

BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN TREASURE

The Grange came into being in 1867 because of the vision of Oliver Hudson Kelley, a Minnesota farmer and activist. He had long held that farmers, because of their independent and scattered nature, needed a national organization which would represent them much as unions were beginning to do for industrial workers. Farmers were at the mercy of merchants for both needed farm supplies and for marketing their crops. Railroads and warehouse companies were taking advantage of farmers as well.

Kelley and some of his friends organized the National Grange (officially known as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry) as a fraternal group similar to the Masonic lodge. The early leaders were responsible for promoting cooperatives which had the potential of helping farmers economically.

Effective lobbying efforts were undertaken early and this activity remains a bulwark of Grange service to rural America. Education of rural residents was championed by the early Grange and, due to Grange agitation, dramatic improvements were made in rural schools. The birth of the Extension Service, Rural Free Delivery, and the Farm Credit System were largely due to Grange lobbying.

The Grange movement in Washington dates from organization of Waitsburg Grange No. 1 near Walla Walla in 1873, before Washington gained statehood. Existing local community Granges in the territory banded together to form the Washington State Grange just prior to statehood in 1889. The organization has continued the national tradition of championing the needs and rights of farmers and other rural citizens. Among Grange accomplishments in Washington are sponsorship of Initiative No. 1 in 1930 resulting in Washington's public utility districts; sponsorship in 1976 of Initiative 59 limiting growth of "corporate farming" in the state; sponsorship of Initiative 872 in 2004 that restored voter choice for primary elections; and support of countless other legislative efforts to enhance agriculture.

Early in its history Grange leaders realized that social interaction was especially important to rural residents. For more than 140 years Grange halls have existed as community centers where residents gather for educational events, dances, potlucks, town meetings, political rallies and other meetings.

Junior Grange, 4-H, FFA, scouting and Camp Fire groups have thrived because of Grange involvement and each year tens of thousands of Grange members participate in numerous community service projects.

*For a complete history of the National Grange, see *People, Pride and Progress: 125 Years of the Grange in America* by David H. Howard (Washington, D.C.: The National Grange, 1992; 336 pages, bibliography and index, Foreword by former U.S. Rep. Thomas Foley).

*For a complete history of the Grange in Washington State see *Washington Grangers Celebrate a Century* by Gus Norwood (Seattle, Wash.: Washington State Grange, 1989, 192 pages, bibliography and index, Foreword by former U.S. Rep. Thomas Foley)