

History of the Scienceers

The First New York City Science Fiction Club, 1929

by Allen Glasser

Transcribed by [Richard Newsome](#)

This article first appeared in Joe Christoff's fanzine *Sphere*, and was reprinted in *First Fandom Magazine* #4 (June 1961), with a plea that comments be sent to Allen Glasser (then living in Brooklyn) for possible use in a follow-up article incorporating further details.

Long before "science fiction" was called by that name, I had become devoted to it through the Mars books of Edgar Rice Burroughs, which I read when I was only twelve. Then I scoured library shelves for the works of H.G. Wells, Jack London, Algernon Blackwood, and the very few fantasy books available at that time.

To me, incidentally, the terms "fantasy" and "science fiction" have always seemed synonymous. I think it's silly, for example, to consider time travel scientific and witchcraft fantastic. One is just as possible -- or impossible -- as the other; and both make interesting and provocative reading, at least to me.

After finishing all the fantasy books I could find in those early days -- there were little more than a dozen then -- I discovered that *Argosy* magazine occasionally ran a fantastic serial, which they called "different" or "pseudo-scientific" stories. These I followed with faithful fervor. Some of the novels I recall from that period were *The Ship of Ishtar*, by A. Merritt; *The Great Commander* by Fred MacIsaac; and *The Return of George Washington*, by G.F. Worts -- which will approximate the time for fans familiar with that wonderful *Argosy* era.

Weird Tales next engaged my absorbed attention -- the first all-fantasy magazine I had ever enjoyed. Then, in 1926, *Amazing Stories* came upon the scene, immediately winning my ardent allegiance.

It was *Amazing Stories* which made me a read science-fiction fan -- the kind who wrote letters to the editor, criticized stories, and corresponded with other fans.

However, it was through *Science Wonder Stories*, rather than *Amazing*, that I finally made personal contact with other fans in New York City and with them founded the first of all science-fiction fan clubs -- The Scienceers.

The exact date on which The Scienceers came into being was Dec. 11, 1929. The founding members, as I recall, were Warren Fitzgerald, Nathan Greenfeld, Philip Rosenblatt, Herbert Smith, Julius Unger, Louis Wentzler, and myself, Allen Glasser. With the exception of Fitzgerald, who was then about thirty, all the members were in their middle teens.

At this point, in relating my activities as a founder of fandom, I should say that most of this account is based on memory alone. Though my recollections of that early era are quite vivid, some minor details may have been forgotten after so many years. However, I still possess a few treasured clippings from those dawn days of fandom which serve to keep certain basic facts fixed in my mind.

Some readers may dispute my foregoing statement that The Scienceers was the very first fan club in the science-fantasy field. Objectors to that claim may cite the fact that the Science Correspondence Club, founded by Walter L. Dennis of Chicago, existed well before The Scienceers.

While that is undeniably true, I contend that the Dennis organization was -- as its name clearly implied -- a loose, widespread association of correspondents, with few members ever getting together personally. By contrast, The Scienceers was a tight-knit local group which conducted regular meetings every week. However, I freely acknowledge our debt to Walter Dennis and his Science Correspondence Club as the medium through which several Scienceers' members were brought into our fold.

During the early months of the Scienceers' existence -- from its start in December 1929 through the spring of 1930 -- our president was Warren Fitzgerald. As previously mentioned, Warren was about fifteen years older than the other members. He was a light-skinned Negro -- amiable, cultured, and a fine gentleman in every sense of that word. With his gracious, darker-hued wife, Warren made our young members welcome to use his Harlem home for our meetings -- an offer we gratefully accepted.

Early in that year of 1930, Hugo Gernsback's *Science Wonder Quarterly* conducted a prize contest on the subject "What I Have Done For Science Fiction." My letter about the Scienceers' formation won a prize in this contest and was published in the Gernsback quarterly.

As a result of this publicity, our club attracted the attention of Gernsback's editor, David Lasser, and G. Edward Pendray, who wrote science fiction under the pen name of Gawain Edwards.

Both Pendray and Lasser were members of the American Rocket Society, an organization of mature scientists, engineers, and other professional men.

After attending a meeting of the boyish Scienceers in Fitzgerald's home, Lasser and Pendray invited us to affiliate with their Rocket Society, as a sort of Junior branch. While this offer flattered our juvenile egos, most of us preferred to maintain The Scienceers as an independent group within our own age bracket, rather than become an adjunct to a much more mature organization. Only Fitzgerald, who was closer in age to members of the Rocket Society, joined their ranks.

With Warren's home no longer available for our meetings, we were glad to accept the offer of a new member, Mortimer Weisinger, to meet at his parents' home in the Bronx. There, in a spacious room of their private house, which Mort used for his science-fiction library, The Scienceers came into full flower, attracting many new members through publicity placed in magazines and newspapers by myself, as Secretary of the club. One paper in particular, the *New York Evening*

World, listed our meetings every week during a good part of that year, 1930; and I still have their clippings of our activities.

It was during this period that we published our club monthly, *The Planet*, which was the first paper issued regularly by any local group of science-fiction fans -- although it was preceded by *Cosmology*, organ of the Science Correspondence Club. Some authorities on fandom, including Robert A. Madle, consider *The Planet* the pioneer of all the multitude of amateur publications that have waxed and waned in the fantasy field since our club paper set the pattern 30 years ago.

Editor and creator of *The Planet* was myself, Allen Glasser. I also cut all stencils needed for each issue of four or five pages. Mimeographing was done by Philip Rosenblatt, who never received full credit for making the paper's publication possible. Most of our members contributed items to *The Planet*, including reviews of professional science-fantasy magazines which then numbered only four.

Six monthly issues of *The Planet* were published, from June to December, 1930. Since I do not have a single copy left for reference, there is little more I can tell about our club paper. But I do recall that it attracted readers far removed from the Bronx. One was Gabriel Kirschner in Temple, Texas, and another was Carlton Abernathy in Clearwater, Florida -- both of whom tried to start branches of The Scienceers in their home towns.

By the end of 1930, dissension among our members caused the club to split into two factions -- the smaller group continuing to meet at the Weisinger home while the larger group, led by myself, held regular sessions at the home of Nathan Greenfeld, in another part of the Bronx.

Rather farcically, both factions retained the name of "Scienceers" and both continued to attract adherents. Notable among the newcomers during this schismatic period were Julius Schwartz, who teamed up with Weisinger; and William Sykora, who joined my own group.

This separation lasted for nearly two years; but by the start of 1933, all members of The Scienceers had reunited at the Greenfeld residence, where they continued to meet until more mature interests drew them away from the club one by one ... and The Scienceers became only a legend in the annals of fandom.