

The Crackerbarrel



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President's Report

Mary Hill, President



Over the past five years, numerous activities have occurred that moved the Society and Museum forward from thoughts and ideas to reality.

The *partial* list includes: updating our constitution and bylaws; developing a 5-year plan to revamp all exhibits with phases 1 and 2 complete; computerizing an inventory of artifacts; indexing probate and divorce records; organizing and expanding the research library; publishing three volumes of *There Used To Be*; establishing a successful series of Brown Bag Lunch programs; improving alliances with other organizations; installing an audio system; establishing an artifact garden; revamping outside gardening and street presentation; facilitating a State Historical Marker for the Elgin Road Races; and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Road Races, the Observatory, and the Wing Park Golf Course.

Two of the most stellar achievements were hiring an Educator, and hosting the first ever Donor Appreciation Night.

Exhibits have been enlivened with color, presentation, and involvement with the people of Elgin. Presentation of artifacts has been expanded to include everything from the smallest of fine Elgin watches and the tiniest screws and jewels used to make them to the large watch factory tower clockworks and bell.

It has been pleasing to see the organization grow and develop. The continued energy and support put into the organization bodes well for its future.

Museum Now Open All Year Long

If you find yourself looking for something to do during the cold and cloudy months of January and February, we are happy to announce that the Museum will remain open throughout the winter, instead of closing in January and February as we have done in the past. The hours will be the usual Wednesday through Saturday, 12-4 pm. Two more months of open hours!

Holiday Tea December 4

The Elgin Children's Chorus will perform at the Elgin History Museum at 1 p.m. during the annual Holiday Tea. Join the fun for outstanding refreshments and ornament making. Visit Old Main decorated for the holidays. Free admission!



Outstanding treats are a hallmark of the Holiday Tea

Also, as the Christmas shopping season begins, please remember that the Museum Store offers many interesting gift items for all ages. Stop in and pick up a few stocking-stuffers! We have books, games, and ornaments—something for everyone.

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.
Next deadline December 20, 2010

 Visit our website www.elginhistory.org

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

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Donations - Thank You!

Artifact Garden

- Carl and Mary Ellen Flaks

General Contributions

- Joseph and Marcia Luptak
- Carrie Rush
- Elgin Garden Club in Old Main iris sales

New Road Race Marker

- Ricky Harris
- Jerry and Kathy Turnquist
- Steve Thoren
- Abraham Kershaw
- Bill Jones



Jerry Turnquist, Arnie Lauber, and Bill Briska at Road Race Centennial Car Show



George Rowe and Terry Carlson from Elgin Granite Works with 1970s-era marker located at Larkin High School

Upcoming Programs for 2010

David Nelson, Program Director

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

December 4, 2010, 12-3 pm:

Holiday Tea at the Museum

Featuring Elgin Children's Chorus

Welcome New Members

- Kathleen Bagg
- Nisan and Sarah Chavkin
- Michael Davis Family
- Scott Evanson from Beef Villa
- Joe Follrath from Quiznos in Downtown Elgin
- Racquel Gabufa
- Michael and Trudi Haskins
- Susan and Doug Horton
- LuAnn Lamp
- Ray Maxwell Family
- Carol Pescinski
- Alan and Kathleen Walters
- Bruce Rakow from the Razor's Edge Salon
- Gloria Verbic
- Jeffrey Willis



New Illinois State Historical Society marker commemorating the Elgin National Road Races, and some people who attended the 1933 race

2010 Board Fundraiser Donors

This year over \$8,000 was raised thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the Society's members.

Albright, Beatrice	Mengler, David and Pat
Alft, Mike and Fran	Menke, Rosella
Anderson, Charlen	Miller, Dan and Patricia
Anderson, Charlen	Moylan, Susan
Barbezat, Mary Ellen	Nelson, David J. and Dolores
Barnhart, Jerri and Ken	Nesler, Patricia
Bendick, Joseph & Lois	Neville, Aubrey
Berna, Greg	Nichols, Richard
Breslich, Jeanne and Richard	Nomellini, Barbara and Peter
Briska, Bill	Nore, Gilbert and Mary
Burkhart, Janet	Pellicore, Joyce
Childs, Helen	Quality Painting & Carpentry
Clossman, Richard	Rauschenberger, Tom
Conley, Ronald and Mary	Redeker, Carol
Crinigan, Linda	Reid, Elaine
Crockett, Stewart	Roberti, Mary
Danner, Marion	Rock, Linda
Elbert, Marvin and Donna	Roller, Jerry & Carolyn
Flaks, Carl and Mary Ellen	Rowe, George and Marge
Gabel, Terry and Sue Brigham	Roxworthy, Dennis
Hagemann, Geraldine	Rush, Carrie Ann
Handrock, Carole	Scarborough, Edith
Hill, Mary	Schnell, Theodore
Hoeft, Elizabeth	Schroeder, Kathleen
Jocius, Patricia	Seigle Family Foundation
Kane, Lee	Shales, John and Marlene
Lawrence, John	Tuttle, Don and Carol
Ludwig, Ernest	Utt, Norma
Lytle, Miriam	Vossler, Jackie
Magowan, Marilyn	Weseman, Margaret and Ed
Malloy, Luella	Whitcomb, Edward
Marston, John & Elizabeth	Ziegler, Phyllis

Eagle Scout Project at the Museum

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Hayden Pierce from Elgin's Boy Scout Troop 2 organized his Eagle project and helped the Museum at the same time! On October 2, Hayden and a crew of scouts planted the new garden next to the Elgin National Watch Company bell in the Artifact Garden, installed a new parking lot sign with the Museum's hours, set up new benches in the Artifact Garden, and constructed a small brick path into the front garden and around the flagpole. It was a windy, cold day, but the boys worked hard and got everything done. Next spring Hayden and his crew will install the Artifact Garden interpretive signs for the bell, the Masonic Temple cornerstone, and the Civil War Cannons.



Eagle Scouts helping out at the Museum

Roosevelt Benefit Gala a Success

Rebecca Marco, Editor

The Society's first-ever benefit gala was held the night of November 6th at the Centre of Elgin. The event drew a near-capacity crowd of about 130 and the silent auction went very well, with fierce bidding on some of the most coveted prizes. The grand prize was a Hawaiian vacation. Many thanks to our generous members who donated prizes, and to our volunteers who wrapped the baskets and coordinated the prize donations.

Though the hors-d'oeuvres were quite delicious and the cocktail conversation was sparkling, the highlight of the evening was the performance by Joe Wiegand as President Theodore Roosevelt. Mr. Wiegand spoke for well over an hour, in character the entire time, and presented a thoroughly convincing portrait of our 26th president. The program was extremely well-researched and provided more facts and anecdotes on TR in an hour than most students receive in four years of high school. "Teddy" even answered audience

questions in character at the conclusion of the program. It was truly a remarkable performance. The program ended with Mr. President auctioning off a cute teddy bear to assist the Society's fundraising efforts. Board member Maurice Dyer won the bear.



"Teddy" raises a glass to Elgin



Great silent auction prizes drew much interest.

William J. Gartner

Chuck Emmert

Bill Gartner was the man who did all of the environmental testing, compiled all the data and convinced the State of Illinois and the people of Elgin to accept the Fox River as our city water supply. The river now supplies 94% of Elgin's water. Bill did it using his own laboratory, a company known as Aqualab, in the late 1970s. At the time, Aqualab was located in a building on the north side of Route 20 in Streamwood. The company's new corporate headquarters are located on West Bartlett Road in Bartlett. In the mid-1980s, Aqualab was the third largest environmental network in the U.S.

Prior to that time, city water came from wells as deep as 1600 feet. One well was at the Slade Avenue pumping station. Early attempts to use river water resulted in disease. In the early 1900s, The Elgin Courier reported that ladies complained of "snakes" and worms coming from their faucets.

Not only did Bill perform the chemical testing of the water, he also projected the requirements for the project's success. He even did ichthyological studies on fish and crustacean populations. In a speech he once gave, he said that the Fox River was so clean that you could filter it through a sock and drink it. The Elgin Courier News carried the story when Bill and several of his staff did just that.



He was not all science; he was also fun to golf with and was a Director and President of Elgin Country Club for two and a half years during 1983, 1984 and 1985. During his tenure, a major reconstruction of the 70-year-old clubhouse was finished. The ponds on the course were rebuilt and cleaned up with a thriving fish population. The Club even held annual fishing derbies back then for the children of members.

Bill formed and staffed new corporations and moved to Arizona after selling Aqualab in 1986. After becoming a member at the famed Desert Highlands Golf Club out there, he started a company manufacturing golf clubs that he designed, and subsequently sold that firm to Fila.

He continues to be very active with his scientific thinking and holds many patents. Bill's most recent venture is marketing a blood test for breast cancer.

Welcome to Elgin Club

By Anne Morrissy

Reprinted with permission from the magazine

"At The Lake," Summer 2010

An historic, fun-loving neighborhood in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin

If you walk the lake shore path starting in Williams Bay and head east toward Lake Geneva, you will eventually find yourself strolling across a charming foot-bridge among the handsome group of homes that comprise the Elgin Club association. The houses, shaded by large trees, may appear modest in comparison to many of the behemoth estates that dot the lake-side, but they carry an enviable pedigree: some of them are among the oldest structures still standing around Geneva Lake.

Three of the houses have maintained the same family ownership since they were built at the end of the 19th century, including the Redeker-Filby house, which is currently owned by Martha Redeker; the Couffer-Townsend house, currently owned by Bob Couffer;

and the Wood-Craven house, currently owned by Martha Craven. According to club historian, Redeker, the connection across the generations is what makes the Elgin Club so exceptional. "When you're young, you don't realize how special it is," she enthuses. "There's nothing like it."

Craven adds that a big draw for Elgin Club is the setting itself. "I never get tired of looking at the lake. We'll have a blue heron that comes by and we have the ducks... and I love to feed the birds. Being at the lake-the lake itself-is a real gift."

It was this same affection for Geneva Lake that led to the establishment of Elgin Club in the first place. In 1873, a group of men from Elgin, Illinois, that included Charles Moseley, Alfred Lavoie, A. H. Smith and William Gooding, traveled to Walworth County for a fishing trip. In a letter that Lavoie wrote in 1880, he described how the men engaged a retired sailor named Billy Woods to transport them to a camping spot, where they spent a few days fishing. According to Lavoie's letter, he and Moseley decided to stay a few extra days and as a result, they got caught camping in a fierce thunderstorm one night. "While eating our breakfast [the next] morning, I casually remarked that



it would be nice to own a lot... facing the lake for camping ground and to put up a small house so we could be protected from such a storm," he wrote.

After an extensive scouting hike around the lake shore, Moseley and Lavoie chose three favorite spots and quickly learned that one of them was available. Lavoie approached John Wykoff who owned the 16-acre plot on the north shore to inquire whether he would be willing to sell them a single acre to use as a camp for their fishing trips. Wykoff did not want to break up the lot, but he offered to sell them the entire 16-acre plot of land. After some haggling, the price they agreed upon was \$25 per acre, for a total of \$400. Lavoie agreed, purchasing the land on the spot. Thus Elgin Club was born.

Eager to earn back some of their investment, Lavoie and Moseley returned to Elgin and began selling 50-foot-wide lakefront lots to their friends and family members, and incorporated an association they initially named the "Lakeside Park of Elgin Club," though the name was eventually shortened simply to "Elgin Club." At first, they limited the club membership to just 10 landowners.



*Charles Scott Moseley
c. 1865*

Moseley was a relatively new arrival to the Midwest. In 1873 the young town of Elgin was just beginning to grow into the modern city it is today. At the start of the Civil War, Elgin had less than 3,000 residents and very little industry. But in 1865 a group of wealthy Chicagoans formed the Elgin National Watch Company, only the second watch factory to exist in

the United States. To gain inspiration for their new endeavor, the investors visited the groundbreaking Waltham Watch Company in Massachusetts, the first factory in the country that had the capability to mass-produce timepieces. While there, they hired away seven of the East Coast watchmakers, including Moseley, who became the first superintendent of the Elgin National Watch Company. The company went on to dominate the watch market for almost a century.

When Lavoie returned to Elgin after his trip to Lake Geneva with Moseley, he returned to a city filled with newly affluent families who were eager to enjoy a taste of the luxury that a summer retreat promised. Moseley had already interested 10 parties in purchasing the Lakeside Park lots.

The founding members began construction of a central clubhouse, which was dedicated on June 11, 1874. According to Lavoie's letter, it was the first building erected on the land and featured bunks and dining facilities. Every member of the newly formed club, save one, attended the dedication, and all of them camped on the property during their visit. The celebration featured a dinner and singing and dancing late into the night, which earned the new association the reputation of being a particularly fun place to visit on Geneva Lake.

The party was such a success that several people who had come from Elgin to celebrate wanted to become members of the association themselves. Although the initial intention was to limit the membership to 10, after the dedication party, the number of lots was doubled to 20 to accommodate the new surge of interest. Each lot boasted 50 feet of lakeshore frontage. The first houses went up that same summer, though due to the informal nature of the bookkeeping in the club at the time, there is some debate as to which house can claim the distinction of being first. Lavoie's letter indicates that the first house was built by Ed F. Gooding.

The original houses were little more than cottages—they lacked electricity, running water or even functional kitchens. The association employed a resident cook and caretaker. Meals were served family-style in the clubhouse. Almost immediately, the association built a pier that could accommodate steamboats for easy transfer to the railroad station in Lake Geneva, as well as the footbridge bridge over the creek. But as more men started bringing their families up for the summer, the houses became more elaborate and modernized. "It really started out as Elgin Camp because the men would come up in tents, but then the theory goes that the women got fed up with the men coming up without them," Redeker explains.

The architectural style favored by the club members was described in newspapers of the day as a gingerbread, Victorian style. Almost every house featured an open porch and some architectural flourish, whether a cupola or turret or pitched eave. This eclectic approach to uniformity of design made Elgin Club a picturesque collection of structures. Even today, several houses remain outwardly unchanged from the way they looked in the late 19th century, including the distinctive circular stone porch of the Couffer house and the open front porch of the Redeker-Filby house.

As members made improvements and built larger and more unique houses where there had previously been tents and rudimentary cottages, the first clubhouse was abandoned in favor of a newer, more luxurious structure built closer to the lake. The new clubhouse was built in 1897 and featured a bowling alley, auditorium, game room and wraparound porch. Church ser-

vices complete with an organ were held in the auditorium on Sunday mornings into the 1940s. "My mom and my dad vaguely remember when they were first going out, they would attend Sunday services there," says Redeker. The clubhouse was torn down in 1943 the lot was divided in half and sold, adding two additional houses to the club.

When the association was first established, travel from Elgin to Lake Geneva was long and arduous on roads that weren't well maintained. "I remember my grandmother saying it would take a two-day horse and carriage ride to get here," laughs Redeker. By the early part of the 20th century, families could take the train from Elgin to Williams Bay and transfer to a steamer yacht or hire a cart for the trip to Elgin Club. Women and children would spend the summer at the lake, while the men commuted on weekends.

Once there, the residents created their own entertainment. Swimming, fishing, sailing, tennis and boating were popular activities both then and now. Prior to World War II, the clubhouse hosted parties, picnics, lectures and dances. One party was so well attended that when the guests shuffled out to the pier to have their photograph taken, the pier actually sank. In such a camp-like atmosphere, pranks were a common occurrence. One time, a piano salesman made the long trip from downtown Chicago to the Elgin Club clubhouse after receiving a coupon in the mail indicating the group's interest in a free demonstration. When he arrived, he discovered that his prospective client was simply a mischievous child. And Couffer's father once posted a notice that part of the beach would be partitioned off for nudist sunbathing. "He got quite a reaction with that one from my grandmother," says Couffer.



Lake Geneva today (photo by Rebecca Marco)

Initially, all the members were from Elgin, but as houses turned over to new families, the group became more diverse. Although the homeowners now hail from all over the country, the spirit of camaraderie at Elgin Club has persevered. "We've always been a tight-knit community," explains Craven. "The kids all know each other and they view all of the houses as their house," she says. "It's fun to see that." About 10:15 a.m. every morning, the members of Elgin Club gather on the lawn for an impromptu daily gathering. "We all parade down to greet the mail boat," explains lifelong resident Andrea Gibbs. They relish the ritual of marine mail delivery and wait eagerly for their mail. Couffer remembers the summers his daughter worked as a mail jumper on the boat. "We'd all be there cheering her on," he says.

The high point of the summer is always the annual Elgin Club Days. The July event started as a lawn party hosted by various families in the 1950s and quickly evolved into an association-wide celebration. There are children's games, a tennis tournament and a large cookout. No matter how far-flung the residents may be nowadays, "that's the one day when everybody in Elgin Club comes together," shares Couffer.



Lake Geneva today (photo by Rebecca Marco)

From its earliest days as a camp for a group of friends from Elgin to its current incarnation as a close-knit summer retreat, Elgin Club has remained a distinctive community on Geneva Lake. "My favorite thing about living here are the memories I've made and the people I know here," says Gibbs. "There are people that my family has known for three generations. In some cases, I have friends where our grandfathers were friends as well. There's not a lot of constancy in most neighborhoods anymore and that's the real joy of Elgin Club."

ELGIN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Collections Corner

Susan Wildemuth donated 39 youth, baby, and crib quilts from Lee Wards quilts! It is a beautiful collection researched by Susan, who is an expert on LeeWards, Dexter Thread Company, Collingbourne Mills, and Virigina Snow Studios, all located in Elgin. The companies are related and were the start of the hobby industry. The quilt designs of the donated quilts were featured in LeeWards Catalogs. LeeWards did not manufacture the quilt kits—they purchased them from other sources and sold them in their catalogs and at their retail stores. The quilts collected by Susan date from the 1940s through the 1980s. The Museum plans to display the collection in 2011.



Kitten cross-stitch quilt, part of the recent donation

Museum Receives State Grant

On Oct. 21, Governor Pat Quinn awarded grants to 51 public museums in Illinois through the Illinois Public Museums Capital Grant Program. The program is funded by capital development bonds, so only museums operated by or located upon land owned by a unit of local government are eligible. Elgin History Museum received \$36,610 to complete the Timeline Project Exhibit. The Museum has been working to update exhibits and create a chronological thread of Elgin history on the Museum's first floor. The project is starting the third phase, 1870-1910, this year with grant funds from Kane County and will start to work on Elgin in the 20th century in 2011. The exhibit will end with Elgin in the 1970s.

Gov. Quinn said of the grants, "Illinois' public museums are some of our most valuable teaching resources. Students learn best when they have access to the hands-on learning available in museums throughout the state," said Governor Quinn. "These capital grants will help ensure that learning is not limited to classrooms—but that students will be able to continue visiting museums, zoos and gardens all over the state to put their lessons to practical use."