

## "A Fair Field and No Favor" In Celebration of the Grange

*This issue of The Courier focuses on the Grange, or "Order of Patrons of Husbandry," a fraternal organization that has benefited the lives of many thousands of people—especially Maine people—since its founding in 1867. Two of the articles presented here are based on papers presented at a conference on the Grange held at the Bethel Historical Society on September 12 & 13, 2008; an essay on the Grange in Maine, written by BHS Associate Director Stanley R. Howe, is included here as an introduction to the subject.*



Opening of the exhibit "To Improve the Farmer's Lot:  
The Grange in Maine" at BHS, July 1, 2008

*For over half a century, beginning in the 1870s, the Grange in Maine numbered some 50,000 members in more than 400 locations throughout the State. Active on behalf of Maine's rural populace, the Grange lobbied the Maine Legislature to improve the quality of education in the State's public and vocational schools, and to reform the taxation system to make it more equitable. Additionally, as the first major organization to grant women equal rights, the Grange provided an opportunity for rural females to escape the drudgery of the farm home so they could take advantage of the educational and social aspects of the Order. The following article by Society Associate Director Stanley R. Howe*

*is based on his book "A Fair Field and No Favor": A Concise History of the Maine State Grange; the author has served as Historian for the Maine State Grange for a number of years.*

### **To Improve the Farmer's Lot: The Grange in Maine**

By Stanley R. Howe

#### **The Grange and Its Origins**

THE "ORDER OF THE PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY," or the "Grange," was founded in 1867 at Washington, D.C., by seven men under the leadership of Oliver Hudson Kelley, a civil servant who had been asked by the Commissioner of Agriculture to travel the war-ravaged South after the Civil War. Kelly was struck by the devastation, and conceived of a society of farmers that would bind up the Nation's wounds by promoting fraternal and brotherly love. Kelley and the other founders were also aware that the proliferation of railroads, mass production of farm machinery, and introduction of middlemen or "monopolists"—who made a living handling or marketing the farmers' products—were causing a shift in the country's economic and political power from the countryside to the city. The Grange, and other fraternal orders like it, created a sense of stability in a changing world, and helped its members come to terms with these shifts. Kelley's niece, Caroline A. Hall, a prominent feminist of the era, successfully lobbied the founders to give women equal rights within the new Order.

An agricultural fraternal order with pageantry, rituals, passwords and secrecy common to other fraternal societies of the mid- to late-19th century, the Grange provided a broadening of rural experience, with males and females fourteen years of age and older sharing equally in the work of the Order. In addition, the strong social and educational aspects of Grange programs improved the lot of the nation's rural farm population.

## **Before the Grange: Maine Agriculture and the Farmer's Club Movement**

Agriculture in Maine has always been a difficult proposition, even in the best of times. Since the 1600s, tillers of the earth have had to contend with a difficult climate (in 1816, there was a killing frost each month), rocky soils (except in the rolling hills of northern Maine and on level river “intervalles”), and uncertain prospects due to transportation, markets, and pests. During the 1830s and 1840s, the American West was opened up and became a competitor of Maine agricultural production; such competition resulted in diversification and reform on Maine farms. By the mid-19th century, rivalry between so-called “book farmers” (those advocating farming based on sound scientific principles) and “dirt farmers” (those who practiced traditional farming, learned from their forebears) became more pronounced. This tension continued until organizations such as the “Farmer's Club” and the Grange made more information available, and the education of Maine farmers became an established tenet of success in farming.

Agricultural societies first appeared in Maine in the 1790s and proliferated in the 19th century. In the 1850s, Farmer's Clubs emerged in Maine (the first was organized in 1853 at Bethel) and flourished for the next three decades. After the Civil War, Farmer's Clubs experienced a brief revival, the Maine Legislature having passed a law requiring part of the subsidy agricultural societies received from the State be spent promoting Farmer's Clubs. So successful was this effort that by the 1870s nearly a hundred such clubs existed in Maine actively promoting agrarian interests. The Farmer's Club movement in Maine gave way to the Grange during the 1870s and 1880s, mainly because of the educational, financial and social benefits provided to entire farm families by the latter organization.

## **The Strong and Faithful Tie of Agriculture: The Beginnings of the Grange in Maine**

The earliest appearance of the Grange in Maine actually predates the founding of the first Subordinate Grange in the State at Hampden in 1873; most sources agree that Amasa K. Walker of Hampden was inducted into the new Order while holding a government position in Washington, D.C. During the next quarter century, hard times brought on by competition from the West and an out-migration of Maine's youth from the farm were counteracted, to a degree, by the strong social and

educational aspects of Grange programs, as well as by its skilled local leadership. Under the expert direction of State Masters Nelson Ham, Frederick Robie, and Rufus Prince—among others—the Grange took an activist position on countless state and national issues affecting farmers. For example, the Grange urged more uniform textbooks in Maine's public schools, the abolition of the district school system, more generous appropriations for the State College of Agriculture (at Orono), cabinet status for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, curbs on the powers of railroads and monopolies, and a graduated federal income tax.



Hampden Grange #1, near Bangor

In 1885, State Master Frederick Robie, who had been elected Governor of Maine three years earlier, proudly pointed out that the Grange's growth in Maine was the best in the nation. By 1900, 356 Subordinate Granges had been established throughout the State, with the majority organized in just a two-year period—between 1874 and 1876. Little wonder, then, that during this period New England became known as the “Gibraltar of the Grange.”

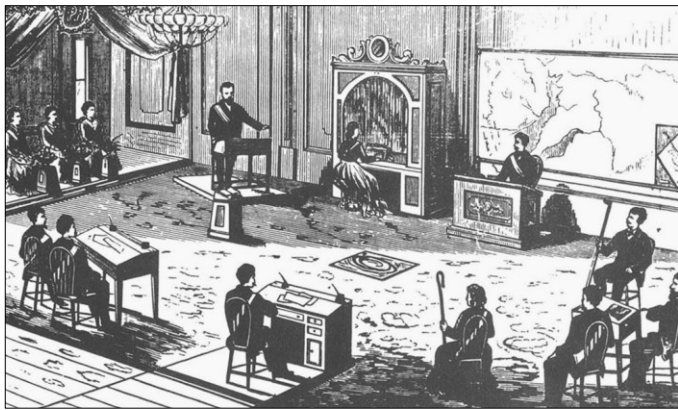
## **The Importance of Legislation**

Members of the Grange in Maine have long supported certain state and national causes by advocating legislative action. For example, early in the 20th century the Grange championed prohibition and Rural Free Delivery, while opposing the creation of the State Highway Commission, the fire warden system and movement of the state capital to Portland. During the era of “Progressivism,” the Maine State Grange backed such progressive legislation as the direct primary, recall and referendum, and voting rights for women.

Increasingly focused on the quality of rural life, the Grange supported the establishment of the Farm Bureau, the Extension Service, the Maine Federation of Agricultural Organizations and the Maine Experiment Station; by doing so, the Grange diminished its role in educating Maine farmers by emphasizing scientific methods of agriculture. In fact, as these other organizations evolved, the Grange's cooperative functions declined and its social and intellectual activities grew, bringing it closer to the organization envisioned by founder Oliver Hudson Kelley.

### Rituals and Regalia

For all members of the Grange, and particularly those in Maine, the ritualism of the Order has long possessed a unique significance and appeal. A vital part of regular procedures, meetings, and activities, the rituals dramatize the beauty and importance of the family, home, community, faith, country, and agriculture. From the beginnings of the Order, Grange "work" reflected the everyday experiences of the farmer, while binding members together across the country. These cohesive fraternal ties have strengthened the Grange on the local level and enhanced its prestige on the state and national level.



The basis for Grange rituals lies in several areas, but chiefly in the Masonic Order, the Bible, the old English estate system, and in Greek and Roman mythology. From these sources came the first four degrees (based on the four seasons of the year), the foundation lessons emphasizing Faith, Hope, Charity and Fidelity, and the ritual stations of three graces, *Ceres*, *Pomona*, *Flora*, plus *Gate Keeper*, *Overseer*, *Steward*, *Chaplain*, *Assistant Steward*, *Lady Assistant Steward*, *Secretary*, *Treasurer*, *Lecturer* and *Master*. The use of the word "Grange" to represent the Order originates in the term applied to those parts of English estates that were set apart as working farms.

### Sisters of the Order: Women and the Grange

The dramatic action of the Founders in giving women full equality and a vote placed the Grange in a leadership position among America's fraternal organizations when it was formed in 1867. Early sessions of the Grange declared for women's right to vote, and it was Grange support and influence which assisted greatly in bringing about equal suffrage for men and women in this country. (It's also worth noting that Caroline Hall, niece of Oliver Hudson Kelley, was officially recognized as an "equal" Founder of the Grange in 1892.)

In Maine, women's roles in the State Grange did not assume a particular focus until 1886, when the Thirteenth Annual Session established a Household Economy Committee (now the "Committee on Women's Activities"). Among the programs advanced by this Committee over the past century has been music in public schools, the organization of Juvenile Granges, assistance for the less fortunate, character building, and improvement of Grange hall kitchens. During World War II, Grange women made notable contributions to Civil Defense, the Red Cross and Victory Gardens. In the post-war period, the Committee took on the job of helping to pay off the mortgage on the State Grange Headquarters in Augusta. This Committee has also had a long tradition of working closely with the Farm Bureau, Extension Service and 4-H Clubs.

### Harvesters and Gleaners All: The Maine Grange in the 20th Century

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Grange in Maine sustained an impressive level of activity, with over 400 Subordinate Grange organizations retaining their role as centers of village life. Members of the Order responded to state and national concerns with the same degree of commitment shown during the 19th century. For instance, some 2400 Maine Grangers answered the call to arms during World War I. During the Depression years, the Grange offered inexpensive entertainment—including plays, tableaux, readings and music—and the fellowship of suppers preceding meetings. And during the Second World War, Grange men and women not only served their country with honor, but the State Grange strongly advocated the purchase of war bonds and the collection of strategic materials such as rubber and metals.

In the years immediately following World War II, Grange membership in Maine was made up less frequently of farmers and their families, reflecting the decreasing number of farms in the State. In time, the

Grange became more interested in community service and social activity, while still passing resolutions and following up with extensive lobbying efforts. With the National Grange dominated by Midwesterners, members in Maine focused increasingly on issues closer to home as they sought a renewed sense of purpose. With this objective in mind, Maine Grangers pledged themselves to a number of new and useful projects, including financial support of the former Maine Conservation School at Bryant Pond, establishment of a Committee on Deaf Activities, the organization of hay relief projects to assist out-of-state farmers, and the publication of a revitalized Grange newspaper (*The Maine Granger*).



Pleasant Valley Grange Fair, West Bethel, 1926

### The Grange in Maine Today

Grange membership in Maine peaked in the 1950s, when more than 62,000 residents belonged to the Order. Not surprisingly, the transformation of American agriculture, the popularity of television, changes in insurance laws, increased opportunities for socialization outside fraternal orders and other developments have resulted in a dramatic decline in Subordinate Granges (down to 160 in 2008) and membership (approximately 10% of its peak number) in Maine today. The main reason for the Grange’s existence—“to improve the farmer’s lot”—has been replaced by a variety of causes less crucial to the country’s general welfare, but nevertheless of widespread significance.

In retrospect, the Grange’s most important contribution appears to be the light it brought to countless rural families and isolated neighborhoods throughout Maine. Through its literary programs, sponsorship of libraries, debates, plays, suppers, dances and other social occasions, the Grange nourished and enriched otherwise bleak lives in ways that are difficult to understand in

today’s “global village.” The continued existence of the Grange will likely depend on whether present and future generations rediscover the simplicity and eternal values espoused by the Order over the past century-and-a-half. In an increasingly turbulent and unpredictable world, the wisdom embodied in the Grange’s seven degrees may supply a quaint yet solid foundation for those seeking fulfillment in a post-industrial age.

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*The following article is based on a paper delivered in September 2008 at the Bethel Historical Society’s conference on the Grange. Jean F. Hankins, of Otisfield, Maine, is an independent scholar, active in the Otisfield Historical Society. A graduate of Tufts University and the University of Indiana, she holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Connecticut. From her extensive research, Mrs. Hankins concludes that, despite the Grange’s pioneering role in granting women equal rights within the Order, its most influential members were more often male, a pattern that continues into the 21st century.*

### Women in the Grange

By Jean F. Hankins

WHEN THE NATIONAL GRANGE was founded in 1867, it made history by admitting women on an equal footing with men. It was the first national organization of its type to do so. To put this in historical perspective, it was not until 1920, after decades of agitation, that the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, finally giving women the right to vote. For individual women, the founding of the Grange was important not historically, but on a personal level. Because its basic purpose over the years was to improve the lives of America’s farmers and their families, the Grange has had a strong social and intellectual impact and has changed the lives of many rural American women. Women members have given back in full measure, contributing substantially to the Grange’s success. Before discussing these two related issues—what the Grange did for women and what women did for the Grange—it may be wise to look at just how equal the Grange women really were.

In 1903, thirty-six years after Oliver Hudson Kelley first conceived of the Grange, Susan B. Anthony stated that she could always recognize a “Grange woman as far off as she could see her, because of her air of feeling herself as good as a man.” In fact, women’s equality

was never as simple as that. It was, after all, the male organizers of the Grange who established the women's role in the first place. While the founders believed that the participation of women was essential, they also believed in separate spheres for the two sexes. Grange founder Kelley followed the advice of his niece, Caroline Hall, to include women on an equal footing with men because he believed they would make meetings more attractive and pleasant. Kelley was convinced, however, that women should restrict their activities to the home or an extension of the home; he insisted that outdoor work stifled development of women's higher qualities. The Reverend Aaron Grosh, another Grange founder, reflected the male attitude of the day when he stated that the woman member would raise the standards with her "gentle influence, her innate tact in all matters of good taste and propriety, her instinctive perceptions of righteousness and parity."

In short, the Grange founders placed woman on a pedestal and expected her to stay there. The founders went so far as to create four new officers which only women could hold—those of Ceres, Pomona, Flora, and Lady Assistant Steward. They may have assumed that men alone could hold the more responsible Grange offices, the duties of which, in the words of Aaron Grosh, "would probably render them undesirable to the [female] sex." Oliver Kelley himself echoed this same attitude when he stated that women liked the Grange because "it was like a fancy dress party." But some women Grangers did not agree. Cordelia Atkeson complained in 1901 that there was no reason for her to report as Ceres because the office had given her nothing to do, and a Connecticut woman complained about the three Lady Graces who "sit in distressing dignity, like so many wax-figures." The idea that men and women were equal but separate was reinforced by the design of separate ceremonies for degrees for men and women, a practice that continued until 1889.

Although Eliza Gifford, an early feminist, in 1894 called the Grange the "greatest equality club the world has ever known, women Grangers made slow progress in attaining true equal status in leadership positions. In California, for example, it was ruled in 1873 that any woman could run for office in the State Grange, but it was three more years before any woman candidate emerged. On the local level, the first woman master of a subordinate Grange was Flora Kimball, elected Master of Howard County (Indiana) Grange in 1877. Slowly, a few women did begin to hold state Grange offices, some of them moving up on their husband's

coat-tails. From 1881-86, for example, Sallie Back was Lecturer for the Indiana State Grange. But not until 1895 did any woman become Master of a State Grange, and until the twentieth century, never did more than seven women hold the top Grange offices in any one year. National prominence for women came ever more slowly. A year later, the first woman became a member of the National Executive Committee, and two years later, in 1897, the first woman was elected Lecturer of the National Grange.



All-women Degree team, Excelsior Grange #5  
Poland, Maine

The slow movement of women into leadership suggests that Grange women were traditionalists. Historian Donald Marti points out that as late as 1978, women seemed stuck in the separate sphere. He states that most Grange women were content to leave the farm problems to the men, and, as one Indiana Grange woman put it, their activities consisted "mostly of contests in sewing, crocheting, needlework and baking." However, as the examples above show, during the 1980s women's leadership role in the Grange expanded rapidly, doubtless due to an increase in better educated women members and "overall changes in the attitude of the general population." Writing near the end of the twentieth century, Marti commented that "the boundary between women's and men's spheres, which Grange women could always cross at some points, is now more permeable than ever."

Turning to one of the questions we began with: Historically, what did women members do for the Grange? We have already mentioned the founders' belief that women's "gentle influence" would contribute decorum to Grange meetings. In addition to elevating the social tone of Grange meetings, Grange

women contributed in four ways: They did much of the routine work of the subordinate Granges; they contributed far more than their share to Grange publications, and increasingly, as speakers on the local level; they assumed leadership of Juvenile Granges, Committees on Women's Work, and Household Economy Committees; and they moved the agenda of the Grange toward educational and social goals.

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Tableau Robes, ca. 1900.

Beginning with Caroline Hall, Kelley's niece, who served as her uncle's record-keeping assistant and secretary, women did much of the Order's routine work. In 1880 a California Granger commented that "one lady is equal to six men and a span of horses." From the outset, women "cleaned Grange halls, devised entertainments, often planned entire programs and prepared meals." These tasks might be viewed as an extension of the traditional homemaker's sphere; the setting was different, but the work was much the same. As we have already noted, women were slow to move into the top positions, but they were especially apt to assume the offices of secretary and lecturers of subordinate Granges. Historian Donald Marti points out that in 1888 Connecticut had sixty-one subordinate Granges, but only one had a woman master. However, women served as secretaries in five, and in just over half of those sixty-one, women served as lecturers, with the important responsibility of planning programs. By

1901, according to another historian, women held most lecturer's positions in local Granges. In this capacity, women helped "mold the policy and activity of the Grange."

In addition to serving as Grange secretaries, lecturers, and librarians, early women members exercised their literary and oratorical skills in Grange publications and subordinate meetings. In 1898 one male observer noted, with some surprise, that "hundreds of thousands of women" were writing and speaking publicly. The voice of the average farm woman was being heard from one end of America to the other. While much of their literary production was unremarkable, consisting largely of formulae poems and essays categorized as "literary entertainment," occasionally women also presented more substantial papers and led discussions at State Grange meetings.

The Grange women, then, were not silent, and state and local Granges soon moved to give their women members a special podium by creating new committees. Formal specialization of men's and women's spheres on the state level began in the 1880s when the Massachusetts State Grange established two women's committees—one on household economy and the other on home entertainment and amusements. Other states copied this pattern. Ironically, these new committees, which created a wider space between men and women's spheres, seem also to have been a springboard for women who wished to widen the Grange agenda, and they provided a means of doing so. In Maine, for example, where the Grange was flourishing, the State Grange established a Household Economy Committee in 1886 which merged a few years later with a Committee on Women's Work. This group, particularly active between 1890 and 1910, promoted causes which might be considered especially relevant to women. They successfully advocated such reforms as adding music to the curriculum in public schools, the organization of juvenile Granges, well-ordered householders, good nutrition, shrewd clothing purchases, and the proper administration of medicine. The Maine Women's Committee also reached out into the community to help the needy, most notably with a \$500 donation to build a Grange cottage for orphans at the Good Will Farm in Fairfield.

So far we have not mentioned the extent to which the early Grange as a national organization sought economic reforms like regulation of railroads and curtailment of monopolies. Nor have we mentioned the retail stores and buyers' cooperatives which the local Granges established. Although these matters must

have been of interest to rural women, they fell largely into the sphere of men and, thus, are beyond the scope of this discussion. As many historians have pointed out, the effort of the Grangers in the early years to achieve radical economic reforms yielded in the 1880s to increasing emphasis on educational and social goals, teaching the farmer and his family how to better their lives through new agricultural techniques, household economies, more pleasant homes, healthier lifestyles, and stronger community life.

But what did the Grange do for the rural woman? Asking this question, of course, implies a double standard. Donald Marti and other historians have preferred to use the term “mutuality” to describe the different areas of interest to rural men and women. “Men and women farmers,” he wrote, “have regularly crossed the boundary separating their spheres to share work and social enjoyments.” The Grange helped rural women most fundamentally by moving them out of their customary role, that is, by ending their social isolation and getting them out of the house. According to the author of a dissertation on the Maine Grange, “No one benefitted from [the Grange] more than the farmers’ wives whose lot was much more drab and dull than their husbands’ and who had less opportunity to mingle and mix.” Henry Dunnack’s 1928 book on rural life in Maine goes a bit further: “The Grange may be called the liberator of the American farmer’s wife.” “Altho frequently stated,” he continues, “the fact that farm women are more prone to insanity than any other class” is not well known. Dunnack believed that the cause of this insanity was women’s social isolation, a viewpoint echoed by American writers such as Hamlin Garland whose fiction shows farm women “distorted with work and child-bearing.”

Although Dunnack’s comments on women’s mental health seem exaggerated, it was undoubtedly true that farm women welcomed the chance to “mingle and mix.” A second benefit was that the Grange gave women an opportunity to use their minds. For some women, the Grange became a center of adult education which found expression also in the women’s club movement, started in 1868, and the popular Chautauqua lectures that began soon after. Women’s clubs and Chautauquas were less likely to be found in rural areas and probably attracted a more sophisticated audience. The appeal of the Grange programs for women was their practical focus on domestic and farming issues.

If Granges provided adult education for women, the educational process worked in two directions as the women in turn became educators. Grange historians

have suggested that it was no coincidence that many women Grange leaders were former school teachers, who, following the rules of the day, resigned their professional positions when they married. The Grange gave them not just a social outlet and a chance to learn new techniques of household economy, but also an intellectual opportunity, a chance for self-expression. As Donald Marti puts it, “They understood the pedagogical role. Sometimes they explained or protested their own problems, but they more generally tried to teach the less fortunate how to live thoughtful, gracious, and satisfying lives. During their years in the Grange, some of these women acquired new organizational skills and experience in writing and public speaking on a broad range of topics.



Penobscot Pomona Grange #8 at Queen City Grange  
Bangor, Maine, 1910

The intellectual benefit occasionally led to the political. Eventually a few Grange women used their new-found voices outside of the domestic sphere to urge new reforms never considered by the founders. The important one was the woman’s right to vote. The Rev. Aaron Grosh had assumed that for women the Grange would be an extension of the home, a sanctuary from the hurly-burly of the public sphere. He was not alone. One male Grange member from South Carolina went so far as to call the women’s movement of the day “a political abortion . . . the mere mention of . . . which would bring the blush of shame to every pure woman’s cheek. Many believed that women should exercise their political views only through the influence they exerted on the male voters in their families, and it is hardly surprising to find that the earliest Grange positions on the issue were “cau-

tious, negative, or downright hostile.” Nevertheless, such nay-sayers could not deny the early history of the Grange and the insistence of the founders on equal membership for men and women. Persistently, from 1874 on, both men and women Grangers argued that woman’s suffrage was simply a valid expression of the principle of equality on which the Grange had been founded.

The question of a woman’s right to vote became linked closely to the temperance issue, especially after the organization of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874. Many Grange women joined the WCTU, thus broaching the issue with male Grangers and, in doing so, broadening the base of the movement. Although the WCTU included members from towns and cities as well as rural areas, the typical WCTU member was, like the Grange, middle class, Protestant, and somewhat progressive. The two causes became further joined by the argument that the only way to enact prohibition was by giving women the vote. For example, in 1886 the Michigan Grange said that the “alcohol problem was so bad that women should be allowed to vote on prohibition. With the leadership of several state Granges like that in California, the National Grange cautiously edged towards support of female suffrage. In 1881, the New York and Indiana State Granges endorsed the right of women to vote. During the decades following, women Grange members managed to keep the issue alive at both the subordinate (local) and state levels. Only in 1916, just four years before the ratification of the 19th amendment, did the National Grange platform endorse women’s suffrage.

Grange women were also interested in public education on all levels. Starting in the 1870s, they lobbied hard for domestic science instruction and vocational training for women in the new state agricultural colleges. The Grange women also pushed hard on the state and local levels for educational reforms. For some, these reforms included raising the schools’ moral tone and inculcating patriotism; others lobbied for more basic reforms in the curriculum and the educational systems. In Maine, for example, women Grangers took the lead in promoting uniform textbooks in Maine public schools, the abolition of the district school system with its one-room schools, and increased funding for the agricultural college in Orono.

Just who were these women Grangers we have been talking about? Without question, the most prominent was Caroline Hall, who first proposed the idea that women should be admitted as members on an equal

basis with men. A former teacher, she worked for years as an assistant to her uncle, Grange founder Oliver Hudson Kelly. Always in the shadows, she excelled at the detail work he avoided. It was she who kept the records and conducted the correspondence between the far-flung Grange leaders that was so necessary for keeping the fledgling organization alive. So important was Caroline Hall to the success of the Grange that in 1892 the National Grange decreed that she be recognized as an equal to the Seven Founders. Unfortunately this belated recognition has been largely forgotten; Grange historians continue to praise the Seven Founders, all of whom were male, and make only cursory mention of Caroline Hall.

Bernice H. Noyes (1906-1972) was elected in 1943 as the first woman Master of Alder River Grange # 145 in East Bethel. She was also a charter member of the Bethel Historical Society. Other women who served as Master of Bethel Granges were Bertha Mundt, who assumed the position of Pleasant Valley #136 Master in West Bethel in 1933 and served until 1937. Olive Head also became Master of Pleasant Valley seven years later in 1945. The earliest instance of a woman heading up a Grange organization in Bethel was Bertha Grover Valentine, who became Master of Bethel Grange #56 at Bethel Hill in 1906—thirteen years before women acquired the right to vote on the national level. Three years later, another woman, Gipsy Barker, assumed the same office at Bethel Grange.

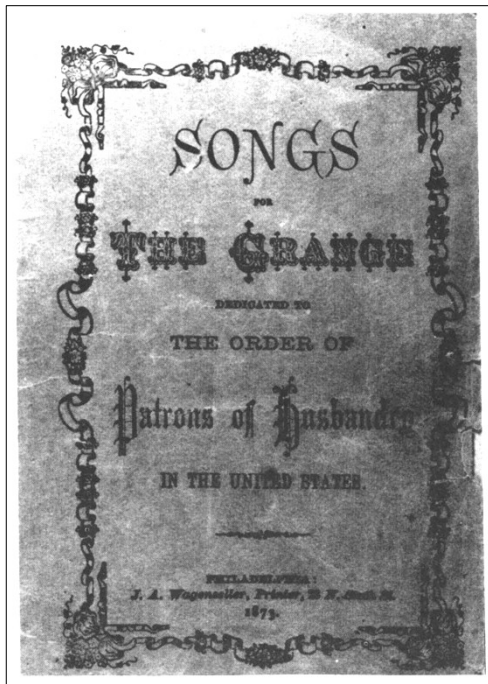


Over the years a large number of Grange women have ignored or overcome such inconsistent and careless treatment. The following brief sketches focus on three strong Grange women whose personal goals differed considerably. First, there was Eliza C. Gifford, who lived in Chautauqua County, New York, and was one of the hardest-working lobbyists for women’s rights. She taught school for seven years before marrying a farmer at the age of twenty-two and raising six children. Gifford and her husband were charter members of their local Grange. She served as Master



of both the Subordinate Grange and the Pomona (county) Grange, wrote for Grange publications, and participated in State and National Grange meetings. Also a member of the WCTU, in 1881 she first proposed an equal suffrage resolution to the New York State Grange, and for over twenty years she persistently renewed her efforts for its passage.

Second, Sarah Baird came from Vermont, but moved to Minneapolis at the age of fourteen. She graduated from a normal school in 1860, taught school for five years, and then married. The Bairds were early members of the local Grange, which Sarah Baird hoped would “elevate, educate, and build up the Farmer to a standard that may be recognized as a fit person for the first society, which he now stands far beneath.” Her major concern was always with the promise of the Grange to enrich farmers’ and farm women’s lives. Sarah Baird spoke and wrote for the local Grange paper, and she served as Master of the local Grange. She then advanced to serve as Master of the Minnesota Grange, a position she held for seventeen years, becoming the first Master of a State Grange.



Grange songbook compiled by Caroline Hall

Finally, closer to home and probably more typical of the thousands of women members of the Grange, there is Ruth Wiley of North Warren, Maine, to whom Stan Howe dedicated his book on the Maine Grange. Born in 1906, Ruth Wiley attended local schools and, like so many other Grange women leaders, attended normal

school and taught school before her marriage in 1926. The mother of eleven children, she must have found the Grange not only a liberating social outlet, but also a forum for asserting her individuality. She joined White Oak Grange as a teenager and served in many offices, including that of Master. She was active in Pomona and the State Grange, was a member of National Grange, and served for many years on the State Committee on Women’s Activities.

These brief sketches of Grange women illustrate changes in how women have contributed to and benefited from the Grange in the years since 1867. They also demonstrate the farsighted wisdom of the eight founders of the Order in admitting women members on an equal basis with men. From the start, Grange women have responded by cooking, sewing, lecturing, recording, organizing, and presiding, making the Grange not only a more decorous place, but also a more enlightening forum for rural families. As they have given, they have received; the Grange has rewarded its women members with a wide variety of social, intellectual, educational, and political opportunities. Grange women have moved increasingly into positions where they were never expected to go. Over the years, Caroline Hall’s insistence on equal status for women has worked well. Simply put, women have been good for the Grange, and the Grange has been good for women.

Further reading: Henry E. Dunnack, *Rural Life in Maine* (Augusta, ME: C. E. Nash, 1928); Charles M. Gardner, *The Grange: Friend of the Farmer, 1867-1947* (Washington, DC: The National Grange, 1949); S. Carleton Guptill, *The Grange in Maine from 1874-1940* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maine, 1973); David H. Howard, *People, Pride, and Progress* (Washington, DC: National Grange, 1992); Stanley Russell Howe, “A Fair Field and No Favor”: *A Concise History of the Maine State Grange* (Augusta: Maine State Grange, 1994); Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood, 1991); Thomas N. Woods, *Knights of the Plow: Oliver H. Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991)

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*The following article is based on a paper delivered in September 2008 at the Bethel Historical Society’s conference on the Grange, and has been edited for inclusion in this issue. Professor Douglas Hodgkin is a Lewiston native, a Grange member and a prolific*

*author of several local histories, including Historic Lewiston: The Grange at Crowley's Junction (2003). He was educated at Yale and holds MA and Ph.D. degrees from Duke University. He taught political science at Bates College until his retirement and is now very active with the Androscoggin Historical Society. In his paper, Professor Hodgkin traces the history of a local Maine Grange and analyzes the reasons and conditions for its growth and subsequent demise. In doing so, he provides an important case study for an examination of those forces that have worked for and against the survival of the Grange in Maine.*

## The Rise and Fall of Lewiston Grange #2

By Douglas I. Hodgkin

Professor Emeritus, Bates College

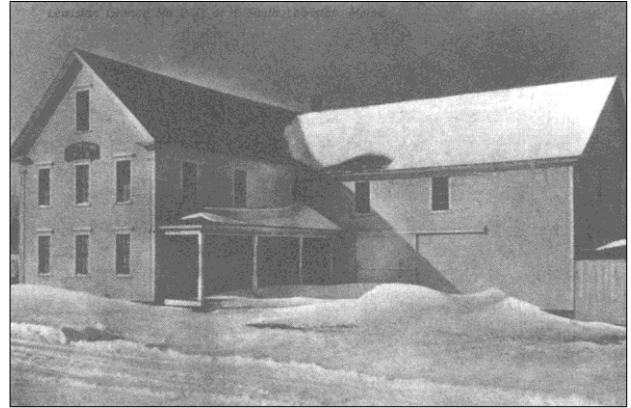
THE GRANGE, or the organization officially known as the Patrons of Husbandry, was founded in 1867 in Washington, DC, by a group of civil servants in the Department of Agriculture. The Order eventually found its way to Maine in 1874 and in January 1874 an organizational meeting for one of the first charters was held in Lewiston at the Crowley School House in "South Lewiston." Nelson Ham, who would become the first Master of the Maine State Grange, was a leading figure in the organization of this Grange. He called the founding meeting of the State Grange at downtown Lewiston's Pilsbury Block in April 1874 and the first session of the Maine State Grange was held in that building in November 1874.

Those interested in founding a Grange in Lewiston immediately decided to build a hall. They organized as stockholders of the Grange building, bought shares and rented the building to the Grange. The building was constructed on a sliver of land between the railroad tracks and Crowley's Junction. Work began on 1 April 1874, the first meeting was held there on 28 May, and the building was dedicated on 24 June. It was the first Grange hall in the State.

The Lewiston Grange hall contained a store designed to provide members with lower prices by eliminating the middleman. It also housed the post office. On the first floor was a dining hall for social activity. The Grange was the first major organization to provide equal rights to women, who found in the Grange's social activity relief from the isolation and drudgery of rural life. Children were also welcome to join their parents for meals in the hall. Later, there would be a Junior Grange for those between the ages of seven and fourteen.

The meeting hall for the Grange was on the second floor where the ritualism and floor work of the organi-

zation was conducted. The Grange was a secret organization, but business was conducted during the meetings and there was a stage for entertainments often provided by an officer known as the Lecturer. Education was emphasized, and progressive agricultural techniques—such as what fertilizers to use and the importance of ensilage in milk production—were discussed. The horizons of farm families were widened in these discussions and in debates on various topics relating to rural life. Many Granges offered their communities libraries of books that could be borrowed.



A 1928 photograph of Lewiston Grange Hall, showing the stable on the right. Courtesy of Douglas I. Hodgkin

The original location lacked a place to stable horses and Thomas Crowley objected to dances held by the Grange. So, in 1885, a group of Grangers purchased a  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre lot nearby and proceeded to move the hall there. Crowley got an injunction to stop the move, but it was lifted and the hall moved. The Grangers then purchased more land next to the new lot, cut the building in half and lengthened it by about twenty feet. They added sheds in order to stable the horses and bought the hall and the  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre lot in 1893.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Grange store had closed, as had most throughout Maine by that time. Obtaining Grange insurance was still an important reason to join, however. The organization became increasingly a social organization, particularly after the Extension Service was created in 1914. The Grange held festivals, entertainments, outings, picnics, track meets, etc. The Lewiston Drama Club used the hall as well.

When the electric interurban railroad was built from Lewiston to Brunswick/Bath, it was decided that the hall was too far away and attendance suffered. In 1902, it was decided to move the hall again so as to be closer to the rail line. The Grange purchased  $4\frac{1}{2}$  acres on

the corner by the railroad. This time the move was not smooth; the contractor got the hall into the road and balked until \$300 more was paid.

In the remodeling that followed the move, they added a large stable and eliminated the store space in order to enlarge the dining hall on the first floor. The meeting hall on the second floor became an exhibition hall for Grange fairs, as well as a place for socials, entertainments, fund-raisers, dances, and dramas. All-day meetings were held on Fast Day and Patriot's Day, beginning in 1901. The hall also served as a site for birthday and anniversary parties, school graduations and church gatherings—a virtual community center.

In 1931, the Grange voted to remodel the hall again. They borrowed money from banks and members. The project provided work for several members during the Great Depression. The Grange needed more space for Pomona meetings and entertainments; they also needed a large hall on the first floor for dances, which were a major fund raiser, as well as minstrel shows, dramas and fairs. A sixteen foot deep stage area with footlights was installed as well. On the second floor, there was a dining room, large kitchen and storage space. The basement was also dug out to provide room for furnaces, and in 1933 bowling alleys were constructed. All these changes were met enthusiastically in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, my father, age fifteen/sixteen, mentioned social activities having taken place there seventy times in his 1930 diary.

Through all these years, membership went up and down. Peaks years were in 1907 (283 members), 1938 (278), and in 1951 (272). Later, there was a marked decline in membership and attendance. Dances ended in 1970. The Grange leased the downstairs to auctioneers beginning in 1971, but meetings were still held upstairs. The foundation began crumbling in the 1980s and some repairs were made. The hall was sold in 1990, but the Grange continued to meet in the hall until 1994 when only ten members remained and they voted to surrender their charter.

The main reason for the waning of the Grange was the decline in the farm base for membership. What farmers there were relied on the Extension Service, the State University, farm publications, etc., for their information. The ritualism of the Grange was increasingly seen as quaint and archaic, and with the change in the insurance laws in the 1960s, there were no longer any selective benefits unique to the Grange. Other trends that discouraged Grange attendance and membership were the existence of many other forms of entertainment, with autos making it easier to travel longer

distances. In addition, watching television consumed large amounts of time and created passivity. The post-World War II “civic generation” was disappearing without any younger replacements. Finally, the need for two family incomes left less time for Grange involvement, and suburbanization of what had been farm land reduced membership opportunities.



## BOOK NOTE

*A History of Maine Built Automobiles & Motorized Vehicles, 1834-1934, With a History of Maine License Plates*, by Richard and Nancy Fraser. (East Poland, ME: Richard & Nancy Fraser, 2008) Pp. 518. Hardcover. \$49.95. Available from the Society's Museum Shop at [www.bethelhistorical.org](http://www.bethelhistorical.org).

Encyclopedic in scope and filled with hundreds of rare and unusual photographs, diagrams and vintage advertisements, this newly-expanded edition of *A History of Maine Built Automobiles* is—like its long-out-of-print predecessor—the first place to look for information about the early manufacture of powered vehicles in the Pine Tree State. Beyond the numerous magazine and newspaper accounts (most reproduced verbatim from the originals) documenting the production of automobiles in Maine, the book contains lengthy chapters dealing with everything from auto accessories made in Maine, to hill climbs, racing events and notable automobile trips. As the book's title indicates, a final chapter covers the history of Maine license plates; easy-to-follow tables arranged by license type are prefaced by a well-written introduction to the subject, which dates back to 1905 when Maine first required the registration of motor vehicles. Based on the long list of individuals and institutions thanked for their assistance in providing material for the book, the authors have left few stones unturned in their search for information. Appropriately, the book is dedicated to those who provided a significant portion of the financial support to publish the work: the Owl's Head Transportation Museum's Lang Education Center and Library, the Seal Cove Auto Museum, and the Richard C. Paine, Jr., Automobile Collection Charitable Trust.

“Many of our back towns still cling to their farmers’ club which was good in its time, but like many other good things it is fast giving place to an organization which has all the good points of the club, and, in addition, it has the advantage of making its influence felt for the welfare of the whole country. There can be no doubt but the Grange will so change and improve the conditions of the average farmer that a reaction will take, and ere many years pass, we shall see the farms which have long been deserted and turned to pasture or allowed to grow up to wood, inhabited, the buildings renovated and resounding with the shouts of happy children as in the olden times. This may seem idle talk, but it is a fact that new homes are being made on many of our hillsides, and let us encourage those who are thinking of changing their homes in the cities. Many of these farms which have laid idle for many years have surprised their owners by giving returns almost equaling those of the rich soil of the west. The only advantage of which the western farmer can boast is his ability to cultivate large tracts at comparatively small cost; but as an offset to this seeming advantage is the fact that all farm products command a price so much above that obtained by the western farmer that we can well afford to content ourselves on our rough hillside farms, happy in the thought that our country is large enough so that all can find a home suited to his desires. Let us take courage, knowing that we shall reap in due time if we choose men to make and execute our laws who have the interest of the whole country at heart and that are willing while they live themselves to let a brother live.”

*Oxford Democrat, Paris, Maine, 1 May 1888*



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