

LONG GROVE HISTORY

The Flagpole Story

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One of the most oft requested tales of old Long Grove is the story of the flagpole on Towner Green in the Historic Downtown.



The story starts in pre-prohibition Chicago, where a young Irish American teenager known as “Terrible Terry” Druggan was a member of the Valley Gang. The gang was led by Paddy “The Bear” Ryan and specialized in pickpocketing and armed robbery. When prohibition began in 1919, Chicago gangs adapted their craft to the more profitable enterprise of bootlegging. The higher stakes also ratcheted up the violence – Walter “The Runt” Quinlan knocked off “The Bear” and took control of the Valley Gang in 1920, though was quickly done in himself by “The Bear’s” son, Paddy “The Fox” Ryan. In the ensuing organizational chaos, Terry Druggan stepped forward with his partner Frankie Lake and assumed control of the “Valley Gang”. They made millions in the 1920’s.

With his disposable income, he acquired a mansion in Miami and took up an interest in horses. As a retreat away from his Chicago activities and as a place to raise his horses, he bought property in Long Grove and Kildeer. His connections and money enabled him to skirt the law during most of the 1920’s and when he did end up in the clink, it was manageable. One infamous story was a jail stint he did in 1924. When a newspaper reporter showed up to interview him, the reporter was told that he was, “out at the moment tending to his horses”, but he would be back by sundown if the reporter would like to return then.

In 1925, he cut a deal with the up and coming Al “Scarface” Capone, whereby he would pay Capone 40% of his beer profits in exchange for Capone’s protection from other gangs. The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre in 1929 is an example of this type of “protection” – Capone killed seven member of the Bugs Moran gang in a turf war.

In 1930, the oft forgotten “echo” of the St. Valentine’s Massacre occurred in Fox Lake, sometimes called the Fox Lake Massacre. Perhaps in retaliation for Valentine’s Day, Bugs Moran associates ambushed 5 Capone associates in a bar that had recently switched from Moran beer to Terry Druggan beer. Terry’s brother was badly wounded in the attack.



By 1930, the violence and outright flaunting of the law had turned the public opinion negative and, in response, The Chicago Tribune published a "Public Enemies List", which included Capone as number 4 and Druggan as number 7. The term caught on, and Warner Brothers released the famous Jimmy Cagney movie, "Public Enemy" in 1931. The movie is loosely based on Terry Druggan.

In 1932 Druggan and his partner Lake were both convicted of tax evasion, had much of their fortune seized, and could no longer effectively manage their gang – it was absorbed into Capone's empire. With prohibition ending in 1933 and Druggan's assets dwindling, he relocated into a house on Long Grove road, located approximately where Middleton intersects today. He had previously acquired the house for his mother, which was one of his tactics in trying to shield his assets from seizure.

Still needing some protection from old rivals and law enforcement, he erected a large flag pole (reportedly 100 foot tall) on the property. The flag pole was visible from Rand Road, and his associates used the flag to signal danger. As he returned from the city, if he saw no flag, he knew to stay away.

Terry passed away in March of 1954. He had lost his fortune and was not in good health the last years of his life. Local stories report that he spent considerable time in an "iron lung". His nurses were said to be much younger and much more attractive than he was. The Long Grove barbershop was supposedly frequented by Terry and his associates.

Norma Sales, long time proprietor of the Long Grove Village tavern acquired Druggan's Long Grove Road property. Shortly thereafter, a lighting strike cut the flag pole in half.

On July 4th, 1954, William Umbendstock, pictured above, wanted to honor his father, who fought in the Civil War, by erecting a flag in downtown Long Grove. William lived in the house (now shops, most recently Wine

Splash), directly behind Towner Green. Norma offered up the top half of Terry Druggan's old flag pole and it was installed across the street from her tavern – in front of William's House.

Have an idea for a story or program you'd like to see the Historical Society put on? Email aaron@aunder.com with your ideas and try to find time to attend one of our upcoming programs.

