

"Al was unconscious for three hours."

That, according to the Grant County Historical Society, was how Greer and Mann met.

Greer ran for Grant County sheriff in 1928, defeating Dan Trainor of Fennimore "by a vote of 11,383 to 4,461."

Greer ran for sheriff again in 1930 and won over Democrat Joe Edge. During this term, Greer started gaining a statewide reputation in his war against bootleggers and moonshiners.

One of the more controversial incidents happened during this time as well. Greer fatally shot a man at a raid on an illegal whiskey still. The culprit was running away, and Greer was, apparently, firing a warning shot.

The Coroner's Jury acquitted the sheriff on the grounds that the bullet glanced and was not intended to injure the man. It was deemed accidental.

According to Weber, the museum director of the Grant County Historical Society, however, Greer was too good of a shot to have missed.

"It is not the intent to stir up old conflicts," wrote Weber, "but rather to show that the problems did leave their mark on our society."

Some of Greer's men from the rodeo gained jobs as deputies when not working the rodeo. This caused some resentment in many Grant County people; however, the men were qualified and did perform their duty.

"Supporters of Greer (and his men) pointed out... that in 1920, sheriff Holmes had 41 prisoners in jail... in 1927, sheriff Bert Morse had 135 prisoners... in 1937, Joe Greer had 365 prisoners."

It was also during this term that Greer's wife, Edna, died. Greer was devastated.

A law existed that kept sheriffs from being in office for more than two consecutive terms. To get around that, in 1932, Harry Greer ran for sheriff, was elected, and promptly appointed Joe as the undersheriff.

"It is said that Joe was not a good father to his son," said Weber. "Harry was never given the authority to run anything and his father criticized him even in public."

Weber pointed out that Harry was never sheriff for two consecutive terms, and that Harry never really ran the office when he was sheriff.

In 1934, Joe Greer ran again for sheriff, and he defeated two more contenders. He again ran for sheriff in 1936, but in 1938 had to give up the office of sheriff because of the succession rule, so Harry became sheriff with Joe again going into the undersheriff's position.

In 1940, Greer won again, but in 1942, Greer lost the election to Alois Klaas.

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JOE GREER

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In 1946, Greer was killed in a car accident. At the time, Greer was returning home from Columbus, Ohio, and Detroit, Mich. No one else was in the car.

Speculation suggests Greer was considering going to Detroit to work as plant protection for Ford Motors. In the early 40's, Ford had a problem with car theft; according to Weber, "people were stealing cars right out of the factory."

Greer and Henry Ford would have known each other: Greer's reputation as a law man had gained national acclaim and Ford was a constant visitor to Greer's rodeo in Ft. Meyers, Fla., where Ford owned a winter home. If Ford wanted Greer for plant protection, all Ford would have to do is contact Greer and schedule an interview.

It is possible, according to Weber, that when Greer met with his fatal crash, he was returning home from that interview.

Greer left his mark on

Grant County, and on Weber.

"I remember Joe Greer, sheriff of Grant County. In the early 1930's, four of us high school students were walking around the courthouse square looking for some action on a hot summer evening, and there in front of the jail was a brand new car.

"And what a car. The new Chrysler Airflow. It was so aerodynamically designed that it was difficult to tell the front from the rear. A voice from the jail porch said, 'How would you like a ride?'"

"Sheriff Greer wearing his cowboy hat came down the steps and said, 'Get in.' It took about ten minutes to get to Fennimore. The boy in the front seat said that the speedometer recorded seventy miles per hour at times."

Greer, a nationally recognized law man, was an original, and is remembered fondly by the Grant County Historical Society.

"Success is getting what you want. Happiness is liking what you get."

H. Jackson Brown

Remembering colorful Joe Greer

By JAY DICKERSON

As the new century begins, local historian Al Weber recently reflected on one of the most unique characters in Grant County in the 20th Century: Joe Greer.

Greer, the Grant County sheriff throughout the 30's, has a complex and involved history, provided by the Grant County Historical Society.

Prior to becoming sheriff, he had a wide variety of business experience. He operated a jewelry store and restaurant, was a rural mail carrier, and played professional baseball in the Dakotas.

Greer always said that his right arm was much longer than his left arm from pitching curve balls.

During all of his work, Greer had his love for horses and "the sawdust ring of the circus."

Greer and Edna May Trinc, a resident of Bloomington, were married and in 1905 had a son, Harry. It was said that Harry was raised on a horse.

When Harry was seven years old, Greer started out

with a wagon show known as "Greers' Society Circus."

Greer did this show for several years, and trained his son as a rider, roper, and trainer of horses. Later, Greer joined another circus.

Soon, Greer was an integral part of the Kuppenient Circus in which he specialized in riding steers and broncos, bull-doing, fancy shooting, and roping.

Edna Greer also worked with the show with an aerial act.

Frank H. Thompson, a columnist for the Grant County Herald in the past, remembered Greer. According to Thompson, Greer was in a circus in Chicago, but the show had to close on account of rain.

The producers of the show had no money, so they gave Greer a large Rhesus monkey.

While Greer and his cowboys were riding horseback to Bloomington, Thompson "saw three cowboys, each on a horse, and a large monkey on another horse coming my way. We all stopped. Joe told of their circus trouble, but bragged

of his big trained monkey..."

Thompson bought the monkey for \$50.

Soon after, Greer had a new show.

"Greers' Society Circus and Wild West Show" was advertising "12 people—22 horses and mules—10 entirely separate acts." It performed all throughout Wisconsin, Illinois, and Florida.

Greer contracted six jumping horses to the Ringling Circus, which opened a season in 1924 at the Madison Square Gardens.

"It was this season that Joe Greer saved the life of Al Mann, a Wyoming cowboy hired in 1923 by John Ringling to ride in the wild west shows.

"A saddle bronc that Al was riding hit a ring curb and turned a forward somersault on him, knocked him out, and the horse got up with Al caught in the stirrup. (The bronc) kicked him and beat him around until the blood was flying.

"Greer heard the yelling, came out, and grabbed the horse by its ears to stop him and get Al out of there.

"Al was unconscious for three hours."

That, according to the Grant County Historical Society, was how Greer and Mann met