

RE: Free public program

WHEN: Thursday, May 23, 2024 at 2:00pm

WHERE: Niagara History Center, 215 Niagara Street, Lockport, NY

CONTACT: (716) 434-7433 – NCHS Staff

Program to Feature 19th Century Woman Athlete & Cyclist

On Thursday, May 23rd, Karen Lankeshofer will present a free public program about pioneering woman athlete Elsa von Blumen at 2:00pm at the Niagara History Center, 215 Niagara Street in Lockport.

Elsa von Blumen was a premier female athlete before it was even thought possible that women could be professional athletes. Growing up in Oswego, NY and Rochester, NY she first became a professional “race walker” in 1879 and was soon enticed to try high-wheel bicycle riding by bicycle manufacturer Albert Pope. She was a prominent figure on the bicycle-racing scene in the 1880s and competed throughout the Eastern United States (including in Lockport and Niagara County), yet is all but forgotten today.

Elsa raced high-wheeled bikes against horses, skaters, male cyclists, and eventually a growing number of women cyclists in an era when women were expected to stay at home, tend the household and raise the children. Instead, she succeeded in a sport dominated by men and helped pave the way for other women to find the courage to break social taboos. She subscribed to the belief that physical exercise improves one’s health and credited her bike riding with keeping herself fit.

Karen Lankeshofer is a long-time Henrietta, NY resident who has also lived and taught in Germany and Russia. She is an avid bike rider and advocates for safe cycling infrastructure. She enjoys studying history, especially if it pertains to New York State.

The free program will begin promptly at 2:00pm on May 23rd.