



Crackerbarrel

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President's Report

Bill Briska, President



Each year in July, the Board of Directors sends a letter to the membership asking for an additional financial contribution. This annual request has come to be known as the Board Fundraiser. The fundraiser generates about 7 percent of our annual income, which may not seem like much, but has proven to be one of the most important factors in our continued success. Money from this request has been carefully applied to the Museum's strategic needs. Some years it went for equipment, others years for specific projects and sometimes, it allowed us to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. It has always been carefully used to move the Museum forward.

You can be assured that the Board of Directors practices good financial stewardship in its management of the Museum. We derive our operating income from several diverse sources, such as dues, sales, fees, grants, investment income and donations. Our expenditures are carefully made and we rely heavily on volunteer labor to keep costs down. This balanced approach has kept the Museum on sound footing, allowing us to provide better programming and services year after year.

When the letter for the Board Fundraiser comes to your home, please consider making a generous donation. Your gift goes to work for causes you are interested in. We see it as the wise investment which allows the Museum to thrive and serve our community. Thank you in advance for your generous and ongoing support.

Museum Extends Hours of Operation

The Elgin Area Historical Society is pleased to announce that the Elgin History Museum's hours have been extended. The Museum is now open 11 A.M. to 4 P.M. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday all year round. The Museum, located in Old Main, is open for exhibits, research, and programming.

The additional hours of operation would not be possible without the efforts of our volunteer docents and staff members. We wish to extend our thanks to these dedicated individuals who make the Museum operation possible.

Welcome New Member

Barbara McLaughlin

Thank You Donors

- **Jeff Gill and the Northeast Neighborhood Association**
- **Laurence Blanchard**

Historical Tidbit from 1915

Rich Renner

July 8, 1915 was the 50th anniversary of one of Elgin's most disastrous fires. The fire started in a bakery on Chicago Street and destroyed several buildings. Among the lost buildings was the studio of photographer R. W. Padelford who was also the city clerk. Padelford lost not only all his property in the fire, but also all the city records.

The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.

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 Visit our website www.elginhistory.org

Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society's Board of Directors.

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Program Schedule for 2015

David Nelson, Program Chair

Events are held at the Museum unless otherwise noted. Check the website for the latest details.

<http://www.elginhistory.org/events.html>

July 9th, 7:00 P.M.

Through The Woods with John Thiel

Elgin native and author John Thiel will discuss the history of the Elgin-based No- Pi- Ming Association. At the end of the 19th century many Americans looked to return to nature as a respite from urban life. This is the story of Elgin businessmen who formed a hunting and fishing camp near Hayward, WI. With the advent of personal vehicles to get into the woods, many groups started small camps in the Midwest at this time, but only a handful of these clubs remain today. The No-Pi-Ming Association reaches its 90th anniversary in 2015. Members: Free; non-members: \$3.00

July 16th, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch

Glimpses of Old Elgin

Jerry Turnquist, local historian, will reveal Elgin's early history using the memories of Charles Gregory, a writer of the newspaper column "Do You Remember" written in the 1920s. Members: Free; non-members: \$3

July 19, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 P.M., Gail Borden Public Library: Music of the 1960s with David Nelson Meadows Community Rooms A&B

Join pianist David J. Nelson as he performs music from the 1960's. David has performed with the Elgin Civic Symphony, Elgin Symphony Orchestra, and Elgin Choral Union. Please register.

July 19th 10:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M.

Classic Car Show at the Museum

This annual event is back for another year! Antique Thunderbird and Mustang cars from the 1950s and '60s will be on display in the Museum's parking lot, sponsored by the Chicagoland Thunderbird Club and Mustang Restorations. Vintage cars from the Model T Car Club will also be exhibited. You don't want to miss Mandy Z & Rural Route 1, playing great music all afternoon. The Museum exhibits will be open and refreshments will include an ice cream social for everyone. FREE admission!

August 14th 7:00 P.M.

An Evening Musical Soiree with Northside Brass - String Quartet

Join the fun at the Elgin History Museum on a sparkling summer night. Bring a friend or two, sip drinks and nibble on tasty treats while listening to the Northside Brass - String Quartet play everything from Bach to Coldplay. FREE admission.

August 20th 12 noon;

Brown Bag Lunch: Toy Soldiers & Miniatures

Don Pielin and Steve Sommers, well-known historians and collectors of vintage toy soldiers, will give insight into how toy manufacturers viewed major historic events and how that reflected in the toy figures they manufactured. This is a not to be missed event! Refreshments provided.

Members: Free / Non-Members: \$3:00

August 27, 7 P.M.

Elgin: How Sweet It Is! at the Martini Room, 161 East Chicago St.

Not to be outdone by Chicago's candy producers, Elgin has also been the manufacturer of sweets and treats for many years. From factory to home production, ice cream and various candies have been made right here! Find out where and when and view memorabilia from Elgin's sweet past. Donations accepted

Sept. 27, 11 A.M.–3 P.M.

Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery

November 7, 6:00–10:00 P.M.

Annual Benefit/Silent Auction/General Meeting

\$40 Members/\$50 Non-Members, advance tickets required. The Benefit will feature Terry Lynch as famed Chicago planner and architect Daniel Burnham, the main force behind the 1893 Columbian Exposition and the lakefront plan for the City of Chicago. Appetizer refreshments, silent auction and cash bar.

December 5, 1:00-3:00 P.M.: Holiday Tea

Marshall Fields History featuring Leslie Goddard

Free admission. Learn about Christmas at Marshall Fields and the store's history. Enjoy Old Main dressed up for Christmas. holiday treats, punch, and tea will be served.

Mike Alft's 90th Birthday Party July 12

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

We are having a 90th birthday party open house for Mike Alft on Sunday, July 12 from 2:00 to 4:00 P.M.! Help us honor former mayor and founding member of the Society by attending a cake and coffee party in the Museum's meeting room. At 3:00, Elgin historians will speak on the significance of Mike's work and what it has meant to them in their research. Hope to see you there!



Meet Our Summer Interns

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Two college students, Ben Floyd and Rachel Rubin, are volunteering at the Museum this summer as interns. They will gain experience in exhibit development and maintenance, collections management, and museum education through programming and as docents. Ben is a sophomore at Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts studying history, and a graduate of Elgin Academy. Rachel is studying at the University of Edinburgh in history and politics and grew up in South Elgin. Both students are helping the Museum tremendously. On their first day as a team, they completely re-organized all of the probate and divorce records in very heavy boxes, making room for oversized object storage.



See Project 2-3-1 Traveling Exhibit

If you have not yet seen the traveling exhibit created to accompany the Project 2-3-1 documentary about Elgin's African American heritage, you will get a chance to do so if you visit the Museum between now and August 15th.

Project 2-3-1 is the dream of well-known Elginite Ernie Broadnax and a partnership between the Elgin History Museum and Grindstone Productions.

The traveling exhibit, a companion to the 75-minute documentary, gives viewers insight into Elgin's Abolitionist activities before the Civil War and introduces the displaced slaves, known as "contraband," sent by the Union army in two boxcars to Elgin in 1862. The exhibit shows how the former slaves put down roots in Elgin and established a community here.

The traveling exhibit also highlights the struggles and triumphs of the Elgin African American community, including fighting for civil rights by forming the Colored Voters Union League in 1884, standing up against the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and organizing the Elgin Housing Group in the 1950s.

The exhibit will be on display at the Museum until August 2015. The documentary will be replayed at Gail Borden Library on July 28th at 7:00 P.M. You may also order a DVD of the documentary from the Museum for \$20.00.

Elgin Inventors

Thanks to the Gifford Park Association website for this information.

Herbert L. Thompson invented gasoline engines that proved a boon to farm families. They were used for lighting homes and running washing machines. He sold one patent to the Maytag Company in 1916 and an improved model to the same buyer in 1923.

Albert M. Price secured patents on a machine that speeded the production of chewing gum and wrapped the completed product. His royalties from Wrigley made him a very wealthy man.

Christian N. Smith, while employed at the David C. Cook Publishing Company, 1878-1926, developed a machine for bending stereotype plates for rotary presses, as well as a method of hardening stereotyping metal by removing gas and air holes.

Herbert McCornack, Elgin Academy 1881, was the successful inventor of a milking machine that became the Surge.

John M. Murphy, during the years 1911-1914, developed the first successful motorized street sweeper while employed by the American Tower & Tank Co.

The Elgin National Watch Company long had an edge over its competitors because of its famed automatics. The most amazing of these machines designed by **William A. Gabriel** drilled, tapped, and countersunk the holes in the pillar plate. Comprised of more than 14,000 separate parts, it performed 85 operations at one setting. It was made up of 36 smaller machines, arranged in pairs so as to work on both sides of the plate at the same time.

All of these ideas were welcomed and provided a good income for their inventors. An exception was **Bernard Hilger**, who sought to eliminate the problem of flat tires in the early '20s. One idea was to replace the inner tube with springs. It was a failure, as was another attempt to substitute sponge rubber for the inner tube. The company that tried them went bankrupt.

A huge thanks to Mike Alft for sharing this with us!

Another Historical Tidbit from 1915

Rich Renner

On July 6, 1915, Elgin's news reported the city's safest Independence Day in memory. Although the celebrations lasted over three days, fireworks caused no deaths or even serious injuries apart from the loss of one man's thumb. Thousands passed the days in the city's parks enjoying family picnics, horse races and baseball. Restaurants and ice cream parlors were jammed. The police, however, did take numerous complaints of young men throwing torpedo firecrackers at pedestrians' feet, but they arrested only one man. He was released without a fine by the magistrate who felt it unfair to fine one man when so many others were doing the same thing.

The McClures of Elgin – Part 2

by David Siegenthaler

Finla Lawrence McClure came west to Elgin in 1846 at age 22 with his father's family. In January 1849 Finla married Levantia Padelford, and later that year the couple had their first child, Charles Vincent. In 1851 their second child, Frederick, was born but died the following year. In 1854 the couple adopted a newborn girl named Eva but she also died within a year. Levantia passed away at age 30 of tuberculosis in 1859.

In November 1861 Finla, now 38, married 23-year-old Fannie Wilder. Their only child, Bertha, was born in 1866, and in 1891 Bertha married Rev. Edward Bosworth. Finla's dairy farm was along McClure Avenue between Highland and Lawrence avenues. In the

1860s he built his Italianate-style home here. This home has had additions over the years and still stands, well-preserved, at 272 McClure Avenue.



Home at 272 McClure Avenue



F. L. McCLURE

Fannie passed away at age 53 in 1892, only months after moving into their imposing new mansion that still stands at 770 West Highland Avenue. This impressive Queen Anne/Shingle-style home, built in 1890-91, was designed by Elgin's most prominent architect, W.W. Abell. In 1900 the home was sold to publisher Willis Lyman Black and it remained in the Black family until 1983. In 2005 this home was designated a local historic landmark by the City of Elgin. Finla also had a summer cottage in Lake Geneva, and, following Fannie's death, spent his winters in Phoenix, Arizona, where he acquired much property. Finla died in Phoenix in 1900 at age 76 of pneumonia and his body was returned to Elgin for burial.

Finla quickly established himself as an ambitious young businessman. In addition to buying and selling property, he built and filled the first ice house in Elgin in 1850, from which ice was either shipped to Chicago or delivered to local users. By the mid-1880s, when he retired from the ice business, there were nearly a dozen ice firms in Elgin, harvesting nearly 100,000 tons annually from the Fox River. In the early 1850s Finla established his dairy business and commis-

sioned the first 8-gallon milk can used in Elgin, using this size in his local milk delivery (the first milk route in Elgin) and for shipment to Chicago. In the late 1850s and early '60s Finla partnered with E.K.W. Cornell and S.D. Wilder in a dry goods store. Wilder was a brother of Finla's wife and Cornell would later be Finla's assistant at the packing company. The Elgin Packing Company was established in 1869 to can fruits and vegetables, mostly sweet corn. In 1877 the firm had labor issues and was about to dissolve, when it was reorganized. From 1877 to 1890 Finla served as its business manager and was largely responsible for turning the company around. During his tenure the Elgin Packing Company became one of Elgin's most prosperous industries, employing hundreds every harvest season.

Finla served two terms as alderman on the city council from 1878-80 and was a township trustee for years. By 1890, at age 66, Finla had retired from most of his business ventures but continued to deal in real estate for the remainder of his life.



McClure Home at 770 W. Highland Ave.

Finla's son Charles Vincent (1849-1932) attended Elgin Academy and spent a year at Beloit College. At age 19 he started working at the watch factory, a job he held for several years. In January 1873 Charles married Kate ("Kittie") Wilbur, of Davenport, Iowa. Shortly after the marriage the couple moved to Sioux City, Iowa, where Charles spent six months in the fruit and candy business. This proved unsuccessful and the couple returned to Elgin, where Charles worked as a bookkeeper for the Elgin Packing Company for the next eight years. From 1881-1888 he worked as a bookkeeper for the Elgin Lumber Company.

In 1889 Charles partnered with Fred Struckman in a lumber business that was located along Ann Street near the river. About 1902 the McClure & Struckman lumber firm moved two blocks south to the northwest corner of Kimball Street and North Grove Avenue, where they remained until being bought out in 1956 by the Elgin Lumber & Supply Company. In 1899 Charles and his son William became owners of a boot and shoe store, but this lasted only a few years.

Charles served one term as alderman on the city council (1888-89) and 20 years as township assessor (1909-29). Charles and Kate built their home at 227 Villa Street about 1882 and here they raised their three children: William L. (1874-1939), Leva (1878-1936; Mrs. Edward Lang) and Ruth (1886-1941; Mrs. Lloyd Arnold). Charles and Kate, members of the Universalist Church, passed away in 1932 and 1941, respectively. Their Villa Street home still stands but was remodeled into an apartment building in 1936.

Acknowledgements: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Kane County histories; Elgin Today (1903); Autobiographies of Fox Valley Pioneers (1981); newspaper articles; city directories; federal censuses; City of Elgin death records; etc.

Members Field Trip; Fox River Boat Ride

Rebecca Marco, Editor

On June 27th Society members were treated to a paddle wheel riverboat ride on the Fox River. The tour left from Pottawatomie Park in St. Charles for a leisurely afternoon cruise. The weather cooperated and the day was very enjoyable for those who attended.

Here are some scenes from the day.



St. Charles Paddlewheel Riverboats in Pottawatomie Park



A Happy Group



Bill Briska, Jackie Vossler and Doug Tomsha

Attention Bungalow Owners

Steve Stroud

The Elgin City Council recently passed an ordinance creating a bungalow initiative for the city of Elgin. This is, in effect, a new historic district just for bungalows. There are no restrictions based on location, except that it be located in Elgin. To have your bungalow included you must complete an application available at Elgin city hall. If you have any questions about whether your home is a bungalow, contact Steve Stroud at the Elgin History Museum. There are more than 2500 bungalows in Elgin at last count.

There are two advantages to having your home designated as an historic property: first, you are assured that the home will be preserved in its current condition or improved, and second, you become eligible for the city's 50-50 grant program for exterior work.

The disadvantage to having your bungalow in this historic district is that going forward you must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the city for any proposed significant changes to the home's exterior.

If you would like to have your bungalow researched, Steve Stroud can help you through the process or do the work for you at a nominal cost.

A typical Elgin bungalow is pictured below. Do you know where it was?



Notes on Education Programming

Sara Russell, Museum Educator

Now that summer vacation is here, it is time to reevaluate the programming Elgin History Museum provides to local schools. Schools are in a tough position right now—decreased funding and more standardized testing mean that outside educational opportuni-

ties—such as museums!—have taken a backseat. So how do we remain relevant? By adapting our programs to foster skills prized by these new methods of teaching.

The Museum's Education team, Tricia Grosser, Don Pielen, Linda Rock and I, have been revamping programs to reflect the new Common Core standards adopted by local school districts. The Common Core focuses on student-driven learning to prepare students for their future, using primary sources to gather knowledge and interpret the world around them. These are all wonderful goals for a museum full of artifacts.

The Education team worked on the most commonly used program first. About half of all school classes schedule the Scavenger Hunt & Museum Tour. We focused on four anchor standards of the Common Core which can be adjusted for different grade levels. Students will be using artifacts and exhibits to back up logical inferences, work in collaboration with their classmates, and present their findings with supporting evidence, all with an emphasis on building Museum specific vocabulary.

Now, instead of checking off an item on the scavenger hunt and forgetting about it, students will need to dig a little deeper. Each artifact has a story to tell about our town that goes far beyond the object itself.

Cobblestones aren't just chunks of rock that show up along the Fox River, they are building materials that helped attract founder James Gifford to this spot on the River. New Yorkers, like Gifford, brought with them the knowledge of how to build cobblestone houses. Cobblestones connected this start-up town to New York cultures though this building technique.

The whistle in the Elgin National Watch Company Exhibit isn't just a big loud machine, it shows the dominant role the Elgin National Watch Company played in this city for almost a century. For people living in Elgin while it blew, it set the rhythms of daily life because almost everyone either worked for the factory or knew someone close who did. That whistle is a symbol of a watch factory that employed enough people to help build a solid middle class and create the character of Elgin.

After familiarizing ourselves with the Common Core and developing our new scavenger hunt method, Linda, Tricia, Don and I chose objects from our collections that we will use to tell a part of Elgin's story. Each artifact chosen sheds light on our history, instilling pride in our community; it is important to pass that legacy along to young Elginites.

If you would like to try out the new Scavenger Hunt, we would appreciate your feedback. Just call ahead so we can have a copy waiting for you. Happy (scavenger) hunting!



Collections Corner: Image Archives

by Kathleen Grimm

When my husband, board member Rick Grimm, and I volunteered to reorganize the image room in the Museum's archives, we found some interesting items, including a World War I photo album. The photos illustrate the 131st Battalion out of Illinois in Metz, France, December 8, 1918. There are many pictures of bomb damage, craters, and actual bombs, and a photo of a 109-year-old man named Charlie.

Having grown up in England, this album interested me because it was my parents' era and I have always heard stories about World War I. Fascinating to see the photos of American soldiers!

