

# Introduction

Editor and political leader Horace Greeley was born in Amherst, New Hampshire, on February 3, 1811. His formal education was cut short at age fourteen, when he was apprenticed to Amos Bliss, the editor of the *Northern Spectator* in East Poultney, Vermont. After the paper's demise in 1830, Greeley traveled in 1831 to New York City. In 1833 he formed a job printing partnership with Francis Story, who was succeeded by Jonas Winchester after the former's death. The shop printed *Sylvester's Bank Note and Exchange Manual* and the *Constitutionalist*. Greeley contributed articles to these journals and to other New York papers, including the *Daily Whig*, and found his metier as a political writer. In March 1834, Greeley established the *New Yorker*, a nonpartisan news and literary weekly consisting mainly of articles reprinted from other papers and magazines but also containing original writing by Greeley, Rufus W. Griswold, Park Benjamin, and others.

Greeley's connections, through his work for the *Daily Whig*, with Whig leaders such as Thurlow Weed and William H. Seward, brought him the editorship, in 1838, of the Whig campaign weekly, the *Jeffersonian*. The publication lasted only one year but attained a circulation of 15,000 and exercised real political influence. More important to Greeley than his editor's salary were the many political friendships he formed. In 1840 he became editor of another campaign weekly, the *Log Cabin*. In his position, Greeley grew to prominence among New York Whigs, making speeches, sitting on committees, and helping to manage the state campaign. Although the *Log Cabin* briefly ceased publication after the 1840 election, it was revived on December 5, 1840, as a general political weekly.

The defining moment in Greeley's career came in April 1841, when, seeing the need for a Whig daily in New York City that could avoid both the sensationalism of James Gordon Bennett's *Herald* and the stiff correctness of William Cullen Bryant's *Evening Post*, he founded the New

York *Tribune*, which absorbed the *New Yorker* and the *Log Cabin* in September 1841. His paper set new standards for American journalism: energetic news-gathering, good taste, and moral and intellectual vigor. No police reports, dubious medical advertisements, or news of scandals appeared in the paper, which instead featured editorials, political news, book reviews and extracts, and transcripts of lectures.

Throughout, the paper was stamped by Greeley's combination of Whig tenets and social radicalism. A staunch egalitarian, Greeley feared monopolies, landlordism, and class dominance, and agitated for social reforms in New York City, thereby endorsing workers' cooperatives, labor unions, and the ten-hour day. He advocated utopian socialism and sponsored the founding of several phalanxes in the American West, becoming famous for the phrase, "Go West, young man, and grow up with the country." He supported a high protective tariff, the abolition of slavery, and the Homestead Act. For advancing these causes and others, the *Tribune* provided a bully pulpit and achieved its status as a "political Bible" for much of the nation. (The combined circulation of its daily, weekly, and semiweekly editions was 287,750 throughout the North and West on the eve of the Civil War).

The *Tribune's* intellectual vigor attracted a number of able writers, including Margaret Fuller, who worked as a critic for the *Tribune* from 1844 to 1846 and whose letters from Europe were published on its front page in 1846; Charles A. Dana, who left Brook Farm in 1847 to write for the *Tribune* and who worked under Greeley as managing editor from 1849 to 1862; Bayard Taylor, who began by contributing letters to the *Tribune* in 1844 and later became manager of its literary section; and George Ripley, the Fourierist, who established the first daily book reviews in the United States in the pages of the *Tribune* in 1849 and continued them until his death in 1880.

In the 1850s, as tension mounted between North and South, Greeley's moderate antislavery views intensified, and the *Tribune* concentrated its political energies on the

Free Soil movement. Greeley opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and advocated resistance to the fugitive slave law included in the Compromise of 1850. When the Whig Party failed to oppose the extension of slavery energetically enough, Greeley became one of the first newspaper editors to join the Republican Party.

Greeley did much traveling and writing during the 1850s. After serving in Congress for three months in 1848–49, he sailed to Europe in 1851 and published an account of his journey in *Glances at Europe* (1851). In 1859 he traveled to the Pacific Coast, writing newspaper letters and an account—*An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (1860)—of the trip. He also published a series of his lectures as *Hints toward Reforms* (1850) and edited a compilation of official documents entitled *History of the Struggle for Slavery Extension or Restriction in the United States* (1856).

During the Civil War and Reconstruction, however, Greeley's political influence began to wane. Initially, he opposed all concessions to slavery, preferred the dissolution of the Union to any complicity in slavery extension, and saw the eradication of slavery as the goal of the war. He allied himself with radical abolitionists in opposing President Abraham Lincoln's conciliation of the border states and insisting on immediate emancipation, attacking Lincoln regularly in the *Tribune*. In 1864 he delayed his support of Lincoln's reelection, a hesitation that injured his popular reputation.

Greeley's peace activities during 1864 and 1865 further eroded public opinion of his judgment and firmness. Sent by President Lincoln to meet with Jefferson Davis's representatives at Niagara Falls, Greeley found them lacking the powers to effect a peace settlement. Rather than support Lincoln's ending negotiations with an ultimatum that he would consider only a proposition that would bring about peace, preservation of the union, and the abolition of slavery, Greeley begged him to leave the door to peace open, asking for an armistice of one year and an end to the blockade of the South.

Greeley's conciliatory attitude toward the South during Reconstruction similarly undermined his reputation. He favored general amnesty and an end to sectional hostilities. When he signed the bail bond to release Davis from prison, objections erupted nationwide and the *Tribune* lost half its weekly circulation. Although initially supportive of Ulysses S. Grant's presidency, Greeley found his administration illiberal toward the South, corrupt, indifferent to civil service reform, and unfair in apportioning federal patronage. Thus, when talk began by other disaffected Republicans in 1871 of establishing a Liberal Republican Party to form a coalition with the Democrats, Greeley's political ambitions rose. He was nominated for the presidency by the Liberal Republicans and, more reluctantly, by the Democrats as well. After a particularly vituperative campaign, involving attacks on Greeley's judgment and intelligence, he lost the election to Grant, who benefited from a superior party organization, support of powerful financial interests, public doubts about Greeley's weak judgment, and his inability to reconcile the Democrats.

After this demoralizing defeat, Greeley nursed his wife through her final illness (she died on October 30, 1872) and then returned to the *Tribune* to find that Whitelaw Reid had supplanted him as editor and had no intention of relinquishing the position. Greeley died insane on November 29, 1872.