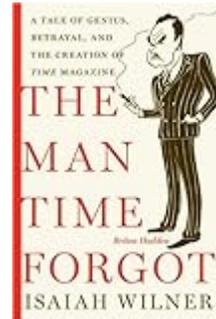




**Isaiah Wilner.** *The Man Time Forgot: A Tale of Genius, Betrayal, and the Creation of Time Magazine.* New York: HarperCollins, 2006. 342 pp. \$26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-06-050549-3.



**Reviewed by** Donna Harrington-Lueker (English Department, Salve Regina University)

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### Brit Hadden and the Founding of *Time*

In journalism history, the name of publisher Henry R. Luce is synonymous with *Time* magazine and its media empire. But, as Isaiah Wilner argues in *The Man Time Forgot*, the story of *Time* is not Luce's alone to tell. For Wilner, the driving force behind the magazine and its groundbreaking publishing concept was Briton Hadden, a name nearly forgotten in magazine history and one, Wilner indicates, that has been nearly scrubbed from the corporate memory of *Time*.

Hadden emerges from the pages of Wilner's biography as a figure worthy of F. Scott Fitzgerald—brilliant, witty, hard-partying, burning his candle at both ends until his death at the age of thirty-one in 1929. Framing his narrative as a story of betrayal, deceit, and tortured friendship, Wilner casts Luce as the conservative ballast to Hadden's lightning-bright creative genius. *Time* simply would not have been *Time* without Hadden, and today's media landscape would not be the same either, Wilner asserts.

There is considerable bravado behind such statements—a kind of youthful zeal that Hadden might have relished. Hadden was born in 1898, two days after

the sinking of the battleship *Maine* ushered in an era of American empire. The scion of a wealthy family of some prominence in Brooklyn Heights, New York, Hadden attended Brooklyn Poly Prep, the same prep school his father and grandfather had attended, then moved on to Hotchkiss, one of the wealthiest boarding schools of the time. It was there that he met Luce, a missionary's son who attended the school on scholarship. And, it was there, Wilner states, that the lifelong competition between the two men began. Bitten by the newspaper bug, Hadden worked manically during his sophomore year to secure a spot on the school newspaper, edging out Luce in the process. (Luce made the newspaper staff later and served as Hadden's assistant managing editor.)

After Hotchkiss, both men went on to Yale where they competed again, this time for coveted spots on the *Yale Daily News*. Upon graduation from Yale, Luce used his profits from the *Daily News* to study at Oxford. Hadden saved his share—\$3,500—to use as seed money for his magazine. Wilner writes: "Hadden would tell his friends three things. He planned to become the greatest editor ever, he planned to make a million dollars before he

turned thirty, and he planned to do both by starting a magazine” (p. 61). He also planned to have Luce work with him.

Such personal details aside, it is Wilner’s description of the early years of *Time* that makes for the book’s most interesting reading. In corporate histories, speeches, and press interviews, Luce cast himself consistently as the creator of *Time*, seldom acknowledging Hadden. For Wilner, though, Hadden was the driving force behind the magazine. It was Hadden who came up with the idea of a weekly news summary as early as his days at Hotchkiss, and he later refined that idea at Yale. As Hadden told a colleague after graduation: “I got an idea to start a magazine which comes out on Friday with all the news condensed so ... all the rich millionaires commuting home for the weekend can catch up on the news they missed. How’s that?” (p. 65).

Abandoning the newspaper jobs they had landed, the two young men moved to New York City and lived with family while renting a room in a brownstone on East Seventeenth Street to serve as the publication’s makeshift office. They named the publication *Facts* but scrapped that title for *Time*, and they labored over the magazine’s prospectus, part of which read: “TIME is a weekly news-magazine, aimed to serve the modern necessity of keeping people informed, created on a new principle of COMPLETE ORGANIZATION. TIME is interested—not in how much it includes between its cover—but HOW MUCH IT GETS OFF ITS PAGES INTO THE MINDS OF ITS READERS” (p. 86). Readers of *Time* would find one week’s worth of news simplified, condensed, compressed, and organized into categories—National Affairs, Foreign News, The Arts, Sport.

Cash-strapped, Hadden and Luce raised \$85,675 from family and friends for the magazine’s launch and flipped a coin to determine who would edit the publication. (Hadden won the toss; Luce supervised the business side.) The first issue of *Time* appeared in March 1923. Within six months, circulation had dipped and then improved. And within two years, the magazine had a paid circulation of seventy thousand. In June 1925, the *Boston Globe* reported on the “boys” who were changing the media landscape of the 1920s. “Who Realized That Busy Men Would Appreciate Reading a Magazine of Skillfully Formed Synopses” was the caption under the photograph of Hadden that accompanied the article. Luce’s caption

described him simply as “Another One of the Organizers of *Time*” (p. 144).

By 1926, the two men targeted newsstand sales, and, in January 1927, the magazine appeared with the now-familiar red-bordered cover. With growing prosperity, *Time* moved its offices to West Forty-fifth Street, one floor below the *New Yorker*. It reached another landmark at the end of that year when it debuted its most famous feature, “The Man of the Year.” Its choice was aviator Charles Lindbergh for his historic transatlantic flight. And, behind it all was Hadden with his manic energy, his penchant for speakeasies, and the giant red pencils he used for editing.

For scholars, it is worth noting that the book is based on a number of the author’s personal interviews. Wilner, who came to his topic as a student at Yale, also draws on an impressive array of archival sources, including the Time Inc. archives, which houses the Briton Hadden papers, the Henry R. Luce papers, and the corporate records of the magazine. But the book’s documentation is troublesome for media historians. Instead of footnotes or endnotes indicating the specific provenance of a fact or quote, the book provides a list of sources grouped according in general themes—“Hadden’s decline,” “Luce’s first years in China,” “Party and days off,” and “*Time*’s rapid expansion.” That approach makes for a lively and unfettered read for the general public. But, for scholars, following up on specific facts or assertions could be difficult, and I found myself wishing for more transparency—more specificity about sources—than the book provides. Further, while the decision to frame the story as an epic contest between Hadden and Luce makes for a dramatic narrative, it also means that complexity and nuance can suffer.

Nevertheless, *The Man Time Forgot* is a rip-roaring read, and Wilner seems to have mastered the storytelling formula that Hadden loved—lots of telling detail, a compressed prose, and a strong narrative, which, in this case, culminates in Hadden’s death at the age of thirty-one, perhaps from a virulent strain of streptococcus. *The Man Time Forgot* is an interesting chapter in the history of *Time* written by someone who was not on its payroll. And, it is a reminder in these days when newsweeklies struggle to be relevant that at one point the storied magazine held the nation’s attention.

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