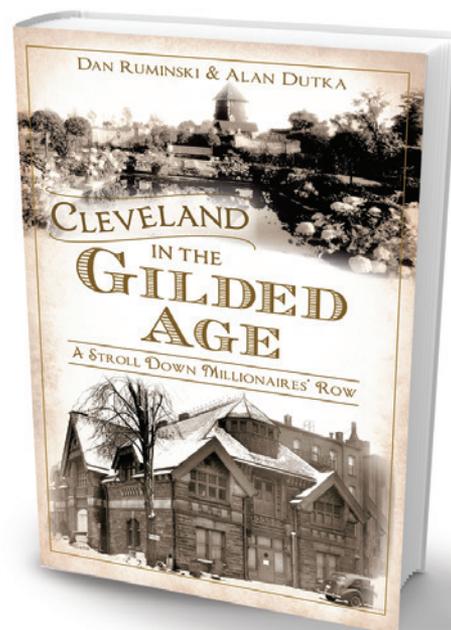


BOOK Review

BY PATTI LONDON



Cleveland's Storyteller

***Cleveland in the Gilded Age:
A Stroll Down Millionaire's Row***
by Dan Ruminski and Alan Dutka

Storytelling has been an art form for millenia thanks to widespread illiteracy before the advent of the printing press. It remains an art form thanks to practitioners like Dan Ruminski. Dan tells stories about Cleveland's past to schools, clubs and library groups over 90 times each year.

Luckily, Dan writes as engagingly as he speaks on the subject of Cleveland's history. With Alan Dutka, Dan published *Cleveland in the Gilded Age: A Stroll Down Millionaire's Row* in 2012. A former school teacher, Dan fell into the storytelling business by chance. After being well received by audiences interested in Cleveland's history, Dan has developed a mission to guide him in his oral and written storytelling. Dan's dual-purpose mission is to revive Cleveland's stories to bolster the pride of Clevelanders in their city and to engage the interest of those outside of Cleveland in tales of innovation and success, which are good to know no matter where they take place.

Cleveland in the Gilded Age furthers Dan's mission on both counts. How could Clevelanders fail to feel a sense of wonder when they learn that in 1885 half of all the millionaires in the world lived in Cleveland? Of the 68 wealthiest Americans in 1892, 53 lived on Euclid Avenue. These facts are from just the first pages of chapter one. The names of these individuals are familiar to anyone who has strolled through Lake View Cemetery or read the names chiseled into the stone façades of our landmarks: Rockefeller, Hanna, Mather, Stone and Wade.

At the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, Cleveland families were starting oil companies, mining iron ore, building ships and railroads and telegraph networks. The wealth generated by their success was exhibited along Euclid Avenue's Millionaire's Row. That so few of these residences remain is surprising, considering the solidity of the construction. The advent of the automobile hastened the relocation further east of many of Euclid Avenue's residents and the street gradually became a commercial thoroughfare. Dan's book contains many photographs and drawings of the mansions as they existed in their prime, courtesy of the collections of the Cleveland Press and Cleveland State University.

The period of Cleveland's economic heyday was relatively short, seeming to end with the Great Depression. The long-term consequences of the wealth generated during that short time, however, are experienced daily in Cleveland. To cite only one example: because Francis Drury manufactured a large number of kerosene stoves, we get to attend a world-renowned theater, the Cleveland Playhouse. Drury also helped establish the Cleveland Music School Settlement and financially supported the Cleveland Orchestra, Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University. Thanks to the Cleveland Clinic, Drury's Euclid Avenue mansion remains standing on East 86th today.

Dan Ruminski's stories, nicely collected in this slim volume, explain the origin of many of Cleveland's institutions. But behind every recognizable establishment are our forebears, each with an idea, an angle or a fortuitous meeting with someone who had an idea or an angle. These are the stories which gathered together make our common history. If you haven't had a chance to hear Dan tell these stories from his big chair, then get comfortable in front of a fire with *Cleveland in the Gilded Age*. You won't see the same city the next time you head down Euclid Avenue. ■