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Notes on *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly*.

By Larry Glatz, Scarborough, Maine, 20 June 2022.

The Nut-Crackers' Monthly, printed in Auburn, Maine, in 1875 and 1876, is believed to have been the earliest “strictly puzzle” magazine published in America.¹ Although the journal is said to have run for twenty months, copies of only four issues can now be found in cataloged collections. These are the numbers for January, April, May and June of 1875, which are held in Special Collections at the Fogler Library of the University of Maine at Orono. The university has recently digitized the collection and made it available for download at its DigitalCommons website.²

Although the publishers are not identified in the magazine itself, they were quite clearly Wellington Harris Eastman (1853-1933) and Willard Lee Small (1858-1930), both of Auburn at the time the magazine appeared. Eastman's editorship is noted in a brief item in the Lewiston *Evening Journal* of 17 April 1875 (p. 3): “The Nut-Crackers' Monthly is the title of a fine little puzzle paper published in this city by an old contributor to the Journal's puzzle department, viz.: 'Patrick,' W. H. Eastman. Success to him and the Nut-Cracker.” “Patrick” was actually not particularly old at the time, but since he'd then been contributing to the *Journal's* puzzle column for at least four years prior, his presence was “old” for the paper.

Eastman was born on January 6, 1853, in Sweden, Maine, to Isaac and Esther (Woodbury) Eastman. What originally brought him to Auburn is unknown, but by January of 1875, he was there at work with his puzzle magazine. The fact that he was granted a patent (No. 179,439) in July of 1876 for “gage-pins for printing-presses” reflects his bona fides as a pressman; and in the 1880 census, his occupation is listed as “correspondent for press.” As an author of puzzles for his own magazine as well as with other later publications, he left “Patrick” in Sweden with his parents and adopted the nom de plume of “Wellington.”³

While in Auburn, Eastman not only edited *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly*, but he contributed puzzles to other magazines and newspapers and at one time or another edited the puzzle columns of the *Cape Ann Advertiser* (Gloucester, Mass.), the Boston *Congregationalist*, the *New England Journal of Education*. and the *Oxford Democrat* of Paris, Maine.⁴

By the time of his marriage to Rachel W. Stetson in January of 1881, Eastman had moved across the river to Lewiston, and it was from that city the following year that he purchased a property in his wife's home town of Sumner, Maine. From that time on, Eastman lived in East Sumner, where he founded and ran the Eastman Seed Company, which conducted both retail and mail-order operations. He became quite active in local affairs, serving stints as selectman, county commissioner, postmaster and census marshal. A later correspondent for the Lewiston *Journal* said of Eastman: “As a public reader and impersonator he has but few equals in the state, and no man in the grange is more popular than he.”⁵

Wellington H. Eastman died at his home in East Sumner on March 22, 1933, and he was buried in

1 Theodore G. Meyer, “American Puzzledom,” in Eastern Puzzlers' League, *Key to Puzzledom, or Complete handbook of the enigmatic art*, New York: Delaney, 1906, p. 15.

2 URL: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory/524/> (accessed 18 June 2022).

3 *Sun-Journal* (Lewiston, Me.), 23 March 1933, p. 2, “Wellington H. Eastman” (obituary); “Nutmeg” (Edgar E. Hamilton), *The Knights of the Mystic Arena: A Complete Directory of our American Puzzledom*, Danbury, Conn.: E. E. Hamilton, 1880.

4 “Gus,” *The American Puzzlers' Directory*, Waterloo, Indiana: A.C. Gruhlky, 1881, pp. 29-32; *Oxford Democrat* (Paris, Me.), 21 Nov. 1882, *et seq.*

5 *Sun-Journal*, 14 April 1906, p. 24.

the nearby Elmwood Cemetery.⁶

The other publisher of *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly* was named in an 1880 source as “W. L. Small,” but there is no contemporaneous documentation of the individual's full name or personal details. The surviving circumstantial records, however, leave no doubt as to his identification. The only “Small” with the initials “W. L.” in the 1870 census of Auburn or the larger county of Androscoggin was Willard L. Small of South Auburn. The lad was eleven years old at the time and was living on his grandparents' farm with his mother, Avis, a widowed seamstress.⁷

Although Small was only sixteen when *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly* was launched, he may well have been a print shop apprentice or the owner of his own “home” press. During the 1870s, amateur journalism was a burgeoning occupation for teenagers. A number of manufacturers were marketing inexpensive presses, and one of them, in fact, was advertised in the April 1875 issue of *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly*.

Professionally, Willard L. Small spent over a decade in the compositing room of the *Boston Herald*, and he completed his career as a proof-reader with the *Newark (N.J.) News*. He died at his home in East Orange, New Jersey, on April 13, 1930. His burial ceremony at Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett, Massachusetts, was attended by a delegation from the Boston Typographical Union.⁸

It is worth noting that the first issue of *The Nut-Cracker's Monthly* featured two puzzles by Edwin R. Briggs (“Ruthven”), who for the prior three years had been editing the puzzle page of a major publication: *Ballou's Monthly* of Boston. Briggs lived in West Bethel, about fifty miles northwest of Auburn, and his puzzling would have been well known to the younger magazine men. Obviously Eastman and/or Small were in touch with Briggs prior to the launch of their magazine, and they must have been pleased and encouraged to include content from such a figure in their premier issue.

The magazine's first number also included three puzzles by Emery Wilson Bartlett (“Wilson”), another resident of Bethel and a frequent contributor to several other columns edited by Briggs. It's easy to imagine Briggs saying, “Sure, I'm happy to send along some puzzles, and I'll have my friend 'Wilson' do the same.”

Although only four editions of *The Nut-Crackers' Monthly* are available for review, it's remarkable that among its pages are puzzles from at least five contributors who were or would become editors in their own right. These were:

Edwin Ruthven Briggs (“Ruthven”) (1841-1923), who edited *Ballou's* “Mystifications” for nineteen years, the puzzle column in the *Portland (Maine) Transcript* for over twenty-five years, and columns in at least eight other publication for shorter stints. One of the latter was his “home county” paper, the *Oxford Democrat*.

Wellington H. Eastman, the magazine's editor, who as described above, managed the puzzle columns of at least four other publications. He succeeded Briggs as editor of the puzzle feature in the *Oxford Democrat*.

Emery Wilson Bartlett (“Wilson”) (1856-1924), who may or may not have edited a puzzle column during his long career in publishing, but who became a “front-office” editor with the *Boston Herald*, the *Pittsburgh Press* and the *Los Angeles Examiner*.

6 *Sun-Journal*, 23 March 1933, p. 2.

7 “Nutmeg,” p. 41. United States Census (NARA Publication M593), Auburn, Androscoggin County, Maine, p. 2, retrieved from <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6LF7-3LY?i=1> (accessed 19 June 2022).

8 *Boston Herald*, 17 April 1930, p. 23 (obituary).

William H. Graffam (“Boff”) (1853-1934), of Scarborough, Maine, edited puzzle columns in the Detroit *Post & Tribune*, the Cincinnati *Sunday Commercial*, the Washington, D.C., *Gazette*, and several others.

Frank W. Freeman (“Honestus”) (1853-1893), of Webster (now Sabattus), Maine, became puzzle editor of the short-lived *Dirigo Rural* of Bangor.

One of the many noms de plume appearing in the magazine may have belonged to Willard L. Small, but regardless of whether he was a puzzler or just a printer, Small, too, became an editor. An active union man for his entire professional life, Small founded, published and edited the *Union Labor Bulletin* of Newark, New Jersey.

Although the *Nut-Crackers' Monthly* survived for only twenty months, it appears to have reached a fairly wide—although probably quite shallow—audience. When advertisements began appearing in April of 1875, they came from publications in the District of Columbia, Ohio and Oregon. An entrepreneur from Shelbyville, Indiana, offered for the small sum of twenty-five cents directions for making and sending up paper balloons by fire!

Given the present rarity of copies of the little magazine, perhaps some of those paper balloons were made of its pages.