

This Day in History... December 4, 1867

Founding of the National Grange

On December 4, 1867, Oliver Hudson Kelley established the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry.

Born in Boston in 1826, Kelley decided in his 20s to become a farmer. So in 1849, he took a steamboat to St. Paul, Minnesota. While the area was mostly one of trade with Native Americans at the time, Kelley recognized that it held great agricultural potential.

Kelley soon proved himself to be a talented and pioneering farmer, impressing the locals with his experimentation with new crops, elaborate irrigation systems, and the use of one of the first mechanical reapers in the state. Soon Kelley was writing popular columns about his ideas on scientific farming for national newspapers. By 1864, he was awarded a position in the federal commissioner of agriculture's office in Washington, DC.

After the Civil War ended, President Andrew Johnson gave Kelley a special job. He asked him to travel the Southern states and collect information to help improve their agricultural situation. While most Northerners weren't well received in the still war-ravaged South, Kelly received a warm welcome from his fellow Masons. They led him on tours of Southern farms, where he was shocked to find they were using such outdated practices.

Kelley soon recognized that there needed to be an organization to help bring Northern and Southern farmers together to cooperate in bettering the conditions in the South. Once his tours were over, Kelley returned to Washington, DC, and met with a few like-minded friends who agreed that they should found such an organization. So on December 4, 1867, Kelley and seven others met in the office of William Saunders, Superintendent of Propagating Gardens in the Department of Agriculture. There they laid the foundation for this new organization, the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, often referred to as simply The National Grange.



Susan B. Anthony made her final public appearance at the 1903 National Grange Convention.

The first local Grange was officially established the following year in Fredonia, New York. New Granges spread quickly, with membership reaching 200,000 in 1873 and 858,050 in 1875. Around this same time, the Grange created its Declaration of Purposes.

The Grange organized America's farmers into a powerful political and economic group. This allowed them to lobby for legislation, fight the unfair practices of railroads, and benefit from educational opportunities. In these early years, local farmers were upset by high prices charged by warehouses and railroads that held and transported their grain. The Grange members then lobbied for a series of "Granger Laws." While these laws didn't necessarily solve their issues, they did set a precedent for later regulation of private businesses for the public interest. However, the Grange was influential in the passage of the 1887 Interstate Commerce Act, which was the first law to federally regulate railroads to end unfair shipping rates.



Issued for the 100th anniversary of Rural Free Delivery.

The Grange was also influential in the establishment of Rural Free Delivery. Milton Trusler, an Indiana farmer and president of his local Grange, began campaigning for the service as early as 1880. The National Grange supported his idea and helped to make Rural Free Delivery a reality in 1891.

Over the years, the Grange also helped establish the Cooperative Extension Service and the Farm Credit System. It has also been a major supporter of youth farming groups such as 4-H and Future Farmers of America. A number of famous Americans have been members of the Grange, including Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, as well as artist Norman Rockwell. Of his time in the Grange, Roosevelt recalled, "For many years I have been a member of the Grange. I have felt at home in it because it embodies the fine flavor of rural living, which I myself have known and loved. Beyond this, it has been an instrument for expressing in useful activity the highest sentiments and deepest loyalties of Americans."

While membership has declined in recent years – to about 5,000 local Grange groups in 36 states – The Grange continues to lobby for American farmers to this day.



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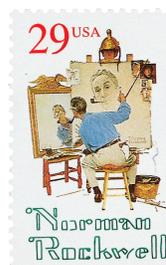
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