Stop 10: Greeley’s Farm

Horace Greeley, founder and editor of the New York Tribune, and later a candidate for president of the United States, started to acquire property in Chappaqua for a summer home in 1852. He and his wife, Mary, bought 25 acres to start and later expanded their holdings to about 78 acres, located near the railroad station and including much of what is now the downtown village.

Mary had insisted upon three requisites for the property: “1. A picturesque spring of pure, soft, living water. 2. A cascade or brawling brook. 3. Woods largely composed of evergreens.” The land in Chappaqua already contained the first two, and Greeley supplemented its mixed woods with a grove of evergreens, some of which still survive. The property was also extensive enough for Greeley to pursue his efforts at farming, although most of it was either a boggy lowland or a rocky, eroded hillside.

The Greeleys’ first home was the House in the Woods, a relatively small house located near the “brawling brook” at the southern boundary of the property. In 1864, the Greeleys moved to a bigger house, the present Horace Greeley House on King Street, and before their deaths in 1872 they built the even larger Side Hill House, near what is now the front entrance of the Robert E. Bell Middle School.

Greeley was by necessity a gentleman farmer. Although he lived within walking distance of the Chappaqua railroad station, the total trip to the downtown Tribune office took over two hours, so he couldn’t commute daily. Instead, he would come up on Friday night, spend Saturday here, and return to the city on Sunday to prepare the Monday issue. He nonetheless spent much time, effort, and money (especially money) trying to turn the land into a productive farm.

He made several improvements to the property. The remnants of the stone dam he erected on the brook can still be seen in Greeley Woods. His innovative concrete barn still exists as a residence. But his most ambitious project was also his least successful. He spent an estimated $50,000 (a huge sum in those days) in attempts to drain his marshy lowland and prevent it from periodically flooding. Not until more than a century later was that problem finally solved.

In 1872, Greeley ran unsuccessfully for president against incumbent Ulysses S. Grant. Mary Greeley died a week before the election, after a long illness. Greeley himself collapsed and died a few weeks later. The Greeley property was inherited by their daughters Ida and Gabrielle – the only survivors of their parents seven children. In the fall of 1873, they moved to the Side Hill House which their parents hadn’t lived to occupy. Ida married Nicholas Smith in 1875 and moved away. She and her husband intended to renovate the House in the Woods and make it their own summer home, but during the renovation it burned and was never rebuilt. Ida herself died in 1882.

Meanwhile Gabrielle made Chappaqua her year-round home. She lived in the Side Hill House until 1890, when it, too, burned down. She moved temporarily to a small tenant house, located near present Town Hall. Then, in 1891, she married Episcopal minister Frank Clendenin, and they converted Greeley’s concrete barn into a home they called Rehoboth. It still exists as a residence, on Aldridge Road.

The Clendenins were very generous toward their community. They donated part of their property next to the railroad tracks for a new station, dedicated in 1902. They built the Episcopal Church of St Mary the Virgin in 1906, on four acres along South Greeley Avenue. In 1926, Gabrielle either donated or sold at a low price the 10-acre site for the Horace Greeley School – now the Robert E. Bell Middle School.

Dr. Clendenin died in 1930, and Gabrielle continued to live at Rehoboth until her own death in 1937. The remainder of the Greeley property was sold and subdivided in the mid-1950s. The largest single portion, along Bedford Road, became the site of Temple Beth-El.

Stop 1: The Greeley House

Horace Greeley started buying property in Chappaqua in 1852. He first built the House in the Woods in 1854, and then bought and enlarged this house in 1864. By that time, his farm was established and efforts were being made to drain the lower fields (the bog). During Greeley’s day, what is now Senter St. was the main road through the farm.

This house, purchased and enlarged in 1864, was the second residence of the Greeley family in Chappaqua (the first was the House in the Woods, at the far end of the property). Horace and Mary Greeley lived here until their deaths in 1872, and their heirs continued to own it for several decades thereafter. During much of the 20th century it was a gift shop. In recent years, the New Castle Historical Society has restored it as a museum and headquarters. Engraving: ‘Horace Greeley’s Home at Chappaqua’, published in Harper’s Weekly, 1871.

Walking Directions: Continue walking along the trail and keep looking toward the brook. Please watch your step!

Stop 11: Rehoboth House

Horace Greeley created this stone and cement structure as a barn in 1857. It was one of the first concrete structures of its kind in the United States, and was extremely resistant against fire and winter weather.

After their marriage in 1891, Frank and Gabrielle Clendenin converted the sturdy barn into a comfortable house, piercing the thick walls with further windows and doors. Adding a two bay, ornamenting the gable ends with raised steps, and completely reconstructing the interior. It became a very comfortable house, piercing the thick walls with further windows and doors. Adding a two bay, ornamenting the gable ends with raised steps, and completely reconstructing the interior.

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Stop 9: Lover’s Leap and Glen

Take a moment to take in the beauty of the brook and glen. Remember, Mary Greeley had asked Horace to find a place that contained “a cascade or brawling brook.” Tertia Brook satisfied that requirement handsomely, and it remains the most prominent feature of Greeley Woods.

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Stop 10: Greeley’s Dam

To the right of the path you will notice the remnants of Horace Greeley’s stone dam. The pond created by this dam provided water for irrigation and watering livestock in the summer, and for ice to be harvested in the winter. Photo: View of intact dam, about 1900.
Stop 2: Well-Spring
When the Greeleys moved to the house on King Street, they needed a source of pure drinking water closer than the original spring near the House in the Woods. Greeley enclosed a second spring, not far from the new home, in this concrete cistern to assure a steady supply. His daughter Gabrielle later connected the cistern to the cobblestone basin closer to the road. Both have been recently restored.

Walking Directions: Begin at the Horace Greeley House Museum. Turn left out of the Greeley House parking lot. Continue to walk along Senter St. toward Bell Middle School. About halfway between the Greeley House and Bell Middle School, look to your left for Greeley’s spring. Stop 2: Well-Spring

Stop 3: Oak Tree
Here, Greeley’s farm road split into two directions. One trail went to the barn on present-day Aldridge Road; while the other went to the “House in the Woods.” The latter road used to pass by this oak tree, through what is now the Bell Middle School and the Church of St Mary the Virgin, and then turned uphill.

Walking Directions: From the spring, look toward the middle school. Do you see the large oak tree straight ahead? As you walk toward it, notice the similarities and differences between this historic photo and today.

Stop 4: Side-Hill House
This leveled area was once the site of Greeley’s Side Hill House. Greeley built this home between 1871 and 1872. He and his wife, Mary, never had the opportunity to live in it, for both of them died in 1872. Their daughters, Ida and Gabrielle, moved into it in the fall of 1873, and it became Gabrielle’s year-round home after Ida’s marriage in 1875. The house burned in 1890, and Gabrielle moved temporarily to a small tenant house on the property. She married shortly thereafter, and instead of attempting to rebuild the Side Hill House, she and her husband, the Rev. Dr. Frank Clendenin, decided to renovate Greeley’s concrete barn as their home.

Walking Directions: While you are standing by the oak tree, look into the woods to the left. Do you see how the ground is leveled about halfway up the hill?

Stop 5: The Bog
The beautiful open playing fields that you are viewing today were once a major part of Greeley’s farm. Greeley spent an estimated $50,000 installing an elaborate system of subsurface drains to dry out the area, but it never succeeded in preventing periodic flooding. Photo: Looking north across Greeley’s “bog” toward downtown Chappaqua, about 1900.

Walking Directions: From the oak tree, begin walking in front of the middle school and toward the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. As you are walking, take a moment to turn and look at the playing fields below. These fields were called the swamp or bog during Greeley’s day.

Stop 6: Church of St. Mary the Virgin
This church was built in 1906 by Gabrielle Greeley Clendenin and her husband Rev. Frank Clendenin, in memory of their daughter Muriel. You may also wish to visit the small family burial ground in the rear of the church.

Gabrielle and Frank Clendenin were very active and generous members of the community. They donated the land for the present railroad station and its adjacent park, and they built the Church of St. Mary the Virgin on another part of the farm. Gabrielle either gave, or sold at a low price, the site of the Horace Greeley School, now the Robert E. Bell Middle School. Furthermore, much of downtown Chappaqua is located on land that was once part of the Greeley farm, including Town Hall, the Chappaqua Library, the community ballfield, the railroad station parking lot, the Community Center, and the business section along South Greeley Avenue.

Walking Directions: While you are facing the front of the church, look for the grove of pine and hemlock trees to your right. Walk toward these trees to find the walking path.

Stop 7: Greeley’s Grove
Here you will see a lane between the pine and hemlock trees, heading back toward the wooded hillside. These evergreen trees were planted as a windbreak for Greeley’s greenhouse, which was located to the right, on the property of the present library. “Greeley Grove” is famous for the political rally that Greeley held here during the campaign of 1872, when he ran for president for both the Liberal Republican and Democratic parties. Photos: (Left) Horace Greeley’s Picnic in the Grove, held to rally support for his presidential campaign. (Right) Inside the Greeley Grove, 1922.

Walking Directions: Continue along the path through the pine and hemlock trees and toward the mixed woods. This was the road to Greeley’s House in the Woods. Continue walking until you see the leveled clearing on the left.

Stop 8: The House in the Woods
The Greeley Family lived their summers here from when it was built in 1854 until 1864. Why did they move? Mrs. Greeley found the house isolated, dark, dank, and possibly dangerous. The New York City Draft Riots of 1863, during which the Tribune office was invaded and nearly burned, may have impressed upon the Greeleys that the House in the Woods was isolated and vulnerable. In any event, the following year, they moved to the house on the main street of the village. Greeley himself, however, always preferred this house, and kept it as his library and study. It burned in 1876 and was never rebuilt.

Walking Directions: Continue walking along the sidewalk toward the church.