



# The Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 53 NUMBER 3  
MAY 2016



## President's Report

*Bill Briska, President*



May is Preservation Month, a nationwide event initiated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation many years ago. Elgin has been a regular participant for almost three decades. This year there are 24 local events on the calendar. These include a wide range of activities from lectures and panel discussions, to walking and

biking tours, to memorial services and awards celebrations. Plus there are a few more just for fun, such as a bowling fundraiser. These are great events to attend. I find them informative, entertaining and inspiring because they reflect the area's history, culture and commitment to its heritage. All are important components of creating a sense of place that is all too often lost in maze of new construction, generic strip malls and anonymous neighborhoods. For more information on the schedule, check the City of Elgin website or call Christen Sundquist at 847-931-6004.

The Museum has a full calendar of events that essentially brings Preservation Month experiences to you year-round. The 2016 programming schedule is one of the fullest, most diverse and innovative that we have ever offered. Check out the listings in this issue, and for the most up-to-date information, see the Calendar page on [elginhistory.org](http://elginhistory.org).

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

## Welcome New Members

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

- Carol Blohm
- Bill Braash
- Charles Burnidge
- Mark and Tracy Holloway
- Steve Bartholomew: new Life Member
- Ben Glunz
- Michael Howell and Family
- Cece Page
- Carol Palframan
- Gayle Strohmaier
- D. Andy Thompson
- Albena Tsoneva
- Christopher Walsh
- Thomas Wisinski
- Nataliya Yordanova

## Fond Farewell

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

Several members and friends of the Museum passed away in 2015, and we will miss them all. If you know of other members who have passed away recently, please let the Museum know.

- Bernice Anderson
- Phyllis Helm Krueger
- Rayette Miller
- Warren Mogler
- Joyce M. Pellicore
- Bill Shaw

## The Crackerbarrel

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**President:** William Briska  
**Vice President:** Terry Gabel  
**Secretary:** Laura Stroud  
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**Editor:** Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline **June 20, 2016**

 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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## Program Schedule for 2016

*David Nelson, Program Chair*

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

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

**May 6, Doors open at 4:00 P.M.**

**Shows at 4:30 and 6:30 P.M.**

**Planetarium Shows: Elgin National Watch Company  
Observatory, 312 Watch Street**

**Contact/RSVP: Peggy Hernandez at 847-888-5324**

Two 1-hour presentations will include a sky show and history of the Observatory and the Elgin National Watch Company. Self-guided tours available before and after both shows. \$3.00 per person (credit cards not accepted).

**May 7, 10:00 A.M. rain or shine.**

**Annual Firefighter Memorial Service**

**Fire Barn #5 Museum, 533 St. Charles Street, Elgin**

Fire Departments from Elgin and 10 surrounding communities will gather to honor Illinois firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty, and current and retired firefighters who passed away the previous year. The fire museum will be open for tours and fire fighting equipment will be on display.

More information: 847-931-6175

**May 9, 6:30 to 8:30 P.M.: Downtown Commercial District Walking Tour with Jerry Turnquist.**

Sponsored by Downtown Neighborhood Association. Meet at city parking lot, corner of S. Grove and Prairie St. R.S.V.P. 847-488-1456

**May 13, 8:00 - 10:00 P.M.**

**Candlelight Museum Tour of Elgin History Museum**

Celebrate Old Main's 160th Birthday with a candlelight tour of the Museum. See the Elgin History Museum in a whole new light as a guide takes you through the Museum, stopping to point out features you may have never noticed. Meet Elgin characters from the past as you go from room to room with a knowledgeable guide. Wine and cheese refreshments afterward. \$10.00/person. Call the Museum to reserve 847-742-4248

**May 14, 9:00-10:00 A.M.**

**Walking Tour, Elgin Mental Health Center Cemetery  
Meet at Grumpy Goat Restaurant parking lot, Elgin  
Sports Complex, 875 Sports Way, Elgin.**

**Contact/RSVP: Bill Briska, 847-421-4022**

The EMHC cemetery is more than a burial ground. It is an artifact of a by-gone era's social safety net and healthcare policy. Tour this little location with Elgin Mental Health Center historian Bill Briska.

**May 14, 11:00 A.M.- 12:00 P.M.**

**Tour Bertrand Goldberg's Laundry Building, Elgin  
Mental Health Center**

**Meet at the corner of Sports Way and Elgin Mental  
Hospital Drive, near Lawrence Hall Youth Services.  
Contact/RSVP: Christen Sundquist, 847-931-6004**

Join Elgin Mental Health Center historian Bill Briska for a technical review of Bertrand Goldberg's Laundry Building located on the Elgin Mental Health Center Campus. Includes a brief history of the Mental Health Center and an overview of building's condition Limited to 15 people, so please register early! Registration required.

**May 14, 1:00 - 4:00 P.M.**

**Continuing the Heritage, Friends of Lords Park Zoo  
Contact: Terry Gabel, 847-888-2348**

Come see the bison, elk, and deer at the Lords Park-Farm Animal Zoo Area while we celebrate the June 4th reopening of the Lords Park Farm Animal Zoo.

**May 14, 2:45 P.M. approx. 1.5 hours**

**Guided Bicycle Tour, Mail Order Homes in the  
Northeast Neighborhood  
Contact: [info@nenaofelgin.org](mailto:info@nenaofelgin.org)**

Meet at 903 Cedar Avenue, one of Elgin's new Bungalow District Homes. See homes from Sears, Wards, Gordon-Van Tine, Aladdin and Harris Brothers. Tour is led by architectural historian and mail order home expert Rebecca Hunter.

**Tuesday, May 17, 7:00 - 8:45 P.M.**  
**Gail Borden Public Library, 270 N. Grove Ave,**  
**Meadows Community Rooms A/B**  
**Elgin Alive-Remarkable Women of Elgin's Past**

Take a further look at some of the women and women's groups that shaped the city's past. Presented by Jerry Turnquist of the Elgin History Museum. Visit [gailborden.info/register](http://gailborden.info/register), call 847-429-4597, or register in person at the Registration Desk in the lobby.

**May 18, 6:00 - 7:30 P.M., Elgin History Museum**  
**A Guide to Elgin's Bungalows**

Join the Neighborhood Housing Services of the Fox Valley, the City of Elgin, the Elgin History Museum and local historians for an informational panel discussion about Elgin's bungalows. This panel will discuss the characteristics of a bungalow, how your bungalow can be a part of the Elgin Bungalow Thematic Historic District, an overview of architectural rehabilitation grants available to bungalows in that district; and NHS of Fox Valley Home Improvement loans and State of Illinois Property Tax Assessment Freeze benefits.

**Contact/RSVP: Elgin History Museum, 847-742-4248**

**May 19, 12:00 noon: Brown Bag Lunch**  
**Preservation of the Nancy Kimball Home**

To kick off Preservation Month local preservationists and Elgin History Museum staff will speak about the latest preservation effort in Elgin at the Nancy Kimball home located at 302 W. Chicago Street. The discussion will center around a brief history of the house, the project milestones and future vision for how the house will be used to serve the community. FREE admission.

**Contact/RSVP: Elgin History Museum, 847-742-4248**

**May 19, 7:00 - 8:30 P.M.**  
**Adaptive Reuse in Historic Preservation with**  
**Rebecca Hunter**  
**Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin Room**

Learn how historic buildings can be adapted rather than demolished, and see examples of successfully repurposed historical structures. Come hear the latest updates on the future of the Elgin Tower Building. Please register at [gailborden.info/register](http://gailborden.info/register), call 847-429-4597, or in person at the Registration Desk in the lobby.

**May 20, 9:00 A.M.**  
**Doughboy Statue Repair Event**  
**Memorial Park, corner of Villa and Prairie Streets**

Watch Dave Reich, head of the ECC Welding Department, repair the 1922 statue commemorating those who fought in WWI.

**May 20, 6:30 - 10:00 P.M.**  
**Elgin Lanes, 401 Shepard Dr. (enter off of Fleetwood**  
**from the east), Elgin**  
**11th Annual Bowl for Preservation Event**

Join ABODE for retro fun to raise funds supporting historic preservation activities in Elgin. Admission: \$25 adults; \$20 ages 6-18; free - children under 6. Price includes door prize raffle ticket, dinner, shoe rental, and up to 3 games of bowling. \$15 for dinner only. Contact: Jennifer Phillips/ABODE, 224-588-7034; [phillipsville500@yahoo.com](mailto:phillipsville500@yahoo.com)

**May 21, 1:00 P.M.**  
**Lord's Park-Elgin Public Museum, 225 Grand Blvd**  
**Guided Bicycle Tour: Elgin's East Side**

Ride through historic neighborhoods, parks, and historic sites on Elgin's east side.

**May 26, 6:00 P.M.**  
**Wing Park Golf Course-Parking Lot**  
**Guided Bicycle Tour: Elgin's West Side**

**May 28, 7:00 - 8:30 A.M.**  
**Bison Feeding in Lords Park**

Meet at Lords Park Public Museum for a short introduction, then we head for the zoo to assist the zoo-keeper in feeding these magnificent creatures. Limited to 12 people, so register early! Registration required. Sponsored by Friends of the Lords Park Zoo. Fee: \$2/Adult, \$1/Child, EPM members: Free. Contact: Terry Gabel, 847-888-2348

**May 30, 11:00 A.M.**  
**Memorial Day at Bluff City Cemetery, 945 Bluff City**  
**Bld., Elgin**

Memorial Day program will pay tribute to the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor with keynote address by Lieutenant Adrienne Benton, staff chaplain from Great Lakes Naval Training Station. Local WWII veterans will also be recognized. Music by Elgin Master Chorale and Northwest Baptist Academy Marching Eagles. Local students will continue the tradition of reading Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and General John Logan's Orders which established Memorial Day. Visit [www.elginmemorialday.org](http://www.elginmemorialday.org) for details.

**June 12: 2:00 P.M.**  
**The Rediscovered Work of Architect and Elgin**  
**Native James Eppenstein with Chicago historian Pat**  
**Steffes**

**June 16, 12:00 noon**  
**Brown Bag Lunch: The Cold War in Berlin with**  
**Steve Stroud**

**June 25, Boarding at 11:00 A.M., departs 11:30 A.M.**  
**Lake Geneva Boat Tour, 2-1/2 hour narrated tour of**  
**entire lake includes plated luncheon of Honey Dijon**  
**Chicken, fruit platter, vegetable, roll and dessert.**  
**Coffee and tea will be served. \$50.00 each. Payment**  
**due May 15.**

**July 21, 12:00 Noon**  
**Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Artist Jane Peterson as por-**  
**trayed by Linda Rock**

**July 17, 10:00 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.**  
**2016 Car Show at the Museum**

August 6: 160 Years of Old Main, details TBD

August 18, 12:00 Noon:

Brown Bag Lunch: Miss Elgin Pageant of 1925 with Jerry Turnquist

September 15, 12:00 Noon

Brown Bag Lunch: History of Presidential Campaigns with Carl Flaks

September 25, 11:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Bluff City Cemetery Walk

October 9, 2:00 P.M.

Amazing Adventures of Bertha Benz and the History of the German Auto featuring Anette Isaccs

November 5, 6:00 P.M.

Annual Benefit/Silent Auction/General Meeting: Jacqueline Kennedy as portrayed by Leslie Goddard

December 3, 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Holiday Tea featuring music by North Side Brass with David Nelson on piano

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## Thank You Donors!

- Hillside Cemetery
- Bill Briska
- Kaye Clemens
- Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham
- Paul R. Larson
- Thomas McGuire
- Roy and Sandra Olson
- Mario Rabaza
- Linda Rock and Jeff White
- George and Marge Rowe
- Doug Tomsha

## Take Project 2-3-1 to the Library Effort

- Lucy and Mark Elliott
- Traci Ellis
- Rick and Sharon Jakle
- Rise Jones
- Rage Ledbetter
- Anna and Marc Moeller
- George and Marge Rowe
- Grindstone Productions

## In Honor of Mike Alft

Many donors, totaling \$603.00

## General Donations

- Wayne and Jeanette Russell, in honor of Sara Russell, the Museum's Educator
- Richard Renner, Bill Briska, Chandler Swan, David Nelson, Jerry Turnquist and Linda Rock for donating speaker honoraria
- Rick and Kathleen Grimm for archival boxes
- Ron Lange
- Rhett Lucke
- Margaret Krueger: generous donation for Dairies to Prairies Project and the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone.
- Triumph Bank for Dairies to Prairies

## Board Fundraiser 2015

- Laurence Blanchard
- Mary Roberti
- Maurice Dyer, \$1,000 scholarship for McPherson College for study of the Elgin Road Races

## Bequests and Memorials

Bequests and memorials are added to the Museum's endowment.

- Joyce Pellicore Bequest
- A generous bequest from Phyllis Krueger

## In memory of Joyce Pellicore

- Elmarie LeHuray
- Julie Longo
- Susan McIntyre

## In memory of Curtis Harris

- David and Dolores Nelson

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## W.W. Abell, Architect and Civil Engineer Part 2

*by David Siegenthaler*

William Wright Abell was born in Cummington, Massachusetts on November 7, 1853, the first of three children of Joshua L. and Mahala Connor Abell. William's siblings were Rodolphus Elliott (1858-1942) and Ashley J. (c1863-1922).

In his late teens William was associated with the engineer corps of the Massachusetts Central Railway, the English engineer corps of the Inter-Colonial Railway of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and with the leading architectural and engineering firm of Springfield, Massachusetts.

In 1873, at age 19, William came to Elgin to work as a draftsman at the Elgin National Watch Co., where his uncle, George Hunter, was the superintendent. Hunter had married Louise Connor, a sister of William's mother, in 1858 and six years later became one of the "Seven Stars" recruited from the Waltham watch factory to start up the Elgin watch factory. William worked at the watch factory for nearly 18 years, designing both watchmaking machinery and factory buildings.

As a young man William was an avid French horn player. During his watch factory years he managed the Cornet Band, the Bluff City Band and, finally, the Elgin National Watch Factory Military Band, which was a consolidation of the other two. The band traveled extensively, especially in the Midwest, and helped to advertise Elgin watches.



*W. W. Abell in Watch Factory Band uniform*

Joshua and Mahala, William's parents, came to Elgin from Massachusetts in 1878 and after a couple of years moved to Chicago, where Mahala died in 1881 and Joshua in 1893. Joshua was a traveling salesman while in Elgin and was in the hardware business in Chicago.

Rodolphus Elliott Abell, William's brother, came to Elgin in 1877 to work at the watch factory. In 1880 he married Anna Kohn, a daughter of Charles Kohn, a successful meat dealer. Charles presented the newlyweds with a home at 16 N. Gifford St., where they lived the rest of their lives. Charles also took Rodolphus into the family meat business, where he partnered with Charles' son until the firm closed in the late 1890s. Rodolphus then returned to work at the watch factory until 1906. In 1910 William designed an 8-unit apartment building that still stands at 398 E. Chicago St. for Rodolphus, who named this brick Prairie-style building the Ellanna Apartments. Rodolphus, like his brother, was a talented musician and helped organize the watch factory band. He was also an avid horseman, owning many fine racing trotters.

Ashley J. Abell, William's youngest brother, came to Elgin in 1880 to work at the watch factory and, like his brothers, was a member of the watch factory band. Ashley worked at the watch factory until about 1891, when he left to become a sales representative for a manufacturer of regalia and society banners. From 1905-08 he was a partner in a firm that manufactured miniature railroad engines.

William married Rachel Calame (1855-1941) on October 11, 1877. Rachel was one of ten children, all born in Switzerland, of Armand and Catherine Sperry Calame. The Calame family emigrated to America in 1867 and first lived in Adrian, Michigan. They soon relocated to Elgin where all eight of the Calame children (two died at early ages) worked at the Elgin National Watch Co.

William and Rachel had two children: Ralph Elliott (1880-1947) and Claudia Viola (1886-1961). Ralph graduated from the University of Illinois in 1904 with top honors, receiving a fellowship to Cornell University, where he earned his master's degree. At Cornell he was awarded the Sands Medal for excellence in design.

In 1905 Ralph joined his father's architectural firm. The accompanying photo, circa 1905, shows Ralph (sitting) and William in their office on the 4th floor of the Home Banks building. On the walls may be seen photos of two of William's signature designs: the Gail Borden Public Library and the Spurling Building.



IN THE OFFICE OF W. WRIGHT ABELL, ARCHITECT, CIVIL ENGINEER AND SURVEYOR. ROOMS 30 TO 31, HOME BANK BLDG. AROUND THE EARLY 1900'S.

*Abell's office in Home Banks Building, c. 1905*

One of Ralph's first designs, in 1905, was a factory for the Elgin Butter Tub Co. (renamed Elgin Corrugated Box Co. in 1946) that still stands at 824 Raymond St. Other notable buildings designed by Ralph include the Crocker Theater (Elgin's largest movie theater, built 1923; 96 S. Grove Ave.; razed 2005); the Masonic Temple (1923-26; 310 E. Chicago St.; 2,500-seat auditorium; owned by various religious groups since 1991); the 1938 additions to Elgin High School on Chapel and Gifford streets; and the funeral home at 310 S. State St. (1940; has four Greek columns). Like his father, Ralph also designed structures in many other communities, specializing in school buildings.

Ralph married Ida Mae Giffert (1881-1952) in 1913 and the couple had two daughters: Arlette (Mrs. James Martine) and Audrey (Mrs. Wade Patterson). Like his father, Ralph designed his own home in Elgin in 1923 at 223 N. Worth Ave. It is an Italian Renaissance-style home with a cement exterior finish. See the accompanying photos of Ralph's home and William's home, an 1888 Queen Anne at 527 Laurel St. Both are highly artistic with unique details, befitting such creative architects.

Claudia Abell, William and Rachel's youngest child, graduated from Elgin High School in 1906. She continued her studies at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, the University of Chicago and the Applied Arts School in Chicago, where she graduated in 1917. Claudia was an Elgin High School art teacher from 1911 to 1950, becoming head of the Art Department. She never married and lived with her widowed mother until her mother passed away.

William passed away at age 62 on January 23, 1916 from valvular heart disease and was buried in Bluff City Cemetery. He would be proud to know that 100

years later most of his works still stand as a testament to his brilliance, and that appreciation for his talent has never waned.

*Acknowledgements: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; newspaper building reports; obituaries; city directories; etc.; home photos by Judy Van Dusen.*



*Ralph Abell's house at 223 N. Worth Ave.*



*William Abell's house at 527 Laurel St.*

## 2016 Elgin History Fair Recap

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

The History Fair was held again at the Museum on Sunday, April 24 with some new activities. Sara Russell, the Museum's Educator, organized the event, bringing in Tim Melville from Milwaukee to demonstrate the game of cricket.



Left: History Fair volunteers Linda Rock (seated) and???  
 Right: Board member Rick Grimm and his wife Sue (??)



Tim Melville shows how to play cricket



Volunteer educator Becky Larsen-Nocchi demonstrates



A family enjoys the Gifford Cabin reconstruction.

## The Cricket Fields of Elgin

Christian Schock

A few years after the Elgin National Watch Company was established in 1867, a number of English immigrants arrived in Elgin. For the most part, they came from Coventry, which had been a leading exporter of hand-finished precision watches. Its method of watch-making suffered from competition with American mass production factories like the one in Elgin.

Many of Coventry's displaced workers found their way to Elgin and employment at the factory. Although they were assimilated without great difficulty, among the customs and pleasures they brought from England was their beloved game of cricket.

It was not long before the Elgin Cricket Club was established, and soon thereafter it was playing matches with teams from Chicago. The club did not actively recruit prospective players, but any who expressed interest were welcomed. For more than a



decade the sport was popular, although not nearly so much as baseball. By the early 1900s, the game was no longer played.

*Editor's Note: For more information on Elgin cricket clubs, take a look at the full paper and research compiled by Christian Schock, located in the Museum archives.*

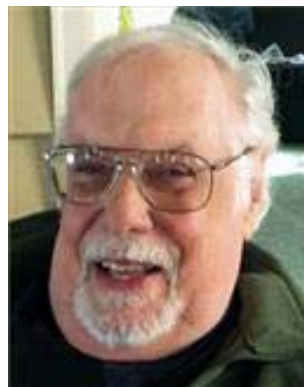
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### **In Memoriam: Bill Shaw**

*by Becky Larsen, 1973 graduate of Elgin High School, Society member, and Volunteer Teacher for History Fair and History Week.*

*Editor's Note: Donations to the Society may be made as honoraria in remembrance of a loved one or friend. Donations can also be directed for specific use, such as enhancing programs for students in educational events such as our History Week.*

I would like to remember and honor our recently deceased Historical Society member William "Bill" Shaw, husband of member Rita Shaw.



Bill Shaw, a career educator in local school district U-46, was a cheerful supporter and participant in the Museum's educational programs. Bill worked for many years as a member of the Special Services department of U-46, a good number of his years working at Elgin High School. Bill was remembered to students at our

History Week educational programs as students enjoyed special treats, with a little historical education to accompany them, in his honor. Students joined us from Ron O'Neal Elementary School and learned about some of our former highly respected educators from Elgin High School such as Bill Shaw, Douglas Hoefl, and Ronald O'Neal. Bill Shaw would have loved the enthusiasm expressed by the students at both their learning experiences at the History Museum and their future school, Elgin High. It was an honor to remember Mr. Bill Shaw, and these educators, as we took an experiential learning trip through some US and Elgin history.