



Speaker's Bureau 2025-2026

Linda Rock Lectures

Linda provides a number of programs on topics including Elgin women, Elgin candy manufacturers, Tupperware, artist Jane Peterson, women's and men's hats through the years, Elgin American compacts, aprons, Elgin's women educators, past times of yesteryear in Elgin, Elgin Christmas Memories and Elgin advertising. Please see Linda's biography for a complete description of these programs.

Bill Briska Lectures

Bill provides a number of programs on topics including the Elgin National Watch Company and Elgin Mental Health Center, Please see Bill's biography for a complete description of these programs. In the event that Bill is not available, his program may be provided by another qualified speaker.

Jerry Turnquist Lectures

Jerry provides a number of programs on topics including Elgin women, the 1917 Elgin Plan, Elgin in the 1930s and 1950s, the impact of WWI or WWII on Elgin, Elgin and Prohibition, and the 1925 Miss Elgin Contest. Please see Jerry's biography for a complete description of these programs. In the event that Jerry is not available, his program may be provided by another qualified speaker.

Al Walters Lectures

Al provides programs on the Elgin's Walton Island and the Elgin Road Races. Please see Al's biography for a complete description of these programs.

Dairies to Prairies: The Land Has a Story to Tell

A nearly forgotten story about Elgin's first wealth, the dairy industry, and how land use and agriculture are changing rapidly in Kane County.

Project 2-3-1: A Story of Elgin's African American History

Elgin's African American history from the arrival of 110 formerly enslaved men, women and children in 1862 to the present day

Lords Park Zoo

Learn about Elgin's oldest and largest park and the Zoo's beginning, how it has changed, stories of how the animals came to reside there and antics of both animal and human.

A History of Things Made in Elgin

From toasters to street sweepers to windmills to coffee grinders and butter, Elgin has a long and successful history of manufacturing. Objects and images bring back past companies, products and the people that made things we needed.

Behind-the-Scenes Tour

Walk through the Elgin Area Historical Museum and discover how the exhibits were created, interesting artifacts, and the thousands of items in storage. Program offered at the Museum only.

More Than Just an Address

Images of Elgin homes and businesses illustrate different time periods and architectural styles. Hear the stories of Elgin through its buildings. A walking tour is also available.

Bus Guides

Step-on guides to take your bus group through Elgin's historic districts, downtown, or cemeteries, showcasing local people and places.

Booking arrangements for all speakers are made through the Elgin History Museum. Please email museum@elginhistory.org or call 847-742-4248 to learn more.

All programs are \$150 per speaker, discount available for programs presented at the Museum.

Programs are prepared for a 30-60 minute presentation, depending on the request of the group. A question and answer time with sharing follows each presentation. Audio Visual and set up requirements for each presentation vary and options are always available to fit any audience.

Linda Rock



Linda has been part of the Elgin Area Historical Society for over 30 years, starting as a board member in 1986. She has been a docent, participated in developing and presenting programs for schools and other children's groups, assisted in preparing exhibits, and organized artifacts and archival material. She is one of a group who researches and records programs for the WRMN radio program "Elgin 100 Years Ago." Linda served as the Historical Society's president in 2003. She co-chaired the Elgin Cemetery Walk from 2000-2007 and for many years portrayed Elgin women in the event.

Linda and her husband Jeff White are enthusiastic Elgin collectors with a large collection of Elgin manufactured products and memorabilia (lovingly known as the White Rock collection.) Many items from their collection are used in her presentations.

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Herstory: Stories of Elgin Women

Dressing in period clothing and making costume changes during the presentation, Linda portrays a variety of Elgin women, including: Laura Gifford, Emeline Borden, Jennie Tazewell, Mary Lord, Alyce "Byrdie" Potter, and Anna Schrader. Each woman's story focuses on her accomplishments and connection to Elgin's past.

Elgin: How Sweet It Is

Never outdone by Chicago's candy producers, Elgin was a manufacturer of sweets and treats for many years. You can practically taste the sweet treats from ice cream to popcorn stands and various candies made in both factories and local homes. A fun candy quiz following the presentation.

Tupperware: The Burp Heard Round the World

Linda shows off her Tupperware Collection to tell a story about the woman behind the popularity of Tupperware. We use Tupperware in our kitchens every day, but where did it come from? Who developed it and how did we keep our food fresh before Tupperware was invented?

Working Women of Elgin

Linda will share the stories of women from Elgin's history that were leaders, educators, business owners, and many more. You will meet Ila Newsome, one of many tireless volunteers in the community.

Jane Peterson: Elgin Artist

Born and raised in Elgin, Jane Peterson studied at Pratt Institute, traveled the world, lived in Paris, and was friends with many well-known 20th century artists. Linda shares her rise from hometown girl to renowned, award-winning painter. Two of Jane's paintings from Linda's collection are displayed.

Hats Off to Elgin!

Linda's hat collection, both men and women's, highlights styles through the decades. She blends a showcase of hats, modeled by audience members, with interesting tidbits of Elgin history.

Elgin American Compacts: The Business of Making Women Beautiful

Using her own collection of Elgin American powder compacts, Linda describes the evolution of women's makeup from Egyptian times through today.

The Apron: from Blacksmithing to Baking

We often think of the apron as only used in the kitchen. Not so! Linda will showcase her collection of aprons to describe their uses for men and women throughout American history. Audience members are invited to model the aprons.

Elgin Women Educators: More Than Classroom Teachers

As Linda describes the evolution of Elgin education from cabin to classroom; she also shares the stories of female teachers who made significant contributions to the city beyond the classroom.

Fun in Elgin

Linda will get you in a summer time fun mood by celebrating Elgin's past baseball games, carnivals and festivals with images from the Elgin History Museum collection. Whether you were an Elgin resident or not, you will enjoy this stroll through the good old days.

Elgin: A Women's City

In his book, *Elgin: A Women's City*, historian E.C. Alft compiled a list of notable Elgin women. Linda has selected several of these women and will highlight their influence in the community.

Elgin Christmas Memories

Meet Myrtle, an Elgin Christmas shopper, as she shows off her purchases from the 1950s. Linda's presentation includes a wealth of photos of downtown Elgin at Christmas time which illustrate local holiday traditions.

Compliments Of: Elgin Advertising Give-Aways from Years Ago

For many years businesses have used promotional items to advertise. Using items from her collection, Linda displays many types of Elgin advertising products from the late 19th century through the 1960s.

Bill Briska



Bill brings to the Museum and the City of Elgin, Illinois a broad range of historical and architectural knowledge, managerial experience, construction skills and experience as a writer and lecturer.

Bill wrote The History of Elgin Mental Health Center: Evolution of a State Hospital (1997) as an in-depth history of the institution, presented in context with the national trends in mental health care. Bill worked at EMHC for 28 years and after retiring in 2002 he continued to volunteer as the facility's archivist, answering research questions, cataloging artifacts and preserving vintage images. Bill advocates for the hospital's old burial ground (Hillside Cemetery), giving tours and organizing clean up days. Working with the City and the Museum, Bill raised funds to install interpretive signage explaining the cemetery's significance.

Bill's second book, Elgin Time: History of the Elgin National Watch Company 1864 to 1968 was originally written in 2003 with E. C. Alft and updated in 2020 with additional photographs and insight. The book is the only complete history of this important American manufacturer. Bill is the volunteer curator of the Museum's Elgin National Watch Company collection including creating exhibits and educational lectures, and assisting with research services.

As a Museum volunteer over the past 25 years, Bill has served as a board member and as Treasurer and President. He has assisted in all areas of the Museum from building and writing exhibits and films to fundraising. Recently, Bill lead the effort to re-build the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House.

Elgin Time: A History of the Elgin National Watch Company

The history of the famous Elgin National Watch Company and its impact on the area and the nation.

Elgin State Hospital: 100 Years of Caring for Mind, Body, and Spirit

A history of mental health nationally and what made the Elgin Mental Health Center so groundbreaking over the years

Jerry Turnquist



Jerry has been a supporter of the Elgin Area Historical Society since its formation, serving in various board member roles since 1986. He started the Elgin Historic Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery over 35 years ago and served as chair for the first seven years of the event. Jerry started the Society's long-running Elgin 100 Years Ago segment on WRMN radio, researching newspapers, writing and recording events for the program.

As a science and social studies teacher at Ellis Middle School in Elgin for over 41 years, Jerry made local history important to students. He developed a walking tour of the historic neighborhood around the school and worked with students on research projects. Jerry also wrote a local history column for the Daily Herald on aspects of Elgin history, called Way Back When. Jerry is currently the President of the Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association and in 1995 won the Mayor George Van De Voorde Outstanding Service Award. His other awards include a 2008 Mayor's Award for the local history news column Way Back When, and 2019 Mayor's Award for Dairies to Prairies Film and Traveling Exhibit Project.

Remarkable Women of Elgin's Past

Jerry Turnquist takes a look at women and women's groups that have helped shape Elgin. Included will be a look at some notable women who have passed through the city, contributions of women during World War II, and some women who have set local records.

A Look at the Plan of Elgin of 1917

In 1917, the city of Elgin unveiled its "Plan of Elgin." Produced by architect and city planner Edward H. Bennett, who had worked on Chicago's "Burnham Plan," this blueprint for the future called for major changes to Elgin's traffic flow, zoning, beautification efforts, riverfront development and more. How did the goals laid out in this plan fare over the past century? Jerry Turnquist takes a look at what's been accomplished and what might still be achieved in the future.

Elgin in the 1920s

The city of Elgin was growing in the 1920s. Skyscrapers are being built, transportation is changing and the downtown is booming.

Elgin in the 1930s

Elgin in the 1930s saw its share of highs and lows. Historian Jerry Turnquist will take you back to this time and share photos and articles which highlight this period.

Elgin in the 1950s

The 1950s in Elgin are remembered as the "good old days" and a time of unprecedented growth and prosperity to many. Historian Jerry Turnquist will take you back to this exciting time.

World War I- The Impact to Elgin

Using newspaper stories and pictures of 100 years ago, this presentation will retell the story of how World War I impacted Elgin citizens both at home and abroad.

World War II- The Impact to Elgin

Using newspaper stories and pictures of 75 years ago, this presentation will retell the story of how World War II impacted Elgin citizens both at home and abroad.

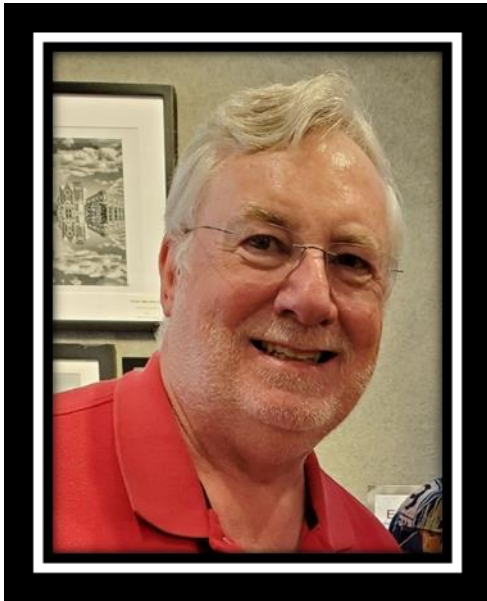
What?! No Beer?- Prohibition and Elgin

National Prohibition began in 1920, but it wasn't the first time Elgin was "dry." Discover earlier efforts to limit liquor sales in the city through the repeal of Prohibition in 1933.

The Miss Elgin Contest of 1925

Sponsored by the Elgin Motor Club with the winner advancing to the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, the event attracted 36 competitors along with both praise and criticism from the community.

Alan Walters



Al Walters is the current chair of the programming committee of the Elgin History Museum. He joined the board of directors in 2013 and served two years as vice president and four years as president. Al is a lifelong resident of Elgin graduating from Larkin High School in 1971 and Western Illinois University in 1975 with a degree in Secondary Education with a focus in Social Studies.

While history is a favorite interest, Al's life has also always been about paint. Growing up, Al helped his father in his Dundee paint store, and ultimately created a career in paint sales, retiring from Benjamin Moore Paint after 20 years. Walton Island was a favorite city

park in Al's childhood, and he took on the task of researching this amazing river island as part of the Elgin Parks and Recreation Foundation Golden Memories program.

Al has developed several presentations appropriate to share with organizations having a small or large audience. Programs are prepared for a 30-60 minute presentation, depending on the request of the group. A question and answer time with sharing follows each presentation. Audio Visual and set up requirements for each presentation vary and options are always available to fit any audience.

The Elgin Road Races

Beginning in 1910 – a year before the Indianapolis 500 – some of the nation's best drivers and mechanics competed in a 300-mile race on rural roads just west of Elgin. The races continued until 1920, and were resumed one more time in 1933 in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair. Thousands of people used to visit Elgin to see the races, come relive their excitement.

Remembering Walton Island

One of Elgin's most beautiful parks, Walton Island was once an island of mud and thought of as an eyesore. This presentation also offers a basic history of the Fox River shoreline that surrounds Walton Island. Al Walters takes listeners through the storied history of what is now one Elgin's greatest assets.

Rebecca Miller



Rebecca Miller is the Museum Educator at the Elgin History Museum. She is a 20+ year resident of Elgin. Rebecca graduated from the University of Wisconsin- Whitewater with a degree in History. In her role at the Elgin History Museum she gets to share Elgin’s story with over a thousand schoolchildren each year. Others may know her as the voice of the Elgin History Museum’s twice-weekly podcast, *Echoes of Elgin* or co-author of The Story of Our Towns, local history for children.

Rebecca has always loved history, perhaps from growing up on the family farm where the house was full of antiques that were simply called “grandma’s stuff.

Rebecca has developed several presentations appropriate to share with organizations having a small or large audience. Programs are prepared for a 45-60 minute presentation, depending on the request of the group. A question and answer time with sharing follows each presentation. Audio Visual and set up requirements for each presentation vary and options are always available to fit any audience.

What’s In a Name: Elgin

A trip up and down the map, learning the story of Elgin through street and public building names. If you have ever thought “I wonder if that building is named after someone?” this presentation is for you.

Elgin National Watch Company- Employee Life

What was it like to work at the Elgin National Watch Company? Factory life was very regimented and manufacturing watches was an exacting job. Learn about life inside the factory, its various departments, rules and employee perks and challenges.

Echoes of Elgin: A Podcast in Person

Listen to a selection of podcast content, presented in person and illustrated with slides. At the end, learn how you can subscribe to the Elgin History Museum's podcast and hear more. Your group may offer advance opinions on the content to be delivered or rely on the presenter to choose.

Elgin Trivia

Enjoy a friendly round or two of Elgin Trivia. Audience members will get to show their Elgin knowledge but also learn more about the subject of each question, making it fun for everyone. This presentation is perfect for experts and amateurs alike.

Silent City: A History of Elgin's Cemeteries

Insight into how Elgin's attitudes evolved regarding final resting places for its citizens. Interesting insights on burial customs as well as local cemeteries and noted residents.