

Winter 12-8-2009

Goosetown: Reconstructing an Akron Neighborhood

Joyce Dyer

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/uapress_publications



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dyer, Joyce, "Goosetown: Reconstructing an Akron Neighborhood" (2009). *The University of Akron Press Publications*. 129.

http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/uapress_publications/129

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by The University of Akron Press at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in The University of Akron Press Publications by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Goosetown

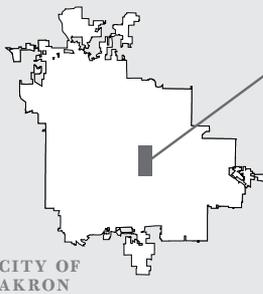
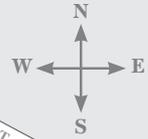
*Reconstructing an
Akron Neighborhood*



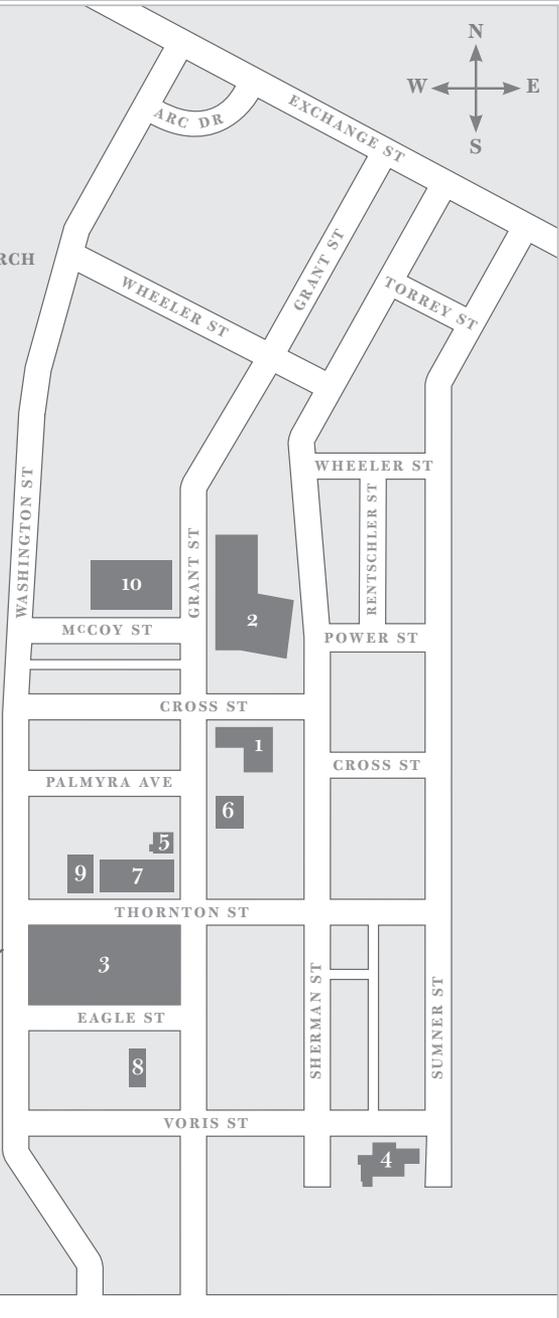
OHIO HISTORY AND CULTURE

GOOSETOWN

1. THE DRUGSTORE
2. BURKHARDT BREWERY
3. THORNTON PARK
4. CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CHURCH
5. GRANDMA'S HOUSE
6. MERKL'S GAS STATION
7. CRISLIPS' GROCERY STORE
8. EAGLE STREET HOUSE
9. SLOVAK LUTHERAN CHURCH
10. CITY BAKERY



CITY OF
AKRON



Goosetown

*Reconstructing an
Akron Neighborhood*



Joyce Dyer



*The University of Akron Press
Akron, Ohio*

All new material copyright © 2010 by the University of Akron Press

All rights reserved · First Edition 2010 · Manufactured in the United States of America · All inquiries and permission requests should be addressed to the Publisher, The University of Akron Press, Akron, Ohio 44325-1703.

14 13 12 11 10 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Dyer, Joyce.

Goosetown : reconstructing an Akron neighborhood / Joyce Dyer. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (Series on Ohio history and culture)

ISBN 978-1-931968-70-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Dyer, Joyce. 2. Dyer, Joyce—Childhood and youth. 3. Early memories—Ohio—Akron. 4. Neighborhoods—Ohio—Akron. 5. Goosetown (Akron, Ohio)—Biography. 6. Goosetown (Akron, Ohio)—Social life and customs. 7. Goosetown (Akron, Ohio)—Description and travel. 8. Akron (Ohio)—Biography. 9. Akron (Ohio)—Social life and customs. 10. Akron (Ohio)—Description and travel. I. Title.

F499.A3D93 2010

977.1'36—DC22

2009041707

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ∞

Segments of Chapters 9 and 35-37 appeared in *North American Review*, January-February 2006, in somewhat different form.

Some description of old Goosetown first appeared in “Erratics and Wanderers,” an essay in *We All Live Downstream* (Motes Books, 2009), edited by Jason Howard.

All photographs, unless otherwise noted, are courtesy of the author.

Back cover photo: Aerial photo of the Goosetown area prior to 1962. Photo courtesy of the City of Akron.

Map of Goosetown by Amanda Gilliland.

For Uncle Paul



My heart knows what the wild goose knows,

I must go where the wild goose goes.

Wild goose, brother goose, which is best?

A wanderin' fool or a heart at rest?

—“Cry of the Wild Goose,” Frankie Laine





P R E F A C E



When I began work in 2000 on a memoir about growing up in Akron, Ohio, I was quite sure that I would tell the story of both Goosetown and Firestone Park in one book. After all, the two south Akron communities where I lived as a girl were just a little over a mile apart. The same street—Grant—ran through both of them.

It was true that only one chapter in *Gum-Dipped*—and not even the whole of it—ended up being about Goosetown, but that didn't bother me. I recorded the details I could remember. There weren't many, so I filled things in with speculation about how my father might have felt returning to Goosetown after the War and with stories I knew from Akron history about the early days. There wasn't anymore to say.

When we moved from Goosetown to Firestone Park, I was only five years old. So it didn't surprise me that I could barely remember the place.

Oddly, though, Goosetown wanted more space than I had given it. It knew it was more important than half a chapter's worth, even though I did not. It grew insistent. Goosetown kept returning after *Gum-Dipped* was released, like the neglected child it was. In the 1990s I'd begun taking frequent trips back to Goosetown with my uncle Paul, who called himself the "Mayor of Goosetown," even though there wasn't one—and never had been. Maybe it was those trips, and the questions that they raised, that lingered and kept prodding me.

I couldn't get Goosetown back the same way I could Firestone Park, but that didn't mean it wasn't mine. The stories of our lives don't all come through memory, and they don't all come easily. I had to *discover*, not remember, the story of this place. *Find* it. It needed to be told just as much as the other story did. Maybe more.

Goosetown is a story about the *way* that we recover a time in our lives that has nearly vanished. It begins by admitting that we *can't* remember everything about our very early years, and goes from there. The process of reconstructing place and time is the true theme of the book. That process is often as erratic and unpredictable as, well, a wild-goose chase.

It's just as important to admit what you *don't* know about your life as what you *do*. I lived my first five years—the most significant five, some would say—in Goosetown, and I had dismissed them as irrelevant because I couldn't get enough images back. But the years hadn't fled. I just had to find different ways to retrieve them.

Not all of us have Goosetown in our past, but everyone has a shadowy place very much like it that's not clear to them. So I've decided that the best thing I can do is take my readers with me—open the car door and invite them to ride along. Perhaps the ride will help them find their own missing years.

I've chosen to write in the present tense to heighten the illusion of traveling in the present—the way I felt all those years Uncle Paul and I rode through Goosetown together, looking for a place that wasn't even there. My trips with Uncle Paul ended just before 2003, so that's where I end too. Some things have changed on Grant Street since then. But that's all right, because things always change. There's no stopping that.

This book is not an attempt to return Grant Street to the way it was in 1950. Nor to mourn its loss. I'm neither a local historian nor a deeply sentimental soul. Rather, it's a greedy search to find a way to get those lost years back.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Sources that helped me in my search for Goosetown include *A Centennial History of Akron, 1825-1925*, published in 1925 by the Summit County Historical Society; David W. and Diane DeMali Francis' *Images of America: Akron*, published in 2004 by Arcadia; Karl H. Grismer's *Akron and Summit County*, published in 1952 by the Summit County Historical Society; Scott Dix Kenfield's three-volume *Akron and Summit County Ohio, 1825-1928*, published in 1928 by Clarke; George Knepper's *Akron: City at the Summit*, published in 1981 by Continental; Samuel A. Lane's *Fifty Years and Over of Akron and Summit County*, published in 1892 by Beacon; John S. Murphy, Kathleen A. Kochanski, and Angela K. Schumacher's *Akron Family Album*, published in 2001 by the *Akron Beacon Journal*; Ken Nichols' *Yesterday's Akron: The First 150 Years*, published in 1975 by Seemann; Mark Price's "The Wolf Ledge," published on January 9, 2006, in the *Akron Beacon Journal*; Alissa Skovira's "Goosetown Revisited," published in the September 2004 issue of *Akron Life & Leisure: The Magazine of Greater Akron*; and Abe Zaidan's *Akron: Rising Toward the Twenty-First Century*, published in 1990 by Windsor.

The two sources I relied on most heavily for this book, however, were early issues of the *Akron Beacon Journal* and C.R. Quine's local history, *The Old Wolf Ledge*, published in 1950 as a monograph and reissued in 1958 by the Summit County Historical Society. There is no way to extend sufficient thanks to both *Beacon* reporters who told

the story of Akron's families and WPA workers who indexed issues from 1841 to 1939. Because of their work, I was able to locate anecdotes and information about the Haberkosts and Golzes that helped me begin to construct the narrative of my own history. And the recollections of Goosetown resident C. R. Quine are invaluable. My book would be a very different thing without the detail of Goosetown from the early years that he preserved—including photographs of Goosetown at the turn of the century, descriptions of land formations and Wolf Run, and lists of residents and businesses.

I thank Tom Bacher, director of the University of Akron Press, Amy Freels, editorial and design coordinator, and Daniel Von Holten, editorial assistant, for their helpful comments and good advice throughout the preparation of this manuscript.

I also am extremely grateful to the staff of the Summit County Historical Society; the Summit County Courthouse; the Harold K. Stubbs Justice Center; local Akron restaurants, especially those on Waterloo Road; Mount Peace Cemetery; the Municipal Building; the Morley Health Center; the Holmes County Courthouse; Castle Nursing Home in Millersburg; and the Ohio Building.

I gratefully acknowledge, as well, the assistance Hiram College has provided me. Both a sabbatical and Summer Scholar Research Grant gave me the time I needed to complete this book.

For their especially generous assistance, I would like to thank Claudia Burdge, planning librarian in the Akron Department of Planning and Urban Development; Chuck Hirsch from the Akron Engineering Bureau; John Miller and Steve Paschen, former archivists at the University of Akron Archives, as well as the current head of Archival Services, S. Victor Fleischer; William Hahn, Akron City Arborist and Horticulturalist; Matt Hils, Hiram College professor of biology; George Knepper, premiere Akron historian; Monica and Dave Hileman, owners of the oldest surviving elm tree in the city who were

kind enough to let Paul Steurer and me spend all the time we cared to in their front yard; Michael G. Prebonick, officer with the Akron Police Department; Wendell Scott, Carol Zink, and Paul Steurer Jr.—my Haberkost family. Most especially, of course, I want to thank Paul Steurer Sr.—the Mayor of Goosetown. I'd give anything to take just one more trip with him for onion soup.

My son, Stephen Osborn Dyer, my daughter-in-law, Melissa McGowan Dyer, and my grandsons, Logan Thomas Dyer and Carson William Daniel Dyer, continue to take care of this good town, and make me proud.

For my husband, Daniel Osborn Dyer, I have no words. This book is as much his as mine.



CHAPTER 1



My eighty-nine-year-old uncle and I are looking for a tree. We're both staring through the windshield of my Corolla, trying to spot the lone American elm that survived Dutch elm disease in Akron, Ohio. An arborist told me about the elm, so I drove twenty minutes from my house to pick up Uncle Paul. We often go on trips together.

They're not high adventure, but the kind of thing we enjoy.

The arborist said the tree was a hundred feet tall and would be impossible to miss. Impossible? I've already driven right by the supposed spot and I've only seen a scrawny silver maple.

"Where'd they put it?" he says.

We prow around Akron every few weeks in search of something. I drive because Uncle Paul doesn't own a car. An aneurysm in his seventies ended all that. I *do* have a car, but my sense of direction is so poor that I often get lost, even here, only a mile from where I grew up.

In the end, we usually figure things out. I drive. Uncle Paul directs. Besides, we never go far. We stay near Goosetown, the south Akron neighborhood where Uncle Paul was raised and where I lived the first five years of my life. He thinks it's as spectacular as Homer's Troy. I'm not sure what to think.

Uncle Paul lives on Grant Street. He was born on Grant in 1913 on the 400th block. He now lives on the 1300th block. Technically, that part of the street is in Firestone Park—the residential community

both the Steurers and the Coynes moved to in the early 1950s. But Grant Street was the main thoroughfare of Goosetown, so a part of my uncle feels as if he never really left. Goosetown is what defines him. I've lured him away from a Goosetown trip with the promise of seeing the only surviving elm in Akron.

I always buy him onion soup and a piece of pie at a restaurant on Waterloo Road before we start our trips. At lunch today I told him about the tree with a heavy dose of persuasion. He loves trees—always has—but lately he's been so insistent on getting back to Goosetown that I wanted to be as convincing as possible. The minute I mentioned the tree, though, he started eating faster—his signal to get on the road.

Long ago, he'd lost his elms on Ivy Place, a street he lived on with his first wife, Ruth. By the 1960s, every elm in Firestone Park was dead, including the ones on Uncle Paul's devil's strip—the term Akronites use for the patch of grass between the sidewalk and the street.

You'd think a tree as strong as an elm would *never* yield. Sometimes, you still see a lone elm in the middle of a farmer's field, maybe a cow or two under it, enjoying the shade. The elm just wouldn't split, so the farmer left it. Fungi and insects can fell it, though, because its vascular system is so accessible. That's what happened to the Akron elms. I guess you could say it's a tree with too much heart.

The American elm we're looking for stands close to the Ohio Canal. *Just off Waterloo Road a little ways on Ley Drive, near Akron Auto Auction*, the arborist told me. I'm sure I followed the route exactly, but I don't see the tree.

"For a long while we were lucky, and our elms seemed just fine," Uncle Paul says, putting aside the fact we might be lost. Or that maybe the tree doesn't exist. "Our trees ain't gonna get it, I thought. Then I noticed a few yellow leaves one day, and within a week the trees were gone. I didn't know any elms around here lived!"

“Neither did I.”

“An American elm,” he says, tilting his head even closer to the windshield, with the hope of making the tree materialize. “My, oh, my.”

“Keep looking!” I tell Uncle Paul. “It’s supposed to be so big you can spot it a mile away.”

We squint. We scan the horizon. We coil around Ley and go under the expressway bridge.

“I must have done something wrong,” I tell him, and we turn around and head back under the bridge again, toward Waterloo.

“Let’s start over,” he says. He’s used to this. It’s why he bought me a compass for my car. I’ve never figured out how to install it. He glances at the dashtop, and I know he’s thinking about the Airguide auto compass he wrapped up for me nearly five years ago as a birthday present, and hasn’t seen since. I want to use it. I do. I just can’t install it, and my husband isn’t any better. I wonder how we survive sometimes.

I always loved the compass my uncle had in his old Fords. I’d watch it bob and spin, then settle somewhere. As a little girl, it was my globe, the whole world divided up into neat grids.

We turn down Ley again, drive a little, and I hear a shout. “There it is, Babe!” my uncle says, pointing to a dark spot in the sky. Now I see it too, the crown of a tree, broad as an open fan, but strangely flat against the sky. Its leaves are dense, and the whole top looks like stage scenery, instead of living cells.

The tree is down a meandering drive, making it impossible to see the elm’s trunk from the edge of the road. There’s a sign posted—PRIVATE PARK, NO TRESPASSING, MEMBERS ONLY. We guess the sign is for the park we see off to our left, but we still worry that it might be meant for us. Perhaps we don’t belong in the world of this mighty elm. We’ll take our chances. I drive slowly. The massive elm swells to fill the

windshield, droops into the rearview mirror, and hangs over the sunroof of the car.

I tell Uncle Paul not to get out yet. I'll go up to the house and see if the owners will let us look at the tree.

A woman with auburn hair answers the door.

"I'm not sure if I'm in the right place, but is that huge tree in your front yard the famous Akron elm?" I ask. I see the wrinkles on her brow begin to climb and a smirk form in one corner of her mouth. She wants to say, "Don't you have eyes," but she doesn't have to.

"All the elms died in our neighborhood fifty years ago," I stumble on. "I haven't seen one in all that time and I've forgotten what they look like."

She nods, but says nothing. Is she sorry for my loss, or for my ignorance?

"Well, you know, I could be in the wrong place," I blurt.

She finally assures me, in no uncertain terms, I am not.

"It's *magnificent!*" I say.

The woman tells me her name is Monica. She likes me now that I've complimented her tree.

I look over my shoulder and see a yellow coat wobbling toward the elm.

"Be careful, Uncle Paul!" I yell, knowing how unsteady he is on his feet these days. "Wait for me!" He hears me and returns to the Corolla, opens the door, and places his hands on the roof, bracing himself before he swivels in.

Monica leans toward me to see what's going on. She pops back into the house and comes out wearing a light coat. It's a cool spring day.

Monica must sense that Uncle Paul is waiting to hear about the tree, so she doesn't talk again until we collect him from the car. He thanks us both as we walk him toward the elm, never taking his eye off of it.