

MESSENGER

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*Katherine Dunham in costume
1955, Photo courtesy of Library of
Congress, Music Division*

Katherine Dunham, Highlights of a Life Well-Danced

Glen Ellyn has been home to many famous people. But very few have an entire museum dedicated to them. A museum celebrating Katherine Dunham, the acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist, can be found in East St. Louis, Illinois.

Katherine Dunham was born on June 22, 1909 in a Chicago hospital to an African American father, Albert Millard Dunham the descendant of slaves, and a Canadian mother, Fanny June Williams.

Katherine was brought home by her proud parents to their house at 647 Euclid Ave. in Glen Ellyn, which still stands today. Her father, Albert Dunham, had built the home, and was listed in the 1910 census as a merchant tailor. Her mother died when Katherine was only three years old. Katherine and her brother went to live with an aunt in Chicago, while her father continued living and working in Glen Ellyn.

After her father remarried, the family moved to Joliet, Illinois when Katherine was seven, and her father ran a dry cleaning business. Katherine had one older brother, Albert Dunham Jr., with whom she was very close, as well as three half brothers and one half sister. Her grandmother, Victoria Buckner, also lived with them in Glen Ellyn. Because of a botched broken leg, Victoria's leg was amputated and she used a wooden leg. In 1910, the population of Glen Ellyn was 1,713 – about 6% of what it is today.

While attending Joliet Central High School, Katherine joined the Terpsichorean Club where she was introduced to a kind of modern dance. (*Terpsichore, in Greek mythology, was one of the nine muses and was the goddess of dance and lyrical poetry.*) Katherine became one of the first African American women to attend the University of Chicago, earning bachelor, master's and doctoral degrees in anthropology. After graduation, she established the Negro Dance Group. The Rosenwald Foundation was so impressed with her work that they funded two years of scholarship in the Caribbean where she studied dance and the motivations behind dance. Katherine revolutionized dance in the 1930s, bringing Caribbean and African influences to a European-dominated dance world.

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Katherine created the Dunham Technique which is credited with transforming the world of dance and helping people to appreciate the beauty of African and Caribbean cultures. In 1931, she formed a powerful partnership with John Pratt, a leading theatrical designer. They were married in 1949 and adopted their daughter, Marie Christine, who was then only 18 months old.

Katherine's first dance school was in Chicago. In 1945, the famous Dunham School opened in New York at 220 W. 43rd Street where such famous performers as Marlon Brando and James Dean studied. She danced and choreographed in the United States and Canada, and choreographed *Cabin in the Sky* with George Balanchine.

She founded the Katherine Dunham Dance Group which eventually became the famous Katherine Dunham Company. During the Depression, she served as a director in the Federal Theater Project, the government-sponsored relief program for artists. The Dunham Company toured for two decades, appearing in 57 countries. Her integrative approach is credited as developing one of the most important pedagogies for teaching dance that was ever created and is still used today. Katherine combined innovative interpretations of Caribbean dances, African rituals, African American rhythms and traditional ballet.

Katherine Dunham appeared in a variety of international films, including American films *Star Spangled Rhythm* (1942), *Stormy Weather* (1943), and *Casbah* (1948). She also choreographed *Pardon my Sarong* (1942), *Green Mansion* (1958), and John Houston's *The Bible* (1964).

Katherine became the first African American to choreograph for the Metropolitan Opera, with *Aida* in 1963. She also recorded songs that were in the show for the Decca label. The Dunham Company performed for the last time at the Apollo Theatre in 1965.

Also in 1965, Katherine became Artist in Residence at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. In 1967, she created "The Performing Arts Training Center" and the "Dunham Dynamic Museum" in East St. Louis, Illinois.

Books she authored include *Journey to Accompong* (1946) describing her experiences with the Maroons; *Dances of Haiti* (1983); an autobiography about her childhood, *A Touch of Innocence* (1959); *Island Possessed* (1969); and *Kasamance*, an African fable (1974).

Katherine Dunham was committed to social justice, and to the elimination of racism and poverty. She worked to re-direct the energy of violent street gangs through the performing arts in St. Louis. She refused to perform at segregated venues in the United States, and was politically

active on domestic and international rights. She made international headlines in 1993 when she staged a hunger strike of 47 days at the age of 82, to protest the U.S. government's repatriation policy for Haitian immigrants.

During her lifetime, Katherine Dunham earned numerous honorary doctorates, awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Arts, The Kennedy Center Honors, the Plaque d'Honneur Haitian-American Chamber of Commerce Award, French Legion of Honor, Southern Cross of Brazil, Grand Cross of Haiti, NAACP Lifetime Achievement Award, The Albert Schweitzer Music Award, and the Urban Leagues' Lifetime Achievement Award. Katherine Dunham died on May 21, 2006 at the age of 96, and was preceded in death by her husband, John Pratt, in 1986.



Katherine Dunham and her daughter Marie Christine board a plane to Rome in 1954. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress, Music Division



Katherine Dunham in costume for *Tropical Revue* (1945), at New York's Century Theatre. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress, Music Division

On your next trip to St. Louis, Missouri, you may want to schedule a tour of the Katherine Dunham Museum located in East St. Louis, Illinois, about three miles from the St. Louis Arch. Tours are by appointment only. Having seen it personally, I can assure you that it is worth the trip to learn about this incredible woman and to enjoy the amazing collection of items that she amassed in her travels throughout the world. She brought an anthropologist's eye to her collecting, as well as finding new ways to infuse culture into dance. Glen Ellyn is fortunate to have a connection to this distinguished woman's accomplished life.



The Katherine Dunham Museum, East St. Louis, Illinois

Tours available by appointment. Website: <http://kdcah.org/museum/>

*Article by Karen Hall
Sources: 1910 Census;
A Touch of Innocence
(autobiography)
by Katherine Dunham;
Special Presentation:
Katherine Dunham Time-
line, Library of Congress;
Katherine Dunham
Centers for Arts and
Humanities website*

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Thanks for joining us this past year!

Ruth Ann J. Allred

Britta Arendt

Norma J. Budzinski

Mary Fetter

Benno R. and Claudia C. Forster

Eric and Laurie Garza

Lori Kappel

Carol Hart Kohlhaas

Laura Micheli

Lynda Pratscher

Mark Rudins

Joyce E. Ursin

Tia and Reed Anders

Jeff and Linda Barkwill

Valerie Dehner

Heather and John Fleming

Amelia Fox

Sara Grabenhofer

Jean Kaczmarek

Janet Linhart

Theresa and Stephen Murphy

Susan Rhodes

Jeanne Sylvester

Tyler and Susan Woods

History's Mysteries: The Willie Crighton Headstone

by Kirk Burger, Assistant Director

Michael Crichton, the famous author and screen writer, once said “If you don’t know history, then you don’t know anything. You are a leaf that doesn’t know it is part of a tree.” Pearl Buck, Nobel and Pulitzer prize winning novelist, also expressed a similar opinion stating, “If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.” These folks understood the important lessons we could learn from studying history. However, sometimes historical discoveries raise more questions than the answers we can glean from them. Sometimes the answers we ask of history go unanswered.

Historical mysteries don’t always come on a grand scale, nor do they always come to us from the darkness of ancient, pre-historic times. Sometimes, they come to us out of our own backyards and basements. Here’s a perfect example of what I’m talking about. On Friday March 5th, the Glen Ellyn Historical Society received a call from Heidi Howlett, museum educator for the Geneva History Museum. Heidi told us that the Kane County Courthouse had found a headstone in its basement she believed belonged to a former Glen Ellyn resident.



The name and dates on the headstone were mostly legible, but parts were missing. Heidi deciphered the name on the stone, WILLIE CRIGH, as being Willie Crighton who had died at the age of 4 years, 10 months, in 1884. She searched through cemetery records and found Willie had been buried in a family plot at Forest Hill Cemetery in Glen Ellyn. So why was Willie in Glen Ellyn and his headstone in a basement 15 miles away?

The Glen Ellyn Historical Society found Willie’s mother, Mary Cooper Crighton (1857-1911), was L.C. Cooper’s sister. L.C. Cooper (1846-1923) is remembered as one of Glen Ellyn’s earliest historians. Willie’s father was John W. Crighton (1855-1925). Mary and John were also buried in Forest Hill. So we started our search there.

The headstones for Willie, Mary and John Crighton are all the same size, style and material. They are a matching set. With Willie passing in 1884, Mary in 1911 and John in 1925, it’s unusual the headstones match exactly. This led us to believe the Crighton family may have replaced Willie’s original headstone, from 41 years earlier, with a stone to match Mary and John’s. However, this would not explain why Willie’s original stone ended up in Geneva.

I contacted a descendant of the Cooper family, also appropriately named L.C. Cooper, to see if we could find out more. L. C. Cooper found in his genealogical research files that John Crighton, Willie’s father, appeared in the 1910 census records as residing in Geneva as a milk dealer. So, the Geneva—Glen Ellyn connection was resolved. Heidi took it from there. She found the Crightons once lived in a farm on Kaneville Road then later at 213 S. Fifth Street in Geneva. The courthouse where the headstone was found was built in 1892, replacing the courthouse that had been destroyed by fire in 1890.

Together, we had solved the question about who Willie Crighton was, and his family’s connection to Glen Ellyn and Geneva. The mystery as to how Willie’s headstone found its way to the courthouse basement goes unsolved. The answer to this mystery is still out there, somewhere. Maybe it will be solved by future historians. But then again...maybe not!



JEAN JESKE

PAUL HERWALDT SENIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR



Congratulations to Jean Jeske for receiving the Glen Ellyn Chamber of Commerce Community Award as the Paul Herwaldt Senior Citizen of the Year! Jean is on the Board of Directors at the Historical Society, has been an active volunteer here since 1991, and has been in charge of Public Relations since 1992. She has also facilitated public relations efforts for other community organizations, including the Glen Ellyn Woman's Club, the Lombard Garden Club, Grace Lutheran Church, the Newcomers, the Junior Woman's Club, the Glen Ellyn 4th of July Committee, the Elmhurst Hospital Association, and the Glen Ellyn-Wheaton Art Institute Associates. Before that, Jean handled public relations for Glen Crest Middle School. Jean and her wonderful husband Jerry have lived in Glen Ellyn since 1964. Jean, thanks for all your years of hard work and dedication!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Just go to our website *Calendar of Events* for the Zoom link. No advance registration required. Click on the link on the website to join the program. You will find it at: <https://www.gehs.org/calendar-of-events.html>

The Seven Names of Glen Ellyn — on Zoom Wednesday, April 14 at 7 p.m.

Did you know that Glen Ellyn has had seven names? Local historian and author Dan Anderson will be sharing the history of Glen Ellyn through its seven names. This Zoom presentation will share many tidbits of Glen Ellyn history, and help you to understand some of the names you see in the Village, like Stacy's Corners. A free presentation!

Native American History in Glen Ellyn — on Zoom Tuesday, April 27 at 7 p.m.

Kirk Burger, our assistant director, will be providing a short presentation on Glen Ellyn's Native American history, focusing especially on the Potawatomi which we know preceded Glen Ellyn's European American settlers. A free presentation!

Book Discussion Group: Meeting Virtually — on Zoom Thursday, May 6 at 10 a.m.

*The book is **Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days to Washington** by Ted Widmer, about the thirteen day train journey of president-elect Abraham Lincoln from Springfield to Washington where he was sworn in as the 16th President. Free! Everyone welcome!*

Memorial Day Flag Planting at Forest Hill Cemetery — in person with masks Tuesday, May 25 at 10 a.m.

Join other volunteers to plant flags on the graves of Civil War soldiers at Forest Hill Cemetery in Glen Ellyn. Volunteers gather at 10 a.m. at the cemetery on the corner of St. Charles and Riford. Flags and grave locations are provided. It is a wonderful way to honor the true meaning of Memorial Day.

GLEN ELLYN VINTAGE AUTO FEST AND DEALING WITH THE PANDEMIC BLUES

by Jim Manak, GEHS Board Member

For many Glen Ellyn residents the pandemic has meant staying at home. For example, I have turned to my home to write my monthly column and Zoom meetings. Working at home is now the norm for many people. Having a hobby can help to enjoy some of the time spent beyond our usual routine.

For three Glen Ellyn residents, driving antique cars around town has now become somewhat of a relief from the lock down. It is an opportunity to safely enjoy these vehicles without the contact dangers that would be part of a typical car show. Simply driving around involves no personal contact and little interaction with others. Perhaps you have seen some of these cars on village streets since May.

For example, Bill Morris has two 1930s Pierce Arrows; Mark Spandikow has a 1936 Auburn Speedster and I have a 1929 Hupmobile, 1953 Cadillac and 1962 Trabant Kombi. These have been shown at the annual Glen Ellyn Vintage Auto Fest at the History Center in June (cancelled in 2020 and hopefully to return this year on June 5th). My son also has antique Volkswagens: a 1963 Beetle, 1965 Bus and 1974 Karmann Ghia. They can now be seen driving around Glen Ellyn in a kind of open air display that satisfies the rules of social distancing.



1929 Hupmobile

The next time you see one of these cars on the streets of Glen Ellyn — and there are many other antique cars in town — don't forget to wave!

The Glen Ellyn Historical Society hopes to have its annual vintage car show return this June in a modified, pandemic version. Only the outdoor portion of the show will be held. It is optimistically scheduled for Saturday, June 5 from 10 a.m.—3 p.m. behind Stacy's Tavern Museum with parking at the History Center at 800 N. Main St. Vintage and antique vehicles will be on display for the public to see. The indoor portions of the event will not be held this year. But one can hopefully roam freely and enjoy the wide variety of vehicles on display, wearing a mask and social distancing.

Interested in entering your vehicle? You will find the registration form in the lobby of the History Center, or on the Historical Society's website: www.gehs.org/autofest.html.



1953 Cadillac

We encourage you to check the website before attending the show, as we won't know definitively if there are favorable pandemic conditions until close to the event. Come enjoy the wonderful vehicles on the grounds of Glen Ellyn's only history museum on June 5th, and lift those pandemic blues!



In Memorium



Remembering our members
and volunteers
who are missed but never forgotten –

Jan-Ann Detmer

Earlene Merrick

Ronald Rennard

Former Member of our Board of Directors

Christiane Rowe

Cleo Wilson

Marilyn Wolff

Ernie Wright

Ruth Wright

Former President of our Board of Directors

Book Group Discussions now on Zoom!

All listings and Zoom workshop links are on
our website calendar of events at:
<https://www.gehs.org/calendar-of-events.html>

Thursday, May 6 at 10 a.m.

*Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days to
Washington* by Ted Widmer

Thursday, July 8 at 10 a.m.

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents
by Isabel Wilkerson

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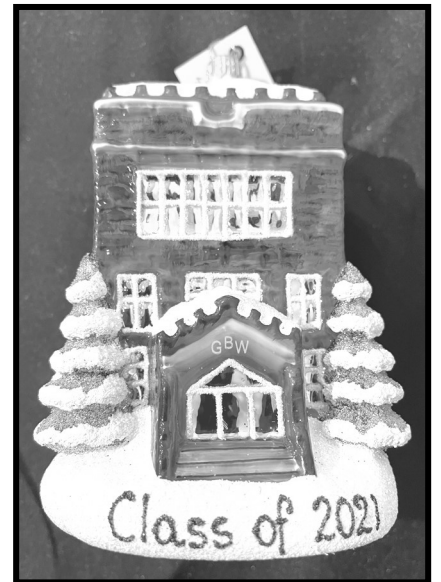
Please note: Stacy's Corners Store is open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 pm. Tuesday through Saturday
for walk-ins, contactless pick-up, free local delivery and by appointment.

Please call 630-469-1867 or email store@gehs.org
if you want to schedule an appointment to shop privately.

For everyone's safety, **Stacy's Tavern Museum** will remain closed, likely until Phase 5.
The History Center remains closed for public events due to pandemic precautions.

STACY'S TAVERN MUSEUM COMMEMORATIVE ORNAMENT: CELEBRATING 175 YEARS

These beautiful glass-blown Stacy's Tavern Museum ornaments were created exclusively for us by local Glen Ellyn artist Matt Litavsky of Mattarusky Ornaments in honor of the 175th anniversary of Stacy's Tavern Museum. This heirloom art piece will adorn your home for years to come. Two designs available: winter and spring! We also have the Mattarusky Ornament of Glenbard West which can be personalized with the year of graduation. Ornaments produced and hand-painted in Poland.



**** Pick up your ornament by shopping in person
at Stacy's Corners Store**

**** Or order your ornament by calling 630-469-1867
and have your order delivered locally for free,
use contactless pickup, or have your order shipped.**

Our Store Manager, Kathy Becker, makes gift buying easy!



STACY'S CORNERS STORE 800 North Main St. - Glen Ellyn

630-469-1867 store@gehs.org www.glenellynhistory.org

Open Tuesday - Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

*You can shop in the store, by phone or by appointment.
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Sales benefit the Glen Ellyn Historical Society