

THE EARLY GRANGER MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTHWEST

RALPH SMITH, Oklahoma College for Women, Chickasha

R. A. Baird, a deputy of the National Grange, appeared in Texas to organize the first subordinate Grange in the Southwest at Salado, Bell County, Texas, in July, 1873. Oliver H. Keller, a clerk in the Bureau of Agriculture, had organized with the assistance of several other government employees the National Grange or Order of Patrons of Husbandry in Washington in 1868. This secret organization whose objectives were to obtain for farm families happier home lives, more social intercourse and educational opportunities, and the advantages of cooperative dealing in business spread westward and became so popular in the Southwest that Baird convened delegates from subordinate Granges at Dallas in October, 1873, to organize the Texas State Grange, which included the Indian Territory under its jurisdiction.

During the middle seventies deputies were carrying on an extensive expansion program in all parts of this region. Lecturing from the back of plow-mule, saddle-horse, buggy, or wagon, these rustic missionaries planted units of the order at road crossings, in river bottoms, and at the end of almost impassable by-ways, installed officers, administered oaths, instructed the Patrons briefly in the ritual, collected the ten dollar organization fee, and hurried on to the next prospective community, leaving the young club to get along as best it could or to die as often happened after a short and lethargic life. Probably the most diligent worker in the Order was A. J. Rose of Bell County, Texas, who rose through the ranks to be Worthy Lecturer of the State Grange by 1876, and who with only a change of raiment and the necessary Grange implements dramatically carried the new philosophy to farmers in every corner of the Southwest. In the Indian Nation, where he enjoyed the hospitality of chief John Ross' palatial home at the Cherokee Capital, he found the white Grangers enthusiastic Patrons and the red brethren comprehending the spirit of the movement under J. W. Jordan, Grange deputy for the Territory. In 1876 the Order in the Southwest reached its peak, reporting over 1300 subordinate Granges and over 40,000 members. Apparently its mushroom growth had been too rapid for effective organization, however. Non-farmer members, such as petty politicians and business men who joined to take advantage of the cooperative business feature, caused much trouble. The lack of information on the unwritten work which could be given only by a State Grange officer retarded growth. Newspapers, charging that the secret feature of the order made it similar to the Odd Fellows and Know Nothing Party, caused its spread to be slow among alien settlements. Attacks by Grange leaders on "all middlemen" while they advanced reasons for the establishment of business cooperatives alienated merchants, professional men, newspapermen, and others who ordinarily would have been in sympathy with the farmer. Where ranchers and farmers disagreed over fencing the range the Grange met the bellicose acts of the cattlemen. By 1880 when A. J. Rose became Master of the State Grange of Texas and the Indian Territory to begin his ten years' service in that capacity the membership had dropped to less than 400. His diligence and more especially the success-

ful record of the Texas Cooperative Association, chartered in 1878 as the central marketing and purchasing agency for the Grangers located at Galveston, caused the membership to rise again to nearly 14,000 by 1884. The final lapse began with the decline of the cooperative system beginning in 1885. This was due primarily to the extension of goods on credit to the amount of nearly \$100,000 by the Texas Cooperative Association to the 150 local cooperative stores scattered throughout Texas and the Indian Territory, which in turn extended credit to Patrons. Beginning in 1886 a three year drouth, the severest ever recorded in the Southwest, made it impossible for the farmers to pay for the goods and ultimately pulled the whole cooperative structure down within the next decade. In 1885 the Farmer's Alliance, a semi-political order, entered the field to compete with the Grange for the allegiance of the farmers; and, both because the Alliance's Credit business system was more attractive to the farmers than the cash scheme advocated by the Grange and because the Alliance's *demands* on the government answered many Grangers' complaints that the lack of Grange success had been due to its failure to enter politics to obtain redress to what it styled *petitions*, many Grangers entered the Alliance with many other farmers whom the Grange had failed to attract.

An evaluation of the Grange remains to be made. In the field of business cooperatives, the Texas Grange Manufacturing Association, organized by the State Grange of Texas and the Indian Territory in 1875 with an authorized capital of \$250,000, possessed an iron foundry in Marion County, in northeast Texas, which was well equipped for hardening plows. Until its dissolution four years later this foundry saved the Patrons as much as forty percent on purchases of plow tools. The Patrons of several Texas counties bought the patent rights to the Clement Attachment, an improved device affixed to old-type textile mills, and set up cooperative plants with the expectation of converting cotton into thread, twine, and rough cloth; however, none was successful. One hundred and fifty local cooperative stores were established in Texas and Oklahoma. The Texas Cooperative Association, 1878-1903, with headquarters at Galveston, had an agent in New York City and bought directly from Eastern factories for local cooperatives. It also received agricultural products directly from farmers to market for them, thus reducing the established commission rate for handling cotton in Galveston, to mention only one minor success, from \$1.25 to 25c per bale. The Texas Farmer Grange Cooperative Publishing Association, begun in 1884, did all Grange printing and under the editorship of a verbose individualist, W. A. "Farmer" Shaw, published the *Texas Farmer* which Shaw used as an effective whip in election years. In 1913, the *Texas Farmer* became the *Progressive Farmer* and today is published as the *Farm and Ranch*. The Texas Grange Mutual Fire Insurance Association, organized in 1882, issued 100 policies covering \$120,000 worth of property held by local cooperative associations and individual Grangers. In 1888, the Grange established the Texas State Grange Fair Association, and on a 400 acre farm at McGregor, Texas, it established an experiment farm and an exhibition hall in which to hold annual State Grange fairs (it was so used until 1894) and to serve as the Grange capital of the Southwest. Today this imposing wooden structure, used as a livestock barn, is the only monument to the noblest effort of the farmers of the Southwest to establish their economic independence.

Though the Grange as an order refused to enter politics its force in the Southwest was felt in many ways. The Constitutional Convention that framed the present Texas State Constitution in 1876 was controlled by Grangers so devoted to their slogan of "retrenchment" in government that severe limitations were placed on salaries for state officials and taxing powers. This has since required the Constitution to be repeatedly amended before Texas could work out a system of public education. Laws requiring the election of public weighers, encouraging European immigrants, checking land speculating companies, setting a maximum interest rate and regulating railways had their origin with the State Grange, which held its annual convention in Austin when the State legislature convened. The Grange in the Southwest took up the fight of the National Grange for the abolition of the protective tariff, the establishment of an interstate commerce commission, the elevation of the Bureau of Agriculture to a position in the President's Cabinet, the labeling of foods, inflation, and popular election of senators.

Probably the most lasting contribution of the Grange was its social and educational influence. Its educational program attacked the farmers' homage to King Cotton by teaching crop diversification, tried to convince the ex-slaveholder that manual labor was not "undignified," advocated the use of newer machinery and methods of cultivation which slave labor had discouraged, demanded a better school system, and offered instead of the pernicious credit-mortgage system in vogue in the post-war South a cooperative financial scheme that was in itself a school in business principles. An extensive reading program was the Grangers' device for lifting the farmers out of their stolidness. The Order strove to place a newspaper in every farm home, and farm papers received a flush of articles contributed by Grangers and their wives. A surprising number of libraries and reading rooms were created in Grange halls. It was the demands of the Grangers that brought the enactment of a law for a six-month school term in Texas, and they were the first to demand in the Southwest better teachers, elevation of the scholastic age from 14 to 18, school consolidation, compulsory attendance, and free text books. They were especially vociferous in their attack upon the teaching of the classics while commercial and agricultural subjects and the natural sciences were neglected. Among the first secondary schools in the Southwest were a number of the Grange cooperative schools on the high school level that operated successfully. When the A. & M. College of Texas was opened in 1876, the Grange was in the process of establishing an experiment farm near Austin. The Grangers of the Southwest were the jealous guardians of the fortunes of the A. & M. College of Texas for two decades when legislators wanted to sacrifice it to the State University, and today it owes most of its status to the protection given by the Grangers in its infancy; while the Texas State College for Women (or C. I. A.), opened in 1901 at Denton, owes its birth and early progress to the Grange.