



Champaign County Historical Society and Museum  
Est. 1934

Nov/Dec 2020

# CHAMPAIGN CHRONICLES

## Address from the President

In my last address (September 2020), I described all the great accomplishments that we have made thus far—UU archives reception; refurbishing War Room; raised over \$12,000; and held a program in July 2020 to name a few. Since that time, we have held yet another program to boot. Further, we were also able to hold our annual Oktoberfest and it was a fantastic success and turnout! Thank you all for coming and supporting Champaign County and our Museum.

Most importantly, I would like to personally thank each and every volunteer who gave their time and effort in making Oktoberfest a huge success. Those volunteers are as follows: James Heiser, Helena Heiser, Nancy Weatherhead, Sarah Finch, David Virts, Dona Tullis, Bob Corbett, Hugh Spellman, Doug George, Dorothy Lee, Jim Baker, Pete Kenton, Mike Hulbert, Sarah Stallsmith, Kathleen Moore, Sue Evans, Skipp Weithman, Sharon Carroll, Richard Baker, Tom Keller, Jerry Teets, Jo Frasure, Neil Stevens, Neil Evans, Mary Collier, Pam Bolton, Chuck Weymouth, Linda Weymouth, Becky Pyle, Terri Marratta, Victoria Banion, Cindy Randall, Beth Adair, Ken Wright, Dick Virts, and Dan Murphy.

Now that Fall is among us and the temperatures are dropping, what a great time to get into the indoor warmth and check out our Museum and new and improved facilities and offerings! Hope to see you soon!

Respectfully,  
Gregory L. Harvey, Esq.

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*The banner picture above  
was taken Dec. 5, 1931 in  
Monument Square,  
Urbana.*

## Dr. Elmer Curry by Elaei Brown, Grady Lantz, Ethan Rose, Janaya Scott, Gavin Stacy, and Michael Upchurch (6th grade students at Urbana Jr. High)

The students of Urbana Junior High School have selected Dr. Elmer Curry for their 2020 Project Based Learning assignment. They used primary and secondary resources to research his family history, educational background, and his different learning institutions. Dr. Curry was a pioneer in educational reform for African-Americans in the early twentieth century and many of his progressive schools were located throughout Champaign County.

Elmer Curry was born on March 23, 1871 in Delaware, Ohio. He lived in a log house on South Street with his mother Julia and his father George. His dad worked as a minister at The Second Baptist Church on Ross Street, which had a great impact on his future career in education. African-Americans that were freed from slavery were not permitted to an equal education that would have helped them to live a better life. Elmer was interested in helping solve that situation through education.

While attending Delaware City Schools at the age of 17 years old, Elmer rented a kitchen shed for 50 cents per month to start his own school for African-Americans. His school was called *The Place of Knowledge for Old and Young*. It was located at 19 Davis Street in Delaware, Ohio. The tuition was 25 cents per week and his first student was a 50 year old man who was a day laborer. After attending Michael College and graduating from Ohio Wesleyan University, he went on to become the first African-American teacher at the desegregated Delaware City Schools.

In 1889 moved to Urbana, Ohio and founded the *Curry Normal and Industrial Institute*. His school had a traditional education, which focused on reading, writing, and math. It also taught trade school skills, such as nursing, caretaking, farming, printing, and clothes making. The building still stands today and is located at 325 East Water Street.

Dr. Curry passed away June 19th, 1930, in Springfield and was buried at Oakdale Cemetery in Urbana, Ohio. There were over 2,000 students who attended the various Curry Schools. Dr.



Elmer Curry's story illustrates activist African-Americans from Ohio utilizing the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments in an attempt to better the lives of African-Americans.

*The Curry Institute located on 325 East Water St. circa 1910.*

## Upcoming Programs



*The Printz home on West Reynolds Street circa 1925.*

In December, (exact date to be determined) Terri Marratta will be presenting a program on the women's suffrage movement. She will cover the larger view of the movement and how she discovered a personal connection while doing research for this program.



## Membership Dinner Cancelled

Unfortunately, due to the COVID pandemic there will be no membership dinner in December this year. We hope to have a new membership event this summer to replace the dinner, but it will depend on what is happening with the pandemic. Please keep an eye on your newsletter for more information as we get closer to this spring.



## Volunteers Needed!

The Champaign County Historical Society is always looking for volunteers to help with everything from being a docent, to researching exhibits and programs. If you would be interested in becoming a volunteer please contact the Museum Director, Cheryl Ogden, by phone at 937-653-6721 or by email at

champhistmus@ctcn.net. More

information can also be found on our website:

[champaigncountyhistoricalmuseum.org](http://champaigncountyhistoricalmuseum.org)

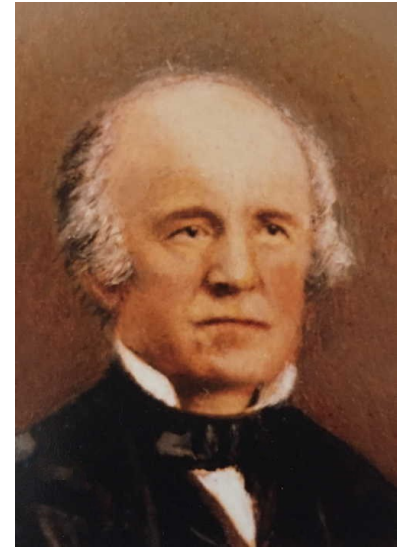


# Mary Loring Williams by Candy Gilliam



*Portrait of Mary Williams*

Mary Loring was born in 1819 and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, the daughter of a well known and prosperous banker. In 1842, Mary married Mr. Milo G. Williams, a pioneer educator in Ohio. Milo Williams began teaching school at the age of 16 years in a log cabin near Cincinnati. He was a versatile man, and besides being a teacher, he devoted his time to studying law, anatomy, surgery and botany. He was gradually accepted as an



*Portrait of Milo Williams*

intellectual by the scholars of Cincinnati and this led to his moving to Dayton, OH to help in the formation of the Dayton Public Library in the 1840's. He was also a meteorologist who made the first weather observations ever recorded in Dayton in 1844.

In 1850, Milo Williams, with his wife and two daughters, traveled by private carriage to Urbana to assume control of the newly formed Urbana University. The university was first started on a corner in the Public Square before moving to the corner of Scioto and Locust Streets the next year. The first college building, known as Bailey Hall, was completed in 1853. When the university opened its doors, Mr. Williams was professor of the science department. His wife, Mary Loring Williams worked tirelessly next to her husband in starting this young institution, which was only the second university to accept women at the time. Mary was full of energy and enthusiasm in training all the young students who came under their care.

With the start of the Civil War in 1861, Mary earnestly helped those in need. She constantly worried about the young men fighting on the front lines and when hospital supplies were desperately needed, she was the leading spirit of the Relief Corps in making sure those orders were fulfilled. Her home was always open to volunteers who were preparing bandages and clothing for the soldiers. She organized and served as President of the Urbana Aid Society, where she assisted women and children left behind by the soldiers. After the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865, Mary Williams was one of the few people allowed to board his funeral train. When the train came through Urbana, Mary asked the guard standing at the door if she might be permitted to enter. He consented and lifted the platform for her where she

*The Williams Home Circa 1860s*



placed a wreath of flowers upon the casket of the beloved President. During the 1870's, Mary continued her interest in various temperance movements and was president of the Women's Christian Union of the Temperance Crusades.

Milo Williams died from the effects of a stroke in 1880, leaving Mary and their daughters to spend more time in their charity work. Every year they invited friends and extended family to celebrate Decoration Day (now known as Memorial Day) with a picnic at their home. Their front lawn was covered in flowers. The ladies held yearly fund raisers and made new flags, which were taken to Oak Dale Cemetery and placed upon the graves of soldiers.

Mary Williams was always a faithful member of the New Jerusalem Church. She and her husband were charter members of the New Church Society that started in the 1850's, sharing spiritual growth in a non-judgmental way. She was a member of the Ladies Society and often held fundraisers to raise money for her church. Starting in the mid-1880's, Mary and her daughters made annual Christmas Day visits to the County Infirmary bringing gifts to give to the misfortunate. Mary continued to hold picnics at her home throughout the years, always with entertainment of music and piano playing, serving coffee and ending the evenings with games. Her annual Christmas Bazaar & Suppers were a huge hit, with plenty of tables set up with useful and good things to buy for the Holidays. There would be country tables, fancy tables, apron booths, candy tables, market produce, rugs and comforters --the skill and ingenuity of many Urbana women as seamstresses and cooks were on display! By 1900, Mary began holding an annual gathering every June for the Alumni Association of Urbana University, honoring the current graduates and faculty with evening receptions. When her kitchen caught on fire in 1905, Mary showed her deep appreciation to the fire department by serving them breakfast the next day. In 1906, Mary held a tea fundraiser, selling cups of tea for 10 cents each with all proceeds going towards the Japanese famine sufferers. The Williams home always promised to be hospitable and was known for their charity and philanthropy.

On Mary's 90th birthday in 1909, a huge social gathering was held at her home by the GAR. The New Church surprised her with 90 carnations in honor of each year of her birth. Sadly,

a few months later, Mary Loring Williams died on January 10, 1910. Her pallbearers were all men who had worked for her, all who felt deep love and appreciation for her family. The U.S. flag was flown at half mast on the GAR pole in the public square, a tribute never given to any other woman in the history of Urbana. It was lowered in testimony of her noble efforts during the Civil War, her love of every soldier and because she worked so tirelessly on behalf of others and giving so much of her time to charities. "Their cheerful part in every worthy case, no less than their many excellences, have doubtly endeared them to this whole community" was expressed by the Urbana Daily

Times when writing about the Williams family.



*The Williams house circa 2020*



*Mary Louise Williams, oldest daughter of Mary and Milo*

## Mission Statement

The Mission of the Society is to tell the Champaign County story and to administer the collection, preservation, and display of our county's artifacts, documents, and other historical resources.

## Welcome New Members

Neil & Karen Stevens

Betsy J. Moell

Cindy Randall

Preston, Joyce, Ben, & Brian Powell

Sally Engle

Mike Russell

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MUSEUM



Est. 1934

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