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Long Grove History

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Three Townships

Long Grove sprawls across a survey grid that doesn't quite fit it — landing the village inside three separate townships. Each name tells a story; one of them only exists because of an argument.

By **Aaron Underwood** · Long Grove Historical Society



Long Grove Village Planner **James Hogue**, with the historical township map on display at Long Grove Village Hall — Fremont, Ela, and Vernon all visible behind him.

The oldest form of local government in the United States is the township — a means of local control more representative and efficient than the county. The Illinois Constitution of 1848 mandated that townships be created. Because they tend to be laid out on a survey grid, geographically large towns like Long Grove don't always fit neatly inside one. In fact, Long Grove lies in three: **Vernon, Ela, and Fremont.**

The names were chosen by local residents back in the day. Sometimes there's a straightforward explanation. Sometimes it's rather complicated. Either way, the names are a fun way to look at history — most place names provide a glimpse into the local mindset at the time.



EASIEST STORY

Ela TOWNSHIP

Ela is the simplest story. **George Ela** was the first settler in Ela Township, arriving in 1835. He operated a store, was a state legislator, and would eventually form the township's first post office. When the time came to name the township, there was general agreement that it should honor its first settler.

MOST CONTROVERSIAL

Fremont TOWNSHIP

Fremont is more complicated, and more controversial. **John C. Frémont** was a US Army Major who instigated a revolt in California against the Mexican government and eventually took possession of California for the United States. For overstepping his bounds in the matter, he was court-martialed and dismissed from the Army in 1848 — but he remained popular with the public, was a staunch anti-slavery advocate, ran for President in 1856, and served as governor of the Arizona Territory in the early 1880s.

When local citizens were asked to pick their township name in 1849, the contenders were Hale, Gilmer, Fort Hill, Seneca, Tickleville, and Haddam. Fremont wasn't even in the running. **Gilmer** won the popular vote with 25 residents; **Haddam** was a distant second with 17. However, those responsible for submitting the name turned in *Haddam* anyway. Officials smelled something fishy and rejected it.

A meeting was convened where proponents of each name came before officials to argue their case. Officials refused to pick a side; the community seemed equally divided. Someone in the audience suggested **Fremont**, for the popular explorer who was much in the news at the time — and both sides agreed to the compromise. Thus Fremont Township came into existence. Hard to believe, however, an awesome name like *Tickleville Township* was passed over.

MOST TANGLED

Vernon TOWNSHIP

The story of Vernon Township's name can't properly be told without first dealing with the naming of its original settlement of **Half Day**. When filing for the county's first post office, the name *Hafda* was chosen, in honor of the local Indian chief by that name. Somewhere in the paper trail, this was changed to *Half Day*. The name has nothing to do with being a half day's travel from somewhere — that's an urban legend.

As for Vernon Township itself: the county's first settler was **Captain Daniel Wright**, who arrived alone on horseback from Ohio in May of 1834. He promptly built a cabin for his family, then sent word back for them to join him. As with Fremont, agreement on a name was hard to come by. Several area residents wanted *Rome Township*, as they were from Rome, New York. Others wanted *Half Day Township*, but objections were raised on the grounds that there wasn't a good reason the name *Half Day* existed in the first place.

The compromise name was Vernon. There are two stories. One: Captain Wright was from Mount Vernon, Ohio, and suggested it. The other: the commissioners themselves chose it, after Washington's Mount Vernon. Since Mount Vernon, Ohio is itself named for President Washington's home, the stories are somewhat equivalent.

Incidentally, Washington's older brother christened their plantation Mount Vernon in honor of his commanding officer in the *War of Jenkins' Ear*, Vice Admiral Edward Vernon. Lest this article on names unwind forever, all I'll say about the war is — it literally involves a fellow named Jenkins losing an ear.

CURIOUS ABOUT A LOCAL PLACE NAME?



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