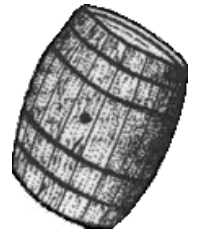


The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News November 2019

President's Report: Collecting History

Al Walters, President



My last several Crackerbarrel columns have highlighted specific ways the Elgin History Museum fulfills its mission to collect, preserve and interpret Elgin's heritage. I will now focus on how the Museum collects Elgin's history.

When Museum Educator Rebecca Miller is welcoming student tour groups to the Museum, she often asks if anyone can define the word "artifact." The best answer I have heard lately came from a third-grader, who suggested that an artifact is something old that we can learn from. I couldn't help but realize that I too am an artifact, according to that definition.

Aside from living human artifacts, The Museum has an extensive collection of Elgin memorabilia, with pieces from James Gifford's log cabin era, early dairy history items, an impressive array of Elgin watches, and factory products of more modern times.

A month never goes by without the Museum's collection growing through the generosity of Elgin's residents and business community. I am always amazed at the interesting donations that find their way to the Museum from Elgin's attics, basements, garages and barns. In fact, the Museum considers each potential acquisition's merits based on condition, possible Museum use, connection to Elgin, uniqueness, interpretive and historical value, and available space.

The artifacts are ably managed by our Curator of Collections, Beth Nawara. Her love of history, preservation training and organizational skills make her the perfect caretaker. Beth's duties include cataloging items, scanning pictures into our database, leading the Accession Committee, cleaning, restoring, protecting

artifacts, and maintaining a discipline of order within the third-floor storerooms, when chaos could easily be the order of the day. We are indebted to her dedication. Let me offer one final thought on collecting and preserving history. When visiting the Museum, don't stop at the second floor. If you have not yet done so, we encourage you to visit the third floor. Ask for a tour of the store rooms and the library. Meet with curator Beth, researcher David and the other staff and volunteers who often work out of the public eye. Learn more about what the Museum can do to help you research and tell your family's story by referencing our materials. Remember, as our third grade visitor said, artifacts are something old that we can learn from!

Welcome New Members!

- Jill Assad
- Sharry L Blazier
- David Carlson
- Pat Carmody
- Rita Corbett
- Truman Crowell
- Jennifer Ford
- Nick Freeman
- Rosemary Gerrans
- Cherian Jacob
- Jerry & Kathleen Ligon
- Jean Pechtel
- Mary Beth Riedner
- Michael Sopcak
- Daniel Strom
- Mary & Bill Vance

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




President: Al Walters
Vice President: George Rowe
Secretary: Laura Stroud
Corr. Secretary: Ricky Harris
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

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

 Visit our website Elginhistory.org

Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the
Society's Board of Directors.
©2019 Elgin Area Historical Society. All rights reserved.

**Thursday March 19, 12 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch
Cobblestone Archaeological Finds**

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

Thank You Donors!

Many thanks to the Grand Victoria Foundation for awarding the Elgin History Museum a \$50,000 operating grant for 2019 and 2020. This important funding helps to meet the Museum's mission of preserving Elgin history in a way that inspires social justice, including completing work on the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House.

Board Fundraiser Donors

- Benevity Community Impact Fund via Matching Donation from Al Walters
- Brian Anderson
- Tish Calhamer
- Scott Damisch
- Bob and Carolyn Malm
- Dan and Patricia Miller
- John Regan
- Edith Scarbrough

Virginia Blietz Memorials

- Robert Albrecht
- Timothy Dearborn
- Gloria Evans
- Debra and Kevin Foutch
- James and Lauralie Pfortmiller
- H. Jane Smith
- Joy Volkening

General Donations

- Brian Anderson, in memory of Steve Stroud
- Mike Kalland, for the Elgin Mental Health History Revision
- Larry Walsh, for the Elgin History Museum Silent Auction
- Rebecca Marco, in memory of Johnny Marco
- City of Elgin

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

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, November 9, 2:00 P.M.: Construction
Celebration at Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House**

See items found in the home's cistern and celebrate progress made on the restoration in 2019!

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

Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum

Victorian Tea featuring Holiday Harmony Carolers.

January 14, 7:00 P.M. Gail Borden Library

Jerry Turnquist: Elgin During Prohibition

**Thursday, January 30, 6:30 pm, Gail Borden Public
Library: Project 2-3-1: A Story of Elgin's African
American Heritage Documentary**

Cosponsored by Elgin History Museum and ECN.

Saturday February 8, 11:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.:

Volunteer Brunch

Saturday February 16, 2:00 P.M.:

**Kevin Wood presents From Obscurity to Greatness:
Illinois and Lincoln, 1830-1861**

Museum News

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Dec. 1 is Illinois Give Day



Discover the stories around you on Illinois Give Day! The Elgin History Museum is part of the Elgin Gives group participating in this national day of giving on Tuesday, December 1, 2019. To contribute, go to

<https://www.ilgive.com/organizations/elgin-history-museum> on IL Give Day (Dec. 1) to keep preserving Elgin's history through stories and research. The Museum preserves stories through our documentary films such as *Project 2-3-1* about Elgin's African American Heritage and *Dairies to Prairies*. Help preserve your story by supporting the Museum's student programs, house research, Museum exhibits and the Cemetery Walk. This year, the first \$3,000 in donations to the Museum will be matched by a very generous anonymous donor!

AAUW Exhibit Opening



The Elgin Area Branch of American Association of University Women (AAUW) has created an exhibit that will be on display in the Elgin History Museum from

December 1 through March 31. The display, highlighting many of the branch's achievements, is part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Elgin Area Branch. AAUW is a nonpartisan organization that has fostered women leaders by using study and action to respond to issues of importance. The mission of AAUW is to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

Cistern Stories

The Illinois State Archaeological Survey excavated the cistern at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House in March 2018. The archaeologists found a number of interesting items. The team visited the Museum in early October to deliver some of the objects and tour the exhibits with George Rowe, Liz Marston, and Beth Nawara (taking photo). Interesting items include early manufactured shell buttons, a complete Elgin Eagle Brewery bottle, container glass and ceramic sheets. Hardware pieces and animal bones were also found. The cistern items will be on exhibit at the Cobblestone Construction Celebration to be held Saturday, November 9 at 2:00 P.M. Come and tour the house!

Museum Presents at Regional Museum Conference

The Elgin History Museum presented a session at the Association of Midwest Museums held in Grand Rapids, MI, covering lessons learned in combining big projects. It is titled *Now Playing Near You: Combining Documentaries and Traveling Exhibits to Reach New Audiences, Build Partnerships and Make Money*.



Sara Richardt, Director of the Lombard Historical Society, Elizabeth Marston, Bill Briska, and Phil Broxham of Grindstone Productions at Regional Conference



Some items found in the Cobblestone's cistern. To learn more, come to the Celebration Nov. 9.



Illinois State Archaeological Survey team, with George Rowe (center) and Elizabeth Marston (r.)

Cemetery Walk Recap

by Rudy and Lillian Galfi

The Elgin History Museum's 32nd annual Cemetery Walk welcomed just over 300 guests this year. Although the expectation was for about 600 guests, the weather played a role in this year's attendance. The guests who attended came prepared, and braved the wind and rain to watch the talented actors portray past Elginites sharing their life stories from an earlier time. Thank you to the 50 volunteers, who did an amazing job getting the cemetery set up and ready for the guests. New this year, tour group cards allowed the guides to stage the first 120 guest at one time and get them going on their tours within the first 20 minutes.

For guests unable to participate in the outdoor Walk, this year's addition of *Silent City Speaks* brought the Walk to them. Hosted at the Iglesia Principe De Paz Church, over 100 guests enjoyed an indoor theater production of the Bluff City Cemetery Walk. The hour and half event was well received.



Rinehimer Brothers Manufacturing Co.

by David Siegenthaler

For 99 years (1867-1966), three generations of the Rinehimer family built in Elgin one of the largest and most respected architectural woodworking firms in the country. Rinehimer products included custom window and door frames, exterior and interior doors, entrances, moldings and trim, mantels, bookcases, paneling, closets, stairways and cabinets. These products were installed in homes, hospitals, churches, schools, commercial and public buildings throughout the Midwest. In 1966 the factory, at the southwest corner of Kimball St. and N. Grove Ave. (240 N. Grove Ave.), was the last and largest business to be razed for Elgin's Civic Center urban renewal project. The Rinehimer legacy,

in addition to their countless woodwork installations, includes the Architectural Woodwork Institute, a professional trade association of custom millwork operators founded by Charles A. Rinehimer, and several handsome homes in the "Gold Coast" area on Elgin's upper northeast side.



Rinehimer Brothers facility on Kimball St.

Emanuel Rinehimer (1832-1883) was born in Pennsylvania, one of 11 children of Conrad and Hannah Fletcher Rinehimer. At age 19, in the early 1850s, he came west to Kane County with his parents and some siblings. In 1857 Emanuel married Eliza Jane Clark (1840-1924) and their first child, Charles Eugene, was born in Plato Center on December 3, 1858. In 1860 Emanuel came down with "gold fever" and he and his family trekked out to California. They traveled around the gold fields, moving frequently, and struggled to make a living. Their second child, Albert Clark, was born October 6, 1862, at Knights Landing, California, and their third and last child, Caroline Amaretta, was born February 6, 1865 at El Dorado, California.

In 1866, with a wife and three young children, Emanuel decided it was time to settle down and returned to Elgin. He entered the planing mill business as a partner of Merritt, Fletcher & Co. in 1867. Over the next 15 years or so, Emanuel continued to be a partner with Charles W. Fletcher and others, though his name never appeared in the company name. After his death in 1883, his sons, Charles E. and Albert C., followed him in the woodworking industry with various partners until 1893 when the brothers bought out the others and became known as the Rinehimer Brothers Manufacturing Co.

In 1898 the firm moved from its site on N. Grove Ave., about where the Post Office is now located, to a new building on the north side of Kimball St., next to the river. They quickly outgrew this site and in 1910 built, on the southwest corner of Kimball St. and N. Grove Ave., a much larger complex of four buildings: the mill itself, the power plant, the lumber shed, and the dry kilns. The firm's rapid growth continued, requiring major additions in 1913 (along Kimball St.) and in 1923 and 1925 (along N. Grove Ave.).

In 1930 the Rinehimers bought out a small millwork factory in Rockford, and maintained an auxiliary plant there until 1959. During World War 2, they were engaged almost entirely in war work and had defense contracts for military and industrial housing facilities, wood pipe for the Army Corps of Engineers, 75 mm shell supports, wood clothes lockers, mosquito bar frames, saw handles, etc.

Elgin's urban renewal project of the 1960s resulted in the razing of the Rinehimer plant in July 1966 to make room for a new public library and adjacent parking lot. The firm dissolved in 1966 but was immediately reorganized as the Rinehimer Woodwork Corp. It moved into a new building on Timber Drive in northwest Elgin and continued there for several years, last appearing in the 1973 Elgin city directory. Charles A. Rinehimer remained with the new company as an officer, director and consultant until his death in 1969.



Charles E., 1937

Charles Eugene Rinehimer (1858-1944) was vice president of Rinehimer Brothers and Albert Clark Rinehimer (1862-1939) was president. Charles married Kate Daly in 1888 and they had no children. Kate may have been his second wife—information is lacking. Kate died in 1899 and Charles married Margaret McGuire in 1900. He

and Margaret had one child, Richard, born in 1902, who became manager of the Rockford plant in 1930. For a few years, about 1905-1910, Charles lived in South Haven, Michigan, where he owned a chicken ranch. In 1910, when he moved back to Elgin, Charles bought a 4-year-old Dutch Colonial home at 707 Brook St., where he lived the remainder of his life.



Albert C., 1937

Albert married Ada Boyles in 1888 and the couple had two children: Charles A., born in 1891, and Helen, born in 1893. In 1923 Helen married G. Radcliffe Stevens, who would become president of the Elgin Manufacturing Co. Ada died in 1916 and Albert married Emma

Cross, a California ranch owner, in 1919. Emma died in 1926 and Albert soon married his third wife, Flora Haviland Hoyt. Three notable and well-preserved homes on Elgin's upper northeast side were built for Albert: a Mission-style home built in 1908 at 917 Douglas Ave.; a Tudor Revival home built in 1924 at 931 Douglas Ave.; and another Tudor Revival home built in 1927 at 933 Brook St.



Albert C. Rinehimer Home, 933 Brook Street



Chic, 1959

Albert's son Charles Albert Rinehimer ("Chic," 1891-1969), graduated from Elgin High School in 1910 and studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin for two years. In 1913 he joined the Rinehimer firm and learned every aspect of the business. In 1916 he became treasurer and in 1939 became president after his father's

death. During the Great Depression, Charles A. was a director of the National Recovery Administration's National Woodwork Code Commission. During World War II he was chairman of the National Industry Advisory Committee. He served as president and director of both the Millwork Cost Bureau and its successor, the Architectural Woodwork Institute, which he founded in 1953. In 1959 he was named to the executive committee of the National Wood Council.

Aside from his work at Rinehimer's, Charles A. was a founder of the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Elgin in 1925 (called Security Building and Loan Association until 1934). He was president of First Federal from 1925-1963, and then chairman of the board until his death. He was active in numerous civic organizations, including the Kiwanis Club, Union League Club, Association of Commerce, Elgin Country Club, Masons and Elks. He helped organize the Community Chest Association (now United Way) in 1923. He headed the Elgin Red Cross and served on the Police Pension Fund Board.

Charles A. married Elizabeth Sherman of Crawford, Kansas, in 1916, and the couple had one child, Elizabeth (born circa 1920; Mrs. Robert C. Edwards). His

impressive Colonial Revival-style home, designed by Elgin architect Ralph Abell, was built in 1923-24 at the north end of Douglas Avenue.



Chic Rinehimer Home, 1025 Douglas Avenue

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; obituaries and other newspaper articles; story in the August 1937 issue of "The Fox Valley Mirror;" Viola Swanson's research (Viola's father, Ogilvie Ashman, was a Rinehimer's employee for 35 years); Internet sources; etc.; house photos by Judy Van Dusen.

Lessons Learned at the Watchmakers' College

Jim Wingfield

Around 1957 I was visiting the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. In one of the halls I came upon an exhibit of clock movements. Along with the well-known pendulum escapement were several other examples of methods used to regulate the dissipation of energy into calibrated time increments: spring suspended weights, weights swinging by centrifugal forces, and teeter totters. Each mechanism was of bright machined brass and large enough to give a clear view of the physics of operation. The display was credited to Mr. William H. Samelius. I have a Certificate of Graduation from Elgin Watchmakers College, September 1951. Mr. Samelius was the Director.

As students, our world was too small for much socializing. Most of our friendships were restricted to our bench buddies, roommates, or after-class jobs. My friends Pete Barrett and Gordon Johnson roomed across the street from me on St. Charles Avenue. Pete was from Edensburg, Indiana, Gordon from Mott, North Dakota and our work benches were close. During the Christmas vacation most of the students went home. Pete drove back in his 1931 Plymouth sedan when he returned after Christmas. The heater didn't work and the windows wouldn't close... Pete was in a light jacket with no gloves. "...got kinda cold

didn't it, Pete?" "Yeah" he replied with his semi-serious smile, "but that Plymouth is tough. Got pistons as big as jugs." A typical non sequitur from Pete.



Director Samelius and some students

Gordon wanted to go to Chicago, a destination I knew well. The Chicago Aurora and Elgin commuter train terminal was just a few blocks from the watch factory, and I knew exactly where to go: the Mellers Building at 5 South Wabash. It was the watchmaker's mecca of the Midwest. One of my favorite stops was Irv Cohen's on the sixth floor. Irv had drawer after drawer full of old watches. For a few dollars one could easily find a high grade Gruen or Bulova that would clean up like new.

For one dollar, Gordon purchased a very old pocket watch with the brand name "Roskopf." It was of cheap construction and not designed to be repairable. When Gordon was asked "Why?" he answered with a diabolical smile, "This is for Pete."

The Roskopf was placed on a corner of Gordon's bench where it was finally noticed by Pete. Deep into some small adjustment, Gordon didn't even look up. "It's yours if you want it, for two dollars." Pete bought it. Gordon looked silently over at me. I could read the look: he had sold Pete a piece of junk for a one hundred percent profit. The price was small but the potential to question Pete's judgment was priceless.

Director Samelius was in the next day and Pete went to his office with the Roskopf in hand. When he came back to his bench an hour later he was carrying a nice high grade 12 size Elgin pocket watch. The Roskopf was now hanging in a cabinet with about a dozen other Roskopfs in Director Samelius' collection.

Gordon's plot had failed. Once each week our class gathered in a small lecture hall and Mr. Samelius would talk about some aspect of the watchmaking craft: train wheel ratios, isochronal error, end shake adjustments, position adjustment and so forth.

During one lecture he reminded us that not every watch we might encounter would be high quality, relatively easy to disassemble and repair. Some would be stamped together in a way that made disassembly difficult. Better learn how to fix these too, because if you can't fix a customer's dollar watch, they're not going to bring you their \$100 Elgin.

I believe this gives us insight into William H. Samelius himself. He was interested in horology, not just watches. The Roskopf represented an important step in evolving watch technology.



Elgin Watchmakers College, formerly located on National Street

Collections Corner

Beth Nawara, Collections

We never know what people might donate to the Museum. The Museum has a Collections Committee that decides what to accept into the collection, focusing on items that have an Elgin connection.

Since January, 75 individuals have donated over 450 items to the permanent collection of the Museum. Ira Marcus and Chandler Swan volunteer their time taking pictures of the objects. Ira mostly takes pictures of artifacts that are in storage and Chan photographs items that are donated during the year.

This year some unique items that have been donated include an Elgin brass license plate, a Larsen Middle School mascot, and a patch for the Elgin Aquarium Society. Did you know that Elgin had an Aquarium Society? No one on the Collections Committee knew either.



1907 Elgin license plate

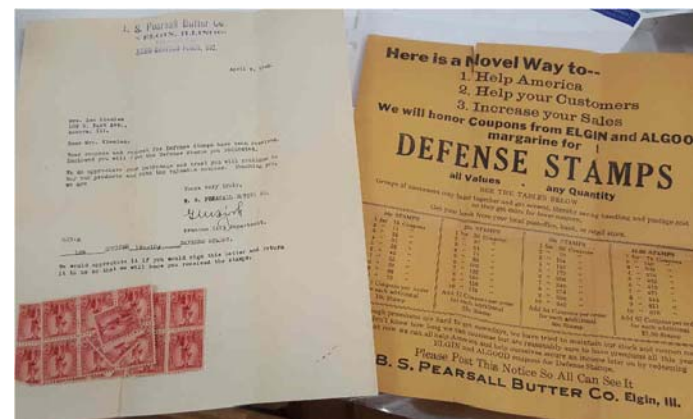


Aquarium Society patch, Larsen mascot



Oysters were a very popular item at restaurants in Elgin. Terry Gabel donated a Kerber's Oyster container from the 1920s.

D.C. Cook was a very large publishing company in Elgin for decades. Until recently, we had very little that related to D.C. Cook. Unexpectedly through the mail, from New York, we received several copies of "Young People's Weekly" a newspaper periodical that was published by D.C. Cook. Also, Bruce Cook donated religious publications from the early 1900s to the 1980s. Some World War II defense stamps from an Elgin business were also donated (below)



Pearsall Butter Defense Stamps, 1944

During the summer, Ira Marcus photographed the Elgin American compacts in the Museum collection. They can be seen on the Museum website at:

<https://elginhistory.pastperfectonline.com/search>

In June, a grant was received from the Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board to digitize photographs, newsletters, and catalogs related to the Illinois Watch Case Company and Elgin American. Jackie

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Marcus has been scanning newsletters and photos. By the end of the year, the material will be on the Museum website and Illinois Digital Archives.



Beth Nawara and volunteer Jackie Marcus with some Illinois Watch Case Co. memorabilia

Volunteer Laurel Garza spent the past five months scanning and organizing five boxes of the postcard collection. Those postcard images will also be added to the Museum website. She is now working on the

March 28, 1920 tornado photographs in anticipation of interest in the upcoming 100th anniversary.



Scene of destruction in the wake of the 1920 Palm Sunday tornado that hit Elgin almost 100 years ago