

First issues are valuable to magazine collectors

by Jeff Figler

The anniversary of the first nationwide issue of *TV Guide* magazine was observed on April 3. *TV Guide* capitalized on Lucille Ball's popularity for its launch with a picture of Lucy's baby on the cover (worth about \$595). That issue, along with the Sept. 25, 1953, issue, with George Reeves as Superman on the cover (\$425), rank as two of the most valuable *TV Guides* in history.

Prior to the Lucille Ball baby issue, there were valuable regional issues, such as the Jan. 23, 1953, issue with Marilyn Monroe on the cover, which can fetch about \$750. The inaugural issue of *Time* magazine was issued March 3, 1923, with Rep. Joseph Cannon adorning the cover. Nine thousand copies were printed, and depending on the condition of the copies, they are valued at about \$500. The magazine was a risk on the part of two young men, Henry Robinson Luce and Britton Hadden. *Time* is still going strong some 83 years later. The first issue of *People* magazine launched March 4, 1974, and featured Mia Farrow on the cover. Today, it can bring about \$100. The starting years of some other major national publications include: *Good Housekeeping*, 1855; *Saturday Evening Post*, 1877; *Ladies Home Journal*, 1883; *Life*, 1883; *Cosmopolitan*, 1886; *National Geographic*, 1888; *Field and Stream*, 1896; *Newsweek*, 1925; *Family Circle*, 1932; *Look*, 1937; *Playboy*, 1953; and *Sports Illustrated*, 1954. Old magazines can still be purchased for anywhere from \$5 to \$20 at flea markets and garage sales. However, keep in mind that the real collectibles, such as the first *Playboy*, published in December 1953, will cost a couple of thousand dollars. Some collectors try to collect all the issues of a particular magazine, but for obvious reasons that can be overwhelming. The most valuable magazines are the first issues, whether or not they are still being published.

The first *Sports Illustrated* was released on Aug. 16, 1954, and featured the Milwaukee Braves' Eddie Mathews on the cover. That issue is worth around \$250 in excellent condition. The second issue, a week later, is also very collectible, as it contained a card foldout of the New York Yankees.

Life magazine debuted as a weekly on January 4, 1883. The motto of the first issue was "While there's *Life*, there's hope." *Life* was the first all-

photograph U.S. news magazine, and was a dominant magazine for more than 40 years. One of its best-known pictures was Alfred Eisenstaedt's shot of a nurse in a sailor's arms taken on VE Day, Aug. 27, 1945, in Manhattan. *National Geographic* actually started in 1888, but there were only nine issues until 1896. Since then (except for a couple of instances) the magazine has been issued monthly. The first four issues from 1888-1889 are worth several thousand dollars each, but are extremely difficult to obtain. Most of the other issues can be purchased for no more than about \$50, but most issues of this highly collected magazine cost much less. One of the most established *National Geographic* collectors is Don Smith of Louisville, Ky., (502) 366-7504.

Not all magazines survive the test of time. Take the case of *Woman's Magazine*. Its founder, Edward G. Lewis, started it in the early 1900s, and for a while its circulation of 1,600,000 was the greatest in the world. However, a dispute with an advertiser, the American Woman's League, led to the demise of Lewis and his publishing empire. In 1912, Lewis, the founder and first mayor of University City, Mo., closed his doors and moved to California. Early copies of *Woman's Magazine*, or another of Lewis' publications, *Woman's National Daily*, are very popular among serious magazine collectors. A comprehensive price guide of contemporary magazines is "Collectible Magazines" by David Henkel. If you are interested in learning more about magazines and their place in history, a book by Norberto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva, "Magazines That Make History: Their Origins, Development and Influence," may interest you.