

# Long Grove History

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## Long Grove's *Oldest* Pole?

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The weather this time of year doesn't exactly encourage outdoor exploring. However, the lack of vegetation can make things visible that you just don't notice during the warmer months. On a recent frigid stroll, I noticed several metal "tags" on a utility pole. The tags appeared to have been placed there over time, as they weren't very uniform in appearance. I assumed they were some sort of inspection tag and I was intrigued as they had a date on them, so could they be used as a clue as to the age of the pole? How old do you suppose this random utility pole was? The oldest tag on this pole was 1960 and placed there when Kennedy was our President.



### INSPECTION TAGS

Top inset: a 1938 "Bell Pole & Lumber" stamp. Bottom inset: a 1960 PICO inspection tag.

A bit of research turned up that the tags are indeed inspection tags, and some poles will have other markings indicating things like their species (e.g. cedar, pine, etc.), type of weather treatment, and even occasionally official survey markings. I don't think any telegraph service traversed Long Grove, so I'll guess Long Grove's first utility poles were likely put in circa 1910. It's possible there might be some older poles associated with the train line on the north side of town, which could be twenty years or so older than that. Is it possible any of those original poles still survive? More research found that utility poles last an average of about 50 years, though 75 or 80 is not unheard of.



*Is it possible any of those original poles still survive?*

Armed with this new knowledge, I returned to the “Kennedy” pole and nosed around a bit more to see if I could find an older one. Hidden amongst (and maybe protected by) a group of big oak trees was a pole with a big “Bell Pole and Lumber” stamp showing 1938. A Roosevelt pole that was 78 years old! The adjoining property to this pole was subdivided in 1938, so that date makes sense. I assumed the Bell stamp meant it was put in by the Bell Telephone Company. That turned out to be a bad assumption on my part, the stamp referred to the Bell Pole and Lumber was a company formed in 1909 in Bellwood, Wisconsin by a Maine lumberjack named Bell who was apparently unrelated to the telephone’s inventor, Alexander Graham Bell and not associated with the Bell Telephone Company.

I suspect there are older poles out there than the one I came across. Of course, I’m not sure a Woodrow Wilson era pole erector signed his work with a date the way they would today. If you venture out of doors for a walk this month, inspect a couple of the utility poles along your path and drop me a note at [aaron@aunder.com](mailto:aaron@aunder.com) if you find an older one. A Taft pole would certainly warrant a special prize of some sort.