

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2018

President's Report

Bill Briska, President



In 1978, when it was abandoned and fell victim to a fire set by vagrants, who could have imagined what Old Main would be like today? Perhaps it was even harder to foresee what the Historical Society would grow into. After the fire, Old Main was narrowly saved from demolition by dedicated volunteers and plenty of community

support. These people saw an opportunity to take the Historical Society to the next higher level by providing it with a permanent home to operate from and grow into. It was also an opportunity to preserve a unique Elgin landmark that would have been lost were it not for the vision and hard work of many Historical Society volunteers and supporters.

Who could have imagined that saving Old Main would help launch a grassroots preservation movement in the surrounding neighborhoods? Or that the community would rediscover so many gems in its history and architecture? Back then who would have dreamed that the Museum would someday contain the huge archive of photographs, artifacts and documents it has today, and that it would become known for its skilled researchers, historians, educators and volunteers?

Now, four decades later, we can see, and better understand, the lessons of perseverance and the rewards of steady incremental progress. The Museum today is undertaking projects that will lead it to the next level of service to our community.

Each year at this time, the Board of Directors asks for your financial gift to provide the extra resources so vital to continuing success. Please look for our annual appeal letter, which will be mailed soon. Take a minute to enjoy what you have done to help the Museum and the

Elgin community. You have been carrying on the work and vision shared with volunteers from decades ago. Your support makes it happen.



Old Main boarded up after it burned in 1978

Fond Farewell

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Several members and friends of the Museum passed away in 2017 and early 2018. We will miss them all very much. If you know of other members who have passed away recently, please let the Museum know.

- Charlen Anderson
- Chuck Bell
- Jean Breslich
- Dave Covey
- Mary Alice Clute, former Elgin Historical Society Treasurer
- Geraldine Hagemann
- Ruth Petty
- Ann Schneck, Museum docent and board member
- Jack Shales
- Kathleen Turnquist

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Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline June 20, 2018



Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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Society's Board of Directors.

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tions will also have information available. Free popcorn, cake, balloons, and more! Contact Terry Gabel, 847-638-3458 for more information.

Saturdays May 12 through June 30, 11:00 A.M.- 12:00 P.M.: Elgin City of Peace Community Story Time

Free event sponsored by the Gail Borden Public Library. Bring your little ones to the Museum for stories and crafts!

Wednesday May 16, 7:00-8:30 P.M., Gail Borden Library: Elgin, An Outdoor Museum of Architecture

Elgin has a treasure trove of residential architecture. This program explains how buildings can be used to interpret the history of Elgin, or almost any other city. Amaze your family and friends when you drive through a city and comment on its past having never even been there before. Presented by historian Bill Briska. Please register.

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!

Sunday, May 20, 2:00 P.M.

Lords Park Painting Dedication, Lords Park Pavilion

Portraits of George Lord and Mary Lord Carpenter will be revealed and dedicated. Linda Rock will portray Mary Lord. Paintings by Earl Burnidge.

Thursday, May 24, 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

Meet at parking lot on S. Grove Avenue across from Festival Park

Wednesday May 30, 6:30-8:30 P.M.:

Reception for the new Fideliter ball gown exhibit

Historian Jerry Turnquist will host a program on the 130-year history of the Fideliter's Club of Elgin.

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

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

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

See documentary, "25 Years of Preservation in Elgin," chronicling the first 25 years of the preservation movement in Elgin. Then enjoy a slide presentation by Dan Miller showing preservation accomplishments in the following 10 years. Dan and others involved in the movement will discuss what local preservationists are doing now and where the preservation movement is headed. Sponsored by: ECN, Elgin Area Historical Society.

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.

Continuing the Tradition: Lords Park Zoo

Saturday May 12 @ 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm Free

Join the Friends of the Lords Park Zoo in celebrating the Zoo's history and learn about events and programs planned for summer. Volunteers from the Stillman Valley Nature Center featuring owls, hawks, and other rescued raptors will join the festivities. Local organiza-

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.

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

Brown Bag Lunch with Linda Rock: Elgin: How Sweet It Is

Never outdone by Chicago's candy producers, Elgin was a manufacturer of sweets and treats for many years. Historian Linda Rock presents researched information on factory and home candy production in Elgin. 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

Sunday, August 26; 2:00 P.M. D.C Cook History and the Mystery Portrait

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

Brian "Fox" Ellis presents Stories of Abraham Lincoln, as told by his law partner, Herndon.

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

Thank You Donors

- Betsey and Dwight Armistead, for Summer Soiree
- Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham, for Candlelight Tour
- June Nissley
- George and Marge Rowe in memory of Jack Shales

Chuck Bell Memorial

- Brian Batsaikhan
- Dorothy and Richard Bell
- Andrew Bost
- Marianne Bost
- Chad Creed
- Martha D'Sanchez
- David and Donna Dusel
- Eloise Hirschey
- Carol Huntoon
- Laurel Ingram
- Ron Kirchoff
- Daniel and Michele Kouba
- Alicia Saucedo
- Maikan Turkalj

Dairies to Prairies Project

- Jerri and Ken Barnhart, major sponsor
- Betsy Sohn, major sponsor

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Project

- David and Dolores Nelson, major sponsor
- Dennis and Laurie Roxworthy
- Open Elgin Donors

Orlando Davidson, Pioneer Banker: Part 1

by David Siegenthaler

Though Orlando Davidson (1825-1899) was intimately involved in Elgin's financial, business, educational, religious and social affairs during the last half of the 1800s, he is perhaps best known as the son-in-law of Elgin founder James T. Gifford. Orlando married Caroline Gifford (1827-1890) and moved into his father-in-law's "Stone Cottage" in 1854, four years after James' death.

In 1855, after working in banking for ten years in Chicago, Orlando opened a private bank in Elgin. In 1860, having survived the financial panic of 1857, he built a three-story brick bank building on the current site of the Tower Building. The bank closed with the outbreak of the Civil War but was soon reorganized under state law as the Home Bank in 1861, with Orlando as president. It was federally-chartered in 1872 as the Home National Bank. In 1877, during another financial panic, the Home National Bank failed. Orlando pledged his entire estate as security for the creditors. He was able to recoup his property and all depositors received their money in full, but he resigned as president, having had enough of the uncertainties and stress of the banking business.



The Home Bank block, corner of Douglas and Chicago St.

The Elgin Academy, a dream his father-in-law originated but never saw realized, became a priority for Orlando when he moved to Elgin. He served as Elgin Academy trustee and secretary of the board from 1854-1899 and treasurer from 1865-1888. He watched the school being built in 1855-1856 and was there when it opened in December 1856. All five of his children were educated there, and one, Laura, returned to teach

there. Years later, Laura and her husband, Nathaniel Sears, would become the greatest benefactors in the school's history.

Orlando served as city treasurer in 1856-1857; he was Elgin Township supervisor in 1861; he was an alderman in 1866-1867; he was superintendent of streets in 1887-1888; and he was a member of the school board for a number of years. He was a member of the committee in 1864 that successfully lured the watch factory to Elgin, and was one of only four Elgin residents to ever serve on its board of directors. He was treasurer of the Board of Trustees for the Northern Illinois Hospital for the Insane for six years and helped oversee its construction in the early-to-mid-1870s.

Orlando was a longtime secretary and treasurer of the Elgin Packing Co., which he helped bring to Elgin in 1869. He was treasurer and part owner of the Elgin Dairy Co. (later called the Elgin Butter Co.), established in 1870. In 1883 he sold his interest in the firm to William Hintze. He was the first treasurer (1872-7183) of the Elgin Board of Trade, which helped Elgin to become the dairy capital of the Midwest.

Following the Civil War Orlando began investing in South Elgin. He bought the east side mill and water power rights and tried to encourage industrial development there over the next 25 years or so. Though he had some short-term successes with a series of foundries, most of his South Elgin ventures were failures, due in large part to a series of damaging fires.

In addition to Orlando's numerous business and civic interests, he was also one of the organizers and officers of the Elgin Scientific and Historical Society; he was secretary of the Old Settlers' Association; and he was president of the Elgin Bible Society. Along with his father and an older brother, he was a fervent abolitionist. In the late 1860s there was a separate school in Elgin for black children but it was sparsely attended. A suggestion to integrate the schools was voted down, though Orlando favored integration.

Orlando and Caroline both came from long lines of Congregational Church members. During the first six years of their marriage they lived in Chicago and became charter members of two Congregational churches. In Elgin, Orlando served 40 years as deacon in the First Congregational Church, as well as 30 years as superintendent of its Sunday School.

Orlando was born May 3, 1825 in Windham, New Hampshire to James Nutt and Lucy (Lancaster) Davidson, one of 11 children. He was descended from William Davidson, a Scotch Irishman from Money-more, who came to America in 1728, and whose farm is now a part of Lowell, Massachusetts. Orlando's father was a meat packer by trade, and moved his family to Sandusky, Ohio in 1835. In 1851 his parents moved to Chicago, where his father was in the com-

mission business for 12 years. His mother died in Chicago in 1855 and in 1863 his father came to Elgin to live with Orlando and Caroline, where he died in 1873. Moving to Chicago in 1844 at age 19, Orlando briefly taught school in the Evanston area. He then took a position in the banking office of Alexander Brand & Co., where he worked for about eight years, followed by two years at Marine Bank of Chicago.

Orlando may have met Caroline Gifford at the home of Caroline's Aunt Louisa Gifford Dyer, wife of a prominent Chicago doctor. Caroline had attended her aunt's private boarding school in the early 1840s and was a frequent visitor there. Dr. Charles Dyer was an abolitionist and knew Orlando through their mutual interest. A February 1847 letter from Caroline's mother in Elgin to her father, who was laying out the now-defunct town of Ulao in Wisconsin, tells of an Abolition convention in Elgin attended by Dr. Dyer and "the two Davidsons." All three had been guests at the Gifford home. Caroline had added a note to her father in the letter, voicing her own enthusiasm for the anti-slavery cause in a flood of superlatives.

In September 1847 James T. Gifford's family joined him in Wisconsin. In late November 1847, Caroline's 6-year-old brother Newton died of an illness diagnosed as measles, followed three weeks later by the death of her 18-year-old sister Lucy. Orlando hastened to visit the family when he learned of the deaths, wishing to comfort them and concerned about the health of the remaining members. Orlando and Caroline were married the following May 26, 1848, on Caroline's 21st birthday, at the new Gifford home near Grafton, Wisconsin.



Orlando and Caroline Gifford Davidson

Following Orlando and Caroline's wedding, the couple moved to Chicago, where Orlando was employed in a bank. Caroline's parents, James T. and Laura Gifford, had lost three members of their family in a six-month period (two died and one got married). Laura had not wanted to leave Elgin in the first place, and now she was longing to return. In the spring of 1849 she convinced James to return to Elgin. The Giffords rented a farm while their cobblestone home on Prairie St. was being built.

James T. Gifford's "Stone Cottage" (363 Prairie St.) was his third Elgin home (following his log cabin, circa 312 Prairie St., and a brick home at 277 Prairie St.). Its original design was inspired by the architecture he had admired during a visit in South Carolina as a young man. Tragically, James T. Gifford died of cholera on August 10, 1850, soon after the home was completed. Orlando was named executor of the estate and by 1854 he and Caroline had bought out the other heirs and moved into the "Stone Cottage."

As seen in the accompanying drawing from 1871, the "Stone Cottage" occupied a full block, bounded by Chapel, Villa, Gifford and Prairie streets. It faced Chapel St. and included a carriage house and servants' quarters. The mansard roof and north wing were not original to the home. After Orlando's death in 1899 the property was sold to developers who parceled the area into building lots and divided the house into apartments. The home still stands and is one of only six cobblestone structures remaining in Elgin. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and in 1985 became the first home in Elgin to receive a plaque in the citywide historic building plaque program.



The Stone Cottage on Prairie St.

To be continued...

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Hazel Belle Perry's newspaper articles; Kane County histories; obituaries; etc.

The Value of Time

Jen Fukala, Executive Director, Downtown
Neighbors Association
Reprinted from Bravo Magazine

The following is a history of the Elgin brand, via the advertising that told the world about the watches made here. In Elgin most of us know that in the beginning there was a watch factory. Our parents or grandparents told us stories about it from their youth. Perhaps we read about it somewhere, or saw an image floating around Facebook of the factory's clock tower exploding when the building was demolished. Time has marched on and at times we find ourselves trying to interpret the evolution of Elgin since then.

**"Time and tide wait for no man.... Elgin Watches,
the World's Standard"**

—McClure Magazine, 1899

In the early days, four Elgin businessmen had a vision for the future: to bring a watch manufacturer to their town. Opening for business in 1865, the company was named after our city. So good was their plan that the Elgin National Watch Company led the American-made watch industry in a few decades. Through embracing the talents of their artisan craftspeople and pursuit of the most innovative technology, the company grew to become the largest manufacturer of fine jeweled timepieces worldwide.

"Nine million Elgin Watches—the greatest number ever made in one factory—regulate the business and pleasure of the greater part of the world."

—Unknown Newspaper, 1901

"Two astronomers watch the heavens every night at the Elgin Observatory."

—National Geographic, approx 1910

"For half a century, Father Time has stood for the finest railroad timepieces that money, brains, and skill can produce—Elgin's!"

—Saturday Evening Post, May 13th, 1922

"Your jeweler, an Elgineer, will endorse it."

—National Geographic, approx. 1910

Such was the craftsmanship of the Elgin watch that the name Elgin came to be used as an adjective for quality. Unrelated companies claimed their automobiles were "Built like a watch" or came out with luxury "Elgin" product lines to showcase their very best.

In 1917 when the US entered WWI, Elgin did too.

"Elgin's! ... the official chronometer of our destroyers and torpedo boats."

—Saturday Evening Post, Sept. 21, 1918

"Thousands of Elgins are used by the Government in our Navy — tens of thousands by our Signal Corps—and along that surging battle line in France hundreds of thousands of Elgins are in hourly use by the fighting men of America and her gallant Allies."

—Literary Digest, Oct 19th 1918

"The Elgin Strap Watch, the Armistices releases them for civilian use."

—Saturday Evening Post, March 8th, 1919

Elgin had an early interest in the arts as well, hiring the finest French fashion designers of 1920s Art Deco Paris to create their iconic Parisienne series of women's watches. A product line made nearly 100 years ago, it has held its value, and is still highly collectible today.

"Elgin, sensing your demand for style in all your personal accessories, engaged the most illustrious of French modistes to design your watches."

—Ladies Home Journal, Nov. 1928

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE—ADVERTISING SECTION.

THE WORLD'S STANDARD

An Elgin Watch

Stands as a monument to America's mechanical genius, recording time accurately, enduring a lifetime—acceptable and appropriate as a gift of permanent value that reminds hourly of the donor. Nearly 8,000,000 complete Elgin Watches have been produced in a third of a century—a greater number than any other factory ever made in the same period.

The Full Ruby Jeweled Elgin Watch comes in various sizes to suit men, women and youth, in artistic patterns of cases that please the eye while they protect the mechanism. Sold by jewelers everywhere.

An Elgin Watch always has the word "Elgin" engraved on the works—fully guaranteed.

Free book about watches to all who write for it.

ELGIN NATIONAL WATCH CO., ELGIN ILL.

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

Watches so artistically designed that....

"Under the personal guidance of these internationally famous women...Never before has such an exquisite watch, such a chic and stylish watch been created."

—*Cosmopolitan*, 1928

Such was their success that...

"The first Elgin Parisiennes were introduced a mere year ago... and today over 150,000 women are timing their comings and goings with Parisienne flair and ELGIN Accuracy."

—*The Saturday Evening Post*, 1929

The Elgin brand became interlaced with family tradition and the milestones of people's lives:

"An Elgin watch should be part of the life-estate of every man and woman."

—unknown magazine, 1920s

"Elgin is a gift that is a life-long expression of love and affection."

—*The Saturday Evening Post*, Jan 1st 1927

"Two Important 'Elgin events' Graduation for College and First Flight in a U.S. Bomber."

—*Time*, April 13th 1942

"It was a memorable day when I received my Elgin."

—unknown magazine, 1940s

This advertising was the message that Elgin was sending the world about itself, not just about the products they produced, but also about the talents of the people who lived here, and the values and vision of the city they were building. As we write the next chapters of our history here in Elgin, let us use the gifts within each of us to contribute to the story.

"Reaffirming the ELGIN Tradition of Leadership... Lord and Lady Elgin."

—*The National Weekly*, 1937

Welcome New Members!

- Jeff Cumpata
- Alice Gaines
- Patricia Gibbons
- Gregg Hagen & Scott Toppel
- Wayne and Pam Jensen
- John Kappen
- William Linke, Jr.
- Lynn Lueck
- Janet L Schroeder
- Billie Jo Waugh

**Save
the
Dates.**



Film + Exhibit Premiere

Sunday, June 24, 2018

1:00 pm - Reception + Exhibit

2:30 pm - Film viewing

Gail Borden Public Library

270 N. Grove, Elgin, IL 60120

847.742.2411

Register for film viewing at:

<http://gailweb.gailborden.info/>

July 19 - 22, 2018

Exhibit only

Kane County Fairgrounds

525 Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL 60174

further info: kanecountyfair.com

Saturday, August 4, 2018

6:30 pm

Serosun Farms

45W485 Berner Rd., Hampshire, IL 60140

847.683.4796

RSVP: museum@elginhistory.org

Saturday, September 15, 2018

5:00 pm

**Corron Farm Preservation Society/
Campton Township**

Gray Willows Farm

5N949 Corron Road

Campton Township, IL 60175

RSVP: museum@elginhistory.org

Light refreshments will be served at all events.

Contact Museum with questions: 847.742.4248



**ELGIN
HISTORY
MUSEUM**

www.elginhistory.org

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Elgin History Museum
Candlelight Tour



Friday, May 11 | 7:00 pm

Tour the past by candlelight while searching for historic artifacts. Win prizes! Wine and cheese after your nighttime exploration.




Tickets \$10 per person



ELGIN
HISTORY
MUSEUM

847-742-4248
elginhistory.org
360 Park Street
Elgin, IL 60120

In Honor of the 130th Fideliter Club Charity Gala
Fideliter Ball Gown Exhibit
May 30th, 2018 at 6:30pm



Featuring
Jerry Turnquist, Elgin Historian
Fideliter Charity Ball Gowns
From 1950 - 2000

Please Join Us
Wine and Cheese Reception
Elgin History Museum | 360 Park St. Elgin
Reception Sponsored By the Kenyon Family
in Memory of Margaret Kenyon

RSVP to Patti at 847-894-6585 or pattiesposito10@gmail.com by May 16th, 2018