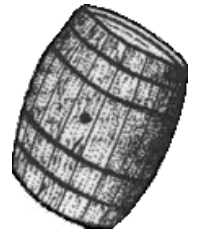


# The Crackerbarrel



## Elgin History Museum News July 2017

### President's Report

*Bill Briska, President*



The Museum staff and volunteers continue to press ahead with several projects, events and programs. It is an amazing lineup for a largely volunteer organization. You can read about these projects in this issue.

The Museum's success is in no small part based on a large and active group of volunteers, who contribute the expertise and skills gained in their own professional lives which are also essential to museum operations. A few examples are:

- Teaching
- Event planning
- Hospitality
- Exhibit design and construction
- Caring for collections
- Genealogy
- Writing and graphic design
- Customer service
- Project management



*Rick and Kathleen Grimm*

Volunteers make the difference, especially when they work side by side with our 5 part-time, but very talented, professional staff. The synergy between the professionally trained staff and skilled volunteers helps keep the Museum's many projects coordinated and well-directed. It also helps keep the payroll and operating costs low relative to other museums and the overall budget. The net effect for the community is a positive one. The Museum has a large reservoir of knowledge and skills assembled in one place. It is the cumulative product of several dozen individuals, not just a few. In our case, whole is definitely much larger than the sum of the parts.

Our best wishes to Rick and Kathleen Grimm, two dedicated volunteers who recently moved to Tennessee.

### Thank You Donors!

- JoAnn and Patrick Funk: a generous contribution to Dairies to Prairies and Save the Cobblestone projects.
- Marilyn Damisch and the Damisch Family, the Laurel Garza Family and Dorothy Martin for significant contributions to the Dairies to Prairies project.
- Signal Hill DAR special donation toward the Gylleck Collection digitization project. Thank you Jackie Marcus for facilitating!
- Dennis and Laurie Roxworthy donation for the annual Elgin History Museum Car Show.
- Donna and Tom Leetz, O'Connor Leetz Funeral Home, for the first lead sponsorship toward the 30th Annual Historic Cemetery Walk.

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

- Many thanks to Jack and Marlene Shales for an important matching donation to complete the masonry work needed for to replace the north wall! To complete the match, many other donors and organizations contributed to the project, including:
- Elias Kent Kane DAR and the Signal Hill DAR
- Elizabeth Haney and Dave Kitz
- Donors to IL Give campaign and matching donation from Grand Victoria Foundation
- Tom Armstrong
- David and Dolores Nelson
- Don and Linda Pielin
- George and Marge Rowe
- Edith Scarbrough
- Ali Hallock
- Dan Miller

## The Crackerbarrel

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



Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the  
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**Saturday 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.

**Saturday November 18, 10 A.M.**

## Ellwood House Holiday Field Trip

**Saturday December 2, 1:00 P.M.**

## Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum

## Welcome New Members

- Kim Bauer
- Frederick and Virginia Brown
- Kent Kinsey
- George McLeod
- Rebecca Miller Family
- Kevin and Michelle Sweeney
- Dan Zamoyiski

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

**Sunday July 16, 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

### Classic Car Show

Come visit the Elgin History Museum for our annual Classic Car Show. The Museum will be open for tours. Food and drink offered for sale. Free admission.

**Thursday July 20, 12:00 Noon**

### Brown Bag Lunch: General Grant With Jim Zingales

Elgin reenactor 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

**Tuesday, August 8, 7:00 P.M.:**

### Circle of Time Watch Factory Documentary,

### Gail Borden Public Library

**Friday August 11, 7:00 to 10:00 P.M.:**

### Summer Soiree

Free reception includes music, wine and cheese, exhibits, raffles and fun! Come join the party!

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

### 30th Annual Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery

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

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

## 30th Annual Cemetery Walk Preview

*Laura and Steve Stroud, Cemetery Walk Co-Chairs*

On September 24, come meet some of the people who helped to make Elgin great: Fred Traub, one of Elgin's first bakers; Laura Davidson Sears, a philanthropist for Elgin Academy; Gilbert Snow, inventor of the self-oiling windmill; Lois Wilcox, founder of the Elgin Woman's Club that opened Sherman Hospital; Civil War General John S. Wilcox; and Libby Goll, creator of Resthaven Home for convalescent care. There will also be several vignettes.

For those of you with limited mobility to take the tour, there will be a free bus with an on-board guide. Reservations for the bus are needed in advance. There will also be a small food court with hot dogs, chips, drinks, popcorn and ice cream reasonably priced.

We are planning a few surprises as well. Be sure to bring your cellphone or camera to have your picture taken with one of the actors.

We hope to see you there. Tickets are available starting August 15 at Elgin History Museum, Ace Hardware on Spring St. and on Lillian St. Tickets are: \$12 in advance, \$10 for Museum members and seniors 65 plus, or \$15 day of and children 12 and under free.

For further information call the History Museum at 847-742-4248 or go to [www.elginhistory.org/events](http://www.elginhistory.org/events)

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# Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Progress

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

John Crowe of Berkley Crowe Masonry is busy creating a new north wall of cobblestones on the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone house. John has been working since last fall to prepare the site, organize the stone, and start wall construction. He is a master mason with experience in historic mortars, and cobblestone and fieldstone construction. During the winter John worked on the interior foundation walls, patching dangerously deteriorated sections. When the weather improved, John reconstructed the quoins on the corners of the old house, set the steel across each window and doorway, hauled up the stones and mortar and placed each cobblestone by hand.



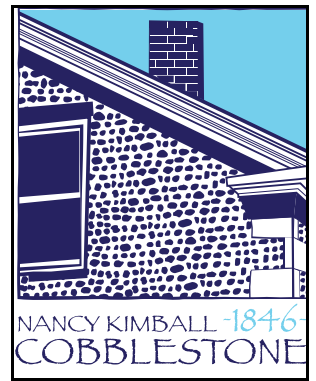
*Master mason John Crowe (l) and Museum volunteers Paul Larson and Dennis Roxworthy working on rebuilding the back wall of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. Original cobblestones are being re-used.*

Elgin preservationist and master woodworker Dan Miller is making the wooden window sills and lintels that John is installing. With the north wall about half-way done, the Museum is organizing construction on the interior of the building, including repair on the beams and floor joists with the help of Mike Howell and Carpentry with Integrity. Thanks to a thoughtful and very generous gift from E. C. "Mike" Alft, the interior work can proceed this year.

Mike Alft is Elgin's leading historian, retired Elgin High School teacher, former mayor, and popular Courier News columnist, who recently moved away from Elgin to be closer to his children. Mike is also celebrating his 92nd birthday this month! He feels that cobblestone buildings are an early part of our local heritage, a reminder that among the first Elgin settlers were emigrants from upstate New York. At one time Elgin had about 20 examples of this type of construction, more than any other community, and now few are left. Among the best examples remaining are the home of Elgin's founder, James T. Gifford, at 363 Prairie, and the Nancy Currier Kimball cobblestone, probably Elgin's oldest residence. Mike cannot think of any structures more worthy of saving, and he is happy to be part of this effort. Although he now lives in Pennsylvania, he wants to be remembered for his part in restoring the cobblestone on West Chicago Street.

The Museum has also started a T-shirt campaign to create awareness of the project and raise money. The new T-shirt's design was donated by member Julie Hofmeister. The shirt features the slogan, "Save the Cobblestone, Build the Neighborhood" on the back, with a small image of the house on the front. Buy your T-shirt at the Museum Store, online, or at any Museum event. Members \$10, non-members \$15.

The Illinois State Archaeological Survey has offices near the Nancy Kimball house. They are considering donating their time to dig some test holes within the foundation as part of a research project.



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## Civil War Walk Helps Nancy Kimball House

*Rebecca Marco, Editor*

The Museum and Near West Neighborhood Association put together a Civil War Walk for Preservation Month in May. Jeff Turner of In the Neighborhood Deli created a sandwich for the project, The Cobblestone Classic, and donated a percentage of one week's sales to the project!

The Museum and Cobblestone partners like Near West Neighbors and Neighborhood Housing Services continue to talk to Elgin organizations about the project and future use of the building, submitting grants for project funds, and keeping the momentum going on a long term project.



The walk was held May 21 for three tour groups, totaling 65 participants. We helped Near West Neighbors conduct the walk, and provided historical background and Civil War-era artifacts from the Museum to display at the Cobblestone House. We also provided images and historical information for the sites along the walk route. Thanks to Ken Gough, Jim Zingales, and David Siegenthaler for their Civil War research and presentations during the walk.



*South side of Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House*

The tour consisted of an introduction at the Kimball Cobblestone house, explaining what the Society is trying to accomplish by restoring the home, and pointed out the roles played by Nancy Kimball's descendants who participated in the war, and then provided an overview of the long-gone Chicago & Northwestern depot formerly located on the southeast corner of Crystal and Chicago Streets. Civil War historian Ken Gough described the depot's role in transporting Civil War soldiers to and from the war.



*Ken Gough in Confederate uniform*

Next, we saw the site of the Waverly House Hotel and another larger cobblestone building on Highland Ave, formerly the stables for the Waverly House.



*Tour Stop at former Waverly House stables on Highland Ave.*

We then proceeded west on Highland and saw the home of General William Lynch, located on Lynch St. but only visible from Leonard St due to subsequent development of the properties surrounding the General's house. Jim Zingales did a great job portraying General Lynch as he gave a biography of the general's life before, during and after the war.

Thank you for helping to make the Civil War Walk a success! We had lots of positive feedback from the tour-goers about the event. \$320 was raised in tour donations for Near West Neighbors and approximately \$50 was donated to the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House restoration effort.



*Jim Zingales as General Lynch of Elgin*





## Civil War Re-enactment

*Rebecca Marco, Editor*

On June 10, Elgin hosted its first Civil War encampment and battle re-enactment on the grounds of the Elgin Mental Health Center. Though the weather was hot for early June, it was a beautiful clear day, and the event was well attended. Museum volunteers handed out information and displayed some Elgin Civil War artifacts. About 624 visitors entered the Museum tent organized by Ken and Diana Gough. Ken created mini reproduction regimental flags for each regiment with an Elgin soldier. These were flying outside the tent and each flag had a soldier's story from that regiment. This was a very thoughtful presentation to remind visitors of the real lives affected by the Civil War.

The participants' uniforms and gear were authentic down to the smallest detail and the battlefield re-enactment was very dramatic, with many cannon shots accompanying the cavalry and infantry as they re-enacted the Battle of Fort Donelson on Saturday. The event was such a success that the city plans to host another encampment next year. Thank you to all who volunteered to help make this event a memorable success.

There were also musical performances, a talk about medical care and battlefield surgery during the Civil War, displays of surgical instruments and other period artifacts, a period fashion show, a presentation on Harriet Tubman, as well as food vendors and souvenirs. All re-enactors I spoke with were more than willing to answer questions about the regiments they belong to, their weapons, gear, and horses, as well as how these events are organized.

Thanks also to Society member Lance Lagoni for providing the wonderful photos accompanying this story.





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# History of Nancy Kimball Cobblestone, Part 1

by David Siegenthaler

There is almost no documentary evidence available that would prove precisely when Elgin's earliest homes were built. Rarely, there are diaries, letters or recollections that will verify construction dates. Thus, we know that James T. Gifford's "Stone Cottage" at 363-65 Prairie Street was built in 1849-50. However, there are almost certainly several other homes still standing in Elgin that are older. Some of them may date to the early-to-mid-1840s, though it is impossible to be much more precise.

Among the oldest homes in Elgin is the Nancy Currier Kimball cobblestone home at 302 West Chicago Street. Based on published histories and recollections, this home was most likely built in 1846. One of six cobblestone structures remaining in Elgin, this 1.5-story and basement home originally had six rooms. The 1-story frame addition along the west side was built sometime between 1913 and 1935, evolving from a small, open porch along the northwest wall in the 1890s, that became an enclosed porch by 1913. There was evidence of a frame west wing of the cobblestone by the 1880s that was razed when the home next door was built in 1890. The home stands on the northwest corner of West Chicago and North Crystal streets, halfway up the hill from the Chicago Street bridge, affording a fine view of the east side of town.

About 90% of all cobblestone buildings in this country are found in a 60-mile radius of Rochester, New York. Construction of the Erie Canal in the Rochester area from about 1820-25 attracted stonemasons to build the lock and bridge abutments. When the canal was completed, many of the masons turned to building cobblestone homes. As a building material, stones were cheaper than bricks and were plentiful in the area. Many of Elgin's pioneers emigrated from upstate New York, including James T. Gifford, the city's founder, and Ralph Grow, the stone mason who built the Nancy Kimball cobblestone.

Elgin is believed to have the largest concentration of cobblestone construction in the country outside of the Rochester area. At one time Elgin had about 20 cobblestone structures, including homes, two churches, a stable and a store. Of the six that remain in Elgin, three are on the west side and all were built for the Kimball family: 302 West Chicago Street (circa 1846), 219 West Highland Avenue (circa 1852; a stable for the Waverly House hotel) and 326-28 Mountain Street (circa 1850; home of Edson Kimball, a second cousin of Samuel and William; chosen as the city's top landmark by Elgin's 1976 Bicentennial Commission). The three on the east side are James T. Gifford's home

(363-65 Prairie Street; 1849-50), and homes at 319 DuPage Street (circa mid-to-late-1840s) and 302 Fulton St. (circa 1850).

The durability of cobblestone may be illustrated by a recollection of Irene Solyom Biddle, who grew up in the cobblestone at 326-28 Mountain Street in the 1920s and '30s. Family and friends set about tearing down their old cobblestone carriage house, which was too small for their new automobile. However, after two days of hard work, only a hole was made in one wall. She said, "It took a very long time to knock down the cobblestone, and a lot of hammers and steel mallets bit the dust before the job was finally completed."

Though all of Elgin's cobblestones are among the oldest homes in Elgin, there are a pair of brick homes that may be as old or older: the General William Lynch home at 35 Leonard Street (built by a stonemason named Charles Stevens) and the Asahel Hinsdell home at 443 East Chicago Street (the only Elgin home in the "Historic American Buildings Survey" of 1934).

Nancy Currier Kimball was the matriarch of the Kimball family that claimed and developed most of the west side of Elgin in the mid-1800s. Her husband Joseph, after reconnoitering the area the year before, met Elgin founder James T. Gifford in Chicago in early 1835. They agreed to share the work of building a dam to provide water power for mills. Joseph Kimball and his kin, settling on the west side of the river, would build a saw mill. James Gifford and his kin, settling on the east side of the river, would build a flour mill. In July 1835 Joseph left his brother Jonathan and son Samuel Jewett in Elgin and set out for New Hampshire to get his family. However, he was stricken with cholera and died in Ohio later that month. In 1837 Joseph's widow Nancy, son William Currier and daughter Ruth Ann came to live in Elgin.

The original Kimball homestead was on South Street, between Vine and Jewett streets. Nancy lived there until 1846, when her sons Samuel and William contracted with a stonemason named Ralph Grow to build the cobblestone home which they presented to her. This property was deeded to Nancy in August 1848 by her son William.



*Details of Cobblestone Construction Technique*

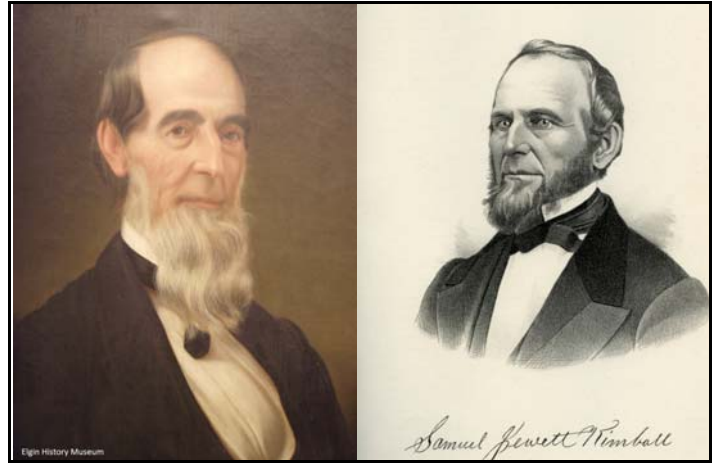


**NANCY (CURRIER) KIMBALL.**  
Aged when taken about 75 yrs.

Elgin History Museum

Nancy Currier Kimball was born September 26, 1787, in Concord, New Hampshire to William and Mary (Carter) Currier. She married Joseph Kimball (1783-1835) in 1805 in Plymouth, New Hampshire and they had nine children—two boys and seven girls, though the last-born girl died in infancy. Both boys became mayors of Elgin: Samuel Jewett, from 1856-58, and William Currier, from 1870-71. Nancy died on September 22, 1888, four days short of her 101st birthday.

William Currier Kimball (1806-75), Nancy's first-born, married Caroline Willard (1813-84) in Canada, where he was a merchant, in June 1835. A few weeks later his father Joseph wrote to him, urging him to come to Elgin. Three weeks after writing the letter Joseph died of cholera. William came to Elgin in 1837 and, along with his brother Samuel, claimed much land on Elgin's west side. About 1838 William opened a general store at the northwest corner of State Street and Highland Avenue. In the mid-1840s he established Waverly Mills, a flour mill across State Street from his general store. In 1853 he opened the Waverly House hotel across Highland Avenue from his general store. All three of William's business ventures were successful, though he lost the hotel in the economic crash of 1857. The cobblestone stable behind his hotel still stands at 219 West Highland Avenue. About 1870 he built his own home at 52 North Crystal Street, a once-grand brick mansion that still stands, but was converted to apartments in the mid-1940s. William and Caroline were the parents of seven children, four of whom died young.



**William C. Kimball (l) and Samuel Kimball (r)**

Samuel Jewett Kimball (1809-66) married Clarinda Jane Hill (1812-97) in 1834 in New Hampshire and their first child, Joseph Currier, was born in November 1836, the first white male child born in Elgin. The only two earlier white children born in Elgin, Louisa and Charlotte Kimball, were distant relatives of Samuel. Their second child, Walter Hill, born in October 1838, lived long enough to participate in Elgin's Centennial celebration in 1935. Samuel's sterling character, compassion and hospitality are emphasized at length in his biography in the 1888 county history. Samuel was influential in getting the railroad to come through Elgin and to schedule early morning and evening milk trains to Chicago. The railroad made dairy farming profitable, at a time when grain farmers were struggling. Samuel persuaded many farmers to switch to dairy, and taught them to build milk houses with vats piped from cold springs to keep the milk from spoiling.

*To be continued...*

*Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Courier-News and Daily Herald newspaper articles; Autobiographies of Fox Valley Pioneers (1981); obituaries; county histories; Kane County Recorder of Deeds; etc.*

## **Harry Blizzard Celebrates 90th Birthday**

*Rebecca Marco, Editor*

Longtime Society member, board member, and generous Elgin philanthropist Harry Blizzard celebrated his 90th birthday in June. The Board of Directors presented Harry with a cake at the June 20 board meeting and thanked him for his community involvement and generosity.



ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM  
360 PARK STREET  
ELGIN, IL 60120



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## Road Race Presentation

*Rebecca Marco, Editor*



Ed Wesemann, who witnessed the last Elgin Road Race in 1933, spoke at the Museum last month. He gave us many little details not available elsewhere, like the deals farmers along the route made to sell food to spectators. It was nice to hear about Elgin's rural surroundings from someone

who was there. Though he was only about eight years old when he helped his family entertain race-goers watching from near his family's service station in Udina, Ed provided very entertaining memories of the last-ever road race run in Elgin. Their service station was located near Graveyard Bend turn on the race route, so it was a popular spot for spectators.

Maury Dyer created the computer presentation, and provided artifacts and background on race organization. Thanks also to Jeff White for lending artifacts from the race Ed attended.

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## Meet our new Museum Media Coordinator



Kim Bauer is our new part-time staffer at the Museum. Kim's role as media coordinator is to keep our website, Facebook page, and Twitter feed updated and relevant. She handles online Museum Store sales information, promotes programs with flyers and emails, and maintains the ever-changing email list. Kim is a graduate student at

DePaul University in Chicago, a Heritage Commissioner for the City of Elgin, and the creator of the Pedaling Preservation blog on local architecture. We are lucky to have Kim's talents, although we miss Hannah Walters, the media coordinator for the past three years. Hannah took a full-time position with PADS in Elgin and continues to volunteer with the Museum.