

Men Who Built the Beach:  
The Price Brothers Homes and Other Stories

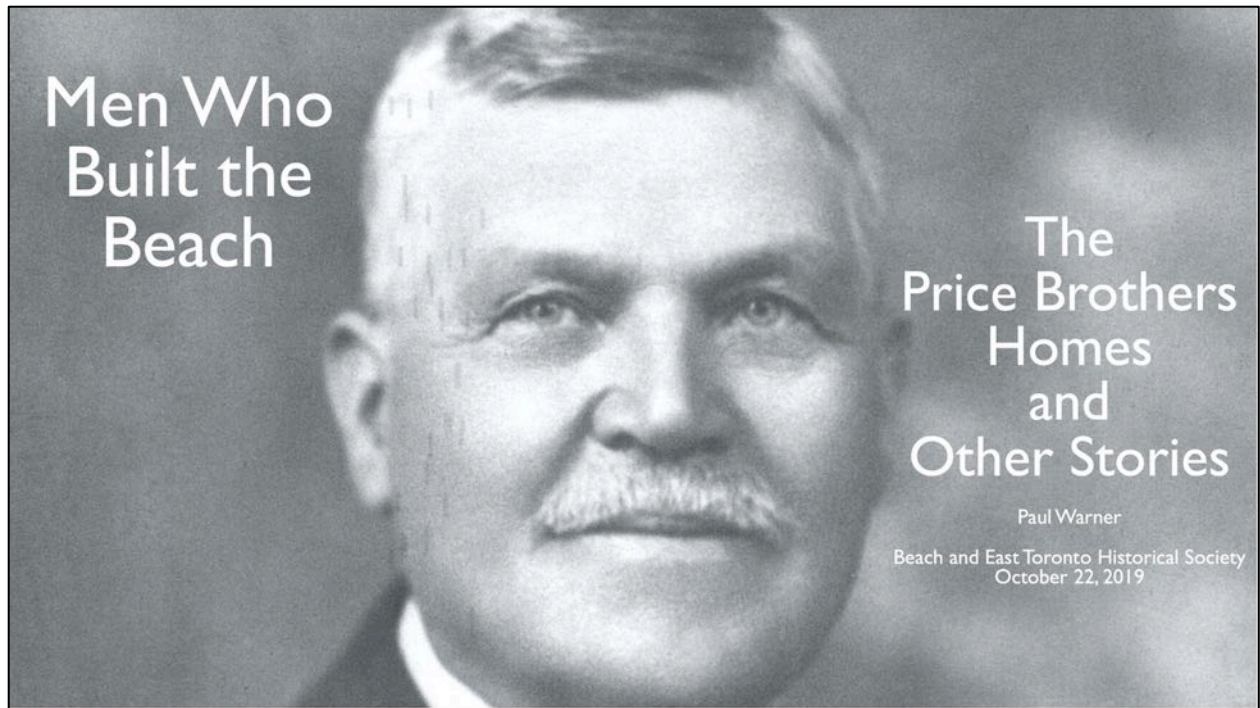
*Adapted from a Talk for the  
Beach and East Toronto Historical Society  
On 22 October 2019\**

Paul Warner

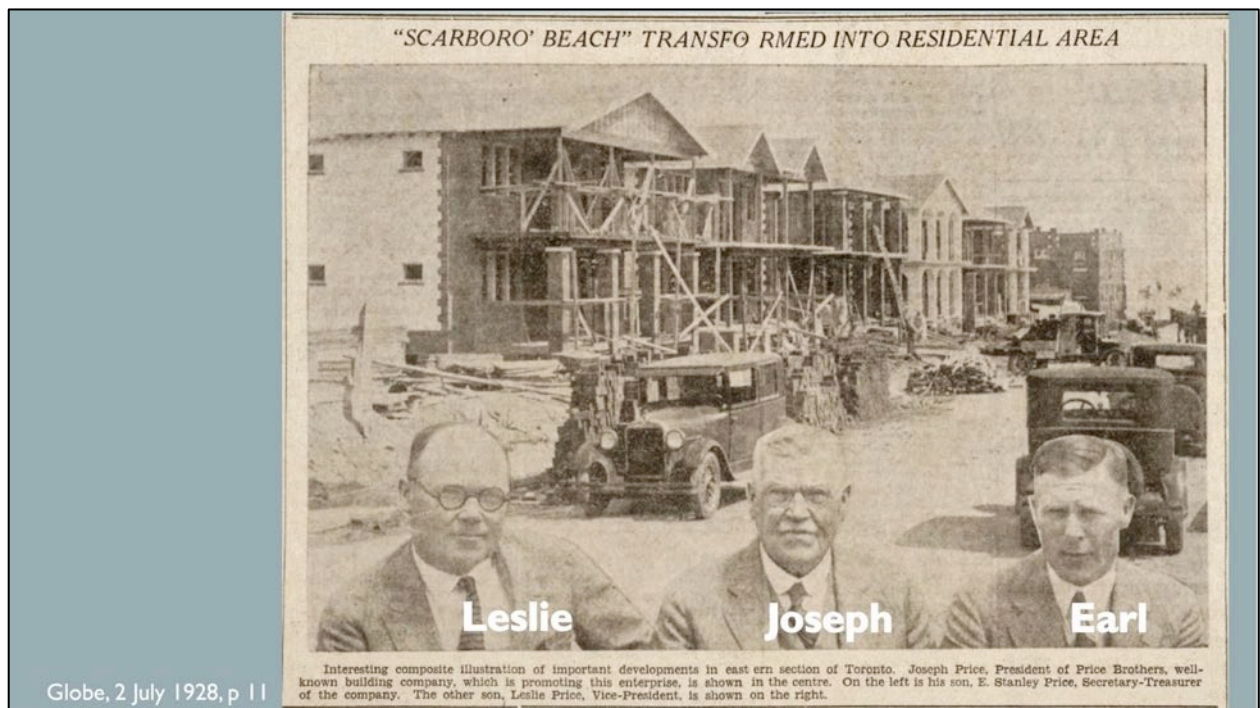
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\* New information, from informed Beach residents and newly-found Price cousins, came to light during and in the days following the talk. Some of it has been incorporated into this text, and some appears in the footnotes. – PW





When I decided to call tonight's talk *Men Who Built the Beach*, I had four men in mind. The first, the central character, is this man, Joe Price, my great grandfather. And I'm going to call him Joe, rather than Joseph, because that's what it seems he preferred to be called.



Joe's sons, Leslie (on the left) and Earl (on the right), are the main supporting characters. These two gentlemen are the Price Brothers.

## Harry Stevens: *unsung hero* of the Price Brothers homes

Globe, 2 July 1928, p 12

### PRICE BROS.' BUYER IS HARRY STEVENS

Superintendent, Architect  
and Factotum With Com-  
pany 21 Years

### A COMPETENT OFFICIAL

One of the bulwarks of Price Brothers  
who are putting up 100 double du-  
plexes in the site of old Scarboro'  
Beach Park, is Harry Stevens. Harry

The fourth man I was thinking of is James Henry Stevens, who was Harry to his friends and co-workers. He's not family, but his role in all of this was every bit as important as that of my Price ancestors.

Together, these men were the Beach's most important developer in the first half of the twentieth century. At the peak of their success, they were also its most important landlord. They didn't build houses to sell them. Their business model was to build and rent.

What the Price Brothers are most known for are the rows and rows of fourplexes, sprinkled with a handful of duplexes, that they built south of Queen Street between 1927 and 1930.

What is less well known is that the Prices had been building in the Beach for a quarter of a century before that. Between 1902 and 1926, they had built over fifty houses and buildings, on Lee Avenue and Queen Street.

Let's start by taking a quick look at some of their later houses.

The photo in the slide on the preceding page, for example, is from a two-and-a-half-page spread that appeared in the Globe in July of 1928. It shows what the east side of Wineva Avenue, near the lake, looked like that summer when it was under construction. The slide on the following page shows what those same houses look like in 2019.



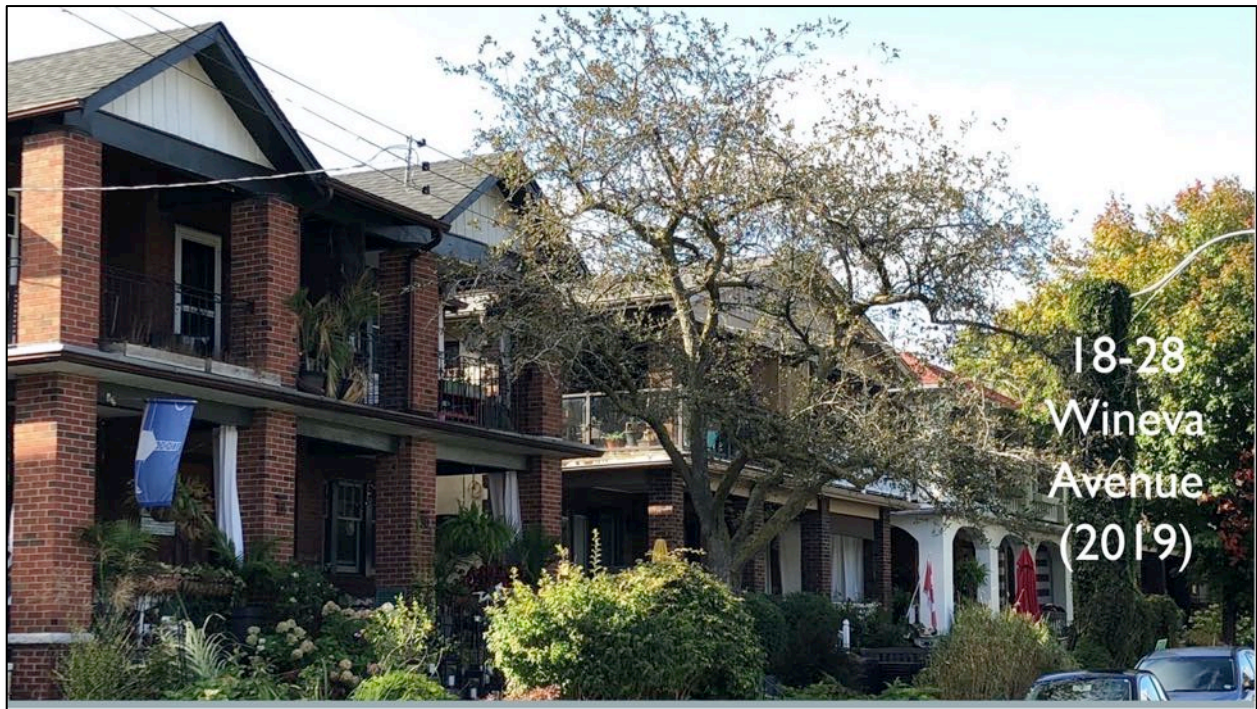


The photo in the slide below is from a great little book called *Historical Walking Tour of Kew Beach*, by Mary Campbell and Barb Myrvold. It shows what some of the Price Brothers homes looked like in 1995.





And the slide below shows what they look like in 2019.



The building in the slide below is what I think of as the quintessential Price Brothers fourplex.



And the first slide on the following page shows what it looks like in 2019.





Now I'm not, in any way, an authority on architecture. but I believe that there's something special and timeless about these houses. And, despite not being an authority, I do have three bits of evidence to support that belief.

Exhibit 1: Those last few buildings I showed you are among five Price Brothers fourplexes (18-36 Wineva Avenue) listed on the city's inventory of Heritage Properties.

*"Rows of original 'Price Brothers' buildings at the east end of [the Kew Beach] precinct are important for their cultural value and should be preserved."*

– Urban Design Guidelines  
(City of Toronto, 2012)

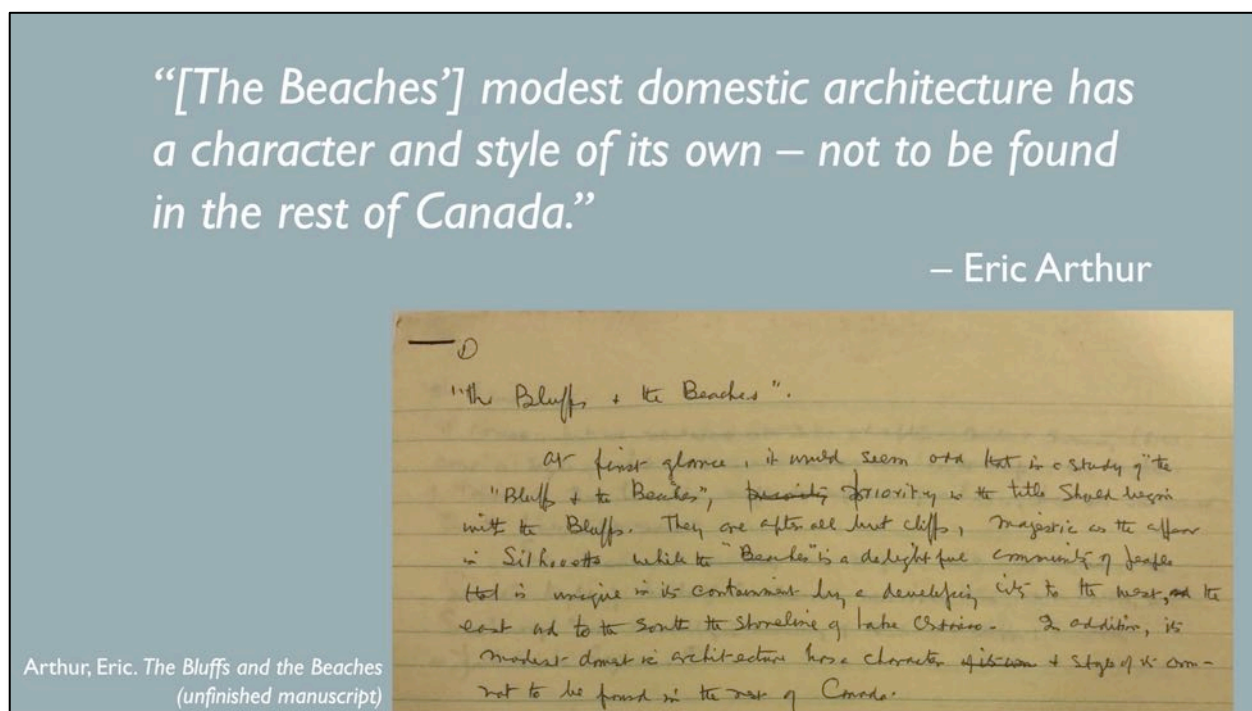


Toronto City Planning

November 2012

Exhibit 2: The city's 2012 urban design guidelines. They say that the "Original 'Price Brothers' buildings [...] are important for their cultural value and should be preserved."

Exhibit 3: Maybe stretching it a little, there's this gentleman.



Eric Arthur, professor of architecture and author of the seminal work *Toronto No Mean City*, took a strong interest in the Beach late in his life, and began research for a book he wanted to call "The Bluffs and the Beaches." But he died in 1982 without finishing it. The first paragraph of his brief, unfinished manuscript says this about Beach architecture:

*[The Beaches] modest domestic architecture has a character and style of its own – not to be found in the rest of Canada.*

The manuscript doesn't say which domestic architecture Arthur was thinking of; he never got that far. If he had finished his book, he would have had to cite some examples, and I have very little doubt that those examples would have included some Price Brothers houses.\*

So, if there is something important and valuable about these houses, who can we thank for this cultural heritage?

Well, we can mostly thank those four men I started with: Joe, Leslie, Earl and Harry. Here is how I see it.

It wasn't the Price brothers, it was their father who was the brains, the dreamer, the risk-taker, the schemer, the driver, the salesman and the lobbyist who made the Price Brothers homes happen. Leslie was the businessman. He kept the enterprise on the rails for forty years. Earl was also a businessman. He kept track of the money. And it was Harry Stevens who actually designed these striking houses and managed their construction.

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\* During the talk, Gene Domagala noted that he had had conversations with Professor Arthur at the time of the research, and that he had spoken very positively of the Price Brothers houses.



*“All the new Scarboro Beach \$3,000,000 development scheme was hatched in the fertile brain of Joseph Price, Esquire.”*

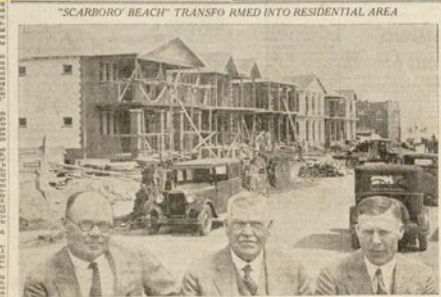
Globe, 2 July 1928, p 11

### Great Vision of Joseph Price Brings Immense Building Boom To City Along Scarboro' Beach

Well-Known East End Contractor Is Responsible for  
Three-Million-Dollar Development Along East-  
ern Waterfront Near Old Park Site; Had  
Faith in That Section and Bought  
Land While People Scoffed  
at His Enthusiasm

LARGE 86-SUITE APARTMENT  
IS SOON TO BE BUILT THERE

**A**ll the new Scarboro Beach \$3,000,000 development scheme was hatched in the fertile brain of Joseph Price, Esquire. The well-known East End contractor, who has built many of the city's most famous buildings, has bought a large tract of land along the waterfront near the old Park site, and has announced that he will build a large apartment house on it. The scheme, which is expected to bring about a building boom in the section, has met with some scoffing from the public, but Mr. Price is confident of its success. He has already secured the necessary permits and is now preparing the plans for the new building. The apartment house, which will contain 86 suites, is expected to be completed within a few months. The new development is located on a large tract of land which was formerly occupied by the old Park. The site is one of the most desirable in the city, and Mr. Price is confident that the new building will be a great success. He has already secured the necessary permits and is now preparing the plans for the new building. The apartment house, which will contain 86 suites, is expected to be completed within a few months. The new development is located on a large tract of land which was formerly occupied by the old Park. The site is one of the most desirable in the city, and Mr. Price is confident that the new building will be a great success.



"SCARBORO' BEACH" TRANSFORMED INTO RESIDENTIAL AREA

That 1928 spread in the Globe recounted all the marvels of the so-called “Price Brothers houses,” but it hardly mentioned Leslie and Earl, the brothers themselves, at all. Instead, the keynote was this rather fawning interview with their father. The first paragraph leads off with this:

*All the new Scarboro Beach \$3,000,000 development scheme was hatched in the fertile brain of Joseph Price, Esquire.*

So, who was this man with such a fertile brain?

If you want to understand Joe Price, and why he was able to pull all this off, I need to take you back to his early years, before he put down roots in the Beach. It means leaving the Beach for the next ten minutes or so, but I hope you’ll indulge me.

I’ve spoken, and will speak again, about the Prices’ importance as builders and landlords, but Joe Price didn’t define himself, primarily, as either of those things. When he died in 1934, his obituary didn’t say a word about his building career (see the slide on the next page).

Instead, it talked about his other, earlier career. It said that “he was well known throughout Canada as [an] advertising man,” that he was “one of the best” and that he was the “originator of billboard advertising” (whatever that means).

# Joseph Price

16 November 1860  
8 August 1934

Star, 9 August 1934, p 24

## JOSEPH PRICE PASSES

**He Was Well Known Throughout  
Canada as Advertising Man**

Known throughout Canada as one of the best advertising men and originator of billboard advertising, Joseph Price, 242 Glenmanor Dr., died yesterday after a lengthy illness in his 74th year.

Born in Toronto, the late Mr. Price received his early education at old Louisa St. school and for many years was known in the advertising business as "Lively Joe Price." About 15 years ago he retired from active business. He was a member of Kew Beach United church; of Harmony lodge, A.F. & A.M.; of Antiquity Chapter, R.A.M., and the Orange association; also of the York Rangers.

Three daughters, Mrs. A. H. Lowden and Mrs. H. H. Warner, Toronto and Mrs. W. A. Rook, Chicago, and two sons, J. Leslie and Earl S. Price, Toronto, survive.

We know almost nothing about Joe's youth, and even less about his parents. We know he was born in Toronto, in 1860, and his obituary tells us that he was educated at this school, the Louisa Street School.

Humble  
beginnings:

Doubtful  
parentage



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1568, f1568\_it0498

If you've ever been in the Zara store on the west side of the Toronto Eaton Centre, then you have stood where Joe received his early schooling in the 1860s.



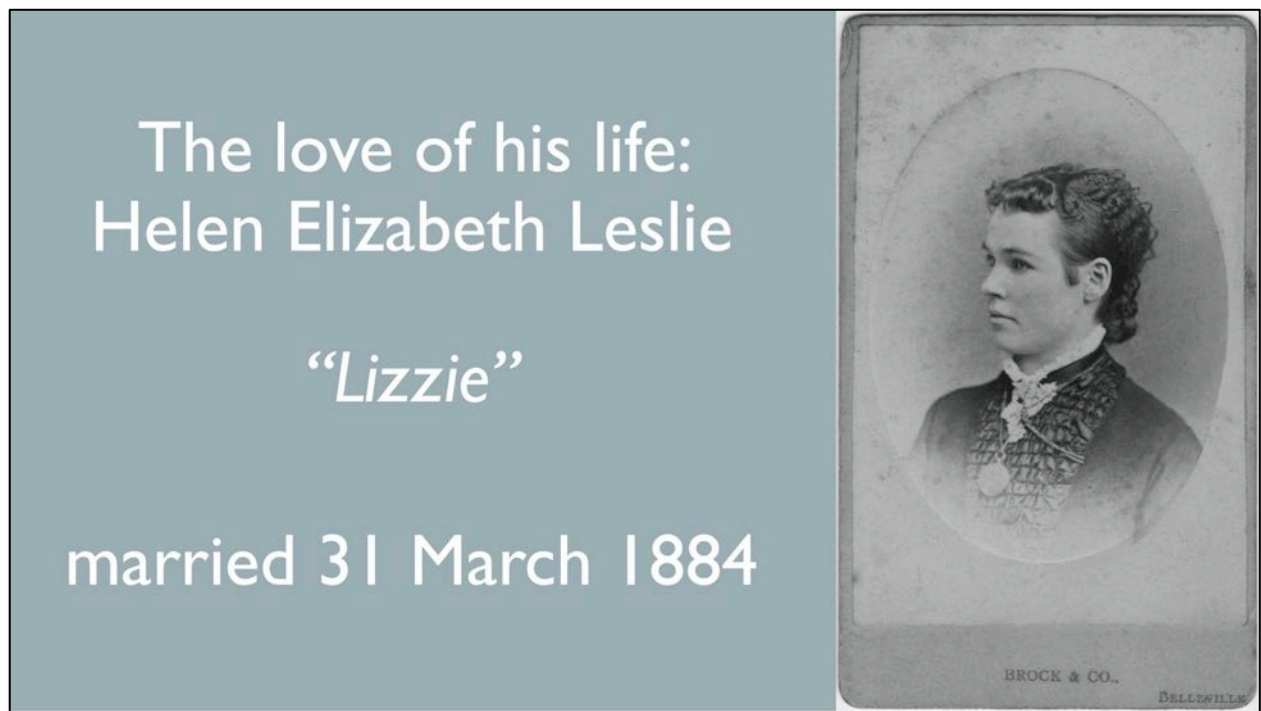
So he grew up within walking distance of Queen and Bay, and he probably had no more than an elementary school education.

It seems that Joe never talked about his parents. His children, later in life, didn't even know their names. They didn't know the names of their own grandparents. Was there something about his parentage that Joe was ashamed to speak of? Was he the child of a single mother? Was he an orphan or a foundling? It was probably something like that.

We know that Joe's parents were born in Upper Canada, probably in the 1830s, and that his ethnic roots were in the protestant north of Ireland. The rest is a mystery.

The few records that I've been able to find from the 1880s portray Joe as pretty ordinary. He is a working-class man in his twenties. He lived in Belleville for a while but had moved back to Toronto by 1885. He is described over the years as a salesman, a painter, a sign painter or a sign writer.

He married the love of his life, in Belleville, in 1884. She was a girl called Lizzie, or – more properly – Helen Elizabeth Leslie.

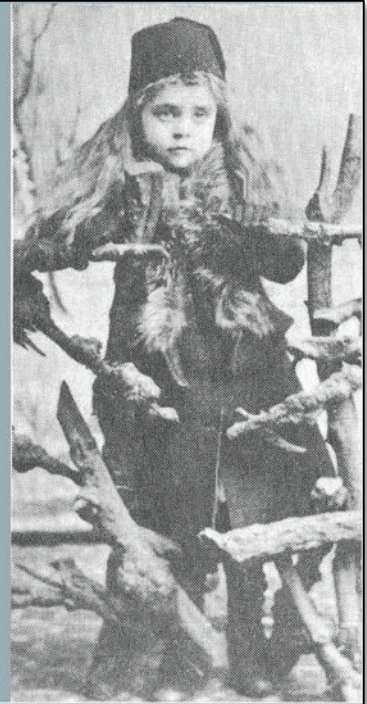


Her family had a farm near Belleville, in Elzevir Township. He was twenty-three when they were married and she had just turned twenty-two.

# Flora Pearl Price

## born 26 June 1885

*Lindner, Campbell of Hastings County, p 160*



Their first child, Flora Pearl, arrived a respectable year and a half later.

# J. Leslie Price

## born 2 March 1888

*Lindner, Campbell of Hastings County, p 160*



The first of the two Price brothers was born a couple of years after that. They named him Joseph, after his father, but he always went by his middle name, Leslie.

The other Price brother, Earl, was born three years later (on 12 September 1891), just as his father was starting to climb the ladder of business success.



“He is a  
very  
pushing  
and  
energetic  
man”


Toronto Illustrated 1893, p 180

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**TORONTO, THE QUEEN CITY OF CANADA, ILLUSTRATED.**

**THE ELLIOTT HOUSE.**

NEW hotels in this or any other city offer such advantages and comforts to its guests as does the widely known Elliott House, located at the corner Church and Shuter streets. This hotel has been in existence for over thirty years, and has become widely known and popular among the travelling public both in Canada and the United States. Conveniently situated within a short distance of the wholesale and retail centre of the city.



It is substantially built of brick, four stories in height and 100 x 125 feet in dimensions, with large L-tacing on Dalhousie street. On the first floor is the office, reading and smoking rooms and dining room. On the second floor is the public parlor and large, well ventilated and newly furnished bed rooms; the remaining floors being occupied as sleeping apartments. There are in all seventy-five rooms, well ventilated, handsomely furnished and heated by steam, each floor being furnished in the most complete manner with hot and cold baths. The dining room has a seating capacity of 120, and is elegantly fitted up and well appointed. The cuisine is under the supervision of a competent and skilled chef, and all the delicacies of the season are here provided in abundance. The building is fitted with all the latest modern

improvements. Opening out from the main hall is a beautiful lawn, 200 feet square, filled with fine old shade trees and rustic seats for the use and comfort of guests. The bar is well appointed and heavily stocked with the choicest wines, liquors, ales, and fine imported and domestic cigars. The proprietor, Mr. J. W. Hirst, is one of the most popular and widely known hotel men in Toronto, and was a travelling salesman for a leading wholesale house in this city for many years.

**MISS PAYNTER.**

THE most fashionable and popular millinery and dress making establishment in Toronto is that of Miss Paynter, which is located on the first floor of the building, No. 3 King street east. The business was established twelve years ago by Miss Paynter, who has always been the recognized leader of fashions. The show room and parlors, 43 x 100 feet, are handsomely fitted up with mirrors, plate glass show cases and all modern conveniences. An extensive display is made of hats, London and New York millinery, and as Miss Paynter maintains close business connections with the best foreign houses, she is enabled to obtain the newest styles and fashions in advance each season. Her trade is drawn from the most fashionable society, and orders are made to order, and particular attention paid to wedding outfits. Miss Paynter is a lady of most excellent taste and judgment and is prepared to meet all requirements, however exacting, in her line of business.

**THOMAS WILSON.**

THIS gentleman has his office in the building, No. 22 Adelaide street east, is one of the most experienced as well as the best known, and most trustworthy of the real estate dealers in Toronto. He has a valuable experience in the business and since 1879 established

in it on his own account. He deals in improved and unimproved city and suburban property, farm and timber lands, and has a long list of the most slightly situated houses and lands for residence and business purposes to dispose of. He buys, sells and exchanges houses and lands, rents and leases property and also deals in subdivisions and plots, and can offer to conservative investors the best possible bargain to be obtained in Toronto, that are guaranteed to produce a steady income and a prospective increase in value. He also appraises property and acts as arbitrator and has the fullest confidence of all having business dealings with him. Mr. Wilson was born in Canada and is a business man of ripe experience and unquestioned reputation.

**R. J. HOVEDEN.**

ONE of the best known and leading representative importers and dealers in artists' supplies and painters materials in Toronto is Mr. R. J. Hoveden, a practical business man of mature experience and unquestioned reputation. He is located at 91-93 King street west, where he occupies a tastefully fitted up saleroom and store, 25 x 100 feet in area, especially arranged and adapted for all business purposes. Immediately in the rear is the plate and sheet glass warehouse, 45 x 100, two stories high. The stock of goods in all lines has been carefully selected and is of a superior quality and comprises everything in the line of artists' materials and painters' supplies, etc., together with oil and water color pictures by leading artists; also a large and varied assortment of picture moulding, as the house does a large picture-framing trade. Mr. Hoveden is an old resident of Toronto and very popular as a business man and citizen, and is a member of the Ontario Society of Artists.

**JOE PRICE.**

THE leading bill poster in Toronto is Mr. Joe Price, whose offices are located at 86 Yonge and 349 Davenport Road. Mr. Price established this business in 1891 and owns the principal boards in Toronto. He employs constantly six men, and does the posting for the Grand Opera House, Academy of Music, the C.P.R. and all other principal advertising concerns in the city and its vicinity. He is a very pushing and energetic man, and is known in the city as "Live Joe Price." Last winter he began a series of popular concerts by leading local talent, known as the Live Joe Price popular concerts. These concerts were held in the Auditorium, one of the largest music halls in the city, and proved a great success. Mr. Price intends to make these concerts permanent, and they will be held at intervals during the next winter season. He is a native of Toronto, and is highly regarded in business circles. Mr. Price's bill boards are lighted by electric lights.

It's in 1893 that we first hear some of Joe's story in his own words.

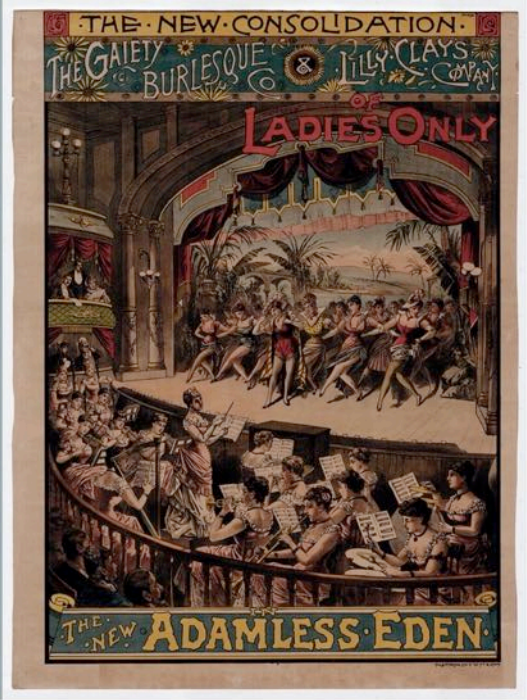
This is a page from a publication called "Toronto Illustrated 1893." It purported, among other things, to present "sketches of the leading business concerns" in the city. In reality, each of these "sketches" was obviously a paid ad for the business concern in question. In Joe's case, I'm willing to bet he wrote it himself. It sounds just like some of the numerous ads that he placed in the mid-1890s.

So, here is what Joe, still a young man of 32, had to say about himself. I think it's worth reading some of it, to get a sense of Joe's tone.

*The leading bill poster in Toronto is Mr. Joe Price [...] Mr. Price established this business in 1891 and owns the principal boards in Toronto. He [...] does the posting for the Grand Opera House, Academy of Music, the C.P.R. and all other principal advertising concerns in the city and its vicinity. He is a very pushing and energetic man, and is known in the city as "Live Joe Price." Last winter he began a series of popular concerts by leading local talent, known as the Live Joe Price popular concerts. [...] Mr. Price [...] is highly regarded in business circles. [His] bill boards are lighted by electric lights.*

Let's unpack that a little. First, when Joe talks about bill boards, in the 1890s, they aren't what we think of as billboards. In those days, a "bill board" (two words) was a board that you posted bills on: bills like this one (see slide on the following page), for a travelling show that played in 1895 at one of Joe's clients, the Academy of Music. So, when Joe said he was the "top bill poster in Toronto," his company did just that: posted bills like this one, on his strategically located, electrically lighted bill boards.

“bill board”  
=  
a board to post  
bills on



I marvel at Joe's capacity for business.

You have to admire someone who could start a business from scratch, in 1891 at the age of thirty, and achieve a virtual monopoly within two years. He must have been, as he says, “a very pushing and energetic man.”

This is the first time we see his nickname, “Live Joe Price.” He will use it again and again in his advertising, and it even appears in his obituary. It was as much a brand as a nickname.

And when he talks about sponsoring concerts that he names after himself, “the Live Joe Price popular concerts,” we can see his self-promotion turning him into a patron of the arts. And where do you suppose he got that idea? To be a patron of the arts?

My bet is that it was from Lizzie, who was an accomplished cornetist (see slide on next page). She was an amateur, but of concert-level skill. She was billed as “Mrs. Helen Price” for performances like the time she soloed at the Pavilion, on Carlton Street, in December of 1895. She drew multiple encore requests that evening, from an audience of 1,500.

The peak of Lizzie's highly regarded musical career was on Christmas Day of 1896. That was the day she soloed at Massey Hall. We're still pretty proud of that.



## Mrs. Helen Price, Cornetist



Lindner, *Campbell of Hastings County*, p 103

Unfortunately, it seems that Joe's business career also peaked, at least temporarily, around the same time.

Joe in his early thirties:  
Owens a successful, growing business  
*Brazen self-promoter, patron of the arts*

1891-1896

Toronto City Directory 1896, p 1158

**P**PRICE ADVERTISING CO. LTD. THE,  
**Bill Posters.**

Own and Control all Bill Boards in  
Toronto.

Fence Sign Writing and General Advertising.

**13 TEMPERANCE STREET.**

*Telephone 1749.*

You see, things had just kept getting better for Joe, from 1891 until sometime around 1896. He had incorporated his business in 1894 as "The Price Advertising Co. Ltd." By 1895, according to his own advertising, he controlled every bill board in the city.

Joe in his late thirties:  
His career takes a downturn  
*He isn't his own boss anymore*

1896 - 1901

Toronto City Directory 1897, p 1315

**T**ORONTO BILL POSTING CO. (Ltd.)  
Own and Control all Bill Boards in  
Toronto.

**Fence Sign Writing and General  
ADVERTISING.**

*18 Temperance Street. Telephone 1749.*

But by 1896, something had happened. The Price Advertising Company didn't control those bill boards anymore. It was the Toronto Bill Posting Company. Joe was still manager for a while; but by 1897 he was out the door and working as a salesman for something called the Mail Job Printing Company.

Helen Price

born 5 January 1898





Knowing what we know about Live Joe Price's "pushing and energetic" nature, I doubt that he gave up his business willingly. And I really doubt that he was happy working for somebody else. Within a year, Joe had left his job to become an independent advertising agent.

To complicate things, at a difficult time, this was when Joe and Lizzie's fourth child, Helen, my grandmother, decided to make her appearance (see the second slide on the preceding page).

In 1899, Joe and Lizzie left Toronto and moved to Buffalo. With their four children, aged one to eleven, they squeezed into this modest little rented house on Seventh Avenue. Joe kept food on the table working for an outfit called the Waterproof Sign Company.



Things turned up again a few years later. I don't know how, but by 1902 Joe had managed to revive his advertising business in Toronto. The family moved back to Canada, and settled at Kew Beach. Joe is now forty-one; Lizzie is forty and pregnant with their fifth child. Leslie is fourteen; Earl is ten.

The photo in the first slide on the following page was taken a year or two later, in the summer of 1903 or 1904. Joe is standing in the centre. He's five foot eleven and a half inches tall, with brown hair and piercing blue eyes. Lizzie is the one looking down.\* By the time the picture was taken, Lizzie had had the baby of course. It was a girl; they named her Frances (born 26 September 1902).

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\* After comparing this photo to other family photos, I have decided that the older woman standing beside Joe is probably his mother-in-law, Lizzie's mother, Flora McDonnell Leslie (maiden name Campbell). She would have been visiting from the family farm in Hastings County. Born in 1829, Flora will die in 1905, a year or two after this picture was taken.



When the Globe interviewed him in 1928, here's how Joe described the Beach as it had been in 1902, when he arrived.

*"In those days people only came to the beach in summer and hurried back in winter. They lived in shell houses, clapboard affairs, that could not withstand the cold."*

Joe Price  
1928 Globe Interview



*In those days people only came out to the beach in summer and hurried back in winter. They lived in shell houses, clapboard affairs, that could not withstand the cold. There were no sidewalks, no sewers, no gas, no waterworks, no electricity. We thought we did pretty well when they laid a two-board plank sidewalk down this way. There were two stores on Queen Street that were really only*



*shacks, and the first barber shop was in a tent. That was on the northeast corner of Queen Street and Lee Avenue.*

I confess that the photo in the second slide on the preceding page is actually from about 1912, not 1902. The teenager on the left is my grandmother, Joe's daughter Helen.

So now they're finally in the Beach, and it will be their home for the rest of their lives. This house at 126 Lee Avenue is where Joe and Lizzie will live for the next fifteen years. The children, including Leslie and Earl, are attending Kew Beach School. It was a four-room schoolhouse then.



I have no idea why Joe and Lizzie chose the Beach. Maybe they had been regular summer visitors when they lived in other parts of the city in the 1890s. Joe's connection with the east end went back as far as 1893, when he had sponsored a free steamboat excursion, for his clients and their families, from Toronto Harbour to Victoria Park.

Maybe they settled in the Beach because Joe understood its untapped potential.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, with Joe in his forties, the outdoor advertising business was thriving again. He wasn't posting bills anymore. Times had changed. Now he was manufacturing signs like the ones in the two slides on the following page, signs that were starting to look like the billboards we know today. By 1910 he had set up shop in a new factory at 242 Main Street, near today's Danforth GO station. If Joe's company was the first in Canada to offer this new kind of billboard, I suppose that would explain why his obituary called him "the originator of billboard advertising."

So once again, Joe is financially comfortable. The family is active in the Kew Beach community and in their church, Kew Beach Presbyterian. Joe belongs to the Masons. His sons become Masons when they reach adulthood. He is active in the Orange Order, a group that was relentlessly pro-protestant and regrettably anti-Catholic.



Joe is also active in local politics. He never runs for office, but he often leads a nominating committee for the City Council seat of what was then Ward 8.



The advertising business is generating enough cash to let Joe build a handful of houses every year. And each year the rental income makes up a bigger and bigger portion of the family's income.



At the same time, Leslie and Earl have come of age. They take on greater and greater responsibility for the family business. Leslie would marry Blanche Edmonds in 1911. Earl would marry Hazel McFadyen in 1915. Their big sister, Flora Pearl, had married Alex Lowden in 1908.\*



\* During the talk, Gene Domagala noted that this wedding was probably the biggest in the history of the Beach up to that time, with four hundred people in attendance.



The photo in the first slide on the preceding page, taken about 1914 or 1915, shows Earl at the wheel of his father's all-Canadian, Toronto-built Russell automobile. Hazel, his fiancé, is beside him. Earl was about twenty-three. Leslie is in the back with his mother and father. He's about twenty-six. The second slide shows Leslie and Blanche, in 1917, with their son Ted and their daughter Isobel.\*

What I'd like to do now is go back to that 1928 interview in the Globe, and use it to tell the rest of Joe's story in his own words. As he tells it, "we put up forty houses on Lee Avenue over a period of ten years. That took us up till a short time before the war."

I spent some time in the city archives, combing through the 1916 and 1917 tax assessment rolls, and I only found twenty-eight of those houses. Joe had probably sold some by the time the war came, or maybe he was just rounding up when he said forty. In 1916, The Price family owned seventeen houses on the west side of Lee Avenue, going from the single-family house at number 120 (in the slide below) to the semi-detached houses (in the first slide on the following page) at 158 and 160 Lee Avenue.



The semi-detached house at 136 Lee Avenue (in the second slide on the following page) is the home that Earl moved into in 1915 with his new bride. Bay windows and gables, like those on Earl's house, are a recurring feature of many of the semi-detached pre-war Price houses. An oval window beside the front door, as we see at 120 and 123 Lee Avenue, is a recurring feature of the single-family homes.

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\* Ted (Joseph Edmond Leslie Price) is the only one of Joe and Lizzie's grandchildren still living. Born in 1916, he lives in Gravenhurst and is 103.



*“We put up 40 houses  
on Lee Avenue over a  
period of ten years.  
That took us up till a  
short time before the  
war.”*

Joe Price  
1928 Globe Interview

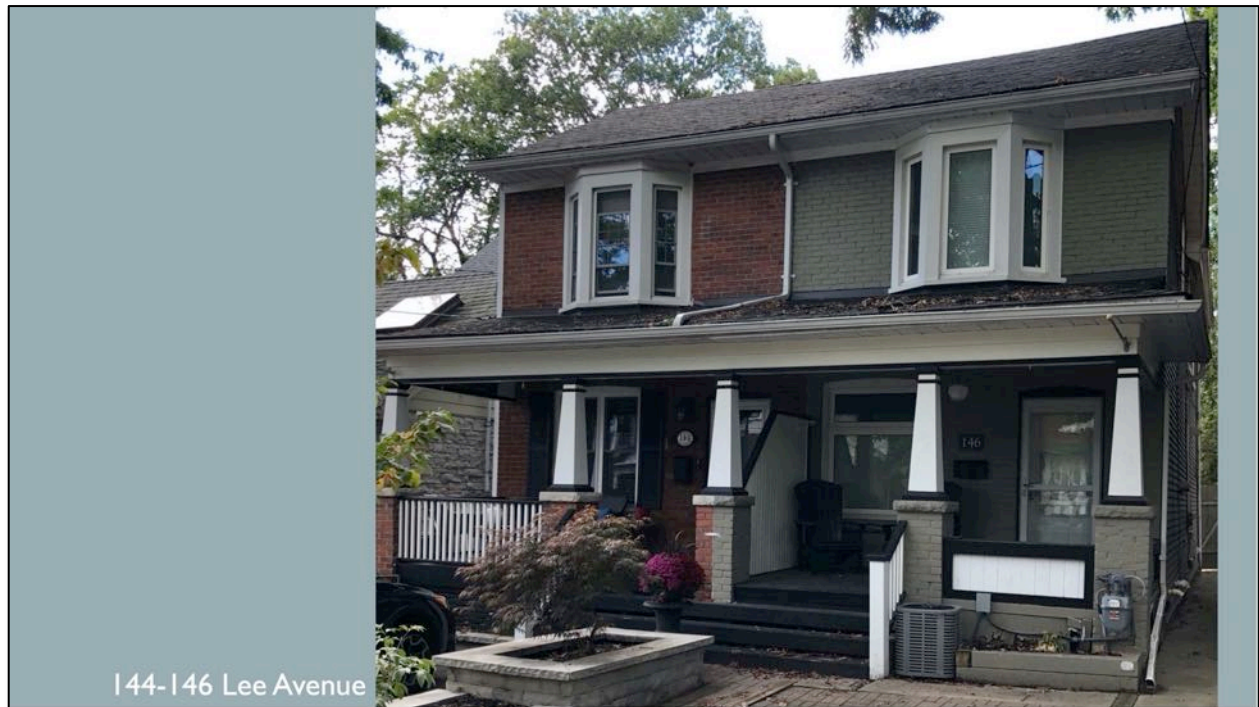
158-160 Lee Avenue



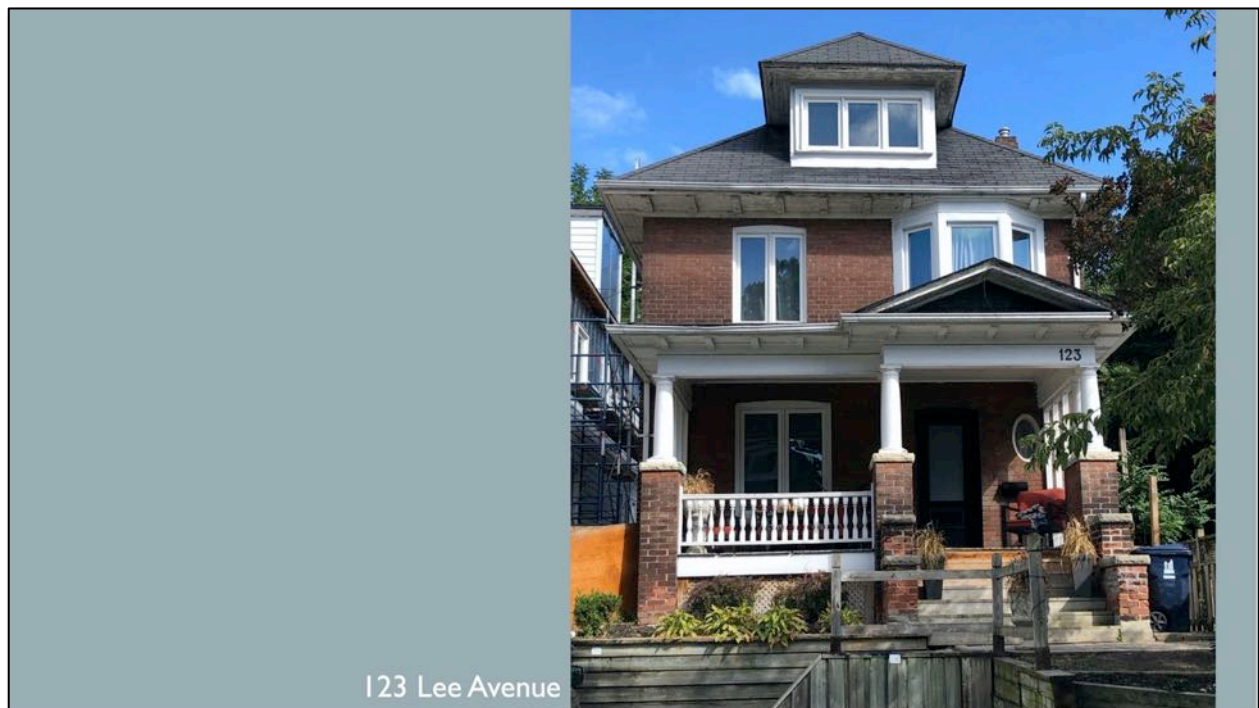
136 Lee Avenue



Bay windows appear again on this pair of semi-detached houses at 144 and 146 Lee Avenue.



On the east side of Lee, the southernmost of the Price houses is this one at number 123 (in the slide below). This was Leslie and Blanche's home.

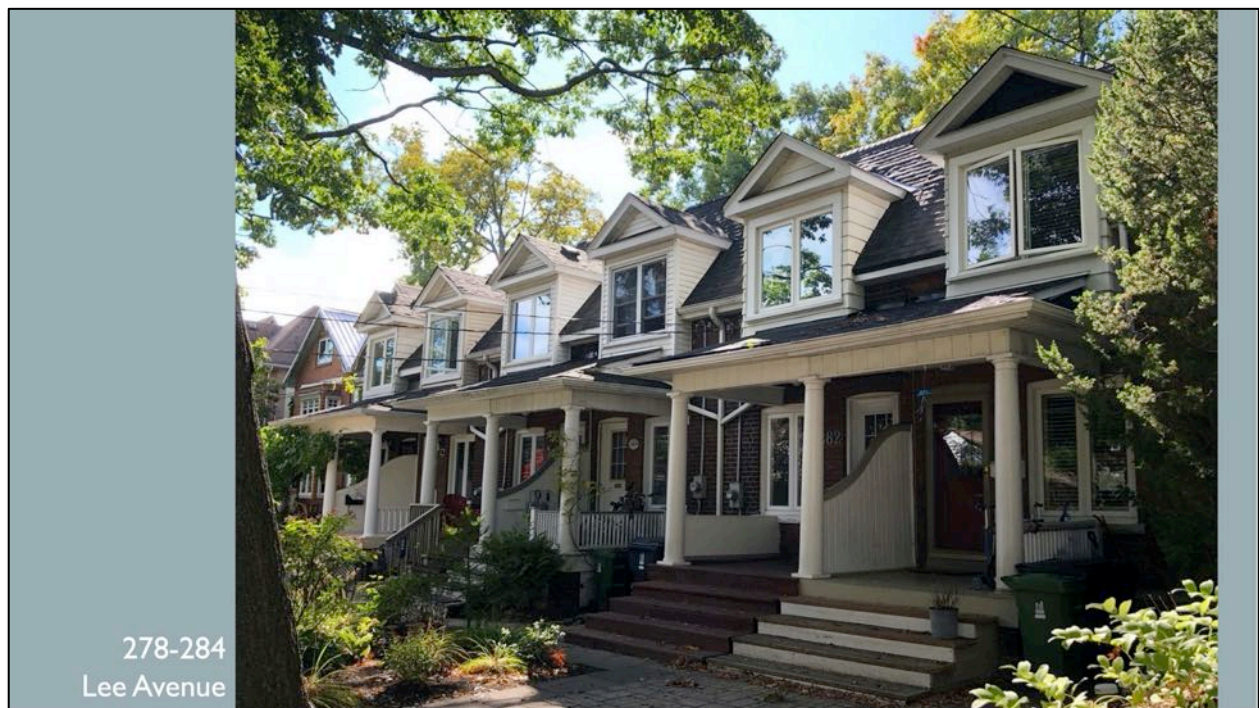


From number 123 north, the Prices owned the east side of Lee Avenue as far as this pair of semis at 135 and 137 (following page), another example of the use of bay windows and gables.





Joe goes on to tell us that “in wartime we did not suspend our building program, but built farther north on Lee Avenue. We also built some stores on Queen Street and erected the Melba Theatre, a small picture house.” That wartime construction included this delightful row of six little townhouses (in the slide below) just a short block south of Kingston Road.





The stores that Joe mentions were in a building that once stood at 2181-2187 Queen Street East. It has since been demolished and replaced.\* The Melba was west of Coxwell Avenue, on the northeast corner of Queen Street East and Ashdale Avenue.

*“... and [we] erected  
the Melba Theatre, a  
small picture house.”*

Joe Price  
1928 Globe Interview

1560 Queen Street East



\* One of the people present at the talk said that the building burned down about thirty years ago. A few days after the talk, I viewed a photo of the old building (in the possession of Kenneth Price). The inscription on a stone in the façade says "Price 1911".



The interview doesn't mention that Joe built his dream home during the war, finishing it in 1916 or 1917. The first house on upper Glen Manor, and for years the only one, it sits at the northwest corner of what are now Hammersmith and Glen Manor Drive West. A hundred years ago, it was a bumpy ride up a dirt road, in the middle of a dense wood. When I tried to re-create the 1917 photo (preceding page) from the same spot, this is what I got.



Here is the house as it appeared in the early 1930s.






Joe's house on Lee had been stately and attractive, but his new house on Glen Manor was magnificent. It still is, and that asking price (below), was seven years ago.



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<b>Status</b>	For Sale
<b>Address</b>	242 Glen Manor Drive West Toronto, Ontario, M4E2Y1
<b>Reference</b>	E2477875
<b>Style</b>	3-Storey
<b>Type</b>	Free
<b>Exterior</b>	Brick
<b>Lot Size</b>	62X150
<b>Rooms</b>	Total: 11+2 Bedrooms: 4    Bathrooms: 5

**\$4,500,000**

Tragically, Joe and his beloved Lizzie would live together in the house for less than a year. She died in September 1917. She was just fifty-five years old, and left Joe a widower at fifty-six.

For the next seven years, Joe lived in the house as a single father with his two youngest daughters. Helen was nineteen when her mother died and Frances was fourteen. But Helen and Frances would get married, in 1923 and 1924, to a pair of World War I army buddies named Harley Warner and Art Rook. Joe would live the last ten years of his life all alone, except for his housekeeper and his chauffeur, in his big, beautiful, Glen Manor home.

Joe tells us, in the 1928 Globe interview, "In 1921 I retired, giving over the management of this business to my two sons. We then built some stores on Queen Street." What that meant is that, as Joe entered his sixties, Leslie and Earl ran the advertising business while Joe worked on his construction schemes and on public service. He was also a frequent international traveller (with extended trips, mainly to England).

At some point in the early 1920s, Joe sells the advertising business to his competitor, the E. L. Ruddy Company. From then on, the business – now Price Brothers Limited rather than Joseph Price and Sons – is one hundred percent about building and renting houses.

The stores that Joe talked about building in the early 1920s were probably at 2223 and 2225 Queen East, between Leuty and Wineva. They were demolished long ago to build that grey brick building where Subway and Jane Harvey Lawyers are.

But a number of Price buildings on the south side of Queen, built later in the twenties, have survived: the ones between Wineva and Hammersmith, for example, in the first slide on the following page. That building at the far end, at the corner of Hammersmith, where Al Sinclair has his real estate office now? That's where the Price Brothers had their office. Farther east, between Glen Manor and Scarboro Beach, the Prices built the two buildings on the right, in the second

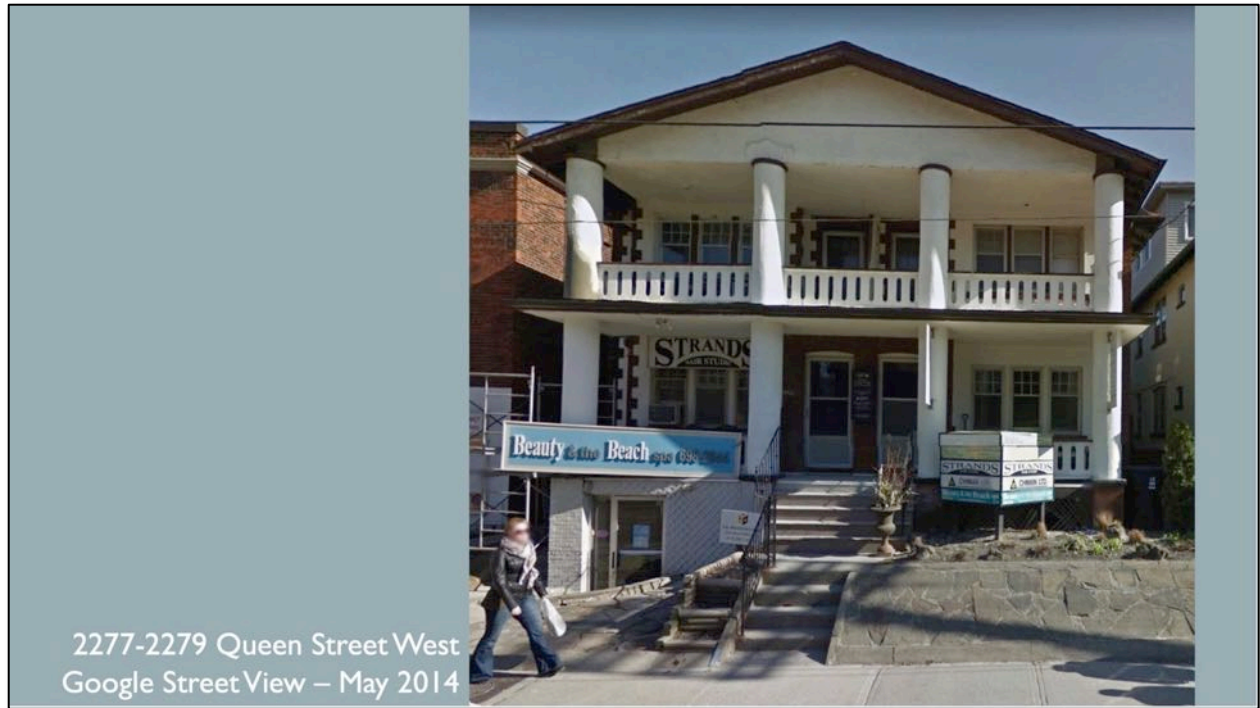


slide below. There used to be another Price building on the left, but the Remax building you see here replaced it a couple of years ago.



The first slide on the following page shows us what disappeared when that happened. I'm not convinced that the new building is an improvement.





Joe goes on to say that “in the spring of 1926 we put up fourteen houses on Queen Street East near Kingston Road.”



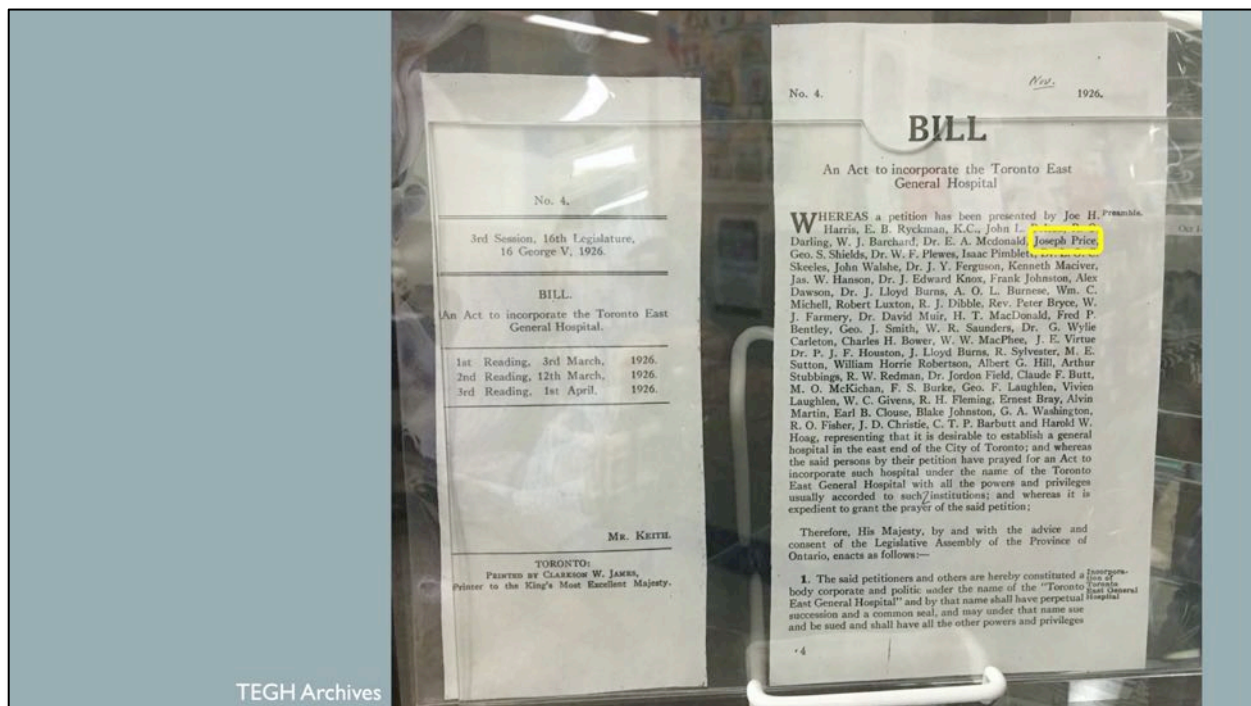
All fourteen of those semi-detached houses are still there, on the north side of Queen, immediately east of Kingston Road. Here are eight of them (above). Again, I’m not an expert, but these houses don’t seem to me to have the same charm as the ones the Prices built earlier or later.



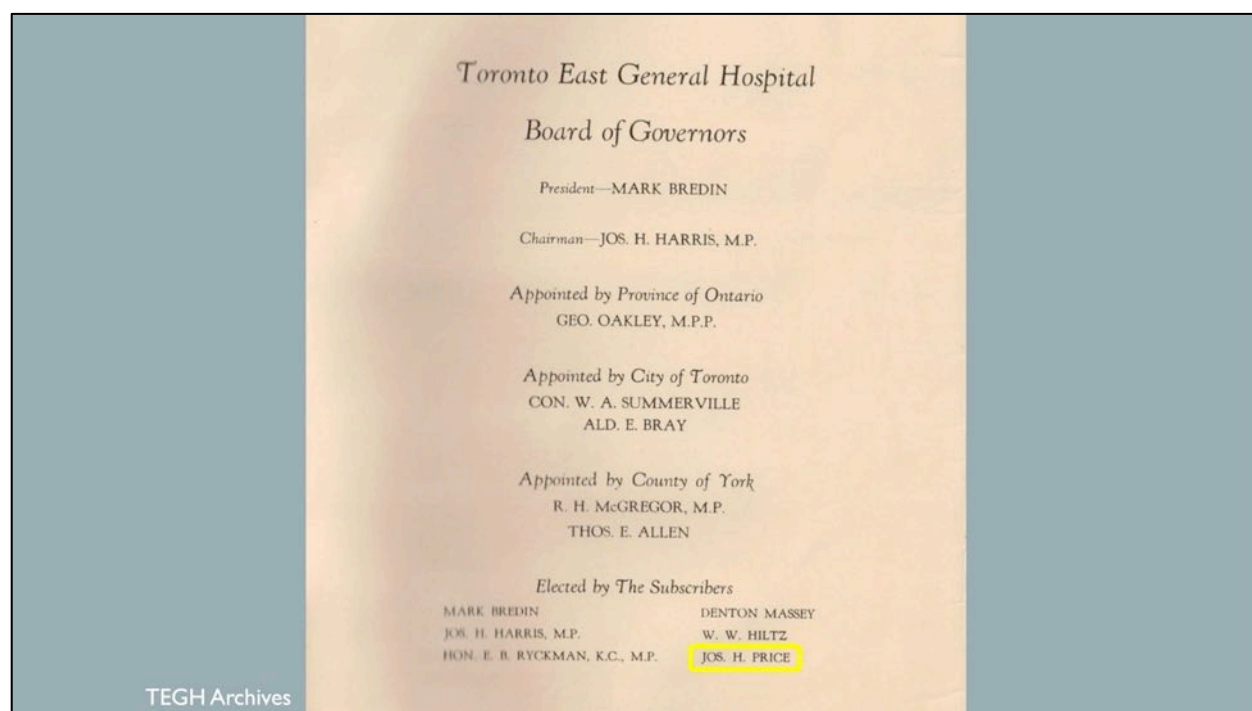
Joe goes on to say that “we also erected twenty four-family units, or eighty suites, on Glen Manor Road.” Those twenty fourplexes (constituting forty houses for eighty families) were the first round in what would become the Price Brothers’ Scarboro Beach development. You can even see the sign on the lawn at number 84 Glen Manor. It says “Price Bros. Builders & Owners.”



Before I go on to describe the Prices’ final great building spree, I’d like to take a minute to tell you about something else Joe was working on.



For years, he'd been part of a small group of business and civic leaders who were convinced that the east end needed its own hospital. They organized a campaign, secured funding, and petitioned the provincial government to pass a bill to incorporate the Toronto East General Hospital. Joe's name was right at the top of that petition, and appears on the third line of the preamble to the bill (second slide on the preceding page). He was a charter member of the Board of Governors, one of six elected by the subscribers (which I suppose means the major donors).





When Joe's ill-health prevented him from continuing on the Board, Leslie took his place. That's him, in 1933, on the far right (in the second slide on the preceding page). In fact, Leslie soon became president of Toronto East General Hospital, a position that he held for a number of decades.

A beloved uncle of mine once told me that there was a wing at Toronto East General that was named after his Uncle Leslie. Based on my research in the hospital archives, I was convinced that the story, like many of my Uncle Harley's, was untrue. I learned just recently, however, that he had been correct. One of the wings of the addition built in the 1950s was indeed named the J. Leslie Price Pavilion (although it has since been renamed to something else).\*

Leslie's name is also on the cornerstone of that addition (see below).



So, from the early 1920s forward, the promotion, funding, building and running of Toronto East General Hospital was at the heart of Joe's, and later Leslie's, commitment to public service.

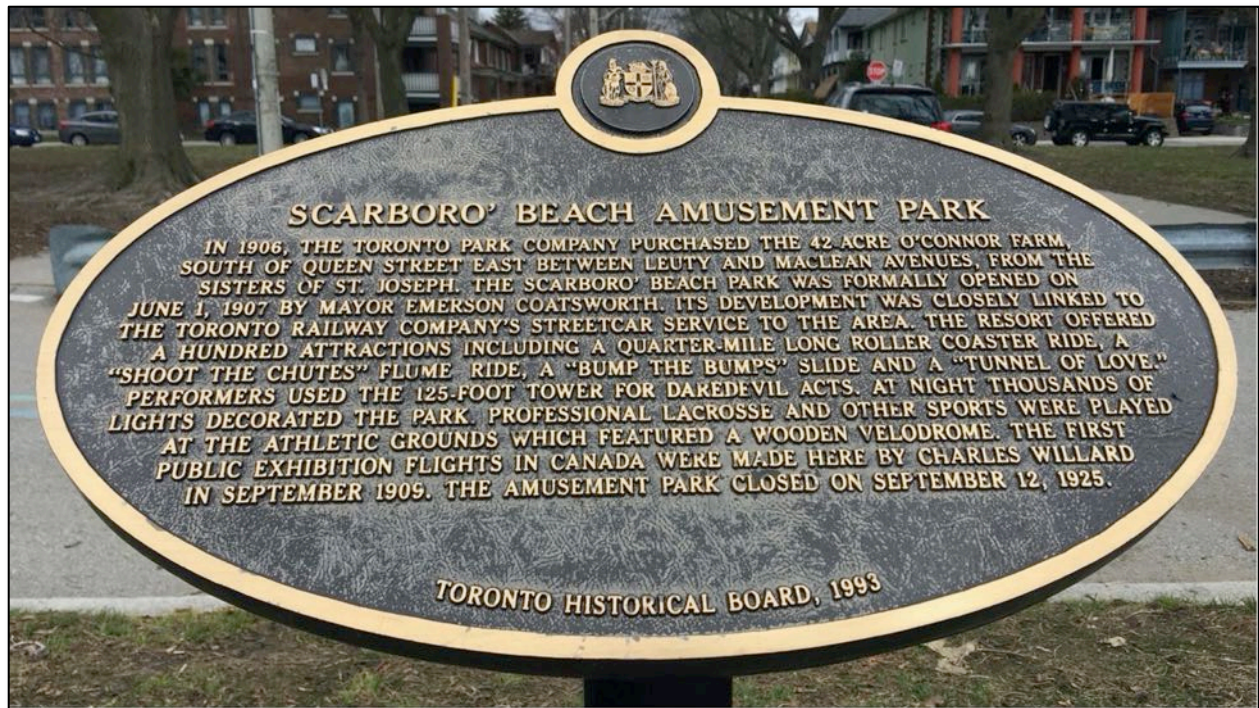
Getting back to business, the catalyst for the Beach building boom of the late 1920s was the closing, in September of 1925, of the Scarborough Beach Amusement Park. It had opened in 1907, and when it closed it opened up almost 40 acres of lakefront land, from MacLean on the east to Leuty on the west (see the first slide on the following page).

Wineva Avenue, Hammersmith Avenue and Glen Manor Drive were extended south of Queen Street for the first time and new streets were created: Avion Avenue, Bonfield Avenue, Selwood Avenue, Hubbard Boulevard, Violet Avenue and Scarborough Beach Boulevard.

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\* A few years ago, volunteer staff in charge of the hospital's archives assured me that there was no Leslie Price wing. Hospital signage confirmed that. A few days after giving this talk, however, I was shown a program from the inauguration, in the 1950s, of the "J. Leslie Price Pavilion" and the "Governors' Pavilion" (the program is in the possession of Leslie's grandson, Ken Price). I offer a posthumous apology to my late Uncle Harley for falsely telling everyone, when I delivered the original version of this talk, that his story was untrue.





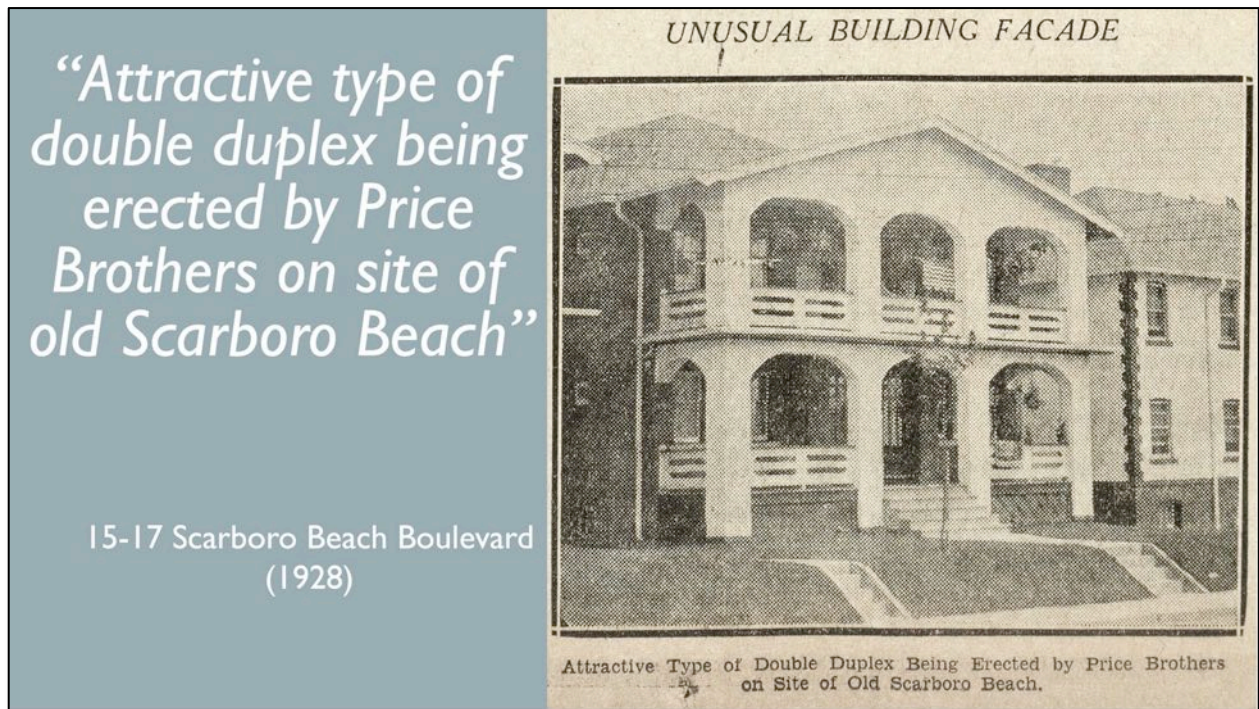
The way Joe tells the story, you would think that he was the only one with the foresight to grasp the potential of that land. This satellite view tells a different story. The Price Brothers houses are easily identifiable by their distinctive outline, but there are clearly a lot of houses that don't match the profile – houses that other people built. A number of builders were just as interested as the Prices in this new subdivision. But Joe, Leslie and Earl did manage to buy up most of the best land, nearest to the lake.



You can see (in the second slide on the preceding page) those twenty fourplexes, on the west side of Glen Manor Drive, that kicked off the development. There are four Price buildings on the south side of Bonfield, three fourplexes and a single duplex; and there is one solitary fourplex on the north side of Selwood. The Price Brothers houses are on both sides of Scarboro Beach Boulevard, going almost half-way up from Hubbard to Queen Street. On Hammersmith and Wineva, the Price Brothers houses predominate even more.

On the following pages, using photos from that 1928 Globe spread, I'd like to show you a few more of these homes.

The fourplex at 15 and 17 Scarboro Beach Boulevard, for example, looked like this in 1928.

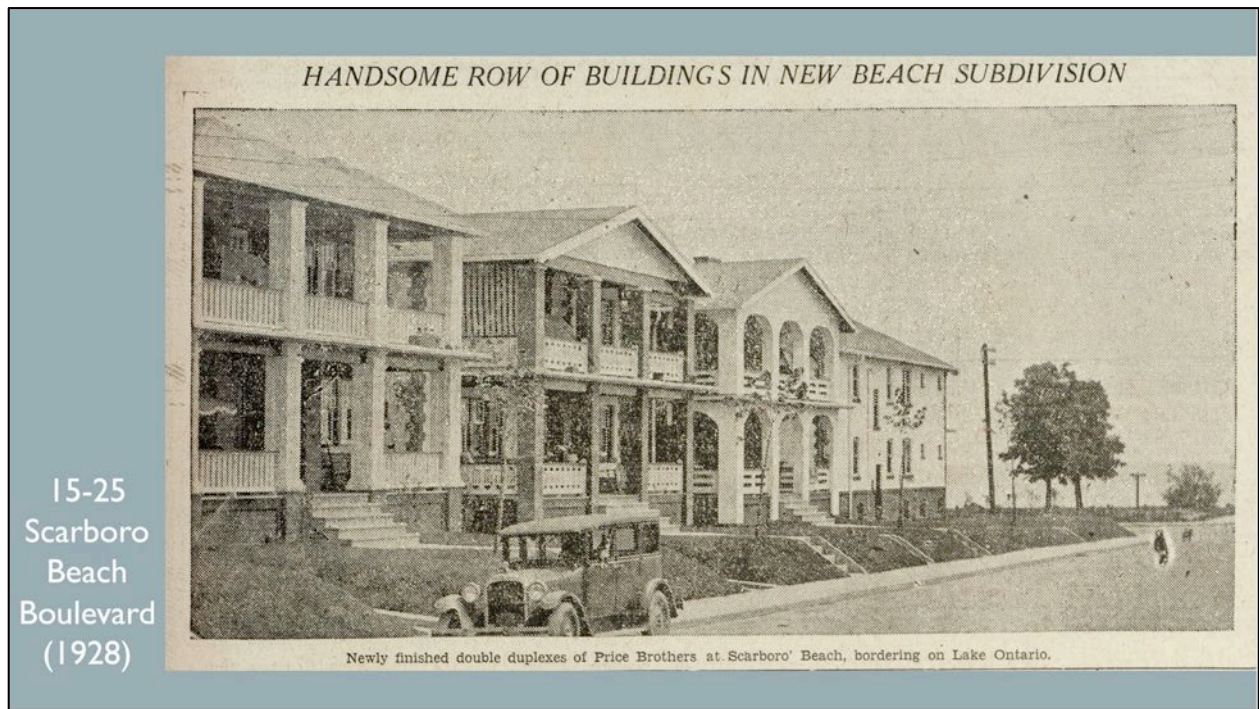


And here it is today.





That building is one of these three, in a shot looking south toward the lake.

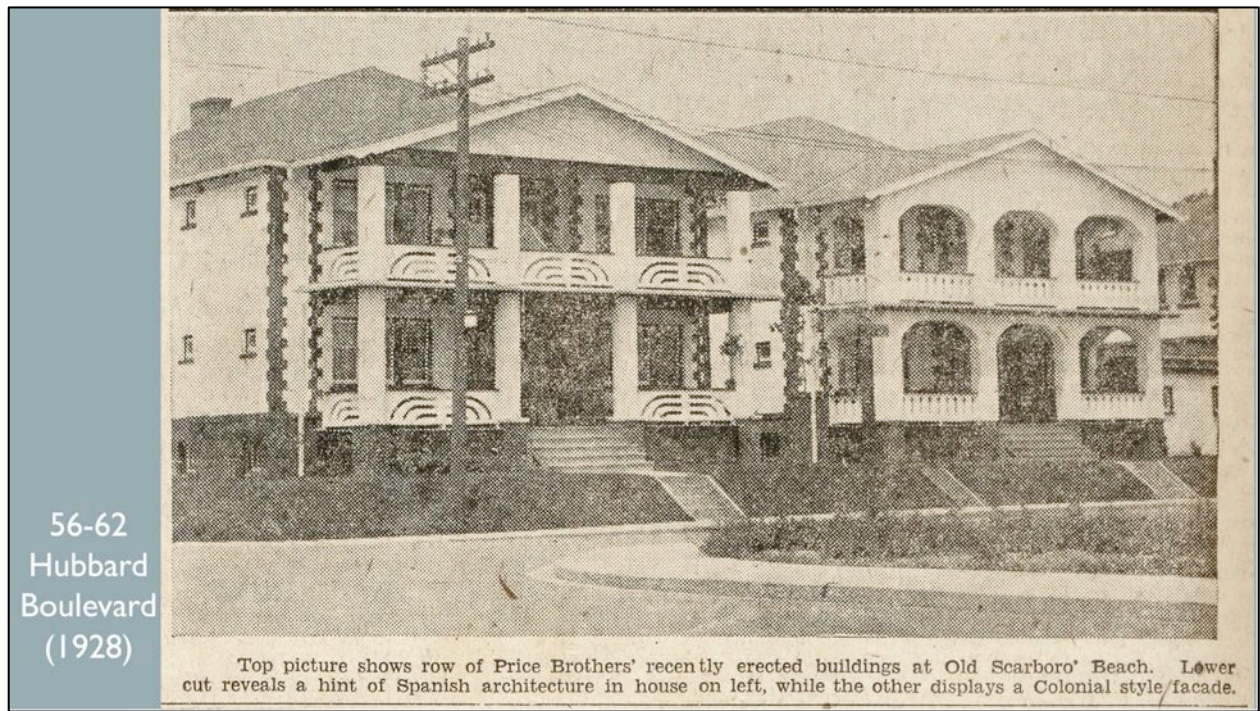


They look like this now. I find it amazing that even the porch railings, on all three buildings, haven't changed a bit in ninety-one years. The green building at the end is the fourplex at 60 and 62 Hubbard, seen from the side.





If you turn the corner and face north, this is what that building and its neighbour looked like from the front (below).

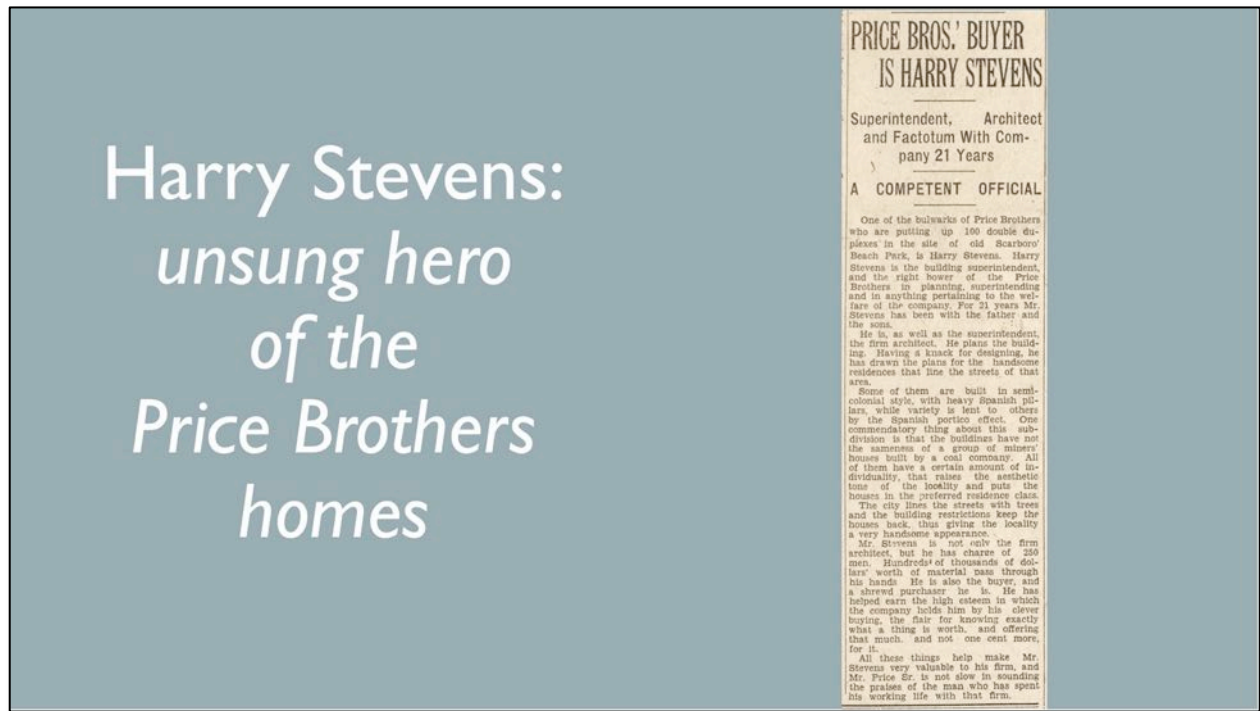


And here they are now (below). The one on the left has been modernized, but I can live with it. The changes seem to me to respect the Price Brothers heritage. Not so much with the building on the right, erected where the now-demolished Price Brothers fourplex had been.





And now it's time to tell you about the architect: Harry Stevens, the fourth man, the unsung hero. He deserves more recognition than he has received.



James Henry Stevens was born in England in 1882 and came to Canada with his parents, John and Emily Stevens, and his three sisters, when he was very young. His father was a market gardener and they lived on Jones Avenue. Harry's mother died when he was about five, and he was raised by his stepmother.

The family eventually moved to Pickering, where Harry's father expanded from gardening to farming, but by 1905, Harry had moved back to Toronto, where he married Elizabeth Theobald.

Joe Price hired him, as a carpenter, around 1907. Harry was about twenty-four. By 1911, Joe was paying him thirty-eight cents an hour. He made \$700 that year. In 1921, still a carpenter, he earned \$1,250.

At some point, Joe saw Harry's true potential and gave him the space to fulfill it. In 1928, here is what Joe, the obvious source for this article, had to say about Harry.

*He is, as well as the superintendent, the firm architect. He plans the building. Having a knack for designing, he has drawn the plans for the handsome residences that line the streets of that area. [...] Mr. Stevens is not only the firm architect, but he has charge of 250 men. Hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of material pass through his hands. He is also the buyer, and a shrewd purchaser he is. [...].*


So, Harry had "a knack for designing" but no architectural training whatsoever? And he created the plans for these amazing houses? I'm impressed.

Harry didn't get rich working for the Prices. In 1940, he and Elizabeth were living in a tiny apartment, over a store, in a building at 1911 Queen Street East, just west of Kippendale. By 1946, they had retired to an equally tiny house in Ajax.

As far as I know, this little article in the Globe (see preceding page) is the only document in existence that attests to the pivotal role of James Henry Stevens in the development of the Beach. I'm thankful for this opportunity to acknowledge and honour him tonight.

Let me remind you that it was 1927, 1928 and 1929 when the Prices were at the peak of their construction binge. And we all know what happened in 1929.

When the Depression hit, financing dried up and tenants had trouble paying their rent. The company was overextended and short of cash. As early as 1930, ownership of some of the houses on Glen Manor had reverted to one of the company's mortgage providers, the Provident Investment Company.



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## 1930: The brothers start selling

Star,  
9 May 1930  
p 8

Globe  
21 May 1930,  
p 12



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Rather than lose more houses to foreclosure, the brothers changed their business model. They came up with a campaign to sell some of the buildings, citing their father's ill health as the reason. The sales pitch was that you could buy a fourplex and rent out three of the units for \$57 each a month. Then you and your family could live in the fourth unit, covering all of your financing and operating costs, for just \$25 a month.

I don't know how successful they were. I do know that the Prices owned at least 190 houses in 1930, but only 35 of those houses were still in their hands in 1940. Many Price-built houses were owned, in 1940, by companies that appear to have acquired them through foreclosure: companies with names like the Provident Investment Company, the British Mortgage and Trust Company, and the London Life Insurance Company.

Before I tell you how Joe and Leslie made it through the Depression, there's another story that I have to tell you, one that reveals a darker side to the Price Brothers. In all the research I've done about Joe and his sons, this is the only thing I've found that I'm ashamed of. I found this story on the website of the Beach Hebrew Institute. It's part of a memoir by the late Mr. Benson Orenstein, about his experiences growing up in the Beach in the 1930s.



Again, back to business. The Price Brothers did manage to squeak through the Depression without going bankrupt. It was Leslie who was the steady hand on the wheel of management. It didn't hurt that Blanche inherited \$10,549 from her mother in 1935. That's the equivalent of 200,000 in today's dollars. Earl, however, eventually decided to seek his fortune elsewhere. When things got really tough, Earl took off for the States, just as his father had almost forty years earlier.

\* Although this incident reflects very poorly on the Prices, several other stories have surfaced, since this talk was first prepared, that demonstrate a certain sense of social responsibility as landlords. Gene Domagala, for example has cited a report that someone at Price Brothers Ltd. had initially decided to increase rents in response to increased demand from veterans returning from World War I. When Joe Price learned of this, he immediately reversed the policy, reducing rents for returning veterans to below pre-war levels. The other story, recounted by living Price cousins, tells how the Prices, during the Great Depression, often allowed out-of-work tenants to live rent-free for considerable periods when they were unable to make their payments.

In September 1937, with \$800 in their pockets, Earl and Hazel packed Stanley, Alan, June and Peggy into the car and set out for Santa Monica. It was there, according to this form that Earl filled out at the border, that they planned to live permanently. But when war broke out, they couldn't stay in the US. They moved back to Toronto around 1940, and Earl went back to work at Price Brothers.

And that brings me to the end of my stories about the Prices, Harry Stevens, and all those houses and buildings that they've left us. I'd like to close with some words from Earl's wife Hazel, and from Joe Price himself, about what the Beach meant to them.

In June 1975, Earl and Hazel were interviewed on the occasion of their sixtieth wedding anniversary. Earl would die five months later. Leslie had died eight years earlier, in 1967.

*The Price duplex Hazel and Earl live in now is at the foot of Hammersmith, and its sunporch affords an unobstructed view of the lake. Hazel says that sometimes she has thought about moving, but dismissed the idea almost as soon as it came to mind. Like most Beachers she and Earl feel they couldn't be happy if Lake Ontario were not nearby. "We've got so used to it ...we'd really miss it."*

*... Like most Beachers she and Earl feel they couldn't be happy if Lake Ontario were not nearby. "We've got so used to it ...we'd really miss it."*

Ward 9 Community News  
17 June 1975





And this is what Live Joe Price himself had to say about the Beach.

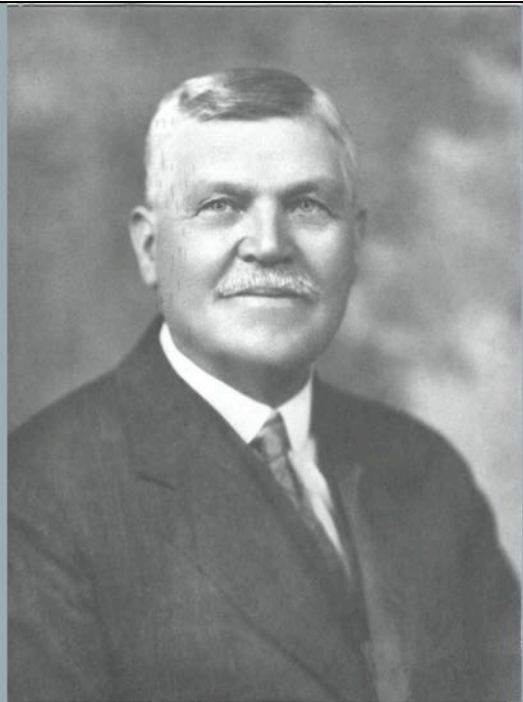
*My faith in the district was rewarded. I was confident in the future of the district, and, you see, my judgment has proved correct. People thought it was a 'wildcat' scheme, putting up houses here away out in the country, but it wasn't.*

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*I was confident in the future of the district, and, you see, my judgment has proved correct.*

*People thought it was a 'wildcat' scheme, putting up houses here away out in the country, but it wasn't."*

Joe Price  
1928 Globe Interview



And finally, two things...

I'd like to dedicate this evening's talk to my late father, Joseph Price Warner.



And I'd like to thank Barb Myrvold and Glenn Chadwick for all their help in pulling this talk together.

Thank you.



