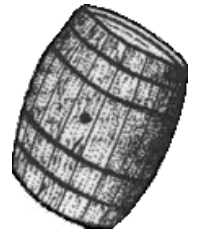


The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2022

President's Report

Alan Walters, President



May is a great month. In May, the long-promised, but often delayed spring in northern Illinois is finally realized. We celebrate mothers and commemorate patriots. And it's Preservation Month.

There is no other month when Elginites can so easily overdose on history, culture and architecture. At the Museum's website elginhistory.org, you'll find no less than 17 events, tours, lectures, walks and bike rides scheduled for this month. There truly is something for everyone.

May also includes the Mayor's Awards. Once again, the Museum and its volunteers are well represented in this celebration of good things happening in Elgin. Among the individuals receiving recognition for years of volunteerism are Museum friends Betsy Armistead, Laurel Garza and Rebecca Hunter. Be sure to congratulate and thank them. We certainly do.

The Museum earned a Mayor's Award for the *Museum Moments* project. This 26-part video series highlights unusual and seldom seen artifacts in the Museum's collection via two-to-three-minute videos narrated by a cross-section of Elginites. *Museum Moments* can be viewed on the Museum's YouTube channel.

The Museum is proud to share a Mayor's Award with Ernie Broadnax and the Gail Bordon Public Library for the "The Settlement," a three-dimensional display celebrating Elgin's African American history. The exhibit was viewed by thousands this winter at the Library.

Finally, spring heralds the return of construction season. We are on the home stretch at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. The parking lot construction has started! The grading and concrete work is complete. Within another few weeks the old asphalt will come out and new dirt and gravel will be laid down for the new blacktop surface. The lot will have one handi-

capped parking space and five regular spaces. It will be handicapped-accessible with graded sidewalks to the back door and an ADA-compliant lift to the main level. Contractors are bidding on that work now. Thank you to the City of Elgin for supporting this effort!

Before the digging started, Rudy Galfi started a small privy dig at the northwest corner of the building. Details of what he found are in the article on page 3.

Stay tuned to learn about an open house or two this summer. We can't wait to show you how far we have come, together.

Enjoy Preservation Month. We hope to see you soon at an Elgin History Museum program.



The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society
360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120
Phone 847-742-4248
e-mail: museum@elginhistory.org




President: Al Walters
Vice President: Tricia Grosser
Secretary: Christen Sundquist
Corr. Secretary: Ricky Harris
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline June 20, 2022

 Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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

©2022 Elgin Area Historical Society. All rights reserved.

Upcoming Events

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

Tuesday, May 3, 7:00 P.M.

Mayor's Awards for Preservation

Livestream presentation, [youtube.com/cityofelgin](https://www.youtube.com/c/cityofelgin)

The Elgin Heritage Commission will honor outstanding contributors to Elgin's heritage. The Museum, Program Committee Chair Betsy Armistead and long-time volunteer Laurel Garza will be recognized with awards!

Friday, May 6 from 6:30pm - 8:30 P.M.

Elgin Symphony League Exhibit Opening Reception
In-person event at Elgin History Museum

Since 1971, the Elgin Symphony League has supported Elgin's award-winning orchestra. Enjoy a live cello performance and wine and cheese. Program at 6:30 P.M., then linger to mingle and view the exhibit. Please register for this event.

Tuesday, May 10 at 6:30 P.M.

Lords Park Walking Tour with Jerry Turnquist
In-person, Lords Park, 100 Oakwood Blvd, Elgin, IL

Experience the beauty and history of this 1890s park in this leisurely-paced walk led by Elgin historian Jerry Turnquist and Lords Park Crew Leader Mike Adams. Wear comfortable shoes. Please register for this event.

Thursday, May 12 at 7:00 P.M.: History of Elgin Mental Health Center with Bill Briska

In-person at Gail Borden Public Library or Zoom

In commemoration of the hospital's 150th anniversary, Mr. Briska's 1997 book has been updated and expanded. Hear the story of the hospital's evolving mission, that affected the lives of thousands of patients, staff members and their families over the last 150 years. Please register on Gailborden website.

Saturday, May 14 at 10:00 A.M.

Hilltop Cemetery Tour with Bill Briska

In-person event at Elgin Sports Complex

Tucked into the Elgin Sports Complex is the burying ground for the old Elgin State Hospital. Join us to learn more about the Elgin State Hospital and why this cemetery is located here. It is the final resting place for 974 individuals for whom other burial arrangements could not be made. Elgin historian Bill Briska will be your guide to discover this little-known site and some stories it has to tell. FREE event, donations accepted. Please register for this event.

Thursday, May 19 12:00 noon:

Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Memorial Days

Learn how Elgin's salute to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice has evolved from the late 1860s, when it joined in the nation's first such tribute, to the well-attended ceremonies the community holds today. Please register for this event.

Saturday, May 21 6:30 - 8:30 P.M.

Art and Architecture in Elgin Exhibit Opening

The Museum welcomes Elgin photographer Carolyn Buhrow's exhibit Art and Architecture in Elgin: A Photographers Love Affair with Her Hometown's Beauty. Wine and cheese will be served; Ryan Carney will perform on the cello. Thank you to the Elgin Cultural Arts Commission for support of this project. Please register if you are planning to attend so the Museum can plan accordingly.

Saturday, June 18, 3:00 - 4:30 P.M.

Mike Alft Memorial at Gail Borden Public Library

Memorial paying tribute to E. C. "Mike" Alft, who passed away on November 22, 2021 at the age of 96.

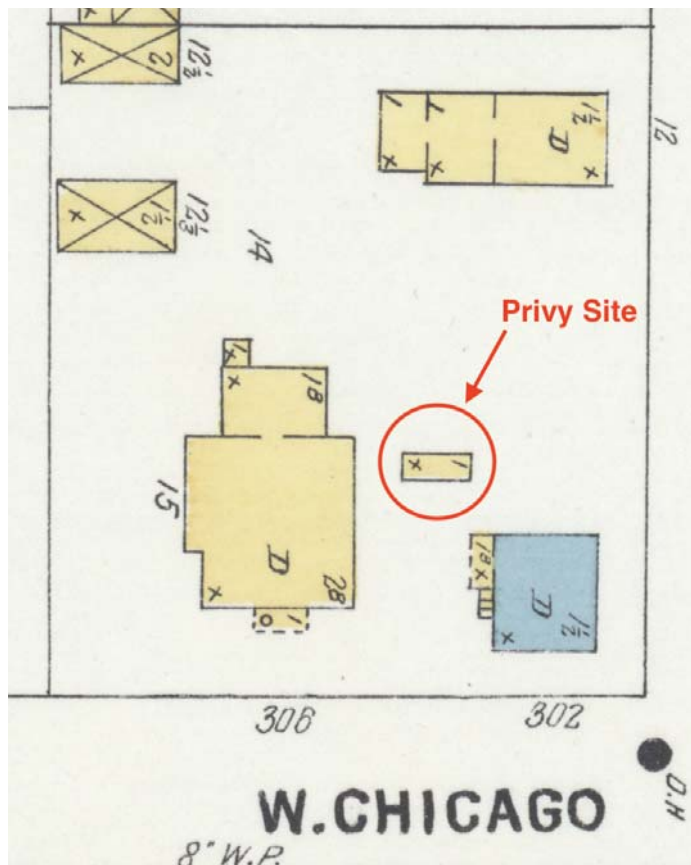


Elgin Woman's Club exhibit opened March 27, celebrating 135 years of service to the Elgin community

Hunting for Treasure at the Cobblestone House

Rudy Galfi, Board Member

Why would anyone want dig up a privy, better known as an outhouse? My research indicates that a small building used to exist behind the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone on Chicago St. The 1887 Sanborn fire map shows a small building three feet deep by ten feet wide. It also appears on the 1903 maps, but it's no longer shown on the 1913 map. What was this a small out-building? Aha, it was a privy!



1903 Sanborn Map, 302 Chicago St.

A privy was normally built to accommodate one person. This privy was larger and was shared between the cobblestone house at 302 W. Chicago St and the home next door at 306 Chicago St., also owned by the Kimball family at one time. It was also very close to the house and situated directly between the two homes.

After measuring the exact location for the privy at the site, a portion of the privy was located under the side-walk leading from a side door of the building next door. Construction was going to start on the new parking lot and walkway, and the privy site would be destroyed by the excavation.

I started digging at the site and after digging down about a foot I started finding artifacts. Slowly removing layers of dirt, I discovered square head nails, broken dishes, and glass bottles. I was able to unearth a number of items proving that I had found the privy. I concluded my search for the day and secured the site to return at a later date.

The next few days brought cold and rainy weather, so I was unable to investigate further. The following week I saw that the parking lot grading had begun, and hurried out to the site to discover they had already excavated the privy location.



Excavation showing privy side wall

The side of the privy was exposed and I got my tools out and started scraping the side of the exposed area. It wasn't the preferred way to do a dig, but it did expose more artifacts. In total I found more than 75 pieces from the exposed area.

In addition to those pictured, some of the more significant items found include:

- medicine bottles
- soda bottles
- Ink bottle
- Heinz Catsup bottle
- Broken china from early 1900s
- What appears to be a metal rake
- Broken jar with 1858 on the side



Small sifter/strainer



Genuine Boyd's Porcelain Lined Caps For Mason's Jar



Rudy Galfi with a hinge found in the privy



Bottles found in the old privy

One interesting patent medicine item is an aqua Atwood's Jaundice Bitters bottle, stating Formerly Made by Moses Atwood, Georgetown, Mass. The bottle is from the 1910s, is embossed with the product name and is in a dodecagon shape. It is one of the many patent quack medicines on the market during the 1800s and early 1900s. The indications or uses for this product as provided on its packaging: Recommended for jaundice, headache, dyspepsia, worms, dizziness, loss of appetite, darting pains, colds, and fevers. For cleansing the blood and moistening the skin. Also for liver complaints, strangury (blockage of the bladder, dropsy, croup and phthisis (pulmonary tuberculosis).



Atwood's Bitters Bottle Fragment

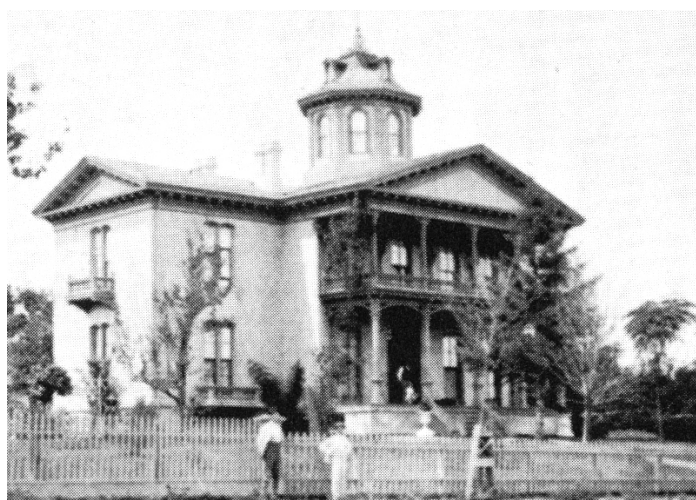
A privy is a part of our history. Digging the privy can tell us interesting things about the families who lived there. We know that Nancy Kimball and her family lived in these two homes for many years. We should be able to tie these items directly to the Kimball family. All the items found will require further investigation by an expert who can help narrow the dates to the correct time period.

The Hamlin Family and Their Wizard Oil

David Siegenthaler

John Austin Hamlin (1837-1908) and his brother Lysander Butler Hamlin (1839-1910) made a fortune selling a patent medicine called "Wizard Oil." The firm was founded in Cincinnati in 1859 and relocated to Chicago in 1861. For a two-year period, 1867-69, the firm relocated to Elgin and then returned to Chicago. The brothers lived in Elgin for that two-year period and by early 1869 were producing 40 gallons of Wizard Oil each day here in Elgin. Lysander married Ella Town, the daughter of an Elgin banker, in 1868, and John's fourth child, George, was born here that

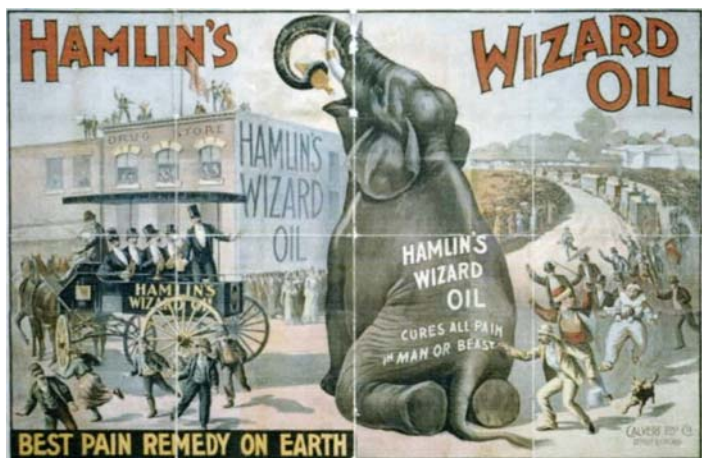
same year. In 1869, citing a need for first-class shipping facilities, the brothers moved their business back to Chicago. In 1886, however, Lysander and his family returned to make Elgin their permanent residence, purchasing the Chisholm mansion at 120 S. State St.



Hamlin Home, 120 S. State St.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, traveling performance troupes, such as circuses, wild west shows and medicine shows, were commonplace across the country. In the Midwest and South, one of the most well-known and successful medicine shows was that produced by the Hamlin brothers to promote their Wizard Oil concoction. The performing troupes were basically advertising crews whose purpose was to sell Wizard Oil, a medicine they claimed could heal any sore and subdue any pain. They would create a demand among their audience members and at the same time convince local druggists to stock their product.

Big on showmanship, the Wizard Oil troupes were rigidly standardized and were, according to a former performer, “the last word in class, dignity and social distinction.” Its employees were contractually bound to wear identical silk top hats, Prince Albert coats with gray dress vests, pinstriped trousers and spats. Their style of dress was a Hamlin trademark and a performer would be fined if he, for example, appeared in public in a roll collar, instead of a more gentlemanly wing collar.



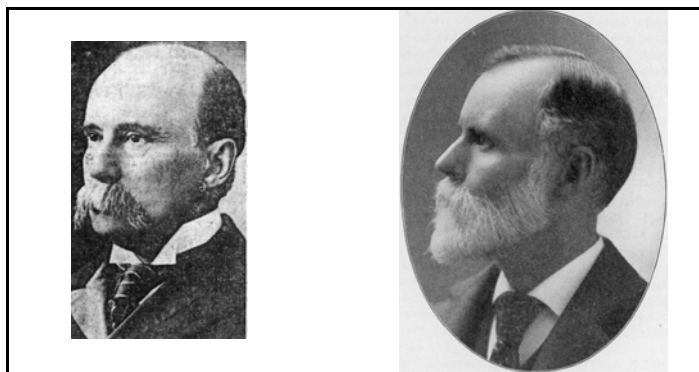
Typically, a Wizard Oil troupe was composed of a lecturer (“pitchman”), a driver and a vocal quartet that also played brass band instruments. They traveled and performed out of self-contained wagons pulled by a four- or six-horse team. The wagons evolved into mobile performing stages that were marvels of compact efficiency, including built-in parlor organs. Hamlin performers were welcome visitors in small Midwestern towns, and would stay up to six weeks in one location. The quartet would sing and play instruments to gather a crowd before the sales pitch began. Song pamphlets were distributed and sometimes the audience would sing along. Wizard Oil advertising was interspersed among the entertainment and in the pamphlets. It was company practice to cultivate goodwill by volunteering to perform for local church groups and charities. Occasionally, a Hamlin troupe would play indoors at the local opera house, but most performances were outdoors on the company wagon. During the winter some of the wagons not in use in the South were stored behind the Hamlin house in Elgin. A large stable at the rear housed some of the horses which drew the show wagons.

Wizard Oil was primarily sold and used as a liniment for rheumatic pain and sore muscles but was advertised as a treatment for many other maladies. An 1864 ad in an Elgin newspaper claimed that it could cure toothache in three minutes, headache in five minutes, earache in ten minutes, diphtheria in a few hours and rheumatism in a few days. Patent medicine quackery was vigorously opposed by the American Medical Association, but it was not until a series of articles entitled “The Great American Fraud” was published in “Collier’s Weekly” in 1905 that the public became alarmed. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 prohibited fraudulent claims, among other things. In 1916, Laurence B. Hamlin of Elgin, the son of Lysander and manager of the firm, was fined \$200 for advertising that his product “will check the growth and permanently cure cancer.” The judge who imposed the penalty considered it “a very light sentence,” since Hamlin could have been sentenced to five years in prison.

The formula for Wizard Oil was unremarkable as patent medicines go. Containing up to 70% alcohol, it also included camphor, ammonia, chloroform, sassafras, cloves and turpentine. It was strong-smelling and produced a tingle on the skin. In some cases, the user was directed to take it internally. With better-educated consumers and the crackdown on fraudulent advertising, the patent medicine business slowly died out in the early 1900s. Hamlin’s Wizard Oil Liniment became just another product on drugstore shelves. The last reference to it that we could find was in a 1941 newspaper ad for Walgreen Drug Stores.



The Hamlin brothers, John and Lysander, were born in Ohio to William Starr Hamlin (1811-81), a prominent doctor, and his wife Eliza (née Welch). Eliza died in 1841 and William remarried, having three more children with his second wife. By 1859, John and Lysander were living in Cincinnati, where John created Wizard Oil at age 22. Lysander's obituary says that the formula was prepared by their father. In 1861 the brothers moved to Chicago, where they developed the business. Sales were large from the beginning and the business grew rapidly.



John (l.) and Lysander Hamlin, c. 1905

It is not known why the firm moved to Elgin in 1867 but Lysander was a close friend of George H. Daniels (1842-1908), an Elgin resident, with whom he served in the Civil War in a New York regiment. Daniels was the son of Dr. Carlos M. Daniels of Elgin, who had concocted his own patent medicine, the popular Tanta-Miraculous, a vegetable tonic for dyspepsia. George peddled his dad's medicine as a youth, so he and Lysander had a lot in common.

In early 1872, just after the Great Chicago Fire, the Hamlin brothers bought the Hooley Opera House site. Over the next eight years, financed by their Wizard Oil income, they developed the site until in 1880 it became the Grand Opera House. John Austin Hamlin owned and managed the Grand Opera House, one of Chicago's most successful theatrical venues, until his death in 1908. He was assisted by two of his sons, Harry and Fred, after they graduated from Yale in the mid-1880s. Now that he was a theatrical manager, John devoted less time to the Wizard Oil business, which continued to boom under Lysander's guidance. Lysander was vice president and active manager of the firm, eventually assisted by his sons Morris, Laurence and Harold, each of whom, like John's sons, graduated from Yale.

About 1906 Lysander became blind and died in 1910. He is buried in Bluff City Cemetery. His brother John died in 1908 and is buried in Chicago. Following John's death, Lysander's son Laurence, an Elgin resident, became president and general manager of the Wizard Oil Co. until he resigned in 1924 and moved to Orlando, Florida. Lysander's son-in-law, M.M. Cloudman of Elgin, succeeded Laurence as president. Cloudman was apparently the last president, as the firm ceased to exist by the early 1940s.

John Austin Hamlin married Mary Eleanor Hart (1837-1937) in Cincinnati in 1860 and the couple had seven children: Harry Leon (1861-1934); Frederick Rupert (1863-1904); Lawrence Barrett (1865-71); George John (1868-1923; an internationally-prominent opera singer); Herbert William (1870-19??; an attorney); Robert A. (circa 1875-1901); and Elizabeth (Bessie) Florence (1879-1971; Mrs. Mancel Clark).

Lysander Butler Hamlin married Ella Town (1845-1935) in Elgin in 1868 and the couple had four children: Maud Louise (1870-1940; Mrs. M.M. Cloudman); Morris Clinton (1871-1959); Laurence Brewster (1875-1949); and Harold Sherwin (1879-1957). Lysander was one of the organizers of Elgin's Union National Bank and was a 32nd-degree Mason. He was a member of the Century Club and the Elgin Country Club, where all of his sons and son-in-law were skilled golfers. He was fond of fine horses and owned as many as thirty at a time, including some of the best race horses in Elgin. He owned a summer home at Lake Geneva and was active in the Lakeside Park Club. In 1885 Lysander bought property near Orlando, Florida, where he and Ella wintered, raising oranges and pineapples.

The Hamlin monument in Bluff City Cemetery weighs about 23,000 pounds and was transported to Elgin in pieces in 1908 on a flatcar from the Barre, Vermont, granite region. A Greek key design encircles the cap of this massive stone. The monument is shared with the Sherwin family, as the two families were very close. The Hamlin's youngest son's middle name is Sherwin. Ella Town Hamlin's sister, Carrie Town, married William W. Sherwin, a butter tub and cheese

box maker, in 1880 and they lived in the home that the Town sisters grew up in at 80 South State St. That home is near the home that the Hamlins bought in 1886 at 120 South State St. Both homes were razed in the 1960s for high-rise apartment buildings. The Hamlin home, built about 1849, had previously been occupied by a succession of wealthy families – Joshua P. Morgan, Walter L. Pease and Robert Bruce Chisholm. It was converted into 11 apartments in 1941.



Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; Ancestry.com; Newspapers.com research by Laurel Garza; obituaries and other newspaper articles; various Internet sources; 1904 Kane County history; Chicago Tribune online; Hamlin monument photo by Judy Van Dusen; etc.

Thank You Donors

- Bill Briska
- Dan Fox
- Laurel Garza
- Ron and Kathie Lange
- Dan Maki
- Janet Real-Miller
- Christen Sundquist
- Travel Class

Welcome New Members

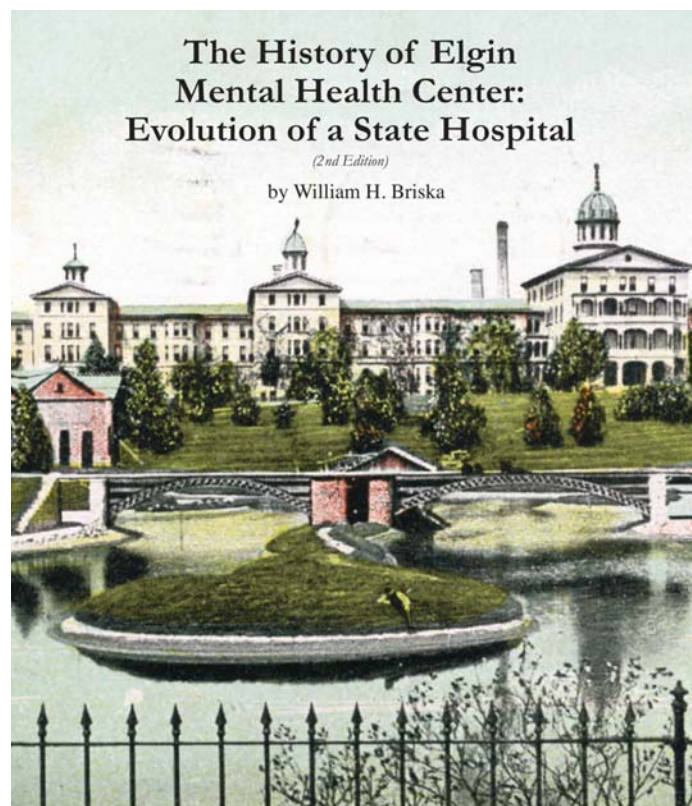
- John and Lamar Blum
- Faith Chapin
- Rick and Sharon Jakle
- Pamela Moseley
- Daniel and Diane Neal
- Trevor Rowe
- Wayne Williams

Updated Elgin Mental Health Center History Now Available

Bill Briska's book on the history of the Elgin State Hospital is available for purchase online and in the Museum Store for \$30. It is a 277-page hardcover book with many new images and updated history for the past 20 years. The video of Bill's lecture on the new book can be viewed on the Museum's website and YouTube Channel. Bill will be speaking again at the Gail Borden Public Library on May 12. Register through the library.



There was a full house for Bill's talk on the hospital history on April 3



ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Collections Corner

Gifford Chair

Steve Bartholomew donated a chair from the Gifford Family in 2019. It needed work, but the Thornapple Questors came to the rescue and wrote a grant to have the chair re-upholstered. After much research and consultation, the chair was finished in March 2022. It is now in the Orientation area of the Museum.



W. W. Abell Blueprints

The Museum often receives requests from people asking to see the blueprints for their home. Unfortunately, the Museum collection has very few architectural drawings or blueprints. Thus it was very exciting when Brian Anderson donated the blueprints to the house at 225 Villa Street. Local architect W.W. Abell made the drawings in 1905 for Mrs. Angel Corbey. Abell's office was located in suite 30 of Elgin's Home Bank Building.

