in 1946. For these, I managed to obtain, scanned by others, lower resolution but still pretty decent (300 dpi) digital images, and it is these I present here. These images are noted in the listing as being 300 dpi images.]

For the years 1926 through 1936 we present here, with the very kind and generous permission of the author, Theodore Watt's three books of indexes and tables of contents to *New Masses*. Two that were published (1926-1933, and 1934-1935), and one unpublished work of his for 1936 *New Masses*. These are searchable PDF files. They should greatly facilitate finding specific material, authors, subjects, art, and artists in those years.

For the years 1937 - 1948 I've extracted the tables of contents from scans of the issues, added OCR, and put them together into searchable pdf tables of contents for each individual of those years. Each is available on the page for a given one of those years. These are rudimentary and limited search tools. They don't list individual works or art, or artists. They don't list the names of books or films or plays reviews, at least much of the time. They are quite poor in comparison to Ted Watts' meticulous, thorough work. But... they are all I was able to have time to do, and they are better than nothing.

Scans here vary from 600 to 2400 dpi resolution. Most are in single bit BW mode ("bitonal"), but I also used 8 bit gray scale and 24 bit color modes as I judged to be appropriate. In individual issues, I often would scan an entire page for proper exposure of the text on it, but then I cropped out artwork on that page, scanning that using significantly different exposures, and sometimes also using a different scanning mode, to properly render the artwork. Occasionally in files of given issues you will see what appears to be a duplication of the scan of the same page. In most of such cases what is going on is that I've scanned a given work of art once using single bit BW, then again using 8 bit gray scale. These two approaches to digitally rendering art have different pros and cons, and for some art I felt it best to provide both, to better preserve the actual work of art.

When I started this project I was using less capable tabloid size paper scanning equipment than I use today, limited to 600 dpi true optical resolution (Epson GT 20000). After some years of this project, I upgraded to 2400 dpi true optical resolution-capable tabloid size page - capable equipment (Epson 10000XL). If I had it to do over, I'd have done those beautiful early years of *New Masses* at somewhat higher (about twice) the resolution I actually did employ.

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SanPablo CA February 2020
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Predecessors / Preludes to *New Masses*:

In 1923, the Workers / Communist Party took over putting out Max Eastman's periodical *The Liberator*. One of the single most famous communist periodicals ever in American history, and most widely known in scholarly circles, *The Liberator* combined communist political news and stories and political cartoons with general literary fiction and poetry, and some general (not specifically political) works of graphic art.

The Workers Party shut down *The Liberator* after the October 1924 issue, combining it with two of its other publications (Soviet Russia Pictorial and Labor Herald) to produce *Workers Monthly*, starting in November of 1924.

The covers of *Workers Monthly* strikingly resembled in some respects those of *The Liberator*: Bright, colorful, art in a wide variety of styles. But internally, *Workers Monthly* from the start was largely... and increasingly became near entirely... a political journal.

In May of 1926 a group of artists in conjunction with the Communist Party launched a new publication dedicated to a radical perspective on art and literature, titled *New Masses*.

The name was an homage to the predecessor of *The Liberator* of 1918-1924, which was *The Masses* of 1911-1917, shut down by the US Government in 1917 for its fierce opposition to US recruitment for fighting in The Great War (what we now call World War I). The format of *New Masses* upon its introduction in some ways resembled that of the earlier *The Masses* issues, too: Large paper size (10 x 14 inches).

Artistic content:

Some of the graphic artists who frequently graced the cover and insides of *The Masses* and *The Liberator* were prominently featured in *New Masses* (such as Hugo Gellert, Stuart Davis, Boardman Robinson, Wanda Gag, William Gropper and Otto Soglow). But other talented artists appeared in the pages of *New Masses*, who had not been seen in *The Liberator*, such as Louis Losowick and I. Klein.

Format of the first six issues of *New Masses* May 1926-October 1926:

The first six issues (the first volume, May - October 1926) of *New Masses* each was printed on extremely high quality, thick, 11 x 14 inch no-acid paper, which survives to this day (90 years later) in mostly supple, clean, creamy-white condition... not that different, most likely, from the way it looked when it was first printed.

Each of these first six issues used a single bright color ink as part of the art on its cover, and to augment graphic art inside on 4 or 5 of the inside pages. May: red, June: green, July: orange, August: pink, September: red-orange, October: blue.

Format used November 1926 thru March of 1928:

After October 1926 (the sixth issue), a new volume (Volume 2) begins and the format changes. Somewhat smaller paper is used (13 x 10 inches). The quality of the paper drops somewhat. It is now a lot thinner and less robust than before, but still low or no acid. The covers of these issues today tend to often be rather battered, but interior pages tend to be intact and without any browning. With the exception of the cover and center art in the May 1927 issue, there is no more use of color ink, only black ink on white paper.

Post March 1928 format:

After the April 1928 issue of *New Masses* (and after a one month hiatus, for there was no May 1928 issue printed), the format and paper of the periodical changes again. It gets still smaller in paper size (around 9 x 12 inches), and the paper quality plummets, so that many of the issues past this point that survive today are in extremely bad shape... brittle and brown and fragile.

The May 1927 issue's Color Cover and Center Art:

There is one exception to the exclusive use of black and white ink after October of 1926: The cover of the May 1927 issue, the issue put out on the first anniversary of *New Masses'* publication, features a lovely Hugo Gellert graphic that is enhanced with bright red-orange ink, and a center two page wide cartoon that has a stunning dash of the same red ink employed in the bullfighter's red flag, drawn by Miguel Covarrubias.

This issue is quite rare, and missing from a number of prestigious special collections library's collections. I despaired of getting the kind of access to it needed to make my sort of scans, and ended up making copies of it from a xerographic copy of the issue. Stanford's Hoover Library and of

Paul Thomas then enhanced our digital copy very significantly by making for us 600 dpi 24 bit color scans of the cover and of the 2 page center.

Much to my surprise, just a few weeks after putting together that scanned copy from Xeroxes and color scans from Stanford's bound volume, Lorne Bair rare books contacted me to let me know an original May 1927 issue was for sale. Lorne gave me a very good price, for he heartily supports this project of making these images freely and widely available.

The copy currently in the archive is scanned from this original, in my personal collection, which I was able to take apart into pages and scan perfectly flat, a luxury special collections are unable to permit themselves to do with their bound volumes.

Literary content:

Editors in this early period of *New Masses* included Hugo Gellert, John F. Sloan, Max Eastman, Mike Gold, and Joseph Freeman. Writers included (over the course of the run of the publication) William Carlos Williams, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Dorothy Parker, Dorothy Day, John Breecher, Langston Hughes, Eugene O'Neill, Rex Stout and Ernest Hemingway.

Political content:

Originally *New Masses* was put out in large part by those sympathetic to but not officially members of the Workers / Communist Party. Wikipedia on *New Masses* states: Frederick J. Hoffman describes "among the fifty-six writers and artists connected in some way with the early issues of the *New Masses*, [Joseph] Freeman reports, only two were members of the Communist Party, and less than a dozen were fellow travelers"

As time passed, the character and politics of *New Masses* (and that of the CP USA) changed.

During this time Stalin was cementing and consolidating his control over the Soviet Union, and the political character of *New Masses* reflects this.

Wikipedia observes: "the editorial shift from a magazine of the radical left, with its numerous competing points of view, gave way to a bastion of

[Stalinist] conformity. When Gold and Freeman gained full control by 1928 [a] “Stalinist/Trotskyist” division began in earnest.”

By February 1933 *New Masses* printed (and answered) a letter of resignation from Charles Yale Harrison, who wrote:

“the magazine has ceased to be an organ of free expression and has degenerated steadily until today it is nothing more than the servile mouthpiece of the Stalin apparatus in this country.”

Charles also chided *New Masses* for not commenting on the death of Trotsky’s eldest daughter Sinaida, who he writes committed suicide after being denied medical care in the Soviet Union, kept under a kind of house arrest. He stated that there was no protest of this in the Soviet Union, because:

“If a protest meeting were called, you know perfectly well that it would be shot down by Stalin’s political police.”

The editors of *New Masses* answered with denial, and soft-pedaled what was in fact the physical liquidation by Stalin of his real and perceived political enemies (including nearly all of the original Bolshevik leadership) over the next 4 years. *New Masses* (and the American Communist Party) massively lost credibility when it, adhering to the Moscow line, defended the Moscow Trials in 1936 and 1937, and then again in 1939 for its 180-degree political flip flop overnight in supporting the Stalin-Hitler peace pact.

However, also during this period, Wikipedia notes: “The magazine still included literary and artistic content until its eventual demise, just not in the same abundance as in its previous years. While this content was slowly crowded out in favor of more journalistic pieces, *New Masses* still impacted the leftist cultural scene. For example, In 1937 *New Masses* printed Abel Meeropol’s anti-lynching poem “Strange Fruit,” later popularized in song by Billie Holiday. The magazine also sponsored the first From Spirituals to Swing concert on 23 December 1938 at Carnegie Hall and was organized by John Hammond.”

Over the years, the quantity of graphic art content of *New Masses* varied. After the first year, the striking and beautiful use of color ceased. Within a few years after that, the number of works of graphic art in each issue of *New Masses* significantly decreased, too. Where during its first two years one found 65% or more of the 32 pages of each issue covered in significant part with graphic art, by 1933 in some issues less than 20% of the pages carried such art. As we get to the late 1930s, the amount of

graphic art in *New Masses* increases again. Some years' issues of *New Masses* up through the middle of 1939 have striking graphic on their covers, but by late 1939 graphic art leaves the covers of *New Masses*. There is a reprise of the appearance of graphic art on the cover of *New Masses* in 1946, starting with the April 23 issue, and continuing for most of the remaining 1946 issues.

The End:

In "Radical Representation, Politics and Form in US Proletarian Fiction" by Barbara Foley, it is stated in a footnote on page 100: "from 1928 to 1930 or 1931 *New Masses* reached several thousand readers in labor circles, but reached very few in the literary community." Another source states *New Masses* had a circulation of 25,000 when it began to be a weekly in 1934. There were 100,000 of a December 1936 issue printed.

New Masses ceased publication early in 1948, when it was merged with "Mainstream", a CP cultural quarterly that had been started the previous year.

Masses and Mainstream had a circulation of 17,000 in 1948, which steadily declined during the McCarthy era. It ceased publication in 1956. In 1956 "Masses and Mainstream" was followed by (became) a publication titled just "Mainstream", which continued into 1963, when its publication ceased.

Regarding Scanning of 1934 - 1948 New Masses

This particular project did not start out as "I am going to scan all of the issues of *New Masses*, 1926 - 1948". Rather, it grew "organically", in stages, over the course of the six years I worked on it. There were multiple times where I felt certain I would be stopping scanning issues at a given point. First at 1933. Then at 1939. Then at 1945. Each time I halted (I thought at the time "ended") the project, only to be persuaded months or years later to continue scanning more issues. In this, it is unlike most other major digital archive projects I've completed, where in contrast I at the start planned on doing the entire big project. Things affecting my decisions to stop and then continue the project included availability of source material to scan, and my understanding and estimation of the importance of various years of this publication. Both of these changed over the years of my working on the project.

I began the above the above art-preserving digital archive of the first 8 years of *New Masses*, (during which it was published monthly) in 2014, and finished it in February 2017. It is in that period... and especially in the earlier part of that period, that this publication had the most and the best graphic art. This archive, years in the making due to the difficulty of

acquiring unrestricted scanning access to every page of every issue, I completed making in February 2017.

In 1934 *New Masses* changed publication from monthly to weekly. By 1934, the political character of the publication had changed significantly, and its presentation of graphic art was by then (for the most part) reduced.

I had not originally intended to continue to scan this publication beyond 1933... had not planned on scanning the weekly *New Masses* that began in 1934 and continued as a weekly through 1947 into January of 1948. Partly because of the decreased quantity and, in my opinion, quality of the artistic content, partly because of the change in the politics behind it, and partly because obtaining proper scanning access to all 52 issues for a given year seemed likely to be impossible given the small shopkeeper mentality of many special collections, and their hostility to facilitating making their precious hoarded material freely available via high quality scans to all. Also significantly in part simply because of the immense amount of work involved in archiving an art-bearing weekly publication.

However, I had to admit that 1934 in particular was a very important year for events in the American labor movement. And that the period of the transformation of third period Stalinism into Popular Front period Stalinism is an interesting and important one for those who wish to know the history of the American revolutionary left. The deciding event occurred when John Durham of Bolerium Books happened to acquire for sale bound volumes of *New Masses*... every issue in years 1934 through 1938 and half of 1939. And offered to sell them to me at a very reasonable price, because he supported the work I was doing. The quality of the paper in these bound volumes was exceptional. Far superior to that which I'd seen in other issues I had personally acquired and in issues I'd seen in much vaunted special collections libraries.

Unbinding these bound volumes so as to preserve as much of the paper edge to edge was time-consuming, tedious work. It took more than 10 hours to properly unbind the each bound (6 month long) volume so as to extract without harming the issues. As time went by, I acquired more of *New Masses* from other sources, such as Eugene P. of Southpaw Books and Daryl V. F. of Bibliomania, in Oakland, CA. Tim Davenport kindly contributed to this project from his collection several runs of entire years of *New Masses* from the late 1930s and early 1940s.

In discussions with comrades and colleagues working with me on this project, I gradually softened in my attitude toward *New Masses* of the 30's and even *New Masses* of the early 1940's. I came to realize that documenting the CP's response to the Molotov - Ribbentrop ("Hitler - Stalin") pact in its publications was important, as was documenting its

later responses to Operation Barbarossa (the German invasion of the Soviet Union) and the Battle of Stalingrad and its aftermath.

Tho the weekly *New Masses* of the mid and late 30s ... and especially the *New Masses* of the 1940s... never was as consistently stunning in artistic quality overall as those of the 20's and early 30's, I came (in part influenced by email exchanges with present day artists who were delighted to see some of the art in *New Masses* in the mid to late 1930s and early to mid 1940s period) to appreciate there WAS a fair amount of very worthwhile art. I also had to admit these issues also contained some political art that made points I felt were relatively intelligent and timeless. Thus I was moved toward committing to making high quality, art-preserving digital archives of *New Masses* thru the end of WWII (end of 1945).

Completing the project: 1946 and 1947:

For a year or two after completing *New Masses* thru 1945, I was resolved to not scan the 1946 and 1947 issues. I was tired from the enormous work required by this project up to that point, and felt 1946 and 1947 to be unimportant years. However, on advice from historians and others, I was persuaded to complete the project by scanning all issues of *New Masses*. At the same time, John Durham of Bolerium Books kindly provided me nearly for free with a complete run of loose 1947 *New Masses* issues, and Eugene Povirk of Southpaw Books was able to sell me two bound volumes of nearly all (missing just one) issues of *New Masses* of 1946, making my scanning those years from original paper issues possible. I'm glad I did scan those years. For (among other things) in those issues is documentation of the valuable and brave work the CP USA did exposing and fighting Jim Crow racism in the 1940s. Work that helped lay a foundation for the successes of the civil rights movement two decades later.

So, as of February 2020, six years after embarking on this project, it is done. Essentially all issues of *New Masses* are now available in high-resolution, art-preserving scanned form, freely, to all, any time, from any place with an internet connection. For viewing AND for downloading to one's personal computer to become part of one's personal local library.

Contents and Indexes:

For *New Masses* 1926 - 1936 we have available here for downloading the definitive indexes for those issues created by Theodore Watts, presented

with his kind permission. After 1936, I've included with each year of the publication a searchable pdf file of the tables of contents of all of the year's issues. These tables of contents have limited value. Unlike the indexes (entire books!) that Ted Watts created, these do not provide information on the artists in given issues, their works, or (in most cases) on the names of books and films and plays reviewed in the pages of New Masses. But... they are somewhat better than nothing.

Technical comment on how the issues were scanned:

In creating this digital archive, I went to great lengths to produce good quality reproductions of the art. At times here I render a work of art twice, using different scanning techniques, to capture more of its detail (or perhaps to provide a tutorial to future digital archivists that compares single bit black and white scanning modes to 8 bit gray scale scanning modes). As a result of using color scans for the half dozen or more color art pages, and high resolution single bit and 8 bit gray scale scans for the rest (at 600, 1200, 1500, 1800, and at times as high as 2400 dpi), the files for a single 32 page issue get relatively large: 35 to 90 megabytes in size. The degree of detail is such that, if you wish, you can print out any individual image on a page the size of the original page, and you'll get something likely as clear and sharp and detailed as the original printed page. Perhaps more so. Suitable for framing. This was a mission-goal in making this archive. Early on in this project I was using an Epson GT2000 tabloid size flat bed scanner, with a max optical (real) resolution of 600 dpi. Later on in the project I acquired, and used, an Epson 10000XL scanner, which provided max optical resolutions of 2400 dpi.

All issues had their staples removed for scanning, and were scanned as individual pages pressed flat against glass on a flat bed scanner. Where a work of art stretched across the center two pages of the issue, I early on employed a broadsheet size flat bed scanner of limited max resolution (400 dpi), but later scanned the work in two parts at higher resolutions on my tabloid size scanner, then in post processing stitched the two halves of the work together, digitally.

See There is another little article / essay accompanying this one, providing technical details on how I created this digital archive. Folks considering doing similar projects might find it of interest to read that.

---marty
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