

# The Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 1  
JANUARY 2011



## Museum Expands Hours and Offers Free Day



*President George Rowe*

George Rowe is the Society's new president for 2011 and 2012. For the past 14 years, George has been an active Museum volunteer as part of the exhibits team, building over 15 Museum exhibits at Old Main. He is part of the Society Board's Finance Committee and is committed to expanding the Museum's presence in the Elgin community. George is employed as the Maintenance Supervisor at the First United Methodist Church in Elgin.

The Elgin History Museum is open year round in 2011! The Museum will be open in January and February during regular Museum hours, Wednesday through Saturday, 12-4 p.m. Plus, in honor of our new president, the Museum will have Free Fridays in January and February. Bring your family down to the Museum to get an exciting behind-the-scenes look at the building of new exhibits on Elgin at the turn-of-the-century. Also see new objects including the master clock from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair with Elgin Observatory Time on the clock face, and Admiral Byrd's Elgin chronometer, used during his exploration of the South Pole.

## 2010 Holiday Tea Recap

*David Nelson, Program Chair*



Our beautiful Christmas tree served as the background for the Elgin Children's Chamber Chorus on Saturday, December 4. They presented an excellent program of French, German, English and American Christmas songs conducted by Jay Kellner, their founder and director. This fine chorus is celebrating their 25th anniversary. They were well received by the audience of 85 people, and joined members and guests for delicious Christmas refreshments organized by Mary Ellen Flaks and Joyce Pellicore. It was an afternoon filled with good music, conversation and Christmas cheer.



*Elgin Children's Choir performing at the Museum*

## The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society  
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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.  
Next deadline February 20, 2011

 Visit our website [www.elginhistory.org](http://www.elginhistory.org)

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Society's Board of Directors.

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Thursday, May 19, 12 Noon:

**Brown Bag Lunch:** Dr. John Cooper, Elgin Academy  
History

Thursday, June 16, 12 Noon:

**Brown Bag Lunch:** Elgin Barbershop Quartet

Thursday, July 21, 12 Noon:

**Brown Bag Lunch:** Elgin in the 1950s with  
Jerry Turnquist

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## 2010 Annual Report

### Significant Accomplishments

- *River to Rails: Elgin 1835-1910* opened second phase of the Museum's Timeline Project from 1850-1870 in March.
- Watch Factory Bell mounted in Artifact Garden in April. The City of Elgin installed a brick path around the monuments and Boy Scout Troop 2 Eagle Scout Hayden Pierce added a new garden and signage.
- First Donor Recognition Party held in July.
- Society's first major benefit in November helps raise money for the Museum with the help of President Theodore Roosevelt.

### Collections and Exhibits

*Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director*

The Collections Committee accepted hundreds of items relating to Elgin history from 65 donors to the Museum in 2010. Several large collections came in including:

- 39 youth and baby quilts from Susan Wildemuth. The quilts were made from kits sold at Lee Wards in Elgin, an early hobby store
- Elgin Professional and Business Woman's club records
- 1920 Tornado photo collection from James Johnston
- Downs Family photos and memorabilia from Benjamin Downs
- Marshall Sherman Family records and photos from cousins Barbara Miranda and Mildred Olson.

Two permanent exhibits were completed: the second phase of *River to Rails: Elgin in the 1850s and 1860s* and *Elgin Architecture*. Temporary exhibits included *A Tisket, A Tasket: A Collection of Baskets* and *Timed to the Stars: 100 Years of the Elgin Observatory*. The Museum's traveling exhibit, *Deep Roots, Green Future: City Planning in Elgin* toured all year, including Judson Univer-

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## Upcoming Programs for 2011

*David Nelson, Program Director*

Check our website for the latest details.

<http://www.elginhistory.org/events.html>

**Saturday, February 19, 1 p.m.**

**Research Your House, Watch, Family or Business**

Let Elgin's leading historians help you with your research! Free admission for members.

**Saturday, February 26, 11 a.m.:**

**We Love You Luncheon for Museum Volunteers**

**Sunday, March 13, 1 p.m.:**

**Elgin: 1870-1910 Exhibit Opening**

**Historic Cooking in 1900 Program with Elizabeth Carlson. Free Admission.**

**Sunday, April 3, 3 p.m.:**

**Afternoon Tea with Clara Barton**

Leslie Goddard reprises Clara Barton.

Members Free Admission

**Sunday, April 17, 1 p.m.:**

**Civil War 150th Anniversary**

Meet Mary Todd Lincoln reprised by Pam Thiel and visit a Civil War Muster Encampment with Ken Gough.

**Saturday, May 14, 1 p.m.:**

**50th Anniversary of the Elgin Historical Society**

Mike Alft presents his new book,

***The History of History in Elgin***

sity, Elgin Public Museum, Elgin City Hall, and ended its run at the Centre of Elgin. The Society also brought a traveling exhibit from the West Chicago City Museum to the Gail Borden Public Library for Hispanic Heritage Month: *Creating Mexican American Identities: Multiple Voices, Shared Dreams*.

## Publications

*There Used to Be, Volume 3* was printed and ready for distribution in August. The Museum Store sold approximately \$5,000 in books and DVDs.

Six issues of our newsletter, *The Crackerbarrel*, were published during 2010. Digital color copies of the newsletter are emailed to about 100 members. The Museum's Facebook Fan Site is currently over 300 friends.

## Museum Store

The Store sold \$1,400 in merchandise other than books. Melanie Burki recently took over as the new volunteer Museum Store Manager. With her help, the Museum Store has added new merchandise for 2011.

## Membership

*Jerri Barnhart, Membership Chair*

Membership in 2010 was 265 households, approximately 797 members, bringing in \$9,211. Over 5,800 volunteer hours were contributed by 77 people in 2010, providing an in-kind value of \$58,000.

## Programs and Events

*David Nelson, Program Chair*

The Society's 20 programs drew 1,722 people. The highlights include:

- **Pearl Harbor Survivor Charlie May**
- **Brown Bag Lunches on Depression Glass and the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893**
- **Elgin History slide show with Mike Alft**
- **Programs on Elgin Road Races, Bertha Palmer, and First Ladies as Activists**
- **The Aubrey Neville Collection and Garden Tours**
- **Bungalow Architectural Walks on Elgin's southwest side**
- **The Cemetery Walk attracted 500 visitors.**

The Museum partnered with U-46 staff to celebrate the centennial of the Elgin National Watch Company Observatory, built in 1910. The Museum's exhibit, with accompanying programs and sky shows at the Observatory, generated a substantial amount of public interest.

The main event of the year was the first benefit for the Society in November, which featured a hugely successful silent auction and an exciting program with President Theodore Roosevelt, reprised by nationally known historian and actor, Joe Wiegand. He held the audience in the palm of his hand! The Elgin Children's Chorus ended the year with a beautiful ensemble performance at the Museum's annual Holiday Tea.

## Education and Outreach

*Lucy Elliott, Museum Educator*

2010 was the centennial of the Elgin Road Races! The Society participated by partnering with the Elgin Heritage Commission to obtain an Illinois State Historical Marker to mark the significance of the Road Races to Elgin. \$10,000 in private funds were solicited from the Elgin community to create the bronze marker and a supplementary interpretive sign with images. The marker was dedicated on May 7 at THE National Bank at U.S. 20 and Nesler Road. The bank donated an easement for the marker. Shales McNutt Construction and Elgin Granite Works also helped to repair the 1970 Road Race marker at Larkin High School.

The Society and Museum participated in the Downtown Farmers Market, U-46 Teaching American History Partnership, the ECCO Rain Barrel Project, the Mayor's Awards, the Heritage Commission Plaque Program, and the Elgin Police Department exhibit project. Board members, staff, and volunteers consistently promote the importance of preservation and Elgin heritage in the community.

Education programs brought in 1,646 students in 78 programs, back down to the Museum's 2008 program levels, but still an increase since bringing on a Museum Educator in 2007. The Museum is seeing fewer U-46 students due to field trip transportation budget cuts by the school district.

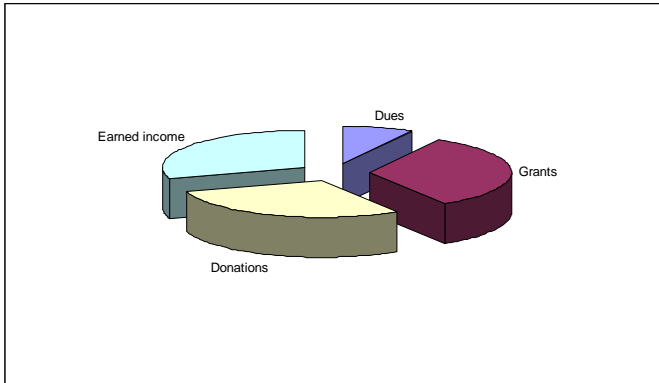
A grant from the First Congregational Church made it possible to give classrooms scholarships for at-risk students. The Elgin Youth History Fair was held at Lord's Park Pavilion in October for a week of school group visits. Over 400 grade school students and over 70 high school students participated in this wonderful event. Speakers Bureau volunteers went out into the Elgin community and gave 7 programs on a variety of topics.

## Finances

*Bill Briska, Society Treasurer*

Income in 2010 was \$208,932. Of this amount, \$88,035 was in the form of bequests and memorial gifts. We dedicate these gifts exclusively to our endowment fund, which now has a value of about \$280,000. None of the principle of the endowment fund is used for operations, only the income, thus creating a lasting legacy from these precious gifts.

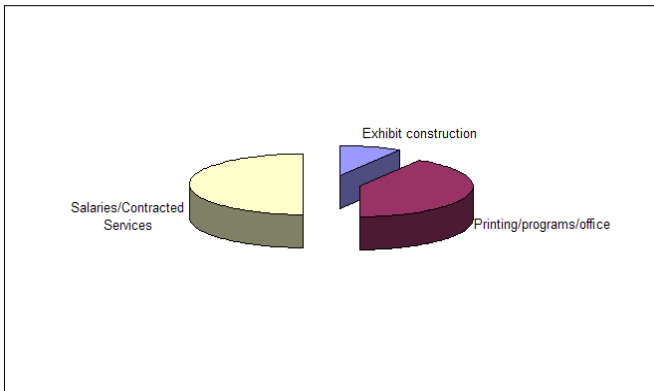
Our operational income (income not destined for the endowment fund) was \$118,898. Donations were up this year, about two-thirds of which were made for specific projects, such as the Road Race Historical Marker and exhibits development and upkeep.



### 2010 Operational Budget Income

8% Membership  
29% Cash Donations  
33% Grants  
30% Earned Income: publications, research, and store sales; admission to programs and events; sponsorship of exhibits and events.

Operational expenses (shown below) were a few hundred dollars less than income, so we ended the year on budget and remain in sound financial shape.



### 2010 Operational Budget Expenses

Exhibit construction: 9%  
Programs, insurance, taxes, office supplies, equipment, postage, printing, etc: 41%  
Salaries and contracted services: 50%

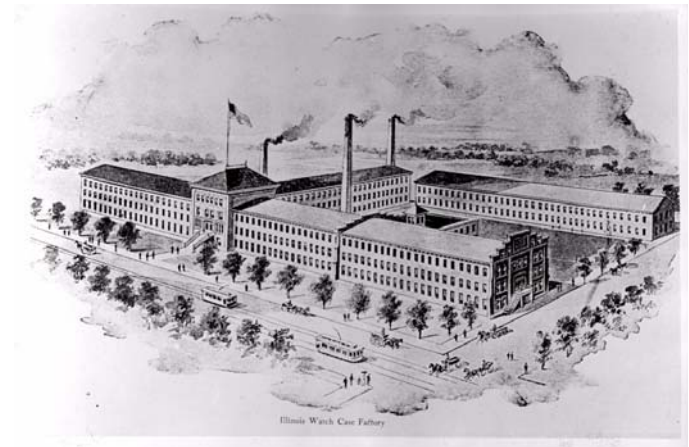
## Simpson Electric Building to be Razed

*David Siegenthaler*

The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chipewewa Indians, owners of the Simpson Electric Co. building at the corner of Dundee and Slade Avenues, have decided to tear it down. Unable to sell, the Tribe has generously been making the building available for police and fire training exercises, as well as salvage opportunities. What will happen to the 5-acre site after clearing is unknown at this point.

One of the last factory buildings in Elgin's north end, the structure was built in 1890 by the Illinois Watch Case Co and expanded over the years. The company moved to Elgin from Chicago for the business incentives of lower taxes and cheap land offered by William Grote and other city officials. In return, the firm agreed to employ at least 100 people the first year, 50 people more the second year, and an additional 50 people the third year. The Illinois Watch Case Co. prospered beyond expectations. Within a year of its arrival, it was employing about 250 workers and producing about 900 cases daily. By 1910 about 500 employees were producing 2,000 cases daily. For many years, the "case factory" was Elgin's second largest industrial employer, producing cases that housed many of the watch movements made by the Elgin National Watch Company on National St.

Initially, the cases were sold through local jewelers, who would match up the watch movement with the case according to the customer's wishes. Later, the cases would be sold directly to the watch manufacturers, who would case the movements at the factory.



*Early image of the Watch Case Co.*

By 1911 the plant was making 2,700 case styles using many different metals, and selling them throughout the world. A 1919 newspaper headline boasted, "Elgin leads world making watch cases." Business continued to boom through the 1920s. The firm built its own

power plant and by 1926 had 1,100 employees. Though production declined during the Great Depression, the firm would expand its plant again in 1937. During World War II, the factory was converted to war production, making mortar shells, incendiary bomb nose units, etc. With so many men off to war, a severe labor shortage developed. On August 7, 1943, the Illinois Watch Case Co. placed a quarter-page ad in the newspaper stating, "254 Men and Women Needed Now - at Top Wages...Inexperience, Age, or Physical Handicaps No Objection!" Following the war, the firm's watch case production declined, paralleling the decline in the domestic watch industry. The last case was produced in the mid-1950s.

In 1898, the Illinois Watch Case Co. established a subsidiary, the Elgin American Novelty Co., to produce jewelry and lockets. In 1923 Elgin American entered the ladies' compact field with a patented "powder box." Metal compacts containing a mirror, face powder and a soft felt-like puff became essential items in women's purses. Cigarette lighters and cigarette cases were also introduced in the 1920s. The Elgin American product line was heavily advertised on radio and TV in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Lucille Ball visited the plant on a promotional tour in 1948. By 1950, Elgin American claimed to be the leading domestic manufacturer of compacts and lighters. Sales declined in the late 1950s as a result of foreign competition and a change in consumer preferences. Disposable lighters were coming on the market. Women smokers no longer cared to transfer cigarettes from a cellophane package to a decorative metal case, and makeup manufacturers began supplying blush and a brush in small containers.



*Elgin American cigarette case with built-in lighter*

The plant was sold to the Simpson Electric Co., a division of American Gage & Machine Co., in 1959. Elgin American continued production in part of the building until closing in the early 1960s. Simpson and its parent, American Gage, moved in by the early 1960s. In 1968, Katy Industries was created as a holding company for a railroad. In 1969 Katy merged with American Gage & Machine Co. Through aggressive buying and merging, Katy soon became a giant multinational diversified conglomerate. Katy moved its headquarters into this building in 1970, where it would remain until 1994, when it moved to Denver.

In the 1970s, Simpson Electric Co. was the world's largest manufacturer of electronic measuring instruments and test equipment, employing 800 people in Elgin. By the mid-1980s, however, Simpson's sales performance was faltering. The firm was slow to react to the growing popularity of digital instruments. One of Simpson's plants was located on the Lac du Flambeau Indian reservation in northern Wisconsin. The Tribe felt that it could better secure the future of its largest employer by owning it.

In 1985 they were able to acquire the firm from Katy Industries for \$23 million in a leveraged buyout that didn't risk any of the Tribe's funds or assets. Simpson's fortunes continued to decline, and by the 1990s it was operating in debt. At that time the Tribe explored the possibility of converting the Elgin plant to a casino or a mega-bingo facility. However, the political climate in Illinois was not receptive to the plan, and federal and city hurdles would also have to be overcome, so the idea was abandoned.



*Rear view, Chester St. side of the facility, July 2010*

The building has been for sale since about 2002. In 2003 the Tribe voted to retain ownership of Simpson but move its Elgin operations to its reservation. The plant has been closed and vacant since 2006. The Elgin Area Historical Society was granted permission to salvage a large 10 x 13-foot canvas mural that hung on the wall in the factory lobby since the 1940s. The mural is a montage of drawings showing the production of World War II armaments (mortar shells and incendiary bomb nose units) that were being manufactured on site. The Society was also allowed to salvage some much-needed shelving units, ladders, carts and a bicycle rack.

## Howard Hoagland: Citizen, Soldier, Patriot

*Raleigh Sutton*

Howard Hoagland was born in Elgin on January 14, 1896, the son of Brigham Hoagland and Cornelia Peer. He belonged to many organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1307, American Legion Post 57, the Elgin United Civic Association, the Kane County Veterans Administration, and the Elgin Patriotic Society. He was also a commander of the Leo Anderson Barracks of Elgin and a past commander of the Disabled American Veterans.

He died at age 91 on January 1, 1988 in the Americana Health Care Center in Elgin. His wife, Kathryn died in 1984.

He firmly believed that when your country needed you, you answered the call. In 1914, the United States had an army about the size of Belgium's. Keeping in close contact with his friends in the Commonwealth Avenue area of Elgin, he found that many of them were joining the National Guard. He also joined, afterward returning to his factory job making artillery shells for the British who were fighting against the Germans in Belgium and France.

Between his enlistment in the National Guard and being shipped to Europe when the United States joined World War I, he fought in Mexico with "Blackjack" Pershing, chasing Poncho Villa. He never saw Poncho Villa but did manage to get a bad case of blood poisoning, which resulted in a medical discharge.

He returned to his old munitions job until a fellow worker showed him a newspaper headline "U. S. Declares War on Germany."\* Although he couldn't see a good reason for the United States to be fighting the Germans, he called to his fellow workers and announced "What are we waiting for?"

He reenlisted and was among the first 11 recruits on September 5, 1917. He was assigned to Company A, 56th Regiment, Fourth Division known as the "Ivies" after the Roman numeral IV.

Howard sailed from Long Island, New York on May 6, 1918. His ship, the *Moldavia*, was a German passenger liner interned by the British, converted to a troop carrier, and armed with several cannons for protection from German U-boats.

The *Moldavia* was supposed to be escorted by four smaller ships near the British coast, where the danger from U-boats was greatest. The British sailors were not overly concerned, as they claimed the ship's watertight compartments made her unsinkable. The Americans were not feeling safe at all, knowing that as many as 1 in 4 ships were being torpedoed by the Germans. On the morning of May 19, the Americans on deck began to see the wreckage of sunken ships as they got closer to England. Empty life rafts and other debris became common sights. Every man was ordered to wear his life vest and carry a full canteen at all times, even into the cramped latrines below decks.

The next morning, May 20th, five British destroyers arrived to escort the *Moldavia* into port. Zigzagging to avoid U-boat attacks, they docked on May 23, 1918.

The last page of Howard's diary read, "May 23—struck by torpedo at about 4 a.m." "We were lying in our hammocks and the wall just went bang—like we'd been hit by a giant hammer" Howard said. "I felt down to the table for my shoes. It was pitch dark and everyone was fighting and screaming. When I jumped down, the water was already rushing over our feet."<sup>†</sup>

Company "B" was down on the next deck—56 of the 250 men never made it out.

Out on deck they pulled out the life rafts as the ship was already listing badly. One of the British sailors told the Americans to leave the life rafts alone as the ship "would not sink". This advice was ignored by the Americans who proceeded to throw the life rafts overboard, going over the side themselves. They kicked away from the sinking *Moldavia* and when they were about a hundred yards away, the ship stood straight up and slid under the surface of the Atlantic in a cloud of steam and escaping air.

\* War with Germany was a great problem for Elgin's Germans, and prejudice against them increased as the war gained momentum. Speaking German was forbidden even in church.

† From a *Courier News* story, Sunday, May 30, 1982

Company "A" clung to their rafts as other ships sailed by, forbidden to stop lest they suffer the same fate as the Moldavia.† Nearly three hours later, a destroyer stopped and rescued them, but Howard refused to go below deck ever again and stayed topside.

On June 5 the men were dropped off at Dover and crossed to France without further mishap. Howard still had his standard-issue diary, though it was salt-water-stained.

Although their arrival was met with great joy, the Allies in the field doubted their ability to fight. After a few engagements they proved their battle worthiness. Going "over the top" became a game of attrition, hoping that the German dead outnumbered ours. The "Doughboys" \*\* believed that it was the sole objective as the yardage gained was insignificant.

By the end of the war, only 2 million out of 4 million American soldiers ever made it to France, and only one million were at the front. Seven hundred and fifty thousand were killed or wounded. Howard was finally able to fight the Germans during the second battle of the Marne, the first big counterattack after the Germans' spring offensive.

Every man in Howard's regiment swore to kill 56 "Huns," one for every man that went down with the Moldavia. Howard said the Americans didn't care much for their gas masks as it took too long to put them on and they were uncomfortable. As a result, he fell victim to a mustard gas attack. The gas hung over the ground like a cloud, and Howard developed a half dollar-sized sore on the back of his leg because he had a hole in his pants. It bothered him the rest of his life.

He also worried about the protection his helmet gave him. Under the impression helmets were bulletproof, his sergeant propped up an American and a German helmet and shot them both full of holes with a Browning Automatic Rifle.

During the Marne attack, the Americans used the new tanks to help clear the way. Crouching behind a railroad embankment, the men were ordered "over the top" and began to walk across a flat field. Shortly thereafter, the Germans opened up with machine guns. Everyone nose-dived flat, but Howard was shot in the foot—he said he "didn't get flat enough." The serious wound severed muscle and tendons in his foot. Medics were nearly unknown then and he had to crawl almost a mile before being carried off on a stretcher.

† The Moldavia today is a favorite diving location for British scuba divers.

\*\* An attempt was made to call American troops "Sammies" after Uncle Sam but the old Civil War term of "Doughboy" won out.

Howard's wound healed and he was ordered back to his unit, but before he could rejoin them the armistice was signed and the war was over. He was livid, as the conflict was supposed to be the "War to End All Wars" yet only an armistice was signed. "Look it up in the dictionary" he said. "It means the temporary cessation of hostilities."

Howard served on the Draft Board during WWII. He also served on the board of the Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association, a group that sponsored Elgin's Memorial Day observances and upheld the community's patriotic traditions.



*Officers of the Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association in 1957. Left to right: Mildred Cook, Mary Brierly, Howard Hoagland, Francis Shine, Mary Madsen, Kathryn Hoagland, Allen Wilcox.*

I met with him often when he was an older man and visited him in the hospital when he had his knee replaced. He couldn't wait to get home, as he "was taking care of a couple of old ladies," all of whom were 20 years younger than himself. He would drive them on errands and doctor visits.

In the end his mind deserted him and he destroyed most of his memorabilia, saying "nobody cares." But we did care.

## 5th Annual Silent Auction Recap

*Marge Rowe*

This year's silent auction held at the Nov. 6 Benefit raised \$5,000! Thank you to all who contributed by bidding on items. Thanks also to the auction organizing committee: Carl Flaks, David & Delores Nelson, Ricky Harris, Laura Stroud, Rebecca Antonson, Lucy Elliot, Jerri Barnhart and Marge Rowe.

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ELGIN, IL 60120

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Thank you to the following individuals and businesses for your generous auction donations:

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Sally & Bill Brown	Klein's Market
Robyn Castoro/Dolce Salon	David & Delores Nelson
Carole Nelson Core	Clare Ollayos
Andrea & Barry Danielson	Joyce Pellicore
ECC Visual & Performing Arts Center	Platt Hill Nursery, Inc.
Elgin Children's Chorus	Carolyn & Jerry Roller
Mark & Lucy Elliott	Marge & George Rowe
Jan Embree	Dennis & Laurie Roxworthy
Carl & Mary Flaks	Studio One/Jack & Rick Sabo
Terry Gabel & Sue Brigham	Laura & Steve Stroud
Grand Victoria River Boat Casino	Jackie Vossler
Murna Hansemann	Artis & Ed Whitcomb
Ricky Harris	Jeff & Linda White-Rock
Donna Hopp	Holly & John Wiedmeyer
Rebecca Hunter	

## Fond Farewell

The Elgin Historical Society would like to say goodbye to members who passed away in 2010. If you know of other members who passed away last year, notify us at [elginhistory@foxvalley.net](mailto:elginhistory@foxvalley.net) or at 847.742.4248.

**Chuck Kincaid** was a past board member and Museum Committee President. Chuck worked to rehab the third floor in the early 1990s, got the Golden Ks to install storage shelving, designed the first Museum sign in front of Old Main, and facilitated acquisition of the Elgin Township probate records.

**Rosella Menke** was a fifth-generation Elginite interested in researching her family history.

**Walt Rust** lived in Bellevue, Washington, but supported the Society because of his strong connection to his hometown of Elgin. He was a Hiawatha dancer and an active member of the EHS Western Reunion.

**Dick Smith** grew up in Elgin and loved Elgin High sports. He and Bob Allerton volunteered as a docent team for the Museum. Bob passed away several years ago, but Dick continued docenting.

**Don Tuttle** was known all over Elgin for directing the U-46 Elgin Observatory Planetarium and teaching astronomy at ECC. He and his wife, Carol, were Elgin genealogists.