

The National Grange

The first stage of the farmers' movement against the new industrialism threatening the foundations of pioneer agrarian democracy was the National Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, which was founded in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelley and six associates in the United States Department of Agriculture. The Grange was a secret fraternal society, open to both men and women, for the promotion of social intercourse and the educational advancement of the farmers. Provision was made for the organization of local Granges, State Granges, and a National Grange. Regarded at first with suspicion, the farmers joined it in large numbers in the depression of the seventies as a medium for organization and discussion of economic and political questions.

The first Grange in Iowa was organized at Newton on May 2, 1868, and the second at Postville in October, 1869. William Duane Wilson, editor of the *Iowa Homestead*, was the chief promoter and organizer of the local Granges. The Iowa State Grange was established January 12, 1871, with Dudley W. Adams as its first State Master. The next three years witnessed the very rapid growth of the Grange. It swept the country,

reaching high tide by January, 1875, with 21,696 local Granges composed of 858,050 members representing thirty-two states and territories. The Middle West was the center of agricultural discontent and the stronghold of the Granger movement. Missouri led with 2,009 local Granges; Indiana came next with 2,000; and Iowa third with 1,891. These three states alone had more than one-fourth of all the local Granges reported for the United States in 1875.

The general program of the National Grange was set forth in the following "Declaration of Purposes" adopted at St. Louis in 1874:

We shall endeavor . . . to enhance the comforts and attractions of our homes, and strengthen our attachment to our pursuits; to foster cooperation . . . to diversify our crops; to discountenance the credit system, the mortgage system, the fashion system and every other system tending to prodigality and bankruptcy. We propose meeting together, buying together, selling together. We wage no aggressive warfare against any other interest whatever. . . . We hold that transportation companies are necessary to our success, that their interests are intimately connected with our interests, and that harmonious action is mutually advantageous. We are not *enemies of the railroads*. In our noble order there is no communism, no agrarianism; we emphatically assert that the truth is taught in our organic law and that the Grange is not a political or party organization. No Grange, if true to its obligations, can discuss political or religious questions, nor call conventions, nor nominate candidates, nor even discuss their merits in its meetings.

Nominally a nonpolitical organization, the Grange opened the way for the independent farmers' parties — Anti-Monopoly and Greenback — that were organized in eleven western states, in some of which they won elections through fusion with the minority party.

An important aspect of the Granger movement in the Middle West was the railroad question, which commanded more attention than any other issue. The high Civil War prices of wheat and corn were followed by falling prices in the late sixties and the early seventies. The resulting hardships were blamed on the railroads, the bankers, and the middlemen. When wheat dropped to fifty cents and corn to fifteen cents a bushel on the Iowa farm, and sold for four or five times the farm price in eastern markets, the farmers complained that "something was wrong" with the marketing system. The railroads, which bore the brunt of Granger protest, were charged with unfair treatment in the transportation of farm products. The chief cause of complaint against the railroads was the practice of discriminations between persons and shipping points. In addition, the general attitude toward and the treatment of patrons by railroad officials and employees caused much dissatisfaction. To eliminate these abuses and compel the railroads to observe the principle of fair and equal treatment of their patrons, the Grangers adopted the policy of state regulation through legislation,

contending that the railroads were quasi-public corporations and as such were subject to public control. This was the real issue behind the Anti-Monopoly and Granger movements in Iowa: "the right of the state to regulate rates in the interest of the people."

The Republican party, which was in control of the state government, at first ignored this demand. The Democratic party, hopelessly in the minority, joined the farmers in inaugurating a movement for the organization of a new political party. One of the leading Democrats in this movement was John P. Irish, militant editor of the *Iowa City Press*. The result was the Anti-Monopoly party which was formed in the panic year of 1873. It conducted a vigorous campaign in Iowa and elected ten of the fifty senators in the General Assembly and forty-nine of the one hundred representatives. The Republican governor, Cyrus C. Carpenter, was re-elected by a reduced majority. The fact that Carpenter was an active Granger, pledged to support railroad regulation, probably saved his party from defeat.

The fourth annual meeting of the State Grange, which was held in Des Moines the following December, devoted its attention largely to the transportation problem. It was attended by 309 delegates representing 88 counties. The pressure the organized farmers brought to bear on the next General Assembly through this body, and through

their elected representatives in the legislature, resulted in the enactment of the Iowa railroad law of 1874 which provided for the establishment of an official classification and the fixing of maximum rates. The story of the repeal of this legislation in 1878 and the enactment of new legislation cannot here be told. Governor William Larrabee later gave a fair appraisal of this legislation in his book on *The Railroad Question*, in which he concluded that:

The Granger laws have been and are still severely criticized by those opposed to the principle of State control and by the ignorant. It is nevertheless true that those laws were moderate, just and reasonably well adapted to remedy the evils of which the public complained. . . .

The Iowa law was imperfect in detail, and yet its enactment proved one of the greatest legislative achievements in the history of the State. It demonstrated to the people their ability to correct by earnestness and perseverance the most far-reaching public abuses and led to an emphatic judicial declaration of the common-law principle that railroads are highways and as such are subject to any legislative control which may be deemed necessary for the public welfare.

Cooperative buying and selling were promoted by the Grange to eliminate the exorbitant profits of the middlemen. This included not only local, county, and state agencies for the sale of farm products and the purchase of implements and supplies, but also local grain elevators, cooperative stores, banking, insurance, and even the manufac-

ture of farm machinery. These cooperative ventures were all best developed in Iowa. One-third of the grain elevators and warehouses in the state were owned or controlled by the Grange. Large shipments of grain, hogs, and cattle were made direct to Chicago through Grange agents at a saving of from 10 to 40 per cent. The State Agency, established at Des Moines in 1872, handled \$200,000 worth of machinery during the following year, reduced the cost of farm supplies, and realized large profits by direct shipments of grain and livestock to Chicago. Cooperative stores were established, some on the Rochdale plan. Farmers' mutual fire insurance companies were organized.

The Grange also ventured into the manufacture of farm implements and machinery, the most important attempts in this form of cooperative enterprise being undertaken by the Iowa Grange. The patent for the Werner harvester was purchased and Grange factories were established. Two hundred thirty-four machines were manufactured and sold to Iowa farmers in 1874; but the State Grange became involved in disputes with the Marsh Harvester Company for infringement of patents and the venture resulted in loss and failure. Patents on other implements and machines were bought and factories established for the manufacture of plows, seeders, cultivators, mowers, and corn-shell-ers.

These cooperative efforts in Iowa and other Middle Western states saved the farmers millions

of dollars. It was claimed that they saved the Grangers \$12,000,000 in one year; but they disappeared as quickly as they came, except for the farmers' mutual fire and tornado insurance companies and the cooperative creamery associations which were more successful than the far more ambitious farm implement factories.

Failure of these business ventures may be attributed to the fact that the Grangers attempted to organize them on the cooperative plan, thus creating large business enterprises requiring experience. They tended to place too much emphasis on immediate financial savings and returns and too little on expert and well-paid management. They were impatient of results. Suspicion, jealousy, and factionalism invaded their ranks. These factors and improvement in economic conditions resulted in a rapid decline of the Grange, which almost reached the vanishing point in Iowa. The number of Granges was reduced from the peak of 1,999 in 1874 to 1,018 in 1876 and to 8 in 1885. Thereafter the Grange maintained a continuing, though somewhat precarious, existence with the membership fluctuating between 1,729 in 1920 and 2,347 in 1945. The leaders of the Grange, determined to perpetuate the order and, mindful of the failure of the cooperative business ventures which had precipitated its decline, returned to the original purpose of the founders.

The Iowa Grange was overshadowed during

the eighties and early nineties by the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist party and, since 1920, by the Farm Bureau and the Farmers' Union, which the embattled farmers joined in their demands for economic and social reforms. Though subordinated to these organizations in membership and influence, the Iowa Grange supported most of the legislative reforms championed by those organizations. It took a consistent stand against the manufacture, importation, and sale of liquor. Women were given important positions on committees, and women's suffrage was endorsed. Grange libraries were established. The Grange advocated the teaching of agriculture in the primary schools of the state, a reading course for farmers, and the appointment of "Tama Jim" Wilson as Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Through its educational and social activities, the Iowa Grange was able to maintain its existence. It became an active champion of the good roads movement, a permanent state highway commission, and federal and state aid for building roads. It recommended laws insuring to the tenant compensation for increased value of the farm or in the soil due to the management of the tenant; the guarantee of bank deposits; a state income tax; and the reduction of the legal rate of interest to 6 per cent.

The Iowa Grange further supported the principles of the McNary-Haugen bill, the export de-

benture plan for the disposal of surplus crops in the twenties, and the farm legislative program; but it has opposed the reciprocal trade agreements. It advocated the exemption from taxation of homesteads to the value of \$2,500. It contributed to the war effort by giving full support to the production of food and fibers for the nation and our allies, and many of its members served on war bond, Red Cross, USO, and other patriotic committees.

Since the war, the Grange has opposed any decrease in the tax rate until the national debt has been materially reduced, and it has warned the farmers against the dangers of inflation of farm land values. It has favored legislation for the reorganization of the school districts with state aid and "an equalization program for financing our public schools."

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