

Long Grove History

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Four Dudes *on a Doorstep*

Often an old photo turns out to be much more interesting than first meets the eye. Ponder this one: aside from four men perched on a stoop — what is actually known about it, and what stories can we tease out?

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society



PLATE I Mr. Hans, Mr. Keiler, Mr. Umbdenstock, and Mr. Cordes, seated in front of a Long Grove shop, ca. 1925. Photograph courtesy of the Long Grove Historical Society.

When a Long Grove old-timer passes on, their families have often moved far away, and photos like these are donated to the Historical Society — with the thought that they mean more to people still in the area than to future generations who will never know Long Grove. There often isn't any real information with the picture, maybe a name or two on the back.

Such is the case here. All that's known is generally where the picture was taken and who it features. It appears to be a "general store" — you can see some of the merchandise in the window. And, of course, that rather prominent ad for **BALL BAND RUBBERS**.



While *Ball* might be a brand you associate today with jars and home canning products, Ball Band was an unrelated company that made rubber overshoes — and that's what the ad is referring to. *Jar Rubbers* is what they would have called the canning seals back in the day.

Dating the photo.

Clothing is a good way to date a photo, particularly with younger people who are apt to be wearing the style of the day. The dapper gentleman on the far right, Mr. Cordes, is sporting some distinctive clothes — a Fedora and what appear to be spats on his shoes. Both were popular in the 1920's and 1930's, so that is a general starting point.

Fortunately, at the Historical Society, we have a picture of Mr. George Umbdenstock, the town blacksmith, from 1923, and he is very similar in appearance — maybe just a little older in this photo. So 1925 is a good guess at when this was taken.

There's some irony in Mr. Cordes' spats. They were a stylish way to keep your feet a bit warmer and protect your shoes from the slop one might encounter in a place like Long Grove (no paved roads, no sidewalks...). Spats fell out of fashion as rubber overshoes gained in popularity — such as those made by Ball Band and apparently sold in downtown Long Grove. Admit it: at first glance, you didn't realize this picture captured an occurring revolution in the shoe industry, did you?

Mr. George Umbdenstock has another interesting clothing accessory — *sleeve garters*. These were a functional accessory that kept one's sleeves "up" and away from the work you were doing with your hands. While a blacksmith would benefit from this, George doesn't appear dressed for work, so I think he was going more for their style on this day. As a side note, we can infer that he doesn't consider himself well-to-do; such a person would not wear sleeve garters in 1925, as it would imply their shirt wasn't properly tailored.

Which stoop, exactly?

If you know any Long Grove history at all, you probably know that there were two "general stores" on opposing corners downtown — sometimes known as the Sauer store and the Stemple store. What you might not know is that a young boy who grew up in the area, **John Hans**, worked as a teenager in the Sauer store and eventually purchased it for himself in 1914. It became the John Hans store. It burnt to the ground in 1916, but John rebuilt, and that building still stands today as the former Farmside Country Store.

The Stemple store had closed up shop by that time, so in 1925 Long Grove would have been a "one corner store" town. The setting for the picture would most likely have been the front stoop of the Sauer / Hans / Farmside store. The Mr. Hans in the picture is likely proprietor John Hans himself, or a close relative.

Mr. Keiler makes an interesting contribution with his quite distinctive hat — something like what a train conductor might wear. It was referred to as a "Judge Style" cap and was popular enough in 1908 to get a whole half-page in the Sears catalog. They appear in the catalog all the way up into the 1930's. I kind of want one for myself, but I can't find anyplace that sells them. I really think they're poised for a comeback.

If you're interested in adding your name to the Sauer / Hans / Farmside store legacy — you're in luck. The store is currently for sale; its assessed value is \$190,000 (hey, that's only \$15,000 in 1923 dollars). If you take it on, be sure to stock some of those Judge Style caps. I'll be first in line.

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