

The Grange - A vital influence for over a century

by Bertha Norman
Courtland Columnist

The 98th Annual Session of the Michigan State Grange is now history. It was held in Hillsdale, Michigan October 19-23, 1971 with regular sessions in the Hillsdale Methodist Church Auditorium, committee sessions in the classrooms upstairs. The luncheons and banquets were held in the 4-H building on the Hillsdale Fairgrounds.

On Thursday evening the Fifth Degree was exemplified by Hillsdale County Grangers. Friday evening the Sixth Degree was exemplified by the State Officers, including the Rose Drill by the State Youth Grange. All this in the gym of the Davis Intermediate School. Candidates for the Sixth Degree from Courtland were Connie Case, Richard Flugger, and Randy Longhurst.

On April 15, 1973 the Michigan Grange will be 100 years old. It is the outgrowth of the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry founded on December 4, 1867. From the beginning it was more convenient to call it the Grange.

It was in January 1866 that Oliver Hudson Kelley, an employee of the U. S. Department of Agriculture made a trip through the South to see what could be done for the farmers during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. Agriculture was bad both in the North and South, and there were no organizations to help the people. Also there were bitter feelings on both sides following the war.

One day during his trip Mr. Kelley rode up to a plantation, and found his life threatened. The owners reported that Union soldiers had shot his father, and no Northerner should set foot on his land. Then he noticed the Masonic pin Mr. Kelley wore on his coat and declared, "There stands my 'brother.' I cannot go back on a 'brother'." This incident gave Mr. Kelley the idea of uniting the farmers of the North and South into one big family through the bonds of fraternity.

Upon his return to Washington, Mr. Kelley presented his idea to two brother Masons, two ministers, a banker, a landscape artist, and his niece, Miss Caroline Hall. This group, known as the founders of the Grange, and using their Masonic ritual knowledge, worked for over a year on a plan for an agricultural fraternity. It was Miss Hall who proposed that the farmer's wife be included in the work of the Grange, and this made it a farm family fraternity.

Delegates to the 98th session from Kent County were Lucille and Francis Alberts, Alpine Grange; Franklin and Doris Roth, Kinney Grange; Dale Case and Keith Norman, Courtland Grange.

Kent County Youth on the Rose Drill team were Lila and Mary Swainston, Connie Case, Dale Case, Carl and Linda Brown, Randy Longhurst, and Keith Norman.

There were three entries in the Talent Contest from Courtland Grange: Connie Case, piano solo; Connie Case and Keith Norman, vocal duet; and Connie Case, reading (skit). Connie won a 2nd place in Skits.

In the Safe Driving Contest on Saturday morning there were six finalists. The Hillsdale Co. Deputy who gave the tests reported that he was well pleased with the performances of all six and found it hard to pick these winners: 3rd place (a tie) - Roberta Keech, Kent County; Pegg Mudd, Midland County; 2nd place - James Grant, Ottawa County; 1st place - Keith Norman, Kent County.

Just before the Coronation Ball on Saturday evening the Grange Royalty for 1972 was crowned. State Grange Prince - James Grant, Ottawa County; State Grange Princess - Sharon Carn-cross, Hillsdale County; Boy Ambassador - Kevin Smith, Oceana County; Girl Ambassador - Jacquelin Paris, Mecosta County; Young Couple of the Year - Janet and Allen Seedorff, Calhoun



Michigan State Grange Safe Driving Contest winners, left to right: 2nd place winner James Grant, Georgetown Grange No. 458, Ottawa County; 3rd place winners (a tie) Pegg Mudd, Studley Grange No. 1174

Midland County and Roberta Keech, Courtland Grange No. 563, Kent County; 1st place winner Keith Norman, Courtland Grange No. 563.

County; National Youth Officer, Mary Hazen, Calhoun County. All these people will attend National Grange in Charleston, W. Va. to compete for the National crowns.

The influence of the Grange appears many times in the legislative records regarding rural life. Among the Grange objectives have been good roads, pure food laws, rural free delivery, child welfare laws, proper regulation of railroads and public utilities, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaways, and a host of others.

The foundations of the Grange

may be likened to the U.S. Constitution in that the Grange has diligently followed its founding principles. Wherever agriculture is fostered that nation has prospered and reached a high degree of perfection; but wherever neglected, that nation has declined.

The Grange has a strong religious basis, even as the Masons, but it is non-sectarian. In the early days some churches did not allow their members to belong to the Grange because of its secret work, and this is true today. But neither the secret work nor any of the principles of the Grange interfere with any religious beliefs. There

is no discrimination in the Grange as to race, color or creed.

The younger members of a family may belong to Junior Grange; for ages 14 to 21 there is the Youth Grange; and Subordinate (local), County, State and National membership starts with age 14.

All Granges are numbered (Courtland #563) and the numbering system in each state started with the first Grange chartered. It is interesting to note that Kent County had four Granges organized and represented at the first session in Kalamazoo in 1874: Paris #19, Alto #113, Grattan #170, and

Whitneyville #222.

The Grange has served the farmers well during its first century of existence. Now with the changing times it is also changing. Today the Grange membership is not limited to farmers, but includes all who have agricultural and rural interests - teachers, Agri-business people, and businessmen, union members, students, many young people. The Grange feels that such a varied membership contributes to a greater understanding of the problems of agriculture and of rural life, and thus of this nation.



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