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George Jones and the News That's Fit to Print

By Thomas L. Benson

In Poultney, Vermont, on the campus of Green Mountain College, stands the Two Editors Inn. This guest house is named for two young men who met in Poultney and went on to become leading newspaper publishers. The first was Horace Greeley, who later founded *The New York Tribune*.[1] The second is not so well known, even though his newspaper still thrives. He was George Jones, founder of *The New York Times*.

George Jones was born in Poultney in 1811. He lived briefly in Ohio, but after his parents died, he moved back to Poultney to live with his brother. He and Greeley met as teenagers, when they both worked for the local newspaper, *The Northern Spectator*.

In 1833, Jones moved to Troy, New York. He worked, first, in the dry goods business, and then in banking and finance. He moved to New York City in 1841, when Greeley invited him to help start a new newspaper, *The New*
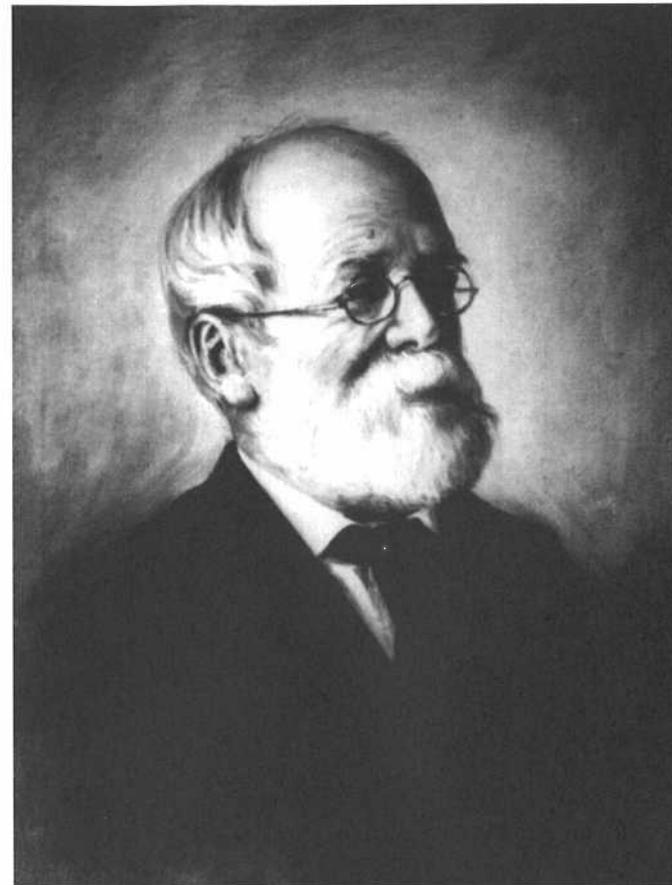
[1] Greeley also ran for President against President Ulysses S. Grant in 1872.

York Tribune. The *Tribune* was to be an anti-slavery, pro-reform paper. It soon became one of the country's most highly respected publications. Jones worked in the paper's business office, where he met and became friends with Henry J. Raymond. Raymond was a graduate of the University of Vermont. He was seen to be a rising star in both the newspaper world and New York State politics.

Two years later, Raymond had left the *Tribune.* Jones then decided to move to Albany, where he had a very successful career in banking. In 1849, when Raymond was elected to the New York State Assembly, the two men became reacquainted. Raymond, too, dreamed of founding his own newspaper.

One winter day in 1850, during a walk across the frozen Hudson River, Jones commented that Greeley seemed to be doing well with the *Tribune.* The paper was highly thought of and was making money. The two men agreed that they would follow his example.

They pooled their own money and borrowed some more. A year later, they formed Raymond, Jones, and Company. Their newspaper would be called the *New York Daily Times.* Raymond was to be Editor-in-Chief. Jones would run the business side. The *Times'* goal was to be "the best and cheapest daily newspaper in the United States." Unlike the liberal, reformist *Tribune,* and the more sensational

George Jones

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New York Herald, the *Times* would try to be even-handed in its reporting. It would limit itself to printing news the whole family could read.

The first issue of the *Times* was published on September 18, 1851. Its front page articles covered political developments in Austria,

New-York Daily Times.

VOL. I.....NO. 1. NEW-YORK, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1851. PRICE ONE CENT.

The front page, above the fold, *of the first issue of the* New-York Daily Times, *September 18, 1851. The page contained no pictures, and more than two dozen items of news.*

A Thomas Nast cartoon of Boss Tweed. Nast and others joined the Times *in a crusade against corruption and influence.*

Harper's Weekly, November 25, 1871.

French elections, ship arrivals, death notices. In its early years, the *Times* was known to be one of the nation's most independent and well crafted papers. As it became increasingly profitable, it moved to larger offices.

Raymond died suddenly, in 1869. Jones then took over the editorial side of the paper. In his role as both publisher and editor, Jones set new standards for courage and honesty in news coverage. He believed that the public had a right to the truth about what was happening and that it was the duty of the paper to report it. He insisted that the business side of the newspaper be completely separate from the editorial side. He felt that the need to attract readers and advertisers must not limit the paper's freedom to report the news honestly and without bias.

The most famous of Jones' crusades against corruption was his battle against William Marcy ("Boss") Tweed. Tweed and his followers had turned Tammany Hall, in New York City, into a wealthy, corrupt, and politically powerful organization.

While other newspapers largely ignored Tweed, Jones and a few others, including political cartoonist Thomas Nast, wanted to expose Tweed's vast corruption. Tweed, in return, tried to undermine the *Times*' circulation and advertising income. At one point, Tweed sent one of his associates to Jones with

an offer of $5 million to back off a story. Jones later wrote "I don't think the devil will ever make a higher bid for me." Tweed's associate told him that with that kind of money he could live like a prince. Jones' reply was: "True sir, all true. But I should know while I lived like a prince that I was a rascal....The *Times* will continue to publish the facts."

Jones remained at the helm of the *Times* until his death in 1891 and always practiced tough-minded journalism. As a result, the *Times* became one of the most respected newspapers in the world. But its outspokenness on the issues had serious consequences. When the *Times* was sold, in 1893, it was in bad financial shape. It was in worse shape three years later, when it was sold again, this time to Adolph Ochs.[2] Ochs, a newspaper publisher from Chattagnooga, Tennessee, was determined to restore the paper to its former prestige and profitability. That he was successful is shown by the worldwide respect in which the paper now called *The New York Times* is held today.

Ochs and his daughter and son-in-law, Iphigene and Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who followed him at the *Times*, recognized George

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[2] Adolph Ochs was the publisher of the *Times* after Jones' death. He created a slogan for the paper, "All the news that's fit to print," that still appears on the front page of every issue. It is a reminder of the paper's purpose and of the vision of its founders.

Jones' vision and work. After the 75th anniversary of the paper's founding, the Sulzbergers came to Vermont and dedicated a memorial stone in front of George Jones' birthplace. One hundred fifty years after its founding, *The New York Times* still publishes "all the news that's fit to print." Its growth and success are the continuing legacy of one of Vermont's most influential, although not best-known, sons.

In honor of The New York Times' *75th anniversary, the paper's publishers placed this stone in front of the house in Poultney where George Jones was born.*