

## The *Last* Blacksmith

By Aaron Underwood • Long Grove Historical Society

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Stevenson High School's first graduating class. Steve Berg, a graduate of that 1966 class remembers it taking a lot of work getting the new school up and running. According to Steve, Mr. Mistic, the chorus teacher was a bit of a perfectionist and had the task of getting the auditorium ready for dramatic productions. When some stage lights he had ordered arrived at the last minute without the proper mounting bracket, fellow student Bob Coffin, Jr went to work in the drafting lab to design the brackets. The design was taken over to Long Grove blacksmith, George Umbdenstock Jr., who created the brackets in short order so the show could go on. Steve comments, "It seems a bit ironic that one of the last practicing blacksmiths in the county was instrumental in getting the newest high school up and running."

Steve continued, "My dad Tony was a brick layer, and I used to take his tools over to Mr. Umbdenstock to get them sharpened. He knew I was a history buff, and he opened up a drawer in his mechanic's tool chest and handed me a metal object. He asked me to identify it. I said that it looked like some sort of animal shoe, but not one for a horse. He said that it was a shoe for an ox, and had been made by one of his ancestors in Alsace-Lorraine in the late 1700's."



UMBDENSTOCK BLACKSMITH SHOP, C. 1900  
George Sr. and George Jr. at work together.



Long Grove old-timer, John Clementsen also recalled fondly his interactions with Mr. Umdenstock, “George taught me how to swear – if you got him around a mean horse he could cuss for 15 minutes and not repeat himself.”

JOHN CLEMENTSEN · LONG GROVE OLD-TIMER

*If you got him around a mean horse he could cuss for 15 minutes and not repeat himself.*

George passed away in 1974, at the age of 91 and is buried in the Long Grove Cemetery. He learned the blacksmith trade from his father, George Sr. The picture shows the two of them working together circa 1900.