

# The Crackerbarrel



## Elgin History Museum News January 2020

### President's Report: Collecting History

*Al Walters, President*



As we look toward a new decade, please allow me to mention the Elgin History Museum's 2019 accomplishments.

Exterior construction and stabilization of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone house is mostly completed. Inside, heating, air conditioning, electric, sewer, water, gas, fire/security alarms

and the basement floor are now completed. Next is the installation of a historically-accurate reproduction front door followed by insulation and drywall.

Despite challenging weather, the 32nd annual Cemetery Walk and experimental companion theater production were great successes. Many thanks to our new co-chairs, Rudy and Lillian Galfi.

The Museum realized a long-term initiative, with the support of many individuals, when the Bluff City Common Grave granite marker was placed and dedicated in September.

The Program Committee led by Betsy Armistead and Mark Preradovic delivered a calendar full of varied and interesting programs. History is at its best when skilled presenters make it come alive.

School and group tour attendance reached an all-time high. We thank Rebecca Miller for generating the interest of schools and teachers, and to the many volunteers who helped her deliver the programs.

Sadly, the Museum lost two pillars of local history in 2019. The many significant contributions provided by the late Steve Stroud and David Nelson helped a generation to better understand Elgin's history. They will be missed.

Community engagement is the cornerstone of our success. Please understand that your support, in whatever form it takes, is greatly appreciated by the staff and board of directors. Happy New Year!

### In Memoriam: David Nelson

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*



David J. Nelson, a well-known Elgin musician, passed away on December 22, 2019. He was also a leader at the Elgin History Museum. Joining the board in 2007, David brought order and creativity to the Museum's public programs as Program Chair starting in 2008. David worked to increase the number of programs and added music and musical history to

the programming. David organized the program schedule and then helped out at each event. David grew the Museum's annual meeting into a gala fundraiser. The first year, 2010, David brought in a leading Teddy Roosevelt re-enactor, Joe Weigand, to entertain and educate members and guests. These events had a broader reach and an added objective of fundraising, different than earlier annual meetings for the Museum.

Local musical history was a strong interest of David's. When David first started on the Museum's board, he used the Museum archives to research and write biographies on some past, but not forgotten, Elgin musicians such as Charlo Bohl and Jane Chipman. This early research formed the basis for his own memoir, published in 2018.



Thank you to David and Dolores Nelson for your lasting impact on the Elgin History Museum and on the history of Elgin.

## The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline February 20, 2020



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

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Society's Board of Directors.

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**Sunday March 22, 2:00 P.M.: Centennial of 1920  
Palm Sunday Tornado with Jerry Turnquist**

**Thursday April 16, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch  
Hats Off to Elgin presented by Linda Rock and Beth Hudson**

Vintage men's and women's hats tell the story of hat styles through the decades. Tidbits of Elgin history interspersed throughout the program add an interesting local flavor.

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## Welcome New Members

- Valerie Barton
- Murna Hanseman
- Cheryl Hartwell-Christensen
- Meghan Lies
- Bill and Kathy Marston
- Michael Patchen
- Paul Richardson

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## 2019 Program Schedule

*Betsy Armistead, Program Chair*

Events are held at the Museum unless otherwise noted. Check the website for the most up-to-date information and to purchase tickets. [elginhistory.org/events](http://elginhistory.org/events)

**January 14, 7:00 P.M. Gail Borden Library, Meadows Community Room:**

**Jerry Turnquist: What, no Beer?**

National Prohibition began in 1920, but it wasn't the first time Elgin was "dry." Historian Jerry Turnquist tells of earlier efforts to limit liquor sales in the city through the repeal of Prohibition in 1933.

**Saturday February 15, 11:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.:  
Volunteer Brunch**

**Saturday February 16, 2:00 P.M., 4:00 P.M.:  
Kevin Wood presents From Obscurity to Greatness:  
Illinois and Lincoln, 1830-1861**

Sponsored by Illinois Humanities. The 4:00 presentation will be in Spanish.

**Thursday March 19, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag  
Lunch presented by John C. Thiel**

On September 18, 1885, the body of 17-year old Frank Charles Thiel, a Bible salesman from Elgin, was found in a hastily dug grave beneath a culvert on a country road south of Dixon, Illinois, brutally murdered. The riveting account of the murder, *Death of a Colporteur: The Story of the Murder at Bloody Gulch Road*, was written by his great-nephew, John C. Thiel. Copies of the book are available in the Museum store.

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## Thank You Donors

### #ILGive Donations

Many thanks to all 130 IL Give donors! We raised a total of \$13,500 to save the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. The most generous IL Give donors include:

- Jim and Sara Ellen Anderson
- Marge Krueger
- Harry and Phyllis Blizzard
- Dan and Lynne Walters
- Al and Kathy Waters

### Other General Donors

- Mecum Auction
- Carl and Mary Ellen Flaks
- Nick and Sheila Freeman
- Laurel Garza
- Martin and Mary Gregory
- Wayne Heinmiller
- Jim Wingfield

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# The Hubbard Families of Elgin: Part 1

by David Siegenthaler

Two unrelated Hubbard families were prominent in early Elgin. William G. Hubbard came to Elgin in 1843 to manage a store and became one of Elgin's most important pioneer merchants. He bought a business lot at the northeast corner of Chicago St. and Douglas Ave. in 1844 and built a store there that was rebuilt three times before it was finally razed and left vacant in 1980. He was also instrumental to the success of the first railroad to reach Elgin in 1850, and to bringing Gail Borden's milk condensing plant to Elgin in 1865. His son William became a telephone pioneer in Elgin, not only inventing early versions of the telephone but also bringing the first telephone exchange to Elgin in 1881. Augustine Hubbard came to Elgin in 1871 and was a longtime justice of the peace and insurance agent before being elected mayor in 1903. A street on Elgin's northwest side is named in his honor.

William Grosvenor Hubbard was born December 1, 1804, in Providence, Rhode Island, to Stephen and Zerviah Grosvenor Hubbard. At age six his family moved to Rome, in upstate New York, where his father was a merchant. William learned the trade and became the owner of a store in Boonville, New York, about 1826. About the same time he attended a series of revival meetings and publicly professed his faith in Christ. On June 6, 1828, William married Mary Schuyler of Boonville and the couple had a daughter Mary, born August 9, 1829. His wife died October 14, 1829, and their daughter grew up to marry William Chase, dying in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1865. In 1829 William became president of the local temperance society, whose members were required to pledge total abstinence from all intoxicating liquor.

The severe New York winters were affecting his health so William decided to scout out the Illinois frontier as a possible residence. In 1832 he came to Illinois via the Ohio, Mississippi and Illinois rivers, as far north as the Jacksonville and Springfield area. This was the year of the Black Hawk War and the Chicago area was not yet opened for white settlers. William was favorably impressed and returned to New York, intending to move to Illinois the following year. However, his in-laws were strongly opposed to the idea, so William put his dream on hold for a couple of years.

By 1835, William was convinced that he could not endure the New York climate any longer and came to Chicago in May 1835 with his younger brothers Benjamin and Stephen. He found Chicago, with its 1,300 residents, to be a muddy hotbed of land speculators, with merchants who did not respect the Sabbath. Unable to rent a store in a suitable location, William

went to Joliet but found business prospects there unsatisfactory as well. He and brother Stephen took a prospecting tour to the vast prairies south of Joliet. Though neither had any farming experience, they purchased a claim along the Vermilion River in Livingston County, near Pontiac. William noted, "we could have all the prairie we wished by paying \$1.25 per acre." Following their farm purchase in late 1835, William returned to New York and in 1836 came back to Joliet with his parents and his daughter Mary. In the spring of 1837 the family moved to their farm in Livingston County.

Their first year as farmers, 1837, was successful. They raised corn and other grain and provisions, enough for their own use as well as a surplus to sell. They got good cash prices and had a good market, with the many immigrants in the area. However, a national depression hit the country that year and the next few years were a struggle. On September 19, 1839, William married Charlotte Wright of Lisbon in Kendall County. She was born February 28, 1817, in Rome, New York. Their daughter Harriet ("Hattie") was born September 16, 1840. In the spring of 1841, they left the farm and moved in with the Wright family in Lisbon. In September 1841, William got a job in a dry goods store in Chicago. The family moved to Chicago, where their second child, William ("Willie") was born May 11, 1842.

William's wife was a cousin of B.W. Raymond, the Chicago capitalist, who owned a store in Elgin. William had asked for a position in the store in case of a vacancy. After the store manager died suddenly in 1842, William was offered the position and his family moved to Elgin in January 1843. The store was at the southeast corner of Chicago and Spring streets and William remained there as manager for two years. In September 1843 baby Willie died at age one, and two months later young Hattie died at age three. The couple's third child, Henry Wright, was born May 17, 1844; their fourth, Charlotte Julia, was born February 11, 1846; and their fifth and last child, William ("Will"), was born June 27, 1849. Charlotte Julia died in November 1850 at age four.

William had his home built about 1844 at 106 N. Spring St. Also in 1844, he decided that it would be a good investment to buy a business lot. He selected a vacant lot at the northeast corner of Chicago St. and Douglas Ave. It was long and narrow, 132 feet by 22 feet, and owned by Dr. Anson Root, who told him that the price was \$200. This was just after the whole town plat had been sold by the government for \$1.25 an acre. William and Dr. Root worked out a credit agreement and the lot was his. William was then able to quickly have a store built on the lot, thanks to further credit agreements with a brick-maker, lumber dealer, mason and carpenter. The lot was in a desirable location and commanded high rent, which enabled him to get along nicely and pay on his indebtedness. For the remainder of his life, William was able to live comfortably as a



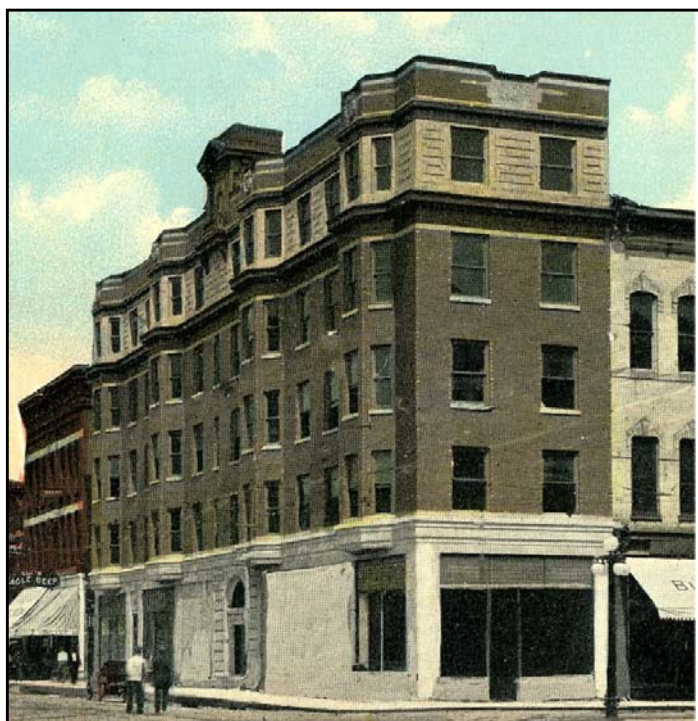
business landlord from the rents, though he did conduct his own dry goods store in the building from 1851-1861, retiring due to health issues.

The original and second Hubbard buildings were destroyed by fire. The third building, built in 1874, was a 3-story brick structure, nearly fireproof.



*Hubbard Building, three stories, built 1874*

William's son Henry rebuilt the Hubbard building one more time, in 1909-10, when he added two stories. In 1967 the Hubbard building was sold and renamed the Lawyers Building. In 1979 it suffered severe fire damage and was razed in 1980. The site stood vacant for 19 years until 1999 when Kurt Kresmery built a 4-story brick business building on the site.



*Hubbard Building, five stories, built 1910*

A vocal abolitionist and member of the Kane County Anti-Slavery Society, William received death threats but was not intimidated. He helped draw up resolutions adopted by his church that slavery was a sin not to be condoned. William served 35 years as a trustee of the First Congregational Church. A pair of stained glass windows in the current church building were donated in memory of William and his wife Charlotte, who helped organize Elgin's first women's missionary society in 1856.



*William C. Hubbard*

Firmly convinced of the necessity of a railroad through Elgin, William became the local agent for the Chicago & Galena railroad in the late 1840s, soliciting subscriptions to their stock. The common roads between Elgin and Chicago, except when dry in the summer or frozen in the winter, were almost impassable. The railroad reached Elgin in 1850 and the local business environment quickly changed. There was now a cash market here for farm products, prompting William to open his own dry goods store in 1851.

In early 1865, William became a partner in the organization of the Elgin Milk Condensing Co. He met with Gail Borden in February 1865 in New York and in May the Elgin condensing plant opened in a converted tannery building. Just before it opened, the Civil War ended. The Union Army was the principal consumer of condensed milk and now this market had almost completely disappeared. William welcomed the peace but noted that "had the war continued a few years I should have made all the money I could have desired."

*To be continued. . .*

*Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Kane County histories; obituaries; William G. Hubbard's autobiography, written in 1878, excerpts of which were published in the Courier-News in Aug.-Sep. 1928; Linda Eder (First Congregational Church historian); etc.*

# 2019 Museum Annual Report

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

## Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Budget

This was the fourth year of the rehabilitation of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. Per the Society's agreement with the City of Elgin, the Society will raise the funds and manage the rehab. The City will retain ownership of the building and lease it back to the Museum when completed. In 2019, \$52,632 was raised and spent. Up to another \$47,725 in grant money is committed for additional expenses this year and into early next year. Major milestones this year were the installation of the HVAC systems, new sewer lines and roughed-in wiring for electricity, fire detection and building security. On the exterior, all windows are installed, tuckpointing completed, and painting begun. Many other smaller tasks were accomplished.



Kimball House, Fall 2019

## Grants

The Museum received a number of grants, mostly for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Project. The Elgin Community Network, Kane County Riverboat Fund, and Grand Victoria Foundation all awarded the Museum funding for the project.

Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board awarded a grant to digitize the Illinois Watch Case employee newsletters, Cases and Faces, along with Elgin American catalogs and photos to upload to the Illinois Digital Archives and the Museum's website. Half the project is completed and accessible on the internet at <http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/p16614coll60/search/>

The Museum completed fundraising \$5,500 for the Common Grave Marker at Bluff City Cemetery. A granite grave marker, bench and memorial tree were dedicated on September 14, 2019.

## 2019 Museum Exhibit Summary

- *Elgin High School 150 Years*
- *A Fox River Testimony* painting exhibit in combination with artist Joel Sheesley and The Conservation Foundation
- *AAUW: 100 Years of Empowering Women*
- *Birds of the Fox River Valley* by Photographer Ira Marcus
- The Museum contributed to the St. Charles History Center's exhibit on the anti-slavery movement and the Sheldon Peck exhibit at Lombard Historical Society Sheldon Peck Home.
- *Dairies to Prairies* and *Project 2-3-1* documentary/traveling exhibit projects continued to rotate through the Chicago area in 2019. School District 300 hosted *Project 2-3-1* in all three high schools in February 2019. The West Chicago History Museum, the Sandwich Public Library and Gail Borden Public Library hosted *Dairies to Prairies*. There were 5 other viewings and programs for *Dairies to Prairies*.

## Volunteer Projects

Volunteers and Interns worked on a variety of projects, including:

- Inventorying Elgin High School yearbooks
- Scanning five boxes of postcards
- Inventorying parts of the costume collection
- Photographing hundreds of artifacts. There are currently 5,317 artifact photographs online. We continue adding more.
- Editing/layout of Crackerbarrel newsletter

## Museum Store

The store offered new custom Elgin products including David Nelson's memoir, coasters, Cobblestone House and Cemetery Walk t-shirts and magnets.

A new computer-based cash register streamlined operations of the physical store with the online Museum store.

## Historical Collections

In 2019, the Collections Committee accepted over 850 items from 98 donors into the Museum's permanent, education, or exhibit collections. Noteworthy items accepted into the collection in 2019 include:

- Watch dial with a Gail Borden movement donated by Jeff White
- Elgin Country Club caddie badge donated by Gary Biesterfeld
- Painting by Albert Kenney donated by Terry and Pat Dunning



- Photographs of the D.C. Cook family and books published by the D.C. Cook Publishing Company donated by Bruce Cook
- Toy Elgin Sweeper donated by Marianne Bost



- M.C. Town pocket watch donated by Elizabeth Hamlin-Morin



#### *M.C. Town Pocket Watch*

There were 22 requests for photograph reproduction. A total of 109 artifacts were deaccessioned.

Artifacts loaned to other institutions:

- Gail Borden Public Library borrowed 22 artifacts from our permanent collection for the exhibit "150 Year Naming Anniversary of Gail Borden Library."
- Gail Borden Public Library borrowed artifacts from the permanent collection and seven additional items for a cooking exhibit.
- The Lombard Historical Society borrowed the James and Laura Gifford portraits by Sheldon Peck for their "Sheldon Peck" exhibit.
- Northern Illinois University borrowed the portrait of Richard Jacobs for an exhibit on war and art.
- The Church of the Brethren borrowed a quilt made by Brethren women for their anniversary exhibit.

#### **Media/Marketing**

- Our social audience grew by 38% for a total of 3321 followers. We increased our email list by 20% for a total of 886 existing subscribers.

- The media team worked with a group of Board Members to execute the most successful #ILG-IVE.campaign to date, incorporating peer-to-peer and Facebook fundraising.
- The Museum received 146 mentions in various newspapers and magazines.
- Increased visibility with a new audience by hosting Family Fringe Fest with Side Street Studio Arts.
- Created a YouTube channel where 1,200 people watched some part of a video.
- Published six Crackerbarrel newsletters

#### **2019 Finance Report**

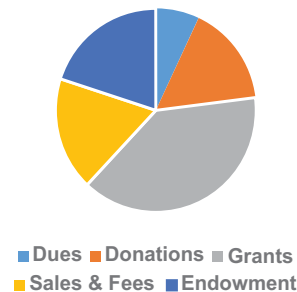
The Museum continues to be in sound financial condition. It remains debt free, pays bills on time, is adequately insured, and maintains an emergency reserve fund and a growing endowment.

Museum membership is up 5% with a total of 320 households, approximately 550 people.

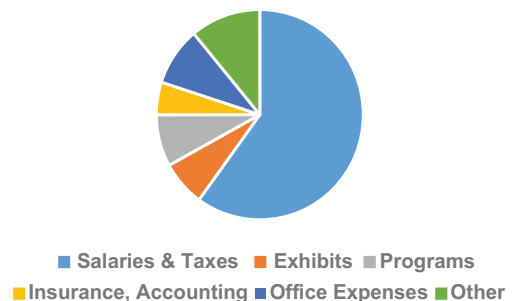
The Museum operating budget is separate from the budget for the rehabilitation of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. In 2019, income for Museum operations was approximately \$210,000.

Expenses for Museum operations were approximately \$190,000. The Museum's four part-time employees add up to the full-time equivalent of 2.1 staff persons.

#### **Museum Operations Income Sources**



#### **Museum Operations Expenses**



The Society's Endowment Fund has grown to about \$2.7 million. Approximately one-third of the Fund's assets are invested to generate income for Museum operations. The remaining two-thirds of the assets are invested in conservative, growth-oriented mutual

funds and other securities. The overall goal is to help support operations while reinvesting in the Endowment for continued growth of the principal.

## 2019 Education Report

The Education Department welcomed 1,901 program attendees in 2019, up from 1,302 in the previous year. In addition to local schools that visit each year, we were happy to see several new schools visit for the first time. School District U-46's decision to stop charging individual schools for use of buses for field trips within the district has made visits possible for more classes.

While elementary school students, primarily 3rd and 4th grade, continue to make up the majority of our field trip visitors during the school year, we were pleased to see an increase in visits from middle and high school special education classes this year. We also had summer visits from local day care center groups and Special Recreation Association adult day camps. We partnered with Friends of Lords Park Zoo to offer three summer programs at the zoo. Adult history enthusiasts on day trips organized by local Senior Centers and collector clubs rounded out our list of visitors. The table below lists all programs offered and the number of times each was presented in 2019.

| Program Name                    | Presentations |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Museum Tour/Scavenger Hunt      | 33            |
| Watch Your Pocket               | 17            |
| Prairie Pioneers                | 12            |
| Great Grandma's Kitchen         | 10            |
| Water Ways                      | 4             |
| History Fair                    | 4             |
| People on the Move              | 3             |
| What Shall I Wear?              | 2             |
| Great Grandma's Wash Day Play   | 2             |
| Cobblestones to Cupolas         | 2             |
| A Tool for Every Job            | 1             |
| Draw and Tell Stories           | 1             |
| Cemetery Bus Tour               | 1             |
| Butter Making                   | 1             |
| <b>Total Programs Presented</b> | <b>93</b>     |

Museum tours are popular with school visitors but we also provided many specialized programs on Prairie Pioneers, the Elgin National Watch Company and the impact of the Fox River on our community. We modify the content for these programs to fit the age and ability level of each group. This year, in response to teacher feedback, we increased biographical content in our discussion of Elgin's first permanent settlers. We also broadened the STEM component in our program on the Fox River's impact on Elgin by making models of the river, complete with running water, functional mill races and working water wheels!



*Family fun at the Museum*



The Museum's Educational Programming Docents provide a rich learning experience for visiting groups, creating a welcoming environment with an enthusiasm that is contagious. Children are encouraged to ask questions and make connections between themselves and what they have seen in the Museum. Each children's program also includes a hands-on component. Students have had fun making butter, rag dolls and apple pies, deciding what to pack in a covered wagon, building model millraces, washing laundry with an old-fashioned scrub board, hauling water with a yoke and bucket, and exploring the tiny parts inside a pocket watch. More importantly, they have learned how these things connect us to our past and our future.

## 2019 Program Committee Report

The Museum organized or participated in 23 programs, summarized below.

Sunday afternoon programs:

- John Devine, Elgin High School History
- Leslie Goddard as Alice Paul
- Betsy Means as Jane Addams

Thursday Brown Bag Lunches:

- History of Paint
- History of the Lords and Lords Park
- Wasco History
- Trending Endings Funeral History



- World War I
  - Elgin Women Teachers
  - Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation History
- The Museum presented or participated in the following special events in 2019:
- Open Elgin architectural tour
  - Classic Car Show at the Museum
  - Bluff City Cemetery Walk
  - Silent City Speaks: an indoor stage presentation of the Cemetery Walk characters
  - South Elgin Trolley Museum Picnic and trolley ride
  - Museum Benefit Gala
  - Grave Marker Dedication
- Other programs that popped up during the year:
- Downtown Elgin Walking Tour
  - Chris Register Book Signing
  - Watch Factory Depot Open House
  - Civil War Experience event
  - Neville Open House
  - Cobblestone Construction Celebration
  - Sheesley Art Exhibit Reception
  - Elgin During D-Day

### Speaker's Bureau

In 2019, Linda Rock, Jerry Turnquist, Marge Rowe, Bill Briska, George Rowe, Aubrey Neville, and Al Walters presented approximately 40 Elgin history programs to small groups around the city. This year the Speakers Bureau raised approximately \$1,500!



*Linda Rock gives a talk*

### Elgin 100 Years Ago Radio Program

Jerry Turnquist, Larry Drafall, Rich Renner and David Siegenthaler keep this daily radio moment on Elgin WRMN going throughout the year. These volunteers research, write and record a 5-minute segment each month to bring news from 100 years ago to radio listeners.