



Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 45 NUMBER 1
JANUARY 2008



President's Report

by Mary Hill, President



The new year brings new additions to the Board of Directors. These are individuals who have chosen to serve the Society as it continues to make its mark as THE place to find exhibits, information, photos, and objects related to Elgin's history. Welcome to Jim Anderson, Barry Danielson, Barb Demoulin, and George Rowe—we look forward to working with them to make EAHS and the Museum even greater. Thank you to Jan Barry for your service.

Exciting things are happening at the Museum! The Museum Educator position is being expanded to provide more hours for programming for school kids; the Program Committee, under the chairmanship of David Nelson, is making plans for interesting and informative events; the website is being improved, and a Collections Manager will help make the process of accessioning and storage run efficiently.

This is also a time of transition as *The Crackerbarrel* continues to be published under the editorial responsibility of Rebecca Marco, who developed and maintains the website. The late George Albee edited and wrote *The Crackerbarrel* almost single-handedly for many years; we now have the challenge of following in his footsteps to put out an interesting and informative newsletter. Your written articles are welcome as we move forward.

Richard Bennett offered his heartfelt remembrance of George when he wrote the following:

"In memory of my good friend George Albee, back home again with God in heaven. His death was a great loss not only to the Elgin Area Historical Society but to everyone in Elgin and around the world who ever read our nice newsletter."

Bill Briska brilliantly put together a Society budget to reflect the aforementioned improvements and you can help if you wish. Board member Terry Gabel just donated \$1,000 for a laptop computer for Microsoft® PowerPoint presentations. We also need the cost of shelving to store the multitude of donated items we get every year. A cash donation for website improvements has been offered as well as a cash donation for the outdoor Artifact Garden from Sara Ellen and Jim Anderson. If you would like to make a donation, speak with Museum Director Elizabeth Marston.

Watch for upcoming General Meetings with good programs, interesting new exhibits, and *The Crackerbarrel* as we begin another year.

Society's Annual Dinner a Big Success

by David Nelson, Program Chair

The Elgin Area Historical Society held its annual dinner in the Heritage Ballroom at the Centre of Elgin on November 11, 2007. The delightful dinner was attended by 72 members and guests, who enjoyed taking part in a silent auction of very fine items relating to Elgin area history. The auction proceeds of \$1,390 will help support the Museum. A short business meeting was held to hear the Treasurer's Report and elect officers.



Dr. Clyde Ellis

Following the meeting, Dr. Clyde Ellis, a history professor at Elon University in North Carolina, was the guest speaker. He spoke on the history of Indian lore clubs in the 20th century. He related stories of the many clubs throughout the United States, including the Hiawatha Pageant in Elgin, that kept the fascination of Indian lore alive. Dr. Ellis interviewed former Elgin Hiawatha dancers and participants for material to be included in his forthcoming book. His presentation was extremely well done with images from his research. It was enjoyed by all.

The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society
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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline February 20, 2008

 Visit our website www.elginhistory.org

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Past President of Society Passes Away

by Rebecca Marco, editor

George Albee edited *The Crackerbarrel* for many years, in addition to performing many and varied volunteer duties for the Society. His presence will be sorely missed. As the new editor of *The Crackerbarrel*, I would like to dedicate this issue to George's memory. I hope I am able to fulfill the editorial role as capably as he did. I have included his obituary listing his many accomplishments.



George Albee

George Albee 1928 - 2007

George Albee, 78, died of natural causes Oct. 6, 2007 in his Elgin home. He worked nearly as hard as a volunteer with Elgin-area historical groups as he had in more than 40 years in the communications industry, friends and family members said.

Mr. Albee was a former employee of Illinois Bell Telephone and retired from AT&T, where he had trained employees and worked

with customers on fiber optics, and digital data and communications systems.

As an Elgin volunteer, he was a member of the Genealogical Society, the Historical Society and the Heritage Commission. He was a past president of the Historical Society and was chairman of the Heritage Commission at the time of his death.

"He retired in 1989," said his daughter Jennifer Bero, "and then made a second career as an Elgin historian."

He grew up in Brookfield and La Grange, and graduated from Lyons Township High School.

His father worked at Illinois Bell, and Mr. Albee was a high school student when he began working for the company during a critical manpower shortage near the end of World War II. He also was a communications instructor in an Air Force National Guard unit for several years in the late 1940s, family said.

He met Joye Palmer when a friend took him to a church-sponsored Halloween dance. They married in 1949.

Mr. Albee spent his entire career with Illinois and AT&T.

He started as an installer, his daughter said. But he spent the last 15 years of his career developing and writing training materials at the company's learning center, where he also taught classes. "He loved teaching," his daughter said, adding that a neighbor told her that she had learned something in every conversation she had with Mr. Albee.

His volunteer work with Elgin historical groups included some notable projects, including helping to raise money to preserve a 19th Century building at Elgin Academy that was known as Old Main.

"George was involved in fundraising and hands-on work to help save Old Main," said Chuck Keysor, a friend of Mr. Albee's. The building, now the home of the Elgin Area Historical Society, was donated to the city by the Elgin Academy but needed repairs.

Mr. Albee was president of the Society in 1989, during negotiations to return the bell from the demolished Elgin National Watch Co. clock tower to Elgin. The bell was then part of the Time Museum at the Clock Tower Inn in Rockford.

In 2000, Keysor said Mr. Albee helped lead an effort by his church, Grace United Methodist in Elgin, to gain landmark status for its 1883 building. The effort was successful, but the status was later rescinded after the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church objected to the designation, claiming it reduced the market value of the property, Keysor said.

Family members said his service to the historical society and his help in renovating Old Main earned Mr. Albee special recognition and a plaque from the society in 1991. In 2000, he received the Mayor's Award for his service to Elgin.

"If somebody needed some help with something, he'd help," his daughter said.

In addition to his wife and daughter, survivors include another daughter, Valerie Grand, and three grandchildren.

Membership News

by Carl Flaks, Membership Chair

As we end the year membership renewals are beginning to come in. Currently, we have 305 membership units. Membership dues are an important stream of revenue for the Society, accounting for 10% of our annual budget. Of the 60 renewals received to date, 10 have increased their level of membership. This is wonderful!

When your membership card arrives in the mail you will also receive some guest passes. In an effort to increase visitors and perhaps membership to EAHS I am asking members to make a real effort to use their guest passes. If every one of the Society's members use two of their passes, the Museum would see over 700 new people at Old Main. As an incentive to use your passes, I am asking that you sign your name on the back of your pass. These will be collected and a drawing will be held at the Christmas Tea in 2008. Winning members will receive prizes! Let's make an effort to boost visitation to the Museum.

Treasurer's Report

by Bill Briska, Treasurer

The Society finished 2007 in good financial shape. Several years of careful financial management and a slow but steady growth of income has given us enough cash on hand to expand our efforts in 2008.

Last summer the Board of Directors identified several areas of potential growth. The top three were: expanding educational programs for children; expanding use of our archives and library; and increasing our presence on the Internet.

In 2007, with help from a grant by the Grand Victoria Foundation we hired Lucy Elliott for 200 hours of work developing, implementing and marketing educational programs for children. This was work over and above her many hours of volunteer commitment to the Elgin Youth History Fair and other museum activities. The goal in 2007 was to bring 1,000 students through the Museum to participate in our various educational programs. In 2008 we intend to double Lucy's time. We hope to bring even more kids to the Museum, as well as take programs into the classrooms. These efforts go hand in hand with the Museum's partnership with U-46 to train teachers in ways to use local history as an adjunct to the traditional social studies and history curriculum. Because many of the children live in households with income levels below the poverty line the Museum has asked for financial help from the First Congregational Church. The church administers an endowment set up to foster its mission of service to those in need.

The second area of growth, expanding use of our archives and library, starts with hiring a professionally trained collections manager to augment the heroic efforts of the volunteers involved with collections management. One of the challenges the Museum constantly faces is processing the inflow of new items to the collection. When the decision is made to accept an item, it must be properly classified, tagged, recorded in our computerized inventory system,

and stored. We are hiring someone who previously did an internship at the Museum and is familiar with our needs and operations. She will provide 200 hours of help in this important behind the scenes activity. In the future, we hope to provide research assistance and greater access to the collection to the public, and upgrade equipment such as scanners, microfilm readers and photo reproduction services.

The third area of growth is to develop a larger Internet presence with a new and greatly expanded web site. A generous financial gift from President Mary Hill is allowing us to upgrade our basic web site. Ultimately, we may be able to include features such as archival databases, images from our collection, online copies of books, pamphlets and other publications.

We still plan a full complement of other programs and services in 2008. Looking back over the last ten years the Society and Museum has experienced steady growth. We look forward to continuing that in the next decade.

Exhibits Committee Report

by Maurice Dyer

The two month annual shutdown period in January and February will be a busy one this year. The exhibits committee will address three major tasks:

- The Lisa Boehm School of Dance entertained Elgin for years, and the people of Elgin will again be able to experience the costumes and stories of a memorable organization. Presented in the second floor meeting room, the studio will come alive to brighten our lives again.
- Wing Park Golf is the focus of an expansion of the Sports Hall of Fame that was installed last year. Elgin's west side, nine hole, municipal golf course is celebrating 100 years of Birdies, Bogies, and Pars. The story of the development of this fine facility will be presented with a fun-time, hands-on, experience for young and old alike.
- Music is a strong recurring theme in Elgin's history. The Museum will continue with the "music corner" by changing the focus to a time before recordings and air-play ruled the industry. Music was played in each home from sheet music purchased from local merchants and demonstrated by a resident piano player in the shop. The art of the music was sometimes surpassed by the artwork of the printing itself. Numerous examples will be available for your inspection and enjoyment.

Efforts continue with the installation of the Artifact Garden. This major undertaking is progressing toward the first installation this spring. Due to the nature of the construction needed to properly present and preserve the artifacts selected, design work is painstaking in the attention to detail. Our goal is to present each installation with the quality Elgin deserves.

For members who would like to experience the development and presentation of our exhibits, we invite you to join us and learn more than you thought you could about the exhibit you work on. Artistic or creative talents are not required, only an interest to participate. Call the Museum for information. The Grand Opening for the new Museum exhibits will be Sunday, March 9, 2008 from 1 to 3 PM.

The Elgin Continentals: Militia Days and a Raid on Geneva

by Ken Gough

In 1855 a number of young Elgin men of wealth formed a military-style group they named the Washington Continental Artillery. Numbering almost two dozen, they applied for and were granted militia status by the state. At first the uniform was a simple one: black trousers and caps with a white blouse. Sgt. Samuel Ward (later killed leading the Continentals as their captain at the battle of Shiloh in 1862) pressed to style themselves after the boys of '76. A continental-style buff and blue frock coat, cocked hat with plume, white vest, and tall boots were added. They were gorgeous. Their first appearance was the 1855 Elgin 4th of July celebration at Colbie's Grove (the level ground just east of Old Main). Militia units such as this drilled more for exercise and wooing young ladies than for serious combat training.

The Continentals were armed with antiquated M1808 and M1816 muskets the regular army had classed as obsolete. Most had been converted to the new percussion system in a somewhat haphazard renovation, giving the mistaken impression the guns had been "modernized." They fired a round ball 5/8" in diameter and were accurate only to about 80 yards. The muskets were 30-50 years old, had been stored for a long time, and were ill-maintained. Because the guns had been used most often for show, the barrels had been burnished to clean and polish them for parades and inspections. Over the years this treatment, which was forbidden by orders rarely enforced by officers more concerned with appearance than safety, had worn the barrel walls down to a dangerously thin condition. In other words, the guns looked good, but in operation left much to be desired.

To bring the group up to military level the Washington Continentals hired Major Elmer E. Elsworth. Over the next few years under his tutelage the Continentals won drill competitions around Chicagoland, most notably against the Illinois National Guard Cadets in 1858. By 1860, with the Continentals in top form, Major Elsworth moved to Chicago to help form the Chicago Zouaves. At the start of the war he relocated back to New York and with a promotion to Colonel, joined the local Fire Zouaves.

While marching his regiment past the Marshall House hotel in Alexandria, Virginia, Col. Elsworth saw a Confederate flag flying from an upper window. Alone, he rushed upstairs and tore down the offending banner. On the way down he was met by the innkeeper, who killed him with a shotgun. Within seconds Elsworth's men slew the innkeeper. Col. Elsworth is considered to be the first casualty by direct fire in the Civil War.

On the evening of April 15, 1861, the following dispatch was received in Springfield:

**WASHINGTON, April 15, 1861.
His Excellency, Richard Yates:**

**Call made on you by to-night's mail, for
six regiments of militia, for immediate
service.**

**Simon Cameron,
Secretary of War.**

This cable changed the future of the Continentals. A meeting was held at Davidson's Hall on April 19 where 75 volunteers were added to the roll and the name of the company was changed to the Elgin Continentals. With his newly formed company ready to board the train for Springfield, Capt. Joslyn needed the one thing unavailable to most companies forming for war: muskets. The few antiquated muskets the Continentals had been using were inadequate for the coming conflict. Contacting DuPage and Kane County offices, he received a donation of 20 muskets from Wheaton. He learned that 90 of the new Minié muskets had been delivered to Geneva, obtained through the hard work of a Mr. John King through the offices of Gen. R. K. Swift in Chicago. As the Geneva company was far from filling its rolls, much less ready to be mustered into service, Capt. Joslyn wired Springfield to have these muskets released to him.

Elgin, Ill. April 23rd, 1861

**To Adgt. General Mather, Springfield,
Ill.**

**There are ninety (90) rifles at Geneva,
Kane Co., will you give me an order for
D. Clark, Sheriff of Kane County for the
same.**

**E. S. Joslyn,
Capt. Elgin Continentals**

Note that nowhere in this cable does Capt. Joslyn indicate that the muskets in question were allocated for the Geneva company. Even with the loan from Wheaton, he was still roughly 60 muskets short. Knowing that companies were forming throughout the state using civilian sporting arms, shotguns, and in many cases brooms in place of muskets, he knew if he didn't procure arms soon, the Continentals might well miss the whole war. Everyone knew the war would only last a few weeks, a couple of months at most. How would it look if the Continentals returned home never having fired a shot in anger? They'd be a laughingstock! What would the young ladies think of them?

**Springfield, Ill. April 23rd, '61
To Capt. E. S. Joslyn, Elgin, Ill.**

**You are hereby authorized to receive from
Sheriff the rifles referred to in your
dispatch, and all other arms and append-
ages and report to this office.**

**(signed) John Wood
Quar. Master General**

Ed Joslyn's brother A. J., known locally as "The Elder," was coolheaded enough to know that proof would be needed if Ed were to prevail in Geneva. He had the following prepared to be delivered with the cable to Sheriff Clark:

**Elgin, April 23d, 1861
To A. J. Joslyn,**

**Dear Sir. Accompanying you have copies of
the messages sent and received in regard
to the rifles at Geneva Kane Co., all of
which I certify to be exact copies of said
messages.**

**Yours,
C. D. Sprague, Operator.**

With a legal order for the arms, Ed Joslyn wired Geneva that the rifles were to be turned over to him that afternoon, as he was to leave with his company on the 9:00 a.m. train the

next day. This was refused. He then sent one of his men, Charles Harvey, who had lived in Geneva and enjoyed the respect of the community, on a fast horse with a copy of the order for Sheriff Clark. When Mr. Harvey wired back that Mr. King still would not hand over the muskets, Capt. Joslyn sent the reply that he was coming to take them and Charles was to wait for him. Just prior to this, not wishing to wait any longer for a reply, Charles Harvey had left the station to find Sheriff Clark again. He was still trying to find a way to resolve the situation and missed Ed's reply. This left Mr. King behind at the station. King was still there when Capt. Joslyn's reply came through. In a rage, he left to round up as many of his company as he could to prepare for the arrival of the Continentals.

In Elgin, Capt. Joslyn went to the arsenal and picked 20 of his men who were getting ready to leave the following day. Hitching up wagons and buggies, they started to Geneva.

Knowing they had but a couple of hours to prepare, Mr. King and about a dozen of his men busied themselves moving the arms to an upper level of the Kane County courthouse. The streets around the courthouse were being paved at the time, and some bushels of paving stones somehow made it upstairs along with the muskets. It is doubtful if any ammunition was included with the shipment of muskets; if it was Mr. King was wise enough to know that firing on the Continentals was not an option no matter the provocation.

On arriving in Geneva Ed Joslyn found Mr. Harvey at Sheriff Clark's office and again presented him certified copies of the wired order. The Sheriff agreed it gave over possession of the arms to Capt. Joslyn and went to the courthouse to serve the order on John King.

When shown the order Mr. King told the Sheriff he would not honor it until "his friends" had a chance to read it and agree. The men who toiled all afternoon moving the arms and barricading the courthouse must not have been included in this circle of friends. The verbal exchange grew more heated until Capt. Joslyn lost patience and called for his men to just "take the guns." King retreated into the courthouse, closing and bolting the main doors.

With enthusiastic cries the Elgin Continentals attacked the doors and easily forced them open. King's men retreated up the stairs, throwing anything that came to hand at the Elgin men in an attempt to stem their advance. Pressed back to their "redoubt" in a courtroom with doors, they tried to jam and wedge the doors shut. There was nowhere left for them to retreat. Finding they couldn't get enough shoulders against this door to force it, the Elgin men battered in one of the panels and crawled through one at a time. These lucky skirmishers were met with furious blows from iron fire-place pokers gathered for the purpose. Gaining possession of the doors, the Continentals rallied for the final assault. Rushing the judges' bench where tables and chairs had been stacked for the final defense, they were met with a volley of paving stones. With great yells they stormed the polished oaken wall, overwhelming it in minutes.

While John King berated Sheriff Clark, the Elgin men loaded the arms and headed back upriver. Their triumphant return was marred only by the number of men needing treatment for wounds ranging from head lacerations inflicted by pokers to bruises from errant stones. Even Ed

Joslyn wasn't spared, having intercepted a paver in flight, awarding him a large bruise on his breast. Their 9:00 a.m. departure was postponed to 2:00 p.m.

The guns taken in the raid turned out to be the same class of "Altered U.S. Musket" the Continentals already had. This was contrary to the report that Gen. Swift had supplied Mr. King's men with the newer Minié rifles. This was quite a let-down for Ed. Joslyn.

The fallout from the raid included a meeting that night in Geneva where it was hotly debated whether Sheriff Clark should be removed from office for his inability to stop the Elgin Criminals. Two facts seemed to have escaped the outraged Genevans: Sheriff Clark was presented a military order over which his civilian office had no jurisdiction; and he had only one deputy, making it unlikely he could have "surrounded" 20 angry men, the cream of the Continentals, and taken them into custody.

With the start of the Civil War the Continentals were among the first in the state to enlist as a drilled and uniformed organization. Mustered in as A company of the 7th Illinois Volunteer Infantry under Col. Cook, they spent the next two years campaigning in the west.

Not satisfied with the outdated arms, the company, along with their regiment, purchased their own Henry 16-shot rifles. With these rifles they won fame in the defense of Allatoona Pass, Georgia in 1864. Coming to the notice of Gen. Sherman, the 7th was among the regiments he hand-picked to accompany him on his March to the Sea.

The reference material for this story comes from the April and May 1861 issues of Elgin's Weekly Gazette, and the *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois*, Vol. I revised by Brig. Gen. Reece dated 1900. My copies of the Gazette are in poor condition so I had to "fill in" some missing information. I also had to keep in mind that the Gazette was edited alternately by A. J. and Ed Joslyn.

Free Snake With Your Elgin Water

by Richard Renner

The quality of Elgin's city services has been a matter of recent political discussion, but were the local good old days really that good?

Elgin in 1912 was a city increasingly committed to Prohibition and the replacement of demon alcohol with fresh and healthful water. But in September 1912 Mrs. Sackett on South Street complained to the city about finding snakes in the city water. Not to worry, Commissioner Kohn assured her and other residents perhaps disturbed at this unexpected addition to their beverage. "This is a common thing," the Commissioner told the Elgin Daily News, "and not one to be worried about. These small water snakes are harmless and are found in water in every city in the country." Lest Elgin water should now be regarded as a form of snake juice, the Commissioner assured everyone that he did not believe that Elgin's water was "infested" with snakes but only that "there may be a few now and then." Well, now and then, just remember the plight of Mrs. Sackett when you turn on your faucet.

The Railroad Bridge at the Foot of Logan Ave.

by Chuck Emmert

In 1909 the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad built a railroad bridge to haul sand and gravel from the A. Y. Reed gravel pit on the west side of the Fox River to the railroad on the east side of the river. It was a very substantial bridge, constructed with over 200 heavy pilings and many cross braces.

During the building boom after World War I, 50 to 60 rail cars left the pit for Chicago almost every night. The gravel pit was originally operated by The Elgin Torpedo Sand Co. (Arthur Y. Reed was President and he also owned the farm.) Much sand was shipped from the pit and much spilled from the cars crossing the bridge, creating sand beaches. Some molding sand for the Woodruff and Edwards foundry also came from the pit. The area by the bridge became the most popular swimming and diving area in the city. During the Depression almost all building stopped and later near the end, they even shipped black dirt.

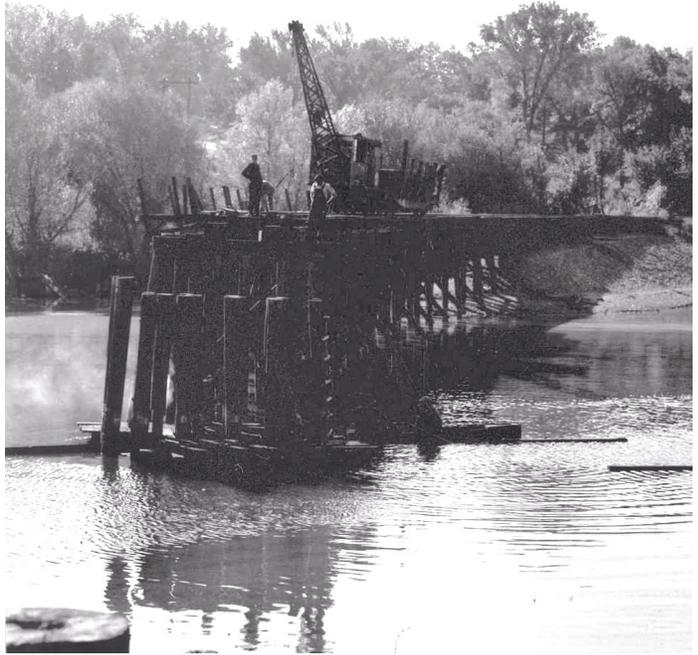
We fished for northern pike at the old "pickerel hole" which were ice cold streams that entered the river at the east end of what is now the tollway bridge. When the river got very warm, we could sneak up and see large northern pike lying in the three-inch deep cold water in the streams with their backs out of the water. They would dart out into the river when they felt the vibrations of anyone approaching. Northerns were caught there in hot weather ranging from five to 21 lb. The water depth near the mouth of the creek dropped from 8 inches to three feet. We used a large chub under a bobber as bait, or cast bass-o-reno or pickey-minnow lures.

In cooler weather we fished for northerns and catfish near the trestle, as that was the deepest part of the river (10 feet). In recent times we discovered that the river is now only four and a half to five feet deep in the center, but 13 feet deep just 10 feet from the western shore.

In a bay on the west side of the river was the remains of a mechanical gravel washer, which separated sand from the gravel and graded it to size. The old gravel pit is now the lake in Willow Lake Estates. During the student strike at Elgin High School in 1935, Jim Flood and others fished and swam in the pit. He said that the water was crystal clear and there was still some work going on in the northeast corner.



Looking north from Logan toward Willow Lake Estates today



Removing the bridge in 1937

In 1933 the city condemned the bridge, fearing accidents due to pedestrians walking across the bridge. Some boaters were also concerned that the bridge was a hazard to motor boating. It was removed in October of 1937.



AMERICAN LOTUS
Nelumbo lutea (Willd.) Pers.
WATERLILY FAMILY

There were large lotus beds south and north of the trestle. They were American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) with six to eight inch diameter yellow flowers that stood 15 to 20 inches above the water in late summer, with leaves two to three feet in diameter.

Just a short way north of the bridge was Trout Park where rowboats and canoes were available for rental. They were heavily utilized and it was a most popular recreational area of the city. In the east side channel, north of the boat piers, there was a wooden swimmers' platform. We valiantly tried to keep mouths closed when swimming; if we stood up, we'd sink ankle-deep in the very soft mud. Per Professor Steinbach of Elgin Community College, perfect mud for lotus is the consistency of mayonnaise, which made it difficult to walk in the water. Memories of swimming there go back to the late 1930s, but surprisingly we did not seem to hear of anyone getting sick.

Under the Cupola

by Lucy Elliott, Museum Educator

The new position of Museum Educator was established in March with a focus on making the Museum more accessible to children in the community, particularly those who reside and go to school within walking distance of this landmark building. Understanding a community's past encourages ownership and heightens pride, so we are intent on spreading the news of the wonderful stories and treasures to be discovered Under the Cupola!

This past fall, the Museum staff worked alongside Hilltop School sixth grade teacher Shawn Leaver, an American History Project partner, to design a "WatchWorks Program" where the students carefully handled artifacts representative of the watch factory. With white gloves they conjectured what the individual pieces might lend to the full history, and together discovered the amazing Elgin National Watch Factory. It was terrific fun and meaningful, too! Companion activities in the classroom preceded and followed the visit—Shawn was quite pleased with how it complemented his unit of study on primary and secondary research sources.



Liz, Shawn, and I were then invited to present the "WatchWorks" program at the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC) conference as a model for hands-on, meaningful learning experiences related to the social studies curriculum. It went splendidly! Following the conference, Roberta Lennon at Elgin High School asked that we tailor a Progressive Era program similar to the WatchWorks program. Elgin examples were used to illustrate national historical concepts like Prohibition, labor reforms, and transportation changes. The white glove treatment of artifacts made it an exceptional experience.

In making more residents (young and old) aware of our unique history, the pride in our community is heightened; when people identify with and understand their place, they are more likely to care for and nurture it.

Relics from the Masonic Temple

by Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

The Museum is holding pieces of the Elgin Masonic Temple, including the cornerstone and remains of the terra cotta Masonic symbol that was located in the front pediment of the building. The Society plans to preserve the architectural remnants until they can be re-installed in the building at some future date. The items may be displayed in the Artifact Garden next spring.

The Elgin City Council approved the removal of the historically significant ornamentation on the old Masonic Temple building at 310 East Chicago in October, on the corner of East Chicago and Geneva Streets in Elgin. The building was dedicated in 1926 by Elgin Masonic Lodge No. 117 and Elgin Masonic Monitor Lodge 522. The architect for the building was Ralph Abell and it was constructed with an Auditorium and Dance Hall, an Egyptian Room, a Grecian Room, a Ladies Parlor, a large banquet room with a seating capacity of 500 and a smaller dining room for up to 200. The building had a smoking room, billiards and pool room, and a lounge.

For 74 years, the Masonic Temple was an Elgin community building, as well as the Elgin Masonic organizational headquarters. There were many concerts, dances, graduations, parties, reunions, and classes held in the building. The Elgin Hawaiian Guitar Band performed in the auditorium, School District U-46 held overflow classes in the building, and a gymnastics studio operated in the Dance Hall in the early 1990s. In 1991 Wonderland bought the building as a recording studio, but also rented the public spaces. In 1999, Templo Calvario bought the building as an extension to its church community.

Currently, the Family Life Church owns the building and objected to the Masonic symbols in the cornerstone and the pediment on the front of the building. The Masonic Temple is in the Elgin Historic District, which has protected the building since 1981. The Church's request was denied by the Elgin Heritage Commission, an ad hoc commission of the city, but the Commission's ruling was overturned by the City Council. The church was allowed to remove the offending symbols intact, if possible. Construction crews removed the pieces in early December and the City moved the items to the Museum.



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Hidden Mysteries

by Richard Bennett

Michele Robey purchased the historic c. 1855 brick home located at 324 Franklin St. in June 2006. While digging through the overgrown yard, she found several old axe blades, broken china ware, and bottle fragments.



The most interesting item was found in the basement, covered with inch-thick dust: a whiskey bottle from the 1880s, containing a carving depicting the Crucifixion. The figures were hand-carved, then painstakingly assembled inside the bottle.

People back then had no television, radio, or computers taking up their time, allowing them to devote their free time to long-forgotten pastimes such as this.

As I examined the old house, I discovered the bricks match those of "Old Main" built in 1855. In one room the floors contain wide planks, but another room had narrow planks common nearer the early 1900s. There is an old coal bin in the basement. Elgin's old homes contain many hidden mysteries if we take the time to look. Who knows what else might be hidden in the walls or attic?

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF THE NEW LAYOUT!

We'd like your opinion! Send an E-mail to the editor at rebecca@marco-inc.com and let us know the following:

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Or, fill out this form and mail or bring it to the Museum:

Elgin Area Historical Society
360 Park St.
Elgin, IL 60120

THANK YOU