

History of Elgin

Elgin is a city 40 mi. (64.5 km) northwest of Chicago on the Fox River. Most of Elgin lies within Kane County, Illinois, with a portion in Cook County, Illinois. As of the 2000 census, the city had a total population of 94,487, making it the eighth-largest city in Illinois. Elgin was profiled in a 1997 issue of Money Magazine as a microcosm of the United States. It is also the 251st largest city in the United States. As of 2007 Elgin's population is estimated to be at 101,903, and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission forecasts Elgin will have a population of 167,375 in 2030. History The Black Hawk Indian War of 1832 led to the expulsion of the Native Americans who had settlements and burial mounds in the area, and set the stage for the founding of Elgin. Thousands of militiamen and soldiers of Gen. Winfield Scott's army marched through the Fox River valley during the war and accounts of the area's fertile soils and flowing springs soon filtered east. In New York, James T. Gifford and his brother Hezekiah Gifford heard tales of this area ripe for settlement, and travelled west. Looking for a site on the stagecoach route from Chicago to Galena, they eventually settled on a spot where the Fox River could be bridged. In April of 1835, they established the city, naming it after the Scottish hymn "The Song of Elgin. In 1849, the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad reached Elgin, which later would be served by railroads running along both banks of the Fox River, linking the growing town to Chicago and other urban centers. Early Elgin achieved fame for the butter and dairy goods it sold to the city of Chicago. Gail Borden established a condensed milk factory here in 1866, and the local library is named in his honor. The dairy industry became less important with the arrival of the Elgin Watch Company. The watch factory employed three generations of Elginites from the late 19th to early 20th century, when it was the largest producer of fine watches in the United States. Today, the clocks at Chicago's Union Station still bear the Elgin name. In 1872, Elgin attracted a major state institution, the Northern Illinois State Mental Hospital and later a Veterans Administration Hospital. Elgin has a long tradition of education and invention. Elgin is home to the Elgin Academy, the oldest coeducational, non-sectarian college preparatory school west of the Allegheny Mountains. Elgin High School boasts five navy admirals, a Nobel Prize winner, a Pulitzer Prize winner, a Tony Award winner, two Academy Award-winning producers, Olympic athletes and a General Motors CEO among its alumni. Elgin resident John Murphy invented the motorized streetsweeper in 1914 and later formed the Elgin Sweeper Corporation. Pioneering African-American chemist Lloyd Hall was an Elgin native, as was the legendary marketer and car stereo pioneer Earl "Madman" Muntz and Max Adler, founder of the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, America's first planetarium.