

Long Grove History

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The *Oldest* Church

A simple question with a sneaky answer: what's the oldest church in Long Grove? Depends entirely on whether you mean the building, or the congregation that meets inside it.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

Most people, asked this question, would answer with the famous Long Grove Church — the one just across the bridge as you travel from the downtown crossroads. Protestant immigrants from the Alsace-Lorraine region of Germany — the Sigwalt, Schmitz, and Vogel families — organized that church in 1846. Construction started in 1847.

If by "church" you mean *building*, the Long Grove Church is the correct answer. But if you mean *congregation*, there's an older body: the Long Grove Evangelical Association (LGEA), organized a year earlier — in 1845 — by the Knopf, Erb, Fehlman, and Knedles families. A mix of first and second generation German immigrants, plus settlers from New York and Pennsylvania.

The Evangelical Association was a Methodist religion started in the U.S. in the early 1800's by a former German Lutheran immigrant, Jacob Albright, who had become disenchanted with German religious teachings and sought to convert German immigrants to a more Methodist view of the world.



HENRY & MARY KNOPF · C. 1880S

Founders' family. The Knopfs donated the burial ground that became the *Knopf Cemetery* on Arlington Heights Road — the Long Grove Evangelical Association's first piece of real estate, years before they ever had a building.



Building first, or burial ground first.

As pioneer congregations often did, both groups met in private homes or barns until they had enough of a following to put up a dedicated building. For the LGEA, the more pressing need turned out to be not a building but a place to *bury* their members. In the early 1850's, the Knopf family donated some land on Arlington Heights Road for use as a burial ground — the cemetery we now know as the **Knopf Cemetery**. The LGEA didn't put up an actual church until 1860, on Old McHenry Road near the crossroads, just east of where the Fire Department building stands today.

IF YOU MEAN BUILDING

Long Grove Church

Founded 1846, building started 1847. Sigwalt, Schmitz, Vogel families — Protestants from the Alsace-Lorraine. Still standing across the bridge.

vs

IF YOU MEAN CONGREGATION

Long Grove Evangelical Assn.

Organized 1845. Knopf, Erb, Fehlman, Knedles families. Methodist, via Jacob Albright. Cemetery 1850's, church building not until 1860.

"Slandering the sainted Jacob Albright as a horse thief."

There was, by all accounts, some tension between the two congregations. In 1847, an official from the national Evangelical Association passed through and left this rather candid description of the competition:

VISITING OFFICIAL · 1847

At a point called Long Grove, our people had succeeded in gaining a solid foot-hold among the Germans. A few had already been converted. But the false teachers and their followers spared no pains to hinder our progress, even slandering the sainted Jacob Albright as a horse thief. But when one of their preachers commits adultery or gets drunk, he is quickly forgiven. Notwithstanding all their efforts to the contrary, let these beautiful groves with their wealth of flowers and their grassy slopes be consecrated unto Him — for the truth has already triumphed.

By 1877, membership at the Long Grove Church outnumbered the LGEA, 110 to 45. In 1906, the LGEA left town altogether and built a new church in nearby Prairie View — known today as the **Grace Church**. And, as seems to happen a lot in Long Grove's history, the old 1860 LGEA building was repurposed and moved across Old McHenry Road, where it still stands today as part of a residence.

So: the oldest *building* answers to one name, the oldest *congregation* to another. Pioneer life was complicated.

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