

The Penny Press and Horace Greeley

Journalism 1002

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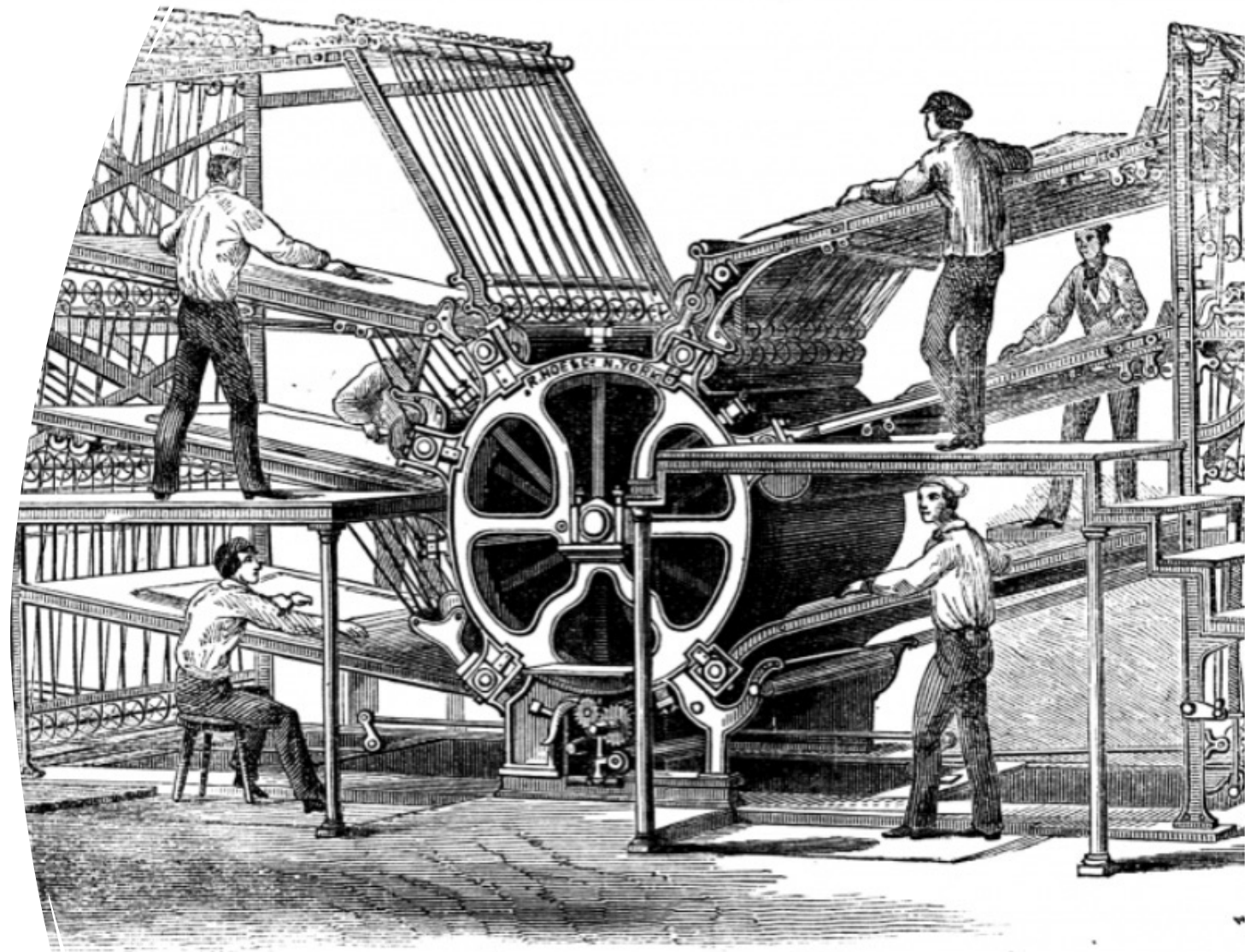
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Printing got faster and cheaper from the 1830s on

- Steam-powered printing presses could print thousands of copies
- Paper cost less than it had
- More people were living in the cities, where it was easy to buy a paper.
- As Daley says (page 60): “Only there [in a city] would the density of the population make it possible to gather, write, and disseminate information **all in one day.**”



HOE'S SIX CYLINDER PRINTING PRESS.

rotary press from the 1860s. The printing plates are located on the large c

This lecture will cover...

- Period from 1830s to 1850s
- *The New York Sun*, pioneer of the “penny press” papers
- *The New York Herald*, which competed with the *Sun*.
- The weird stories those two published to entice readers!
- Horace Greeley, who had loftier goals who hired...
- Margaret Fuller, brilliant magazine editor and writer

The New York Sun

- The pioneer of the “penny press papers.” 1833-1850
- Publisher was Benjamin Day.
- Published many crime stories to entice people to buy it.
- Enticed businesses to buy ads.
- “New Yorkers snapped up copies of the Sun, with its breezy local news about ordinary people.” (Daly, p. 63.)



Richard Adams
Locke's fake
moon story ran
in 1835 in The
New York Sun



Benjamin Day and the New York Sun

- “The brash publication served up fires, murders, and other scandals for a working class and immigrant readership. And the paper really hit the big time, and quickly became the most widely read newspaper in the world (circulation: 19,360!)” when the moon-bat story came out in 1835.
- —Matthew Willis, Jstor Daily.
- <https://daily.jstor.org/how-the-sun-conned-the-world-with-the-moon-hoax/>

James Gordon Bennett and The New York Herald

- Competed with The New York Sun
- Influential publisher: began exploring ways to appeal to a large audience.
- Bennett told readers the paper “shall support no party ... and care nothing for any election or candidate from president on down to constable. We shall endeavor to report facts, on very public and proper subject, stripped of verbiage and coloring”
- (See Daly, page 65)
- From 1835-until his death in 1872



Competition and speed motivated Bennett to publish some strange copy

- Bennett (and others): extensive stories of a prostitute's murder, 1836.
- Stories of other grisly murders
- Personals column
- Editors of other papers tried to discredit Bennett and Day in the "moral war" of 1840. It failed.

Horace Greeley, New York Tribune, 1840s

- Greeley was New England born, came to New York, became a printer
- Published two party papers
- Tribune debuted 1841... also cost 1 penny
- It supported Whig party and high tariffs
- Called New York with its high unemployed population “the metropolis of beggary”
- He admired those who worked, “producers,” and scorned investors, speculators, and the lazy.
- Hired brilliant Boston writer Margaret Fuller to write a column.

Be sure to read the Smithsonian piece on Horace Greeley

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-horace-greeley-invented-persona-crusading-journalist-180974348/

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How Horace Greeley Turned Newspapers Legitimate and Saved the Media From Itself

The 19th-century publisher made reform-minded, opinion-driven journalism commercially viable



PHOTO OF THE DAY

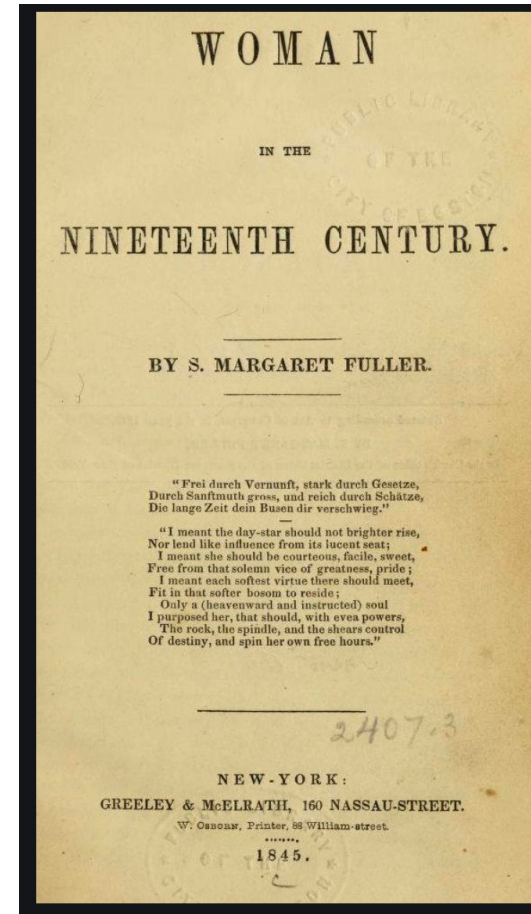


The Hand of the Sun

[PHOTO OF THE DAY»](#)

MOST POPULAR

Margaret Fuller



Margaret Fuller

- She was an established journalist and editor before Horace Greeley hired her
- Our two textbooks barely mention her. Many accounts of her go on too long about the way she died, in a shipwreck
- She was a vital link in the intellectual dialogue of the late 1830s and early 1840s
- Founding editor of *The Dial*, a groundbreaking magazine

Perhaps the greatest disservice of the *Memoirs* comes during its representation of the New York period of her life, when, as this paper argues, she was at the peak of her professional career as a writer. Although in a letter to Charles King Newcomb shortly before she left for New York she said that she dreaded going, a month later, settled in, she writes to Elizabeth Peabody, “I like my position very well; think I can fill it, and learn a great deal in it.”⁸ New York was a good move; there she broke new ground for women by holding her own in the fiercely competitive, male-dominated journalism world. Yet Emerson, Channing, and Clarke do not present her insightful analyses and cultural comments written for the *Tribune*, but passages describing the scenery where she lived and her domestic arrangements with the Greeleys, her relationships with both Mr. and Mrs. Greeley, and her attachment to their baby boy, Pickie. Similarly, in a section ostensibly on Fuller’s criticism, the editors do not feature materials written for the *Dial* or the *Tribune*, but informal comments Fuller made in personal letters to friends. Greeley’s assessment of Fuller’s writing—“I think most of her contributions to the *Tribune*, while she remained with us, were characterized by a directness, terseness, and practicality” (2:157)—gets buried under a mass of minor secondary selections and editorial glosses to the contrary.

Legacy of the “Penny Press,” the cheap newspapers of 1830-1850

- They focused on sensational reporting to sell papers each day
- Deadline journalism became the practice: get that news out to the people fast
- Publishers and editors like Benjamin Day used the paper as a creative joke (the person-bats of the moon hoax, for example) – this kind of ploy would come and go for years
- News for the masses