

Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING
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The Battle of *Ela* Township

As school children, we were taught how our country was born of armed resistance — everyday citizens arming themselves and resisting an invading force. Ever wonder how Long Grove's government got started? Would you be surprised to learn it, too, involved an invading force and armed resistance?

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



PLATE I The Founders Memorial Bridge on Cuba Road, dedicated to Dorothea Huszagh and those who joined in founding the Village of Kildeer and establishing its rural character.

Admittedly, comparing the two is a bit of a stretch, but it makes for an interesting tale nonetheless. In the 1950's, Long Grove consisted of a few hundred people — farmers mixed with young, well-to-do big-city refugees who fancied "the country life" and multi-acre home sites. Everyone had their own well and septic.

If you shared a gravel road with a few neighbors, you all pitched in to keep it in shape and clear it of snow. Your kids went to the new Kildeer Countryside School, which anchored the community and hosted local meetings. Long Grove was simply an unincorporated area — in "the country," fancy zoning and police protection didn't seem that necessary.



Brickman's plan.

But that country lifestyle was about to be threatened. As high-density suburbia crawled out from Chicago, it was inevitable it would one day swipe its paw at the immense green fields around Long Grove. Residents banded together and formed the Kildeer Countryside Association, fighting a few successful legal battles to keep the land residential. Sensing that such a weak form of government wasn't going to be enough in the bigger battles to come, residents voted to formally incorporate Long Grove in 1956.

And none too soon — scarcely a year later, Chicago-area visionary **Joseph Brickman** revealed his "Blueprint for the Future," which would create the largest planned community in the United States: more than 20,000 homes to be situated across Long Grove, Kildeer, and Hawthorn Woods. Area residents feared it would obliterate their beloved open space and rural ways of life.

Brickman's plan to gain control of the land was to quietly establish residency for his workers within the boundary of his plan. The law at that time stated that only 35 registered voters in an unincorporated area were necessary to hold a referendum and incorporate. Because the local population density was so low, he needed relatively few votes to ensure passage and then to elect himself and his associates into governing positions. Once his town was official, he could begin uncontested annexation of all the surrounding land.

Brickman's plan was discovered by area residents when they started questioning all those newly registered voters, who appeared to be living in temporary housing and not paying any rent.

The warning shot.

Matters came to a boiling point when Brickman's company was caught trying to transport one of these temporary housing structures down Cuba Road. The structure wouldn't clear a tree overhanging the road, and the movers began to cut the tree branches down. As the tree was on private property, surrounding property owners saw an opportunity to confront the invaders.

Area resident **Dorothea Huszagh** and her family contacted neighbors urging they rally to the scene. Some brought guns. A warning shot was fired into the ground. Police arrived and ordered the truck to turn around and go away. The first shot in the "Battle of Ela Township" had been fired.

Like Long Grove, Kildeer residents soon organized and voted to incorporate, with Dorothea's home on Cuba Road serving as the polling place. Several years of legal battling ensued, and Brickman was eventually forced to abandon his plan. The spot on Cuba Road where the incident occurred — just a bit west of the Long Grove–Kildeer border — is commemorated with a plaque.

VIRGINIA PARK · LONG GROVE LORE AND LEGEND, 1977

Some change, of course, is inevitable... those who have spent many years trying to maintain the country atmosphere of Long Grove hope that those who come to live in Long Grove will continue to see that it remains a green area. Other communities offer all the various services demanded... Long Grove, however, offers open space and a unique opportunity for a more rugged type of self-sufficient country living.

NEXT MONTH / READER MAIL



Submit your local-history questions to AARON@UINNOVATE.NET — here's a sample: why is Kildeer (Countryside) School named that, when it's in Long Grove, not Kildeer?