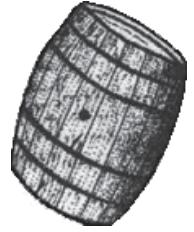


# The Crackerbarrel



## Elgin History Museum News May 2023

### President's Report

Anne LoCascio, President



May is Preservation Month and in 2023 the Museum has some exciting activities planned.

May 6 is the dedication of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. It's been a long journey since the Elgin Historical Society took on the project 8 years ago and we are ready to celebrate.

The project was accomplished with the tireless dedication of an army of volunteers, donors and crafts people who have resurrected the 1846 home from disrepair and neglect. I live near the site and have seen the trans-

formation over the years into something that is a credit to the neighborhood and a joy to look at every time I pass by. There isn't space enough in this letter, or even this issue of The Crackerbarrel, to list everyone who made this project possible.

On May 6, tours of the house will take place from 11:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M., with a dedication at 1:00 P.M. That's not all we have planned for you this May. Join Rebecca Hunter for a walking tour of the mid-century Wing Park neighborhood May 11. On May 13, Rebecca Hunter and Beth Nawara will be giving behind the scenes tours of the Museum. Al Walters will be Remembering Walton Island on May 18 and Bill Briska will be leading a Hilltop Cemetery Tour on May 20.

We hope you enjoy the activities we've planned. There is something to interest everyone.

### NANCY KIMBALL COBBLESTONE HOUSE Open House and Ribbon Cutting



**1pm**  
Speakers  
Presentation

Live  
music and  
kids  
activities

Photos with  
Nancy!



**May 6 from 11am-3pm / 302 W. Chicago St.**

## The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline June 20, 2023



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

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## May 18, 12:00 noon: Brown Bag Lunch: Remembering Walton Island with Al Walters

In-person event /FREE for Members / \$5 for guests. Now one of Elgin's most beautiful parks, Walton Island was once thought of as an eyesore. Also touches on the history of the Fox River shoreline.

## May 20, 10:00 A.M.: Hilltop Cemetery Tour with Bill Briska (Meet at Highlands Golf Course) FREE event, donations accepted

Tucked into the Elgin Sports Complex is the burial ground for the old Elgin State Hospital. Tour the cemetery with historian Bill Briska to discover this little known site and some stories it has to tell.

## May 23, 7:00 - 8:30 P.M.: How to Cemetery Walk Presented by Rudy Galfi at Gail Borden Public Library, Main Branch

Curious about the Elgin History Museum's famous fall event, the Cemetery Walk? Learn about its history, how you can attend or volunteer, and view the 2022 video. Please register:

<http://attend.gailborden.info/event/7983906>

## May 24, 6:30 P.M.: Hats Off to Elgin with Linda Rock Gail Borden Public Library, Rakow Branch

See Historian Linda Rock's extensive hat collection and hear interesting bits of Elgin history from each decade of hat fashion. Feel free to wear a vintage hat!

## May 24, 6:30 – 7:30 P.M.

### History of Elgin Historic Preservation 1980-2023

Gail Borden Public Library, Main Branch.

Please register: <http://attend.gailborden.info/event/8054140>

Architectural historian Rebecca Hunter and Heritage Commission Chairman John Marston present Elgin's preservation movement from the 1982 house tour to the 2022 mid west area architectural survey.

## May 29, 11:00 A.M.; and live broadcast on WRMN 1410 AM: Memorial Day at Bluff City Cemetery 945 Bluff City Blvd.

Co-Sponsored by Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association and City of Elgin. [www.elginmemorialday.org](http://www.elginmemorialday.org).

## June 6, 7:00 P.M.: Elgin Watch Factory: A Worker's Life Gail Borden Public Library, Main Branch. Please register: <http://attend.gailborden.info/event/8037877>

What was it like to work at the Elgin National Watch Company? Elgin historian Bill Briska and Museum Educator Rebecca Miller revisit a time when everyone walked to work and had lunch at noon.

## June 10, 6:30 P.M. Meet at Elgin History Museum: Scavenger Hunt Fun-raiser! in Downtown Elgin \$20 Members/\$25 Non-members

Participants get 1-1/2 hours to solve clues and complete tasks leading them on a journey through Elgin's historic downtown. Find fascinating landmarks, buildings, and points of interest offering a glimpse into Elgin's rich cultural heritage. Then return to the

## Upcoming Events

**May 1 – 31: New exhibit: P.E.O. Chapter DY in Elgin**  
This women's society chapter, chartered in 1933, is celebrating 90 years of philanthropic work with a new exhibit on view.

**May 2, 6:00 – 9:00 P.M.**

**Elgin's 33rd Annual Mayor's Awards for Preservation Frida's Party Room, 219 W. Highland Avenue, Elgin**

Elgin Heritage Commission honors outstanding contributors to Elgin's heritage. To attend, call 847-931-6776

**May 6, 11:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.**

**Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Grand Opening 302 W. Chicago St. FREE Event**

Open house. Hear the home's journey of preservation and celebrate the grand opening. Live music and fun activities for kids - get your photo taken with Nancy! Speaker presentation at 1:00 P.M.

**May 11, 6:00 P.M.**

**Walking Tour of Wing Park's Mid-Century Homes**

Meet at Wing Park front parking lot along Wing Street. See the beauty and history of this neighborhood's mid-century homes with architectural historian Rebecca Hunter and Judson University Architecture Student Lauren Hall. To attend call 847-610-0993.

**May 13, 11:30 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. FREE Event**

**Behind the Scenes Tour of the Elgin History Museum**

See behind the scenes at the Museum with Architectural Historian and Heritage Commissioner, Rebecca Hunter and Museum Curator Beth Nawara. Max. 15 people per tour. To register: <https://bit.ly/EHMTour>.

Museum for prizes and refreshments. Tickets:  
<https://elginhistory.org/shop-category/admission/>

#### **June 15, 12:00 noon Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Advertising with Linda Rock**

Linda Rock will explore vintage promo items used by Elgin businesses at the turn-of-the-century through the mid 50s. Along with the history of the business, she will dive into the creative and strategic ways these items were used by Elgin businesses to attract and retain customers.

#### **Save the Date!**

**July 9, 10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.: Classic Car Show and Museum Store SALE! Rain date July 16**

#### **September 9 & 10, Historic Elgin House Tour**

9:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. both days. The historic Northeast Neighborhood on Elgin's east side

#### **September 23 & 24: Cemetery Walk**

Saturday, September 23 tours at 2:00 P.M. & 5:30 P.M.  
Sunday, September 24 tours at 11:00 A.M. & 1:30 P.M.

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## **At Last: Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House Grand Opening May 6**

After 8 years of fundraising, planning, and hard work, the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House restoration and rehabilitation project is complete and the house is now ready to host events and meetings, become an educational space, hold hands-on demonstrations, or anything else the community can dream up! Tour the finished house and hear the home's journey of preservation as the community and the Museum celebrate the grand opening with an open house on Saturday May 6. A presentation will take place at 1:00 P.M.

#### **Why Save this House?**

In 2015, the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House at 302 W. Chicago St. was boarded up, neglected, forlorn, and forgotten. The interior had been gutted, revealing structural problems and architectural challenges galore. Some people thought it was best to tear down this neighborhood eyesore. But, to a few others it was a once in a lifetime opportunity.



*A sad sight in 2015*

Here was the chance to dramatically show the value of rehabilitating historic buildings. The house still possessed architectural and historic significance. It was one of only six remaining cobblestone buildings in the city, and perhaps the oldest building in town. Cobblestone buildings are a unique architectural style.

For over 100 years, the building was the home of one of the city's founding and most important families. The Kimball family were vital to Elgin's early civic and business endeavors. The house was poised on a corner lot, an ideal place to become a landmark entryway to the historic near west neighborhood.

Here was a building that could foster neighborhood pride and identity. Saving it could inspire nearby property owners to invest in and save their own buildings. It could spur interest in the rich history of the near west side. It could be a community gathering place for educational and cultural arts programing. It could serve a wide range of age groups, in a variety of ways. It was the only Elgin cobblestone building in public ownership, meaning it could serve a larger public purpose than just being a private residence. But first it just needed to be saved.

#### **The Challenge was Daunting**

The City had purchased the building in 2009 with the intention of converting it to a resident officer's home, but structural issues made the cost of rehab seem prohibitive. No developer could profitably rehab the building; the city could not justify spending that much more money on the house. No neighborhood group, not-for-profit club, or organization had the resources or manpower to take on the job.



*Squalid basement apartment, one of six*

Only the Elgin Area Historical Society was in the position to find a way forward. That way relied on partnerships with many groups and individuals, donations of cash, in-kind services, and volunteer labor, grants from many sources, and, finally, a strong relationship with city staff and elected officials. The Elgin Area Historical Society stood ready to realize the potential of this building for this community.

## Who Are the Kimballs?

After meeting Elgin founder James T. Gifford in Chicago, Joseph Kimball arrived in Elgin in 1835. By agreement he staked a claim to land on the west side of the Fox River. The two men agreed to share the work of building a dam to create water power for mills. Joseph Kimball and his kin, settling on the west side of the river, built a sawmill and flour mill, hotels and stores. The Kimball family and later settlers would be key to developing the near west side of Elgin.

In July 1835, Joseph set out for New Hampshire to move his wife Nancy and their children to Elgin. However, on the trip east he was stricken with cholera and died in Ohio later that month.

In 1837, Nancy, her son William Currier Kimball, and daughter Ruth Ann moved to Elgin. The original Kimball homestead was along what is now South Street, near Vine and Jewett streets. Nancy lived there until 1846. That was when her sons, William and Samuel, had Ralph Grow, a stonemason from upstate New York, build the cobblestone home at 302 W. Chicago St. Nancy Kimball resided in the home until her death in 1888 at the age of 101.

William and Samuel Kimball were both mayors of Elgin. William was a successful businessman. Samuel was a farmer who encouraged other local farmers to start shipping milk to Chicago, leading to the Elgin Board of Trade a generation later. The Kimball Family were prominent and active in Elgin until the 1970s, with the well-known Kimball Furniture Store.



Gutted interior revealed cobblestone construction from the inside. Original beams were reused when possible. Photo from 2018.

## Partnerships Helped It Happen

The Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House project is a story about cooperative partnerships. After the Kimball Family sold the house in 1954, the building was divided into four apartments. In the 1970s, two more apartments were added in the lower level. By 2008, the house had become a problem property with 81 emergency calls in 3 months, nearly one a day.

In February 2009 the City of Elgin purchased the house, with plans to eliminate the blight by rehabilitating the home for the resident police officer program (ROPE). But that never happened because in preparing the building for rehabilitation, the contractors found the building to be structurally unsafe.

The first partnership was between the Museum, Near West Neighbors, and the City of Elgin. After years of being boarded up, the Near West Neighbors Association president, Jennifer Fukala, approached the Elgin Area Historical Society for help. In 2015, discussions began with city manager Sean Stegall. The following year an agreement was reached that the Historical Society would fundraise and manage the rehabilitation of the house for a new purpose. The city would retain ownership and lease the finished building back to the Historical Society to operate. The new purpose envisioned a building that could serve the neighborhood and the city in a variety of ways:

- an educational venue
- a gallery
- a landmark entry to the Near West neighborhood
- a demonstration of historic preservation at its best
- a meeting place to foster historical awareness, neighborhood pride and identity, and encourage home restoration, creating a positive interaction with the neighborhood.

There continue to be so many exciting and important connections:

- **Dan Miller** and the Gifford Park Association have contributed not only as donors, but Dan and Pat Miller designed all of the wood trim in the building to be appropriate for the 1840s when the house was built. Dan created the baseboards, window and door trim in his shop and installed it over a period of two years. He also made some doors and built the interior staircase. Dan even made the newel post and spindles for the stair balustrade!
- **Paul Spiller**, a plumber, had his business a few doors away from the house and jumped in to help save the house. Paul donated his time and labor to install all of the plumbing in the building over four years!
- The **Wild Ones** garden group got involved by suggesting a native landscape for the cobblestone. Now they are two years into a phased-in native plant demonstration garden.
- **Matt Martin** donated his architectural services for designing the front porch and the back lift enclosure, deck and stairs. His partnership allowed the project to move forward with a harmonious addition to the building.

## Eight Years is a Long Time!

The Historical Society board agreed to undertake the project, with the caveat that it did not threaten the financial stability of the organization. No money would be taken away from Museum operations at Old Main. Work would progress as funds were raised. A team of volunteers and Museum staff was assembled to guide the project.

### Cobblestone Volunteer Team

Bill Briska, Elizabeth Marston, George Rowe, Dennis Roxworthy, Christen Sundquist, and Al Walters managed the project. They hired contractors, made design decisions, and worked together to solve many problems that came up along the way.

Planning and fundraising began in 2016. Architect Eric Pepa revised the plans he had originally prepared for the ROPE house. Enough funds were raised to begin the journey. This construction season focused on the demolition of the unstable exterior walls. A new concrete foundation and footings were poured, and new walls were framed and enclosed. Carpentry with Integrity, headed by Mike Howell, oversaw the demolition and framing. Elgin mason John Crowe began to recreate the appearance of the missing stone walls.



*Major crack in cobblestone wall was repaired in 2017.*

During construction in 2017 and 2018, the building was made weather tight. A new roof was constructed by Toby Culver. New windows were installed. Repair and tuckpointing of the remaining original stone walls was completed.

The wood-sided addition, added to the west side of the building in the early 1900s, was reframed, and given new siding. Painter Chris Shreve painted exterior siding and wood trim. What little was left of the interior was completely removed, leaving the building an empty shell for a time. Then the floor systems were reframed using as much original materials as practical. Next, interior walls were framed for the new configuration of rooms.



*John Crowe prepares to set the last few cobblestones under the eaves to complete the north wall, November 2017.*



*Completed stonework on North side of house shown in March 2018, awaiting new windows.*



*Wooden addition repaired and resided in 2018*



*Removing inappropriate concrete steps, 2017*

In 2019, work began on the building's mechanical systems—plumbing, heating, air conditioning, and electrical. Master plumber Paul Spiller roughed in the plumbing lines. **Warren Tejes**, a heating, ventilation and air conditioning engineer volunteered ideas for a new HVAC system for the house. **Elgin Sheet Metal** designed and installed it. **AJL Electric** did the wiring for electricity, fire detection, and security systems. Insulating the building was another tricky job because the stone walls required a different technique and materials than the framed ones.

Carpenter **Dave O'Donnell** lived in the neighborhood and joined in to save the Cobblestone. He worked hard to build steps to the lower level, creatively adding wood remnants to highlight the staircase, and did many other tasks early in the project.

Preparations for a new front door with side windows and a transom began in 2020. This involved replacing the stone lintel above the doorway and the stone sill under it. The beautiful door assembly in place today was researched and designed by Preservation Planner **Christen Sundquist**, replicating the original. The door was built by **Restoric** of Chicago and installed by **Miller Woodworking**.

With those tasks completed, **Scott Savel** of **All Around Home Improvements** built a new front porch and steps. The drywall was hung, and painter **Chris Shreve**

began interior painting. The installation and finishing of new maple flooring by **Dave Olesen** added a polished look to the interior.

The next leap forward in 2020 came with the installation of woodwork to trim out the doors, windows, and floors, and to install the staircases, newel post and spindles. Who else but **Dan Miller** could create and install these fine finishing touches? Dan donated all to the project.



*Left: custom window trim installed and painted in 2020. Right: Staircase with custom spindles and newel post installed in 2021.*

In 2021 a new kitchenette was installed. **Seigle's Cabinet Center** donated three base cabinets for a work counter, and several small jobs were completed. The local chapter of the **Wild Ones** volunteered to begin landscaping the lot with native plantings. Much of 2021 was taken up with planning and fundraising for the remaining big-ticket items: a new parking lot and ADA-compliant handicap accessibility.

The parking lot had to come first. Fortunately, **H.R. Green**, an engineering firm, donated the design work, but winter set in before construction could begin. In early 2022, when the ground thawed, the parking lot was quickly installed. With that done, the specifications for the handicap lift, lift enclosure, rear staircase, and deck could be finished by pro bono Architect **Matt Martin**. **Manuel Roa** of **CROAM Lakes** constructed this big addition to the building in 2023.



*Spring 2023: new rear deck and lift*

**Future Use**

The Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House is an intimate rental space for business meetings, education groups, and special events.

Please call 847-742-4248 to discuss your event.

## Many Thanks to Many Volunteers

This was truly a volunteer-driven project. Dozens of people helped in many ways, from lending expertise and employing craftsman skills, to moving stones and picking up litter. Volunteers made curtains, designed blueprints, selected paint colors, and put together fundraisers. Their time amounted to thousands of hours. There is not enough space to list them all, but the Museum certainly thanks everyone for their efforts. Special thanks to Karen Bach, Jen Fukala, Rudy Galfi, Tricia Grosser, Ricky Harris, Rick Jones, Trish LaFleur, Paul Larson, Rebecca Marco, Dennis McClure, Rebecca Miller, Beth Nawara, Glenna Preradovic, Mark Preradovic, Marge Rowe, Laura Stroud, Jim Turner, and Kathy Walters.



Volunteers sort rubble after demolition of the damaged north wall. Many of the original stones were reused in the rebuild.

## Thanks, Generous Donors

About two-thirds of the funds raised for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House project came from private donors. Over 600 donations have been received! The 25 largest donors are listed below, in alphabetical order. The Museum honors and thanks all donors, regardless of the size of their contribution.

### Donations: Individuals

Mike Alft	Glen and Susan Holland Family
Jim and Sara Ellen Anderson	Marge Krueger
The Estate of Warren Anderson	Dan and Pat Miller
Dwight and Betsy Armistead	David and Dolores Nelson
Ken and Jerri Barnhart	Aubrey and Rachel Neville
Harry and Phyllis Blizzard	Don Nish
Bill Briska and Fran Cella	Tom and Sue Rakow
Linda Eder	George and Marge Rowe
Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham	Dennis and Laurie Roxworthy
Carl and Mary Ellen Flaks	Jack and Marlene Shales
Rudy and Lillian Galfi	David Siegenthaler
Laurel and Ivo Garza	Doug Tomsha
Martin and Mary Gregory	

### Organizational Grants and Donations

- Cobblestone Reflections Community Art Project
- Daughters of the American Revolution National Organization
- Daughters of the American Revolution, Signal Hill Chapter and the Elias Kent Kane Chapter
- EFS Foundation
- Elgin Community Network
- Gifford Park Association
- Grand Victoria Foundation
- Kane County Riverboat Fund
- Landmarks Illinois



2023: A welcoming neighborhood sight.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM  
360 PARK STREET  
ELGIN, IL 60120

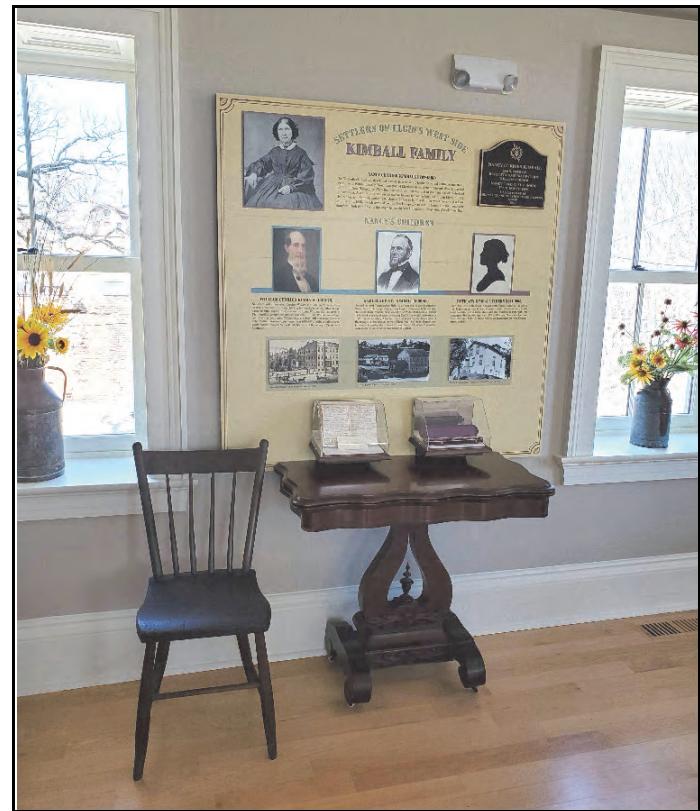


## Collections Corner

*Beth Narwara, Collections Curator*

Our Collections feature for this Cobblestone Edition is a wooden side table, made by Kimball Furniture Company of Elgin. The table was donated to the Museum collection by Maurine Hoepner in 2023. The 1946 photo on the left shows W.D. Kimball touching the table.

This table is now part of the decor at the rehabilitated Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, shown in the photo at right.



*Come see the beautiful new interior on May 6!*