

The Crackerbarrel



Elgin History Museum News November 2025

President's Report



Anne LoCascio, President

I want to end 2025 by expressing my gratitude to all the people who supported the Museum over the past year: members who attend events, donors who generously support the Museum financially, volunteers who donate their time and enthusiasm, and the amazing staff that keep all the balls spinning. Like a well-choreographed

ballet, everyone plays an important part in inspiring the historical discovery of Elgin by preserving and sharing our heritage. It is all of us together that make the Elgin History Museum the vibrant, busy, community space that it is.

The 38th annual Bluff City Cemetery Walk took place September 27 and 28 and exemplifies how we all work together. Celebrating the Route 20 Centennial in Elgin, scores of volunteers started working a year out to put on this signature event. John and Ana Devine helm the production. Board member Nick Freeman lent his talents to create the poster artwork and graphics. Local businesses provided financial support, like long-time sponsors Symonds-Madison and Elgin Granite Works, and new ones like Elgin Sweeper

Company. Invaluable in-kind donations came from Hopkins Ford and Artie's Towing. The City of Elgin lent the Museum an Elgin Street Sweeper. Volunteer greeters met guests as they arrived and guided them through the route. Volunteer actors presented scripts researched with the help of David Siegenthaler, telling the tales of Elgin's past. Other volunteers kept the cast and crew fed over the course of two days. Museum staff made online ticketing possible and worked the Museum Store tent. Over 500 people came out to learn about Elgin's role in transportation and to enjoy the beautiful rolling hills of Bluff City Cemetery. For those who could not attend, a video will soon be available on our YouTube channel.

This behind-scenes-snapshot of one event shows how there are no small parts in the show. Every single person's contributions make this successful and well-regarded event possible. We couldn't do it without all of you.

Welcome New Members

Kristine Kovari
Maryann Thompson

Varchmin, Brian
Zugay, Theresa



Thanks to the volunteer actors for this year's characters: l. to r.: Don Gingold (Charles Burnidge); Caleb Hanson (David McBride); Tracy Hanson (Alice Potter); Matt Bach (Theodore Schmitz); Erik Bosque (Frank Wood) Mike Bruce (Leo McGrath); and Steve Delaney (Clarence W. Helm).

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
 Next deadline December 20, 2025
 Visit our website Elginhistory.org
 Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society's Board of Directors.
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2025 Events Calendar

Al Walters, Program Chair

Check the website for current information. Events take place at the Elgin History Museum unless otherwise noted. To buy tickets, you can scan the QR codes or buy online at elginhistory.org/events-calendar

Nov. 22
10:00 A.M.-4:00
P.M.

Mini Photo Sessions with Santa at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House 302 W. Chicago, Elgin, IL \$30 per 15 minute session.

Book a 15-minute time block and bring your own camera to take photos with Santa. Santa is pet-friendly and sensory-friendly, ensuring a comfortable experience for everyone, from little ones to furry friends. Enjoy a holiday craft activity and light snacks downstairs for a little extra cheer. It's a wonderful holiday outing for the whole family! Book online or call the Museum.

Nov. 23
10:00 A.M.-2:30
P.M.



Santa Mini Sessions

NOVEMBER 22 | 10 AM - 4:00 PM

NOVEMBER 23 | 10 AM - 2:30 PM

15 minute session

\$30



BOOK YOUR TIMESLOT

Dec. 2, all day.

Giving Tuesday
 Please remember the Elgin History Museum on Giving Tuesday

GIVING TUESDAY



Nov. 30
All Day
ONLINE ONLY

Museum Store Sunday
 Get your holiday shopping done early. Check out the new Elgin-themed postcards too!

Have you seen what's new in the Museum Store?

MUSEUM STORE SUNDAY
 BE A PATRON

Shop online November 30 for special discounts and free gifts with purchase!

Dec. 6
12:30 P.M.-2:30
P.M.
Performance at 1:00 P.M.

Holiday Tea at the Museum with Kathleen Monson, Soprano, and Friends
In person event / FREE for Members / \$10 for guests

Seating is limited. Reserve tickets online, or call the Museum at 847-742-4248. Celebrate the season with an afternoon of music, treats, and holiday cheer! This year's "Merry & Bright" concert features beloved Christmas songs with a classical twist! Enjoy a generous spread of sweet and savory treats prepared by our amazing Museum volunteers. This is a holiday tradition you won't want to miss!

Annual Holiday Tea
with Soprano Kathleen Monson and Friends

Scan to reserve your tickets →

Thank You Donors

Board Fundraiser

The Board Fundraiser this year focused on raising funds for the Museum's Endowment. *Thank you* to the many members and friends of the Museum who donated!

Andresen, Paul and Amelia	Marston, Elizabeth and John
Armistead, Dwight and Betsy	Martin, Dorothy & Dick Meier
Barry, Christopher and Jan	Mathews, Bill
Bauer, James and Lois	McClure, Sandra and Dennis
Bosely, Dave	McIntyre, Susan
Brandes, James and Rhonda	Miller, Rebecca and Mike
Briska, Bill and Fran Cella	Missele, Carl and Chris
Burkart, Janet and Gordon	Moore, Bonnie
Calhamer, Tish	Moore, Jill and George
Caughlin, John and Peg	Muchow, Linda and Stephen
Chevalier, Jim	Muirhead, John W.
Conley, Ronald and Mary	Nawara, Beth and David
Corzine, George and Kim	O'Connor, Linda
Dieringer, Roger	Oregon, Derrick
Dyer, Maurice (Cust)	Preradovic, Glenna and Mark
Emmert, Judy	Rauschenberger, Tom
Fidelity Charitable	Regan, John
Flaks, Mary Ellen	Reinert, Coral
Gabel, Terry and Sue Brigham	Rowe, George and Marge
Garza, Laurel	Savel, Moira and Scott
Grosser, Patricia and Jeff	Schroeder, Kathleen
Heise, Georgeann and Ted	Siegenthaler, David
Hoeft, Libby	Smith, H. Jane
Hofmeister, Julie and Kurt	Smith, R. Lorece
Jakle, Rick and Sharon	Trejo, Armando
Jocius, Patricia and James	Turner, James
Jones, Richard	Turnquist, Jerry and Kathleen
Kemerling, Mary and Tom	Vierck, Dana and Gary
Larson, Paul R.	Wingfield, Jim and Sue
Locascio, Anne	

General Donations

Barnett, Randy	Gail Borden Library Foundation, Hispanic Heritage Project Sponsor
Collin, Charlene (Cemetery Headstone Cleaning)	Garza, Laurel (NAWCC Program)
Flaks, Mary Ellen (Museum Youth Programming)	Jammers Music Group (Cemetery Walk)
Murphy, Vanessa	

Monthly Recurring Donations

Evan Fry	Patricia Harkin
Rudolph and Lillian Galfi	

Get to Know the Museum Board: Terry Gabel



As a retired State of Illinois administrator and an avid collector, Terry has helped steer the Museum and make it better. He started on the Board in 2006 and serves on the Finance Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee and the Collections Committee. Terry served as Vice President, from 2018 to 2020 and led the STEPS Assessment program

reviewing operations in each area of the Museum. As a founding member of the Friends of the Lords Park Zoo, Terry has included the Museum in Zoo programming and partners with the Museum to enhance Zoo operations. The Museum is lucky to have as great friends Terry Gabel and his wife, Sue Brigham!

William Cloudman, Watch Factory Assistant Superintendent

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

As Assistant Superintendent of the Elgin National Watch Co. (ENWC) from 1880 to 1909 (and acting assistant superintendent for two years before that), practically all of the thousands of employees hired during those years were assigned to their positions by William. As such, he may have been the best known and most highly-esteemed citizen of Elgin. With his warm, kindly and cheerful disposition, he quickly befriended all who knew him. The ENWC's superintendent during most of his tenure was George Hunter, who had known William since 1860 when they worked together at Waltham, MA.

William Henry Cloudman was born in Boston, MA, February 11, 1842, to David Radcliff and Mary (Brown) Cloudman. He was of Scotch descent on the paternal side. His ancestor came from Scotland sometime in the 17th century, with descendants living in Dover, NH, as early as 1714, and in Gorham, ME, in 1738.

While still quite young, William was placed with a family living on a farm in Holliston, MA, where he remained until the age of 15, when his mother placed him at N.T. Allen's English and Classical School at West Newton, MA. He left school in 1860 to work for the American Watch Co. at Waltham, MA. When the Civil War broke out, William enlisted in Company H, 16th Massachusetts Infantry Reg-

iment as a private on June 29, 1861. That same day, he was recognized for his leadership abilities and promoted to the rank of First Sergeant.



W. H. Cloudman

In August 1861, the 16th Massachusetts Infantry sailed to Fort Monroe, VA, where they were assigned to the Army of the Potomac. From 1862 through the end of William's three-year enlistment on July 27, 1864, his regiment was engaged in numerous battles with Confederate forces. In March 1864, William was promoted to Sergeant Major. His combat engagements included McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg.

Following the war, William returned to the American Watch Co. In November 1865, he left Waltham for Memphis, TN, and worked as a watchmaker for F.H. Clark & Co., then one of the largest jewelry and gun firms in the South. He remained there until July 1868, when he joined with Otis Hoyt of the ENWC and went to California to introduce Elgin watches on the Pacific coast. In the fall of 1868 they opened a shop in Sacramento. William was appointed watch inspector for the Central Pacific Railroad and sold Elgin watches to the trainmen.

Though unconfirmed, some sources say that while William was in California he assisted the San Francisco jewelry firm of Schultz, Fischer & Mahling in the casting and engraving of the ceremonial "golden spike." This symbolic spike was used to commemorate the uniting of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869, completing the transcontinental railroad.

In July 1869, having disposed of his stock of Elgin watches, William returned to Memphis and resumed his former position with F.H. Clark & Co. That same month he married Jennette ("Jennie") Sayers (1849-1933) of Memphis.

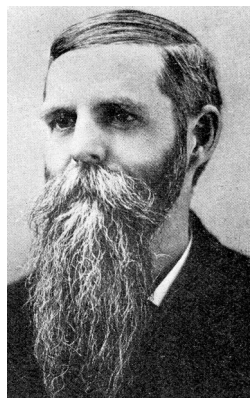
In 1874, William accepted a position with the ENWC as a traveling agent. He served in that capacity until August 1876, when he was appointed foreman in the finishing department. In December 1877, William was appointed ENWC's acting assistant superintendent and was formally elected assistant superintendent by the directors on January 10, 1880.

In 1884 William became a member of Elgin Post No. 49 of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). He was also a member of the Masonic Monitor Lodge No. 117, the Century Club, and Sons of the American Revolution.

William and Jennie had three children: Mortimer, Belle and William Jr. The Cloudman family lived on East Chicago St. until about 1891, when they moved to 320 Watch St., a 3-story brick home built in 1866-67 for Charles Moseley, the ENWC's first superintendent. This home remained in the Cloudman family until Jennie sold it to Albert Collingbourne in 1918. The home was razed in 1968 for a public housing project.



Cloudman Home, 320 Watch St.



CP Corliss

The Cloudman family shared their home with Charles P. Corliss (1841-1915; born and buried in Bradford, VT), who came to the ENWC in January 1877 as a watch designer and model maker. He and William had worked together at Waltham and at Memphis. Mr. Corliss boarded at the Cloudman home for all of his 38 years in Elgin. He was recognized for his encyclopedic knowledge of watchmaking and created some ingenious inventions. Tall and stately with a long beard and a grave face, Mr. Corliss was affectionately known as "Father Time" by co-workers and those who saw him on his solitary walk to and from work. It was said that he maintained a very strict routine, so regular that you could set your watch by it.

William Cloudman passed away on March 12, 1911, and the Universalist Church conducted a private funeral. His body was cremated at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago and the ashes interred at Bluff City Cemetery. In 1933, William's wife Jennie's ashes were interred alongside his.



Mortimer Maine Cloudman (1871-1943) was born January 12, 1871, in Memphis, TN. In 1888 he began employment in the main office of the ENWC, becoming assistant cashier, and later traveled for the company. In 1898 he served during the war with Spain and saw active duty in the Puerto Rico campaign. In 1902 Mortimer entered the retail fuel (coal and wood) business in partnership with Walter Hemmens. In 1905 he purchased Mr. Hemmens' interest

and became the sole owner. In 1936 Mortimer sold the Cloudman Coal Co. to Edward Moser, who continued the firm under the Cloudman name until 1971, when it closed.

Mortimer was an active civic leader in Elgin. He was a trustee and one of the organizers of the Elgin Sanitary District. He served on the board of education from 1908 to 1913, the last two years as president. He was for a time president of the Home Trust & Savings Bank of Elgin. Mortimer fished and hunted extensively and also was one of the city's first golfers. He was a member of the Elgin Country Club, the Century Club, the Kiwanis, and the Elks. His family had a summer home at the Elgin Club at Lake Geneva.

In 1899 Mortimer married Maud Hamlin (1870-1940), daughter of the Lysander Hamlins of Wizard Oil fame. Mortimer and Maud had three children: Carolyn (1900-85; Mrs. Clarence P. Gubbins); Margaret (1904-85; Mrs. Harold W. Brown); and Eleanor (1906-86; Mrs. Horatio H. Chandler). His family lived at 552 E. Chicago St. from 1905-25, and then at 821 Douglas Ave. from 1926 until Mortimer's death on October 19, 1943. His ashes are interred in the family plot in Bluff City Cemetery.

William's daughter, Belle (1873-1929), was born in Memphis and in 1895 married Guy V. Dickinson, an official of the Chicago office of the ENWC. She passed away in 1929 at her home in Highland Park.

William Henry Cloudman, Jr. (1881-1926) was born in Elgin and lived most of his adult life in New York City and Greenwich, CT. He graduated from Andover University, MA. and served in the hospital corps during WW1. He was a concert manager and in 1924 married Bertha Hayes. He died in 1926 at his home in New York City. Neither Belle nor William Jr. had children and both are buried in the Cloudman family plot in Bluff City Cemetery.



Cloudman Monument, Bluff City Cemetery

Acknowledgments: "Historical Notes on the Foundation and Development of the Elgin National Watch Company," by George Hunter, 1906; obituaries and other newspaper articles; "Watch Word," Nov. 1921 and Jan. 1922; Findagrave.com; Cloudman monument photo by Jill Moore.

Note: An expanded research version of this article is available upon request at the Museum.

From Hiding a Pox to Everything In A Box

A Brief Summary of Early Makeup Containers by Maureen Thoren, Elgin Collector and Historian.

Born of the horror of disfiguring diseases such as smallpox and plague, scarred victims covered their facial pockmarks with patches that they stored in tiny containers named patch boxes. These boxes eventually morphed into face powder boxes and suddenly, a new market was created for portable makeup containers. The golden age of makeup accessories had begun and soon carved out a solid base in Elgin.

During 1888 in Chicago, brothers Max and Solomon Eppenstein, along with Thomas Duncan, organized the Illinois Watch Case Company of Chicago. A few years later, they were offered a great proposition by the City of Elgin to move their operations there for a large parcel of free land. In fact, Duncan Avenue on the east side of Elgin was named after Thomas Duncan. Their company was built on Dundee Avenue, and it produced the first Elgin-made watch case in 1890.

The company prospered and the Elgin American division was formally established as a novelty and jewelry manufacturer, eventually branching out to several products. Jewelry sets of necklaces, bracelets and earrings, vanity items, lockets, novelty silverware, even Spanish-American war items were made by Elgin American.

The Watch Case division produced cases in solid gold, while Elgin American made a myriad of objects in other metals. The quality of the Elgin-made products was recognized worldwide. But then trouble came when Thomas Duncan, president of the firm, resigned in 1898 and the next year, he was arrested for alienation of affections of Max Eppenstein's wife. Later, a legal storm was unleashed as Elgin American stock ownership was contested in numerous court cases. Finally, matters were legally settled and the Eppensteins continued as owners.

With the dawn of the 1900s, public acceptance of the average woman using face makeup was growing. Previously, after having been almost exclusively used by stage actors and other performers, the practice of coloring the face or lips with makeup was considered by the general populace as inappropriate for women of good breeding. But times and standards were changing and women were beginning to enjoy many new-found freedoms.

Using makeup made women feel more attractive and with the shortage of available men following World War I, they needed every advantage. Openly using powder, rouge and lipstick was soon considered not just appropriate, but essential anytime a woman left her home. Women needed to take their makeup with them, and Elgin American had plenty of options to choose from.

In addition to manufacturing loose powder boxes very early in its history, Elgin American made beautiful containers named vanity cases beginning around the time of World War I. Initially, vanity cases held just powder, rouge, puffs and a mirror. As the need for more amenities in the case grew, they were increased in size to include specific sections to safely hold makeup along with other essentials. These well-engineered cases held powder, rouge, one or two slots for coins, a mirror, a tube for lipstick or perfume, and some even had an area for cigarettes or paper money, all in a three inch case!

The company's use of precious metals made it a target on the night of April 9, 1927, when ten armed bandits broke in and assaulted the maintenance man. Then they forced him to open the safe and the gang made off with \$25,000 worth of gold bars, plate and wire. There is no record that the case was ever solved.

Vanity cases were available in gold plate, sterling silver, or for a lower cost, in Elgin American's own patented nickel metal alloy named, not Kryptonite, but "Elginite." Elginite was especially resistant to dents and scratches, and some surviving examples look like they just came from the box.

Cases made in the mid-1920s through the early 1930s sometimes had chains which could be wrapped around the wrist, handy for dancing or other activities. Smaller cases were sometimes fitted with a shorter chain attached to a finger ring. These handled cases were typically used for evenings out and took the place of a purse.

A small vanity case was sometimes also called a compact, and examples from the early 1920s through the early 1930s included the usual powder and rouge sections, a mirror, and puffs (or pads) to apply the makeup. Later, the compact model held a cake of pressed powder, which was developed in the late 1920s and gave birth to the modern pressed powder compact. Elgin American advertised a pressed powder cake containing "Elgium" which promised to have a more beautifying effect on the skin.



A fancy sterling silver vanity with a wrist chain. The original powder puff is still in this unused vanity.

Elgin American products were sold in jewelry stores and better department stores. Vanity cases were often monogrammed and also could be embellished with engraving or the attachment of decorative creations. A few early models had bale-type, firm handles that were designed to be hung from a car's dashboard, allowing the woman to apply makeup hands-free while in the car.

In 1928, Elgin American completely changed their vanities and compacts to reflect the new "modern" designs we now know as Art Deco. Flamboyant colors, startling, geometrically bold and even scenic designs graced the case covers. The artwork was created with vitreous enamels or paint and embodied a huge variety of motifs. Zigzag lines, buildings,

clouds, women with dogs or birds, faces, flowers and fountains, all were fair game to include on a compact.



An early Art Deco vanity compact, 2" square, with compartments for powder and rouge

Designs were applied by hand, mostly by young girls sitting at tables in the company's well lit, long rooms. With so many different designs printed in the Elgin American catalogs of 1929 through 1931, surely it was tempting to own more than one. However, the reality of the Depression began to affect the public's buying power, and by 1933, designs had become simpler and cheaper materials had to be used to keep prices down. The height of the Art Deco era of compacts had passed, though later designs continued to include some aspects of this modern style.



Two arrowhead-shaped vanities from the later Art Deco period. These held powder and rouge.

Recent Events

The Museum recently participated in the U-46 Alignment Explore event held at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates. Every 8th grader in the district toured the event, which gives them a glimpse of various career paths they may be interested in pursuing when they get to high school.

The Museum presented displays on Project 231, Hispanic Heritage, the Elgin National Watch Factory, and general information about Elgin and the Museum, geared toward students interested in studying history.

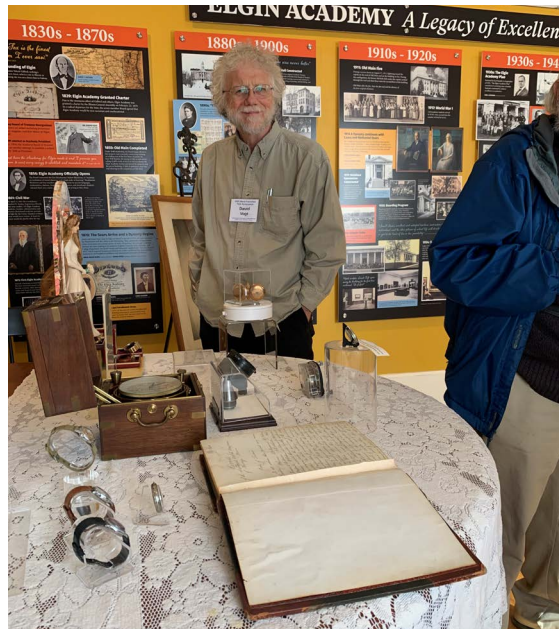


Students view the Traveling Museum at the U-46 Alignment Explore event at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Historical interpreter Ellie Carlson as Phyllis Diller entertained Museum members at the annual meeting.



Members of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors viewing Elgin National Watch Company artifacts



Honor the past.
Inspire the future.

Include the Elgin History
Museum in your estate plans.

