



Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 3
MAY 2011



Letter from the President

George Rowe

Well.....What a surprise this is.

About the last place I expected to be was the president's desk.

And I am sitting at it, not polishing it.

I must thank the board for the nomination, and the membership for the majority vote.

I look at this with some trepidation; yes it is an honor, but I am a little overwhelmed with the responsibility.

Still, we have already accomplished much this year.



The House that Dennis and Dave Built

Jackie also brought in a great story from Fortune magazine on Elgin watches. It was from April 1930; featured great photos from Margaret Bourke-White, a famous photographer of the era. Jackie and Richard Renner found the article on exhibit at the Art Institute. There is now a copy on display in the Museum meeting room on the second floor.

The new exhibit was completed and opened on schedule. We cannot thank Lucy Elliott and Doug Tomsha enough. They sit somewhere between Michelangelo and Eiffel in my book. Maury Dyer did his usual exceptional layout, and you may enjoy his new overlay map. Dennis Roxworthy joined the board this year and we asked a small favor of him: "Dennis, could you build us a house?" And he did—with his friend Dave O'Donnell, they constructed a façade that looks just like the picture we gave him. Other Exhibit Team members include myself and Museum Director Elizabeth Marston.

Jackie Vossler worked on the exhibit room and a special exhibit on Keeney's sporting goods store.

George and Marge Rowe with Jackie Vossler at the March Grand Opening



George and Marge Rowe with Jackie Vossler at the March Grand Opening

We have much more to get done.

Adirondack chairs, Bike to Work Week, VIP tours, and next year's exhibits are all on the list.

Keep an eye out for David Nelson's next program—every one is bigger and better.

And Mike Alft's new book, *The History of History in Elgin*, should already be out by the time you read this. You can get a copy in the museum store. Or try ordering online: Rebecca Marco is working diligently to get all of our store items on our website, and Melanie Burki is adding new items to the store's inventory. Please check us out.

The Crackerbarrel

Published bimonthly by the Elgin Area Historical Society
360 Park Street, Elgin, IL 60120
Phone 847-742-4248
e-mail: elginhistory@foxvalley.net



President: George Rowe
Vice President: Maurice Dyer
Secretary: Laura Stroud
Corr. Secretary: Ricky Harris
Treasurer: William Briska



Editor: Rebecca Marco

The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline **June 20, 2011**

 Visit our website www.elginhistory.org

Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society's Board of Directors.

©2011 Elgin Area Historical Society. All rights reserved.

Thursday, July 21, 12 Noon

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

Thursday, August 18, 12 Noon

Brown Bag Lunch: History of the Bicycle Industry in Elgin with Tom Armstrong

Sunday, September 25, 12 Noon - 3:30 P.M.

Elgin Historic Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery

Sunday, October 16, 3 P.M.

Ladies' Afternoon Tea with Clara Barton

Refreshments will be served and ladies are encouraged to wear hats as Leslie Goddard reprises nurse Clara Barton.

Sunday, November 6, 4 P.M.

Museum Benefit and Silent Auction

Bucky Halker portrays Woody Guthrie

Saturday, December 3, 1 P.M.

Annual Holiday Tea

Heartland Voices Ensemble will perform, directed by John Slawson.

Upcoming Programs for 2011

David Nelson, Program Director

Check our website for the latest details.
<http://www.elginhistory.org/events.html>

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*, celebrating historical preservation in Elgin. Following Mike's talk, the dedication of the Elgin National Watch Company factory bell takes place in the Artifact Garden, with Elgin's new Mayor David Kaptain. The BikeCHAIN project kicks off with a new bike map of the trail connecting all three Elgin Museums and a number of Elgin landmarks and monuments. An exciting day!

Thursday, May 19, 12 Noon

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

International Museum Day is our first Brown Bag Lunch of 2011, kicked off by John Cooper's history of the Elgin Academy and a tour of the campus.

Thursday, June 16, 12 Noon

Brown Bag Lunch: Elgin Barbershop Quartet Performs at the Museum

Saturday, June 4: Bus tour to the Kenosha Civil War Museum. Cost: \$35 for members; \$40 for non-members. For further information call the Museum at 847.742.4248.

Fire Barn No. 5 Museum

Brendan Morse, President, Fire Barn Museum

The Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum is located in old fire station 5 at 533 Saint Charles Street in Elgin. Fire station 5 was designed in 1903 by Elgin architect Smith Hoag in the ornate Classical Revival style of architecture. This was the last fire station in Elgin built to house horse-drawn apparatus; horse-drawn equipment was used here until November 1916 when the city started purchasing motorized vehicles. Even though 95 years have passed since horses were kept here, feed continues to trickle out of the wall where the feed chute was once located, adding to the building's historic character.



Beginning in 1932 the station, along with two others in the city, were closed due to the Great Depression; it was during this time that famed Elgin sculptor Trygve Rovelstad used the station as a temporary studio. In the late 1930s, Elgin's fire chief suggested that the building be torn down to help save maintenance costs; luckily, that did not happen and in 1939 the station was reopened and saw many more decades of service.

Fire station 5 served the citizens of Elgin for over 80 years before being decommissioned in 1991. The building was immediately placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A short time later it became the second official City of Elgin Landmark.

Shortly before fire station 5 was set to be decommissioned, a small group of individuals met to discuss the future of the building. It was deemed logical to use it as a museum to house the city's extensive collection of Elgin Fire Department memorabilia, which was stored in the basement of fire station 1 on Summit Street at the time.

Today the museum has several artifacts in its collection, one of the most prized being Elgin's first fire engine, a hand-drawn (and later horse-drawn) Silsby steam fire engine, bought by the City of Elgin in 1869. It is thought to be the third oldest still in existence. Other exhibits include a 1929 American LaFrance fire engine, originally housed at the now-demolished Elgin fire station 2 on West Chicago St.; and a hose cart thought to be used by the Elgin National Watch Company fire brigade. Other displays include a burn display, an exhibit on past Elgin fire stations, a Fire Chief display, historic uniforms, fire gear, telecommunications, extinguishers, and much more.

The regular hours for the museum are Saturday and Sunday 12 noon to 4 P.M. April through December. The Museum is closed January through March, although tours may be scheduled during the closed season. For more information about the Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum, please call the museum at (847) 697-6242 or visit their web site at www.elginfiremuseum.weebly.com.

Museum Open House March 13

Rebecca Marco, Editor

Our grand opening of our *From River to Rails: Elgin 1870-1910* exhibit, held on March 13, was a tremendous success, attended by 120+ people. Ellie Carlson demonstrated food preparation methods of 1900 in a very entertaining way, and cooked a delicious meal consisting of homemade white bread, deep-fried oys-

ters, sauteed parsnips, and old-fashioned tapioca pudding, all made "from scratch" right before our eyes and baked in the Museum kitchen.

Whether she was peeling parsnips, kneading dough, or breading the oysters, Ellie entertained the crowd with cooking lore and traditions of the turn of the 20th century and provided many helpful hints for cooking "the old-fashioned way." She used cake yeast for faster bread rising.

The crowd got to sample the food when it was ready and it was delicious. She also provided recipes for the dishes she prepared. Everything about the presentation was authentic, including her utensils and clothing. The program was very informative.

The new and very impressive exhibits were also well-received. Many thanks to our dedicated volunteers who made it all happen.



Lucy Elliott with the new Turn of the Century exhibit on the first floor



Maury Dyer at Museum Grand Opening

Mrs. Lincoln Visits the Museum

David Nelson, Program Director

We had another very successful event at the Museum, when over 100 people attended the April 17 program in remembrance of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War. Ken Gough gave a short talk about the Elgin Continentals, said to be the first Illinois unit to participate in the war.



Ken Gough speaks on the Elgin Continentals

Don Pielin's new diorama showed the Battle of Shiloh, where the Elgin Continentals battled two Confederate regiments on April 6, 1862. Don has donated this handmade diorama to the Museum



The main program featured Pamela Thiel reprising Mary Todd Lincoln. Mrs. Thiel dramatically portrayed many happy and sad events in the life of the first lady. The audience gave her a standing ovation.

Pamela Thiel as Mary Todd Lincoln, at the Museum

Welcome New Members

- Jim Brandes
- Len Govednik II
- Jean Hempstead
- Costin Hewitt
- Dave O'Donnell
- Patricia Palmer

The Story of Keeney's Sporting Goods

David Siegenthaler

A 127-year Elgin institution ended in December 2010 when Patricia Keeney, 62, longtime owner/operator of Keeney's Sporting Goods on Douglas Avenue, passed away after a two-month struggle with cancer. Four days later, her mother and co-owner Kathryn, 90, also passed away. Keeney's Sporting Goods may be best known to generations of Elginites as the place students would go for gym uniforms and letter jackets. It was one of the few businesses that had survived in Elgin's downtown since the bustling heydays of the 1950s and 1960s. Pat's father and Kathryn's husband, Earl Keeney Jr., passed away in 1993. Earl and his brother, Jacque (who died in 1994), took over Keeney's Sporting Goods in 1971, when their father, Earl Sr., passed away.

Keeney's origins date back to 1883 in Elgin when Walter Gartland entered the drug and sundries business with his brother-in-law, Edwin Springer. Gartland would subsequently operate the drug department in Swan's department store, and in 1914 he would open the Independent Drug Store at 21 South Grove Avenue. Earl Keeney Sr., who had married Gartland's daughter Julia, joined the firm in 1918. When Gartland died in 1924, Earl became the owner and changed the name to Keeney's Drug Store. In 1934 Keeney's moved to 23 North Grove Avenue and discontinued the drug business, focusing on selling sporting goods, which had been a sideline of the business for a number of years. It was one of the first sporting goods-only stores in the state. In 1946, Keeney's Sporting Goods moved to 19 Douglas Avenue. In 1990, Pat and Kathryn added an antiques and collectibles shop in the basement.

The Keeney family was a big promoter of youth sports in Elgin. Earl Sr. helped to form the first boys baseball league in Elgin in 1941, called the Knot-Whole Gang, which lasted through 1946. In 1951 the Keeneys helped to bring Little League baseball to Elgin and expand it over the years, eventually including girls. They also helped to organize Pee Wee Football in Elgin in 1956 and reorganize the Elgin Teener League (baseball) in 1963. In 1985 Jacque Keeney was inducted into the Elgin Sports Hall of Fame for his dedication to youth sports and his coaching success. In 1977 lights were installed at the Trout Park field for night baseball, thanks to a committee headed by Jacque.

Recent Donations

- **Bill Briska**
- **Terry Gabel: for the 2012 calendar project**
- **David and Dolores Nelson**
The Nelsons underwrote the Museum's participation in Elgin's Adirondack Summer Thrones project for \$180. The project consists of Adirondack chairs colorfully painted and decorated by individuals and organizations. Look for the chairs around Elgin this summer!
- **Carol Plagge (in honor of Bill Briska)**
- **Linda Rock**
- **Gary Rogers**
- **Jack and Marlene Shales: for the Mrs. Lincoln program**
- **Jackie Vossler: for the Elgin 1870-1910 exhibit**

Thank You Donors!

Memorial Donations

A number of people donated to the Museum in memory of Museum supporters Jan Embree and Walter Huntoon, who both passed away recently.

In memory of Jan Embree:

- **Richard Renner**
- **Joyce Pellicore**
- **David and Delores Nelson**
- **Carl and Mary Ellen Flaks**
- **Sara Ellen Anderson**

In memory of Walter Huntoon:

- **Lois McCauley**
- **David Huntoon**
- **George and Marge Rowe**
- **Laurie Walrack**
- **Linda Gray**
- **Lois Egoroff**
- **Melanie Howe**
- **Linda Lamprecht**
- **Carol Zamie**

Thank you for your donations to the Museum. Both Walter and Jan are missed.

Elgin BikeCHAIN Project

Lucy Elliott, Museum Educator



A new bike map of Elgin's east side neighborhoods connects Elgin's three museums—the Elgin History Museum, the Elgin Public Museum, and the Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum. The route includes a number of landmarks and monuments marked along the way.

The BikeCHAIN Committee is a group with representatives from the three museums, ARCHES (Advocates Revitalize Cultural and Historic Elgin Sites), and the Observatory. They have worked for a year to create a map that will serve to heighten awareness of the amenities in the neighborhood in an independent and family-friendly manner. A Small GreenWorks Grant from the City of Elgin and funding from the City of Elgin's Heritage Commission made the design and printing of the map possible. The City of Elgin's Bike and Pedestrian Committee also lent its support to the project.

As part of the Preservation Month activities, the Elgin BikeCHAIN Project map—the MUSEUM LINK—will be inaugurated on May 14 in the Society's 50th Anniversary Celebration and Artifact Garden Dedication. The map may be the first of several bike maps to showcase neighborhoods throughout Elgin.

ARCHES is a wonderful community group working to monitor Elgin's landmark buildings. Members of the group were active in protecting the David C. Cook building on Grove Avenue several years ago, and protested the demolition of the Crocker Theater. In the past few years, ARCHES has lobbied and encouraged School District U-46 to become more aware of their Observatory on Watch Street and assisted Elgin Fire Barn No. 5 Museum in events and friend-building. At the same time, Elgin Public Museum and the Elgin History Museum have been partnering more in programming and community activities.

The hope is to raise awareness of the unique resources found in near east Elgin, including the five landmarks listed on the National Register and some of the most wonderful examples of our housing stock.

Summer Mornings at the Museum

Lucy Elliott, Museum Educator

This summer the Museum is again offering the Elgin Junior Tour Guides program for kids in grades 2 through 5. The program gives kids a blast from the past while introducing them to our local history in a fun, hands-on way.

Day 1 features Early Elgin, Agriculture, and the founding families of Elgin. Day 2 covers the city's growth and the various types of architecture. The new architectural exhibit shows kids how to identify architectural features that can be found throughout Elgin. Day 3 is about Elgin watches and local industry, and focuses on the role of women. Day 4 (August session only) includes the railroads and dairy industry.

A few mornings at the Elgin History Museum can change a child's view of the past. There will be three sessions, so we encourage you to enroll interested children soon!

Session A1 (4 days)

June 21, 22, 23, 24, 9:30 A.M. -noon

Fee: \$65 per child

Session A (3 days)

July 6, 7, and 8, 9:30 A.M.-noon

Fee \$50.00 per child

Session B (4 days)

August 8, 9, 10, and 11, 9:30 A.M. TO Noon

Fee: \$65 per child

Each day will include hands-on activities. Please contact Lucy, Under the Cupola, at 847-742-4248 to sign up or for more information.



Go Green! Sign Up for E-Crackerbarrel

Rebecca Marco, Editor

In consideration of Earth Day and to conserve resources, the Board of Directors is making a concerted effort to reduce our printing costs and our environmental impact by encouraging the membership to opt for paperless delivery of the Crackerbarrel, for the following reasons:

- The PDF file sent to email recipients has the same page layout as the paper copy, but it's in color, so it actually looks much better than the printed copies. It is sized for printing on standard 8-1/2" x 11" paper.
- The Adobe® Reader® software needed to view PDF files is free, and most computers already have it installed. If you need Adobe Reader, it is available as a free download from www.adobe.com.
- The PDF copy will arrive in your email box much sooner than the paper copy arrives in your postal mailbox.
- Bulk mail delivery can sometimes take up to 10 days, and we have no control over this. To improve service to our members we would like to send the Crackerbarrel to you via email, for more timely delivery.

We will be contacting members in the next few weeks to update our mailing list, and we hope you will help save trees and fossil fuel by choosing to receive your Crackerbarrel via email. Thank you!

May is Preservation Month

Rebecca Marco, Editor

Celebrate Elgin's rich heritage with a variety of historical activities, at the Museum and around town.

Learn about any "Made in Elgin" items you may have lying around the house. Gail Borden Public Library is hosting **Elgin Alive! –Things Made in Elgin** on Tuesday, May 17 from 6:30–8:30 P.M. Bring your made in Elgin items to this program. Local Elgin collectors will be able to help you find out more about your collectible. The library is located at 270 N Grove Avenue, and this event will be in 2nd Floor Meeting Room 1.

Other activities for Preservation Month include the following programs at Gail Borden Library. Call the library at 847-429-4680 or register for any of these events online at www.gailborden.info/register.

- May 3, 7:00–8:00 P.M. **We are a College at War: Women Working for Victory in World War II.**
- May 12, 7:00–8:00 P.M. **Community Rooms A and B: Marshall Field and Company: Presented by Dr. Leslie Goddard**
- May 18, 7:00–8:00 P.M. **2nd Floor, Meeting Room 1 Mid-Century Modern: The Ranch Makes Its Debut as Historical Architecture**
- May 22, 3:00–4:30 P.M. **2nd Floor River Room: 6th Annual Fireside Chat: Celebrating Elgin's Treasures – Past and Present.** No registration required
- May 23, 1:00–2:30 P.M. **Circle of Time:** Explore the history of the Elgin Watch Company and its impact on the City of Elgin in this timeless film.

Other events planned include:

- **Tours of the Elgin Mental Health Center Cemetery** For information contact: Jennifer Fritz-Williams at (847) 931-6004.
- **May 13: 6th Annual Bowl for Preservation Event,** Elgin Lanes, 401 Shepard Drive. Doors open at 6:00 P.M. Bowling at 7:00 P.M. Tickets: \$25 per person, \$20 per child under 12, kids 5 and under free; ticket includes 3 games of bowling, shoe rental, and a dinner buffet. For information contact: Doug Watkins (847) 488-0397 or elginabode@gmail.com

A full brochure published by the City of Elgin is available on the city's website at <http://www.cityofelgin.org/Document-View.aspx?DID=3730>

NEW! Elgin Heritage Jewelry in the Museum Store



New necklaces: only \$18!

The Museum Store just got in a limited edition of new bracelets and necklaces with iconic charms relating to Elgin history! The bracelets have little charms representing Elgin Watches with authentic Lady Elgin watch dials, trolley transportation, the dairy industry, a Museum building icon, and the Fox River. There are also three different styles

of pendant necklaces, themed with Eagle Brewery, Elgin Watch, and the Elgin Road Races. Members receive a 10% discount. Great gift idea! Exclusive to the Museum Store, and uniquely Elgin!



These Elgin charm bracelets are \$36 in the Museum Store

We are also pleased to announce that the Elgin windmills are back in stock! These 17-inch high galvanized metal replicas of the Wonder Model B, made in Elgin at one time, are great for display inside your home or out in the garden. The windmill spins in the wind and the vane shows the wind direction. \$24.95 and, as always, members get a 10% discount!



Collections Corner

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Mary Beith Tayon of Elburn recently donated this newspaper ad shown on the following page, for a film about Elgin's Dick Peck in the Stirling Expedition.

From the front page of the May 26, 1931 *Elgin Courier News*:

"Richard K. Peck, better known to his numerous friends as "Dick" Peck, was widely known throughout the central west, and, in fact, in aviation circles over the entire country, as one of the greatest of pilots."

Dick Peck was the son of George Peck, well-known Elgin merchant and businessman. He crashed in Wheaton flying the Blue Streak and was killed instantly. He was only 35 years-old, but already a great adventurer participating in two major scientific expeditions to New Guinea in 1925 and 1926.



Here Is Your Chance **TO FLY With DICK PECK**

Children25c Thursday Afternoon
Adults75c Thurs. and Fri. Evenings

"DICK PECK" was the official photographer and pilot for the STIRLING EXPEDITION TO NEW GUINEA.

THE AMERICAN LEGION is showing this picture for the benefit of the Larkin Childrens' Home Bus fund.

This is an ethnologically educational picture showing native life in Pygmy land. Also the life and the hardships endured by the members of the expedition.

The movie is educational and is shown as a history story that will grip and hold your attention throughout the entire performance of seven reels.

See us at the
ELGIN HIGH SCHOOL
MAY 2 and 3, 1929