

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News March 2024

President's Report



Anne LoCascio, President

I could not be more excited about the Society's Annual Museum Gala on April 20, 2024 with its program, "Chicago True Stories of the 1920s."

I've only owned homes from the 1920s. I have scoured antique stores and fairs for Art Deco jewelry for decades and my favorite piece of furniture is a French Art Deco

dessert buffet. When the theme was announced, I almost broke out in the Charleston.

Martina Mathisen will tell us how fashion, crime, and Prohibition mixed with explosive creativity and shaped the decade of the century, from the viewpoint of a fun and funny flapper named Flora.

With a live-action auction hosted by Steve Thoren, it will be a great evening of entertainment, all supporting the Museum's mission to preserve and share Elgin's heritage.

Invitations will be in the mail, and you can also buy tickets online at <https://elginhistory.org/museum-gala-silent-auction/>

Now I just have to choose which Art Deco necklace to wear!

Welcome New Members!

- Jonathan Charalambous
- Andre Jimenez
- Dennis and Barbara Del Carlo
- Alison Sherman
- Loni Mecum

1924 Elgin High State Basketball Champions

Ron Lange, Elgin Sports Hall of Fame

March 22, 2024 marks the 100th anniversary of Elgin High School's first of consecutive state basketball championships. The team, led by Louis "Soup" Semeny's 10 points, defeated the team from Athens High School 28-17 in the University of Illinois gym annex. In order to reach the state final, Elgin had defeated the Canton High team 16-14.

Following the state championship, Elgin competed in the National Tournament, held at the University of Chicago. After losing its first game to Emporia (KS) 30-15, Elgin rebounded with victories over Jackson (MI) 28-22, Chattanooga (TN) Central 30-22, and Spokane (WA) Central 24. In the final game on Saturday, April 5, Elgin lost a tough tournament final 34-27 against Warrensburg (MO).

The 1924 Elgin High basketball team had an outstanding record of 25 victories and 3 losses. The team was undefeated in the Big 6 Conference, 13-1 in the regular season, and won District and Sectional titles. Leading scorers for the season were "Soup" Semeny (266 points), Herb Hill (183), Harry Lange (158) and Doug Mills (147). Otto Vogel coached the team to a 12-1 record the first half of the season, while Mark Wilson coached the team to a 13-2 record the second half.



Front, l to r: T. Stern, C. Stone, D. Mills, H. Hill, H. Biggers. Back: Coach Wilson, E. Johnson, A. Solyom, Soup Semeny, H. Lange, F. Lehman, E. C. Wagoner

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline April 20, 2024
Visit our website Elginhistory.org

Enjoy dinner, drinks and entertainment while supporting the Museum! Martina Mathisen will present Chicago True Stories of the 1920s, saturated with surprise, sequins, and murder! Learn how fashion, crime, and Prohibition mixed with explosive creativity to shape the decade of the century. Also featuring a live auction. It's going to be a roaring good time! Holiday Inn, \$75 for members, \$90 for non-members.



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

March 7, 6:30 P. M. - 7:30 P. M.

HERstory: Stories of Elgin Women with Linda Rock
Gail Borden Public Library
270 North Grove Avenue, Elgin, IL

To celebrate Women's History Month and the Library's 150th anniversary, Linda Rock brings to life Elgin women Laura Raymond Gifford, Mary Carpenter Lord and Alice Byrd Potter. Q & A session follows.

March 10, 2:00 P. M. - 3:00 P. M.

National Park Service Places in Our Region with Dr. Norman Moline

The National Park Service (NPS) sites in Illinois and surrounding states include National Monuments, National Trails, National Heritage Areas and Corridors, National Historic Landmarks (88 in Illinois), and sites on the National Register of Historic Places (over 1,900 in Illinois). Dr. Moline will highlight places to experience cultural history at significant but less-known NPS sites in the vicinity.

March 22, 7:00 P. M. Elgin Academy Exhibit Opening, with a short history by Linda Rock. Refreshments served.

April 20, 5:30 P. M. - 10:00 P. M.

Museum GALA at Elgin Holiday Inn

495 Airport Road, Elgin

Martina Mathisen presents Chicago in the Roaring 20s

May 16, 12:00 noon - 1:00 p. m. Brown Bag Lunch
Laura Davidson Sears Art Gallery at the Elgin Academy – 100 Years with Ann Chipman

Learn about the historical and cultural significance of this beautiful and important building to celebrate its 100th anniversary. In person event / FREE for Members / \$5 for guests

Thank You Donors

General Donations

Christopher and Jan Barry
Phyllis Blizzard
Dave Bosely
Dan and Diane Neal
Wayne and Jeanette Russell
Kathy Skaggs

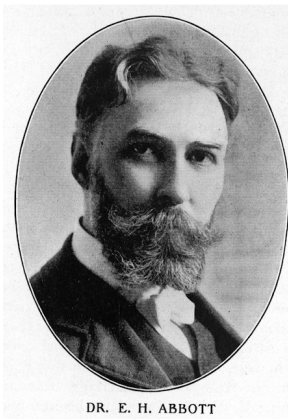
Monthly Donations

Evan Fry
Patty Harkin
Rudy and Lillian Galfi
Dorothy Turay

Dr. Edward H. Abbott of Elgin

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

Edward Hiram Abbott (1866-1926) became the watch factory's youngest employee in 1877 when, at age ten, he began working there during school vacations. At age 14, as the oldest of three children, he became the family's breadwinner when his father had to give up his job due to illness. Edward took his father's place as a full-time employee in the watch factory's balance room in the fall of 1881 and worked there for the next ten-and-a-half years.



DR. E. H. ABBOTT

Deprived of a normal high school experience, Edward, ambitious and motivated, was determined to get a good education. He studied nearly every night, completing not only a high school course of study but much more. He became proficient in mechanical drawing, mathematics, literature and science. An interest in medicine led him to study with Elgin's veteran doctor Joseph Tefft. Edward left the watch factory in the spring of

1892 to enter Rush Medical College in Chicago, where he graduated in the spring of 1895.

Immediately upon graduating medical school, Edward returned to Elgin and opened his practice, which was successful from the start. His interest in education never waned. He was elected to the Elgin School District Board of Education in 1904, serving until 1916, the last four years as president. He again served as School Board president from 1920-23. In 1932, six years after his death, the School Board named its new west-side school the "Edward H. Abbott School" in his honor.

Edward, born in Elgin in 1866, was the son of Frank U. Abbott (1840-82), a New York native and Civil War veteran, and his wife, Dora Louise (nee Helm; 1842-1925), a native of Hanover, Germany. Frank, who worked at the watch factory for over ten years, died at age 42 of spinal meningitis. In addition to Edward, Frank and Dora had two more children: Katherine Louise (1868-1946; never married) and Jeanette E. ("Jennie"; 1871-1957; never married). All are buried in Bluff City Cemetery.

Jennie Abbott was employed at the watch factory for 41.5 years (1890-1932), mostly in the cashier and payroll division of the executive offices. Katherine, a graduate of the Wisconsin Library School, was employed at the Gail Borden Public Library for 54 years, beginning in 1889 as a library assistant. In 1903, upon the death of Cecil Harvey, she was appointed head librarian, a position she held until her retirement in 1943.

While Edward was employed at the watch factory, he served as the factory correspondent for the "Every Saturday" newspaper for three years. During his first year as an Elgin doctor, Edward purchased a half interest in a drug business with C.F. William Schultz, a young pharmacist. At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, he helped organize a provisional regiment. Though never called to the front, his efforts earned him a complimentary commission as surgeon from the state legislature. He also held a commission as surgeon and major (unassigned) in the Illinois National Guard.

In 1897 Edward accepted the nearly-hopeless case of a 16-year-old Elgin girl whose limbs were severely burned the previous year when her dress caught on fire while she was

pouring gasoline on a pile of papers in her yard. Her burned skin would not heal and attempts to use grafts of frog skin were unsuccessful. Edward successfully prepared and applied at least 250 small grafts of human skin donated by her brothers and friends. The remarkable success of this case immediately established Edward's reputation in the medical profession.

Just over a year later, Edward was again called upon to treat a strikingly similar case. A 17-year-old St. Charles girl's chest and arms were severely burned when she was preparing a meal on a gasoline stove and her dress caught on fire. Once again, Edward's skillful skin grafting and the generosity of friends who donated skin saved the girl's life. These were the first two cases of skin grafting ever performed at Sherman Hospital.

Edward's kindly, cheerful disposition, as well as his professional ability, brought to him a large practice and many friends. Widely known for his charity, Edward seldom charged patients who had few resources. He was active in numerous organizations, both professional and fraternal. As a school board member he became chairman of the buildings and grounds committee and directed the building of a new Elgin High School on DuPage St. That structure, over 100 years later, still serves the school district as its administration building.

Edward often expressed regrets that he did not graduate from Elgin High School. In June 1914 school board members, appreciating the conscientious and earnest work that he devoted to the schools of Elgin, determined that he should have a diploma from the school and concocted a surprise. As school board president, Edward attached his signature to 140 diplomas awarded that year. Among them was his own diploma, which he unwittingly signed. At the conclusion of the graduation exercises, the school district superintendent presented Edward with his own diploma, taking him completely by surprise.

In 1901, Edward married Ethelyn M. Wells (1875-1959) in Chicago. Ethelyn was born in Michigan and moved with her family to Corning, AR, where her father, Professor Warren A. Wells, was principal of schools. Ethelyn came to Elgin in the late 1890s and worked at the watch factory. She and Edward had three children: Dr. Cyril E. (1902-70; wife: Georgia); Dr. Gordon W. (1904-82; wife: Bessie) and Eunice Ethelyn (1907-96; Mrs. William H. Stephens). Edward retired from practice in the fall of 1925 due to failing health and died of uremia at age 59 on April 12, 1926.

Dr. Cyril Abbott graduated from Elgin High School and the University of Wisconsin. He earned his master's degree from Kansas St. University and his PhD from Ohio St. University. Cyril was an authority on the physiology of insects and authored many books and articles in his field. He taught biology at a number of colleges.

Dr. Gordon W. Abbott graduated from Elgin High School and the University of Wisconsin. He earned his medical degree from Rush Medical School and practiced in Elgin from 1929-65. During World War 2 he was an Army captain. He and wife Bessie (nee Larson) had two children: Attorney Gordon D. (1928-78; wife: Mary Lou) and Dr. Edward H. Abbott (1932-2010; wife: Eloise).



Attorney Gordon D. Abbott, grandson of Dr. Edward H. Abbott, earned his law degree in 1951 from the University of Wisconsin and immediately partnered with Earl Gromer in an Elgin law firm. He was elected to the Elgin City Council in 1955 but resigned his seat in 1957 to accept the post of corporation counsel for the City of Elgin, a position he held until 1972.

Dr. Edward H. Abbott, another grandson as well as namesake, earned his medical degree from the University of Illinois and interned at Illinois Central Hospital in Chicago. He was an Elgin physician from 1961-93, joining his father's practice and becoming the third generation of Abbott doctors in Elgin.



Abbott School in the 1930s

In the 1860s, the Abbott family lived on the west side of Villa St., just north of what was then the First Congregational Church. In the early 1870s they moved to 358 Yarwood St., a home that remained in their family until 1941, when sisters Katherine and Jennie moved to an apartment building. Dr. Edward Abbott and his wife Ethelyn had a new home built in 1907 at 24 S. Liberty St. In 1931, five years after her husband's death, Ethelyn moved to Chicago to live with her daughter Eunice. Their son, Gordon W. Abbott and his family, then moved into 24 S. Liberty St. and remained there until 1949.

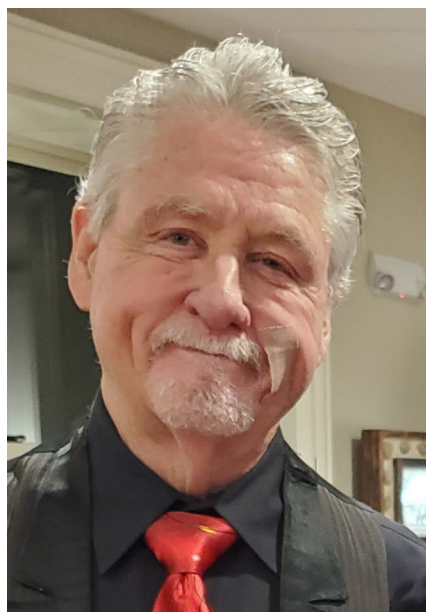


The Abbott family monument at Bluff City Cemetery

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's publications; obituaries and other newspaper articles; Kane County histories; Findagrave.com; federal censuses; city directories; Familysearch.org; monument photo by Judy Van Dusen.

Meet Renaissance Man Jim Turner

He is a multi-talented retired Metra train engineer who is interested in music, science fiction, antiques and collectibles, and woodworking.



Jim started volunteering at the Museum 13 years ago in 2011 as a docent, but he helped out with so many projects and tasks that he was asked to join the Board in 2021. Jim is very active in his Odd Fellows organization, travels in his camper, with his wife Linda and their two standard poodles.

Thanks to Jim, the Museum is now hosting the Jammers, who practice old-time music together every Saturday at the Museum. Jim still greets visitors and plays music at many Museum events. He serves on the Collections Committee and will be joining the Finance Committee.



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Another successful year –
thanks to our supporters.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

ALAN WALTERS, Program Chair

The Museum Programming Committee came up with a new strategy for 2023 - create engaging, interactive programs that also served as mini-fundraisers. This new approach not only helped raise money, it also attracted new Museum members and guests.

- Trivia Night premiered in January 2023 with a packed room of 60. Teams answered questions designed by Museum Educator Rebecca Miller with cash prizes.
- The Northside Brass Band awarded the Museum a grant to give a concert at the Museum in April.
- In June, Rudy and Lillian Galfi organized a Scavenger Hunt in downtown Elgin. 80 people participated or helped on this event.
- The wine tasting program in September brought in another 55 people. Don Clemons donated his services to lead a class in wine tasting.
- The final mini-fundraiser in November was the Santa Photo Sessions at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. Over one weekend 140 people donated money to have their families, including pets, have a photo with Santa.



MEMBERSHIP
386

MEMBER
HOUSEHOLDS

48 new members
in 2023.

GRANTS &
FUNDRAISING



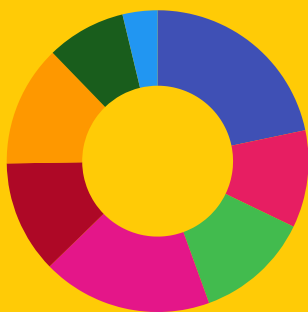
- Grand Victoria Foundation, \$25,000
- National Daughters of the American Revolution, \$4,750 final payment
- Kane County Riverboat Fund, \$23,000
- Institute of Museum and Library Services, \$14,862 final payment
- Back to Business Arts Grant, \$5,000 for the Hispanic Heritage Project
- Palmer Foundation, \$1,500 for the Hispanic Heritage Project
- Signal Hill Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, \$1,000

MUSEUM STORE



The best selling item in the store for 2023 were the souvenir pocket watches. The LeeWards inspired ornament kit, books, and puzzles were also strong sellers.

ATTENDANCE



10,004 TOTAL

2,172
Museum Visitors

1,206
Meeting Room
Guests

1,044
Event Attendees

1,300
Traveling Exhibit
Attendees

1,232
Cobblestone Event
Participants

850
Partnership Event
Guests

1,825
Speakers Bureau
Attendees

375
Research Requests

TREASURER'S REPORT

BILL BRISKA, Treasurer

The Museum continues to be in sound financial condition. It is debt-free, timely in paying bills, adequately insured, has an emergency reserve fund, and a small but growing endowment.

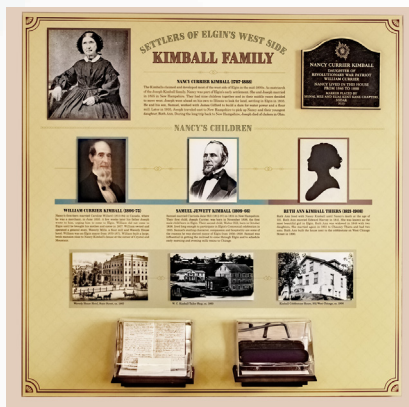
FINANCIALS AT A GLANCE

Museum Operations Income	\$241,670
Endowment Earnings	\$138,804
Museum Operating Expenses	\$211,946
Kimball House Rehab Costs	\$114,231

EXHIBITS

ELIZABETH MARSTON, Museum Director

The Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House needed historical interpretation before opening in May 2023. Three areas of information were created - the Kimball Family and their impact on Elgin; The history of the near west neighborhood development and a donor recognition space.



Elgin artist Joel Amore exhibited his work at the Museum with an opening of *Hastings* in August 2023. The Museum collected part of a mural Joel painted during the 2020 protests when Elgin boarded up some of the downtown.

All of the Museum's traveling exhibits were on view in 2023. *The Jewish Experience in Elgin* and *Project 231: Elgin's African American Heritage* were at the Gail Borden Public Library in May and June as part of the Violins of Hope project. *Dairies to Prairies* was at Corron Farm in September.

MEDIA

TRISH LAFLEUR, Media Coordinator

- New website launched in 2023 - includes new ticketing system so the Museum no longer needs to use outside services.
- Created graphics and promoted all events including Cemetery Walk.
- Prepared Giving Tuesday materials/campaigns.
- Engaged community by maintaining social media presence and bi-weekly email.
- Maintained a 50% open rate on email communications.
- Four volunteers created 260 WRMN *Elgin 100 Years Ago* radio program spots.



INSTAGRAM
Reach up 26%



WEBSITE
21% more views



YOU TUBE
Added 98 subscribers



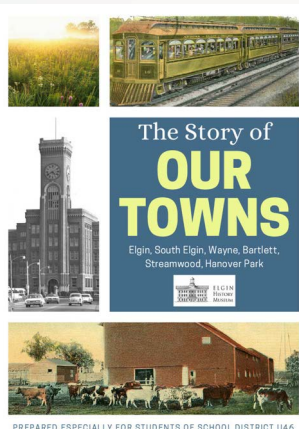
FACEBOOK
Reach up 70%

EDUCATION

REBECCA MILLER, Museum Educator

With 2023 behind us, the numbers confirm what it felt like all year...the Museum was busy! Many teachers came back with new classes, but there are also new schools such as Coleman and Oakhill Elementary.

The Museum debuted a new program in late 2022, Old and New, that continued to be a popular choice for 1st-3rd grade visitors. The program was offered 10 times in 2023 and received very good teacher feedback on its connection to curriculum points. While the kids had fun dialing rotary telephones and learning how suspenders were worn, they were also learning about how and why things change over time.



PREPARED ESPECIALLY FOR STUDENTS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT U46

The Elgin National Watch Company program on factory life also remained popular. In this program the students are first-day employees at the factory and, after an aptitude test and meeting with the factory superintendent, they work in an assembly line to produce a model pocket watch.

The Story of Our Towns, a children's history of Elgin, is now a school district U-46 resource available to students electronically.

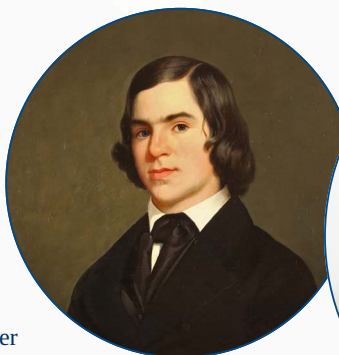
33
PROGRAMS
WERE PRESENTED TO
1,693
ADULT & YOUTH
LEARNERS WHICH
ACCOUNTED FOR AN
89%
INCREASE IN
REVENUE OVER 2022.

COLLECTIONS

BETH NAWARA, Curator of Collections

The Collections Committee met 11 times in 2023, reviewing donations from over 90 donors. About 800 items were accessioned. Significant donations include a painting of Walter Pease, over 50 milk bottles from Elgin dairies, furniture made by George Washington Kimball, an Elgin Sanitary Milk Delivery Wagon, and a variety of objects related to Garfield School.

Preservation and accessibility of the historic collections is a priority. Staff and volunteers spent many hours digitizing photos, archival pieces, postcards and objects to make the collection accessible through the Museum's website and other sites. The Institute of Museum and Library Services grant was completed. The grant allowed the Museum to digitize over 1,000 images of underrepresented people and groups in Elgin from the Courier News. Collections volunteers cataloged items, answered research and genealogical questions, and photographed and mounted new objects in exhibits.



ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



ELGIN
HISTORY
MUSEUM

Collections Corner

This plaque was donated to the Museum by a young child who had previously visited the Museum. It was very important to him to save this piece of Elgin History.

Save Our Streets was a neighborhood organization in Elgin during the 1990s. The plaque has been added to the Education collection for visitors to see and touch.

