

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: J. Hart Rosdail (1914-1977)

Many people do not know that Elmhurst was once home to the “World’s Most Traveled Man.” Jesse Hart Rosdail was born and raised on a farm near Springview, Iowa, on February 10, 1914. Upon graduating from college at the University of Iowa in 1934, Rosdail took off for a tour of Europe. The voyage spanned 10 months, 33 countries, and 11,000 miles. He accomplished this feat with \$300 cash and a second-hand bicycle that he purchased in Germany that he affectionately called Jacqueline. The experience left Rosdail with an insatiable longing to travel abroad.

After moving to a small frame house at 286 Elm on the north side of Elmhurst with his wife Dorothy in the early 1940s, Rosdail worked at a variety of jobs that allowed him to travel abroad for long stretches of time. Following a middling career in business, he eventually became a social studies teacher at Glen Hill Elementary School in Glendale Heights, allowing him to take advantage of months-long summer vacations to expand his growing list of visited countries.



Rosdail and his storied bicycle, Jacqueline, at his home at 286 Elm. M2019.2.378

Rosdail traveled frugally, usually moving by bicycle and simply pitching a tent when it came time to rest. Referring to his first voyage to Europe, he wrote that he “slept in Russian haycocks and in Spanish jails and ate with the common man whether in Scotland or in Turkey.” He maintained this Spartan ethos throughout his life while on his adventures across the globe.

In 1968, the *Guinness Book of World Records* took note, checked the evidence, and found that Rosdail had surpassed Robert Ripley of *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* fame to become the World’s Most Traveled Man, a record that would stand for another 10 years. In addition to traveling, he wrote several books about his exploits as well as other topics such as local history and genealogy. By the end of his life, Rosdail had, by his own account, traveled more than 1.5 million miles and visited 226 different nations and territories. After a brief illness, Rosdail passed away in November 1977. His final book, *Adventures of a Globe Trotter*, was published the following month.

*By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff
Updated April 2023*