

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News September 2017

President's Report

Bill Briska, President



September is one of the most historic months in Elgin history. Not so much for the events that once took place here, but rather the events that are about to happen. These include the 30th Annual Cemetery Walk and the 36th Annual Historic Elgin House Tour. There is also the annual Fire Barn No. 5 Muster and the Museum's

Brown Bag Lunch program about Elgin's dairy industry past and the future of those former farms.

The Gifford Park Association is sponsoring the Historic Elgin House Tour on September 9 and 10. This year's tour features seven homes, including two huge mansions, three large late Victorian era residences, a historic farmhouse, and a 1925 brick bungalow. There is something for all old house lovers. The homes represent the history of Elgin's west side in the area of the landmark intersection where Highland and Larkin Avenue split.

September 16 is the Fire Barn No. 5 Museum's Annual Muster. In addition to the usual festivities there will be extra attractions honoring the 150th anniversary of Elgin's Fire Department.

The Brown Bag Lunch at Elgin History Museum on September 14 delves into the area's past, present and future all in one thought-provoking hour. The program traces Elgin's important role in the national dairy industry from about 1880 to 1920. Then it looks at today's competing pressures over how former dairy land will be either farmed, developed or returned to a natural state.

The climax of the month is the 30th Annual Cemetery Walk on September 24. This is the Elgin History Museum's oldest and largest public event. This milestone anniversary has a great lineup of actors and guides who will introduce you to several local citizens from the past. It is entertainment and education per-

formed in a beautiful historic setting combined with an easy afternoon stroll. Those not quite up to walking the tour can reserve a seat on a free bus. See page 3 for details on obtaining tickets for these events.

Welcome New Members

- Elgin Community Broadcasting LLC (WRMN Radio)
- Kathe Pava
- Rachael Schrank
- Linda Wall
- Hans & Marge Zaage

Elgin Cemetery Walk Celebrates 30 Years!

The Elgin Area Historical Society will host the 30th Annual Elgin Cemetery Walk on Sunday, September 24, 2017. The guided tour of the Cemetery will take place from 11-3 p.m. at the Bluff City Cemetery, 945 Bluff City Blvd. on Elgin's southeast side. Tour guides will escort groups through the cemetery to six different characters who will talk about their life and impact on Elgin history at their gravesites. This year the Society will also be dedicating a new interpretive sign honoring the common grave of remains moved from the Channing Cemetery in 1968.

Thank you to sponsors O'Connor Leetz Funeral Home, the Castoro Family, Dan and Karen Fox, Dennis and Laurie Roxworthy, and EFS Foundation. There is still time to sponsor this anniversary event; contact the Museum at 847-742-4248 for sponsorship opportunities available.

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



Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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

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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

Anette Isaacs presents the History of the Teddy Bear.

Cemetery Walk Characters

The Historic Bluff City Cemetery Walk has been an Elgin tradition since 1988. This event provides insight into Elgin's unique history and attracts nearly 600 people each year. Visitors are taken on a 90-minute guided tour through the scenic Bluff City Cemetery to gravesites of former residents, portrayed by actors in period costumes.



Beth Hudson portraying a character

Tour guides point out unique grave markers, cemetery symbolism and provide fascinating cemetery facts. Chairs are available at the gravesites, but visitors are expected to walk with their guide.



A typical Cemetery Walk presentation

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

Saturday and Sunday September 9 & 10

Historic Elgin House Tour

Sponsored by Gifford Park Association

www.gpaelgin.org or

www.facebook.com/ElginHistoricHouseTour

September 16: Fire Barn No. 5 Muster

<http://www.elginfiremuseum.com/>

Thursday Sept. 14, 12:00 Noon

Brown Bag Lunch: Dairies to Prairies

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*

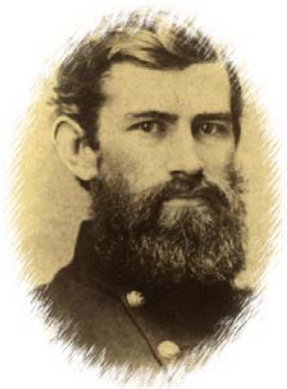
Saturday, October 14, 2 p.m.:

Parks Foundation Golden Memories program on Hawthorne Hill.

Saturday, October 21, 2 p.m.:

Elgin American Compact Designers sponsored by the Chicago Art Deco Society.

Come meet some of the people who helped make Elgin great:, featured on this year's Cemetery Walk:



Civil War General John S. Wilcox (L); Inventor of Self-Oiling Windmill, Gilbert Snow (R)



Libby Goll (right) founded Resthaven Home for convalescent care.

For those with limited mobility, we offer a free bus with an on-board guide. Please reserve a seat on the bus in advance if you do not wish to walk the route.

There will also be a food court with hot dogs, chips, drinks, popcorn and ice cream.

Tickets are available at the Elgin History Museum, Ace Hardware on Spring Street, and Ace Hardware on Lillian Street.

Buy tickets online at

<https://elginhistory.org/shop-category/event-tickets/>

\$12 in advance (\$10 for Elgin History Museum members and seniors 65+) or \$15 at the gate (children under 12 are free).

For further information or to reserve a seat on the tour bus if you are unable to walk the route, call the Museum at 847-742-4248.

History of Nancy Kimball Cobblestone, Part 2

by *David Siegenthaler*

Nancy Currier Kimball's youngest daughter, Ruth Ann (1821-1908), lived with her, through Ruth Ann's two marriages, until Nancy's death in 1888. Ruth Ann married Edward E. Harvey (1818-48), an attorney and postmaster, in 1841. In 1847 Edward was commissioned captain during the Mexican War and died of sickness in Mexico the following year. The couple had two girls, Isabelle and Florence, the latter dying in infancy. Isabelle (1842-1907) married Sherwood Raymond in 1862 and they left the Elgin area. In 1904 Isabelle and Sherwood returned to Elgin and moved into Isabelle's childhood home, the cobblestone at 302 West Chicago. By this time, Isabelle's grandmother Nancy had died (1888) and her mother Ruth Ann had moved next door to the double home she had built in 1890 at 306 West Chicago Street.

Following her first husband's death in 1848, Ruth Ann married Chauncey C. Thiers (1821-61), a school director and notary public, in 1851. Chauncey died suddenly while attending a Union convention in Geneva. The couple had two boys: Henry K. (1854-78; died in a railroad accident) and William C. (1858-1934). William's occupations included watch factory paymaster, state hospital clerk, men's furnishings merchant, federal treasury employee and banker. In 1887 William married Helen (Nellie) Powers (1862-1955) and they shared Ruth Ann's home at 302 West Chicago until 1890, when they all moved next door into the new double home that Ruth Ann had built.

William and Helen Thiers lived at 306 West Chicago Street from about 1890-1925, after which they moved back into the cobblestone at 302 West Chicago, where they remained until William's death in 1934. The couple had a son, Raphael, and two daughters, Ruth (Mrs. Robert Dugan) and Orrel (Mrs. A.C. Breer). Ruth Dugan, Nancy and Joseph's great-granddaughter, lived at 163 Orchard Street for about 50 years, only two blocks south of the original Kimball homestead. As the last local descendant of that line of the Kimball family, Ruth was guest of honor at the dedication of Kimball Junior High School in 1959. Ruth moved to a Milwaukee nursing home about 1976 to be near her son, and died there in 1982 at age 90.

In 1880 Nancy, at age 93, sold her property at 302 West Chicago to her daughter Ruth Ann. Nancy passed away in 1888 and in 1890, after Ruth Ann, her son William and daughter-in-law Helen had all moved next door to 306 West Chicago, the cobblestone at 302 West Chicago was rented out. According to city directories, at least three different Salvation Army officers lived there successively in the 1890s. In 1904 Ruth

Ann's daughter Isabelle and son-in-law Sherwood Raymond moved into the cobblestone and remained there until Isabelle's death in 1907. About 1910 William's sister-in-law Julia and her husband Richard Dwyer moved into the cobblestone. Richard died in 1913 but Julia and her children continued to live there until Julia's death in 1925.

Before Ruth Ann Thiers died in 1908 she transferred her properties at 302 and 306 West Chicago to her son William. Following his sister-in-law Julia's death in 1925, William and Helen moved back into the cobblestone at 302 West Chicago, where they had lived during the first few years of their marriage. After William died in 1934, Helen moved back into an apartment at 306 West Chicago. She lived there until about 1950, when she moved in with her daughter and son-in-law, Ruth and Robert Dugan, on Orchard Street.

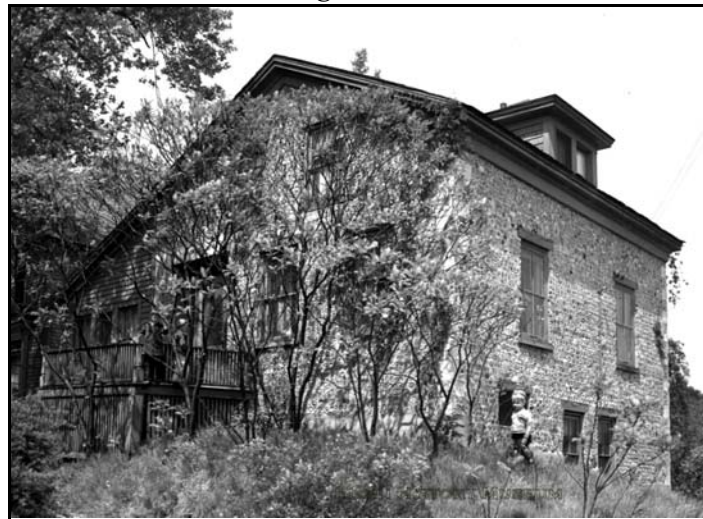
After Helen Thiers moved out of the cobblestone in 1934, it was rented to Louis and Agnes Heine from about 1936-46. Louis conducted a music studio in the home, where he also sold and repaired instruments. Louis died in 1945 and Agnes moved out about a year later. In 1951 Helen sold her properties at 302 and 306 West Chicago to Virgil and Nola Bennett, thus ending the Kimball family's ownership of the cobblestone after 105 years. It would also end the cobblestone's service as a single-family home.



302 W. Chicago St., May 14, 1946

Beginning in 1951, the new owners, the Bennetts, lived in the cobblestone at 302 West Chicago Street for a few years. According to city directories, they also

converted the home into about four apartments. In 1959 the home was sold to Ralph and Grace Wehner. The Wehners never lived there but by 1971, according to city directories, they had converted the cobblestone into six apartments, plus six more at their property next door at 306 West Chicago.



After Ralph Wehner died in 1976, the property was put into a trust. In 1985 the property was acquired by Frederick Haas, a Wisconsin resident who had been involved in home renovation and real estate in Elgin since 1976. By 1986 the directories show the cobblestone as comprising seven apartments. In August 1991 a fire, caused by careless smoking, caused about \$60,000 worth of damage to the building. Haas then essentially gutted the building and added new electrical and plumbing systems, new windows and replaced the plaster walls with drywall. At that point, in 1992, the cobblestone included two 1-bedroom apartments, two efficiency apartments and two sleeping rooms.

By the mid-1990s the properties at 302 and 306 West Chicago, both owned by Haas, had become notorious for illegal activities—drugs, prostitution, assaults, etc. A young man died in the cobblestone of an apparent heroin overdose in 1998. In the first four months of 1999 alone, police were called to the properties at 302 and 306 West Chicago more than 50 times.

In 1999 Haas, under pressure from police and code administration officials, agreed to take advantage of Elgin's multi-family deconversion program. He reduced the number of rental units in the two properties from 18 (12 at 306 West Chicago and six at 302 West Chicago) to 11. The cobblestone at 302 West Chicago would have one unit removed, leaving it with five apartments. In return, Haas received \$12,000 for each unit removed.

In February 2009 the City of Elgin bought the cobblestone for \$222,500. Thus, not only was a blighted nuisance property removed, but plans were to rehabilitate the home and create a living space for a resident police officer, much-desired in this crime-ridden neighborhood. It would include an office and a community room, as well as serving as a model for showcasing

energy-efficient systems installed in historic homes. It would also preserve one of Elgin's most historic homes, built for one of Elgin's founding families.

However, in 2010, an architectural evaluation revealed significant structural damage to the exterior walls, the foundation and the interior framing. The cost to rehabilitate the home was estimated to be about \$454,000, much higher than anticipated when the home was purchased a year earlier. In 2011, bids for the work came in even higher and the City Council balked at the expense. In hindsight, Mayor David Kaptain said it might have been better to condemn the home rather than pay \$222,500 for it, and could not justify spending so much additional city money to preserve it.

In mid-2011 the City Council decided to accept the recommendation of staff and "mothball" the home. For less than \$1,000, the home was temporarily sealed up to secure it from vandalism and weather. This preserved the property and gave the community a chance to decide what to do with it. The Elgin Historical Society, in partnership with the city, agreed to manage the rehabilitation/reconstruction. So far, the slumping north wall was torn down, the cobblestones were salvaged, the wall structure was rebuilt using steel framing to support the replaced masonry wall, the interior has been gutted, and master mason John Crowe is rebuilding the cobblestone walls in a historically accurate manner using the salvaged original stones. The Museum is partnering with the Southwest Neighbors to create a community space that will become an asset to the neighborhood and preserve this unique structure for generations to come.

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

New Photo Exhibit

Get a new perspective of Elgin at night. Lance Lagoni, Elgin photographer, gives us a vision of Elgin landmarks at night in this photo exhibit on display at the Museum through December 2017.



Sharing Gylleck's Photos

In the fall of 2016 the Museum received a grant for \$24,770 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to digitize the Gylleck Photo Collection. Part of the grant funds cover uploading the digital images to the Illinois Digital Archives. With the help of photographer Bill Brown, who has been scanning the mounted photographs, we currently have over 600 images on the Illinois Digital Archives website. Volunteers Rebecca Miller and Jackie Marcus have been adding descriptions of the photos and helping to upload them to IDA. The Gylleck Photo Collection is important because of the wide time span it covers and the subjects of the photographs.

To see the photographs, go to Illinois Digital Archives website, click **BY INSTITUTION** to find the Elgin History Museum and then click **BROWSE** to see the collection. Scanned images range from the 1840s to the 1960s and more images are uploaded monthly.



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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



Elgin National Watch Company image from the Gylleck Collection

Thank You Donors!

- Susan Reeve (see Collections Corner donation)
- Carolyn Likou in honor of Jerry Turnquist
- Chicagoland Thunderbirds through board member Dennis Roxworthy

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Project

- Association for Preservation Technology
- International Laborer's Union, Local 502

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Thanks to Museum Speakers' Bureau Volunteers

Many thanks to the Museum's Speaker's Bureau volunteers: Linda Rock, Bill Briska, Jerry Turnquist, Steve Stroud and Tom Armstrong. They have been busy this summer giving entertaining historical programs to a variety of groups, while often earning honoraria for the Museum. New programs now offered include *Elgin Architecture* and *Elgin American Compacts and the Evolution of Makeup*.

Abell Architects

The granddaughters of Ralph Abell had a family reunion in Elgin this month and stopped at the Museum to learn more about Ralph and his father, W. W. Abell, both prominent Elgin architects. Dan Miller, Elgin preservationist, arranged for a donation of W. W. Abell architectural drawings from the owners of 428 Fulton. This is a wonderful gift for future generations. Thanks to Dan and the donors!



Becky Arnold, Pam Rokke, and Nancy Arnzen, granddaughters of Ralph Abell, at Museum

Circle of Time Still Timely

The Gail Borden Public Library has shown the Museum's documentary on the Elgin National Watch Company, *Circle of Time*, twice this year, both times to crowds of over 100 people. Nice to see such interest in a film made 15 years ago! When it first came out, the documentary was sold on VHS tape. It was copied from the tape to DVD, but without packaging or artwork. David Briggs, a producer of the film (see photo next page), personally donated the funds to create artwork for a DVD that is copied from the master, and gave the Museum 100 copies. Thanks David!



David Briggs and Family

Museum Docents and Volunteers Needed

Do you like meeting new people, *and* want to help the Museum? You can learn about Elgin history and learn how to engage visitors in the Museum's exhibits. It's a great way to give back to the community and have fun! Volunteer help is needed Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday afternoons. Call the Museum at 847-742-4248 to talk about your interest in volunteering or go online to <https://elginhistory.org/volunteers/>



Mark Preradovic (center) volunteering at Elgin's first Hay Day, a family event held August 26 on Elgin's far west side.

Collections Corner

The Museum recently received a donation of a hand-made beaded purse from Susan Reeve, an Iowa resident. She sent us a nice letter asking if we were interested in her donation:

My mother grew up in Elgin. There were Norwegian families in the neighborhood and my grandmother was friends with two sisters from Norway, Ida and Anna Jensen. The Jensen girls were not married at the time, and to earn money they made beaded purses. They gave a lovely red beaded purse to my grandmother, and it was passed down to me. The attached photo shows the Jensen girls. The notation on the back of the photo is "Ida & Anna Jensen, friends of Anna Young, Elgin, Illinois. Handmade beaded purses - circa 1925."

If you would have any interest in the photo and the purse I would be happy to donate them. I have no one to whom to pass these on, and it seems fitting that they return to Elgin.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely,
Susan Reeve
Cedar Rapids, IA



Donation from Susan Reeve, made by the Jensen Sisters of Elgin

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



ELGIN
HISTORY
MUSEUM



Ellie Presents
The Brief Double Feature
"It's a stand-up comedy routine with history!"

***Speaking of Unmentionables:
The Rise & Fall of Ladies'
Underwear***

&

***Cup Check Please:
A Scholarly Talk on a
Jocular Subject***

Together at Last

One Day Only
Sunday, October 8, 2017
Elgin Area Historical Society
360 Park Street, Elgin, Illinois

Ladies First at 2:00
Gentlemen Following, Bringing Up the Rear

For more information contact the Museum at 847.742.4248
Or ElliePresents ellie@elliepresents.com 312.771.2400



30TH
ANNUAL
CEMETERY
WALK
AT BLUFF CITY CEMETERY
945 BLUFF CITY BLVD. • ELGIN, ILLINOIS
SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER 24, 2017
11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
For more information call: (847) 742-4248
Go to: www.elginhistory.org/events
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\$12.00 in Advance • \$15.00 on Day of Event
\$10.00 for Elgin History Museum Members and Seniors 65 plus
Free for children 12 and under.