Joseph Medill Biography

Joseph Medill

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Biography

American editor and publisher Joseph Medill (1823-1899), a staunch abolitionist and an early advocate of the Republican party, was influential in Abraham Lincoln's presidential drive.

Joseph Medill was born near the village of St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, on April 6, 1823. His father, who had emigrated from Ireland, moved the family to Ohio in 1832. Except for brief schooling, young Medill educated himself. He studied law with attorneys and was admitted to the bar in 1846. But law practice was uncertain, so he turned to journalism, purchasing the *Coshocton Whig* in 1849 and renaming it the *Republican*. In 1851 he established the *Daily Forest City in Cleveland,* which he consolidated the following year with the *Free Democrat;* he called the new paper the *Cleveland Leader*. In 1852 Medill married Katherine Patrick.

Medill did not found the *Chicago Tribune*. He bought an interest in it in 1855, the year he became managing editor, and he bought controlling interest in 1874. Many people were involved in establishing the *Tribune,* but Medill gave the paper its impetus and direction.

Most authorities credit Medill with popularizing the name "Republican" for the rising new political party. He tried to get Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation many months before Lincoln thought reasonable. He personally reported many of Lincoln's speeches, and Lincoln often visited the *Tribune* offices before he became president. Medill was opposed to a compromise of any type with the South and joined the Radical Republicans after the Civil War.

The Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed the *Tribune* building, but the *Tribune* was back on the streets in 2 days. The first, revitalized issue carried Medill's famous editorial "Cheer Up." He ran for mayor as a Republican on the "Fireproof Ticket" and was elected.

One of the *Tribune*'s greatest achievements was the publication in May 1881 of a 16-page special supplement that gave the complete, newly revised version of the New Testament. Medill also promoted his city, and largely through his efforts Chicago became the site of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. He was strongly nationalistic; after the sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in 1898, he beat the drums for the Spanish-American War.

Medill died on March 16, 1899, in his winter home at San Antonio, Tex. He had brought the *Tribune* from a circulation of 1,200 to 200,000. His paper cited an appropriate epitaph: "His monument is *The Chicago Tribune.*"