

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2017

President's Report

Bill Briska, President



May is Preservation Month in which Elgin and other communities celebrate local history and architectural preservation. The Museum's involvement in the line-up of events began a few days before May 1st with the annual Youth History Fair. During the three week-days set aside for school groups hundreds of elementary school students

visit the Museum. Seeing these kids reminded me of the many other ways the Museum is engaged with the community. Throughout the year the Museum will host events, as well as partner with organizations holding events at other sites. Even when the Museum is not directly involved its members are often active in neighborhood and church groups, civic and patriotic organizations, the business community, educational institutions, the arts world and serving on government boards. All of these connections have "rooted" the Museum's firmly to the city we serve. It has also been part of the Museum's success.

There is no doubt that an attractive facility such as Old Main with its extensive archives and knowledgeable volunteers is essential. Once this home base was established the Museum's outreach efforts provided both new opportunities, and challenges. Examples of which are the successful collaborations with local schools, colleges and neighborhood groups, plus, staging special events, such as the Cemetery Walk, lectures, performances and even a collector car show. Mounting of large scale projects, such as the documentary film and exhibit about Elgin's African American heritage is another example. That effort was preceded by a similar one highlighting Elgin's Jewish community. One of the current large projects is the ongoing rehabilitation of the Nancy Kimball House. These activities not only foster new partnerships, they help to expand our knowledge base about Elgin. They make the Museum relevant to larger segments of the community.

Join with our community partners and enjoy Preservation Month. It is both a celebration and a learning experience. Pick up a brochure detailing events and locations at the Museum, City Hall or other locales around town.

Welcome New Members

- Lois Flick
- Tiffany Jensen
- David Thompson

Thank You Donors!

Dairies to Prairies

- City of Elgin Cultural Arts Grant for \$6,700
- Palmer Foundation Matching Grant, \$6,000
- Lois Flick

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House

- Jack and Marlene Shales to complete the north side stonework. Thank you!
- Elias Kent Kane Chapter of the DAR
- David and Dolores Nelson
- Don Pielin

General Donations

- Ann Chipman
- Chandler and Pam Swan
- Elizabeth Hoeft for the Board Fundraiser

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Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society
360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120
Phone 847-742-4248
e-mail: museum@elginhistory.org



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



Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline June 20, 2017



Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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Society's Board of Directors.

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May 18, 6:00 P.M.

Elgin Downtown Historic District Walking Tour

See downtown Elgin and its unique buildings and history in this walking tour led by historian Jerry Turnquist. Recently added to the National Register of Historic Places, this new historic district (Elgin's sixth) boasts buildings ranging from the 1870s to more recent times, all with interesting stories to tell. Meet at city parking lot, southwest corner of S. Grove Avenue and Prairie St. Wear comfortable shoes. Free admission.

May 20, 10:00 A.M.

Hillside Cemetery Tour

Tour Hillside Cemetery, the small hidden cemetery used by the Elgin State Hospital for 50 years. Meet Elgin Mental Health Center historian Bill Briska in the east parking lot of Highlands golf course/Grumpy Goat restaurant, 875 Sports Way. Free admission.

May 21, 12:00 Noon to 3:00 P.M.

Near West Neighborhood Civil War Walk and Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House

Tours are hourly at 12, 1 and 2.

Start at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, 302 W. Chicago Street, to join a walking tour of Civil War sites on Elgin's near west side. Visitors will meet Civil War General William Lynch at his home on Leonard Street and hear stories of life in the 1860s. The Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House will feature Civil War era history of the Kimballs with a few family artifacts.

\$5 suggested donation.

May 25, 7 P.M.: Lords Park Zoo History

Bear, bison, elk, and even a lion are part of Lord's Park history. Friends of the Lords Park Zoo will share information about the Zoo's beginnings, how it has changed, and stories of the antics of animals and humans.

June 4, 2:00 P.M.

Elgin Road Races with Ed Weseman

Ed Wesemann was at the 1933 Race! He will give us his memories of that day and show some of his collection of souvenirs. Maury Dyer will back up Ed's remembrances with Road Race factoids. Light refreshments. Non-members: \$3/Members: Free

June 15, 2:00 P.M.

Brown Bag Lunch: Sears Art Gallery History

David Nelson and Ann Chipman will be giving a lecture on the remarkable history of the incredible Sears Art Gallery on the campus of Elgin Academy, with a tour of the Gallery following. Refreshments. Non-members \$3/Members: Free.

June 17, 10:00-1:00 P.M.

Ellsworth House Field Trip.

Sign up for a special members-only tour of the Ellsworth House Museum in DeKalb with lunch at the Hillside Restaurant.

2017 Program Schedule

David Nelson, Program Chair

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

elginhistory.org/events.html

May 12, 7:00 to 10:00 P.M.

Candlelight Tour of the Museum

The candlelight tour will feature four unusual stories from Elgin's past: a Road Race driver will tell you how his car crashed during the race, the dairy industry will be explained by an Elgin dairy farmer, a discussion of ladies' hats from the 19th century, and a story about Native Americans encountering the first settlers in Elgin. Wine and cheese refreshments after the tour. Tickets \$10 per person online at www.elginhistory.org

May 18, 12:00 Noon.

Brown Bag Lunch: Historic U.S. Route 20

Since 2012, the Historic US Route 20 Association has been actively working with local towns and communities in a grass roots effort to designate 20 as a Historic Highway. This presentation will tell the history of why the road became Route 20, starting as a Native American path, all the way to the railroads and westward expansion. Hear the stories of the people along the highway who call 20 home. Bring your lunch. Drinks and dessert provided. Free admission.

June 10-11, Civil War Battle Reenactment

Elgin Mental Health Center grounds on Rt. 31

See a Civil War battle played out on the ground of the old Elgin Mental Health Center along Route 31. Adults \$10.

July 7, 12:00 Noon

Brown Bag Lunch: General Grant With Jim Zingales

Elgin re-enactor Jim Zingales will perform as Civil War General Grant. Bring your lunch as you learn about Grant's service to the country. Drinks and dessert provided. Non-members: \$3 / Members: Free

July 16, 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Antique Car Show

Get ready to step back in time! Come visit the Elgin History Museum for our annual Classic Car Show. This annual event had over 300 attendees in 2015 and some very cool classic cars. Cars styles and years vary but if you love classic cars this is a must attend event. The Museum will be open for tours. Food and drink offered for sale. Free admission.

August 11, 7:00 to 10:00 P.M.: Summer Soiree

September 24, 11:00 to 3:00 P.M.

30th Annual Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery

October 8, 2:00 P.M.: Annual Meeting

Ellie Carlson presents *The Brief Double Feature: A History of Underwear*

November 11, 6:00 to 10:00 P.M.

Annual Benefit and Silent Auction

Elgin Country Club, 2575 Weld Rd., Elgin, IL
Terry Lynch portrays Alexander Hamilton.

December 2, 1:00 P.M.

Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum

Museum Store News

Sandy McClure, Store Manager

Have you stopped by the newly updated Museum Store? It is so bright and roomy now. It is filled with books, crockery, pictures and a few new items. We finally have a new book/tote/shopping bag and a fantastic special. For only \$5.00, you can purchase our new Elgin History Museum book bag and a pen. It is a great deal and a perfect way to advertise our great Museum by using your bag for shopping.

The pen features a soft stylus tip for use on your electronic devices, in addition to a retractable ballpoint ink pen. Several colors are available.



Elgin History Museum Tote bag and Pen

Be sure to watch for new items coming into the store soon, such as the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House t-shirt and Elgin Road Race t-shirt.

As always, we are open to your suggestions of items that you would like to see in the Museum Store.

May Sandwich Special

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

In May, make sure you stop by **In the Neighborhood Deli** (185 N. Edison) for their **Cobblestone Classic sandwich** named after the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House! It is a chicken salad with grapes, celery and almonds on focaccia bread topped with mixed greens, tomatoes, and spicy brown mustard.

This special sandwich will be available during May only, and 10% of all sales during the third week in May will go to the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House project to help with Preservation Month. Please help save the cobblestone with your stomach! Many thanks to In The Neighborhood Deli for their participation and "good taste."

Tom Lee, Preservation Photographer

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

The Museum is very fortunate to have good neighbors, including Tom and Maureen Lee at 359 Park Street. Not only did they completely rehab their beautiful 1890s Queen Anne Victorian home since they moved in eight years ago, but Tom Lee has also been using his professional skills as a photographer to depict Elgin.

His wonderful images have been used in the Elgin Historic District Walking Tour Map and Guide featuring historic homes in the Gifford Park neighborhood. Tom and Maureen volunteer for the Historic House Tour organized by the Gifford Park Association. Tom has photographed the interiors and exteriors of all houses featured on the Tour over the past few years. Tom has also generously allowed the Museum to use his home images for a future architectural exhibit.

Tom started his photography career in 1989 shooting portraits at a local studio, then started photographing weddings and schools and now real estate. He is a self-taught photographer in film photography and is now enjoying learning digital techniques. "I love the art of capturing that perfectly lit and composed photograph." Thanks to Tom Lee for capturing Elgin historic preservation.

See the back cover for another of Tom Lee's beautiful photos, this one featuring our Museum at twilight.



Tom Lee's Photo of 326 E. Chicago St, for Gifford Park Association's Annual House Tour (cropped to enhance building details)

The Stiles Family of Elgin

by David Siegenthaler

One of Elgin's pioneer families, the Stiles contributed much to Elgin's early growth and development. Luther Stiles, a carpenter, built many of Elgin's first frame homes and was a 3-term alderman, including a term on Elgin's first city council in 1854. Luther and his eldest son Charles both served in the Civil War, Luther as a volunteer nurse and Charles as an enlisted musician (drummer boy). Luther's youngest surviving son, Clarence, grew up to become an architect in Elgin, Chicago and California. Though most of his Elgin designs are now gone or significantly altered, two landmark churches remain, as well as one of Elgin's most magnificent mansions, converted to a funeral home in 1939.

Sarah Jane Jenne (1823-90) came to Elgin in the summer of 1837 with her parents, John and Mercy Bartlett Jenne. The family resided on the farm of Luther Herrick, Sarah's uncle, along Poplar Creek, just east of Elgin. In 1839 Luther Charles Stiles (1819-92) appeared at the farm. Sarah had known Luther from their childhood back in Amsterdam, New York. Luther decided to settle here and built himself a log cabin on the Jenne farm. Four years later, on April 14, 1843, Luther and Sarah were married. Nearly 40 years later, Sarah was asked to reminisce on her early life in Elgin to the First Families Club. In her talk, she noted that Luther is "disavowing to this day that a maiden named Sarah had anything to do" with his remaining in Elgin.

Luther, a 7th-generation American with English roots, was born March 7, 1819 in Amsterdam, New York to Luther and Clarissa Peirce Stiles. By the 1850 census his parents were living in Elgin. Luther, the father, died here in 1857, and Clarissa in 1865. At the time of his marriage in 1843, Luther built for himself and Sarah a small 3-room home on DuPage St. where the old high school is now. It overlooked a wheat field (now Gifford Park) and was enlarged as the family grew. In 1847-48, the "Old Brick" School was built just to the west of their home. In 1883 their home was sold to the school board and removed to make way for a new Elgin High School, which, coincidentally, was designed by Luther's son Clarence, by then an established Chicago architect.

One of Luther's first carpentry jobs in Elgin, in 1839, was for Elgin founder James T. Gifford's second Elgin home, on the southwest corner of Prairie and Villa streets. By the 1850s Luther was listed in directories as a machinist who manufactured agricultural implements and had a shop in downtown Elgin. In the 1867 directory he is listed as city collector. Luther also served as both deacon and trustee in the Congregational Church, and played trombone in Elgin's first brass band, organized in 1842.

During the Civil War, Luther answered the call of Governor Yates three different times for volunteers to aid the wounded after bloody battles. He saw the horrors of war firsthand while tending to the victims of the battles at Fort Donelson, Shiloh and Vicksburg.

Though Abraham Lincoln never visited Elgin, Luther, along with ten other Elginites, visited Lincoln in Springfield in 1860 to congratulate him on his nomination for the presidency. On arriving at Lincoln's home, Luther was shocked when he realized that he had left his coat on the train. Sensing Luther's embarrassment, Lincoln patted him on the shoulder, escorted him to a chair and remarked about how warm it was that day. Both Luther and Sarah were strong Abolitionists.

Luther and Sarah had seven children: Charles Bartlett (1844-1919); Ellen Frances Cole (1847-1927); Albert John (1849-1931); Clarence Luther (1852-1919); Lizzie Wallin Palmer (1856-1940); Harry Otis (1859-63); and Jennie B. (1861-72). Sarah passed away in 1890 at age 67. In 1889 Luther, at his request, was declared legally insane and put into the insane asylum for treatment, where he died February 4, 1892 at age 72.

Luther and Sarah's first-born child, Charles (born February 25, 1844) was only 17 years old in the summer of 1861 when the "Fox Valley Regiment" was organized in Geneva. Too young to enlist as a soldier, Charles enlisted as one of two "musicians" (a fifer and a drummer) each company was permitted without regard to age. The regiment was officially mustered in as the 36th Illinois Regiment and Charles was in Company A, which consisted of about 100 officers and enlisted men. The term of enlistment was three years.

Charles' Civil War letters and diaries have survived and in 1986 were edited and published by his grandson, John Stiles Castle, under the title, "Grandfather Was a Drummer Boy." Charles was only 105 pounds at the time of his enlistment on August 8, 1861, but by October 23rd was up to 119 pounds, at 5-foot-6. He faithfully recorded, often under miserable conditions, his company's travels and activities throughout his 3-year enlistment. Though he never fired a weapon or was wounded, he experienced the hardships and horrors of war as much as any other soldier. His company's first battle action came at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, March 6-8, 1862. This was the largest Civil War engagement west of the Mississippi River and the Union victory here was said to have preserved Missouri for the Union. From here they slowly made their way back to Kentucky, Tennessee and finally, Georgia, where Charles' enlistment term ended in September 1864. Having experienced three years of war without a furlough, Charles resisted all efforts to re-enlist him.

The photo below shows Charles and 11 other members of his company at a reunion in Elgin in 1911. Charles is sitting in the front row just to the right of his drum. That drum, a prized Civil War artifact, is in our Museum's collection.

Following the war, Charles attended the Warring Military Academy of Poughkeepsie, New York, where he was both instructor and pupil. He was one of the first employees of the Elgin watch factory and for many years worked in its machine room. For a time he was a draftsman at the Springfield, Illinois, watch factory and also at the watch factory in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. For nine years he was a draftsman for the A.B. Dick Co. in Chicago.



On Christmas Day, 1873 Charles married Nellie M. Spencer (1852-1926) and the couple had two children: Emma Gertrude Nelson Kerber (1874-1967) and Mabel Bartlett Castle (1878-1962). Charles passed away September 10, 1919.

Clarence Stiles was born January 14, 1852. After attending Elgin public schools, he studied architecture at the University of Illinois. At age 18 he left school to enter the architectural office of J.C. Cochrane of Chicago. During his two and a half years with Cochrane, he was one of the draftsmen who designed the Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines. He then worked with another Chicago architect before moving to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he designed their watch factory in 1874, a building that still stands and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. He also designed other structures in Lancaster and other eastern cities before returning to Chicago in 1877. In 1878 Clarence opened his own architectural office in Chicago.

Clarence designed many buildings in Elgin during the 1880s. Of the eight Elgin public schools he designed, three—McKinley (1886-87), Lowrie (1888-89) and Garfield (1888-89)—remain standing, although these have been significantly enlarged and altered and look nothing like the original designs. The other five schools were: National St. School (1883; razed 1978); Locust St. School (1881; burned and rebuilt in 1884 and 1906; razed 1967); Elgin High School (1883-84; razed 1910); Grant School (1886-87; razed 2006); and Sheridan School (1888-89; razed 1973). In addition to the public schools, Clarence designed, in 1888, a manual training school building (razed 1962) for Elgin Academy.

Of the three Elgin churches he designed, two remain—the First Congregational Church (1888-89) and the former Grace Methodist Church (1883-85; the first church built on Elgin's west side). The other church, the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, was built in 1880-81 and burned down in 1916.



Grace Methodist Church

Clarence also designed several major Elgin commercial buildings, of which, only the Rosencranz Building (11-13 N. Grove Ave.; c1880) is known to remain. The others include the Grote & Church Block (50-56 Douglas Ave.; 1881-82; razed 1965); the Hunter & Hawkins Building (31-37 S. Grove Ave.; 1883-84; razed 1942); the DuBois Opera House (16-22 S. Grove Ave.; 1886-87; rebuilt after the 1920 tornado); and the Marguerite Block (2-10 E. Chicago St.; 1889; razed 1961). He also designed the National House gymnasium for the watch factory (216 National St.; 1889-90; razed 1937).

The only documented Stiles-designed home in Elgin is the imposing Romanesque Revival-style mansion at 364 Division St., built in 1886-87 for Alfred Church, the wealthy stepson of Gail Borden. Its cost was estimated at \$25,000—more than 20 times the price of a typical Elgin home at that time. In 1939-40 it was converted to a funeral home.

Clarence married Ella Irwin of Evanston, Illinois, on August 19, 1873. He and Ella had six children: Marion (born 1874); Luther (born 1877); Winnifred (born 1880); Mildred (born 1883); Imogen (born 1886); and Vivian (born c1890).



First Congregational Church, Elgin

Sometime between 1900 and 1910 Clarence moved his family to California, where he continued his architectural career. One of his final designs, about 1914, was the Carnegie Library in the northern California town of Corning. Clarence passed away in Oakland, California on July 12, 1919.

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; newspaper sources, including obituaries and building reports; federal censuses; city directories; City of Elgin death records; Internet sources; "Grandfather Was a Drummer Boy," etc.

Watch Factory Finds

by George Rowe, Treasurer

While I was working at Old Main one afternoon, member Chandler Swan stopped in with some neat watch factory artifacts: a silver plate creamer set given to one of his ancestors in 1868. It is inscribed:

Presented to
Jennie E Chandler
by her friends
of the Dial Dept
Nat Watch Fact
Elgin
Sept 10th 1868

The pieces are about 9 inches tall and 4 inches in diameter. Items like these would have been fairly expensive and are quite unique. Chandler believes Jennie is his relative Jane E. Chandler, who worked at the Condensed Milk Factory (for \$75 a month). She would have been 19 yrs old at this time and Chan believes the set may have been a marriage gift. It is interesting that Jennie must have had some very dear and caring friends in the dial department.



Jennie Chandler's Engraved Creamer Set

Discussion ensued, and someone mentioned that Jeff White also had a similar piece. Jeff's piece is slightly larger pitcher, about 14 inches tall and 8 inches in diameter. Jeff's piece is inscribed:

Presented to Edw E Pratt
by The Employees of the Finishing Dept
National Watch Factory
Elgin Ills.
Dec 25, 1867

All three items are silver plate, a coating of silver over some base metal, usually brass, bronze or pot metal. The items are more decorative than functional.

The Elgin National Watch Company was incorporated in 1864. Actual production of watches began 150 years ago, in April of 1867. Pieces like these give us some insight into the enthusiasm of the business and the community as the new watch factory began production.

While Chandler's set is a family heirloom, Jeff White's just came back to Elgin via Ebay. The seller told Jeff that the item was found on Cape Cod, but did not say when. The piece is apparently a gift to a supervisor or department head given at Christmastime to celebrate the end of a successful year (and the beginning of a company).

Mr Pratt was born in Massachusetts. In 1867 he was 32 years old. Coming from Mass., he may have been one of the people coaxed away from Waltham Watch to join Elgin's new company, but that is pure speculation. Research shows him listed as a jeweler in 1878-79 on State St, 3 buildings north of Walnut Ave.

Collector Jeff White says he has never seen any other pieces like these. Chandler is unaware of any similar items, other than Jeff's pitcher. I believe these rare finds show the enthusiasm and optimism of the era. Other than being the same age, there is no other known connection between Chandler's pieces and Jeff's pitcher.

Thanks to Judy Van Dusen for the background info on Mr Pratt, and many thanks to Chandler Swan and Jeff White for sharing.



Edward Pratt's Commemorative Pitcher

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Old Main at Twilight, photograph by Tom Lee