

WILL STRAW

Traffic in Scandal: The Story of *Broadway Brevities*

In December of 1937, a man named Stephen G. Clow was arrested in Toronto and charged with the publishing of obscene matter tending to corrupt morals.¹ The arrest followed a police raid on a printing shop at 10 St Patrick Street. Authorities seized copies of three magazines published on the premises – *Broadway Brevities*, the *Canadian Tattler*, and *Garter Girls*. These titles quickly evoke the worlds of scandal and entertainment; their constitutive words have served to name silent films, eighteenth-century society magazines, and late twentieth-century supermarket tabloids. ‘Broadway Brevities,’ the title that concerns us here, had been the name of a Broadway musical revue in 1920, then of a series of short films produced by Warner Brothers in the 1930s. Most notoriously, however, *Broadway Brevities* was the title of a New York-based gossip magazine, published from 1916 to 1925 and, in a later revival, from 1930 through 1933. Its editor throughout most of these years was Stephen G. Clow, the man whom Toronto police arrested in 1937. Near the end of his career (and of his life), Clow had moved to Toronto to participate in one more launch of a title that had brought him short-lived fame and a more long-lasting disgrace.

On its own, the Toronto *Broadway Brevities* is a minor example of periodical print culture. Like its US predecessor, the Canadian title survived several changes of style, purpose, and frequency of publication, in the

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1 See ‘Thanks for Sentence,’ *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 December 1937, 8; ‘Editor Arrested, Magazines Seized on “Obscene-Literature” Charges,’ *Globe and Mail*, 17 December 1937, 7; ‘Charge Literature Corrupted Morals,’ *Toronto Star*, 14 January 1938, 7.

course of a sordid history marked by ongoing clashes with legal authority. Nevertheless, the history of this single title invites us to trace lines of continuity running through the development of North American scandal-oriented periodical publishing in the first half of the twentieth century. As well, the unusual career of Stephen G. Clow offers a useful case for analysis of the cross-border movement of goods, people, and sensations between the United States and Canada. Clow's professional trajectory is one of virtually uninterrupted decline, as he moved from a position on the edge of New York's literary and social worlds down into the more tawdry realms of the gossip tabloid and horse racing tip sheet. The *Broadway Brevities* that Clow came to edit in Toronto, in 1937, seemed little more than a vehicle for recycling stockpiles of magazine features imported from New York. Like Canadian cultural artefacts more generally, however, each issue condensed within it complex relations between its place of production and a variety of other places from which its style, mission, and many of its materials were derived.

THE LITERARY CLOW

Stephen G. Clow was born in Prince Edward Island in 1873.² I have been unable to determine when, or by what routes, he moved to New York City, but his name first appears in the *New York City Directory* in its 1903–4 edition. He is listed there as proprietor of the Broadway Publishing Company, located at 853 Broadway. This firm assumed the corporate name that had been used, between 1899 and 1904, by the publishers of the influential *Broadway Magazine*, but there is no confirmed connection between the two firms. Clow's Broadway Publishing Company was active in the publication and retail selling of new poetry, fiction, and non-fiction books, and in the reprinting of older, previously published titles. Its 1904–5 catalogue runs some eighty-eight pages, listing dozens of titles and several series. These encompass a variety of works typical of the time and of once-popular genres: poetry by Civil War officers, stories of the Mexican Revolution, novels of the Old South, stenographers' romances, and so on. Some of these are in their tenth or later editions, and the catalogue as a whole encompasses both works with long publishing histories and others in their first editions. The Library of Congress catalogue lists some four

2 Clow's marriage certificate confirms that he was the son of James and Lucy Graham Clow of Prince Edward Island. An on-line genealogy gives his date of birth as 5 June 1873 (Descendants of William Graham). The age given on his death certificate further confirms 1873 as the year of his birth. His marriage certificate, however, lists his age as forty-one in 1920 (rather than the forty-seven years he most certainly was), and a witness in his trial refers to him as '45 years of age' in 1925. His marriage, incidentally, had ended by the time of the *Brevities* trial.

hundred books published by the Broadway Publishing Company between 1903 and 1917, the year in which it apparently ceased to operate.³

Later in his life, Stephen G. Clow would be described, by a former collaborator, as a man of 'literary attainments.' In one of his court appearances, he identified himself as a journalist, but his writings strain, awkwardly and even pompously, after literary effect. In the years in which he presided over the Broadway Publishing Company, Clow turned up intermittently in the letter pages of the *New York Times* and its *Book Review*. In 1908, he responded to an editorial concerning the banning of automobiles on Prince Edward Island: 'Is it a mark either of insularity or old foggism to detest, with deep detestation, the popularization of the auto, with its menace to human as well as brute life, its odious outrages upon the senses of sight and smell, its nerve-murdering noises, its utterly coarse, brutal, and disgusting characteristics?'⁴ On several other occasions, he took part in an ongoing letter-column debate over the future of poetry in the modern age, offering versions of the argument that 'great poetry' was impossible in an era of scientific materialism. In October of 1907, display ads for the Broadway Publishing Company announced a forthcoming edition of Macaulay's 'Essay on Robert Montgomery,' 'with an Introductory Essay, "The Decay of Poetry" by Stephen G. Clow.' There is no evidence that this volume was ever published, however, and there are no known literary or critical works by Clow, beyond one or two short prefaces to books published by the Broadway Publishing Company.

BROADWAY BREVITIES AND SOCIETY GOSSIP

At some point in 1916, a firm identified as Broadway Brevities, Inc, located at 1475 Broadway, launched a magazine with the title *Broadway Brevities and Society Gossip*. The mastheads of later issues of *Brevities* would claim it had been founded in May 1916; many years later, a man named Mel Gutman would be identified as the person who had conceived and

3 In the entry on 'Broadway Publishing Company,' Peter Dzwonkoski's *American Publishing Houses, 1900-1980: Trade and Paperback* gives the firm's years of existence as 'circa 1901-circ. 1912.' The precise date of the firm's founding (or information on any previous incarnation) cannot be confirmed, but it is clear that the company was active until 1916 or 1917. On 9 November 1913, the *New York Times* reported the dissolution of 'the Broadway Publishing Company, Inc., of New York, incorporated 2 October 1912, with \$10,000 capital, by Stephen G. Clow, Edwin D. Sibley, Aimee Gibbon' (8). However, since Clow was publicly associated with the firm from 1903 onwards, and since books under its imprint continue to appear until 1917, we must assume the corporation born in 1912 and dissolved in 1913 was merely one among several of the firm's financial structures.

4 *New York Times*, 9 April 1908, 8.

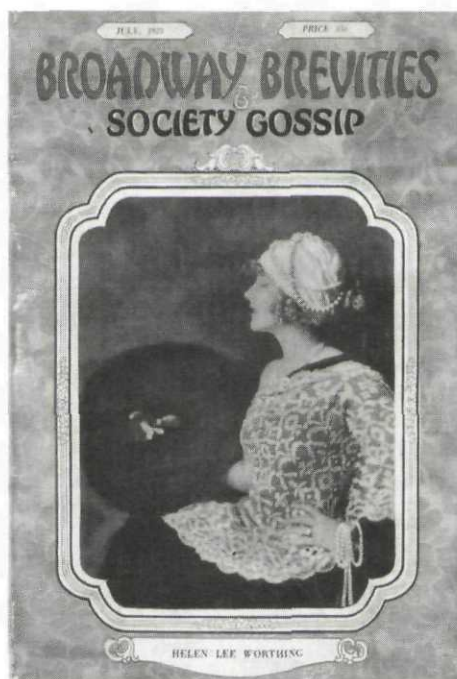
published its first issues.⁵ Stephen G. Clow was listed as 'Treasurer' of the magazine during much of its nine-year run, but court documents, Broadway memoirs, and his own statements identify him as its editor and the writer of much of its content. Issues of *Broadway Brevities* were 6" x 9" in size, and typically carried the black and white photograph of a theatrical performer on their covers. (See, for an example, figure 1.) Most issues of the period 1921–25 were forty-eight pages in length, though the magazine expanded to fifty-six pages in the months just prior to its demise.⁶

While it offered itself as a magazine of 'society gossip,' *Brevities* focused more on the worlds of theatre and entertainment than did its older contemporary, *Town Topics*, whose circle of reference was New York's more established high society. Conversely, *Brevities* was less exclusively preoccupied with show-business circles than the *Tattler*, another of its New York-based, gossip-oriented competitors, whose declared focus was the worlds of music, cinema, and the theatre. *Brevities* covered both established elites and emergent theatrical circles, but the targets of its gossip were often social types who had assumed a new notoriety in the postwar economic boom: newly rich entrepreneurs, manufacturers of faddish products (like facial regeneration creams), and Manhattanites newly arrived from the Midwest. A typical issue of *Broadway Brevities and Society Gossip* from the 1920s contained pages of paragraph-length gossip on prominent New Yorkers, smaller lists of questions or innuendo that hinted at scandal ('What is the inspiration Jack Barrymore has found on the lower city wharves'), and full-length articles (of two to three pages) devoted to the detailed destruction of reputations. These were interspersed with advertisements (typically for restaurants, theatrical revues, and hotels) and full-page publicity portraits of theatre or film stars.

Much of *Broadway Brevities*' distinctiveness lies in the way it interwove the narrative forms of urban exposé with the gossip magazine's charting of social rituals and places of sociability. Beginning in its January 1924 issue, *Broadway Brevities* began a series of articles collectively entitled 'A Night in Fairyland,' which claimed to expose the night worlds of gay and lesbian life in Manhattan. The series ran for at least thirteen instalments, concluding in the period of the magazine's demise, in early 1925. In these extraordinary 'investigations,' the writer recounts evenings spent in gay or

5 The reference to Gutman is made in the column 'Strictly Confidential,' in *New Broadway Brevities*, 21 September 1931, 2.

6 As Chauncey notes, issues of *Broadway Brevities* are notoriously difficult to find, and the very earliest may well have disappeared completely (449). My analysis in this article is based on fifteen issues from the period 1921–24, twenty-three issues from the 1930s revival of the title in New York, and thirteen issues of the revived Canadian title from the period 1937–48. All of these are in my possession and were acquired from dealers or (in one case) as a photocopy very generously provided to me by Don McLeod of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives.



1. *Broadway Brevities* (New York). July 1923. Front cover

lesbian bars, parties attended, and seductions witnessed. These accounts acknowledge the presence, at such occasions, of well-known figures in theatre or business, and describe, in detail, the places of gay and lesbian congregation in New York. The series' homophobic sensationalism is evident, but this is tempered by a meticulous charting of the shifting fashionability of places and practices. Here is one passage, from an instalment devoted principally to the Greenwich Village club Trilby and its owner:

No story, with Greenwich Village as its locale, is complete without mention of Trilby. Her real name is Diana Rose, and she is a really charming girl. She conducts Trilby's after the fashion of a maître d'hôtel at the Parisian Hotel Metropole. She is keenly sympathetic with androgynes, who of course are by far her main custom. In her naive way she calls them 'temperamental boys.' She will not believe bad about them, and they reciprocate her regard for them. They are willing and anxious to serve her and she never lacks for a fairy to help her serve the hordes of sightseeing guests. Sometimes it is 'Chuckles,' a dapper young sylph, who serves the ginger-ale, 'sass' or waffles and coffee, or 'Aggie' Lynch, pipy-voiced juvenile aberrant, or Leon, with his long cigarette holder, ever ready for conscription as - 'waitresses' if you please.

It WAS a night rife with 'camp.' Every fairy seemed to be having a high old time, with the exception of our Latin androgynes who were modest and retiring, almost to taciturnity.⁷

The literary, even pedantic flourishes in this series (such as its regular use of Karl Heinrich Ulrich's nineteenth-century term 'urnings,' to describe gay men) suggest it might have been written by Clow, but this cannot be confirmed. In his book *Gay New York*, George Chauncey notes the usefulness of *Broadway Brevities* to historians seeking to reconstruct social and sexual communities in inter-war New York City (449n64). Chauncey is referring principally to the tabloid version of the magazine, published in the early 1930s, which regularly reported on 'fag balls,' lesbian meeting places, and the broader gay underground of New York City. The 'Nights in Fairyland' series of the early 1920s, however – driven, as it was, by the drive to document and expose – remains a much more specific and detailed resource for historians. So, too, was *Brevities'* 'Mirrors of Mayfair' feature of the 1920s, a column of society comings-and-goings that, with each new issue, seemed increasingly preoccupied with the same-sex travelling patterns and domestic arrangements of prominent 'smart' people.

CLOW ON TRIAL

The notoriety that came to surround *Broadway Brevities and Social Gossip* in its final year had little to do, however, with its mappings of queer Manhattan. In May 1924, a US Federal Grand Jury indicted Stephen G. Clow, two of his associates, and the firm *Brevities, Inc*, on charges of using the mails to defraud. This charge followed complaints that the magazine was being operated as a blackmail racket and that letters of coercion had gone through the mails to potential victims. The indictment claimed that potential advertisers had been approached and told of materials possessed by *Broadway Brevities* that were injurious to their reputations. If they refused to purchase advertising, they were told, these materials would be published. If they acquiesced, favourable mention of themselves or their activities would appear in the magazine. Numerous cases of this pressure were cited in the indictment, but only one of the coercive letters is reproduced in full within it. That letter was addressed to a Mr B.J. Palmer, of the Palmer School of Davenport, Ohio. The Palmer School trained chiropractors and, amid public controversy over the status of chiropractic, Clow was anxious to exploit his public support for the profession. In his letter to Palmer, Clow noted that 'I have devoted years to the publicizing of Chiropractic. Other magazines receive advertising from the UCA [Palmer's organization] – I don't get even a tumble. I wont [*sic*] continue it. Either I

7 'Night No. 5 in Fairyland,' *Broadway Brevities*, May 1924, 15.

get some support or I shall open my editorial and advertising pages to the "opposition." What that opposition is you will not ask me to explain.⁸

Palmer was among the least glamorous in a series of trial witnesses that included Ziegfeld Follies performer Helen Lee Worthing, 'modiste' Edith Bobe, boxing promoter Tex Rickard, and actress (and Countess) Peggy Hopkins Joyce Morner. Industrialist Otto H. Kahn, movie mogul Jesse Lasky, 'yeast king' Jules Fleischmann, socialite W. Averell Harriman, and others prominent in business or entertainment were also cited in the indictment, and confirmed having paid money to Clow, but these did not testify. A comparison of testimony with materials published in *Broadway Brevities* shows clear correlations between the failure to advertise and adverse coverage within the magazine. It also reveals that persons or firms threatened with exposure often purchased substantial advertising space.

The most intriguing (and tragic) of these examples, perhaps, involved Gerrit Lloyd, scenarist and advertising manager for D.W. Griffith, who testified that *Brevities* had sent him 'annoying telegrams' following the production of Griffith's film *Way Down East* (1920). These telegrams made reference to the unexplained death of a female cast member on the set of the film. Biographies of Griffith refer to the death by 'mysterious affliction' or 'during emergency surgery' of actress Clarine Seymour, who had been scheduled to play the role of Kate Brewster in *Way Down East* (Schickel, 435-6; Henderson, 212). It is unclear whether *Brevities'* insinuations concerned the manner or circumstances of Seymour's death, but it is easy to suspect that this was the case. In any event, the Griffith company took out a full-page advertisement for its film *The White Rose* in the July 1923 issue of the magazine.

The trial of Clow and his associates lasted from 2 through 30 January, 1925. On its conclusion, the New York *Sunday News* claimed it had been the 'greatest show on earth.'⁹ It was, indeed, the focus of prominent coverage in New York City dailies during its duration, much of that coverage featuring a widely circulated photograph of the well-dressed Stephen G. Clow, a cigarette holder clenched between his teeth. Clow and two of his advertising associates were found guilty on several counts of using the

8 United States of America against Stephen G. Clow, Andrew S. Brown, Charles S. Green, and Brevities, Inc. United States District Court, Southern District of New York, 1924.

9 'Brevities Trial Greatest Show on Earth - and Admission's Free,' *Sunday News*, 1 February 1925, 1. Coverage of the indictment and trial is extensive, across many newspapers, days, and editions, but see, among many others, the following: 'Brevities' Owners Indicted for Fraud,' *New York Times*, 6 May 1924, 8; 'Karr Tells of Blackmail Plan,' *New York Sun*, 21 January 1925, 3; 'us Outlines Case against Owners of "Broadway Brevities,"' *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 January 1925, 7; 'US Begins Fierce Fire on "Brevities,"' *New York Daily News*, 21 January 1925, 2; 'Judge Raps Fallon At Brevities' Trial,' *New York Evening Post*, 22 January 1925, 3; 'Stars Set for Brevities Trial: Lights of Stage will Lend Color to Final Scenes as US Speeds Up,' *Daily News*, 26 January 2002, 2; 'us Stages Brevities of 1925,' *Sunday News*, 1 February 1925, 1.

mails to defraud; another of their collaborators was acquitted. Clow was sentenced to six years in Federal Prison in Atlanta, and fined \$6000. He served two years of this sentence, and, as a result of his conviction, *Broadway Brevities* ended its nine-year publication run. In an article published after his release, in the magazine *Plain Talk*, Clow described the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, almost fondly, as full of celebrities, interesting professionals, and fallen politicians whose acquaintance would otherwise have been unavailable to him. In an unusual crossing of biographical trajectories, the pan-Africanist leader Marcus Garvey was in the Atlanta prison at the same time as Clow, sentenced for the same crime in a trial that had involved the same judge and district attorney (Clow, 1928).

TRANSFORMATIONS

The *Broadway Brevities* trial condensed several important transitions in the development of a scandal-oriented press in the United States. Small society gossip magazines of its type had grown out of Social Registers and other publications designed, much of the time, to be read by the people covered within their pages. Two decades before the *Brevities* trial, the magazine *Town Topics* (whose editor had published Manhattan social registers on a subscription basis) was the focus of a trial based on charges that it, too, had been used for years to extort money from the socially prominent (Logan, 150–88). In 1932, the New York-based *Tattler and American Sketch* (and the still-lingering *Town Topics*) would cease publication under pressure from the New York Attorney General's office, which accused their publishers of selling shares in the magazines in return for silence about the personal indiscretions of potential investors.¹⁰ All of these magazines had oriented themselves to the steady but relatively slow eventfulness of social seasons and theatrical fashions. Their proximity to circumscribed social worlds made blackmail or extortion the crime by which they were most commonly tempted and with which they were usually charged. Virtually no examples of this kind of society magazine – a form that was typically genteel in appearance, limited in its circles of reference, but vicious in its circulation of rumour – would survive past the 1930s. By the late 1920s, the nationally syndicated newspaper gossip columnist and the daily or weekly tabloid newspaper had conclusively redefined the forms and protocols of printed gossip.

Coverage of the *Brevities* trial in New York's newspapers served to make *Brevities'* own textual rhythms and graphic forms seem inept and antiquated. In a comparison of the two, we may glimpse the continuing displacement of one scandalous form by another. The rich theatricality and

10 See, for example, 'Town Topics Case Ends in a Blaze,' *New York Times*, 22 January 1932, 21.

ongoing sensationalism of the *Brevities* trial were magnified across the multiple daily editions of tabloid newspapers, and fixed, in particular, in two expressive devices that *Brevities* lacked – the headline and the candid photograph. In his well-known article on the chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin points to the role of the criminal trial in generating forms of speech that assist the novel in ‘uncovering and making private life public’ (123). In their coverage of the *Brevities* trial, we see newspapers exploiting the trial’s status as an effective site of transit between intimate and public forms of revelation. In *Brevities*’ own responses to its indictment, in its final issues, the magazine scrambled to respond to its detractors with threats and justificatory claims. Its monthly frequency, however, made it unable to overtake the heated and persistent coverage in daily newspapers. Its publicity portrait covers seemed all the more quaint during these final issues, curiously oblivious and incommunicative on a magazine at the centre of a public scandal and rushing to marshal public support.

BREVITIES REVIVED

The full extent of Clow’s activities immediately following his release from prison is not known. There is good reason to believe that he wrote the unsigned gossip column ‘Sweeping Up Broadway,’ which appeared in the Fawcett magazine *Smokehouse Monthly* beginning in 1928.¹¹ In 1930, however, Stephen G. Clow resurfaced as editor of a magazine with the title *The New Broadway Brevities*, published at 116 Bond Street in New York. The earliest issue of this revived *Brevities* that I have been able to find is the second, from September 1930. This issue measures 9¹/₄" x 6³/₈" and has a solid brown cover, without illustration or title, as if the magazine were playing ironically with the notion of the plain, brown wrapper. In this brief incarnation (for its format and appearance would quickly change again) the *New Broadway Brevities* is a curious artefact. The paper stock, list of contributors, and ninety-six-page length all suggest high levels of backing

11 I am convinced that Stephen Clow was the author of ‘Sweeping Up Broadway,’ but as yet unable to prove it. The style is very close to that of Clow’s other writings, particularly in describing Manhattan gay and lesbian spaces or events. At different points, the column makes reference to Walter Winchell, early in his career, having stolen much of his material from ‘a certain monthly Broadway “scandal sheet” that was the talk of the city and town,’ a probable reference to the 1920s *Brevities*. Twice, the column offers anecdotes concerning author Gaston Means’ stay in the Atlanta Penitentiary in the years 1925–28, referring in one of them to the things Means talked about in prison; it speaks as well of Earl Carroll’s imprisonment and behaviour in the Atlanta penitentiary during the years 1925–27. The column also refers persistently to Peggy Joyce and Evelyn Nesbitt, well-known figures of New York celebrity culture with whom Clow was close (Nesbitt was one of the few people who turned up at Clow’s funeral). One of these columns spends a paragraph hinting at unreported stories about the recently deceased New York lawyer William Fallon, who had been Clow’s lawyer in the *Brevities* fraud case.

and promise. (Already, in this second issue, there are proud claims about the magazine's newsstand circulation relative to that of competitors.) Unlike its earlier incarnation, however, this version of *Brevities* lacks the sense of a coherent editorial voice or easily identifiable readership. Journalists with reputations developed elsewhere, such as Louis Sobol, contributed brief columns, and the magazine's pages are an uneven jumble of poems, movie publicity photographs, jokes, and thematic columns. (Clow himself contributed a column of book reviews, using the publication of Frank Harris's biography of Oscar Wilde as a pretext to talk about his own, allegedly close friendship with Harris circa 1914.)¹²

From the time of its re-emergence in 1930 until its demise in 1933, *Brevities* was published by the 'New-Broad Publishing Company,' but its appearance and production circumstances would change dramatically in 1931. Midway through that year, it increased its frequency of publication, and soon dropped 'Broadway' from its title, announcing itself as *Brevities: America's First National Tabloid Weekly*. The magazine was now published in the Flatiron Building, at 175 Fifth Avenue, and Clow's name had disappeared from the list of editors and administrative officers. One can only speculate (until further research resolves this) whether he had sold the title or been forced out. In this third incarnation, *Brevities* was published in a large, tabloid-newspaper-like format, on newsprint, with blaring headlines, text on its front page, and a notable shift in emphasis. (See, for an example, figure 2.) Columns and recurring features were, most of the time, signed by their authors, or (in the case of each issue's lead story) credited to pseudonyms. Gossipy references to individuals were still common, but *Brevities'* most prominent articles now dealt with more generalized sorts of vice (such as white-slavery) and their titles were often constructed around the dirtiest of double entendres.¹³

This version of *Brevities* claimed to be national, though there was little evidence (beyond a column, 'Hollywood Lowdown,' which appeared in a

- 12 In one of the only extended profiles about Clow to be found within the vast literature of Broadway reminiscences, Louis Sobol describes Clow's attempts to market his memoirs: 'Clow was always promising to write about fin-de-siècle Manhattan, about Allen street when it was, in his words, "the port of missing nymphs, in the full penumbra of 40 cents lubricity." On Fourteenth Street, as he put it, "when Tom Sharkey hung over the bar of his saloons." Of Luchow's and its "sacrosanct odors of Pilsner where Frank Harris used to berate the waiter about his delayed amontillado while eating buns from an ambulatory cardboard box.'" (Sobol, 334).
- 13 A sample of headlines from lead articles: 'Miners' Hot Holes: Coal Holes Hot as Gals Dig Deep; Underground Love Runs True to Form' (10 October 1932); 'Gals Yank Chumps: Show Girls Show Heels Hot Tricks' (17 October 1932); 'Fair Gals Grab Stiffs!; Chicago Gals Perform in Weird Exhibition Rites; Midway Blazes with Open Red-Light Houses' (20 July 1933).



2. *Brevities: America's First National Tabloid Weekly* (New York).
20 July 1933. Front cover

few issues in 1932) that it employed reporters located outside New York City. Through its increased reliance on forms of miscellany (risqué cartoons, horse racing tips, fiction, etc) and in its emphasis on patterns of vice (rather than the lapses of the socially prominent), this *Brevities* conveyed the sense that its audience had broadened and fragmented. The newspaper now seemed designed to shock and titillate in ways that did not presume a reader's close familiarity with any given social or professional world. Indeed, *Brevities'* increased frequency seemed to be justified by its busy, cacophonous juxtaposition of bold headlines, multiple voices, and diverse graphic forms (such as cartoons and puzzles) rather than by the steady eventfulness of any distinct world on which it might be reporting.

The tabloid *Brevities* has become almost legendary, featured in the recent exhibition that opened New York's Museum of Sex, and quoted regularly in on-line calendars devoted to gay history. Much of this attention has focused on the lurid headlines featured on the front and back covers of each issue. These headlines, like those of today's supermarket tabloids, mimic those of the daily newspaper, but their references are general and their elaborate inventiveness obscures the low number of references to specific events or people. 'Pansies Blow US,' for example, on the cover of the 9 May 1932, issue, flows into the subheads 'Hightail for Europe When Queer Antics Win Bronx Cheers from Normal Society' and 'Yank Queens

Go Native in Pretzelville and Flutter Purple Wings on Main Drags.' The article itself pursues the claim that large numbers of homosexuals from the United States have fled to the greater tolerance of Berlin or Paris, but merely extends a few stereotypical ideas about European culture with few specific details.

In January, 1932, the Licensing Commissioner for the City of New York forced city newsstands to cease selling *Brevities* (and two other titles, *Paris Models* and *Artists' Notebook*), but the impact and duration of this ban are unclear.¹⁴ I have seen no issues of the tabloid *Brevities* dated later than November of 1933, and it appears to have folded shortly thereafter. Joe Fabian, one of *Brevities'* most consistent contributors, appeared as columnist in the first issue of the tabloid *New York Tattler*, which was dated March 1934 and very much modelled after the presumably now defunct *Brevities*. (See figure 3.) The history of scandal tabloids in this period is further clouded by a federal indictment in 1932, which resulted in the closing of the Baltimore-based *Brevities Publishing Company*. This firm had launched five tabloid newspapers in the early 1930s: *Baltimore Brevities*, *Washington Brevities*, *Philadelphia Brevities*, *New York Hush*, and *Chicago Hush*. However, there is no evidence of any connection between the New York *Brevities* and the Baltimore company, whose owners included the Annenberg family, publishers of the *Daily Racing Form* and, later, of *TV Guide* and the *Philadelphia Enquirer*.¹⁵

In the years 1932–33, New York gossip could be found not only in the syndicated columns that took it to daily newspapers across the United States and Canada but across a variety of other periodical formats. In New York, the Dell company's *Manhattan: A Weekly for Wakeful New Yorkers*, launched in a large newspaper format in 1933, offered gossip mixed with cartoons and entertainment listings. A number of Manhattan entertainment guides, like *Bill Myers' Inns and Outs*, *Cue*, and *Chatter*, contained gossipy columns that had, as one of their obvious functions, the plugging of acts or venues. *Zit's Theatrical Weekly* combined the expected features of a show-business trade magazine with gossip only slightly less lurid than that of *Brevities* or the other scandal tabloids. Gossipy text in all of these magazines now built its rhythms around the three-dot pauses that Walter Winchell had made standard.

In early 1933, Stephen Clow (now identifying himself as 'Steve') re-emerged as editor of the *Broadway Tattler*, a sixteen-page monthly tabloid newspaper that copied the format of the tabloid *Brevities* with striking fidelity (figure 4). Based on the single issue available to me, Clow wrote most of the copy for the *Broadway Tattler* himself. As in most of his subsequent writing, his features refer regularly to the 1920s and to the preoc-

14 'City Warns Stands to Bar Obscenity,' *New York Times*, 13 January 1932, 2.

15 See 'Omit Printing "Brevities,"' *New York Times*, 25 November 1932, 6; and Ogden 94–95.



3. *New York Tattler*. March 1934. Front cover

cupations of the original *Broadway Brevities*. This is most evident in the feature 'The Pansy Bugle,' a one-page newspaper-within-a-newspaper devoted to cartoons and gossipy bits written in campy voice: 'My dear, just the other night we were reminiscing about the old Village places. Oh, dearie, what dirt-dishing. There was "Trilby's," on Greenwich avenue, steered by Diana Rose ...'¹⁶ Like the tabloid *Brevities* and the *New York Tattler*, the *Broadway Tattler* offers virtually all of the miscellaneous forms of the daily newspaper (including sports and financial 'news'), but carries no photographs. Cartoons and text from *Broadway Tattler* would be reprinted later in the *Broadway Brevities* that Clow came to edit, briefly, in Toronto.

TO CANADA

In September of 1932, *Brevities* made its first appearance on lists of Prohibited Publications barred from entry to Canada by the federal government.¹⁷ The growth of this list in the early 1930s is revealing of ascendant fashions within US periodical publishing at the time. Alongside the relatively new confession and true crime magazines were a clutter of titles testifying to the explosion of the 'spicy' periodical. The 'spicy' label assumed

16 *Broadway Tattler*, February 1933, 12.

17 'Prohibited Publications,' *National Revenue Review*, September 1932, 6.



4. *Broadway Tattler* (New York). February 1933. Front cover

coherence when a variety of magazines founded on claims to serve distinct interests (Hollywood celebrities, ribald humour for men, 'French' sex stories, etc) began more and more to resemble each other, each offering slightly different combinations of pin-up imagery, sexual cartoons and risqué fiction. In this category, we find such titles as *Film Fun*, *Paree*, *Stocking Parade*, and *Stolen Sweets*. Magazines like *Jim Jam Jems* and *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang*, begun in the 1910s as vehicles for extended, folksy commentary by their editors, would, by the 1930s, be given over to miscellaneous graphic and textual forms of risqué sensation. In the most convoluted of these developments, the *Calgary Eye-Opener*, once a crusading, Alberta-based newspaper, was transformed into a Minneapolis-based magazine of dirty jokes, cartoons, and pin-ups. As such, it would be banned from Canada, and its contents reprinted (probably without permission) by Toronto publishers of the late 1930s.

One way of grasping this history is through the extraordinary circulation within it of images of women. For decades previous, theatrical agents had given images of performers to magazines as publicity, and the movie studios had perpetuated the practice. By the late 1920s, images of female stars appeared more and more, within magazines, alongside pin-ups and semi-pornographic images produced in photographers' studios. Magazines of various kinds came to feature several pages of black and white nude or semi-nude photographs bound into their centres; their covers featured drawn and painted female figures in varying degrees of undress and

physical activity. These images accumulated within inventories that were copied or reassembled as magazines stole from each other or reprinted materials in annuals or other spin-offs. One precondition of this reassembly was the decline, in several kinds of magazine, of clear forms of editorial address or topical content, of the sort that would make materials lose currency in the months following their publication. The gags, folksy or risqué poems, cartoons, press 'bloopers,' tall tales, and other genres that proliferated in magazines during this period all were 'detachable' and could circulate within less legitimate corners of the magazine industry. The effect was a gradual muddying of periodicity within whole classes of magazines, as many of them appeared without dates or otherwise avoided the topical references that would limit their shelf-life or reproducibility.

Some of the reprinting of these materials would be done by Canadian publishers seeking to exploit prohibitions on the entry to Canada of dozens of US titles. In 1930–31, Prime Minister Bennett's government had imposed significant tariffs on US magazines, in order to stimulate a Canadian periodical publishing industry. One effect of this was that some sixty-five US magazines came to publish separate editions in Canada, usually in association with Canadian printers or publishers. In 1936, the government of Mackenzie King removed the tariff, resulting, according to the *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, in a flood of US magazines into Canada.¹⁸ This flood was tempered, however, by the continued existence of a long list of prohibited titles, which provincial governments and Canadian customs officials had maintained since the 1920s and revised throughout the 1930s. These magazines were kept out of Canada or seized upon their appearance on Canadian newsstands. Their contents, as we shall see, were regularly purloined by Canadian publishers and reassembled within new periodical titles.

THE TORONTO BREVITIES

It is within this context that Stephen G. Clow came to Toronto to work for a man named Morris Rubin. Rubin was not present for the police raid on 10 St Patrick Street in December of 1937, but he was charged shortly thereafter, and both men appeared in court on 13 January 1938. At the trial, Rubin was described as 'manager, owner and publisher' of the three magazines on which the charges were based. Since early 1937, Rubin had been doing business as the Union Publishing Company, at 446 Spadina in Toronto. From 1937 onwards, Toronto city directories list this as the address of the Atlas Press, a 'Job and Commercial Printers' with which Rubin's enterprise was presumably connected in some way. For most of the next

18 See, for example, 'Competition Continues,' *Canadian Printer and Publisher* 48:1 (January 1939), 33.

two years, Rubin's activities would move between the Spadina address and 10 St Patrick Street, both of which were identified, in various mastheads and advertisements, as the site of the Union Publishing Company. *Broadway Brevities*, launched with its April 1937 issue, seems to have been the first of many magazine titles to be published under this imprint. *Garter Girls* and the *Canadian Tattler* were introduced very shortly thereafter.

The origins of the partnership between Stephen G. Clow and Morris Rubin remain a mystery. Clow was clearly down on his luck at this point, begging funds from old New York friends and pleading for editing work of any kind (Sobol, 334.) Rubin's enterprise apparently had close links with New York publishers, and seems to have been launched principally as a means of reprinting cheap US print materials for the Canadian market. From the very beginning, his magazines are full of advertisements for novelty instruction guides (on subjects such as tap-dancing and private detection), sex manuals, and other books offered as being 'from leading New York publishers.' The second issue of *Garter Girls* (1937; no month is given) lists its publisher as the Union Publishing Company at 10 St Patrick Street, but asks those seeking advertising rates to write to the same company at 145 West 41st Street, in New York.¹⁹ Clow may have offered Rubin his contacts within the low levels of New York publishing; it is clear that he brought with him inventories of reprintable materials from US magazines.

The first issue of the Toronto *Broadway Brevities* was published on 8½" x 11" newsprint, and carried the subtitle 'Humor with a Million Laughs!' (figure 5.) Its title was printed in red, and the typeface and spacing for the word *Brevities* were the same as those used on the cover of the New York tabloid *Brevities*. (One may presume that Clow had brought with him original plates or other materials.) The sixteen pages of the first issue consist entirely of cartoons and small jokes, of various styles and organized rather randomly. There is no masthead, or any text that might be characterized as direct address to the magazine's readership. A single line on the final page lists the publisher as 'Union Publishing Co. - 446 Spadina Ave., Toronto, Ontario.'

In the magazine's second issue, the following month, a 'Publisher's Announcement' tells the reader that 'We take great pleasure in informing our readers of the interesting, indeed rather thrilling fact that we have been able to secure the editorial services of Stephen G. Clow, the founder of "Broadway Brevities" in 1917. Mr. Clow happens to be Canadian-born and is thus especially fitted to gauge the tastes of Canadian readers.' Clow's

19 There are no references to a Union Publishing Company in New York business or telephone directories for this period, but 145 West 41st Street was full of small mail-order and novelty companies, and the Union Publishing Company may simply have been one of the business names of a larger entity.



5. *Broadway Brevities* (Toronto). April 1937. Front cover

involvement in this second issue is easily identifiable. Reminiscences about Greenwich Village in the early 1920s introduce retold tales about “invert” joints’ and third-sexers, and there are brief profiles of New York’s prominent gossip columnists of the mid-1930s. Clow did not sign any of these pieces, but their style and preoccupations are his. The gossipy elements of the magazine are buried, however, amid sex stories, cartoons, and humorous poems that were almost certainly taken from somewhere else.

In its eighth issue, also from 1937, *Brevities*’ status as a vehicle for older, previously published materials is even clearer. Its cover image, set against a blue background, has been taken (and presumably stolen) from that of a mid-1930s issue of the US spicy magazine *Stocking Parade*. There are two pages of humorous miscellany identified as ‘Gossip of Canada’ and ‘More Dominion News,’ but none of the other jokes or stories refer to Canada and they appear to have been taken from other magazines. The most curious feature of this issue is an article announced as Episode VII of ‘Nights in Queerland.’ This is simply a reprint of ‘Night No. 13 in Fairy-Land,’ which had appeared in the January 1925 issue of the *Broadway Brevities and Social Gossip*. In 1937, Clow changed the title, and added two paragraphs that identified it as a historical look backwards. The original piece is reprinted without further modification and with no change of verb tenses.²⁰

20 I have been unable as yet to find issues 3–7, and, therefore, do not know when reprinting of the ‘Nights in Queerland’ began.

The contents of the 1937 issues of *Broadway Brevities*, *Garter Girls*, and the *Canadian Tattler* differ little from one title to another. The latter two are smaller in size than *Brevities*, and there is no evidence of Clow's direct involvement in either of them. Nevertheless, all three carry similar features, and appear to have recycled these from similar sources. The covers of *Garter Girls* number 1 and of *Canadian Tattler* numbers 4 and 5 feature pin-up images that previously appeared on covers of the US magazine *Film Fun* (its August 1934, May 1933, and December 1934 issues, respectively; see figure 6).²¹ Elsewhere, features such as the 'Whiz Bang Baloney Hour' and 'Sex-a-Phonies' suggest that Rubin was reprinting materials from magazines published by members of the Minneapolis-based Fawcett family. Indeed, the crown attorney for Toronto would claim that Rubin's magazines were stealing features from the *Calgary Eye-Opener* – published first by Harvey Fawcett, and subsequently by Annette Fawcett – with slight changes to their titles (Ontario Archives, RG 4-32, no 958, 1939). Beyond clear instances of borrowing, there are very close similarities between the Fawcett and Rubin magazines in the format and design of features. In any event, by 1938–39 Rubin was involved in publication of Canadian versions of William Fawcett's *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang* and the *Smokehouse Annual*. Given his probable association with *Smokehouse Monthly*, Clow may well have been the conduit for these materials.

The charges against Clow and Rubin were dropped in January of 1938, when the Government of Ontario acknowledged that there were insufficient grounds for a successful prosecution. Files from the Ontario Attorney General's Office show the government responding to a steady stream of complaints about these magazines from groups such as the Knights of Columbus and the National Council of Women. The Ontario government would use its failure to obtain a conviction against Rubin and Clow to justify judicial restraint in dealing with other, similar magazines (Ontario Archives, RG 4-32, no 498, 1938). As it happened, *Garter Girls* and the *Canadian Tattler* would both disappear in early 1939, while *Brevities*, as we shall see, lasted several more years.

MORRIS RUBY, THE NATIONAL TATTLER AND THE TATTLER REVIEW

A flurry of publishing and judicial initiatives between 1938 and 1940 make this a murky period in the pre-Second World War history of Toronto

21 I own issue nos 1 and 5 of *Garter Girls*, and issues no 4, no 11, and 'vol. 2, no. 12' of the *Canadian Tattler*. Issues 5 through 9 of the *Canadian Tattler* are held in the Archives and Special Collections Department of the York University Libraries. Comparison of their covers with those of US magazines such as *Film Fun* and *Stocking Parade* is based on images of covers of the latter posted on E-Bay as issues went up for auction.



6. *Garter Girls* (Toronto). First issue, 1937. Front cover
Film Fun (New York) August 1934. Front cover

periodical publishing. Susan E. Houston's ground-breaking article on Toronto tabloids of the 1920s and 1930s carefully charts the interplay of economic incentive and journalistic zeal in sustaining earlier newspapers such as *Jack Canuck*, *Hush*, and *Thunder*. In 1938, two more tabloid newspapers would be launched in Toronto, by interests that overlapped with those that had produced *Broadway Brevities*. The first issue of the weekly *Tattler Review* was dated 23 April 1938, and gave its place of publication as 50 Yonge Street (figure 7). In November of the same year, the *National Tattler*, a bi-weekly newspaper similar to the *Tattler Review* in appearance and stated mission, was launched at 319 Bay Street. Both would identify their publisher as the Tattler Review Company at various points in their existence, though other corporate names would come and go. Each, as well, carried regular advertisements for *Brevities*, *Garter Girls*, *Zippy Stories*, and other periodicals linked to publishing enterprises previously associated with Morris Rubin. In 1938, however, Morris Rubin disappeared from the public record, and the name 'Morris Ruby' began to appear, acknowledged in government documents as that of the man responsible for *Brevities*, the *Tattler* tabloids, and a variety of other magazines and publishing ventures.²²

As newspapers, the *National Tattler* and the *Tattler Review* are unlike Ruby's other periodicals, inasmuch as they work to develop an ongoing, regular address to a readership. Like its competitor *Hush*, Ruby's two *Tattlers*

22 As I complete this article, my belief remains unconfirmed. In October 1937, a Morris Rubin of Toronto changed his name to Morris Ruby by deed poll. Morris Ruby was the brother of Louis W. Ruby, who ran Super Publications in the 1940s and published the Toronto tabloid *Flash*; the claim that Morris Ruby had been Morris Rubin obviously presumes that his brother had made a similar change of name.



7. *Tattler Review* (Toronto). 23 April 1938. Front cover (partial)

spoke from a vantage point within Toronto, then supplemented this with columns from Hamilton, Ottawa, Montreal, and elsewhere.²³ While the journalistic resources of these tabloids were clearly limited, their lurid headlines and exposé reports bound them to rhythms of local eventfulness much more tightly than had anything in *Brevities* and its companion magazines. Several instalments devoted to political corruption in Sudbury, for example, resonated with reports, published in the tabloid *Hush*, of a Nazi *bund* operating in that community. Indeed, *Hush*, the *National Tattler*, and the *Tattler Review* all spoke with a determined anti-Nazi, pro-war voice; denunciations of anti-Semitism were much more common within their pages than in those of the mainstream Toronto dailies.

The *Tattler Review* seems to have survived no later than 1939. The *National Tattler* seems to have disappeared in 1940, after having been the object of an injunction in 1939. That injunction offered, as evidence, the titles of several dozen articles appearing in the newspaper, and sought to prohibit the magazine from any further publication of obscene materials (Ontario Archives RG 4-32, no 957, 1939). By late 1940, in any case, the amount of reporting in the *National Tattler* had declined relative to the reprinting of fictional stories, dated gossip, and cartoons clearly taken from US publications of several years vintage. (Figure 8 shows a portion of the

23 The *National Tattler's* first Montreal columnist was Al Palmer, who had written the Montreal column for the Toronto-based tabloid *Weekender* in 1937. Palmer was a Runyonesque Montreal character who has become somewhat legendary; see Straw. Palmer was replaced in the *National Tattler* by S.R. Martin, who later wrote the Montreal column for *Hush*. Ontario Archives RG-42 contains a newspaper clipping from a Syracuse newspaper reporting on efforts by that city's district attorney to ban sales of a Syracuse edition of the Canadian *National Tattler*. While this reference to further cross-border traffic is intriguing, no Syracuse sources, to date, have turned up any further information.

cover of its 15 July 1940 issue. The image of the woman with a cane was stolen from an earlier issue of the US magazine *Film Fun* and had already served as the cover of the first issue of *Garter Girls*.)

In the efforts of Ruby and others to sustain periodical titles across several issues and months, we may glimpse the challenge, for Canadian publishers, of building that 'temporality of circulation' that Michael Warner deems crucial in the elaboration of modern publics (65). Ruby and his collaborators during this period seemed caught between the impulse to build a smooth sequentiality, through which successive issues of a title might convey an identity and build a readership, and an exploitative sense of each artefact as assembled from materials acquired cheaply or illegally somewhere else. This tension is a defining one within English-Canadian cultural entrepreneurship. At all levels of cultural production within English Canada, the brokerage of materials acquired elsewhere will almost always render cultural artefacts slightly out-of-step with any coherent and collective sense of cultural movement. Any legitimacy that foreign materials provide may be tarnished by the delays with which they are put into circulation, and by the sense of being out of step that results. At the same time, the dominant role that imported materials play within Canadian cultural artefacts (whether these be magazines of the 1930s, or made-for-television films in the present) often overwhelms any continuous, effective address to a Canadian public.

These are the familiar dilemmas of English-Canadian cultural production, but they are magnified in the case of those forms, like the scandal tabloid, which seek to imbricate themselves within the rhythms of urban language and sensation. Following Karlheinz Stierle, we might suggest that urban scandal moves along trajectories whose extremes are the promiscuous, unfixed passage of whispered gossip and the fixed, graphic forms of the sensational tabloid headline. 'Language in movement,' Stierle claims, 'is immobilized within writing that fixes within itself the dynamism of the city, just as cold comes to be fixed within ice' (29; my translation). In Ruby's *Tattlers*, much of the time the headlines work to fix within themselves traces of local, public sentiment, but this connection invariably unravels within the variety of reprinted and non-current materials that fill the later pages of each issue

DUCHESS AND SUPERIOR

The interests that produced the Canadian *Broadway Brevities*, the various *Tattlers*, and a long list of other titles (*Zippy*, *Lulu*, *Keyhole*, *Paree*, and so on) would find new purpose and respectability over the course of the Second World War. On 4 December 1940, the Canadian minister of finance introduced measures intended to prevent the flow of sterling currencies outside of Canada. These included a ban on the importation of a whole range of



8. *National Tattler* (Toronto). 15 July 1940. Front cover (partial)

periodical publications, including 'detective, sex, western and alleged true or confession stories.'²⁴ In a summary of promising local business developments for the month of October 1940, the *Toronto Daily Star* noted the launch of Duchess Printing and Publishing, at 104 Sherbourne Street.²⁵ Very quickly, Duchess (and Morris Ruby, its president) launched a number of new titles and continued to publish many of the titles initiated in 1937–38. By 1940, both *Brevities* and the *National Tattler* were published under its imprint at 104 Sherbourne. Duchess began publication of a wide range of paperback novels, comic books, pulp fiction titles, and humour, true crime, and romance magazines. Some of these appeared under Duchess's Herald Publishing imprint; more of them, including *Brevities* and the *National Tattler*, bore logos for 'Superior Publishing' or 'Superior Publishers.' A few of these titles, such as *Famous Crime Cases* and *True Crime Cases*, survived until the mid-1950s.²⁶ While it had several competitors during the 1940s,

24 Bill quoted in 'Import Prohibitions Helpful to Greeting Card Printers,' *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, December 1940, 34.

25 'New Retail Outlets Lead City's Expansion,' *Toronto Daily Star*, 4 November 1940, 26.

26 For dozens of covers of Canadian periodicals of the 1940s, most of which are from Duchess/Superior, see the section 'Print Culture and Urban Visuality' at the website of the McGill team for the Culture of Cities Project. <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/ahcs/cultureofcities/>

such as Franklin Publishing or the Magazine Publishing House, Superior would emerge as the most respectable of publishers who had moved to exploit the ban on imported magazines. By 1942, most of its magazines announced that they were 'edited, illustrated and produced in Canada by Canadians on Canadian paper without foreign affiliation.' In appearance, certainly, they seemed less obviously exploitative than the Canadian magazines assembled, by other publishers, from US plates.

In late 1938 or early 1939, the Canadian *Broadway Brevities* changed its name to *Brevities*. Over the next year, it moved erratically between formats: its fourteenth issue, for example, bore the title 'Broadway Brevities and Smart Story,' its contents and editorial information suggesting they had been planned for another title, then redirected so as to continue *Brevities'* schedule. The numbering of issues remained consistent, despite changes in format and frequency, throughout the 1940s. By 1942, *Brevities* announced itself as 'Canada's Oldest Humour Magazine,' a ludicrously self-important claim that may have been technically accurate but that obscured the magazine's newness and its links to one of the most notorious scandal magazines in US publishing history. During the 1940s, the magazine shrank to digest size; while many of its jokes and cartoons were risqué by the standards of its time, they were significantly less so than had been the case in 1937 and 1938 (figure 9). Before it ceased publication (I have seen no issues dated later than 1948) it was one of a number of Superior magazines (like *Halt*, *Zippy*, and *Paree*, the latter two having been transformed from their 'spicy' roots) specializing in mildly impolite cartoons clearly directed at a military readership.

CLOW'S END

Following his hearing in Toronto court in January of 1938, Stephen G. Clow returned to New York. A letter to columnist Louis Sobol, pleading for money, was dated 16 March 1938, and sent from Clow's address at 353 West 57th Street in New York. Clow died of cancer in the most dismal of circumstances in New York City's Bellevue Hospital in June 1941, after going there alone in a taxi, in severe pain. His body went unclaimed by friends or family, until officials took it to the morgue. In his last few months, the *New York Times* reported, Clow had lived alone in a furnished room, selling the occasional column to a race track tip sheet.²⁷ The few friends who attended his funeral included individuals who had figured prominently in his life and his writings: Evelyn Nesbitt Thaw (wife of

27 'Stephen Clow Dies at 67,' *New York Times*, 7 June 1941, 19. In one of the many errors of chronology surrounding Clow, the *New York Daily News* reported that he had come to New York from Canada twenty-three years earlier. Obituary, 'Stephen G. Clow,' *Daily News*, 7 June 1941, final edition, 24.



9. *Brevities* (Toronto). Summer, 1948. Front cover

Harry Thaw, murderer of Stanford White in 1906); Maxwell S. Mattuck, the prosecutor in his 1925 trial; and Juanita Clivette, the 'Village Sappho' of New York bohemia, whose weekly salons were regularly advertised in the 1930s tabloid *Brevities* (Sobol, 334). Their presence at his end nourishes the sense of Clow as a colourful, Runyonesque New York scoundrel. As a small-time entrepreneur, he is one of innumerable such figures whose passage across the US-Canadian border has served to knit together the circuits of influence, theft, and exchange on which so much of Canadian popular culture has been based.

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