

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News May 2024

President's Report



Anne LoCascio, President

Wow!

May's Crackerbarrel is coming out on the heels of the most successful Museum Gala ever! A sold-out crowd of Museum supporters attended the Roaring Twenties-themed event, where I was delighted to see many flappers and gangsters who showed up in spangles and pinstripes.

Martina Mathisen gave a laugh-inducing performance as Flora the Flapper, where everyone in the audience learned something new and interesting. The enthusiasm was contagious, evidenced by how many people participated in the live auction event, new this year, and raised their paddles in support of the Museum's mission. Peek inside the Crackerbarrel for photos of the event.

Your generous support ushers us into Preservation Month with the wind at our backs. It provides a solid foundation for the Museum to inspire historical discovery and preserve and share Elgin's heritage. The Museum houses a deep archive of Elgin's past, preserving documents and objects for future generations to learn from. It preserves Elgin's history throughout the community, from the Museum's Artifact Garden to the Elgin Windmill, and Hilltop Cemetery. Our school programs, such as Watch Your Pocket or Old and New, reach thousands of local school children each year and provide a basis for kids to think about the past and their place in the community. Programming at the Museum provides opportunities for the whole community to share in our passion for Elgin's past.

May's Preservation Month activities this year range from a Hilltop Cemetery tour to a Brown Bag Lunch to an architectural lecture and a city-wide Museum Crawl. Take a second peek inside for a complete listing of May Preservation Month events that will inspire YOUR historical discovery.

Welcome New Members!

- Katherine Abbott
- Susan Cooper
- Rick Kautz
- John and Heather Svast
- Ralph Westphal
- Connie Zapata

Thank You Donors

Automatic monthly donations are a great way to donate easily to the Museum! Contact the Museum for more information.

The Museum wishes to thank the Seigle Foundation for their grant for the Hispanic Heritage Project.

General Donations

Tish Calhamer
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Dorothy Turay



Steve Kroiss Paper Artwork exhibit opens May 17.

The Crackerbarrel

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360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120
Phone 847-742-4248
e-mail: museum@elginhistory.org



President: Anne LoCascio
Vice President: John Devine
Secretary: Christen Sundquist
Corr. Secretary: Ricky Harris
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

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

May 16, 6:00 - 8:00 P.M.

**Elgin Public Museum - Lords Park,
225 Grand Boulevard**

**Architectural history of the Elgin Public Museum with
“guests” George P. and Mary Lord**

A fascinating lecture on the architecture of the oldest public museum in Illinois. In-person event, \$3.00 members, \$5.00 for guests. For more information, contact Sharry Blazier, 847-741-6655.

May 17, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 P.M.

**From Pulp to Precision: Layering in Paper Exhibit Opening and Neighborhood Open House
Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House**

FREE Event! Elgin artist Steve Kroiss exhibits paper works of art at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House from May 17 through August 2024. Steve's style of art is paper sculpting with a strong architectural influence. Each piece is designed layer by layer, then cut and assembled accordingly. Extra parking available in public lot at Highland and Crystal. Light refreshments.

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

**May 10: U-46 planetarium, 312 Watch Street
Planetarium sky shows and brief history of Elgin
National Watch Company and its connection with the
District U-46 planetarium. Doors open at 4:00 P.M. shows
begin at 4:30 P.M. and 6:30 P.M.**

Two one-hour sessions include a look at the night sky. Safe eclipse viewing eclipse glasses will be on sale for \$2.00 each. A self-guided building tour is available before both shows, so come early! \$2.00 per person or max \$10.00 per family (cash only). No reservations; first come, first served seating. Free parking at Raymond St. and National St. Contact: Peggy Hernandez at 847 888-5019

**May 11, 10:00 A.M.
Hilltop Cemetery Tour**

Meet in the east parking lot at The Grumpy Goat at Highlands Golf Course.

**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.



Another example of Steve Kroiss' artwork

May 18, 1:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

216 E. Highland Avenue

Tour First United Methodist Church, celebrating 100 years! Beginning in 1838, three Methodist churches have stood on this site. Tour includes history of church and building. Significant rooms on the first floor will be open featuring the extraordinary stained glass windows in the narthex, chapel and sanctuary.

For more info, email alwalters1953@gmail.com

May 18, 1:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Open Doors On Holy Hill

Tour Elgin's churches within the Holy Hill area. Elgin's founder, James T. Gifford, donated land to encourage churches to come to Elgin, resulting in a wide variety of religious architecture in and near our downtown. Open churches include: First Congregation Church of Elgin (256 E. Chicago St.), First United Methodist Church (216 E. Chicago St.), Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (357 Division St.), St. John's Lutheran Church (115 N. Spring St.), Primera Iglesia Bautista (12 S. Chapel St.), Vineyard Church of Elgin (220 Division St.) and St. Mary's Catholic (400 Fulton St.) Contact: Christen Sundquist, 847-931-6004

May 21, 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Program begins at 7:00 Pm. Elgin Public Museum, 225 Grand Blvd.

The Leopold Collection: A 100-year Mystery

Admission \$5.00 per person (\$3.00 for museum members). Due to sensitive subject matter, adults only, please.

On the 100th anniversary of the Leopold & Loeb murder that touched off the “trial of the century” in 1924, explore the Elgin Public Museum’s bizarre connection to the case. Convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, bird collecting enthusiast Nathan Leopold donated 1500 of his birds to the then-Audubon Museum. Learn about the controversy at the time, and the recent curatorial detective work as we determine how many of Leopold's birds are still in our collection. Erik Rebain, author of *Arrested Adolescence: The Secret Life of Nathan Leopold*, will speak on his research into whether the eventually-paroled Leopold was truly reformed. The book will be available for sale and signing. Contact/RSVP: Sharry Blazier, 847-741-6655;

May 30, 7:00 P.M.

Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House

Dan Miller presents Elgin architect W. W. Abell

Learn about the man, his drawings, his houses, and his incredible contribution to Elgin.

May 25, 12:00 noon - 4:00 P.M.

Open Elgin Museum Crawl

See article below for details.

Join us for the Open Elgin Museum Crawl May 25

The Elgin History Museum, Elgin Public Museum of Anthropology and Natural History, U46 Planetarium, Fire Barn No. 5, and Gail Borden Public Library will join forces on May 25th to offer tours and a fun quiz event. All will be open on Saturday, May 25th from noon to 4:00 P.M., with free admission and a trolley to take visitors from site to site. Start at any site to answer special trivia questions. Your answers could win a prize! To warm up your brain, try these sample questions:

Elgin was once home to which specialty museum:

- a historical radio museum
- a cat's eye marble museum
- a museum of petticoats and undergarments
- a museum of railroad signs.

Which of the following Elgin manufacturers had the largest factory?

- Elgin American, maker of compacts, cigarette cases and more

- The Elgin National Watch Company, maker of pocket watches
- D.C. Cook, publisher of religious books and pamphlets?

In 1882 a cow was found on the stairs at Mendelssohn Hall, 152-154 E. Chicago St. **True or false:** Cows can walk up a flight of stairs, but are anatomically unable to walk back down.

(Answers in next issue!)

Get To Know Board Member Tricia Grosser

Tricia Grosser is the new Elgin Area Historical Society Corresponding Secretary. This year, she took over for Ricky Harris, who had held the position for nearly 20 years! Tricia has been on the Board of Directors since 2013. She served as Vice President for one term until taking over as Corresponding Secretary.

Tricia is an amazing multi-talented volunteer who serves the Museum and many other organizations in the community. She is the Museum’s current STEPS leader, organizing the second round of compliance with the national museum standards and accreditation program. Tricia reports to the Board about upcoming policy reviews that are needed, including updates to the bylaws. She maintains the Society’s procedures and policies and provided new informational binders to the other board members.

She serves on the Museum Education Committee, a perfect role as a retired teacher. Tricia presents programs to hundreds of students each year, guides groups at the Cemetery Walk, docents twice a month, and often volunteers during larger Museum events.

Tricia has spearheaded the annual Giving Tuesday campaign in November for several years, and organizes the Board's Gratitude Committee. For several years, Tricia acted as the Museum's Shipping Department, fulfilling online Museum Store orders. Thanks to Tricia and all of the volunteers/board members at the Museum for making the Elgin History Museum grow to serve the Elgin community.



Tricia Grosser (with pink scarf) at the Near West Neighborhood Cleanup in the rain on April 7, 2024.

The Wing Family, Part 1

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

The Wing family has left some well-known legacies in Elgin. Foremost is the 121-acre Wing Park, which opened in 1903 and included Elgin's first public swimming pool and first public golf course, both opening in 1908. Two northwest-area streets, Wing Street and Wing Park Boulevard, are named for the family. The Abby C. Wing School, in use from 1899 to 1977 at 260 Center St., was the first Elgin school named after a local person. The landmark Wing Mansion, 972 W. Highland Ave., has been featured on the Gifford Park Association's annual house tour six times, more than any other Elgin home.

Washington Wing (1808-88) was born in Madison County, New York. In 1831 he moved to Michigan, near Ann Arbor, where he farmed and was elected to a term in the state legislature. About 1836 he married Catherine Hines (1817-54). He and Catherine had three children in Michigan: William H. (1836-1902; wife: Abigail "Abby" C. Saunders); George W. (circa 1839-42); and Mary V. (1842-62; never married). The family moved to Elgin in 1846 and one more child was born: Orlando A. (1848-1921; wife: Harriett "Hattie" Weld). Catherine died of cancer at age 37 in

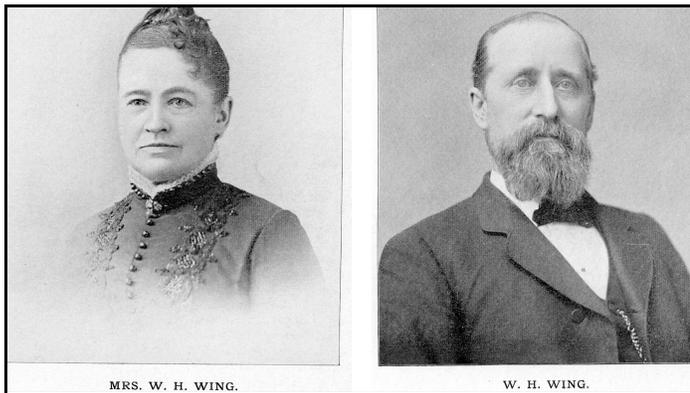
1854. Later that year Washington married his second wife, Melissa Gray (1833-55), but she died just a year after the wedding. In 1856 Washington married his third wife, Adeline Willetts (1835-1910). He and Adeline had two children together: Kate L. (1857-1936; Mrs. Rev. Silas Sprowls); and Edwin W. (1859-1951; wife: Esther Pierce).

In 1846 Washington purchased a farm just north of Elgin, where the Ludlow shoe factory was subsequently located. In 1852 he bought a 208-acre farm just northwest of Elgin, where he and his descendants would live for the next 100-plus years. For several years Washington served on the Kane County Board of Supervisors. According to the Owl Magazine, a publication of the Wing Family of America, Inc., Washington's "line of descent was through Benjamin, Enoch, John, Ananias, John, John and Matthew." Washington passed away at age 79 in 1888 and several months later his widow Adeline moved to California to live with her daughter Kate. Washington and his first two wives are buried in Bluff City Cemetery. Adeline and her two children are buried in Los Angeles County, CA.

In 1853 a new school district was organized just northwest of Elgin for the purpose of levying a tax, locating a site and constructing a schoolhouse. Washington donated a piece of land near the northwest corner of his property and in the fall of 1854 the first school opened in what would become known as the Illinois Park District. The first teacher hired was Miss Abigail (Abby) Clement Saunders (1829-97), who had recently arrived from New Hampshire with her sister Sarah and Frances Kilbourne (1832-1921; Mrs. Oscar Lawrence). Frances was also a teacher and would go on to teach for 60 years in the rural districts northwest of Elgin. Abby, daughter of Henry and Martha Saunders, was born in Wilmot Flat, New Hampshire.

Abby taught at Illinois Park's one-room, red brick schoolhouse for the winter and spring terms of 1854-55. Following a year in the Dundee area, she returned to Elgin in 1856, when she taught at the Mill Street School, corner of Mill and Jackson streets. In 1861 Abby married William H. Wing. In the spring of 1865, when Edward Lovell resigned as principal of the "New Brick" high school to serve in the Civil War, Abby became Elgin's first woman high school principal when she was appointed to succeed him. In 1866 she was again appointed principal of the "New Brick" high school and later that year, assistant principal. In 1870 Abby was appointed principal of the grammar school, where she served till resigning after the 1871 fall term. She also taught for a time at Elgin Academy.

By the time Abby resigned in 1871, her husband's law practice was thriving. Abby devoted the rest of her life to being a homemaker and hostess. She did much charity work through her membership in the Universalist Church and the Elgin Woman's Club. She and William had no children.



William Henry Wing, after completing his high school education in Elgin, attended Lombard College in Galesburg. In the 1860 census his occupation is listed as “laborer,” probably at his father’s farm where he was living. In 1861 William married Abby Saunders in Milwaukee. Abby continued to teach for another ten years while William studied law and established his career. William read law in Judge Sylvanus Wilcox’s Elgin office in the mid-1860s, prior to attending the University of Michigan’s law department, from which he graduated in 1867. After being admitted to the Illinois bar that year, he opened a law practice in Elgin.

For four years William was a law partner with renowned Elgin attorney Edward Joslyn. In 1871-72 he was city attorney of Elgin. In 1875 he was admitted to practice in federal courts for the northern district of Illinois. In addition to his law practice, he also dealt in real estate and loans. From 1880-85 he served as treasurer of the Northern Illinois Hospital for the Insane. For four years, about 1884-88, William was one of the directors of the First National Bank of Elgin, over which he had his office. In later years William gave up the part of his law practice that required he attend court, as his real estate and loan business occupied all of his time.

By 1890, William’s success as a lawyer and businessman had accumulated for he and Abby substantial wealth. In 1891 he commissioned prominent Elgin architect Smith Hoag to remodel his 1850s-era farmhouse into a grand Victorian mansion. Hoag was best known for designing the impressive Dunham Castle in Wayne about ten years earlier. The improvements and carriage house cost about \$13,000, a huge amount in those days. The exterior was shingled in cedar and included a 1.5-story tower above the third floor. The remodeled home featured 23 rooms, four fireplaces, and stained and leaded glass. Seven different types of wood were used, including very ornate carvings, both inside and out.

Tragedy struck the Wing home early in the morning of March 20, 1897. Fire broke out in the third floor attic. Against William’s orders, Abby went up the narrow, winding staircase to retrieve a box of keepsakes and couldn’t get back down due to the smoke and fire. She screamed for help out the attic window. Her husband and onlookers struggled to put up a heavy ladder but it was too short. The Fire Department was called but it took time to get their horse-drawn firetruck up the muddy Highland Ave. grade to the

Wing home from their station near the Chicago St. viaduct. Upon arriving they coupled their hoses to hydrants but low pressure produced only feeble streams of water. It did not matter, though, because Abby had disappeared from view, probably suffocated by the smoke, well before the firemen arrived. Her body was recovered, burned beyond recognition. The third floor of the house was burned beyond repair.

The cause of the fire was never definitely determined. Initially, it was thought that a wood stove in the attic, which was in use the day before, was the cause. Later however, insurance experts said the house was struck by lightning on the evening before the fire and smoldered all night between the ceiling and roof. William immediately had the home repaired, with the exception of the 1.5-story tower.



William lived in the home until his death from heart paralysis on October 31, 1902, at age 66. Childless, he left the home to his brother Orlando. William and Abby are buried in Bluff City Cemetery.

The Wing Mansion, which had been remodeled to include four apartments for family members, remained in the Wing family until 1982, when it was sold to Harold and Marcelyn Henrickson. The Henricksons removed two of the apartments and in 1987 sold the home to Bill and Maureen McWaid. The McWaid’s restored the home to single-family use. Bill McWaid passed away in 2010, and Maureen married Steve Thoren in 2015. Maureen and Steve have spent countless hours remodeling and restoring their home and have even created a mini-museum of the home’s history, which they unveiled in 2012. The home earned a Mayor’s Award in 2012 for rehabilitation. In 2013 and 2017, the home won the “Chicago’s Finest Painted Ladies” contest’s grand prize. In 1993 it was awarded a “Heritage Building Plaque” and in 2017 an “Individual Landmark Plaque.”

To be continued.....



The Wing Mansion



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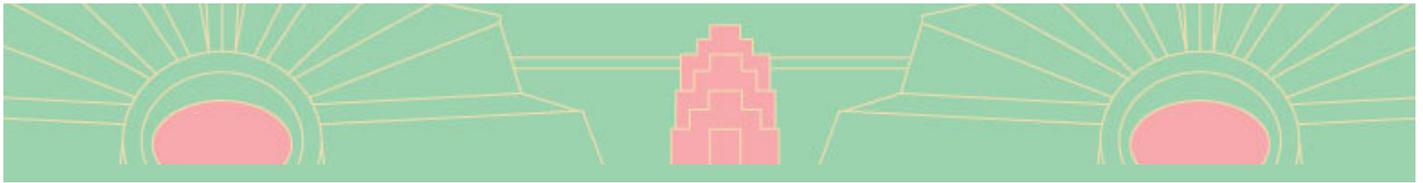
All attendees looked smashing in their finest 1920s attire and it was a roaring good time! After dinner, Steve Thoren of Raising Paddles started with a lively game of “Heads or Tails” to get the crowd warmed up for the live auction. The bidding was fast and furious for the many trips and experiences offered.

Attendees were inspired by an incredible video about the Museum created by Len Govednik, and it showed with the many hands in the air during the paddle raise! To close out the evening, Martina Mathisen’s alter ego “Flora the Flapper” told compelling stories of Chicago in the 1920s. The silent auction was full of unique items that all went home with winning bidders.

The Museum is grateful to every person who attended, donated, or sponsored the gala. We rely on supporters like you to continue to preserve and share Elgin’s heritage.



Pictured from L to R: Lilian Galfi, Anne LoCascio, Kathy Walters, Laura Stroud, Ricky Harris, Mary Kemerling.



Visit elginhistory.org to see all of the photos and paddle raise donors.

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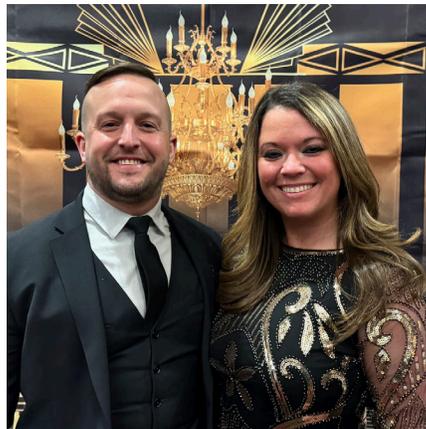
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Pictured from L to R: Tricia & Jeff Grosser, Linda & Kerry O'Connor



Mike & Krisilee Murphy



Ana & John Devine



Pictured front row: Len Govednik, Karen Nitz, Laura Bonuchi. Back row: Sarah Lake, Tim Lake, Adam Mosley.

