

The Crackerbarrel

Elgin History Museum News September 2026

President's Report: Our Semiquincentennial



Anne LoCascio, President

The Elgin History Museum exists to preserve Elgin's diverse heritage and sense of place. We collect and preserve the stories and artifacts that illustrate Elgin's almost 200 years of history. Elgin's story is the same as all over America: successive generations of people coming to our city and adding their genius and hard work to make the city thrive.

On Friday, August 21 at Elgin Community College's Blizzard Theatre, the huge contributions that the Hispanic and Latino communities have made to Elgin were celebrated at the premiere of the Museum's documentary *Nuestras Historias: Celebrating Hispanic Culture and Community* and the unveiling of the traveling exhibit. Hundreds attended the culmination of the two-year Hispanic Heritage Project that collected, preserved, and shared the memories of the Hispanic and Latino communities in Elgin.

Over 40 individuals shared their stories in interviews that created over 50 hours of oral history that are now part of the Museum's archives, preserving them for future generations. The documentary was also shown at the Gail Borden Public Library on September 3, and will soon be available online for those who could not attend the public viewings. The full collection of interviews will also be available in the months to come. The exhibit is designed to travel to churches, schools, and libraries in the region, continuing to educate children and the community.

The Community Advisory Committee was invaluable in the creation of the project. They shared their valuable time for the many meetings and events that got this project to completion. A special thanks to all who worked on it:

Cristina Colunga, Elgin Artist, Committee Chair; Kim Alvarado, Elgin History Museum; JoAnn Armenta, TAAFA; Bill Briska, Elgin History Museum; Phil Broxham, Grindstone Productions; Tish Calhamer, Gail Borden Public Library; Gil Feliciano; Jaime Garcia, Retired Educator/Centro de Información; Elisa Lara, VNA Healthcare; Trish LaFleur, Elgin History Museum; Elizabeth Marston, Retired Elgin History Museum; Martha Martinez, Gail Borden Public Library; Rose Martinez, City of Elgin City Council; Beth Nawara, Elgin History Museum; Rafael Vilagomez, Epic Realty; Alan Walters, Elgin History Museum; Patricia Williams, Youth Build Elgin

And because we always have something going on, be sure to attend the annual Cemetery Walk September 26-27. This year's theme, in celebration of America 250, is Hometown Heroes. Come and hear the inspiring stories of Elgin's citizens who helped to shape our country and our city.

Welcome New Members

Veronica Betz	Mary Dulabaum
Cristina Colunga	Patricia Kramer
August Conte	Richard Nichols
David Damask	Chris Sinatra
Allie Dulabaum	Lisa Toppel

Thank You Donors

Rachel Campbell	Edgar Santiago
Chicago Thunderbirds Car Club	Eric Selin
Terry Gabel and Sue Brigham	Rita Shaw
Patricia Harkin	Susan Spengler-Abell
Patricia Campbell Kramer	Jerry Turnquist

Monthly Recurring Donation

Evan Fry	Patricia Harkin
Rudolph and Lillian Galfi	Dorothy Turay

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
 Next deadline October 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

- Sept. 10**
12:00
noon -
1:00 P.M.
Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Neighborhood Grocery Stores with Linda Rock
 Linda shares the history of neighborhood grocery stores in Elgin and tells the story of one particular grocer, Libbie Samuelson. Please RSVP.
- Sept. 26**
3:00 P.M.
5:30 P.M.
Sept. 27
11:00 A.M.
1:30 P.M.
Bluff City Cemetery Walk
Tickets \$20 Members / \$25 Guests / \$15 Jr/Sr High
 See article on the next page for a preview. Visitors will be guided on a 70-minute tour that showcases gravesites of former residents portrayed by actors in period costumes. Tickets: <https://elginhistory.org/cemetery-walk-2026/>
- Oct. 18**
2:00 P.M.
Annual Business Meeting with Brian "Fox" Ellis as John Adams
 John Adams will share the history of the steps leading to the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, then lead a discussion about our rights and responsibilities, our shared history, and a hopeful future.
 Annual Meeting portion includes the election of officers and short reports on Museum status, lasting about 20 minutes. FREE event. This program was made possible in part by a grant from Illinois Humanities. Please RSVP through the website.

Nov. 15
2:00 P.M. -
4:00 P.M.

Illinois Brass Band playing the music of the Watch Factory Band at First Methodist Church, 216 Highland Ave., Elgin
 History sounds better in brass! Join the Elgin History Museum and the Illinois Brass Band for a special concert at the First Methodist Church. The program features special selections resurrected from the Museum's archives! This performance is a joint fundraiser supporting both organizations. \$20 for Members / \$25 for Guests. Tickets on sale now.

Nov. 21,
10:00 A.M.
- 4:00 P.M.
Nov. 22,
10:00 A.M.
- 2:30 P.M.

Take Photos with Santa at the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, 302 W. Chicago St. Elgin
 The historic Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, is the perfect setting for your festive photos! Book a 15-minute time block and bring your own camera to take photos however you like. Santa will be there—he's pet-friendly and sensory-friendly. Bring along your favorite props to make your photos unique! Plus, enjoy a holiday craft activity and light snacks for a little extra cheer. Tickets on sale soon.

Dec. 5,
1:00 P.M. -
3:00 P.M.

Holiday Tea: The Legend of St. Nicholas with Terry Lynch
 Terry Lynch portrays the Old English Father Christmas, sharing the global origins of St. Nicholas and the history behind our favorite Christmas traditions.
 Indulge in 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! Tickets available soon.

39TH ANNUAL ELGIN BLUFF CITY

CEMETERY WALK

SEPTEMBER 26 AND 27 2026



PIONEER FAMILY MEMORIAL SCULPTURE TRYGVE ROVELSTAD

PRESENTING STIRRING STORIES HONORING

Hometown Heroes

ADVANCED TICKET SALES ONLY	SHOWTIMES	SCAN FOR TICKETS
\$20 MEMBERS \$25 GUESTS \$15 JR/SR HIGH	SAT, SEPT 26 3:00PM & 5:30PM SUN, SEPT 27 11AM & 1:30PM	

PRESENTED BY THE ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM

ELGINHISTORY.ORG   

Cemetery Walk September 26 and 27

John and Ana Devine, Cemetery Walk Coordinators

Each year before the Cemetery Walk, volunteers meet at Bluff City Cemetery to carefully clean the monuments of the people whose stories will be told. Some stones have stood untouched for generations. As we remove the layers of dirt and grime, our purpose is to bring their names and memories forward again.

The theme of this year's walk is "Hometown Heroes," honoring people who served, sacrificed, built, cared, and contributed to the Elgin community. We have taken a broad view of what makes a hero: someone who sees a need in their community and selflessly steps in to meet it. We are sure there are many common-man type heroes buried at Bluff City Cemetery that will likely not be remembered for their service to others, but we are pleased to honor seven whose stories we can tell. Here's a quick look at these people who added something inspiring to the story of our city.

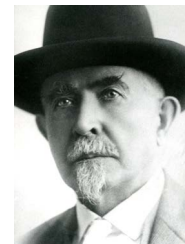
- **Miland Gieske** was the recipient of heroic action of several who dug him out of the rubble of the 1920 tornado.
- **Trygve Rovelstad** sculpted medals for military heroes of World War II and honored Elgin's founders with his Pioneer Memorial statue.



- **W.D. Nichols** joined up with a rough group of abolitionists from Kansas and protected President Lincoln's life and our Union in the first tense weeks of Lincoln's presidency.
- **Louise Logan** started what is now called Family Services Association. She organized various charities in the worst

moments of the Great Depression to meet the needs of jobless families in Elgin.

- **Nora Wagner**, while still a teenager, helped to organize a group of young women in 1908 to repair an important part of Chicago Street which had been washed out by fall storms. As city and county officials argued over who bore responsibility for the work and expense, Nora and her friends got to work.
- **Dr. Alban Mann** served as Elgin's city physician in the early 20th century. His commitment to science and modern sanitation measures helped him mitigate the worst effects of several major outbreaks of disease. Dr. Mann was featured in the July edition of *The Crackerbarrel*.
- **Jesusita Saucedo** immigrated to Elgin to escape the Mexican Civil War in 1920. She endured hardship and unwelcoming attitudes and raised her family around the values of faith, respect and education. Club Guadalupano is one of her best-known legacies.



Guests walking this year's ¾-mile route will experience brief stops between characters featuring additional aspects of Elgin's interesting history, including an up-close look at one of Elgin Fire Department's rescue boats, and the story behind them. Guests will also get a chance to hear the music that Union soldiers marched to.

Our Hometown Heroes gave something of themselves to their families, their community, and their country. In this year's Cemetery Walk, we give something back to them: the gift of remembrance.

Come walk and remember with us on September 26 or 27! Tickets are available through the Museum website: <https://elginhistory.org/cemetery-walk-2026/>

Thanks to the Grave Marker Cleaning Crew

The Museum's Grave Marker Cleaning Crew recently completed the stone cleaning for the upcoming Cemetery Walk. They cleaned 50 objects, including Walter Jahn's small military marker, Dr. Mann's wife's six-foot family obelisk mon-

ument, and the guide stop at the Leath grave with its tennis ball and bowling ball. The family group size ranged from just Walter Jahn to 25 Rovelstad markers at one guide stop.

The Museum is extremely grateful for the grave cleaners who showed up bright and early, and left just as cheerful, but really dirty! The crew consisted of Doreen Christiani, Jim Swick, Tricia Grosser, Lillian Galfi, Marianne Kemerling, Elena Ecklund, and Marianne Bost.

Finally, a special thanks to Jill Moore, who ran the cleaning crew in previous years and taught everyone the process.



Grave Marker Cleaning Crew at Bluff City Cemetery

Celebrating a Productive Summer: Goodbye to 2026 Summer Interns

Over the past three months, the Museum has been fortunate to work with two exceptional summer interns. Sara Grossmayer, a history major at the University of Iowa, and Danica Sebastian, a history major and museum studies minor at Aurora University, volunteered to gain hands-on experience across many areas of museum work.

The Museum provides a well-rounded introduction to the field, and Sara and Danica dove right in. They served as docents welcoming visitors, assisted with setting up events, cataloged newly acquired donations, and played an important role in refreshing exhibits.

Visitors stopping by the Museum will immediately notice the tangible results of their hard work. Thanks to Sara and Danica's efforts, a Civil War drum used by Elginite Charles Stiles is now on display. They put together a new exhibit case highlighting how Elgin celebrated the 1976 bicentennial. Two exhibit cases in the 20th Century Room were updated, featuring a tribute to Korean War Veteran Corpo-

ral Eriverto Ortiz alongside a fascinating look at Collingbourne Mills. They even worked by flashlight when the electricity went out during the summer storms.

The Museum is deeply grateful for Sara and Danica's hard work, creativity, and commitment to preserving local history. The next time you visit the Museum, please be sure to stop by and check out these exhibits.



Sara and Danica, hard at work in June 2026, when summer storms caused a brief power outage at Old Main

Andrew O. Apple, Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

David Siegenthaler, Museum Researcher

Though Elgin was home for a time to four Congressional Medal of Honor winners, only Andrew Apple (1845-90) is buried in Elgin. The other three Congressional Medal of Honor recipients from Elgin were: Leverett M. Kelley (1841-1901), buried in Arlington National Cemetery; Andrew B. Spurling (1833-1906), buried in Chicago; and Andrew McCornack (1844-1920), buried in Monticello, MN.

As one of the original 200 recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, Andrew was issued his award, our nation's highest honor for valor, on May 12, 1865. His heroic act occurred on April 2, 1865, when Corporal Apple was fighting with his regiment, the 12th West Virginia Infantry, as part of the Third Battle of Petersburg, Virginia. As his regiment stormed the Confederacy's Fort Gregg, their flag bearer was shot down. Andrew caught the falling flag and leaped over the parapet, being one of the first Union men inside. There was no time to reload their muskets after the

initial discharge, so it became a brutal two-hour bloodbath of hand-to-hand bayonet warfare. The heavily outnumbered Confederate forces were defeated but not before inflicting over 700 Union casualties. The Battle of Fort Gregg is often called the “Confederate Alamo” because of their heroic but futile defense in the face of overwhelming odds. Battle-scarred veterans from both sides have described this clash as the nastiest of their entire war experience. Thirteen of Andrew's comrades also received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their bravery at Fort Gregg.

Following the Civil War, Andrew returned to his native state of Pennsylvania, but before long he moved west to seek his fortune on the burgeoning frontier. He arrived in Elgin at age 23 in 1868 to work on the rebuilding of the Chicago Street bridge. Residing at the “Chicago House” hotel, Andrew met 15-year-old Mary Barbara Cecilia Pabst (1853-1928), daughter of the owner of the hotel, Joseph Pabst. Andrew was smitten and in late 1869 he and Mary were married. Putting down roots in Elgin, he remained here the rest of his life, raising a family and becoming the city's fire marshal.

Andrew was born on January 30, 1845, in Northampton, PA, to David and Matilda (Leshner) Apple. His mother died when he was five and his father remarried. Altogether, Andrew had at least 11 siblings. By 1850 his family was living in Easton, PA, and by 1860 they had moved to New Cumberland, WV. At age 17, in August 1862, Andrew enlisted in Company I of the 12th West Virginia Infantry as a private.

Andrew's regiment fought in numerous military engagements, nearly all in Virginia, throughout the war. In May 1864 he was promoted to corporal. Following his regiment's heroic actions at Fort Gregg on April 2, 1865, they participated in the pursuit of Gen. Robert E. Lee's Confederate troops that led to the surrender of Lee and his army at Appomattox, VA, a week later on April 9th.

When Andrew arrived in Elgin in late 1868, he lodged at the Chicago House, which was at the northwest corner of Douglas and Highland avenues, only three blocks from the bridge he was working on. Joseph Pabst (1830-1913) and his wife Johanna (1831-1886), both German immigrants, had moved to Elgin from Chicago in the mid-1850s, when they opened the Chicago House, one of Elgin's earliest inns or hotels. After Andrew's bridge work ended in early 1869, he did not want to leave Mary, so he managed to get a job as a bartender at the Chicago House. On November 2, 1869, Andrew and Mary were married. The 1870-71

city directory shows Andrew employed as a clerk at the Chicago House.



Andrew Apple medals and photo

In 1875 Andrew joined the Excelsior Hose Co., a volunteer fire fighting organization, and in 1877 he became a member of the city fire department. In 1878 he became second assistant fire marshal and in 1879, first assistant, a position he held until 1889 when he was appointed fire marshal. In addition to his firefighting duties, Andrew was employed as a manufacturer of tubular wells (water pipes) (1875-76 directory); machinist (1881-82 directory); inspector of steam boilers for the city (1884-85 directory); and an engineer for the Elgin Milk Condensing Co. (1884-90 directories).

Andrew and Mary had eight children: Anna May (1871-1941; Mrs. George W. Egger); Joseph George (1873-1930); Charles Francis (1874-85; died of scarlet fever); George Oliver (1879-1906; killed by a train at Sterling); Clara (1880-1902; died of renal suppression ten days after giving birth; Mrs. William Eyre); Clarence Claude (1882-1903; died of tuberculosis); Katherine I. (1883-1971); and Viola (1886-1949; Mrs. Thomas H. Kennell). The family lived at 226 N. Spring St. beginning in the mid-1870s. The home was razed in the mid-1970s, a few years after its last occupant, Katherine Apple, died.

Andrew passed away on June 7, 1890, from Bright's disease (inflammation of the kidneys). He was buried in the old Channing St. Cemetery but moved to Bluff City Cemetery in October 1891. His was said to be the first funeral held in the new First Congregational Church. Elgin GAR Post 49 conducted graveside services. At his funeral, it was said that Andrew was so modest and unassuming that some of his closest friends learned only by chance that he was in the army. Widowed at age 37 with seven children between the

ages of three and 19, Mary never remarried. A small government pension helped to support her and her children. She died at age 75 of pernicious anemia.



Andrew Apple and family, c. 1885



Andrew Apple's granddaughter, Mrs. Owen Kerr, places flowers at his Bluff City Cemetery grave site on Memorial Day 1960

Acknowledgments: Mike Alft's books and newspaper articles; obituaries and other newspaper articles; federal censuses; Ancestry.com; Findagrave.com; Elgin death records; Elgin city directories; various internet sources; etc.

Hispanic Heritage Documentary Premiere

The official premiere of the Elgin History Museum documentary *Nuestras Historias: Celebrating Hispanic Culture and Community* took place on August 21, 2026, at the Elgin Community College Blizzard Theater. Here are some scenes from the celebration.

The reception at ECC had food, dancing, music, and hands-on activities for children, followed by the premiere of the documentary that presents Elgin's six generations of Hispanic history. Thank you to all who attended the event.

A community screening is scheduled for Gail Borden Public Library on September 3, 2026 from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. The documentary will be available on the Museum's YouTube channel on September 4th.

There is also a traveling exhibit which will be on display at Gail Borden Library until November 3.



Music by Proyecto 7 Salsa and Latin Jazz Band





Traditional dance performance by BFH



Documentary Director Phil Broxham





Our Stories: Celebrating Hispanic Culture and Community

Nuestras Historias: Celebrando la cultura y la comunidad hispana

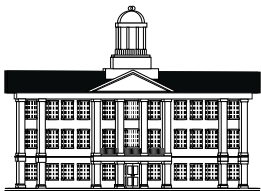
Enjoy the traveling exhibit on view from
September 3 - November 3.



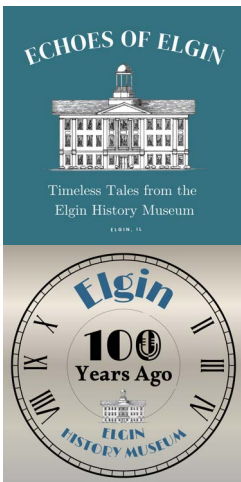
Gail Borden
Public Library District

MAIN LIBRARY: 270 N. GROVE AVE.

ELGIN HISTORY MUSEUM
360 PARK STREET
ELGIN, IL 60120



Museum Podcasts

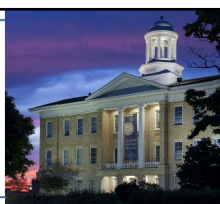


Echoes of Elgin: Timeless Tales from the Elgin History Museum is published semi-weekly.

Elgin 100 Years Ago Podcast delivers news from the 1920s, from Elgin's vintage newspapers. Researched and recorded by society members Alan Walters, Nick Freeman, Tricia Grosser, and Linda Rock.



**Honor the past.
Inspire the future.**
*Include the Elgin History
Museum in your estate plans.*



Elgin Jigsaw Puzzle Available in Museum Store



The Museum Store still has a limited number of the Elgin Cityscape Puzzle available. Part of the nationwide **Land That I Love** project, this puzzle is an original Elgin cityscape by artist Eric Dowdle.

His colorful painting features local landmarks and includes an information sheet about the places shown in the image.

Puzzles are sold exclusively through select local retailers for a limited time, and are available in 500-piece (\$24.95) or 1,000-piece (\$27.95) boxes. Pick one up on your next visit to the Museum, or contact the Museum at 847-742-4248 or museum@elginhistory.org to have yours shipped to you.