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The Rest is History

True Tales from Akron's Vibrant Past

MARK J. PRICE



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To my beautiful wife, Susan Gapinski Price, who makes every day a happy day, and my devoted parents, Angela Bolas Price and Joel Edwin Price, who taught me how to read and write.



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Acknowledgments

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—Mark J. Price

Foreword

One of the great things about working in a newsroom is that we get to write history as it unfolds. As journalists who share a common trait—insatiable curiosity—we often are the first to see it happen and the first to share it with the world. We then generally move on to the next story. That is the nature of what we do.

The Akron Beacon Journal's Mark J. Price is different. He looks back. Unlike the reporters who work the phones or traverse the city during the day, it is not unusual to find Mark late at night, long after others have gone, on the floor with old newspaper clippings and photographs spread before him, framed by dark file cabinets and a lonesome fluorescent light. Mark digs through drawers, history books and microfilm to find great stories that define Akron's history, then brings them back to life to share with today's readers.

Mark came to the Akron Beacon Journal as a copy editor in February 1997. (For those of you who may not know, copy editors write some of the most important words in the newspaper—the headlines.) Shortly thereafter, he came up with the idea of a weekly history feature about Akron and environs. One of my predecessors had the good sense to listen and take him up on the proposal. So Mark's weekly "This Place, This Time" local history feature began in 1998 and continues to this day.

He has established himself as one of our finest researchers and most entertaining writers. His readers remind us constantly that they enjoy reliving Akron's past through his words. Longtime residents say the articles bring back fond memories. Those who are newer to Akron are captivated by his narratives.

So, from the pages of the Akron Beacon Journal (which dates to 1839, making it Summit County's oldest continually operating business) and Ohio.com, we offer this collection of colorful characters and memorable events that shaped the Akron of today—thanks to the hard work of Mark J. Price.

Bruce Winges
Editor, Akron Beacon Journal



Introduction

Is it possible to be in two places at once? I'm pretty sure it is.

When I visit communities in Northeast Ohio, I don't just see what's there now. I look beyond the fast-food restaurants, big-box retailers and drugstore chains to glimpse the distant past.

I try to picture the landmark buildings that stood for generations at major intersections before falling to demolition crews. I reconstruct old neighborhoods on streets that no longer exist, imagining what life must have been like in bygone times.

For nearly 15 years, I've been writing about local history and nostalgia for the Akron Beacon Journal. In 1998, I suggested to an editor that the newspaper should start publishing a weekly feature about local history. We were headed toward a new century, and it seemed like the perfect time to look back.

My editor liked the concept and named the series "This Place, This Time," a title that I still have trouble remembering! Is it "This Place, This Time" or "This Time, This Place"? It's appeared both ways in the newspaper.

My first article—about the Flatiron Building in downtown Akron—was published May 10, 1998. At last count, I've written nearly 800 stories.

I'm always stitching together information from a variety of resources: microfilm, interviews, historical societies, local experts, libraries, vintage books, city directories, maps, Internet sites. I'm a regular visitor at Akron-Summit County Public Library's Special Collections Division and the University of Akron's Archival Services.

I don't consider myself an historian, but I really do like learning about the past. Dr. George Knepper's 1981 book, *Akron: City at the Summit*, was a major influence. I remember picking it up in a bookstore in the 1980s and being amazed by the historic pictures. It made me look at my hometown in a different way.

People often ask how I find ideas for articles. My desk is a complete mess. I have legal pads, manila folders and cabinet drawers filled with ideas.

Every time I run across a story possibility, I jot it down or save it in a file. There is a steady flow of tips from readers, editors, co-workers and others in the community. I am also fortunate to have built-in knowledge from anecdotes that have been handed down in my family for nearly a century.

Truthfully, I can never catch up. We make local history every day.

For years, Akron Beacon Journal and Ohio.com readers have requested a compilation book of my articles. It was extremely difficult sifting through nearly 15 years of work, but I think this is a good representation of reader favorites.

The real-life stories range from quirky to poignant, from humorous to tragic, and all points in between. Read about the U.S. president who strolled through the countryside, the Akron stagehand who became a Hollywood icon, the beloved beagle that attended elementary school, the natural landmark that slid underground, the pop concert that made girls faint, the lost cemetery that turned into a city park, and the world-famous gadget that caught on in Northeast Ohio.

As they say, the rest is history.

Thank you for reading.

—Mark J. Price