President’s Report
Al Walters, President

If it is May, it must be Preservation Month in Elgin! For these 31 days the City, many organizations and involved individuals focus on Elgin's remarkable history, neighborhoods, culture and architecture. If you can’t find an interesting event, commemoration or open house to attend, you’re not trying!

Hand in hand with Preservation Month are the annual Mayor's Awards, presented by Mayor David Kaptain to institutions and citizens whose efforts enhance the understanding of local heritage and support cultural experiences in Elgin. I’m proud to say the Elgin History Museum, including friends, supporters and volunteers, are well represented this year. Recipients include:

George Rowe: A former Museum president, George is being awarded the George Van de Voorde Outstanding Service Award for more than 20 years dedicated to supporting the Museum and Elgin history as a volunteer and leader. No project was too big or too small for George to tackle. Best of all, we know he is not done volunteering yet.

Paul Spiller: A professional plumber in town, Paul is received a Mayor's Award for donating his time and talent to install all plumbing for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House renovation. Many thanks, Paul.

Rudy and Lillian Galifi: As co-chairs of the Museum’s annual Bluff City Cemetery Walk, they earned their Mayor’s Award by quickly shifting gears last summer to deliver a virtual Cemetery Walk in place of the Covid-cancelled in-person event. Right after the Cemetery Walk, the Galifi’s were able to create a way to share the Museum’s annual gala online. Rudy and Lillian made a tough task look easy and quickly shifted the events to a virtual audience.

Ira Marcus: An amateur photographer with professional skills, Ira shares his photography talents with the Museum in many ways. His Mayor’s Award recognizes his “Art and Artifacts: Where History Meets Art” exhibit. By viewing Museum artifacts through his lens, Ira blends color, perspective and creativity into photographs currently on view at the Museum, alongside the subject piece.

Elgin History Museum Staff: Our dedicated staff earned yet another Mayor’s Award, this time for the ongoing “You Are Living History” project. The project documents for posterity the challenges faced by Elginites living through a pandemic by collecting their real time stories.

We also wish to offer congratulations to several friends of the Museum. Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham earned a Mayor’s Award for their volunteerism and leadership with Friends of the Lords Park Zoo organization. And, hats off to the Elgin Public Museum for picking up a Mayor’s Award for their “Centennial Project and Exhibit” celebrating their first 100 years.

I never cease to be amazed by the width and breadth of the talent that surrounds the Elgin History Museum. No matter the task or need, there is always a skilled volunteer who steps forward and says, “I can do that.”
Making Space: A Mural and Documentary

The Elgin History Museum is partnering with the Elgin Social Justice Collective as part of the ongoing You Are Living History project. It started as a way to alert the City of Elgin that the Museum had collected some of the board-up artwork to tell the story of the 2020 protests and economic downturn. The Museum was asked to be the fiscal sponsor for a larger effort to create a mural where American Nocturne was located in the downtown pocket park. The mural grew into a documentary that would record the recent history of the 2020 pandemic, but also discuss racial equity in Elgin. To date, the effort has raised $24,000. Check on the Making Space web page at https://elginhistory.org/making-space/ to become a sponsor or donate to this project. Events are planned in May as community conversations. The mural artist has been selected, along with the documentary team. The mural will be a community art project and is scheduled for installation on June 19. Be a part of history and get involved!

Thank You Donors

In memory of Carl Flaks
- Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham
- Al and Kathy Walters via Benevity Matching Funds

General Donations
- Dan and Lynne Walters
- Rebecca Hunter
- Janet Real-Miller

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Project
- Don Nish and the Nish Family
- Dwight and Betsy Armistead
for sponsoring the Cobblestone kitchen and back deck staircase.

2021 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

Please register for in-person tours on elginhistory.org
See page 3 for Preservation Month events.

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

Tour the Museum and explore Elgin’s rich history with a Spanish speaking guide! There are two floors of interactive exhibits to explore. Learn about the founding of Elgin, the Watch Factory, Elgin Road Races, and products Made in Elgin. Kids are welcome!

Visitas Guiadas En Español
¡Visita el Museo y descubre la historia rica de Elgin con un guía que habla español! Aprende sobre la fundación de la ciudad de Elgin, la Fábrica de Relojes, las Carreras de Autos de Elgin y los productos hechos en Elgin. ¡Los niños están bienvenidos!

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Ongoing Events throughout the month of May

Saturday, May 1

Walking Tour: Historic Spring Street Brick Hill
Location: Meet at gate at north end of Spring Street and River Bluff Road.
Contact: Jeff Gill, 847-530-3575
Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 1

Elgin Military Memorials - Scavenger Hunt
Contact: Joy Symonds, 847-741-1128; joy@symondsmaclain.com
More information: www.symondsmaclain.com
Timeframe: Scavenger Hunt forms due June 1st to Joy Symonds

Saturday, May 1

Your City @ Home: Chicago Children’s Museum
Contact: Gail Borden Public Library
More Info: https://attend.gailborden.info/event/4905673
Time: 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Tuesday, May 4

Elgin’s 31st Annual Mayor’s Awards
Contact/RSVP: Invite Only; Tune in on the City’s Facebook page for Live viewing of the event.
Location: Discovery Church, 200 Prairie Street
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Reception at 6:00 p.m.; Ceremony at 7:00 p.m.)

Sunday, May 9

Cyclofemme Ride
Contact: Elgin Community Bikes; 224-407-2124; info@elgincommunitybikes.org
Location: 119 S. Grove Avenue, Parking Lot north of Festival Park
Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 15

Walking Tour: Architects of the Spring-Douglas Historic District
Location: Meet at parking lot across from 809 Center Street, Hospital Building.
Contact: Rebecca Hunter; rebecca-hunter1216@gmail.com
Time: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

WKEDNESDAY, MAY 19

Taste of Asian Pacific Heritage
Contact: Gail Borden Public Library
More Info: https://attend.gailborden.info/event/4979128
Time: 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 20

History of Biking in Elgin
Location: Elgin History Museum, 360 Park Street
Contact: Elgin History Museum, 847-742-4248
Time: 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 22

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Tour
Location: Nancy Kimball Home, 302 W. Chicago St.
Contact: 847-742-4248
Time: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 22

Your City @ Home: Field Museum
Contact: Gail Borden Public Library
More Info: https://attend.gailborden.info/event/4935783
Time: 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, May 26

Walking Tour of the Elgin Historic District with Jerry Turnquist
Location: Meet in front of Channing School, 63 S. Channing Street.
Contact: Elgin History Museum, 847-742-4248
Time: 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Christen Sundquist at 847-931-6004, or go online at www.cityofelgin.org
The Tyrrell Families of Elgin

by David Siegenthaler

Most of the Tyrrell (pronounced “Teer-ul”) families in the Elgin area in the mid- to-late-1800s were related to William and Bridget (Frisby) Tyrrell, who emigrated from Ireland to America in 1847, coming directly to Kane County. They initially settled in Rutland Township in the Gilberts area, about five miles northwest of Elgin, where there was already a settlement of Irish Catholics. By the late 1860s, after the watch factory opened and Dr. Pierce Tyrrell opened his medical practice in Elgin, many Tyrrell family members made their home in Elgin.

The most visible Tyrrell family legacy in the area is the Tyrrell Block, an impressive 3-story brick and stone commercial building at 209-211 East Chicago St., built in 1886-87 for Dr. Pierce Tyrrell and designed by architect Smith Hoag. One of Elgin’s most iconic downtown buildings, it has been home to Dr. Tyrrell’s medical office and residence (1887-circa 1904), the Masonic Temple (1887-1903), various undertakers (circa 1890-1936), Pierce C. Tyrrell’s law office (circa 1906-13), the Muetterties bakery (1890s-1927), the Eagles Club (1914-65), the Owls Club (1979-2001) and the House of Jean restaurant (1949-73), among many other businesses and organizations. The Eagles Club bought the building in 1913 and extensively remodeled it, carving their name, “Eagle’s Home,” on the façade. The most recent occupant of the Tyrrell Block has been “Medusa’s” nightclub.

William (1798-1847) and Bridget (Frisby) Tyrrell (1798-1856) were farmers from Bullyduggan, Mullinahone Parish, County Tipperary, Ireland. William’s parents were Patrick and Johanna (Tobin) Tyrrell, and Bridget’s father was John Frisby. In 1847, William and Bridget and their family emigrated to America with William’s brother Pierce and his family. It is said that only six hours after their arrival in New York City, William went before a notary public and declared their intention of becoming citizens of the United States. William, however, died on Lake Erie, while en route to Illinois, at age 49, and was buried at Cleveland, Ohio. Bridget died in Kane County at age 58 in 1856. William and Bridget’s sons included Dr. Pierce, David, Patrick, William and John. William’s brother Pierce’s children included Catherine (“Kate”; circa 1845-97; Mrs. Lafayette Brayman) and William (1847-1928; wife: Mary Brayman).

David Tyrrell (1833-1912) farmed near Gilberts from 1847 until about 1906, when he retired and moved to Elgin. David and his first wife, Mary Hilby (1839-66), had two children: William J. (1863-1911) and Phillip Francis (“Frank”; 1865-1942). Mary died in 1866 and in 1868 David married Margaret Ross Wiley (1844-1927). David and Margaret had eight children: Maud (1869-83); Dr. Joseph Walter (1871-1952; Des Moines, Iowa, resident); Nevada Pearl (“Neva”; 1875-1961; Mrs. Sherman Morse); Alba Ross (1877-1912; Mrs. Irving Banks); Minerva A. (“Mina”; 1878-1971; Mrs. Rollin Mason); Leslie Edwin (1880-1969); Bes-sie May (1883-1909); and Iris T. (1887-1963; Mrs. George Graupner). David and his second wife, Margaret, are buried in Bluff City Cemetery. David’s farm eventually passed to his daughter and son-in-law, Minerva and Rollin Mason. Leslie bought the Tobin/Hae-ger farm in 1909 and that eventually passed to his son, Leslie Jr. (1917-2015), who remained on the farm until his death, carrying on dairy operations until the early 1960s, and crop farming after that.

Dr. Pierce Tyrrell was born in Ireland in either 1829 or 1832 (sources are conflicting). He arrived in Kane County with his family in 1847, residing on the Tyrrell farm near Gilberts. After studying medical books and learning under the direction of Elgin physicians Dr. Henry Whitford and Dr. Anson Clark, Pierce entered the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati, Ohio, graduating in 1866. He first opened an office in Gilberts and soon after moved to Huntley. In 1868 he located his office in Elgin, where he practiced until his death in 1914.
Dr. Tyrrell was especially interested in scientific investigations and was an expert in microscopic research. He believed in the bacterial origin of disease and was one of the first physicians in the state to use antiseptics. Dr. Tyrrell was also well-known for his outspoken agnostic views. He devoted much time to reading religious doctrines and discussing his opinions, in which he viewed religion as a confidence game and followers as deluded dupes.

On September 14, 1868, Dr. Tyrrell married Margaret Ann McGrath (1847-1905) and the couple had four children: Mary Etta (1869-1934; Mrs. Harry Avery); Dr. William David (1871-1935; New York resident); John Stafford (1873-1956); and Pierce Crawford (1876-1960). Margaret died December 3, 1905, at age 58. On October 4, 1908, Dr. Tyrrell married Maria Daly Periolat (1847-1946), widow of Caesar Periolat. Dr. Tyrrell died Nov. 19, 1914. He and both of his wives are buried in Bluff City Cemetery.

Pierce Crawford Tyrrell, the youngest child of Dr. Tyrrell, was born November 10, 1876. He graduated from Elgin High School in 1897 and attended the University of Michigan and Northwestern University law school, where he graduated in 1902. He was admitted to the Illinois bar association in 1902 and opened a law practice in Elgin with Richard Lowrie, who left to enter the newspaper field after two or three years. Pierce served as city attorney from 1919 to 1931, when he resigned to accept appointment as a member of the Kane County Board of Review (investigates tax assessment complaints), a position which he held until resigning in 1953.

Pierce Crawford Tyrrell married Margaret Agnes Geddes (1887-1984) on June 28, 1919. The couple had three children: Pierce Geddes (1920-2015); John William (1924; died at 24 days); and Mary Jean (1932-2018; Mrs. Richard Myers). Pierce Crawford died January 29, 1960, and his wife died February 19, 1984. All were buried in the Tyrrell family plot at Bluff City Cemetery.

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft newspaper article (Courier-News, March 22, 1987); Kane County histories; Ancestry.com; obituaries and other newspaper articles; Kane County probate files; Kane County Clerk’s website; Elgin city directories; “Looking Back at Gilberts” (by Nancy Bacheller and Bob Oury, 2012); Historicelgin.com; etc.

What’s in a Name? The History of Elgin Through Names

By E.C. “Mike” Alft, re-presented by Rebecca Miller, Elgin History Museum Educator

A brief history of Elgin can be written using some of the city’s street signs. James Talcott GIFFORD, who arrived with a brother in 1835, was the town’s founder. Platting his settlement on the east side of the Fox River, he was responsible for some of our first street names.

DIVISION Street marks the dividing line between his claim and that of Phineas Kimball to the north. Gifford assumed that the main business thoroughfare would be up the hill from the river and out of reach of the spring floods. He made it the CENTER of his plat. Simon Newton DEXTER of New York bought part of Gifford’s claim in 1838.
The KIMBALL families of New Hampshire settled on the west side of the river. Joseph Kimball bought with him grafting from apple trees which his son, Samuel JEWETT Kimball, developed into a large ORCHARD.

The arrival of the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad in 1850 encouraged William C. Kimball, Sam’s brother, to erect a resort hotel, called the WAVERLY, on the southwest corner of State and West Highland Avenue. The rail link to Chicago was a factor in the location of a distillery along the West Bank of the Fox above the dam. One of the proprietors was Benjamin Franklin LAWRENCE.

Elgin enlistments suffered heavy casualties on the battlefield of SHILOH during the Civil War. Not long after the conflict ended, Gail BORDEN started a factory to condense milk supplied by the many dairy farms in the vicinity. Among these were the farms of Cyrus LARKIN and John McLEAN, as well as the TODD FARM.

The watch industry was once the city's largest. Craftsmen arrived from the East to begin operations in 1864. The firm was originally called the NATIONAL Watch Company. The first president was Benjamin W. RAYMOND, and one of the Chicago capitalists who kept the firm going in the early years was Martin RYERSON. George HUNTER, production superintendent, 1872-1903, lived on WATCH Street, as did other company executives. Joseph HECKER was the director of the famed Elgin National Watch Factory Military Band.

An industrialized Elgin produced more than watches. William Grote, a real estate subdivider, attracted several manufacturers from Chicago. The largest was the Illinois Watch Case Company. The general manager was Thomas W. DUNCAN, who later ran off with the wife of the firm’s president. George W. LUDLOW and George R. KEEP opened a shoe factory in the northeast end in 1891. Mrs Ludlow’s name before marriage was HARTWELL. R.S. DICKIE, Milton V. KIRK, E.E. HOUSTON and Philip D. ARMOUR established a plant on Bluff City Boulevard to print can labels in 1892.

The Elgin Road Races were first held in 1910. The first winner was Ralph MULFORD and GRANDSTAND Place is a reminder of the thousands of spectators who came to this city to watch the grueling tests of men and machines. For more than fifty years, until they ended in 1979, Carl Parlasca produced and directed the Song of HIAWATHA pageants.

In the southeast end are ELGIN street and ILLINOIS Avenue. Now what could have prompted those names? Elgin is named after the hymn, Elgin, in the Presbyterian hymnal. It was town founder James Gifford’s favorite song. The song title is named after Elgin (pronounced El-Gin with a hard g), Scotland, the capital of Moray. Located in northeastern Scotland, on the River Lossie just east of Inverness. Named after Helgyn, the Norse general who founded Elgin in the 10th century. Or another story is that Elg or Eilg is a poetic name for Ireland and in meaning little Ireland. Elgin was one of the first Scots burghs created in the 12th century by King David I. Receiving a royal charter later, Elgin became the cathedral seat of the bishoprig of Moray. The Cathedral of the Holy Trinity was built in the 1300s. Elgin’s ruined castle was the reputed scene of the murder of King Duncan by Macbeth.

Maybe you have heard of the Elgin Marbles? They are named after the sixth earl of Elgin, Thomas Bruce, the British ambassador to Constantinople. In 1806, he received permission from the sultan to remove statuary from the Parthenon. The Turks ruled Greece at that time, and the Parthenon was being mistreated. The Turks were using it for ammunition storage, tourists were picking up anything they could find and taking it with them, and the local Greeks were grinding down some of the sculptures to make mortar. Lord Elgin removed part of the Parthenon frieze of sculptures and spent a total of ten years and a fortune taking back to Britain a whole collection of Parthenon artwork.

Back in Britain, Lord Elgin stored the sculptures in a coal shed on his property for years, until the British Government reluctantly bought them for the British Museum. Lord Elgin developed a disease (possibly syphilis) that ate away his nose and part of his face. He brought his wife to trial for adultery during a divorce and was brutally, publicly humiliated before he died impoverished in the 1840s. His son, the next Lord Elgin, became famous for his governorship of Canada. Lord Elgin is also the name of a famous line of Elgin watches. The Sears Gallery on the Elgin Academy campus is decorated with a reproduction of the Elgin Marbles.

How about the shipwreck of the Lady Elgin? The Lady Elgin was a steamer that was wrecked on Lake Michigan off of Winnetka in 1860. The Union Guards were a group of militia in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The State was very anti-slavery and state’s rights at
this time, and the state government was seriously considering secession if the Federal Government did not end slavery. In this political climate, the militias were surveyed to determine which would support the state and which the federal government. The Union Guards, an Irish Catholic group, said that although they were opposed to slavery they would support their country. The state quickly revoked the militia’s commission and disarmed the Union Guards. They refused to disband and were determined to raise money to re-arm their unit.

The Union Guard decided to commission an excursion to Chicago to raise money and lift their spirits. They booked passage for their company and guests on the Lady Elgin to a democratic party rally in Chicago where they would go on parade and hear a speech by Illinois Congressman and presidential candidate Stephen A. Douglas. On their return to Milwaukee, September 8, 1860, the Lady Elgin ran into bad weather, which the ship was handling. About 2:30 a.m., an out-of-control schooner, the Augusta, rammed the Lady Elgin eventually causing it to break apart and sink. 380 of the approximately 500 people on the boat died in the wreck, making it the worst accident in the Great Lakes until the Eastland in 1915. Dead bodies washed up on shore through December that year and the incident served to further increase the tensions between Democrats and Republicans over the slavery and state’s rights issues. Most of the Union Guards were members of St. John Cathedral in Milwaukee and they continue to hold a memorial service for the Lady Elgin victims every Sept. 8. The Lady Elgin was also a line of Elgin Watches.

In Case You Missed It

With all the virtual events we have to choose from, it’s easy to miss something you wanted to see. If you were unable to be in front of your screen for some of the Historical Society’s recent presentations, you can catch up by watching them on the Museum’s YouTube channel and website. Here’s a list of recent postings:

**History of Elgin Symphony Orchestra**

 Recorded March 18, 2020 The Elgin Symphony Orchestra is one of the preeminent regional orchestras in the United States. Since its founding in 1950, the organization has developed a reputation for artistic excellence. Erik Larsen will speak about the development of the ESO from a community to a professional orchestra, with a particular focus on 1979 - present. He will also highlight the tenure of Grammy Award-winning conductor Margaret Hillis and how she may have influenced the rise of women conductors. After the presentation, questions were asked about Rachmaninoff’s performance in Elgin. Viewers provided much helpful information about it.

**Cherie Murphy: Elgin Community Garden History**

See how the gardening movement of the 1920s inspired community beautification. Illustrated by Elgin projects the Garden Club has tackled, Cherie discusses the latest trends in native plants for butterfly gardens and community building through vegetable gardens. Recorded April 15, 2021.

**Museum Moments**

See the entire collection of Museum Moments at https://elginhistory.org/museum-moments/

**Elgin Street Sweeper:** John Murphy, Elgin's superintendent of streets, envisioned a 3-wheeled motorized street sweeper that could sprinkle water on the dust, brush it onto a conveyor belt and then deposit it in a collection box. He took his idea to the American Tower and Tank Co in 1911, and the first sweeper was sold to Boise ID in 1914. This Museum Moments features an Elgin Sweeper tin toy manufactured c. 1945.

**Elgin Watch College Jacket:** The Elgin National Watch Company established the Elgin Watch College in 1920. Before the College, watch repairmen learned the skilled trade under an apprenticeship that could take years and result in varied success or gaps in learning. The Elgin Watch College program was 12-36 months long and provided up-to-date information. Just like any other college, the Elgin Watch College organized teams to participate in various sports, and offered swag to purchase to show school spirit. In this video, Elgin collector, Jeff White will present an Elgin Watch College jacket.
Welcome New Members

- Jane Anderson
- Georgiann Camacho
- Evan Fry
- Steve Jessup
- Gaylo Landwer
- Karoline Patterson
- Daniel Rodriguez and John Lalley
- Lorraine Tatge

New Life Member: Dennis and Sandi McClure. Wow!