

# Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING  
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## Olde *Holiday* Traditions

*Caroling in German, candles on the tree, a new dress from mother — and a single glass pickle hidden somewhere in the branches.*

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

In 1986, a local newspaper interviewed long-time Long Grove resident **Elsie Krueger** regarding her holiday memories. Elsie was born in 1896 and passed away not long after the article was written. What follows is excerpted from that article.

Elsie Giss Krueger grew up on farms in and around Long Grove and recalled the German history of the area. Even into the 1920's, some churches in the area conducted their services in German, and Elsie remembered going caroling and singing in German.



CHICAGO STUDIO · C. 1899

**Elsie Giss Krueger**, born 1896 in Long Grove. Photographed by Köppelmann & Danneberg, 221 E. North Ave.

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY  
· 1986

*“ That was always my favorite part of Christmas.*

ELSIE KRUEGER · ON CAROLING IN GERMAN



*Real wax candles, and bags of candy.*

Fire safety was a bit different then. Elsie also recalled real candles on the tree.

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*“ We always had the Christmas trees with the wax candles, and the big trees, pretty near to touch the ceiling.*

ELSIE KRUEGER

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But gifts weren't as plentiful then, and playing games with family members was what one did on Christmas.

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*“ There was never very much. We used to get little bags of candy from the storekeepers in Long Grove. And we generally got a new dress for Christmas. Our mother generally made it for us. Cousins would come over to visit on Christmas day and we'd spend the day playing games. But we always had to quit early and go milk the cows.*

ELSIE KRUEGER

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*From a German Lutheran prince — to your living room.*

The tradition of a holiday tree originated with the German Lutherans — the same religion as the original Long Grove Church — so it was likely very prevalent in Long Grove back in the day. In 1840, when Germany's Prince Albert married Queen Victoria, he brought the tradition with him to England. Pictures of the holiday tree in the London papers spread the custom across Europe and America. The royals added a tradition of decorating the tree with small gifts, mini cakes, and candles — and that gave rise to our modern tree ornaments.



THE PEAR TREE SHOPPE · 2014 The *Weihnachtsgurke* — a glass pickle, hung deep among the branches.

### *Down a rabbit hole, into a pickle barrel.*

Mini cakes hanging on your tree sounds quirky enough, but I sensed I could find some more bizarre traditions if I delved a bit deeper. After all, our historic downtown was founded by these same tradition-starting German Lutherans — and one of the shops in downtown Long Grove specializes in Christmas. What mysteries might it still hold? Off I went to visit Nancy Fino, owner of *The Pear Tree Shoppe*.

Browsing the rows of tree ornaments, I came across an entire section of *pickle* ornaments. Pickles? My hopes rose — there must be a story here. Nancy explained:

*“ The tradition of hanging a single pickle on the tree originated in Germany in the 1800's. The first child to find the pickle on Christmas day received a special gift.*

NANCY FINO · THE PEAR TREE SHOPPE

There were a variety of different-sized pickles, so that you would use smaller and smaller pickles as your children got older to make the finding a bit more difficult. As with many traditions, there's an alternative history for the skeptics. The "hide the pickle" custom is not well known in Germany — which suggests it originated in the U.S. In the 1890's, Woolworth's began importing glass ornaments from Germany, and there is speculation that this tradition was invented by Woolworth's for their marketing purposes.

