

Moments in History

Information taken from *A Fair Field and No Favor* by Stanley Russell Howe 1994.

As Grangers, most know that our Organization was instituted in December 1867, by Oliver Kelly and six others, but how many of you know the history of the Grange in Maine?

1. Amasa K. Walker of Hampden is usually cited as Maine's first Grange member. He was inducted into the new order while holding a government position in Washington, D.C.
2. Walker, Allen Carter, I.C. York and Daniel Patten got others to start the 1st Grange in Maine, Eastern Star #1 in Hampden, on October 20, 1873.
3. Six months after the 1st Subordinate Grange was organized 20 men met in Lewiston on April 21, 1874 to found the Maine State Grange. Nelson Ham of Lewiston was elected State Master at this session.
4. December 1874 the State Grange met for its 1st annual session in Lewiston. By then the organization had grown from 18 to 64 Granges with about 2,000 members.
5. When the State Grange met in Bangor for its second Annual session, 136 new Granges had been organized. The following year 228 Granges existed in Maine with about 12,000 members.
6. Daniel Thing was State Master from 1878 to 1881. During his years the Grange urged more uniform text books in Maine's schools, more generous appropriations for the Maine State College, and cabinet status for the US Department of Agriculture among other issues.
7. During Frederick Robie's tenure the Maine State Grange gained the right to confer the 6th degree, the State Lecturer's office grew in importance and the Pomona Grange System was extended to cover the entire state.
8. The Robie era marked the beginning of annual Grange festivals. In addition, the State Grange encouraged reading of books. State Master Robie requested that each Subordinate Grange start a group to promote reading and the study of agriculture.
9. Edward Wiggin (1893 – 1897) chaired the committee raising funds for the construction of the Grange Cottage at Good Will Farm in Fairfield at Hinkley Village. In 1896, the Maine State Grange contributed \$500 to construct the Grange Cottage. The Cottage was dedicated on December 20, 1897 and was occupied in 1898 by fifteen girls and a matron.
10. State Master Wiggin labored to strengthen the education function of the Lecturer's office. The Grange became active in promoting reading programs and placed increased emphasis in upgrading the educational content of the Lecturer's hour.
11. During Obadiah Gardner's years as State Master the number of Subordinate Granges grew from 243 to 419; membership increased from 21,515 to 55,212. Through the first half of the 20th century, membership would range between 50,000 to 60,000 Grangers.

About 1960 changes in insurance laws, the arrival of television and the decline of farming were among the factors that brought a marked decrease in Grange membership.

12. About 1900 the State Grange began to support Juvenile Granges. It was not until the 1920's, however, that the Juvenile Grange began to grow. Merle J. Harriman was appointed the first Juvenile Grange Leader in Maine. From that time on, more than 300 Juvenile Granges were organized. The name was changed from "Juvenile" to "Junior" in the mid-1960's.
13. Progressivism was a popular national movement during Clement Stetson's years as State Master. In fact, the Maine State Grange played an active role in a rebellion against the leadership of the National Grange, which lasted for 2 years. By 1912 harmony had returned, the rebellious states, including Maine returned to the fold.
14. Issues took a secondary role in the Grange of the 1920's. The Grange continued to be the focal point in most Maine communities. Its fraternal side and its various degrees were popular in the spirit of boosterism that permeated a nation of joiners. Increasingly however, social functions took the place of debates and serious discussions. The State Grange became concerned that the frivolity would undermine the Grange's significance.
15. Following World War II, the Maine State Grange was active in a number of domestic fronts. More emphasis was placed on community service. The State Grange became increasingly involved in promoting the Maine Tree Farm program.
16. One of the most significant developments was the purchase of a State Headquarters for the Maine State Grange. On December 11, 1945 the Maine State Grange decided to buy the property at 146 State Street in Augusta for \$12,500.
17. Since the very beginning, women were given equal rights within the new Order. Ceres, Pomona, Flora and Lady Assistant are held specifically by women. As time moved forward women were elected to the offices of Chaplain, Lecturer, Treasurer and Secretary. However, it took until the 20th century before a woman was elected to the Maine State Grange Executive Committee. In 1986, Hazel C. Conant of Oxford Grange, was elected to State Executive Committee, serving 2 years and soon after Pricilla Corey was elected. Other women who have been elected and served on this committee were Margaret Austin, Nancy Clark, Glenys Ryder and Vicki Huff.
18. Over the years several women have been suggested for the office of Master of the Maine State Grange. Although other states had been led by woman Masters it took 140 years before Maine followed suit. Finally in 2013 Vicki Huff was elected and installed as the 1st woman Master of the Maine State Grange. In 2017 the 2nd woman Master, Sherry Harriman, was elected.

The Challenge of the future for the Grange remains to be seen if present and future generations will rediscover the simplicity and eternal values espoused by the order over its 156-year history.