



# Crackerbarrel

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JULY 2008



## President's Report

Mary Hill, President



Dear Members and Readers,

This issue of the Crackerbarrel marks the midpoint of the year! EAHS and the Museum have made forward strides in reaching out to school children, offering them the opportunity to learn about their city. A neighbor girl said she has been to "that big building over there" and participated in a program. It has always

been fun to hear the kids in the Museum, to see them flitting about like birds, and to see them making connections between the stories they hear about Elgin and the buildings and locations around the city. They will help keep the story of our great city alive and pass them along.

Congratulations to Board member Dave Buck on receiving a Mayor's Award for his unwavering dedication to preserving the history of Wing Park Golf Course. And, a tip of the hat to Museum Director Elizabeth Marston on receiving a Mayor's Award for her 10 years of dedication to the Museum and Society. Liz was also nominated for a YWCA Leadership Award.

## Fourth of July Parade Highlights

George Rowe, Board Member

The theme of the Society's entry in this year's parade was "100 Years of Wing Park."

The parade planning was done by Carl Flaks, Barry Danielson, Jerry Roller, Ed Whitcomb, Jim Anderson, Maurice Dyer, and Rich Renner.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the successful entry. Jerry Roller thinks we have a good shot at winning next year-so get ready!



Sara and Jim Anderson carried the Society's banner.



Marge Rowe and Linda Rock walked behind the Lincoln. John Marston played "Abe Links-oln": five score and still golfing. Will Marston and his sisters Emma and Jane led the way along with friend Heidi Luczynski! Ernie Ludwig provided a 1967 Lincoln convertible, which was once used by Richard Nixon when he campaigned in Chicago—and Ernie has a certificate from the Republican National Committee to prove it.

## The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline August 20, 2008

👉 Visit our website [www.elginhistory.org](http://www.elginhistory.org)

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

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That's Ernie's lovely wife Susan next to him in the car. Susan helped me finish up the decorating. Thanks to Lucy Elliot who did a great job on the signs.

This trolley image from the Museum's collection was the model for ABODE, whose float this year was a cute green replica trolley car similar to the one pictured.

### 👉 ATTENTION MEMBERS:

ABODE needs a covered place to store their float for the winter. Anyone willing to donate storage space is asked to please call the Museum 847-742-4248.



## Garden Party for the Artifact Garden

Rebecca Marco, Editor



A Garden Party and Ice Cream Social was held in June to benefit the Artifact Garden planned for the southeast corner of the Museum property (corner of College Ave and Park St.) adjacent to the cannons, shown in this old photo. When complete, the Artifact Garden will provide a more appropriate setting for the Watch Factory bell currently stored near the entrance to the Museum. There are also plans to relocate the urban windmill currently being restored to the artifact Garden as well. Even without the installation of the artifacts, the garden and grounds of the Museum are quite lovely this year, thanks to the Elgin Garden Club.



## Upcoming Programs

David Nelson, Program Director

Here are the programs for the remainder of 2008.

- **Thursday, August 21, 2008**  
**12 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch**  
**Old popular music and Tin Pan Alley**
- **Sunday, September 28, 2008**  
**Cemetery Walk/Bluff City Cemetery Noon - 3 PM**
- **Sunday, October 5, 2008**  
**Elgin History Fair**  
Lord's Park Pavilion, 12:30 - 4 p.m.
- **Sunday, November 9, 2008**  
**Annual Dinner/Auction**
- **Saturday, December 6, 2008**  
**Annual Holiday Tea**  
Program: Elgin Choral Union and talk on Frank Kratkey, ECU's co-founder, 1947

## June Brown Bag Lunch Program

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director



On June 19, Ron Lange and Dave Covey presented a program about the Elgin Sports Hall of Fame. The discussion covered how the Elgin Sports Hall of Fame started, its scholarship program, and recognition of sports figures in Elgin. As an enhancement to the Museum's featured golf exhibit, Ron and

Dave also discussed golfers in the Hall of Fame. Ron is shown on the left and Dave is on the right. Memorabilia they brought and discussed is displayed on the table in the foreground.

## Someone Has to be First:

### The Story of S. M. Harney, 1839-1861

by Kenneth L. Gough

On April 19, 1861 Searghfield M. Harney, a young farmer whose parents had died some years past, attended a war meeting held by the Elgin Continentals at Davidson's Hall in downtown Elgin. Caught up in the excitement of the drums and patriotic speeches, he added his name to the roll, volunteering for three months service along with over 70 others that night. Everyone said the war would only last a few weeks and it sure beat living with his sister and her new husband.

A couple of days later, he was handed a musket taken in the Geneva Raid. Searghfield was mustered into Company A of the Seventh Illinois Volunteer Infantry and sent to Camp Dubois in Alton, Ill.

Early in May, while still at the camp, he reported for Sick Call with a rupture. The explanation he gave was that he had injured himself while mounting cannon, but the truth came out that he'd been engaged in a Stone Put with his mates (a Highland game similar to our shot put but with a large stone).

#### Hospital, Camp Dubois May 19th 1861

S. M. Harney was taken sick about the 2d or 3d of this month, was admitted to Hospital on the 5th, complaining of some pain in the lower part of his bowels, which upon examination, proved to be a slight rupture, or hernia. The hernia was easily reduced, but immediately upon its reduction, his whole bowels seemed to become inflamed, very much swollen and tympanitic. His bowels soon after being reduced, became too loose, and continued so up to within a few hours of his death. His death was brought about in consequence of inflammation of the bowels, after reduction of hernia; gradually sinking for the three days previous to his death. His bowels must have been very much impaired, as he told me, a few days after his admission, that he had been jumping, and throwing a large stone, which he thought injured him internally in some way. He was entirely conscious up to the last moment.

#### R. I. Metcaly, Surgeon, Camp Dubois.

Pvt. Searghfield M. Harney was the first soldier from Illinois to die in the Civil War. Capt. Joslyn accompanied the remains back to Elgin where they were received by Capt. Short of the Old Continentals. They then escorted the body to Hampshire, where Pvt. Harney's sister resided, and gave him a military burial with full honors.

## New Website and CD Debuting Soon

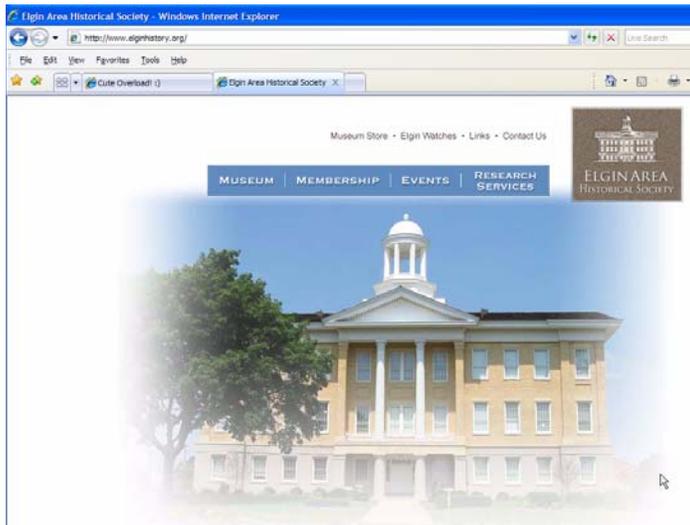
Rebecca Marco, Editor

The Society is publishing a new CD which will be available in the Museum Store very soon. Entitled *Headlight*, the CD contains a unique old booklet originally published by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The purpose of the booklet was to publicize stops along the Chicago and Northwestern's passenger routes with the goal of attracting fare-paying tourists. The edition of *Headlight* we're publishing has 40 pages of informative text and beautiful old photos all about Elgin. The CD will be sold for \$9.95 and will be of interest not only to Elgin history buffs but also to Chicago and Northwestern fans.

To make the CD, the paper booklet was scanned using a high-resolution color scanner, then each page was digitally edited to clean up scratches and other defects caused by age. The booklet was then converted to an Adobe® PDF file, which is readable by any personal computer with the free Acrobat Reader application, and packaged on a compact disk.

Look for this new CD in the Museum Store soon - it will make a great gift for family and friends

The Society's website [www.elginhistory.org](http://www.elginhistory.org) is getting a face-lift! Here's a sneak preview of the new home page, designed by Karen TerHorst. We hope to make the website more content-rich in the future and to give it a cleaner look. In the meantime, the current site continues to provide information on upcoming Society events.



## Ziegler Family Donates Rare Watches

Bill Briska, Treasurer

Gregg and JoAnn Ziegler donated two amazing Elgin watches to the Museum in June. Gregg is a watch collector and in the last few months snapped up an Elgin watch with an 1893 World's Fair custom dial including the name of the original owner, G. S. Mullin. The watch is a B.W. Raymond movement, one of Elgin's top of the line models. The case is an extraordinary work of art. It is engraved in deep relief with numerous details. The metal is tri-color gold. The case is hunter style with a box hinge.



Gregg also donated another watch that is a collector's dream, especially for local watch aficionados. It is an Elgin movement sold by the Rovelstad Brothers jewelry store. The store was a downtown Elgin fixture for more than 75 years. The store name is on the dial and the movement. The watch is cased in an Illinois Watch Case Company sterling silver case, making it a "triple play" for Elgin: movement, case, and retailer.

Both of these fine timepieces will be on display in August or September after they have been accessioned and cataloged by museum staff. They are handsome additions to our growing collection of Elgin National Watch Company artifacts.

## Clarke and Glessner House Bus Trip

Rebecca Marco, Editor



Clarke House



Glessner House

The Society's May 17 bus trip to the Clarke House and the Glessner House on South Prairie Avenue in Chicago was filled to capacity and thoroughly enjoyable. The bus was comfortable, the driver was very professional, and the lunch was delicious.

The Clarke House is Chicago's oldest residence. Our tour guide was very knowledgeable about the home, its residents the Clarke family, and the objects and furnishings in the house. Of interest was the fact that the home was moved more than once before coming

to its present location, and that Mr. Clarke, the original owner, took ill with cholera and died in the house surrounded by his family. Ever practical, he used the time of his final illness to settle his affairs, as he knew that cholera was almost invariably fatal.

By contrast, the nearby Glessner House represents the start of the modern era with its inward-looking features designed to create a private sanctuary.

Many thanks to program director David Nelson for planning the tour.

## Back Home Again: Elgin Watch Advertising

Richard Bennett

In May 2008 I stopped at an antique store in Wisconsin, and lo and behold, hanging on the wall behind the counter was a tall wooden wall clock advertising the Elgin National Watch Company. It was a Waterbury key-wind clock made in Connecticut with beautiful colors in the glass door. Research indicates clocks like this were perhaps presented to jewelry retail stores by the Company. On the glass it says:

**Style — Dependability — Accuracy**  
**Authorized Distributor of Elgin Watches**

It is an 8-day clock with perfect timing and a wood case with fancy carvings. As you might guess, the clock came home with me to Elgin.

## Butterfly Season at Bluff Spring Fen

Rebecca Marco, Editor

July is prime butterfly-watching time at Bluff Spring Fen, located behind Bluff City Cemetery. The fen is a rare geological feature where upwelling groundwater keeps the underlying peat saturated, creating rare plant communities called graminoid fens. The calcium-rich water continuously flows from seeps in the area, resulting in alkaline soil. Only 142 acres of this wetland type exist in Illinois, so it's worth a look!

More than 50 species of butterflies have been observed at the fen, including the mulberry wing skipper, which survives only at high-quality wetlands. The rare Baltimore checkerspot (below) can sometimes be seen in the fen also.



To get to the fen, take Highway 20 or Route 25 to the southeast side of Elgin. Turn onto Bluff City Boulevard, which runs parallel to Route 20 on the south side, and enter the main entrance of Bluff City Cemetery. Follow the road to the small parking lot with the split rail fence. Note that you must leave the cemetery before the gates are closed and locked for the night. Closing times are posted at the main entrance.

Bluff City Cemetery, where the Society holds the Cemetery Walk each year, is beautiful this time of year as well. Take an opportunity to get outdoors and enjoy the natural history of the Elgin area this summer. The trails at the fen are intentionally kept as natural as possible, so it is recommended that visitors wear boots or sturdy shoes, long pants, and bug spray.

The next Cemetery Walk is Sunday, September 28, 2008, from 12:00 to 3:30 PM.



## Museum Receives Donations from 1953 Elgin Soap Box Derby

by Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director



Edgar Alm was 11 years old on June 28, 1953 when he won the Elgin Soap Box Derby. He established a new track record of 29.7 seconds on the National Street hill. Edgar went on to represent Elgin and the car's sponsor, the Elgin Daily Courier News, at Akron, Ohio for the All-American Soap Box Derby finals. He raced against 152 other local champions, and wore a special shirt given to him by the Elgin National Watch Company.

Edgar Alm graduated from Elgin High School in 1960 and had just completed two years in the Army Air Corps when he drowned in a tragic accident at a pond near Elgin at the age 20.

John Buell, Edgar's cousin, recently donated Edgar's Soap Box Derby helmet, trophy, flag, and certificate to the Museum. The items will go on exhibit in fall 2008.



*Through Tears of Joy—Elgin's Soap Box Derby champion manages to smile while receiving the T. H. Keating trophy from E. W. Stranc, Chicago zone Chevrolet Motor division, General Motors Corp. Little Edgar Alm is seated in his championship car which now becomes property of the Elgin Daily Courier-News and will carry the colors of this newspaper in the All-American finals at Akron, OH. Kneeling beside the car next to their son are Mr. and Mrs. Paul Alm, 62 Maple St., Edgar became 11 years of age just a month ago, and competed his sixth grade studies prior to the summer vacation at Illinois Park school. The Elgin Soap Box Derby is co-sponsored by the Courier-News, Brotzman & Melms Chevrolet Sales, and the Elgin Exchange club.*

## Splendid! A Memoir of the Elgin High School Class of 1963

Leon Busche

In September of 1962, we entered Elgin High School for our senior year. By then Larkin High School had also opened, and we knew we would be the last class to graduate as the *only* senior class in the U-46 School District. In many ways, our senior year would be typical of all senior years, but, in other ways, we would be unique. If Teddy Roosevelt had known about the EHS Class of 1963, he would, without a doubt, have described us in a single word: *splendid!*

We began the school year with a tragedy when we lost a classmate, Phil Murphy, to cancer on September 8, 1962. Our year also ended in tragedy with the death of Bill Heck on June 29, 1963, in a one-car accident on Route 20 on his way home from his summer job. So we knew we weren't invulnerable, but we also had a strong sense of our collective status and legacy.

We had brain power: we were in the top echelon of National Merit scholars in a single class at EHS. We had athletes, including future Olympian shot putter, Brian Oldfield. We had school spirit, embodied in a respect for tradition and the ingenuity to create new traditions. Inspired by an outstanding faculty, many of whom had also taught our parents and others who would later teach our children, we were eager to do many things and achieve much.

Working within the student council structure, and inspired by our foreign exchange students, Maurice Badibanga from the Republic of Congo and Wilhelm Hinsch from West Germany, we created the International Relations Club and played host to several dozen exchange students in northern Illinois on International Relations Day in April 1963.

Many talented seniors, led by Mary Akemann, wrote and performed some hilarious skits, collectively known as "The Squid's Embrace." From a spoof on "Bye Bye Birdie" to the EHS football team performing "Swan Lake" complete with tutus, it was a hit. Even local politicians, including the unsuccessful candidate for Elgin mayor identified as "Mr. Gavelhead," came under satirical scrutiny. The gentle satire prompted even the Gavelek family to smile at our efforts.

Our biggest challenge as a class came as a complete surprise in the spring of 1963 when the Board of Education announced their decision to change the name of the high school itself to "Central High School." The outrage of our class was amplified when we learned that the change would take place *before* our graduation! Instead of being the *last* district-wide class to graduate from Elgin High School, we would be the *first* to graduate from Central High School!

Fortunately, many of us had learned valuable lessons in Mr. E. C. Alft's government class, and we mounted a campaign to change the Board of Education's decision. Led by student council president Bruce Twomley and largely without faculty involvement, members of the class circulated petitions among Elgin citizens, some of whom had graduated from Elgin High School and were as outraged as we were over the change. The petitions were presented, together with student and community testimony, to the Board. The *Courier-News* reported our activities, and the Board rescinded their misguided decision. We would graduate from "Elgin High School" in June, as all previous classes had done.

The Vietnam War had started, but it was not yet a major source of protest. Our final few weeks at EHS saw many of the traditional pranks. No senior class worth anything could fail to "kidnap" the bust of Longfellow from the third floor library. The Class of 1963 managed that feat and one better: we removed the oak doors to the Goble Library from their hinges, carried them down three flights of stairs, out the door, and to the basement of the First Methodist Church, where our senior class supper would be held. At the supper, we presented the doors to Principal Chester Alexander and librarian Ethel Hoagland as a "door prize." Mr. Alexander was not amused. The evening ended with his announcement that, if the doors were not back in place by 11:00 pm, the culprits would not graduate. We had no doubt that he would manage to find the culprits, and the doors were magically back in place by the appointed hour.



Elgin High School had a dress code in 1963 that, among other things, prohibited boys from wearing collarless shirts, girls from wearing pants, and everyone from wearing shorts. Extreme rebels that we were, on the day before final exams, virtually the entire senior class came to school in (collarless) T-shirts and shorts. Even Principal Alexander's daughter Sharon managed to get to school in shorts. We were all denied entrance to the building, so we staged a sit-in across

the street in High School Park. During first period, Mr. Alexander and Mr. Donald Quillman, the assistant principal, appeared in the park with our class sponsors, Mrs. Isabel Lynn and Mr. William Shaw. Admonishing us to "get properly dressed" and return to school, they were met with total silence. Exasperated, Mr. Alexander announced that if we were not properly dressed and in class by third period, the baccalaureate service scheduled for Sunday would be canceled. That threat was met by a roar of laughter, since most of us didn't want to attend the service anyway. However, when we were reminded that attendance at baccalaureate was *mandatory* if we wanted to be at graduation later in the week, our resolve broke. Just about everyone had already planned for this contingency—I *did* mention earlier that we were an intelligent class—and my guess is that those who lived near the high school were amused to see several hundred students hovering around parked cars changing their clothes!

We remember our teachers at EHS: Mr. E. C. Alft, whose children were named for presidents Adams, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Wilson and who practiced the government he taught by serving on the Elgin City Council and as mayor, yet failed to mention those facts in the school and city histories he has written; Miss Alice Pragman, who taught us to write—and memorize—great pieces of literature. Who could forget reciting the introduction to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (in Middle English) while working on the student council homecoming float? Mr. Larson's first period Biology class was memorable for those of us in the first row of seats who would regularly turn and yawn, infecting the rest of the class and prompting lectures on getting more sleep. And we must not forget Mr. Howard Schulte, whose love of economics and debate was exceeded only by his love of bridge and Teddy Roosevelt. Mr. Marvin Elbert gave sound advice while teaching us about the rich history of the world. Mrs. Mary Ann Fox's wit and wisdom inspired us to question what goes on politically in our world. Mr. Wilfred McWilliams reshuffled the class seating chart after every test to reflect student performance (how times have changed!) and sent us to the language lab to follow the Cuban missile crisis on radio.

The class that questioned whether we would even be alive after the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962 managed to graduate in June of 1963.

Our senior year was a very distant forty-five years ago, yet almost one hundred class members attended our 40<sup>th</sup> Reunion at Lake Geneva in 2003.

This year, members of the class of 1963 turn 63 years old. We have grown and gone into the world, and, I believe, we have achieved great things. I still think that Teddy Roosevelt would look at the EHS Class of 1963 and correctly describe it in one word: *splendid!*



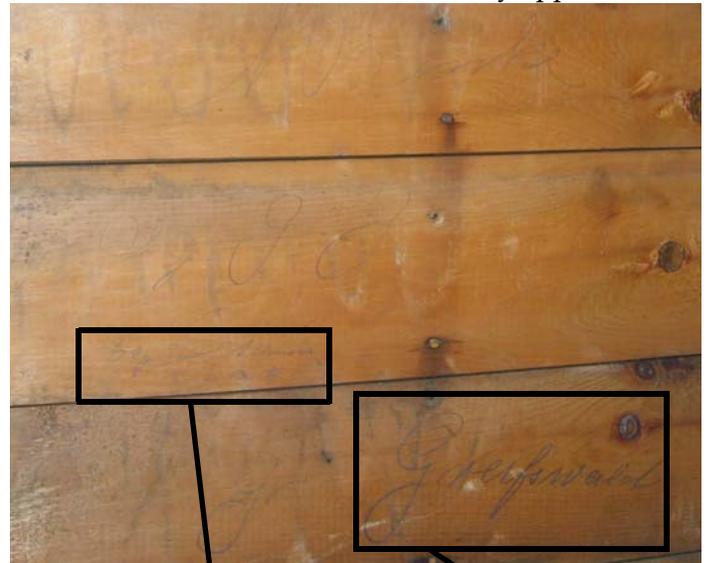
## Hidden Mysteries

Rebecca Marco, Editor

I can now answer “Yes” to the question posed in the last edition of Hidden Mysteries: “Have you searched the walls in your old home yet?”

After tearing off some weathered clapboards adjacent to the porch of my Victorian-era home, I was delighted to find some handwritten signatures on the underlying boards. The good news is that the signatures are legible, providing another clue for research. The bad news is that they are undated. The carpenters who signed their work (Greifswald, Stralsund, and Weinke) included the words *Elgin Illinois Kane County*. Considering it was unlikely that the building would be moved to another town, county, or state, including the location is not a great help to someone trying to figure out the history of the building 122 years later. Because the signatures are undated, there is no way of knowing whether the signatures are from workmen who built the original house, did a later remodeling, or just replaced some worn siding like I am doing now.

The siding is being replaced with a concrete product available in planks just like the original wooden siding. When painted, it is indistinguishable from the original cedar, and it is fireproof. Stralsund, Greifswald and Weinke would undoubtedly approve.



*Elgin Illinois  
Kane County*

*Greifswald's  
signature*