

Blazing Star Grange Plans to Restore Historic Stage Drapes

Meeting in Danbury on January 4

Press release

Known for its seasonal suppers, Winter Farmers Market, famous community fair each September, and Living Sustainably program, Danbury's historic Grange Hall is home to another remarkable, one-of-a-kind treasure.

A grange not only supported local agriculture, but provided a social and cultural outlet for its community. With the coming of the railroads, entertainment such as singers, musicians, and vaudeville acts became available in many small communities in northern New England.

In the early 1900s, stage drapes were commonly the most important artistic feature in a small town's cultural life, providing color and escapism as well as a backdrop for locally produced variety shows and social events.

Organized in 1875, Blazing Star Grange's hall was eventually built in 1911, featuring a large main room for meetings and performances. By 1922, the stage had a full set of three scenic curtains and a grand drape, as well as ears, wings, and teasers.

What makes this set so outstanding is that it was produced by New Hampshire-born Arthur Egbert Foster in his studio in Manchester and probably shipped by train to Danbury, where it was installed permanently.

"Finding an entire set of backdrops, teasers, wings, and flats is rare," said Chris Hadsel, director of Vermont's Curtains Without Borders at an initial meeting on October 27 at the Danbury Grange Hall. Although Foster produced other work in New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts, only one other curtain, in Deerfield,

has been located in the state.

Curtains often included a scene of a town's local interest. The Grange's "Country Scene" depicts what is believed to be a view of Mount Kearsarge, while the "Springtime" drape depicts a locally-known home beside a river.

As a complete reversal, the set includes an advertising curtain painted in the 1930s in a bold and structural style, using primary colors, by another artist. Featured on it are the names of businesses in the vicinity of Danbury in a "downtown" street scene, with an airborne blimp painted with another advertisement.

Though the Grange's curtains are basically in good shape, there is much work and expense involved in cleaning, restoring, and being sure these treasures last another 100 years. The group assembled discussed ways to fundraise and the grants that are available if the curtains were owned by the Town of Danbury.

Hadsel mentioned that many curtains across the area have been restored with "moose money" grants, as it so happened that the curtains were in town halls in which Granges had their meeting hall as well. In Danbury's case, the Blazing Star Grange built its own hall, purchased the curtains, and have maintained them since their inception.

Throughout 2014, the Grange will be hosting informational meetings with the additional purpose of gathering helpers and sponsors for the restoration of these pieces of historical artwork.

The first meeting will be on Saturday, January 4, at 3 PM at the Grange. The hall is located on North Road at the intersection of Routes 104 and 4 in Danbury. For more information, call Donna at 768-5579 or Phyllis at 744-2332. All are welcome.

Andover's Blackwater Grange Merges with Danbury Grange

November 8 meeting ends 123-year-old organization

Press release

Andover's Blackwater Grange #152 met on November 8 in a special meeting and voted to consolidate with the Blazing Star Grange #71 in Danbury.

Because the Blackwater Grange had already purchased its dictionaries for the year, they were passed out to Andover, Hill, and New London elementary school students, as they have been for years.

Good-bye, Blackwater Grange!

Blazing Star Grange Helps Community Make Sustainable Choices

First and third Thursdays in Danbury

Press release

This fall, the Blazing Star Grange has begun to lead the community to make more choices for sustainable living by increasing the use of sustainable supplies used in serving their suppers. For the Grange fair in September, which served around 200 people, Styrofoam divided plates were replaced with a compostable variety. For the November supper, with plastic silverware supplies running low, 100% recycled cutlery, using no virgin plastic, has been added. Though more expensive, the Grange hopes to raise awareness by example. As current supplies dwindle, sustainable items will be ordered.

The Blazing Star Grange cooks up

five suppers each year plus sponsors a Winter Farmers Market. Also, in support of the local foods movement, the November supper used apples for the crisp and squash from local farms, while crisp topping and pot pie crust was made by Huntoon Farm.

Supper proceeds are used to maintain the Grange building in Danbury and to provide service to the community. Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of the month and welcome those interested in supporting their building and rural issues or concerns. During the winter months, meetings are held in members' homes or at the Grange Hall on market days, therefore it would be best to call for meeting locations. For information on the Blazing Star Grange, call Donna at 768-5579.

For information on the sustainability project, call Phyllis at 744-2332.

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