

Building Plaque Application

Name John B. Crowe
Building Address 52 Crighton, Elgin, IL 60120
Building Name _____

Original Owner Sylvanus Wilcox
Date of Construction ca. 1860
Architect (if known) _____
Builder (if known) _____

Check if attached:

☒ **Statement Of Value**

Please review the criteria on page 5. The Elgin Heritage Commission uses these criteria to review your application and award a plaque. Attach an explanation of the historical **and** architectural value of the building. Attach photocopies of relevant materials such as copies of Sanborn maps, original property deeds and City Directory listings. Applications without these requirements will not be considered by the Elgin Heritage Commission.

☒ **Building Alterations**

Describe any alterations to the **exterior** of the building and include dates. Attach description to the application.

☒ **Photograph**

Include a recent photograph in which the building is clearly visible. Additional photographs depicting a close up and details of decorative features are helpful.

Stipulations

If the building is not awarded a plaque, the application fee of \$15.00 will be refunded.

This application and submitted materials shall be retained by the City of Elgin as a part of the permanent record of the building.

The Elgin Heritage Commission has the authority to edit and publish the information submitted in the application. This does not prohibit others from using the information.

When awarded, the plaque will remain the property of the City and cannot be altered or removed from the building. It is the City's responsibility to replace the plaque if and when the situation warrants it.

In addition to agreeing to the above stipulations, the undersigned attests that the information provided is, to the best of his/her knowledge, accurate.

Owner's Signature John B. Crowe

Date 9/29/2000

Signed _____

Date _____

John Crowe, 52 Crighton, Elgin



John Crowe 52 Crighton Elgin

2 Crighton, Elgin
Ivanus Wilcox
Ca. 1860
ned by John Crowe



Statement of Value

52 Crighton

Judge Sylvanus Wilcox

ca. 1860

Architectural Value

52 Crighton is a very good example of an early well-to-do farmhouse. The architectural style is a simple Greek Revival with wide trim at the roofline, a projecting gabled bay, multi-sash windows and wide lintels. It is a simple home with no sidelights or columns. The only architectural ornament are the two decorative attic windows on the north and south side of the house. The quality construction includes walls that are 16 inches thick of solid masonry. The brick is different than anything in the Fox Valley area. The bricks are smaller and much harder than regular valley brick. The current owner, John Crowe is a mason, and has researched the brick to find that it may be expensive pressed brick brought in from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There is one other home in Spring Grove that has similar brick and that family was able to trace the brick to Milwaukee. There are thick stone lintels above each window and stone sills at the bottom. There are two chimneys on the gable sides of the house, which work to heat the home today with only wood stove heat.

An octagon shaped addition for the kitchen was added about 1890 in the same color of yellow brick. The second addition is a louvered-windowed porch added in the 1960s. Plans are underway to remove the second addition and build a period open style porch.

Historical Value

52 Crighton was Judge Wilcox's farm home. The farm was 136 acres beginning at Galena Rd (now Highland) stretching to South Street to the south and from Union St. west past the Elgin city limits at DuBois St. The 1859-1860 Kane County directory lists Sylvanus Wilcox as living on Galena Rd. The Judge's town home was at No. 8 S. Crystal and for a time in the 1870s, the Judge was in partnership with Healy at an office at Bridge (State St.) and Crystal.

Sylvanus Wilcox was the eldest son of Elijah Wilcox who came to Elgin from New York State in 1842. Sylvanus was born in 1818 in New York and attended West Point in 1836, but had to leave school within two years because of poor health. He married Jan Mallory in 1840 and joined his family in Elgin in 1844. Sylvanus studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1846 becoming a successful lawyer. In 1867 he was elected circuit judge and re-elected in 1873, but then became ill again. He was one of the seven immortals that brought the Watch Factory to Elgin in the 1866. He was stockholder, and president of the Elgin Condensed Milk Company for three years. In the 1890s he subdivided his farm property naming the streets after the family, like Wilcox, Schuler (his mother's maiden name), and Mallory after his wife. He also served as Elgin postmaster for four years.

The Wilcox family had national and local significance. Judge Wilcox's great-grandfather was Sylvanus Wilcox, a Revolutionary War hero, his son Sylvanus Jr. was a general in the New York State Militia, and his son, the Judge's father, Elijah Wilcox, was also in the New York militia. Elijah Wilcox was an early trustee of Elgin Academy, serving for 11 years starting in 1843, and also served a four year term as an Illinois State Senator in 1846. Judge Wilcox's brother is John Schuler Wilcox, a lawyer and Civil War hero with the 52nd Illinois Infantry earning the rank of general by 1864. The war caused a hearing problem for John Wilcox so he wasn't able to practice law. He started a number of banks in Elgin and was a board member of a railway company. He and his wife had a comfortable home at 456 Douglas, an 1858 Italianate that is still standing although it has been remodeled many times. In 1882 it was enlarged and remodeled into an Eastlake style. John Wilcox retired to California in 1920s.

Age of Building

The house was built right around 1860. Sylvanus Wilcox purchased the farmland that the house stands on from the Kimball Family sometime after 1855, using the 1855 plat map at the Elgin Area Historical Society as a source. The Kimball's are listed as owners of that property in 1855. The Kane County Directory for 1859-1860 has S. Wilcox's home listed as Galena Rd. The next available Elgin directory is 1867, the year that he was elected judge, which lists him still on Galena. Future directories list him on Crystal St., but for at least five years when he wasn't feeling well he lived on the farm property. It is appropriate for the house to have a date of ca. 1860.

Documentation

1. Courier News article on 52 Crighton.
2. 1859-60 and 1867 Directories
3. 1870 Plat map
4. Wilcox Family stories by Hazel Belle Perry, 1969
5. Wilcox genealogy
6. Kane County Biography, 1907
7. Wilcox references from *Elgin: An American History*, *Days Gone By*, and Hazel Belle Perry articles.

MICK ZAWISLAK

Mason finds history in brick and mortar

Bits of history are spread on the dining room table, including an abstract of title that was painstakingly scripted more than a century ago on what now are brittle pages.

Fuzzy copies of plat maps from the Civil War era, scraps of paper filled with dates gathered during impromptu research expeditions, and copies of newspaper clippings are also used to fill gaps in the story of one old home on Elgin's near west side.

Outside, a bank of scaffolding fronts the north wall, the apparatus on which John Berkey Crowe continues a tradition dating to the ancients, his way of completing the circle at 52 Crighton Ave.

"I was the perfect guy for the house, and it was the perfect house for me," says Crowe, a chimney sweep and mason who finds inspiration in old structures.

Crowe's castle is on a hill along this out-of-the way street that was once part of a 136-acre farm owned by Silvanus

Wilcox, a judge and influential resident of early Elgin who was instrumental in enticing Elgin National Watch Co. to town.

The Wilcox family had deep roots in the area, and its legacy continues in the names of surrounding streets — Wilcox, Mallery, Shuler.

Elijah Wilcox was a prominent military man in New York state and became a general in the militia before becoming a farmer.

In 1842, he headed west, staking a claim to farm land in Elgin, believed to be near Big Timber Road. He soon was elected a state senator and continued to live on the farm while fathering 10 children.

One son, Silvanus, had been a cadet at West Point but was forced to resign after three years because of ill health that would continually plague him.

Silvanus studied law and then joined his family in Elgin in 1844. He served as Elgin postmaster for a time, joining three brothers who held the post at one time or another. Later, he would serve for seven years as circuit court judge for Kane, DuPage and Kendall counties.

Crowe believes that Silvanus Wilcox lived on the west-side Elgin property beginning in the early 1850s and finished constructing the existing house in 1863.

With maple floors, crown molding in all of what were then spacious rooms, banks of windows (most with the original glass intact) and a surprisingly efficient ventila-

tion system, the brick home was elaborate for the time.

"This was meant to be very masculine and plain on the outside; all the elegance is on the inside," says Crowe.

"The style is Colonial Federal — it was L-shaped, and it looks bigger than it is because the walls are so thick."

Constructed of four courses, the brick walls are 16 inches thick and are a mystery of sorts.

"The brick on this house is smaller than the normal brick (used in the area). It may be from around here, but there's nothing else like it," says Crowe, who said he has noticed the same brick on what he believes was the Wilcox homestead.

Crowe is in the process of "repointing" the old brick, fixing cracks and generally restoring the joints. That is where an age-old mixture comes into play.

Modern mortar, made of Portland cement, does not allow the bricks to "breathe," according to Crowe. Instead, the only mixture that will work on the old house is lime putty mortar, the same used in its construction.

Lime putty, says Crowe, is made by burning limestone at a temperature of up to 2,000 degrees, which removes water and carbon dioxide.

The result is quick lime, an extremely caustic substance that is dangerous to handle.

Mixed with water and then aged for three months, the substance dries rock hard after it is applied and is not prone to cracking and shifting, as is modern mortar.

That method was used in the construction of the Great Wall of China and ancient Greece, says Crowe. A premixed version has been available in the United States for the past year, but Crowe has found it to be too expensive and continues to mix his own.

"That's the only way it should be done," he says of ongoing repairs. "This house is 135 years old."

Wilcox moved out in 1870, and the home has had only five subsequent owners, including Jessie Creighton, for whom the street is named (but not spelled the same way). Crowe says he would like to assemble a full and complete history of the structure and occupants to get landmark status.

"In the summer, with those trees, it's like the woods," he says of the area outside the dining room.

"You know in your heart the feeling that people have been here a real long time."



THE COURIER NEWS

52 Crighton Ave., Elgin.

We're Making

Dennis Roxworthy

**Elgin Heritage Commission
Building Plaque Program**

Property Address: 52 Crichton Avenue

Total Points: 74

Criteria

Points

1. Architectural Value (20 points)

Is the building a particular example of a particular architectural style and/or construction technique? Have the distinctive architectural details of the building been preserved or refabricated as closely as possible - especially in regards to additions or alterations?

18

2. Maintenance (20 points)

Is the building and its outside buildings and grounds well maintained in regards to the condition of siding, paint, roofing, fencing, sidewalks and drive, landscaping and shrubbery?

17

3. Historical Value (20 points)

Is the building associated with people, groups or events that contributed to the historical, economical, cultural, social or development patterns.

19

4. Age of Building (20 points)

See below for formula

20

<u>Points</u>	<u>Yr. of Construction</u>
20	Before 1865
19	1866 to 1872
18	1873 to 1878
17	1879 to 1884
16	1885 to 1891
15	1892 to 1897
14	1898 to 1904
13	1905 to 1910
12	1911 to 1917
11	1918 to 1923
10	1924 to 1930

<u>Points</u>	<u>Yr. of Construction</u>
9	1931 to 1936
8	1937 to 1942
7	1943 to 1949
6	1950 to 1955
5	1956 to 1962
4	1963 to 1968
3	1969 to 1975
2	1976 to 1981
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0	1989 or later

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STROW

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Pat

**Elgin Heritage Commission
Building Plaque Program**

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HART

Elgin Heritage Commission Building Plaque Program

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Todd & McNeil, grocers, Chicago st
co. River.
Tourtelot A. G., h Kimball st cor
Mill.
Towner J. C., blacksmith, h Pinnacle
n Dundee.
Treadwell William M., h Geneva st n
Fulton.
Treniar —, lab, for A. J. Waldron.
Truesdell Burgess, h Center st bet
Fulton and Prairie.
Truesdell Charles, h Pinnacle n Mill
street.
Truesdell Eugene, h with B Truesdell.
TRUESDELL JAMES N., DENTIST,
Chicago st bet Mill and Spring.
(See adv.)
Truesdell William H., h Pinnacle n
Mill st.
Tuerney James, lab, h Geneva st n
Dupage.
Turner A., physician, h Crystal cor
Mountain.
Tuttel Horrace, teamster, h Bridge st.
Tweddale James, student, with Mc-
Clure & Merrifield.
Tyler L. S., h Chicago st bet Chapel
and Gifford.

(U)

Underhill George W., carpenter, h
Ball st n Elm.
Underhill Monroe, lab, h Main N of
Mill.
Underwood —, cooper, h Center n
North.

(V)

Vail Robert S., manufr and dealer in
boots and shoes, cor Chicago and
Mill st, h Dupage n N Center.
Van Nostrand Peter, furniture dealer,
River st n Chicago, h Chicago st.
Vastine Louis B., dry goods, etc, Chi-
cago st bet Mill and Spring, h
Chapel st n Chicago.
Vaunibush William, h River cor Dex-
ter st.

(W)

Wadsack William, druggist, Chicago
st n City Hotel.

Waite Arthur, blacksmith, h Clinton
road.
Waite John, carpenter, h Cherry st
cor N Center.
Waite Thomas H., h River st n Fulton.
WALDRON A. J., ATTORNEY. IN-
SURANCE AGT, Union Hall Bk
h Gifford st n Villa. (See adv.)
Walker Abel, undertaker, Dupage st
n Geneva.
Walker Charles, butcher, h Chicago
st n Geneva.
Walker Rev. Wareham, Baptist min-
ister, h Gifford st bet Prairie and
Villa.
Walker William, clerk, with S. D.
Wilder.
Wallace Mathew, books and station-
ery, Chicago st n Fox River.
Walter Christian, cooper, River st n
Dupage.
Walters Joseph, bookkeeper, h River
st n North.
Ward Henry, stonecutter, h W Villa
W of Summit.
Warden William, carpenter, h Gifford
st n Dupage.
Ward William J., painter, h W Villa
st W of Summit.
WARD S. G., MARBLE MANUFAC-
TURER, LIME, CEMENT, &c.,
Chicago cor Spring, bds City
Hotel. (See adv.)
Weatherill Lawrence, physician, h cor
Milwaukee and Spring st.
Webster Benjamin, painter, Union
Hall Bk, Mill st.
Webster Frederick F., clerk, with J.
P. Morgan.
Welch Elbert, h Pinnacle N of Dun-
dee st.
Welch Mrs. Phoebe, wid, h Dundee
N of Pinnacle st.
WESSNER MATHIAS, PROPRIE-
TOR WESSNER BEER SA-
LOON, River st n Chicago st.
Wester Benjamin, h Gifford cor Pin-
nacle.
Wester Frederick, clerk, h Gifford
cor Pinnacle.
Westover L. H., h Dundee cor Pin-
nacle st.
Wheaton Hosea, carpenter, h Chicago
st n Chapel.

Whedon Edmond, carpenter, h Ann
n Mill st.
Wheeler Benjamin D., lab h Dundee
N of Pinnacle st.
Wheeler Rev. C., Methodist minister,
h Spring st n City Hotel.
Whidden J. M., h Division st n
Chapel.
White John J., dry goods, etc, Chi-
cago st bet Mill and Spring, h
Prairie n River.
Whitcomb, E. R., h Chicago st n Gif-
ford.
Whitford Henry K., physician, h Dun-
dee cor Ann st.
Whittemore Mrs. H., h Crystal n
Washington.
Wilber Joshua, carpenter, Division st
bet College and N Center st.
Wilcox John, h Mill st cor Seneca.
WILCOX JOHN S., ATTORNEY,
Office over J. Parker's store, h
Mill st cor Seneca.
(Wilcox Sylvanus, attorney, cor Crys-
tal and Bridge st, h Galena st.)
Wilder S. D., dry goods, etc, Com-
mercial Bk, Chicago st, h Villa
n Lake.
Wilkins Benjamin, artist, with R. W.
Padelford.

Winchester Edgar, physician, h Du-
page st bet Geneva and Chapel.
Wishart Robert, carpenter, h cor Mill
st and Division.
Works George, (of Renwick & W.),
h Center cor Dupage.
Wright D., carpenter, h Crystal st N
of Mill.
Wright F. W., h Chicago st n Gif-
ford.
Wright Joseph, turner, h Clinton rd.
Wright Samuel N., farmer, Clinton
road.

(Y)

Yarwood Henry, (of L. H. & Co.,) h
Park st n College.
Yarwood James R., (of R. L. & J. R.)
h Milwaukee st n Mill.
Yarwood L. H. & Co., druggists, Chi-
cago st bet Mill and Spring.
Yarwood Louis H., (of L. H. & Co.,)
h Park st n College.
Yarwood Reuben L., (of R. L. & J. R.,)
h Division n Mill st.
Yarwood R. L. & J. R., dry goods,
etc, River st n Chicago.

Kane County Directory
1859-1860

Webster Sarah E., teacher northwest school, West Elgin
 Webster Virgil A., drayman G. Hassan
 Webster & Co., (Benjamin and Dean S.,) house and sign painters w s Broadway, 2 s Bridge
 Welch Elbert, teamster, bds R. Welch
 Welch Phoebe, wid William, bds R. Welch
 Welch Renal, mason, h e s Dundee, 3 n Franklin
 Wells —, wks Watch Factory, h n s Chicago, 3 e Spring
 Wells Carmi, cabinetmkr G. W. Kimball, h n s Chicago, 3 e Gifford
 Wells Hubbard, teamster, bds C. Wells
 Welsby Jonathan, wks National Watch Co.
 West Erastus, bds George Ostrander
 Westover Layman, street commissioner, h n s Kimball, 2 e N. Center
 Whaland John, wks Fox River Woolen Mills, h N. Broadway, near Tazewell's brewery
 Wheaton Eunice, wid Hosea, h n s Chicago, 1 e Geneva
 Wheaton Frank, bds Mrs. E. Wheaton
 Wheeler Arthur S., wks National Watch Co., bds Chicago, n w cor N. Center
 Wheeler David B., wks National Watch Co., h n w N. Center and Chicago
 Wheeler George M., sec'y National Watch Co., bds Waverly House
 Whedon Edmund L., carpenter, h n s Ann, 2 w Spring
 Whedon Louisa, wid Adolphus, h n s Division, 6 e N. Center
 Whitcomb E. K., lumber dealer Wisconsin, h s w cor Chicago and Gifford
 White George W., patternmkr National Watch Co., h s w cor Villa and St. Charles road
 White Maggie, wks National Watch Co.
 White P. B., traveling salesman, bds City Hotel
 Whitehouse Albert, engineer National Watch Co., bds Mrs. E. S. Fowler
 Wilford H. K., physician and surgeon, office S. A. French & Co., h n w cor Park and Dundee.
 Whittemore Harriet, wid Thomas H., h n w cor Washington and Crystal
 Whittle Harrison, lab, h s w cor Center and Fulton
 Wilber George D., physician, office, Home Bank bldg, h n s N. Division, nr N. Center
 Wilbur Lorenzo B., carpenter and builder, h n s DuPage, 3 e Chapel
 Wilbur George, bds R. W. Padelford
 Wilbur Joshua M., architect and builder, h n s Division, 5 e N. Center.
 Wilcox Charles E., salesman M. & J. McNeil, bds same
 Wilcox Edward S., (Wilcox & O'Connell,) h e s Dundee, opp N. Division
 Wilcox John S., attorney at law, office, over First National Bank, h n w cor Seneca and Mill
 Wilcox Sylvanus, (Wilcox & Healy,) h s s Galena, 5 w Grove
 Wilcox Vernon O., (Gage & Wilcox,)
 Wilcox W. B., dry goods and groceries, 15 Chicago, bds N. J. Bloomfield

WILCOX & O'CONNELL,

(E. S. Wilcox and Charles O'Connell,) groceries and notions, s s Chicago, 4 e of the Bridge. (See card page 8.)

Home Ins. Co. of New York. Capital \$3,714,669,
 Padelford & Yarwood, Agents, Court House, Elgin.

Wilcox & Healy, (S. Wilcox and J. Healy,) lawyers, s w cor 1 and Crystal
 Wilder Samuel D., (S. D. Wilder & Co.,) bds E. W. Cornell
WILDER S. D. & CO.,
 (Samuel D. Wilder and Benjamin C. Wilkins,) dealers in furniture, repairing and upholstering, 4 Market sq.
 Wilkie Charles A., salesman John J. Wilkie, bds City Hotel
WILKIE JOHN J.,
 books and stationery, and toys, 24 Chicago, h St. Charles. card p. 7.)
 Wilkins Benjamin C., (S. D. Wilder & Co.,) bds E. W. Cornell
 Wilkins John, watchman National Watch Co., h e s River, 2 n La
 Willard George D., physician, bds R. W. Padelford
 Williams —, h n s Ann, 4 w Dundee
 Williams John, h s w cor Franklin and Gifford
 Wills —, engraver National Watch Co.
 Willsby —, wks National Watch Co., h East City Limits, bet and Raymond
 Wiltsey Jerome, teamster, h n s DuPage, 2 e Gifford
 Winchester Edgar, (E. & W. Winchester,) bds Mary L. Dickenson
 Winchester William, (E. & W. Winchester,) h s w cor N. Center North
 Winchester William, dentist student P. B. Pratt & Son, bds Mrs. L. Dickenson
 Winchester E. W., physician and surgeon, room 7 and 8 Home Bldg.
 Wing A. C., Mrs., preceptress Elgin Academy.
 Wing William, Mrs., asst. teacher High School, bds Kimball House
 Wolaver Fordham, bds E. W. Vining
 Wolaver Nicholas C., bds E. W. Vining.
 Woodruff Cyrus H., (Elgin Butt Co.,) h Dundee
 Woods E. M., h w s Broadway, 4 s Locust
 Worrell Elizabeth, wid John H., h n e cor Ann and Spring
 Wright John, farmer, h w s Grove, 2 s Galena
 Wright Joseph, wood turner, h e s Broadway, bet River and Wa

A. B. Little

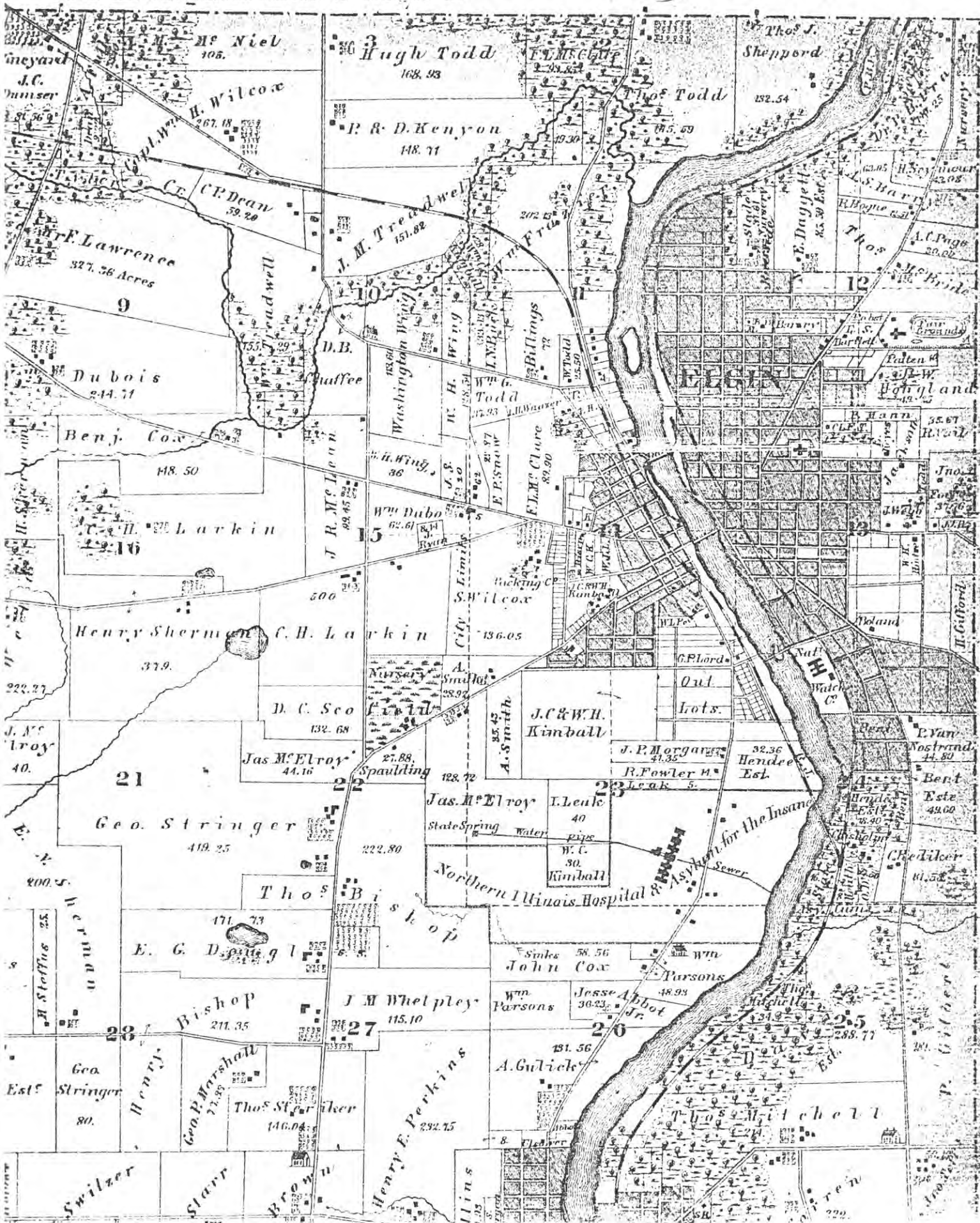
YARBRAUGH Mollie E., bds City Hotel
 Yarwood James, painter, h s s Park, 3 e Dundee
 Yarwood L. H., (Padelford & Yarwood,) h College, cor Park
 Yarwood R. L., wid Reuben L., h n e cor Division and Mill
 Young Adam, blacksmith John Young
 Young Conrad, cabinetmkr Wilder & Short, h s s Kimball, bet and Mill
 Younger Kate, wid Alexander, h n e cor River and Back.
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION ROOMS,
 House

Phoenix Ins. Co. of Hartford. Capital \$1,200,000
 Padelford & Yarwood, Agents, Court House, Elgin.

OF ELGIN TOWNSHIP

1870

TOWN 4 NORTH RANGE 8 EAST OF THE 3 P. M.



Old Elgin Tales



Jan. 22, 1969 Hazel Belle Perry



JUDGE SYLVANUS WILCOX

The Wilcox Family

CONTINUED

Last week's article about Old Elgin, we learned what a team Elijah Wilcox and his sons made in many years of service to the young town of Elgin. Today, we see how well those sons carried on the various services in Elgin which their father had shown them how to do by their own example. We will also see how these Wilcox boys lived on bravely in helping our city to become one that led the good life to all its people.

First, we must go back in the years to see how Elijah Wilcox tried to prepare his oldest son Sylvanus, for the life of endeavor they had planned for him. Sylvanus was born in Montgomery County, N.Y., Sept. 30, 1818, the fourth of six children. His father's home was in the town of Amsterdam, which was not far away, and he made such a good record in his studies that in 1836, he was appointed a cadet at West Point. His entrance examinations placed him fifth from the top of the whole West Point class that year, and he continued to make such good records that the family and the relatives were sure that this young man was going to become a very hero like his grandfather, Sylvanus Wilcox of revolutionary fame. But before two years had passed, it was evident that young Sylvanus did not have the health needed for cadet training and in 1839, he was forced to resign. For two years, he tried to regain his health, but with little success. For a time, he acted as a doctor for his father on a line of boats that ran from New York to Ulster. In 1840, he married Jane Mallory, and had a son he called Sylvanus. And in 1844, he moved with his wife and child to Elgin where his father and the rest of his family had gone two years before.

As soon as he and his family were settled in Elgin, Sylvanus began the study of law and in 1846, he was admitted to the bar. He was successful in his law practice from the start, and in 1867, was elected circuit judge. In 1873, he was re-elected, but the next year, he was forced to resign again because of ill health. The next two or three years were spent in trying to regain his health and in working on private matters. In 1891, he platted some of his farm land to make city lots. He became a stockholder in the Elgin Condensed Milk Co., and was its president for three years. He also helped organize the Packing Co., and had a part in bringing the Watch Factory to Elgin. While he was trying to regain his health, Judge Wilcox traveled extensively in the far west, visiting Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Portland, Tacoma and Sitka, Alaska. He spent one winter in Mexico. In spite of all the trouble he had with poor health, Judge Sylvanus Wilcox always showed a well-trained and well-balanced mind and all Elgin came to honor and rely on his just decisions and his sound legal advice. His son, Sylvanus Jr., died at age 32, which was a hard blow for his father.

During the most of Judge Wilcox's life in Elgin, he lived in his familiar home on the west side bluff, which through the years, bore the address No. 8 S. Crystal St. For a time, he was in partnership with Healy in an office at the corner of Bridge and Crystal. Five of the years he was fighting for health, Judge Sylvanus lived on his farm.

John Shuler Wilcox probably was the most versatile of the sons. At least, he seems to have tried out the greatest number of jobs during his lifetime. He was only nine years old when he came to Elgin with his parents, brothers and sisters from New York State, and settled on the large farm which for so many years, was called the Wilcox Homestead. Under his father's training, he was soon able to handle even such difficult jobs as plowing the wild land with seven yoke of oxen. No job, no matter how difficult, daunted John Shuler. And this young man had the happy faculty of seeing the beauty that was all about him whether in cultivated gardens or in the prairie wilderness.

Here are a few lines of his description of Wilcox Homestead as he saw it in those early days of 1842:

"The lurid gleam of prairie fires against the horizon of night was a common sight. Sandhill cranes, wild ducks and geese abounded. Prairie chickens and quails covered the prairies and vast flocks of wild pigeons darkened the sky in their annual migrations. The songs of the brown thrush, robin, oriole, cat bird, lark, bobolink and other birds filled grove and prairie with music. Myriads of wild flowers bloomed from early spring to late autumn and it was indeed a beautiful and fertile land."

John Shuler's first job outside the home farm was as clerk in a general store in the little town of Union, McHenry County. In 1852, he went to a college in Galesburg, Ill., and studied law for a year and a half, after which he studied under the direction of his brother, Sylvanus. He was admitted to the bar in 1855. That same winter, John Shuler was president of a club called the Young Men's Assn. and he conceived the plan of having the YMA present to Elgin audiences, a series of lectures by America's top-ranking speakers and literary men of the time. It was a most successful venture, and Elgin heard in the old brick church auditorium such men as Wendell Phillips, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Bayard Taylor and Emerson. John Wilcox himself became known as Elgin's Silver-tongued Orator.

In 1856, John married Lois Conger, and the young couple built a spacious home at 456 Douglas Ave., which for many years, was one of the most hospitable homes in our city.

The Civil War interrupted the very successful legal practice of John Wilcox, but it did give him the title of General which we called him all the rest of his life, and it did give him the opportunity to campaign for Abraham Lincoln, in which the General Wilcox silver-tongued oratory had much to do with the victory of Lincoln. But the General's hearing became impaired during the war, so that he had to give up his law practice. The things he did do for Elgin in his last years are so many, that we can name but a few: Incorporated and was director of First National Bank, also the Elgin City Banking Co.; served as mayor; president of Elgin Agricultural Society; lowered freight rates on Elgin railroads; built up a large fuel trade in Elgin. He died in California, where he went to retire.

Old Elgin Tales



Jan. 15, 1969 Hazel Belle Perry



ELIJAH WILCOX

Elijah Wilcox, Father of the Elgin Wilcoxes

There is little doubt that few of all the families that have contributed fine service to our city throughout its history can equal the total number of years of service that is represented in the story of the father and sons team created in the history of the Elgin Wilcox family.

Take, for instance, the data about the trustees of the Elgin Academy in its early years. General Elijah Wilcox, the father of Sylvanus Wilcox and John Schuler Wilcox, had just come west with his family and taken a claim of nearly three hundred acres of wild prairie land, two and a half miles northwest of Elgin. Knowing that he must immediately put up some sort of protection from the elements and the wild wolves for his wife and children, he erected a cabin with shake roof and puncheon floor, and then, he bravely started the task of taming the wild prairie to make it yield the crops he wanted.

You would know by the ruggedness of his features that Elijah was a man of strong will, dauntless courage and determination. He did conquer that wild prairie land and make a highly productive and beautiful farm of it. The son, John Shuler, who was only nine years old when they moved west and took up the farm, used to tell of helping his father plow that wild prairie. John recalled that his father taught him to drive the breaking team of seven yoke of oxen hitched to a great plow which would turn with every furrow, 27 inches of prairie sod, clean cut and straight as a ribbon.

But Elijah Wilcox was not only a man of determination with a will to tame the wilderness. He was also a dreamer, who planned great things for the future of his children. Although he had not had much formal education for himself, he spent much time planning for the education of his children and for all the children of this Fox Valley area. That is why, just about a year after he came west, he joined a group of men who were also dreamers. They were the board of trustees of Elgin Academy.

At that time, 1843, there was no academy building, even any site for such a building. There was only the board of men who for several years had been determined there was going to be an academy, and who met frequently to discuss what should be the guiding purpose of the school; what should be the courses of study, and to enthuse the community with the great good that would come out of establishing the academy. So, Trustee Elijah Wilcox dreamed and planned with the other trustees until finally, they dreamed the Elgin Academy into existence.

Elijah Wilcox died in 1862, just six years after the Academy doors had opened. He had served as a trustee for eleven years, the eleven years when it took the most faith and determination to make the academy come true. His oldest son, Sylvanus, carried on the Wilcox service by being a trustee from 1865 until 1890, a period of 25 years. John Shuler, the younger son, joined his brother as a trustee in 1872, and carried on for at least 22 years, and it may have been longer, for records are missing. So, the father and sons team served the academy a total of at least 58 years. During that period, the Wilcox men served as president of the board of trustees for five years.

One other interesting case of the Wilcox family duplicating the kind of service rendered to Elgin, has to do with holding the position of postmaster. Through the years, four of the sons of Elijah Wilcox held the job of Elgin Postmaster — Sylvanus for 4 years, Edward S. for 2 years, John Shuler for 4 years and William H. for 3 years. So the Wilcoxes held the job for a total of 13 years.

Let it also be noted that the Wilcox family had many heroes going back to the earliest of the Revolutionary soldiers, and many of the family bore titles of military rank.

The deeds of this brave and patriotic Wilcox family are a vital part of our American history. The family tree can be traced back to one William Wilcockson (for that is how the name was originally spelled), who came to America in 1635.

One of the first town meetings held in this country, was that held in Alford in 1775. At that meeting, a Sylvanus Wilcox, who was born Nov. 14, 1735, was elected constable and collector of taxes. Also, this Sylvanus became one of the selectmen of the town, which office he held for five terms. This same Mr. Wilcox was later appointed to serve on the "Safety Committee" to alert the town if any unfriendly moves were made by the British. That Sylvanus Wilcox became one of the heroes of the Revolutionary War, and won the title of captain. His son, called Sylvanus Jr., attained the rank of General in the New York State Militia. And that Sylvanus Jr. was the father of the man we have been talking about today — Elijah Wilcox, born in Montgomery County, New York State, May 10, 1791. Elijah married Sally Shuler, also from one of the prominent old families of New York State. They had ten children, eight of whom lived to adulthood and made honored names for themselves. Elijah Wilcox died in 1862, leaving his sons to carry on for him.

Of those sons who moved with their parents to the farm that came to be known as the Wilcox Homestead, about two and a half miles northwest of Elgin, there are so many interesting stories to be told that we have not told before, that we will make next week's Old Elgin Tales the fascinating story of the variety of interests which the Wilcox sons carried on for the good life in Elgin.

ELIJAH WILCOX

Questionnaire prepared June 14, 1881 by
his son, John Shuler Wilcox.

Son of Silvanus Wilcox & Sarah (Johnson) Wilcox
Born in Glen, Montgomery Co., New York
On 10 May 1792
Died in Elgin, Ill.
On 11 Dec. 1862

Married in Florida, Montgomery Co., N.Y.
On 26 Aug. 1813 to MISS SALLY SHULER

She was daughter of John Shuler & Hannah (Buck) Shuler
She was born in Florida, N.Y.
On 17 Mar. 1791
She died in Elgin, Kane Co., Ill.
On 2 April 1875.

CHILDREN OF ELIJAH WILCOX & SALLY (SHULER) WILCOX

	BORN	DIES
1. Amelia Ann	Charleston, NY 27 Nov. 1814	Elgin, Ill. 12 Oct 1868
2. John Shuler	" 13 Sep. 1816	Charleston NY 11 Nov 1832
3. Silvanus	" 30 Sep. 1818	
4. Rensalaer	" 3 Dec. 1820	Charleston NY 8 Sep 1822
5. Daniel Shuler	" 23 Jun. 1823	Belvidere Ill 11 Jan 1855
6. Calvin E.	" 2 Dec. 1825	Acapulco, Mex. 24 Apr 1851
7. Edward Sanford	" 25 Feb. 1828	
8. Hannah Maria	" 14 Dec. 1830	
9. John Shuler #2	Glen, NY 18 Mar. 1833	
10. William H.	" 13 Jan. 1836	

	MARRIED	PRESENT ADDRESS
1. Amelia	15 July 1834	John Hill Elgin, Ill.
3. Silvanus	27 Aug 1840	Jane Mallery
5. Daniel	20 Jan. 1847	Sarah Ballard
6. Calvin	26 Aug. 1846	Emily Larkin
7. Edward	6 Jan. 1853	Sarah Clark Genoa, Ill.
8. Hannah	28 May 1855	Charles R. Collin Elgin, Ill.
9. John	3 Sep. 1856	Lois A. Conger "
10. William	19 Jan. 1857	Mary Green "

NOTES

1. Amelia's husband, John Hill was Mayor of Elgin, one term
3. Silvanus served one term as Circuit Judge; was re-elected and resigned because of impaired health
5. Daniel's wife, Sarah was daughter of Ezekiel Ballard. After Daniel's death (1855) she Mar. James H. Davis of Elgin, Ill.
6. Calvin's wife, Emily was daughter of Cyrus Larkin. After Calvin's death (1851) she Mar. David W. Scofield of Elgin.
7. Edward's wife, Sarah died in Elgin 7 Oct. 1861 (age 22 yrs.) Edward Mar. (2) Delia (Peck) Alston, a widow on 8 Oct. 1862
10. William's wife, Mary died. William Mar. (2) on 25 Nov. 1879 to Nelly Green, a widow.

ELIJAH WILCOX (Continued)

ELIJAH WILCOX removed from the town of Glen, Montgomery Co., N.Y.
 He first arrived in Elgin, Ill. on 8 May 1842.
 He first resided on SE Frac. of Section 4
 OCCUPATION: FARMER

He was Supt. of poor of Montgomery County, N.Y.
 Collector of Tolls on the Erie Canal, N.Y.
 He was Commissioner to locate State Road Chicago to Galena, Ill.
 He was State Senator in 1846 and held other minor offices -
 can't give dates.

MILITARY HISTORY

He was Captain, Colonel, and Brigadier General in the New York
 State Militia.
 He was too old for service himself (in Civil War)
 He encouraged his 3 youngest sons:
 Edward, John and William
 to serve in the 52nd Ill. Infantry Vols. during the Rebellion
 of 1861-65.

than for the party which he represents. Socially, he is a prominent Mason, belonging to Elgin Lodge No. 422, F. & A. M., and the consistory and Medinah Temple of the Syrian Shrine of Chicago. He also belongs to the Uniformed Rank, Knights of Pythias. He takes a deep interest in everything pertaining to the public welfare of his adopted city, and withholds his support from no enterprise calculated to prove of benefit to the people. His wife is a member of the Presbyterian church, and a member of the Elgin Woman's Club and the Elgin Anti-Slavery Society, and in the social circles of Elgin they occupy an enviable position.

JOHN SILVANUS WILCOX, ex-judge of the twenty-seventh judicial circuit of Illinois, now residing on the corner of Bridge and West Chicago streets, Elgin, is one of the best-known and most distinguished citizens of Kane county. He was born in Charleston, Montgomery county, New York, September 30, 1818, and is a son of Elijah and Sally (Shuler) Wilcox, both of whom were natives of New York, the former born in Charley, and the latter in the town of Florida, Montgomery county. Of thirteen children, eight grew to manhood and womanhood, and five are yet living—Silvanus, our subject, Hannah Maria, wife of Charles R. Collins, of Elgin; Edward Sanford, of Cloud Chief, Oklahoma; John E., of Elgin; and Captain William H., also of Elgin.

John Wilcox was a man of marked ability, and in his native state was duly honored by his fellowmen. For some years he served as county commissioner of Montgomery county, was collector of toll on the

Erie canal, and held various town offices. He also served as general in the state militia. By occupation he was a farmer. In 1842 he came to Illinois, bringing his family with him, and located on a farm of three hundred acres two and a half miles west of Elgin. Three years later he was elected a member of the state senate, the duties of which office he discharged in a most satisfactory manner. The farm on which he settled was in an almost primitive condition, and he at once began its improvement. His death occurred there in 1862 at the age of seventy-two years. His wife survived him some years, dying at the age of eighty-five. In early life she was a Presbyterian, but later in life became a Universalist, accepting the faith of her husband, who was steadfast in that belief.

The paternal grandfather of our subject, Silvanus Wilcox, was a native of Dutchess county, New York, of Welsh origin. He was a Revolutionary soldier, and was one of the guard at Tarrytown when Major Andre was captured, and was present at the execution. His death occurred at Fultonville, Montgomery county, New York, when he was eighty-seven years old.

The maternal grandfather, John Shuler, was also a native of New York, born near Catskill, of German parents. For years he served as justice of the peace and held other minor offices in the town of Florida, Montgomery county. He was a very able man and one of strong intellect. He was eighty-six years old at the time of his death.

The subject of this sketch was reared in his native county, and received his primary education in the common schools of the town in which the family resided. Later he attended the academy at Amsterdam, and in July, 1836, was appointed a cadet at

West Point, his examination giving him fifth place in a class of fifty. On account of failing health he resigned August 15, 1839. His room mates were H. W. Halleck, R. Q. Butler, Stewart Van Vliet and Schuyler Hamilton, all of whom are dead except Van Vliet. In 1861, at the Planters House in St. Louis, he met Hamilton going up the stairs and accompanied him to Halleck's room. He was a great friend of these gentlemen, and on meeting them Halleck exclaimed "Wilcox, I thought you were dead." He corresponded with them all through the war. Besides those mentioned, William T. Sherman and George H. Thomas, both famous generals of the Civil war, were his classmates. The following is a letter to Mr. Wilcox from the superintendent of the military academy at West Point:

MILITARY ACADEMY,
WEST POINT, December 4, 1839. }

Mr. S. Wilcox:

SIR: Your friend, Cadet Van Vliet, has requested me in your behalf for such a statement of standing and merit in your studies and character relative to conduct, as the records of this institution will enable me to give.

It appears that you joined the Academy as a cadet in July, 1836, and that, at the last examination at which you were present, the Academic staff pronounced you the fourth in order of merit in mathematics, the ninth in French, and the thirteenth in drawing; which, when compared with the rest of your class, then consisting of fifty members, secured you the fifth place in general merit. It also appears from the records of the Institution that you left here in bad health, and that, after a protracted illness of more than a year, you tendered your resignation,

which was accepted by the secretary of war, to take effect the 15th of August, 1839.

It gives me much pleasure to have it in my power to put you in possession of such highly favorable testimonials of your conduct and talents when a member of this Institution.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

RICHARD DELAFIELD.

Major of Engineers, Superintendent of Military Academy.

For over two years after his resignation from West Point Mr. Wilcox was an invalid, but in 1840 he came west to Elgin, and located some land in that vicinity. Returning to New York for a time, he acted as agent for his father for a line of boats running from New York City to Utica.

On the 27th of August, 1840, Mr. Wilcox was united in marriage with Miss Jane Mallory, daughter of Henry and Polly Bent Mallory, of Yankee Hill, town of Florida, Montgomery county, New York. One son was born to this union, Silvanus Marcus, who died at the age of thirty-two years. Mrs. Wilcox died in Elgin April 24, 1884. Religiously she was a Universalist, as is also the Judge. She was a woman of domestic tastes and habits, one who tried to make a happy home, and in this she succeeded admirably.

In May, 1844, Mr. Wilcox came with his family to Elgin, and here has since made his home. Since 1845 he has lived upon the site of his present home, except five years, when he resided upon his farm near Elgin. About the time he came here he commenced the study of law, and in 1846 was admitted to the bar, and at once commenced an active practice. His success was assured from the very start, and it was not long before he secured recognition as

one of the most active practitioners in his court. His standing among the legal fraternity was such that in 1867 he was nominated and elected circuit judge, and served the full term of six years. In the spring of 1873 he was re-elected for another term, but in the fall of 1874 he was compelled to resign on account of ill health. The impartiality displayed as a judge, and the justness of his decisions, is well known and duly acknowledged by all his circuit.

For some two or three years after his resignation from the bench, Judge Wilcox devoted his time principally to regaining his health and looking after his private business interests. In 1891 he platted a part of a farm, and for a time was engaged in the disposal of town lots, with which he combined other real estate business, greatly to his profit. In addition to his other private business, he was a stockholder in the Elgin Condensed Milk Company, and was its president for three years. In every enterprise in which he engaged he brought to bear a well-trained and well-balanced mind, and was therefore greatly relied on by his business associates.

The Judge has traveled extensively for business and pleasure, and has visited every state and territory in the United States. In 1891 he went to the Pacific coast, and on this trip visited Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Portland, Tacoma, Seattle and Yellowstone Park. His next trip was from Portland, Oregon, thence to Tacoma, then to Sitka, Alaska. His third long trip was to Mexico, at which time he visited nearly every city of any note in that country.

Politically the Judge is a gold Democrat, from the fact that in order to have genuine prosperity in the country its currency must have stability and be accepted at

its face in any country in the civilized world. He has never cared for political office, and has held but few. In 1844 he was appointed and served as postmaster of Elgin until 1849. As a citizen he is honored and esteemed by all. The Judge, B. F. Lawrence, Walter Pease and Henry Sherman were instrumental in locating the Elgin watch factory in this city; was also identified in locating the Elgin Packing Company.

JOHAN GUSTAVUS LINDGREN, a retired mechanic, who for thirty-five years was a trusted employe of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railroad shops at Aurora, dates his residence in Kane county from 1854. He is a native of Sweden, born March 18, 1826, and in his native country grew to manhood, and received a common-school education. His knowledge of the English language was obtained after coming to this country. In Sweden he learned the trade of a carpenter and joiner, serving a regular apprenticeship. The chance for advancement in the countries of the old world are very limited; and the aspiring young man usually thinks very seriously of emigrating to the United States, where golden opportunities are offered to every one. Our subject had heard much of this country and here determined to make his home. Accordingly in June, 1854, he took a sailing vessel at Guttenberg, for Boston, and was six weeks on the Atlantic, making landing July 24, and coming direct to Chicago, and thence to Geneva, where friends had previously settled. He immediately began work at his trade, and soon engaged in contracting and building.

On the 6th of May, 1855, Mr. Lindgren

Prospects seeming favorable, the National Watch Company of Chicago, was organized on August 18, 1864. Before the end of the month, the firm was licensed, and Raymond was elected president. Through his influence, the location of the factory was offered to Elgin on condition that a site of thirty-five acres be deeded to the company and twenty-five thousand dollars worth of stock was subscribed by the town's residents. Taking up one-fourth of the capital of a business with a questionable reputation for stability, at a time when most of Elgin's able-bodied men were in uniform, was an exhibition of civic heroism.

A location on the Dexter farm south of the little city, adjoining the east side North Western railroad tracks and extending to the east bank of the Fox River, was deemed satisfactory. The farm contained a little over one hundred seventy-one acres, and the owners living in Oneida, New York, agreed to sell no less than the entire property for fifty dollars an acre, cash. Efforts to raise the money to purchase the land and to sell the stock were then started, but funds came in slowly. To prevent other communities from attracting the industry away, an article divulging the news in the *Elgin Chronicle* was suppressed. Finally, Silvanus Wilcox, Walter L. Pease, Henry Sherman, and Benjamin F. Lawrence on December 24, 1864, bought the farm, each paying one-fourth of the purchase price. They donated thirty-five acres to the watch company and subdivided the remainder into building lots. The investors, who became known in company lore as the Four Immortals, also subscribed to the balance of the twenty-five thousand dollars in stock that hadn't been sold.

In September 1864, company representatives had traveled to Waltham to recruit experienced watchmakers to start up the new factory. They secured Charles S. Moseley, George Hunter, John K. Bigelow, Patten S. Bartlett, Otis Hoyt, Charles E. Mason, and Daniel R. Hartwell, who were referred to as the Elgin constellation of the Pleiades, or the Seven Stars. Each was paid a five thousand dollar bonus and given a five-year contract at five thousand dollars per year. In addition, they received an acre lot on thirteen of the donated acres lying east and south of the factory site. "With two exceptions," recalled George Hunter, "they were all machinists before they were watchmakers, and all were backed by youth and the best of New England traditions." ²⁰ Moseley, who was designated the new factory's superintendent, had entered the watch industry in 1852. He was the inventor of the split-chuck and hollow spindle lathe, which embodied the princi-

ple leading to the later development of automatic machinery. Hunter had evolved the system of compound dies and punches which was later utilized to the maximum at Elgin.

In January 1865, a temporary wooden building three stories high was hastily erected over the east side mill race south of the bridge. Machinery was shipped from Boston, and for some time the labors of the seven recruits were concentrated upon making machines and tools. The building was braced on the outside by long beams to prevent shaking with the vibration of the machinery. When fire raged in the Elgin business district in July, men and women formed a bucket brigade to save the structure and its contents. Their destruction may have ended the undertaking, because the original capital was too small to cover a loss in the event of a disaster.

The authorized capital of the National Watch Company under its 1864 license was one hundred thousand dollars, represented by one hundred shares at \$1,000 each. When the shares were first issued, thirty-nine men purchased one to five shares in the venture, twenty-three of them residents of Elgin. The organization was re-structured under a new special charter granted by the state Legislature on April 25, 1865. Authorized capital was raised to half a million dollars, and the general offices were established in Chicago, where they would remain for more than sixty-five years. Benjamin F. Lawrence was the only Elgin resident on the board of directors.

A second manufacturer arrived before war's end. The discovery by Gail Borden that cow's milk could be preserved in tin cans was tested on a large scale by the Union forces. His eastern plants working at capacity, Borden sought a new site for a plant in the West. The burgeoning milk supply of the Fox Valley attracted the inventor, whose wife had once lived in Elgin. In February 1865 work was started on remodeling the east side tannery into a condensed milk factory.

Battlefield experience changed the political attitudes of many veterans who had been Democrats, solidifying the Republican dominance. When Col. William Lynch was released from Libby Prison, he declared: "I hardly need tell you that I have always been a strong uncompromising Democrat . . . I was opposed to Abraham Lincoln; I am now opposed to every man who opposes Abraham Lincoln." ²¹ Col. John S. Wilcox, who had been a prominent Douglas man in 1860, was released from service to speak in various parts of the state as a member of the Republican Central

thus occurring through military operations long before Lincoln issued his proclamation. Depriving the Confederacy of its labor force helped to weaken its war effort, and the Union armies could use the male contrabands as laborers and teamsters. The Negro women and children, however, posed a problem for the military authorities.

The 52nd Illinois, then commanded by John S. Wilcox of Elgin, was one of the Union regiments laying siege to Corinth. Wilcox described the condition of the contrabands in a letter to his wife: "But these poor miserable beings—what is to be their present fate, how are they to live during the coming winter? I have this forenoon been to the Negro corral, and such a spectacle of poor wretched thoughtless semi-humanity I never dreamed of."¹⁸

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton on September 18, 1862, authorized the transfer of those contrabands who could not be utilized to local committees which would provide for their support in the North. The Illinois Central Railroad began carrying one to four carloads of Negroes per day across the Prairie State. The order aroused bitter resentment and embarrassed Republican candidates in the approaching congressional elections. When the Democratic mayor of Chicago was invited to cooperate in finding jobs for black immigrants, he refused with the backing of the City Council. Elsewhere in Illinois the action was opposed by mass meetings and threats. On October 13th, the same day the governor of Illinois warned the President of the political consequences of this violation of the state's Negro exclusion law, Stanton forbade further shipments.

Before the order was rescinded, however, contrabands were already on the cars heading for Elgin. The 52nd's chaplain, Benjamin Thomas, had asked the Rev. Adoniram J. Joslyn, "How many do you think can find homes at or near Elgin? . . . Now, the time to prove our faith by our works has come in regard to the Negro . . . We are told that we dare not bring these persons north . . . Who will complain? None but sympathizers with treason!"¹⁹

Joslyn called a meeting which appointed a committee. The editor replied on October 6: "The committee instructs me to say to you that if you find it necessary to bring any of the contrabands under your charge so far north as this, they shall be well taken care of and provided with good homes during the war. We are willing to do anything, bear anything, suffer anything if we may be instrumental in tearing down the odious temple of oppression

Elgin: An American History

and taking from this accursed rebellion its elements of power . . ." Joslyn admonished objectors by writing that "those who made themselves ridiculous by scolding and swearing about 'niggers coming to Ill.' had better go into a room alone, look into a French mirror, and see how foolish they look."²⁰

Notwithstanding Joslyn's claim to speak for the city, there was bitter opposition to receiving the contrabands, especially among the Democrats and Irish. It was one thing to free slaves in the South; bringing them to live in the North was another. The previous summer, voters had an opportunity to put the black exclusion laws into a proposed new state constitution. The article incorporating the prohibition had received huge majorities, and Elgin was no exception.

Thomas arrived in Elgin from Cairo on October 15th with two carloads of contrabands, consisting of five men, twenty-eight women and seventy-seven children. Some aroused citizens proposed to lynch the chaplain, and others attempted to have him arrested for violating the Black Laws. Thomas in turn threatened with military arrest anyone interfering with what he called military orders. On at least one occasion he was physically assaulted.

A large number of the newcomers had been slaves on the Newsome, Oates, and Pride plantations located near Cherokee, Franklin County, Alabama. They were put up for the night in the basement of the Kimball House, and next morning were placed among sympathetic families. William E. Bent, for example, built an addition the rear of his farmhouse to accommodate one of the families. Mrs. Wilcox wrote her husband on October 19th that: "Silvan (the colonel's brother) has taken six, a man, his wife and three children and the Maternal Grandmother. They are all anxious to obtain a Negro. Mrs. Sherman has two, Dr. Tefft, seven, and nearly every one you can think of here has one or more. They are welcome to them and it is well to have them taken care of, but I have no desire to have them around. I don't like them . . ."²¹

The contrabands had been exposed to smallpox, diphtheria and scarlet fever before their arrival in Elgin. When they were distributed about town, these diseases spread among families with children. The height of the epidemic came in November. At least sixteen of the contraband children, including four children of Mingle and Emma Newsome (the ex-slaves had generally adopted the last names of their former owners) died of smallpox, and about an equal number of white children died of scarlet

we have an Addison. The similarity in the two names could be confusing in an emergency call.

Some of our street names are obviously directional references, such as the road east to CHICAGO, south to ST. CHARLES, and north to DUNDEE. The name of the road west to GALENA was later changed to West Highland. NORTH and SOUTH Streets once defined the town's residential limits. Part of the dividing line between two counties runs down the middle of COOKANE Avenue.

At least three names have, or had, a geographic derivation. MOUNTAIN has a steep slope on the west side, and there was once a SPRING near North Street. RIVER Street, which once paralleled the Fox on the east side, is now North Grove Avenue. LAKE Street, however, preserves the name of William Lake, a pioneer resident whose cement house still stands on the corner of Lake and Michigan.

WASHINGTON, JEFFERSON, LINCOLN, CLEVELAND, and HARRISON were presidents, but Adams Street was not named after either John or his son. It honors August ADAMS, an early state senator. There was GRANT Street, but it became River Bluff Road.

Vincent S. LOVELL purchased a large claim in the north-east end. His sons, Edward C. and Vincent Smith Lovell were partners in a real estate business. Both became mayors of Elgin. Edward was joined in matrimony to Carrie WATRES, and his brother named ADDISON Street after a friend, Addison A. Keyes.

If you're a Chicago Cubs fan, you'll recognize the names of Whitey LOCKMAN, Ernie BANKS, Rick MONDAY, Dave KINGMAN, and Bobby MURCER. Among the mayors of Elgin whose names adorn street signs were Joseph TEFFT, George S. BOWEN, Arwin E. PRICE, Augustine H. HUBBARD, Walter E. MILLER, and Clyde SHALES.

Many streets were named by subdivision developers for themselves, their children and other relatives, and their friends. For example, the City Council approved an addition platted by Silvanus WILCOX in 1890. His mother was the former Salley SHULER, and he married Jane MALLERY. Other subdividers were Thomas McBRIDE, James BARRETT, Bernard HEALY, Finla L. McCLURE, Abel WALKER, Henry SHERMAN, and George L. CONGDON. Seth MOSELEY was a surveyor and Alfred LAVOIE a realtor.

HENDEE family names were used for several streets on the west side. The family claimed descent from Captain Miles STANDISH, who came over on the Mayflower. Mary WASHBURN Hendee had been engaged to Griswold Lord before his death. She then married Joshua Palmer MORGAN. Her sister, Marcy BILLINGS Hendee married Samuel N. Brown. (Samuel lost out in this name perpetuation game. There is no Brown Street.)

The practice of using first names began early. Mary ANN Kimball was the first settler to die in Elgin. One of James T. Gifford's sons was FULTON. JAY, MAY, and STELLA were the children of Orlando and Caroline (Gifford) Davidson and Gifford's grandchildren.

One of the plat makers remembered his homeland. John Webb, an early dial maker at the watch factory, was born in England and learned his trade there. WARWICK is the county in which English watch manufacturing was once centered, and RUGBY is the British version of football.

The signs for HIGH Street, EASY Street, and SEXAUER (pronounced "Sex Hour") are frequently stolen. There were so many thefts of LOVERS LANE that the name had to be changed to Fox Lane. What? No Main Street? We did have a MAIN Street, but it became a part of State Street long ago.

School Names

Fashions in Elgin school names have varied over the years. The first public school building was at DuPage and Chapel Streets. Built of brick, it became known as Old Brick when a New Brick school opened on Kimball Street.

Other early schools were identified for a time by their ward, such as the Third Ward and Fifth Ward Schools. The Colored School, abandoned when enrollments were integrated, was the only school named after the students who attended.

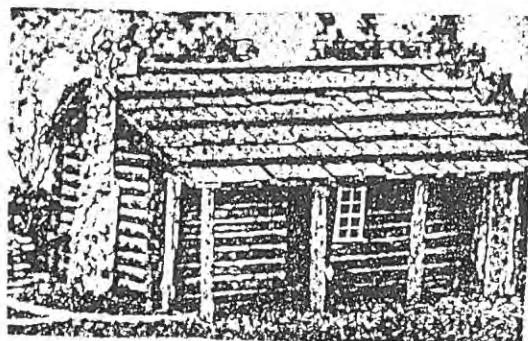
Some schools were associated (at least in the public mind) with their area. One was the Watch Factory School, which overlooked the main plant of the Elgin National Watch Company from about 1870-83. It lost that name when it was moved down to Bent Street. The Old Church or Stone Church School on Geneva Street referred to its original use as the Baptist Church.

Old Elgin Tales



Aug. 9, 1967

Hazel Belle Perry



A TYPICAL LOG CABIN OF EARLY DAYS

Romance of Early Settlers

One of the richest sources of Old Elgin Tales is the leather-bound ancient record book of the Fox River Valley Old Settlers Association, an organization which was started here ninety-nine years ago and has been meeting annually ever since. The origin of the Fox River Valley Association came when in the summer of 1868, John McLean and his family, who were among the very early settlers of Elgin, were invited to the McHenry County Old Settlers Picnic. The McLeans enjoyed that picnic and reunion so much that they determined to start a similar affair in Elgin for all the Fox Valley towns. And so John McLean lost no time in calling together some of the leading men of Elgin, such as Dr. Joseph Tefft, Cyrus Larkin, Henry Sherman, George P. Harvey, the Lovells, the Wilcoxes and others and plans for an association of Fox River Valley Old Settlers were drawn up.

We are indebted to John Newcomb, who had a private school in Elgin before there were any public schools and who later taught a business and a teachers course in the Academy, for starting the fine record system in this precious Old Settlers book. Mr. Newcomb was the secretary of the association for many years and samples of his beautiful handwriting grace many pages of the book. The pages are yellowed but they contain such valuable information as can be gleaned from newspaper clippings reporting the speeches made at the picnics, long printed lists of all those present at the reunions with the dates when they migrated to Fox Valley, long lists of those settlers who had died during the year preceding each annual meeting with dates and ages, printed programs, minutes of business meetings, pictures of large crowds present for reunions, copies of papers on pioneer life and even reports on the stories which old settlers used to tell about their pioneer experiences. It is one of these tales which was written and read by Miss Illone Harvey for the 1887 reunion of old settlers which we have copied from the book for you today. Illone's mother was Mary Love Burr before her marriage to George P. Harvey and the story is of Mary's trip from New York to the Fox Valley in 1836 with her parents and sisters and brothers, the Atwell Burr family:

In May of 1836, the Atwell Burr family started their trip from New York to the Fox River by boarding an Erie Canal boat labeled "Westward Ho!" which was to take them to Buffalo where they would change to a sailboat and go up through the Great Lakes and down to Chicago. The first night out all was commotion, for baggage and household goods must be stowed away and each family must unpack their food and cook their supper taking turns on the open hearth provided by the ship company. Then they must find a place to eat on the crowded deck. Before it grew dark, quilts and pillows were spread around and people settled down to try to sleep. But just as quiet settled over them, a goose cackled out on the bank and one uncomfortable passenger shouted: "I say, catch that goose, somebody; we could make a hundred pillows, like this here one, out of his feathers."

It was three weeks before they finally sailed into Chicago and the Burr parents must have considered it no less than a miracle that they had arrived with their whole brood of nine lively children intact. Early the second morning after their arrival in Chicago, two prairie schooners, followed by a heavily laden wagon, passed slowly down Lake Street over the old wooden bridge and struck across the prairie. The flat monotony of the land, was broken now and then by groves of oak trees and even the level fields were dotted with bright colored wild flowers. The children, who were tired of riding, spent much of their time chasing butterflies along the wagon paths and stopping to pick and eat the luscious wild strawberries.

After stopping at noon at the widow Barry's tavern for a dinner of venison steaks and coffee, the travelers drove on until evening when they saw in the distance a cabin with a lighted candle in the window, the signal that the place would accommodate paying guests for the night. When they reached the cabin, they found it full of travelers but blankets and quilts were quickly laid on the floor and everybody was too tired to be fussy. However, one of the girls was curious about the lumps she was lying upon and, in the morning, she investigated and found she had slept on a huge quarter of beef wrapped in cloth.

At sunset the next evening, the Burrs sighted the Fox River winding between its green banks. The water looked deep but the horses plunged in and after a struggle, reached the west bank with their load.

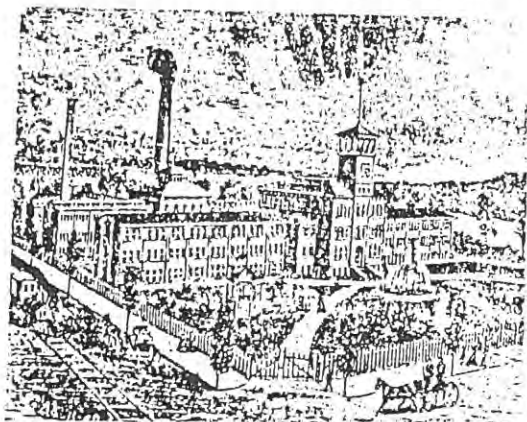
A month later, the Burr family were living in a new log house on a large creek two miles west of the river and north of where St. Charles now is. The inside walls of the cabin had been papered, neatly and with true literary fervor, with newspapers fitted together so that the continued story could be read without a break from one sheet to the next, but where the papering came to an end at the bottom of the far corner of the room, the story stopped finally in the middle of a sentence, tantalizing the reader with fruitless conjecture as to the fate of the hero and heroine.

Thus ends the story which Illone Harvey wrote and read to the Old Settlers in 1887 about the migration of her mother and her grandparents to the Fox Valley in 1836. From other Elgin history sources, we learned that in 1835 the Joel Harvey family, including the 19 year old son George P. Harvey, drove by wagon from New York to about this same area as the Burrs settled upon the next year. George Harvey must have met Mary Love Burr sometime in those pioneer years of 1836 and after because they were married in November of 1839 and lived happily together for many years, first in a log house near her parents, then on a farm in Chicken Grove and finally in Elgin where they and their children all became leading citizens serving our city in many ways with their varied talents.

Old Elgin Tales



Sep. 6, 1967 Hazel Belle Perry



ONE OF THE EARLIEST PICTURES OF THE ELGIN NATIONAL WATCH FACTORY, taken from one of the earliest histories of Elgin, published by Lord and Bradford in 1875. Note the smoking chimney which might well be the one which Frederick U. Adams and his pal climbed.

The Art Of Watchmakers

You have heard how Henry Sherman, Benjamin Lawrence, Walter Pease and (Sylvanus Wilcox) were the men who induced the newly formed watch company of Chicago to locate their factory in Elgin by buying the Dexter farm on the south side of the town and giving thirty-five acres along what is now National street and the east bank of the river to the company for a site on which to build the factory.

Thus the factory came to Elgin, but it would not have become a great and successful watch factory if it had not had skilled workers in the art of watchmaking who, when they heard that a watch factory was being established in Elgin came west in true pioneer spirit and offered their special talents. For watch making is truly one of the skilled arts that is handed down from father to son and from son to grandson. Palmistry books even name a certain shape of hand as "the watchmaker's hand" because it denotes that its owner takes infinite pains to achieve perfection and precision and uses both mind and physical effort in attaining that end.

From the start of the watch factory, there must have been many of these precision artists who left their East Coast homes or their European homes such as Switzerland to pour out their talents in Elgin. From the start, the company men welcomed these artists in watchmaking both for their skill in producing and for their suggestions as to how production might be improved in various departments. And thus, through the years, the factory became a school for precision artists in which all were inspired to attain perfection in their work and to help think out better methods of production.

We choose as fine examples of this type of employee, John Spencer Adams and his family of nine children all of whom had a part in the excellence of the Elgin National Watch Factory. No doubt there were many such families which added to Elgin's fame.

John Spencer Adams was born near Waltham, Massachusetts, on April 14, 1834, son of John A. Adams and his wife, Nancy Churchill. The father, John A. Adams had been a watchmaker in one of the Waltham factories but had caught the "gold fever" in 1849 and after a hazardous trip by sailboat from Bristol, Rhode Island, around Cape Horn where waves seemed like mountains and up the Pacific, he finally landed safely in San Francisco only to find that living prices in that region were so high that it would cost him almost as much to go from San Francisco to the "diggins", where the mines were, as it had cost for the whole trip of seven months duration on the sailboat. In despair, he tried to earn some money by making shingles of the redwood, but found it cost more to have the shingles carted to the buyer than he received for his labor. He finally remembered that he had his watch repair kit and was doing fairly well with that work when his letters to his wife, which he had been writing as a diary and sending home at stated times, suddenly ceased and they never learned what became of him.

John Spencer and his brother Oscar both went to work in the Howard Watch Co. in Waltham to help support the family after it became evident that the father was not living. Later both boys went to work in the American Waltham Watch Factory. Then in 1866 when the Elgin National Watch Factory was about to open, John Spencer and Oscar moved to Elgin. Both men found jobs in the Elgin plant. John Spencer was put in charge of the screw and the plate departments. Later, he was asked to be foreman of the finishing department, also. It was 1867 before any watches were put out as finished products. Foreman Adams was one of the first foremen and he had to organize departments and invent devices to use as the need arose.

Meanwhile, he was serving his community in many ways. He was superintendent of the First Methodist Sunday School for several years. He helped organize the Ancient Order of United Workmen. He served as alderman during the years 1869 and 1870.

By 1882, John Spencer Adams had become interested in a system of tubular iron towers for electric lighting of cities, so he resigned from the watch factory and with his sons, Frederick Upham, George Spencer and Howard he organized a company and started equipping cities with this tower lighting system. Aurora was the first city they equipped with the system. They put up two towers in Elgin -- one in the high school park and the other on the corner of Chicago and Porter. The seven other towers had been put up by another company.

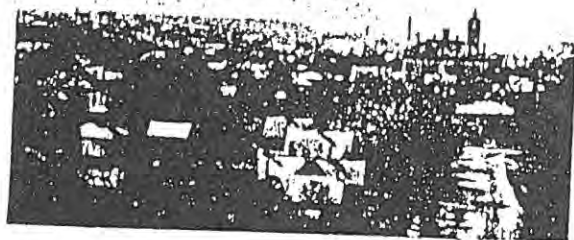
In 1889 this Adams Co. received a call from New Orleans to come and help them with their problem of sewage disposal because of the lowness of the city land. For five years John Spencer was draftsman and engineer of city works in New Orleans and with the help of his sons he did solve the city's problems. In 1894 Mr. Adams had a stroke and died in New Orleans.

The sons carried on with the traditional Adams ingenuity and inventiveness. Charles and Fred U. experimented with streamlined trains long before most people were aware of such things. They called their model the "windspitter". Bert became head electrician of the watch factory. George S. manufactured the Adams bicycle and shortly after the turn of the century became one of Elgin's first garage operators, having the automobile agency for Ford and several other makes of cars. His last project was to bottle and sell spring water. After being a watch factory employee, Fred U. became a Chicago Tribune reporter, a writer of books and a smoke inspector for Chicago. Friends who knew of an episode of his youth say he had good training for his smoke inspector job. The story goes that he and a pal, Frank Peabody, went for a walk one Sunday afternoon and noticing a new 144 foot chimney which had just been completed in the watch factory, they went in to inspect it and seeing a built-in ladder climbed it to the very top where they could get a panoramic view of the countryside. But it happened that a power plant employee wanted to see how the new chimney would draw and built a fire. It was more than two hours before the two boys could attract anybody's attention to their plight and they were thoroughly smoked.

Old Elgin Tales



Dec. 31, 1969 Hazel Belle Perry



BIRDSEYE VIEW OF ELGIN IN THE 1880's
LOOKING SOUTH FROM THE ACADEMY

Highlights Of 1969 Tales

It has become a custom in newspaper circles to bid goodbye to the old year with a review of the highlights of history that have made stories in print during that year which has just slipped by. So let us follow the custom by recalling briefly some historical highlights which have filled this column of Old Elgin Tales just to note what a wide variety of phases of life in Old Elgin we are attempting to cover in our articles.

The very first article published in these Old Tales in 1969 was about John B. Newcomb who chose Elgin as his home and the town he wished to serve when he came here from Kendall County after the death of both his parents. The year was 1840 and John was only 16 years old but he knew what he wanted to devote his life to. It was teaching young people how to lead worth-while lives in the community. Among other services which John Newcomb rendered to Elgin were these two which add vital data to Elgin history: First, while he was secretary of the Old Settlers Association of Fox River Valley, he filled in the early history of the organization where no records had been kept and started making accurate records of all papers that were read telling of early experiences of the pioneers or reminiscences that threw light upon the life of the early settlers. Also he kept a complete list of all who were present each year with dates when they came west. He even kept track of all of the deaths of the old settlers during the year, with dates and printed lists of all those who had died since the meeting the previous year. All this historical information remains in the record book in John Newcomb's beautiful writing.

Also we searchers of local history data are grateful to Mr. Newcomb for leaving to us the alphabetical records of burials in the city cemetery. For when John Newcomb served as sexton in his later years, he did organize the records of burials so that to this day when we want to know the death date and place of burial of even the earliest of Elgin pioneers, the sexton's secretaries can quickly and accurately find the information for us, thanks to the filing system which was started by John Newcomb so long ago.

Soon after John Newcomb came to Elgin to live and while he was still only 16 years old, he found a job as teacher in a country school east of Elgin. There he became acquainted with the Gould family and ten years after that he married the Gould daughter. When in 1851 the law was passed permitting taxes to be levied to maintain public

schools, Mr. Newcomb became the teacher in what was called The Old Pioneer School situated on what is now West Chicago street a block and a half west from the west end of the bridge. Later, he kept his own private school and was a popular teacher. Then when the Academy opened in 1856, Newcomb became a part of the first staff, teaching Phonography (shorthand), Natural Sciences, Penmanship and the Normal Course. Hundreds of boys and girls in this area received their training for teaching from Mr. Newcomb. In 1860, he became Superintendent of Elgin schools. In 1867, he was County Superintendent of Schools. Much of the time in his last years he was carrying more than one job at a time.

There are many other men who have been written up this passing year as having been outstanding servants for Elgin but we must be content with naming only the Rev. Nathaniel Clark who was sent by the American Home Missionary Society about 1833 to preach the gospel and organize churches throughout this large area. The fact that Elgin is called the City of Churches and that every little settlement in this area had from almost the start at least one church, is proof of the tremendous task this "circuit rider" performed so well.

Dr. Joseph Tefft about whom we have had so many wonderful tales telling how he would ride his faithful horse through floods, wind storms, and hail to reach a patient who needed his help, won first place in many fields of service to Elgin. To name some of his first services, he became Elgin's first mayor, first president of the Elgin Board of Trade, owner of the first farm to ship milk to Chicago and thus he started Elgin in the dairy business.

The Wilcox family also stood high in giving a life-time of service to Elgin. The father, Elijah Wilcox, came west early and took 300 acres of wild prairie which he tamed and turned into a highly productive and beautiful farm, with the help of his little sons whom he had trained at a tender age to drive a team of seven yoke of oxen hitched to a great plow. After they were graduated from farming, the sons Sylvanus and John Shuler, studied law and then set about improving the city of Elgin. The father served as trustee of the Academy for eleven years and at his death Sylvanus took his father's place as trustee and served 25 years and John joined him and served 22 years so that the family served a total of 58 years. Four sons of Elijah held the office of postmaster, serving a total of 13 years.

B.W. Raymond spent much of his life planning to make Elgin a great city, though he never lived in Elgin. He played an important part in bringing the Galena railroad and also the east side North Western to Elgin and was leader of the group which brought the watch factory to our city.

These sketches of the men and women who played an important part in the building of Elgin were interspersed during the year with some of the more frolicsome scenes from early Elgin life: opening night at the DuBois Opera House, with full description of the plays presented and the decor of the stage; a souvenir program of one of the early years of the Fortnightly Club, a home study and discussion group, the tale of Trout Park and its Botanical Gardens; the Elgin Dramatic Club entertainment; Fairyland Operetta composed and produced by Berta Hecker, and with a fabulous cast of Elgin children in Mother Goose costumes-children whom you now know as staid citizens; a "Unique Vacation Junket" enjoyed by Lydia Keyes Becker and her Judge husband in 1908 on the Belvidere trolley, and finally a delightful visit to the Poultry Shows which once were among the most popular shows of our town.

Old Elgin Tales



Jan. 14, 1970 Hazel Belle Perry



COL. EDWARD S. JOSLYN

Among Our Early Lawyers

One of the old historians of Elgin who had been making a list of the early lawyers of our town, made the remark that "Like most industrial towns, Elgin has never had need of much litigation nor did it require the noble talents of forensic eloquence which a few of its legal men possessed. The labors of our lawyers have been mostly confined to the ordinary legal demands common to every well regulated business community." He did admit that there were periods in Elgin's early history when we had more legal men than we could keep busy and no doubt that accounts for the fact that many Elgin lawyers moved to Chicago or to other places where they found a greater need for their talents. The historian also noted that at the period when we seemed to have a superabundance of lawyers, many of the legal men proved that they could fight as well as plead cases and went into service in the Mexican and the Civil War.

A very brief sketch of the first men of legal profession in Elgin would include Edward E. Harvey, who came to Elgin in 1840 and practiced in Elgin until 1847 when he raised a company for service in the war and died during his service in Mexico. Isaac G. Wilson was the second lawyer who settled in Elgin, having come from McHenry, Illinois, in 1841. He remained here until 1849 when he was elected judge of the county court and moved to Geneva. Edmund Gifford came from Massachusetts in 1845 and brought the first good law library ever owned in Elgin. In 1861, he became paymaster in the volunteer service and after the war, settled somewhere in the south. In 1846, Paul R. Wright, A.J. Waldron and Silvanus Wilcox were admitted to practice law in Elgin. Wright practiced law until he was elected clerk of the circuit court in 1856 and moved to Geneva where his office was. In 1860, Mr. Wright moved to Cobden, Ill. Mr. Waldron served Elgin very well as secretary of the Fox River Valley Railroad and also as Justice of the Peace. He died in 1865. Silvanus Wilcox became very popular and was elected judge of the circuit court, but failing health caused him to retire.

There were many other good lawyers who deserve mention in the list of Elgin's first attorneys, but there was one man who stood out as unique in his talent for dramatic oratory in pleading a case, his quick wit, his persuasive arguments, his apt illustrations and his powerful logic which won a three-million-dollar case for him. That man was Edward S. Joslyn of Elgin, the famous winner of the Emma Silver Mine case.

But let us start at the beginning and tell his story: In the year 1835, when Edward S. Joslyn was just seven years old, his parents brought him west to McHenry County. His father went to farming and Edward enrolled in the subscription schools. At 15, he went to work in a blacksmith shop to learn the trade. His father had some knowledge of law but evidently Edward had no ambition to go into law at that time. For five years, Edward worked in the blacksmith shop. Then he made up his mind to go to the Academy where he did prepare for a law course. He read law in Paul R. Wright's office and also in some of the other law offices of Elgin and was finally admitted to the bar. He mixed his law with some politics slumping the state for Fremont, the first presidential candidate of the Republican party. Later he endorsed Stephen Douglas.

When the South seceded, he took arms in defense of the Union, serving as captain of Company A of the Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Later he organized the 36th regiment of Illinois Infantry as a commissioned lieutenant-colonel. He was wounded in the battle of Pea Ridge and although he tried hard to hold his place in the army, his physician insisted that a resignation be granted because of his health. So he went home and continued his practice of law, perfecting his technique and persuasive style until he was considered one of the ablest criminal lawyers in Illinois.

Edward S. Joslyn married Miss Jennie Padelford, daughter of Rodolphus W. Padelford, who had come west from Massachusetts and settled in Elgin in 1842. Probably Edward had known the family for some time, since both men were prominent in the affairs of the city. Edward served as alderman for several years and for two terms was mayor of the city. He worked to establish the free school system in the state and was an active member of the First Baptist Church where Mr. Padelford was clerk for many years.

The city directory of 1867 lists Edward S. Joslyn as having his law office on Chicago St. over Sherman's store which was near the east end of the bridge. His home was listed as on the southwest corner of Ann and Brook Sts.

The law case which brought so much fame to Edward S. Joslyn was that of the ownership of the Emma Silver mine in Utah. Robert Bruce Chisholm had come west and taken a claim of a farm on part of the land where the State Hospital is located. Later he built a home on N. Spring St. But Mr. Chisholm was a prospector at heart and started working with the Galena lead mines and then tried prospecting in the mountains out west. In Utah, he saw a man come in one day to have some silver ore assayed and it proved to be of superior quality. That set Chisholm to work to learn where that ore had been found. It took several years and a lot of money before Chisholm finally broke through the rock into a large chamber with rich silver ore lining all the walls. When this happened, everybody claimed a share of the mine, those who had helped a little and those who had nothing to do with the mine. So Chisholm hired Edward Joslyn to take over the law case. It was the kind of thing that Joslyn loved to do. He went out to the mine, dressed as a mountaineer with buckskin breeches, jacket and sombrero hat; he made friends with everybody, by telling funny stories, mimicking the dialects and making speeches to entertain those who called him "Old Man Eloquent of the Mountains." He won the case for his clients to the tune of about three million dollars.

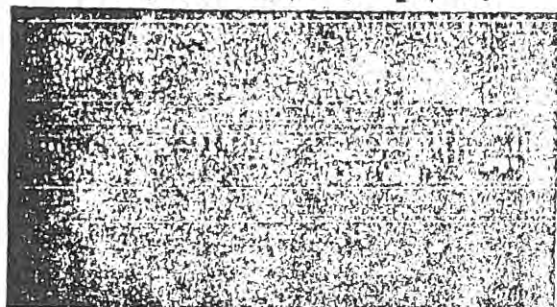
Edward Joslyn died in 1886 when he was only 58 years old. His wife survived him by several years. The 1889 directory informs us that the widow kept the home at 160 Brook St. for herself and the children who were not married until the early nineties when she moved to 425 Chicago St.

It was the oldest son, Frank W. Joslyn, who carried on the career of his father, for he inherited his father's talent in oratory and keen persuasion. As state's attorney, he carried out his duties faithfully, securing the conviction of a large proportion of those he prosecuted.

Old Elgin Tales



Mar. 3, 1971 Hazel Belle Perry



A Familiar Old Elgin Scene

One of the wise sayings of Elmer Gylleck who has gathered together an amazing collection of photographed old Elgin scenes is that a familiar old scene of the town gives delight both to those who are old enough to recall the places and also to those who are curious to know what the old town looked like and how different it was from now. So today, we have for you, one of the most familiar of Old Elgin scenes, the west end of the old Chicago St. bridge where strangers coming into the town either on the High Northwestern or the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad trains got their first glimpse of Elgin and those commuters or others who had been absent from home for some time rejoice as they find themselves back in the familiar surroundings. We shall try to make it a guided tour so that both the old and the young may know something about the various points of interest.

We start at the top of the picture at the far left to point out the Grace Methodist Church which was built in 1884-5 on Jackson and South St., not very long before the photograph was taken. The Grace Methodist was no doubt the most photographed church of the early days because it stood on such a high hill and could be seen clearly whether the photographer was standing on the roof of the Elgin Academy or on such west side streets as Mountain. Even at night, the lighted cross on the church spire made a beacon for the whole city to see. The Lynch house stands toward the rear of the church and below stands the station of the High Northwestern Railway. Below on the west bank of the river can be seen just the corner of the Milwaukee Railroad depot and cars standing on the tracks. In front are freight houses and Wolff Brothers flour and feed and also coal and wood and cement storage places. The ads for facial lotion, Weld Drug Store and Western House nearly cover the side of the large store.

Lifting your eyes directly above the advertising we have been talking about, you see the familiar old home of Judge Wilcox at the top of the hill with steps leading from the front porch clear down to Crystal St. This house with the five front windows in the upper story was widely known as the home at number 8, South Crystal St. where Judge Sylvanus Wilcox loved to entertain his many friends. Laura Karsten remembers many happy visits she had in that house, but especially she remembers that on Fourth of July night a crowd would always gather there at the top of the hill where they could look down upon the fireworks which they could admire all over the city below, both the west side and the east side. The friends were saddened when Judge Wilcox had to leave his home often for long periods when he would be seeking better health by traveling to other countries where he thought the climate would give him relief from his illness.

The house just north and west of the Wilcox home was built for a niece of the Judge. It faces Chicago St. Across the street from the Wilcox home, at the corner of Bridge and Crystal, was the law office of the Judge where, for a time, his partner was the lawyer named Healy.

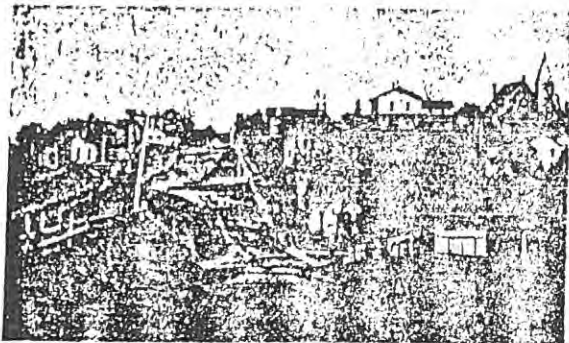
Coming down the north side of Chicago St. towards the bridge we can see what might well have been The Old Pioneer School, as it was called, about a block and a half from the west end of the bridge. That school was taught by John B. Newcomb in the early days about 1853 or 4. Newcomb was a fine teacher and served in various kinds of schools throughout his lifetime. One of his enthusiastic projects which he carried out in the Old Pioneer School was to start a circulating Library for his pupils. Among his pupils at the Pioneer School were Walter and Joseph Kimball and William Sylla, the father of Marguerite Sylla.

Our tour ends as we come back to Broadway and find an abundance of signs for boots and shoes and tailor shops and a large sign for Becker's Shoe Store at 116 W. Chicago St.

Judge
S. Wilcox

Old Elgin Tales

March 10, 1971 Hazel Belle Perry



VIEW ON CRYSTAL STREET LOOKING SOUTH FROM MOUNTAIN STREET. Photo taken in the 1880's.

A City Of Bluffs And Hills

The story is told of one of the early settlers who was bringing his family in a prairie schooner from the hill country of New England to the Illinois prairie land. The children had been delighted all the way with seeing so many new things, but on the last stretch from Chicago to Elgin, they were tired and restless and no doubt a little bit homesick for the home they were leaving and they began to complain to their father: "Aren't there any hills and mountains here in Illinois?" Then the father comforted them with this promise: "Keep your eyes open wide from now on and you will soon see some beautiful hills and some high, wooded bluffs rising from the banks of the Fox River where I have chosen a place for our new home." It was true that, though the pioneers went west to claim prairie farmland where they could raise good crops of grain, they were, for the most part, building their homes on the high bluffs overlooking the river or on the sloping banks of the river in the shade of oak trees.

The editor of a large book of photographic scenes of Elgin describes the city with these words: "This beautiful city cannot be surpassed for its loveliness of location." Another writer uses these words to describe the fact that two photographic panoramas, one of the East Side and the other of the West Side, are really well rounded hills or "a succession of elevated plateaus on both sides of the river."

So today we are going to talk about some of the really high hills in Elgin and how the city has made use of them and in some cases has graded them for use in the automobile age.

The picture we show today gives us the view of Crystal Street in the old days before paving and grading. We are looking south from Mountain Street. We also see, at the left, the passenger station of what we called the High Northwestern Railroad which was the first railroad to come to Elgin. You can see the railroad water tank which for years supplied the railroad with fresh water for its steam engines, from the springs of Samuel Kimball. At the top of the right side of the picture, we see the large white house, home of Judge Wilcox of which we had a front view in last week's picture. And to the far right we again see the Grace Methodist Church which we told you holds a prominent place in many of the scenes of Elgin. If your eyes are sharp, you may also see below the Wilcox yard an old cobblestone home, the oldest home in Elgin for many years. It faces Chicago Street.

The highest and sharpest bluffs on which Elgin homes have been built are found on the West Side along South State Street where many of the most beautiful of Elgin's old homes were built and many are still there. But there are also sharp and beautiful bluffs all along the extreme north end of Elgin where homes were built later. These homes look down to the river where for some distance that river flows from east to west instead of flowing south.

The hills on the southern part of the East Side of Elgin rise from the river and climb to the top much more gently than do the State Street bluffs. The builders of the city also chose to adorn several hill-tops with lovely homes that might induce Waltham expert watchmakers who were hill lovers to come to Elgin to practice their skill and accept the gift of a hill-top home. Thus the colony of hill-top homes were built on Watch Street which included the Cloudman home with a ballroom on the third story, the old Hunter homes and others most of which have now been torn down. But we were very proud of those beautiful homes on the hill. Later there was added to the colony, the beautiful little astronomy building which rested on the top of the Watch Factory reservoir hill. All these homes could be seen from almost any part of Elgin and guests who came to the ballroom delighted in looking out the window and seeing the lights in various homes on State Street bluff. The Waldron house, built on a knoll above Channing Street, is a fine example of a home that can be seen from almost any high spot on either the West or the East side of Elgin.

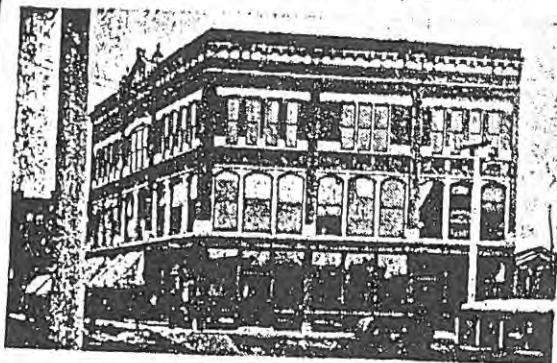
Aside from the fact that hills and bluffs in a town furnish delightful sites on which to build beautiful homes and public buildings, Elgin has made good use of her hills in the past as furnishing enjoyment for its young people. Remember the soap box derby which was held on the National Street hill? And the fun we used to have every winter when certain hills would be kept free from ordinary traffic so that bobsled riders could enjoy long slides on such highways as Villa Street hill, the hill at the end of East Chicago and Liberty, Mountain Street, Center Street hill, the long hill from Washington School which ended on what we called Judge Ranstead's hill and many others. Even old shovels or dustpans made as good sliders on which to ride belly-flop as any we could purchase today. Those of us who lived near the Waldron home with its long hill down to Gifford Street used to slide the whole distance from Channing to Gifford via dustpan. The sport was just as much fun sliding on the dustpan as any youngster has today using expensive "saucers."

We haven't named all the hills of old Elgin which furnished us with amusement, I am sure, but enjoy reminiscing about your own favorite old Elgin hill.

Old Elgin Tales



March 31, 1971 Hazel Belle Perry



ELGIN POST OFFICE, NORTH EAST CORNER OF GROVE AVENUE AND DuPAGE before it was moved to the Spring Street building.

Early Elgin Postal Service

The first post office established at Elgin was in the cabin home of James T. Gifford, late in the year of 1837. But it didn't happen as quickly and as easily as that first statement seems to imply. For the very earliest settlers to come to this land in search of a home had to have their mail addressed to them simply as "on The Fox River." Such mail was then held in the Chicago post office until some one from Elgin who knew the people whose names were on the letters, had occasion to drive in to Chicago and would pick up the letters and pay the postage and deliver the letters to the right people. In those early days it was always the person who received a letter who had to pay the postage which was rated by the distance it had come. So it was that as soon as there was a settlement in Elgin large enough to warrant a post office, James T. Gifford wrote to the post office department at Washington, D.C., asking that a post office be granted to Elgin and that Gifford himself be appointed postmaster. The answer to that letter surprised everybody. It was written May 10, 1837, and read: "Sir, I am authorized by the Postmaster General that he has examined your application and he declines establishing the same because it is too near McClure's Grove, an office lately established. Very respectfully, Rob Johnston, Second Assistant Postmaster." McClure's Grove was on the Dundee Road, almost in the town of Dundee, so that all the Elginites thought it ridiculous, but two months later the Elgin post office was established in Gifford's home and he became the first postmaster. The wages Mr. Gifford received for the year 1841 were \$135.57.

Following Gifford in the role of postmaster were these early holders of the office: Isaac Wilson, 1842; Edward E. Harvey, 1845; Judge Sylvanus Wilcox, 1845; Charles H. Morgan, 1849; George E. Renwick, 1853; Edward S. Wilcox, 1854; Geo. W. Renwick, 1856; Geo. B. Raymond, 1861; Adoniram J. Joslyn, 1863; Jonathan Kimball, 1866; Frank T. Gilbert, 1869; Melvin B. Baldwin, 1873; John S. Wilcox, 1877; John K. LeBaron, 1881; W.F. Hunter, 1884; William H. Wilcox, 1886; S.W. Chapman, 1894.

Jonathon Kimball deserves special mention for his many years of service in handling Elgin's mail. He was sixty years old when he first came to Elgin but through all his years of service he kept a youthful enthusiasm. He was one of the first mail clerks on the Northwestern Railway. He was one of the very first of the Elgin carriers and he was Postmaster when he was far beyond what we would now call retirement age. It is stated in some of the old histories of Elgin post offices that when Jonathon was Postmaster, the post office was in one of the old buildings on River Street between Milwaukee and Chicago Street. This is quite possible, for River Street was an important part of our town in the early days.

Our picture today was taken sometime in the year 1884 when the Elgin Post office was being housed on the first floor of the Hunter and Hawkins building on the north-east corner of Grove Avenue and DuPage Street. The horse-drawn bus in the foreground, marked "Villa and South State Street" is evidently waiting for passengers at the Nolling House.

W.F. Hunter who was the partner of Andrew Hawkins in the ownership of the building which housed the post office was also the Postmaster for Elgin during the year 1884 and for some time after that. Other officers of the post office at that time were: W.A. Mercfield, assistant Postmaster; H.J. Burdick, mailing clerk; Louis Stohr, delivery clerk; William F. Struckman, assistant clerk. The caption of the picture also explains that the post office at the time was a very attractive and well equipped place and had 1,400 glass and 156 lock boxes for the use of the customers. You can also see that on the second floor of the building is a book binding company and also the press rooms of the Daily News and the Advocate. Old timers tell us that the third floor of the building was often used for parties and entertainments put on by the Masonic Lodge.

On October 1, 1884, Elgin started a city delivery service for the post office, although it was some time before they had more than one regular carrier and a few substitutes and helpers. We believe that this first regular carrier was Jonathan Kimball. For in one of the old Gifford letters which we have preserved, the writer mentioned that she had just looked out the window and had seen Jonathan coming with his mail bag.

By 1902, the city had seventeen regular carriers employed. They were: Charles Eshelman, G.L. Pask, Stewart Christie, N.M. Groce, J.E. King, Herbert Parker, F.J. Connor, Martin Sipple, George Colie, Brendt Christopherson, C.E. Kemp, E.E. Balch, C.N. Higinbotham, W.F. Lynch, L.J. Adams, John Scheflow and A.L. Castle.

By 1902, the new postoffice building on Spring Street, which had been under construction for about a year was ready to move into and it seemed as if everybody in town helped in moving all the boxes and other post office belongings from the Hawkins and Hunter building to the new Spring street location. Most of those people who helped in transferring equipment were aware before the job was finished that the new white stone building was far too small for the future postal needs and before long an addition had to be built on the new building.

But if the buildings proved unsatisfactory, the faithful carriers did not. For of all the men who spend their working hours serving the people of Elgin there are none that we hold more warmly in our hearts than the mailmen both in the old days and now.

They used to tell of Billie Lynch who was a bachelor and lived with his sister on Mountain Street and who loved children and used to make colored string hammocks for all the dolls on his route. And there was Lyman Adams whose route was on St. Charles Street and who never failed to give a big bully the lecture of his life whenever he found him tormenting the little boys. Mr. Higinbotham had the business district for his route many years and he loved it because it gave him a chance to make so many interesting friends. Old people and cripples always found their mailmen very helpful.