



Gilbert House  
Children's Museum



Photo by Ron Cooper

Media Kit 2021



## *Inspiring Children to Learn Through Creative Play*

Gilbert House Children's Museum is a private non-profit 501 (c) (3) children's museum in Salem Riverfront Park.

Founded in 1989, Gilbert House Children's Museum is named after Salem native A.C. Gilbert. Gilbert was a scholar, inventor, Olympic athlete and gold medalist, entrepreneur, magician, and so much more. Gilbert's famous Erector Sets were the inspiration for our giant outdoor Erector Set, that has been the anchor of our Outdoor Discovery Area since 1998.

Gilbert House Children's Museum provides hands-on innovative and stimulating education experiences which spark children's natural curiosity. During the 2020 pandemic closures, Gilbert House Children's Museum continued to respond to kids learning needs throughout the community by encouraging families to Bring Gilbert House Home. Through development of an exhibit checkout system for members and subscription STEAM activity boxes, as well as providing online resources to support parents Gilbert House was able to continue to provide relevant and accessible learning opportunities to families.

The Museum's mission to "inspire children to learn through creative play," remains at the forefront of all programs and activities developed and provided by Gilbert House Children's Museum. These include: 16 hands-on exhibits, outdoor inventors yard, camps, birthday parties, field trips, membership opportunities, at home activities and educational programs in the sciences, arts, and humanities.

The Museum's exhibits are located inside three historic houses; the Rockenfield House, Gilbert House and Parrish House, and one historic market: Little Gem.



Alfred Carlton (A.C.) Gilbert was born in Salem, Oregon on February 15, 1884. In 1900, at the age of 16, he attended Tualatin Academy, a prep school for Pacific Academy in Forest Grove. In 1903, Gilbert transferred to Yale University where he studied medicine, planning to use his degree to become a coach. To help pay his tuition, Gilbert performed the magic tricks he learned as a child, often making as much as \$100 a night. Gilbert and his friend, John Petrie began to manufacture the magic sets in a toolshed in Westville, Connecticut as a way to make money to pay for school.

In 1911, Gilbert got the idea for his Erector Set while riding a train from New Haven to New York. Railroad crews from New York, New Haven and Hartford were raising new power lines that would convert the train from steam to electricity. Gilbert was fascinated by the architecture of the steel towers that carried the power lines. Gilbert and his wife cut out some cardboard girders and worked with them until the pieces fit together and could be used to build a variety of objects.

Gilbert's educational sets revolutionized the toy industry. He was one of the first toymakers who believed that playing was essential to learning. Gilbert sensed the possibility of scientific toys, which would enable a child to play with ideas and hypotheses, and at the same time teach them about the laws of physics, engineering and nature.

His philosophy of learning through play, that he shared as part of his testimony before the U.S. Council on Defense on behalf of toymakers during World War I, is the inspiration for our present day mission "to inspire children to learn through creative play."



# A.C. Gilbert and his Legacy of Play



## The History

The home of Andrew T. Gilbert (A.C.'s uncle) was built in 1887, in the same location where it stands today. The grand home was turned into apartments in 1947, and through the years the once elegant home fell into disrepair.

In 1987, community leader and museum founder, Martin Morris, envisioned turning the historic Victorian home into a children's museum.

Restoration began the summer of 1988. With the help of several volunteers, the City of Salem, and funding from grants, foundations and the community, enough money was raised to restore the home and Gilbert House Children's Museum opened in December 1989.

In 1988, a group of citizens began restoration of the Wilson-Durbin House (built on its current site in 1858). In 1990, the house burned to the ground. In 1999, local business and community members came together to reconstruct the house. Today the building is used as a classroom space and may also be rented for parties.

In 1990, the Josiah L. Parrish House (built in 1852) was moved from its original location at 745 Capitol St to the Museum. It opened in 1992 as another building to house exhibits and play areas.

In 1991, as part of the Capital Mall expansion, the Rockenfield House (built in 1883) was moved from the corner of Court and Summer Streets to its current location. It was opened as part of the Museum in 1992 and currently houses the admissions desk, Gilbert's Gift Shop, offices, and exhibits.

The Little Gem Grocery Store (built in 1925) was moved from the northwest corner of Chemeketa and 17th Streets to the Museum in 1998, and now features the A.C. Gilbert Legacy of Play Exhibit. This space is home to many of Gilbert's inventions, including assembled Erector Set toys.

Generations of children have been inspired to learn through creative play, and we are thankful to Morris for his vision and determination. We are grateful for the support of the Salem community and their vision and understanding of the importance of creative play for children.

Why is play so important to all of us at Gilbert House Children's Museum? It's because we believe and know that play is a vital part of learning and development for children. Play is so important in child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right for every child.

**Play is the work  
of childhood.** ~Fred Rogers

"Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imaginations, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength," says a report by The American Academy of Pediatrics.

We at Gilbert House Children's Museum know the great importance of play. We know that each time a child goes down the slide in our Outdoor Discovery Area, that child uses their imagination to be an astronaut, outrun a dragon, or travel through time.

## Philosophy & Vision



# FAQs

## What is the appropriate age for the museum?

Exhibits are designed for children ages 2-10 years old. However, older siblings (and grown-ups) enjoy being the play guide for younger visitors.

## Is the Bubble Room still there?

While it may not be the bubble room that you remember, we are excited that our new Bubble Factory has been completed and is ready for play!

## Is the museum wheelchair and stroller accessible?

Because our museum is housed in three unique historic houses, the first level of each house is accessible by wheelchair. This includes about half of the exhibits. The Outdoor Discovery Area is accessible all the way up to the Erector set climbing tower.

## Is the museum open on holidays?

The Museum is closed on New

Year's Day, Easter, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas. We are also closed in September for a week of annual maintenance.

## What is the best way to find out about upcoming events, programs, and classes?

The best way to find out what is happening at the Museum is to sign up for our monthly e-news. You will also want to check out our website and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

## Why do adults and infants need to pay admission at a children's museum?

The Museum's mission is to create a community where children and their grown-ups learn through play. All of our exhibits have been designed for adults and children to play and learn together. We encourage you to explore and experience our Museum with your children and are certain that you will "play" too.

## What discounts do you offer for military families?

Families of active duty military receive \$2 off the general admission price for each member of their family.

## How does someone become a Gilbert House volunteer?

Whether you love digging into the gooey Oobleck, building fantastic forts, mending well-loved costumes, or spending time in the garden, there are many great ways to get involved at the Museum. Visit our website to complete our online application form.

## I don't have children but I'm a kid at heart, can I come to the museum?

The Museum does not allow adults without children to play. However, we are happy to give you a tour and share our Legacy of Play exhibit with you. Just give us a call to set up a time.

## Admission and Membership

Average number of visitors each year: 95,000+

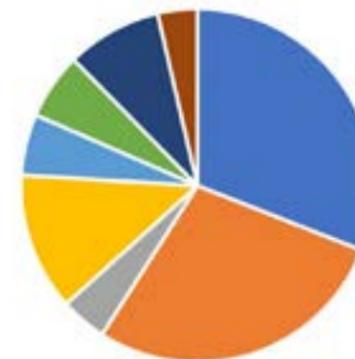
Average number of memberships: 2,300

Percentage of reduced cost memberships and admissions: 20%

Each year we serve over 7,284 children through our educational programs. 59% of these children learn in Title 1 schools.

## Funding

In addition to admission and membership sales, Gilbert House Children's Museum relies on support of from foundations, businesses and private donors to provide funding for all of its programs.



## Tidbits and Trivia

We go through 90-95 gallons of bubble solution each week in Bill's Bubble Factory.

The bronze statue in front of the museum is called Our Dreams. The statue made from a bronze casting, was a joint project by Marji and Ken Scott and a gift to the museum from the "Christmas Club" upon the museum's opening in 1989.

The museum's mascot is Gillie the Bubble Girl. Her name is an homage to one of A.C. Gilbert's nicknames.

Until 2002 Gilbert House Children's Museum was home to the National Toy Hall of Fame. In that year it was purchased by the Strong Museum.

Each year, Gilbert House Children's Museum provides over 186,000 hours of play.

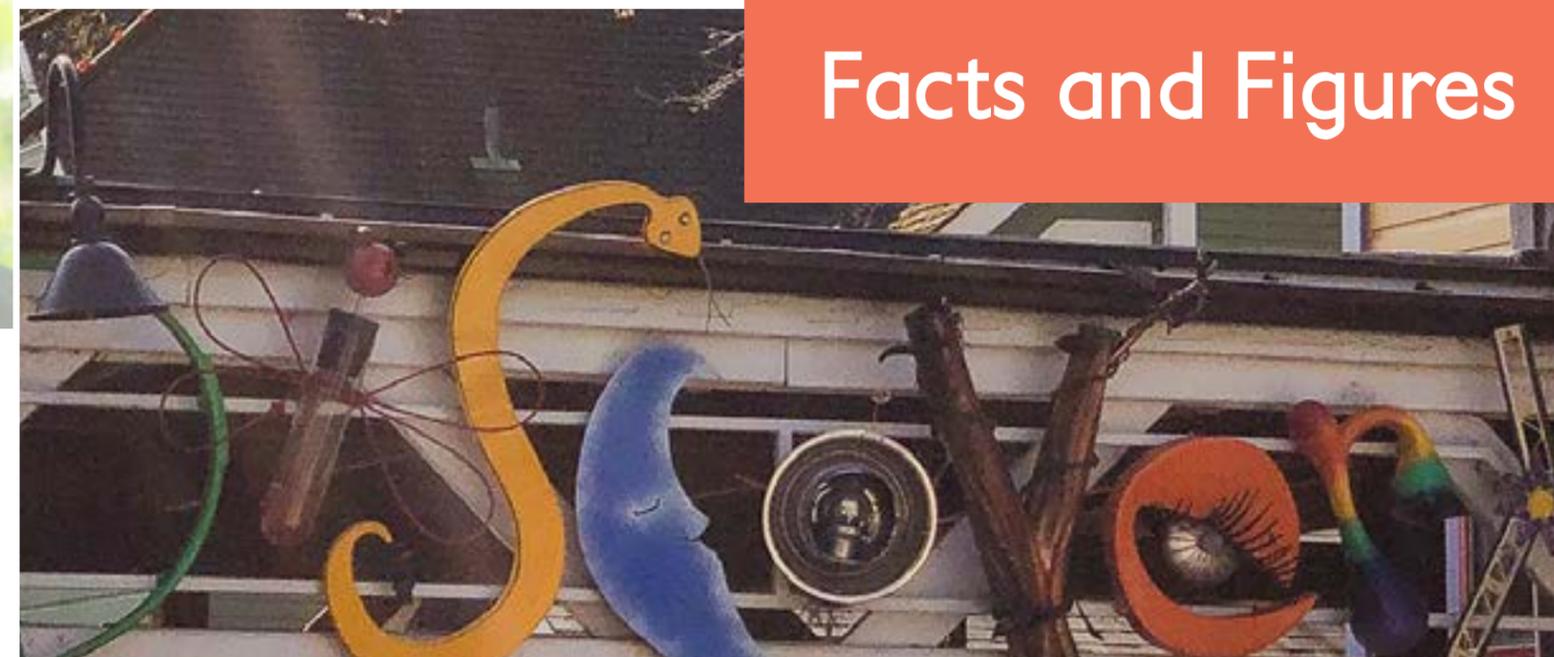
There are over 985 items to prompt play throughout the museum exhibits.

Gilbert House Children's Museum benefits from over 3,500 hours of volunteer service each year.

The Big Chair was once used as advertising in front of Miklia's Unfinished Furniture. It was donated to the museum when the business closed in 1999.

\*Admission numbers are averaged and do not reflect closures due to COVID-19.

# Facts and Figures





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