

# The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News November 2023

## President's Report

Anne LoCascio, President



Normally I'd be talking about the Annual Gala in our November issue of The Crackerbarrel, but last year the Society made the decision to distribute the big events more evenly throughout the year. I'll be talking more about the April 2024 event as it draws closer, but for now I will just hint that you should be practicing your Charleston!

The Annual Gala is one of the Museum's biggest fundraisers, and a series of mini-Fun-raisers have been added to fill the calendar and the operating budget. These events have been very successful: the Wine Tasting on September 29 sold out. The Programming Committee has done an amazing job of creating novel events that bring in current members as well as people from the community. The programs allow the Museum to raise revenue and involve the community with the Museum in new ways.

The final Fun-raiser for 2023 will be November 18 and 19: Santa Mini Photo Sessions at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. Several rooms in the charming and historic house will be decorated to serve as the perfect backdrop for photos with Santa Claus. The event takes place November 18, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and November 19 from 10:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

Please visit [elginhistory.org/events-calendar/](http://elginhistory.org/events-calendar/) to book your 15-minute private session. Santa will give you all his attention for pictures with children, pets, grandparents, and family members. Bring your own camera and Museum staff/volunteers will be on hand to shoot your photo. A craft activity and small snacks will be available while you wait.

GivingTuesday follows quickly thereafter, on November 28, where hopefully the Museum will be on your list of donations. My birthday falls in December, so I ask friends and family to donate on my behalf to the Museum, which is near and dear to my heart.

2023 has been a great year—thank you for the myriad ways in which you sustain the Museum: volunteering, providing financial support, and attending events. The Museum continues to make meaningful contributions to the Elgin community because of you.

## Museum Wins Elgin Image Award

At the recent Elgin Image Awards ceremony, the Museum won the Game-changer Award for completing the rehab of the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House and changing the look of the neighborhood entryway.



Board member Sandi McClure and President Anne LoCascio, pictured, accepted the award.

## Welcome Mary Kemerling

Welcome Mary Kemerling as the Museum's newest board member! Board elections were held at the Annual Meeting on October 15 for 2024 terms. Mary is a Museum Docent and a member of the Program Committee.



### The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
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Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

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### Tuesday, November 28: GivingTuesday

Please go online and donate to support the Museum.

### Thursday, November 30, 6:30- 7:30 P.M.

#### Gail Borden Public Library The Holidays in Elgin

Elgin historian Linda Rock highlights how Elgin prepared for the Christmas and New Year's holidays during the 20th century with Elgin collectibles. Traditions include Santa, parades, shopping, decorations and more. Get in the holiday season! Please register on the library's website.

#### December 9, 1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.: Holiday Tea It's a Wonderful Life with Leslie Goddard

Celebrate the holidays during this annual tradition at Elgin History Museum. Leslie Goddard's presentation will explore the story of the movie's creation and show rare photographs taken behind the scenes!

#### December 16, 12:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.

#### LeeWards Style Ornaments at the Cobblestone 302 W. Chicago St.



Bring the kids and create LeeWards-inspired sequin ornaments to take home! \$5 per ornament.

## Upcoming Events

### Al Walters, Program Chair

Check the website for current information. Events take place at the Elgin History Museum unless otherwise noted. [elginhistory.org/events](http://elginhistory.org/events)

Joel Amore's "Hastings" art exhibit is on display in the meeting room until December 31, 2023.



### Santa Mini Sessions

**November 18 10:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.**

**November 19, 10:00 A.M. – 2:30 P.M.**

**Santa Mini Photo Sessions FUNraiser**

**Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House**

**302 West Chicago Street**

The house will be decorated for Christmas. Bring the whole family: babies, grandparents and pets! Just \$30 for a scheduled time to take a photo with Santa and his elf. There are refreshments and crafts to make, too!



### November 26: Discounts in Museum Store Online

Get your holiday shopping done early! Special discounts and product bundles will be available to online shoppers.

## Thank You Donors

### Board Fundraiser

- Steve Rauschenberger
- Pat Sekowski
- Chandler and Pamela Swan
- Mary Ellen Flaks for Youth Programming Fund
- Ted Whittington Facebook Fundraiser in honor of his birthday!
- Michelle Huff in honor of Rebecca Miller's birthday!
- Kathleen McGrath in memory of Robert Brault

### In Memory of Barry Danielson

- Jim and Sara Ellen Anderson
- Bill Briska
- Bill and Sally Brown
- Edward Ehorn
- Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham
- Tricia and Jeff Grosser
- Model T Car Club
- Rachel Neville
- Doug Scheflow
- Laura Stroud
- Debbie Walker
- Alan and Kathy Walters



# GIVING TUESDAY

GivingTuesday is a global movement created in 2012 as a day that encourages people to do good. Since then, it has been embraced by nonprofit organizations as a way to reach out for community involvement and support. This includes fundraising. The Museum has been participating since 2016 and has raised over \$79,000 through GivingTuesday.

On November 28th 2023, the Museum will be reaching out to the community via social networks to help reach a goal of \$10,000. How can you help? During that week share the Museum's Facebook page with your friends. Talk to friends about why you are a member. Invite friends to come along to our programs or visit the Museum exhibits. Go on the Museum website and click "Donate."

Any or all of these actions will benefit this venerable institution that has been built on the contributions of those who came before us. The Museum continues to grow because the community believes in the mission to inspire historical discovery and create a sense of place in Elgin.

Please....GIVE ON GIVINGTUESDAY, Nov. 28, 2023!

## Volunteers Needed!

Thanks to the 10 volunteers who tended the graves at old Elgin State Hospital Hilltop Cemetery on October 7. Volunteers cut back bushes and trimmed around the partially sunken flat grave markers. The Museum is grateful to the City of Elgin forestry crew for preparing the area for the volunteers!

There are many opportunities for volunteers! Contact Liz at 847.742.4248 or email [museum@elgin-history.org](mailto:museum@elgin-history.org). It's fun and it helps the Museum! <https://elginhistory.org/volunteers/>



Friendly volunteer Jill Moore has a great time each time she volunteers at the Museum to greet visitors! Can you help, too?



George Moore and Mary Kemerling cutting back bushes at the cemetery

## Alamo Survivor and his Family Once Lived in Elgin

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

William Lockhart Hunter (1809-86) was a survivor. He survived a yellow fever epidemic, a shipwreck, the siege at the Alamo, the massacre at Goliad, a near-hanging, and the loss of his Texas property and fortune due to his Unionist sympathies. And he played a part in Elgin's history.

On the eve of the Civil War, his family relocated to the North for safety, eventually settling in Elgin about 1864. William L.'s son, William Franklin Hunter (1853-1928), became a leader in Elgin business and civic affairs, and his daughter, May F. Hunter (1861-1955), married Willard H. Yarwood (1859-90) and later, Gilbert B. Snow (1856-1919).

Born in Virginia in 1809, William L. went to New Orleans about 1830 as a manufacturer's agent. A yellow fever epidemic swept the city, killing his partner and thousands of others. On a voyage from Louisiana to Galveston, TX, his ship was wrecked and only he and another man survived after enduring three days at sea.

In late 1835, at the outbreak of the war for independence in Texas, William L. joined a military company raised in New Orleans and went with them to Texas to join the Texas Army. He participated in the Texans' siege and capture of the Alamo Mission in San Antonio. In February 1836 Santa Anna's Mexican Army marched into San Antonio and laid siege, with the intention of reclaiming the Alamo. William L. was one of three couriers sent by David Crockett to seek aid and was not at the Alamo when the Mexicans' final assault took place on March 6. About a quarter of the 2,000 Mexicans were killed at the Battle of the Alamo and every one of the badly-outnumbered 200 or so Texas men died. A few Texans surrendered, thinking it would save their lives, but Santa Anna demanded their immediate execution.

About two weeks later near Goliad, southeast of San Antonio, nearly 400 Texas troops under James Fannin, including William L., surrendered on the promise of freedom. They were marched back to Goliad and crammed into a church. After a few days, under orders from Santa Anna, they were taken out and shot down in cold blood. William L. and a few others dropped as if shot and for a time escaped notice. Soon afterwards, a Mexican seeking plunder stripped him, causing him to flinch. Seeing that William L. was not dead, the Mexican stabbed him through the neck with his bayonet and left him for dead. After nightfall, William L. regained consciousness and managed to crawl to a Mexican ranch where a woman nursed his wounds and helped him escape to safety.





**Goliad, southwest of San Antonio Texas**

Though the Goliad massacre was more horrific and reprehensible than the Alamo battle, it is lesser known. A Texas newspaper published the headline "Remember the Alamo!" and this became the battle-cry to recruit and rally the Texas Army. On April 21, 1836, the Texas Army under Sam Houston defeated Santa Anna and his Mexican Army at San Jacinto. Independence was proclaimed and the Republic of Texas functioned as a nation until 1845, when it was admitted to the Union.



**The Alamo, Texas**

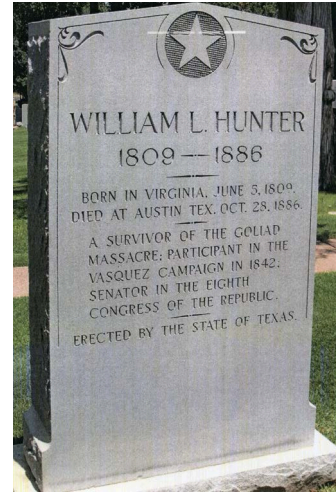
William L. served several terms in the Republic of Texas legislature. During the United States' war with Mexico, 1846-48, William L. served with distinction, rising to the rank of major. He became a prosperous rancher, accumulating tens of thousands of acres of land and many thousand head of cattle. He purchased the site of the Goliad massacre and erected a monument. In 1850 he married Fidelia Cook (1819-1908) and the couple had five children, though three died in infancy. He purchased many slaves to work his ranch, but abhorring slavery, William L. liberated them and paid them wages.

William L.'s outspoken abolitionist views put him at odds with his secessionist neighbors. As the Civil War hostilities began he was warned to leave. A public meeting was held and a resolution was passed to hang him. The pleadings of a dying friend and his own cool courage saved him. Finally, his home was ransacked, \$30,000 in notes and mortgages destroyed, his cattle confiscated and his land sold. William had already sent his family to the North and now he rejoined them,

settling in Elgin about 1864 with his wife Fidelia, their 11-year-old son William F., and their three-year-old daughter May. Their Elgin home was at 277 E. Highland Ave.

Following the Civil War, William L. recovered part of his property through the courts. Always mindful of his former colored tenants, he succeeded in getting for them wages and damages in part. For the rest of his life, William L. divided his time between Elgin and Texas. In Texas, he became a county judge and an active member of the state veterans' pension commission.

William L. passed away in Austin, Texas, on October 26, 1886, at age 76, and is buried in the National Cemetery at Austin.



**William L. Hunter's headstone in Austin TX**

Though William L. was born in Virginia and lived in Elgin 22 years, he was a Texan at heart. He nearly lost his life fighting for the state's independence. He made and lost his fortune in Texas. He was married and started his family there. He was elected to numerous Texas offices and was politically active there until the day he died.

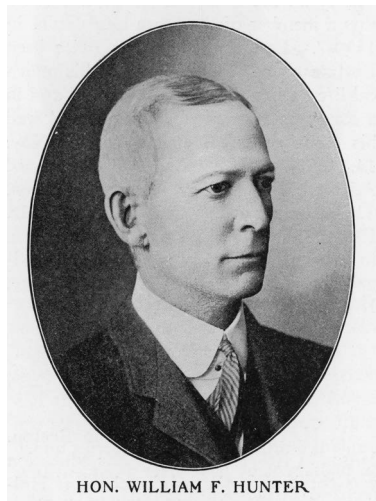


**Fidelia Hunter Memorial At Bluff City Cemetery**

William L.'s wife Fidelia, an Elgin resident for 44 years, died in 1908 and is buried in Bluff City Cemetery, as are their children, William F. and May. May Hunter married Willard Yarwood (1859-90) in 1881 and the couple had two children, Marguerite Yarwood Klock



(1885-1961) and Bertram Yarwood (1877-1966). Willard, son of landscape artist Louis Yarwood, died young. In 1893 May married Gilbert B. Snow and they had one child together, Ruth Snow Lord (1895-1984). Gilbert was a designer, plant manager and officer of the Elgin Wind Power and Pump Co. The couple lived at 14 N. Geneva St., near May's mother Fidelia. After Fidelia died they moved to a new home at 400 E. Chicago St.



William Franklin Hunter completed his education at the University of Michigan and worked for a time at the watch factory and D.F. Barclay's hardware store. From 1875-81 he partnered with Fred Cornell in a furniture and undertaking firm and in 1883 he married Mary Van Brunt (1858-1927). From 1888 until about 1915 William F. was associated with Hugh Givens in a real estate, insurance and loan firm.

William F. began a lengthy career in politics in 1884 with his appointment as Elgin postmaster. That year Elgin began a city delivery service, hiring its first mail carriers. He served as postmaster from 1884-86 and again from 1889-94. From 1886-1902 the Post Office was located in the Hunter & Hawkins building, where the Woolworth store was subsequently built. William F. and Andrew Hawkins had this building built in 1885-86.

William F. served about ten years on the Kane County board of supervisors. From 1897-99 he was a member of the state legislature. From 1903-05 he served as a city water commissioner. In 1911 he was elected to the city council, the first year Elgin was governed under the commission form of city government. In 1915 he was re-elected and served a second four-year term as commissioner of city accounts and finances.

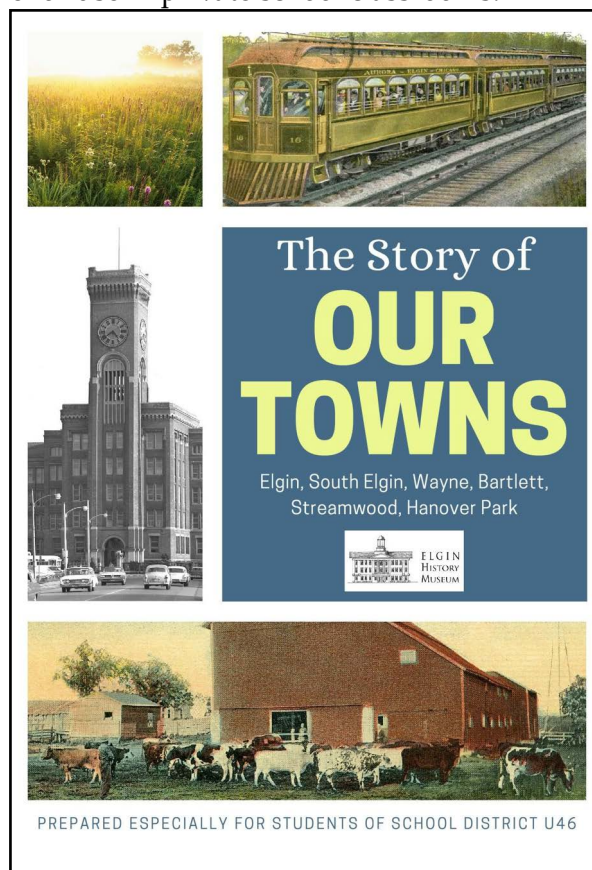
In 1885, William F. and his wife Mary bought the home at 528 E. Chicago St. and lived there the rest of their lives. They had no children. In 1902 William F. bought the apartment building at 320-22 E. Chicago St., which remained in the family until the 1960s, when his niece Marguerite died.

**Acknowledgments:** Viola Ashman Swanson's research (1993); Kane County probate files; Elgin city directories; Ancestry.com; Findagrave.com; various other Internet sites; obituaries and other newspaper articles; "Elgin Today" (1903); Alamo photo courtesy of Rudy Galfi; photo of the Hunter monument at Bluff City Cemetery courtesy of Judy Van Dusen; etc.

## The Story of Our Towns

In 1970, Elgin historian Mike Alft wrote a short document for use by district U-46 teachers about the history of the district's communities, including Elgin, South Elgin, Carol Stream, Bartlett, and Streamwood.

With the recent social studies curriculum changes to include local history in elementary schools, Museum Educator Rebecca Miller updated Mike's work and added worksheets and biographies to assist teachers. District U-46 licensed the workbook this summer for use by all elementary students! This digital resource is now available to all students and teachers on their laptops. The workbook is also available in the Museum Store for use in private school classrooms.



## Elgin's First Telephones

Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator

Elgin's first telephone exchange opened on July 30, 1881, a time when other nearby cities were also committing to the new technology. Telephone lines were installed from each of the initial 37 subscribers' homes or businesses to a central switchboard located in a corner room on the third floor of the Hubbard Block at the corner of Douglas and East Chicago St. Subscribers wishing to make a call simply raised their earpiece and asked the central operator to connect the call to one of the other subscribers. When finished, the callers needed to signal so that the operator could disconnect

the call. Surely those initial subscribers had confidence that the use of telephones would spread but, initially, where could one find a telephone?



Corner of Chicago St. and Douglas Avenue, looking north. Hubbard Block is on the right. Notice the telephone poles.

Not surprisingly, one of the 37 lines connected to 140 N. Gifford St., the home of William G. Hubbard, real estate developer and owner of the building that housed the exchange switchboard. Among the list of other private names are some you may recognize. H. Lee Borden, son of Gail and president of the Elgin Lumber Company, the Illinois Condensing Plant and the Home National Bank had a phone at his home at 258 Douglas Ave. Phones were also installed at the condensing plant and the bank so Borden could stay in touch with his many enterprises. Alfred Church, probably Elgin's richest man at the time, had a phone in his home at 364 Division Street and one at his business enterprises, the Grote & Church building at Highland and Douglas Avenues.

George Hunter, Elgin National Watch Company Superintendent, had a phone at his home at 309 Watch Street. Mr. Hunter could phone the watch factory or the National House, the company's employee boarding house at the site of today's Grand Victoria parking garage. He could also call the homes of Frederick Corthell, watch factory foreman, Carlos H. Smith, Manager at the National House, or ranking employees Rolland L. Morgan and Erwin Byington.

The other private residents who joined the telephone exchange were doctors of various sorts. Doctors Robert F. Bennett, Anson L. Clark, Henry K. Whitford, William Winchester and John Zahn were all reachable at their homes after July 30, 1881. Dr. Bennett also installed a second line in his office at 161 E. Chicago St. Dr. Simon P. Brown thought it best to install a line at his office in the Town Block, rather than at his home. One wonders how easy he was to reach after hours? Certainly, he couldn't hear the phone ring four blocks away at his home on Center Street, so his patients must have kindly waited until morning.

Businesses that joined the telephone exchange for its first day of operation included three of the rail freight depots, David Barclay's hardware, A.J. Voss grocery,

the W.H. Chapman livery, Congdon & Co shoe factory, Elgin Printing, Elgin Packing, C.W. Gould's butcher operation, Lee & Co Drugs, Swan's Department Store and Volsch Meats. By 1885, the Elgin telephone exchange had 130 subscribers and was here to stay.

A notable new subscriber came in February 1882 when the Bluff City Market, run by butcher Joseph Henry Smith, joined the exchange. The Market presumably needed to keep up with competition like Volsch Meats and take orders by phone. Many years later, in 1929, a long-time Elginite named Alice Beebe Smith passed away. Her obituary noted she was the wife of Joseph Henry Smith, and the first Elgin woman to speak on the telephone.

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## Welcome New Members

- Larry Best
- Tim and Laura Costello
- Karen McConaughay
- Enrique Rodriguez

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## Native Plant Landscaping

Volunteers assisted local native plant group Wild Ones with plantings at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. The plants selected for the site are varieties native to this area, and thus able to withstand the extremes of temperature and moisture levels common to Northern Illinois. Native species evolved for this climate and require little to no maintenance once established. They also require less water than non-native ornamentals. The Wild Ones designed the plantings for the site and donated the plants. Thank you to Wild Ones and volunteers who helped with the planting.



Prairie blazing star (at left) and other native species now form part of the landscape at Chicago and Crystal St.



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## New Sign for Downtown Mural

A new interpretive sign has been placed in front of the Promise of Elgin mural located in the small park between Spring St. and S. Grove Ave. Check it out the next time you are downtown. The mural was painted by Pablo Serrano.



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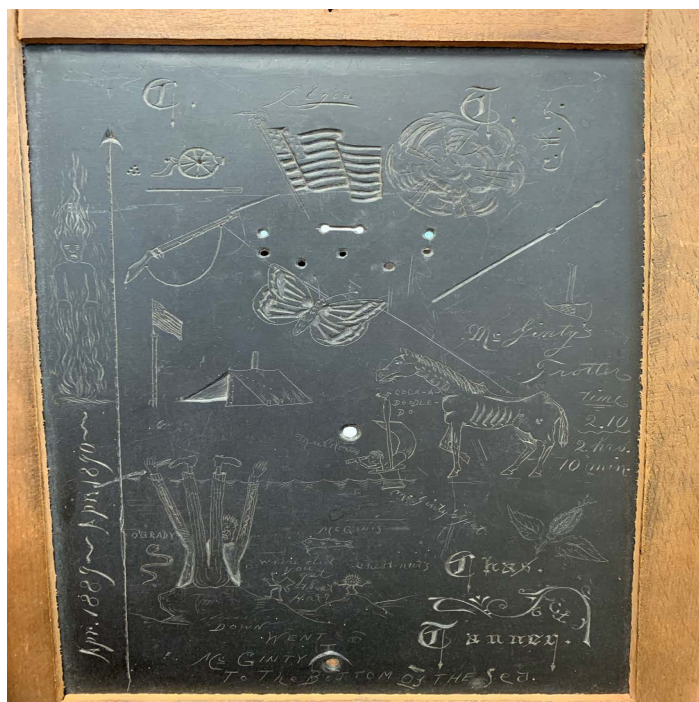
## Collections Corner: Charles Tanner Slate

**Beth Nawara, Curator**

Recently, the Museum received a donation of a child's small chalk slate. The name Charles Tanner, dates April 1889 - April 1890, and "Elgin" are carved into the slate. The Collections Committee that decides what to add to the Museum's collection were very intrigued by the donation. Volunteer researcher David Siegenthaler revealed the following information about Charles Tanner.

He was born in Canada in 1876, he had several brothers and sisters born in Elgin, and he was married in Kane County in 1900. He worked as an illustrator for D.C. Cook Publishing Co. Charles Tanner's creativity was evident at an early age, judging from the sketches still visible on his chalk slate.

By 1914, he was living in California. He was a painter and became an influential architect in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, practicing in and around Palm Springs. He designed houses, a church, and the Desert Inn, a resort in the then-primitive Palm Springs desert.



**Charles Tanner's blackboard slate, 8 x 10 inches**

Nellie Coffman hired Charles Tanner as her architect to redevelop the Inn after borrowing money from oil baron Thomas O'Donnell. Tanner created the Spanish Mediterranean facility that catered to customers seeking the dry desert air for medical reasons, and it later became popular with the Hollywood crowd.



**The Desert Inn**





The Museum Store has some wonderful items for your consideration. Stop by the store or order through the Museum website and get your shopping out of the

way early for a change! Special online-only discounts are available on November 26.