

# The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News March 2025

## President's Report



*Anne LoCascio, President*

This month's Crackerbarrel contains our annual report on the Museum (see pages 4 through 7). The good news is, that with all of your continued support, the Museum is in a stable financial position to start out 2025.

Through the stewardship of the Finance Committee, bequests and donations have been judiciously invested to provide operating income for the Museum and continued growth of the Endowment Fund.

The endowment started from a generous bequest in 2000 that was the seed money for the Endowment Fund. We have been adding to it ever since. With careful management, these bequests will multiply in perpetuity to support the Museum.

The Endowment Fund makes it possible to have the staff to grow our educational programming for local area school children and get them interested in history and their community. It makes it possible for us to continue to provide quality programming such as Dr. Caroline Kisiel's February 23 presentation detailing how close Illinois came to allowing slavery in 1824. It means showcasing local artists like Nick Freeman and Steve Kroiss.

If you would like to consider a bequest, the Museum can provide more details.

I hope to see all of you at this year's Fabulous 50s Gala Fundraiser. Last year's Gala was a blast and I'm looking forward to what the Gala committee has planned for April 26. I watched a lot of I Love Lucy growing up, so Dr. Leslie Goddard's portrayal of Lucille Ball will be a treat.

## Welcome New Members

Janice Caldron  
Ann Marie Dufelmeier  
Jeanine Manser  
Anthony Mirabella  
Cathleen Newby

Nana Oakeycampana  
Dan Pritchett  
William Swalwell  
R. Kip Welborn  
Bill Witte

## Museum Hosts Fabulous 50s Fundraiser April 26

The gala will take place at the Holiday Inn on Airport Road from 5:30 P.M. to 10 P.M. The highlight of the evening will be a special performance by historian and actress Leslie Goddard, taking the stage as the iconic Lucille Ball.

Guests can bid on auction items, including trips to Scottsdale AZ and Panama City FL, and exclusive Elgin experiences like a helicopter ride, a Wing Mansion tour, and golf outings. There will also be raffles, wine bags, and a "Boss Night Out" package that includes dinner and a show in Aurora. Attendees are encouraged to dress in cocktail attire or their best 50s outfits.

Tickets are \$75 for Museum members and \$90 for guests, with sponsorships available: Corvette (\$1,000), Thunderbird (\$500), and Bel Air (\$250). All proceeds will support the Museum. Tickets and sponsorships must be secured by April 16, 2025. For more details, visit [elginhistory.org/museum-gala-2025](http://elginhistory.org/museum-gala-2025) or contact Liz Marston at [museum@elginhistory.org](mailto:museum@elginhistory.org).



## The Crackerbarrel

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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 April 20, 2025  
Visit our website [Elginhistory.org](http://Elginhistory.org)

**April 17**  
**12:00 Noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: History of Color**  
FREE for Members, \$5 for guests. Bring your lunch; soft drinks and dessert provided. Mary Hoffman is Color and Design Training Specialist at Benjamin Moore & Co.

**April 24**  
**6:30 P.M.**

**American Cut Glass presentation at Gail Borden Library by author Don Quant (see article below)**

**April 26**  
**5:30–10:00**  
**P.M.**

**Museum GALA at Elgin Holiday Inn 495 Airport Road, Elgin**  
Save the date! See page 1 for details

**May 22**  
**12:00 Noon**

**Brown Bag Lunch: Al Walters presents History of Elgin Churches**  
FREE for Members, \$5 for guests. Bring your lunch; soft drinks and dessert provided.

## 2025 Events Calendar

### *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)

**March 15**  
**12:00 noon**

**AAUW Elgin Welcomes Kim Sigafus presenting *Singing Bird and the Importance of Native American Women in Illinois History***

Illinois Humanities Road Scholar Kim Sigafus is an award-winning Ojibwa author and speaker. She travels the US doing Native programs for schools, libraries, and interest groups, dressed in her native regalia.

**March 23**  
**2:00 P.M.**

**“What’s Coming Down the Line: Railroads in the American Mind” a Road Scholar presentation by Mike Matejka**

**March 30**  
**2:00 P.M.**

**Alien Spouse: A performance by Luiza Moraes** born of her relocation to the US and the process of applying for a marriage-based Green Card. She experienced the legal and bureaucratic obstacles created for immigrants that border on the absurd. Her performance is a blend of dance, lecture, healing ritual, and dreamscape, the hope is to spread information to those who don’t know what the process is like and to honor the experience of those who do. \$5.00 donation suggested.

## Thank You Donors

### General Donation

Rebecca Albert  
Dave Bosely  
Maurice Dyer  
Mary Kemerling  
Dan and Diane Neal  
Steve Rauschenberger  
Wayne and Jeanette Russell

### Monthly Donations

Evan Fry  
Rudolph and Lillian Galfi  
Patricia Harkin

Remember, you can leave a gift in your will for the Museum. All bequests go into the endowment fund.

## The Koch Cut Glass Co.

### *Don Quant*



*E. J. Koch*

For a few short years, Elgin was home to a premier cut glass factory owned by Edward J. Koch. Mr. Koch began his career as a glass salesman and then became a cut glass factory owner when he and F. X. Parsche ran a factory on Chicago’s State Street in 1899. Mr. Koch



*T. Singleton*

even received a patent in 1902 for a beautifully designed cut glass bowl. When a fire destroyed Mr. Koch’s Chicago cut glass factory in 1911, which was operating under the name of E. J. Koch & Co., he relocated the factory to Elgin by paying \$20,000 for the Wolff Building at 70-72 River Street, in the same block as the Elgin Flour & Feed Company. After spending a couple of months remodeling the

interior, the factory began operations in August 1911 and within a few weeks the labor force was doubled from 20 to 40 employees. The new factory superintendent, Thomas Singleton, held nine cut glass design patents from his previous work with the Mt. Washington Glass Co., the Pairpoint Manufacturing Co., and the Ohio Cut Glass Co.

The business venture in Elgin prompted Mr. Koch to keep E. J. Koch & Co. in Chicago as a sales outlet and then create a new company in Elgin called Koch Cut Glass Co. which was incorporated in 1911 with \$150,000 in capital. The incorporators were Mr. Koch, his son-in-law Arthur E. Meier, and Thomas Singleton.

Mr. Singleton married in October 1911 but unfortunately died from Bright's Disease at his Elgin home at 452 Douglas Avenue on March 3, 1913. His pallbearers were J. Langendorfer, A. C. Rineheimer, Phil Freiler, Wm. Ableman, and Victor Comosh who succeeded him as factory manager.

Mr. Koch's family included a remarkable assortment of people. His wife, Pauline Meier, was the daughter of the St. Louis city council president, E. F. Meier, and the most prominent china and glassware merchant in St. Louis. His wife's younger brother, Arthur E. Meier, graduated from Princeton, played professional baseball for the Pittsburg Pirates, and received two patents, one for a cut glass design and another for a sports ball. One of Mr. Koch's sisters married William H. Eggebrecht who became president of the Furniture Designers Association and was chosen by President Herbert Hoover to be part of a group reporting on the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts held in Paris.

Soon after the Elgin factory was operational, the American Flint Glass Workers union organized local chapter 117 that met at Council Hall, Ellicott and E. Huron streets, the first and third Tuesday of each month with the Corresponding Secretary Wm. Koshmider of 230 Spring St., Elgin. Mr. Koch insisted on having an open shop and within the first year of operation, the union went on strike for a shorter work week. The issue was amicably settled after a few weeks and over the next few years, there were some disputes with the union, but in general, the relationship was a good one.

The factory produced a tall vase that Mr. Koch gave his nephew as a birthday present and later a water set as a wedding present. A few years later a very uniquely shaped vase was given to Mr. Koch's uncle as payment for a loan. These pieces were eventually handed down to family members.

The cut glass business was very competitive and when the company ran into some financial trouble, Mr. Koch began borrowing money from a few of his relatives. Unfortunately, as so often happens, that didn't end well. When a \$9,000 loan payment wasn't received as expected, one of Mr. Koch's sisters who lived in Chicago and another sister and her husband from Grand Rapids Michigan, filed an involuntary petition of bankruptcy in March 1915. When payment still wasn't received several months later, an attorney ordered the

auction of the factory plus its contents along with all of the finished glass in Mr. Koch's Chicago sales office. Although the value of the Chicago glass itself was estimated to be over \$10,000, it sold for only \$3,090. The following day the high bid at the Elgin factory auction was only \$1,200, which was nowhere near the value of the building plus its contents, so no sale was completed.

Mr. Koch then secured a job as president of the Midland Cut Glass Company in Chicago and also established himself as a manufacturer's agent, selling cut glass made by other companies. He worked for two years to regain his financial standing, but in January 1917 it was reported that after a jury listened to the case, the judge officially declared the Koch Cut Glass Co. bankrupt. Mr. Koch always claimed that he was forced into bankruptcy and the whole issue was a family dispute that was later amicably settled. He remained in business for many more years selling glass as E. J. Koch & Co.

Although no Koch Cut Glass Co. catalogs have been found, pieces that were cut at the Elgin factory have been verified to be included in the following company catalogs: Rogers, Thurman & Co. 1911; Norris, Allister Co. 1911; Marshall Field 1911-1913; Burley & Tyrrell 1912; C. G. Riem 1913; J. W. Huntley 1913-1914; MTJ 1915. Jewelry stores known to sell Koch glass were M. L. Werner, Dixon IL. 1912 and F. A. Marean, Belvidere IL. 1913.

Much more information on this company and dozens of other Chicago area cut glass firms can be found in my newly published book, *Chicago Cut Glass 1893-1933*, sold in the Museum Store. If you think you may have a piece that was cut at the Elgin factory, the book has pictures of over 50 patterns that were cut by the company.



*Dish cut in the Valparaiso pattern.*



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

MEMBERSHIP  
**388**

MEMBER  
HOUSEHOLDS

46 new members  
in 2024, and 5 new  
Life Members.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**ALAN WALTERS**, Program Chair

2024 was an active year for adult programming at the Museum. Now that the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House is fully online, there is extra space for programming and art shows, leading to the most active programming year to date. Here is a roundup of the events and programs offered. Most were well attended:

Four Saturday/Sunday afternoon programs with professional speakers. Two were subsidized by the Illinois Humanities Road Scholar Program, making those programs free to the Museum and guests.

Five Thursday Brown Bag Lunches presented by Museum members or friends of the Museum covering local history topics.

Five Wine and Cheese Events celebrating Exhibit Openings.

Two Artist in Residence Shows at the Cobblestone featuring local artists.

The annual Car Show displayed over 100 classic and antique cars on the Museum grounds and Park Street.

The 38th Annual Bluff City Cemetery Walk spanned two days in late September centered around the theme of the Gail Borden Public Library's 150 anniversary.

The Annual Gala was held in April at the Holiday Inn. The 1920s themed event was a sell-out and a successful fundraiser for the Museum.

Three mini-fundraisers were held. Trivia Night, A Wine Tasting Evening and Santa at the Cobblestone are fast becoming Museum mainstays.

The Museum celebrated Dan Miller's extensive Cobblestone woodworking contributions of time, talent and material by hosting his presentation on Historic Elgin Homes at the Cobblestone.

The Museum partnered with Elgin's other Museums and Side Street Studio Arts to co-host cultural events.

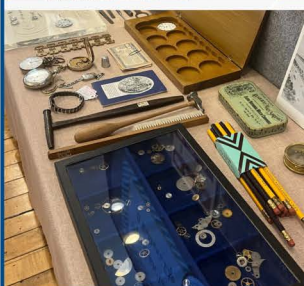


VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

**3,245**



From 112 volunteers.



# MUSEUM STORE



The Museum Store added several new items in 2024 designed to educate, as well as entertain. Shoppers appreciated new items which highlighted the Crocker Theater, Ackemann's, and Elgin's butter history. A new custom wooden keepsake box was designed to store a family's heirloom Elgin pocket watch and jewelry made from ENWC watch parts remain very popular.

# ATTENDANCE



## 11,730 TOTAL

- 2,107 Museum Visitors
- 934 Meeting Room Guests
- 2,203 Event Attendees
- 425 Traveling Exhibit Attendees
- 547 Cobblestone Event Participants
- 1,025 Partnership Event Guests
- 1,298 Speakers Bureau Attendees
- 258 Research Requests
- 2,933 Education

# EXHIBITS

**ELIZABETH MARSTON**, Museum Director

A number of new exhibits refreshed the Museum galleries in 2024. *Preserve Your Neighborhood!* advocates for the importance of historic districts as a way to protect older neighborhoods from decline and disinvestment. The exhibit will change neighborhoods from time to time and focus on their architectural highlights. *Fun and Games* and *Teeple Barn* were exhibited in the meeting room, highlighting themes within in the collection. Max Michelson, a watch collector, offered to help create an exhibit in the Elgin National Watch Company room featuring self winding watches. Partnering with the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, the Museum installed *Elgin Symphony Orchestra 75th Anniversary* in May.

At the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, the Museum premiered the use of the space as a local artist gallery with art from Steve Kroiss - *From Pulp to Precision: Layering in Paper*. Steve is a paper artist and had 15 objects to show during the exhibit opening and two additional public artist-in-residence times. The traveling exhibits *Project 2-3-1* and *Dairies to Prairies* were displayed in neighboring communities.



# MEDIA

**TRISH LAFLEUR**, Media Coordinator

The media department worked on 31 events in 2024. The events were promoted to Museum supporters by creating compelling graphics, maintaining events on the website and Facebook page, sending email blasts, sharing events on community calendars, and posting to social media. The Museum's social media presence and interactions have increased since Kim Ruiz came on board: first as an intern, now as a part time employee. Email communication is still strong with an open rate above 45% for 60 emails sent in 2024. The website gets about 23K visits over the course of the year, with highest engagement when tickets are on sale for events.



**INSTAGRAM**  
Interactions up 100%



**WEBSITE**  
Users up 10%



**YOU TUBE**  
Added 117 subscribers

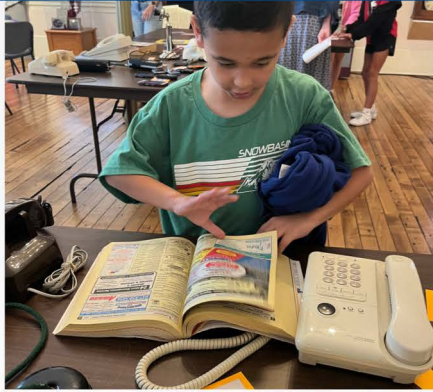


**FACEBOOK**  
Interactions up 43%

# EDUCATION

REBECCA MILLER, Museum Educator

Measured in children's high-fives, smiles and overheard comments such as "this place is so cool," 2024 was successful beyond measure! Using teacher feedback and the number of repeat visits from individual schools, we can confirm the kids are right; 2024 was a great year for learning at the Elgin History Museum.



Our "Old & New" program continues to be popular because it helps introduce younger students to the concept of change over time. These learners are often too young to identify different time periods but they are able to contrast their daily life with the past. Teachers appreciate that the program highlights these contrasts and organizes learning into categories that resonate with children. Being able to touch and explore so many things while attending a program is also a favorite of the kids and teachers alike. A group of 12-15 volunteers works weekly to support the Museum's education efforts. They add a rich layer of expertise and enthusiasm to every student visit and speaker's presentation.



The Museum's impact on local school children also includes our publication "The Story of Our Towns." This book, available in English and Spanish and including 12 chapters, photographs, worksheets and biographies, has been digitally licensed to School District U-46 for use by every elementary-aged student. In May we welcomed 58 high school students for a special program designed to compliment the coursework in their Advanced Placement U.S. History class. These students spent a large portion of the day at the museum learning how Elgin's story could be interwoven into the greater history of the U.S.

**47**  
PROGRAMS  
WERE PRESENTED TO  
**2,933**  
ADULT & YOUTH  
LEARNERS WHICH  
ACCOUNTED FOR AN  
**42%**  
INCREASE IN REVENUE  
TO \$11,127

# SPEAKERS BUREAU

The EHM Speakers Bureau gave 32 presentations to private groups in 2024. The wide variety of topics included a new program on Alice Byrd Potter offered by Linda Rock as well as staples of Elgin history related to Prohibition, the 1950s, Elgin Mental Health and the Elgin Road Races. The audiences at each presentation enjoyed in-depth discussions supported by ample photographs and historical analysis. Our feedback continues to be excellent and we are pleased to see many repeat bookings.



# WRMN

The Elgin History Museum volunteer team recorded Elgin 100 Years Ago each month in 2024, 20 90-second segments each month for a total of 240 segments! A new team of volunteers has stepped up to research and record these histories, including Alan Walters, Nick Freeman, Linda Rock, and Tricia Grosser. Many thanks to Jerry Turnquist and Larry Drafall for their years of contribution.



# GRANTS & FUNDRAISING

- Grand Victoria Foundation, \$25,000
- Signal Hill Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, \$1,000
- IDNR Museum Grant reimbursement for the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone Project, \$89,800

## HISPANIC HERITAGE PROJECT GRANTS

- Seigle Foundation, \$45,000
- Kane County Riverboat Fund, \$26,000
- TAAFA (Trinidad Armenta Aguirre Foundation for the Arts), \$1,000
- City of Elgin Cultural Arts Commission, \$6770

# TREASURER'S REPORT

**BILL BRISKA**, Treasurer

Operational income in 2024 was boosted by \$89,600 from a reimbursement grant for some of the Kimball House rehab work in 2022 -23. The Kimball House project is now complete. Endowment earnings are dividends which are reinvested in new shares. This allows the fund to grow and keep up with inflation.

## FINANCIALS AT A GLANCE

Museum Operations Income	\$366,226
Endowment Earnings	\$191,630
<b>\$263,376</b>	Museum Operating Expenses



## PODCAST

The Museum's history podcast, *Echoes of Elgin* launched in June 2024 and two episodes are released each week. The episodes have covered a variety of topics including Elgin's church bells, the collapse of the Chicago Street bridge, a 1907 scam that targeted the lovelorn via a nondescript office on DuPage Street, and many other local stories, large and small. Did you know Lord Spark was not the only lion to live in Elgin? Or that there might be a gold hoard buried on Park Street? Listeners to the podcast know! The podcast continues to attract new subscribers each week with over 2,200 individual downloads to date.

# COLLECTIONS

**BETH NAWARA**, Curator of Collections

The Collections Committee met 10 times in 2024. Donations from 73 donors were accepted and 1,285 items were added to the collection. Significant donations related to Elgin's history included a Cubs garbage can manufactured in Elgin, an Elgin Riders motorcycle shirt, and a Theo Swan maid sign. Staff and volunteers continue to improve accessibility to the collection. 257 images from the Courier-News Negative Collection were uploaded to Illinois Digital Archives. Over 700 objects in the collection were photographed to improve documentation and accessibility. The Elgin History Museum Speaker's Bureau was provided with 118 images from the Museum's collections for programs related to Elgin history. Thirteen people and companies ordered over 80 photograph reproductions from the Museum's collection for personal and business use.





ELGIN  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM

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## The First Valley Fox Trot, May 29, 1978

by historian *Edward L. Bates*

I recently had the opportunity to meet Dr. David Bruce, the original race director of the Valley Fox Trot and a former ER doctor at Sherman Hospital in Elgin. He holds medical and dental degrees from Northwestern University. Through our discussions, I gained insight into the origins of this incredible event, which inspired me to document the history of the Fox Trot and its significant role in Elgin, Illinois.

Remarkably, the Fox Trot traces its roots back to the 1977 Mayor Daley Marathon, the predecessor of the Chicago Marathon. Dr. Bruce participated in that race on September 25, 1977. The original Chicago Marathon was promoted as “the people’s race—anyone can come and enjoy” and had an entry fee of only five dollars. Inspired by this inclusive spirit, Dr. Bruce returned to Elgin determined to bring a similar experience to his own community.

Dr. Bruce and his associates incorporated many elements of the Chicago race into their planning for Elgin’s first “people’s race” shortly after their return from Chicago in October 1977. Some of the key features he introduced included pre-race packets, mile markers with volunteers calling out

times as runners passed, three aid stations along the route, and an affordable five-dollar entry fee. The race also offered lottery prizes, local discounts, and free race entries. Participants also enjoyed a post-race meal in the basement of the Hemmens Cultural Center, followed by an awards ceremony featuring a race video filmed by paramedics in the lead vehicle.



In the era before cellphones, era, Dr. Bruce personally checked the course by car about 40 minutes before the race and then ran it himself to ensure everything was in place. His ability to maintain a six-minute-per-mile pace certainly aided his race management efforts. The original pin design for the

first two years featured the race name and its sponsor between the fox's ears.

Continue the tradition! Register for the 48th running of the now Elgin Valley Fox Trot on June 1, 2025, at: <https://elginfoxtrot.org/>