

Long Grove History

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Dynamite Jake

Sometimes you really don't need to make it up. After this year's Ghost Walk, one of the guides asked me: "That Jake Eissler fellow, that's just made up, isn't it?" No, friend. He was very much a real person.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

One of the fun things about the recently concluded Ghost Walk is the mystery around what is and isn't embellishment. One of the guides, after the walk, said to me — *"That Jake Eissler fellow, that's just made up, isn't it?"* No, I said. Sometimes you don't need to embellish — history is pretty interesting on its own.



(No actual photo of Jake survives. This is the best you're going to get.)

So this month, I thought I'd share a bit of the Jake Eissler story. As we don't have any actual pictures of Jake, I will let you have a look at Ghost Walk stalwart John Kopecky's rather convincing homage.

A dynamiter, a miller, and some very tipsy goats.

Jake's folks, like many early residents, came over from Alsace-Lorraine in the 1870's. Jake made a living as a dynamiter and also operated a mill near the downtown crossroads — just west of where the covered bridge stands today. The mill alternated between grist, cider, and sorghum with the seasons.

He had many goats. They were a bit famous in town. They would get a bit drunk eating the apple mash left over from the cider press, and apparently provided lots of local entertainment with their shenanigans.



Three jobs from Jake's books.

Eldon Gadke, a longtime resident who passed away a few years ago, remembered Jake well. We have his account along with several others. The math, as you'll notice, was Jake's own.

ELDON GADKE · WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE

Jake was the wildest man I'd ever seen. He really always wanted to do a good job — and to be sure he often used more dynamite than was really necessary.

JOB		CHARGE
NO. 1	The Field Boulder Hired by Eldon's family to clear a four-foot boulder from a virgin field. A job that should have taken ten pounds of dynamite. Jake used twenty. He laid a long fuse and yelled "Run! Run!" From five hundred feet away, the boulder rose up into the air and then disintegrated. The Gadkes spent the rest of the day digging pieces the size of your head out of the field.	20 lb

NO. 2	The Tavern Stump Hired to remove a tree stump from behind the Village Tavern. Onlookers, who likely knew Jake too well by then, suggested that the amount of dynamite he was loading was a bit excessive. "I guess I know my business!" snapped Jake. Down went the plunger. The stump went up through the roof of the Tavern. Jake was humiliated, but paid for the damages. Catch current owner Mary Ann Ullrich when she's not busy and she'll show you the hole still visible from the attic.	?? lb
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NO. 3	The Porch · Highway 53 When Highway 53 was built through town, Jake wanted the dynamite work but was passed over. In retaliation, he snuck out one night and blew the porch off the home of the man overseeing the contracting. That one finally got him. Jake went to prison — and was eventually committed to a mental institution. He passed away in 1953.	—
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Jake, in summary.

There you have it. A dynamiter, a miller, a goat-keeper, an arsonist, and a man with a strong opinion that 20 pounds of dynamite is almost always going to be better than 10.

IN MEMORIAM

*Jake Eissler, of Alsace-Lorraine and Long Grove.
A man who really always wanted to do a good job.*

JAKE EISSLER · ? — 1953

As for that Ghost Walk guide's question: yes, Jake was real. Most of the village's wildest stories are. The trick of the Ghost Walk is that the real ones and the embellished ones are usually shoulder-to-shoulder on the tour, and you have to listen carefully to tell them apart.

Which, I admit, is half the fun.

Mary Ann Ullrich, if you're reading: please don't fix that hole in the Tavern attic. It's part of the historic record.

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