



# The Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 53 NUMBER 2  
MARCH 2016



## President's Report

*Bill Briska, President*



I would like to introduce an article written by our Treasurer, George Rowe, describing some recent projects completed by the City of Elgin's Heritage Commission. The Commission has worked with our Historical Society to make information about Elgin's historic buildings available to the public.

I am also proud to present the 2015 Annual Report in this issue, which includes the results of our sound financial planning and management as well as highlights of a very productive year for the Museum. Many thanks to all of our members, especially those of you who volunteer your time so generously.

## Elgin Heritage Commission Project Update

*George Rowe, Treasurer*

In 2009, the City of Elgin Heritage Commission undertook the task of highlighting some of the city's major landmarks that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Bill Briska, along with several other Heritage Commission members, put together a cell phone walking tour of significant sites in Elgin.

The cell-phone tour consisted of signage installed at 29 sites throughout Elgin. Each sign provided a short description of the site, and included a phone number for passers-by to call and hear a short, recorded vignette including interesting details about the site/building.

The cell phone tour was initially successful, but in recent years, the program did not see enough use to justify maintaining, and paying for, the cell phone tour service.

The Heritage Commission looked for a better solution to publicize Elgin's significant sites and buildings. The fastest and most affordable solution was to create a web page accessible by smartphone or home computer.

With the help of Elgin Historic District homeowner Ben Eubank, a website template was created that now allows city staff to easily add unique information and images about Elgin's historic properties in a cost-effective and user-friendly way.

Currently, there are over 50 homes and landmarks placed on the website, with plans to add more—Elgin has almost 500 homes bearing historical plaques, and even more landmarks!

The website is [www.historicelgin.com](http://www.historicelgin.com). Visit it now and see the excellent work the Heritage Commission, city staff, and volunteers have done taking an existing project to new heights. Put it on your smart phone so it's handy when you're out walking, and want to learn more about Elgin. Or, just stay home if you prefer, and explore Elgin from your computer.

The Elgin Heritage Commission dates from 1984, and helped implement the first Historic District in 1989. Elgin currently has five historic districts. In 1984 the commission was chaired by Bruce Dahlquist, and its original members included Pat Miller, John Walters, Jerry Turnquist, and John Roberson. John is still serving on the Heritage Commission Design Review committee, in addition to Scott Savell, John Weidemeyer, Rebecca Hunter and Dennis Roxworthy.

Other members serving on the Heritage Commission are John Weidemeyer, chair; Steve Thoren, Scott Savell, Tom Krebsbach, Judy Van Dusen, Elizabeth Femal, Judith Rivera, George Rowe and Christen Sundquist as city staff representative (some members serve on both committees).

## The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society  
360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120  
Phone 847-742-4248  
e-mail: [museum@elginhistory.org](mailto:museum@elginhistory.org)




**President:** William Briska  
**Vice President:** Terry Gabel  
**Secretary:** Laura Stroud  
**Corr. Secretary:** Ricky Harris  
**Treasurer:** George Rowe



**Editor:** Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline April 20, 2016

 Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society's Board of Directors.  
©2016 Elgin Area Historical Society. All rights reserved.

The Heritage Commission has helped implement housing grants available to individuals living in the historic districts. The Heritage Commission also began plaquing historic homes and created separate designations for Sears homes, commercial buildings, and National Register buildings, most recently creating a designation for bungalows.

A unique feature of the bungalow initiative is that it is city-wide. This allows for the homeowner to utilize the improvement grants even if the bungalow home itself is not located in one of Elgin's five historic districts. The Heritage Commission worked for many years to get the language approved to allow for this type of designation.

The Commission recognizes individuals and groups involved in improving their homes and neighborhoods at the annual Mayor's Awards (coming up May 3rd, 6 P.M. at the Haight Building in downtown Elgin). The commission is also responsible for specific street signage and district markers for historic districts. The commission designates May as Preservation Month in Elgin, in accordance with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Programs on architecture and preservation are hosted at sites throughout Elgin, so make certain you watch for these events.

The architectural heritage of Elgin has become an important part of the city's image. Just a few years ago *This Old House* magazine cited Elgin as the best city in Illinois in which to look for vintage homes for sale. This is attracting energetic individuals interested in renovating a house and resurrecting neighborhoods.

## Program Schedule for 2016

*David Nelson, Program Chair*

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

[elginhistory.org/events.html](http://elginhistory.org/events.html)

**March 20, 2016, 2:00 P.M.**

**The Hayloft Gang: Story of the National Barn Dance, Stephen Perry**

**April 10, 2:00 P.M.:**

**Mother Jones featuring Betsey Means**

**April 24, 3:00 P.M.: History Fair, 12:00 to 3:00 P.M.**

**May 13, 8:00 to 10:00 P.M.**

**Candlelight Tour of Museum**

**May 19, 12:00 noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House**

**May 23, 7:00 P.M.**

**Free Masonry and the Elgin Masonic Lodge History**

**June 16, 12:00 noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: The Cold War in Berlin with Steve Stroud**

**June 25 TBD**

**Lake Geneva Boat Tour, Details TBD**

**July 21, 12:00 Noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Artist Jane Peterson as portrayed by Linda Rock**

**Sunday, July 17, 10:00 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.**

**2016 Car Show at the Museum**

**August 18, 12:00 Noon:**

**Brown Bag Lunch: Miss Elgin 1925 with Jerry Turnquist**

**September 15, 12:00 Noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: History of Presidential Campaigns with Carl Flaks**

**September 25, 11:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

**Bluff City Cemetery Walk**

**October 9, 2:00 P.M.**

**Amazing Adventures of Bertha Benz and the History of the German Auto featuring Anette Isaccs**

**November 5, 6:00 P.M.**

**Annual Benefit/Silent Auction/General Meeting: Jacqueline Kennedy as portrayed by Leslie Goddard**

**December 3, 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

**Holiday Tea featuring music by North Side Brass with David Nelson on piano**

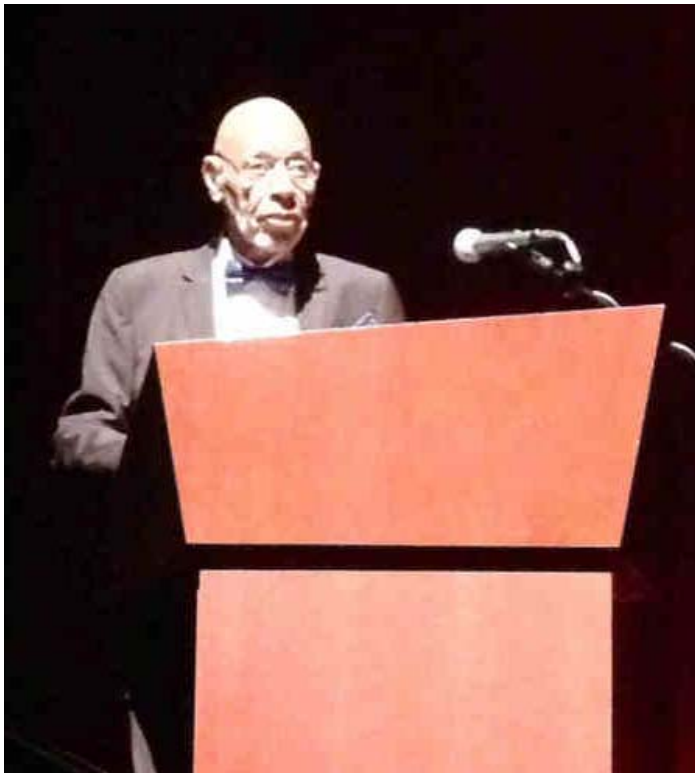
## Annual Report for 2015

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

The Elgin Area Historical Society saw the successful opening of two special projects in 2015, while planning and fundraising began on two new projects. The Society Board completed a self-accreditation process to improve all areas of the organization. As part of that process, an internal audit found that EAHS continues to operate on a sound financial basis with a stable and growing endowment fund.

### Significant 2015 Projects

- *Premiere of Project 2-3-1: The story of Elgin's African-American Heritage.* This two year-long effort premiered on April 26, 2015 with a feature length documentary film and traveling exhibit on the history of the local African-American community. A standing room only crowd of 630 people cheered the film at the Elgin Community College Blizzard Theater. The film and exhibit have been seen by an estimated 10,000 people in 2015. Over 1,500 people have viewed the film in public venues. The exhibit traveled to 9 venues in 8 months, including 4 of the 5 School District U-46 high schools, with a total student exhibit attendance of 3,800. Schools and churches have screened the film with discussion afterward.



Ernie Broadnax at Project 2-3-1 Premiere

- *Newsome Park Signage:* Six interpretive signs for the Summit-Park neighborhood and Newsome Park at Dundee Avenue and Kimball Street were installed and dedicated in May 2015. The interpretive signs, including four biographical signs, mix text and images to present the history of the Second Baptist Church and the Summit-Park Neighborhood to passers-by.



Newsome Park signage dedication ceremony

- *Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House:* EAHS started conversations with the City of Elgin to partner in the rehabilitation of the cobblestone house located at 302 West Chicago St. in Elgin. The building was purchased by the City in 2009 and has been vacant since that time. It is showing signs of advanced deterioration. The City awarded EAHS a Neighborhood Improvement Grant to complete an engineering report and preliminary drawings. The house is historically significant for its ties to the Kimball family as well as its unique cobblestone construction.
- *Dairies to Prairies Special Project:* This is a new project being proposed to tell the history of Elgin's use of rural lands, from agribusiness to suburbanization. Using the same format as Project 2-3-1 (a documentary film and traveling exhibit), the new project would combine oral histories from the farming community, dairy Board of Trade history, and environmental changes to the newly annexed areas of Elgin. Funding is currently being explored.

### Finance Report

George Rowe, Treasurer

EAHS's financial position remains sound and continues nearly two decades of gradual, steady growth. The Historical Society and Museum continues to be debt-free and properly insured, maintains adequate funds for specific projects, and has an emergency reserve.

Operating income in 2015 was \$184,136. Expenditures were \$158,790. There were also commitments for an additional \$53,000 of income to help fund the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Project. This money, while committed in 2015, will arrive in late 2016.



The endowment fund, which is separate from operational funds, was valued at \$461,000 at the end of 2015. EAHS continues to have a conservative, but growth-oriented investment strategy, which consists of holding mutual funds invested primarily in American companies. The Board of Directors sees the endowment fund as essential to building long-term financial resiliency. The EAHS endowment began in the year 2000 with a single \$16,345 gift.

## Membership

*Jerri Barnhart, Membership Chair*

At the end of 2015, Society membership included 303 households (approximately 825 members). The Museum used Groupon sales to gain an additional 42 new membership households. 9,954 volunteer hours were logged by 91 volunteers in 2015!

## Programs and Events

*David Nelson, Program Chair*

In 2015, 1,750 people attended 21 programs and events presented by the Society. Highlights include:

- Berlin Airlift program by Anette Isaacs, sponsored by the Illinois Humanities Council.
- Premiere of Project 2-3-1 at Elgin Community College featuring the documentary and the traveling exhibit. Three public viewings were held at the Gail Borden Public Library over the summer.
- Brown Bag Lunch Lectures on the history of the Elgin Women's Club, Underground Railroad, Glimpses of Old Elgin, and Toy Soldiers and Miniatures.
- Annual Cemetery Walk, and Annual Benefit with a program on Chicago Planner Daniel Burnham.
- A fun field trip and riverboat ride for members at Potawatomi Park in St. Charles.
- A special program on the history of the Elgin Mental Health Center was part of Preservation Month in May.
- The Illinois Brass Band entertained at the Museum's Summer Soiree in August.
- Leslie Goddard presented a history of Marshall Fields at the December Holiday Tea.
- The Society's daily radio segment on WRMN Radio continued in 2015 with volunteers Jerry Turnquist, Rich Renner, Larry Drafall and David Siegenthaler. Many thanks!

## Education and Outreach

In 2015, Sara Russell, Museum Educator, conducted 32 programs for 1,120 participants. The Museum participated in the Harvest Garden Market and the Historic Elgin House Tour. We also partnered with Gail Borden

Public Library in several programs and exhibits, participated in the Friends of Lords Park Zoo events, Armchair Generals Civil War Roundtable, and Nightmare on Chicago Street. The Museum's four dedicated presenters gave programs to the Golden K, Sun City in Huntley, Edgewater and other venues. The Museum building hosted 14 rentals with 432 visitors for members' events and meetings, and several non-profit events, including meeting space for the Gifford Park Association.

## Collections and Exhibits

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

In 2015, the Collections Committee accepted hundreds of items, from 81 donors, into the Museum's permanent, education, or exhibit collections. The Museum contracted with Beth Nawara in 2015 to provide part-time assistance in collections management. Noteworthy items accepted into the collections in 2015 include:

- Elgin National Watch Company archival and objects collections from Charlen Anderson, Helen Childs, and Mari Cook.
- Elgin National watches from Peter Veerhusen, Dee Stambeeze, Kathleen and William Sanderlin, Rick Grimm, Dorothy Nesse and Marge Fox.
- Kimball Family Collection including letters and diaries from Roger Klemm, and Hameister Family Collection.
- Colloquy Coffee House archives from Alan Ladwig and the Breakfast Kiwanis archives.
- Elgin Steel Kitchen sign, a Cutter & Crossette men's shirt, and an Elgin National Watch Company advertising display from the White Rock House.
- Elgin National Watch Company scrapbooks and vintage technical drawings from Brian Truxell.
- Abell architectural drawing of Elgin Butter Tub company, ca. 1905.
- Handrock Family World War II ration books from Marge Rowe.
- Elgin Artist Trygve Rovelstad miniature Pioneer Memorial statue, a framed sketch of the centennial dollar and framed mold for the coin from the City of Elgin.
- Universalist Church pew from Harry and Patricia Weiskopf

## Exhibits

- *Madman Muntz: An American Icon* exhibit was donated by Custom Aluminum Products and Jim Castoro. Located in the meeting room, the donation also included a nice amount of Muntz promo material to sell in the Museum Store.
- The Gifford Elgin pocket watch was donated by Peter Veerhusen of the Gifford Family. This is the third Lady Elgin produced in 1868, originally given to Orlando and Caroline Gifford Davidson and handed down through the family. This pocket watch is now in a special display case in the Elgin National Watch Company exhibit.

## Museum Store

The online store was re-designed with more products and services available for purchase.

## Crackerbarrel and Websites

- David Siegenthaler contributed new research to each issue of the Crackerbarrel newsletter, including articles on the Lovell, McClure and Harvey Families and on Elgin National Watch Company designer William Gabriel.
- The Museum's Facebook Fan Site currently has over 3,000 friends.
- EAHS started a Twitter account in 2015.
- An Elgin Bungalow website was started by Steve Stroud.

---

## W.W. Abell, Architect and Civil Engineer Part 1

by David Siegenthaler

William Wright Abell, who lived in Elgin from 1873 to 1916, was one of Elgin's most talented and respected architects. He was recruited to Elgin as a 19-year-old to work as a draftsman at the Elgin National Watch Co. by his uncle, Superintendent George Hunter. Our Museum has no Abell architectural plans for homes or buildings, but we do have two Abell technical drawings for watchmaking machinery, both dated 1879.

It is assumed that Abell helped design some of the watch factory buildings during their almost constant expansion during his time there. However, the first outside architectural design work by Abell that we know of were two buildings completed in 1885: the Oriental Roller Rink and the Teeple Barn.

The Oriental Roller Rink, built during the height of a roller skating craze, was a huge 1- and 2-story building on South Grove Ave. just north of the watch factory. We have no photos of it, but it was described as "palatial" and "elegant" in newspaper reports. It had 11,000

square feet of hard maple skating surface and could seat up to 600. It also served as a venue for other large gatherings and burned down in 1895.

The Teeple Barn was a 16-sided barn built by Lester Teeple, a lumberman, who ventured into dairy farming. Realizing that his lumber was not long enough to build a standard 8-sided barn, Teeple asked Abell to design one with 16 sides. Located at the southeast corner of Randall Road and the Northwest Tollway, the barn was a stunning architectural and visual achievement. It was the only barn and one of only 47 landmarks and artifacts in the entire country to be included in the book, *Saving America's Treasures*, published by National Geographic in 2001. This book beautifully describes the barn: "Latticed with cross braces and rafters and centered on an ingenious multi-pulleys device for lifting and distributing hay, the shadowy interior achieves a level of Piranesian grandeur that makes 'Teeple Barn' seem too modest a moniker; 'Teeple Temple' is more like it. Architect W.W. Abell must have been conscious that he had created something truly noteworthy here: The cupola with which he topped off the building towers over the surrounding Kane County farmland like a big exclamation point."



*Teeple Barn, formerly on Randall Rd.*

The Teeple Barn, the last 16-sided barn in Illinois, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. After the Teeple farm was sold in the late 1980s, preservationists spent years raising and spending money to keep it standing, efforts that were ongoing when a severe windstorm destroyed the barn in May 2007.

The first home designed by Abell that we know of was his own home, an attractive Queen Anne-style home at 527 Laurel St., built in 1888. Abell worked at the Elgin National Watch Co. for nearly 18 years, until February 1891, when he entered private practice as an

architect and engineer. He originally had offices in Elgin and in Chicago, but closed his Chicago office in 1894.

Though we know Abell primarily as an architect, his training prior to working at the watch factory was mainly as a civil engineer. He worked for three different engineering firms in Massachusetts and Canada, including two that were involved in railroad building. Abell never gave up his engineering work. In 1888 he was appointed city surveyor. An 1893 newspaper building report noted that "aside from his architectural work, Mr. Abell has done more engineering than in any previous year." His engineering skills were put to use in many of his buildings, allowing him to design ingenious solutions to complex problems. Examples are the multipulleyed device and trussing in the Teeple Barn; the erection of the Spurling Building (40 DuPage Court), which incorporated 180 tons of steel, atop underground springs; and the revolving automobile turntable in the basement of the George Cook home (70 S. Chapel St.).

In 1891, his first year in private practice, Abell designed three big factory buildings: the Ludlow Shoe Factory (630 Congdon Ave., converted to residential units in the late 1990s); the Cutter & Crossette Shirt Factory (915 N. Liberty St.; razed 1964); and the Dickie Label Works (Wright Ave.; burned down 1904). Also in 1891 Abell designed two churches which still stand: the First Presbyterian Church (240 Standish St.) and the Universalist Church (southeast corner of Villa Court and DuPage St.).



The Universalist Church may be the most unique and visible of the Abell-designed structures in Elgin. Co-designed by Superintendent George Hunter of the watch factory, this Romanesque Revival-style church

was built in the shape of a pocket watch enclosed in a hunting case, as seen from above. The Universalists were a New England sect that reflected the values of the watch factory officials, most of whom were natives of New England. As noted in the book *Elgin Time*, the church's design "was an architectural synthesis of the religious and secular callings of the membership." The structure was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and today is owned by a Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Principe De Paz.



*Universalist Church, Villa St.*

In 1892-93 Abell designed, in addition to many Queen Anne-style homes, three noteworthy buildings that still stand: the former Gail Borden Public Library (50 N. Spring St.); the former German Methodist Church (76 S. Jackson St.); and the Spurling Building (40 DuPage Court). The 5-story Spurling, Elgin's first steel-framed building, was the city's tallest at the time. However, its impressive series of bay windows were removed in 1957 when the building was remodeled and renamed the Elgin Commerce Building.

In addition to the Universalist, Presbyterian and German Methodist churches, Abell also designed a fourth Elgin church that still stands: the former St. Paul's Evangelical Church (1905-06; 224 Division St.). Some other notable Abell-designed buildings have been substantially altered over the years, such as the former Ackemann's Department Store (1894-95; 168-70 E. Highland Ave.) and the former Old People's Home (1905-06; 204 S. State St.).

Abell's architectural work was not limited to Elgin. He designed homes, churches, schools and factory buildings throughout northern Illinois and beyond. According to his obituary, "during the years of his practice as an engineer and architect, he has built some work in almost every state of the union." In Arlington Heights, the Prairie-style Banta House, added to the National Register in 1998, was designed by Abell and



his son Ralph in 1908. He also designed, in 1906, the brick Prairie-style building with a shingled bell tower that served as Algonquin's village hall until 1997. This landmark building still stands as a community center and looks exactly the same on the outside as Abell designed it. Algonquin's St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Gothic Revival structure built in 1915 and razed in 1999, was one of Abell's final designs.

It is not known how many Elgin homes were designed by Abell, as documentation is lacking, but a rough estimate would be close to 100. He adapted as fashions in home design changed during his career, from the asymmetrical visual feasts of the Victorian era in the 1890s, to the more symmetrical Foursquares and Prairie-style homes of the early 1900s. There are Abell-designed homes all over Elgin but the highest concentration may be in the 700- and 800-blocks of West Highland Ave., where there are seven.

Accompanying photos include two examples of Abell's attractive Queen Anne-style homes: the Finla McClure mansion (1891; 770 W. Highland Ave.) and the David Sharples home (1892; 303 River Bluff Rd.).

*To be continued...*

*Acknowledgements: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Elgin Time: A History of the Elgin National Watch Company, 1864-1968 (by Mike Alft and Bill Briska, 2003); Saving America's Treasures (National Geographic, 2001); newspaper building reports; obituaries; federal censuses; city directories; etc.; home photos by Judy Van Dusen.*



*Finla McClure Mansion. 770 W. Highland Ave.*



*David Sharples Home, 303 River Bluff Rd.*

## Elgin Window Quiz

*George Rowe, Treasurer*

Feeling a little of the winter blahs, a little cabin fever, or need to get out and stretch your legs? Here is a great way to do just that! The Heritage Commission has put together a local "Architecture Window Quiz" and you can play!

This is a great way to get out and take a walk around town to appreciate local architecture.

The quiz consists of pictures of 25 windows that are from local buildings or homes, and all you need to do is identify the window's address! Want extra points? Name the architectural style of the window pictured along with the address.

This year, the windows are located on the east side within the boundaries of the Fox River on the west, Seneca Street to the north, Channing Street to the East and Villa Street to the South (boundary map will be included with the quiz).

There are a total of 50 points, and the winner gets a guided tour of the Wing Mansion, a ride to Wing Park in a Model A as well as a photograph of the ride! Second and third place prizes will also be awarded. So get out there, get that quiz and take a walk around town!

Quizzes can be picked up at Old Main (360 Park St.), Ace Hardware (215 N. Spring St.), or City Hall (150 Dexter Ct.). Return the completed quiz to the City Hall Community Development desk by 5 P.M. April 29th. The winners will be announced at the Mayor's Awards on May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00pm at The Haight (166 Symphony Way). For more information contact Christen Sundquist at 847-931-6004.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM  
360 PARK STREET  
ELGIN, IL 60120

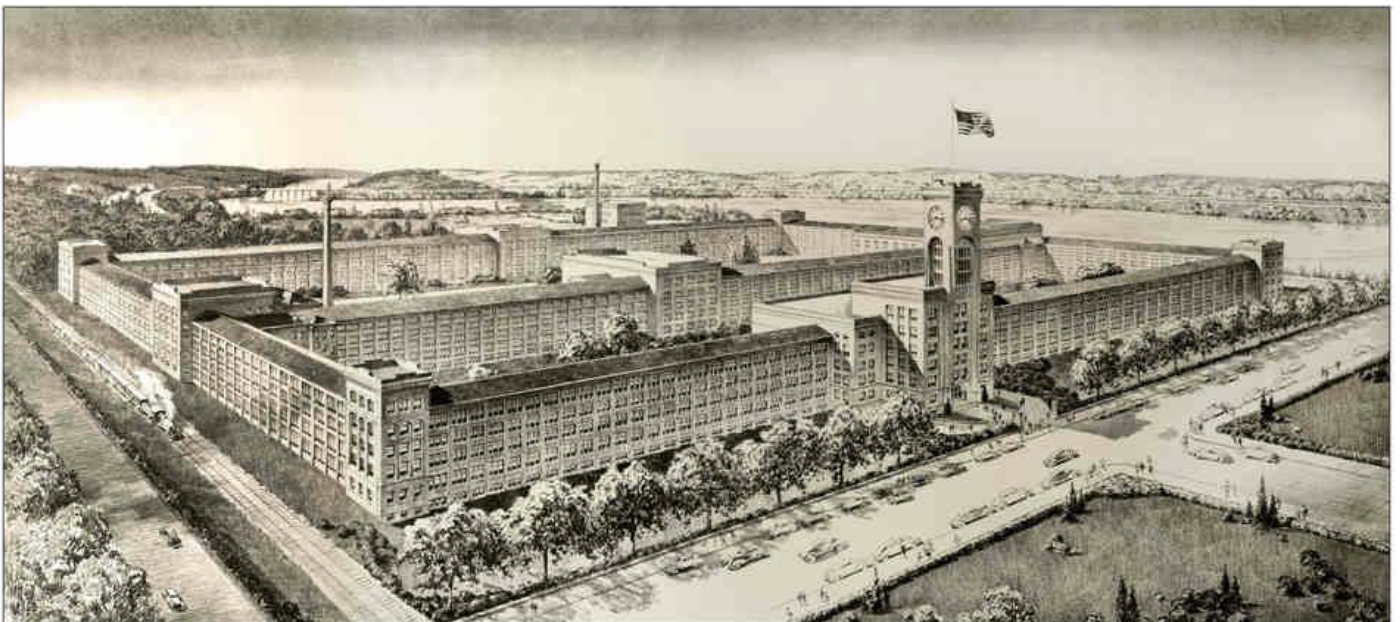


---

## Museum Store News

*Sandi McClure*

We are now selling a larger size Watch Factory signed and numbered lithograph, measuring 21" x 38", in the Museum Store. Many folks were asking about buying a larger size and they are now available.



Home of the **ELGIN NATIONAL WATCH COMPANY**  
• *The World's Largest Fine Watch Factory* •