



The Crackerbarrel

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 5
SEPTEMBER 2011



Greetings from the President

George Rowe, President

Well, here it is the end of August. One more month and the weather will be perfect.

30th Gifford Park Housewalk

But please don't wait one more month to stop at the Museum. Plan on visiting on Sept. 10 and/or 11 for the 30th annual Gifford Park Association house walk. To make this year's walk the best ever, GPA is starting it at the Elgin Area Historical Society Museum. That's right—you will stop at the Museum to start your tour. We are planning some special events on these two days at the Museum so we hope to see you there, and please bring a friend.

This year Chris Berry's house is on the walk (again). But this time it is done. Chris has been working night and day for a year, and is very excited to have the finished product on the tour. Chris occasionally gets some help from his neighbor Dan Miller, so I can't wait to see it. You will also get to tour First Congregational Church, one of the oldest churches in Elgin, and the longest running congregation in the same building. It is a beautiful sanctuary and I always enjoy being in this building.

EAHS Video to be broadcast

We have been working with Grindstone Productions and have big news there (see the article for more details), but I want everyone to watch your local access channel (channel 17 at my house). They will be broadcasting the newest EAHS video three times a week and there is some new footage of Bill Briska and Lucy Elliott.

This is what local access is all about, but it doesn't happen without some push. We got ours from Phil Broxham, who created the *Circle of Time* documentary for us as well as some other productions. Channel 17 airs the city council meeting every week, and the

hourly local events show featuring Jeff Myers. With Phil's guidance we were able to take advantage of this resource. Many thanks to Phil, channel 17, and the city workers who helped make this happen.

Adopt-an-Artifact and Other Ideas

Our Director, Elizabeth Marston, and I have been talking for some time about the Sheldon Peck portraits of the Giffords on display facing the entry to the Museum. I wanted to have them photographed, and the originals moved to a more secure area.

Because of the generous donation of an insightful patron we are on the road to doing that. The portraits will be photographed by Bill Brown, who has done a lot of photo reproduction for the Museum. We will have copies made, which will be displayed in the same spot. The originals will be given the museum spa treatment: reframed and matted using acid-free materials, behind (but separated from) ultraviolet-blocking glass, and moved to a more secure area.

The patron, who wishes to remain anonymous, came up with the great idea of adopting the portraits. He can't take the art home or to the ball game, but is now forever connected to these irreplaceable artifacts.

Think of all the items in the Museum that could be adopted. Many of the Hiawatha Pageant items could be restored; they need special treatment to survive forever. If there is an item you would like to adopt, talk to me or Liz Marston, and look for more on this idea in the next Crackerbarrel.

Jerri Barnhart, in charge of membership, has also grooved a great idea. Her friend Wally Niedert is promoting EAHS on his extended email list. Apparently Wally keeps in touch with 4,000 of his closest friends, most of them graduates of Elgin High School or otherwise connected with Elgin. Thanks to Jerri and Wally for a great way to boost Society membership. Hope to see you soon at the Museum.

The Crackerbarrel

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The Crackerbarrel welcomes reader contributions.

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 **Visit our website www.elginhistory.org**

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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>

Sunday, September 25, 11 A.M. - 3:30 P.M.
Elgin Historic Cemetery Walk at Bluff City Cemetery

Sunday, October 16, 3 P.M.
Civil War Nurse Clara Barton

As a single woman determined to make a mark for herself, Clara Barton earned distinction as the first woman to serve as a nurse on the front lines of a battlefield. This first-person program focuses on her childhood and her Civil War work, introducing Barton as a woman of unusual ambition who survived remarkable, often shocking experiences, in her quest to improve conditions for wounded soldiers in the American Civil War. Tea and traditional refreshments will be served. All ladies are requested to wear a hat. *Reservations required:* call 847.742.4248 or email elginhistory@foxvalley.net

DATE CHANGE: Saturday, November 5, 4 P.M.
Museum Benefit and Silent Auction

Bucky Halker portrays Woody Guthrie and we will have a silent auction with many wonderful items.

Saturday, December 3, 1 P.M.
Annual Holiday Tea

Heartland Voices Ensemble will perform, directed by John Slawson.

Thanks to our Donors

Donations in Memoriam for Chuck Emmert

- Harry and Phyllis Blizzard
- Willard Brown
- Peter Constance
- John and Wilma Hagan
- Geraldine Hicks
- Dana and John Tanner

Annual Fundraiser Contributors for 2011

Anderson, Bernice	Barnhart, Jerri and Ken
Bendick, Joseph & Lois	Blizzard, Harry and Phyllis
Breslich, Jeanne and Richard	Briska, Bill and Fran Cella
Burkart, Janet	Childs, Helen
Covey, David	Crinigan, Linda
Crockett, Stewart	Dyer, Maurice
Elbert, Marvin and Donna	Gabel, Terry and Sue Brigham
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Hempstead, Jean	Hill, Mary
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Jocius, Patricia	Kaptain, P.J.
Lawrence, John	Magowan, Marilyn
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McIntyre, Susan	Miller, Dan and Patricia
Moylan, Susan	Nelson, David J. and Dolores
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Quality Painting & Carpentry	Redeker, Carol
Reid, Elaine	Rowe, George
Schmoltdt, William and Margaret	Schnell, Theodore
Seigle Family Foundation	Shales, John and Marlene
Tuttle, Carol	Utt, Norma
Wesemann, Edward & Margaret	Whitcomb, Edward
Ziegler Family Charity Fund	

10,000 New Items Added to Courier-News Online Photo Index

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

Volunteers have been working hard to add information about the Museum's Elgin *Courier-News* photo negatives to the Museum's website. David Siegenthaler indexes the negatives, and Judy Schroeder enters the data into the website database with the help of Rebecca Marco and Jeffrey Pierce. Rebecca volunteers to manage the Museum's website and Jeffrey volunteered to write a computer program allowing the *Courier-News* photo index to be searched by keyword.

To use the search function, go to the Museum website www.elginhistory.org. Click **Research Services**, then **Photo Collection**, then **Search the Courier-News Photo Archives**. Type a date, name, or subject, then click the **Search** button. When the search results are displayed, print or write down the negative number(s) and ask for it at the Museum. The records start in 1951 and go through 1967. There is still much data to add, but it is exciting to see the database grow.

Brown Bag Lunch about Old Bicycles

Rebecca Marco, Editor

August 18 was a good day to ride a bike to the Museum, because Brown Bag Lunch attendees that day were treated to a lecture by Elgin's bicycle ambassador, Tom Armstrong, about the long-dead Elgin bicycle industry.



Tom Armstrong Giving the Presentation



Tom Armstrong, Elgin's Bicycle Ambassador

New EAHS Video Debuts on Channel 17

George Rowe, President

Please tune your TVs to channel 17! The Museum has been lucky enough to team up with Grindstone Productions to produce a pair of half-hour videos highlighting "Fifty Years of the Elgin Area Historical Society."

Of course the first step is always, "How do we get the money to make this happen?" Turns out Phil Broxham of Grindstone Productions has a new client, Best Res-

toration, which opened a large new facility in Elgin and thought this would be a good way to introduce themselves to the Elgin area.

Next step: the idea was introduced to the Board of Directors, who of course loved it enough to donate money. Yes, real greenbacks. Jim Anderson was extremely generous. Terry Gable, Maury Dyer, and Bill Briska were so moved by Jim's generosity that they also contributed.

Then Jim had a great idea. He has bought a few cars over the years from Woody Buick, and decided to see if Woody Woodring would be able to help. Woody liked the idea and made a major pledge to the Historical Society.

We are still looking for sponsors. Pledges over \$500 will receive a promotional notice at the end of each airing of the show. The first episode began airing in late August. It will be broadcast on:

Sundays at 9:30 A.M.

Mondays at 12:00 noon

Wednesdays at 7:00 P.M.

Fridays at 11:00 A.M.

Saturdays at 5:00 P.M.

It is also online at www.cityofelgin.org/videocenter

Go to the on demand section.

The second episode will be shown sometime in September. Many thanks to Phil Broxham of Grindstone, Jim Anderson, and everyone who has contributed to this project.

Museum Receives EGS Grant

Elizabeth Marston, Museum Director

The Elgin Genealogical Society (EGS) awarded the Museum a \$1,000 Bowser Grant to index several Elgin corporate newsletters held in the collection. During World War II, many Elgin companies added workers and created a newsletter to communicate with the new staff. The Museum has copies of *Cases and Faces* from the Illinois Watch Case Co./Elgin American, *Toastmaster Tattler* from the McGraw-Edison/Toastmaster Company, *Rawhide Roundup* from Chicago Rawhide, and tabloid-format editions of the *Watch Word* newsletter from the Elgin National Watch Company, produced for just a few years in the 1940s. The project also includes the Sherman Hospital Rx and the Fox Valley *Mirror*. The Museum will index the copy and photos by name and subject. The data will be added to the Museum's website and linked to the EGS website by early 2012.

2011 Cemetery Walk

By Steve and Laura Stroud

This year's 24th annual Cemetery Walk will take place on Sunday, September 25, 2011. Starting time is an hour earlier this year to accommodate more visitors, so the hours are from 11 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. at Bluff City Cemetery. Prices are \$8 the day of the event, \$7 for members and in advance, \$5 for seniors and ages 13-18. Children 12 and under are free.

There are several interesting portrayals this year:

- **A husband and wife killed in the disastrous fire at the Iroquois Theater in Chicago**
- **A famous local photographer**
- **A lady from Scotland whose husband was lost at sea**
- **The mother of two little girls who died of scarlet fever and whose husband died later "under suspicious circumstances"**
- **A Civil War nurse**

Come out and enjoy the park-like setting of Bluff City Cemetery and follow the costumed guides on a short walk. There are few events that cost so little, but bring you so much. Next year will be the 25th Annual Cemetery Walk! Great things are already in the planning stages for this spectacular event.

Brian Ellis Gives Civil War Program

David Nelson, Program Chair

On July 14 at the Lords Park Pavilion, we shared a magnificent program with the Elgin Public Museum. "Civil War Ghosts and Legends" was presented by Brian Ellis, a storyteller, author and educator. The dramatic gifts of Mr. Ellis held the audience's attention as he brought to life the various persons and events of the Civil War. The audience erupted into huge applause for a super presentation. Delicious refreshments were enjoyed by the 84 people in attendance.

In Memoriam: Warren Carbary

Warren E. Carbary passed away on July 5, 2011. He is survived by two sons, Jonathan and Warren V., and a daughter, Nancy. His wife Barbara passed away in 2007. Warren was born in Elgin on November 18, 1920, to George D. and Lillian Friedland Carbary.

George D. Carbary, born in Elgin in 1888, was a practicing attorney for 61 years. He was Elgin's city attorney from 1912 to 1915 and Kane County state's attorney from 1928 to 1936. In 1928, as a newly-elected state's attorney, George pledged to crack down on Pro-

hibition violators and immediately launched a series of successful raids in the Elgin area. Promising to never retire, George passed away in 1973, working from his hospital bed up to his death. Lillian, Warren's mom, passed away in 1976.

When Warren was born in 1920, his family lived at 318 Gertrude Street. He was named for Warren G. Harding, who had just been elected President about two weeks before his birth. In 1925, when Warren was five years old, his family built a big brick Italian Renaissance-style home at 226 Wing Park Boulevard. Warren lived there until he was 15 years old, sharing a bedroom with his older brother, George Irwin. He attended Illinois Park School, Grant School and Abbott School.

In a 2001 newspaper interview, while revisiting his childhood home, Warren recalled when his dad met privately in 1929 with three men, one of whom turned out to be Al Capone, Chicago's notorious organized crime kingpin. Capone was there with his bodyguards to intimidate State's Attorney Carbary into allowing gambling at the greyhound racing track that was to be reopened on McLean Boulevard. Warren quoted his dad as saying, "I know who you are. Get your a__ out of Kane County." On opening night of the dog track races, law enforcement officials were positioned at every betting window. The following day the track was burned to the ground in a fire determined to be arson. Warren said, "My dad had a gun on each side of his bed. The hoods threatened to kidnap his kids. My mother and brother and I were sent to California."



In the fall of 1936, following his sophomore year at Abbott School, Warren left home to attend the Northwestern Military & Naval Academy in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, where he graduated in 1938. In 1942 he received his B.S. degree from Harvard University. In World War II, Warren served as a sergeant in the Army Air Corps as a cryptographer for a B-24 Bomber Squadron in the Pacific Theater.

In 1941, Warren began dating Barbara Jean Leigh, a 1940 Elgin High School graduate and one of the first two women to twirl a baton in the EHS marching band. Barbara wanted to become a flight stewardess and, prior to World War II, that meant she needed to

be a registered nurse. She graduated from the Sherman Hospital School of Nursing and worked briefly at Sherman and Delnor hospitals. During World War II, airlines dropped the nursing requirement, but trains still needed RNs as attendants. Barbara got a job as a stewardess on trains from Chicago and St. Louis to Washington, D.C. Following the war, she and Warren were married in 1946. Her railroading days ended when Warren entered the University of Michigan Law School and they moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A 1997 newspaper interview with the couple includes a photo of Barbara that Warren took in 1952 while she was seated on a pillar at Niagara Falls. That photo is juxtaposed with one of Marilyn Monroe taken at the same spot in possibly the same year, to publicize her 1953 movie, "Niagara." Warren had not seen the Marilyn Monroe photo until the week before the interview.

After graduating from law school in 1948, Warren was admitted to the Illinois Bar in January 1949, at which time he joined his dad to form the Carbary and Carbary law firm. He was junior law clerk to Justice William Fulton of the Illinois Supreme Court for two years and was master in chancery for Judge John Barnes of the U.S. District Court in Chicago for one year. In 1964 he served as president of the Kane County Bar Association. In 1975 he was chosen as Boss of the Year by the Kane County Legal Secretaries Association. He had also served as a director for the Union National Bank and Trust Company and as an advisory board member of the Chicago Title Insurance Company in Geneva. In 1999, he was honored by the Illinois State Bar Association for 50 years of legal service.

Warren's son, Jonathan Leigh Carbary, is a third-generation lawyer. He received his law degree in 1978 and practices in Elgin, opening his own firm in 1996.

Dad's Uncle Thee, 1887

Rosemary Pendery

It can be fun to discover what genealogists have found about your ancestors. I got little information from the relatives I interviewed about the early Schmitz family, but I found an abundance of information on the Internet. Starting with Sophia Dehn Draher, I found John Draher III and IV, Sophie Draher Schmitz, William Anton Schmitz, Wilhelm Schmitz I, and Theodore J. Schmitz, Dad's Uncle Thee.

Sophie Draher Schmitz, my father's mother, was a recognized porcelain artist, watercolorist and quilter. She married an entrepreneur who developed a dry goods business in Elgin. Her father-in-law Wilhelm Schmitz I invented the upright back of the cook stove. His son's brother-in-law (and best friend) John Draher IV invented the machinery that made the Arctic shoe

buckle, as well as machines that first manufactured clothing fasteners (the hook and eye) and paper fasteners later known as the staple. But this story is about Wilhelm's youngest son, who came to Elgin in 1886 at 18 with his older brother William A., my grandfather. Theodore Schmitz is credited with a revolutionary idea that probably saved more lives following the invention of the "horseless carriage" than any other.

The first purchase of a "horseless carriage" by an Elgin resident took place in 1900. It was called a Waverly Electric. The top speed of the Waverly was the unheard-of figure of 20 mph. Of course, it had to be plugged in each night to charge its batteries. Car travel gained in popularity and two years later, Elgin had its first car dealership. Business owners as well as residents could see that wagon transportation was definitely on its way out. The harness, the wagon makers and the bicycle dealers quickly switched to selling Ramblers and the forerunner of the Cadillac town car.

By 1905 Elginites owned 60 automobiles. Five more Waverly Electrics were made by the Elgin Sewing Machine and Bicycle Company. There was also a car called "Winner" (only 15 were manufactured) produced by the newly formed Elgin Automobile Company.

Another car most people today have probably never heard of was the Marr Autocar. It was an "in town" vehicle that used one cylinder mounted under the seat. In 1904 the factory burned to the ground and production of the Autocar never resumed. In 1907, another fledgling company was built by two men who owned and operated Van Wambeke's grocery store on Jefferson St. They built eight cars in the back of their store and called them "Vans." These vehicles replaced the store's delivery wagons.



Theodore J. Schmitz, 1918

Traffic increased overnight in downtown Elgin. At first, there were no traffic laws, stop signs, road dividers or speeding tickets. Folks drove pretty much the way they wanted to, much to the distress of horse and buggy drivers. Although horsedrawn wagons continued to supply milk, ice, fresh produce, and other sundries, the horses were often spooked by the auto traffic and ran out of control down the streets until they were cornered and caught. Then, a certain town alderman began racing his Rambler around town at speeds up to 30 miles per hour. The pedestrians and the wagon drivers

demanded that something be done. Speeding laws were quickly put into effect, restricting speeds to 6 mph downtown, 8 mph in residential areas, and 4 mph around corners. Soon vehicles had to be registered and leather license plates with metal numbers were issued.

Enter my great uncle Theodore J. Schmitz, better known to our family as "Uncle Thee." He eventually became a foreman at the Elgin National Watch Company and worked there all his life. He saw the growing chaos in downtown Elgin, and decided to do something about it. Calling all motorized vehicle drivers in Elgin together, he was instrumental in organizing them into the first auto club. The purpose of this club (Elgin Auto Club) was to campaign for better roads.

One evening, as Mr. Schmitz was contemplating how to make driving safer for man, beast, wagon, motorist and pedestrian, like a flash of lightning, he came up with the brilliant idea that if a yellow line was painted down the center of a road, it would improve safety. Almost at once, he began campaigning and telling folks about his idea. Today he is credited with conceiving the yellow painted center line on highways, first in Elgin, then for the state of Illinois, and finally for every highway in the US and in many villages and hamlets abroad.

Motorists and business interests then persuaded the state to pay for more lasting highway construction. In 1917, Kane County had in place the first state funded concrete highway, ever. It ran between Elgin and Aurora, Illinois and was called the Fox River Trail, now known as Route 31.

It wasn't until 1920 that Elgin's streets (which had been either Macadamized or hand-laid with cobblestone many years before) were paved with concrete. In 1927, the first traffic light was installed, just a few blocks from 59 Park Row, Mother's childhood home.

When Mother was a girl and cars were at a premium, a certain James M. Roche attended high school with her. He pumped gas at the local gas station. Graduating high school in 1923, he continued to work around cars. In 1964 he became president of General Motors.

Uncle Thee was always looking for ways to improve roads in and around Elgin. Once he noticed a mud hole on old Lake Street growing bigger and bigger. Because nothing was being done to fix it, he offered to pay the city of Elgin whatever it would cost to fill the hole with concrete. It seems many motorists (including himself) had been trapped in the muck during bad weather. His offer was refused. The local road commissioner at the time informed him the hole was a money making opportunity for local farmers: they were getting \$5.00 for every stuck motor vehicle they towed out of that hole.

Some of this information was provided by Uncle Thee's second wife Eva (Ciocca) Schmitz, and my Aunt Hazel (Schmitz) Wilkening. Other facts were gathered by Mike Alft, Elgin historian and from his book *Elgin: An American History, 1835 – 1985*.

60 Years of Public League Golf

Susan McIntyre

The Elgin Golferettes nine-hole league will celebrate their 60th anniversary on Sept. 10, 2011, with the annual 18-hole tournament and luncheon at Cary Country Club.

The Elgin National Watch Company was one of the largest employers in the entire Midwest for over 100 years. Factory owners hired highly skilled craftspeople to manufacture the watches, and developed a sense of teamwork and community pride by encouraging employee cultural, social and sporting activities.

In 1951, the league called the Wackers was formed to provide recreation for 32 interested female watch factory employees. Three previously established men's leagues (Golfers, Duffers and Hackers) consisted of 104 men. The four groups alternated weekly nine-hole play at one of four local public courses (Bartlett Hills, Villa Olivia, Bonnie Dundee and St. Andrews Country Clubs). The men and women enjoyed a "tee-off" dinner in April and concluded each season with a company-sponsored tournament dinner.

The league is very lucky to have a recollection letter written by original member Bernice Russell. The letter states that the first year, most of the 32 ladies had never played golf, so they scheduled six group lessons with Elgin Country Club pro Willie Leith. The goal for some was to break 90! The tournament took place several times at Cary Country Club. Afterward, the golfers cooled off under the shade trees and imbibed a wonderful concoction of "moose milk." The letter ends with a wish that current members treasure the past, and continue creating fond memories.



The Golferettes

Over the years, the league name became Elgin Golferettes and the ladies became more independent of the men's leagues. The watch factory closed in the 1960s so

other “working girls” were invited to join. Traditions like a business meeting and holiday party were introduced. Past and current members number over 250. In 2011, the Golferettes continue to gather after play, tell stories of their rounds, and share friendships.

In Memoriam: Chuck Emmert, Part 2

David Siegenthaler



Continued from the July edition

In 1960 Chuck came down with a strange illness diagnosed as “stress glaucoma.” He was told he would no longer be able to play handball, but after a layoff of five years, he gradually worked his way back into competition. He had to avoid running hard, so his

game became more strategic and deceptive. He took medication for this condition for the rest of his life.

Chuck went on to win four U.S. Handball Association regional titles in his career, the first two in the Masters division (over 40 years of age), and the other two in the Golden Masters (over 50). He also won the Illinois State Golden Masters title in 1985. In 1999, Chuck was inducted into the Elgin Sports Hall of Fame for his accomplishments on the handball court, and for being an ambassador for the sport of handball and the city of Elgin during his travels around the country. At the time of his induction, he was 71 years old and still competing.

Soon after his dad passed away in 1964, Chuck began dating Judy Eckman, whom he had met at the Crackerjack Company in Chicago, one of his packaging clients. Judy’s job was to design and purchase the tiny prizes inside the Crackerjack boxes. It was difficult to be creative when you have to design kids’ toys with a maximum size limitation of 0.25 x 1 x 1.25 inches, with a maximum cost of a quarter of a cent per prize. Chuck and Judy married in November 1964.

Chuck’s first job out of college in 1951 was with Rheem Manufacturing Company of Chicago, makers of steel tanks and drums. He became a successful salesman there, opening accounts with such firms as General Mills, Pure Oil, Monsanto Chemical, and Anheuser-Busch. In about 1955, the company tried to relocate him to St. Louis. Chuck felt he had too much going for him here. Rather than move, he resigned.

At Rheem, Chuck became friends with Alfred Gruetzmacher, a member of the Chicago Board of Trade who became its chairman in 1980. Al was an enthusiastic advocate of free trade markets and got Chuck started trading commodities. In 1959, Chuck declined

the opportunity to buy a membership in the Chicago Board of Trade for \$4,500. Today that membership would be worth several million dollars.

After resigning from Rheem, Chuck took a sales job with Container Corporation of America, where he worked until 1959. In 1959 he moved to a sales job at International Paper Company and stayed until 1978. The company had a plant in Clinton, Iowa. Chuck realized that he and his customers could commute to Clinton much faster by airplane, but Ozark Airlines had only two inconvenient flights per day to Clinton. So Chuck broke company rules and began chartering small planes to make the trip. His pilot was also an instructor, so Chuck took the opportunity to learn to fly, and soon got his pilot’s license. He had some heart-pounding experiences in small planes but never piloted a plane with any of his clients aboard.

In 1978, Chuck left International Paper to become a Vice President of the St. Regis Paper Company’s Folding Carton division. In 1984, he was hired as President of the Rockford (MI) Paper Company, with a carton plant in Rosemont. In 1990, the Rosemont plant was closed and Chuck did not want to move to Michigan, so he accepted an offer to act as a broker for the firm.

The brokerage business offered no assurances, and Chuck and Judy became concerned about the future. They accepted a friend’s offer to take over his small commodity trading shop for one year as a trial. They had to enroll in classes and pass testing to get licenses. It was not easy and Chuck didn’t finish the course, but Judy did. They put in long hours, but they made no money and decided that the risks outweighed the potential.

Fishing was a big influence in Chuck’s life. After college he became fishing partners with a couple of very successful fishermen who often fished in Wisconsin. Chuck was the greenhorn and they laughed at his college education. They taught him many things about fishing that he could never learn in school.

After his marriage, Chuck built a 150-gallon aquarium in his basement, much to his wife’s dismay. He de-chlorinated and oxygenated the water and filled it with fish he’d caught in the river. There was too much waste for the filters, so he siphoned out waste every morning. One problem he could not overcome occurred every April when the fish spawned. The filters clogged with eggs and milt and the tank quickly filled with egg disease, lethal to the fish. After struggling with this for a couple of years, Chuck began releasing the fish in April and re-populating the tank in June. After eight years, his aquarium adventure ended when the glass cracked and his wife and her friend collected the fish in a wash-tub and freed them in the Elgin Country Club lake.



Chuck was a 50+-year member of the Izaak Walton League and was proud of their Fox River conservation and clean-up efforts. A self-described “river rat,” Chuck probably knew the Fox River in this area better than anyone. He remembered the huge lotus beds in the river during the 1940s. The lotus is beautiful, with giant yellow blossoms, and it provides excellent protection for small fish and other aquatic creatures.

For nearly 20 years, Chuck was obsessed with re-establishing the lotus in the river. He enlisted the aid of ECC biology teacher Bob Steinbach, an expert in aquatic gardening. They went to Grass Lake in Lake County for seeds and rhizomes. The project was unsuccessful because lotus seedlings require protection from fish and birds, but geese gobbled up all they could find. Years ago, geese didn’t live in the area year-round and they weren’t here in the summer when the seedlings are most vulnerable.

In recent years, Chuck championed reintroducing hydro-electric power on the Fox River. Towns like Elgin were situated to harness the energy of the flowing water through a mill race system that powered mills and factories. The Kimball Street dam was part of such a system, and maintained a reservoir of water that was funneled through power-generating turbines located in the lower levels of individual factories.

Chuck’s interest in hydro-electric power was kindled in the 1980s when he was president of Rockford Paper, whose paper mill in Michigan generated electricity from its own dam and power house. Conflicting studies have been done regarding the hydro-electric potential of the Kimball Street dam. Chuck admitted that such a power plant would not put a major dent in Elgin’s power needs, but it could provide electricity to some city buildings and save taxpayer money.

In the 1990s, Chuck compiled a history of the Elgin Country Club from its 1901 founding to 1948. A member of the Club for over 50 years, he played golf, dined and built friendships there since the 1950s. His research required hundreds of hours at the library, scanning many microfilm rolls of old newspapers.

Chuck truly was a “Renaissance Man.” His varied interests often grew into obsessions which dominated his life. How did he have time to pursue all of these interests? Chuck would be the first to tell you. In a 2010 newspaper interview, he said, “...the luckiest part of my life has been my wife, Judy... She bore me three children and did almost all of the work, allowing me the time for all these activities.”