

The Impossible Takes a Little Longer

A Brief History of REASON Magazine

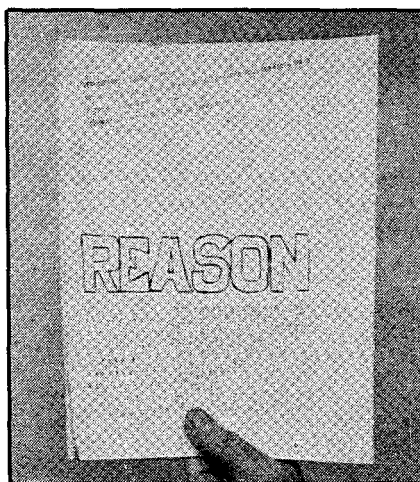
EXACTLY 10 YEARS AGO, in May 1968, a six-page mimeographed publication appeared on the campus of Boston University. Its name was REASON. Its price: 10¢. Its three brief articles reflected the concerns of the day: violence, racism, and poverty.

More unusual than its contents was the new publication's credo, which appeared on page 2:

Introducing REASON: We accept the responsibility that others have defaulted on. Others preferred to smear the issues with irrelevancies and falsifications. We don't. Others preferred to be incomprehensible and incoherent. We don't. Others preferred to ignore your mind. We won't.

When REASON speaks of poverty, racism, the draft, the war, student power, and other vital issues, it shall be reasons, not slogans, it gives for conclusions. Proof, not belligerent assertion. Logic, not legends. Coherence, not contradictions. This is our promise; this is the reason for REASON.

Clearly, this was more than just another campus throwaway. What 20-year-old journalism student Robert Lawrence (Lanny) Friedlander had in mind



Volume 1, Number 1 (May 1968)

BY ROBERT POOLE, JR.

was a whole new kind of magazine.

A REAL MAGAZINE

A second issue appeared, hard on the heels of the first, followed by a three-month (summer vacation) hiatus. But publication resumed with Volume 1, Number 3, in September and continued each month through May 1969, to end the first volume with 11 issues. The first volume saw two

people added as staffers—David Narlee and Peter Neilson—and the cover price increased to 25¢. Subscriptions were offered—at nine issues for \$2. And across the country a grapevine of fledgling libertarian and Objectivist student groups began to learn of REASON's existence. By April 1969 there were 250 subscribers.

That first year brought several of the magazine's future principals into the fold. In March, Friedlander put out a request for a chemist and for someone in aerospace to research articles on the FDA and drug development and on the effects of the CAB and the FAA. Lynn Kinsky (chemist) and Robert Poole (aerospace analyst), both subscribers (and married at the time) responded with article proposals. And Friedlander spotted in the *Personalist* (a journal edited by John Hospers) an article titled "Justice and the Welfare State" and wrote to the author, Tibor Machan, requesting permission to reprint it.

Over the summer of 1969, Friedlander made plans for Volume 2. REASON's second year would feature a major expansion into "a general format high-quality magazine with printed interiors and perhaps twice as many pages." He spent weeks at the

design department of nearby MIT Press, learning about sans-serif typefaces, ragged-right margins, and the spare, clean "Swiss style" layout then becoming popular. The result made its debut in September 1969, with Poole's "Fly the Frenzied Skies" as its cover story.

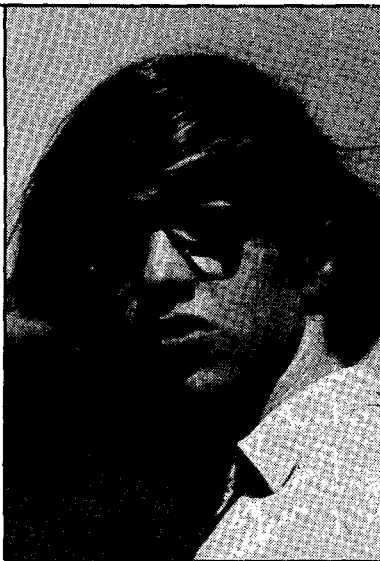
The effect of this issue was electrifying—and not merely to the egos of Poole and Friedlander. Here, for the first time among libertarians, was a magazine that looked and felt like a *real* magazine—one that showed promise of living up to the ambitious credo of its inaugural issue. In Boston, Mark Frazier and Ann Kotell joined the (unpaid) production staff. In Connecticut, Poole decided that, despite his career in aerospace, he was going to get involved in making the magazine a success. He and Kinsky went to Boston to meet Friedlander, spending an interesting but frustrating weekend. Interesting because of exposure to Friedlander's many plans and ideas; frustrating because of his obvious lack of business and organizational ability.

By that time (November 1969), Poole and Kinsky had already decided to move to California that winter. Friedlander put them in touch with Machan, who had just graced the pages of REASON for the first time and who was living in Santa Barbara, the site of Poole's new job. The four—Machan, his then-wife Marilyn Walther, Poole, and Kinsky—soon became good friends.

During 1970, REASON's new, printed issues continued to appear, but at increasingly long intervals. Circulation increased to 400 and the price was finally raised, to 12 issues for \$5. Even so, the income was never really sufficient to cover the costs. As contributing editors, Poole and Machan were worried. They spent many long, pleasant evenings in Machan's hillside house overlooking the lights of Santa Barbara, imagining what it might be like if there were a magazine of the kind REASON aspired to be, as a significant intellectual presence in America.

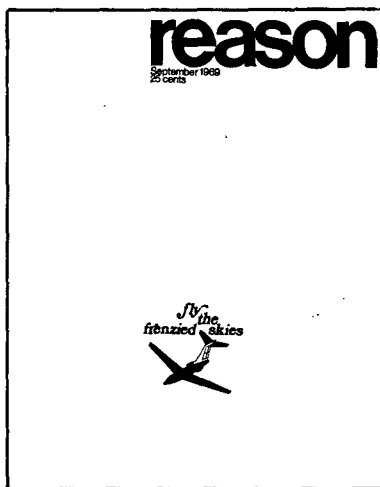
REASON IS BORN AGAIN

It wasn't long before the combination of excitement over this potential and worry over REASON's survival led to action. Poole and Machan produced a 46-page proposal for an expanded REASON magazine, including a two-year marketing plan aimed at reaching a circulation of 6,500 and showing a profit by the 24th month. They mailed



Photos by Lynn Kinsky

REASON's founder
Lynn Friedlander



First printed issue,
September 1969.

it out to about 20 potential investors and waited for the money to come rolling in. Well... the net result was a \$400 gift and \$1,250 in loans—not exactly the typical magazine start-up

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capital.

By this point, two more people had gotten involved in the project. Poole's MIT roommate, Jim Weigl, had signed on as business manager. And Los

Angeles attorney Manuel Klausner, having heard Machan's weekly KFFK radio commentaries, contacted him and was asked to join. The six—Poole, Kinsky, Machan, Walther, Klausner, and Weigl—decided to form a partnership, buy REASON from Friedlander, and hire him as editor. Despite the lack of success at raising start-up capital, they plunged ahead, bootstraps-style, each putting up \$300 to add to the gift and loan already obtained.

Enter Nathaniel Branden, in a crucial role. The key concept in the Poole-Machan business plan was direct-mail advertising to mailing lists having a high probability of favorable response. Most of the partners' initial capital would be risked on the first mailing, and if it failed, they would be out of business. The prime mailing list for their purposes was the 65,000-name list compiled over the years by Nathaniel Branden Institute—the organization that from 1959 to 1968 had offered lecture courses on Objectivism across the country. Obtaining permission to rent Branden's list was therefore essential to the magazine's success. Many other people had similar ideas, and it was well known that Branden was very cautious about allowing the list to be used. Fortunately, from reading the business plan and talking with Machan, he decided that Reason Enterprises was a worthwhile endeavor and agreed to rent the list.

In September 1970, Friedlander spent a week in California attending a conference on political philosophy organized by Machan and John Hospers. Friedlander and the partners of Reason Enterprises reached an agreement on transferring ownership of the magazine and signed a contract hiring him as editor for the first six months. On December 1 the first 5,000 promotional letters for the new magazine went into the mail. And then the wait began. The first order came in on December 8, a second on December 9, then five more on the 11th... and by the end of the month the total had reached 150—a three percent response. Reason Enterprises was in business.

The next job was actually producing the magazine. None of the partners knew anything about typesetting, layout, printing, or any of the other aspects of magazine production. And Friedlander, Frazier, et al. were back in Boston, not within helping distance. Fortunately, the southern California



The original partners of Reason Enterprises: Poole (1971), Klausner (1972), Weigl (1971), Walther (1971), Machan (1972), Kinsky (1976).

libertarian community at that time included an aspiring young publisher, Leon Kaspersky, who was even then producing a monthly underground libertarian newspaper, *Protos*. Kaspersky offered to teach the partners layout and to arrange for the typesetting and printing—a deal that all parties found beneficial. So it was that Poole, Kinsky, Walther, Machan, and Weigl spent from 9:00 P.M. to 5:00 A.M. one December night laying out the January 1971 issue in a typesetting shop somewhere in Long Beach. That issue, which carried a message from the new owners, marked a resumption of regular monthly publication—and a permanent change in the partners' lives, which would thenceforth be shaped by the demands of editing and producing a new issue every month, 12 times a year, like clockwork.

TAKING OFF

REASON's first year in California was marked by heartening growth. Friedlander and Frazier, from Boston, obtained articles from and conducted interviews with a number of notables—John Holt, Robert Rimmer, Jay Forrester—leading to impressive features in the magazine. And a major breakthrough came when Nathaniel Branden consented to be interviewed. The libertarian/Objectivist world had been buzzing with rumors about Branden's break with Ayn Rand three years before. After one brief statement from each at the time, nothing more had been made public.

Branden's interview was welcomed as—and proved to be—a major scoop. Circulation was already at 1,000, based on several small mailings to Branden's list, and the partners decided to go for broke. With the interview on tape, and operating completely on credit, they cranked up a mailing to the remaining 52,000

people on the list and won big, with a response that topped three percent. REASON was now on the map. An office manager was hired and the mailing list computerized to handle the surge of growth.

With the Branden interview on tape, and operating completely on credit, the partners decided to go for broke with a big mailing.

REASON was never to experience another year of sixfold growth, but 1972 and 1973 saw a more-or-less steady expansion—with one notable exception. Flushed with the success of the Branden mailing, the partners incautiously rented the entire 48,000-

First California issue,
January 1971

reason

new! improved!

(commercialism)

name list of another well-known libertarian organization (now defunct) and sent out, *without* testing it, a mailing. The result was disaster—a response of less than half a percent, including an alarming barrage of hate mail. Sorely chastened, and humbled by the experience, the partners retrenched, appreciating the need for cautious empiricism in addition to intelligent hypotheses regarding who will buy what.

Following that debacle, consultant Donna Rasnake helped develop a series of direct-mail approaches that appealed to several audiences—libertarian groups on the one hand and hard-money book buyers on the other hand—and these sustained the magazine during the balance of 1972 and 1973. An interview with Harry Browne in the fall of 1972 helped sell the hard-money people on subscribing to REASON. That year also saw the beginnings of the Libertarian Party, an organization that REASON encouraged via exchanges of advertising, a special issue put together by Klausner (September 1972), and a regular LP correspondent's report. The magazine added another thousand or so subscribers when the *Individualist*, the magazine of the Society for Individual Liberty, folded early in 1973, and REASON arranged to take over its unfulfilled subscription liability.

By the end of 1973 REASON had grown large enough to employ a professional subscription fulfillment house, Media Selection Corporation, to handle that end of the business, significantly improving such operations as billing and renewals and enabling REASON to enter the list rental business. The arrangement was fortuitous, for the company's president, Jim Lance, was also experienced in direct-mail work and became REASON's principal promotional mailing consultant.

His direct-mail efforts aimed at hard-money investors added some 4,000 subscribers in 1974, bringing circulation nearly to 12,000 by year's end.

GROWING UP

A key element in the success of these campaigns was REASON's special financial issue. This concept—of a special issue offering investment commentary based on free-market and hard-money principles—originated with two young leaders of the fledgling Libertarian Party: Bob Meier and Ed Crane. Working closely with Poole, they contacted authors, sold ads, and helped generate bulk orders for the May 1974 Special Financial Issue—a 140-page behemoth that introduced REASON to a much wider circle of people and has since become a REASON tradition. (Meier and Crane, of course, later went on to key leadership roles in the growing Libertarian Party.)

The years 1975 and 1976 were something of a plateau for REASON. The magazine was at an awkward size, with

circulation fluctuating between 12,000 and 15,000 throughout. It was too small and financially shaky, the partners thought, to justify any full-time, paid editorial staff, too large to survive for very long solely on volunteer efforts. Somehow, REASON struggled through those two years, overcoming partnership frictions and attrition. (By 1975 the partnership had dwindled to three—Klausner, Machan, and Poole. Friedlander had lost interest and never participated beyond his original six-month contract.) Producing the magazine as a hobby, in addition to their regular careers, had become quite a burden to the three remaining partners. It was a feat to keep the magazine coming out, and there was little time to dream up and implement innovations.

In mid-1976 the magazine received a shot in the arm when Mark Frazier reappeared on the scene. Having graduated from Harvard and worked a year and a half on a New Zealand newspaper, Frazier moved to Santa Barbara, eager to get REASON back on

the growth curve. Though he soon became involved in a variety of other projects, his presence had a catalytic effect on Poole. They brainstormed on artwork, headlines, articles, publicity, fund-raising, etc., leading to a number of improvements. Material was solicited and editing of articles was stepped up. In an important move, the partners decided to hire Poole as editor on a half-time basis, starting in January 1977. Next came the graphic redesign of the magazine by the new art director, Don Wood. Poole and Wood began an extremely fruitful collaboration on integrating the editorial and design aspects of the magazine, leading to a significantly improved look as of mid-1977. REASON's 1977 promotional efforts were redirected away from hard-money people and targeted more toward groups (such as the National Taxpayers Union) more interested in political and economic issues. New columnists—Edith Efron and Jim Davidson—and several new contributing editors—Thomas Szasz, Eric Mack, Henry Manne, Karl Pflock—joined the staff.

The upshot was substantial improvement in a number of key indicators of the magazine's health. Renewal rates increased by a third, circulation climbed to 18,000, and a number of new advertisers discovered REASON. The early months of 1978 continued these encouraging trends. REASON thus begins its second decade from a revitalized position.

It has weathered financial ups and

A Word of Thanks

In writing this history of REASON, the need for brevity meant that a number of people were not mentioned—people who in one way or another played a role in helping REASON to survive and grow. So the purpose of this note is to acknowledge their contributions and publicly express our thanks.

Many individuals have served as staff members, advisors, or suppliers of services, sometimes for free, sometimes for pay—but nearly always at below-market rates. All took part because they believed in what REASON was attempting to do. So our deepest thanks to Leon Kaspersky, Clarica Scott, Hank Hohenstein, Jim Garrison, Lou Rollins, Barbara Yorke, Tom Yorke, Ruth Sutton, Phil Groves, and Allison Hammond. Special thanks are due to Marty Zupan for her dual roles as copy editor and book review editor over the past two years.

In the first few years of REASON's California existence, one of its important sources of security was the long-term commitment of advertising by the Institute for Humane Studies and the Center for Independent Education. Ken Templeton, George Pearson, and Charles Koch of those institutions have been loyal friends and supporters over the years.

At various times since 1970 REASON has made appeals for funds, both privately, to friends, and publicly, to our subscribers. The support of the late Hank Clay and of Stan Abraham, Jim Carey, Shari Elias, Charles Koch, Robert LeFevre, Joseph Coberly, Bruce Lagasse, and the Second Libertarian Church of San Francisco has been greatly appreciated.

In 1973 several hundred subscribers became Reason Associates, contributing \$25 to \$100 to support REASON's expansion plans. In early 1976 we sent out a mailing to subscribers asking for contributions to help cover our 1975 deficit. And hundreds responded. Most recently—in January—we again appealed to subscribers. Nearly 600 responded with contributions, many of them enclosing letters of advice and encouragement. To say that such a response was moving is an understatement. I only wish I could thank each of you personally. Since it isn't possible, this brief acknowledgement will have to suffice.

For 10 years of support, encouragement, and dedication, I would like to say, on behalf of Reason Enterprises, thank you.

—R.P.

With the same hope, a little more wisdom, some recent changes, and ideas for progress, REASON embarks on another 10 years.

downs. It has lived through normal partnership falling-outs. It has managed with part-time, spread-across-the-country editors and low-paid contributors. Nevertheless, it has come out, in a process that has on the whole been smooth. Not to be forgotten, it has benefited from the growth of the libertarian movement. Yet it has tried to maintain its journalistic independence, airing the controversies over theory and practice. Its evolution has been guided by the editors' hope of

FINANCIAL SURVIVAL IN A TROUBLED WORLD

*First Financial Issue,
May 1974*

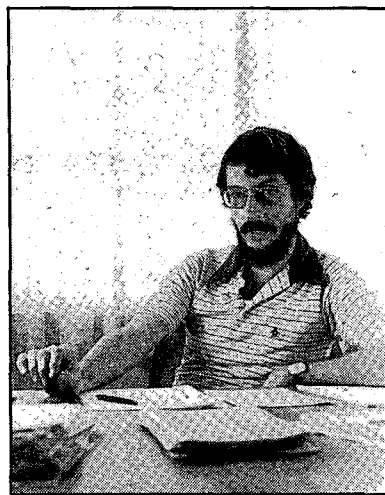
reaching, not only libertarians, but other reasonable readers. As the edi-

tors expressed it in the April-May 1971 issue, starting off Volume 3:

REASON is addressed to all thinking people, particularly those for whom integrity, independence, and liberty are primary values. It is specifically designed as a means for spreading libertarian ideas among such people, not as part of a "movement" but rather as an expanding intellectual community.

With the same hope, a little more wisdom, some recent changes, and ideas for progress, REASON embarks on its second decade, ready to live up to its founder's high ideals:

It shall be reasons, not slogans, we give for conclusions. Proof, not beligerent assertion. Logic, not legends. Coherence, not contradiction. This is our promise; this is the reason for REASON. [E]



Bob Poole, editor and part owner of REASON, has been involved with the magazine almost since its inception.

Panel

(Continued from p. 50.)

cringe when I talked about decriminalizing marijuana. Now they'll listen seriously and maybe chime in when I talk about decriminalizing heroin and all other drugs. Things are changing very quickly.

NOLAN: What do you see as the threat that we, "the movement," should be most on guard against? Dissipation? Compromise? Co-optation? Sabotage? Cult tendencies? Or what?

POOLE: Well, this will probably sound funny coming from a person with my alleged gradualist reputation. I think compromising our principles is the greatest danger that we face. I really do—precisely because I think it's important for us to be flexible and to not always demand that our programmatic proposals be the ideal that we'd like to see in the future, realized tomorrow morning. Precisely because we have to be realistic about what we propose to do, I think it's crucial that we keep our *principles* visible and make sure that we don't allow any hint of compromise to come into those. So I think that's where the need for vigilance is the greatest. We can't give up quality in the search for quantity. We have to maintain our principles and maintain a high standard of leadership.

ERNSBERGER: In a similar vein, I would say that the big threat would be libertarians' sensing that victory is so close that it's worth a few compromises to get to it.

CRANE: My concern is how compromise sneaks up on us, and in my view, therefore, gradualism is the great threat.

COBB: Well, one thing, going back to my earlier reference to risk—one thing I worry about is that at some point we'll bite off more than we can chew.

CRANE: We already have.

COBB: That's not what I mean. For example, sometimes I worry what would happen if, by a fluke, a libertarian candidate were elected governor of a state without having any libertarians in the general assembly of that state. And at that point

you have a person that, you know, is really caught in a trap, because if he compromises he throws away everything the party stands for; and if he attempts to govern he makes a fool of himself, because the general assembly will eat him alive. This is the danger. If you're going to take over a state, you have to take over a general assembly first, not the executive. The libertarian headland, I think, for a transition period, would be 49 percent of both houses of the legislature. You could dismantle the State more rapidly than you can believe with 49 percent, and the executive would take all the blame. It would work beautifully. But accidental victory is something that we have to worry about, because it would put us into a compromising situation, one that it would be very hard to get out of.

KLAUSNER: I'm kind of intrigued by Joe's comments. I'd love to see Murray Rothbard as governor of New York State.

CRANE: We've consciously avoided accidental victory.

KLAUSNER: What's the main problem that I see? Probably the limits in terms of manpower and resources. I think that the Libertarian Party is presently the main vehicle to reach the masses, and it's very dependent on a few good people. In the last election, Roger MacBride served us very well as a party and as a movement, but what about the next election? What about the election after that? Time will tell if we will be able to recruit the kind of individual who both has the time, the expertise, the knowledge, the ability, to convey ideas as Roger does and has the finances to mount the campaign.

NOLAN: I see us as being in kind of a funny stage of development. As recently as five years ago I would have seen the greatest danger as being the tendency to go off in a little corner into study groups and never do anything in the world. The creation and growth of the Libertarian Party has pretty much killed off that danger. But right now I see our greatest threat as being the one Bob alluded to earlier, where you get a whole bunch of people coming running in with the idea that we're going to get 20 percent of the vote this election; then when we only get 3 percent of it they say, "Aw the hell with it," and pack up and go home—sort of a false raising of hopes and then getting dashed.

That's it. Thank you all very much. [E]

Reason's Tenth-Anniversary Banquet



Photos by Bruce Lagasse



John Hospers



Mark Frazier

Davis Keeler



*Willette
Klausner,
Mrs. and
Mrs. Clyde
Packer,
Nicole
Bergland,*



*Nathaniel
Branden,
Poole,
Machan,
Klausner,
Marty
Zupan*

