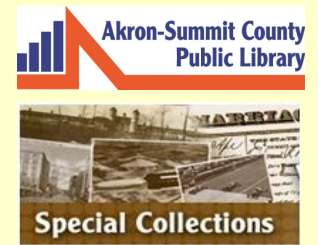


Past Pursuits

A Newsletter of the Special Collections Division
Akron-Summit County Public Library

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Kenmore's Boulevard to Annexation

by Cheri Goldner, Librarian

The first white settlers arrived in what is now Kenmore in the early 1800s, building sawmills, gristmills and a glass factory near Nesmith Lake, the Ohio & Erie Canal and the southern terminus of the Portage Path.

At the end of the century, it was a different mode of transportation—streetcars—that led to the development of the area. Thomas F. Walsh's Akron and Cuyahoga Falls Rapid Transit Street Railway Company built a line from Akron to Barberton in 1893-1894, and homes began to spring up alongside it. Noticing this growth and anticipating more, William Alexander Johnston, who had laid out the neighboring town of Barberton and is the subject of this issue's "Getting to Know...", began purchasing acreage in the area.

When Walsh declined to sell to the Cleveland-based Everett-Moore Syndicate's Northern Ohio Traction Company (NOT), they sought to build a competing line from Akron to Barberton. Akron-based NOT executive Will Christy reached out to Johnston, and the two worked together towards a solution. Johnston first detailed his account of the



Kenmore City Hall about 1945. The Akron Public Library maintained a small branch on the second floor of the building from 1930 until the opening of the current branch location on Fourteenth Street SW in 1957. From the Library History Collection, Summit Memory.

development of Kenmore in *A Centennial History of Akron* in 1925. It was reprinted in *Barberton and Kenmore, Ohio: The Golden Years* in 1976.

According to Johnston, he suggested a route of the new line, which crossed Walsh's line at Manchester Road and again new East Avenue at Stop 97, to Christy. After receiving approval of the plan from NOT, Christy negotiated for a right-of-way along present-day Kenmore Boulevard from Ira Avenue in Akron to the edge of Barberton, offering landowners a five-cent Akron-Barberton fare and part of the cost of opening the new road. NOT began work on their streetcar line in November 1900 and finished the following summer.

Real estate development coincided with the new streetcar line. As he began to look at land along the new line, Johnston connected with another local landowner, Noah R. Steiner. Steiner and a group of associates including Horace B. Camp, Horatio T. Willson, William W. McIntosh, George C. Berry and Ulysses F. Houriet formed The Akron Realty Company in January of 1900. Johnston, as he had in Barberton, set about surveying the new town, assisted by Harry W. Alcorn.

In this issue

New Books.....	3
Getting to Know...William A. Johnston.....	4
Virtual Event with Maureen Taylor.....	5
American Ancestors Database.....	6
Bits & Bygones: Smallpox in Akron.....	7
Gifts to Special Collections.....	7

KENMORE

Is Beginning to Look
Like a Town.

A Number of Fine Houses Are
Being Constructed

And the Boulevard Pushed Rapidly
Toward Completion.

Mount Kenmore, a Famous Observation Point,
and a Loft of Homing Pigeons.

Akron Daily Democrat, *May 25,*
1901.

Johnston recalled that there was a delay in naming the town, writing that he attended a meeting in which it was agreed upon to name it Hazelhurst or Hazeldale after Steiner's daughter, Hazel, who later married Bert Alfred Polsky. Steiner later decided to call the new town Kenmore. Different people have different ideas as to why—after real estate owned by a friend on the East Coast, real estate owned by George Washington, Kenmore Castle in England—but none have been verified.

The Akron Realty Company offered its first lots in the spring of 1901. Among its enticements for the sale of lots and the building of "high grade" homes was an interesting contest, home giveaway via homing pigeon. May 1901 issues of the *Akron Daily Democrat* featured clever ads, one even referencing the Biblical story of Noah releasing the dove, explaining how the company would give away ten \$3,000 homes to lot purchasers. "A well trained pigeon has been assigned to each lot and will be sold with the lot....When one hundred lots have been fully paid for, the pigeons corresponding to those lots will be liberated in a nearby city." Tagged with lot numbers, the pigeons would then fly back to Kenmore. The owner of the lot number affixed on the first pigeon to make it back would win a new home.

The company held its first pigeon fly on June 8, 1901. A June 13, 1901 Summit County Beacon article reports how the birds were taken nearly to Barberton and released, with the first returning to Kenmore and entering the lofts bearing the number 805, the property of Stark County Treasurer Thomas Harvey Smith. Smith won his choice of three homes under construction along the boulevard, but he was not the only one for whom the event was a big deal. Hundreds crowded the boulevard to witness the contest, some picnicking on Fairview terrace, while the Eighth Regiment band provided music and members of the realty company stayed busy showing visitors around. The company planned to hold another pigeon fly as soon as buyers purchased 100 more lots. Whether or not they actually did is unclear. A contest scheduled for November of 1901 was cancelled due to inclement weather, another that was to take place in the summer of 1903 never did, and yet another that was advertised for August 13, 1904 does not seem to have been reported on in local papers.

Giveaways or no, Kenmore continued to grow. As it did, so did its needs. After several years of "agitating the question of incorporating into a village," residents drew up a petition, obtained the needed signatures and took it to Coventry Township in order to call a special election to vote on the matter. Voters took to the polls on Saturday, December 28, 1907 and approved incorporation by a vote of 77 to 11. Through incorporation, voters hoped to secure a regular portion of the tax levy for needed public improvements to their new village.

With a sixty-day requirement between election and incorporation, Kenmore officially became a village on February 28, 1908. Residents elected their first officials one month later, with Republican Charles M. Smith beating Democrat W. J. Watters in the race for mayor by a single vote. Smith's words published on March 30 are as fitting today: "The political part of the work is over. Now let us all join hands and see which one of us can do the most to make the village clean, progressive, moral and prosperous."

PIGEON FLY.

**Another Contest to be Held at
Kenmore Next Week.**

Another pigeon fly, the owner of the winning bird to receive a \$8,000 house and lot in Kenmore, will be held at Kenmore next Thursday. Many from out of town are expected to attend. This is only one step the Akron Realty Co. is taking to push forward its plans to make Kenmore all that has been promised and expected. Much work is being done along this line.

Akron Daily Democrat, *November 8,*
1901.

Kenmore grew rapidly between 1910 and 1920, even more so than Akron, and entered city status. Johnston credits this largely to the paving of Kenmore Boulevard around 1910. In his 1925 account, he writes, “The building of this paved road brot [sic] new life to Kenmore. Next to the street railway, it was the greatest factor in the development of the city. New homes were built. Stores, churches, schools, banks and other buildings followed, and the city has continued to grow with little, if any, interruption.” Many, including the National Park Service, agree with Johnston’s view. Last year, it added Akron’s first neighborhood business district to the National Register of Historic Places, the Kenmore Boulevard Historic District.

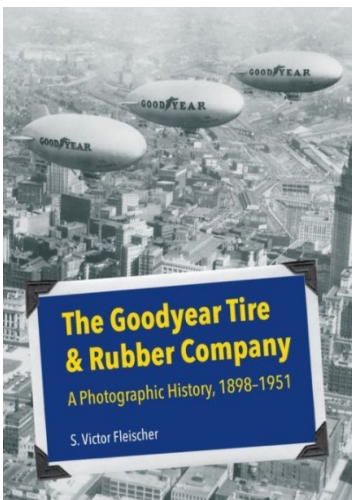


Business Center, Kenmore, Ohio. Postcard dated 1916 from the Ruth Wright Clinefelter Postcard Collection, Summit Memory.

With the city’s growth spurt came growing pains. Lacking the industries to contribute to its tax base, Kenmore was having difficulty supporting services like schools and fire and police departments and needed sewer and water lines. Several years of annexation talk led to just 700 signatures on less than half of the petitions in circulation. To pursue annexation to Akron more seriously, residents formed the Kenmore Citizens Organization in March 1928.

Despite opposition—four Kenmore councilmen were jailed for refusing to put a citizen-driven referendum on the ballot in October and someone slashed tires and sprinkled tacks on the road during a pro-annexation parade on the eve of the November 6 vote—voters approved annexation by a vote of two to one in Kenmore and six to one in Akron. The municipality may have become Akron’s 9th and 10th wards with the vote, but to many residents, it would always be Kenmore.

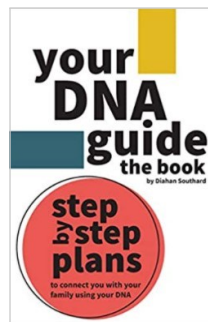
New Books



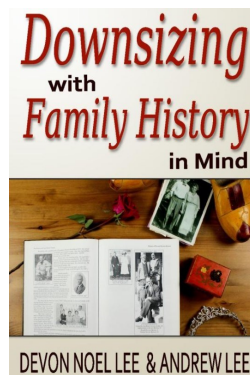
Archival resources at the University of Akron include an unparalleled collection of thousands of photos depicting the history of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. S. Victor Fleischer, Head of the University’s Archival Services, has selected over 250 of these images for this notable pictorial volume steeped in Akron’s history. Featured are production

and manufacturing processes, airships, employees, and moments in time with accompanying informative descriptions.

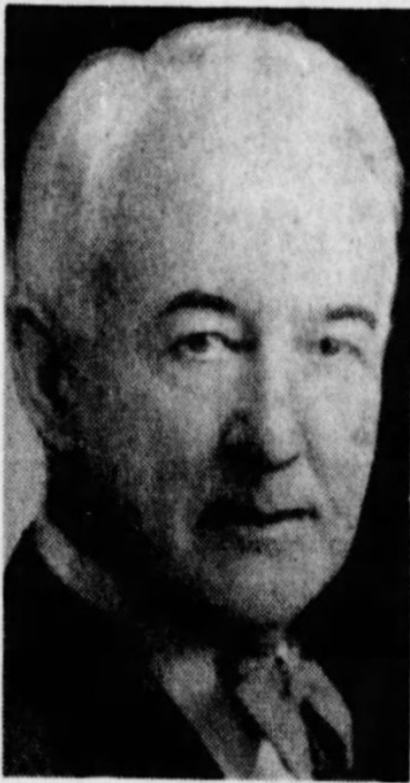
For more newly added resources, check out the latest [New Books list](#) on our website.



Confused about how to use DNA testing in genealogy research? You’re not alone. Let Diahna Southard’s expertise help you make sense of the DNA testing landscape and answer the most common questions about this growing field of study.



Family historians should have a plan for reducing, organizing, and distributing accumulated materials and results of their research. Devon Noel Lee and Andrew Lee have a premise worth considering: It’s not possible to keep everything, and less is more. Their practical advice can help us choose what to prioritize and what to let go.



W. A. JOHNSTON
.... a full life completed

Akron Beacon Journal,
October 16, 1946.

Getting to Know... William A. Johnston

by Rebecca Larson-Troyer, Librarian

William A. Johnston was born near Oil City, Pennsylvania in 1864 to Joseph J. and Louise (Kilgore) Johnston. He spent most of his childhood in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh. At the age of 15, he embarked on a decade-long career with the Pennsylvania Railroad, rising to the level of supervisor of the engineering department and gaining particular skill as a draftsman. In 1890, Johnston left the railroad to work for businessman and civil engineer M. J. Alexander, who had been tapped by Ohio industrialist O. C. Barber and his associates to plan and promote a new manufacturing town near Akron. Leaving his new wife behind, Johnston made the journey to Ohio to survey and plat the area that would be Barberton, then little more than a large pond surrounded by farmland.

In the book *Barberton and Kenmore, Ohio: The Golden Years*, Johnston recounts some early misgivings about his decision to abandon an established career at the railroad and venture to the “out of the way” village of New Portage. Upon his arrival, he observed both his mannerisms and garb made him rather conspicuous amongst the rugged citizens, yet he found the land and job agreeable and set to work. Johnston began laying out Barberton, setting aside significant acreage for the factories that would characterize the town, as well as designating a business district and plotting the streets to surround the recently christened Lake Anna. As soon as Johnston was established, his wife Minnie (née Cassell) joined him in Barberton, and the couple’s eldest son, Joseph, would be the first baby boy born in the “Magic City.” Johnston’s role in Barberton’s growth and development included his management of the Barberton Land and Improvement Company and his work

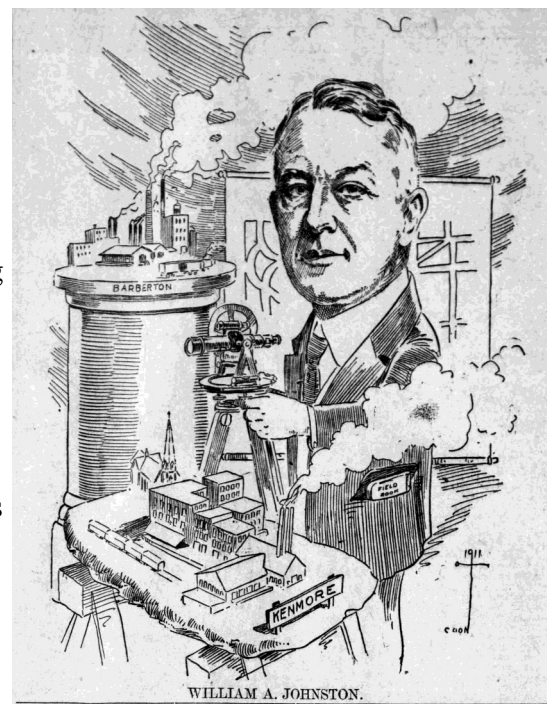
with the East Barberton Land Company, but he was notably instrumental in the planning of the Akron and Barberton Belt Line Railroad, a venture that greatly contributed to the early success of the city.

Between the growing town of Barberton and the already thriving city of Akron, Johnston and his colleagues at the Akron Realty Company spotted an opportunity to connect the two cities. Around the turn of the century, a growing number of houses were cropping up between Barberton and Akron, spurring Johnston to purchase more than 100 acres of land in the area. His vision for the town of Kenmore, billed as a residential community set aside from the dust and pollution of its neighbors, included a revamped streetcar route that brought double lines of tracks within a broad thoroughfare that cut through the center of town. At one hundred feet wide, Kenmore Boulevard and its new stations, streetcar poles and electric lights were truly a showpiece. South of Kenmore, Johnston was also plotting a third town, this one completely of his own design, planning and funding. Nestled in the crescent formed by Barberton, Kenmore and Akron, Johnston’s planned manufacturing city “Coventry” was parceled, graded, partially developed, then quickly overtaken by Kenmore. Newly assessed city taxes, coupled with the Depression of 1920-21, prevented the city from being realized, though the area situated between the belt line, the canal and Nesmith Lake would be developed years later as part of Akron. Kenmore’s time as an independent community proved short-lived as well, with Johnston ultimately serving as chairman of the joint annexation commission that managed Kenmore’s absorption into Akron in 1928.

Johnston’s long career included various roles in banks, construction companies and local rubber enterprises, but his interests remained predominately in area real estate. He relocated to Akron around the turn of the century, making his home at 755 East Market Street and establishing his offices on South Main Street. Throughout his time in the city, Johnston worked to address ongoing housing issues. During the Great Depression, he held a national post with the Hoover administration’s Conference for Home Building and Home Ownership. In 1933, he financed a city farm project offering several-acre lots, lumber and building

materials on installment to families escaping poverty in the city for a chance at subsistence farming. The project garnered the attention of Washington leaders and received comment from Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Following World War II, Johnston helped returning soldiers find homes during the post-war housing crisis, giving away dozens of lots to families of returning servicemen. When a shortage of building materials delayed construction, he investigated the use of locally mined clay in residential construction, a material he called “clayment.” Johnston’s compound was tested and deemed safe shortly before he was seriously injured in an automobile accident, complications from which led to his death on October 16, 1946 at the age of 82. Upon his death, the *Akron Beacon Journal* wrote, “Akron and Barberton are fortunate that so many years of Johnston’s long and useful life were spent in the building of these two cities. His mark has left an indelible impression.” Johnston is buried in Greenlawn Memorial Park in Akron, just two miles from where he first stepped off the train in New Portage and set to work shaping a city – or two.



On March 11, 1911, the Akron Beacon Journal featured a drawing of William A. Johnston with a representation of his accomplishments.



Join Us for a Virtual Event Featuring Maureen Taylor: “Identifying and Preserving Your Family Photographs”

Saturday, January 16, 1:00 pm—2:30 pm

From unnamed photos to mysterious clothing, deciphering photo puzzles is about clues in the photos and facts in your family tree. Learn five steps to identifying family photographs from daguerreotypes to snapshots and explore tips for preserving images on a budget.

Maureen Taylor, The Photo Detective®, is a frequent keynote speaker on photo identification, photo preservation, and family history at historical and genealogical societies, museums, libraries, conferences, and other organizations in the U.S., London, and Canada. She’s the author of several books and hundreds of articles, and her television appearances include *The View* and *The Today Show*. She’s been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*,

Better Homes and Gardens, *The Boston Globe*, *Martha Stewart Living*, Germany’s top newspaper *Der Spiegel*, *American Spirit*, and *The New York Times*. Currently a contributing editor of *Family Tree Magazine*, Maureen also writes personal memoirs and narrative family histories for the Newbury St. Press of the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

This program will be presented via Zoom. Please register on our [Events Calendar](#). Attendees will receive an email with the participation weblink one day before the program. If you do not have an email address or are unable to attend, please contact Special Collections at 330-643-9030 or speccollections@akronlibrary.org.

Spotlight on Databases: American Ancestors

by Barbara Leden, Librarian



Are you in search of ancestors who may have originated in the early days of America? You just may find some information in the Library database American Ancestors, administered by the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS). NEHGS was established in 1845 and notable original members include President John Quincy Adams. The society is commemorating their 175th anniversary as well as the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower landing. American Ancestors claims to be the “World’s Biggest Searchable Mayflower Database,” with a search link available on the home page. Within the search, family trees are available for the original Mayflower passengers and Mayflower descendant applications from General Society of Mayflower Descendants are available to view.

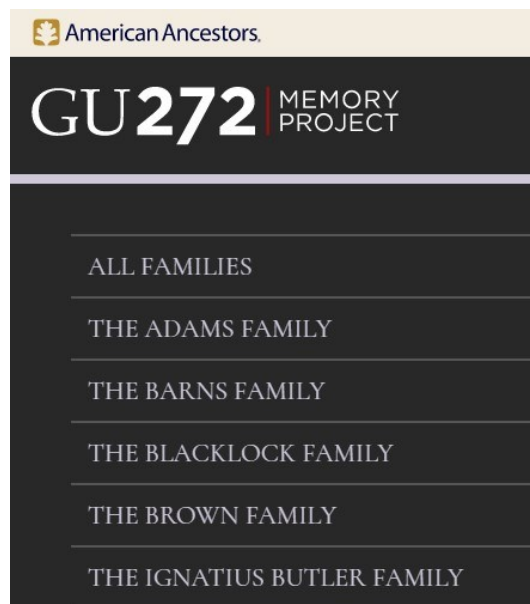
American Ancestors boasts more than one billion searchable and digitized records, which are comprised of vital records, cemetery records, probate records, genealogies and NEHGS journals and periodicals. There are a number of free educational resources and webinars available wherever you have internet access, but to view the full content available to libraries, you will need to be at Main Library and have a valid ASCPL card. Go to the Library’s website and hover over “Research” at the top of the page. Select “Databases by Title,” then scroll down to find “American Ancestors.”



The main categories available on American Ancestors’ home page are *Search*, *Services*, *Learn*, *Library*, *Events*, *News* and *Bookstore*. *Search* provides access to the billion or so records available in the database and is further divided by sub-categories, including four unique genealogical study projects supported by NEHGS. *The Great Migration* is an account of immigrants to New England who arrived between 1620 and 1640. *Early New England Families* includes accounts of New England families from 1641 to 1700. *Western Massachusetts Families in 1790* provides sketches of select heads of household in Western Massachusetts, a crossroads for families heading west. *Early Vermont Settlers to 1784* is an account of the first settlers of Vermont and New England’s northern frontier.

The *Services* tab presents research experts to consult or hire. *Learn* links to free webinars and information to improve research skills. Some require creating a free guest account. The *Library* tab allows access to the NEHGS’ library catalog. To get a recap of lectures, tours and exhibits, look under the *Events* option. The *News* and *Bookstore* tabs show updates to society news, resources, and publications. One unique feature in the *News* category is the *Mayflower 2020* project, which shows a map of people who have submitted their names as descendants of the Mayflower passengers. Another feature is the *GU272 Memory Project*, which highlights the family histories of the enslaved people sold by Georgetown College in 1838.

Don’t let yourself be limited by the database’s focus on American research. Records from many other countries are available in the Search category, including German births and baptisms; a map of Cork, Ireland; a civil register from Italy in the 1800s; and Scottish



births and baptisms, to name a few. Many of these data sets are also available on Ancestry or FamilySearch, but searching American Ancestors will produce results combining these records with its own unique content.

There's a lot to look at, so be sure to investigate the category tabs to discover the resources available on this database. American Ancestors is yet another great tool for helping researchers on the journey of discovering their ancestors.

Explore our latest online programs and activities All Programs

JANUARY 14
What's New at AmericanAncestors.org

JANUARY 15
The Crown: A Tour of Filming Locations of the Most Expensive TV Series Ever Made

JANUARY 21
New York and London in the Gilded Age

JANUARY 28
The Federal Census: Moving Beyond the Population Schedule

Check out the free webinars offered by American Ancestors in January.

Bits & Bygones: The Smallpox Epidemic of 1892-1893

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY.
The matter of closing the public library until the smallpox scare had subsided, was suggested this morning. It was thought very probable that some of the men at the foundry were patrons of the library and the germs would easily be carried in the books. The matter will be brought up at a meeting of the Board of Control of the library this evening.

In the winter of 1892-1893, an outbreak of smallpox disrupted the lives of Akron's citizens. Measures that were suggested or taken to reduce the spread of the highly contagious and dangerous illness included quarantine, the closure of public venues and shops, surface disinfection, vaccination, and forms of contact tracing. In this *Akron Beacon & Republican* snippet from December 30, 1892, concerns about identified cases in individuals who visited the library is apparent. The articles chronicling this epidemic have an eerily familiar ring to us today.

Thank
You

We would like to thank the following for their generous contributions:

Emily Olhoeft for a program from Goodyear Theatre, early 1920s; and Central High School materials including issues of school newspaper *Akron Forge*, 1923-1924, and class of 1924 50th reunion booklet

Steve Love for *Football, Fast Friends, and Small Towns: A Memoir Straight from a Broken Oklahoma Heart*, by Steve Love

Jim C. Meador for *Selected Poems of Roger D. Meador, Selected Poetry of Jim C. Meador, God's Time Thieves, God's Time Thieves: Final Assignment, and Uncle Jack's Story* by Jim C. Meador

Please note: We are not accepting donations of books, archival collections, or other materials at this time. Check our [website](#) for updates.



West Buchtel Avenue after a snowstorm, 1943. From the Akron Beacon Journal Photograph Collection, Summit Memory.

The Akron-Summit County Public Library
Special Collections Division
is located on the third floor
of the Main Library.

Special Collections
Akron-Summit County Public Library
60 S. High St.
Akron, Ohio 44326

330-643-9030

email:
speccollections@akronlibrary.org

website:
www.akronlibrary.org/specialcollections



**Special Collections Division
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Akron, Ohio 44326**