

Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING
MAGAZINE
NOVEMBER 2015

Organized Protection

A Christmas shopping trip, a forgotten candle, and a Palatine fire engine racing down Long Grove Road in the dark — arriving too late. The very long story of how Long Grove finally got its own fire department.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

A COLD DAY · DECEMBER, 1916

It's getting late in the day, this cold day in early December, 1916, and I'm trying to do a little Christmas shopping at the Sauer-Hans general store at the crossroads in Long Grove. Not finding what I want, I ask the clerk:

— Care if I go upstairs and look at some of the things you haven't put out yet?

— Sure. There's not much light up there. Take this candle with you.

As I make my way upstairs, the light's not bad at all — the low angle of the setting sun is just making it in the window. Nosing around, I find just the thing: a pair of ice skates. Back downstairs I go, arms clutching the skates. Hmm — I feel like I'm forgetting something. Oh well. My sister's really going to like these.

An hour later, it's dark at the crossroads and the shops have closed. The only light is a small flicker coming from the upstairs window of the general store. The candle — that's what I forgot. But the flicker is too much for a little candle. The flame has spread from the candle to the boxes nearby. Soon the ceiling is burning, and then the roof.

A panicked phone call is made to the nearest fire department in Palatine. Their horse-drawn fire engine comes racing down Long Grove Road — but it's too late by the time they arrive. The building and its contents are a total loss. Christmas 1916 will not be a merry one for Sauer, Hans, or many of their neighbors.





LONG GROVE FIRE DEPARTMENT · 1930S An all-volunteer crew, in the years after organized fire protection finally came to town. Note the EMERGENCY FIRST AID Red Cross sign on the station behind them — the building doubled as a community medical post.

You would have thought a fire would have done it.

You would think such a tragedy would have spurred the community to set up its own fire protection right away. It would not. It wouldn't be until 1929 — thirteen years later — that the Long Grove Fire Department was finally established.

LONG GROVE FIRE PROTECTION · A TIMELINE

- 1916** **THE SAUER-HANS FIRE**
Candle left upstairs. Total loss. Palatine's engine arrived too late.

- 1916–** **BUCKET BRIGADES**
29 The Long Grove Church bell rung as a fire alarm. Neighbors brought what they could.

- 1929** **LONG GROVE F.D. ESTABLISHED**
All-volunteer force. Door-to-door fundraising; annual October dance at the firehouse.

- 1929–** **PASTORS NOT EXCUSED**
40 More than one Sunday sermon cut short with a hasty "amen" when the fire siren went off.

- 1990** **24-HOUR STAFFING**
For the first time, firefighters stationed around the clock.

All volunteer. Almost everyone.

As a stopgap before the department was set up, the Long Grove Church granted permission for their church bell to be rung in case of fire – in hopes of rallying neighbors to bring their buckets and do what they could. Whether a bucket brigade ever saved a building, I'll leave to your imagination.

From 1929 to 1940, it was an all-volunteer force. Firemen went door-to-door in September each year to get acquainted with their constituents and to sell tickets to a fundraising dance held at the firehouse in October. An old-timer recalls the annual fundraiser being scheduled right before the election – with lots of politicians in attendance.

Even the pastors were not excused from the expectation of volunteer fire duty. More than one Sunday sermon was cut short with a hasty "amen" spurred on by the wail of the fire siren outside.

A clue about where the firefighters hung out.

Where did the volunteer firefighters spend their time when there wasn't a fire? I don't know for sure. But the fire department phone was actually located at the **Village Tavern** – so that might be a clue.

Starting in 1990, firefighters were stationed at the firehouse 24 hours per day. The tavern, I have to assume, finally got its phone back.

A SMALL CONCESSION

*It took a town a long time to organize protection from
a thing as old as fire. Long Grove was no exception.*

Next time the siren goes off on a Sunday morning, give a little thought to the pastor who once had to cut a **LongGroveHistory.org** sermon short.