

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: RUTH H. STRAND (1904-1999)

Ruth Strand was born in Chicago in 1904 and moved to Elmhurst with her family in 1915. After graduating from York Community High School, Ruth Strand earned her B.A. from Northwestern University, and her Masters Degree from Columbia University in New York.

Ms. Strand had a lifelong career of public service at Elmhurst Public Library starting as a high school page and culminating in twenty years as Head Librarian, until her retirement in 1968. Ms. Strand, well known for her personal service to library visitors, had a keen sense for choosing just the right books for patrons.

She spearheaded the addition of a new wing to the library building in 1965 that included The Ruth Strand Children's Room. Ms. Strand had an avid interest in the history of Elmhurst.



*Ruth Strand at Elmhurst Public Library. M2014.1.343*

After her retirement she became an active volunteer at Elmhurst Historical Museum. She compiled biography notebooks that continue to be a starting point for patrons interested in former residents. In addition, she served on the Elmhurst Historical Commission 1969-1987, presented programs, served as co-chairperson of the Heritage Committee of the U.S. Bicentennial Commission in 1976, and researched and wrote biographical sketches of Elmhurst residents. Ms. Strand contributed to the publication of several books about Elmhurst history including: *Elmhurst Origin of Names: Streets, Schools, Parks and Landmarks*, 1976 (Elmhurst Branch of the American Association of American Women), *Elmhurst: Trails From Yesterday* by Don Russell, 1977 (the Heritage Committee of the Elmhurst Bicentennial Commission) and *Elmhurst: Scenes From Yesterday*, 1986 (Elmhurst Historical Commission)

When Ms. Strand moved to a retirement community in Batavia in 1987, she had written biographies of numerous early Elmhurst women. She was particularly interested in documenting women who were literally the first in their field (i.e. the first teacher, the first merchant, the first female school board member, etc.) Friends encouraged her to publish these works, but it did not seem possible until her friend Genie Urick suggested that they work together. Ms. Urick felt that the book should include biographies of contemporary women too, so she wrote those stories. Eventually the two women wrote the biographies of 39 Elmhurst women. Although Ms. Strand died in 1999, her work was published in 2001 with the printing of *The First Ladies of Elmhurst: Prominent Women of the Twentieth Century* by Ruth Strand and Genie Urick. The book is a lasting tribute to Ms. Strand and her lifelong interest in the history of Elmhurst.

*Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum Staff*

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