

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News September 2021

Vice President's Report

Tricia Grosser, Vice President



In 2016, the Elgin Historical Society and Museum embarked on a self-evaluation process that is endorsed by the American Association for State and Local History. The most important aspect of this evaluation is that it is an organic, participatory process that is integrated into all aspects of the Society's structure and operations. At that time, directors and staff looked at five different areas within which the Museum operates. Using this method, the Museum's performance and operations were compared to nationally recognized standards. Through this process called STEPS, various policies and procedures were updated and clarified. Important discussions were held about longstanding procedures and also changes that were needed. Because self-evaluation is a necessity for any organization's health this process was never meant to be ephemeral. So, five years later, the Museum Board is again on this journey to look at updated standards.

I am thankful for the participation of all the staff members and so many directors from the Board. In June, three committees were formed to address the standards in certain areas of Museum operations. Meetings have been ongoing as the process continues.

Under the direction of Alan Walters, a committee is looking at all aspects of Museum **Management**. They are currently working on writing updated job descriptions for paid staff and revising the 2001 personnel manual. The **Management** committee has also been looking into the privacy protection we offer our donors within the Museum software.

Christen Sundquist is chairing the committee on **Stewardship of Historical Structures and Landscapes**. This is our first time analyzing this standard. The preservation of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, as well as Old Main, has given this committee a lot to do. Along with a long term plan for preservation and

maintenance for both buildings, they are also creating an emergency and disaster preparedness, response and recovery plan which will include a risk assessment.

The third committee, **Mission, Vision, and Governance**, is being chaired by myself. There have been lengthy discussions about our mission, vision, and value statements. Also, a statement was written to address diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Policies for conflict of interest and donor privacy have also been written. Currently, the committee is working on revising the Constitution and By-Laws.

The STEPS goal is to finish the standards in each of these three areas and complete the projects that develop from those assessments. But, **foremost**, the goal is to keep this Museum's performance as fiscally responsive, vibrant, and thriving as it has always been.

Thank You Donors

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- Chicagoland Thunderbirds

Museum Gala

- Betsy and Dwight Armistead

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360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120
Phone 847-742-4248
e-mail: museum@elginhistory.org




President: Al Walters
Vice President: Tricia Grosser
Secretary: Laura Stroud
Corr. Secretary: Ricky Harris
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline October 20, 2021

 Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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

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Sept. 25 and 26: Annual Cemetery Walk Bluff City Cemetery

See specific ticket times in the article on page 7.

October 3, 12:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.: Neville Buggy Barn/Prairie Restoration Open House

39W714 McDonald Rd. Donations accepted.

October 10, 2:00 P.M.: Annual Meeting—William Pack presenting The Essential Great Chicago Fire

October 16, 6:30 P.M. Art reception opening: The Gin Art Show

Nov. 13, 5:30 P.M. Annual Benefit and Gala See article below.

Dec. 4, 1:00 P.M.: Annual Holiday Tea and Program Linda Rock presents An Elgin Christmas.

2021 Program Schedule

Betsy Armistead, Program Chair

Check the website for current information. elginhistory.org/events

Please register for in-person tours on elginhistory.org

Every third Saturday of the month, starting Oct. 16: Bilingual Play Day at the Museum

Kids are welcome to learn and have some fun exploring the Museum's interactive exhibits about Elgin history. Learn about the founding of Elgin, the Watch Factory, Elgin Road Races, and products Made in Elgin! play is supervised by English/Spanish-speaking personnel.

Los niños pueden aprender y divertirse explorando las exhibiciones interactivas del Museo sobre la historia de Elgin. ¡Aprenda sobre la fundación de Elgin, Watch Factory, Elgin Road Races y los productos Made in Elgin! El juego es supervisado por personal de habla inglesa / española.

September 2, 12:00 Noon: Brown Bag Lunch Ira Marcus, presents Capturing History Through the Photographic Lens

An interactive program discussing photography and documenting history.

September 7, 7:00 P.M. Jim Gibbons presents A Date We Will Always Remember: Sept. 11, 2001

Zoom presentation only; see website.

September 15, 6:30 P.M. Laotian Immigration to Elgin: New Life exhibit reception. Includes Laotian dance performance!

Elgin History Museum Gala Nov. 13!

It's time to party! Please mark your calendars and plan to attend the Elgin History Museum's Annual Gala and Silent Auction on Saturday evening, November 13, 2021. The Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites in Elgin will be our host.

This year's theme is Oktoberfest. German food will highlight the menu. Providing entertainment for the evening will be the Musikmeisters German Band. The Edelweiss Chicago Dancers will amaze us with traditional dance, demonstrating the rich culture of the German people.

As in years past, a silent fundraising auction will be held. Baskets and other exciting auction items are being assembled now. There will be offerings to satisfy everyone's interests. Plan to bid on items for you to enjoy or to give as gifts this holiday season. Major auction items this year include week-long 2022 vacations in Door County, Wisconsin and Panama City Beach, Florida.

The always popular Mystery Wine Bags will also be featured again. Take a \$40 chance, pick a bag and be surprised at the special wine and local business gift card enclosed. These sell out quickly....don't wait!

For those wishing to treat their friends or family, sponsorship ticket packages including full tables and partial tables are available. Individual tickets will also be sold.

Watch for more information on the Museum's website and your personal invitation in October. Prost!



The Museum Saved A Piece of Elgin History!

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

There were four original Watch Factory fence panels remaining as part of the Butera Shopping Center entrance on National Street. (Clock Tower Plaza)

The owners decided to change the entrance area and knocked down the 1980s tiled walls on either side of the driveways. They also knocked down the fence panels and were going to throw them away! The Museum was able to save one intact fence panel to use at Old Main, but only with the help of the City of Elgin Public Works Department. Led by Aaron Neal, the team transported the heavy, black, wrought iron fence panel back to the Museum. Many thanks to our city's Preservation Heroes!



Fence Panel at the Museum

Welcome New Members

- Gary Hilquist
- Patricia Milford
- Mike Shackleton
- John P. Real

The Kerber Family of Elgin

by David Siegenthaler

The Kerber brothers, Charles A. and William A., opened a retail meat market in downtown Elgin in 1882 that remained in the Kerber family until 1950. In 1890, Charles A. opened a slaughterhouse and ice house along the west bank of the Fox River just south of Elgin that expanded to become a wholesale packing plant by about 1893. In 1904 it was incorporated as the Kerber Packing Co. and became one of the largest independent meat processing firms in the Midwest, with retail markets in Elgin and Rockford.



Kerber Packing Co., South Elgin

The packing plant, like its retail counterparts, also remained in the Kerber family until 1950, at which time it had about 130 employees. The new owners kept the Kerber name and the firm underwent a corporate reorganization in the late 1950s. The plant finally closed in 1970 after suffering substantial losses for some time.

The Kerber Packing Co.'s output was chiefly from hogs – hams, bacon, lard, pork and sausage. Their cattle output was about 10% of that until a building addition in the late 1940s allowed for a more balanced output. Fresh meat sales were originally limited by the distance it could be hauled by horse and wagon: about 10 miles. The company's major expansion came in the 1910s, when paved roads and motor trucks reduced delivery

times substantially. This was when their sales area expanded across all of northern Illinois. In 1917, a large modern plant was completed and production capacity was tripled.



Kerber's Meat Market, 56-58 S. Grove. c. 1935

"Kerber Kountry Kure" and "Kerber Kountry Kleeer" brands became widely known throughout northern Illinois. By-products included soap, grease, lard cracklings for use in chicken feed, hides, fertilizers, hair for use in automobile upholstery, and food additives for hogs and cattle. Charles A. Kerber, company president, was one of the founders of the American Meat Packers Association and a member of its first executive committee. After his death in 1930, he was succeeded by his wife Alice, and then in 1931 by longtime employee and part-owner Ernest H. Redeker.

The Kerber retail market was originally at 36 S. Grove Ave. and moved to 56-58 S. Grove Ave. in 1911. In 1956, six years after the Kerber market was sold, the building was razed and replaced by a Walgreen's Drug Store. After the packing plant closed in 1970, the site was leased to several businesses, including GMP Inc., a plastics reprocessor. In May 1978, a spectacular fire at GMP Inc. destroyed most of the plant. In 1980, the Illinois Hydraulic Construction Co. built a new factory on the site at 1797 N. La Fox St. in South Elgin.



Fire destroys GMP Inc. in 1978

Rail access to the Kerber Packing Co. was initially through the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, which had a stop on the east side of South Elgin. Livestock would be unloaded there at a small stockyard, herded across the Fox River bridge and then north to the plant. An interurban electric trolley line was built in 1896 and provided transportation for employees of the packing plant at Kerber Station. In 1915, a side-track from the trolley line was built at Kerber's, giving the plant access to the Illinois Central Railroad, just south of South Elgin at Coleman Station.

Charles Gustav Kerber Sr. (1828-88) was born in Germany and emigrated to America in 1853, settling in South Elgin. In 1855 he married Mary Andorff (1830-1920), whose family emigrated to the area from Germany in 1854. After working in the milling industry in South Elgin for a few years, Charles Sr., who became a naturalized citizen in 1859, moved his family to Chicago and later to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where he owned a butcher shop. In the early 1880s, the family returned to Elgin, where the sons had purchased their own butcher shop.

Charles Sr. and Mary had five children: Charles August (1855-1930; wife: Alice Beckwith); Otto A. (1857-1942; wife: Rose Berna); Emma Dorothy (1859-1961; never married); Louise Agnes (1862-1951; Mrs. Carl E. Botsford); and William A. (1865-1945; wife: Emma Stiles Nelson). Charles Sr. and Mary are buried in Bluff City Cemetery, as are all of their children.

In 1882, Charles A. Kerber, assisted by his younger brother William ("Will"), bought the meat market of Robert Beckwith in Elgin and moved here from Kenosha. Beckwith was a prosperous livestock dealer and, in 1885, Charles A. married his daughter Alice (1865-1931). Will sold his interest in the market to Charles Werthwein of Hampshire in 1888 and left to work for a packing company in Chicago but returned in 1893. For several years Will was secretary-treasurer of the firm but sold his interest in 1918. Brother Otto worked for the Kerber firm for a few years in the early-to-mid-1880s before opening his own market, specializing in fish and seafood. Later, Otto would again work for Kerber's for a few years.

Most of the Kerber family interests were sold in 1950 to Adolf G. Ackermann of St. Louis, who quickly sold the retail market portion of the Kerber Packing Co. to Thomas W. Meder, Jr. of Chicago. By the summer of 1955, the former Kerber market at 56-58 S. Grove Ave. was vacated and the building was razed in 1956.

Charles A. and Alice Kerber had four children, all daughters: Marie Alice (1887-1969; Mrs. Ralph W. Crocker); Louise Edna (1891-1972; Mrs. John A. Logan, Jr.); Harriet Maud (1893-98); and Ruth Leah (1895-1979; Mrs. William P. Kemler; divorced 1944). Their three sons-in-law were all officers in the Kerber Packing Co. Ralph Crocker is notable for having built the Crocker Theater in 1923, which remained in the

Crocker family for 67 years. Louise Logan made a name for herself during the Great Depression, when she directed, without pay, the Family Welfare Association.



Kerber Packing c. 1950

In 1898, Charles A. and Alice bought the former Patten Bartlett home at 440 E. Chicago St. and lived there the rest of their lives. In 1901, they had the home extensively remodeled. Charles A. was a member of the Moose and Elks lodges, and the Union League Club. He passed away on Feb. 21, 1930. His widow Alice, who had been treasurer of the Kerber firm for many years, succeeded him as president. Alice, who passed away on May 18, 1931, was for many years president of the board of the Larkin Home for Children and a member of the Elgin Woman's Club.

Will Kerber, in 1918, sold his interest in the Kerber Packing Co. and devoted the rest of his life to banking interests, the management of his extensive realty holdings, and to civic affairs and fraternal groups. He was a director of the Union National Bank, a member of the Elgin zoning board of appeals and a charter member of the Elks lodge. Will had his home built at 27 Rugby Place in 1888 and lived there until his death on Oct. 1, 1945. His mother Mary lived with him until her death in 1920 and his sister Emma lived with him until the late 1920s. In 1931, at age 66, Will married Emma Stiles Nelson (1874-1967), widow of Oscar Nelson. Will also had homes built at 15 Rugby Place (1890) and 11 Rugby Place (1906), both of which he used as rental properties.

Otto A. Kerber married Rose Berna (1867-1954) in 1886 and the couple had two children: Harold Otis (1887-1942; wives: Margaret Cronin; later: Margaret O'Connor) and Valerie Berna (1889-1970; Mrs. Joseph A. Reising). Otto and Rose lived most of their married lives at 171 Ann St.

Louise Agnes Kerber married attorney Carl E. Botsford in 1889 and had a home built in 1890 at 472 Division St. After Carl's father Richard died in 1908, the

family moved into his home at 111 N. Channing St. Carl was elected mayor of Elgin in 1905 and served a 2-year term. Their children were Alosia Louise (1893-1982; Mrs. Robert Phillips Lamb) and Carlyn Louise (1903-92; Mrs. Merrill Wills Simpson).

Emma Dorothy Kerber never married and lived with family members most of her life. She passed away at age 101 in 1961.

Note: There was another Charles Kerber family living in Elgin contemporaneously with the packing plant Kerbers, though unrelated. Charles J. Kerber and his wife Anna (née Boettcher) were both born in Germany and by 1905 were living in Elgin. Their children were Carl, Harry and Elsie (Mrs. Alfred Kleinschmidt). Daughters Edna and Violet died as infants in 1912 and 1913, respectively. Charles J. worked for the Western United Gas & Electric Co. for 30 years, retiring in 1936. In August 1937, Charles J. died at sea aboard an ocean liner, returning from a 4-month visit with friends and relatives in Germany.

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; obituaries and other newspaper articles; Kane County Clerk; city directories; Ancestry.com; "Modern Elgin" (1950); probate files; etc.

Entertaining Education

Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator

In the past year, the Museum created many exciting opportunities for the public to connect with the historical collections and learn about Elgin's rich history.

The Museum has hosted several free Play Days On the Lawn, giving families the opportunity to try out hands-on activities like painting with condensed milk, making rag dolls, and learning about dairy farming by trying our milkable wooden cow, Emmeline. Programs were offered in partnership with the Friends of Lords Park Zoo on storytelling, old fashioned tools, and how technology has changed over the years.

Another partnership with the Gail Borden Library has given the Museum the opportunity to plan family events highlighting Elgin's dairy history and the immigrant experience. All these events were made possible through the support of educational programming volunteers. The Museum is grateful for their time and talents.



Learning about old-fashioned ways of working

In addition to family programs, new exhibits were installed! An exhibit was added on Elgin's early photographers and hometown grocery stores, including Gromer's. The amount of hands-on activities within the exhibits increased by completing the telegraph learning station and adding children's worksheets to the 1920s tornado exhibit. Now visitors can take home a recipe card for delicious chocolate fudge, made using Gail Borden's invention, condensed milk. Exhibit signage was added with more information on the Elgin Motor Club, Kerber Packing, Elgin American compacts, and Elgin artists Benjamin Downs and John Mosiman.

Reaching an even larger audience are the articles written for the Kane County Connects blog and the Crackerbarrel on Fremont Recreation Center founder Lewis P. Andrews, Elgin's first auto accident and the Elgin Motor Club. Undoubtedly, my favorite project is the new video series, Museum Moments. Each of these videos highlights a single artifact from the Museum collection and tells its story. Being able to showcase rarely seen artifacts from the collection and help the community see their significance has been a very interesting and rewarding experience.

Each week presents new and exciting opportunities in the Education Department; what a wonderful thing!



Emmeline entertainingly educates on milk extraction



Rebecca Miller shows photos from the Museum's collection to students at the Bethlehem Lutheran Child Development Center. Paul Larson, Linda Rock, and Laura Davies assisted with this program.

2021 Bluff City Cemetery Walk

by Lillian & Rudy Galfi, Cemetery Walk Chairpersons

The 2021 Bluff City Cemetery Walk is back and we will be LIVE! This year, the Walk will be a 2-day event with timed entry tickets rather than an open all-day ticket. On Saturday, for the first time ever, the walk is being offered as an evening performance at 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 p.m. Sunday performances will start at 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. The Cemetery Walk team is excited about these changes because it will accommodate more visitors per day, there will be less wait time during the tour, and we also hope to attract some new faces to the walk!

The event will also be professionally recorded, as we did last year, and a video will be available for viewing on October 3 for a \$15.00 fee.

What is the same this year?

Visitors will be welcomed to the historic Bluff City Cemetery that has provided the final resting place for area residents since 1889. A guide will lead guests on a 70-minute tour that showcases six former Elgin residents and one vignette, portrayed by actors in period costumes.

Please Note: This year's route is in the back section of the cemetery that has some steep grades.



Just one of many beautiful monuments you may see at Bluff City Cemetery

The characters featured this year are:

- **William Grosvenor Hubbard:** Came to Elgin in 1843, worked as a merchant in a Chicago Street store, and was responsible for bringing the first railroad to Elgin. He was a devout member of the Congregational Church and opposed slavery.
- **Henry Sherman:** Arrived in Elgin with his family in 1838. Farmer and businessman, he donated land and a building for the first hospital in Elgin in 1888, named Sherman Hospital.
- **Ralph Elliott Abell:** Well-known architect in Elgin and Chicago. Designed many schools and public buildings. He graduated from the University of Illinois in 1904, continued his education at Cornell University and was awarded the Sands medal for excellence in design.
- **Eliza Ann Hadwen Lovell:** Born in England in 1844, she came to Elgin in 1876 as the new bride of Vincent Lovell. They had a home built at 600 Margaret Place. Lucy opened her home to many homeless children and adopted children of family members, evolving into what became the Larkin Home. Later, in the 1970s, 600 Margaret Place became the Elgin Community Crisis Center.
- **John West Ranstead:** Lawyer and banker, attended Elgin Academy and served as a judge in Elgin for 19 years. His law office was on the second floor of the Ranstead building on the corner of Spring and DuPage streets., now Al's Café.
- **Daniel Broadnax Sr.:** Came to Elgin in 1925, worked 11 years at Saxe Shoe Rebuilders before opening his own shop at 450 Dundee Ave. He was a dedicated family man, active in the Second Baptist Church and a member of the Mount Moriah Masonic Lodge.
- **Vignette – Elgin Women in WWII:** Women entered the work force during WWII to join the war effort. Their mission was to assemble ships, tanks and airplanes on the home front. They did not think twice about heeding President Franklin Roosevelt's call to build a "Great Arsenal of Democracy."

How do I buy tickets?

Go to elginhistory.org website and click **Events** tab. Ticket are \$15. You can choose the date and time you would like to attend. You have you choice of having the ticket sent to your mobile phone, or emailed to you and you can either use the ticket on your phone as your ticket to be scanned at the event, or print the email for use as a paper ticket to bring with you. The Bluff City Cemetery Walk is a rain or shine event.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



For a link to buy tickets, scan the QR code above with your phone app.

Collections Corner

Beth Nawara, Curator of Collections

The Museum has a research request that we need your help with! Do any of you happen to have a better photo (or actual tin) of Elgin Creameries canned butter? The tin would have been produced around 1897 or so. The cans are a key-strip open can with the key supplied in a shaped indentation on the top. The photos show a tin in really rough shape. The tin is approximately 12 cm (4.75 inches) in diameter. Any info you can provide would be appreciated!

