

## Old Main

In 1848, the Free Will Baptists built just the foundation of the building at 350 Park Street, before running out of money. They had hoped to establish a school to be called

also contributed, the sale was called off, the Elgin Academy continued turning out "manly boys and womanly girls."



In 1911, lightning struck the bell tower and within minutes the dome was in flames. The roof was destroyed and was replaced by a flat roof which remained in place for the next sixty years.

Old Main's function as a school building ceased in 1969 when the fire department ordered it closed for fire hazards, mainly because there was only one stairway. Money was not available to fix the building or to tear it down, so Old Main stood there with

Northern Illinois College, but their funds ran out.

In 1855, a reorganized board of trustees bought the site. Old Main was completed in 1856 as the main building of Elgin Academy, which was open to students of all religious denominations, an especially unusual practice for the time.

During the Civil War, the building and grounds were put up for sale to pay off the mortgage. However, on the day of the sale, Dr. Joseph Tefft stepped forward to ward off the shame and disgrace of the situation, and vowed to save the school. Others

its white paint peeling from the bricks, its windows boarded up and generally looking its age.

The restoration of Old Main began in 1976. The Gifford Park Association donated nearly \$5,000 to the restoration fund, and members volunteered literally thousands of man hours on work inside the building.

In 1981, a 25-year contract was signed by the City of Elgin and the Elgin Area Historical Society to maintain the Greek Revival Style building as a museum, and it has been in operation since 1987.

