

Grange - - Chris Co PATRONS of Husbandry - Chris. Co. Ky.

SOME NOTES ON CHRISTIAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, GRANGE ACTIVITIES

By James D. Bennett

Grange Activity in Christian County, Kentucky, began shortly after the founding in 1867 of the National Grange in Washington, D. C. Although the first local Grange in Kentucky was established in adjoining Todd County in 1871, Christian County became, during 1873, the scene of intense Grange activity. By spring of 1874, no fewer than nineteen local Granges were operating in the county. Undoubtedly the leading farmers in the county felt that membership in Granges would go far toward solving all their problems. The numbers of some local Granges, No. 15 (Flat Lick), No. 23 (Forest), No. 24 (Hopkinsville), indicate that Christian County Granges were among the first in the state to receive charters. Other Granges chartered during the period were Casky, Pembroke, Glenburine, Longview, Church Hill (which became the most active Grange in the state), LaFayette, Garrettsburg, Bennettstown, Newstead, White Hall, Little River, Sinking Fork, Roaring Springs, and Cherry Hill.

But the decline in the number of Granges was almost as rapid as the increase had been. Travel was difficult, meeting times were often inconvenient, and some farmers decided that the Grange could not solve their problems. A number of the Granges surrendered their charters within a year after their organization. Such was the case with Garrettsburg Grange, Number 182. It had been organized on December 23, 1873, and had met in Woodson's old storehouse. In a meeting December 12, 1874, a motion was made that this Grange consolidate with Flat Lick Grange, Number 15. The motion was carried and Garrettsburg Grange held its last meeting on this date.

Other Granges encountered Difficulties early in their history but, unlike the Garrettsburg Grange, were usually less precipitous in their decline. Some preferred union with stronger Granges to abandonment of their charters. The Flat Lick Grange Number 15 had been organized on October 2, 1873, and met in Bennettstown. This Grange did not experience a vigorous growth and on June 7, 1879, the motion was carried that the Flat Lick charter be surrendered after the first Saturday in February, 1882, and that the jewels and regalia be donated to Church Hill Grange, Number 109.

Forest Grange, Number 23, meeting at Beverly, Kentucky, was organized on October 9, 1873. By 1875 this Grange was experiencing difficulty in collecting dues from its members and by the meeting of November 13, 1876, there was talk of consolidation with Longview Grange. No definite action was taken on the proposal to consolidate, however, and no further mention of consolidation was made in subsequent minutes. The last minutes found for this Grange were entered on March 31, 1887.

The Casky Grange was chartered on November 4, 1873, and its membership increased rapidly; by the end of 1874 it numbered about one hundred members. Its decline was also rapid, being noticeable by 1875, and it had ceased to be a working Grange by the fall of 1877. The charter, seal, and books were not returned to the state Grange, however, and after being dormant for several years, it was reorganized on January 11, 1881. Twenty-five former members entered into the reorganization, and membership once again reached one hundred. This reorganization was marked with renewed vigor which saw the erection, in 1883, of a substantial meeting hall which, with the purchase price of a lot, represented an investment of nine hundred dollars.

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In the following years, however, this Grange again became dormant and it was not until 1912 that another reorganization was attempted. A. J. Culver, acting as deputy, announced a meeting on the afternoon of March 26, at his home. It is not certain what action, if any, was taken at this meeting, but is probable that it resulted not in the reorganization of the Casky Grange but in the organization and chartering of a new Group, the Wheat Land Grange. Announcement of this new Grange was made by the master of the Church Hill Grange on April 12, 1912.

The Casky Grange was located in one of the finest farming sections of Christian County. Among its members were W. T. Radford, thought to be the largest wheat grower in the state, and George U. Green, who specialized in the development of fine herds of Jersey cattle. There were other large-scale wheat farmers in the area as well as a number of farmers who developed outstanding herds of shorthorn cattle. Thus it was only natural that these men would be interested in developing methods for the disposition of surplus stock.

The Casky Grange held stock and wool sales as one of its many activities. The first sale, June 7, 1883, set a pattern which was followed for several years thereafter. These sales proved to be both popular and financially successful. Two hundred twenty-five head of stock, mostly cattle and eight thousand pounds of wool were sold at the first sale, with a total value of more than seven thousand dollars.

It was the Church Hill Grange, more than any other, which carried on Grange activities in Christian County. Organized in the South Union Church on December 2, 1873, Church Hill Grange began with thirty charter members - farmers, their wives and daughters - resident in the Southern portion of the county.

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Dr. J. D. Clardy, the first Worthy Master, by reason of his interest, loyalty and effective work in the Grange, had a lasting impact upon the organization, and served many times in this office. His outstanding work at Church Hill resulted in his election as State Master some years later. Dr. Clardy, a Democrat, was elected as the Christian County delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1891. The Grange contributed substantially to his success since the county was normally Republican. Other members of Church Hill also held state Grange offices from time to time.

The Church Hill Grange Hall was built in 1878 on a tract of land procured for the sum of thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents. The lot was a part of the James Adams farm and was located on the southwest side of the South Union Baptist Church. Members who hauled lumber, sand, and other building materials for the Hall were given stock in the building at the rate of two dollars per day for two-horse wagons and team and three dollars per day for four-horse wagons and team. The dedication of the new building was held November 22, 1878, with the Worthy State Master, W. J. Stone, dedicating the hall to the Grange and with other speakers, addressing the members.

It had been an original objective of the National Grange to promote the educational and cultural development of farm families. This objective was obtained in a number of ways by the Church Hill Grange. As early as 1883 the members were discussing the desirability and possibility of constructing a school house for their children. Brother James Adams donated two acres of land adjacent of the Grange Hall and fourteen hundred dollars was solicited for the erection of a school building. The Grange felt that competent teachers should be employed, and that the parents should cooperate with the teachers. The school should be a pleasant place for the purpose pupils, they felt, and not a place that the children would dread and shun.

The teacher should be respectful and patient with all pupils and should conduct himself and his school in such a way that all pupils would love him.

The Grange continued its interest in education into the twentieth century. As late as the 1920's, the vexing problem of county school consolidation developed and was discussed at length in the Church Hill Grange. Their decision in favor of graded schools retarded the consolidation movement for many years; only recently has the system of several community high schools been replaced by a consolidated county high school. Brother W. H. Adams, in arguing for the graded system, stated that the county schools should be maintained in such a way as to eliminate the necessity of sending the children to town for an education.

In line with education activities, the Grange began to develop a library in 1884. The collection was housed in the Grange Hall and circulated among the members. This soon proved to be a most popular undertaking, with members reading avidly and demanding more books. The library became "one of the most important things" in the Grange, with members feeling it desirable to store their minds with useful knowledge. By 1902 the Church Hill library had collected two hundred ninety-two books.

The National Grange, in developing its program and ritual, made provision for social activity. The formal work of the local Grange meeting was usually followed by a bountiful dinner and a period of recreation. The Church Hill Hall was furnished with a reed organ and a quantity of hymn books, and the members enjoyed music in both their meetings and social gatherings. They also owned a croquet set and a lawn tennis set for members to use during rest hours. Use of these facilities must have been rather hotly contested at times, inasmuch as the membership felt it necessary to appoint a committee to see that the ladies were not deprived of the use of the croquet set.

The Church Hill Grange, like the Casky Grange, conducted sales for many years. In fact, the most distinctive feature of the Church Hill Grange was the cattle and wool sales which were begun in 1880 and continued for more than forty years. The superior quality of the cattle which Grange farmers brought to these sales soon won favorable attention and notices of the annual sales, carried in many newspapers of the area, attracted buyers from a wide area of western Kentucky. Pens were constructed on grounds across the road from the Grange Hall, cattle were driven in from neighboring farms and an auctioneer was employed to conduct the sale. Large crowds- as many as one hundred farmers-attended the sales, and brought their families with them. The sale day was a real holiday for residents of South Christian County, who gathered to visit neighbors as well as to buy and sell cattle. In this respect it was similar to the trade or "court" days held in county seat towns during the nineteenth century.

The financial success of these sale days is illustrated by the 1883 sales which amounted to \$9948.42, and in 1909 two hundred head of livestock were sold for \$3894.90. Changing conditions in stock raising and marketing procedures reduced the effectiveness of the sales in the twentieth century, however, and the stock committee was obliged to report in 1925 that the profit from the sale of that year was only \$2.45. The sales were abandoned shortly thereafter. An account of one of the annual sales was recorded by J. W. McGaughey in his diary for May 24, 1901:

Drove eleven herd of cattle to Grange sale. A. M. Henry sent two Jersey steers, the day passed off all right, a large crowd in attendance. Dinner came off satisfactory and no disorder. Cattle sold well, eight calves sold for \$19 a head, two small ones for \$14. I purchased a young bull at \$31. Our Grange sale was pronounced success.

For many persons the important feature of the sale day was not the auctioning of the cattle but the dinners spread on tables under the oak trees. This area of Christian County, in common with almost all sections of Kentucky, has traditionally abounded in good cooks, and each lady of the Grange prepared her specialty to bring to the sale. The variety and abundance of food was overwhelming and one can well imagine the difficulty encountered in avoiding the social error of slighting some lady's cake or pie.

The Grange was active in improving the quality of agricultural production and in the development of more favorable markets for their products. The practice of awarding premiums on stock was begun in 1889. Blue, red, and white ribbons were awarded to superior specimens of cattle, sheep, and hogs. To secure a more favorable market for sheep raisers, wool sales were instituted in 1919 and the Church Hill Grange disposed of 12, 116 pounds of wool for a price of \$6537.54.

Tobacco grown by members was also sold in concert through the Grange. A special tobacco committee was appointed to solicit propositions from Hopkinsville warehouses and the firm offering the best proposal received the Grangers' leaf. Hopkinsville warehousemen had determined by 1883, however, to refuse further rebate arrangements with the Grange" . . . with a view of breaking down the Grange organization and destroying any collusion among farmers." The Grange thereupon instructed the tobacco committee to correspond with warehousemen in other towns, and resolved" . . . that we will never sell another hogshead of tobacco in the town of Hopkinsville until the present position of the warehousemen is abandoned, or some satisfactory proposition be received from some warehouse in that place.

In addition to these co-operative sales, the Grange took an active interest in all proposals which they felt would improve living conditions for the residents of the county. At a time when Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot were beginning the conservation movement on a national scale the Granger had recommended a program of selected cutting of timber in the county to insure an adequate supply for future generations. They urged the establishment of a small dairy to serve the needs of both suppliers and consumers of dairy products. The Granger worked with county representatives in the state legislature for the improvement of local roads, believing that the future prosperity of the county was greatly dependent on such an undertaking. Through the action of the Granger the "phone rent" in the county was reduced. At the national level Grange members urged their representatives in the United States Congress to work for passage of the Parcel Post Bill and of the Pure Food and Drug Bill.

The Church Hill Grange provided for an annual assessment of its activity through the report of its criticism committee. This committee reported on the growing of fruits and vegetables, stock-raising, farm improvements financing, and other aspects of farm life. The criticism committee reported in 1885 that the county had improved at least fifty percent in ten years, both in farm machinery and in stock of all kinds. Taking stock of improvements directly attributable to Grange activity, they could report that members had acquired an amazing collection of implements which reduced physical labor while improving the quality and increasing the quantity of their products, buildings to house these implements, and that the dwellings within five miles of the Grange Hall had been improved, together with the fences, barns, and cattle.

Shortly thereafter, however, the Grange felt that it was losing rather than gaining ground, because members were showing a declining interest in most of the Grange affairs. It was reported to the Church Hill Grange in 1901 that there were but twelve working Granges in the State. After a brief flurry of interest which witnessed the reorganization of a number of Granges in the northern part of Kentucky, the State Grange discontinued operations in 1924, at which time only seven local Granges were paying state dues.

The Church Hill Grange celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and homecoming on October 26, 1923. Two charter members, thirty-eight members, and many guests attended the celebration, held on the lawn of the Grange Hall. James Speed, editor of the SOUTHERN AGRICULTURIST, and T. R. Bryant, Assistant Director of Extension Work at the University of Kentucky, were guest speakers. While Bryant could speak on this occasion of "Future services that a community organization like the Church Hill Grange can continue to render", it was increasingly clear that the Grange was less important to the citizens of southern Christian County than it had been formerly. For one reason, the roads which the Granger championed had been constructed and these were breaking down the isolation which had characterized Church Hill and other rural communities in the past. Improved means of travel and communication were merging the activities of many formerly isolated communities into a larger organization. The county was fast becoming the unit of local organization, and most activities were taking place at this level. Also, other organizations--the American Farm Bureau, for example--were more appealing and seemingly more valuable to the twentieth century farmer. Hopkinsville, as the county seat town, was now more easily accessible to all county residents, and it soon became not only the headquarters for economic and political activity, but the hub of social and cultural events as well.

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The day of the small, isolated, virtually self-sufficient community was nearly done, thanks in no small measure to the successful work of the local Granges in securing better roads, cheaper communication facilities, and better methods of production and marketing.

A resolution to discontinue the Church Hill Grange was entered in the Minutes of February, 1926. Three trustees were empowered to hold the property of the Grange and use it "... for the benefit of the white people of this community." Although a reorganization was undertaken in 1936 and experienced a fitful existence for some two years, it was not successful, and the last meeting recorded in the minutes occurred on December 29, 1938..