

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Elmhurst Travelers Football Team

Though football has been played in Elmhurst for more than a century at the youth and high school levels, the city once fielded a semi-professional team that produced winning seasons for decades in the early 20th century. The Elmhurst Travelers were a semi-professional football team that played in several local and Midwest leagues between their founding in 1927 and their eventual sale and move to Rockford in 1968. After humble beginnings as a 19-player team fielding football games in the space behind the old mill at Elmhurst College, the team was successful enough to bring home championships and sponsorship dollars to become a mainstay in the community.



Elmhurst Travelers team portrait, 1929. M2015.1.181

The story of the Travelers begins in 1927, when locals George Kulton, Mickey Hild, and Laut Davis came together to form a football club. Made up of former high school or college players and other athletically inclined young men, the team fielded a squad of 19 players for their first season. At that time, their competition consisted of other teams within the Chicago suburbs, playing teams from Wheaton, Villa Park, Bellwood and Berkeley. They won six of their first seven games, and would only lose two games total in their first three seasons. By 1929, their exploits were regularly covered by the *Elmhurst Press*. One of their most dominant campaigns was the 1941 season, in which they went undefeated and outscored their opponents 242 points to 6.



Elmhurst Travelers game, November 1946. M84.23.6

George Kulton served as both the coach and manager as well as the owner of the non-profit organization. He secured uniforms, playing fields, and competition for his team in addition to sponsorship dollars from community businesses to turn the Travelers into an Elmhurst institution. From the rough back of the mill yard on Walter Street, the Travelers eventually made the York Community High School field their home turf. The team would hold a couple practices a week for players who had day jobs and families. Sundays were spent at the YCHS gridiron or traveling to

their opponents' fields across Chicagoland. Kulton maintained his coaching position with the team for the duration of the organization's history in Elmhurst. The Elmhurst Travelers played in the Bi-State, Tri-State, and Central States semi-pro leagues in the 1950s and 1960s, often playing teams across state lines in Racine, Sheboygan, and South Bend.

By the mid-1960s, the team was facing financial difficulties. Despite a history of winning, the Travelers never drew large crowds to their home games, and in 1966 played a complete 10-game season as the visiting team. In 1967, the team relocated to Arlington Heights and became known as the Northwest Travelers. After one middling season in a new city, George Kulton sold the team to new ownership in 1968, when they moved westward to become the Rockford Rams. Across 41 years, the Elmhurst Travelers earned a record of 292 wins, 79 losses, and 29 ties, including 11 undefeated seasons.

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