



Maine State Grange

Reply to:
Walter Boomsma, Communications Director
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2023-24 Annual Report of the Maine State Grange Communications Director

Brothers and Sisters,

It is my distinct honor to report some activities and accomplishments from this year's efforts. This is the tenth full year I have served in the capacity of Communications Director—a position created in January 2014 that combined and expanded the historical roles of the publicity director and webmaster. My broad-based role includes assembling the printed Bulletin, maintaining the website, facilitating communication between and to State Leaders, advising on communication matters, and providing information and resources to Subordinate and Pomona Granges.

During the past year, I published twelve monthly Bulletins without missing a deadline and wrote at least two columns each month. I am grateful to those directors and officers who regularly submit articles and support improving our internal communication.

The website is now in its fourteenth full year of operation in its current form. The objectives for the redesign in November 2010 were simple. Some of the more important included:

- To encourage prompt posting and maintenance of information and resources,
- To control that posting process with some level of moderation and quality control,
- To allow users to find basic information and resources (such as applications, manuals, etc.) readily and
- To allow users to subscribe to the site and receive email versions of posts.

We continue to achieve those objectives. There have been 17,985 site views from September 1, 2023, through August 31, 2024—an average of nearly 1,500 monthly. However, these visits do not include subscribers receiving the posts without visiting the site. While this represents a significant decrease from the previous year, the number of actual visitors hasn't changed much. One could rightly conclude that a similar number of visitors are viewing less pages and posts.

Considering the decline in Granges and Grange membership, the site is doing well. Some of that success can be attributed to the site design and content. The site is resource-rich and appeals to both members and non-members. The top pages visited are the information pages, such as the directory of Granges, program books, and information, etc. This year, the Grange Event Calendar received the third most visits.

During this past year, I have continued to add resource documents and tools to our collection of communication resources available on the site. There is value in our website.

Several significant accomplishments this year include:

<http://mainestategrange.org>

- Added additional resources for Grangers, including timely posts that seem to be of interest to them on a variety of subjects.
- Completed interviews with media representatives and researchers. One example is a favorable feature article in the Bangor Daily News and Piscataquis Observer.
- Completed another significant purge of the website's oldest posts and images. This makes the site much more manageable, saves server space, and remains an ongoing focus.
- Continued to work with an editorial calendar to ensure regular, consistent posting. This includes Grange Heirlooms and Why I Love the Grange.
- Continued to make "under the hood" improvements to the site.
- Continued posting of "special events" sponsored or hosted by Granges. These events are also added to the MSG Calendar Page.
- Continued to facilitate an email service that allows information to be sent directly to officers, directors, and deputies on short notice.

My goal is to keep website costs as low as possible by using free software versions and applying creativity to how things get done. Technology costs continue to rise as software companies look to switch from purchased software to paid subscription software. Website security continues to be a growing issue requiring additional time, support, and expertise.

I encourage members to visit other state Grange websites and compare the appearance and content. Our site should be a source of pride!

Thanks again to Heather and Phil Retberg of Halcyon Grange for their willingness to continue to share columns for our monthly "View from the Farm."

Looking ahead to 2024-2025, some objectives include:

- Continue researching options for a site subscription. The current process is time-consuming, and more automation is needed.
- Continuing to keep communication positive, helpful, and engaging.
- Investigate the feasibility of sponsoring at least one virtual roundtable discussion. Due to time limitations, this was not achieved last year. I am currently upgrading my computer system and hope this becomes more feasible soon.
- Continue to research further connections between the MSG website and social media.
- Continue searching for resources, including additional guest columnists and regular topical information that can be reposted with attribution.

Our greatest accomplishment is also our most significant need for the coming year. We must continue increasing participation and information, working to build a positive communication program. The Maine State Grange website is an integral part of our organization and is becoming a "go-to" place for members and friends who wish to learn more about our Order. We impact Maine Communities and beyond while preserving our heritage.

I believe the primary role of any state position or function is to support Subordinate and Pomona Granges and their members. But communication is not a "one-person job." Individuals, Community/Subordinate, and Pomona Granges can best support our communications efforts by providing positive news and information.

I will continue encouraging open communication throughout our Order and with the public. We must generate interest and excitement among our communities, prospective members, and ourselves.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you and your Grange.

Thank you for your continued confidence and support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter Boomsma', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Walter Boomsma
Maine State Grange Communications Director

<http://mainestategrange.org>