

CURATOR'S CHOICE

The Grange

THE ORDER OF THE PATRONS OF Husbandry, commonly known as the Grange, was founded in 1867 by Elk River farmer Oliver Hudson Kelley (1826–1913) and six associates. The Grange was a fraternal society that billed itself as an educational and social organization that sought social betterment and political influence.

“From its beginnings in Minnesota, the organization had spread across the Midwest like wildfire during the hard decade of the 1870s,” wrote Rhoda R. Gilman and Patricia Smith in the fall 1967 issue of *Minnesota History*, “and it had been the first of many groups to cry out on behalf of the depressed and debt-ridden farmer.” The Oliver Kelley Farm, one of the Minnesota Historical Society’s 26 historic sites, was named a National Historic Landmark in 1970

for its association with the founder of the Grange and for being an outstanding example of an early homestead in Minnesota.

The Grange had a significant impact on many Minnesota rural communities. More than 800 local Grange organizations have existed in the state from 1868 to the present, ranging from St. Louis and Polk counties in the north to the Iowa border. The Society’s manuscripts collection contains significant records of the Minnesota State Grange and more than 70 of its local lodges, documenting membership and events as well as how those activities have affected local communities. Records include reports listing when local lodges were organized and by whom, meeting minutes, membership records, finan-

cial reports, and efforts to preserve Oliver Kelley’s homestead.

As the Minnesota Historical Society celebrates the April 1, 2017, opening of the Oliver Kelley Farm’s new visitor center (occurring during the sesquicentennial of the founding of the National Grange), all Minnesotans can appreciate the progress made since the 1957 report of the Kelley Farm Committee, which noted, “The youth have started to brush out the river bank in front of the house so that a picnic grounds will be here established to keep fire danger from camp fires away at a safe distance. . . . The part of the land in front of the house has been seeded down to Alfalfa and will be kept green all the time.”

—Duane P. Swanson, curator of manuscripts



Left to right: song sheet used in 1937 for Grange picnics; state grange letterhead from 1875 celebrating the American Farmers' Centennial; Minnesota State Grange leadership c. 1936; cover of executive committee minutes from 1883 to 1900 (red spine); constitution, bylaws, rules of order of the Minnesota State Grange, adopted Dec. 19, 1873; stock certificate used to raise funds for the building of Minnehaha Grange Hall, 1900. (MNHS COLLECTIONS/JASON ONERHEIM)



Special grand opening events celebrating the Kelley Farm’s newest facilities, including the new visitor center are May 6 and 7. Details at www.mnhs.org/kelleyfarm.



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