



# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

[www.LansingHistory.org](http://www.LansingHistory.org)

March 2016

## Up Cloche: Fashion, Feminism, Modernity A Guided Tour of the MSU Museum Exhibit

Thursday, March 10, 7:00 p.m.

MSU Museum

409 W. Circle Drive, East Lansing

Please note that this event coincides with MSU's spring break, thereby allowing for additional parking near the museum.

Don your favorite vintage hat and join HSGL and Shirley Wajda, the curator of *Up Cloche: Fashion, Feminism, Modernity* for a guided tour of this temporary exhibit at the MSU Museum. We'll hear the stories behind the exhibit, which highlights the storied fashion of the 1920s when young women soundly rejected the clothing traditions of the Victorian grandmothers and Edwardian mothers. She became known as the "flapper"--a daring young thing who voted, worked, and danced wearing short dresses, clear stockings, bobbed hair, and a head-hugging cloche hat. The cloche--a bell shaped hat considered "clever" and "smart"--framed the face with fashionable Art Deco panache. Explore how these young American women of the 1920s and 30s used consumer goods to become modern.

## Lansing Has Fun!

### Exhibit March Update

Due to some scheduling issues, the next installment of the Lansing Has Fun! exhibit featuring clubs, fraternal organizations, and societies will not be installed in Lansing City Hall until mid April. More news about the exhibit and themed programming will appear in April's *History Explorer*.

The Delta Township Historical Society  
would like to invite you  
to attend....

## 2nd Annual Collector's Showcase

Saturday, March 12, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Delta Township District Library

5130 Davenport Dr., Delta Township

The Delta Township Historical Society and the Delta Township District Library invites the public to enjoy this free, for-fun, no buying or selling event. A People's Choice Award for the "best" collection will be awarded. Collectors who wish to display their collections must pre-register by **March 12**. For more information, or to register, visit [www.dtdl.org/showcase](http://www.dtdl.org/showcase) or call the library at 517-321-4014 ext. 4.

Anticipated collections available for viewing include Jim Blaine's PEZ candy dispenser collection, recently featured in the *Lansing State Journal*, Chinese jade, Coca-Cola items, vintage aviation-themed postcards, vintage hats, and T-Rex figures.

## Club Exhibit Items Needed!

HSGL is looking for memorabilia associated with Lansing area clubs, fraternal organizations, and societies for our April mini-exhibit. If you have something that you would like to loan or donate, please contact HSGL at 517-282-0671 or [info@lansinghistory.org](mailto:info@lansinghistory.org).

## Samuel Elgin Mifflin of Lansing, Michigan

by Roni Sionakides

A child's beanie that was donated to the Historical Society and a remembered name in William Wade Hinshaw's *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy* came together in a small bump. The shop was Mifflin's, owned and operated by Samuel Elgin Mifflin, first at 103 North Washington, where Comerica bank is located today, and later, until the store closed in 1924, at 109 S. Washington. And Mifflin, from an ancient Gaelic Scottish name, is an old Quaker family from the earliest formation of the Society of Friends.

About 1887, Elgin, as he was called, moved to Lansing, Michigan from Pennsylvania, with his wife, Harriet Sophia (Randall) Mifflin and young son, Samuel Elgin Jr. He established his store at 103 N. Washington, selling notions and men's and women's furnishings such as hats, ties, hosiery, gloves, collars, cuffs, underwear, ribbons, laces, etc. He owned and operated the store until his death in 1919, with his two sons continuing the business for another five years before they finally closed it. It was a shop that specialized in fine quality goods with advertisements on the front page of the *State Republican* next to J. L. Hudson's.

When one hears about Lansing's leading families, his name is not mentioned although his obituary said he was one of Lansing's most prominent businessmen. During his years up to his death he was involved in many businesses that were important in Lansing manufacturing as well as his own store. Primarily he



**Samuel Elgin Mifflin**

was active in Hugh Lyons and Company at various times: first president from 1894-1897, treasurer from 1898 to 1905, vice-president from 1906 to 1908, and president again after Hugh Lyons died in 1909 until his death in 1919. The founder, Hugh Lyons, was mayor of Lansing from 1904 to 1907. The Lyons Company at first made store fixtures of many types: store displays both floor and table models, manikins, hat stands, tie holders, and whatever would be needed to outfit the most modern shop. It also patented (#390,178) and made the Hat Comformator, a peculiar gadget that would stretch a new hat to fit the head of the purchaser perfectly as though it was a comfortable, old hat. Later the company would be an early investor in and producer of car bodies for REO Motor Company until 1930 when REO began to make their bodies in house. Both his sons, Elgin Jr. and Plummer, worked for the company for many years. Elgin Jr. was a director for a number of years.

At various times Elgin was also involved with several

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### Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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other Lansing manufacturers: vice-president of Automatic Sales Company that made the True Blue gum dispensing machine (label reads “Penny in Slot-Push the Rod,” nickel-plated cast iron base with glass dome, one sold at Wes Cowan’s Auction House for over \$4,000) about 1906-1907; vice-president of Michigan Distributing Company in 1912; treasurer of Gardiner Artificial Lumber Company in 1913 (located at 207 E. Franklin); vice-president of Kneeland Crystal Creamery (located at 42 Concord) in 1895 about the time the company moved from New York to Lansing. This company manufactured equipment for dairies. Also, he was a director of the Lansing State Savings Bank, vice-president of Duplex Truck Company (located at the corner of Washington and Mt. Hope Avenue), director of Auto Wheel Company, director of U.S. Mortgage and Bond Company of Detroit. He was one of the original fifteen directors of the businessmen’s association that brought about the industrial rebirth of Lansing after the panic of 1893. Not only was he a successful merchant and businessman, he was also involved in community service as a director of the Lansing Country Club, a trustee and treasurer of the First Presbyterian Church. He was nominated to become a member of the Board of Control of the Michigan School of the Blind in 1905 for a term of 6 years. He was busy man for one mentioned infrequently in Lansing’s movers and shakers. But that’s not surprising considering his Quaker family heritage.

John Mifflin and John Mifflin, Junior, father and son, came to America, from Wiltshire, England, in 1679, about three years before William Penn arrived. It is probable that they sailed in one of the five ships containing colonists, members of the Society of Friends, who disembarked at what is now Burlington, New Jersey, in 1677 or 1678. The family settled on an estate in Philadelphia’s Fairmont Park that was called Fountain Green. Mifflin was a merchant, a trade that passed down the generations through various lines. The family became wealthy, a common occurrence among the thrifty Quakers. The Quakers also placed a premium on education, founding school and colleges shortly after their earliest arrival in the colonies.



John’s great grandson, John (1714-1759), another wealthy Quaker merchant, held numerous significant political posts including trustee of the College and Academy of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) from 1755 until his death in 1759. He was the father of Thomas Mifflin (1744-1800), Revolutionary War general, and first governor of Pennsylvania. Although uncertain, this does appear to be Samuel Elgin Mifflin’s line since the name Thomas repeats down the generations.

Thomas Mifflin, a cousin, was one of the American Revolution’s most radical promoters even though he was born into a prominent Quaker mercantile family. He graduated at the age of sixteen from the above mentioned University of Pennsylvania, became a successful businessman and member of the prestigious American Philosophical Society. He became involved in politics, was sent to the Continental Congress in 1774. In August of 1775 George Washington selected him as the Continental Army’s first quartermaster general. At this point in time his Quaker Meeting disowned him for “being active in the promotion of military measures.” He served in the Pennsylvania legislature in 1778 to 1782 and again in 1785 to 1788 where he was the speaker of the Pennsylvania House of

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Representatives. In 1787 he was selected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, and was a signer of the U.S. Constitution. From 1790 to 1799 he served as the first governor of Pennsylvania, after which he returned to the state legislature where he served until his death in 1800. Sadly, it took a financial toll on the once wealthy businessman. His finances were so unsettled that he had to be buried at state expense. Thomas and his wife, Sarah (Morris) Mifflin, were the only Philadelphians painted by John Singleton Copley. The painting was from 1773, just before the Revolution, and is housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The first census of the United States in 1790 had this listing for him: Thomas Mifflin, Governor of the State, Water Street, East Side, Philadelphia.

Elgin was also a cousin of George Harrison Mifflin who became a partner in 1868 in the textbook publishing company that became Houghton Mifflin and Company in 1880. He was from a very wealthy family. His father, Charles Mifflin, a physician, born in Philadelphia, owned real property in 1870 with a value of \$120,000. George got the Mifflin surname in an unusual manner. His grandfather, Samuel Mifflin was born Samuel Francis to Sarah Mifflin and Turbutt Francis. Her father's (Samuel Mifflin) will instructed the younger Samuel to change his last name to Mifflin in order to inherit his wealthy grandfather's estate, Walnut Hill. Old Samuel was rich enough to have his and his wife's portraits painted by American artist Charles Willson Peale about 1777; both now hang in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As this Mifflin family moved west they were no longer Quaker but became Presbyterian. A great grandson of John Mifflin, Thomas Mifflin (1791-1862), grandfather of Elgin, moved to Butler County just north of Pittsburgh where he took up farming. He was definitely out of step with his mercantile family. Over time he built up a wealthy farm. Yet, his son, Robert Armstrong Mifflin (1827-1891), abandoned farming and instead followed the longtime family business. He was a merchant in dry goods and a grocer, a man active in his community who served as Justice of the Peace, clerk

of the Butler County court, and ran for the Legislature as a Republican. And was probably an abolitionist. He had four children, Thomas, Samuel Elgin and twin daughters Clara and Lillia. His sons Thomas and Samuel Elgin Mifflin grew up in the family business.

Samuel Elgin Mifflin was born October 1861 in North Washington, Washington Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania to Robert Armstrong Mifflin and Catherine Halderman where he started in the dry goods business with his father. He was educated in the common schools and attended college at Worcester. About 1883 he married Harriet Sophia Randall in Pennsylvania. Their first child, Samuel Elgin Jr. was born 1886 in Pennsylvania and his second son, Edward Plummer, was born June 1888 in the City of Lansing. Between births he and his family moved to Michigan and set up shop. About 1905 or 1906 he moved his store to 109 S. Washington where it operated until it's closing in 1925. He and his wife are buried in the family plot in Mount Hope Cemetery. There is a large monument at the site.

The family resided at 421 Seymour Street in a large wooden house, a modest house for a wealthy family. There was something of Quaker simplicity still held in his manner of living. The residence is still standing but has been completely remodeled and no longer resembles anything like the old residence might have looked. After Elgin's death, his younger son, Edward Plummer resided in the house until he died in 1963. His wife Helen lived there for a few more years then it was vacant by 1969, waiting for a new owner.

Elgin and Harriet's two sons both worked at the dry goods store, closing it a few years after their parents died. Samuel Elgin Mifflin, Jr., born June 1886 in Vanango Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, attended first local schools, followed by the University of Michigan, where he received a B.A., and then Dartmouth, where, in 1911, he received his Masters in Commercial Science. He served in the Naval Reserves in the First World War, in Wales and France. After the

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closing of Mifflin's store, he traveled. His first wife, Bertha Drees, whom he had married in 1912, died in 1919; his second marriage to Emelie Harwood ended in divorce in 1927. He was in Massachusetts when he married her and was probably divorced in the same state. There is no evidence she was ever in Michigan. He married his third wife, Alice Sovereign in 1928 in Indiana and they lived in New York near his mother's relatives and in northern Michigan for a while. On his marriage record he listed himself as retired. At age 42! They lived and are buried in Cheboygan County. He was obviously wealthy enough to live on his money. He never had children by any of his wives.

His brother, Edward Plummer Mifflin (1888-1963), on the contrary, did continue working after his father passed away, first at the store and as a director at Hugh Lyons. He married Helen Drees, sister of Samuel's first wife, Bertha, in 1916 and they had one child, Plummer Randall Mifflin (1917-1976). After Mifflin's closed he worked as a farm manager and at Westinghouse Electric Supply in Lansing in the 40s. But in the 1930s he had no occupation yet was well-off enough to have three African-American servants - Frances Breckenridge, William Crossgro, and wife Maggie Crossgro, all living in the old house. He and his wife are buried in the family plot in Mount Hope Cemetery.

Of special interest, one of Samuel Elgin's twin sisters, Clara, married Jonathan LeMoyne Snyder (1859-1918), who was the seventh president of Michigan Agricultural

College (M.S.U.) from 1896 to 1915. He was raised in Butler County, Pennsylvania near the Mifflin family. Snyder Hall at M.S.U. is named for him. Their children were Robert, LeMoyne and Plummer, all common family names. They lived on a farm in Lansing Township, and both are buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery in a family plot beside the Mifflin plot.

#### Resources

City Directories for City of Lansing, Michigan 1885-1925.

*Michigan Gazetteer*, 1885-1925.

U.S. Census 1790-1940.

William Wade Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*, Volume II, Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting.

Historical/Biographical Information from the Mifflin Collection at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

*Journal of the Senate of the State of Michigan*, Volume 2, Executive Journal/Committee of the Executive Business Report, Nominations to Office, page 1639.

*Headlight Flashes, Lansing, Michigan: A Reprint of a Periodical Growth of a City, 1895*, printed ca. 1959, page 6.

Obituary in the State Republican

Genealogical research at *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.com* and *Google*.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing  
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Lansing, MI 48901

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