

A Short History of the Grange

Blackwater Grange gave up charter on November 8

By Paul J. Fenton Jr., for the Beacon

The Blackwater Grange # 152 held its last meeting on November 8, 2013. I wrote an article about the Grange several years ago and it appears in my book *Halfway Up The Hill*. I felt that I should rewrite this article as it applies to current times as we honor the many years that the Grange served Andover and surrounding communities.

Several years ago I attended a church service where a gospel singing group from Pennsylvania was performing. They noticed a group of people sitting in the congregation with blue and gold sashes and asked what they represented. They were told the Grange. They appeared to still be puzzled, although they did not pursue the matter.

It got me to wondering how many younger people realized what the organization was. It was founded in 1867 to promote the interests of agricultural people. I was fortunate enough to receive my 50-year membership pin in December 2000, and I treasure what the Grange has done and the support that it has given rural communities over the many years of its existence.

The Grange, whose popular name was Patrons of Husbandry, was founded in 1867 as a fraternal organization for farm families to promote the interest

of agricultural people. The Granges is a secret order and has a simple ritual. Its membership consists of both sexes, and the minimum age to join is 14.

Although the Grange was organized primarily as a social and educational organization, it served to concentrate public attention on the acute agricultural distress that followed the panic of 1873. Much of the difficulty was blamed on the railroads, which were accused of charging exorbitant and discriminatory rates and other high-handed practices.

Grange meetings became occasions of political discussion and actions. This resulted in laws being passed in many states that regulated the rates of railroads and warehouses and established permanent regulatory commissions. The railroads challenged these many times, and eventually it ended up in the US Supreme Court which held, in March 1877, that the states had the right to enact these regulations.

The Grange during this period attempted many different business undertakings, including stores, marketing organizations, and the manufacture of farm implements. Most of these failed.

Membership rose and fell over the years. It hit its peak of 800,000 in 1870 and had dropped to 125,000 by 1880. Around 1890 it started to rise again, and in recent years it has declined markedly.

It probably would be useful to explain that the Blackwater Grange Hall

was on the second floor of the building where, today, there is a physical therapy business and a doctor's office. Access to the hall was a set of stairs from the Popular Street side of the building.

When you reached the second floor, there were two doors. The door in front of you was the main entrance to the Grange Hall. If you turned right and entered the other door, you went into Oscar Couture's barber shop, which also served as the ante room for Grange meetings. The space that was used for the meeting and the other room used for

Grange suppers and other gatherings are now apartments.

My father and mother, Paul and Bertha Fenton, were very active for many years. My father had the distinction of being the youngest Master elected to the Grange when he was installed at 18 years of age in 1924. Mother served as secretary for many years.

I can remember when growing up that I could hardly wait until I was 14 so that I could join the Grange. It was a great source of entertainment during
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west and north sides of the building after the electrical and plumbing.

A 40-gallon electric hot water heater will be installed.

There will be an outdoor spigot.

Jon Champagne is contributing a drinking fountain.

Electrical and plumbing should be done soon.

A refrigerator, upright freezer, and cherry cabinets have all been donated.

The propane tank for the stove will require security.

Rec Programs

Soccer: There will be no tournament in Andover this year. October 12 is the last day in Andover for both the first and second grade program and the third and fourth grade program. Both 3/4 teams are going to the Bob Andrews Jamboree in New London on October 13.

The fifth and sixth grade team has its last regular season game on October 15. They will play in the Merrimack Valley Soccer League tournament on October 19 and in Henniker on October 20. Their pink socks have been a huge hit and greatly appreciated by the parents. A fifth and sixth grade girls team will go to the MV Cup at Merrimack Valley High School, sponsored by the towns of

Salisbury and Webster, on October 27.

Nicole has done a wonderful job with Andover Soccer for three years with its multiple programs, staffing issues, reffing issues, and the inevitable stresses that go with youth sports. Characteristically, she will seek a replacement for herself and work with him or her to get the program up and running next year. Nicole will be sorely missed.

Basketball: The basketball signup will once again take place during Math Night at AE/MS on October 24.

Skiing: Skiing will also have its signups during math night at AE/MS on October 24. There will also be Andover Outing Club signups for Ski Jumping and X-C Skiing.

Ice Rink: The water pipe has been lowered over the summer, and there should be no more problems with freezing.

New Business

The Blackwater Park field needs a full winter prep after the last game on October 19, and the nets need to be taken down from the batting cage.

The pitching machine needs to go in the attic of the new building.

Next Meeting

A policy for the new building use. The next meeting will take place at AE/MS on Tuesday, November 12, at 7:30 PM.

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