

Harry Elkes

2/28/1878 – 5/30/1903

Plot 14 lot 1

Harry Elkes was born to William and Martha Elkes in Port Henry, N.Y. on February 28, 1878. His father was a home decorator and constructor which required the family to move several times while Harry was a child. They lived in Essex County, Saratoga and Canada in order for his father to find work. They settled in Glens Falls in 1893 when Harry was 15 years old. It was the time of the Lumber Baron Boom and Harry's father was a part of building many homes in Glens Falls.

Upon moving to Glens Falls, Harry's life's passion was born. He received a bicycle in March 1893, not only was it fun riding the streets of Glens Falls but Harry realized that he could go fast. He rode up and down the big hill on Glen Street 20 times a day with his father William "Pop" Elkes coaching. William was a famous trainer and ex-athlete himself. Because of his long and lean frame he was nicknamed "Lanky". His friends encouraged him to enter the July 4th bike race in Saratoga. He won 2nd place in a sharply contested race. Then he began entering amateur bicycle races all over the area, he began to win and win by wide margins. At 15 it was exciting for Harry; no one could believe that he was so young. In 1896 he was encouraged to enter the professional ranks with the offer of a large salary. An offer was provided by a bicycle company that wanted him to ride their wheels only. He agreed and at 18 began bringing in as much income as his father. French Bicycle Champion, Lucien Lesna, saw him ride and encouraged him to enter the Charles River Bike Race in Boston in 1898.

Elkes broke records at all distances up to 25 miles, beat two of the most famous pace-followers in the world (Tom Linton of England and Edward Taylor of France) in paced matches. On the way, he met and defeated the best American pace-followers. He also broke the world hour paced record with 34 miles 1223 yards behind the small motored tandems of the time, not the big motorcycles of the 1900's. His work had not passed unnoticed abroad, and he raced in Europe at the invitation of the French and Germans in 1899 and 1900, meeting and defeating Edward Taylor (France), "Jenny" Walters (bol d'Or and Goldene Rad winner), Thad Robl (Germany), Bouhours (France) and Tinkertam, Linton. All these men were top World class champions or record holders. One of the few men to ever beat Harry at a paced race was his pal Will Stinson.

In 1900 Harry won the USA National Paced Championship. In 1902 he won a 6 day race in New York with his partner, Floyd MacFarland. The pair were known throughout the World, they even won the American Race at Madison Square Garden. Harry took a spill at Revere Track on May 30th which kept him laid up for about 4 weeks. Bicycle racing was the number one sport, even bigger than baseball from 1899 to 1922.

Harry was invited to race in Europe in 1902, but because his father was ill he didn't want to travel too far from home. He did however; break the World's record for the mile once in 1902 and twice in 1903. Harry decided that 1903 was to be his last year of racing; he had earned enough prize money and accolades to pay for his education as a Doctor. He decided to race all summer and retire on Labor Day. Harry wanted to win the Charles River Race very badly to earn money for his impending wedding to Miss Edith Garrett. She was the

daughter of Dr. and Mrs. JS Garrett. Harry met Edith when they were just children and they had always known they were meant for each other. Dr. Garrett had made arrangements with his old friend Dr. Chase of Chelsea, Massachusetts for Harry's apprenticeship as a Physician right after the September wedding. Harry and Edith were planning to move to Chelsea, Massachusetts for at least a year.

Because of his record breaking year, he was again invited to race in the Charles River Race. In this race motorcycles were used for pacing and they raced right alongside the bicycles.

By the time the Charles River Race was started on Memorial Day weekend in 1903, Harry had obtained the hour record for paced cycle racing, lost it for a year and regained it in style at the Paris Exposition. This placed him as the leading racer of the middle distance cyclists of the world. Harry was eager to keep or break his own records at Charles River.

Saturday's race could not have started any better. Harry broke the World's record for five miles, ten miles and fifteen miles. He was headed into the sixteenth miles when something went awfully wrong. His pace was about 60 miles per hour and he was leading the pack, with Will Stinson and his pacemaker F.A. Gately on his motorcycle in close proximity. Harry's back tire blew out and he began to lose control of the bicycle. He turned toward the bank at the side of the track and put his foot down to slow his speed. When Harry did this, his foot caught, the bicycle stopped, the chain broke and he was thrown backwards onto the track and into the path of Gately's motorcycle. The great machine was ditched, but not before it had crushed Harry's head in a dreadful manner.

Stinson on his bicycle rammed into the accident in a horrible tangle. Attendants ran to the men and ambulances were quickly called. Harry Elkes died on the way to the Homeopathic Hospital in Boston, Stinson and Gately were severely injured.

A shock went through the sporting world. News of Harry's death was wired around the world. Harry's Uncle Harry Elkes of Saratoga went to Boston to recover his body. Harry was but 25 years old. Will Stinson attended the funeral, still heavily bandaged.

Admirers from Boston and New York erected a granite monument at his grave in Glens Falls. On the monument is the "winged wheel" the symbol of his racing club, "Old Boston".

Prepared by Mrs. Kyle Graves from a theatrical script written by William Woodward for the Chapman Historical Museums fall Glens Falls Cemetery Tour in 2003 and 2010.

Questions and comments should be directed to the Glens Falls City Historian at: City Hall 42 Ridge St. Glens Falls, NY historian@cityofglensfalls.com 518-761-3871.



Harry Elkes grave stone and photo of him on his racing bike.

