

Discovering *Local* History

A sparse, year-end diary in German — kept by a Long Grove ancestor in the 1850's — surfaces in a basement research room in Vernon Hills, and brings with it a small-town squabble between Lutherans and Catholics.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

I continue to be surprised by the number of local-history discoveries that are possible if enough attention and inquisition is applied. *Discovery* is a funny concept — it's usually defined as something seen for the first time. Who discovered America? Most people would say Columbus, but, of course, there were thousands of people already here before Columbus. I guess by *local-history* discoveries I mean things that myself and my contemporaries in the Long Grove Historical Society have never seen before. These discoveries always seem to pop up when you're not looking for them.

I was checking a couple of facts about the Long Grove Community Church the other day when I came across some interesting correspondence from someone residing far away from Long Grove. She was seeking some clarification regarding the Long Grove Community Church and St. Mary's Church in Buffalo Grove — trying to make sense of an 1850's diary of an ancestor who lived in Long Grove and had some apparent involvement with both. *My discovery radar went off.*



JOHANN KITT · C. 1855

Author of an 1850's diary kept in German — wife and three children left Hannover for America in 1851, settled briefly in Newark, and arrived in Long Grove in 1852.



A 91-year-old volunteer, a copy in the basement.

Chasing the correspondence, it turned out a copy of the diary had been donated to the **Lake County Genealogical Society**. They have a wonderful little research room in the basement of the Vernon Hills Government Office Building. I paid them a visit to get a copy of the diary and met a delightful 91-year-old volunteer and longtime Lake County resident, who was happy to dig up a copy for me.

The diary turned out to be pretty sparse. The entries, translated from their original German, were simply a few sentences written at year's end to summarize major events. It was written by **Johann Kitt** (pictured on the previous page), whose wife and three children left Germany for America in 1851 and settled briefly in Newark, New Jersey. A year later, in 1852, they made the nine-day trek to Long Grove.

FROM JOHANN KITT'S DIARY · IN GERMAN, PARAPHRASED

1851 Left Hannover for America with wife and three children. A child taken at sea. Arrived in Newark; lost another shortly after.

1852 Nine days from Newark to Long Grove. No money; no work to speak of. Thankful for the kindness of our neighbors, on whom we depend for our survival.

1853–4 The Evangelical pastor, in whom we placed our trust, has fallen short — a falling out. Joined the German Catholic congregation in Buffalo Grove (St. Mary's).

1860 Long Grove behind us. Bound for the Nebraska Territory.

Their initial years were tragic — one of their children died during the ocean voyage, and another perished soon after arriving in Newark. There are frequent references to lack of money, lack of employment, and being grateful to the kindness of their Long Grove neighbors, whom they were dependent upon for their survival. While they were initially very positive in their description of the local German Evangelical pastor, they apparently had a "falling out" — a nicer description than what's in the diary. The Kitts attended the German Catholic Church in Buffalo Grove, what we now know as *St. Mary's*.

Friction — real, imagined, or just a few players?

I've heard of friction between the early German Evangelicals and their Catholic and non-German counterparts before, so this was interesting. Local community squabbles aren't the sort of thing you're likely to find written about, so it's hard to know if it was a real issue, if it was overblown, or if it was limited to just a few key players on each side. About all you can do is use your imagination to fill in the space around these little tidbits of information.

Remember that Long Grove used to have a German name — *Muttersholz* — and one of the German Evangelicals was the postmaster. When one of the non-German residents took over as postmaster, the name changed to *Long Grove*. Perhaps a further sign of some friction between the early Germans and non-Germans — or simply a desire to assimilate?

By 1854, if there was something brewing between the German Evangelicals and the rest of the community, it seems to have been patched up. In that year, members of the area who were *not* members of the church donated a bell to show their appreciation for the congregation. The bell lasted until 1922, when it was cracked and had to be replaced.

Things gradually improved for the Kitts, and in 1860 they left Long Grove for the Nebraska Territory.

An infamous buried horse?

As I was wrapping up my conversation with the nice volunteer at the LCGS, I mentioned the **Gridley** family as being one of Long Grove's first settlers. She responded:

OVERHEARD AT THE LCGS

"Yes, I'm familiar with that area, they lived close to 83 and Gilmer — you know, near where that infamous horse is buried."



NEXT MONTH / WORTHY OF DISCOVERY

An infamous buried horse? Now that sounds like some local history worthy of discovery. Stay tuned.