

# This Day in History... August 4, 1821

## *The Saturday Evening Post*

On August 4, 1821, *The Saturday Evening Post* published its first issue.

According to the *Post*'s official history, it has a neat connection to Benjamin Franklin! In 1728, Franklin had the idea to create *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, an informative magazine. However, before he had a chance to begin work on the paper, his partner, Samuel Keimer, stole the name and idea. Luckily for Franklin, the paper failed within a year, and he and Hugh Meredith took over production.

Under Franklin's leadership, the *Gazette* became one of the most influential newspapers in the American colonies. By 1748, he had experienced enough success with his various business ventures to retire. The *Gazette* continued on without him until 1800, and the print shop where the magazine was produced remained open after that.



Stamp honors Franklin's time as a printer and pictures *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Twenty years later, Samuel Atkinson was running the shop when Charles Alexander submitted an idea. He wanted to print a popular poem about a blind girl in the city who set type by hand. He managed to find 200 people who would subscribe to the poem. Based on that interest, he suggested to Atkinson that they start a newspaper.

Atkinson and Alexander decided to name the new paper *The Saturday Evening Post* because it would be printed and ready for the second mail delivery on Saturdays. The first issue was produced on August 4, 1821. The *Post* included local and national news, including the letters between former presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. In addition to the paper being printed on Franklin's press, much of the writing also matched his style. Subjects included business, law, exploration, fashion, etiquette, agriculture, and science.

Over the years, the *Post* featured the works of many renowned authors including Edgar Allen Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Washington Irving, and Mark Twain. Unfortunately, by the late 1890s, the paper had become watered down with trivia and fashion news and didn't feature any illustrations or advertising. It dropped to only about 2,000 readers.



Stamp pictures a cartoon by Constantin Aljlov that appeared on a 1946 cover of the *Post*.

Following the death of the magazine's owner in 1899, the editor turned to Cyrus Curtis. Curtis had founded the *Ladies' Home Journal* (the first American magazine to reach a circulation of one million) and wanted to try to save the historic *Saturday Evening Post*. He started using the profits from the *Ladies' Home Journal* to fund his improvements to the *Post*. Curtis introduced new content, redesigned the pages, and printed full-cover illustrations. While some of the current subscribers didn't like the new direction, others did, and by 1900, he had 250,000 readers. By 1908, he had over one million readers and had invested \$1,250,000



Rockwell's Triple Self-Portrait appeared on the February 1, 1960, cover.



From J.C. Leyendecker's January 2, 1937, cover.

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in the *Post*.

Curtis was also one of the first publishers to realize that advertising, rather than the price paid by customers, was the future in funding the paper. He was diligent in only including wholesome, honest advertisements from reputable ad agencies, which earned the loyalty of his readers.

Curtis's editor, George Lorimer, was also influential in the *Post*'s success. While most publications of the day were more regional, he worked hard to make the magazine appeal to people all over the country. Lorimer also sought out the day's best writers and paid them faster than other publications, which in turn encouraged them to go to the *Post* first. He attracted such writers as Joseph Conrad, O. Henry, Rudyard Kipling, and Jack London. He even convinced former president Grover Cleveland to write a series of articles.



Rockwell's *The Doctor and the Doll* appeared on the March 9, 1929, cover.



This image by J.C. Leyendecker appeared on the cover in 1935.

Lorimer is also credited for the *Post*'s famous colorful covers. He personally picked the covers, which became one of the most talked-about aspects of the magazine. Over the years, the *Post* featured covers by Andrew Wyeth, J.C. Leyendecker, and George Hughes. Of course, the most famous cover artist was Norman Rockwell, who worked on his first *Post* cover in 1916. He would produce a total of 321 covers during his 47-year relationship with the publication.

By 1960, the *Post* reached its peak circulation of 6 million readers. However, the rise in popularity of television and an increased number of magazines provided lots of competition. Readership declined and the *Post* closed in 1969. It was revived in 1971 as a quarterly publication, and is still in circulation today.



Rockwell's Four Freedoms series appeared on covers in February and March 1943.



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