



Gertrude Price

Also Known As:

Aunt Gertie

Lived:

Unknown - Unknown

Worked as:

gossip columnist, journalist, reporter, women's page editor

Worked In:

United States

by Richard Abel

To date, nothing has been found concerning Gertrude Price before she began working for the Midwestern newspaper chain Scripps-McRae. In November 1912, an announcement appeared in the Scripps's weekly *Chicago Day Book* as well as in numerous other daily papers: as “a moving picture expert,” Price would be writing “The Movies” column of “personality sketches” of actors and actresses because the movies now were “the biggest, most popular amusement in the world” (“The Movies”). Apparently, she lived in Chicago as the 1912-1914 city directories listed her as a reporter there (Olsson 347).

From the beginning, Price focused her columns on screen personalities, addressing a new public interest the industry was exploiting to its advantage. All were illustrated with one or more halftone sketches drawn from publicity photos (sometimes copyrighted by the film companies). At first, the personalities she wrote about were associated with the licensed manufacturers, but gradually she included those working for the “Independents.” There are several striking patterns in her choice of players. One is the dozen or more columns on child actors, which paralleled several children's stories she signed as “Aunt Gertie.” Another is the frequency—one out of every four or five performers—of those acting in westerns. Most striking, however, are the number of columns—at least two thirds in all—devoted to women. Overall, Price tended to focus on active young women, carefree but committed to their work, frank and fearless in the face of physical danger; tellingly, nearly all seemed unattached and without children. Kalem's Ruth Roland, for instance, was “an athletic girl” who “runs, rides and rows with the freedom and agility of a boy” (“Runs, Rides, Rows”). Anna Q. Nilsson was another “movie beauty [who] risks [her] life to put thrill in the pictures for Kalem” (“Movie Beauty”). Jessylyn Von Trump, likewise, was “a capital rider” at American Film, who “likes herself in a cowgirl costume very much, indeed” (“She Reads

Balzac”). And that “tall woman of the picture players,” Ann Schaefer, enjoyed acting lead roles for Vitagraph’s western production unit (“Face Is Fortune”).

Complementing these profiles were columns on women who had become successful filmmakers and/or scenario writers. For example, Price wrote about [Nell Shipman](#) (“Lucky Thirteen Word”), [Lois Weber](#) (“Sad Endings Are All Right”), and the pioneering [Alice Guy Blaché](#), who now headed her own company, Solax (“Charming Little Woman Runs ‘Movie’ Business”). In one of her last columns, Price even described the “wonderful field which the moving picture has opened” as a “great new field for women folk,” where a woman’s “originality [...] her perseverance and her brains are coming to be recognized on the same plane as [a] man’s” (“Sees the Movies”).

From November 1912 through June 1914, newspaper readers may have read Price’s column, syndicated through the United Press Association, more than any of the few others on the movies. So, why did she stop? Were changes in the movie industry, Scripps-McRae readers, and film audiences partly responsible? In 1914, feature films were beginning to attain prominence, and Price seemed less interested in them than in shorter films, especially cowboy and cowgirl westerns. At the same time, readers and fans were becoming more middle-class, with women aligned more closely with consumption and domesticity. In April 1913, Price had described Essanay’s multi-talented Beverly Bayne as a “clever horsewoman” (“Movie Girl in Social Whirl”); by July 1914, the “Beautiful, Graceful Beverly Bayne, Society Actress of the Movies” was the subject of a series of newspaper articles Price wrote on proper feminine appearance and behavior (Gibson). By then, too, there was more competition, with [Mae Tinée](#) and [Kitty Kelly](#) introducing movie pages and film reviews in the *Chicago Tribune*.

According to Jan Olsson, by 1914 Price was living in Los Angeles, where the *Los Angeles Record* was publishing her column as well as a few short pieces about her novice work as a movie extra in late 1914 and early 1915. By then, she had accepted a permanent position at the *Record* and soon became editor of the paper’s daily “Women’s Page,” answering readers’ questions as Cynthia. Later she was in charge of the newspaper’s “Club” page (346-348). Price remained a member of the *Record*’s staff until at least the 1930s.

See also: [“Newspaperwomen and the Movies in the USA, 1914-1925,” Special Dossier on Early US Newspaperwomen](#)

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[Occasionally, there was no byline for Price in some of the columns, but these articles most likely belong to her given the textual style and captions. As such, this profile lists all articles attributed to Price, either directly or inferred, under her name in the bibliography—Eds.].

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