

Our Very Own Gilford Village Grange No. 52

2009

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The Gilford Grange as it stands today.

What I must say before writing this article, is thank you to Joan Nelson, who included this information in a pamphlet she created while President of the Thompson-Ames Historical Society. She did a splendid job and I'd like to highlight some of the information from this to create the following article. My intent is to share the information she so carefully researched with folks who may not have had the opportunity to read the pamphlet. And more especially, for out-of-state transplants, such as me, who are/were unfamiliar with the word or meaning of Grange.

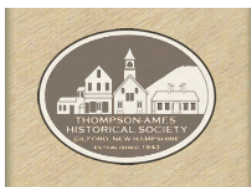
This is primarily meant to be about our Gilford Village's Mt. Belknap Grange No. 52 located at 8 Belknap Mountain Road, Gilford, New Hampshire 04349.

However, before getting into our local Grange, I'd like to give a bit of the history of the National Grange. It was officially known as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, a fraternal organization. It was founded by Oliver Hudson Kelley of Minnesota (formerly of Boston). Kelly wrote encouraging farmers to study and do experimental work. While working for the Federal Department of Agriculture in 1865, President Andrew Johnson asked him to do a survey of post-Civil War agricultural conditions

in the South. The way in which the southerners found they could be accepting of this northerner was through the Masonic Order. So, he felt that there was a need for a "secret society of agriculturists to restore kindly feelings among people". Kelly and the "Seven Founders" began the National Grange in 1868. Women were included in this society at the insistence of his niece Caroline Hall. Thus, the Grange has the distinction of being one of the first major national organizations besides the church which sought the membership and involvement of everyone in the family.

The National Grange initiated and promoted, since 1868, a number of programs. Included are: Development of the rural road system; Promotion of Inter-State Highway Systems; State Police system; Agricultural Extension Service; Rural Free Delivery (RFD) and Parcel Post mail delivery; Cabinet status of the Department of Agriculture; Efforts to curb and control monopolies; Rural Electrification and Rural Telephone system; Agricultural Experimental Stations; Land Grant colleges; School Lunch and Milk programs; Future Farmers of America and 4-H; Social Security to the Farmers and the Self-Employed. I do not know how many of these are still in effect but do know that some are, i.e. school lunch programs, 4-H, Future Farmers of America, and I'm sure, well at least hopeful, that many more are also still viable entities.

The Mt. Belknap Grange was organized on a cold and stormy night on March 1, 1875. The meeting was held, with its 30 charter members, in the brick house in Gilford Village. (Does anyone know if that house is still there?) In 1888 the Grange rented the Munsey Hall over the Village Store. (Now I know that is still there!) As it is today, money was hard to come by and at one meeting furnishings had to be sold at auction in order to pay bills! In 1909 the Grange was doing better and voted to buy the J.B. Morrill property, which is the present Hall. The upstairs, which is now a meeting place for the Board of Directors and also displays some exhibits, was originally storage for the store located on the ground floor. The kitchen was originally the



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woodshed and the ell, later the Junior Room and now the Heritage Room, was a horse stable. Originally, the kitchen had an iron sink and a woodstove. In 1915 a furnace was installed that also heated the upstairs. I'll quote Ms. Nelson "In 1922 a Delco lighting system was installed, consisting of a generator run by a gasoline motor. Rumor had it that the motor was hard to start and unless a Mr. Gove came to the meeting, the lighting was a bit unreliable!"

In 1929 extensive remodeling included a new furnace, a kitchen made out of the wood shed which included the cabinets that are still in use today, the Delco system was superseded by electricity. The kitchen was again updated in 1948 with a gas hot water heater, gas range, electric refrigerator, copper sink, new counters and a flush toilet.

Gilford's Old Home Day for many years was primarily a Grange event. There would be a morning baseball game, afternoon brought speakers and later after a baked bean dinner there was a three-act play and a dance to be enjoyed.

In 1949 one of the Gilford Grange's projects was to create the first life guard tower at the town beach. The raft was refurbished, a diving board added, and a shallow area was created for the little folks to wade and splash safely.

The Belknap Grange sold the building to the Thompson-Ames Historical Society in 1990 due to declining membership in the Grange. The members remaining did continue to meet at various member homes until 1997 when the group was completely disbanded with members transferring to other Granges.

Today the downstairs contains the John J. Morrill Dry Goods Store, circa 1857, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This room displays specific areas, i.e. a post office, herb/apothecary, printing press and many tools that Gilford farmers actually used. There is a potbelly stove, wooden toys, wringer washing machine and other items from that era.

Also on the first floor, are the kitchen, a hallway that displays historic signs and the Homestead Room. Upstairs, is the Society's office, extensive reference materials and a large meeting room that is bordered by more artifacts and displays of local history.

It is a wonderful asset to the town of Gilford. The Thompson-Ames Historical Society is active in preserving and sharing with the public this special building and its collections. Elementary school children visit and learn about the Grange as part of their curriculum. If you would like to visit this building, and the other two historic buildings this summer, they will be open for tours on July 11th and 25th and also August 15th and 29th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. There is no charge for these tours and docents will be available to explain the various exhibits.

Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes comments on, or suggestions for articles. You can reach us at Thomames@worldpath.net.