

Independence Day in Elmhurst

John Adams, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, wrote to his wife following the vote of Congress for independence from England, "It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of the continent to the other- from this time forward, for ever more."

People have celebrated U.S. Independence Day in various ways over the years. There have always been gatherings of friends and family for picnics and informal celebrations. However, today's article looks at Elmhurst's public observation of this holiday.

The First Ward Improvement and Social Club had a "Patriotic Entertainment" on the grounds of Lincoln School July 4, 1918 with recognition of those from the ward who were serving in World War I. The program included a flag ceremony, music, and patriotic orations.

The Elmhurst Golf Club hosted annual July 4th celebrations in the 1920s with a full day of golf, baseball, sack races, 3-legged races, and tennis tournaments followed by a dinner dance and fireworks.

Throughout the 1930s there is no record in the *Elmhurst Press* of July 4th community celebrations. In 1941 the American Legion T.H.B. Post 187 sponsored an all-day fair in East End Park that included: games, races, baseball, a swim meet, a concert by an 80-piece band, and fireworks. The event was planned so that "all Elmhurst might have a safe and enjoyable Fourth of July." (Elmhurst Press July 3 1941) Citizens who ordinarily spent money on fireworks were invited to contribute the same amount for public use. These celebrations sponsored by the American Legion continued until 1952.

The newly organized Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) assumed sponsorship of the community celebration in 1954 with its *Freedom Flame Festival* that included speakers, a concert by the Elmhurst Community Theater Orchestra, baseball games, an 8-act pageant of American history written and performed by Elmhurst residents and fireworks.

The Elmhurst Jaycees continue to sponsor a parade on July 4th followed by an ice cream social at the Elmhurst Historical Museum, sponsored in part by the Elmhurst Park District.

Sources for this Historic Highlight: the Elmhurst Historical Museum archives, Elmhurst Public Library, and *Chambers Dictionary of Quotations*



Kiwanis Club of Elmhurst entry, July 4, 1975 parade.