

Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING
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Clowns, Mimes, and Barbershop Quartets

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

I've often wondered if, circa 1890 when Long Grove was viewed as a burgeoning village, if a Circus or Wild West show ever came to town. It seems perhaps not that far-fetched an idea as Western celebrities such as Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody were born less than 200 miles from Long Grove. Barnum and Bailey's circus was headquartered a similar distance to our north. I've not had any luck finding records of any of this gracing our borders, however. But during my searches, I've come across some interesting tangents, such as the time one of the local Gridley boys went on his first Buffalo Hunt while on a trip in Nebraska in 1850 — I'll paraphrase:



Matt Potempa, organizer of Long Grove's new festival — Vintage Days. Matt's shop Scout and Forge is the last place left in town where you can still buy a Buffalo head.



A LONG GROVE GRIDLEY · NEBRASKA, 1850

It is not like hunting deer at home, where the difficulty is finding them. With Buffalo, the difficulty is killing them. After leaving our wagon by the road, we hiked inland toward the river bottom and I saw a sight which was beyond anything I had seen — every hollow and ravine, far as eye could reach was a living moving mass of buffalo meat.

It was no trouble to get within close shooting distance, but our bullets seemed to have no effect other than to make them shake their heads, lift their tails and run in with the herd. After chasing them nearly all morning over the hills and wounding many, we succeeded in hitting a large bull in a vital part and brought him down.

Each of us took as much meat as we could carry, but the trip back to wagon was very arduous wading creeks and swamps and fending off the large and very numerous Wolves around us. While Buffalo hunting may be big business, I've concluded it's a little too big for me.

These days, if you read any description of Long Grove you're apt to find it known for its summer festivals. That's a fairly recent claim to fame, with the first festival having been organized as Strawberry Fest in 1983. While you certainly wouldn't consider the festivals a circus (insert your own witty retort here), that first festival featured clowns, mimes and barbershop quartets. I know on festivals I've participated in there have been funnel cakes, cotton candy, live animals, and amusement rides, so maybe we can sort of claim to have had a circus. Maybe the word carnival would be a closer historical term for our modern day festivals.

The word carnival conjures up my own memories of the Penny Carnivals the neighborhood kids used to stage. In that spirit, we're inviting local families to join us on August 21st, during the Historic Downtown's new Vintage Days festival, for our first attempt at staging our own Long Grove Community Penny Carnival. It'll be a low key, just for fun event with all the games devised and run by kids. If you think your kids would like to get involved, drop us an email at admin@LongGroveHistory.org and we'll keep you in the loop. Perhaps we have the next P.T. Barnum out there somewhere in our midst?