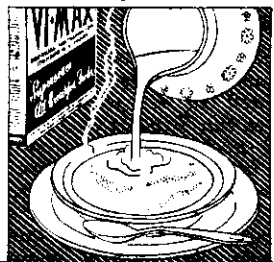


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STILL POPULAR BUT NO LONGER A CRAZE

Curious History Of The Crossword Puzzle

NEWSPAPER readers still like their crossword puzzles, as *The Listener* found out some months ago. In an effort to save space we dropped our regular puzzle as being one of our less essential features, and then received so many complaints from readers that we had to restore it. Exactly the same thing has been happening in the United States, according to *Editor and Publisher*, which in a recent issue mentioned several instances of the continuing popularity of crosswords, and then gave some facts about their curious history in an article by S. J. Monchak.

The crossword puzzle began as a childish diversion, and grew, like the yo-yo, to become an absorbing adult craft. In the years of its greatest vogue, the early 'twenties, dictionaries, Roget's *Thesaurus* and Crabbe's *Synonyms* became best-sellers. What's more, Princeton University seriously considered giving a course in the making and solving of crosswords, and the University of Kentucky actually did do so, in 1924. In the same year, freshmen of Mount Holyoke College were required to make a puzzle of new words they had learned during the term, as the requirement for passing a grade.

So marked was the boom in the optical trade at this time that it was attributed to the eyestrain caused by crossword puzzling, and the courts found that the practice had played a part in the events leading up to many divorces.

Anagrams for Inmates

Occupants of Sing Sing Prison awaiting execution were provided with puzzles and pencils to help them pass the time; authorities at the State Hospital for the Insane at Warren, Pennsylvania, found that both men and women enjoyed poring over them; in the carriages of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, dictionaries were installed as standard equipment, while the Lackawanna Railroad supplied a puzzle at every plate in its dining cars; not to be outdone, the Pennsylvania Railroad presented a Christmas gift of three books to its regular patrons—a dictionary, a book of synonyms, and a book of puzzles!

Paris got the craze in 1924, when it seems to have been at its peak generally. The French name for it was *Mosaïque de Mystère*, and as might be expected in Paris, the craze had its effect on fashions in dress—women's stockings and clothes

appeared with the familiar black and white checks.

Stanley Baldwin, Too

The following year, Britain's Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, in a speech to the London Press Club, said that he regarded the newspapermen as helping him "uplift Great Britain through the marvellous medium of the puzzle." He himself was an inveterate puzzler.

But not everyone shared the puzzlers' joys. Newspapers in the U.S.A. received thousands of letters from readers, arguing as to the merits of the new sport, and some famous names participated in the controversy. One American author wrote:

"Crossword puzzling teaches an impressive array of words which are splendid for working out crossword puzzles. The sum total of knowledge gained thereby is on a par with what a kitten finds out by chasing his tail."

A newspaper which resisted the pressure of the craze for some time paid for its independent thought in the end. It was the *Emporia Gazette*, whose editor, William Allen White, refused to print a puzzle, with the result that someone broke into the office and removed a dictionary, a concordance, and a Bible.

"Ki Juji no Nazo"

In keeping with its policy of adapting Occidental customs and creations to the Oriental mind, Japan produced its first "Ki Juji no Nazo" in 1925 in the *Japan Times*.

Solving crosswords took so much of the average fan's time that business firms in America found it necessary to impose a specific ban on doing them during business hours, under threat of immediate dismissal.

The columns of *The Times* were opened to crosswords in the early 'twenties, and this paper was once reported to have carried as many as four in a single issue. The crosswords of *The Times* earned a reputation of their own, and books full of *Times* puzzles, with the answers in the back have been useful presents ever since. The *New York Times*, on the other hand, had never had a puzzle in its pages until last year, when the feature appeared in the Sunday magazine section.

So far as research can reveal, the first American appearance of the crossword was in *Fun* in 1913, but the editor of that paper said he had got the idea from a copy of the *London Graphic* of years before.



... Banned during business hours