

The Fredonia Grange  
By Douglas H. Shepard

At some time in 1867, with the Civil War ended and the Reconstruction under way, the Commissioner of Agriculture in the administration of President **Johnson** sent one of his employees, Oliver Hudson **Kelley**, to survey the state of agriculture in the rural south. What he found was enormous destruction which led **Kelley** to consider what remedies there might be, including the need for an organization of farmers joining together for mutual support.

As a Freemason, **Kelley** thought in terms of a fraternal organization with local, county, state and national levels reached by attaining successive degrees. Back in Washington, D.C., with seven other co-founders, including William **Saunders** of the Agriculture Department, he held the first formal meeting, on 15 November 1867. That meeting established The Order of Patrons of Husbandry, The Grange.

The group was casting about for a place that would form the first unit when William **Saunders**, possibly on a fact-finding trip to Fredonia about the grape industry, met Adiel S. **Moss** a pioneer grape grower, local authority on agriculture, and president of the county fairgrounds committee. **Saunders** apparently reported back to **Kelley**, who began a correspondence with **Moss**, who was in turn elected Assistant Steward of the Order at the National Grange meeting of 4 December 1867. **Moss** wrote a description of the planned organization and had it published in *The Fredonia Censor* of 11 March 1868, as follows:

A NEW AGRICULTURAL ORDER.— We have received a circular containing a statement of some of the principles of an organization now being introduced, called “The Patrons of Husbandry,” with the view of encouraging more frequent intercourse and greater unity of action among farmers and [others?] who are engaged or interested in the cultivation of the soil. Its object is to elevate and instruct the great mass of producers. It includes both sexes and is designed to educate the young to a just appreciation of their high calling as producers; that they be better qualified for their position.

It says “we ignore all political or religious discussions in the order; we do not solicit the patronage of any sect, association, or individual, upon any grounds whatever except upon the intrinsic merits of the order.”

Again it says, “It is hoped by these means a love for rural life will be encouraged, the desire for excitement and amusement so prevalent in youth will be gratified instead of being repressed; not, however, in frivolities as useless for the future as they are for the present, but by directing attention to the wonder workings of nature; and leading the mind to enjoy that never ending delight which follows these studies, whether pursued in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms.”

Much good has already come from Agricultural and Horticultural clubs and societies but it seems evident to us that an order based on the above principles in a band of brotherhood, will give permanency, and elevate its members. While it does this it must necessarily prove a public benefit.

A.S.M.

An additional sentence had been added, either by the editor or by **Moss** himself: “We hope a branch or ‘grange,’ as it is called, of the society, may be established here.”

The *Censor* of 25 March quoted from an article in the *National Intelligencer* about a “meeting of Harvest Grange, No.2” in Washington at which the Master of the National Grange appointed “special deputies” “to supervise the order in their respective states” including A. S. **Moss** of Fredonia, N.Y. He also directed the secretary of the National Grange, O. H. **Kelley**, “to visit the several states.” **Kelley** arrived in Fredonia on 15 April 1868, and on 16 April oversaw the organization of the first subordinate grange, Fredonia’s “Grange No.1.” The organizers were A. S. **Moss**, M. **Stile**, W. H. **Stevens**, U. E. **Dodge**, Willard **McKinstry**, Louis **McKinstry**, A. P. **Pond**, D. **Fairbanks**, William **Risley**, and M. S. **Woodford**. U. E. **Dodge** was chosen master.

The Grange met at what was called Armory Hall, on the second floor over 45 West Main Street. In time, special meetings needing more room used the Odd Fellows Hall, the Masonic Hall, the Opera House and Old Main. The *Censor* of 12 October 1887 reported that the local Grange “is revived under the direction of the secretary of the State Grange,” but it is not clear if this language simply refers to a periodic “renewal” or if Fredonia Grange No.1 had not been functioning for a time. If the latter is the case, it certainly bounced back. The 18 January 1905 *Censor* reported that Grange No.1 was considering putting up its own building, adding that it was “in a very prosperous condition with an enrollment of 317 members and an average attendance of 91.”

However, it took another eight years before the decision was finally made. On 4 August 1913, Mrs. Corinne B. **Gates**, an heir of Dr. Elias **Johnson**, quit-claimed the lot and dilapidated building at 54-56 West Main Street to Edward **Colvin**, George I. **Button** and Marshall H. **Shannon**, trustees of the Fredonia Grange No.1, Patrons of Husbandry of Fredonia, N.Y. (*L.375,p.325*). The old building had stood as early as 1817, one part occupied by Jesse **Holly** and later David **Dickson** (or **Dixon**). By 1832 it was part of John Z. **Saxton**’s holdings. He deeded the main lot to Elias **Johnson** on 30 March 1832 (*L.45, p.509*), added a narrow strip on the southwest side on 12 September 1832 (*L.45, p.510*), and a further small lot on the back of the first one on 3 December 1832 (*L.45, p.508*).

Another year and a half elapsed before the details of the building were decided and Harry **Beebe** was chosen as the architect. A Grange building committee made up of E. L. **Colvin**, S. J. **Lowell** and L. E. **Cowden** met on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1915, opened the fourteen sealed bids and chose the winners: Peter **Meister** Co., Dunkirk, mason work; John F. **Luke**, carpentry; J. M. **Zahm & Co.**, roofing; George M. **Breed**, plumbing; **Fleischman** Electric Co., wiring; and Fred **Brett**, painting. The contracts were signed on Monday, 7 June 1915. Throughout the remainder of the year the work went on, and on 8 January 1916, the dedication ceremonies inaugurated the new home of Fredonia Grange No.1 at 54-56 West Main Street as it remains to this day.