

The Grange Ritual – A Masonic Harvest

Douglas L. Jordan

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Introduction

We are all familiar with the idea that our ritual is the characteristic that distinguishes Masonry from other fraternal and social orders. Many of us are also aware that these other orders have frequently adopted rituals that contain strong echoes of the ideas and even the expressions and phrases of Masonic ritual. My purpose here is to illustrate the influence of Masonry and the Masonic ritual on one of these organizations - the Patrons of Husbandry - better known as the Grange.



We tend to listen to the lessons of Masonry and forget that although our heritage caused the "tools and implements of architecture . . . to be selected to imprint upon the mind wise and serious truths," other implements and symbols might have been chosen. In choosing the farmer's implements and building on the farmer's experience, Oliver Hudson Kelley presented the same lessons using much of the same language, phrases, and similes as we find in the Masonic ritual with the added benefit that the members were daily reminded of the lessons as they went about their work.

My primary sources are two editions of the *Manual of Subordinate Granges of the Patrons of Husbandry*. The Tenth Edition was adopted and issued by the National Grange in 1923, while the Eighteenth Edition was published in 1940. In addition I have visited the numerous web sites that are maintained by the National, State, and Subordinate Granges

to see what the order is doing today. I have also consulted a number of secondary sources on the history of the Grange in order to provide a proper background on the order. These are listed in the bibliography.

Background

Following the War Between the States, the American farmer, particularly in the South and Midwest, was entering a period of hard times. The War had brought high prices for farm goods, but it was now over; prices had fallen, but costs had not. Oliver Hudson Kelley, a Minnesota farmer and Mason, was a clerk in the Bureau of Agriculture. He was assigned in 1866 to investigate rural conditions in the South and West.

Kelley was born in Boston in 1826, and became a farmer on the Minnesota frontier in 1846. In 1849 he was the first person to be "brought to light" in the Minnesota Territory and he gained a reputation as a Masonic ritualist. In 1866 the Bureau of Agriculture hired him as an investigator to journey through the South to collect data on Southern farms and farming. As a northerner in the post-war South he found his reception as a Mason was much friendlier than his reception as a farmer. This led him to the idea that a fraternal



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organization having secret ritual, signs, and passwords like Masonry could help alleviate rural isolation, apathy, and ignorance. It was to be an organization to educate and elevate the American farmer.

Returning to Washington in December 1866, he presented his idea to John R. Thompson and William M. Ireland, two government workers who were also active Masons and proficient ritualists. Together with Rev. Aaron B. Grosh, who was an Episcopal minister

and author of the *Odd Fellow's Improved Manual*, they wrote the Grange ritual. In December 1867 in Washington, D.C. these four, along with three others organized the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry.¹

Page Smith, author of *The Rise of Industrial America* summarizes the Grange organization as follows:

Modeled on the Masonic Order, there were seven degrees and four categories: Laborer, Cultivator, Harvester, and Husbandman. The categories for women were Maid, Shepherdess, Gleaner, and Matron. The Pomona or Hope degree is the fifth stage for masters. Patrons of the sixth degree made up the National Council. The final degree is that of Demeter (Faith). The preamble of the constitution of the Patrons read: "The soil is the source from which we derive all that constitutes wealth . . . "

Charles M. Gardner in *The Grange -- Friend of the Farmer* states:

One needs only to hold membership in both these fraternal organizations to note similarities in ritualistic expression, and it is probably no exaggeration to assert that if there had been no Masonry there might be no Grange today. Kelley was a man with a mission, and that mission carried him up and down the land, east, west, and south, until by 1874 local chapters counted a million and a half members.²

This was the Grange's high point. The farmers used their organization to unite against the railroad and grain elevator monopolies and passed the so-called "Grange Laws" in several of the Midwestern states. After a Supreme Court decision, these laws established

¹ Grange is an old word for barn or more loosely, farmstead. It has nothing to do with the various communities named La Grange. They were named for Lafayette's country home in France at the time of his visit to America in 1824-25.

² Charles M. Gardner, *The Grange -- Friend of the Farmer*, p22

the right of the State and the Federal governments to regulate certain monopoly businesses. Thereafter, the Grange slowly faded. By 1899, membership was down to 107 thousand, but it then grew again to some 850 thousand in 1970, mostly located in New York and northern Pennsylvania and on the West Coast. In this period it caused Congress to enact the laws providing for Rural Electrification and Rural Free Delivery.

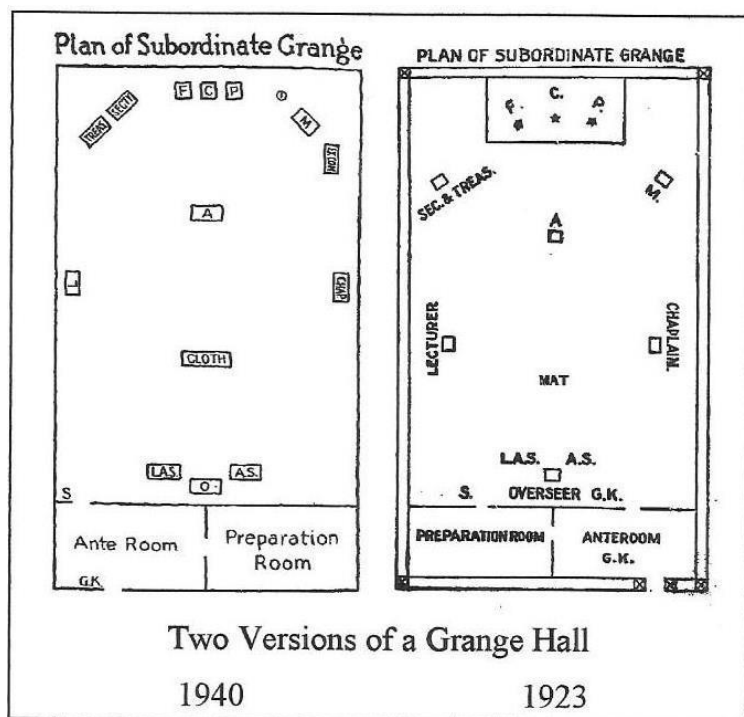
Today State Granges are active in 36 states and the District of Columbia. Washington State claims the largest membership with 50 thousand members in 373 Subordinate Granges. The Grange program continues to focus on the needs of the farmer and the rural population, including lobbying for specific bills and providing insurance, but it has broadened to include assistance to the deaf, and a program of youth activities.

Examination of the Ritual

The Grange ritual was published in several parts. The *Manual for Subordinate Granges* is the only part I have in my possession. Being a published and copyrighted book, it contains no secret work. It does refer to the "Private Instructions" and the "U.W." which, from the context, are the ciphered secret and unwritten work. In addition, rituals exist for the Pomona (i.e. county), State and National Granges.

The Grange Hall

In describing the layout of a Grange Hall, I will use the terms North, South, East, and West since the present audience well understands the references. However, these terms are not used by the Grange. I have also copied diagrams from each of the rituals to help you visualize the proceedings. The room is laid out much like a Masonic Lodge. An altar is located one-third of the way from East toward the West, and a cloth or mat is placed midway between the West and the altar to mark the location for members to stand while addressing the Overseer in the West.



In the East of the hall there is a stage on which sit the three Graces - Ceres, Pomona, and Flora, goddesses presiding over cereals, fruits, and flowers. Ceres, as the goddess of cereals, is in the center of the trio.

No one is permitted to pass between Ceres and the altar except an officer in the performance of his or her duty.

The Master sits at a desk in the Southeast. On his desk is a box containing miniatures of the "implements" or working tools of the farmer. (Only those implements appropriate to the current and preceding degrees are displayed.) To the right of his desk is the American flag. The Chaplain is seated in the South. In the West is the Overseer with the Assistant Steward (A.S.) seated in front and toward the South, and the Lady Assistant Steward (L.A.S.) seated in front and toward the North -- similar to the placing of the Junior Deacon and Marshal in a Virginia Masonic Lodge.

The Steward is stationed in the Northwest at the door to the Ante Room. In the Ante Room, the Gate Keeper stands guard with his Gate Keeper's staff — five feet long and surmounted by an owl. The Treasurer and Secretary sit at desks in the Northeast, while the Lecturer sits in the North. In the 1923 Installation ritual, only the three Graces and the L.A.S. are noted as being "Sisters", however, the 1940 ritual allows for installing women in all offices. This acceptance of women (and also youth) as full members made the Grange very much a family organization, and I notice that a number of ladies are State Masters.

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The Steward and his assistants carry staves of office. These are six feet long and black. The Steward's is a spud, while the Assistant Steward's is a pruning hook, and the Lady Assistant Steward's a Shepherd's Crook.

So much for the general layout; let us turn to the words of the ritual. I will not spend much time commenting on them since the similarities will be as obvious to you as they are to me. I will present most of the ritual for opening and closing the Grange, and some excerpts from significant parts of the degrees. In this I will be assisted by several of the officers who have been given scripts to aid them.

Meeting Ritual

As you would expect, a Grange meeting starts when the Master gives one rap and says:

M. The hour of labor has arrived, and the work of another day demands our attention. Let each repair to his or her allotted station. Worthy Overseer, are all present correct?

O. Worthy Steward, you will ascertain.

S. My assistants will make examination and report.

The A.S. and L.A.S. take their staves, and advance to the altar where the A.S. opens the Bible. They then return to the Overseer and are individually given instructions which are not written. The Assistant Stewards then proceed to take up the words from all present working from West to East, return to the Overseer, and report. He in turn says:

O. Worthy Master, we find all present correct.

M. Worthy Steward, are the gates properly guarded?

S. *[Examines and finds G.K. at his post.]* They are, Worthy Master.

M. Worthy Steward, inform the Gate Keeper that we are preparing for work.

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S. *[Opens wide the I.G.]* Brother Gate Keeper, the Worthy Master directs me to inform you that we are preparing for work.

G.K. *[Closes the O.G.]* I therefore close this Outside Gate in Faith, Hope, and in Charity and will guard it with Fidelity.

M. Right, Worthy Gate Keeper. And now, Worthy Chaplain, as Laborers under the Great Master of the Universe, let us bow in prayer. *[Calls up]*

Chap. Almighty Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth and Giver of all good, we return our heartfelt thanks...and when we are called to lay down our implements on earth, may we enter the Paradise not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and receive that welcome plaudit, well done good and faithful servants... Amen.

The Opening Song is then sung followed by:

M. Worthy Steward, please close the Inside Gate.

S. In Faith, in Hope, and in Charity I close this Inside Gate, and will guard it with Fidelity.

At this point the Grange Salutation is noted as being given, but because it is in the "U.W." I cannot provide any enlightenment on its nature. Following the Grange Salutation the Master says:

M. In Faith, in Hope, in Charity, and with Fidelity this Grange is now opened in ample form, in the Fourth Degree. Worthy Overseer, please proclaim it accordingly.

O. By command of the Worthy Master, I proclaim this Grange opened in ample form for promoting the welfare of our country and of mankind, and for advancing the interests, elevating the characters, and increasing the influence of all Patrons of Husbandry, by properly transacting our business and by exemplifying our principles in Faith, in Hope, and in Charity, with Fidelity.

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The flag is saluted while *The Star Spangled Banner* is played -- a ceremony adopted during the 1930's -- and the business then proceeds in a normal business order. As with Lodges in Virginia, the minutes are read and adopted prior to the Closing ritual. One italicized note in the ritual will strike a familiar note for the more senior members present:

"At special meetings for conferring degrees, open the Grange in Fourth Degree, then close in the Fourth Degree and open in the degree to be conferred. When the degree work is completed, re-open in the Fourth Degree."

After adopting the minutes, the Master proceeds to close the meeting:

M. Worthy Overseer, are the labors of the day completed?

O. They are Worthy Master.

M. As there is no more work for us to-day, the Steward will see that the implements are properly secured for the night.

[The A.S and L.A.S. advance to the altar and close the Bible, while the Steward goes to the Master's desk, receives the case of implements, closes it, and returns to his station.]

S. All is secure Worthy Master.

M. *[Calls up]* Brothers and Sisters: As we are again to separate, and mingle with the world, let us not forget the precepts of our Order. Let us add dignity to labor, and in our dealings with our fellow-men be honest, be just, and fear not. We must avoid intemperance in eating, drinking, and language; also in work and recreation; and whatever we do, strive to do well. Let us be quiet, peaceful citizens, feeding the hungry, helping the fatherless and the widows, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

The Closing Song is sung, and the Grange Salutation given as at the opening, and then:

M. Worthy Overseer, please proclaim the Grange closed.

O. By command of the Worthy Master, I proclaim this Grange duly closed until again lawfully opened in Faith, in Hope, in Charity, and with Fidelity.

M. So be it. *[All repeat, "So be it"]*

The Chaplain then gives a benediction and the gates are opened. I am sure that you have recognized ideas, phrases, and expressions that are found in our Lodge ritual as well as the ritual of other Masonic bodies. In order to bring out these points more strongly, let us examine portions of the degrees.

The Degrees

There are four degrees in a subordinate Grange:

The First Degree represents Springtime and Preparation and teaches Faith.

The Second Degree represents Summer and Culture and teaches Hope.

The Third Degree represents Autumn and the Harvest and teaches Charity.

And the Fourth Degree represents Winter and the Home and teaches Fidelity.

There was no catechism to learn, however the 1940 ritual contains a requirement that candidates for the Third Degree must be tested on their knowledge of the Declaration of Purposes before being permitted to receive the degree.

The four degrees are very similar in structure. In each, the candidates are led through the door and around the hall to the various stations for examination and instruction. However, blindfolds are used only in the First Degree and the obligations for the last three are primarily ones of secrecy concerning the content of the particular degree and a promise to be true and faithful, to perform the duties of the Order, and to aid others in the same.

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For the First or Preparation Degree the candidates are blindfolded by the A.S. and the L.A.S. in the Preparation Room, and the ladies' dresses are covered by cloaks. If only one candidate is present, someone will be appointed to balance the group. An alarm is then given at the Inner Gate.

S. Worthy Overseer, an alarm at the gate.

O. See who approaches.

S. Who comes?

A.S. Men and women seeking employment, who desire to assist in our work.

S. Are they unconstrained and willing?

A.S. They are.

S. Have they been tried and found worthy?

A.S. They have.

S. You will tarry while I ascertain our Worthy Overseer's pleasure.

Worthy Overseer, the alarm comes from strangers seeking admittance.

O. Satisfy yourself that they are worthy and well qualified, and, if so, admit them.

S. [*Opens Inner Gate and says:*] None but those worthy and well qualified can enter here. It is the pleasure of our Worthy Overseer that you enter the field with this caution: Use discretion, respectfully obey all order, and, should work be assigned to you, labor with diligence.

A.S. Let our future conduct prove us so.

The candidates are then led in by the A.S. and the L.A.S. in a double file with the ladies on the right, each with their left hand on the shoulder of the one ahead. They circumambulate the room to the Overseer where they are introduced and greeted with a short lecture on the significance of the Grange and of this degree. They then proceed toward the Lecturer who stops them with:

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L. Hold! *[All members clap]* Who are these who trespass within our peaceful enclosure?

A.S. Friends, who desire to be initiated into the mysteries of our Order.

L. By what token may we prove them?

A.S. By this signet.

L. Present it. *[A.S. presents a card bearing these words]* "An Honest man is the noblest work of God." Right, brother . . . Conduct them to the Worthy Overseer for his examination.

The Chaplain delivers a prayer as they are conducted toward the Overseer. Along the way the Steward meets them in the guise of Ignorance and suggests that they give up their search for light. However, they persevere and arrive at the Overseer who asks a set of questions similar to those asked by the Steward at the door. He ultimately says:

O. We have confidence that you will persevere, but, before assigning you a place in our work, it is necessary that you give us a solemn pledge, which will not conflict with your moral, social, religious, or civil duties. With this assurance, are you willing to proceed?

Upon their assent, they are placed in two lines, the men on the North and the women on the South of the altar and the Worthy Master administers the following pledge:

In the presence of our heavenly Father and these witnesses, I do hereby pledge my sacred honor that, whether in or out of the Order, I will never reveal any of the secrets of this Order, nor communicate them, or any part of them, to any person in the world, unless I am satisfied by strict test, or in some legal manner, that they are lawfully entitled to receive them -- that I will conform to and abide by the Constitution, rules and regulations of the National Grange, and of the State Grange under whose jurisdiction I may be, and of the Subordinate Grange to which I may be attached -- That I will never propose for membership in the Order, nor

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sanction the admission of anyone who I have reason to believe is an improper person; nor will I oppose the admission of any one solely on the grounds of a personal prejudice or difficulty. I will recognize and answer all lawful signs given me by a brother or sister of the Order, and will render them such assistance as may be needed, so far as I may be able and the interest of my family will permit. I will not knowingly wrong or defraud a brother or sister of the Order in word or deeds; nor will I permit it to be done by another if in my power to prevent It. Should I knowingly or willfully violate this pledge, I invoke upon myself suspension or expulsion from the Order, and thus be disgraced among those who were my brothers and sisters.

They are then directed to the Overseer for further instruction.

O. My friends, to primeval darkness, covering the face of the deep, came the command, "Light be!"

All present give a salute with a single clap of the hands while the blindfolds are removed from the candidates' eyes. Lectures are then given by the Overseer concerning the need for brotherly love, by the Steward concerning their duty to care for the farm animals, and by the Chaplain concerning the place of Agriculture as the first and noblest of all occupations. The Master then teaches the use of the implements of the degree. Each degree has its own set of implements:

First or Preparation Degree - the Ax, Plow, Harrow, and Spade.

Second or Culture Degree - the Hoe and Pruning Knife.

Third or Harvest Degree - the Sickle.

Fourth or Home Degree - the polished Agate.

The first of these serves to illustrate these teachings:

The Ax is used to cut away obstructions in the fields and prepare timber for use. Its use teaches us perseverance in overcoming obstacles; for as, by repeated blows it cleaves its way through the hardest wood, so should we by repeated trials surmount every difficulty.

Later the Steward in a lecture says to the Ladies:

Sisters, you entered here blinded and covered with that garment. Before you were placed Ignorance and Knowledge. You were allowed to choose for yourself, and you chose wisely and found light. Wearing that garment is to teach you that those we admit into our circle are not chosen by outward appearance, and that we are not deceived by display in dress . . . remember that a noble mind and generous heart are often concealed beneath the garments of poverty. *[Removes the cloaks]*

Although I suspect that the "secret instructions of this degree" that the Master then imparts would have some similarity to things we all know, they are contained in the "U.W." and not in the manual. For the First Degree there is a Signal and Password at the Outer Gate, Signal and Degree words at the Inner Gate, Sign and Salutation of the Degree, and the Sign of Caution, Sign of Distress, and Patron's General Sign. Each of the other degrees has a similar set of signals and words. In addition, in the Fourth Degree the Patrons are given the voting sign, the sign of recognition, the grip, the Patron's Test, and an Annual Word that changed every year.

Each of the degrees ends with lectures by the three Graces followed by the Master's charge. A unique feature of the Fourth Degree is the Harvest Feast that is enjoyed by all just before the Master's charge. Grange dinners were justly famous!

Conclusion

It is intriguing to note that Robert Morris, founder of the Order of the Eastern Star, was also born in Boston about the same time as O. H. Kelley. In 1867 the Eastern Star ritual was being written by Robert Macoy in Richmond based on Morris's notes. Those who are members of that organization will have noted similarities in the Grange ritual. Since both were being written by Masons at the same-time and only 100 miles apart, one can speculate on possible mutual influences. But that is another paper.

And finally — The Grange Ritual of 1914 contains some instructions for effective meetings that are equally, applicable to Masonic meetings of today:

In a well ordered Grange the business will be disposed of expeditiously so that the literary program may be started at a reasonable hour and closed likewise. It is a grave mistake in the Grange procedure to so prolong Grange meetings that members will become wearied and in consequence be disinclined to come again. Long tedious Grange recesses are an inexcusable waste of precious time and should never be permitted.

And so with that injunction in mind, I must now end this presentation.

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www.nationalgrange.org

This is the Web page of the National Grange. From comments on other pages, it has very recently been upgraded. I found it easy to navigate and very informative concerning the Grange. It also provides links to the various State Grange Web pages.