

The Story of The Sun 1833 to 1918

Dana America's First Managing Editor When on "The Tribune"—Isaac W. England First One on "The Sun"—Amos Jay Cummings's Career in Journalism

This is the twelfth of a series of articles narrating the history of THE SUN, and giving a vital, intimate view of metropolitan life and journalism during more than eighty eventful years. The first article told of the founding of the paper by Benjamin H. Day in September, 1833, and its rapid rise to success. Succeeding articles told of the paper's continued prosperity and of changes in ownership, including its purchase by Charles A. Dana, and then sketched Mr. Dana's career and began to describe his journalistic methods.

By FRANK M. O'BRIEN.

Managing editors did not come into favor in American newspaper offices until the second half of the last century. As late as 1872 Frederic Hudson, in his "History of Journalism in the United States," grumbled at the intrusion of a new functionary upon the field:

"If a journal has an editor and editor in chief, it is fair to assume that he is also its managing editor. That historian had not been reconciled to the fact that between the editor of a newspaper—the director of its policies and opinions and general style and tone—and the sub-editors to whose various desks comes the flood of news there must be some one who will act as a link, lightening the labors of the editor and shouldering the responsibilities of the desk men. He may never write an editorial article; may never turn out a sheet of news copy or put a head on an item; may never make up a page or arrange an assignment list—but he must know how to do every one of these things and a great deal more.

A managing editor is really the newspaper's manager of its employees in the news field. He is an editor to the extent that he edits men. He may appear to spend most of his time and judgment on the acceptance or rejection of news matter, the giving of decisions as to the length or character of an article, its position in the paper, and, more broadly, the general makeup of the next day's product; but a man might be able to perform all these professional functions wisely and yet be impossible as a managing editor through his inability to handle newspaper men.

The Tribune was the first New York paper to have a managing editor. He was Dana. Serene, tactful, and a man of the world, he was able by judicious handling to keep for the Tribune the services of men like Warren and Pike, who might have been repelled by the sometimes irritable Greeley. The title came from the London Times, where it had been used for years, perhaps borrowed from the director general of the French newspapers.

The Sun's First Managing Editor.
The Sun had no managing editor until Dana bought it. Beach having preferred to direct personally all matters above the ken of the city editor, the Sun's first managing editor was Isaac W. England, whom Dana had known and liked when both were on the Tribune. England was of Welsh blood and English birth, having been born in Twerton, a suburb of Bath, in 1822. He worked at the bookbinding trade until he was 17, and then came to the United States and made his living at bookbinding and printing. He used to tell his Sun associates of his triumphal return to England, when he was 29, for a short visit, which he spent in the shop of his apprenticeship, showing his old masters how much better the Yankees were at embossing and lettering.

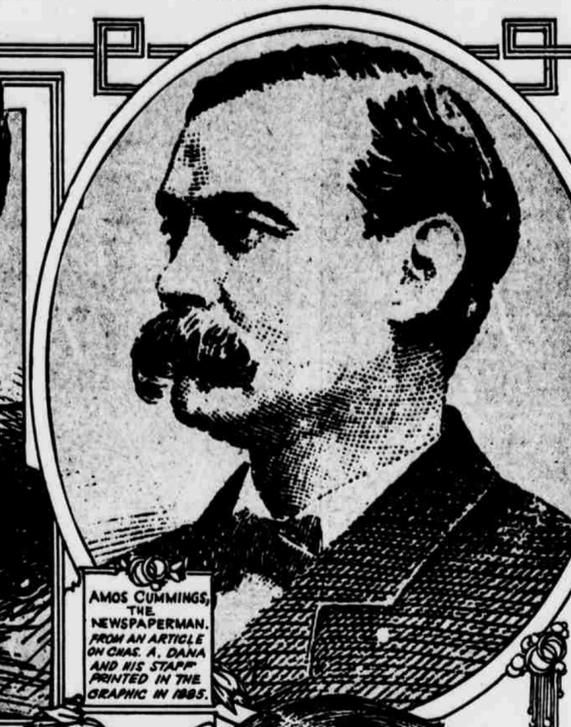
England returned to America in the steamer and saw the brutal treatment of immigrants. This he described in several articles and sold them to the Tribune. Greeley gave him a job pulling a hand press at \$10 a week, but later made him a reporter. He was city editor of the Tribune until after the civil war, and then went with his friend Dana to Chicago for the short and profitless experience with the Chicago Republican. In the period between Dana's retirement from the Republic and his purchase of The Sun, England was manager of the Jersey City Times.

Cummings and His Pictorial Career.
England was managing editor of The Sun only a year, then becoming its publisher—a position for which he was well fitted. An example of his business ability was given in 1877, when Frank Leslie went into bankruptcy. England was made assignee, and he handled the affairs of the Leslie concern so well that its debts were paid off in three years. This was only a side job for England, who continued all the time to manage the business matters of The Sun. When he died, in 1885, Dana wrote that he had "lost the friend of almost a lifetime, a man of unconquerable integrity, true and faithful in all things."

The second managing editor of The Sun was that great newspaper man Amos Jay Cummings. He was born



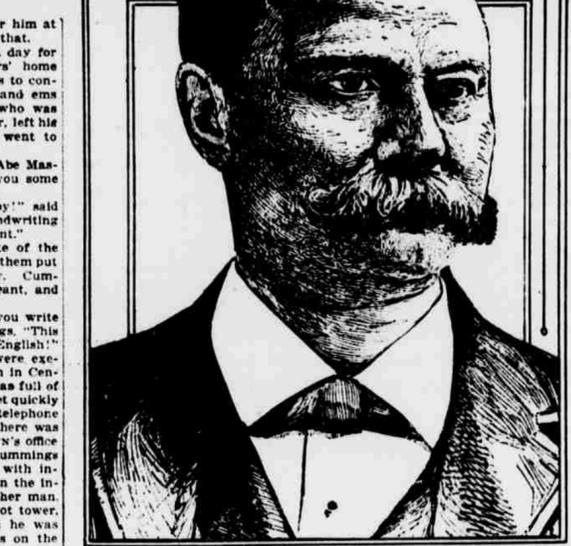
"JIM" FISKE, WHO HAD TO HAVE HIS "SUN" EVERY MORNING BEFORE BREAKFAST, IN THE UNIFORM OF A COLONEL IN THE NATIONAL GUARD.



AMOS CUMMINGS, THE NEWSPAPERMAN, FROM AN ARTICLE ON CHAS. A. DANA AND HIS STAFF PRINTED IN THE GRAPHIC IN 1885.



THE HON. WILLIAM M. (BOSS) TWEED WHILE IN THE HEYDAY OF HIS POWER.



AMOS CUMMINGS, THE CONGRESSMAN, FROM A PROGRAM OF THE UNVEILING OF THE UNION PRINTERS' MONUMENT AT MT. HOPE CEMETERY, MAY 30, 1898, AT WHICH HE WAS THE SPOKESMAN. LEON H. ROUSE, PRESIDENT OF TOPOGRAFICAL UNION NO. 6, HAS THE PROGRAM IN HIS PRIVATE SCRAPBOOK.

to newspaper work if any man ever was. His father, who was a Congressional minister—a fact which could not be surmised by listening to Amos in one of his explosive moods—was the editor of the *Christian Palladium and Messenger*. This staid publication was printed on the first floor of the Cummings home at Irvington, N. J. Entrance to the composing room was forbidden the son, but with tears and tobacco he bribed the printer, one Sylvester Bailey, who set up the Rev. Mr. Cummings's articles, to let him in through a window.

The trade once learned, young Amos left home and wandered from State to State, making a living at the case. In 1845, when he was only 14, he was attracted by the glamour that surrounded William Walker, the famous filibuster, and joined the forces of that daring young adventurer, who then had control of Nicaragua. The boy was one of a strange horde of soldiers of fortune, which included British soldiers who had been at Sebastopol, Italians who had followed Garibaldi, and Hungarians in whom Kosuth had aroused the martial flame.

Like many of the others in Walker's army Cummings believed that the Tennessee was a second Napoleon, with Central America, perhaps South America, for his empire. But when this Napoleon came to his Elba, by his surrender to Commander Davis of the United States Navy in the spring of 1857 Cummings decided that there was no marshal's baton in his own ragged knapsack and went back to be a wandering printer.

Cummings was setting type in the Tribune office when the civil war began. He hurried out and enlisted as a private in the Twenty-sixth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry. He fought at Antietam, Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg. At Marye's Hill, in the battle of Fredericksburg, his regiment was supporting a battery against a Confederate charge. Their lines were broken and they fell back from the guns. Cummings took the regimental flag from the hands of the color sergeant and ran alone, under the enemy's fire, back to the guns. The Jerseymen rallied, the guns were recovered and Cummings got the Medal of Honor from Congress. He left the service as sergeant-major of the regiment and presently appeared in Greeley's office, a seedy figure enfolded in an army overcoat.

Cummings and the "Tribune" Office.
"Mr. Greeley," said Amos, "I've just got to have work."
"Oh, indeed?" croaked Horace. "And why have you got to have work?"
Cummings said nothing, but turned his back on the great editor, lifted his coatails and showed the sad if not shocking state of his breeches. He got up. In 1865, when the Tribune office was threatened by the rioters, most helped to barricade the composing room and saved it from the mob. Cummings served as editor of the *Weekly Tribune* and as a political writer for the daily. This is the way he came to quit the Tribune.

John Russell Young, the third managing editor of the Tribune, got the habit of issuing numbered orders. Two of these orders reached Cummings's desk, as follows:

Order No. 756—There is too much profanity in this office.

Order No. 757—Hereafter the political reporter must have his copy in at 10:30 P. M.

Cummings turned to his desk and wrote:

Order No. 1234567—Everybody knows well that I get most of the political news out of the Albany Journal, and everybody knows that I get well to sit on a window sill and dance on the roof at 11 o'clock at night, and anybody who knows anything knows well that asking me to get my stuff up at half past 10 is like asking a man to sit on a window sill and dance on the roof at the same time. CUMMINGS.

The result of this multiplicity of numbered orders was that shortly afterward Cummings presented himself to the editor of The Sun.

"Why are you leaving the Tribune?" asked Mr. Dana.

"They say," replied Amos, "that I swear too much."

"Just the man for me!" replied Dana, according to the version which Cummings used to tell.

At any rate, Amos went on The Sun as managing editor, and he continued to swear. The compositors now in

The Sun office who remember him at all remember him largely for that. The union once set apart a day for contributions to the printers' home fund and each compositor was to contribute the fruits of a thousand ems of composition. Cummings, who was proud of being a union printer, left his managing editor's desk and went to the composing room.

"Ah, Mr. Cummings," said Abe Masters, the foreman, "I'll give you some of your own copy to set."

"To hell with my own copy!" said Cummings, who knew his handwriting faults. "Give me some reprint."

Green reporters got a taste of the Cummings profanity. One of them put a French phrase in a story. Cummings asked him what it meant, and the youth told him.

"Then why the hell didn't you write it that way?" yelled Cummings. "This paper is for people who read English!"

In those days murderers were executed in the old Tombs prison in Centre street. Cummings, who was full of enterprise, sought a way to get quickly the fall of the drop. The telephone had not been perfected, but there was a shot tower north of The Sun's office and east of the Tombs. Cummings sent one man to the Tombs with instructions to wave a flag upon the instant of the execution. Another man stationed at the top of the shot tower, had another flag with which he was to make a sign to Cummings on the roof of The Sun building as soon as he saw the flag move at the prison.

The reporter at the Tombs arranged with a keeper to notify him just before the execution, but the keeper sent on an errand and presently Cummings, standing nervously on the roof of The Sun building, heard the news-boys crying the extras of a rival sheet.

The plan had fallen through. No blanks could adequately represent the Cummings temper upon the occasion.

Cummings was probably the best all round news man of his day. He had the executive ability and the knowledge of men that make a good managing editor. He knew what Dana knew—that the newspaper had to get to the news as fast as possible, and he knew how to do it, how to coach men to do it, how to cram the moving picture of a living city into the four pages of The Sun. He advised desk men, compilers of corrected copy, editors of local articles, and when a story appealed to him strongly he went out and got it and wrote it himself.

Cummings a Great Reporter.
In such brief biographies of Cummings it is hard to say what he has done that has been printed you will find that he is best remembered as an outer world as a managing editor, or as the editor of THE EVENING SUN, or as a Representative in Congress fighting for the rights of civil war veterans, printers' unions and letter carriers; but among the oldest generation of newspaper men he is revered as a great reporter. He was the first real human interest reporter. He knew the news value of the steer loose in the streets, the lost child in the police station, the Italian murder that was a case of vendetta. The Sun men of his time followed his lead, and a few of them, like Julian Ralph, outdid him, but he was the pioneer; and a thousand Sun men since then have kept, or tried to keep, on the Cummings trail.

It was Cummings who sent men to cover the police stations at night, and made it possible for The Sun to beat the news association on the trivial items which were the delight of the reader, and which helped, among other things, to shoot the paper's daily circulation to 100,000 in the third year of the Dana ownership.

The years when Cummings was managing editor of The Sun were years stuffed with news. Even a newspaper man without imagination would have found plenty of happenings at hand. The Franco-Prussian war, the gold conspiracy that ended in Black Friday (September 24, 1869), the Orange riot (July 12, 1871), the great Chicago fire, the killing of Fisk by Stokes, Tweedism—what more could a newspaper wish in so brief a period? And, of course, always there were murders. There were so many mysterious murders in The Sun that a suspicious person might have harbored the thought that Cummings went out after his day's work was done and committed them for sport's sake.

When men and women stopped killing Cummings would turn to politics. Tweed was the great man then; under suspicion even before 1870, but a great man, particularly among his own. The Sun printed pages about Tweed and his satellites and the great balls of the American Club, their politico-social organization. It described the jewels worn by the leaders of Tammany Hall, including the \$2,000 club badge—the head of a Uzer with eyes of ruby and three large diamonds shining above them.

Jim Fisk, Boss Tweed and "The Sun."

Everybody who wanted the political news read The Sun. As Jim Fisk remarked one evening as he stood proudly with Jay Gould in the lobby of the Grand Opera House—proud of his notoriety in connection with the Erie Railroad jobbery, proud of the infamy he enjoyed from the fact that he owned two houses in the same block in West Twenty-third street, housing his wife in one and Josie Mansfield in the other; proud of his guilty partnership in Tweedism:

The Sun's a lively paper. I can never stay for daylight for a copy. I have my man down there with a horse every morning, and just as soon as he gets a Sun hot from the press he jumps on the back of that horse and puts for me as if all hell was after him; he has to get it before daylight too. You always get the news ahead of everybody else. Why, the first news I got that Gould and me were blackballed in the Blossom Club we got from The Sun. I'm damned if I'd believe it at first, and Gould says, "Where is this Blossom Club?" Just then Sweeney came in, and he says, "It was true, and Sweeney said, you and Tweed was the man that done it all. There it was in The Sun, straight as a die."

The Sun reporter who chronicled this—it may have been Cummings himself—had gone to ask Fisk whether he and his friends had hired a thug to blackjack the respectable Mr. Dorman B. Eaton, a foe of the Erie outfit; but he took down and printed Fisk's tribute to The Sun's enterprise. As there was scarcely a morning in those years when The Sun did not turn up some new trick played by the Tweed gang and the Erie group their anxiety to get an early copy was natural.

Tweed and his philanthropic pretences did not deceive The Sun. On February 24, 1870—a year and a half before the exposure which sent Fisk to prison—The Sun printed an editorial article announcing that Tweed was willing to surrender his ownership of the city upon the following terms:

Police Commissioner Smith and a dozen other faithful Tammany men were on the list of trustees. They decided upon the space then known as Tweed Plaza, at the junction of East Broadway and New Canal at Rutgers streets, as the site for the monument.

The Sun added to the joke by printing more letters from contributors. One, from Patrick Maloy, "champion eel-hobber," brought 10 cents and the suggestion that the statue should be inscribed with the amount of money that Tweed had made out of the city. This sort of thing went on into the new year. The Sun aggravating the movement with grave editorial advice.

Tweed Declines the Monument.
At last the joke became more than Tweed could bear, and from his desk in the Senate Chamber at Albany, on March 13, 1871, he sent the following letter to Judge Shandley, the chairman of the statue committee:

My dear Sir: I learn that a movement to erect a statue to me in the city of New York is being seriously pushed by a committee of citizens of which you are chairman. I was aware that a newspaper, our city had brought forward the proposition, but I considered it one of the jocosse sensations for which that journal is so famous. Since I left the city to engage in legislative work, I have not been taken up by my friends, no doubt in resentment at the supposed unfriendly motive of the original proposition and the manner in which it had been urged.

The only effect of the proposed statue is to present me to the public as assenting to the parade of a public and permanent testimonial to vanity and self-glorification which do not exist. You will thus perceive that the movement, which originated in a joke but which you have made serious, is doing me an injustice and an injury; and I beg of you to see to it that it is at once stopped.

I hardly know which is the more absurd—the original proposition or the grave comments of others, based upon the idea that I have given the movement countenance. I have been about as much abused as any man in public life; I can stand abuse and bear even more than my share; but I have never yet been charged with being deficient in common sense. Yours very truly,

W. M. TWEED.

This letter appeared in The Sun the next day under the facetious heading: "A Great Man's Modesty—The Most Remarkable Letter Ever Written by the Noble Benefactor of the People." Editorial regret was expressed at Tweed's declination; and, still in solemn mockery, The Sun grieved over the return to the subscribers of the several thousand dollars that had been sent to Shandley's committee. William J. Florence, the comical statue offerer to him by The Sun, had put himself down for \$500.

Was it utterly absurd that the Tweed idolaters should have taken seriously The Sun's little joke? No, for so serious a writer as Gustavus Myers wrote in his "History of Tammany Hall" (1907) that "one of the signers of the circular was assured the author that it was a serious proposal. The attitude of THE SUN confirms this." And another grave literary man, Dr. Henry van Dyke, set this down in his "Essays in Application" (1908):

William M. Tweed of New York, who reigned over the city for seven years, stole six million dollars or more for himself and six million dollars or more for his followers; was indorsed at the height of his corruption by six of the richest citizens of the metropolis; had a public statue offered to him by The New York Sun as a "noble benefactor of the city." &c.

Of course Mr. Myers and Dr. van Dyke had never read the statue articles from beginning to end, else they would not have stumbled over the brick that even Tweed, with all his conceit, was able to perceive.

The Downfall of the Tweed Ring.
In July, 1871, when the New York Times was fortunate enough to have put in its hands the proof of what everybody already suspected—that Senator Tweed, Comptroller Connolly, Park Commissioner Sweeney and their associates were plundering the city—the Sun was busy with its own pet news and political articles, the investigation of the Orange riots and the extravagance and nepotism of President Grant's administration.

The Sun did not like the Times, which had been directed, since the death of Henry J. Raymond in 1863, by Raymond's partner, George Jones, and Raymond's chief editorial writer,

Exposure of the Tweed Ring, the Boss's Charities and Extravagances and the Famous Monument, Joke—The Birth of "The Sunday Sun"

41 West Thirty-sixth street. The Hon. William M. Tweed's horses reside in East 107th Street between Madison and Park avenues.

That was THE SUN's characteristic way of starting a story.

Tweed was in a way responsible for the appearance of a Sun more than four pages in size. Up to December, 1875, there was no front of The Sun on Sundays. In November of that year it was announced that beginning on December 5 there would be a Sunday Sun, to be sold at three cents, one cent more than the weekday price, but nothing was said or thought of an increase in size.

On Saturday, December 4, Tweed, with the connivance of his keepers, escaped from his house in Madison avenue. This made a four column story on which Mr. Dana had not counted. Also the advertisers had taken advantage of the new Sunday issue and there were more than two pages of advertisements. There was nothing for it but to make an eight page paper, for which Dana, who then believed that all the news could be told in a folio, apologized as follows:

We confess ourselves surprised at the extraordinary pressure of advertisements upon our pages this morning. America appointed in being compelled to present The Sun to our readers in a different form from that to which they are accustomed. We trust, however, that they will not be less interested than usual; and, still more, that they will feel that although the appearance may be somewhat different, it is yet the same friendly and faithful Sun.

But the Sunday issue of The Sun never went back to four pages, for the eight page paper had been made so compact with special stories, reprint and short fiction, that both readers and advertisers were pleased. It was ten years, however, before the weekday Sun increased its size. Even during the Becher trial (January, 1875), when The Sun's reporter, Franklin Fyles, found himself unable to condense with special stories, within a page of seven columns, The Sun still gave all the rest of the day's news.

The Great American Condenser.
Cummings's right hand man in the news department of The Sun was Dr. Joseph C. Hendrix, a great American condenser. All the city copy passed through his hands. He was then nearly 50, a white haired man who wore two pairs of glasses with thick lenses, these crowned with a green shade. He had been a printer on several papers and a desk man on the Tribune, but Dana brought him over to The Sun. Wood's sense of the value of words was so acute that he could determine, as rapidly as his eye passed along the pages of a story, just what might be stricken out without loss. It might be a word, a sentence, a paragraph; but it would be 98 per cent of the article.

Even when his sight so failed that he was unable to read copy continuously, Dr. Wood performed the remarkable feat of condensing through a reader. Willis Holly read copy to him for months, six hours a night. Holly might read three pages without interruption, while Wood sat as silent as if he were asleep. Then—"Throw out the introduction down to the middle of the second page, begin with 'John Elliott killed,' and cut it off at 'arrested him.'"

Joseph C. Hendrix, who became a member of Congress and a bank president, was a Sun reporter, one night he was assigned to read copy to Dr. Wood. He picked up a sheet and began:

"The application of Mrs. Jane Smith for divorce from her husband, John Smith—"

"Cut out her husband," said Wood.

"—who alleges cruelty," Hendrix continued. "In that case," Hendrix's reporter's writing was blurred, and Hendrix, who could not decipher it, said "Damn!"

"Cut out the 'damn,'" said Dr. Wood.

In keeping news down to the bone Wood was of remarkable value to The Sun in those years when Dana showed that it was possible to tell everything in four pages. New York was not content to be a city. The Sun got along nicely on its circulation for the newswriters paid 1-1/2 cents for each copy. With the circulation receipts about \$1,400 a day the advertising receipts were clear profit. Amos Cummings had such a fierce disregard for the feelings of advertisers that often, when a good piece of news came in late he would throw out advertising to make room for it.

A Veteran Still in the Service.
Another desk man of great value to Cummings in the first days of the new journalism that Dana was making was Amos B. Stillman, a ninety pounder from Connecticut. He was a newspaper man in his native State until the civil war, and after Appomattoch went back to Connecticut. He was in The Sun in 1870 as telegraph editor and stayed on the same desk for fifty years. Even Charles A. Dana could not dislodge him.

One night Dana discharged the Deacon, as Stillman was called, and the next evening Stillman was at the desk, busily handling the despatches from Albany.

"Didn't you understand what I said last night?" inquired Dana. "I told you you were dismissed, to take effect immediately."

"I heard what you said," replied Deacon Stillman, "but I'm not going. I like it too well here!"

(To be continued in next Sunday's Sun.)

The Hon. William M. Tweed resides at