

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2019

President's Report

Al Walters, President



May is Preservation Month, a nationwide event initiated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation many years ago. Elgin has been a regular participant for almost three decades. This year there are 18 local events on the calendar. These include a wide range of activities from lectures and panel discussions, to walking tours, memorial services and awards celebrations. These are great events to attend. I find them informative, entertaining, and inspiring because they reflect the area's history, culture and commitment to its heritage. All are important components of creating a sense of place that is all too often lost in a maze of new construction, generic strip malls and anonymous neighborhoods.

For more information on the May schedule check the City of Elgin website at <https://www.cityofelgin.org/DocumentCenter/View/67556/Preservation-Month-poster?bidId=> or call Christen Sundquist at 847-931-6004.

The Museum has a full calendar of events that essentially provides Preservation Month experiences year-round. The 2019 programming schedule is one of the fullest, most diverse and innovative that we have ever offered. Check out our website and the list in this issue for near term events.

To commemorate Preservation Month 2019, Bravo Magazine has put together a wonderful new poster with Elgin doorways on it, photographed by Jim Zorn. The poster is available for sale locally.

Finally, I want to thank our programming partners in making Elgin such an interesting place to live. These include the City of Elgin Heritage Commission, the Gail Borden Public Library, The Elgin Public Museum, and the Fire Barn No. 5 Museum.

Thank You Donors

Steve Stroud Memorial

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Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Project Donations:

- George & Marge Rowe
- Dennis & Laurie Roxworthy

Other Donations

- Gerald Biggers in honor of David Nelson
- Janet Burkart
- Ron Lange
- Carol Plagge
- David Slocum matching gift for Anne LoCascio

In-Kind Donations

- Pam and Chandler Swan: wine for the Museum Benefit
- Maurice Dyer: Museum microphone equipment
- Al Walters: hardware
- Gloria Hunter: Ipad exhibit interactive
- Grace Richard: allowing the Museum to lead tours of her Elgin loft and collect donations

The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline June 20, 2019

 Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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Thursday May 16, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.: House Research with Rebecca Hunter and David Siegenthaler

Come in to the Museum and learn how to research the history of your house.

Saturday May 18, 2:00 p.m. Hawthorne Nature Center: Golden Memories of Walton Island with Al Walters

Walton Island was built as a park by the WPA in the 1930s and dedicated to the City by the Izaak Walton League. Al Walters will talk about the development of the island as a park and the land surrounding the park. \$3.00/person, members free.

Thursday May 23, 6:30 p.m.: Walking Tour of Holy Hill/Historic District with Jerry Turnquist

Learn about Elgin and its reputation as a "city of churches" during this leisurely paced 90-minute walking tour. Walk will begin outside First Congregational Church, 256 E. Chicago St.

Monday May 27, 11:00 a.m.: Memorial Day at Bluff City Cemetery, 945 Bluff City Blvd.

Visit www.elginmemorialday.org for details.

Thursday May 30, 7:00 p.m.: Gail Borden Library Impact of World War II and D-Day on Elgin

The effect of the war on citizens at home and abroad is retold through newspaper clippings and photos from 75 years ago. Presented by Jerry Turnquist of the Elgin History Museum.

Thursday June 13, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch Dairies to Prairies: History of Wasco with Adam Gibbons

Bring your lunch; drinks and dessert provided.

Thursday June 20, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch Conversations With US – Great Lakes States

Book signing with author Chris Register and Ernie Broadnax. This book is the first in a series portraying Chris' cross-country bicycle tour and interview project. Bring your lunch; drinks and dessert provided.

Saturday July 14, 10:00 a.m.

Classic Car Show at the Museum

Music and refreshments from 11:00 to 3:30.

Thursday July 18, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch Funerary Practices with Mike Murschel

A fascinating look at how customs and practices related to funerals have changed over time. Bring your lunch; drinks and dessert provided.

Thursday August 15, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch WWI Impact on Elgin with Jerry Turnquist

Bring your lunch; drinks and dessert provided.

Thursday Sept. 19, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch History of Women Educators in Elgin with Linda Rock

Bring your lunch; drinks and dessert provided.

2019 Program Schedule

Betsy Armistead, Program Chair

Events are held at the Museum unless otherwise noted. Details will be added as they become available. Check website for the latest details. and tickets. elginhistory.org/events.html

Monday May 6, 7:00 p.m. Gail Borden Library: Ornamental Concrete Block in Residential Architecture

Saturday May 11, 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Hillside Cemetery Tour

Meet at Highlands Golf Course east parking lot. Join Bill Briska for a walking tour of the cemetery for the Elgin Mental Health Center.

Saturday May 11, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Lords Park Zoo: Continuing the Tradition

Join Friends of the Lords Park Zoo at the park for an event commemorating our local zoo.

Monday May 13, 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Downtown History Walk: Watch Factory Depot

Meet at the southwest corner of National St. and Wellington St. Call 847-488-1456 for more information.

Thursday May 16, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch

Lords Park History. With land donated by George and Mary Lord in the 1890s, Lords Park has been the centerpiece of Elgin's outdoor recreation for more than 100 years. Marge Rowe developed this fascinating talk, which also highlights Lords Park Zoo, one of the few municipally owned zoos in the state. Bring your lunch! Drinks and dessert provided.

Sunday September 22, 11:00 A.M. to 3 P.M.:
Cemetery Walk, Bluff City Cemetery

Sunday October 13, 2:00 P.M.

Jane Addams, presented by Betsey Means

Saturday, November 2, 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.

Museum Benefit and Silent Auction

Grand Victoria Casino

Carry Nation: The Original Barroom Smasher with Ellie Carlson. Tickets available from elginhistory.org

Saturday, December 7, 1:00 P.M.

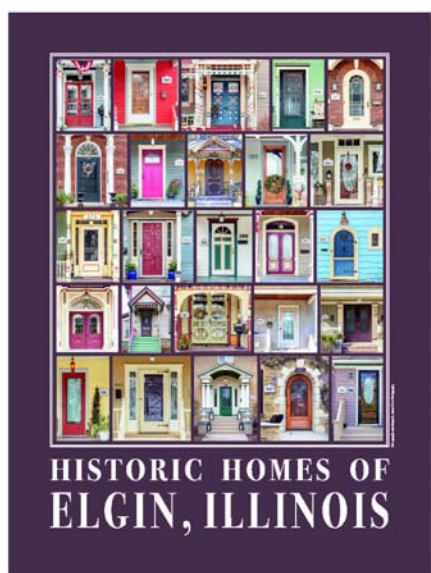
Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum

Victorian Tea featuring Holiday Harmony Carolers.

May is Preservation Month!

To commemorate Preservation Month 2019, Bravo Magazine is offering a wonderful new poster with Elgin doorways on it, photographed by Jim Zorn. This limited edition 18 x 24" poster is offset-printed on heavy weight paper and features 25 historic Elgin homes recognized by the Heritage Commission

The poster showcases original photography and design by James Zorn Photography and is published by Marquee Media. Limited to 250 prints, individually packaged in 2" protective tube with end caps. The sale of the posters benefits the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House preservation project managed by the Elgin History Museum. Retail price: \$18.35 each plus tax. Order online at: <https://elginhistory.org/product/historic-homes-of-elgin-illinois-18-x-24-poster/>



New poster benefits the Cobblestone House

Project Updates

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

As we celebrate Preservation Month, we can all be proud of the work the Society is doing to preserve the history and some of the actual structures of Elgin.

Museum Documentary Update

The *Dairies to Prairies* documentary and traveling exhibit have been on the road in northern Illinois. The film was shown at the Bartlett Public Library, Hoffman Estates Village Hall, and Sun City Huntley over the past few months. The exhibit was at the West Chicago City Museum and is now at the Sandwich Public Library until mid-June.

Dairies to Prairies also won a Mayor's Award from the Elgin Heritage Commission, in recognition of the importance of preserving the story of Elgin's dairy industry and land usage changes since the days of dairy farming.

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Update

The Elgin Community Network awarded the Museum a grant for \$19,995 toward the heating and air conditioning systems in the cobblestone house. The Museum chose radiant heat in the floor of the house, which required the new concrete floor to be poured.



New concrete floor with radiant heating tubing

Elgin Sheet Metal, owned by Pat Hudgens, installed a new furnace, venting, and a boiler for the basement floor heating system in March.



Elizabeth Marston and Aaron from Elgin Sheet Metal with the new furnace

The City of Elgin is working to install a gas line and repair the sewer line to the house. The Museum welcomed visitors to the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House during Open Elgin on April 27. Over 80 people came out in a snowstorm to take a look at the improvements since last year, which include new floor joists and beams, and the shiny new HVAC, not to mention the new windows, siding, and roof built in 2018. Before the event a group of dedicated volunteers moved rocks and cleaned up the site with the help of the City of Elgin Public Works Department. Thanks to George Rowe, Bill Briska, Paul Larson, Rick Jones, and Al Walters.



Boiler for concrete floor radiant heating system

Welcome New Members!

- Roderic Ashcraft
- Bruce Bather
- Mike Burns
- Meghan Charochak
- Scott G Haacker
- Charles Kellenberger
- Steven Lewandowski
- John W Muirhead
- Susan Payne
- Grace Richard
- Thomas Stewart

Elgin & the Golden Spike

by Jeff White

May 10, 2019 marks the 150th Anniversary of the linking of the east and west by the first transcontinental railroad line. President Ulysses S. Grant attended the ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah. Elgin has a connection to it.

William H. Cloudman (1842–1911) fought in the Civil War with the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. He was mustered out as a Sergeant Major and began working for the American Waltham Watch Company, first in Waltham, Massachusetts and then in Memphis, Tennessee where he met his wife.

For one year during that period he was employed by the San Francisco jewelry firm of Schultz, Fischer and Mahling. While he worked there, he assisted in the casting and engraving of the symbolic Golden Spike that united the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads on May 10, 1869. The Golden Spike's head is engraved "The Last Spike." All four sides are also engraved. The original spike is now on display at Stanford University.

Cloudman moved to Elgin in 1874 to work for the Elgin National Watch Company. He became a foreman in 1876 and Assistant Superintendent in 1880. He remained in that capacity until retiring in 1909. The Cloudman family lived at 320 Watch Street and eventually went into the coal and ice business in Elgin.

Steve Stroud 1943–2019

by Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director



I think I first met Steve Stroud when he was active with the Gifford Park Association or ABODE, but it was not until 2003 that he started volunteering at the Museum. Steve was interested in helping with the care of the photo collections. I showed him the Gylleck negatives and asked him to match the negative with the Gylleck image. When Steve

started on the project, he became very interested in the images, particularly of buildings. Steve's interest morphed into a survey of all the images in the archival collections. He spent months going through each photo file, album, postcard and stereoview in the collection.

The result of that process was the book *There Used To Be* Volume 1 in 2005. Steve worked with members of the board and the Heritage Commission to find the money to design and publish the book. In 2006, Steve joined the Elgin History Museum Board. With the success of Volume 1, Steve produced *There Used To Be* Volume 2 (2007) and Volume 3 (2010) and *Silent City* (2012) each time finding different sources of funding for the books. Steve partnered with the Elgin Township Assessor's Office, scanning thousands of house images from their files. These snapshots offered a real look at Elgin through the mid-20th century. He collected the old tax assessor ledgers and used them to create more information on individual properties. Steve often used the probate records to find information on homeowners. He created a guide to the street number changes Elgin made in the 1890s, and he would spend hours with a homeowner helping them to research their home. Steve never got tired of teaching people how to find out more about Elgin. He developed several programs on the history of Elgin's city cemeteries, and on researching old houses to present at the library, Museum, and for small groups around Elgin.

For these efforts and for the restoration of his home on Douglas Avenue, Steve was awarded several Elgin Heritage Commission Mayor's awards and an Elgin Image award. Steve would help at table events, answering Museum and history questions while signing copies of his books.

Steve and Laura Stroud co-chaired the Cemetery Walk for 10 years starting in 2008. They continued the tradition of evolving the event a little each year, but Steve

took it to a new level by writing a history of Bluff City Cemetery combined with a history of 25 years of the Cemetery Walk. The book lists all of the researched characters and the volunteers who portrayed them. The injustice of the common grave at Bluff City Cemetery, where bones found during construction of Channing School were buried in 1968, really affected Steve. He started fundraising to create an interpretive sign explaining the significance of the unmarked site, and to have a memorial headstone placed there. The Museum funded the interpretive sign and now with funds received for Steve Stroud's memorial, the Museum will be able to install a headstone. Steve also came up with the idea of a Channing Cemetery Walk event, which was done two different years.

He helped with the Museum's photo calendars, especially the issue with the Morehouse photos. Steve had scanned the Morehouse Collection for Dale Morehouse and knew every World War II photo.

He helped improve the Museum through board meetings, nominating committee, bylaws and STEPs meetings. His later projects centered on website development. Although he started fundraising for a Bungalow book, Steve was able to reach people faster with the same information and images through his Bungalow website. He was also working on another version of a *There Used To Be* website.

Steve Stroud is a fine example of a Museum board member and active volunteer who used books, websites, photos, and indexes to fulfill the Museum's mission of engaging the public in Elgin history. He will be missed by all.

Steve Stroud passed away on April 5, 2019 at age 76.

Elgin Machine Works/ Elgin Industries Celebrates 100 Years

by David Siegenthaler

Elgin Machine Works was founded in 1919 by Martin Skok (1886-1966), a Czechoslovakian immigrant who arrived in this country at age nine. Known as "Elgin Industries" since 1983, it is Elgin's oldest family-owned manufacturer. It is one of only two 100-year-old manufacturers in Elgin (the other is the Elgin Sweeper Co., founded in 1914).

Skok came to Elgin in 1918 to manage the service department of Charles Moody's automobile dealership. One of the most frequent causes of engine breakdowns, he found, was broken or ill-fitting piston pins. Getting replacement factory parts could take weeks or months and there were no alternative sources. Skok saw the potential for manufacturing piston pins for all

makes of cars and supplying them direct to the growing number of independent repair shops. His vision, combined with skill and determination, would soon make him a very successful supplier of replacement piston pins that were machined to precise tolerances and strengthened for long wear.

His success did not come easily, however. Skok had to persist even though investors were hard to find and retain. His first shop was a rented garage at 397-99 Silver St. that he shared with its owner, T.G.F. Dolby. This garage still stands, part frame and part brick, attached to a 2-story brick home. He soon outgrew that and rented space in a factory building where the Elgin Post Office now is located. By 1927 he was successful enough to build his own modern factory at 412 North State St. This building has had several additions and still stands, though Elgin Machine Works/Elgin Industries moved their operations to a much larger and more modern factory building between 1983 and 1990. Their current factory, on Elgin's far northwest side, was opened in 1983 and has already had several additions.

For the first several years the company specialized in piston pin manufacture, but then expanded to include other automobile replacement parts such as water and oil pumps, hangers, bearings, bolts, shafts, and guides. Skok designed some of the early automatic production machines himself.

During the Great Depression, many motorists had to repair their cars rather than buy new ones. These were boom years for Elgin Machine Works, when employees worked overtime on two shifts supplying replacement parts. The factory was enlarged three times in the 1930s.



Elgin Machine Works, on North State St.

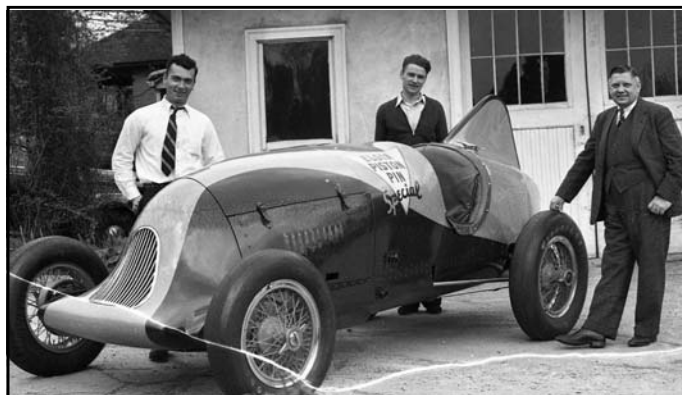
In 1941 Skok built a 2-story brick building at 401 North State St. (razed 2008), across the street from his factory, to house the Fox Valley Paper Box Co. (renamed Mar-Sko Inc. circa 1960), which he acquired in 1939. During World War 2, Elgin Machine Works was awarded national defense contracts to produce parts for tanks, airplanes and jeeps, and converted to 100% war production. In 1944 the firm earned the Army-Navy "E" award for outstanding production of war materials. Post-war growth required another factory building to be built, across the street to the north at 620 Wing St.



Martin Skok Sr.

Martin Skok's favorite diversion was building racing automobiles. His firm built 16 cars for competition between 1926 and 1954 and ran in 11 Indianapolis 500s. The "Elgin Piston Pin Special" with a "catfish" body design, for the 1937 Indy 500, had a 350 horsepower all-aluminum engine.

Martin Skok is on the right in the photo. "Indy 500" competition was a means to prove the quality of the firm's auto parts and was an effective promotional tool. Skok also underwrote the 1933 revival of the Elgin Road Races.



The Elgin Piston Pin Special, for 1937 Indy 500

Martin Skok married Franciska (Frances) Voelkle in 1917 in Chicago. He and Frances built an excellent example of a Colonial Revival-style home in 1928 at 101 Hamilton Ave. This 2-story brick-veneered home received a historic building plaque in 2006. The couple had two sons, though one, Norbert, died in infancy in 1919. Martin Jr. (Marty), born in 1928, became CEO of the firm in 1954. Martin Sr. passed away in 1966.

Over the next 50 years, Martin Skok Jr. built on his father's legacy of quality automobile parts. Elgin Industries today is a fully integrated supplier of internal engine and chassis components and one of the world's premier manufacturers of push rods and complete valve train packages. The firm maintains leading-edge technology at its engineering, manufacturing and distribution facilities at 1100 Jansen Farm Drive in Elgin.

Today's engines last longer and fewer are rebuilt. The firm now produces chiefly for original installation. Customers include Fiat Chrysler, Ford Motor Co., John Deere and Co., Polaris, Harley-Davidson, General Motors, Mack and Navistar.

Martin Jr. married Carolyn Doyle in 1950 and the couple had four children: Cheryl, Martin John III, Thomas, and William. Martin Jr. passed away in 2015 at age 87. The firm is now owned and operated by his

children, the third-generation of the Skok family. The family cannot envision leaving Elgin, Bill Skok has said—even when it has become harder to do business in Illinois. “Our roots, our employees’ roots, and their families are here. We don’t make business decisions based on monetary gain,” but for the company’s health as a whole.

In the summer of 2016, Martin Skok Jr.’s family had a fountain custom-made to honor their father. It was gifted to the City of Elgin and installed on DuPage Court, next to South Grove Ave., in the heart of downtown Elgin. Dedicated in a ceremony, this beautiful fountain represents both the Skok family’s love of Elgin and the city’s gratitude to the firm that has made the Elgin name known and respected worldwide as a symbol of quality workmanship.

Acknowledgments: Various newspaper articles, including those by Mike Alft and Mick Zawislak; obituaries; internet sources; “The Fox Valley Mirror” (Dec. 1944 feature article); etc.

Andrew Spurling

by Brian Lawrence

The city of Elgin is famous for many things: The Elgin National Watch Company made world-renowned timepieces from 1864 until its closure in 1968, and its observatory still stands at 312 Watch St. In 1865, Gail Borden established the Elgin Milk Condensing Company on the land where the Centre of Elgin now sits. The nationally-famous Elgin Road Races were held here between 1910 and 1920 and drew tens of thousands of spectators from all over the country.

One piece of historical Elgin trivia that is not nearly as well-known has a direct connection to our police department. It centers around the man who served as the City’s Police Marshal for one term from 1887 to 1888. The man’s name was Andrew Barclay Spurling.

Spurling was born in Cranberry Isles, Maine on March 20, 1833. Following in the footsteps of his father, who fought the British Navy during the War of 1812, Spurling became a sailor at the age of 12. Six years later, he found himself in California, where he tried his hand at mining, farming, and being a cowboy. Spurling was radically opposed to slavery and was rumored to have fought a duel with a Southern man. Though yet barely a man, he won the battle using the chosen weapon: Bowie knives! The wounded Southerner begged for mercy and fortunately for him, Spurling gave it to him.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, Spurling volunteered to fight for the Union. Having returned to his home state in 1855, he was commissioned as a first lieutenant in a Maine cavalry regiment. Throughout

his distinguished service, Spurling suffered numerous wounds and was rewarded with battlefield promotions, eventually achieving the rank of lieutenant colonel.

After the war, Spurling took a government job in Chicago and also speculated in real estate. He was a primary investor in the Chicago Rawhide Manufacturing Company and served 12 years as its president. In 1950, Chicago Rawhide opened a plant in Elgin. Spurling next moved to Elgin and became friends with Mayor Vincent S. Lovell, who appointed him to the position of City Marshal in 1887. The 54 year-old war veteran earned a reputation for enforcing laws equally and without preference or bias. Spurling even had officers arrest his own son for disorderly conduct! The bar owners came to learn that the closing times would now be strictly enforced, regardless of who they knew within Elgin’s city government. Because of his refusal to give preferential treatment to Elgin’s “connected” citizenry or the influential saloon operators, the City Council refused to renew Spurling’s appointment as Marshal, and he returned to real estate.

In 1894, he unsuccessfully ran for Kane County Sheriff and after the election, moved back to Chicago.

On September 10, 1897, Spurling finally received national recognition for his war service when he was awarded the Medal of Honor. He earned it for his March 1865 exploits at Evergreen, Alabama. According to the Medal’s citation, “Lieutenant Colonel Spurling advanced alone in the darkness beyond the picket line, came upon three of the enemy, fired upon them (his fire being returned), wounded 2, and captured the whole party.” Spurling was also commissioned with the breveted rank of brigadier general.

Spurling’s last years were spent in relative poverty, with his real estate speculation having ended in abject failure. Subsisting on a monthly government pension of only \$50, he died on August 13, 1906, at the age of 73. Andrew Barclay Spurling is buried in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago.



1st Lieutenant Andrew Barclay Spurling in the Civil War and in later years

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
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Collections Corner

Beth Nawara, Curator of Collections

Steve Lewandowski recently acquired and donated a wonderful stereoview card of Old Main to the Museum. The photo was taken from the doorstep of the old Elgin Academy Headmaster's House at the corner of Park and College, in 1884. We thank Steve for this donation.

