

# The Crackerbarrel



## Elgin History Museum News March 2018

### President's Report

*Bill Briska, President*



This issue of the Crackerbarrel concerns activities at the Museum in 2017. The compilation of numbers is a reflection of the vitality of this small, but steadily growing, organization. The remarkable thing is that the Museum is largely a volunteer-run organization, with volunteer hours surpassing those of the paid professional staff.

Yet without the combination of both, the output would not only be far smaller, but far less rich and robust in terms of its impact.

Looking back upon 2017 only hints at how far the Museum has come in the last 20 years. That progress is remarkable and has been acknowledged by our colleagues in the museum industry. I appreciate watching a continual stream of new and talented volunteers add their skills to the overall effort. And, I appreciate the positive reception given to the next generation of volunteers by those already here. These intangible measures of progress and activity cannot be adequately summarized in the statistics that follow, but I assure you they underlie the real message behind the numbers.

The second installment of David Siegenthaler's article on the life of Dr. Joseph Tefft is the other major piece in this issue. Dr. Tefft was an outstanding example of business and civic leadership. His world view was based on concern for others. As a physician he cared for personal needs of individuals. As a community leader he cared for the city as a whole by fostering organizations that contributed to Elgin's quality of life.

Elgin has benefited from generations of people like Dr. Tefft. A superlative example is the late Jack Shales. He said that "You are never too busy to help someone." I find this to be an inspiring statement and the lives of Jack, and his beloved wife Marlene, back it up. They are the kind of people who nurture a selfless spirit of

concern for individuals and the community. Perhaps the longest-lasting impact of people like Dr Tefft and the Shales is that of role models. They inspire others, who in turn pass along those values to the next generation. What I like about the Museum, its staff, volunteers, and patrons is that their efforts help both individuals and the community.



*Elgin Mayor Dave Kaptain, the late Jack Shales, and Bill Briska*



*The late Jack Shales with Ernie Broadnax*

## The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
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 Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

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

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## Monday, April 30, 7:00 P.M., Gail Borden Public Library: Miss Elgin Contest of 1925

Elgin historian Jerry Turnquist tells the story of the Miss Elgin Contest of 1925, sponsored by the Elgin Motor Club. The winner advanced to the Miss America pageant.



## Sunday May 6, Noon to 4:00 P.M. Civil War Walking Tour

## Tuesday, May 8, 7:00 P.M., Gail Borden Public Library: 25 Years of Preservation

## Friday, May 11, 7:30 P.M.: Elgin History Museum Candlelight Tour

Tour the Elgin History Museum by candlelight! Meet characters from the past as you go from room to room. Wine and cheese refreshments after your peculiar nighttime visit. Tickets \$10 per person.

## Wednesday, May 16, 7:00 P.M., Gail Borden Public Library: Elgin Architecture

Elgin historian Bill Briska gives an overview of Elgin architectural styles with local examples.

## Thursday May 17, 12:00 Noon Brown Bag Lunch: Abraham Lincoln Quiz

Celebrate Illinois' Bicentennial year by learning more about our favorite president and show off your Lincoln knowledge to win prizes. Past President Carl Flaks will host an Abraham Lincoln Quiz. Bring your lunch and play the game! FREE admission as part of International Museum Day!

## Thursday, May 17, 7:00 P.M., Gail Borden Public Library: Online House Research Computer Lab

Elgin house researcher Rebecca Hunter shows how to research your Elgin home online.

## Saturday May 19, 10:00 A.M.: Tour of Hillside Cemetery, Elgin Mental Health Center

## Tuesday, May 22, 6:30 p.m.: Walking Tour of Downtown Elgin with Jerry Turnquist

## Saturday June 9, Sunday June 10, 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

## Civil War Experience in Elgin: Civil War Re-enactment, Corner of Rt. 31 and Rt. 20

Join the 9th Virginia Cavalry, Co B & McGregor's Battery, and the City of Elgin for the 2nd Annual Civil War Event, featuring live skirmishes, living history, Confederate and Union encampments, medical field operations, and baseball as it was originally played.

## 2018 Program Schedule

*David Nelson, Program Chair*

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

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

### Sunday, March 18, 2:00 P.M.

#### Elgin History Museum, Members Free, \$3 Guests Virtuoso: The Life of Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Clara Wieck, a brilliant performer, and Robert Schumann, a gifted composer fell deeply in love. Their marriage became one of the great true love stories of all time. Clara was eternally grateful for the art that was to sustain her through a lifetime of triumph and tragedy.

### Wednesday, March 21, 7:00 P.M.

#### Gail Borden Public Library

#### Elgin American Compacts: Making Women Beautiful

Using her collection of Elgin American powder compacts, Elgin historian Linda Rock describes the evolution of women's makeup from Egyptian times to today. Audience volunteers will become makeup artists and make up models from the 1920s and 1950s.

### Saturday, April 21, 12:00 Noon to 3:00 P.M.

#### Open Elgin Event

Discover historic Elgin by touring schools, churches, downtown office buildings, and businesses not normally open to the public. Free admission.

**Thursday, June 21, 2:00 P.M.**

### **Brown Bag Lunch with Linda Rock**

Join Elgin resident and local historian, Linda Rock, This is a perfect way to enjoy your lunch and learn at the same time! Desserts and drinks will be provided. Non-members: \$3/Members: free.

**Sunday, July 15, 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

### **Antique Car Show**

Get ready to step back in time! This FREE annual event hosted over 70 very cool classic cars in 2017. Car styles and years vary, but if you love classic cars this is a must-attend event. The band, Mandy Z and Rural Route 1 will play all day. The museum will be open for tours. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. Prizes awarded for cars. The Museum will open at 11:00 a.m. and tours will be available. Free admission.

**Thursday, July 19, 12 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch:**

### **The History of the Miller Girl with Linda Hoffman**

The iconic Miller High Life “Girl in the Moon” was created by Thomas Wallace Holmes, commercial artist and illustrator from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago at the turn of the 19th century. Linda Hoffman will describe her research journey on connecting “Girl in the Moon” to her family in Elgin. Desserts and drinks are available. Members: free/Non-members: \$3.

**Friday, August 10, 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.**

### **Summer Soiree**

**Thursday, August 16, 12 Noon**

### **Brown Bag Lunch with Jerry Turnquist**

**Saturday, August 25, 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.**

### **Elgin Hay Day at Providence Park**

**Thursday, September 13, 12:00 Noon:**

### **Brown Bag Lunch**

History of the Telegraph with John Hora

**Sunday, September 23, 11:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

### **31st Annual Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery**

**Sunday, October 14, 2:00 P.M.: Annual Meeting Program TBD**

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

### **Museum Benefit and Silent Auction**

Bucky Halker: Folksongs of Illinois

**Saturday, December 8, 1:00 P.M.**

### **Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum**

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer with Nancy Koutsis

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## Thank You Donors

- Betty Brown
- Forefront through IL Give
- Grand Victoria Foundation through IL Give Matching Funds
- Wayne Heinmiller
- Rebecca Hunter
- Mike Kalland for the Elgin Mental Health History Book Reprint
- Susan McIntyre
- Northern Trust Bank, matching a donation by Paul Larson
- Jeanette and Wayne Russell in honor of their daughter, Museum Educator Sara Russell
- Rita Shaw in memory of Bill Shaw
- Triumph Bank and Scott Damisch for Dairies to Prairies

### **Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Project**

- E. C. “Mike Alft
- Daniel Walters
- Signal Hill Chapter of the DAR

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## Dr. Joseph Tefft, Elgin's First Doctor and Mayor: Part 2

*by David Siegenthaler*

Joseph was an eminently practical man, whose beliefs and convictions were shaped by science and experience. As a doctor he was well aware of the harmful effects of alcohol, calling it a “liquid poison.” In an era when the alcohol debate was a leading social issue, Joseph was the most outspoken, articulate and influential local temperance advocate.

However, without city status, Elgin had no way of restricting or regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages. Thus, Joseph was the driving force in obtaining a city charter (incorporating) in 1854. The city charter was procured to, among other things, prohibit the sale of intoxicants, which was the main issue in the vote on adoption of the charter, and in the first city election, in which Joseph was chosen mayor.

In his first term as mayor, the City Council passed a prohibition law against the sale of intoxicating liquors. During Joseph's first two terms as mayor, in 1854 and 1855 (mayoral terms were for one year until 1881), the law was strictly enforced. However, the liquor interests

brought about the election of officials sympathetic to their cause, and in 1856, after Joseph left office, saloons started to reappear. Though still outlawed by the prohibitory ordinance, the law wasn't enforced. In 1858 a liquor license ordinance was passed, expressly allowing saloons, though now governed by regulations and fees. Joseph served five terms as mayor: 1854, 1855, 1863, 1866 and 1868. In his 1866 inaugural address he was as personally opposed to liquor as ever ("...of no use or benefit to mankind") but was resigned to accept the licensing system as the will of the people. However, he did advocate higher licensing fees, fixed closing times, and enforcement of the ordinance against gaming in liquor establishments. Joseph often regretted that Elgin could not remain a temperance city, but was always proud that it was so during his first two terms.

Elgin's dairy industry began in the 1850s and, thanks to the Elgin Board of Trade, became nationally influential by the 1880s. No single person was more responsible for the success of the local dairy industry than Joseph. The first can of milk that was shipped by rail from Elgin to Chicago, in February 1852, came from Joseph's farm in what is now the Lords Park area, then tenanted by Phineas Smith.

The success of the milk trade in Chicago led many Elgin-area farmers to switch to dairy farming. By the mid-1860s there was often more supply than demand for fluid milk. This gave rise to numerous small cheese and butter factories called creameries. In 1870 Joseph helped organize, and was the first president of, a cooperative butter factory called the Elgin Dairy Co. at Harvey and Ball streets. This was the first steam-operated butter factory west of the Great Lakes and its product was far superior to hand-churned butter.

The creameries sold the cheese and butter to middlemen who were often unscrupulous in their dealings. The dissatisfaction of the creamery operators led Joseph to suggest and help organize a commodity exchange for cheese and butter in 1872, called the Elgin Board of Trade. The Elgin Board of Trade, of which Joseph was president for the first nine years of its existence, was so successful that, by the mid-1880s, it set prices on cheese and butter for much of the country. Producers now had a fair and stable market and, thanks to rigid grading standards, Elgin cheese and butter guaranteed top quality and thus commanded high prices.

In order to increase milk production, farmers began to import stock and follow scientific methods of cattle breeding. In 1874 the first black and white Holsteins from the Netherlands appeared in the area. Joseph bought a Holstein cow in 1875 that produced an impressive daily yield of eight gallons. In 1885 Joseph became the first president of the Illinois Holstein Breeders Association and within a few years the daily yield of some cows was astounding. In 1888, within a

year of his death, Joseph helped to organize the Elgin Condensing Co., a competitor of Gail Borden's Illinois Condensing Co.

Elgin Academy, though chartered in 1839, remained dormant for many years—a vision without substance. In 1843 the Academy's Board of Trustees was reorganized and Joseph came on board. However, the time wasn't right. Clamor for a public school in the 1840s resulted in the opening of the "Old Brick" school in 1848. In 1854 the Board was reorganized again and Joseph was elected president, at which time he affirmed: "We must have the Academy, for Elgin needs it, and I promise you, gentlemen, to exert every energy to establish and maintain it."

Opened in December 1856, the Academy's development was retarded by chronic deficits. During the Civil War the buildings and grounds were advertised for sale to pay off the mortgage. On the day of the sale, after the auctioneer had made his announcement of the terms, Joseph stepped forward and declared, "It is a blame shame and disgrace to the citizens of Elgin to permit this sale, and I will be one to redeem it." His words inspired contributions from others, and the sale was called off.



*Old Main when it was new, ca. 1860*

When people complained to him that Academy stock paid no dividends, Joseph would declare that no stock ever paid better dividends. He held tenaciously to the belief that his farm was worth more, valuations generally were higher, and the city and surrounding country were much better materially when the people were educated. In 1888 the Academy Board exhibited appreciation of his long and faithful service by declining to accept his resignation when he was unable to attend its meetings due to declining health.

Joseph passed away on August 26, 1888, of chronic nephritis, three days short of his 76th birthday.

Several members of the Tefft family were important in the early history of South Elgin. Joseph initially settled there in 1835 and by 1838 had helped build two dams (the first one washed away) and a sawmill. In 1847 Joseph and B.W. Raymond platted the west side of "Clinton" in anticipation of the railroad.

Joseph's sister Maria was the teacher in the first schoolhouse in Elgin Township. Built in 1837 at the northwest corner of Route 25 and Kenyon Road, this log schoolhouse was replaced with a frame structure and then, in 1925, with a brick structure. The school closed in 1946 but the building still stands. The Kenyon family bought the property in the early 1880s. In 1844, Maria's husband, Eliphalet Mann, opened a stone quarry on the west side of the river. After several expansions and changes of ownership, South Elgin's stone industry was booming by the 1890s.

Joseph's brother Jonathan, Jr. eventually took over his father's farm along the east side of Route 25, just south of Kenyon Road, extending into Cook County. He once raised sheep (600 head at one time) and later switched to dairy farming. Jonathan's son Frank (1862-1921) became a veterinarian. The Tefft farm was sold in the mid-1930s to the Chicago Gravel Co.

In 1852 in South Elgin, Joseph's brother Erastus built a paper mill to manufacture wrapping, and later, roofing paper. Between 1873 and 1885 brother Eli was a partner in numerous South Elgin enterprises, including a creamery; ice house; stone quarry; fork factory; iron foundry; and grocery.

The Tefft name lives on today in Tefft Ave., a short street on former Tefft property just southeast of Lords Park, and in Tefft Middle School, the first junior high school in Hanover Township. Opened in 1964, the U-46 School Board recognized that the Tefft family represented a historical link between Elgin and Hanover townships, just as School District U-46 links the two townships today.

*Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; "South Elgin: 150 Years of Heritage, 1835-1985," by Ralph Tredup (1989); obituaries; newspaper articles; "A History of Elgin Academy of Northwestern University," by L.K. Becker (1906); etc.*

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## 2017 Annual Report

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

### Significant 2017 Accomplishments

The Elgin History Museum worked on a wide variety of projects to bring local history to the public. The north and east walls of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone house were completely rebuilt and finished in 2017.

The Museum assisted with planning and implementation of two new city events (Open Elgin and the Civil War Experience), and participated in another new event, Hay Day. The Museum worked with Near West Neighbors to create and host a new Civil War Walk of the neighborhood.

An interpretive sign for Hillside Cemetery was installed at The Highlands golf course, and the design for an interpretive sign at Bluff City Cemetery was completed.

Cataloging was completed on the City of Elgin art collection, with data entered onto the City's 311 system.

The Museum helped plan and implement a tour of Mid-Century Modern architecture in Elgin for the National Trust Conference, presented a session at the 2017 Association of Midwest Museums conference, and assisted the Sons of the Union Veterans in dedicating a plaque to Civil War General Lynch, from Elgin.

The Gylleck Digitization Project really got rolling—over 2,000 images have been scanned and uploaded to the Illinois Digital Archives. The Museum also added Past Perfect online to the website and uploaded another 500 images to the system before the end of the year.

Dairies to Prairies filmed throughout the year; our new documentary will premiere in 2018. Highlighted at a number of events and meetings throughout the year, the project continues to generate interest in Elgin's rural life.



*Filmmaker Phil Broxham, Tom Corron, historian Jerry Turnquist, Elizabeth Marston, Rhonda Acitelli and Dave Corron working on our new documentary at Corron Farm*

### Membership and Museum Operations

*Jerri Barnhart, Membership Chairperson*

In 2017, Elgin Area Historical Society 273 households held memberships, 34 of which were new households. 82 volunteers worked a total of 7,982 hours serving the public through activities at the Museum. The Museum was visited by 1,787 people during normal operating hours.

The public made approximately 285 research requests, most of which were in five categories: Elgin houses; Elgin watches; family histories, Elgin memorabilia, and Elgin businesses.

## 2017 Program Committee Report

*David Nelson, Program Chairman*

The Program Committee, with help from many volunteers, presented 26 programs within the Museum, at Gail Borden Library, and all over the Elgin area. 2,100 people attended the programs, including nearly 600 at the 30th Annual Cemetery Walk. Programs included:

- Juliette Kinzie by Betsey Means
- Candlelight Tour of Old Main
- Near west side Civil War Walk



*Civil War Generals Lynch and Grant visit the Museum, portrayed by Jim Zingales and Larry Werline*

- Walking tour of Elgin's downtown National Register district
- History of Sears Gallery with David Nelson and Ann Chipman
- 2017 Classic Car Show



*A perfect day for the 2017 Car Show*

- Summer Soiree celebrating the Museum's 30th anniversary
- Dairies to Prairies program
- 30th Annual Cemetery Walk
- History of Underwear by Ellie Carlson
- 8th Annual Museum Benefit with Houdini program by William Pack
- Holiday Tea, with History of the Teddy Bear by Anette Isaacs

## Collections Report

*Beth Nawara, Collections Manager*

In 2017 the Collections Committee met 9 times and accepted donations from 93 donors. Almost 1,000 items were accessioned into the Museum's permanent, education, or exhibit collections. A few of the highlights of the donations included a horsehair car blanket, Sheridan School attendance records from 1908-1961, a Channing Cemetery plot map indicating plot purchasers, and over 200 letters written by Warren Anderson to his family while he served in WWII.

The Museum contracted with Beth Nawara to provide part time assistance in collection management and implementation of the Institute of Museums and Library Services grant to digitize photographs and make them available on the internet. There are now 2750 searchable photographs from the Elmer Gylleck Collection on [idaillinois.org](http://idaillinois.org) and 993 photographs that are searchable on the Museum website. Four volunteers began helping with the digitization project. Each volunteer helped about 2 hours a week on the project. Also, volunteers added location codes into the Past Perfect collection management software for 16 boxes of cataloged photographs, simplifying location and tracking of those photographs.

## Museum Communications Report

*Kim Bauer, Media Coordinator*

In 2017, the Elgin History Museum published six issues of the Crackerbarrel newsletter with articles contributed by a number of writers.

Local publications featured the Museum a total of 118 times in 2017. The Courier News published 34 articles and press releases for or about the Museum. The Daily Herald published 66 articles or press releases for or about the Museum, up from 39 in 2016. Three other publications featured the Museum. Bravo Magazine featured the Museum 15 times!

The Elgin History Museum website highlighted 39 programs on the events calendar, an increase of 19 from 2016. Program information, directions, and ticket purchase links were included for programs like the Cemetery Walk and the Annual Benefit. The Museum participated in #ILGive and built a website on their platform for the event.

The Museum's social media presence continues to be strong. At the beginning of 2017, the Museum Facebook page had 1,842 total page likes. By December 31, 2017 we had 2,236 total page likes, a net increase of 394 page likes (36.33%) for the year. In 2017, the Museum also added 109 new Twitter followers and opened an Instagram account, which already has 154 followers.

In late 2017, the Museum also started working on a new website design to update and revamp our connection with online visitors. The new layout focuses on increased clarity, full-width layouts, blog posts created from Crackerbarrel articles, and updated page designs. The Museum is looking forward to launching the website in the first quarter of 2018.

### Education Report

*Sara Russell, Museum Educator*

The Museum provided programming for 60 groups with 1,593 participants. Most were school groups, but programming was also provided for scout and adult organizations. The most common program was the Scavenger Hunt and Tour, followed by Water Ways, a program that charts the development of Elgin along the Fox River. New programs developed for school groups include Schoolhouse Days, Elgin 150 Years Ago Today, and an Elgin National Watch Company Research Project. The Museum was honored to work with O'Neal Elementary to bring a Veterans' Day program to 200 students in Veterans Park in November. Elgin History Museum collaborated with Washington Elementary and the Near West Neighborhood Association to guide students through a tour of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House.

New scout programs included My Family Story and A Cemetery Walk featuring Linda Rock as Mrs. Borden. New Memory Care programs, such as Elgin and the Roaring Twenties, were developed for The Sheridan at Tyler Creek. The Museum collaborated with the Elgin Public Museum and the Gail Borden Public Library for Lords Park Zoo programming, as well as children's reading programs at each institution.

Speaker's Bureau volunteers conducted approximately 18 lectures to a wide variety of local organizations and clubs, about 520 people. There were 23 Museum rentals providing meeting space for the Gifford Park Association, Elgin Garden Club, Current History Forum, and the Historic House Tour Committee. The WRMN radio program, Elgin 100 Years Ago, continues on every day reminding listeners about how life has changed in 100 years. Thanks to Jerry Turnquist, Rich Renner, Larry Drafall, and David Siegenthaler.



*Local children from Washington School learn about the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House restoration project.*

### Finance Report

*George Rowe, Treasurer*

Financially, 2017 will be remembered as a very good year. The Museum budgeted a little over \$178,000 for income, but was able to raise over \$249,000. The difference here is in large part due to the generosity of Mike Alft, who takes great interest in the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House and donated \$70,000 towards the rehabilitation project. That enabled the Museum to complete the cobblestone exterior as scheduled and provided additional funding for 2018.

The late Jack Shales also donated \$15,000 to be used specifically for the Cobblestone, allowing the north wall to be completed. Many other donors contributed to this project including two chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Our other major ongoing project is *Dairies to Prairies*, which tells the story of Elgin's dairy industry. Individual donations and grants have brought us very close to the project goal of \$90,000.

Our traditional concept of many sources of revenue continues. The Museum did very well this year with the Illinois Give promotion, which happens every November and is supported by the Grand Victoria Foundation. The Museum raised about \$14,000 from donations, the Grand Vic's matching funds, and incentive bonus dollars. Board member Tricia Grosser took a lead role in promoting our involvement in this project, along with members of the finance committee.

The board fundraiser raised a total of \$17,000; and the Cemetery Walk did well again this year, raising about \$3,600. The May Fox Trot brought in \$1,000 and the Museum Benefit in November earned about \$9,000 in sponsors, tickets, silent auction and raffle. The Museum Store earned \$6,168 in revenue from the sale of books, jewelry, and small souvenirs.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM  
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The Society started an endowment fund in 2000. Bequests or memorials received are placed into the endowment. By the end of 2017 the endowment has grown to over \$620,000. Although this seems like a lot, it would only sustain the Museum for three years at the current level of funding, so the Museum must continue to grow this fund. The Board of Directors has adopted resolutions to keep this money separate from general funds, and only the income, not the principal, may be used for general operations.

One of our greatest assets at the Museum is the staff, and we continue to keep salaries competitive with other museums. Staff salaries were increased with the cost of living this year and hours were increased for two staff members. With our five part-time employees, the Museum operates at the equivalent of 1.9 full-time employees. The excellent performance of these staff members shows not only in their daily duties, but also in how closely and effectively the staff works with our volunteers. Many thanks to the Elgin History Museum staff for their dedication and diligence.

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## Welcome New Member!

- William Linke, Jr.



*L to R: Phil Broxham, longtime WGN farm reporter Orion Samuelson, and Jerry Turnquist working on Dairies to Prairies.*