

## History of The Grange

The commissioner of the [Department of Agriculture](#) commissioned [Oliver Kelley](#), after a personal interview with President [Andrew Johnson](#),<sup>[2]</sup> to go to the Southern states and to collect data to improve Southern agricultural conditions. In the South, poor farmers bore the brunt of the Civil War and were suspicious of Northerners like Kelley. Kelley found he was able to overcome these sectional differences as a [Mason](#). With Southern Masons as guides, he toured the war-torn countryside in the South and was appalled by the outdated farming practices. In the western states, Kelley deplored the lack of "progressive agriculture", with illiterate "ignorant" farmers who were "using a system of farming [that] was the same as that handed down by generations gone by".<sup>[3]</sup> He saw the need for an organization that would bring people together from across the country in a spirit of mutual cooperation; after many letters and consultations with the other founders, the Grange was born.<sup>[4]</sup> The first Grange, Grange #1, was founded in 1868 in [Fredonia, New York](#).<sup>[5]</sup> Seven men and one woman co-founded the Grange: [Oliver Hudson Kelley](#), [William Saunders](#), [Francis M. McDowell](#), [John Trimble](#), [Aaron B. Grosh](#), [John R. Thompson](#), [William M. Ireland](#), and [Caroline Hall](#).<sup>[6]</sup> In 1873 the organization was united under a National Grange in Washington, D.C.<sup>[7]</sup>

Paid agents organized local Granges and membership in the Grange increased dramatically from 1873 (200,000) to 1875 (858,050). Many of the state and local granges adopted non-partisan political resolutions, especially regarding the regulation of railroad transportation costs. The organization was unusual at this time, because women<sup>[8]</sup> and any teen old enough to draw a plow (aged 14 to 16<sup>[9]</sup>) were encouraged to participate. The importance of women was reinforced by requiring that four of the elected positions could be held only by women.<sup>[9]</sup>



1967 U.S. postage stamp honoring the National Grange

Rapid growth infused the national organization with money from dues, and many local granges established consumer [cooperatives](#), initially supplied by the wholesaler [Aaron Montgomery Ward](#). Poor fiscal management, combined with organizational difficulties resulting from rapid growth, led to a massive decline in membership. By the turn of the 20th century, the Grange rebounded and membership stabilized.

The Granger movement supported efforts by politicians to regulate rates charged by the railroads and grain warehouses. It claimed credit for the ideas of the [Cooperative Extension Service](#), [Rural Free Delivery](#), and the [Farm Credit System](#). The peak of their political reputation was marked by the Supreme Court decision in [Munn v. Illinois](#) (1877), which held that grain warehouses were a "private utility in the [public interest](#)," and so could be regulated by public law. However this achievement was overturned later by the Supreme Court in [Wabash v. Illinois](#) (1886).<sup>[10]</sup> The Grange also endorsed the [temperance cause to avoid alcohol](#), the [direct election of Senators](#) and [women's suffrage](#).

## AMESVILLE GRANGE 798

