

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Paving York Street

When Otto Balgemann was elected Mayor of Elmhurst in April 1919 the city was in need of modernization. It was time for elected officials to update the city's infrastructure to better serve the growing population. One of the major issues that needed to be addressed was the condition of the streets. The following statement appeared in the *Elmhurst Booster* newsletter: ... *Let's not apologize any longer for our streets. Our most excellent city administration has delved painstakingly and intelligibly into the matter of the streets. As the Booster editor so aptly stated in his last issue "Stick for Paving or Stick in the Mud."* (February 7, 1921)

On March 7, 1921, City Council passed an ordinance to pave York Street from Lake Street to St. Charles Road; First Street from Haven to Addison; and Park Avenue from Kenilworth to Prospect Avenues. The American Asphalt Paving Company won the contract with a bid of \$175,615 and a promise to complete the job within ninety days. (*Elmhurst Press* June 24, 1921). By mid-August members of the Boosters Club realized that the paving would be completed by Labor Day, and thought it would be appropriate to plan a public celebration to mark the occasion. Elmhurst residents were urged to stay in

Elmhurst on Labor Day, "Arrange to stay here on a week from next Monday, September 5, if for no other reason than to have brought home to you the kind of a city you are living in today in comparison with the one you lived in a few years ago." (*Elmhurst Press* August 26, 1921)



Mayor Otto Balgemann and city officials cutting the ribbon on newly-paved York Street during the Labor Day parade, September 5, 1921. M2010.1.26



The Elmhurst Boosters Club march in the Labor Day parade on W. Park Avenue, September 5, 1921. M2001.95.100

The festivities started with a parade originating at York and Lake Streets, proceeding south on York. City officials led the parade that had floats and decorated vehicles representing many Elmhurst businesses. When the city leaders got to the post office building at 101 N. York, the parade stopped and the mayor cut a ribbon, as a band played the Star Spangled Banner. The celebration continued with a concert by the Daily News Band, a baseball game, a carnival, and a

dance on the new pavement. According to the *Elmhurst Press*, "Summing up the day there was just twelve hours of rejoicing over the paving of our streets; and considering what the accomplishment means to all of us, it was not a minute too long." (September 9, 1921)

Modernization of Elmhurst continued throughout the 1920s with an improved sewer system, construction of cement sidewalks, and the installation of decorative electric streetlights.

By Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, Updated October 2021