

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News March 2023

President's Report

Ann LoCascio, President



On January 27, the Museum hosted its first Trivia Night Fun-raiser, to a sold out crowd of 60 and raised \$1500 to benefit the Museum. Al Walters and Mark Clemens took turns as jovial MCs, calling out the Elgin History questions. Research was provided by the Museum's intern, Logan Fingerle, under direction of Museum Educator Rebecca Miller. Curator Beth Nawara selected artifacts from the

archives, including a small brewing barrel and a giant shoe, for the visual portion of the event.

My team was coming in close to the top, with George and Marge Rowe providing most of the answers, and my husband providing railroad-related information. With a thrilling twist at the end of the competition, we bet all our points, hoping to double our score. Almost all the other teams made the same bet, and lost with crushing defeat to the Gold Coast Team (Rudy and Lillian Galfi, Laura Stroud and Ricky Harris) who correctly guessed the locally-coined architectural term "Garabungalow."

Trivia Night was the first of a series of mini-fundraising events that the Museum will be hosting in 2023. We hope to see you all throughout the year.

Thank You Donors!

General Donations

- Alan and Kathy Walters in memory of Mira Wojciechowska

Deborah Kelly's Birthday Celebration

Clare Cavanaugh
Deb Kelly

Lisa Rooney Birthday Celebration

Susan Eide
Pat Jindrich
Mark Rossmore

Dan Miller's Birthday Donations

Laura Anderson	Charlie Liepitz
Tom Armstrong	Riccardo Mancha
Steve Einhorn	John McKeivitt
Terry and Sue Gable	Silvija Moess
Patricia Harkin	Jean Natrop
Kory Kendziora	

General Donations

Phyllis Blizzard	Eileen and Lambert Lucietto
Christopher Burke	Diane and Dan Neal
Jan and Bill Jones	David and Elizabeth Walden
Ron and Kathy Lange	

Giving Tuesday

Betsy and Dwight Armistead	Trish and John LaFleur
Denise Brown	Will Marston
Justin Budd	Peggy Meller
Julie Butcher	Sandi and Dennis McClure
Kari Christensen	Susan McIntyre
Laura Costello	Rebecca and Mike Miller
Susan and Allen Cramton	Krisilee Murphy
Susan Cudden	Natalie Murphy
Kimberly Doren	Colleen O'Keefe
Lynn DuPratt	Leslie Pappas
Linda Fingleson	Jason Pawlowski
Jennifer Fukala	John Pullaro
Mark Fry	Lisa Richman
Rudy and Lil Galfi	George and Marge Rowe
Francine Haight	Brett Rozek
Patricia Harkin	Dylan Rozek
Thomas Hokenson	Erin Rozek
Todd Ivens	Alan and Kathy Walters
Deborah Kelly	

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Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society
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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline April 20, 2023

 Visit our website Elginhistory.org

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Annual Report

Year in Review – Al Walters, President

2022 was an active year at the Elgin History Museum. Importantly, for the first time since 2020, operations that were interrupted by Covid returned to normal. How exciting to see volunteers and docents, visitors and school kids, program presenters and attendees return in person. The Museum is at its best with frequent activity.

Some highlights from 2022 include:

- Opened and celebrated four new exhibits.
- Membership has reached an all-time high.
- Presented numerous programs in-person, with Zoom and YouTube access provided for out-of-town members.
- Organized two very successful fundraising events: the annual Gala and the Cemetery Walk.
- Produced a 15-minute video on the history of German people in Elgin.
- Updated a local history education resource titled The Story of Our Towns for use by U-46 grade schools.
- Uploaded 2,000 historic photographic images to multiple websites.
- Photographed more artifacts for digital access.
- Added parking lot, exterior deck, stairway, and handicap lift enclosure to the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone in preparation for May's grand opening.
- Assisted the Alft family in celebrating the remarkable lives of their late parents, Mike and Fran, as they were brought home to Elgin for interment.
- Enhanced our partnerships with Gail Borden Library, Lords Park Zoo, Explore Elgin Tourism, the City of Elgin and others.
- Accepted hundreds of items from 99 donors into our collection

The Elgin History Museum had an active, successful, and rewarding year. Our new leadership team is off and running. 2023 will be just as productive. Stop by to see what's new or attend a program!

Treasurer's Report - Bill Briska, Treasurer

The Elgin Area Historical Society continues to be in sound financial condition. It remains debt-free, timely in paying bills, adequately insured, has an emergency reserve fund, and a small endowment.

In 2022 new income for operations at the Museum and the ongoing rehabilitation of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House totaled \$225,005. Expenditures totaled \$343,163. The difference between operational income and expenditures was largely due to the \$127,558 spent on the work at the Kimball House. A

Upcoming Events

Check the website for current information. Events take place at the Elgin History Museum unless otherwise noted. elginhistory.org/events

March 12, 2:00 P.M.

Mamie Eisenhower: The Hostess in Chief

Settle in for a cup of tea and plate of fudge with America's beloved first lady, Mamie Eisenhower portrayed by Ellie Carlson.



April 20 - July 1, Gail Borden Public Library
Jewish Experience in Elgin exhibit on display

The Museum's exhibit will be on display at the Gail Borden Public Library.

Elgin's Congregation Kneseth Israel is celebrating 130 years! Historian Richard Renner highlights Jewish families and culture in Elgin over 100 years from the 1850s. Max Adler's family immigrated to Elgin from Germany. He graduated from Elgin High School and ultimately donated the funding for Chicago's Adler Planetarium.

large portion of that amount, about \$94,000 will be reimbursed to the Historical Society by grants after the work is completed. By design, the remaining difference between operational income and expenditures was made up with income from the endowment fund.

Approximately one-third of the endowment fund's assets are invested to generate income for Museum operations. The remaining two-thirds of the assets are invested in conservative, growth oriented mutual funds and other securities. The value of the endowment's investments at the end of 2022 was \$2,894,584.

Grants and Fundraising

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

The IMLS Digitization Grant work was mostly completed by the end of 2022. 2,000 historic images were made accessible online on different platforms.

- The Making Space project was extended into 2023.
- The DAR Historic Preservation Grant, the IDNR Public Museum Grant, and the Kane County Riverboat Grant for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House were extended into 2023.
- The Grand Victoria Foundation granted the Elgin History Museum \$12,500.
- Giving Tuesday raised \$13,302 in donations.
- The Board Fundraiser generated \$18,000 in donations.
- The Museum Gala garnered \$11,200 in tickets, silent auction, and donations.
- The Cemetery Walk raised \$8,400 in admission and sponsorships.

STEPS Accreditation

Tricia Grosser, Past Vice President

In 2016, a self-evaluation of the Museum's performance and operations was undertaken by board members and staff. Five standards were assessed. In those areas the committees reported a "silver level" of progress. In 2021-2022, a reassessment was conducted in all five standard levels, plus an additional assessment for the Stewardship of Historic Structures standard. These are the outcomes:

Mission, Vision, And Governance

Revised: Mission and Vision Statements and By-Laws
Created: Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion Statement; Conflict of Interest Statement and Policy; and Constitution was integrated into the By-Laws.
Silver Level achieved.

Management: Revised and assessed Donor privacy policy; Risk assessment; Financial protection; and Personnel Policy Manual. Silver level achieved.

Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes
Created Long Term Maintenance and Capital Needs Log for Old Main and Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Interpretive Plan; Public Use policy for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House; Emergency and

Disaster Preparedness, and a Response and Recovery Plan that includes risk assessment.

Silver level achieved.

Audience And Community Engagement: Reviewed accessibility for visitors and involvement of stakeholders. It also included environmental sustainability and climate change and involvement in the community.
Bronze level achieved.

Stewardship Of Collections: Revised the Collections Management Policy and Collections Procedure Manual. This included adding a digitization policy and emergency/disaster response and recovery plan. Silver level achieved.

Interpretation: Reviewed the interpretive plan. Included the use of primary sources, shared authority, and multisensory choices in exhibits and programs. Silver level achieved.

Museum Store – Sandi McClure, Museum Store Volunteer Manager

The publication of the book *Elgin Mental Health Center: Evolution of a State Hospital* helped the Museum store make a profit of \$3,630. In addition to this book *Forty Dollars and A Dream: Breaking Through the Bamboo Ceiling* was added to the inventory. Mini crocks and baseball caps were reintroduced. The third and final collectible ceramic Elgin Watch ornament was available during the holidays. The Museum stocked up on pens, magnets and flashlights.

Membership - Paul Larson, Membership Chair

At the end of 2022, 375 membership households were active, a new all-time high. 50 new families joined the Museum during the year.

Education Report

Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator

In 2022, 32 education programs were presented to 836 students. This is a significant increase from 247 students attending 26 programs in 2021! The programming brought in nearly \$4,000 in 2022.

The Museum Educator helped Linda Hoffman arrange a talk on artists Tom Holmes and Blanch Fischer Wright Holmes at the Gail Borden Public Library.

The new educational program "Old and New" debuted in December and was presented four times for Parkwood, McKinley, Horizon and Washington Elementary Schools. It is proving to be very popular with second-grade teachers and hits one of their social studies curriculum standards right on the nose.

The Museum held the second annual holiday Leewards ornament making event. Fifty-five people participated to make a Leewards-inspired ornament.

Volunteer speakers in the Speaker's Bureau presented 33 interactive lectures and performances to a variety of groups.

Historical Collections

Beth Nawara, Curator of Collections

The Collections Committee met 12 times in 2022, reviewing donations from 99 donors. About 830 items were accessioned. Significant donations included an Elgin National Brewery keg, Elgin Watch Words from the 1920s, Freiler shot glasses, Marie Templin artwork, and a derby hat with a Chas. G. Shoemaker Co. label.

- 2 interns and many volunteers helped catalog objects in the collection and enter collection data into the Museum's software database.
- Lara Garza spent over 300 hours scanning Courier-News negatives, postcards, and photographs.
- Jackie Marcus volunteered 100 hours helping photograph objects and data entry for the Courier-News digitization grant projects.
- Ira Marcus spent 134 hours photographing and processing 790 Museum objects including artwork and dairy bottles.
- The Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board grant to digitize 700 Courier-News negatives was completed. Work on the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to digitize Courier-News negatives continued.
- There are 8,881 images on the Museum's website to help make the collection accessible to more people.

Exhibits – Museum Staff

The *Elgin Women's Club Celebrates 135 Years* exhibit opened in April with an opening reception and later a lecture by Elgin Historian Jerry Turnquist.

Art and Architecture photography exhibit by Carolyn Buhrow was installed in May with an opening reception. The images showed the beauty of Elgin's architecture.

50 Years of the Elgin Symphony League was celebrated with an exhibit that opened in June.

Elgin's Fox River: An Environmental History exhibit opened in the temporary gallery at the end of August. It highlights how important the Fox River and watershed is to the Elgin area for drinking water, sewage, recreation and industry.

Publications, Videos, and Media

Trish LaFleur, Media Coordinator

- Cemetery Walk video, German Immigration video.
- Blog posts and articles on Hamlin's Slough, Arc Light Towers, and Artist Marie Templin
- WRMN Elgin 100 Years Ago Today radio program every day in 2022.

Attendance Numbers 2022

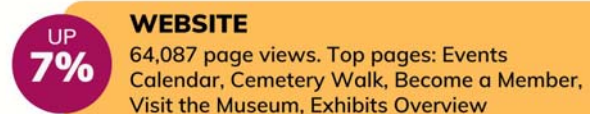
- 1,664 Museum Visitors
- 2,702 Event Attendees
- 120 Cobblestone Event participants

- 1,358 Speaker's Bureau attendees
- 955 Meeting Room guests
- 1,300 Traveling Exhibit Attendees
- 830 Partnership Event guests
- 82 Research Requests

Total In-Person Reach: 9,011



EMAIL, WEBSITE AND MEDIA



36 MEDIA MENTIONS

2022 Programs - Betsy Armistead, Program Chair

- Jan. 9: John F. Lyons, "The Beatles, Chicago and the 1960s"
- Feb. 20: Dr. Felicia La Boy, "Significant Black Women of the Reconstruction Era"
- Mar.13: Linda Rock, "Elgin Women"
- April 3: Bill Briska, "Elgin Mental Health Center"
- April 9: Volunteer Appreciation Brunch – Training
- Apr. 11: Linda Rock, "Fun in Elgin" at Library
- May 7: Open Elgin - Cobblestone House Event
- May 11: Jerry Turnquist, Walk Around Lords Park
- May 12: Bill Briska, "Elgin Mental Health Center" at Library
- May 19: Jerry Turnquist, "Elgin Veterans"
- June 16: Ann Chipman and Richard Renner, "A History of Elgin Community College"
- July 10: Classic Car Show
- July 17: Leslie Goddard, "Remembering Route 66"

- July 21: Richard Bennett, “My Life in Show Business”
- Aug. 10: Jerry Turnquist, “Elgin Road Race” at Library
- Aug. 14: Martina Mathieson, “Louella Parsons”
- Aug. 18: Linda Rock, “Hats off to Elgin”
- Sept. 15: Jerry Turnquist, “Education in Elgin”
- Sept. 24/25: Cemetery Walk
- Oct. 9: Annual Meeting: Annette Isaacs, “The History of Beer”
- Oct. 29: Annual Gala, Oktoberfest at Holiday Inn
- Dec. 3: Holiday Tea: Olde Town Carolers

Welcome New Members

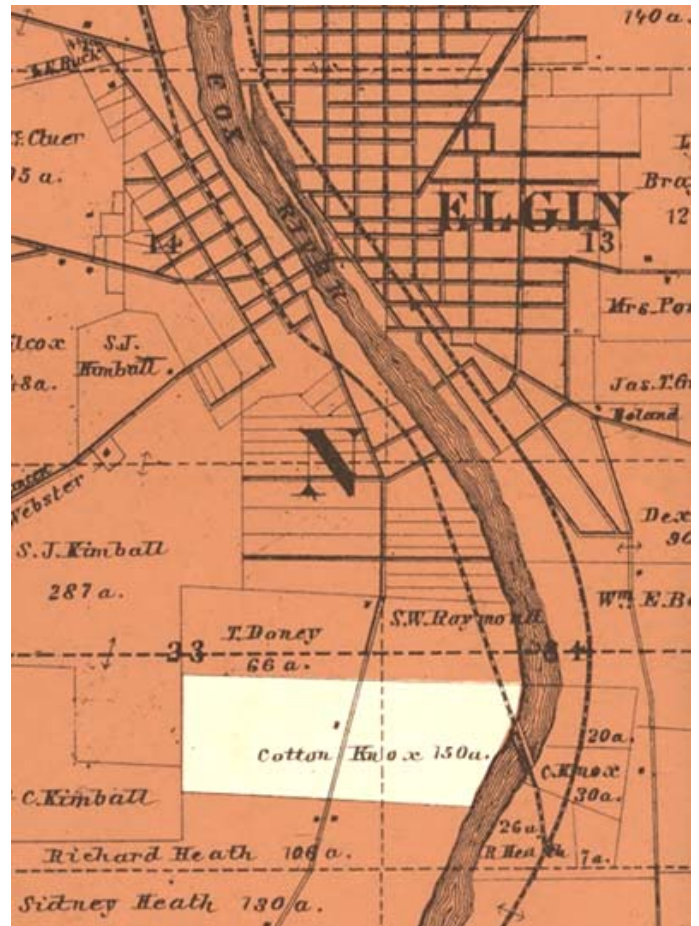
Mary T. Bavido	Priscilla Nagreen
Kari Christensen	Rachael Proulx
Benjamin Downs	Shirley Remes
Barbara Keselica	Karen Sherman
Mary Kirkman	Jane Textor
Jeanette Mihalec	Rebekah Thompson

The Chisholm Family of Elgin – Part One

David Siegenthaler, Researcher

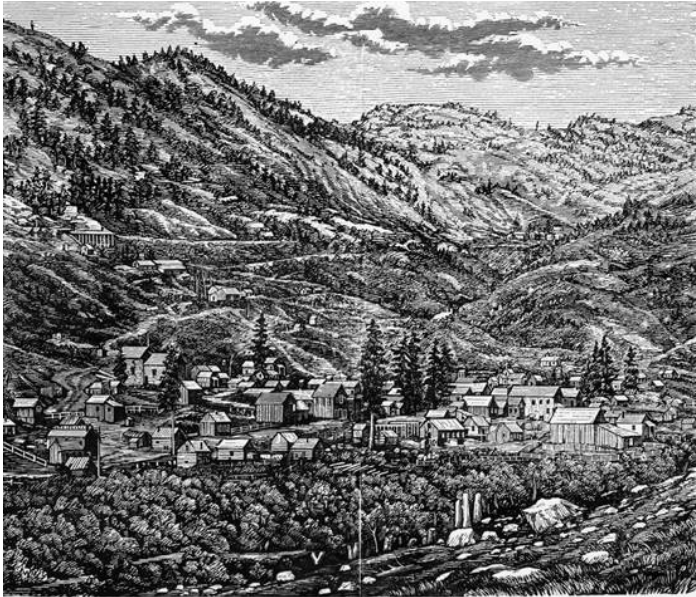
One of Elgin’s wealthiest families in the late 1800s derived their wealth from mining interests in the West. Robert Bruce Chisholm (1812-91), of Scottish descent, was a true adventurer at heart. By the time he moved to Elgin in 1863 at age 50, he had lived in two countries and numerous states. Robert traveled extensively throughout the mining regions of the American West and Mexico. Why he moved to Elgin is unclear. Having lived in Chicago in the late 1830s and in the Galena area in the 1840s, Robert was familiar with Elgin. His two oldest sons were both trained in the printer’s trade and the Elgin Gazette was a thriving newspaper. Also, by coincidence, Robert had spent most of his youth living in Elgin County, Ontario, Canada.

In 1863 Robert purchased the 155-acre Colton Knox farm just south of Elgin along the west bank of the Fox River. In 1869 he sold it to the State of Illinois for \$75 per acre. This land, along with the purchase of adjacent farms, became the site of the Northern Illinois Hospital for the Insane (now the Elgin Mental Health Center). While living here he continued to explore the mining regions out West.



Future site of Northern Illinois Hospital for the Insane

In 1864 Robert was in an assayer’s office in Utah when a prospector brought in an ore sample from the Little Cottonwood Canyon at Alta, Utah, in the Wasatch Mountains just east of Salt Lake City. The ore, upon assay, proved to be so rich in silver that Robert remarked to the prospector that there must be rich mines in that canyon and he should follow up his discovery. The prospector proceeded to do so and sold part interest to developers, who smelted tons of ore in the canyon with disappointing results, eventually abandoning the mine and forfeiting their claim. In late 1868 Robert formed a partnership with James F. Woodman (1823-1902), an old prospecting crony, and they selected a claim about 500 feet down the mountain from the abandoned claim. Winter snows forced them out of the mountains and Robert returned to his Elgin farm, hoping to liquidate his property to raise money to continue prospecting. By May 1869 Robert was still unable to sell his farm, so he asked his eldest son, William, who at that time was working as a printer in Chicago, to meet Woodman in Utah and continue exploring their claim. William and Woodman together had only ten dollars and were forced to exchange shares in their claim to investors for advances in money and credit.



Alta City, Little Cottonwood, with Grizzly Flat and Emma Hill in the Distance.

Little Cottonwood Canyon at Alta, Utah. Emma Hill in background

In July 1869, Robert sold his farm for \$11,625 and moved to Brook St. in Elgin. He sent money to Utah to help fund the continuing exploration of his claim. In October 1869, William and Woodman broke through to a chamber of solid ore. They had struck silver! The chamber was subsequently discovered to be 90 feet high, 40 feet wide and 125 feet long. This new discovery was found in a different direction from the original shaft. William and Woodman relocated their claim and, in February 1870, had it surveyed and entered on the books of the district. Needing to name the mine, William Chisholm suggested "Emma," for his 11-year-old sister, Mary Emma, who had been writing him long letters urging him to come home.

About March 1870, the Chisholms and Woodman sold shares of their claim and the new owners took over management of the Emma Mine. In June 1870, a man who had bought an interest in Chisholm's former claim in 1868 filed a lawsuit. He and his lawyers had worked up an old title to a nearby mine, which proved to be fraudulent. To defend his claim, Robert hired Edward Joslyn of Elgin and a Salt Lake City law firm. Joslyn, a brilliant lawyer, exposed the fraud and won the case for his clients.

In March 1871, wealthy mining speculators from New York bought a large share of the Emma Mine and assumed the entire business management, forming a stock company. The new owners worked the mine vigorously, extracting large quantities of high-quality ore. They proceeded to buy up all other interests in the mine. James Woodman sold his last interest in the mine in the winter of 1871 for \$110,000. Robert Chisholm sold his last interest in April 1872 for \$226,000.

During this same time period, 1871-72, the Emma Mine was becoming depleted, though this fact was covered up by the owners who were attempting to sell out to British investors for a massive profit. Bogus ore samples and the reputation of a U.S. ambassador were part of an international scandal exposed by a U.S. Congressional investigation in 1876.

In 1872, with no further interests in the Emma Mine, the Chisholm family was flush with cash. In 1873, prospecting partner James Woodman got married and moved to Elgin, buying the former Walter Pease mansion at 120 S. State St. (razed 1969) for \$28,000. In 1875, Woodman, eager to return to Utah, sold this home to Robert Chisholm for \$19,000, and it was in the Chisholm family from then until 1886 when it was sold to the Lysander Hamlin family for \$16,000. Robert's wife Sarah died in 1878 and he moved to California in 1884 to live with his son, Robert, Jr.



ca. 1885

Chisholm mansion, 120 S. State St.



After the Emma Mine, Robert, now in his sixties, didn't do much prospecting but continued to invest in various mining enterprises. His four sons all became involved in successful mining careers as prospectors, managers and investors. In 1876 the Centennial Eureka Mine was opened at Eureka, about 75 miles south of Salt Lake City. Eventually, all of the Chisholm family members, as well as James Woodman, had interests in the Centennial Eureka Mine, which was still productive in the late 1890s.

To be continued

Hamlin Slough

Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator

In a recent game of “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Clues- Where?” we studied a photograph taken from atop the 125 foot light tower at the corner of Locust and Elm Streets. In the photograph we could see the back of the John McNeil home at 162 S. State St., the Elgin National Watch Co. factory, and the National House. The photo was cropped for the article but is worth a second look in its uncropped form.

A Second Look at the Picture

In the uncropped photo is a distinctive body of water, just behind the McNeil home and garden. It is a perfect opportunity for a quick game of A Picture is Worth a Thousand Clues.



*What is at the site of this pond today?
89.1.673b Elgin History Museum collection.*

To recap, we know the photo was taken in late 1883 or early 1884, notice the ice on the body of water. We also know where the photo was taken: from atop the electric carbon arc light tower at the corner of Locust and Elm streets. But **WHAT** is this body of water? Those who live on Elgin’s west side know there is no pond there now. So what was this and what’s there now?

Elgin in 1883/1884

To answer that question we have to remember what Elgin was like in 1883/1884. The city ran on horsepower, and not the modern kind. Automobiles had not yet come to Elgin; residents traveled distances by horse and wagon. These animals left hundreds of pounds of manure on city streets. Privy vaults (what a delightful name for bottom of the outhouse hole) had to be emptied manually and disposed of elsewhere. Elgin residents kept cows, pigs and chickens who also made manure which needed to be disposed. The hog operation on Goff’s Island in the middle of the Fox River created a notable stench for watch factory employees at

their workstations. Visit the Museum’s YouTube channel to learn the fate of those pigs and the island itself. A Spring 1883 edition of the *Advocate* newspaper reported downtown streets were “reeking of pestilential filth.”

Trash, Trash and More Trash

More mundane trash also accumulated. Items purchased at the local grocery often came wrapped in brown paper. Glass bottles and tin cans were common by this time and were considered trash when empty. Newspapers, old clothing, wood ashes, food waste, and broken furniture had to be taken care of at homes all over town. In 1880 Elgin’s population was 8,787 but within 10 years it would grow to 17,723, a 101% increase. All these people were making trash and it had to go somewhere.

Take it to the Dump

There was no city trash service at this time; residents made their own arrangements and most of the time that meant paying a private hauler to take the trash to open dumps. Many of these dumps were outside city limits but others were not. Dumps were located on Bent Street, Laurel Street, Bluff City Boulevard, Summit Street, and along the river downtown, where the trash pile was higher than a neighboring factory. These were what was known as “open dumps”. They were simply piles of trash, sometimes behind a short fence. They were not maintained, leveled, raked or covered with any material in an attempt at public safety. We now know these kinds of dumps are dangerous to groundwater supplies, they can spread disease and they attract vermin in addition to being an eyesore.

But what is it?

The body of water shown in this photo was originally known as Pease Pond and later Hamlin Slough. Today it would be bounded by Locust and Elm Streets. It was a low lying and swampy area on the west side that simply filled with water when the season was right. Spring rains often caused the pond to flood neighboring lots on Locust St. The pond was eventually drained, leaving an obnoxious mud hole. In an attempt at a win-win solution, the mud hole was used as an open dump for a short period. Known as the Elm Street dump, the trash pile was covered with ashes when the dump was full. In 1914 residents observed smoke rising from the ash covered mud hole-turned-dump. Burning peat had ignited the trash below the ashes. A herd of fat rats a thousand strong was soon seen fleeing the site. Problems continued at the former dump into the 1940s when a cricket infestation plagued nearby neighbors.

No More Dumps

The city closed all trash dumps within city limits in 1948. The Elm Street dump was already closed by this time but the area probably looked much like what you would expect from a covered-over dump. This however would turn out to be a good thing.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



A True Win-Win

St. Edward High School opened in 1941 at 335 Locust Street, occupying the former George Lord Elementary School. The St. Edward team played their home games at Elgin High School's Maroon Field, near present-day Huff Elementary at 801 Hastings Street. By 1950, St. Edward purchased the former dump across the street from the school and repurposed it as a football field and track. This was quite a win: it is a challenge for urban high schools to have adjacent football fields in the residential neighborhoods these schools occupy. At that time, Elgin High was located at 360 DuPage St., 10 blocks from Maroon Field.

The body of water at Elm and Locust is a swampy area turned dump, later converted to the sports field for St. Edward High School.



Students preparing the field for grass planting, May 16, 1950. Museum collection CN 59670

Meet the New Intern

Logan Fingerle is the new intern at the Museum. Logan attends Aurora University and is working as an intern for the spring 2023 semester. He helped prepare the questions for Trivia Night and is assisting with general research and other tasks at the Museum. Welcome Logan!

