



The Crackerbarrel

Elgin History Museum News January 2026

President's Report



Anne LoCascio, President

Welcome to 2026! And welcome to another great year of history—both local and national. America is celebrating 250 years in 2026, and the Elgin History Museum is part of the festivities.

I was six years old for America's Bicentennial in 1976 and remember the excitement around those celebrations. Since it was such a special occasion, I got to see my first fireworks, and I really admired the fire hydrant at the end of my street, painted to look like Uncle Sam. I still have my hoard of Bicentennial quarters. I doubt I will be around for the Tricentennial in 2076, so I'm looking forward to celebrating this year. Planning is in progress for several America250 events within the community.

Also happening in 2026 will be the premiere of the *Elgin Hispanic Heritage Project: Celebrating Culture & Community*. Following our successful projects celebrating Elgin's African American and Jewish communities, the film and traveling exhibit will explore the profound impact of Hispanic immigration across six generations—tracing stories of resilience, cultural pride, and economic influence from the early 20th century to today. Almost two years in the making, it will be a significant contribution to telling the story of this growing community in Elgin.

I hope to see you on Friday, January 30, for the Elgin Trivia Night FUN-Raiser 2026. The event has now become a raucous annual evening filled with good-natured competition. I look forward to seeing whose most arcane knowledge will win the cash prize and bragging rights for the next year.

Get to Know the Museum Board: Doreen Christiani

The Museum welcomes new board member Doreen Christiani in 2026! Doreen has been a Cemetery Walk volunteer for several years and enjoys planning the event as a member of the Cemetery Walk Committee. She is training as a Docent for group tours and in Visitor Services. Doreen is also interested in design and marketing for the Museum, in contrast to when she was working as a Systems Engineer for Dell Technologies. Doreen enjoys public speaking and is hoping to connect the Museum with the Bluff City Cemetery records. While a newcomer to Elgin, Doreen loves our 'City in the Suburbs' and wants to share that positivity.



Welcome New Members

- Roc Ordman and Eliza Freeman
- Tyler Walker

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 Phone 847-742-4248
 e-mail: 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 February 20, 2026
 Visit our website Elginhistory.org
 Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society's Board of Directors.
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2026 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

Jan 10
12:00 - 3:00 P.M.
Open House: Kiln-Formed Glass: An Artist's Medium art exhibit
at Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, 302 W. Chicago St., Elgin
 See unique glass artwork up close—and meet the artist behind it! Hans Klemmer of Prairie Street Studios will be present to share insight into his work, process, and inspiration. Come enjoy art and conversation at one of Elgin's oldest landmarks. FREE event.



Jan. 30
7:00 - 9:30 P.M.
Trivia Night FUN-Raiser
In-person event / \$25 Members / \$30 Guests
 Gather your friends, form a team, and join us for a night of fun, learning, and friendly competition. You'll learn fascinating facts and discover new tidbits about a wide range of topics, all while having a blast. It's a fantastic way to have fun while contributing to a meaningful cause. Reserve your spot today, and let the trivia battle begin!

Feb. 14
11:00 A.M.

Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon

The Museum wants to thank our volunteers for their hard work and dedication with the annual Volunteer Appreciation Event.

Feb. 22
2:00 P.M.

Abolition and the Underground Railway in Kane & DuPage Counties

In person event / FREE for Members / \$5 Guests. Presented by Eric Krupa, Archivist at St. Charles History Learn about Illinois' expansive role on the Underground Railroad and the Illinois Network to Freedom Collective, a new initiative dedicated to researching the Underground Railroad in the State of Illinois.

March 2
2:00 P.M.

Jane Austen Presentation Celebrating Women's Month

In person event / FREE for Members (Donations appreciated)
 The Elgin Area branch of the American Association of University Women invites members of the Elgin History Museum to a portrayal of Jane Austen by Debra Ann Miller.

March 29
2:00 P.M.

Abigail Adams: From Colony to Constitution presented by Megan Wells

In person event / FREE for Members / \$5 Guests
 Storyteller Megan Wells brings Abigail Adams to life. Adams' own words and experiences provide a powerful glimpse into the intellect, humor, and resilience of one of America's most influential First Ladies.



Thank You Donors

2025 Board Fundraiser Donations

Allerton, Lorraine	Malm, Robert and Carolyn
Blizzard, Phyllis	McIntyre, Susan
Ann Broihier	Pedersen, Kirsten
Campbell, Rachel	Ryzner, Betsy
Costello, Laura	Smith, R. Lorece
Cottone, Siobhan	Sorton, Judy and Alex
Devine, John	Stroud, Laura
Dunning, Charles and Patricia	Swan, Valerie
Freeman, Nicholas and Sheila	Van Dusen, Judith
Galfi, Rudolf and Lillian	Vece, Michael

Endowment Donations

- Linda Eder
- Richard Renner Family
in memory of Madeline Waggoner, Elgin Area Historical Society founder

Grants

Signal Hill Chapter NSDAR for optimizing collections storage

Giving Tuesday Donations

Amato, Rebecca	Locascio, Anne
Armistead, Dwight and Betsy	Marco, Rebecca
Bosely, Dave	Marcus, Ira and Jackie
Briska, Bill and Fran Cella	Marston, John and Elizabeth
Briska, Luann	Marston, William and Kathy
Burkart, Janet and Gordon	McClure, Sandra and Dennis
Burnidge, Richard	Moore, Jill
Calhamer, Tish	Mullin, Daniel
Cullnan, Daniel	Mullin, Gregory
Dulabaum, Allison	Mullin, John
Dyer, Maury	Nawara, Beth and David
Gabel, Terry and Sue	O'Connor, Linda
Brigham	
Groenwald, Susan	Pullaro, John
Grosser, Patricia and Jeff	Rowe, George and Marge
Harris, Ricky	Roxworthy, Dennis
Hoppe, Roberta	Rush, Carrie
Hyser, Susan	Shaw, Rita
Jocius, Patricia	Sundquist, Christen
Keleher, Amy	Swan, Chan and Pam
Kerr, Susan	Turnquist, Jerry and Kathleen
Koss, Eileen	Walters, Alan and Kathy

General Donations

Broadnax, Ernie	Pinion, Brian for the Elgin Hispanic Project: Celebrating Culture and Community
Burke, Christopher	Shaw, Rita
Cassell, Charles	Spengler-Abell, Susan
Gregory, Martin and Mary	Wahl, Elizabeth
Nelson, Dolores	Wingfield, Jim and Susan
In memory of David J. Nelson	
Patten, Al	

Monthly Recurring Donations

Evan Fry	Patricia Harkin
Rudolph and Lillian Galfi	Dorothy Turay

In Memoriam: Len Govednik

Len Govednik passed away on December 21, 2025. Len volunteered in the Elgin community and at the Museum over the last 10 years. He was a docent, a donor, and sometimes a video producer for the Museum. Len created the Museum's Gala video highlighting Museum accomplishments in 2023, and made a promo video for 2024. Len volunteered for the Elgin Historic House Tour, allowing visitors to tour his lovingly rehabbed home on Monroe St. He remained involved with historic preservation through the Elgin Heritage Commission.



New Strategic Plan

The Museum Board approved the new Museum Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 in November. The goals of the plan are listed below. The Strategic Plan will be used as a fundraising tool to show progress and vision. Many thanks to the Museum Board members, especially Tricia Grosser, who led the Plan development, and Christen Sundquist who designed the document, and to Museum staff for their thoughtful insight. A complete copy of the [Strategic Plan](https://elginhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/EHM_Strategic-Plan-2026-2029-Final.pdf) is available on the Museum website at https://elginhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/EHM_Strategic-Plan-2026-2029-Final.pdf.



The mission and vision of the Elgin History Museum align with these six goals. They are part of a continuing multi-year plan.

OUTREACH & VISIBILITY

Increase the Museum's outreach and visibility in the local community. This will result in making resources and programming well known and readily accessible. Accurately convey Elgin's history so that it is inclusive and provides perspective and context to past and present events. Seek partnerships with other local organizations, institutions, and individuals.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Improve the Museum's overall operation by adherence to professional standards. This will be accomplished by participating in the STEPS self-assessment program issued by the American Association for State and Local History.

ENHANCE COLLECTIONS

Enhance collections management and stewardship by improving storage, and indexing systems. Accelerate work on digitization of images and other holdings. Support the collection management with upgraded information technology.

INCREASE REVENUE

Seek opportunities to increase revenue from diverse sources. Operate on a sound financial basis and pursue long-term financial resiliency through the steady growth of the endowment fund.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Adopt technological advances to improve museum management accessibility to collections. This extends programming to larger audiences to enhance communication and outreach.

EQUITABLE PRACTICE

Through governance, staffing, training, collecting, programming, investing and all other aspects of operations, be inclusive of diversity, mindful of conscious and unconscious bias, evaluative of environmental implications and demonstrate fair and just treatment of all community members.

George Hans Andresen, Businessman and Civic Leader

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

Known as “The Little Giant” for his 5-foot-3-and-a-half-inch height and his dynamic, outspoken personality, George Andresen (1880-1957) was one of Elgin’s best-known and most successful businessmen in the first half of the Twentieth Century. A Norwegian immigrant with only a fourth-grade education, George was a self-made man. He worked at the Elgin National Watch Co. (ENWC) for 12 years. He was elected an alderman for five years and served as a Kane County deputy probate clerk for three years. In 1911 he established a real estate and insurance business, successfully pursuing this career for the remainder of his life. In the mid-1920s George bought an unsightly dumping ground near the watch factory and converted it into a modern residential subdivision. 100 years later, this subdivision is the last visible reminder of “The Little Giant.”

George was born April 15, 1880, in Kongsberg, Norway to Hans J. and Gunda Andresen. Hans (1855-1922) was a master watchmaker in Kongsberg. In early 1888, at the suggestion of a boyhood friend who had become a jobmaster at the ENWC, Hans emigrated to Elgin, where a position was awaiting him at the ENWC. Hans arrived in Elgin on a Sunday and reported for work in the Motion room the next day: May 21, 1888. He worked at the watch factory from then until his final illness in December 1922.



Hans Andresen

Hans Andresen left his family in Norway when he came to Elgin. At the end of his first year here, he sent for his wife Gunda and six children: James S., Adolph C., George H., Anno M., Olaf W. and Fred W. All of the children except Olaf and Fred worked for a time at the ENWC. Hans and Gunda had three more children born in Elgin: Frank W., Arthur and Gertrude. (The last two died in infancy.) Gunda (1855-1900) passed away at age 44. Hans married Elisa Christiansen (1868-1956) in

1909 in Chicago.

As a youngster, George delivered newspapers. Then he worked in a grocery store as an errand boy. In 1895, at age 15, he began working at the ENWC as an errand boy. He

was soon promoted to the position of hairspring truer in the Escape department, where he met Dorothy (Dot) Leone Curtis, a native of Kansas. George and Dorothy (1879-1962) were married February 12, 1901. The couple had one child, Ollene Gertrude (1902-?; Mrs. Everett George Opie).



*George Andresen,
Company A, 1902*

While an ENWC employee, George enlisted in Company E of the Illinois National Guard, becoming company clerk. In 1906 his natural leadership qualities helped him to be elected as the city’s youngest alderman, a position he was re-elected to for the next four years. It was during his years as alderman that he acquired the nickname “Little Giant,” by which he was known the rest of his life. In 1908 George left the ENWC to become Kane County deputy probate clerk and served in that capacity until 1911.

In 1911 Elgin citizens voted to abandon their aldermanic form of government in favor of the commission form. Despite running high in the primaries, George lost out in the final election for commissioner. Following the election, Elgin Daily News publisher Adam Lowrie suggested the city was ungrateful. He wrote in an editorial, “No man has worked harder; no man has stood firmer for the honor and good of Elgin than George H. Andresen.” About 15 years later George noted, “As it turned out, it was the best thing in the world that could have happened to me. Had I been elected to the commission, I might never have gone into the real estate business, and now I feel positive that real estate was first and last my chosen field.”

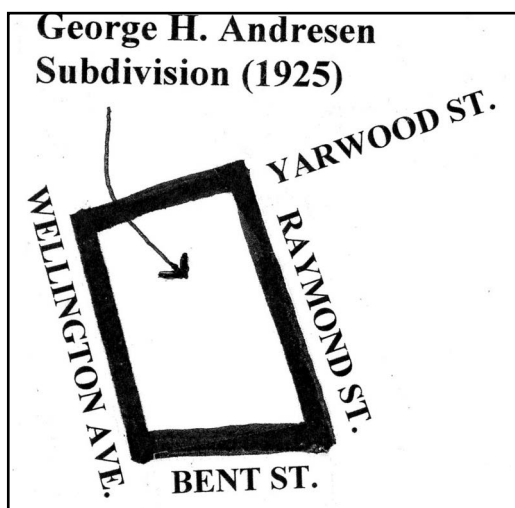


*George
Andresen, 1938*

From its beginning in 1911, George’s real estate and insurance business grew steadily. During WWI he was appointed secretary of the local draft board, which was headquartered in his office. In 1918 he was appointed to a one-year term on the Kane County board of tax review. In 1922, when the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin “third rail” line went into receivership, he was the realtor selected to make an appraisal of

the company's right-of-way. This included all of the company's holdings throughout the Fox Valley, DuPage County and in Chicago.

In September 1924 George bought the roughly four acres of land along the west side of Raymond St. between Yarwood and Bent streets, extending a block to the west along



Wellington Ave. Geographically, it was an ideal residential location, only a 5-minute walk to the watch factory, where over 4,000 people were employed. Known as the "Watch Factory Woods," the name belied the fact that it had become an unhealthy, foul-smelling eyesore after years of people dumping garbage into a deep ravine at the site, which also included a 30-foot-tall mound of earth. Reclamation of the land proceeded quickly, as the mound was leveled and the earth used to fill in the ravine. In February 1925 the site was subdivided and home construction began in May 1925. By the end of 1927, all 11 homes on the west side of Raymond St., numbers 400-440, were completed. George also coordinated with the city to build a cement roadway along Wellington Ave. between National and Bent streets, thus opening this section of Wellington to automobile traffic for the first time.

In 1932 when the Home Trust & Savings Bank (the original occupant of the Tower Building) closed during the Great Depression, George was selected as receiver because of his knowledge of real estate values and previous contacts with depositors and creditors. His guidance showed earnings of \$62,000 over and above the costs of the receivership administration. Thus, unfortunate creditors of the bank were spared a much heavier loss than they might have incurred under less careful administrative procedures.

George's numerous civic services also included: highway right-of-way appraiser for the State of Illinois; president of the Elgin Real Estate Board; director of the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railway; chairman of the Elgin zoning board of appeals; and honorary secretary of the Illinois Mayors' Association for 3 years. In 1933 he was chosen by

the Federal Department of Justice to rehabilitate the affairs of Jacob Kulp & Co., a Chicago investment firm that dealt principally in bonds on post office buildings.

In 1936 George re-entered the field of politics when he ran unsuccessfully as a Republican candidate for State Representative. He was also a member of many social organizations, being especially active in the Elks Lodge, where he was chairman of the building committee in 1928 that constructed the former Elks home still standing at 18-20 Villa Court.

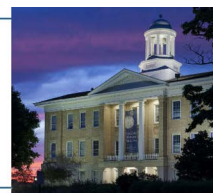
After his marriage in 1901, George and his family lived at several different addresses in Elgin, most notably at what were, in their day, three luxury apartment buildings that still stand: 320 Percy St. (Percy-Villa Apartments); 400 Douglas Ave. (Lucille Apartments); and 4 S. Gifford St. (Ruby Apartments). George died of a heart attack on December 11, 1957, and Dorothy passed away on July 21, 1962. They are buried in Bluff City Cemetery.

Acknowledgments: *Obituaries and other newspaper articles; "Watch Word," Jan. 1923; "Elgin: Past and Present," (1927); Ancestry.com; Familysearch.org; Elgin city directories; etc.*



**Honor the past.
Inspire the future.**

*Include the Elgin History
Museum in your estate plans.*



2025 Holiday Events Drew Big Crowds

The Photos with Santa event November 22 and 23 at the Cobblestone House was well-attended. We thank the volunteers who helped the event run smoothly. Even the pets who participated had a good time!

The Holiday Tea performance by vocalist Kathleen Monson and Friends was a big hit with the full-capacity crowd in attendance. As always, the treats were well-received. Thank you to the volunteers who staffed the event at the Museum and to those who baked the goodies enjoyed by everyone.



Santa and Friend pose for their picture.



Volunteers at the Photos with Santa event at the Cobblestone House. Left to right: Mark Clemens, Mary Kemerling and Al Walters, all members of the Program Committee



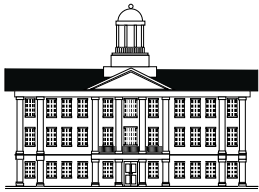
Kathleen Monson performs at the 2025 Holiday Tea

America's Semiquin- centennial and the Hispanic Heritage Project



Rafael Villagomez represented the Elgin History Museum at the kickoff of the Illinois America 250 Celebration with Governor Pritzker in December, held at Navy Pier. Rafael (pictured) highlighted the Museum's new Hispanic Heritage documentary and traveling exhibit celebrating Hispanic culture and community in the

Fox River Valley. The Project will premiere in June 2026.



Collections Corner: An Artist and So Much More

Louis Yarwood was born in New York and studied art as a child. He moved to Elgin in 1851. He held a variety of jobs in Elgin, including bookkeeper and drugstore operator. He became Elgin's first librarian in 1874. By 1882 he was a successful artist and taught painting. He was an alderman for one term. He and his wife Caroline built the house at 373 Park Street. His 1896 oil painting "River Landscape with Boat" in 1896 was recently donated to the Museum.



"River Landscape with Boat" by Louis Yarwood, 1896