

History of Gardner Grange # 68

Gardner Grange was founded on March 31, 1873 by an organizational team composed of The Kansas State Grange Master Frederick H. Dumbauld and State Grange Secretary George Spurgeon. There may have been a National Grange rep as well, likely Oliver H. Kelly, the first of seven founders of the National Grange. The entire organization would never have happened without the vision of Mr. Kelly.

Kelly had a farm in Minnesota. He worked in Washington, DC for the Dept of Agriculture and was given the task of assessing the damage in the south after the Civil War, for possible government grants. He found the situation to be much worse than he had first imagined. Seeing how isolated the farmers were and no money to rebuild, he began to brainstorm on how to help fix the situation. It was not just in the south either, he saw this isolation as far north as Missouri. Back home in Minnesota, sitting along the river near his home, he stated to watch as the water from streams and tributaries fed the river. Kelly had a vision of farmers working together in one cause and aiding each other. Kelly was an instant action sort of person, so he went right to work. Thus the National Grange was formed on December 4th 1867. Kelly then traveled from State to State forming local Granges once a number of Granges were formed a State Grange could then organize. The first 9 Granges in Kansas were formed in 1872 The first Grange in Kansas was Hiawatha Grange #1 in Brown County.

Dumbauld and Spurgeon organized 400 more Granges in Kansas over a period between Dec 1872 and June of 1873. Thirty two of those Granges being in Johnson County A state meeting washeld in June of 1873, members of Gardner Grange attended that meeting, held in Lawrence Ks. With a total of 409 Granges represented.

Gardner Grange was the 68th Grange to be formed in Kansas, and was the 1st Grange organized in Johnson County, it was also the first organization formed in the City of Gardner. The earliest Records were lost in a fire, In July of 2002 we able to get a copy of the list of Charter Members of Gardner Grange #68 from National Grange. This was with the help of the our current State Grange Sect Debra Douglass. The earliest records we have date back to 1917. The Gardner Grange was able to save the original Charter. It is in the vault at the 1st Kansas Bank in Gardner.

In an entry from these early record books Mrs. Kristina Johnson Sect. Reported members would answer roll call at the next meeting, by answering; for the brothers, "How to get rid of moles" and for the sisters, "How I can fruits and vegetables." on the next page. It is reported as to how some of the members answered. Several ladies spoke of canning everything from pickles, tomatoes, and peaches. It was done mostly by water bath methods, none mentioned the use of pressure canners. The men's answers for getting rid of moles in your yard, ranged from methods very scientific, to one brother answering "Get a Dog!"

In those days they were addressing some of the same problems we still address today. Such as; "How do we get new members." Have a Feast was the solution. Thus the Oyster soup feeds started.

A Grange store was opened in 1882. It isn't known where it was. It would have been a Feed and General Store with farm implements and groceries . It is believed that that first building burned. Later another "Grange Store" Stood at the corner of Park and Center across from the post office. It was a two story building with the store on the first floor and meeting room on he second floor.

Other than the churches the Grange was the center of community activities, in the 1880s and 90s. The earliest Newspaper "The Gardner Graphic" reports, dances, special speakers, ice cream socials, oyster soup feeds, literary programs, and pie suppers, all held at the Grange Hall.

By 1920 the Grange was beginning to decline. Some of the other granges in and around the rural Gardner area either closed or consolidated. In October of 1920 Bellflower, consolidated with Gardner Grange after their building burned. Bellflower Grange was located on 159th St half way between Dillie and Four Corners Roads. One of the members of Bellflower Grange Henry J Rhoades, served as Master of Kansas State Grange from 1896 to 1900. Mr. Rhoades had a 1200 acre farm in Gardner township (somewhere near the Four corners (Mount Pleasant) area.)Several members of Gardner Grange have been State Officers in the Kansas State Grange.

Clatawa Grange closed in 1931 and the members joined Gardner Grange. Clatawa Grange met in the Carroll School.

Gardner Grange laid almost dormant during the depression years and WWII. There are no records for the depression years. Records dating form 1939 through 1948 state the Grange met about three times a year. By 1947 things

were beginning to flourish again. Under the leadership of Master C. Roy Gay, Gardner Grange began to meet twice monthly. Margaret Gay remembers;

“Roy was Master and I was Secretary of the Grange. Jerry was born during that time. We worked hard at getting new members.”

Two membership teams were formed. The red team and the blue team, there was a contest to see which team could sign the most members over short period of time. I think it was reported that the blue team won. The next report of “Names proposed for membership” was very long. In the 1950s it made a big come back. Since that time, Gardner Grange has contributed greatly to the community of Gardner, Community service projects include; the organization of the first Rural Fire Dept, and raising funds to purchase the first fire truck.

Being during the baby boom years everyone was having babies by, 1955 some of them were getting old enough that Gardner Juvenile (Junior) Grange #91 was formed. Linda Kincaide Rothwell remembers; “We met in the basement of the building, on the NW side of Main and Elm streets. It was not the best place to meet, It was always damp and cold, we felt like we were in a cave, as a younger child it was pretty scary if the lights went out. Flash lights were always used. I can remember on one occasion there were only two light bulbs in the whole room.”

In the Subordinate Grange minutes it was reported that “The Juveniles met with only two light bulbs.” A motion was made and seconded. that, “The Grange buy some light bulbs for our Juvenile Grange. Motion carried.” Later there was a Resolution passed at Nationals Grange that the word “Juvenile” was not the proper word because it is associated with Juvenile Delinquents. “Be it resolved that The Juvenile Grange now be known as The ‘Junior Grange’” This was passed and or around 1962. Gardner Junior Grange also moved out of the basement about that time, to a room that had been an apartment, upstairs next to the big hall. I loved and looked forward to those meetings, as a 5 year old I could not wait to be Ceres and carry the flag. That day came and I felt like that was the most important job in the meeting. I stood just as tall as I could as I carried the Flag around the room and stood holding it as the other kids repeated the Pledge of Allegiance. This was followed by the Juvenile Pledge. Which talked about avoiding tobacco and intoxicating drink and NOT talking Gods name in vain. All of which we promised on our honor. It meant a lot to me and stayed with me”.

“Teen Town” was started for teens on Friday nights, it was also held in that basement and later held at the Old City auditorium (now Parks and Recreation Dept)

A benefit show was held in the City Auditorium for polio .This was held on February 4th 1956. Clifford Laquet, Vera Dunlap and Phares Ellis, made up the committee in charge of this “Community Fun Night” 14 organizations and the Gardner High School Band and . Chorus were called upon to present a number. Dr A.S. Reece gave an address; “Progress of Flight of Polio, since 1870.” Tickets were sold for .50 cents for adults and .25cents for kids.

Gardner Grange worked with the State Highway Commission, the Historical marker on 56hw west of town, was placed at that time, landscaping was also done on the “Road Side Park” there were picnic tables built be Grange members. This project was never completed, there were plans to have shelter houses and even restrooms. Most of these activities happened in the 55-56 Grange year, We received recognition from WIBW in Topeka. They came to Gardner to interview the Gardner granges, We were honored at National Grange that year, and awarded a large trophy for community service which we still display proudly in our Hall.

For many years Gardner Grange met at the corner of Main and Elm streets, in a meeting hall above the Gardner Variety store (now a Dr’s office) In 1971 Gardner Grange approached the Johnson County Fair Board,. about the possibility of placing a Building on the Fair grounds for our use during the year and their use during fair. Three or four tractor pulling contests, were held per year for the next few years to fund this building project. The project was finished in 1973. For a number of years the Grange served meals at the fair, out of our Grange kitchen. This was discontinued later, due to aging members, and not enough younger members to help (we were all working during the day) We found it easier to have a booth in the commercial building for many years we quilted and sold chances on the quilt for a \$1 donation. In 2000 our women made a beautiful lavender and white bear paw quilt. The proceeds were given to the WW2 Memorial Fund in DC. Last year was the last year for the quilt both however.

Grange meetings have always consisted of opening with prayer, the open Bible, Presentation of the American Flag. Opening Song, from “The Grange Song Book” business meeting, literary programs in charge of the Lecturer. A program might consist of a musical numbers, readings, speakers, slide presentations, Hobby Nights. Gardner Grange continues to meet on the 1st Monday of each month at our hall on the fair grounds.

Written and submitted by Linda Rothwell of Gardner, Kansas.