

# Notes on American Atheist magazine

## Frank R. Zindler, September 21, 2013

It is impossible to determine exactly when the magazine began. It appears ultimately to have grown out of a mimeographed newsletter that MMO'H circulated in Baltimore before her 1963 victory in SCOTUS. Certain reconstructions (*e.g.*, the fact that the Sept. 1975 issue is labeled Vol. 17, No. 9) would place this in 1958, but that does not seem likely. In any case, there may have been a publication in the early 1960s styling itself a magazine, but no copies survive at the American Atheist Center in NJ. Over the course of American Atheists history, there have been a number of newsletters, both general and private (*i.e.*, a members' Insider's Newsletter). It is possible that the Volume 17 numbering for 1975 represents a continuation of the numbering of a newsletter going back to the late 1950s.

### The Title of the Journal

The name of the journal changed several times over the course of its history. An issue (not necessarily representing the true first issue, but probably it) numbered Volume 1, Number 1 (January 1971) is titled:

*The American Atheist*  
*Poor Richard's Reports*

(See commentary at beginning of catalog for details of the sub-title circumstances) Some time before July, 1975 (V17N7) the subtitle disappeared. The title now is *The American Atheist* (with definite article).

Beginning with V17N9 (September 1975), the word 'Magazine' is added to the title: *The American Atheist Magazine*.

Beginning with V19N1 (January 1977), 'Magazine' disappears and a new subtitle appears: *The American Atheist: A Journal of Atheist News and Thought*.

The definite article disappears in 1979 (V21N1):

*American Atheist: A Journal of Atheist News and Thought*.

### Dating System

The magazine originally was dated according to the common Gregorian calendar. Then, in May of 1980, MMOH began dating the magazine with the French Revolutionary Calendar: The May 1980 issue bears the date Foréal, 188. (The number 188 marks the number of years since the adoption of the revolutionary calendar on 2 January 1792.) The revolutionary dating obtained until the end of 1981 (V23N12).

Gregorian dating resumed with V24N1 (January 1982).

### Lapse in Publication

By late 1991, publication became extremely sporadic, lapsing entirely in early 1992. (This corresponds to the period of IRS harassment ordered by President George H.W. Bush; see separate notes.) The magazine would not resume publication until Winter 1996.

### Documentable publication of the magazine

January 1971 to autumn of 1992 (Bush presidency)

Winter 1996 up to present

# EDITORS

- Richard F. O'Hair** Editor-in-Chief V1N1: January 1971  
until  
V18N1: January 1976
- Madalyn (Murray) O'Hair** Associate Editor V1N1 (Jan. 1971)  
Contributing Editor V17N8 (Aug. '75)  
Editor V18N2 (Feb 1976)  
Editor-in-Chief V19N2 (Feb. 1977)  
Editor Emeritus V25N7 (July 1983)  
(murdered Sept/Oct, 1995)
- Jon Garth Murray** Contributing Editor V17N8 (Aug 75)  
Editor V19N2 (Feb 77)  
Managing Editor V19N11 (Nov 77)  
(murdered Sept/Oct, 1995)
- William J. Murray** Contributing Editor V18N8 (Aug 76)  
Managing Editor V19N2 (Feb 77)  
until  
V19N10 (Oct 77)
- Isaac Asimov** Contributing Editor V18N8—V18N9 (Aug-Sept 1976)  
Asimov's article "Do Scientists Believe in God?" appeared in  
January 1980, V22N1, page 11.
- Interview with **Woody Allen** (Allen S. Konigsberg) appeared in V17N9 (Sept. 1975)
- Robin Eileen Murray-O'Hair** Poetess V23N5 (May 81)  
Poetry V23N7 (July 1981)  
until  
Editor-in-Chief V25N7 (July 83)  
until  
being murdered in Sept/Oct 1995
- Anne Gaylor** (founder of FFRF)  
Contributing Editor V18N8 (Aug 76)  
Non-resident Staff V19N2 (Feb 77)  
until V20N3 (March 78)
- Frank Duffy** General Editor V20N8 (Aug 78) through V21N4 (April 1979)
- G. Richard Bozarth** Assistant Editor V21N5 (May 79) through V22N8 (Aug 80)
- Ann E. Zindler** Associate Editor V35N1 (Winter 1996/97)  
through V44N1 (JanFebMar 2006)  
then Editorial Assistant V46N6 (July 2008)  
through V47N1 (Jan 2009)
- Conrad Goeringer** Contributing Editor V35N4 (Autumn 97)  
through V44N1 (JanFebMar 2005)

then  
Editorial Assistant V46N6 (July 2008)  
through V47N1 (Jan 2009)

**Ellen Johnson** Editor, American Atheist Magazine  
V44N2 (April 2006) through V46N5 (June 2008)

**Frank R. Zindler**  
Editor & Managing Editor V35N1 (Winter 1996-1997)  
through V44N2 (JanFebMar 2006)  
Editor, American Atheist Press V44N2 (April 2006)  
through V46N5 (June 2008)  
Editor, American Atheist;  
Managing Editor, American Atheist Press V46N6 (July 2008)  
through V47N1 (January 2009)  
Managing Editor, American Atheist Press V47N2 (Feb 2009) **up to the present.**  
  
(Resumes being Editor, American Atheist, for V49N2 (2Q2011))

**Bill Hampl** General Editor, American Atheist V47N2 (Feb 09)  
through V47N7 (Oct 09)

**David Smalley** Design & Layout Editor V47N2 (Feb 09)  
Editor, American Atheist; Cover Art & Magazine Design  
V47N8 (Nov/Dec 09) through V49N1 (1<sup>st</sup> Q 2011)

**Pamela Whissel** Editor-in-Chief V49N3 (3Q 2011) **up to present**

**Rick Wingrove** Layout & Graphics Editor V49N3 (3Q 2011) **up to present**

## **President George H.W. Bush (41<sup>st</sup> President, 1989–1993) and publication history of *American Atheist***

Vice President Bush was questioned by American Atheist Press news reporter Rob Sherman at Chicago's O'Hare Airport on 27 August, 1987, just after announcing his candidacy for president. Sherman asked him about separation of church and state and about his opinion of the citizenship and patriotism of Atheists. Sherman quoted him as saying:

“No, I don't know that atheists should be regarded as citizens, nor should they be regarded as patriotic. This is one nation under God... I support the separation of church and state. I'm just not very high on atheists.”

Rob Sherman's Website give the following proof of this contested quotation:

### **Documents at Bush Library prove that conversation between Sherman and Bush took place**

An exchange of letters that took place in 1989 between the late [Jon Garth Murray](#), then President of [American Atheists](#), and White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray, prove that the conversation between Vice President Bush took place, exactly as I reported it. Those two letters are on file at the [Bush Presidential Library](#) in Texas. The letter from Mr. Murray to Mr. Gray is expected to be available later this year as a part of a file called Item # CF 01193-002, but a related letter by Mr. Murray to the Members of Congress, which referenced Mr. Murray's letter to Mr. Gray, is available for public view. The reply letter from Mr.

Gray to Mr. Murray is also available for public view.

The letter from Mr. Murray to the Members of Congress is from a file identified as White House Office of Records Management, Subject Code RM, Document Number 157715 CU. This document is a letter that Jon Murray sent to every Member of Congress on February 21, 1990. In this letter, Mr. Murray describes the news conference that I attended, quotes exactly the conversation between Mr. Bush and myself, and then states:

Subsequent to these astonishing statements, I wrote to (then) Vice President Bush demanding a clarification of these remarks. More than two months later, on February 21, 1989, C. Boyden Gray, Counsel to the President, wrote to me from the White House as follows:

Your letter of December 19, 1988, to President Bush has been referred to me for reply. As you are aware, the President is a religious man who neither supports atheism nor believes that atheism should be unnecessarily encouraged or supported by the government. Needless to say, the President supports the Constitution and laws of the United States, and you may rest assured that this Administration will proceed at all times with due regard for the legal rights of atheists, as will as others with whom the President disagrees.

This letter was a clear admission by the President, through his counsel, that he had indeed made the remarks and was not backing down from them.

Mr. Murray's letter to the Members of Congress went on to say that Mr. Bush must issue "an apology and retraction of the remarks or alternately the Congress of the United States must pass a resolution censuring President Bush for the remarks."

The letter from Mr. Gray to Mr. Murray, which was quoted above, is located in a file identified as White House Office of Records Management, Subject Code RM, Document Number 041388 CU.

The significance of Mr. Gray's letter is that it corroborates my conversation with Mr. Bush. Mr. Gray is a lawyer. If his client, Mr. Bush, had not made those statements to me, Mr. Gray would have denied that they were said rather than trying to justify the statements. If Mr. Bush wanted to distance himself from the statements, Mr. Gray could have tried to create doubt about whether Mr. Bush had made the statements. Here, Mr. Gray makes it clear that Mr. Bush acknowledges making the statements reported above.

Bush's effect on publication of American Atheist

(end quotation from Rob Sherman's Website)

Already by the end of 1989, publication of the magazine became erratic for a variety of reasons that now are unclear. However, by 1991 publication became increasingly disrupted by harassment by the IRS. MMOH reported that President Bush, acting upon his public declaration of hostility to Atheists and Jon Murray's objection thereto, had sicked the IRS on American Atheists. In 1991 and 1992, publication faltered and then ceased. The IRS actually moved into the American Atheist Center in Austin, TX, commandeering an office for their auditor. The Murray-O'Hair family's work was practically brought to a halt for many months as they were forced to supply documents and records to the auditor. The IRS never found evidence of any illegal activities nor improprieties. MMOH claimed their entire purpose was to bring American Atheists functioning to a halt. Publication of the magazine would not resume until after the murder of the Murray-O'Hair family in 1995 (resuming in winter 1996/97).

