

Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING
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STRANGE CROSSINGS • HILLCREST COUNTRY CLUB

Degrees of Separation

A pile of yellowed notes labeled "odd things that need further research" yields a thread that runs from a Borscht-Belt comedian to a Las Vegas postcard to a mob hit on Lake Cook Road. It all starts at the Long Grove country club.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

One of the reasons I find history fascinating is the unexpected crossing of paths. It is a real kick to find a famous person, place, or event that you never knew had any association with a seemingly unrelated famous — or infamous — person or event.

In digging through my pile of "odd things that need further research" recently, I came across an index card titled "Buddy Hackett in Long Grove." For those younger than 50, Hackett was the comedian who voiced Scuttle in *The Little Mermaid*; for the rest, I don't need to remind you about Johnny Carson. What was on my card was an offhand 1966 *Daily Herald* reference: Buddy carried an honorary membership at Long Grove's Hillcrest Country Club — now The Grove. *Why?*



SAHARA • LAS VEGAS • C. 1960

Buddy Hackett, headlining the Sahara — and, it turns out, also carrying an honorary membership at a country club in Long Grove.



A boxing promoter and a charity for boys.

Since it was an honorary membership, I guessed there was a relationship between Buddy and one of the club's officers. **Joe Kellman** was the President of Hillcrest at the time, and quick research confirmed the connection. Aside from running his family business — Globe Glass and Manufacturing — Joe was a boxing promoter and loved the sport. He and Buddy Hackett founded a charity called **The Better Boys Foundation (BBF)**, which ran an after-school boxing and leadership program for young boys. Other comedians, including rat-pack member Joey Bishop, also held honorary memberships at Hillcrest and performed at BBF benefits.

The hardhat photo, and a name I almost missed.

In chasing the Kellman connection, I came across a press picture of a groundbreaking at Hillcrest from a big expansion in 1967. It is a classic staged photo-op: Long Grove's Village President **Robert Parker Coffin** in a hardhat, holding a putter, alongside Kellman and other members of Hillcrest's Board.

Glancing down the list of names underneath, one jumped out at me: **Alan Dorfman**. Wasn't that the name of a Jimmy Hoffa associate who got whacked by the mob over in Lincolnwood in the 1980's? After more digging — yes, one and the same. If you have seen the movie *Casino*, the character Andy Stone was based on Alan Dorfman. The role was played, of all people, by the comedian Alan King.

I wondered: was Alan King ever brought in to do a benefit for the BBF? Same era, same room. Yes — turns out he did. I don't find any record that he got *Casino* because he knew Dorfman, but who knows. Maybe they met on a golf course in Long Grove.

A SHORT WALK FROM LAS VEGAS TO LONG GROVE

1 **Buddy Hackett**

Honorary member at Hillcrest C.C., co-founder of the Better Boys Foundation.

2 **Joe Kellman**

Hillcrest president, glass heir, boxing promoter, fellow BBF founder.

3 **Alan Dorfman**

Hillcrest board member, Hoffa associate, killed in Lincolnwood, 1983.

4 **Alan King**

Plays the Dorfman-inspired "Andy Stone" in *Casino* — ran BBF benefits.

5 **Jack Ruby**

A 1940's Chicago acquaintance of Kellman's — per Warren Commission testimony.

The seagull chase.

Not that this wild goose chase — or maybe I should say *seagull chase*, in honor of Scuttle — needs to get any weirder, but my research into Kellman turned up something else. He had been interviewed by the Warren Commission in its investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy. Kellman apparently knew Jack Ruby in the 1940's, and provided some background on Ruby to the commission.

Which reminds me of a couple of other things in my "odd things" file — the Long Grove connection with Jack Ruby's brother, and the strange Long Grove tale of **James Files**, who claims to have shot President Kennedy from the grassy knoll. Research, I suppose, for another day.



Scuttle, voiced by Buddy Hackett
— spiritual mascot of the wild-
goose chase.

THE TAKE-AWAY

Six degrees of separation gets you from a Long Grove putter and hardhat to a hit man in Dallas. Three, if you count the country club bar.



COMING UP / PULP HISTORY, APRIL 2015

We pick up the loose thread above — the James Files story. Make of it what you will.

Got an "odd thing" of your own? The Society's pile is always open to additions.

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