

Capone's *Vault* – Part 1

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society



1931 PIERCE ARROW CONVERTIBLE COUPE Only five of this model were made — a car for celebrities and the wealthy elite.

If you give an infinite number of monkeys each a typewriter, one of them will eventually produce the complete works of Shakespeare. So goes the “Infinite Monkey Theorem”. I live a variant of this concept every day with the Historical Society’s email account — sending an email is effortless and there are apparently an awful lot of people out there with email accounts. Aside from my long lost inheritance and pleas for help from relatives I didn’t know I had, many of the incoming requests are from people in far flung regions of the country asking us to research their family history for them. Those are politely declined with referrals to the local library and genealogy clubs. But every so often a gem shows up in the inbox.



Last month I received an email from a fellow who had recently purchased a classic car that he believes was once owned by someone in Long Grove. He wanted to know the history of the car. At first glance, I'm thinking the only thing infinite about this email is the number of reasons why I wouldn't be spending my volunteer time tracking that down for him. However, as I read on, it got somewhat more interesting. The car was a 1931 Pierce Arrow Convertible Coupe (pictured on the previous page), and only 5 of this model were made. It was a car for celebrities and the wealthy elite. All he knew was the previous owner had acquired the car from a Long Grove barn in the mid-1950's and the car was in bad shape. He postulated that the car had been put in that barn during the war (gas rationing) and never made it out. So I scratched my head... hmm... who do I know in Long Grove in the thirties/forties that would have had a lot of money, a flashy car, but somehow fell on hard times in the 50's? Wow – the Chicago mobster Terry Druggan, popped into my mind.

THE SUSPECT PROFILE

Lots of money, a flashy car, but somehow fell on hard times in the 50's.

You may recall a previous article I did on Druggan in November of 2014 and his flagpole that currently sits on Towner Green in downtown Long Grove. I won't repeat the story (you can find it at LongGroveHistory.org/Newsletters.html), but the calling card of his gang was flashy cars, and he bought property for himself and his mom in Long Grove/Kildeer in the 30's. He hid many of his assets in his mother's name to keep authorities from seizing them. He was in ill health the latter part of his life and passed away in 1954. Could this be his car? The owner has offered that if it turns out to be Druggan's, he would ship the car here for display at the Historic Downtown's Vintage Days this August.

Could this be his car?

I talked with a few longtime residents, and have several more to interview. Chip Ullrich (pictured), who along with his wife Mary Ann own and operate The Long Grove Village Tavern, moved to Long Grove in 1949. Chip was two years old at that time when his folks purchased Terry Druggan's stucco house on Long Grove road. The home still sits near the entrance to Farmington Bath and Tennis. Druggan owned much of the land in that area and relocated to another home a short distance away. Chip reported meeting Terry one day when he fell off his bike, skinned his forehead on some gravel, and was rescued by Terry's live-in nurse. Chip and the nurse retreated to Druggan's new residence to clean up his injury. Regarding a flashy car, Chip didn't recall anything like that, but did remember liking Druggan's elaborate security flood lighting that could illuminate Chip's entire yard so he could play baseball at night.



CHIP ULLRICH

Owner of the Long Grove Village Tavern. Moved to Long Grove in 1949, when his folks bought Terry Druggan's stucco house on Long Grove Road.

Long Grove resident Ed Wachs was known to have a Pierce Arrow, but the family still has it according to his son, Charley. That seems an interesting coincidence, but those that knew Ed don't think the car's story fits him. Corresponding more with the car's previous owner, he reported that he thought the Long Grove fellow he purchased it from was a doctor.

Many years ago, I remember when Capone's vault was discovered and Giraldo Rivera was going to open it on live TV. What was inside? Myself and most of the rest of the country tuned in to find out. It was such a good story when your imagination could fill that safe, but it went downhill pretty fast once it was opened and the truth revealed. It occurs to me that, as cool as it might be for this car to have belonged to Druggan, whatever is eventually uncovered might not be near as exciting. I don't know when Part 2 will be written, but stay tuned and keep your fingers crossed.