

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2020

President's Report: Collecting History

Al Walters, President



This spring America was visited by a most unwelcome guest, the Covid-19 virus. While to my knowledge no one in the Museum family has been infected, it certainly has affected our operation. In mid-March we followed the lead of U-46, Gail Borden Library and ECC by closing our doors to the

public ahead of the statewide shutdown. When we will re-open is most likely in the hands of the governor.

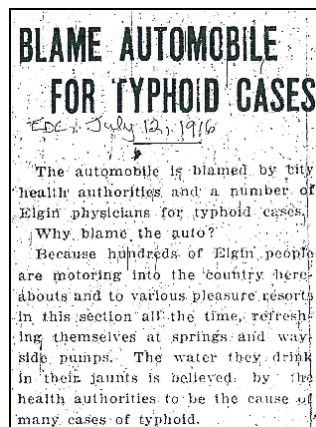
Having no visitors or programs, and missing out on what promised to be a busy spring school field trip season, the Museum's cash flow is affected. But thanks to a growing membership and generous donors, the Museum will weather this storm financially.

Staff and some volunteers continue to work, often remotely and occasionally on-site, being careful, of course, to properly socially distance. Phone calls are answered, Elgin history questions are researched, and Museum Store items sold online are shipped or delivered. The staff quickly adjusted to new work demands. Some long-postponed projects are being attacked with newfound free time. Creation and posting of timely on-line content has ramped up. Visit elginhistory.org for new stories, videos and children's activity ideas designed to support lockdown learning.

Just two years ago many of us enjoyed Jerry Turnquist's presentation commemorating the centennial of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. With Jerry's research in mind, Curator Beth Nawara concluded that the Museum should record and preserve the stories, sacrifices and hardships endured by Elginites during the 2020 Coronavirus event. One of the toughest things for historians to do is collect current history in real time. You can help us preserve today's history by sharing your tale. Please see the back page for instructions on how to record your experiences directly through the

website, or on paper if you prefer. The website has templates ready for you to add your experiences during the state shutdown. A future Elgin historian will thank you 100 years from now!

All of us working and volunteering at the Museum miss you and miss the programs. Most of all I miss the energy and enthusiasm that visiting students, parents and teachers bring to the Museum. Let's hope we can resume hosting young and mature learners soon, as together we explore Elgin's history. Stay well.



History repeats itself: See page 3.

Welcome New Members

- Laurie Faith Gibson

Thank You Donors

- Miriam Lytle: in memory of David Nelson

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



Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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

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Presented by William Hazelgrove

Saturday, September 5:

Family Fringe with Side Street Studio Arts

Thursday September 10, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch, Elgin Railroad History presented by Andy Thompson

Sunday September 27: Bluff City Cemetery Walk

October 4: "Silent City Speaks" theatre presentation of Cemetery Walk characters. Details TBD

Sunday October 11, 2:00 p.m.: Annual Meeting "French Fiddle Tunes and Tall Tales" presented by Dennis Stroughmatt

Saturday November 7, 5:30 p.m.:

Annual Benefit Gala, at Holiday Inn and Suites in Elgin. Oktoberfest theme with music from German band The Musikmeisters

Saturday December 5, 11:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.
Annual Holiday Tea

2020 Program Schedule

Betsy Armistead, Program Chair

NOTE: All events in May and the East Troy train ride luncheon are cancelled. Events after June 1 are tentative due to the Covid-19 state shutdown. Cancelled events may be rescheduled in the future. Check the website for current information. elginhistory.org/events

Every third Saturday of the month, 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M.: Spanish language tours of the Museum

Opening in June: Ira Marcus: "Art in Artifacts" photography exhibit

Thursday June 18, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch "Murder at Bloody Gulch" presented by John Thiel (rescheduled due to Covid-19 shutdown)

Thursday July 16, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch Once Every Four Years: Carl Flaks presents Political Memorabilia

Saturday July 18, 10:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M.: Classic Car Show at the Museum (Rain Date July 19)

Saturday, August 8, 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.: Taco 'Bout History Trivia Night

Thursday August 20, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Stories and Songs presented by Sharry Blazier

Sunday August 23, 2:00 P.M.: The Secret Presidency of Edith Wilson

The Case of the Missing Miniatures

by David Siegenthaler

The Elgin History Museum has been corresponding with Arvid Daastol Hoy, of Bergen, Norway. He is continuing a decades-old search to locate a special piece of art: a "scrapbook" of more than 50 miniature watercolor paintings made by the first Norwegian missionary to Africa, Hans Christian Knudsen (1816-1863).



Hans Christian Knudsen

The Elgin connection is acclaimed miniature painter Miss Anna Lynch (1865-1946), who had her own art studio in Chicago. In 1942, a man visited Miss Lynch's studio. Knowing she was a celebrated artist, he had something unique to show her: the Knudsen scrapbook. She bought the 6-by-9-inch scrapbook from the man, paying more than he asked. Describing the scrapbook as "sacred," Miss Lynch showed it to another Norwegian-born artist, August Klagstad, who shared her enthusiasm. They both agreed that it belonged in a gallery in Norway. However, before they could complete the arrangements, Miss Lynch died in 1946. Her interests were handled by her Elgin-based attorney and nephew, Robert L. Kemler. In a letter, he informed Mr. Klagstad that he didn't know about the scrapbook but promised to look into it. The scrapbook has never been found.

Arvid is renewing the search, although many years have passed, in the hope that new means of communication may reach someone with a clue. The April 2020 issue of "Viking," magazine of Sons of Norway members, based in Minnesota, includes Arvid's story of Mr. Knudsen and the missing miniatures.



Elgin Epidemics

Compiled by Elizabeth Marston from research and writing of E.C. Alft and Barbara Schock

This is not the first time Elgin has been shut down due to disease. In the 19th century, there were frequent epidemics that came with suffering and sorrow.

Ague: 1845

In 1845, the ague—or "bilious fever"—ragged. Many settlers fled town and nearly every remaining resident was prostrate. It was said that one man whose wife succumbed from the illness had difficulty finding assistance to bury her in a decent manner.

Cholera: 1854, 1856

Cholera hit the city in 1854 and again in 1866. Cholera killed Elgin founder James Gifford in 1850. Cholera hit again in 1866.

Smallpox, Scarlet fever, Diphtheria: 1862-1863

"Children have been swept away as with a pestilence," reported the weekly Elgin Gazette in 1862-1863. This was right after former slaves, called "contraband," arrived in Elgin. They traveled for two days in unheated boxcars after living in a crowded refugee camp. Sixteen African American children died mainly of smallpox. An equal number of white children died of scarlet fever and diphtheria. Though the white children died of different diseases, the new war refugees were blamed.

More Diphtheria: 1883, 1895-1897

Diphtheria was an all-too-frequent visitor in the fall and winter months. Lottie Magden, 13, died on Saturday. Her brother, Eddie, 3, and her sister Lizzie, 15, died the following Wednesday. All three children were Elgin victims of the diphtheria outbreak of 1883. The source of the disease was believed at the time to be a stagnant and slime-covered slough at the intersection of Dundee Avenue and Gifford and Summit streets. The bed of this wetland was at the same level as neighborhood wells. A severe onslaught of diphtheria occurred in 1895, 1896, and 1897, when there were 42 deaths.

Tuberculosis: 1906 and Beyond

A slow-moving epidemic, tuberculosis affected world populations from the 1600s through the 19th century. At the Elgin State Hospital in 1906, over 25 percent of all hospital deaths were caused by tuberculosis, including three doctors. To control the spread of the disease, a tent hospital was set up to isolate state hospital patients who also had TB. Within a few years, the care of TB patients was relocated to a specially-built separate building.



Elgin State Hospital's Cottage for Tubercular Patients

For the general Elgin population, private sanitariums took on the care of tuberculosis patients.



Elgin National Watch Co., spring 1908

Typhoid: 1916

July 1916 was the hottest month Elgin had known up to that time. Typhoid fever killed one person on July 5, but eight others in the city were ill with the disease. Many of the sick were Elgin National Watch Company employees. Smallpox was also reported. Quarantine signs were posted outside of homes with sickness, warning neighbors not to visit and milkmen not to pick up empty bottles. Typhoid fever is a bacterial infection picked up through contaminated water, milk, shellfish, and other foods. It causes headache, fever, sore throat

and diarrhea. Diagnosing typhoid is difficult in the early stages because the symptoms are common for many diseases.

Dr. Alban Mann, the City of Elgin physician at the time, kept records of the typhoid cases. He tested the city water supply and found no typhoid, and none in the milk supply. By August 16, there were at least 25 cases, but officials could not find the source. Esther Range, who worked in the Spring Room at the watch factory, died. The next day there were 10 more cases. The third victim, Verna Brandow, died on August 18. She was employed in the Stem Wind department at the factory.

There were all kinds of ideas on what was causing the disease. Some residents thought it was the public bathing beaches on the Fox River, or sediment in the city drinking water, or bad water from automobile trips. In the end, over 200 residents were stricken, with 26 deaths reported that year. The last person to die of complications of typhoid fever on December 12, 1916 was Elizabeth Simms, who had been ill for 14 weeks. She worked 30 years in the Stem Wind department of the factory.

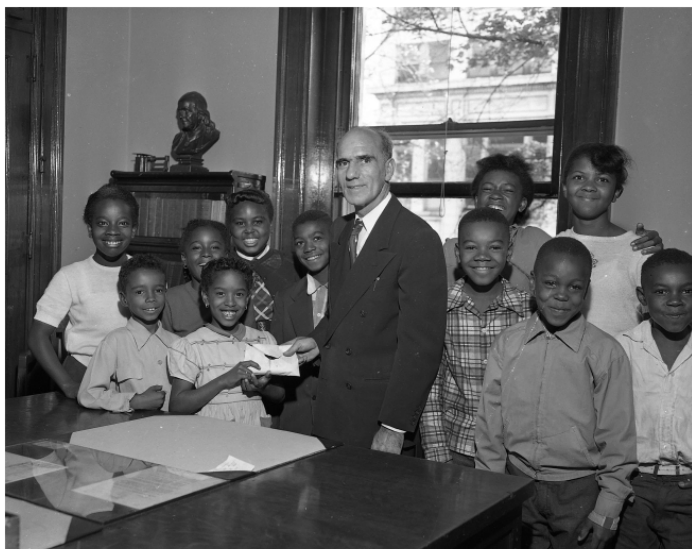
The source of the contamination was traced by Dr. Mann to a leaky valve, which separated water from the watch factory's reservoir on Watch Street and water taken from the river. The leaky valve allowed river water seepage to contaminate water pumped to drinking fountains throughout the watch factory building. The watch factory instituted mandatory vaccinations for typhoid. The vaccine was to be given in a series of three injections over a period of about three weeks. It was said that women and men had fainted during the process. There were also rumors that some workers had to be taken to the hospital after they received the treatment. The company had a history of demanding vaccinations: in 1882, 34 years before the typhoid epidemic, all employees were vaccinated for smallpox.

Spanish Flu: 1918-1919

The great influenza pandemic of 1918, which caused an estimated 20 million deaths in Europe and the Americas, was the last major scourge inflicted on the city. Although 70 died in Elgin, the outbreak here was relatively mild compared to 236 dead in Joliet and 125 in Aurora. Also in 1918, Elgin experienced a smallpox epidemic started by a young girl who traveled from Jacksonville to visit her married sister. The sister's husband was a barber who worked the first two days after he was infected. There was an immediate 20-day quarantine to suppress the disease and an immediate large-scale vaccination program. Over 5,000 vaccinations were given to Elgin citizens, but many refused to cooperate. 117 cases of smallpox were reported, but fortunately, no deaths.

Polio: 1940s/1950s

Later in the 20th century, Elgin had cases of polio and then AIDS in the 1980s/1990s. Both diseases were rampant for periods of time with unknown sources and cures. A polio vaccine has existed since the early 1960s and today AIDS, though not curable, is manageable through the use of antivirals.



Children at the Fremont Center on the east side of Elgin make a contribution to the Polio Fund.

Covid-19: 2020

Medical science, public health programs, and improved sanitation have eliminated disease fears of an earlier day, but the ever-mutating influenza virus and the new coronavirus are reminders that the battle against contagious disease is not yet won.

Cobblestone Update

Rebecca Marco, Editor

Though the statewide shutdown and the need for social distancing has put a damper on life in Elgin, work is still progressing at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House.

Recent accomplishments include delivery and installation of a new front step for the house, consisting of a 700-lb. block of limestone. The original front step fragmented due to water accumulation and the freeze-thaw cycles of many winters.

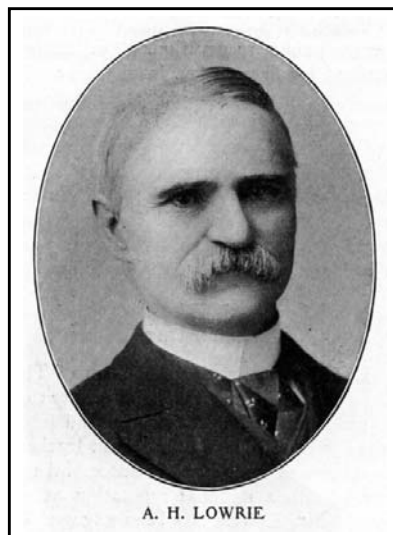
Dan Miller is making custom interior window surrounds. These consist of panels and molding to cover the thickness of the cobblestone walls.

In the new bathroom, wainscoting, baseboards, and the door have been installed and painted. Installing the fixtures is the next step. A video tour of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House will be available online for Preservation Month in May.

The Lowrie Family of Elgin

by David Siegenthaler

Adam Lowrie, born in Scotland, came to Elgin in 1882, after purchasing the Elgin Advocate newspaper. A year later, he bought the Elgin Daily News and consolidated the two papers. For nearly 50 years Adam and his son Richard (Dick) were editors and officers of some of Elgin's largest and most influential newspapers. Adam's wife Mattie became Elgin's first woman public office holder with her election to the school board in 1889. Their son Will devoted 37 years of his life to the United States consular service, serving in Brazil, New Zealand and several European countries. Adam, a former college professor in Michigan and school superintendent in Ohio, was president of the Elgin Board of Education in 1906-07. In 1913, the school board renamed the Oak Street School in his honor. Lowrie School, opened in 1889, is the west side's oldest existing school. In 1916, an unnamed alley running east from N. Gifford St., midway between Chicago and Division streets, next to his home, was named "Lowrie Place" in his honor.



Adam Hilton Lowrie (1836-1919) was born October 29, 1836, in Berwickshire, Scotland, one of ten children of David and Margaret (Selby) Lowrie. The family emigrated to America in 1841, settling in Cleveland, Ohio. Adam graduated from high school in Cleveland, then attended the University of Michigan and Adrian College in Michigan, where he graduated

about 1858. He became principal of a school in Cleveland and then superintendent of schools in Bellefontaine and Marion, Ohio. He then returned to Adrian College as a professor of English literature and political economy for 15 years, followed by two years as acting president. Entering the field of journalism, Adam became the owner of an Adrian, Michigan, newspaper about 1879, which he successfully directed until moving to Elgin.

In 1882, Adam moved his family to Elgin, having bought the Elgin Daily and Weekly Advocate newspaper. In 1883, he bought the Elgin Daily News and consolidated the papers, dropping the Daily (Evening)

Advocate. His business partner from 1887-1916 was Willis Black. The successful partnership of Lowrie and Black combined the skills of the educator/communicator (Lowrie) with the businessman/banker (Black). In 1892-93, Adam served as U.S. consul to Freiburg, Germany, appointed by President Harrison.

Adam was one of the founders of the Inland Daily Press Association. For five years he was treasurer of the National Editorial Association and has acted as its president. For more than 30 years, he was a member of the Elgin City Banking Company's board of directors. He was the recipient of several honorary college degrees, including a PhD from the University of Florida, where he had lectured on political and economic subjects.

An ordained minister, Adam preached in small Ohio towns during the period of his early teaching. In Elgin, he conducted religious services from many of the pulpits in town and lectured from most of them. On arriving in Elgin in 1882, Adam became a member of the First Congregational Church. Concerned to learn that at least 160 persons desired "sittings" but could not be accommodated because of lack of space, Adam became active in planning and building a much larger church, the current church, which was completed in 1889.

On September 11, 1859, Adam married Samantha (Mattie) Beckwith Pease (1839-1921), daughter of Henry and Oraline (Waldo) Pease. She was born December 11, 1839, in Jackson, Michigan, and graduated from Adrian College, where she was a French language teacher and head of the women's department.

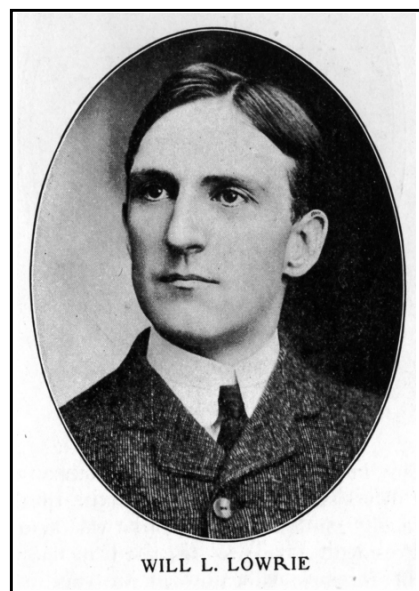
Mainly associated with the work of the Elgin Woman's Club, Mattie was twice elected president for two-year terms. She was active in the founding and promotion of Sherman Hospital, from its earliest days in 1888 until her death. Mattie was also active in the First Congregational Church; the Every Wednesday Literary Club; the Elgin Mothers' Club, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She was one of the organizers of the Associated Charities (now United Way) and was a member of the committee which built the YWCA building in 1906.

Mattie's principal claim to fame in Elgin began in April 1889 when she was elected to a 3-year term on the school board, becoming Elgin's first woman public officeholder. This was three years before Illinois allowed women to vote in school elections. In 1892, she was elected to a second term. Adam died April 3, 1919, at age 82, and Mattie died January 30, 1921, at age 81. Both are buried in Bluff City Cemetery

Five children were born to Mattie and Adam, though two, May and Grant, died very young. Their eldest surviving child, Harry R., was born July 25, 1865, at Jackson, Michigan. Harry graduated from Adrian College and worked at the Elgin Daily News for a few years. In 1890, he was employed by the Detroit Evening News and in 1893 began a promising career with the Chicago

Times-Herald. In early 1898, he was assigned by the Times-Herald to be a war correspondent, accompanying the Illinois troops in the field, expecting to go to Cuba in the fall. While reporting from Springfield in May 1898, Harry was critical of Governor John Tanner's actions, which angered the Governor. One night he was brutally assaulted by hired thugs and beaten into insensibility. Harry never recovered from the shock and died from tuberculosis June 6, 1899, in New Mexico, where he went to try to recover.

At the district Republican Congressional convention in May 1900, Adam angrily accused Governor Tanner of causing his son's death: "Governor Tanner has brought disgrace on our State.... My poor boy died in my arms in New Mexico, and as he lay dying he told me Tanner's thugs were responsible for his death." Harry is buried in Adrian, Michigan.



Will Leonard Lowrie (1869-1944) was born March 8, 1869, in Adrian, Michigan. He graduated from Adrian College and took post-graduate work at the University of Leipzig, Germany. As a young man he spent about 12 years in the newspaper business, including time as an editor of the Elgin Daily News and as a Chicago Tribune staff member.

Will entered government service in 1898 as a private secretary to the American minister to Brazil, and in 1899 was named vice-consul for his government at Rio de Janeiro. In 1906 he was transferred to the American consulate at Hobart, Germany, and subsequently served as consul at Weimar and Erfurt, Germany, and at Carlsbad, Austria. From 1912-20 he was designated consul-general at Lisbon, Portugal, and served in a similar capacity at Athens, Greece, 1920-24; Wellington, New Zealand, 1924-31; and at Frankfurt, Germany, 1931-33.

Returning to this country in 1933, Will was assigned to duty with the State Department before retiring to Alexandria, Virginia, in 1935. He saw history in the making on many occasions. He recalled having been an eyewitness to no less than 19 revolutions during his consular activities. Will married Amy Wenonah Alden (1872-1959) of Boston, Massachusetts, on September 18, 1907, in England. The couple had no children. Will died April 2, 1944, at age 75, and is buried in Washington, D.C.

Alfred Richard (“Dick”) Lowrie (1876-1932) was born February 28, 1876, in Adrian, Michigan. He graduated from Elgin High School, attended Andover College and graduated from Yale University in 1899. He then graduated from the Northwestern University law school and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1903. For two years, Dick practiced law in Elgin with Attorney P.C. Tyrrell. In 1907 he entered the field of journalism when he became an assistant to his father at the Elgin Daily News. When his father died in 1919, Dick took his place as editor. On January 1, 1926, when the Elgin Daily News merged with the Elgin Daily Courier, Dick became associate editor of the Elgin Daily Courier-News.

Dick married Adrienne Josephine Thomas (1878-1960) of Reading, Massachusetts, on January 3, 1905, in Reading. The couple had two children: Janet Lowrie Moody (1906-73) and Robert Thomas Lowrie (1911-68). Dick died April 16, 1932, at age 56 and is buried in Bluff City Cemetery. Adrienne moved to California in 1943 to live with her daughter and son-in-law, Janet and Desmond Moody. She died there at age 82 and her ashes were returned to Elgin.

Adam Lowrie’s home, built about 1882 at 25 N. Gifford St., had distinctive mansard rooflines with a matching square tower. When Adam died in 1919, Mattie moved in with her son Dick and lived there until her death in 1921. The Lowrie home at 25 N. Gifford St. had multiple owners after Adam’s death, and was razed in 1966.



Lowrie Home, 25 N. Gifford

Dick and Adrienne had their Colonial Revival-style home at 845 N. Spring St. built in 1911. In 1925, the Lowries bought property along Highland Ave., just west of Elgin.



Lowrie Home, 845 N. Spring

Here they built “Crowsbrook,” an English Tudor-style home at 35W966 W. Highland Ave., in a wooded area along Tyler Creek. In 1942, ten years after Dick died, Adrienne sold the home to Carl Hussman, a Chicago engineer, and, in 1957, Mr. Hussman sold it to the Burnidge family.



Crowsbrook, 35W966 W. Highland Ave.

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft’s books and newspaper articles; Kane County histories; obituaries and other newspaper articles; Internet sources; house photos by Judy Van Dusen; “Crowsbrook” information from Charles Burnidge; Kane County Recorder of Deeds research by Laurel Garza; etc.



You Are Living History

by Trish LaFleur

The Museum wants to hear about your feelings and experiences on a variety of topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Your stories will be included in the Museum's permanent archive and possibly a future online exhibit.

Please submit your stories of life in Elgin during the state shutdown through the Museums' website:

<https://elginhistory.org/research/you-are-living-history/>

You can also email photos of life during a pandemic if you choose to do so.

If you don't have access to a computer or prefer not to provide your information electronically, you can also write down your thoughts and send them to the Museum via the Post Office. Some example questions to consider:

- How are you staying in touch with your family?
- Are you spending more time on the phone?
- Are you leaving the house to go shopping or are you having groceries delivered?
- Are you working on any new projects or skills now that you are spending more time at home?

Thank you for helping collect and preserve history to share with generations to come.

