



Elgin History Museum News November 2017

President's Report

Bill Briska, President



"If you build it, they will come," may be a memorable line from a sentimental film, but it is not a very good business strategy. Expecting people to come into your place of business ignores the larger reality in which we live. Daily life is too full of distractions and worthy causes that compete for the public's attention. While some patrons will

come, many others will simply pass by, unaware of what is being offered.

As businesses, museums are in the educational and service industry sectors. The Elgin History Museum's business plan began with creating an engaging environment of exhibits and displays within the walls of Old Main. Just as important was creating the space to house collections and archives that support the Museum's mission. The next phase of business growth for the Museum is taking its programs and services to the world beyond the Museum's walls.

Outreach efforts have many facets. Some include offering a wider variety of programming to attract visitors to Old Main or to other venues. The Museum's speakers' bureau and Cemetery Walk are examples of taking programming to off-site locations. Table displays at community-wide events is another way to interact with the public. Publishing books and producing the *One Hundred Years Ago Today* segment on local radio are further examples. These are more "traditional" platforms. To further extend outreach, the Museum has to sometimes mount larger projects. Past success with documentary films, such as *Circle of Time*, *Art Deco in Elgin*, and *Project 2-3-1*, are examples that have reached large audiences and enjoyed a long shelf life. The upcoming *Dairies to Prairies* will be paired with exhibits, lectures, and educational programming to increase its educational role in the community. Another large and highly visible

project is the ongoing rehabilitation of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. When completed it will, hopefully, have a very long shelf life.

Another outreach project currently underway is the digitization of photos from the Museum's huge collection. Approximately 2,000 images are being scanned and indexed according to museum and library standards. These will be made available on the internet.

Our on-line presence, consisting of a robust website and active social media accounts, are examples of newer forms of outreach. These are just a few of the Museum's many outreach initiatives.

The primary goal of these efforts, both traditional and new, is to better serve the Elgin community by making the Museum a vital and visible resource for community education. We also seek to foster civic pride and preserve the cultural heritage of Elgin.

Thanks to your support and the work of volunteers alongside our professional staff, the Museum continues to thrive.

Films are fun to watch, but we do not live in a "field of dreams." A more realistic business plan for a successful future at the Museum might be stated as "if we build it, we must bring it to them."

Welcome New Members

- Dale Betts
- Charles Burnidge
- Bonnie Hancock
- Paul and Jill Hawkins

The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline December 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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2017 Program Schedule

David Nelson, Program Chair

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

elginhistory.org/events.html

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

Annual Benefit and Silent Auction

Elgin Country Club, 2575 Weld Rd., Elgin, IL

\$45 for members, \$55 for guests.

Heavy appetizers, raffles, silent auction, cash bar. Registration deadline is Tuesday, November 7.

Chicago performer William Pack portrays The Essential Houdini. the American self-liberator, Europe's eclipsing sensation, world's handcuff king, exposé of fraud, original prison breaker, and master magician. He inspires generations who dare to dream the impossible.

Saturday November 18, 10:00 A.M.

Ellwood House Holiday Field Trip

Tour the Ellwood House decorated for Christmas! Meet at the House at 10:00 for the tour, share lunch with other members afterward in DeKalb (lunch optional, at members' expense) Tour is free.

Saturday December 2, 1:00 P.M.

Annual Holiday Tea at the Museum

Anette Isaacs presents the History of the Teddy Bear. Join us for holiday treats and see the holiday decorations. Event is free.

Thank You Donors

• Tom and Moe Lee

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone

• E.C. "Mike" Alft

• Glen and Susan, Maxwell and Sophie Holland, who donated over \$1,000 in proceeds from their lemonade stand at the Gifford Park House Tour



Holland Family, Ellie O'Brien, and Treasurer George Rowe

Dairies to Prairies

- Aubrey Neville
- Doug Schefflow

Board Fundraiser

- Lorraine Allerton
- Karen Beyer
- John and Sara Boline
- Dave Covey
- Charles and Patricia Dunning
- Lucy and Mark Elliott
- Lois Flick
- Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham
- Georgeann Heise
- Paul Larson
- Carl Missele
- John and Claudia O'Haire
- Edith Scarbrough
- Dawn Silfies
- Betsey Sohn
- Judy and Alex Sorten
- Al and Kathy Walters

Thanks For the Help

Thanks to board member Dennis Roxworthy for refurbishing and repainting and the Museum's event sign.



Dennis watches paint dry before repainting Museum details to the sign.

The Determination of August Nolting

By: Rachel Schrank

August Nolting knew that to make his dreams a reality, he would need a lot of grit. In the 1880s, he arrived in Elgin ready to lay down roots and provide for his family. It was a perilous and booming time for upcoming businesses. August was determined to see his ideas succeed. Prior to his journey to Elgin, August had been a merchant in Prussia, a grocer in Chicago and a dairyman in Hanover, Illinois. By 1881, he had paved the way for his family to join him in Elgin by building a practical, yet stunning home on North Porter Street and operating a number of businesses.

Elgin was the land of dairy in the late 19th century and Mr. Nolting's experience had given him the tools to run a dairy company for a number of years, simply known as "The Creamery." Later he would join forces with John Newman's dairy business. While taking on the task of running and owning a creamery, Mr. Nolting also started The Nolting House, a beautifully built hotel that would welcome travelers on their way to and

from Chicago. Businesses such as Dunham Farms would advertise in his hotel ledgers as a way to promote their own industries.



Nolting House, formerly located at DuPage Court and Grove Avenue in Elgin.

August's practical business sense led him to help oversee Elgin Wind and Power, where he would serve as Vice President for many years before handing the reins to his son, Emil.



August Nolting, Vice-President of Elgin Wind and Power

Mr. Nolting spent the next 46 years helping Elgin grow as a community. He and his wife Sophia raised six of their seven children in Elgin, many of whom would go on to do great things for Elgin. His son, Emil, married Mayor Grote's daughter and worked as president of Elgin Wind and Power in the early 1920s. His son Julius operated West Side Hardware. His son Frederick received an award from the City of Elgin for his civil service.

It would be August's granddaughter, Myrtle Spiegler, who supported the Elgin Historical Society in her role as Elgin's first female City Clerk. She worked for the

city for a total of 34 years, 12 as City Clerk. The Society meant so much to her that she chose to celebrate her 90th birthday in Old Main.

August celebrated his 93rd birthday in Elgin as well, recounting the journey and determination he took to help make Elgin a better place.

John McLean, Pioneer Dairyman

by David Siegenthaler

Though Elgin's pre-eminence in the dairy industry ended over 100 years ago, there was a time when Elgin was as well known for its dairy products as it was for its watches. One of the earliest and most influential leaders in Elgin's dairy industry was John McLean (1812-81). In addition to his numerous dairy interests, John established an "old settlers" association that held annual reunions for over 100 years; he was a road commissioner; a township trustee; a school director; a justice of the peace; and an active member of the First Methodist Church. Today his name lives on in the name of one of Elgin's busiest thoroughfares – McLean Boulevard.

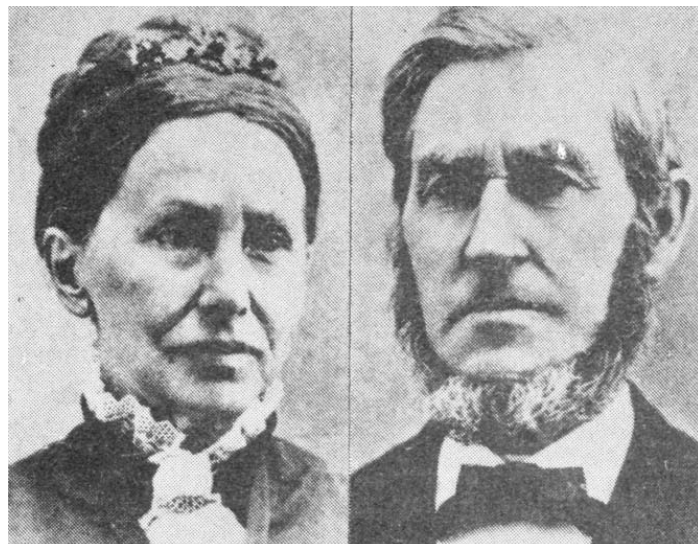
John Remer McLean, born August 18, 1812 in Benton, Yates County, New York, was one of seven children of John Armstrong and Jane V. (Remer) McLean. Beginning in his late teens he was active in the Methodist Church in nearby Dresden, serving a total of 11 years as class leader, steward and trustee. On December 31, 1835, John married Caroline Augusta Hurd of Starkey, New York. Caroline, born April 2, 1813, was one of nine children of General Timothy and Mabel (Booth) Hurd. On June 11, 1839 in Benton, New York, John and Caroline had their first child, Jane Missouri ("Jennie").

In the summer of 1842 John joined the great tide of immigration to the West. He first arrived in Elgin in August 1842, and on September 23, 1842, purchased 80 acres of land from the government. His plot of land was defined as the eastern half of the northwest quarter of section 15 in Elgin Township. Following his purchase, John returned to New York and in the spring of 1843 came back to Elgin with his wife and daughter. It is likely that John chose Elgin because his wife Caroline's sister Jeannette was already living here. Jeannette had married Henry Sherman (namesake of Elgin's Sherman Hospital) and in 1838 they had settled on a large farm about a mile southwest of the McLean farm.

In 1843 John built a log cabin for his family and proceeded to farm his land, raising grain and vegetables. Farming for the pioneers was a precarious and strenuous occupation, due to, among other things, the difficulties in transporting their produce to market.

Though Elgin-area farmers had a large market only 40 miles away in Chicago, in the 1840s 40 miles could be an arduous journey. Hauling grain to Chicago by wagon required three or four days for a round trip in good weather, and often five or six in bad. Roads were often muddy or rutted and prying wagons out of mud and ruts was a back-breaking chore. Lodging costs along the way ate up much of their profits.

On March 25, 1848, John and Caroline had their second child, Mary Jeanette. By now the log cabin was getting crowded and John began building a frame home on their property. It would be completed in 1849, in time for the birth of their third and final child, John Timothy, born December 11, 1849.



John and Caroline McLean

In 1851, John's 80 acres was enlarged to about 100 acres when he purchased about 20 acres from his neighbor to the south, Cyrus Larkin. Larkin sold him the portion of his land north of the state highway (Larkin Ave.) which was adjacent to the southern boundary of the McLean farm. The eastern boundary of both farms became the road today known as McLean Blvd. From 1851-92 the McLean farm was bounded on the east by McLean Blvd., the south by Larkin Ave., the north by what today would be the northern end of Hoxie, Sexauer, Triggs and Heine avenues, and the west by what today would be Hoxie Ave. and Jane Drive.

In 1850 the railroad reached Elgin's east side from Chicago, and the following year it reached Elgin's west side. Prior to the railroad, the McLean home, at the southwest corner of McLean Blvd. and Highland Ave., served as a roadside inn for stagecoach travelers on the old Chicago-to-Galena road.

The arrival of the railroad revolutionized farming in the area. Farmers took advantage of the potential the railroad offered for bringing their produce to market in Chicago in a much quicker and more profitable manner. For the first time, shipping perishable fresh milk to Chicago was possible. The first can of milk shipped to Chicago from Elgin was in 1852. By the late 1850s

many Elgin farmers, including John McLean, had switched from grain to dairy farming, with a large milk-hungry market now just hours away, thanks to the railroad.

The success of Elgin's milk trade in Chicago encouraged more farmers to jump on the dairy bandwagon and soon the supply of milk frequently exceeded demand. This gave rise to cooperative cheese and butter factories, called creameries, beginning in the mid-1860s. The cheese and butter was sold to Chicago commission men, who would often use deceptive practices to re-sell the cheese and butter at much higher prices than were paid to the local producers. The discontent of the local dairymen led to the organization of the Elgin Board of Trade in 1872 by the owners of 19 creameries. John McLean was vice president for the first year and secretary for the four succeeding years.

The Elgin Board of Trade was successful beyond expectations. It was dominated by producers, who used it to eliminate the middle man. Instead of sellers trying to find a reliable market, the buyers would come to Elgin. The board not only provided a fair and stable market, it also established rigid grading standards. "Elgin cheese" and "Elgin butter" became as widely known as the New York products, and their excellence was proven by the equal or higher prices they commanded. By the mid-1880s, the Elgin Board of Trade was the monitor to which a large portion of the country looked for prices on cheese and butter. Elgin's central position in the dairy industry reached its peak in the 1890s, when the Elgin Board of Trade had 300 members representing nearly 500 creameries.

In addition to John McLean's five years as an officer of the Elgin Board of Trade, he assisted in organizing the Dairymen's Horticultural and Agricultural Society in the 1860s; he was an active member of the Northwestern Dairymen's Association; he was president of the Illinois State Dairymen's Association two years; and at the time of his death he was president of the Elgin Dairymen's and Farmers' Club.

In the summer of 1868 John and his wife Caroline were invited to a picnic of early settlers in McHenry County. They were impressed with the huge gathering and John was determined to organize a similar event for Kane County. He promoted the idea to many influential Elgin men and got an encouraging response. The following summer the first Old Settlers Association of the Fox Valley picnic was held and it continued to be an annual event in Elgin for 103 years. The last one took place in 1971. John's descendants continued to promote the association and, as late as the 1940s, his grandchildren – Helen Hewitt and Rev. Clare Hewitt – served as presidents.

Among John's other civic services, he was a road commissioner in Illinois for 11 years and a justice of the peace for eight years. He passed away June 5, 1881 at age 68 of Bright's disease of the kidneys. His wife Caroline passed away at age 82 on June 25, 1895.

John and Caroline's first-born child, Jane ("Jennie") (1839-1924), married Darius Hewitt (1833-1907) on November 13, 1862. Darius' parents had moved from New York to a farm west of Dundee in 1839. He and Jennie were among the founders of the Grace Methodist Church in the early 1880s, and would continue to be among its most active members throughout their lives. Two of their children, Helen Hewitt and Rev. Clare Hewitt, devoted much of their lives to the church – Helen as a missionary in Mexico, and Clare as a minister. Their only other child, Mrs. J. Stillman Badger, lived in Australia.

John and Caroline's middle child, Mary Jeanette (1848-1920), married John Howard Kelley (1846-1910) on October 18, 1871. John Kelley had a large farm just west of Pingree Grove where he raised grain, Holstein dairy cattle and thoroughbred horses. He and Mary had five children: Lynn, Jennie, Mabel, Howard and Dwight.

John Timothy McLean (1849-1923) married Ida Kee (1858-1929) on April 6, 1881. Ida, who was born on a farm near Dundee and graduated from Elgin High School in 1875, taught in Elgin public schools before her marriage. In the early 1880s John and Ida were instrumental in the founding of the Grace Methodist Church. John and Ida had four children: Ida Grace McEwan (1884-1960); John Richard (died of cholera in October 1886 at about a month old); Ruth Eleanor (1892-1981); and Helen Hurd (1894-1936). Ida Grace worked at the Gail Borden Public Library from about 1900-20. She and her husband Robert lived in Elgin till 1951, when they moved to Michigan. Ruth was a teacher and an assistant principal at Glenbard High School in Glen Ellyn for over 40 years. Helen worked at the YWCA, the David C. Cook Publishing Co. and, from 1931-36, was the head of reference at the Gail Borden Public Library.

John Timothy continued to operate the McLean dairy farm after his dad's death in 1881. In 1892, however, he sold the 40 acres of the farm lying north of Highland Ave. to H. J. Stelford, a developer, who subdivided it and placed it on the market as the Columbia Park Addition. By 1910 the McLean farm was reduced to about 20 acres after several more small pieces were sold off. John Timothy died June 24, 1923, at his home, "Willowmac," in the same room in which he was born. The home continued to be occupied by members of the McLean family until 1951. In 1998 the 149-year-old McLean family homestead was razed. In 2003 an Amcore Bank (now BMO Harris Bank) was built on the site.

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; "Autobiographies of Fox Valley Pioneers" (1981); obituaries; Kane County Clerk's website; Kane County histories; city directories; Kane County Recorder's website; Elgin Township plat maps; etc.

Advertising Elgin



The website [Chicagoist.com](http://chicagoist.com), in 2006, posted a question asking why the old clocks at the downtown Metra stations and Union Station say "Elgin Central Time?"

The clocks in Metra stations and on the front of Union Station are advertisements for the

Elgin National Watch Company.

Elgin was most famous for manufacturing railroad watches, which met the railroad's written standard of reliable time service. To meet the stringent demands of the railroads, where the incorrect time could prove disastrous, American watchmakers began making a watch that was incredibly reliable and more accurate than any watch previously made. Railroad watches were produced between 1890 and 1940. They would lose no more than 30 seconds per week and were specially adjusted to keep accurate time no matter what position in which they were held, and in cold weather and hot. Only certain watches met the standards and were authorized for use by railroad conductors and engineers. Most railroad watches were sold to regular consumers. The clocks in the Metra and Union stations just served to advertise that all the trains of the station were running according to the exacting standards of the Elgin Railroad Watch.

See http://chicagoist.com/2006/02/03/ask_chicagoist_who_cares_what_time_it_is_in_elgin.php for the complete posting.

IL Give Day is November 28

Kim Bauer, Museum Media Coordinator



This year is the Elgin History Museum's 30th anniversary of operation. Every day that we open our doors to the public is a new opportunity for those in Elgin's present to meet with Elgin's past. To connect with people who are interested in history, and provide that service to you, is incredibly humbling and something we

do not take for granted.

That said, the Elgin History Museum is far from the only organization in town providing a sense of community through arts and culture. Sometimes people think Elgin's greatest days are over, gone with the closed doors of Woolworth's and other downtown businesses of yesteryear, but when I meet people or go to events, I see something totally different. I see a thriving community in places like the Elgin Fringe Festival creating welcoming places for artists of all kinds, the Autumn Harvest literally bringing people into the streets to gather and enjoy one another's company for a good cause, or homeowners welcoming the public into their home through the Gifford Park Association's annual historic house tour.

Elgin's history is its greatest asset. It is a city that has reinvented itself time and again, moving from being dairyland to a bustling river town to a national hub for manufacturing and is now known for its deep connection to its arts and culture.

On this upcoming Giving Tuesday, please don't forget about all the organizations that make this city great. Your contribution helps local groups make lasting impacts on the place we all love and call home, Elgin. Every dollar donated can help make history happen, whether it be through the arts, music, or storytelling, and for that we thank you.

To give on Illinois Giving Day, go to <https://www.ilgive.com/>. Our goal this year is to attract as many new donors as possible, so if you have not given to ILGive before, please help us out by signing up this year!

We welcome donations from our generous donors of years past as well. Thank you!

Nancy Kimball House Stone Wall Party

Help celebrate the completion of the first step in renovating the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, 302 West Chicago Street, at 1:00 P.M. on Saturday, November 4, 2017. Master Mason John Crowe will set the final stone in the new cobblestone wall he built on the north side of the 1846 historic home. This event marks a major milestone for the Save the Cobblestone, Build the Neighborhood project. The Elgin History Museum, along with the City of Elgin and the Near West Neighbors Association, started working in 2015 to create a plan to save the cobblestone. In 2016 the north wall and part of the east wall were demolished. A concrete foundation and footing were poured to support a new wall. Working by himself, John Crowe started patching extensive holes on the inside founda-

tion late last year and then in 2017 began building the wall using the original cobblestones. Next steps for interior renovation began fall 2017.

Nancy Kimball, as portrayed by Elgin resident Linda Rock, will be on hand to greet people visiting her home under construction and say a few words as the final stone is set. Supporters will be recognized. Light refreshments will be served and tours of the first floor of the house will be available. Help the community to celebrate this achievement in renovating the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House.



North and east walls of Cobblestone House showing cobblestone rebuild underway.

Celebrating Illinois' 200th Birthday

On December 3, 2018 Illinois will celebrate its 200th birthday. The Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) has developed a program to observe this special occasion. An ISHS donor family has provided for small commemorative trees to be planted in each of Illinois' 102 counties. These trees are descendants of apple trees planted in Illinois in the early days of the 19th century by John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed).

Fresh scionwood from an original tree was used to grow 102 Johnny Appleseed trees for planting throughout Illinois. The ISHS offer these trees on a first-come, first-served basis. The Elgin History Museum has obtained a tree designated for Kane County through

the generosity of Carl and Mary Ellen Flaks, who were kind enough to purchase the Kane County Bicentennial Apple Tree for planting at the Museum. A formal ceremony commemorating Illinois' bicentennial will take place December 3, 2018. Thanks to City of Elgin staff who planted the State of Illinois Bicentennial Apple Tree on October 25, east of the cannons.



City of Elgin staff planting the Bicentennial Apple Tree at the Museum.

Shop the Museum Store for Holiday Gifts

This year, in time for the holidays, we will have Christmas cards featuring cover artwork from *The Watch Word*, the employees' magazine of the Elgin National Watch Company.

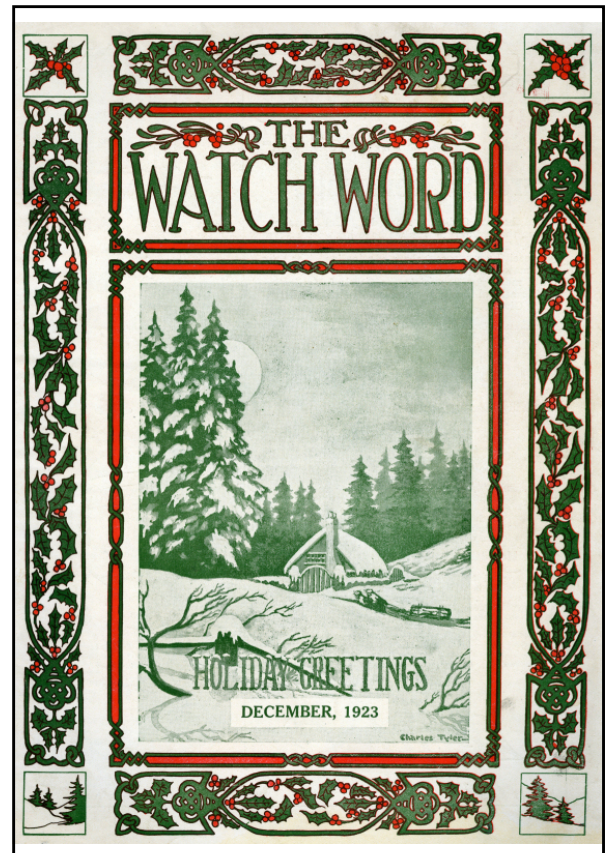
We also have some new magnets, a bookmark featuring the Parisienne Art Deco ladies' watch made by the Elgin National Watch Company, and some new and unique jewelry made by Mary Pierce from salvaged watch parts. No two pieces are exactly alike. Mary's jewelry is quite popular so come in soon for the best selection.

Shop online at <https://elginhistory.org/shop/> or stop by the store during Museum hours.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Front and Back of the Parisienne Bookmark



Watch Word Christmas Card