

HISTORY FROM OHA

The Price is Right: A Tale of the Merchant Prince of Syracuse

■ BY KAREN Y. COONEY

The concept of "you can't sell anything unless you promote" was the underlying reason behind 19th century businessman Milton Price's success. His unusual promotion practices ensured that customers flocked to his dry goods store.

to Chittenango, where he learned about merchandising and the benefits of advertising. He briefly ran a small dry goods store (the precursor

ness in the Globe Hotel on the corner of Salina and Washington St. (eventually E. W. Edwards and Son) and was joined by a partner, Henry

Wheeler. This partnership lasted for almost 10 years before Price became sole proprietor.

Price quickly made a name for himself — The Merchant Prince — due primarily to his unusual marketing practices. Price was not a teetotaler and frequented many of the saloons north of the city. Saloon owners welcomed his presence despite the fact that he regularly rode his horse into the bar and caused a great deal of damage. However, Price always handsomely compensated the owners for that damage while bringing a bit of appreciated notoriety to their businesses.

Occasionally on the way home from one of his nights out, he would stop by the farmer's market and purchase a cart full of vegetables. The driver was then told to dump his produce in front of Price's store. Curious people quickly gathered to find out what was happening and subsequently took time to shop.

He was also known to throw unsuspecting youths into the Erie Canal. After rescuing them, he handed them money while instructing them to tell their mothers to spend the money on new clothes sold at his store. One of his more "popular" stunts was to ride his horse into his own establishment to show how durable his rugs were. Again, all these pranks were done as a form of promotion.

Milton Price's exploits did provide entertainment for all the citizens of Syracuse; however, he was also known for his many acts of philanthropy. There are numerous newspaper articles that detail the contributions he made to the community. He donated 2000 yards of calico to Syracuse's orphan asylum and hospitals, teaching materials to the Ladies' Employment Society, and thousands of dollars and merchandise to local churches and hospitals. Once while crossing Clinton Square, Price turned over a vendor's push cart full of popcorn, nuts, and candy and told the children playing in the area to help themselves. He then paid the shocked vendor double its worth.

Milton Price



Price was married to Rhoda Lynn in 1842 by abolitionist Rev. Samuel May. The Price mansion stood on the property that is now the Dey Brothers building. It was noted for its beautiful grounds and interesting statuary. In fact, the dog statue that now stands in front of the SPCA came from his property. In 1889, Milton Price's promotion days came to an abrupt end due to a short illness, but his antics were remembered for years to come. □

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