

# WINTER 2008 NEWSLETTER

**Celebrating  
100  
Years**



**Located  
in  
Lords Park**

## *Learning Through Adventure*

### *From the Director*

The summer has gone by quickly, but successfully. The Museum educators stayed busy with programs and camps, including Adventures in the Zoo. Cherrie Musial left us to become a teacher in District 301, and Sara Russell joined us. Sara is a recent anthropology graduate and we welcome her and her new ideas to the Museum family. Sara has some wonderful programs planned for the winter and they are listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our second annual members' picnic was a great success this past summer. The Museum staff really enjoys getting to know our members. We realize that our members are a very important part of the Museum. If you haven't attended one of these picnics, be sure to come in 2009

September was a busy month! Mike, Sara and I attended the Illinois Association of Museums conference in Elmhurst. Besides attending stimulating sessions, the Elgin Public Museum won an Award of Excellence for the 2008 Newsletter. Mike McGrath accepted the award on behalf of the Museum. Mike is the newsletter editor and welcomes your suggestions.

September was also the time of our annual Native American Cultural Days and Bison Blessing. About 500 people and participants enjoyed the beautiful weather, the music, dancers, games, demonstrations and dancing. The function was held in conjunction with Midwest SOARRING (Save Our Ancestors Remains and Resources Indigenous Networking Group). We were pleased to add the Aztec dance group from Elgin this year. They are a very talented group of performers.

2009 will present some real challenges to the Museum. Our funding is down, grants are nearly non-existent, and our membership is faltering. We hope that when you receive your membership renewal, you will renew and, if possible, give a contribution. Any amount given is greatly appreciated, and will be used to continue to provide quality programming. We are in negotiations with other museums to bring in traveling exhibits, and we hope you will be able to visit often.

Feel free to contact me or any other staff member at any time. [epm@cityofelgin.org](mailto:epm@cityofelgin.org), or 847-741-6655.

### **Upcoming Events**

#### **Touching on Traditions**

See Page 4 for dates, times and programs.

#### **Winter Solstice Celebration**

Sunday, December 21, 6:30 PM

#### **Survivors! Series**

Human Survival

Friday, January 16, 7 PM

#### **Bison Feeding**

Saturday, January 31, 7 AM

#### **Survivors! Series**

Animal Survival

Friday, February 6, 7 PM

#### **Lincoln Tales Tall and True**

Friday, February 20, 7 PM

#### **A Night at the Museum - Sleepover**

Friday, March 6, 7 PM

**See page 6 for the P.A.W.S.  
program schedule and our new  
Story time in February**

#### **EPM Hours**

#### **Labor Day to Memorial Day**

Saturday & Sunday Noon - 4:00 PM

**Museum closed from Dec 22 - Jan 9  
for Touching on Traditions**

#### **Memorial Day to Labor Day**

Tuesday thru Sunday Noon - 4:00 PM

Closed Mondays

**For additional information or  
to register in advance for  
classes and programs.**

**Phone: 847-741-6655**

**Fax: 847-931-6787**

**[www.elginpublicmuseum.org](http://www.elginpublicmuseum.org)**

### OUR PURPOSE

*To promote an understanding and appreciation of the natural world and other cultures, both past and present; and to increase our awareness of the decisions human cultures have made.*

### EPM STAFF

**Executive Director:**

Margaret "Peggie" Stromberg

**Museum Coordinator:**

Mike McGrath

**Education Coordinator:**

Sara Russell

**Educator:**

Marge Fox

**Museum Attendants:**

Lychelle Erickson

Will McGuigan

**Collections Supervisor:**

Elizabeth O'Toole

### Board Members

Martha Yochum

Gilbert Nore

Dwight Armistead

Mark Havemann

Clare Ollayos

Diane Ramsay Shedd

William Barnes

Sal Camacho

Don Quillman

Bruce Dahlquist

## EPM Support Team

During these uncertain economical times, the Elgin Public Museum is extremely grateful to those people who have renewed their memberships and/or donated to the Museum's Sustaining Campaign. The Museum receives about half of the funding from the City of Elgin. That base is also eroding, so members and donors are more important than ever before. When you receive a membership notice, please renew and even increase your membership, if you are able. Please also consider the Museum in estate planning. Through the support of our members we will be able to continue providing exciting programs, exhibits and educational opportunities to the Elgin community.

### New & Renewed Members June through October 2008

Jennifer Whallen-Kessuvan

Valerie & Jim Howells

Paul & Carole Burris

Irene & David Medemeyer

Joann Armenta

Trini Armenta

William & Margaret Schmoltdt

Mark & Lucy Elliott

Lawrence & Joan Damhorst

Frank & Colleen Koncilja

William & Maureen Alexander

Helen Scibetta

Martha & John Yochum

Carl & Mary Ellen Flaks

Clare Ollayos

Gary & Dana Vierck

Rebecca & EJ Marchewka

Scott & Laura Teipe

Harry Blizzard

Janice Frum

### Donors June through October 2008

Carl & Mary Ellen Flaks

Gary & Dana Vierck

Illinois Tool Works (William Schmoltdt matching)

AT&T (Jim Howells matching)

Wayne & Jeannette Russell

## NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL DAYS AND BISON BLESSING A ROUSING SUCCESS



*Elgin's El Cenxontle Dancers performing in authentic regalia*

Beautiful weather was just an additional blessing to our annual weekend event held this year in September rather than October. Close to 500 people attended, enjoying (and participating in) song, dance, drum, flute and authentic vendors. What was particularly impressive was the 120 people that formed a circle for the Bison Blessing. It was a heart-warming sight to see so many people who wanted to make that sacred connection with Nature.

## ATTENTION

Sponsors are being sought to help fund the cost of *A Celebration of Souls: Day of the Dead in Southern Mexico*. This is a traveling exhibit created by the Field Museum of Chicago. We have an anonymous donor who has agreed to match up to \$500.00. The exhibit is projected to cost \$3,000 to \$5,000. Any sponsorship amount, no matter the size, is appreciated and needed.

# STORY TELLING:

WHAT MYTHS CAN TEACH US ABOUT WHO WE ARE

By Sara Russell  
Elgin Public Museum Educator

Myths, legends – these conjure images of bedtime stories: Cinderella and her glass slipper, Pinocchio's extra long nose. Comfortable tales retold over and over again until the meaning is all but forgotten. Sleeping Beauty's take-home message is .



Sara Russell

. . . wait for prince charming? . . . sleep as much as you can? . . . stay away from spinning wheels?

Perhaps because we are too close to the stories, we don't realize that these deceptively simplistic bits of childhood are actually glimpses into our cultural identity.

Myths in the anthropological sense are not synonymous with fiction. Even the most fantastical details of a Kiowa story are accepted as real events and not supernatural. The people of this southwestern American Indian nation acknowledge these myths are not dreams. They are not tall-tales. Rather myths are part of a society's make-up; they connect a people with their heritage, past events, and culture. With this understanding, myths are part of our everyday lives.

One of the most common myths is the creation myth. Every society has one. Many American Indian myths begin with the world as one big ocean. The animals wanted somewhere to rest. Some dived down for

earth; some were even able to bring it to the surface. But where to put it? The giant turtle offered its shell. From then on all of North America became known as Turtle Island.

Perhaps one of the best examples of world-view revealed through stories emerged from slave folk tales. On the surface, they are fun tales about animals: Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. Indeed, white slave owners could believe that the rabbit tales were mere figments of a childish imagination. Dig a little deeper and these "children's" tales reveal resistance to and relief from an unjust institution.

The heroes of slave folk tales tended to be the trickster characters; those that were naturally weaker, but managed to outwit stronger animals, as is the case of The Tar Baby. Brer Fox, wanting to play a trick on the ever-curious Brer Rabbit, created a baby out of tar and placed it in the middle of a tar pit. When Brer Rabbit stumbled upon the tar baby, he investigated. It didn't take long before Brer Rabbit was completely stuck and sinking fast. Using his wits, he moaned loudly that at least he was not going to die in the thicket patch. That would be the absolute worst way to go! And so Brer Fox scooped up Brer Rabbit and tossed him into the thicket patch – to inflict maximum suffering – where Brer Rabbit hopped away unscathed. Brer Rabbit's victories became the victories of the slaves. Through these stories, slaves could turn the hierarchy on its head and assault the powerful. They turned the tables on

the strong, telling these tales in front of their masters.

However to say the slaves only identify with their trickster hero ignores the complexity of these folk tales. Slaves were forced to live in a world of confusing duality. Masters expected slaves to be childish dependents, while at the same time complete tasks as mature adults. Slaves were considered barbarians bereft of any culture, yet whites were fascinated with African dance and music. These stories were not simply clever tales of wish fulfillment. They could be painfully realistic tales that taught the art of survival. They illustrated the importance acting with care, not acting rashly. They emphasized cynicism of the powerful's sincerity. Slaves lived in a world where you could never be too trusting. Most of all Brer Rabbit taught slaves to resist when they could.

. . . And the moral of Sleeping Beauty is . . . Fill in the blank. Hopefully, though, learning the myths of different peoples reintroduces us to our own stories. And maybe even who we are as a society.

*Sara is a recent graduate of Illinois State University with a degree in Anthropology. You can contact Sara with any questions, comments or suggestions via email at: russell\_epm@cityofelgin.org*

Join us for myths, storytelling and treats at the Pavilion on Dec 7th and join us on Sunday afternoons during the month of February at the Museum.

## MUCH MORE THAN A BUNCH OF DECORATED CHRISTMAS TREES.

The holidays are almost upon us and the Elgin Public Museum for the 23rd year will again be acknowledging the diverse cultural holiday traditions of 62 different countries from around the world. Culture is defined as the ideals, values, and beliefs shared by a group of people and are passed down from generation to generation. This is accomplished through traditions: the stories, myths, legends, songs, signs and symbols. Most countries share many ideals, values and beliefs. But the way they are taught and practiced differs, and is a reflection of their physical, social and political environments.

Take a break this holiday season and stop by to see just how much the different people from around the world are the same. Then take a look at your holiday traditions and see where their roots lie.

This year we are opening the exhibit the Saturday after Thanksgiving. So, after that Friday after Thanksgiving shopping madhouse, experience some of the true meanings of the holiday season.

**Hours: Saturday & Sundays starting November 29th, Noon to 4 pm. Open daily starting December 22nd, Noon to 4 pm except December 24th & 31st, Noon to 3 pm. Closed December 25th and January 1st.**

**AND THERE'S MORE** Sunday afternoons starting on December 7th we will be conducting special programs at the Pavilion that reinforce our holiday traditions.

### Sunday December 7th

#### SONGS OF THE NATIVE FLUTE

Flutes wielded great influence in Native American cultures. They could turn an enemy into a friend or convey secret messages between young lovers. Come listen to some beautiful songs played by Bill Buchholtz.

2:00 - 3:00 pm  
Free with admission

### Sunday December 14th

#### HOMEMADE TOUCH NATURAL PAINTS

We all cherish those unique holiday cards our kids made for us in school. Bring a little creativity and create some cards for your special friends and family. The dye and paint recipes we will be using date back 100 years.

Noon - 2:00 pm  
\$2.00 plus admission

### Sunday December 28th

#### STORY TELLING AND TREATS

Story telling that will entertain the entire family. Make the connection with the exhibition through the tales drawn from the cultures that create Elgin's diverse ethnic heritage. Cider and treats for all.

2:00 - 3:00 pm  
Free with admission

**Admission is \$2.00 adult and \$1.00 for children under 12.**

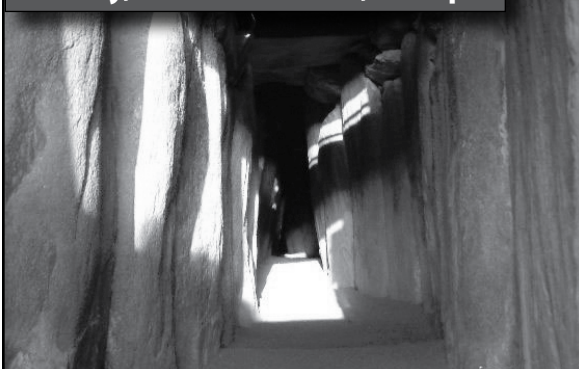
School, scout and clubs can schedule programs centered around the exhibit, weekdays between Nov 24 and Dec 19. Call us for details.

Touching on Traditions is presented at the Lords Park Pavilion, 100 Oakwood Blvd., Elgin IL.

Visit our website for more information. [www.elginpublicmuseum.org](http://www.elginpublicmuseum.org)



**Sunday, December 21st, 6:30 pm**



*Sun light in the passage at Newgrange, Ireland*

## ANCIENT CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND THE SOLSTICE

The cycle of nature is the ultimate celebration. Join us to hear about long gone cultures and the astronomical significance of the winter solstice. Learn its important relationship to harvest and the natural world of the ancient peoples. We will meet at the Pavilion and walk to the zoo for a fire, stories, hot cider and treats.

Admission \$5 per person (EPM members \$3)

**Friday, January 16th, 7:00 pm**



*Sioux Teepee, winter encampment.*

## SURVIVORS! SERIES HUMAN SURVIVAL

Imagine a life without the luxuries of electricity, gas heat, warm showers and heated cars. How would you survive? People native to this region survived our extreme winters by preparation and intimate knowledge of the land. Learn about winter foods, housing and transportation. Also explore how the European settlers adapted. Registration Required.

Admission \$5 per person (EPM members \$3)

**Saturday, January 31st, 7:00 am**



*Dakota, waiting for breakfast*

## BISON FEEDING AT THE LORDS PARK ZOO

An extremely popular program. Join us at sunrise for an invigorating learning experience as we assist Dwight in caring for the Deer, Elk and Bison at the Zoo. Kids love it and so do adults. The program is free and limited to 12 people, so register early. We'll meet at the museum for a short introduction then walk to the zoo. The program takes place snow or shine, so dress for the weather.

Admission FREE but Registration Required

**Friday, February 6th, 7:00 pm**



*Hibernating Chipmunk*

## SURVIVORS! SERIES ANIMAL SURVIVAL

When it's 10 degrees outside and a 30 mph wind blowing in my face, I'm longing for the comforts of home in a matter of minutes. Most animals don't have that luxury, yet they survive these extremes for months on end. How do they do it! Learn some of the many ways different animals have evolved and adapted to stay alive. Registration Required.

Admission \$5 per person (EPM members \$3)

Friday, February 20th, 7:00 pm



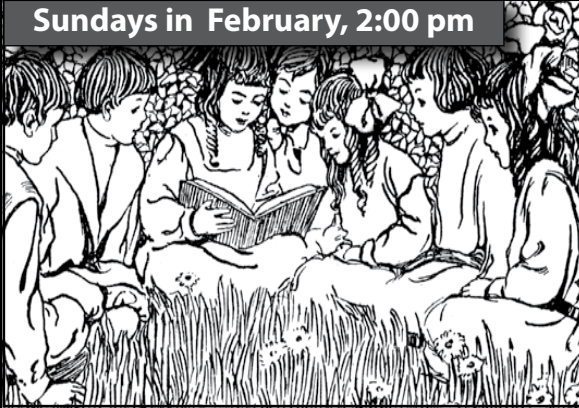
Brian "Fox" Ellis

## LINCOLN TALES TALL AND TRUE

Celebrate the 200th year of Lincoln's birth when we welcome back Brian Ellis who steps into the character of Austin Gullaher, a childhood friend of Lincoln. Story-telling; combining history and humour that disentangles reality from myth. Brian is a consultant for the Lincoln Library and Museum in Springfield. This program is sponsored by the Illinois Humanities Council.

Free Admission - Reservations Required

Sundays in February, 2:00 pm



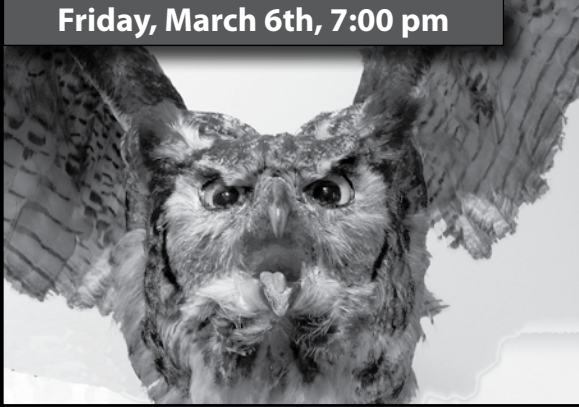
Sharing diverse cultural myths and legends.

## STORYTIME

From the Inuit of Alaska to the Dogan of Mali, every culture has myths and legends. Learn how day came to be, delight in coyote the Triskster's exploits and discover Anansi, the clever spider of Africa. Come to the Discovery Room in the Elgin public Museum to hear some amazing stories and learn a little bit about the society it came from. Great for children!

A Free Drop-In Program

Friday, March 6th, 7:00 pm



Great Horned Owl

## A NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM - SLEEPOVER -

Amidst our exhibits we will tell tales, watch movies with popcorn, even explore the night sky in Lords Park. For children grades 2 - 6. Sleeping bags on the floor for the evening with snacks provided at night and in the morning. It will be an experience the kids will talk about for years to come.

\$30 per child (Members \$25) - Reservations Required

## Preschool Awareness World Series

Stimulating educational programs for children 3-7 years old along with their caregivers. We use stories, games, crafts, songs and museum objects, so a the young child can comprehend and appreciate the diverse world around them.

Conducted on Saturdays of every month from 11am to 12:30 pm.

### Upcoming Program Schedule

Nov 8 - *Thanksgiving Thoughts*, Dec 13 - *Touching on Traditions*

Feb 14 - *In the Arctic: Polar Bears*,

Mar 14 - *On the Equator: Giant Tortoise*

Cost: \$10 per child (Members \$8)  
Advanced Reservations Required.

## DO YOU HAVE....

... a perfectly good DVD player sitting in the basement? We could use one for education department.

... experience in retail purchasing, promotion, and design coupled with a interest in science, culture and education? We have a volunteer opportunity for an individual who would like to help upgrade the products and image of our Museum Store.

If you can help, please contact Mike McGrath at 847-741-6655.

# INSECTS ARE EVERYWHERE ANATOMY OF AN EXHIBIT MAKE-OVER.

by Mike McGrath

A little over a year ago, George Hulse and his family stopped by the museum to look around. He and his children enjoy fossil hunting and insect collecting. The comment was made that it seemed our permanent insect exhibit on the second floor could use a little updating. That had been on my “to-do” list since I started volunteering at the museum over 3 years ago. George made an offer to donate collected insect specimens, so I had one less excuse to get moving.



*Specimens waiting for a home*

For me, the story I wanted to tell was: Insects blow-away all other classes of animals on our planet. What is it about them that made them so successful? Before I got too far down this road I started to study the museum literature in order to understand what makes a stimulating exhibit for the visitor.

What I learned was, besides presenting specimens of course, the information on labels must do more than just state facts. People come to museums and experience “the real thing”. We at the museum must also supply information that will spark their interest so that they will want to learn more. Most visitors

will stop and read if some kind of connection can be made at a personal level. “How does the everyday life of a bug affect my life?” “Why should I care?” And if we want them to read the label it must be grab their attention with clarity and efficiency.

I found myself faced with a little problem. Although, why insects are so successful might make a good science research paper in school, it was not the path we should take in developing a good museum exhibit. Brainstorming with staff and anyone else who we could lend an ear and render an opinion, we decided that the “big idea” should be: Why are insects so important to you and me? We came up with 3 reasons: 1. Pollination – a majority of the foods we eat are pollinated by insects as well as the foods eaten by many other animals. 2. Decomposers – insects get rid of a lot of dead things, thus assisting in the nutrient cycle 3. Nourishment for other animals - many other animals that we depend on for food need insects as their food source. Without insects there would be virtually no fruits, vegetables or flowers, we would be wallowing in dead plants, animals and dung



*Before: Staircase with blank walls*

and many other animals that are part of a complex food chain would be non-existent. Without insects to keep this complicated cycle of life in motion, the question could be asked: Would the human race have even evolved as we know it?

So we are presently writing labels that will tell this story. We are collecting specimens that will tell this story. And we are designing and fabricating that will tell this story. It’s a slow process, especially the collecting part. Although we have many specimens, (I taught myself collecting and pinning techniques this summer), there are still a lot of gaps in specimens needed to pull the whole exhibit together.

The exhibit has started to go up. The staircase leading to the 2nd floor now has some plaques on the walls along with a few circles. It’s a simple message that we’re trying to convey before you get to the main cases at the top of the stairs. There are a lot of insects crawling, flying, swimming, and burrowing out there. Hopefully after we finish the main cases with our story, visitors will walk away thinking to themselves; “This is a good thing, thank goodness for insects.”



*After: Staircase with a message*

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE PAID  
ELGIN IL 60120  
PERMIT NO 369



**ELGIN PUBLIC MUSEUM**  
of Natural History & Anthropology  
225 Grand Blvd. in Lords Park  
Elgin, IL 60120

## SOME TEACHERS NEVER STOP TEACHING

**W**e here at the Elgin Public Museum are very fortunate to have Marge Fox as part of our Education department. Or rather I should say our community is very fortunate. Marge has been conducting school, scout, and family programs for EPM the past 13 years. She had some time on her hands after a 38 year career as an elementary school teacher, a passion she couldn't stay away from. Marge possesses the uncanny ability to connect with the young child at that critical time in their life



*Marge preparing for yet another program.*

when the excitement for learning is being cultivated. And I'll attest to the fact that she has the curiosity and energy of the children she teaches. Her organizational skills and enthusiasm for everything are invaluable to our organization. Marge is also involved in numerous community organizations and is a world traveler. The only continent she hasn't set foot on is Africa, but there is still time for that. Thank You Marge!

**The Illinois Association of  
Museums presented the Elgin  
Public Museum with an  
Award of Excellence for their  
2008 Summer Newsletter.**



*Mike McGrath accepting the award for EPM  
from Dave Oberg, President of IAM.*

***Get Involved!***

***We'd love to hear from you.***

Email us with comments and suggestions at [epm@cityofelgin.org](mailto:epm@cityofelgin.org)