If Aaron Sorkin had set *The Newsroom* in the 1940s, it might have been at the New York newspaper *PM*. Founded by former Time editor Ralph Ingersoll in 1940, the Popular Front daily tabloid was proudly anti-fascist, pro–New Deal, anti–Poll Tax, and pro-Roosevelt. Believing that advertising would compromise its editorial judgment, the paper refused to run ads, relying on department store heir Marshall Field III and other progressive investors to pay the bills. Ingersoll believed the paper would sell so many copies in its first year that it wouldn’t *need* ads; he was wrong, but it did attract prominent readers like President Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Vice President Henry Wallace, bandleader-composer Duke Ellington, and writer Dorothy Parker. *PM* ran articles by Parker, Ernest Hemingway, and future Speaker of the House Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill; photographs by Margaret Bourke-White and Weegee; child-rearing advice from Dr. Spock; and editorial cartoons by Carl Rose, Don Freeman, and Dr. Seuss.

Though the paper initially did not include comic strips, *PM* swiftly changed its policy and made a significant contribution to comic art. Crockett Johnson’s *Barnaby*...
I GOT AN IDEA!
(1942–1952) had the largest impact, but Coulton Waugh’s Hank (1945) broke new ground in its depiction of a veteran who, having lost a leg in the war, tried to adapt to life back home. As Waugh himself described his title character, Hank was “determined to find out why it [the war] had been necessary and to prevent his son from having to make such a sacrifice.” In the process, he had to contend with an anti-Semitic boss and other people who hoped to convert him—as a wounded vet—into a useful spokesperson for their often dubious causes. These conflicts created an occasion for debate and exposed the bigotry (racism, anti-Semitism, red-baiting) that threatened democracy at home in the immediate postwar period. If Bill Mauldin’s Willie and Joe cartoons offered a more trenchant look at a soldier’s life on the fields of battle, Hank’s serial narrative took the difficulties of homecoming seriously, and is (as far as I know) the first realistic strip to feature a main character who is disabled.

Though the paper initially did not include comic strips, PM swiftly changed its policy and made a significant contribution to comic art.
Opposite page:


I don’t know what your beef is, Toughie, maybe it’s legitimate, but...

Maybe?!

Why, you broken down cripple...

Above:

Below:
years longer. As the Popular Front coalition came unraveled after the war, progressives came under attack from the right, and publications like *PM* began to attract suspicion. Though the paper did at last accept advertising in 1946, the income wasn’t enough to keep it afloat. *PM* lost its main backer and folded in June 1948.

Waugh, however, had a much longer and more varied career. Before *Hank*, he had worked as a painter, textile designer, and comics artist. He wrote and drew Milt Caniff’s *Dickie Dare* from 1934 to 1944, and returned to that strip from 1950 to 1958. Just before, he created the work for which he may best be remembered today, one of the pioneering studies of the American comic strip, *The Comics*, published in 1947. In his later years, he continued painting and wrote articles and textbooks. Waugh died in 1973 at the age of 77, and though today his name is unfamiliar to all but the most avid comics scholar, his work—as artist, educator and comic-strip innovator—deserves to be better known. In this golden age of comic reprints, *Hank*, especially, remains a lost gem.

**Hank’s serial narrative took the difficulties of homecoming seriously and is the first realistic strip to feature a main character who is disabled.**

**NOTES**

2 Ibid.
3 Waugh was not American by birth but emigrated from England with his family when he was eleven.
Ros! See, I burned your letter...

Oh Hank! I should never have trusted Aunt Hattie with that letter...