

ELGIN ★ TEXAS

# HERITAGE WALKING TOUR





## **The History of Elgin**

The City of Elgin owes its existence to a major flood of the Colorado River in the early 1870s. The flood quickly persuaded the Houston and Texas Central Railroad to re-survey a line through Manor to Austin. The original had been a line from McDade, southwest to the Colorado River between Bastrop and Webberville.

Incorporated on May 13, 1872, the city was named for Robert Morris Elgin, the Railroad Land Commissioner. In the early 1870s, a new North-South line was organized and Elgin became the beneficiary of two major rail lines with eight passenger trains daily.

The early 1900s brought growth and prosperity to Elgin. A bumper crop of cotton in 1900 helped to establish five cotton gins and a cotton oil mill all in operation at the same time. Three brick manufacturing companies in the area gave Elgin the title, "The Brick Capital of the Southwest."

The growth continued through the 1920s when most of the brick commercial buildings were built.

Currently, Elgin's population is a proud 8,000 and growing! We are famous for Elgin's "Hot Sausage", historic buildings, brick and friendly folks! Today the community proudly claims the following titles:

**Sausage Capital of Texas  
Brick Capital of the Southwest  
Texas Main Street City**

The historic downtown district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.





**1. 1872, Houston and Texas Central Freight Depot**  
114 Central Avenue



This small depot, built in 1872, was the original freight depot for the H. & T. C. line. The building was renovated 1999-2002 and has the original board and batten construction. It is the oldest building downtown.

**2. 1912, Veteran's Memorial Park**

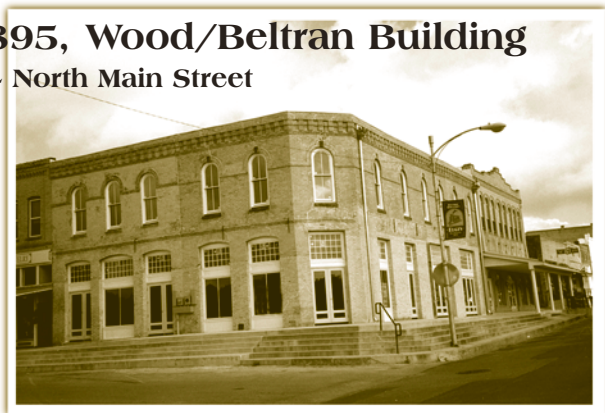
After becoming infested with rats while serving as the home to the Mutual Lumber Company, The park became a project of the ladies of the Civic Improvement Committee. They found a new home for the lumber yard and signed a lease with the railroad company with plans to convert the park. A bandstand was erected and the park became much more inviting. The bandstand was removed after WWII and replaced by a fountain. In 1991, the current gazebo was built in an effort to revitalize the park. Originally called City Park, it was named Veterans Memorial Park in early 2000.

**3. 1890, O'Connor Building**  
116 Depot Street

This two-story buffed brick building was built by Thomas O'Connor in 1890. Mr. O'Connor was an Irish-born brick contractor who moved to Elgin in the late 1800s to build cisterns, wells, and fireplaces for the growing community. He initially bought bricks from Butler Brick Company in Austin, but found a source of high quality clay in the Elgin area and began manufacturing his own bricks. The building contained a furniture store on the ground level and family quarters on the second floor. The freight elevator is still in working condition.



**4. 1895, Wood/Beltran Building**  
14 North Main Street



This building, constructed around 1895, was the location of Dr. William Wood's medical practice early in the 20th century. Harvard McCloud operated a pharmacy for Dr. Wood on the ground floor. The soda fountain in this store was a popular meeting place during and after the second World War (the bus station from Camp Swift was next door). The pharmacy was taken over by Charles Ramsey who later moved his business to 115 N. Main St. There have been many tenants since then. The building is a fine example of Elgin's early brick architecture.

**5. Jones Drug Store**  
28 Main Street

This building was constructed around 1895. For many years, it operated as Jones Drug Store. Since the passing of Mr. Jones, the building has remained closed.

**6. 1906, Simon's Building**  
30 Main Street



In August of 1919, Mr. and Mrs. H. Simon moved to Elgin from Hempstead, Texas to open a dry goods and clothing store in the old Smith Building (100 North Main). In 1922, Mr. Simon opened a second store two blocks south of the Elgin National Bank. He was assisted by his sons, Abe, Manny, and Meyer. In 1935 Mr. Joe Simon purchased the business from his father. Simon's, one of the original department stores in Elgin, closed in 1998.





## 7. Miller Building/Merchants & Farmers State Bank

34 Main Street

The Miller Brothers Building was built around 1890 and added to in 1911. The property is a good example of a two-part commercial building with elaborate detailing which retains its essential architectural integrity.



## 8. 104 Main Street

This building was occupied in the early years by Singleton's Grocery and Frost Barber Shop. The grocery was tiny, as noted by one of Elgin's senior citizens, who was a boy at the time. The little grocery, small as it was, found room to market a few used musical instruments, such as violins and guitars.



## 9. Joe's Toggery

106 Main Street

This building was constructed around 1901, and housed "Joe's Toggery", which sold clothing, hats, and footwear.

A unique feature of this building is a full-height "ghost" sign depicting Owl Cigars, painted on the then exposed north exterior wall of the adjacent 104 North Main, circa 1900-1901. The interior original bead board ceiling is intact and the skylight was restored.

## 10. The O'Connor Building

112 and 110 Main Street



This building was constructed around 1920, built by Thomas O'Connor. Occupied by Alex Moore Grocery, Levine Dry Goods and then Elkins 5¢ & 10¢ store. It was vacant during much of the depression. Later occupied by Winns 5¢ & 10¢ Store and Bill's Dollar Store.



## 11. The Bengston Building

114 Main Street

Selstrom Hardware was one of the early businesses in this building. They sold farm equipment and tools, as well as other items used by the early citizens of Elgin. Horses were also stabled in the back portion of the building.

## 12. 1906, Nofsinger House

310 Main Street



This Victorian brick home was built by Dr. and Mrs. I.B. Nofsinger in 1906. Dr. Nofsinger came to Elgin from McDade in 1900 even though there were four other physicians in

town. It was a smart move considering the population grew from 832 people in the year 1890, to 1709 people in the year 1910. Mrs. Nofsinger designed the house and the floor plan. The ground-level rooms have 11 foot 10 inch ceilings, and the upstairs rooms have 9 foot ceilings. Bricks were made from deep red clay manufactured by the Elgin Press Brick Company. The tall cupola on the left front adds to the uniqueness of the home. In 1980, the home was purchased by Elgin Savings and Loan and was converted to the use of a savings & loan. Currently the home serves as Elgin City Hall and was restored in 2003.



## 13. Elgin Public Library

404 Main Street

The New Century Club started the first library in Elgin in the early 1900's and supported locations on Avenue C and Lexington Road. In 1985, volunteers opened a storefront on Main Street with donated books and the library grew into the wonderful facility and services that are enjoyed by the community today. Constructed in 2004, at a cost of \$1.7 million in voter approved bonds, the 14,000 square foot facility includes a community room, computer lab, conference room and reading materials for all ages.



**14. J.C. Miller Building**  
119 Main Street

Built by J.C. Miller to house his furniture and funeral business, this two-story masonry structure was restored in 1985 by its current owners Owen, Bogart & Rogers Attorneys at Law. The Miller Furniture Co. was housed on the first floor and the second floor housed the funeral business. The building still sports some of the best looking and the best preserved pressed tin ceiling panels in town. Also note the original tiled entry way that reads "J.C. Miller 1913". The building has two working elevators.



**15. 1913, J.C. Miller Funeral Chapel**  
117 Main Street

There was an alley here in the past as indicated by the existence of a Spearmint Gum wall mural on the inside of the present building. The mural was discovered during renovation in 1985. J.C. Miller built this small building in 1913 to house his funeral chapel. Note the multi-colored transom windows, the lead-paned glass, and the interior sky lights still in use.



**16. 1910, Ramsey Pharmacy**  
115 Main Street

Ramsey served Elgin residents for over 40 years at this address. All the interior fixtures, including the amazing soda fountain, were built for the pharmacy in 1950.



**17. 1910, Ray's Barber Shop**  
113 A Main Street

In 1911, Mr. Roy Ray set up his barber practice and in 1912 his brother D.B. Ray joined him. They moved it to this location in 1940. In 1971, after barbering for 61 years, Roy Ray died, leaving his brother to carry on the business. In 1992, D.B. Ray retired at the age of 100. Since then the shop has been remodeled, but still houses the original fixtures. The barber pole outside was made out of an old water heater because earlier wooden ones kept getting knocked down.

**18. 1910, McGee Brothers Shoe and Upholstery Shop**  
113 B Main Street

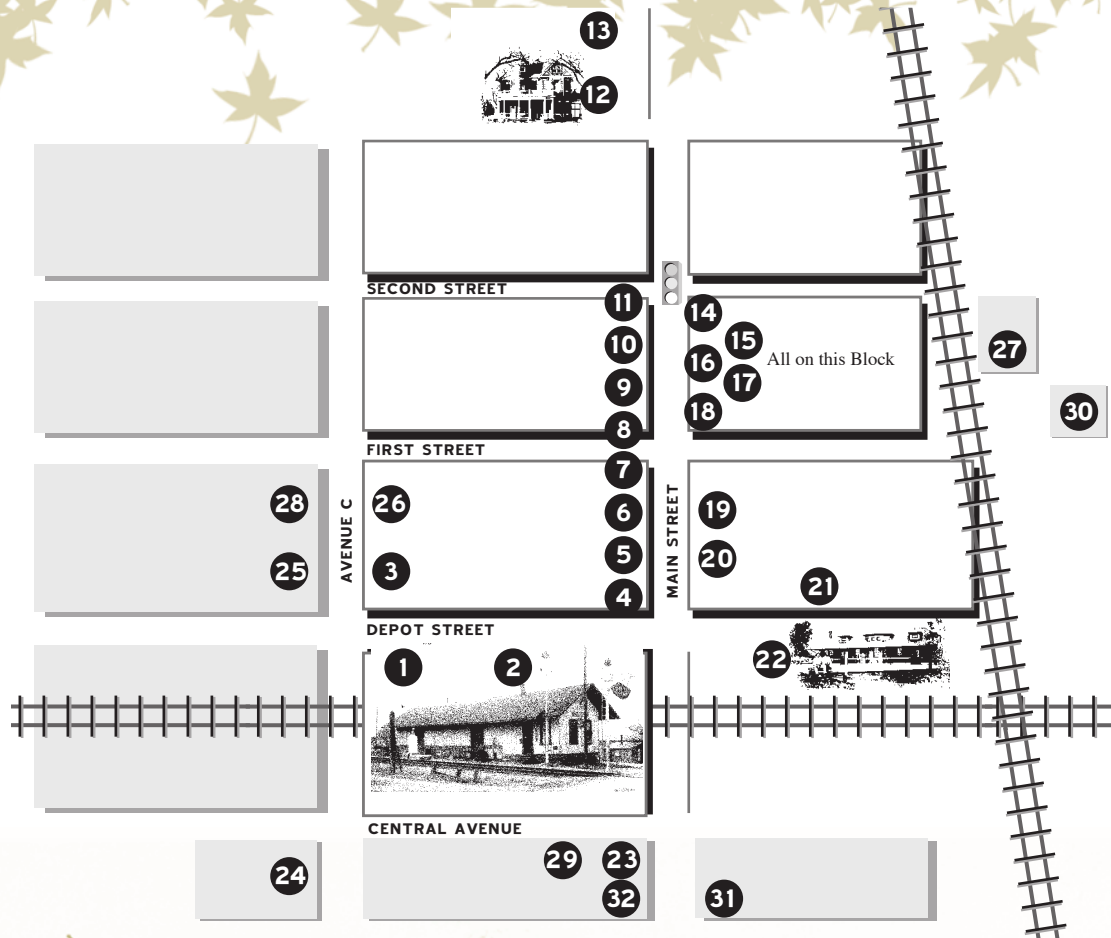
In 1928, Ross McGee purchased this shoe shop from Will Nichols. He was soon joined by his brothers Mack and Howard McGee - although Mack did not stay long in the business. The brothers knew nothing about repairing shoes, but it was the Depression and they were willing to work hard and learn. The business expanded into mattress making, seat covers for automobiles and furniture upholstery. Much of the original shoe repair and mattress making equipment remains inside. This family business has been in continuous operation since 1928.

**19. 1923, Elgin National Bank**  
31 Main Street

The Bank of Elgin, organized in 1891, was privately owned by entrepreneur W.H. Rivers. The bank was incorporated on April 21, 1906. It was first located on the south side of town, but the original structure burned down in 1923. The bank is Elgin's only structure from the Beaux Arts Period. Designed by world renowned architect, Hugo Franz Kuehne, Elgin Bank may be the single most important structure in the community. Kuehne was known for his studies and style influence on Texas. He went on to design state buildings, many of which can still be seen today in the Austin area.



# WALKING TOUR MAP



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|---|---|
| 1. 1872, Houston and Texas Central Freight Depot                    | 13. Elgin Public Library<br>404 Main Street                           |
| 2. 1912, City Park  | 14. J.C. Miller Building<br>119 Main Street                           |
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| 7. Miller Building/Merchants & Farmers State Bank<br>34 Main Street | 19. 1923, Elgin National Bank<br>31 Main Street                       |
| 8. 104 Main Street  | 20. 1891, City Cafe<br>19 Main Street                                 |
| 9. Joe's Toggery<br>106 Main Street                                 | 21. 1897, A. Christian Saloon<br>16 Depot Square                      |
| 10. The O'Connor Building<br>112 and 110 Main Street                | 22. 1903, Union Depot<br>15 Depot Square                              |
| 11. The Bengston Building<br>114 Main Street                        |   |
| 12. 1906, Nofsinger House<br>310 Main Street                        |   |

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| 23. 1882, Southside Market and BBQ<br>109 Central Avenue | 28. Webb Building<br>34 Avenue C                 |
| 24. 1906, P. Bassist Opera House<br>201 Central Avenue   | 29. Ridings Grocery<br>111-113 Central Avenue    |
| 25. 1910, Courier Printing<br>200 Depot Avenue           | 30. Elgin Cotton Oil Mill<br>301 East 1st Street |
| 26. 1936, United States Post Office<br>21 North Avenue C | 31. The Arbuckle Garage<br>100 South Main Street |
| 27. The Culp Building<br>202 East 1st Street             | 32. The Rivers Building<br>110 South Main Street |

**20. 1891, City Cafe**  
19 Main Street

This building was constructed by the Elgin Improvements Company and is believed to have been the second brick building in downtown Elgin. It first housed a general store and drug store on the first floor, and an opera house upstairs. In 1910 it housed a jewelry store, a barber shop, and a bakery. The cafe opened in 1910 and continues to operate as a full service restaurant.



**21. 1897, A. Christian Saloon**  
16 Depot Square



Mr. A. S. Christian, a descendant of Mary Christian, the original pioneer in this area, bought the lot in 1897 for \$300 and built the present structure. Christian's Saloon was one of seven saloons in Downtown Elgin at a time when Elgin was known as "wild" with the best (or worst) Western Traditions. Elgin's reputation was perhaps best illustrated by the manner in which the train conductor announced the stop as "Hell-gin, half way to Hades, next stop!". There was a large sign painted on the side of the building which read, "A. Christian Saloon" to attract customers from the eight daily passenger trains. Old timers tell the story of a Bible salesman who got off the train, saw the sign and headed straight for the saloon. He rushed in, with intent to congratulate the proprietor on such a fine establishment. He very hastily retreated when he figured out the nature of the business.



**22. 1903, Union Depot**  
15 Depot Square

Elgin Union Depot was built jointly by the Houston & Texas Central and Missouri Kansas and Texas (MKT or "Katy") railroads in 1903. It replaced a small wooden depot built in the 1880s. Olle Lorehn, a Swedish architect in Houston, designed the new brick building. Interlocker Tower #100, which housed the telegraph office and the switch levers, was built at the RR crossroads in 1913 and demolished in the 1970s. Passenger service ended in 1957 and the depot building then served as the Elgin Police Department from 1960 to 1990. After a lengthy period of fund-raising and restoration, the building was opened as the Elgin Depot Museum in June 2002. It is operated by the Elgin Historical Association.

**OFF THE BEATEN PATH**

**23. 1882, Southside Market and BBQ** 109 Central Avenue

In 1882, Southside Market was established as home of the famous Elgin "hot" sausage. William Moon, the original owner, started the market on Farm Road 1704. He sold his product door to door out of a wagon. By 1886, Southside Market was located at 117 Central Avenue and continued to move around until it found its home here between 1944 and 1991. The locals as well as the state of Texas have kept the demand high for Elgin's "hot guts" naming Elgin the Sausage Capital of Texas in 1995.

**24. 1906, P. Bassist Opera House**  
201 Central Avenue

Built by German immigrant, Philip Louis Bassist in 1906, this opera house quickly became the center of Elgin's



cultural and social scene. The auditorium located on the second floor hosted shows, operas, and "stars" of the day, including Lily Langtry. The ground floor was used by various commercial establishments including Benitz Jewelry, Bassist Produce, and served as the third home of the Elgin Post Office in 1908.

### 25. 1910, Courier Printing

200 Depot Avenue



Built by B.J. Soloman and Mutual Lumber Company, this building was the second home to the Elgin Courier. The Elgin Courier has been in continuous operation since 1890 and serves the community today.

### 26. 1936, United States Post Office

21 North Avenue C



Built in 1936 to permanently house Elgin's post office, this depression era, streamlined, art deco building is one of a kind in Elgin. Inside you will find a well preserved W.P.A. mural painted by Julius Woeltz in 1939. Titled "Texas Farm", the mural was part of a federal program to provide work for artists. You will also find original fixtures in the building.

### 27. Culp Building

202 East 1st Street

Constructed in mid-late 1940's of concrete block, the Culp Building was originally a trade warehouse selling ear corn, watermelons, etc. Over the years, it has been a flour trading company, grain/feed mill and a metal smith shop.



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### 28. Webb Building

34 Avenue C

Built in 1947, the Webb building housed the family law firm which was established March 12, 1900 by C.W. Webb. In 1923, his wife Emma joined the firm and in 1945 their son, Jackson S. Webb, became a junior member of the firm. In 1961, Ross Meredith joined the firm and it became known as Webb, Webb & Meredith Attorneys. The firm provided legal services to the City of Elgin for many years and was known as the law north of the Colorado. After 93 years, the Elgin law office closed its doors, ending a "mighty chapter in one of Elgin's longest continuous family operated businesses in this community" Elgin Courier, June 1993.

### 29. Ridings Grocery & The Santos Building

111-113 Central Avenue

Ridings operated a grocery store for many years serving the Elgin community. The Santos building was a bar and grocery store. These classic storefronts and original Elgin brick represent typical architecture of the time.



### 30. Elgin Cotton Oil Mill

301 East 1st Street



Operating since 1906 this mill still uses machinery that presses the seed to obtain the oil without using chemicals for processing. Originally, a cooperative called the Elgin Cotton Oil Company, E.O. Lundgren purchased the mill in mid 1930's. It is currently operated by a third generation of the Lundgren family. One of four in Texas and one of 12 in the U.S., the mill processes cotton seed, provides grain storage, and retail feed sales. The A-frame buildings with tall roof lines store cotton.





**31. The Arbuckle Garage**  
100 South Main Street

Opened in 1920's as the Arbuckle Garage it was a full service automotive repair shop and gas station. Their neighbor to the immediate south of this property was The Mule Barn, owned and operated by Roy Rivers, Sr.. The Mule Barn was a grocery store, feed store and kept mules and horses. The mules were typically sold to farmers and horses were rented by the hour to soldiers from Camp Swift to "play cowboy" when on leave.

**32. The Rivers Building**  
110 South Main Street

Built in 1906, the Rivers, a founding family in the Elgin community, established a successful mercantile at 110 South Main Street and were involved in many business, social and cultural activities in Elgin. It was known as Rivers Mercantile or Rivers Brothers. They carried everything from farm equipment to groceries and dry goods. The building had a roller skating rink on the 2nd floor and for many years was a bus station.

**Elgin Special Events**

**Western Days**  
4th Weekend of June

**Hogeye Festival**  
4th Weekend of October

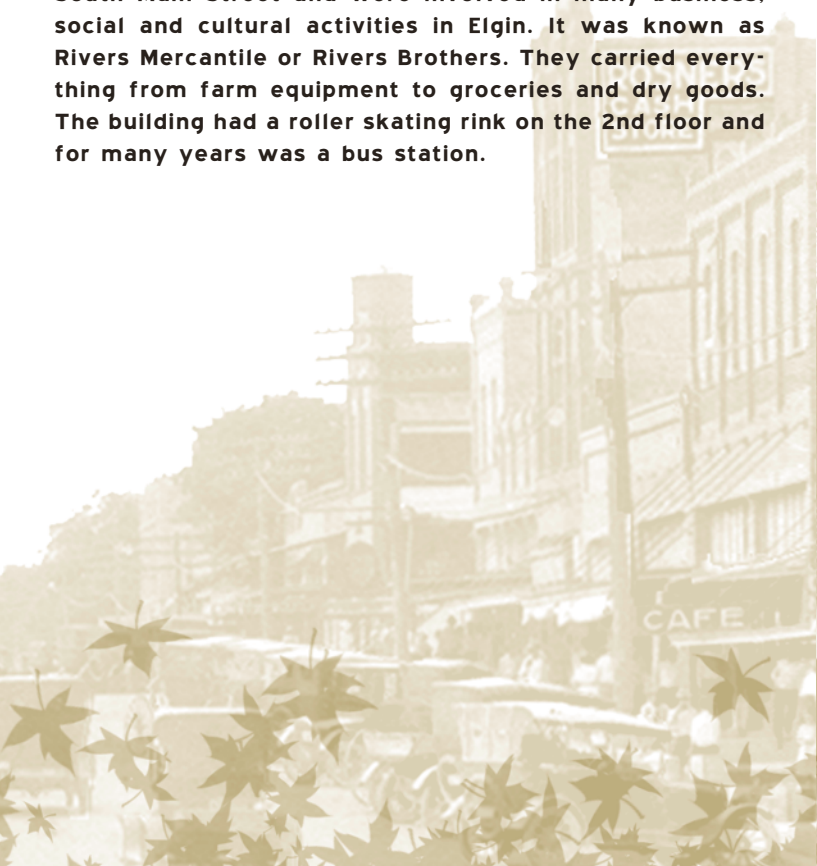
**Holiday By The Tracks**  
1st Weekend of December

**For More Information Contact:**

Greater Elgin Chamber of Commerce  
114 Central Avenue  
P.O. Box 408  
Elgin, Texas 78621  
(512) 285-4515

City of Elgin  
Elgin Main Street Program  
310 North Main Street  
P.O. Box 591  
Elgin, Texas 78621  
(512) 285-5721

[www.elgintx.com](http://www.elgintx.com)





## Special Thanks

Descriptions by Joseph O. Connor, Joe Garland and Charles and Elwanda Lundgren with help from Ann Helgeson, Barbara Stockley, Brian Lundgren, Elgin Main Street Board, Elgin Historical Association and the Greater Elgin Chamber of Commerce.  
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