

# The Crackerbarrel



## Elgin History Museum News November 2020

### President's Report

*Al Walters, President*



If it is November, it must be Gala time at the Elgin History Museum. In recent years as the Gala has expanded in popularity, it has outgrown venues to become an annual tradition for many. The Gala has morphed into an evening to enjoy friends and family, a meal, a few drinks and historically themed entertainment. In our family, it seems to kick off the holiday season. Best of all, most attendees leave the event knowing their generosity supports the important mission of the Museum to collect, display and interpret Elgin's remarkable history for the young and old alike.

In this difficult year of 2020, you can guess that this year's gala will be different. Gone for now is the large social gathering and dinner. In its place is a Virtual Gala, to be enjoyed in the comfort and safety of your own home. The Program Committee has worked diligently to transfer the Gala from a banquet hall to your home computer.

Please plan on joining the Gala via Zoom on Saturday, November 7 at 7:00 PM. Sign-on details are included elsewhere in this issue. More information is available on the Museum's website. Members should have received a formal invitation in the mail by now. But this is not an invitation-only event. Please invite your friends to join our virtual party. You don't even have to dress up!

The Gala will last about an hour and feature traditional fundraising activities such as the silent auction (beginning Nov. 4) and the popular mystery wine bag/gift card purchase. There will be an update on this year's Museum activity, board election results, and a chance to view newly created videos.

However you choose to support the Museum, please know we are grateful for all you do and donate. We hope you can join us on November 7. It won't be a party without you!

### Online Gala and Auction

Though the pandemic prevents us from meeting in person for the annual gala and benefit, you get the chance, no matter where you are the first week of November, to bid on donated auction items as part of the Museum's online 2020 Gala. All of the items offered for auction may be viewed on the Museum website. Notable items include a getaway at The Abbey resort in Fontana Wisconsin, and a week-long stay in Fish Creek, Door County. There are also gift baskets, a golf package and much more. Bidding starts at 8 A.M. Nov. 4 and ends at 7:30 P.M. Nov. 7. The winners will be announced the night of November 7 during the virtual Gala presentation. To view auction items, and register for the online auction and virtual gala, visit [elginhistory.org](http://elginhistory.org). More information, including event sponsorship options, will be available as the date approaches. Thank you to those who donated the items and thanks in advance for your participation in this (hopefully) once-in-a-lifetime virtual event!

The poster features a blue background with a gold confetti border at the top. In the center is the Elgin History Museum logo, which includes a building illustration and the text 'ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM'. Below the logo, the text '2020 ZOOM GALA & ONLINE AUCTION' is written in large, bold, gold letters. Surrounding this central text are four gold-bordered boxes containing the following items: 'GOLF PACKAGE', 'GETAWAY AT ABBEY RESORT IN LAKE GENEVA', 'AMAZING GIFT BASKETS', and 'WEEK LONG STAY AT FISH CREEK DOOR COUNTY'. At the bottom, the date and time 'NOVEMBER 7, 2020 AT 7PM' are displayed in white, followed by the phrase 'From the comfort of your own home!' in a gold script font.

## The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society  
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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline December 20, 2020

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

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

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## December 13 (Tentative, details TBD)

### Cobblestone Celebration program

Highlighting the progress made on the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone rehabilitation. Check [elginhistory.org/events](http://elginhistory.org/events) for details.

## Cobblestone House Virtual Tour

[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10157334042841366&id=151739836365&sfnsn=mo&extid=af8Jd1uVlwU2dc6E](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10157334042841366&id=151739836365&sfnsn=mo&extid=af8Jd1uVlwU2dc6E)

## Welcome New Members

- Pita Betancourt
- Bruce and Char Carey
- Siobhan and Peter Cottone
- Virginia Horan
- Patricia Sekowski

## Thank You Donors

### Memorials

Marge Krueger in memory of Al Mink	Dann and Nancy Farquhar in memory of Karen Mathews
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### In memory of Don Pielin

David Bellamy	Lucy and Mark Elliott
Edward Fitzgerald	Jen Fukala
Lillian Krmpotich	Lisa Schwalbe

### General Donations

Barry and Andrea Danielson	Amanda Carlson
Marianne Gilliam in honor of Dolores Nelson	Linda Rock

### Grants

EFS Foundation  
Grand Victoria Foundation  
Elgin Community Network

### Cemetery Walk

The virtual Cemetery Walk was a big hit this year! Over 2,000 people viewed the video and donated a total of more than \$1,000. Thank you to Sponsors, too. These businesses really made it possible for the Cemetery Walk to continue.

## 2020 Program Schedule

*Betsy Armistead, Program Chair*

**NOTE:** In-person events are tentative due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Check the website for current information. [elginhistory.org/events](http://elginhistory.org/events)

**Every third Saturday of the month, beginning in August, 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M.: Spanish language tours of the Museum**

**Ira Marcus: "Art in Artifacts" photography exhibit**

**Saturday November 7, 5:30 P.M.:**

**Annual Benefit Virtual Gala and Auction, held online**

See Page 1 for details.

**Saturday December 5, 1:00 P.M. Virtual Holiday Tea**



Virtual program to be presented over Zoom. See [elginhistory.org](http://elginhistory.org) for the link.

The fascinating real life story of The Night Before Christmas chimes to life as told by Martina Mathisen, along with the stories of our American Christmas traditions, including why we kiss under a mistletoe and decorate with poinsettias.

And where did the jolly old man in the red suit come from anyway?

## Sponsors

EFS Foundation	Friends for Anna Moeller
Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham	Dennis and Laurie Roxworthy
St. Charles Memorial Works, Inc.	O'Connor-Leetz Funeral Home
Symonds-Madison Funeral Home	City of Elgin
Countryside Funeral Homes & Crematory	Laird Funeral Home/Wait Ross Funerals

## Cemetery Walk Donors

Joan Albert	Carol Anderson
Jim and Sara Ellen Anderson	Donald Bak
Wendy Breitmeyer	William Briska
Mark Butcher	Rita Corbett
Jannell Fannin	Terry Gabel/Sue Brigham
Janet Gohl	Wayne Heinmiller
Michele Machowicz	Charlene Martin
Donald Malzahn	Tamara Markl
Sandi and Dennis McClure	Hollie Myers
Don Nish	Kate O'Leary
Randy Pahl	Richard Payne
Sue Peterson	Linda Schabelski
Skulski, Sandra	Brynn Speh
Summers, Candace	Sally Stack
Gail Talbot	Jerry Turnquist
Jim Turner	Gil Walsh
Matt Walters	Cheryl Wilkins

# Remembering Don Pielin

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*



We are saddened to report that longtime board member and volunteer Don Pielin passed away in October. Husband, Father, Brother, Uncle, Friend, Teacher, Geographer, Historian, Collector, Guide, Homebrewer, Wiseman—these are the words describing Don in his obituary. He was all of that, and also a non-profit board member, community

activist, historical interpreter, volunteer, and artist.

Don started volunteering at the Elgin History Museum in 2004 in conjunction with Elgin's Sesqui-centennial Celebration and the first Elgin History Fair. As a retired teacher, Don was interested in working with students, particularly in museum education. He served as an Education Docent for more than 10 years, and also joined the Elgin History Museum Board of Directors in 2008.

*From Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator:* I worked with Don at the Elgin History Museum. I enjoyed the days when our paths would cross. He was such a delightful man and I really enjoyed seeing him work with the school groups. I remember one day when he arrived at the Museum to help with a 3rd grade field trip and I said "Oh Don, thank goodness you're here! You're the only one that knows how to do this special part!" He gave me a quiz-zical look, laughed and said "I've never done this part before in my life! But, well, let's see how it goes!" And he did it, and it was great. It was always great and the kids felt his enthusiasm and knowledge on whatever the topic. I'll truly miss working with him.



Don had many interests! He was an avid beer brewer and taster. He researched past breweries in Elgin, such as the Althen Eagle Brew. Don wrote a pamphlet on beer history in Elgin and presented programs on the topic. His research was included in the Museum's exhibits of the pre-temperance era. He also took us to a couple of great beer shows for some tasting.

Don was also an artist specializing in miniature toy soldiers, but he worked on any miniature, not just soldiers. He and his brother created a mesmerizing diorama of Shiloh, giving viewers a 3D version of the skirmish that killed Sam Ward, an Elgin Civil War hero. Don also created a diorama of the contraband arriving at the train station in Elgin in 1862. It accompanied the Project 2-3-1 traveling exhibit. Don also collected toys and helped others find new homes for their antique pieces.



He was also interested in architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright. Don was a docent for the FLW House Walk for years in Oak Park.

The Pielin family purchased a building at 8 Douglas Avenue in downtown Elgin in 2012.

Don's wife Linda and daughter Betsy opened the wonderful Elgin Knit Works shop on the ground floor. Don researched the building and that section of downtown to understand the building changes over time. Don was an active member of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, and helped organize many events patronizing the businesses there.

As a Museum board member, Don helped with every event and program held when he was in town, especially the History Fair. He often contributed good beer to the refreshments, which everyone appreciated. Thanks to Don for helping generation of students to understand the world that came before them. We are all missing Don's genuine smile and obvious enjoyment in Elgin history.



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## Old Main Improvements

The Museum, Gifford Park Association, the Elgin Heritage Commission and all people who love Elgin architecture, commend the City of Elgin for the improvements made to Old Main in 2020. Thanks to the leadership of City of Elgin Maintenance Superintendent, Rich Hoke, and his team including Vanessa, Jim, Enrique, Amber, George, Joseph, Glen, and others, the Museum building received love and care. Old Main's bricks from the 1850s were tuckpointed, the stucco was repaired and painted and all the trim painted, even the window frames and the cupola! All exterior lighting on the ground and on the building roof was replaced. Drive by sometime at night, the new lights are very bright! All of the heating and ventilation systems were replaced with high efficiency units. The City replaced the chain link fence with re-purposed Bluff City Cemetery fencing that has been repaired and painted. The west and north doors are being replaced with new, but historically correct doors. Even the cracked and broken limestone door sill is being replaced—not an easy task.



*Painting the Cupola*

A new electrical outlet has been added to the orientation space on the first floor. Many thanks to the Maintenance Department and their contractors, F. H. Paschen, Celtic Painting, Seyller's (tuck-pointing), Crossroad Construction, Trico Mechanical (HVAC), and Carmichael Construction.

But, that's not all...many thanks to Mike Adams, the new Land Management Crew Leader at Lords Park, and Jason Platt, Crew Leader, Forestry and Sports

Complex, both for the City of Elgin. Jason and a crew of workers cut and cleared the big catalpa tree in front of Old Main that blew over in July. Mike and his team repaired the red brick sidewalk, planted a young catalpa tree, and repaired the garden bed for the Elgin Garden Club to re-plant. The Elgin History Museum continues to thrive as a partner with the City of Elgin. It takes a village to keep Old Main looking and operating at its best.



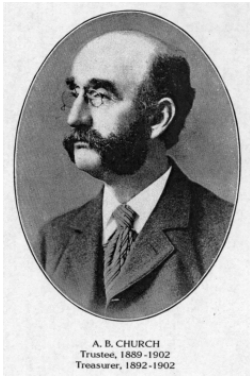
*Walkway damage before repair*

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## The Church Family of Elgin

*by David Siegenthaler*

The first Church family members, Caleb and Samuel, came to Elgin in 1865 with the establishment of Gail Borden's milk condensing plant. The condensing plant itself was located in Elgin due to the influence of Emeline Church Borden, the third wife of Gail Borden. Emeline, widow of Hiram Church, had previously lived in Aurora and knew of the growing dairy industry in the Elgin area. The condensing plant grew steadily and by 1890 it was one of the largest condensing factories in the world, employing nearly 200 persons. Gail Borden bought a home in Elgin and intended to move here but died in Texas in January 1874. Emeline and her son and daughter-in-law, Alfred and Mary Church, moved into the home at 378 Division St. Alfred and Mary built the Queen Anne next door at 364 Division St. in 1886-87. These two homes still stand, but have long ago been converted into a church and a funeral home, respectively.



Possibly the wealthiest man in Elgin of his day, Alfred B. Church, along with his brother Samuel M. Church, presented Elgin Township with a home at 50 N. Spring St. for use as a library, provided that it was named in honor of their stepfather, Gail Borden. The home, extensively remodeled and enlarged, was opened in 1894 and served as a library until 1968.

This building, still standing with Gail Borden's name prominently displayed above the main entrance, has effectively perpetuated the memory of their stepfather for the last 126 years, even though the library has moved twice since outgrowing this original site.



*Gail Borden Library on Spring Street*

Alfred and Mary Church's philanthropies were legendary. Among the biggest recipients of their generosity were the YWCA (for whom they donated a building site), YMCA, Gail Borden Public Library and Elgin Academy. Avoiding publicity as much as possible, the Church's funded the education of dozens of young men and quietly supplied food to countless destitute families.

Hiram Church (1797-1857) was born in Vernon, Oneida County, New York. In 1838 he married Emeline Eunice Eno in Connecticut. Emeline (1808-90) was born July 26, 1808, in Colebrook, Litchfield County, Connecticut. The couple had two children, both born in Vernon, New York: Samuel Mills Church (1842-1902) and Alfred B. Church (1844-1911). Hiram's family came west in 1856 and settled in Aurora, where Hiram had visited as a young man in 1835. Hiram died November 29, 1857, and Emeline and her two sons returned to Connecticut. There she married, on August 16, 1860, Gail Borden (1801-74), the twice-widowed, 58-year-old inventor of a milk condensing process, for which he was granted a patent in 1856. In 1858, Mr. Borden founded the New York Condensed Milk Co.

The condensed milk business grew slowly at first, but quickly became very profitable when the Civil War began and Union armies couldn't get enough of it. Additional condensing factories were built in the New York and Connecticut region. Emeline told her husband of the thriving Midwest dairy center of Elgin. In 1865, Mr. Borden opened a condensing plant here, in a converted tannery building. The Civil War ended a month before the Elgin plant opened, but by then condensed milk had become widely known and accepted.

Caleb C. Church (1807-93), brother of Hiram, married Clarissa Norton (1812-98) in New York in 1831. The couple, who had no children, came west about 1853 and settled in Chicago, then moved to Rockton, Illinois, when a cholera epidemic hit Chicago. They came to Elgin in 1865, where Caleb became superintendent of the Elgin Milk Condensing Co. For the remainder of his life, Caleb held positions of responsibility with the company, which was reorganized as the Illinois Condensed Milk Co. in 1868. Caleb died at age 86 on November 23, 1893, and is buried in Bluff City Cemetery.

Samuel Mills Church, son of Hiram and Emeline, was born in August 1842. He came to Elgin in 1865 to work for his Uncle Caleb at the milk condensing plant. Poor eyesight and health issues led to his early retirement and in the mid-1870s he returned to the east, where he spent the rest of his life in Brewster, New York. An heir to the Borden fortune, Samuel, like his brother Alfred in Elgin, took great pleasure in quietly aiding those less fortunate than himself. Samuel never married and died at age 59 on March 30, 1902, in Brewster, New York, where he is buried.

Alfred B. Church, the younger son of Hiram and Emeline, was born May 10, 1844. He married Mary E. Peterson (1842-1915) of Rockton, Illinois, on October 11, 1871. Alfred came to Elgin about 1868 to work as a bookkeeper for the milk condensing company, joining his Uncle Caleb and brother Samuel. In 1871, Alfred was promoted to superintendent of the condensing company, a position he held until 1877, when he left the firm to enter the real estate business.

About 1880, Alfred became a partner—and probably a major financial backer—of William Grote in a real estate investment business. In 1884, they formed, with two other associates, the Elgin Improvement Association, which bought vacant land and subdivided it into residential and commercial lots and factory sites. The partners prospered by offering businesses a free site, and often a building as well, and then selling the lots around the factory to their employees. Manufacturers attracted to Elgin by this arrangement included, on the northeast side, the Ludlow shoe factory, the Cutter & Crossette shirt factory and the Illinois Watch Case factory; and, on the southwest side, the Elgin Silver Plate factory (casket hardware). In addition, the partners established a streetcar line (the Elgin City Railway



Co.) in 1890 to provide transportation from the factories to Fountain Square. Grote was the president and Church the treasurer.

Grote and Church were also builders. In 1881 they put up a building at 50-56 Douglas Ave., in which the Jennings House hotel occupied the 2nd- and 3rd-floors. There was no bar in the building, which was razed in 1965, because Grote and Church were opposed to liquor. In 1886, Alfred Church built an attractive brownstone and brick business building that is still standing at 23 Douglas Ave.

Alfred was a corporate officer of two local banks and the streetcar line. A major Borden stockholder, he also was a director of the Seybold Piano & Organ Co., the Elgin Lumber Co., the South Elgin Stone Co., the YMCA and the Old People's Home. He was a trustee of Elgin Academy from 1889-1902, and treasurer from 1892-1902. At various times he served as president of the library board and as a member of the board of education. From 1895-97, he served two terms as city treasurer.

Alfred and Mary had two children: Mary Borden Church (1875-76) died at 16 months; and Alfred Whiting Church (1877-1953). In 1874, Alfred and Mary moved into the home at 378 Division St., with Alfred's mother Emeline. They lived there until 1887, when they moved next door to their imposing new mansion at 364 Division St. In early 1903, however, the Church's surprisingly announced that they planned to sell their home and leave the state. Alfred believed his personal property tax assessment was unreasonable. Unlike those who underreported or did not list their holdings of securities, Alfred declared on his tax form his Borden stock, which was assessed at \$760,000. He resented the fact that the tax, more than \$10,000, was a good part of the income derived from the stock and therefore confiscatory. The Church's moved to New York City, where Alfred died at age 67 on December 18, 1911. His wife Mary died at age 71 on April 2, 1915, at her son's home in Port Chester, New York. The bodies of Alfred and Mary were returned to Elgin for burial in Bluff City Cemetery.

Alfred and Mary's son, Alfred ("Fred") Whiting Church, was born May 18, 1877. Educated at Elgin Academy, Fred was engaged in the automobile business in New York state prior to becoming associated with the Star Watch Case Co. of Elgin. In 1905 this firm moved to Ludington, Michigan, where Fred lived for many years. Fred and his wife Elsie were divorced in 1923. Sometime in the 1930s, he married Edith Willson (1888-1980). There is no record of any children. Fred died at age 76 on August 22, 1953, in Camden, South Carolina.

*Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; obituaries and other newspaper articles; Kane County histories; Elgin city directories; federal censuses; Ancestry.com; etc.*



*The Church home at 364 Division St.*

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## Virtual Cemetery Walk

*Rudy and Lillian Galfi,  
Cemetery Walk Co-Chairs*

This year's walk was a virtual experience, due to the pandemic regulations imposed upon the state.

The video was available for streaming from September 27 until October 4, 2020. Many people watched the video and donated as well, so the Walk was a success although it was not our standard event.

Bluff City Cemetery is the third municipal cemetery in Elgin's history, dedicated on Sept. 8, 1889.

The 108 acres for the cemetery, located at 945 Bluff City Boulevard, were purchased in 1888 for \$11,000, with an additional \$3,000 spent on improvements.

Bluff City Cemetery has over 72,000 burials. Many individuals important to Fox Valley history are present in the cemetery including monuments, as well as small and simple ones.

Grave markers dated prior to 1889 were moved from Elgin's second cemetery, Channing Cemetery.

Elgin holds its annual observance of Memorial Day at the cemetery. Every military grave is adorned with a small American flag, and for the week prior to Memorial Day, more than 500 oversized American flags line the roads, purchased by families of military servicemen and women.

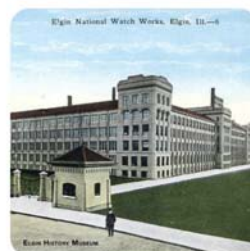
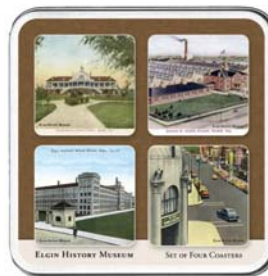
The central Spire monument is inscribed with the names of Civil War casualties and was moved to its current location from the Channing Street Cemetery.

Visitors interested in nature can also walk through Bluff Spring Fen, a 160-acre nature preserve with wetland habitats, prairie, and hiking trails. The Museum's book about the cemetery, *Silent City*, is available in the Museum Store. A short video is available at <https://youtu.be/Vw9J5nmVneE>



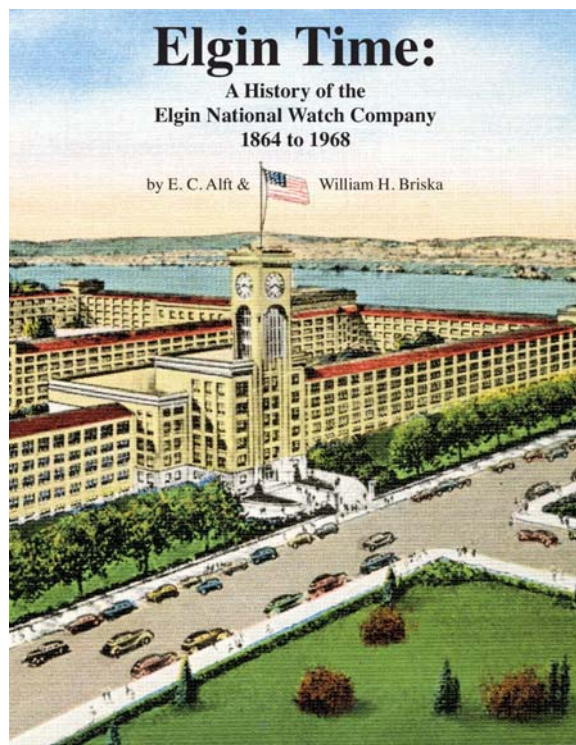
# New Items in the Museum Store

The Elgin History Museum is pleased to offer some new Elgin-inspired items in the Museum Store, just in time for holiday gift shopping. These items and the other goods in the Museum Store may also be purchased online through the Museum website.



*New coaster set of 6 Elgin designs, \$12.99*

Two different new Elgin Watch porcelain ornaments are being offered, inspired by Elgin pocket watches on loan from the White-Rock collection. Members get a discount on all Museum Store merchandise.



*Made in Elgin magnet, \$3.00, and a new edition of Elgin Time book is also available.*



*Pink Watch Ornament, \$12.99*

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM  
360 PARK STREET  
ELGIN, IL 60120



*Blue Watch Ornament, \$12.99*

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## You Are Living History

The purpose of the You Are Living History Project is to collect stories and items related to events in Elgin. In 100 years if the Museum wants to do an exhibit on what happened in 2020, there will be resources available. Please click here to go to the Museum website <https://elginhistory.org/research/you-are-living-history/> and answer

one or more of the prompts about your experiences in 2020. We also accept submissions mailed to the Museum.

We have received almost 400 digital images, artwork, a face shield, and a church program for a parking lot worship service. Items that reflect 2020 can be mailed or dropped off at the Museum, 360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120.

The submissions were helpful to Museum summer intern, Muskaan Siddique, when she created a PowerPoint highlighting the COVID-19 crisis in regard to public health, economics, and social justice. The You Are Living History PowerPoint is on exhibit at the Museum.



*Symonds Funeral Home, 2020*