

# The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News November 2024

## President's Report



*Anne LoCascio, President*

Obviously, all Museum members and the board of directors are as interested in Elgin's history as I am. At the Museum, we are ALWAYS looking for ways to bring in new community members and tell the story of Elgin. Over the past several months, we've been doing just that with our events.

John and Ana Devine took over as co-chairs for the 37th Annual Bluff City Cemetery Walk and had the inspired idea to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Gail Borden Public Library, highlighting past Elgin citizens involved with literature and the Library. This cross-over event with the library brought in new attendees, drawn from library patrons, to one of our most beloved events.

Adding to the literary theme, our actors provided period-appropriate reading suggestions at the end of each monologue. The Library's Bookmobile was at the Cemetery Walk, and attendees borrowed all the copies of the recommended book selections!



*Cemetery Walk Characters, 2024. Left to right: Arthur Newsome (portrayed by Kiron Blackwood); Katharine Abbott (Lisa Raffety); Cecil Harvey (Linda Rock); Abby Wing (Sarah Steamer); Edward Lovell (Caleb Hanson); Louis Yarwood (Danny Rice); David C. Cook (Brandon Massey)*

It is always a big job taking on a well-known legacy project, so I want to extend a very warm thank you to John and Ana. Their attention to detail and enthusiasm helped create a distinctive event.

On October 4th, the Museum hosted a Wine Tasting with Halloween candy pairings. Lots of new guests joined familiar faces to circulate throughout the Museum while tasting a selection of wines and viewing the exhibits. It was a joy to hear new guests exclaiming as they learned about Elgin's past. A special thanks to board member Krisilee Murphy, who worked with East Side Café-Coffee and Wine Bar in Dundee to curate the wines for the event.



### *Wine Tasting*

Don't forget to visit Santa at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House the weekend of November 23 & 24. We're reprising the private 15-minute viewings for a second year.

Thanks to all who registered for the Holiday Tea on December 7th, the event is already sold out!

## The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society  
360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120  
Phone 847-742-4248  
e-mail: [museum@elginhistory.org](mailto:museum@elginhistory.org)



President: Anne LoCascio  
Vice President: John Devine  
Secretary: Christen Sundquist  
Corr. Secretary: Tricia Grosser  
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline December 20, 2024  
Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

## December 1, 2024: Museum Store Sunday

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

## Tuesday, December 3: GivingTuesday

Your contributions keep the Museum educating students and connecting the history dots for visitors.

Please donate online at

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=V7RXA9BDEG8TU](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=V7RXA9BDEG8TU)

This year you can also choose to buy the Museum a gift from the Amazon Wish List, at

<https://www.amazon.com/registries/gl/guest-view/2GS2DVKIL6KME>



# GIVING TUESDAY

## 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)

**November 23, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 P.M.**

**November 24, 10:00 a.m. - 2:30 P.M.**

### **Photos with Santa at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, 302 W. Chicago St., Elgin**

The historic Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House will be filled with holiday cheer, the perfect backdrop for your photos. Book a 15-minute time block, and take your own photos in any format you like. Santa will be there to give you all his attention for pictures with children, pets, grandparents or family members. You can also bring other props. Craft activities and small snacks will be available. More details and registration to come.



**December 7 1:00-3:00 P.M.**

### **Holiday Tea**

### **Mid Century Christmas with Leslie Goddard**

**Limited to 80 - SOLD OUT**

Christmas in America from the 1940s through the 1960s meant aluminum trees, department store Santas and TV specials. Every kid wanted an Easy Bake Oven, a G.I. Joe or a Slinky. Look back at this optimistic era in a fun illustrated lecture, using photos, ads, greeting cards and catalogs to explore why this era was a turning point for how we celebrate the holidays. Giving Tuesday is the Amazon Wish List or a donation. Add in the wish list sentence and link

### **Mid Century Christmas with Leslie Goddard**

Saturday, December 7 @ 1:00pm-3pm

FREE for Members | \$10 for Guests



---

## Welcome New Members

---

|                               |                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Ruth Cavanaugh and Hans DeKok | Tonya Lucchetti    |
| Donna Danielson               | Norman Nissen, Jr. |
| Greg Hulke                    | Carmen Pinto       |
| Susan Kerr                    | Anna Rozales       |
| Dilara Keyifli                |                    |

---

---

## Get to Know the Board: Alan Walters



Al Walters joined the Board in 2013 and has helped in all areas of the Museum. As a former Benjamin Moore Paint Executive, Al is good at management, serving as the Board Vice President from 2016-2018 and as President from 2019-2022, during Covid. He is currently the Program Committee Chair, organizing the group that brings new and interesting information to members

and the public. Al assists with student programs and often says that he is fortunate to get to teach history like he always planned to do as a career. He works on exhibits, helps set up traveling exhibits and fixes broken exhibit interactives. Al is a great painter and contributed so much to the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House. He's even served as a docent. The Elgin History Museum is very lucky to have Alan Walters volunteer to serve the community!

---

## A History of Elgin's Springs: Part 2

### *David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher*

In 1909 the Western Thread Co. (later renamed Collingbourne Mills), specializing in job dyeing for textile mills, moved to Elgin from Chicago. The chief lure was the pure spring water at the site, just southeast of the Bluff City Blvd. and Raymond St. intersection. Several springs on the property produced water that allowed the firm to create boil-proof thread and yarn colors in pastel and floral hues that no other firm in this country could duplicate. As Mr. Collingbourne said, "No one can produce the colors we can, or successfully match any desired shade, as we can, because of the quality of our water."

Wing Park, on Elgin's northwest side, had a number of sulphur-iron springs, including a pair that were cemented by the city with circular concrete rings after 1903 when the site

became a public park. These were popular picnic spots in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The springs apparently dried up or altered their drainage patterns due to changes in the water table. They were buried but traces of at least one of them remain visible just northeast of the bridge over Tyler Creek. One of them, "Sulphur Spring," got its name because the sulfurous water left the spring white in color.



Sulphur Springs, Wing Park, Elgin, Ill.

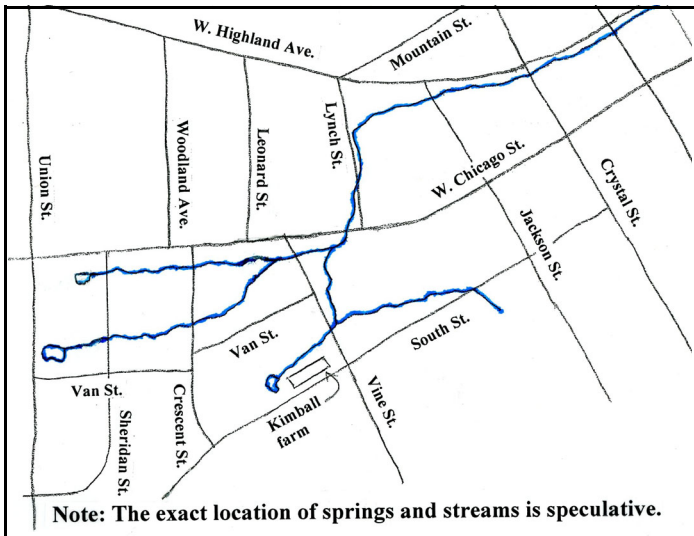
### *Wing Park Springs*

"Slop Hill," on Elgin's near northwest side, was originally the site of Buttermilk Creek. In 1870 a butter and cheese factory was built at the corner of Ball and Harvey streets next to a small stream that originated from a spring near the corner of McClure Ave. and Mill St. The stream provided a convenient conduit for disposing of the butter and cheese waste products, called slops. The accumulation of these slops emitted an "abominable" odor, and an 1888 newspaper article noted that the butter company was ordered to clean out Buttermilk Creek at least three times per week. Families living in the area scooped the slops from the creek, probably with the encouragement of the butter company, and filled barrels with it to feed their pigs, and the area became known as Slop Hill. The stream flowed downhill between Ball and Mill streets, crossed Jackson and Crystal streets and continued east to the Fox River. The former Grant School at the northeast corner of Mill and Jackson streets (razed 2006) was known as the "Slop Hill School." The school's attendance boundaries roughly encompassed Slop Hill's geographic boundaries – Highland Ave. on the south, McClure Ave. on the west, Wing St. on the north and the river on the east. Residents were proud to say they lived on Slop Hill. In 1990, however, the new Grant School principal said, "I don't want to be known as the school on Slop Hill," feeling that the image contributed to low teacher morale and under-performing students. The "Slop Hill" name lived on in the annual "Slop Hill Golf Tournament," which took place from 1946 through 2005.

On Elgin's near southwest side, there were several gushing springs on Samuel Kimball's farm, within the area roughly bounded by South, Vine, W. Chicago and Union streets. The waters converged to form a creek that ran downhill to the east, crossed W. Chicago St. near Lynch St., flowed northeast to W. Highland Ave. and then followed W. Highland Ave. down to the river. When the local dairy industry was developing in the early 1850s, Kimball built a milk house and piped the spring water into vats where milk cans

could be set to cool. Neighboring farmers adopted the idea and had spring water piped to their vats. The springs were all on high ground so that the water flowed by gravity. Before long, spring water was also piped into homes in the area to provide running water. Prior to 1888, when Elgin's water department was organized, these springs furnished water for the Waverly Hotel (southwest corner of State St. and Highland Ave.) and the Chicago & North Western steam engines.

Just southeast of the intersection of W. Chicago and Union streets, the "Kimball Woods Spring" was a popular site. It was said that people would come there from miles around to help themselves to pure, high-quality drinking water. In 1920 an entrepreneur turned it into a business when he built a bottling plant there and sold it as "Oak Ridge Spring Water." It was said to produce 600 barrels per day until the firm closed in the mid-1950s.

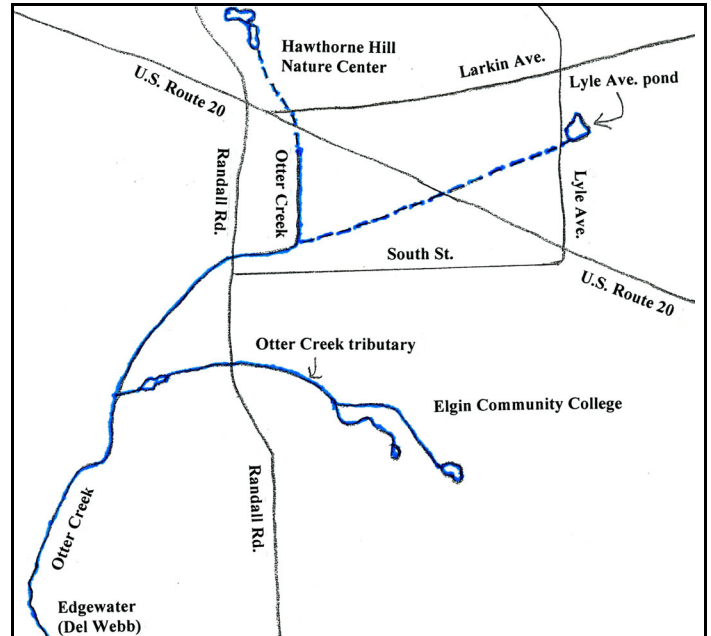


### Near West Side Springs

Early topographical maps show a depression on the south side of W. Chicago St., between Vine St. and Sheridan St., in the vicinity of the springs and streams. In 1913 a newspaper reported that "five carloads of gravel are being spread in the gully like stretch of West Chicago Street between Union and Lynch streets." Though these springs are buried and no longer visible they still exist underground and can cause problems, such as the foundation issues at a house in the 600 block of Van St."

When Elgin Mental Health Center, on Elgin's southwest side, opened in 1872, its water needs were expected to be met by the "McElroy Spring," located about 0.8 miles to the west. A reservoir was built at the spring head and a 3-inch pipe was laid to the building site. Almost immediately after the first residents arrived, the spring began to go dry, the apparent result of a two-year drought. The spring never fully recovered, its water probably diverted through the permeable gravel to other underground outlets. Fortunately, the Fox River was nearby and pipes, pumps and reservoirs were quickly put in place to access its water. Later, deep wells and more reservoirs supplemented the water supply.

Otter Creek, on Elgin's far southwest side, flows south from approximately Route 20, through the middle of the huge Edgewater housing community, and joins Ferson Creek in St. Charles Township. Though Otter Creek has many tributaries, there are three principal sources east of Randall Road. These are the spring-fed wetlands at the Hawthorne Hill Nature Center and the Elgin Community College campus, and the spring-fed pond on the east side of S. Lyle Ave., near Larkin High School.



### Otter Creek Springs

The ponds at Hawthorne Hill today were created in the early 1970s and serve largely as detention ponds for the numerous surrounding developments. Located at the north-east edge of the heavily-traveled Randall Rd.-U.S. 20 interchange, the site is also surrounded by several housing developments created since the 1950s. Much like the Lords Park lagoons, the ponds have collected an increasing amount of runoff water, which has increased their nutrient and sediment load. This has made the ponds shallower and created favorable conditions for duckweed to grow and cover the top of the ponds. Until 2018, the Hawthorne Hill ponds were stocked with fish and offered catch-and-release fishing. Now, however, fishing is not allowed as the duckweed has depleted the water of oxygen needed by the fish.

The Hawthorne Hill springs once converged to form a stream, the northern-most source of the main branch of Otter Creek. Today they converge into underground drainage pipes and emerge from the ground just southeast of the Randall Rd.-U.S. 20 interchange, behind the Elgin Marcus Cinema at 111 S. Randall Rd. A little further south, but north of South St., another branch of Otter Creek merges with the Hawthorne Hill branch. The source of this branch is a big spring-fed pond just east of S. Lyle Ave. and west of Larkin High School. This pond is prominent on the earliest maps, which show a stream flowing from it to the west. About 1920 this stream was diverted into underground drainage pipes. In 1969 a Country Knolls Subdivision resi-

dent called his subdivision a “water retention pond” because of the frequent backup of water onto lawns. He said that the drainage pipes have been moved and broken by farm machinery and operate at “about 25 per cent efficiency.”

The springs on the west side of the Elgin Community College campus, and in College Park immediately to its west, form wetlands that drain into Otter Creek west of Randall Rd. Lake Spartan was created in 1969 as a 6-acre detention pond during construction of the original college buildings.

The Elgin area’s springs were attractive to the pioneer settlers. In an era before “city water,” deep wells, windmills and refrigeration, the springs provided drinking water for people and livestock, water for washing and gardening, and cool water to extend the life of perishable dairy products.

Prior to 1888, when Elgin’s waterworks system was completed, residents relied on natural springs and shallow surface wells for drinking water. However, these water sources were unsafe at certain periods of the year, and some were unsafe at all times, being permeated with cesspool water and sewage and responsible for recurrent outbreaks of typhoid fever. Pioneer homes often had cisterns to collect rain water. However, stagnant water became a breeding ground for microorganisms and was unsafe for drinking unless boiled.

Initially, the city water was drawn from the Fox River about a mile north of the dam. By the turn of the century, however, the river had become increasingly polluted and the city turned to deep wells for its water supply.

*Acknowledgments: Mike Alft’s publications; various newspaper articles; various Internet sources; historic and topographical maps; Elmer Gylleck’s 1855 Diorama; Bill Briska’s “The History of Elgin Mental Health Center,” 2nd edition, 2021; etc.*

## New Museum Intern: Kim Alvarado



Kim is a senior at Aurora University majoring in Business Administration and Marketing. She is a lifelong Elgin resident, graduating from South Elgin High School in 2021.

As an intern, Kim’s project focus is marketing, social media, the cemetery walk and other upcoming events. Welcome, Kim!

## Thank You Donors

### Automatic Monthly Donors

Evan Fry  
Rudy and Lillian Galfi  
Patricia Harkin  
Dorothy Turay

The annual Board Fundraiser letter was sent at the beginning of September. Many, many thanks to the Museum members listed below who answered the call with their generous donations.

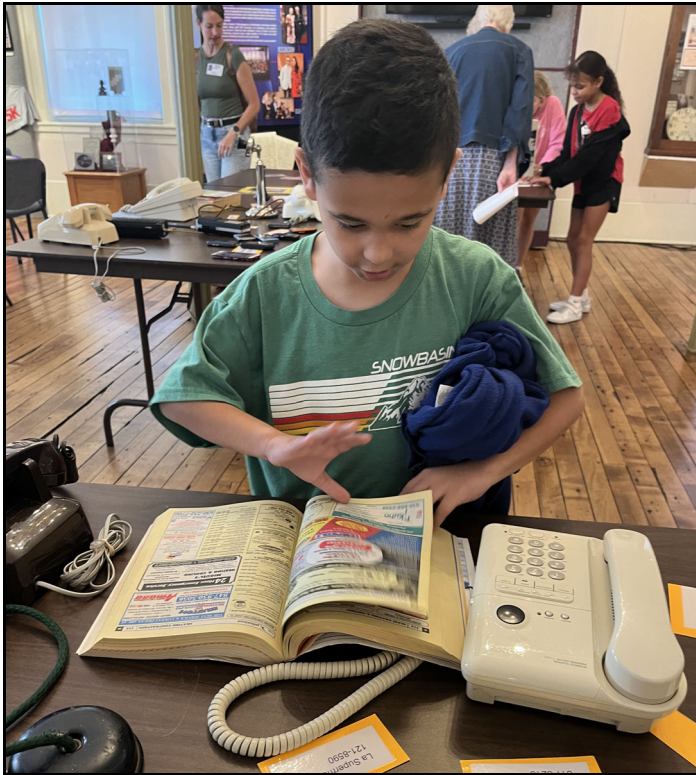
### 2024 Board Fundraiser Donations

|                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Allerton, Lorraine            | Jones, Richard                  |
| Andresen, Paul and Amelia     | Kemerling, Mary and Tom         |
| Armistead, Betsy              | Krueger, Margaret               |
| Bartholomew, Steven           | Laura Stroud                    |
| Barton, Valerie               | LoCascio, Anne                  |
| Bauer, James                  | Lytle, Miriam                   |
| Bavido, Mary                  | Malm, Robert and Carolyn        |
| Blohm, Carol                  | Marston, John and Elizabeth     |
| Bosely, Dave                  | Martin, Dorothy and Meier, Dick |
| Bost, Marianne                | McClure, Sandra and Dennis      |
| Briska, Bill and Fran Cella   | McLeod, George and Janet        |
| Burkart, Janet                | Missele, Carl and Chris         |
| Busche, Leon                  | Moore, Jill and George          |
| Campbell, Rachel              | Nelson, Beth                    |
| Caughlin, John and Peg        | Neville, Rachel                 |
| Coleman, Mark                 | O’Haire, John and Claudia       |
| Conley, Ronald and Mary       | Preradovic, Glenna and Mark     |
| Devine, John and Ana          | Reinert, Coral                  |
| Drommerhausen, Judith         | Rowe, George and Marge          |
| Dunning, Charles and Patricia | Schock, Edward and Karen        |
| Dyer, Maurice                 | Schroeder, Kathleen             |
| Emmert, Judy                  | Siegenthaler, David             |
| Fox, Dan and Karen            | Smith, R. Lorece                |
| Freeman, Nicholas and Sheila  | Sorton, Judy and Alex           |
| Gabel, Terry and Sue Brigham  | Turner, James and Linda         |
| Galfi, Rudolph and Lillian    | Vierck, Dana and Gary           |
| Grosser, Patricia and Jeff    | Walden, David and Elizabeth     |
| Harris, Ricky                 | Walters, Alan and Kathy         |
| Heise, Georgeann and Ted      | Wingfield, Jim and Sue          |
| Huber, Rebecca and John       | Youngren, Linda and Thomas      |
| Jocius, Patricia and James    |                                 |

# Education Update

*Rebecca Miller, Museum Educator*

The Museum was excited to welcome 216 school students in October 2024. They ranged in age from kindergarten to fifth grade, and learned about the history of the Fox River, Elgin manufacturing, and the dairy industry. For the first time, Algonquin's Neubert Elementary brought students to the Museum. Lincoln and Channing Elementaries from District U-46 and a homeschool group also visited.



*I have to press the buttons every time I call somebody?*

The second-graders from Channing Elementary told us it was their best day ever because, not only was it Pajama Day at school, they got to come to the Museum too! It is common on a school visit for the kids to focus on something unexpected and ask a lot of questions, perhaps because it ties into something at school or home. This month, there were questions about Elgin street sweepers. Because street sweepers tend to work during the day when kids are in school, those who had actually seen a street sweeper go past their house or apartment were very excited to brag. These connections between the past and the present are a favorite among the education volunteers.



*Educational program in progress*



*Learning how things were done in the Old Days*

## Podcast Reminder



Just a reminder to subscribe to “Echoes of Elgin: Timeless Tales from the Elgin History Museum” available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music. If you don't have a podcast app on your device, scan this QR code to listen, or listen from the Museum website at

<https://elginhistory.org/echoes-of-elgin-podcast/>

---

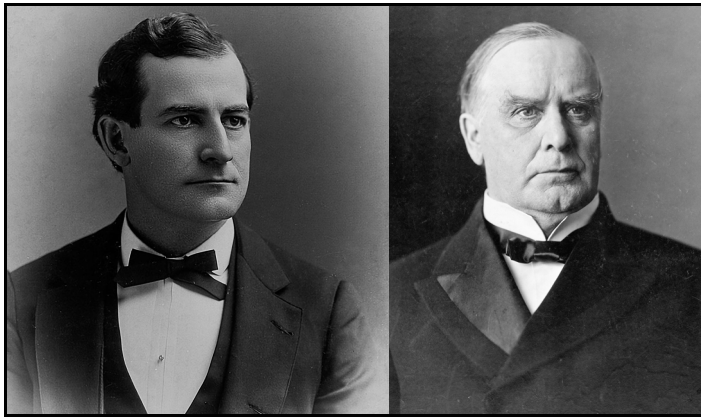
# Anger, Not Apathy, Marked 1896 Politics

By E. C. "Mike" Alft, October 27, 1996

*Interesting comments from Mike Alft 30 years ago, about the 1896 election. Note the similarities between today and the presidential election 130 years ago.*

In the current presidential election campaign voters tend to be unenthusiastic about the candidates and disillusioned with the political process.

In marked contrast to this apathy, a century ago the contest between William McKinley, the Republican candidate, and William Jennings Bryan, the nominee of the Democratic Party, aroused widespread interest and attracted more citizens to the polls than any previous election in American history.



*Bryan (L) vs. McKinley (R), 1896*

The campaign of '96 began in July, when Bryan's silver tongue electrified his party's convention at Chicago with a speech declaring, "You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!"

The Democrats advocated the free coinage of silver as a remedy for hard times and falling prices; Republicans proclaimed their faith in a gold standard. It was a class issue - depreciation of the currency, inflating prices, would help debtors and hurt creditors.

Cleveland, the Democratic incumbent, was immensely unpopular in Elgin because of the Panic of '93 had resulted in a wholesale layoff at the Watch Factory. An early straw poll showed an overwhelming local preference for McKinley, and several McKinley Clubs were formed, including organizations of Germans, Scandinavians and African Americans.

As early as the middle of September, business was suspended and factories closed down for a huge McKinley parade that ended in oratory at Lords Park. The bands, uniformed marching clubs, red, white and blue umbrellas, and "gold bug" hats made a colorful spectacle.

Bryan himself gave a brief address in Elgin when his campaign train stopped here for 10 minutes. A speakers' stand had been erected at the northwest corner of State and Chicago streets.

Some anxiety was felt by Democratic leaders who feared his words would be drowned out by catcalls and horns, but he was given a respectful hearing by a crowd displaying many more Republican than Democratic badges. It was the first time a major party Presidential candidate had visited Elgin.

In another rally, cannon, bells and whistles greeted Civil War heroes who arrived at the "high" North Western station. Their Republican train was bedecked in party slogans: "Honest Money Will Revive Trade," "Not an Increase of Coin but an Increase in Confidence," and "The State of Lincoln Will Never Surrender to a Champion of Anarchy." The last referred to Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, who had pardoned the Haymarket anarchists.

Three Union generals, the party's candidate for governor and a corporal whose legs were shot off at Bull Run were given an ovation by a throng estimated at 15,000. Telephone poles were covered with red, white and blue bunting, and two large banners were suspended over Crystal Street.

Negative campaigning was the order of the day. Gen. Dan Sickles, who lost a leg at Gettysburg, accused the Democrats of "trying to tear up the foundations of our social order and civilization," and described Altgeld as a vulture who preferred carrion to fresh meat.

Throughout the presidential contests of 1896, Elgin residents listened to long harangues about the economics of the gold standard and the free coinage of silver, turned out in droves to watch the marching clubs parade, wore party badges and put placards in their windows.

They were involved more intensely than we are today (in 1996), and the percentage of eligible voters who went to the polls was probably higher than it will be in 1996.



*The late Mike Alft at the Museum*



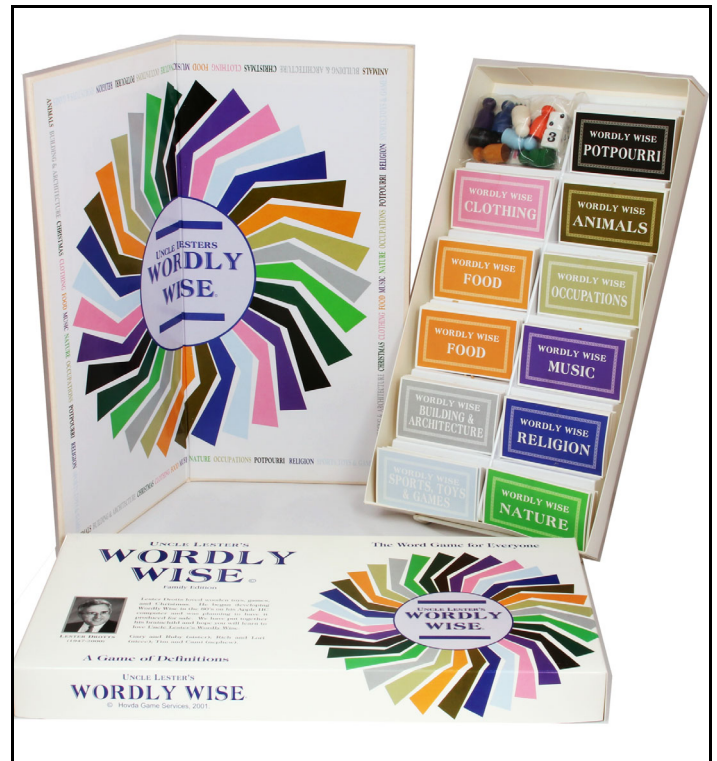
ELGIN  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM

## Collections Corner

A recent addition to the Museum's collection is "Wordly Wise," a board game that combines trivia and vocabulary. It was developed by Elginite Lester Drotts. The board is circular with each space designating one of 11 different question categories. Players roll 2 dice, one die determines how many spaces to move, and the other the level of question difficulty and point value. The first player to reach 20 points wins the game.

From the box: "Lester Drotts loved wooden toys, games, and Christmas. He began developing this word game in the 80's on his Apple IIC computer and was planning on having it produced for sale. We have put together his brainchild and hope you will learn to love Uncle Lester's Word Game."

Do you have a copy of the board game that celebrates Larkin High School's 25th anniversary that you would like to donate to the Museum? The Museum is looking for a donation of that board game to put in the Museum collection and for the Education collection so people can play the game.



*The Wordly Wise Board Game*