

The Washington Grange Music Heritage Project

Music
in the
Grange Halls
of
Washington State

With thanks to:

Northwest Folklife

The National Endowment for the Arts

The Washington State Arts Commission

Washington Rural Development Council

Northwest Center for Art and
Community

and members of

The Washington State Grange

The Washington Grange Music Heritage Project

"I remember this one dance we went to and there was a pot-belly stove in the corner and it sounds old-fashioned, and maybe it is, but there were children there, and these children were able to hear the music and be with their parents, and they didn't have to be left at home with a babysitter—and miss out on those notes in the air and the pot luck supper at 12 and all those wonderful things. I just think our kids and other people's kids are missing something. I really wish they would reinstate the dances. With all my heart."

Gail Secord

The Grange Halls of Washington State are a familiar sight on our rural landscape, yet far too little has been known about the role these halls played in our history and the importance of the Grange in the rural life of our communities.

The Grange movement was begun as a response to the impoverished conditions of post-Civil War farmers—farmers being crushed by the policies of Eastern business interests and railroad monopolies. Oliver H. Kelley founded the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange, in 1867 in an attempt to better the economic and social position of farm families. It was established as a secret society by organizers who wisely ascertained that if the organization was to be successful, it must cater to both the political and social needs of farm families. Toward that end, women would need to be active participants. Their organizing tactics were successful, and the Grange movement spread rapidly across the country.

In Washington State, the Grange was established in 1889, two months before Statehood. Its history is inseparable from the history of our state—through its advocacy for rural electrification, the PUD's, Columbia River Development, rural delivery service, antitrust laws, the initiative and referendum, a vigorous network of cooperatives, and the Grange Insurance Association. Along with its political advocacy, the Grange was

involved in the establishment of county fairs, the Junior Grange, educational forums, community service projects, and, of course, the big event in most farm families' lives—the dances.

Doris Conner of the Columbia Valley Grange writes:

"Two Saturday nights each month, freshly bathed and dressed in our best, we motored to the Grange Hall in our 1927 Whippet. If it was our family's turn to serve refreshments, homemade desserts rode snugly in the car's trunk alongside a tall cream can full of water. The Grange Hut, called the Wigwam, stood on a high, wooded hillside above the Farm to Market Road. The Wigwam never knew such a thing as a sound system. Les or Tom or Joe played fiddle, (sometimes Joe played trumpet), and Lydia or Dess chorded enthusiastic and basic rhythms on the piano. Cowboy songs, soulful ballads, and current popular hits were performed by these willing sharers on the Hall's small stage. The music was loud and very much appreciated.

"...When we youngsters and could no longer hold our eyes open, we were arranged on benches lining the Hall's perimeter, where we slept until picked up by the folks and carried to the car. One night, a large family riding in a pickup left a sleeping child at the Hall. The parents in the front of the pickup thought he was in the back with the other kids, and the kids thought he was in front with the parents."

Steven Buxbaum of the Washington State Rural Development Council reflects on the role of the Grange:

"Granges were a gathering point to share information and help each other cope. They were also a place for people to come together and formulate ideas about how to collaborate together on anything from fire insurance, to building irrigation ditches, more water systems, and they of course were also a place for people to come together and talk about how to influence the State Legislature and Congress. Granges were all those things. They were also places to have fun. Under the same roof all this happened. People flowed pretty freely from one kind of activity to another. The people that were there talking about heavy policy issues were also there singing and dancing with each other."

Miss Caroline Hall, a niece of Oliver Kelly's has been credited with the creation of the first Grange songbook, **Songs for The Grange**, published in 1874. Like the I. W. W. **Little Red Songbook** of a later time, the Grange songbook used familiar tunes to convey lyrics which reflected the struggles of the times.

George F. Root of Chicago contributed this song:

Rally Round the Grange (tune of Rally 'Round the Flag)
We will rally round the Grange, we will rally once again,
Shouting the Farmer's cry of Freedom.
We will rally to the Grange, our rights to maintain,
Shouting the Farmer's cry of Freedom

Chorus:

The Patrons forever, hurrah, then, hurrah!
Down with th' oppressor, up with our star,
We will rally to the Grange, our rights to maintain,
Shouting the Farmer's cry of Freedom.

Early editions of the **Agricultural Grange News** in Washington State, which began publishing in 1912, contained songs to be sung to popular tunes. The following was to be sung to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*:

We are the many, they are few,
come let us drop the chains
Which they have forged on me and you,
come let us use our brains.

We run the mills, we till the soil
which masters claim to own
Who neither spin nor do they toil
but reap where we have sown.

In 1891, **Grange Melodies** was published, containing the song, *Do Not Mortgage the Farm*, by James Orr. Here are a few lines.

Fortune may sometimes forsake you.
Useless the struggle may seem;
But be not tempted to hazard
That which you may not redeem;

*Do not imperil the homestead,
Banish the thought in alarm,
Make it your strong resolution,
Never to mortgage the farm.*

Given the nature of the struggles of farm families today, the Grange might well consider reinstating some of these classic songs!

The Patron Grange songbook was published in 1925. By 1983, when *The Grange Songbook* was published, there was little reminiscent of those early rallying songs. These days, the Songbook contains primarily popular and patriotic songs, hymns, and the ritual songs of the Grange.

For many people, their best Grange memories revolve around the Grange dances which seemed to reach their peak in the period prior to World War II, and waned after the war with the intrusion of television, rapid transportation, and differing values.

Tom Casey, Washington State Grange legislative liaison, remembers:

"Well, I don't know much about dancin' — always wished I could dance like the older people danced at that Grange. And I was always real impressed that you know, guys like uh Larry Case or Hap Hollitz, these guys, who — you go see 'em at their ranch and — they growl and complain and work hard and not seem to be too interested in anything that didn't have to do with gettin' their hay in or workin' on a piece of equipment. But they came to that Grange dance and their hickory shirts would look pressed, your know, and they would have clean pressed slacks and they would stay close to their wives — pay attention to their wives — and - my memory is watchin' em kind of touching their wives on the elbow to lead 'em out to the floor- and they'd go into this dance, I mean they knew the steps! It was beautiful dancing. And I was just so impressed that they had that kind of cultural education."

The Grange represented — and represents — a way of life for many of our State's citizens. It represents values of cooperation, family unity, and community that both rural and urban folks find highly relevant in these days of uncertainty, transition and loss of vision. A new generation of Grangers are challenging the old as they push for environmental and power reforms, make room for a more multicultural membership, and question the secret rituals.

Tamara Stone, of the Bainbridge Island Grange:

"There's no voice for those small family farms. People hear what we're doing and they get excited about it.... and then they think maybe we'll go to our Grange meetings. If you could just reactivate this tremendous network nationally, there's a voice for small family farms. What a difference you could make nationally, if not internationally. And a movement toward sustainability. Where else can you find a network like that that's in place and ready to go?"

And so it is that the Grange today remains a repository of hope for an often beleaguered generation of rural people. The Grange Halls of Washington State are still filled with music and dance — although often there is little connection between those renting the halls and the Grange organization itself. But people are rediscovering the joy of family dances and Saturday night concerts and potlucks. It is in such a spirit that we invite you to join us in hearing the music and the stories of the people of the Grange. Maybe in hearing their vision, and their memories of how a community once worked and played together, you too will find some long-forgotten memory that will help kindle your own hope for such a time again.

"I am a member - a life member. Our kids are life members. My mother and father were members. My grandmother and grandfathers were members. And Grange has always been an important part of my life. And you hear it said so many times, it's a way of life.....It's just been a part of my life — always."

Glenda Clark

The Washington Grange Music Heritage Project

The Washington Grange Music Heritage Project began in May of 1993, under the sponsorship of the Washington State Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts with assistance from the Washington State Rural Development Council. Its purpose has been to explore the importance of music, past and present, in the Grange movement, and to better understand the importance of the Grange in the lives of Washington's people. Project Director, Linda Allen, distributed questionnaires then conducted oral interviews with Grangers throughout Washington State. She also researched the Grange songbooks, Grange histories, and turn-of-the-century editions of the Grange News. She has prepared a radio documentary: *By the Light of the Moon: Grange Hall Dances in Washington State*. She hopes to produce a recording of Grange songs entitled "The Grange: A Way of Life."

The Northwest Folklife Festival
Saturday, May 27th, 1995
Evening Grange Concert
Flag Pavilion East Stage
7:00 - 10:00 PM

Performers

Linda Allen

Mistress of Ceremonies Linda Allen is the director of the Washington Grange Music Heritage Project and the Northwest Center for Art and Community. She is a songwriter, performer, and song collector with 5 recordings of original songs and two songbook collections to her credit. The summer of 1993 was spent visiting Grangers throughout Washington State, collecting their stories and producing a radio show from those interviews: *By the Light of the Moon: Grange Dances in Washington State.*

The Cascade Mountaineers

Bud & Elsie Rudy, George Ansel, and Ida May & Gary Vomenici play old time traditional tunes, polkas, bluegrass and gospel music. They've recently completed their ninth year touring together and have deep roots performing in the Grange halls of our State. They have four cassette recordings of their music.

Dick Warwick

A Granger who hails from Oakesdale, Washington, Dick is a nationally recognized cowboy poet, featured at the Elko Cowboy Poetry Gathering, and the Colorado Cowboy Poetry event. He's also a member of the Urban Coyote Bush Band and a frequent performer at Folklife.

Snake Oil

This old-time, good-time string band takes its inspiration and name from the medicine shows that traveled the West before the turn of the century. The patent medicine peddlers found that good entertainment could relax an audience and entice people to the "product" they were selling. Snake Oil's "product" is music, jokes, and entertainment flavored with history and tradition. They have performed at Grange halls, fairs, festivals and concerts. The group includes Burt & Di Meyer, Deb Hunnemuller, and Earl Stark. Burt and Di are long-time Grangers who also host the Oldtime Medicine Show concert series at Prosperity Grange.

Gene Semingson

Gene is a cattle rancher in the Snake River Canyon area of Whitman County whose hobby is writing and reciting cowboy poetry, mostly humorous, based upon ranch and neighborhood experiences. He was the winner of the Washington State Grange Talent Contest in 1993, and placed second at the National Grange Convention with his poem, "County Road Anti-Pothole Patrol."

Lamont Kitchen Kuties

The Lamont Kitchen Kuties is a group of ten ladies from Eastern Washington who initially joined together to furnish entertainment for the Grange Booster Night. They have performed over one hundred times to a variety of organizations. Most of their instruments are derived from household articles that were used to make music in the early days of our country. Their songs are also reminiscent of these earlier times.

Lucille Schetter

Lucille Schetter was given her saw, a Diston Cross Cut - 9 point, by her father at the age of 14. That was in 1929. Since that time, she has played for numerous church services, banquets, funerals, weddings, private parties, and, of course, the Grange. She joined Grange in 1947 and remains an active member of the Pleasant Mountain Grange, having held several offices and achieving the 7th degree. She is accompanied by Orma Christian on piano.

Sasquatch Revival

A high energy bluegrass gospel band from Castle Rock whose humorous antics appeal to a wide variety of audiences. The band features Eric Parrill on banjo, Reggie Kemp on Bass, Lanny Scagraves on mandolin and Hugh Barton on guitar. They are frequent performers at the Upper Hill Pleasant Grange.

Phil and Vivian Williams

Phil first became aware of Grange activities in the late 1940's - his father was a square dance caller in Grange halls throughout Thurston county. Later, Phil's father and her, both attorneys, worked as legal counsel for the Grange Insurance Association. Phil, playing guitar, bass, banjo and mandolin, and Vivian, champion fiddler, have a long history of performing in Grange halls, hosting old-time square dances and contra dances. They have numerous recordings to their credit, and have performed at Vancouver Folk Festival, the Smithsonian Folk Festival, and countless concert halls and festivals throughout the Northwest and beyond. They are also hosting the Grange Dance at Folklife.

For further information on the **Washington
Grange Music Heritage Project,**
or the **Northwest Center for Art and
Community,** please contact:

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For further information on the **Grange,** please
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For further information on projects of the
Washington State Arts Commission, please
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Olympia, WA 98504-2675

For further information on the **Washington
State Rural Development Council,** please
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**Washington State Rural Development
Council**
PO Box 48300
Olympia, WA 98504-8300

Don't miss the
Old-time Grange Dance

hosted by

Phil and Vivian Williams

Center House Court

Saturday, May 27th

3:00-5:00 PM

Then come to the
Evening Grange Concert

hosted by Master of Ceremonies

Linda Allen

Featuring fine performers
well-known in the Grange halls of

Washington State

Flag Pavilion East Stage

7:00 -10:00 PM

Northwest Folklife is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation and presentation of ethnic and traditional arts, and to fostering understanding of different cultures. The free Northwest Folklife Festival has been held at Seattle Center since 1972, and annually attracts about 6,000 regional and international participants and nearly 200,000 visitors.

"Well we still have the old moon at our Grange hall that hung up in the corner. They always turned out the lights in the hall—the orchestra was up on the stage and the hall lights were turned out. But we had this great big round moon that was, I must admit, an old sheet or something that they'd painted this face on it and then there was a light behind it—but it always hung in the corner just away from the orchestra so we could dance by the light of the moon."

Guynethia Buckley

Special Thanks to:
Linda Allen
Director of the Washington Grange
Music Heritage Project
and the
Northwest Center for Art and
Community
and to the
outstanding Grangers
who have so generously shared their
music and their memories of the
Grange way of life.
