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HORACE GREELEY

The Vermonter who shaped America's Destiny

The founding fathers of our country were all American heroes. Some became Presidents of the youthful nation during its first 32 years. Amazingly, Adams, Jefferson and Madison died on the very day they made famous—the Fourth of July. Some of their successors did not carry the same spirit and received more than they gave. Greed for power supplanted greatness and statesmanship. The fledgling country needed a soul, a conscience, and a backbone.

From western Rutland County emerged a young man who became one of America's most influential and most charismatic individuals. He would be the champion of the common man, the father of quality journalism, advocate of the Lincoln presidency, the trumpet of the Emancipation Proclamation. Without



doubt Horace Greeley was the heart, soul, spirit, conscience, voice, and backbone of the United States of America. Horace Greeley was an editor who inspired a nation. Raised on a farm, he spent his formative years (ages nine to nineteen) in West Haven and East Poultney. He neither looked nor behaved as a child prodigy, but he was to words as Mozart was to music. Having learned to read, he entered school at two years and ten months of age. At five he could read any adult book and had memorized the Holy Bible and Shakespeare by the time he was six. Horace decided rather firmly that he wanted to be a newspaperman by the age of seven. At nine he was granted a scholarship to Philips Exeter Academy, thence to Dartmouth or Harvard, or any college of his choice. His parents declined the offer.



1811-1872
 Founder of The New York Tribune (1841)



Unfortunately, his father had to flee westward to avoid debtors' prison after he lost the family farm in Amherst, New Hampshire. He couldn't understand his son's thirst for knowledge and was upset with losing the help of his oldest child. Book-learning? Where's the value in that? Or so his father thought!

At eleven years of age Horace applied for a job with the Whitehall Times in New York, a few miles away from West Haven. He was turned down automatically because he was too young. He quit school for work at age fourteen, and the following year, walked eleven miles to East Poultney, Vermont to apply as a printer's apprentice. His considerable knowledge won him the job. By age sixteen he could typeset an entire edition of the "Northern Spectator" which included the weekly political editorial. At days end, a weary Greeley trudged a few yards north, passing Vermont's first public library (a stone still stands to mark the spot) onward to the Eagle Tavern where he received his nightly food and rest.

He could out-debate any challenger on political issues, and became known as a walking encyclopedia and arbiter of disputed facts for the entire Poultney community.

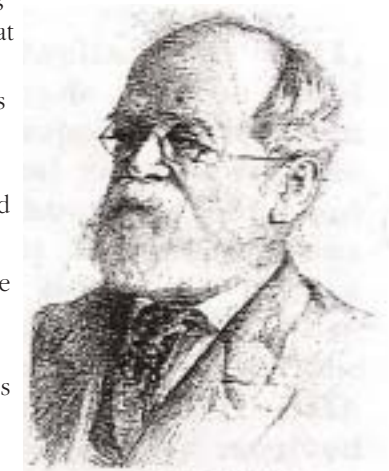
After a short interlude in Erie, Pennsylvania, Greeley set out for New York City in 1831, traveling on a canal barge and dressing like a hobo. Twenty-three year old, Horace founded a weekly literary and news journal, the New Yorker.

An omnivorous reader, eager to write as well as edit, Greeley's views gave him a wide reputation. He earned his income by writing, especially in support of the Whig Party. He capitalized on his relationships, too; his connections with Thurlow Weed, William H. Seward and other Whigs led, in 1840, to his editorship of the campaign weekly, the "Log Cabin." Horace decided that the "Log Cabin" would attract the common man as a voter. Additionally his support influenced the careers of F.L.Olmstead and H.D. Thoreau.

The paper's circulation rose to about 90,000, and contributed significantly both to William Henry Harrison's presidential victory and Greeley's influence.

But Greeley didn't wish to be a mere spectator; his goal was to help influence voters. So he directly participated in the Whig campaign by giving speeches, sitting on committees and helping to manage the state campaign.

Despite his front-end efforts, Greeley felt he could influence more people by writing than by being directly involved in politics, though he did serve in the U.S. House 1848-49. In April 1841, Greeley decided to play up his strengths and launch his mouth-piece, the New York Tribune. To reach as many people as possible, he devoted the paper's space to a variety of topics, including politics, social reform, literary and intellectual endeavors and news.



George Jones
 1811-1891
 Founder of The New York Times (1851)

"Go West Young Man, Go West!"

~ Horace Greeley



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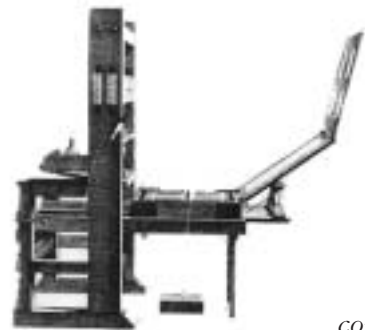
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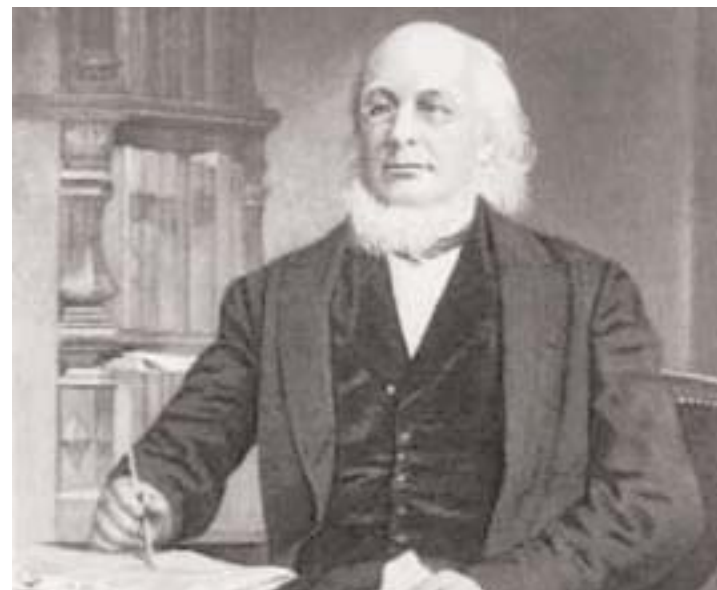
Greeley used the paper to inspire others to his pet causes. He wrote many editorials supporting the homestead principle of distributing free government land to settlers, attacking the exploitation of wage labor, denouncing monopolies and opposing capital punishment. He didn't do it single-handedly. Greeley knew he needed a strong support staff to create an excellent product, so he



sought out the most versatile writers and thinkers he could find for his penny newspaper. Greeley made the Tribune an enormous success, and used it to extend his readership. Throughout the 1840's and 1850s, and by the eve of the Civil War, the Tribune had a total circulation of more than 250,000. This number, however, vastly understated the papers influence, as each copy had many readers. The weekly Tribune was the preeminent journal in

the rural North, in the West, and in fact, throughout the country!

Greeley was known as "Uncle Horace" and was regarded as the finest editor in the history of the United States. Never wavering, he was a vehement abolitionist. His views on slavery and his invariable idealism, equality of race and gender, never faltered. He was a visionary far ahead of his time.



Twenty years later, realizing it was time to cease the string of lackluster presidents, Greeley reached out to a westerner unknown in the northeast and helped secure his nomination, then his election as sixteenth President of the United States. Like Greeley, he came out of nowhere—from lowly parents, uneducated, unafraid of hard work, and fully aware of his responsibility to society-at-large.

This man, Abraham Lincoln, was apparently the only president to be saddened by his victory. He refused to give an acceptance speech to the clamoring masses, feeling inadequate for the job of leading a divided nation on the verge of civil war.

Horace Greeley, using his newspaper continued to guide Lincoln through the rough shoals that faced him in 1861. ON TO RICHMOND read the headlines of the New York Tribune day after day until the Union army became organized. It was likely Virginia's military alone could have taken Washington, D.C. in the very early stages of the War. "Conscript," Greeley shouted for Lincoln to strengthen the Blue before the Grays invaded. PROCLAIM EMANCIPATION said Uncle Horace to the Union President, who had planned to buy freedom for the slaves over a 35-year period. Lincoln listened.

In the 1870's, when Horace was running for President against Grant, his good friends the Ward brothers of Finel Hollow in East Poultney were so confident he would become the President, they began to restore the Ward homestead for the purpose of becoming the summer White House.



The Horace Greeley Legacy lives on today through the limitless energy of the Horace Greeley Foundation, which offers: A Writer's Guild, Scholarship Program, and Writer's Symposium. The Horace Greeley House located at 95 on the Green in East Poultney was the home of the Northern Spectator, the weekly newspaper in which Greeley served his apprenticeship from 1826 to 1830. The house was built in 1823 and is currently occupied by the Foundation's Co-Founder, Linda Nye Barbaro, who also operates The Picket Fence Antiques Shoppe on the premises. While apprenticing here, Horace had a good friend, George Jones, who later became the founder of the New York Times.



The Poultney Historical Society has restored the 1791 Union Academy School along with the Melodian Factory, and the 1896 East Poultney School House, which are now museums open to the public during the summer months. Take a walk back in time visiting the Green in East Poultney. You will see breath-taking views of the Gorge, 200 year old Baptist Church, the Horace Greeley house and many other historical homes.

*Text edited by Dr. William Bloom and Linda Nye Barbaro.
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