

= George Ripley ( transcendentalist ) =

George Ripley ( October 3 , 1802 ? July 4 , 1880 ) was an American social reformer , Unitarian minister , and journalist associated with Transcendentalism . He was the founder of the short @-@ lived Utopian community Brook Farm in West Roxbury , Massachusetts .

Born in Greenfield , Massachusetts , George Ripley was pushed to attend Harvard College by his father and completed his studies in 1823 . He went on graduate from the Harvard Divinity School and the next year married Sophia Dana . Shortly after , he became ordained as the minister of the Purchase Street Church in Boston , Massachusetts , where he began to question traditional Unitarian beliefs . He became one of the founding members of the Transcendental Club and hosted its first official meeting in his home . Shortly after , he resigned from the church to put Transcendental beliefs in practice by founding an experimental commune called Brook Farm . The community later converted to a model based on the work of Charles Fourier , although the community was never financially stable in either format .

After Brook Farm 's failure , Ripley was hired by Horace Greeley at the New York Tribune . He also published the New American Cyclopaedia , which made him financially successful . He built a national reputation as an arbiter of taste and literature before his death in 1880 .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life and education = = =

Ripley 's ancestors had lived in Hingham , Massachusetts for 140 years before Jerome Ripley moved his family to Greenfield , a town in the western part of the state , in 1789 . He was moderately successful as the owner of a general store and tavern and was a prominent member of the community . His son George Ripley was born in Greenfield on October 3 , 1802 , the ninth child in the family .

George Ripley 's early life was heavily influenced by women . His nearest brother was thirteen years older than he was and he was raised primarily by his conservative mother , who was distantly related to Benjamin Franklin , and his sisters . He was sent to a private academy run by a Mr. Huntington in Hadley , Massachusetts to prepare for college . Before going to college , he spent three months in Lincoln with Ezra Ripley , a distant relative who was also the stepfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson . Although Ripley wanted to attend the religiously conservative Yale University , his Unitarian father pushed him to attend Harvard College , then known as a hotbed of liberal Unitarianism . Ripley was a good and dedicated student , although he was not popular with students because of his trust of the establishment . Early in his time at Harvard , he had sided with the administration during a student @-@ led protest against poor food , and his attempts at reconciling the two sides prompted ridicule from his peers . Ripley , seeking a socially useful role , found work as a teacher in Fitchburg during winter vacation of his senior year . He graduated in 1823 .

During his time at the school , Ripley became disenchanted with his father and his home town , admitting " no particular attachment to Greenfield " . He hoped to enroll at Andover but his father convinced him to stay in Cambridge to attend Harvard Divinity School . There , he was influenced by Levi Frisbie , Professor of Natural Religion , who was largely interested in moral philosophy , which he termed " the science of the principles and obligations of duty " . Ripley was becoming very interested in more " liberal " religious views , what he wrote to his mother as " so simple , scriptural , and reasonable " . He graduated in 1826 . A year later , on August 22 , 1827 , he married Sophia Dana , a fact which he originally kept a secret from his parents . He asked his sister Marianne to inform them shortly after .

= = = Early career = = =

Ripley officially became a minister at Boston 's Purchase Street Church on November 8 , 1826 ,

and became influential in the developing the Unitarian religion . These ten years of his tenure there were quiet and uneventful , until March 1836 , when Ripley published a long article titled " Schleiermacher as a Theologian " in the Christian Examiner . In it , Ripley praised Schleiermacher 's attempt to create a " religion of the heart " based on intuition and personal communion with God . Later that year , he published a review of British theologian James Martineau 's The Rationale of Religious Enquiry in the same publication . In the review , Ripley charged Unitarian church elders with religious intolerance because they forced the literal acceptance of miracles as a requirement for membership in their church . Andrews Norton , a leading theologian of the day , responded publicly and insisted that disbelief in miracles ultimately denied the truth of Christianity . Norton , formerly Ripley 's teacher at the Divinity School , had been labeled by many as the " hard @-@ headed Unitarian Pope " , and began his public battle with Ripley in the Boston Daily Advertiser on November 5 , 1836 , in an open letter charging Ripley with academic and professional incompetence . Ripley contended that to insist upon the reality of miracles was to demand material proof of spiritual matters , and that faith needed no such external confirmation ; but Norton and the mainstream of Unitarianism found this tantamount to heresy . This dispute laid the groundwork for the separation of a more extreme Transcendentalism from its liberal Unitarian roots . The debate between Norton and Ripley , which earned allies on both sides , continued until 1840 .

= = = Transcendental Club = = =

Ripley met with Ralph Waldo Emerson , Frederic Henry Hedge , and George Putnam in Cambridge , Massachusetts on September 8 , 1836 , to discuss the formation of a new club . Ten days later , on September 18 , 1836 , Ripley hosted their first official meeting at his house . The group at this first meeting of what would become known as the " Transcendental Club " included Bronson Alcott , Orestes Brownson , James Freeman Clarke , and Convers Francis as well as Hedge , Emerson , and Ripley . Future members would include Henry David Thoreau , William Henry Channing , Christopher Pearse Cranch , Sylvester Judd , and Jones Very . Female members included Sophia Ripley , Margaret Fuller , and Elizabeth Peabody . The group planned its meetings for times when Hedge was visiting from Bangor , Maine , leading to the early nickname " Hedge 's Club " . The name Transcendental Club was given to the group by the public and not by its participants . Hedge wrote : " There was no club in the strict sense ... only occasional meetings of like @-@ minded men and women " , earning the nickname " the brotherhood of the ' Like @-@ Minded ' " . Beginning in 1839 , Ripley edited Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature : fourteen volumes of translations meant to demonstrate the breadth of Transcendental thoughts .

= = = Separation from church = = =

Amid the Panic of 1837 , many began to criticize social institutions . That year , Ripley gave a sermon titled " The Temptations of the Times " , suggesting that the major problem in the country was " the inordinate pursuit , the extravagant worship of wealth " . Ripley had been asked by church proprietors to avoid controversial topics in his sermons . He said , " Unless a minister is expected to speak out on all subjects which are uppermost in his mind , with no fear of incurring the charge of heresy or compromising the interests of his congregation , he can never do justice to himself , to his people , or the truth which he is bound to declare " . In May 1840 , he offered his resignation from the Purchase Street Church but was convinced to stay . He soon decided he should leave the ministry altogether and , on October 3 , 1840 , he read a 7 @, @ 300 @-@ word lecture , Letter Addressed to the Congregational Church in Purchase Street , expressing his dissatisfaction with Unitarianism .

Because of his experience with the Specimens translations , Ripley was chosen to be the managing editor of the Transcendental publication The Dial at its inception , working alongside its first editor Margaret Fuller . In addition to overseeing distribution , subscriptions , printing , and finances , Ripley also contributed essays and reviews . In October 1841 , he resigned his post with The Dial as he prepared for an experiment in communal living . As he told Emerson , although he was happy

seeing all the Transcendental thoughts in print , he could not be truly happy " without the attempt to realize them " .

= = = Brook Farm = = =

In the late 1830s Ripley became increasingly engaged in " Associationism " , an early Fourierist socialist movement . In October 1840 he announced to the Transcendental Club his plan to form an Associationist community based on Fourier 's Utopian plans . His goals were lofty . As he wrote , " If wisely executed , it will be a light over this country and this age . If not the sunrise , it will be the morning star . "

Ripley and his wife formed a joint stock company in 1841 along with 10 other initial investors . Shares of the company were sold for \$ 500 apiece with a promise of five percent of the profits to each investor . The founding membership of the original community included Nathaniel Hawthorne . They chose the Ellis Farm in West Roxbury , Massachusetts as the site of their experiment , which they named Brook Farm . Its 170 acres ( 0 @.@ 69 km<sup>2</sup> ) were about eight miles ( 13 km ) from Boston ; a pamphlet described the land as a " place of great natural beauty , combining a convenient nearness to the city with a degree of retirement and freedom from unfavorable influences unusual even in the country " . The land , however , turned out to be difficult to farm and the community struggled with financial difficulties as it built greenhouses and craft shops .

Brook Farm was initially based mostly on the ideals of Transcendentalism ; its founders believed that by pooling labor they could sustain the community and still have time for literary and scientific pursuits . The experiment meant to serve as an example for the rest of the world , established on the principles of " industry without drudgery , and true equality without its vulgarity " . Many in the community wrote of how much they enjoyed their experience . One participant , a man named John Codman , joined the community at the age of 27 in 1843 . He wrote , " It was for the meanest a life above humdrum , and for the greatest something far , infinitely far beyond . They looked into the gates of life and saw beyond charming visions , and hopes springing up for all " . In their free time , the members of Brook Farm enjoyed music , dancing , card games , drama , costume parties , sledding , and skating . Hawthorne , eventually elected treasurer of the community , did not enjoy his experience . He wrote to his wife @-@ to @-@ be Sophia Peabody , " labor is the curse of the world , and nobody can meddle with it without becoming proportionately brutified " .

Many outside the community were also critical , especially in the press . The New York Observer , for example , suggested that , " The Associationists , under the pretense of a desire to promote order and morals , design to overthrow the marriage institution , and in the place of the divine law , to substitute the ' passions ' as the proper regulator of the intercourse of the sexes " , concluding that they were " secretly and industriously aiming to destroy the foundation of society " .

In 1844 , the community , perpetually struggling financially , drafted an entirely new constitution and committed to following more closely the Fourierist model . Not everyone at the community supported the transition , and many left . Many were disappointed that the new , more structured daily routine de @-@ emphasized the carefree leisure time that had been a trademark . Ripley himself became a celebrity proponent of Fourierism and organized conventions throughout New England to discuss the community .

By May 1846 , troubled by the financial difficulties at Brook Farm , Ripley had made an informal split from the community . By its closure a year later , Brook Farm had amassed a total debt of \$ 17 @,@ 445 . Ripley was devastated at the failure of his experiment and told a friend , " I can now understand how a man would feel if he could attend his own funeral " . His personal life was also taxed . His wife had converted to Catholicism in 1846 , encouraged by Orestes Brownson , and had become doubtful of his Associationist politics ; the Ripleys ' relationship became strained by the 1850s .

= = = Writing = = =

After Brook Farm , George Ripley began to work as a freelance journalist . In 1849 he was

employed by Horace Greeley at the New York Tribune , taking the role left vacant by Margaret Fuller . Greeley had been a proponent of Brook Farm 's conversion to Fourierism . Ripley started his role with the Tribune at \$ 12 a week and , at this wage , was not able to pay off the debt of Brook Farm until 1862 . As a critic , he believed in high moral standards for literature but offered good @-@ natured praise in the majority of his reviews . Greeley took advantage of Ripley 's cheerful style of writing to boost circulation amid significant competition . Ripley wrote a " Gotham Gossip " column and many articles discussing local personalities and notable public events , including speeches by Henry Clay and Frederick Douglass . He stayed away from philosophy of theology , despite some efforts to persuade him to write on the subject . As he told a friend , he had " long since lost ... immediate interest in that line of speculation " .

Ripley then edited Harper 's Magazine . Together with Bayard Taylor he compiled a Handbook of Literature and the Fine Arts ( 1852 ) .

With Charles A. Dana , he edited the 16 volume The New American Cyclopaedia ( 1857 ? 1863 ) , reissued as The American Cyclopaedia ( 1873 ? 1876 ) . It sold in the millions and its immediate earnings amounted to over \$ 100 @,@ 000 .

He also continued his critical work and in 1860 reviewed On the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin . He was one of the few contemporary critics to be sympathetic to Darwin , although he was reluctant to show he was convinced of the theories .

= = = Later years = = =

In 1861 Sophia Ripley died . George Ripley remarried , to Louisa Sclossberger , in 1865 , and was a part of the Gilded Age New York literary scene for the remainder of his life . Because of his convivial nature , he was careful to avoid the city 's rampant literary feuds at the time . He became a public figure with a national reputation and , known as an arbiter of taste , he helped establish the National Institute of Literature , Art , and Science in 1869 . In his later years , he began suffering frequent illnesses , including a bout with influenza in 1875 which prevented him from traveling to Germany . He also suffered from gout and rheumatism .

Ripley was found dead at his desk on July 4 , 1880 , slumped over his work . Pallbearers at his funeral included Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard , George William Curtis , and Whitelaw Reid . At the time of his death , Ripley had become financially successful ; the New American Cyclopaedia had earned him royalties of nearly \$ 1 @.@ 5 million . The biography of George Ripley ( 1882 ) was written by Octavius Brooks Frothingham .

= = Critical assessment = =

Ripley built a wide reputation as a critic . Contemporary publications rated him as one of the most important critics of the day , including the Hartford Courant , the Springfield Republican , the New York Evening Gazette , and the Chicago Daily Tribune . Henry Theodore Tuckerman commended Ripley as " a scholar and an aesthetic as well as technical critic : [ he ] knows public taste and the laws of literature " .