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**IF NOT ME, WHO? WHY A GROUP CONTINUES TO COME TOGETHER TO
ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF A MICHIGAN GRANGE**

VOLUME I

By

Jacquelyn Ann Lowman

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mass Media Ph.D. Program

2004

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ABSTRACT

IF NOT ME, WHO? WHY A GROUP CONTINUES TO COME TOGETHER TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF A MICHIGAN GRANGE

By

Jacquelyn Ann Lowman

This study is an exploration of community and community service. Its catalyst was the diffuse sense of public unease that community is eroding, a generalized perception that despite material comforts and technological advances, the anomie of modernity is stealing something fundamental from the essence of life. Research took the form of a case study of a local branch of the Grange, or the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, a fraternal community-service organization with roots in agriculture and the environment. Although the Grange, as a national entity, is suffering from the membership hemorrhaging that is all too typical of other voluntary groups, some local chapters, such as the subject of the study, continue to thrive. This work probed for the reasons.

After exploring contested understandings of the terms “community” and “community service” and providing the dissertation’s working definitions of them, research was guided by a set of overarching questions and subquestions. Among them: Why do people voluntarily form groups to address community needs? What do members of the group gain from addressing these needs? What are some of the benefits that communities can reap from having voluntary groups seek to resolve some of their needs?

Using such methods as participant observation, ethnography, oral history, and focus groups, the study gained insights into and possible answers for these and other issues and concepts. The study learned that many of the Fredonia Grange members came together and stay together because Fredonia Grange has been able to satisfy some of the most

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essential and motivating psychological and emotional needs for which they seek fulfillment in life: a way to define themselves, make meanings in their lives, be part of something greater than themselves, feel that they are valued and valuable, find empowerment, know that they can make a difference, create community, serve others. The findings of this research are not Grange specific, but have the potential to provide guidance to other groups and communities that are struggling to discover and preserve their essential cores and identities, adapt to the exigencies of modern life, and remain relevant and viable into the future.

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For Man and Commu

For Mom and Commie, whose love and faith has been unconditional.

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-Hilal Ismail The V

If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

—Hillel, *Talmud: The Wisdom of the Fathers*

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Every day since then, she
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Getting to this point has been a long, eventful journey. Mentioning all the people who have helped along the way would fill a substantial volume. I have been truly blessed to have been given great love and support throughout my life. Through the decades, there have always been family, friends, and shining examples to emulate. For this and for the miracle of life and all that it brings with it, I am eternally indebted, first of all, to my Creator. Beyond that, there are too many debts to adequately acknowledge. But a few deserve special mention.

I first met Lucinda Davenport, Associate Dean for Graduate Education, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, and the chair of my guidance committee, when I had just begun my doctoral program. When I said that I hoped that I would survive, she replied that not only would I survive, I would thrive. Every day since then, she has worked to make that prognostication a reality. She has been a constant, buoyant source of encouragement and hope. She has been a fine academic example; as important, she has been a true friend to my entire family.

Brenda Wrigley, now Associate Professor, Public Relations, S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, came along at just the right time. She had the vision and faith to believe that someone who had spent a lifetime with dusty old books could become an ethnographer. During her time at Michigan State University, she pushed and pulled me out of the Ivory Tower—and changed my life. I am honored that she has continued her connection with me.

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Jeff Charnley, Associate Professor, Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, Michigan State University, Director, Michigan State University Oral History Project, has been a marvelous tutor for oral history. His work and example have given me a glimpse of the vast range of situations and applications that oral history can embrace. He has also been an unfailing sounding board and invaluable asset to my growth as a scholar. His steadfastly positive reaction to my efforts is always a welcome tonic.

What can one say to someone who leaves the comfort of his retirement to almost literally hold one's hand during a long graduate program and dissertation? "Thank you" just does not seem adequate. Bill Cote, Professor Emeritus, Journalism, Michigan State University, has been my indefatigable supporter and cheering section for more years than either of us would probably care to admit. I have learned from Bill's scholarship and teaching. I have learned even more from Bill's life: he has borne a host of health afflictions with grace, dignity, and ceaseless good humor. His has been a gentle touch that leaves an indelible, enduring impression.

Together, these four members of my guidance committee have tried their best to form this rough piece of coal into a polished diamond. Superb mentors, they have allowed me to tread some unusual paths. They have remained constant and forbearing throughout a very long process. The flaws that remain in the work are mine alone.

When I first met Chuck Salmon, now Acting Dean, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, he was the Director of the Mass Media Ph.D. Program. He took a huge risk in accepting me, a woman whose background was in ancient languages, who acknowledged a considerable physical disability, and who had some inchoate visions of changing the world through communication and technology.

He did not stop there.

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He did not stop there, but has continued to offer help and support in the intervening years. I hope that he has never regretted his decision. I have never had a day that I have not felt enormous gratitude for finding the program.

Jeanne Drewes, Assistant Director, Access and Preservation, Michigan State University Libraries, and Anita Ezzo, Food Science and Technology Librarian, Michigan State University Libraries have helped my research immeasurably. They have afforded me tremendous opportunities to grow as a scholar. They have taught me a great deal about preservation and what is possible if one has the will and perseverance. They have taught me that the phrase “activist librarian” is not an oxymoron.

The Mass Media Ph.D. Program gave me an opportunity to sample a broad array of classes, all of which have enriched my work. I appreciate the lessons learned from my teachers: Bob LaRose, Sue Carter, Fred Fico, Bonnie Reece, Barry Litman, David Stowe, Kevin Kelly, and Lisa Fine. I have probably learned at least as much from my fellow students, especially the cohort with whom I have shared the Mass Media Ph.D. Program.

The Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies, and Media, and later the School of Journalism have given me a base of operations. The Connecticut College Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship helped me to start this program. The Provost Communication Project and the College of Nursing helped me hone old skills, develop new ones, and finance graduate school. The College of Communication Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School, through several small scholarships and a dissertation completion fellowship, made it possible for me to do fieldwork, make academic presentations, and work concertedly to complete this dissertation.

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This research would never have come to fruition without a truly compelling subject. For that I am infinitely indebted to the Grange. Beulah and Roland Winter were the first Grange members whom I got to know: they were my guides, were unfailingly cordial, opened their home—and their minds to me, answered countless questions, helped me realize that all Grangers are remarkable.

The late Helen Peck has been the muse of this project: once I met her, my doubts about my research vanished. She enabled me to reach deep inside and plumb personal depths that I did not know existed. She convinced me that I, too, could “do it.” Her spirit has guided the research. I believe that somewhere, somehow, she knows that. Helen’s daughters, the “Tech girls” Mary and Ginny, helped me get to know their mother. In the process, I discovered two women every bit as outstanding as their mom.

The research would have been far different without Athol Hazen’s unceasing help. He was an assiduous assistant, always there when needed. At a critical juncture, when I needed someone from the Grange to believe in what I wanted to do and to step up, he did so. I hope that his faith has been rewarded. Randy Nail was a terrific gopher. His actions speak louder than words. He is wrong though—it is not the Grange who is taking him somewhere, but he who is propelling the Grange.

I have learned so much from my interviewees—about the Grange, but more important, about life itself. I can never thank them enough. But I can, at least, mention them: Helen Hazen, everyone’s favorite mom; the late Reuben LaFountain, the embodiment of community service; Rich Hazen, the Grange’s star entrepreneur; Mary Houghton, who dares to dream the big dreams; Sue Withers, for whom I would drive

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Although I cannot call the focus group community participants by name, I am deeply obliged to their keen insights, which have enlightened this work. The Fredonia Grange member focus group participants were superb—open, thoughtful, perceptive, sharing, trusting. Their thoughts and feelings have contributed to so many answers. Even though I cannot adequately thank them, I can at least acknowledge them: Avis Williams, my potluck buddy and guardian angel; Paul Jones, the best friend a bluebird—or Granger—could have; Russ Clutter and Charlie Letts, the pride of CCAIS, who are never too busy to help someone else; Judy Dennis, who overcome some tough odds to find the Grange—much to its delight; Lois Hazen, Gwen Combs, and Jan Armour, who can never get away from those good people of the Grange—but who are renewed and made more fully human thereby; Don Johnson, who wants to keep Fredonia Grange alive; Twylia Webber, whose pride in Fredonia is palpable.

Being around the members of Fredonia Grange has been a real learning experience. All have enriched this project, but some have left ineffaceable memories: Marj Trine, a terrific e-mail buddy; Cecil Trine and Jim Mohn, a couple of lovable curmudgeons; Erma Mohn, a calm and cheerful presence; Marilyn Jones, great cook and craftsperson; Martha Rocco, who shows how to age gracefully; Andrea Peck, a truly kind lady. There are so many others who cheerfully work for Fredonia and the community: Shirley Clutter; Margaret Reincke; Karen Hardenburg; Jack Hardenburg; Mary Jane Fountain; Katrina Rome; Tom Rome; Judy Rocco; Joann Myers; Milford Combs; Dorothy Combs; Gail

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Morgan; Ray Morgan; Tammy Johnson, to name only a few. They have all been important to the research.

My friends and their unquestioning belief in my ability have played an integral part in bringing this to fruition. Nea constantly reminded me that it is never too late to become what one might have been. Jo's unflagging certainty that I could do whatever I wished has been a responsibility, but also a pole star that has helped me set my course. Without Don Rowley and his concern, I quite simply would not be here. Michael Herzfeld never let me lose faith that I could convey a message and make a positive difference.

My sister, Sharon, brother-in-law, Garry, and niece, Megan, have seen me through the long haul. Their support has been crucial.

Most of all, I need to acknowledge the incalculable debt that I owe to my mom, Barbara Lowman, and my best friend, Commie—a beautiful, gentle spirit, housed in a furry, canine body. They have understood when the meals were late, the walks were hurried, the schedule juggled, the study door barred. It is their unwavering love and faith in me that keeps me fully human. My goal is to be half the person that they think I am. I hope that this study, and what it engenders, gets me a bit further along that path.

PREFACE

I took the long way round to get to this point. The first twenty-one years of the journey were fairly standard. I was an awkward kid who lost herself in books and writing and who became fascinated by language: its beauty, its power. After high school, I started college, studying classics, trying to understand how language had developed and evolved. Then, when I was a junior in college, my father died and I had to leave school. Although I tried to return, financial and family pressures were too great. I was away from academia for about fifteen years, working, among other things, as a writer and editor for a major publishing company. At this point, I decided to resume my education. By going to school part-time while working full-time, I managed to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Classics. My passion for language reignited, I decided to probe language use and development even further back. I earned a Master of Arts in Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations: the ancient Sumerian and Akkadian of historic Babylonia.

By this time, I had to switch my focus to deal with a serious physical challenge. The childhood awkwardness had progressed to being a debilitating disability that affected mobility and that would at one point put me in a wheelchair and make it impossible to physically write or type or care for myself. I had to step back and examine my life, decide what I really wanted—and whether I could achieve it. It was a frightening time. The medical community could not determine the problem. In the meantime, it kept getting worse; there was no way of knowing how bad it would become. How could one plan for the future? How could one know if there would even *be* a future?

Although most physical functions were impaired, I remained able to speak—and think—and thus to communicate verbally. This was somewhat ironic, since I had always been more of a writer than a talker. But I learned that people are adaptable. When it became clear that whatever the problem was, it did not seem imminently fatal, I realized that I had to make the most of what I had. I learned about assistive technology and aids for daily living. I got a PC and voice recognition software that allowed me to run it and to write again. This gave me back my “voice” and let me reach out to others. I grew to realize that the beauty and power of language did not end in ancient times. As important as that may have been, in some ways, such as the profound, contemporary ramifications, it could not compare with the realities and potentialities of current usage.

I was very, very lucky. I had always been a person who had grappled with ideas, analyzed situations, and sought to conceptualize every situation, striving for just the right words with which to do it. I came from a tradition, a culture, and an environment that promoted this, that prepared and encouraged me to do this. This was a heritage that inculcated the need to understand and make sense of occurrences rather than passively accepting them; instead of harboring churning, inchoate feelings, it led one to apprehend them, examine them, verbalize them. The healing, reifying power of language! Once the amorphous dread, the shadowy weight, the sinister barrier, the nameless injustice *was* given a name, was framed in words, it could be pulled out into the daylight for all to see, to ponder, to analyze, to judge—and to resolve. It is true that the handmaidens of words are actions. But the catalyst, the motivating force behind the actions, for ill or good, is language. As a person of language, I was never truly voiceless. I was able to keep my fears and feelings of helplessness from turning inward into self-destruction. Although in

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many respects I might have appeared to be a marginalized person, I never truly felt that I was: the gift of language, used to conceptualize and articulate, gave me strength and kept me from becoming a passive victim.

I learned that others were not so fortunate. An infinite number of people were being marginalized by such conditions as race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, education, culture, creed, religion. Too many of these were voiceless: lacking the ideational tools to conceptualize and enunciate their states so that they could in turn motivate and mobilize themselves and the larger society to deal constructively with and ameliorate the conditions. So it was time to climb down from the Ivory Tower and do something to help give voice to some of these people.

I applied to and was accepted by the Mass Communication program at Michigan State University (MSU). This is a program under the aegis of the Advertising, Journalism, and Telecommunication departments. One is exposed to an interdisciplinary core and has the opportunity to sample other courses in such areas as sociology, psychology, history, law, public policy, economics. At first, no one in the program seemed to know quite what to do with me. Because I had a disability and was technology dependent, it was thought that Telecommunication would be the best home department. There, several well-meaning people talked about how I could help “my” people—those with disabilities. But as I had a chance to work through the core of courses and gain exposure to a wide range of thoughts, perspectives, and situations, I was reminded that *all* people are my people—there is more that unites us all than divides us, and people with disabilities do not have the market cornered on being marginalized.

I began to do research on historically marginalized groups. Up to this point, my work had always had an historical orientation. I believed that I was perhaps better physically suited for this. That impression had been reinforced by a number of academics who, through the years, had frequently pronounced that I would never be able to work with people because they would be alienated by my disability.¹

At about this time, I finally received a diagnosis for some of my physical problems. With the help of powerful medication, some of the worst of the symptoms were alleviated. After a period of treatment, I was able to relinquish the wheelchair and manually type. My mobility is still affected: I walk with a cane, continue to be awkward, lack dexterity and strength. But the former physical barriers are now greatly diminished.

By this time also, I had finished my core course work and some of the specializations. Because my emphasis is on qualitative research, and because MSU had a more quantitative orientation, I had created an overall course-work plan with a number of independent, qualitative studies. Two were scheduled for the following fall semester. The previous spring, I had taken a journalism history course. This had provided an opportunity to think about and utilize old agricultural journals and newspapers as tools and windows to gain insights into the lives of marginalized groups from different eras. As the former Michigan Agricultural College, MSU had long-standing ties to agriculture and farmers; its library housed a priceless collection of old agricultural periodicals. That is where I first encountered the *Grange Visitor*, the official newspaper of the Michigan State Grange from 1875 through 1896. I thought that something that to me seemed so

¹ This is somewhat euphemistically expressed. Some were much less kind and diplomatic in their choice of words. Incredible as it may sound, I had an academic advisor, before I came to MSU, who said that the world would be a better place if all persons with disabilities were exposed to the elements and left at birth.

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priceless would be showcased and housed in Special Collections, but was surprised to learn that it was kept in remote storage. The issues were apparently bound, one or two years together. I requested a few volumes. When I went to retrieve them, I felt a combination of elation and alarm: I was elated to have such a superb window into the past. But I was alarmed at the condition of the volumes. All of the issues were now more than a hundred years old. Although some of the paper for select issues may have had a rag/cloth base, much of the paper was real newsprint—thus from wood pulp with a highly acidic content. In addition, when the newspapers had been sent to subscribers, they had been folded; although they were open in the volumes, the sharp creases from long ago had taken a toll. The leather bindings of the volumes themselves were dropping apart. Many of the pages inside were clearly fragile, discolored, and turning to dust.

I was not sure how to proceed. I did not want to worsen the papers' condition. On the other hand, just letting them quietly molder did not seem like a good solution. I hoped that perhaps by working with these documents and disseminating information about them, I might be a force for their appreciation and preservation. So I contacted Jeanne Drewes, Assistant Director, Access and Preservation, Michigan State University Libraries, asking for guidance on how to handle the periodicals. I said that I realized that old agricultural papers might not seem important in the face of other pressing library needs, but that I hated to see them deteriorating without preserving their priceless legacy. I received a very supportive, enthusiastic response from Jeanne, saying that the newspapers mattered a great deal to the library and that she and Anita Ezzo, Food Science and Technology Librarian, were in the process of writing a grant proposal for

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funds that would ensure their preservation. She asked if I would like to write a letter of support: nothing could have stopped me from doing so.²

Having received encouragement and advice on how to handle these fragile documents, I continued my work with the *Grange Visitor*. I used it as the basis for one of my independent, qualitative research studies—this one, with Bill Cote, Professor, Journalism, Michigan State University, using old newspapers as a source of history.

As I read this paper, I grew more and more excited about this entity called the “Grange.” Here was an organization that had advocated equality for women almost from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century; whose goal was to help people attain their highest potential; that had valued people regardless of gender, age, class, etc.; whose

² A search of the OCLC Union List of Periodicals database reveals that the MSU library has the most complete run of the *Grange Visitor*, the official newspaper of the early Michigan State Grange. It was published from 1875–1896; MSU is missing only two years. Other researchers, such as Donald Marti, a history professor who has written on the Grange, readily acknowledge this invaluable resource. Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Jeanne Drewes, April 23, 2001a, in author’s possession; Jeanne Drewes, Assistant Director, Access and Preservation, Michigan State University Libraries, e-mail to author, April 23, 2001, in author’s possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Jeanne Drewes, April 23, 2001b, in author’s possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Jeanne Drewes, April 25, 2001, in author’s possession; Jeanne Drewes, e-mail to author, April 25, 2001, in author’s possession.

This was the beginning of a fruitful collaboration. I have learned about Jeanne and Anita’s Agriculture and Rural Life in Michigan: 1820-1945 project, in which they are identifying and preserving state and local published literature relating to agriculture and rural life in America between 1820 and 1945. Much of this material is Grange literature. I have tried to help identify sources for the materials and rank them in order of importance. I have been delighted to have helped promote increased relationships between MSU and the Grange as the Grange looks for fitting repositories for some of its priceless records and MSU has advised how the Grange can better preserve those records and materials that it does keep. I am very excited by the potential not only to microfilm the old Grange and agricultural materials, thus preserving them for posterity, but also to digitize them so that they can be put on CDs, DVDs, or online and can then be accessed by virtually anyone, anytime, anywhere. It is a pleasure to see MSU taking the lead in recognizing and honoring the rich agricultural heritage that is a part of us all. In the interests of time and space, every instance of our prolific e-mail correspondence is not mentioned here: only a few highly significant and exemplary messages and meetings are noted. They characterize, however, the bulk of our communication. Jeanne Drewes and Anita Ezzo, meeting with author, October 30, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Jeanne Drewes and Anita Ezzo, March 10, 2003, in author’s possession; Anita Ezzo, e-mail to author, March 11, 2003, in author’s possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Jeanne Drewes, March 13, 2003, in author’s possession; Jeanne Drewes, e-mail to author, March 15, 2003a, in author’s possession; Jeanne Drewes, e-mail to author, March 15, 2003b, in author’s possession; Jeanne Drewes and Anita Ezzo, Preservation Workshop, Statewide

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My other independent study was to be on ethnography with Brenda Wrigley, then Assistant Professor, Public Relations, Michigan State University. I, the person who existed for dusty old books, was supposed to go out and talk with people. Initially, I felt that I had no idea with whom to talk or how to go about it. Then I realized that this was the perfect opportunity to try to learn whether there was a contemporary Grange and, if so, to discover more about it.

An online search lead me to the National Grange Web site, an adequate product, with links for all thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia that have state Grange organizations.³ Some of the links led to sophisticated state Grange Web pages; others led to a bare-bones outline (not always accurate), listing the names and addresses of a state's Grange officers, with email contacts, if available. The Michigan State Grange had one of the latter Web sites, constructed for it by the National Grange.⁴ I e-mailed the state office, briefly describing my position and research, asking if there were any Granges in my area, and if there would be any members who would be willing to talk with me about the Grange. Peggy Johnston, Secretary, Michigan State Grange, responded promptly, suggesting that I contact Beulah and Roland Winter of Marshall, Michigan. Both have been involved with the Grange on the local, county, state, and national levels for many decades, and remain active.⁵ Despite their hectic schedules, they made an appointment

Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

³ National Grange, *National Grange Web Site*, <http://www.nationalgrange.org>.

⁴ The Michigan State Grange now has a greatly improved Web site, <http://www.michigangrange.org>.

⁵ Peggy Johnston, Secretary, Michigan State Grange, email to author, July 10, 2001, in author's possession.

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for me to see them soon. I planned that my initial meeting would last about one-half hour; four hours later, I was still sitting talking with them.⁶ That was my first indication, which has continually been confirmed since then, that Grange people love to talk.

At the end of the conversation with the Winters, I knew that I had found just the sort of example that I was seeking: people who were trying to articulate what their organization meant to them and to their greater communities, people who were trying, albeit often unconsciously, to express an identity so that they could preserve it. It seemed that this was an area that cried out for further exploration and explication. I was so excited. But then my research almost got derailed.

I have osteoporosis. When medical treatment enabled me to get up from the wheelchair, my doctor suggested that, although it would be painful, I try to walk in order to prolong my life. So I began to take slow, short walks with my golden retriever, Commie. Friday, July 27, 2001 did not start well: I had to have an emergency root canal. By that night, I just wanted to relax. But I had a rule that I had to walk, so Commie and I set off. There were still a few hours of daylight; my neighbor, Don, was mowing his lawn. We waved as Commie and I began. Other than that, it was fairly quiet; there was little traffic. We headed down the dirt road. We had not gone far when I heard someone running up behind me. I thought that it was a jogger, so I stepped off the road where Commie was sniffing bushes. Suddenly, I felt myself enveloped by strong arms and a

⁶ Beulah Winter, Secretary, Home Grange, officer of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, Michigan State Grange Deaf Awareness Director, Michigan State Grange Historical Collection Committee member, active at the local, county, state and national Grange levels for more than fifty years, community activist, meeting with author, July 19, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Roland Winter, Master, Home Grange, officer of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, Michigan State Grange Executive Committee member, Michigan State Grange Historical Collection Committee member, National Grange Historical Preservation Committee member, active at the local, county, state and national Grange levels for

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muscular body. A voice hissed in my ear, “I’ve got a knife and it’s sharp!” I thought that this must be a sick joke. I managed to half turn—and saw a huge hunting knife as the assailant began to stab. I grabbed at the knife with my right hand to protect myself. I began to call for help. The attacker half-dragged, half-lifted me across the road, trying to draw me into the woods. I believed that I was going to die—but determined not to make it easy for him. I fought and threw us off balance; we landed at the edge of the road, him on top of me. It was clear that he was going to kill me—but he did not want to do so right out in the road. He kept saying that we must go into the woods. I kept thinking that if I could keep out of the woods, someone might come to help me.

It seemed as though we lay there for hours, although it could not have been more than minutes. I will never forget the look in his eyes—the look of a predatory animal closing in for the kill. Suddenly, I heard another voice saying, “Is everything all right here?” The attacker’s expression changed to one of cunning as he answered, “Yes, everything’s fine.” Although I thought that it might lead to more stabbing, I knew that this was my only chance, so I yelled, “No it’s *not*!” With that, the assailant, John Boda, was pulled off me. I lay there for a moment, looking up at a face—it was Don, my neighbor! I managed to get up, get my cane. Don asked me if I could walk. I was unsure, but nodded. He told me to go—he said that I could stop at his house if I could not get home.

I do not know how I made the walk home; although I tried to hurry, it seemed as though I were moving in slow motion, but I finally got there. It was only then, when I went to open the door, that I discovered that my hand and arm were covered with blood

more than fifty years, community activist, meeting with author, July 19, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

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from my stab wounds. All I could think of, though, was that Don was still out there with Boda—Boda armed and dangerous. I entered the house, intent on getting to a phone to call the police. Mom, who was in another room, called out to me, asking why I was back so soon. I told her that I had been attacked. She ran into the kitchen, saw me, and asked “By what?” “By a man with a knife.” I asked her to call 911, since I was going into shock by now and could hardly speak. The police responded quickly. By that time, Boda, who was not looking for a fight but had, in a rage, wanted to harm someone who appeared helpless, had fled from Don. There was a police and sheriff’s department manhunt, which netted Boda after some hours. But a long legal process lay ahead and I wondered if I could get through that and continue my research at the same time. Yet, once I reflected on the situation, I realized that there truly was no question, no debate—I had to keep going.

It may seem trite or melodramatic to talk about a near-death experience or having a second chance—that is, unless you have been there. I saw death in Boda’s eyes, saw how slender and fragile the thread of life is. It is a miracle that I am still here: there is no way that someone my size (five feet two inches, 115 pounds) should have been able to fight off someone over six feet tall, weighing 230 pounds. Further, what made Don look down the road where he had just seen me walking, realize that I should not have been out of sight yet, turn off his lawn mower, and, although he felt foolish, walk down the road—to save my life? I learned about terrible evil that day, but also about great courage and goodness. I do not know why the assault occurred—why I was attacked by a complete stranger. But I knew that being alive was a miracle, a gift—and that I needed to do something with the opportunity, to give back in return.

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So, after a short recuperation, I went back to my research. I set up another appointment with the Winters. I told them that I was looking for a person whose life story would be compelling and also serve as an apt introduction to and manifestation of the Grange. They told me about Helen Peck, the matriarch of Fredonia Grange. Once I heard about her, I knew that I had an ideal topic. Researching Helen Peck brought me into contact with many remarkable people, not least of whom was the subject herself.

At the end of that semester, I wrote two papers: one on the *Grange Visitor* and the people who seemed to come alive within its pages; the other on Helen Peck, the remarkable pillar and conscience of the Grange. Both papers were well received. But again, I was confronted with a choice: I could not concentrate on both the past Grange and the present Grange at the same time; trying to do so would mean short-changing each. I had to decide on which era to focus. I ultimately decided that the most compelling story for me was the contemporary Grange and its struggle for survival. Thanks to the efforts of Jeanne Drewes, Anita Ezzo, and others, the old Grange newspapers should be there for future researchers. But if the Grange continued down the path on which it seemed to be headed, there might not long be living Grangers with whom to interrelate. I had a unique opportunity; I decided to seize it.

Beulah and Roland Winter had been my main Grange contacts. I initially planned to concentrate on them and their families' long history with the Grange. But Beulah became very ill, requiring a long hospitalization and recuperation. If my work was to continue without an uncertain hiatus, I had to look elsewhere. So I opened up my work to other Grangers; since I have been so heartened and energized by those results, the work will ultimately include other individuals and groups as well.

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As hackneyed as it may sound, this work has changed my life. It taught me a lot about people, and about myself. When I began, I wondered if people would overlook my disability, or if it would be too off-putting. I learned that most people are able and willing to move beyond one's disability—if one gives them a reason to do so. My research forced me to learn and apply skills of which I never dreamed I was capable. It reminded me that ideas and will can overcome nearly any physical barrier. And it affirmed the awesome power of language. It has made an incomparable difference in my life. I am convinced that it can for so many others, as well, and am determined to do what I can to help bring that to pass. This is the first step on the journey: I look forward to the thousand miles to come.⁷

⁷ This refers to the traditional saying: "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Lao-tzu, "The Way of Lao-tzu, 64," in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002): 59:12.

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INTRODUCTION: NOSTALGIA—AND A SENSE OF CONTEMPORARY LOSS

During the late spring of 2004, over a span of a few weeks, a series of events took place that both took the pulse and reflected the mood of many in the United States.¹ On May 29, 2004, nearly sixty years after the end of World War II, a memorial was dedicated to those who lent their support, both on the battlefield and on the home front. On June 6, 2004, President Bush, along with other world leaders, gathered together to honor the sixtieth anniversary of the Allied landing at Normandy, which opened another battle front and helped turn the tide in World War II. On June 5, 2004, former United States President Ronald Reagan lost his long battle with Alzheimer disease.

At Last: A World War II Memorial

The National World War II Memorial took seventeen years of struggle to erect. Its catalyst was an Ohio World War II veteran who, in 1987, asked his Congresswoman why there was not a large scale national monument to those who participated in the war. It took six years to gain congressional authorization; planning took another seven years, particularly acquiring an acceptable site—its ultimate location on the National Mall was hotly contested. But it was finally completed and opened to the public on April 29, 2004, a month before the formal dedication. This particularly was to make it possible for more veterans, now all in their seventies, eighties, and beyond, to visit the memorial before it would be too late for them.²

¹ Supporting data for this chapter have been drawn from extensive sampling of media coverage of events within the United States and abroad. Unless specifically noted, the basis for the writing here is a composite of coverage by the *New York Times*, the *Lansing State Journal*, CBS news, NBC news (with its progeny MSNBC and CNBC), ABC news, and CNN (including its offspring, Headline News).

² National World War II Memorial, Washington DC, "Welcome," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/>

The dedication ceremony was replete with the powerful and famous. Movie star Tom Hanks, who became identified with World War II through his role in the film *Saving Private Ryan* and who was the national spokesperson for the World War II Memorial Campaign spoke. So did Tom Brokaw, NBC news anchor and author of best-selling books about the World War II generation that helped raise the national and international consciousness. Bob Dole, one of the United States' best-known World War II veterans, who overcame grievous wounds to have a distinguished congressional career and became the memorial's national chairman, also addressed the audience. Other governmental luminaries, such as former Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, sat on the stage during the formal ceremonies. The current President Bush gave the keynote address and accepted the memorial on behalf of the people of the United States.³

Perhaps it was the nonfamous, the "everyday" soldiers who did their jobs, came home without fanfare, and settled down to build a peaceful future from the detritus of war who garnered the most rapt attention. Experts from the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution presciently realized that the dedication was an unparalleled opportunity to record and preserve the memories and stories of many of those who participated in the war—before the chance was gone forever. From the very young to the very old, people gathered around the aged

default.asp?page=home.asp; National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, "Overview: Introduction," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=overview.asp&subpage=intro>; National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, "Correcting the Critics," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=overview.asp&subpage=critics>; National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, "Chronology," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=overview.asp&subpage=chronology>; Bob Dole, "National WW II Memorial: A Message of Freedom," National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=overview.asp&subpage=dole>.

³ National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, "Introduction," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=dedication2.asp&subpage=intro>; National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC, "Events," <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=dedication2.asp&subpage=events>; Michael

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veterans, drawn by an irresistible force, mesmerized by tales of almost incomprehensible hardship, courage, and ultimate triumph. Sometimes the tales came amid tears; at other times, they were told in surreal voices, as if the speakers were peering backward into distant dreams. But throughout the stories, a common theme sounded: They were able to succeed and prevail because they did so together. Millions of individuals had come together, been united by a common purpose, created synergy and community, and prevailed as one because of that. Although individual medals may have been awarded at times, the recipients accepted them on behalf of the larger group. Those veterans who were able to be present at the dedication did so with the deep reverence and conviction that they were representing all those who had been a part of the war effort. Even some of the invited officials with tickets to the dedication eschewed this event so that they could have a few more moments, listening to these extraordinary stories from people who perceived themselves as profoundly typical and ordinary. As they said, being brave did not seem to be remarkable—for them, everyone was brave.⁴

Most veterans who visited the memorial seemed delighted by the recognition that they had never sought, deprecatingly explaining that they were simply doing their duties. Filled with deep emotions, they struggled for words, trying to articulate what this meant for them. Haltingly, they sought to express that this memorial was not so much for them as for their comrades who could not be there today: those who had not made it home and those who had fallen during the intervening years. Some also indicated that the monument was bigger than even this—that it symbolized will and works of a nation, both

Janofsky, "Veterans Gather to Dedicate World War II Memorial," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004, http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

⁴ Lynette Clemetson, "Stories of World War II Quietly Told by Those Who Won It," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004, http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

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then and now, and the power of millions of everyday people to build and achieve something great. There were some, though, who could not help wondering why, if it were going to happen, it had taken so many years. Why did it have to wait until 3 out of every 4 United States World War II veterans had died (leaving about 4 million of an original 16 million) and the ranks of the survivors were thinning by approximately 1,100 a day?⁵ Perhaps the answer lies more in the present than in the past; perhaps the memorial is not so much for those, living and dead, who brought the United States through World War II as it is an effort for the contemporary nation and its people to reconnect and draw inspiration from what some perceive as their better, truer natures. It may not be so much an effort to recreate or rewrite the past as it is to transfer its more estimable virtues to the present, using what now seems the moral clarity and optimism of those times to fashion a comparable future.

D-Day, Revisited

Similar strands are interwoven through the tapestry of sixtieth anniversary D-Day commemorations. Several of the notables who had been at the World War II Memorial dedication were there as well: President George W. Bush, giving another keynote address, Tom Hanks, Tom Brokaw. They were joined by more of the famous, leaders of twenty nations including: Jacques Chirac, president of France; Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom; Vladimir Putin, president of Russia; and, in an intriguing and controversial gesture of reconciliation, Gerhard Schroeder, chancellor of Germany—the first German leader to take part in D-Day anniversary ceremonies. As Tom Brokaw, who

⁵ John Files, “Decades Waiting and Not a Day to Spare for Veterans at World War II Memorial,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2004, http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

spoke that day, asserted, D-Day was a metaphor for World War II United States: a gathering of many, drawn from disparate communities—farms, small towns, cities—led by a man from a small town in the heartland, who together created synergy through their common will and purpose.⁶

The biggest luminaries on this international stage were the veterans who had made the pilgrimage back to where they had endured such battle carnage and lost so many comrades. Filled with pride, wearing their old uniforms and medals, they were eager to talk about their experiences. A number also contrasted those actions with the current military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq, many contending that there was no comparison since their war had a clear purpose—and current hostilities did not.⁷

The other star of the sixtieth anniversary commemoration was not there physically, but his presence was tangible everywhere. Ronald Reagan died on the afternoon before the ceremonies. Commentators remarked that, even in death, and after being out of the public eye for a decade, the former president's timing was impeccable. For most of the United States media, his passing completely overshadowed the contemporary D-Day rites and those enacting them. Most coverage was cursory, particularly of the present events. What coverage there was primarily looked backward twenty years to President Reagan's appearance and his "Boys of Pointe du Hoc" speech, one of the more memorable ones of his presidency. With his superb sense of drama, he made that day live again for his

⁶ Elisabeth Bumiller, "How a Quiet Observance Evolved into a Day of Drama," *New York Times*, June 7, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; MSNBC, "Leaders Honor D-Day Veterans in Normandy," <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5144550/>; Tom Brokaw, "A Metaphor for America," MSNBC News, <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5113399/>.

⁷ Elaine Sciolino, "In First, Allies and Axis Unite on Norman Coast to Remember D-Day," *New York Times*, June 7, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; Richard W. Stevenson, "In D-Day Rite, Bush Praises Veterans of Normandy," *New York Times*, June 7, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

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listeners, many of them survivors of the fight up the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. He skillfully interwove the fibers from 1944 with those of 1984, fashioning a fabric that showed that the two eras were not separated by an unbridgeable abyss but were animated by the same types of people accomplishing the same sorts of purposes. The American flags flying at half mast on the coast of France presaged the week of national mourning that lay ahead for the late president.⁸

A Love Affair with the “City on a Hill”

For five days, from June 7 through June 11, the nation mourned, both officially and personally. Tributes from the rich and powerful poured in, flags were lowered, and the former president was lionized on both coasts by a veritable who’s who of international governmental and entertainment personalities. But perhaps the more touching testaments came from those without specific invitations to the main events, the everyday people who endured hours of traffic jams and still more hours standing in long lines, often in sweltering heat, just for a few moments of quiet reflection before President Reagan’s casket. While the president’s body lay in state at his presidential library in California, more than 100,000 are estimated to have passed by. Countless thousands more lined the route of his procession to the Capital rotunda, where he would again lie in state and another 100,000, at least, filed through. When Nancy Reagan, the late president’s widow, brought the body back to California, crowds of well-wishers lined the entire motorcade route back to the presidential library, cheering, waving flags, and

⁸ Alessandra Stanley, “Once Again, Reagan Lands the Big Television Moment,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; Ronald Wilson Reagan, “Speech Commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of the D-Day Landing in Normandy,” MSNBC News, <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5146000/>.

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holding their hands over their hearts.⁹ A sampling of comments from those who stood in line at the presidential library capture the mood well. According to Joan Liebke, “Ronald Reagan and his family meant so much to me. What he did for the country has changed so many things. I was very moved just to be close to him today and to feel the spirit of who he was.” In the words of Moises Almendariz, a marine recently returned from Iraq who brought his mother so that they could mourn together, “A ton of bricks fell on me when I heard he had died. He was more than just our commander in chief. He was a very honorable man.” Reagan Wilson was named for the president by his parents, who expected great things of both of them. In his opinion, “The story of Reagan is the story of America, one of manifest destiny.”¹⁰

Ronald Wilson Reagan was president from 1980–1988, but he was very much of figure of the Depression and World War II generation. Although he was once employed by the Hollywood studios to act in its mythic portrayals of the United States, the image and life that he created for himself were perhaps his most brilliant work: not even the most skillful screenwriter could have done better. Born and raised in the heartland, Ronald Reagan described his youth as a Huck Finn idyll. He put himself through college by working summers as a lifeguard, saving scores of people. In college he excelled at sports and theater. Graduating at the height of the Depression did not afford many opportunities, but Reagan capitalized on his resonant voice and theatrical

⁹ Marilyn Berger, “Ronald Reagan Dies at 93; Fostered Cold-War Might and Curbs on Government,” *New York Times*, June 6, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; National Desk, “Washington Heat Wilts the Waiting,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

¹⁰ John M. Broder and Charlie LeDuff, “In California, 100,000, One by One, Pay Tribute to a President,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

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delivery, first as a radio sportscaster in the Midwest, then, after passing a screen test, as an actor in Hollywood movies and television.

Although some denigrated his acting background, he never disavowed it and used it to great effect. He developed impeccable timing and delivery, the ability to inspire, motivate, and reassure with his voice, his look, and his actions. To a nation sunken into recession, inflation, and a sea of recriminations in the post-Watergate era, he provided a potent elixir and a soothing balm. He renewed the faith of many, persuading them that a boy from a small Midwestern town could don a white Stetson, ride into the West, and lead a weary nation to a future in which the best was yet to come. He accepted the conventional wisdom that during World War II, those of the United States had done great things. But one of his greatest feats was that he persuaded many Americans that they still had what it takes to achieve even greater things.

Some bedrock concepts that framed the last day of official memorials stand out as embodiments of President Reagan's philosophy. One was the image of the United States as a "City on a Hill." Early in the service at the National Cathedral, at President Reagan's request,¹¹ Sandra Day O'Connor, whom he had appointed as the first female justice of the Supreme Court, read from John Winthrop, who in 1630 preached "We must consider that we shall be as a city on a hill." Later in the service, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Washington sounded the same theme by reading the Gospel of Matthew's

¹¹ The Reagans planned much of the funeral back in the early 1980s. This was not a sign of morbid obsession on their part: soon after taking office, a president is asked to prepare a plan for his funeral. This is particularly important should the president die while in office. If the president survives his term(s), the presidential funeral plans may change or be superseded in the intervening years. Richard Nixon, for example, did not have a state funeral. The Reagans had to make some adjustments: After the Reagan library was built in California, they added segments that incorporated that venue into the overall arrangements. They had to make changes in some of the people involved: for example, the Reverend Billy Graham, their first choice for minister, could not officiate because of frail health. But, in general, the ceremonies were elaborations on the earlier design.

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Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hid."¹²

Many hours later and a continent away, the president's casket was placed in a crypt at his presidential library. The crypt is embraced by a curved wall that bears an inscription of words Reagan first publicly uttered when he opened the library in 1991. "I know in my heart that man is good. That what is right will always eventually triumph. And there's purpose and worth to each and every life."¹³

Halcyon Days?

Why did people mourn the passing of President Reagan with such intensity? Surely it was not because his long journey through the twilight of Alzheimer's was finally ended. Before that, he had by all accounts had a long and happy life, feeling more fulfilled than many. Perhaps it was not so much that they mourned his passing as that they grieved for themselves and their contemporary age of diminished possibilities, which his death and reflections upon the contrasting achievements of his prime brought into sharp focus.

This is not the place to delve deeply into the differences between perception and reality. It should be noted, however, that the past is often viewed through a rose-tinted and distorting prism of time that makes memories of experiences accentuate only certain aspects of the original experiences. Our current memories can also be influenced by the ultimate outcome of an experience and our need to rationalize our place in it. As some say, it is the winners who write history and who use it to fashion myths to build the present and future.

¹² Todd S. Purdum, "At Rites for Reagan, Soaring Farewells," *New York Times*, June 12, 2004, http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main.

¹³ MSNBC, "Sun Sets as Reagan Laid to Rest in California: Bush Leads Tributes before Late President Flown out of Washington," <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5144264>.

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In the aftermath of his death, it is hard to speak critically of a man who gave his best to his country, helped it find renewal and bridge difficult times, and generally managed to behave with decency and courtesy. Still, neither the 1980s, nor the 1930s and 1940s, to which Ronald Reagan linked them, were halcyon days. Today, amid the romanticism of hindsight, it is easy to look upon World War II as a superb victory, a testament to all that is good in the United States. What is dropped from the story is that war is the ultimate failure, the last resort when all else fails. If that generation was so supremely gifted, so very special, why could they not reach out to those in other countries and build bridges of understanding—and avoid the near apocalypse of World War II? Perhaps this is glossed over because it is impossible to comprehend the sheer enormity of loss: tens of millions killed, more tens of millions permanently maimed, a generation decimated, nations

devastated. Under such conditions, any “victory” could be Pyrrhic at best. In contrast, Reagan’s presidency did not face such terrible trials or win such deliverance. But many at the time and now are grateful to him for helping them find hope and faith in their country and themselves after long, dark years of assassination, racial unrest, turmoil over Vietnam, Watergate, and paralyzing inflation and recession. Again, memory can be selective: in those who venerate Reagan, it tends to overlook that during the 1980s, the United States began building gargantuan deficits, inequalities among people intensified, and the Pandora’s Box of corporate greed was flung open. These problems, which have exploded in the intervening years, continue to plague the United States.

It is hardly surprising that these eras were not perfect. One significant difference between then and now, however, is that both the Depression–World War II period and the 1980s were manifested in a great communicator: for the earlier time, it was Franklin

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Delano Roosevelt; for the 1980s, it was Ronald Wilson Reagan. Both men had an ineffable enthusiasm and optimism, a buoyancy, a palpable and indefatigable faith in the power of the people and their ability to come together, act concertedly, and accomplish anything. They believed intensely, conveying this conviction effectively and persuasively. Because they believed, many people also came to believe in themselves and the collective vision, accomplishing things of which they had never dreamed.¹⁴

The United States, in the early twenty-first century, continues to face difficult tests. As was noted, many of the problems already cited are with us still: crippling deficits, racial unrest, inequality, worldwide political instability, environmental degradation, globalization in all areas—particularly the economy. These and others pose serious challenges, but surely not more severe than what those other periods faced. Yet people no longer seem to feel that they have the capability to overcome or even ameliorate them. They are bombarded with images of themselves as a nation of hedonists. But unlike the previous eras, they have no compelling communicator, no visionary who can reveal to them their best selves, carrying them toward that shining City on the Hill. They are told, implicitly and explicitly, that the days when Americans could come together, work as one toward a common goal, and change the world, one step at a time, are over. So as they mourned Reagan, they were also mourning themselves—their sense of lost possibilities.

¹⁴ Berger, "Ronald Reagan Dies at 93"; Broder and LeDuff, "100,000, One by One, Pay Tribute"; David Stout, "From Lincoln on, a Time of Grieving Has Been One of Reconciling," *New York Times*, June 11, 2004, http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; Bill Carter, "Day after Day, Funeral Filled the Small Screen," *New York Times*, June 12, 2004, <http://web1>

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The Promise of Community

What does all this indicate? Is this nothing more than the nostalgia that a contemporary era is apt to feel for an earlier time, one now bathed in the rosy glow of distance and hindsight? Or is it an expression of something deeper, a widespread unease that something fundamental is missing from contemporary life, a primal yearning for the apparent moral clarity that seemed to arise from the almost palpable feelings of community and connection that that earlier generation felt? Is it truly missing? If it is, can it be found, replaced, renewed?

This study will examine some of the evidence that has been marshaled by others who claim that, by and large, people within the United States are no longer fashioning the myriad personal interconnections and interrelationships that create rich, multifaceted communities and societies. Perhaps even more important than this data are the indications that many within the society perceive this deterioration to be true. Such dysfunction produces stunted, warped individuals and societies: the members of a community, and the communities that make up societies, must be engaged and involved in them for their own health and well being, as well as that of the larger whole.

But all is not lost. There is a growing body of evidence that a number of people are not content to wring their hands over or turn away from problems. Instead, they are rolling up their sleeves, determined to make a difference, or to at least try. Each of them, alone, is capable of accomplishing something. But when they join together in associations with common purposes, their possible impact multiplies exponentially.

.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc6_SP02?sw_aep=msu_main; Purdum, "Soaring Farewells"; MSNBC, "Reagan Laid to Rest."

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This study is, in part, an examination of a group of people who have come together to address community needs and who have been greatly empowered in the process. At a time when many other community-service organizations are atrophying, this one continues to thrive. This study will explore why the members of this group continue to come together, what they derive from the work and associations, and what the community, in turn, derives from it. In doing so, it will not only recount the compelling story of one successful group; it also will delineate a template, a sort of guidebook that other groups can adapt to their unique needs as they seek to maintain, renew, or create their groups' relevance and viability within their communities.

A Word about Voice

Throughout the text, when the foci of the research are not speaking in their own voices, the study is stitched together by a third person.¹⁵ Depending upon the context,

¹⁵ The author agonized over how best to handle this situation. In researching and reporting a study such as this, there is a desire to let the events, thoughts, and participants speak for themselves. An author becomes acutely aware of her own inadequacies, her inability to be completely objective. She does not want the study to become a pretext for autobiography. On the other hand, the author is immutably convinced that what this study has uncovered is significant and needs to be shared. She is also heartened by the knowledge that no observer can ever attain perfect objectivity: when one inserts oneself into an event, even if it is "just" to observe and report it from behind the secrecy of a two-way mirror, one inevitably has an impact upon the outcome, even if it is only in what aspects one can grasp and report. Further, the author *has* been a participant in this study, in the various roles enumerated above. Therefore, she will not affront the reader with claims of total dispassion. She can, however, unequivocally assert that as she has written this text, she has weighed every word, perspective, and conclusion, striving to strike, with the integrity, responsibilities, and ethics of a researcher, the best balance between depicting the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other participants as they intended them, and portraying aspects so that readers can apprehend them. When the author has written about herself, her activities, in the third person, she has tried to do so as she would with any other third person—without privileging, justifying, or distorting the depiction. Although these efforts will inevitably fall short—there can never be complete parity of treatment since, for example, one can be aware of one's feelings, thoughts, and activities in a way one can never attain with another—the combination of consciousness, diligence, and an attempt to view her actions as an audience might helps to make these stories less biased. This approach finds support in the work of Paul Atkinson, professor of sociology and head of the School of Social and Administrative Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff and Martyn Hammersley, reader in educational and social research, School of Education, the Open University, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. Among other things (including a scholarly exploration of ethnography and participant observation), their work is a useful reminder that all research is, to some degree, personal and human and that one cannot let oneself become paralyzed by the certain knowledge that it will never be perfect. Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, "Ethnography and Participant

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she is referred to by such terms as author, researcher, narrator, observer, interviewer, moderator, transcriber, analyst. Unless explicitly noted to the contrary, all these words denote the same person.

What the Balance of the Study Does

The rest of this text consists of nine chapters, an appendix, and a bibliography. Chapters two through eight conclude with summaries of the major points covered therein. The appendix contains copies of the research instruments used in fieldwork. Brief descriptions of the chapters' contents follow here:

Chapter two examines whether community, and, in particular, close interactions among community members to sustain the community and one another, appear to be in inexorable decline, or whether there are indications of community renaissance. It discusses the significance of community and describes the contribution that this study makes to the community debate.

Chapter three draws from decades of literature on community to ponder what, essentially, community is. The chapter defines some of the possibly contested terms that are used in the study and states the research questions that have guided and inspired the present research.

Chapter four describes the triangulated methods used in the study. The combination of case study, participant observation and ethnography, oral history, and focus groups wove a deeper, richer, more multistranded tapestry of life than any single-stranded method could have. This chapter explains how the particular case study of Fredonia Grange was chosen.

Observation," chap. 15 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*," edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna

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Chapter five is filled with history. It gives a brief history of the Grange at the national and state levels, examining how past and present decisions, concepts, and actions may influence the Grange's future. A succinct history of Fredonia Grange illustrates the evolution of the Grange and some of its attendant problems.

The next three chapters deal with the results obtained by using the methods previously mentioned. Chapter six depicts some of the experiences revealed to the researcher through participant observation and ethnography. Through descriptions of such events as community-service activities, meetings, conferences, and seminars, a portrait of the organization begins to emerge.

Chapter seven concentrates on some of the remarkable people whom the author interviewed. Gaining in-depth insights into some of the more dynamic stalwarts of

Fredonia Grange gives an idea of how and why the organization has endured. It also offers intimations of its future.

Chapter eight limns the focus group interviews—group interviews, in the true sense—commensurately enriched by the multiplicity of perspectives and voices. An electrifying experience for all who participated, the groups offer compelling revelations of the feelings, thought processes, and actions of both community and Grange members.

Chapter nine discusses the results of the previous three chapters. It considers how the three methods have enhanced one another and analyzes the synergistic portrait that has resulted. It examines how the data come together and what they mean.

Chapter ten gives a summary and conclusions. It examines what in the results can be applied to the broader research questions. It muses upon what might be done differently in research that would affect the outcomes. It suggests, based upon this study, some of

S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 248–61, especially 249, 254–57.

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the possibilities for future utilization and study. It lays out a course of action that the author plans to pursue, using the present study and its findings as catalysts to engender a template for further research and practical applications.

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CHAPTER 2

THE DEATH OF COMMUNITY?

Community Obituaries

In his widely acclaimed book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert D. Putnam, a professor of public policy at Harvard University, voices the concerns of many. He asserts that almost without interruption in the twentieth century, up through the 1960s, people in the United States were increasingly active in a host of community involvements. But, in the last three decades of the century, these activities, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but all seemingly inexorably, declined. Over more than 400 pages, Putnam painstakingly delineates how community participation has diminished in such areas as: political participation; civic participation; religious participation; connections in the workplace; informal social connections; altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy; reciprocity, honesty, and trust. He supports his contentions with interpretations of decades of social science surveys.¹

Perhaps more than any other contemporary, Putnam has popularized the concept of “social capital.”

By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital—tools and training that enhance individual productivity—the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among

¹ Putnam—and his numerous graduate students—impressively marshaled decades of academic survey research from such well-known archives as the National Election Studies (NES), the General Social Survey (GSS), the Roper Social and Political Trends data set, the DDB Needham Life Style (sic) surveys, and the Americans’ Use of Time project. He then performed statistical analysis, looking for trends for periods that appeared in more than one source. From these he drew inferences, conjecturing on causality. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 183-284, 415-24.

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individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. . . .²

Putnam is not alone in his views: the front matter of a paperback version of his book contains excerpts of rave reviews from more than twenty respected sources.³ So the book touches a raw spot in public observer consciousness.

Although the book itself may not have had an immediate, direct impact outside a relatively constrained circle of intellectuals and professional thinkers, the phenomenon that it describes is not felt only by academics, writers, and other professional social commentators. Putnam cites an array of stories in the popular press that indicates that his thesis taps into an angst felt by many of the demographic groups that constitute contemporary United States society.⁴ He asserts that community involvement peaked with what he terms the “long civic generation,” those who came of age during the Depression and World War II. These people were at the peaks of their powers and numbers during the 1950s and 1960s, and civic involvement, on all fronts, reflected this. But according to Putnam and his data interpretation, the ranks of this generation and their profound and myriad connections to community have not been replaced by subsequent generations of their children and grandchildren. This book can be elegiac, expressing a longing for a simpler, more clear-cut age.

² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18–19. What Putnam is describing—mutual trust and reciprocity deeply embedded in thick networks—is very much akin to some of the conceptions of community that will be explored in this study.

³ Among those cited are *Economist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Harvard Business Review*. Ibid., front matter, unpagged, but actually pages 1-3 of the book. Barnes & Noble.com, in its lengthy product details section for the book, cites additional reviews by still more critics, scholars, authors, and readers.

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The work of a number of other scholars lend further credence to Putnam's assertions. While they may not always concur with how Putnam has weighted the causes that he has ascribed, they do agree with his conclusions that community involvement is in severe decline.⁵ Bellah et al. state: "Another common alternative explanation of our difficulties is to explain them as the failure of Community. This is indeed the case, we believe, but only if our understanding of community is broad and deep enough." They cite a combination of individualism and globalization as undergirding much of the current social disintegration.⁶

Pippa Norris, associate director (research) at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, refutes Putnam's assertion that "television is the root cause of the lack of confidence and

⁴ He quotes stories lamenting the loss of onetime civic institutions and activities from such sources as: *Christian Science Monitor*, *Roanoke Times*, *New York Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Sunday Globe Northwest Weekly*, *Life*. Ibid., 15-17.

⁵ Kay Lehman Schlozman, chair of the Department of Political Science at Boston College, has done research that supports Putnam's assertion that the massive influx of women into the workforce in the second half of the twentieth century has made little direct contribution to an overall deterioration in community connections. Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Did Working Women Kill the PTA?" *American Prospect* 11, no. 20 (September 11, 2000), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>. In *Business Week*, Gene Koretz quotes Dora L. Costa, of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Matthew E. Kahn, of Tufts University, who conducted a study that led them to focus on a different effect of working women. They conclude that the widespread entry of women into the outside workforce has eroded social capital at home; their research also led them to infer that rising income inequality has eroded interconnections among the larger community. Gene Koretz, "Why Americans Grow Apart: Behind the Fraying Social Fabric," *Business Week*, July 23, 2001, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>.

⁶ They continue: "Dismantling structures of public provision for the most deprived in hopes that the voluntary sector can take over is mistaken in three important respects. The voluntary sector by no means has the resources to take up the slack. . . . The second reason is that our more affluent citizens may feel that they have fulfilled their obligation to society by giving time and money to 'make a difference' through voluntary activity without considering that they have hardly made a dent in the real problems faced by most Americans. The third reason is that the voluntary sector is disproportionately run by our better off citizens, and a good many voluntary activities do more to protect the well-to-do than the needy." Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, "Individualism and the Crisis of Civic Membership," *Christian Century* 113, no. 16 (May 8, 1996), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>. Here the authors refer to the well-established, well-entrenched, uncontroversial charities—big business philanthropy. Their conclusions do not pertain to grassroots organizations, traditionally unempowered groups united by common cause and a sense of shared destiny who seek to define themselves and carve out their niche through understanding of and adaptive coexistence with the larger society. Still, the caveat

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trust in America. . . .”⁷ Although she agrees that society in the United States is in crisis, she contends that some of the causes to which Putnam imputes the malaise are really straw men that draw focus and energy from uncovering some of the deeper, underlying etiologies. In Norris’s view, television has been a familiar bogeyman for such a long time that it is an easy target. But seeing it as monolithic and omniscient ignores the salutary effects that some television can have on community.

We get, from American television, a diversity of channels, programs and choices. If some choose C-Span, Meet the Press, and CNN World News, they are likely to end up somewhat more interested in the complex problems and issues facing American government at the end of the twentieth century. Could we be better informed and more involved? Of course. But compared with most democracies America is already high as a nation of joiners, with a dense network of civic associations. And it is not self-evident that turning off the television, and talking with our neighbors, or even going bowling, is necessarily the best way of addressing the long-term problems of confidence in American government or trust in a deeply divided American society.⁸

So this matter of community appears to be a complex business, a chimera, capable of assuming protean shapes. One should be cautious about accepting one-dimensional ideas and answers, easy absolutes that cannot accommodate the infinite variability and nuances of real life.

Putnam’s positions gain further support from such popular bards of nostalgia as Tom Brokaw and Bob Greene. Although their work may draw mixed critical reviews, the popularity and widespread diffusion of their books makes them a force with which to be

about dangers of placing too much faith in the power of local volunteerism to solve all social ills, no matter the scope, is a useful caution as one reads about proposed antidotes for community ennui.

⁷ Pippa Norris, “Does Television Erode Social Capital? A Reply to Putnam,” *PS, Political Science & Politics* 29, no. 3 (September 1996), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>.

⁸ *Ibid.* Some additional positive, community-reinforcing uses of television will be discussed in the conclusions of this study. While television can help dissolve community and pull people apart, it can also do just the opposite. Further, it is not just public affairs and news programming that can generate these latter, happy results.

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reckoned.⁹ According to Brokaw, during 1984, when he went to France to cover the fortieth anniversary commemoration of D-Day, he underwent a life-changing experience.¹⁰ This epiphany inspired him to write a series of books about the United States, including the widely popular *The Greatest Generation*. In this book, Brokaw pays homage to what he deems the “greatest generation”—those who grew up during the Depression and fought in World War II or supported it on the home front. Through interviews and letters, he tries to let some of them speak. His book title coined an epithet now irrevocably associated with these men and women.¹¹ Brokaw has become so closely linked to World War II that it is almost unthinkable to hold a memorial for it without featuring him as a participant, sometimes highlighting him over those whom he chronicled. Some members of the so-called Greatest Generation (a number of whom disavow the term, particularly in light of the struggles for human rights and freedoms that the United States continues to wage), comment wryly that, to paraphrase Voltaire, if World War II had not existed, Brokaw might have invented it.¹²

⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 287. Who is it who really helps to shape public opinion and social conscience? Is it the pundits in their brain trusts who interact with the movers and shakers, those with official authority, who try to formulate public policy? Or is it the people who write the books that make it onto Oprah’s book club: the books that people read on the bus commuting to work, in the employee’s break room in between shifts, the kinds of books that millions discuss and with which they find resonance? It is probably an insoluble question, but neither side should be discounted, particularly by the other.

¹⁰ Tom Brokaw, “Synopsis,” Barnes & Noble.com, under extensive product details for *The Greatest Generation*, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/>. The site also boasts reviews from a host of notables, including *Biography Magazine*, *National Review*, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, Ken Burns (well-known documentary film maker), Doris Kearns Goodwin (highly regarded historian), Frank McCourt (acclaimed author), and Colin Powell (former chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff and secretary of state under President George W. Bush).

¹¹ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998).

¹² Barbara Lowman, raised during the Great Depression, defense worker during World War II, and ardent advocate of the contention that there is no “Greatest Generation,” conversation with author, June 14, 2004. The Voltaire quote reads: “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” Voltaire [François Marie Arouet], “Épître à l’Auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs [November 10, 1770],” in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, ed. Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 316. The present research does not impugn Brokaw’s sincerity. It accepts his claim that his visit to the D-Day site was a transformative experience from which he derived a new mission: effectively utilizing the media to proselytize on behalf of a generation that he believes has not been sufficiently recognized and

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Although he effectively mined the nostalgia vein as a syndicated columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Bob Greene made one of his most substantial contributions to this corpus with *Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen*. This short book tells the compelling story of North Platte, Nebraska, a small city at the crossroads of the United States that sat astride major rail convergences and that performed an extraordinary service during World War II. This was a time when rail was king, and all troops being transported across the country in any direction passed through North Platte. It was a convenient refueling stop for steam locomotives. So every one of the six million troops who crossed the country stopped in North Platte for a few minutes. There each was entertained by the North Platte Canteen. Everyone left in the city and its surrounding hinterlands (to distances of hundreds of miles and even into other states) came together to convert the rail station into a canteen that offered homemade food, magazines, caring, concern, gratitude—free—to all the military personnel: each of the six million. It was a voluntary, collective act of service and compassion on a breathtaking scale. Greene is quick to point out that it could never happen again, that the heartland has now become blurred with the rest of the country: homogenized, distant, unfeeling.¹³

Reports of Its Death May Be Exaggerated

The intrepid reader who has waded through the previously cited literature on the death of community could well be feeling depressed by now. The picture painted so far is a grim one. Is it true? Has community entered an irreversible decline? Are there no glimmers that community may yet survive, be renewed and become relevant and viable?

acknowledged. This study, however, would be remiss if it did not point out that often, though, the messenger overshadows the message.

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Although it is risky to try to project long-term trends, there are hopeful indicators, in numerous areas and from disparate sources, that community, in a multitude of forms, endures and could yet thrive.

One compelling refutation of Putnam's gloomy prophecy comes from the federal government. The White House is in the forefront of promoting volunteerism on a massive scale. During his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush called upon all Americans to dedicate at least two years over the course of their lives to the service of others. He created the USA Freedom Corps, housed in the White House and chaired by him, to help people answer this call. The USA Freedom Corps Network matches people and their interests with volunteer opportunities, close to home or around the world. It is also expanding and strengthening such federal service programs as the Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps.¹⁴

But the White House contends that the most effective volunteer programs, the ones that can make the most difference to people, are not necessarily federally or even governmentally based. The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is an explicit, high-level, extremely public acknowledgment of the existence and necessity of local, voluntary community service. In the words of the office's Web site: "In every corner of America, people of all ages and walks of life are calling out for

¹³ Bob Greene, *Once upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen* (New York: William Morrow, an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).

¹⁴ USA Freedom Corps, Home Page, <http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/>; USA Freedom Corps, "Overview: The President's Call to Service," http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/content/about_usafc/overview/index.asp; USA Freedom Corps, "Service Crucial to Successful Life, Former President Tells Volunteer Leaders," http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/content/about_usafc/newsroom/announcements_dynamic.asp?ID=605; USA Freedom Corps, "Overview: A Call to Summer Service," http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/content/for_volunteers/summer2004/index.asp; Corporation for National & Community Service, Home Page, <http://www.cns.gov/>; Corporation for National & Community Service, "About the Corporation," <http://www.cns.gov/about/index.html>; Corporation for National & Community Service, Programs Included, <http://www.nationalservice.org/>; Corporation for National & Community Service, "The Vision Statement,"

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help. . . . For years, faith-based and community groups have been assisting these people and others in need. They have transformed lives with their compassion and are America's unsung heroes—healing our country's ills one heart and one act of kindness at a time.”¹⁵ This office's professed purpose is to support faith-based and community groups in succoring their communities.

On December 17, 2003, the USA Freedom Corps Web site showcased a new Web page proudly declaring, “Volunteer Service by Americans Increases.” John M. Bridgeland, Director of USA Freedom Corps, welcomed the news.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor reported today that both the number of volunteers and the volunteer rate rose over the year ended in September 2003. About 63.8 million people did volunteer work at some point from September 2002 to September 2003, up from 59.8 million for the similar period ended in September 2002. The percentage of the American population who volunteered has increased to 28.8 percent, up from 27.4 percent the previous year. . . .

Forty-four percent of those who volunteered reported they did so because they were asked. Teenagers showed the greatest increases in volunteer service.¹⁶

Not everyone writing for the popular press is ready to sound the death knell for community, either. In her book *Ordinary Grace*, Kathleen Brehony, a clinical psychologist, provides an even more detailed and overt counterpoint to the diagnoses of community apocalypse. She shares vignettes describing such instances of grace under pressure as: donating human organs to near or complete strangers; building an accessible

<http://www.nationalservice.org/about/vision.html>; Corporation for National & Community Service, “The Mission Statement,” <http://www.nationalservice.org/about/mission.html>.

¹⁵ White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, “Mission Overview,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/mission.html>; White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Home Page, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/index.html>; White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, “Executive Orders,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/executive-orders.html>; White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, “Messages from Director Jim Towey,” http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/jim_towey.html; Jim Towey, “Message,” White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/message.html>; White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, “Contact Us,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/contact.html>.

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playground in memory of a beloved child; and feeding, clothing, and giving shelter to the poor and homeless. She derives her title from her belief that such actions are so widespread among people in the United States that what initially might appear extraordinarily rare are actually “ordinary.” She confesses that when she first conceived her project, friends, relatives, and colleagues cautioned her that she could never gather enough material, enough instances, to fill even a modest-sized book. She is thrilled to note that, in the course of her research, she filled so many notebooks and files with stories of kindness, of caring for and connection with community, that she could have written continuously—and still not told every tale.¹⁷

Some scholarly studies also demonstrate that, in at least some contexts, community is still alive and well. After reviewing a study conducted by the Institute of Jewish Policy Research (JPR), British policy makers concluded that the British Jewish community could be a successful role model, not only for successful minority communities, but for a cohesive society in general.¹⁸

In a 2003 book, an even more respected academic authority tries to refute the notion that community is on life support: Robert Putnam! Although Putnam ended *Bowling*

¹⁶ USA Freedom Corps, “Volunteer Service by Americans Increases,” http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/content/about_usafc/newsroom/announcements_dynamic.asp?ID=315.

¹⁷ Brehony notes certain human traits that she thinks characterize those who display this grace. “1. They feel, at a deep level, a strong and clear connection with other people. 2. They have an abiding faith in the goodness of people. 3. They believe that helping others is not a service but, rather, a privilege and a blessing. 4. They are humble. 5. They have a sense of humor, they describe themselves as ‘happy,’ and they give the impression of being psychologically healthy people. 6. Their impulses to do good are immediate and instinctual. 7. They are able to turn negatives, even excruciating suffering, into positive energy and grace.” Kathleen A. Brehony, *Ordinary Grace: An Examination of the Roots of Compassion, Altruism, and Empathy, and the Ordinary Individuals Who Help Others in Extraordinary Ways* (New York: Riverhead Books, a member of Penguin Putnam, 1999), 167-68.

¹⁸ In the words of Stanley Waterman, JPR’s director of research, “While the general feeling is that overall social capital is in a state of decline, studies such as this show that among key ethnic and religious groups, voluntary, grassroots associations still play a key role in holding individual communities, and society in general, together.” Andrew Morris, “British Jews Not Bowling Alone, Says Study That Lauds Community,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 29, 2003, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>.

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Alone with a few broad, suggested antidotes for the community-killing poison, they apparently were not detailed or heartening enough to offset such a massive and bleak assemblage of data arguing for community decline and many turned away from the book in gloom.¹⁹ Putnam tries to offer more encouragement with this new book, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*.

Some will find it unsatisfying: it does not truly address many of the points raised in his earlier book and will not placate those who want scientific facts and figures. Where the former book is filled with statistics and hundreds of thousands of exemplars spanning decades, this book is anecdotal, telling a dozen stories and featuring at most hundreds of characters. In many ways, it is not so different from Brehony's book. Because of the stature of its author and because it is an outgrowth of the Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America (a gathering of prominent thinkers and activists from disparate fields who collaborated for three years to devise a national agenda to create social capital), it should enjoy wider acceptance and a more sympathetic reading than Brehony's, however.²⁰

¹⁹ Casey Nelson Blake, Review of *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, *Washington Post*, as cited under Product Details for that book, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/>.

²⁰ Putnam offers an explanation for this book's different basis. He says that as he and his colleagues traveled the country after the publication of *Bowling Alone*, "the toughest challenges have come not from scholarly critics but from ordinary Americans who have asked," if the central thesis of that book is correct, if community is collapsing, what are people doing about it? What can they do? "Despite the flood of recent academic research on social capital, these practical questions remain largely unexplored. . . .

"We want to emphasize that this is a book about social capital, not a textbook of social-capital creation or a casebook designed to elucidate or test a particular theory of social-capital development. . . . *Better Together* aims instead to illustrate some of the ways in which Americans in many diverse corners of our society are making progress on the perennial challenge of re-creating new forms of community, adapted to the conditions and needs of our time.

"Our aim in telling these stories is not to excuse ourselves from the rigor of social science, but to gain the positive advantages of storytelling. We believe that stories, with their specificity and ability to express the complex realities of particular people and places and their possibly unique ability to express thought and feeling simultaneously, are the appropriate medium for capturing a sense of how social-capital creation works in real life. . . . The rich mixture of events, values, feelings, and ideas that stories communicate has long made storytelling an important mechanism of social connection. Stories help us relate to one another."

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Why Community Matters

Does it matter to the individual if community is diminishing across a broad spectrum? Does community really have value, beyond providing the warm and rosy greeting-card image of some fancied pastoral mirage? Dietlind Stolle, of Princeton University, and Thomas Rochon, of Claremont Graduate University, did a cross-cultural study, surveying 102 associations in Germany, Sweden, and the United States to see which fostered such indispensable traits of group health as trust, reciprocity, and tolerance. After exhaustive analysis, they concluded that there was not a single trait that was not positively linked to associational membership.²¹ Another study, using a variety of existing surveys, concluded that there were direct correlations between level of social trust, membership in voluntary associations, and economic equality with morbidity and mortality: the less trust that there is between people, the fewer voluntary associations to which they belong, and the greater the income disparities, the sicker and shorter the life spans will be.²²

The cynical may find this a fluent but thinly disguised apologia from someone who wanted to get a quick publication out of research already done, someone who did not want to devote sufficient effort to make it a more rigorous, exacting work. They are likely to disparage this new book as a travesty by Putnam, a collection of New Age vignettes trying to masquerade as a serious academic endeavor. Others, on the other hand, may see in the book a shift in a person's thinking, a tacit acknowledgment that there are many nuances of the daily realities of life and community—thoughts, feelings, tendencies, attitudes, dreams—that are difficult to capture by number crunching. There are many who find life a numinous undertaking, one whose essence cannot be completely captured by quantification. For them, the lessons gleaned through storytelling are as valid as any statistical data—if not more so. Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, with the assistance of Don Cohen (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

²¹ Stolle and Rochon speak eloquently and pragmatically about the benefits that can be achieved through what they construe as the social capital (community involvement, integration, interrelationships) aspects of community. "The existence and maintenance of social capital in certain communities or regions is believed able to lower the amount of drug use and criminal activity, to increase the success of schools and their pupils, to enhance economic development, and to make government more effective. . . ." Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, "Are All Associations Alike?" *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 1 (September 1998), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>.

²² Ichiro Kawachi, Bruce P. Kennedy, and Kimberly Lochner, "Long Live Community: Social Capital as Public Health," *American Prospect* 35 (Nov./Dec. 1997), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>.

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Perhaps Putnam makes the case most articulately. He amasses a considerable body of evidence to answer a resounding Yes, community matters! Using his classic term “social capital,” an appellation equivalent to “social networks” or “community involvement,” he articulates some of the ways in which community makes a difference.

- First, social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily. . . .
- Second, social capital greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly. . . .
- A third way in which social capital improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. . . .
- The networks that constitute social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals. . . .
- Social capital operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individuals’ lives. . . .²³

No government can or should be encompassing enough to answer all possible community needs. Even if one lived in a Big Brother society, there simply could not be enough government programs and bureaucrats to address every conceivable problem. In order to keep local issues from falling through the cracks, it is effective to have them addressed by local organizations made up of people from the community who can nimbly adapt to changing needs.

Whether one calls it community involvement or social capital, its value to the well-being of individuals is manifest. Yet, if one is to believe academic and popular sources, a heightened awareness of the necessity of community connections is growing in inverse proportion to its quick recession. Is this true? Were people “better” in a past time? Do people no longer get involved, try to help, feel that they can make a difference? Has the

²³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18-19, 288-89.

United States' past century paralleled Hesiod's "Five Ages of Man," with the World War II generation one of gold and ours one of iron, doomed to destruction?²⁴

Is Community, and Especially Involvement with Community, Moribund or Resurgent?

Putnam and his colleagues rely heavily on survey data to substantiate their claims. These surveys draw upon hundreds or thousands, extrapolating the data as typical. The author and her colleagues, however, question the universal applicability of the sample, believing that it is weighted toward professionals who live and work in urban or suburban locales. Those who respond to surveys, whether by phone or mail, are those who are asked and who have some belief in the instruments' efficacy and underlying premise. Those who are poor—whether urban or rural, those who live in ethnic enclaves, those without telephones, those who live in remote areas or the hinterland, and those who are not demographically attractive, they conjecture, are not so likely to be approached or to respond.²⁵ For example, when the author lived in Chicago for a number of years, she was frequently surveyed. Since moving to a more rural home, she has never been approached

²⁴ Hesiod, a Greek poet who is thought to have lived in the eighth century BC, wrote the *Works and Days*, an epic describing rural life. In it he depicts the "Five Ages of Man:" the Golden Age, ruled by Kronos, a period of serenity, peace, and eternal spring; the Silver Age, ruled by Zeus, less happy, but with luxury prevailing; the Bronze Age, a period of strife; the Heroic Age of the Trojan War; and the Iron Age, the present, when justice and piety had vanished." This systemization, has become a part of popular culture, particularly the contrasting Golden and Iron Ages. *Columbia Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Hesiod," <http://www.bartleby.com/65/he/Hesiod.html> (accessed June 25, 2004). It is worth noting that nostalgia, the belief that the past was incomparably better than the present, is not a new phenomenon, but is thus documented as going back at least three millennia.

²⁵ Those who are demographically attractive are likely to be those who are easy to reach, familiar with and amenable to the survey process, and quick to respond. Some of those most likely to be successfully maintaining community associations—people who live in rural and small town areas, people who live in ethnic enclaves, people who live in inner cities—are less likely to be tapped: mass mailings and phone banks are more likely to target areas that better fit traditional conceptions of loci of power. Also, from a strictly practical perspective, those who have taken refuge in fortress home, who eschew involvement with physical community in favor of that mediated by the glowing screen of a television, computer, or video game, are more likely to be there to answer the phone when the surveyor calls or to have time to fill out the

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by surveyors. Her colleagues and the people with whom they do fieldwork have had similar experiences. While these collective experiences hardly constitute a scientific study, they do cast doubts upon the generalizability of the survey data that many of the academic and popular arguments for the death of community use to buttress their claims.

So is community involvement waxing or waning? One's answer may be influenced by the data that one collects and the interpretations that one derives. Putnam, the social surveys, a number of other academics, and the popular press offer too many concrete examples of community decline to be completely denied. On the other hand, the White House, Brehony, other scholars, and Putnam himself can proffer their own substantial lists of exemplars of vibrant communities with involved members.²⁶ Reality probably contains elements of both stances. There are undoubtedly a number of community networks and organizations that are failing. There are also, indubitably, some that continue to function with varying degrees of efficacy. The point of universal agreement between the two sides, however, is that community involvement is essential for the smooth functioning of the greater society and the well-being of individuals.

What is it that has enabled some community organizations to survive and even thrive, while others have withered? What secrets of success can be gleaned from viable community organizations that might revive moribund ones and invigorate inchoate ones? This study will examine these issues.

questionnaire than those who are constantly occupied with reaching out to fulfill community needs. So to some extent, such surveys will inevitably provide skewed results.

²⁶ Neither side can claim complete disinterest in its position—both have vested interests. Some elements of the press are known to subscribe to the “If It Bleeds, It Leads” doctrine in the belief that gore, sensationalism, and titillation sell. In an era when the federal government is trying to cut back on social services and entitlement programs, while cultivating an image of compassion, it behooves it to delegate more and more of these activities to local, nonprofit organizations. Supporting such groups with modest grants is far less expensive and frustrating than if the federal government tried to alleviate local needs directly by using federal agencies and programs.

What This Study Will Be Worth, and to Whom

This research takes the form of a case study. During three years of living among and interacting with people in small Midwestern towns, the researcher came into contact with a variety of groups. Among some of the more memorable were local Granges—community branches of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry. Although once known primarily as an agricultural organization and associated with farms and rural life, this organization, founded in 1867, was striving to redefine itself essentially as a community-service organization and struggling to remain relevant into the twenty-first century.²⁷ The researcher became acquainted with members of a number of Michigan Granges and grew fascinated by their sense of mission and purpose, their drives to fulfill the needs of what they perceived as their communities, the sense of family that they created in their groups, the feelings of support and empowerment that they seemed to derive from this womb of association. These were people who had no doubts that they could make a positive difference. They were confident that together, they could change the world, one person at a time. These were not megalomaniacs; they had no delusions of grandeur. They realized that there was much in their lives that they could not control. But they chose to focus on the things that they could control, drawing strength and encouragement from each victory.

As the researcher got to know Grange members better, she became aware of questions that nonmembers asked of them: Why do you work so hard to help others? What do you get out of slaving for the community? Popular culture, social science surveys, and academic studies seemed united in the contention that the United States was undergoing a

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period of profound anomie, one in which people felt isolated, helpless, disconnected, rootless. Such people were portrayed as needing to fill up the emptiness in their lives with material objects, diversions, competitive displays—the late twentieth-century equivalent of the ancient Roman bread and circuses to placate the masses. Yet here were people who did not fit this dismal description. How had they withstood the paralyzing onslaught of modern malaise? Would the answers be applicable only to the Grange, or would there be lessons that might be relevant for other groups and communities? Learning how a certain Grange had been able to maintain its community focus and relevance, as well as a core of dedicated, energized, committed members, could offer clues for how other community groups could become revitalized. This study will explore these issues, creating a template of organizational maintenance, renewal, fulfillment, and relevance that, it is hoped, other groups can adapt and productively utilize to address their unique needs.

Summary

During the past few decades, particularly from the 1990s on, a school of thought has become ascendant in the United States. It has popularized its viewpoints through the media, depicting a society in crisis, on the wane, one whose best years are behind it, trapped in a time warp of longing for and trying to reenact the 1940s and 1950s. During World War II and its immediate aftermath, the position contends, society reached an apogee of involvement, concern, caring, connectedness. Since then, the convention goes, it has been all downhill. Scholars, pundits, popular bards, the media have all invoked this mantra, keening over the death of community. Such a position is highly blinkered,

²⁷ There will be a fuller discussion of the Grange, past and present, at the national, state, and local levels in

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however. It ignores that the Golden Age had a patina that was threadbare in many places: it does not acknowledge the stains of segregation, the Cold War, nuclear apocalypse, repression of women, enforced conformity, and a host of other problems that beset the forties and fifties until they erupted in the massive unrest of the sixties. Nor does it apparently realize that since at least the days of Hesiod, three millennia ago, people have been sanctifying “the good old days,” believing their own age to be a pallid counterfeit.

This position also overlooks myriad indications that community is alive and could possibly be resurgent. Sources from the federal government to popular writers to some of the very scholars who previously lamented the loss of community document that reports of community death have been exaggerated.

Whether they argue that community is waxing or waning, those who are engaged with the concept of community are near universal in their affirmation that it matters. Robert Putnam, who argued first that community is atrophying and then, later, that it may be experiencing renewal, and whose concept of “social capital” parallels this study’s concept of “community involvement,” puts the case eloquently and succinctly.

- First, social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily. . . .
- Second, social capital greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly. . . .
- A third way in which social capital improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. . . .
- The networks that constitute social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals. . . .
- Social capital operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individuals’ lives. . . .²⁸

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²⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18-19, 288-89.

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So, is community moribund or renascent? The answer, in large part, will depend upon the data that is used and the interpretation that is derived from it. There is too much evidence on both sides for either to be completely invalid. Some organizations have become extinct, unable to connect with a cause, a purpose, a constituency. Others are in danger of doing so. But elsewhere, there are groups that have remained or have become relevant and integral to their communities. What is it that separates the dying groups from those that are resurrecting community? This study has attempted to uncover the secrets of success that can be gleaned from a viable community organization, tips that might revive terminal ones and invigorate those that are inchoate.

Through years of working and interacting with small-town and rural community groups, the author became acquainted with the Grange. Its core members were committed to their communities. They were empowered, secure in their knowledge that each of them mattered and that together, they could make a difference. They were tireless in their efforts to help others, seeming to draw energy and revitalization from the process. This study examines how one Grange has triumphed over the enervating pressures that contribute to contemporary anomie and community dissolution. In probing how this group has retained its relevance and community involvement, as well as its base of dedicated, passionate adherents, this study distills key characteristics and behaviors, creating a template that other groups, who are also seeking renewal and revitalization, may be able to adapt and effectively apply to their own unique situations and demands.

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CHAPTER 3

EXPLORATIONS OF COMMUNITY

Learning from the Work of Others

In a major sense, this is a study about community: how people perceive it, define it (implicitly), create it, and relate to it; what people derive from it and it from them.

Because of this, most of the literature consulted touches upon community in some way.

The early, seminal works in community studies in the United States, while not directly relevant to the current research, are nonetheless essential because they laid the foundation of what has followed. It is easy to smile at the apparent naïveté and biases of these early studies without pondering their deeper ramifications. Such a reaction is simplistic: these early works made legitimate the then-revolutionary concept that studying community in the United States was a legitimate area of academic endeavor—one did not have to travel halfway round the world to find “exotic” cultures to do meaningful research.¹

Community is a concept that transcends time, space, and specific demographics. One can find something resembling its bonds of connectedness, mutuality, support, and belonging in such urban collectives as neighborhoods and gangs.² But the literature that

¹ Prominent among these studies are Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956); Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Roland L. Warren, *The Community in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, 1978). Bell and Newby, who regard community study as a method of empirical investigation, provide a good overview of the classic American and European community studies. Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1972).

² Carl S. Taylor, *Dangerous Society* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989); Taylor, *Girls, Gangs, Women, and Drugs* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1993). Beyond confirming that gangs fulfill some community needs for members: opportunities to develop leadership skills, support, encouragement, protection, camaraderie, etc., these studies do not really pertain to the current research.

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deals with the phenomena of community most fully focuses on rural and small town life.³

Since the present research also focuses on rural and small-town life, the findings of the existing literature have this innate, surface connection. Because every study and case has its unique aspects, some data will be more apposite.

Much of the literature on rural and small-town life that has been written in the last several decades deals with the changes and pressures that are coming to bear on these regions. Although popular culture may tend to simplify and freeze rural and small-town life into a Tom Sawyer mold, in an age of global markets and communication, mass merchandising and commodification, no geographical area can hold itself truly isolated and aloof from the rest. Even books whose professed aim is to chronicle the history of rural life in the United States cannot avoid mention of what are perceived as the threats that change poses to traditional lifestyles, customs, values.⁴ A number of writers

³ Perhaps this stems, at least in part, from a belief that rural and small town life is simpler, less complex, easier to apprehend and experience than life in the fast lane of the city. Such beliefs, however, are not often found among those who have lived for a time in rural and small-town America, trying to comprehend the intricate matrix of relationships that entangles, but also buoys, each resident. As Richard Lingeman points out, the traditional American assumption has been that small town equals community. "The equation . . . is a cherished one in the American imagination, and its converse is that the city is the antithesis of community. Yet, small towns can suffer social malaise and anomie as much as the city, while in the city there are neighborhoods that retain the elusive characteristics of 'community.' What the small town, like the city neighborhood, has is the potential for community—for direct, caring, face-to-face interaction of people, over time, and an opportunity for individuals or small groups of people to effect visible, if modest, changes. . . ." Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History 1620–the Present* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 474. In their book dealing with rural communities, Cornelia Butler Flora and her colleagues, all of whom are academics specializing in areas such as sociology, economics, political science, and rural planning at well-respected American universities, also address the universality of this phenomenon called "community." "Our definition of community, then, applies to both rural and urban areas. Communities may have political boundaries, or they may simply have social ones. Communities may be recognized politically and thus endowed with local governments and the power to tax their members. They may also be informal groupings of households, neighborhoods within the larger city. Issues can cause neighborhoods to band together to demand better services from the city just as they inspire rural communities to take control over their economic future. Although the focus in this book is on rural communities, many of the topics are immediately relevant to communities within urban settings as well." Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan L. Flora, Jacqueline D. Spears, and Louis E. Swanson, with Mark B. Lapping and Mark L. Weinberg, *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 16.

⁴ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, Revisiting Rural America, edited by Pete Daniel and Deborah K. Fitzgerald (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Danbom, a professor of history at North Dakota State University, has written extensively about agricultural history.

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maintain that rural and small-town communities face a survival struggle every bit as acute as their urban counterparts.⁵

An even greater number of books analyze the effects of change on rural and small-town regions, what they are doing and can do to maintain some control over their own communities and ensure that their communities, in some form and sense, will continue. Marilyn Aronoff writes of how people have reinvented "a nonmetropolitan social identity compatible with external realities," and thus developed their own niche.⁶ Emery Castle has edited a substantial volume with contributions from sociologists, anthropologists, economists, geographers, and political scientists, among others, in which they explore myriad facets of change in the countryside and how it is affecting traditional conceptions and enactments of community. The present study has drawn upon a number of these essays.⁷ In particular, it has been informed by Sonya Salamon's writing. Salamon has

⁵ As Sonya Salamon, a professor of family studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, declares: "Community viability is based on a number of factors: the ability to provide amenities for homes and farms, and whether families feel attachment to and receive social support from a cohesive structure." Sonya Salamon, *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest*, Studies in Rural Culture, edited by Jack Temple Kirby (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 243. Kenneth Wilkinson, professor of rural sociology at Pennsylvania State University, summarizes the essence of studying community in rural areas: "First, how is it possible for the community to persist in modern society? Second, how does ruralness (sic) affect this possibility? These questions relate to the essential elements of the concept of community, and attempts to answer them can help to clarify those elements." Kenneth P. Wilkinson, *The Community in Rural America*, Contributions in Sociology, Under the Auspices of the Rural Sociological Society, edited by James J. Zuiches, no. 95 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 1-2.

⁶ Aronoff, a professor emerita of sociology at Michigan State University, continues, "Viewing external relationships as an inevitable constraint on their own initiatives, county units can attempt to limit their impact or maximize their benefits, at least in part in terms of their own definitions of local interest. What is fundamental is not the county's identity at this point in time, but the capacity for groups of people in territorial units to define local options for change by using local resources in the context of their awareness of external opportunities and constraints." In her article, Aronoff focuses on a nonmetropolitan county; but her theory, the "social construction of communities," could as easily be applied to other units, such as townships, small towns, rural settlements, community-service groups. Marilyn W. Aronoff, "Changing Rural Communities: Reconstructing the Local Economy of a Nonmetropolitan Community," in *Changing Rural Social Systems: Adaptation and Survival*, edited by Nan E. Johnson and Ching-li Wang (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 208, 218.

⁷ There is much to be gained from this entire volume of fine discussions. The author especially recommends the following chapters, all of which are found in *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, edited by Emery N. Castle (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995):

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been studying rural and small-town Illinois life for more than twenty years. She generalizes much of what she has found to the rural Midwest in general. Accordingly, there is much that is apposite to the small-town and rural people with whom the author has worked.

In a time when many Americans seek community and a community of identity, rural Midwesterners feel secure about these elusive qualities. Midwestern rural people have a robust and positive place identity. . . . People live among neighbors who know them and care about them in an environment shaped by a good physical infrastructure, strong social services, and active civic organizations. . . . Midwesterners have endeavored to preserve their way of life by acting collectively, assuming that by working together the destiny of a community can be controlled. Midwestern rural people recognize that a community's future depends on dedicated citizens who value the small size, intimacy, slow pace, and simplicity that several generations ago their counterparts were anxious to exchange for the bright city lights.⁸

Beyond her explicit subjects of Midwesterners, however, many of Salamon's observations and conclusions are also relevant to other types of communities: close-knit ethnic, racial, religious, or ideological enclaves, for example, even in densely settled locales. So although rural areas may have created or profoundly influenced certain prototypes of community, it is possible to adapt some of their principles and characteristics, such as those that Salamon articulates, to widely differing demographics.

Life is a dynamic process; change is inevitable; the present and future will differ from the past. While it is true that the future builds upon the past, it is also true that our current

Emery N. Castle, "The Forgotten Hinterlands," chap. 1; William Howarth, "Land and Word: American Pastoral," chap. 2; Peirce Lewis, "The Urban Invasion of Rural America: The Emergence of the Galactic City," chap. 3; John Fraser Hart, "'Rural' and 'Farm' No Longer Mean the Same," chap. 4; Glenn V. Fuguitt, "Population Change in Nonmetropolitan America," chap. 5; Edwin S. Mills, "The Location of Economic Activity in Rural and Nonmetropolitan United States," chap. 6; Pierre Crosson, "The Use and Management of Rural Space," chap. 7; Bruce A. Weber, "Extractive Industries and Rural-Urban Economic Interdependence," chap. 8; Daryl Hobbs, "Social Organization in the Countryside," chap. 20; Emery N. Castle, "An Overview," chap. 26.

⁸ Sonya Salamon, "The Rural People of the Midwest," chap. 19 in *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, edited by Emery N. Castle (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995): 365.

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realities may influence how we recall the past.⁹ Was that time really so stable? Or do we just remember it that way in the face of our current tumult?¹⁰ It is understandable that communities and organizations, like the Roman god Janus, will look to the past. But those communities and organizations that endure and prosper will recall that Janus has two faces so that even as he looks to and learns from the past, he regards and plans for the future. The two visages are guided by a common brain that heeds the messages of each in constructing a relevant, vital, highly adaptive present that they both inform.

Underlying Questions

This study framed a few broad research questions that guided its course. These overarching questions imbued and influenced the subquestions that were employed in gathering information through set methods. The first two tiers of questions are delineated

⁹ Janet Fitchen, a professor of anthropology at Ithaca College, puts it well: "This mutual shaping of past and present perceptions is not merely a quaint rural custom or an idle cultural curiosity, however, for it has significant consequences as communities face and adapt to the changes that come their way. In some respects, the images of the past, if they are believed as still appropriate today, may make it harder for communities to come to terms with the present and future. In other aspects, however, holding onto cherished identity and values may be the only way to enter the future with a claim to being distinctly rural and having a community identity. The problem, of course, is in knowing what to discard and what to keep, what to recategorize as the historical past and what to program into the community ideology of the future." Janet M. Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 259.

¹⁰ Jane Adams, a professor of anthropology at Southern Illinois University who spent a decade studying the rural life of southern Illinois, poignantly captures the almost unbearable tensions inherent in trying to live in and meld two different eras—two disparate worlds. "Such scenes evoke nostalgia in most of the people I have worked with—a complicated nostalgia because no one would, given the option, resurrect the past these relics represent. . . . Farm families and people who have grown up in rural areas seem caught on the horns of a dilemma: the old way was materially impoverished but far richer socially than the present. Must one quality be lost in order to have the other? Into that unresolved tension nostalgia creeps, a love affair with an imagined past stripped of its suffering and injustices.

"It is well to remember that not everyone who grew up on a farm or who lives in one locality much of his or her life feels the deep attachment to the landscape that seems to characterize much of this area. Even more, every individual seems to be of several minds about preserving what is old and building what is new. If young people are going to stay around, after all, they must have jobs, and for jobs there must be new activities. We cannot live out of our past only, no matter how beautiful it has become with the patina of age. Nostalgia can mask passivity in the face of painful and unwanted change; worse, it can cover the complicity we share in having created this present with its threat of ecological catastrophe and its enormous and increasing disparities in wealth and power." Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern*

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here. Their progeny, in the guise of further layers and nuances, appear in the chapters that describe what the specific methods unearthed as well as in the appendix containing the study's instruments.

- Why do people voluntarily form groups to address community needs?
- How is “community” perceived?
- How is “need” perceived?
- What do members of the group gain from addressing these needs?
- What are some of the benefits that communities can reap from having voluntary groups seek to resolve some of their needs?
- How can a community-service organization remain viable?
- Are there needs that it can continue to alleviate?
- Can it adapt its vision and mission to remain relevant?
- How can it retain members?
- How can it maintain a coherent sense of purpose?
- How can it attract new adherents?
- Why does it matter if people voluntarily seek to ameliorate community needs?

Contested Terminology

Certain terms and concepts will recur throughout this study. Perhaps the most salient and obvious one is “community.” Most of the literature cited here deals with community,

Illinois, 1890–1990, Studies in Rural Culture, edited by Jack Temple Kirby (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), xviii.

sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—defining it in great detail.¹¹ “Community,” as a concept and a term, is a chameleon, a chimera, able to assume apparently infinite protean shapes. It seems readily understandable to most people: ask them if they have a sense of it in their lives, and they are liable to reply in the affirmative, talking readily of its presence or lack, secure that their idea is a shared one. There is no obvious need to define it, since they believe it to be a mutual conception that everyone knows and shares. It is only when one probes and encourages people to articulate their community visions that one becomes aware that every person’s “community” is unique. What is it, then, that saves us from existing as just so many isolated individuals? Perhaps, in part, it is the “common” aspect of community. People come together, not because they share some cloned ideal, but because there is enough mutuality among their disparate ideas that they can create something greater than the sum of their parts. In the words of Peter Hamilton, an anthropologist who studies key ideas in social sciences: “People manifestly *believe* in the notion of community, either as ideal or reality, and sometimes as both simultaneously.

¹¹ It would be an unproductive use of space and the reader’s time to cite all definitions of community found in the literature review, in part because there tends to be overlap and commonality among them, in part because the goal here is not to pick a “best” definition. Indeed, the study contends that there is no one universal, all-encompassing definition. In order to give the reader a taste of academic opinion, a small sample is offered here. According to Daniel Kemmis, there is a strong element of physical place in the idea of community: where people live has a significant influence on their individual and collective conceptions of self. As a political scientist, he contrasts the constitutions of the United States and the state of Montana. The U.S. Constitution is decidedly non-place-specific. Montana’s constitution, however, describes its natural beauties in some detail in the very first sentence. Kemmis asserts that this is a unifying device, pulling together the people of the state with a sense of community. Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 3–4. John Freie, also a political scientist, warns against the dangers of imposing definitions, cautioning that although they appear innocent, simple words of description, they are far more powerful, containing “within them biases that identify what is important and what is not, what is essential and what is at the periphery. Definitions, as conceptual categories, identify what the definers think is worthy and necessary and what is irrelevant and should be pushed aside. . . .” Although he offers this caveat against defining, he himself feels compelled to do so, and has produced a good working description. “Community is an interlocking pattern of just human relationships in which people have at least a minimal sense of consensus within a definable territory. People within a community actively participate and cooperate with others to create their own self-worth, a sense of caring about others, and a feeling for the spirit of connectedness.” John F. Freie, *Counterfeit*

Now, as the American sociologist W. I. Thomas observed, if people believe a thing to be real, then it is real in its consequences for them.”¹² So people do not have to define community to know that it is essential in their lives, something to maintain and preserve.

This work tried not to impose an external definition upon the groups it studied. Although the author believes that anything that involves human beings cannot be completely objective (certain biases of selection, focus, analysis, reportage, etc., will inevitably creep in), she continually strove to keep as much precognitive baggage from the study as possible. Over the course of the research, as the study explored and attempted to express the meanings that members of a group bring, through their actions and articulation, to the concept, a set of overarching traits emerged.

Close, personal, multifaceted ties are only possible among a finite number of people. It is precisely these sorts of ties that are most likely to produce the concerted group effort necessary to accomplish complex tasks over a period of time. From a purely practical standpoint, no person has more than twenty-four hours in a day: each must contend with constraints of time; one can only expend the resources (time, effort, emotion, commitment, etc.) requisite for a rich, nuanced relationship on a relative few. As the concentric rings of involvement spiral outward, the number of one’s contacts grows in inverse proportion to their depth. It is possible for people who have fewer facets of connections—those who might be called “acquaintances” rather than “friends”—to work

Community: The Exploitation of Our Longings for Connectedness (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 22–23, emphasis in the original.

¹² Peter Hamilton, editor’s foreword to *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, by Anthony P. Cohen, repr. (Ellis Horwood, 1985; repr., London: Routledge, 2000), 8. It was in reading the work of Anthony P. Cohen, a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Manchester, that the author first became transfixed by the vast concept and process of community. Anthony P. Cohen, ed., *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation* (sic) in *British Rural Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982);

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together to achieve things—particularly if each is backed by a group of more closely linked people. Within any group larger than two, there will be dividing lines: the forces within the larger group along which group members align. We have all seen this at work: the meeting of five or more (indeed, often even fewer) cannot maintain univocal focus, but will at some points inevitably dissolve into smaller conversation units (e.g., the two people who talked to each other throughout the last presentation that one attended). The most effective community groups do not, like Canute, seek to hold back the tides, but use this tendency as a strength. They realize that any larger community has, under its aegis, smaller subcommunities that are tightly unified by close connections. The effective communities find a way to maximally tap the strengths of the subgroups so that all can substantively contribute to the overall community goals: they intuitively understand and utilize the principle of synergism.

It is easier to form community groups with those with whom one perceives that there is much in common. But in order to effectively tackle the sorts of broad, intricate, multilayered problems that beset most communities, homogeneous groups need to broaden their horizons, be willing to accept ideas and people with whom they have not traditionally had contact, build bridges to other groups, get out of their comfort and complacency zones, and realize that attaining goals often requires unusual alliances. This is not to say that a group can or should be willing to compromise everything: those core beliefs that most define an organization, the essence of a group, should not change with the wind. But its basic principles have to be worthy to stand the tests of challenges and

Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, with a foreword by Peter Hamilton, repr. (Ellis Horwood, 1985; repr., London: Routledge, 2000).

time. Beyond that, viable communities realize that a paraphrase of the old adage really is true: Effectively addressing community needs can make strange bedfellows.

Most people belong to a number of communities. In times past, when mobility and contacts were much more constrained and many lived in near isolation, it was possible and often common for people to find fulfillment of nearly all their needs, such as: food, shelter, clothing, education, employment, religion, judiciary, government, health, entertainment, and, not least, camaraderie, within the same relatively finite, fixed, and stable community. A number of factors, including technological developments and globalization has changed all that for most people. Improved transportation, changes in the economy, and population shifts, for example, now make it possible (some would say likely) for people to work in one area, live in another, shop in a third, have their children attend school in a fourth, worship in another, and recreate in still others. It is possible that these nomads will have ties and bonds with different sets of people in each of the areas. They will thus have a connection with numerous groups of people, but often on only one level, for only one purpose. It is still possible, though perhaps at times more effortful, to have overlap among one's communities, to engage in many of life's activities with the same group. People tend to find the personal connections that they have with people with whom they interact on a number of levels most satisfying, enduring, and productive. In general, those whom one sees stand up to the demands of a variety of situations are the people one most trusts.

A community's boundaries, definition, and identity can be liminal, adapting and metamorphosing as needs dictate. This does not mean that a community group must, to

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paraphrase Lillian Hellman, pattern its actions to suit the latest fad.¹³ It does mean, however, that in order to remain relevant and viable, it needs to agilely adapt to the changing dynamics of its community. At a time when 95 percent of a population are farmers, it makes sense for an organization that wants to have broad appeal to target them—doing so focuses on the vast majority of the population. When the percentage of the population engaged in farming has fallen to no more than a few percent,¹⁴ a group that focuses only on them is not going to have a wide base. This does not mean that the group needs to abandon its interest in agriculture; but it would be more effective to broaden the parameters of how it is construed to include such other aspects as food safety, nutrition, environmentalism, natural resource management and conservation. There is no one in the population who is not touched by these factors in some way. A group can remain true to its traditions and history while at the same time adapting to the realities of the present.

In order to achieve a nuanced, profound, robust feeling of community, there needs to be some element of physical contact between community members. Telephone calls, e-mails, and letters can all be effective ways to begin, and particularly to maintain, ties. But at some point, people need the extra aspects of personal connection that come from body language, facial expression, and tone of voice in symbiosis.¹⁵ There are times when

¹³ Hellman's actual words were: "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashion." Lillian Hellman, "Letter to the House Committee on Un-American Activities [May 19, 1952]," in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 770:14.

¹⁴ Peter Fronczek and Patricia Johnson, *Occupations 2000: Census 2000 in Brief*, prepared by the Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Bureau of the Census (Washington, DC, 2003), 3.

¹⁵ There are those who would argue that one can already transcend spatial separation and virtually achieve this sort of close, physical contact; they point out the type of real-time communication that one sees, for example, on news programs, where the host talks with someone far away who appears and interacts on a large video screen. While this does make it possible to observe facial expressions and tones of voice to some degree, the body language transmitted through talking-head technology is extremely limited. More

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there is no substitute for being there—to wipe away tears of joy or laughter, share hugs of comfort or exultation. It is also frequently easier and more effective to coordinate community efforts and avoid redundancy when people are physically together. Actually being in people's presence also can be an indication of commitment and solidarity. It is much harder to walk away from people who are physically within the same space with one than it is to get up from the computer or to hang up the phone.

Community members derive fulfillment from their membership. They feel empowered and that they have a purpose. The people that this research has encountered have a need to understand their existence, to feel that they matter, to be part of something larger than themselves. They want to believe that they make a difference and that the world is better for their having been part of it. They need to feel that their unique contributions—whatever they may be—are essential. Successful communities tap these feelings, needs, and desires; they give each member the opportunities, encouragement, and support to be successful. In the process, all are immeasurably enriched. It is not uncommon to hear community members remark with a sense of awe that thanks to their community membership and the trust thereby invested in them, they have learned to do things that they never thought they could and discovered abilities within themselves that they never knew existed. Manifesting this faith in its members thus earns a community enduring reciprocal loyalty and commitment.

Community members obtain enjoyment from their membership. Many of the things that communities must undertake are not inherently pleasurable. The easy, quick, lucrative, high-profile tasks will probably have been handled by others. What remains is

important, it has not yet made it possible to truly transcend the glass wall between the discussants: there is not the true aura of physical presence, the sense that one can reach out and touch the other—certainly not

not glamorous: intractable, long-term social problems involving people who are lonely, ill, undernourished, unemployed, undereducated, bored, hopeless, poorly housed, among others. Just trying to grasp the enormity of some of these issues and grappling with what a group can do to ameliorate them is sobering.¹⁶ The actual, concrete actions taken to address some of the maladies—preparing mailings, cleaning up pollution, feeding the hungry, improving shelter, devising youth activity, visiting those who need attention, and more—at times can seem like an exercise in futility. The equation dictates that no matter how much one does, it will never equal enough. Some communities are trying to develop hybrids, combinations of those traditions they most value with those advancements that best mesh with their overall vision. But trying to stand with a foot in two different worlds and times can leave one without firm footing and on very shaky ground. In the midst of all these uncertainties, community members need something to keep them afloat: the ties that they have with other members are such a buoy. The reason that many hands make light work is that the hands belong to bodies that are having a good time associating with one another. Successful communities are able to incorporate a pronounced element of fun into their activities.

Members of viable communities have faith. Here, “faith” does not refer to affiliation with a religious denomination, although there are certain parallels. Faith in community

physically, and perhaps not in other modes, as well.

¹⁶ Many community groups could appropriately adopt slogans used by the United States Armed Forces. *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* ascribes the first to the United States Army Service Forces. “The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer.” Anonymous, “Slogan of United States Army Service Forces,” in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 851:15. The United States Navy, however, was not to be outdone in sloganeering. The author's father, a member of the United States Navy Civil Engineer Corps from 1941 until his death in 1973 (first as active duty, then as a reservist), frequently quoted the proud claim of the Seabees—the construction battalion of the United States Navy with whom the Civil Engineer Corps often worked: “The impossible we do right away. The miraculous takes a little longer.” John Gower Lowman, personal communications with author, 1952–73.

appeals to its members' belief that there is something greater and more important than themselves that deserves their allegiance. Viable communities appeal to their members' faith in a communal good, in a belief that the community to which they belong can fulfill needs that they deem important. The most effective communities and community groups elicit sentiments from their adherents that correspond to the tenets of those who profess a specific set of sectarian beliefs. The faithful are loyal and committed; they are grateful for the opportunities to develop as human beings; they find acceptance, comfort, and sanctuary; they believe that perpetuation of the institution is essential; they are eager to proselytize on behalf of their faith; they delight in observing the rituals of their faith, whether they be religious rites or their secular counterparts such as harvest festivals and county fairs; they have a firm belief that the object of their faith is good and worthwhile and that those who embrace it will be saved in return—whether from mundane or spiritual afflictions.

This study does not presume that these characteristics are universals. Neither does it infer that they are comprehensive. They are offered not as a *sine qua non* but as hypotheses—concepts that warrant further consideration and attempted application.

Most of the other possibly contested meanings used in the study build upon “community.” “Community needs” are understood to be deficiencies that members of the community perceive and believe keep the community from functioning as smoothly as it should. The study recognizes that perceived needs will vary among people: one person’s “need” may be another’s “luxury.” It will focus most on those issues that seem most compelling to members of the community who exhibit somewhat disinterested community involvement, and on those needs that affect a number of people. It will also

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emphasize deficiencies that a voluntary community-service organization, or at least a local group, might ameliorate. Thus, while it does not deny that things like outsourcing of jobs to foreign countries may pose significant problems, it will not dwell on these, since there is little that a local organization can do to staunch the flow.

“Community service” is here construed as the activities that voluntary organizations and individuals undertake to attempt to assuage community needs. There is a very strong element of volunteerism in this understanding. That is not to say that people who are paid for their efforts cannot improve life in a community. But for the purposes of this study, that is not called “community service”—it is called a “job.” Community-service organizations seek to alleviate needs for which there is no ready, structured, formal, existing, governmental or organizational answer—things that might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Two sociological concepts that are useful for this study are “community control” and “information age.” Community control is embodied in the perhaps apocryphal stereotype of the rural village of yore, a small, homogeneous settlement with a stable population who interacted on many levels. The information age is manifest in images of the high-tech city: a place without rootedness, impersonal, where people deal in information rather than the concrete, and in which there is such specialization that one deals with a particular person for only one specific thing. Sociologists claim that the United States, overall, is past the community-control era. Some of its characteristics can persist, however, in communities in which there is a deliberate effort to retain them.¹⁷ The

¹⁷ As is true of many of the other authors cited here, the work of John C. Allen and Don A. Dillman, rural sociologists, has been influenced by where they have chosen to live and work and the lifestyles that they have cultivated. Most whose work is cited and who have written eloquently about small-town and rural community do so from deep fascination, compulsion, and infatuation. John C. Allen and Don A. Dillman,

present study finds that some of the most vibrant communities emerge from a blending of the paradigms—they need not be mutually exclusive but can create an alloy of greater value than either of its base elements alone.

Summary

This current research is incredibly indebted to prior work. Without the dedicated endeavors of generations of previous researchers to establish and legitimate the study of community, the present effort would not be possible. A number of these explorations have elements that are relevant to this study. Yet, in the final analysis, none of the works truly embraces the same perspectives or questions. Therefore, although this study has heeded and acknowledges these writings, it has taken a different path. Its journey has been guided by the following questions and concepts.

Research Questions

- Why do people voluntarily form groups to address community needs?
 - How is “community” perceived?
 - How is “need” perceived?
 - What do members of the community gain from addressing these needs?
 - What are some of the benefits that communities can reap from having voluntary groups seek to resolve some of their needs?
- How can a community-service organization remain viable?
 - Are there needs that it can continue to alleviate?
 - Can it adapt its vision and mission to remain relevant?

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- How can it retain members?
- How can it maintain a coherent sense of purpose?
- How can it attract new adherents?
- Why does it matter if people voluntarily seek to ameliorate community needs?

Informing Concepts: The Meaning of Community

Although the researcher is loath to attempt to formulate and claim an immutable, universal definition of community, as she interacted with group members, listening to, observing, and working with them and trying to understand and articulate their perspectives on this complex idea, certain characteristics emerged. These appear to have broad applicability and, because of the considerable group success that they have apparently engendered, warrant further consideration and application.

- Close, personal, multifaceted ties are only possible among a finite number of people. It is precisely these sorts of ties that are most likely to produce the concerted group effort necessary to accomplish complex tasks over a period of time.
- It is easier to form community groups with those with whom one perceives that there is much in common.
- Most people belong to a number of communities.
- A community's boundaries, definition, and identity can be liminal, adapting and metamorphosing as needs dictate.
- In order to achieve a nuanced, profound, robust feeling of community, there needs to be some element of physical contact between community members.

- Community members derive fulfillment from their membership. They feel empowered and that they have a purpose.
- Community members obtain enjoyment from their membership.
- Members of viable communities have faith.

The study's other salient ideas include these:

-) **“Community needs”** are understood to be deficiencies that members of the community perceive and believe keep the community from functioning as smoothly as it should.
-) **“Community service”** is here construed as the activities that voluntary organizations and individuals undertake to attempt to assuage community needs.
-) The sociological concepts of **“community control,”** embodied in a small, homogeneous settlement with a stable population who interacted on many levels, and the **“information age,”** characterized as a place without rootedness, impersonal, where people deal in information rather than the concrete, and in which there is such specialization that one deals with a particular person for only one specific thing are supposed to be mutually exclusive. Indeed, the information age is supposed to have superseded community control. Yet there are communities that, through concerted effort, have blended what they deem best of these two worlds, continually creating community that is richer, deeper, more satisfying, more effective, and more enduring than any based on either concept alone.

In particular and unlike most of the existing literature, this study does not limit its focus to a description and analysis of a particular culture or an enumeration of the challenges that beset community. It has sought to distill the lessons and strategies that a

specific group have used to maintain vitality and relevance, fashioning a template that other groups can adapt and utilize to preserve their own viability.

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CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY: WHO AND HOW

Triangulation of Methods: Weaving More Strands into the Tapestry

This study employed a number of qualitative research methods. The researcher considered it absolutely essential to conduct the study among people within their familiar environs. Research explored emotions, attitudes, actions, and above all, relationships. Why do people come together to form a group? What do they gain from the group? What does the group gain from them? How do they, individually and collectively, interact with their perceived communities? All these strands are inextricably interwoven: one cannot remove any one without rending the entire fabric. Trying to isolate individuals by giving them discrete questionnaires to complete alone or placing them in a laboratory setting would have introduced intolerably falsifying artificiality. It is true that the very act of doing a study inevitably introduces some elements of artificiality, since the researcher cannot apprehend everything about an individual life: some aspects will be etched in sharp relief, some will be blurred, and some will be omitted altogether. Still, using a variety of methods in a fieldwork setting provided a fuller and more nuanced portrayal than what could have been obtained using an approach that isolates people or takes them out of context. Therefore, this study used the range of methods¹ deemed most appropriate and amenable to its subjects and to gaining answers and insights into the

¹ The author's approach to case-study research has been heavily influenced by the work of Robert K. Yin, president of COSMOS Corporation, a research and management technology firm specializing in social policy problems, and, particularly, Robert E. Stake, professor of education and director of the Center for Institutional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Both of these sources affirm using triangulation. Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2nd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series 5 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994); Robert E. Stake,

overarching questions it sought to explore through them: case study, ethnography and participant observation, oral history, and focus groups.

Case Study

This research was framed as a case study. The decision to concentrate on one Grange, and the further reality of reporting selected aspects of that Grange, comply with standard case study guidelines. These guidelines affirm selection of Fredonia Grange as the quintessential case, not simply because the researcher was able to forge close ties to a number of members, but also because its access, interests, and activities held the potential to afford a superb opportunity to learn.² The guidelines further suggest that the researcher spend “substantial time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on.”³ The guidelines recognize that the researcher cannot observe everything of interest or consequence for study, and recommend that such gaps be filled by interviewing those who were observers or by relying on documentation of the events. In the tradition of rigorous case study work, this research tried to “learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but . . . describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings”⁴ and apply them to their own relevant situations.

“Case Studies,” chap. 14 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 236–47.

² Stake, “Case Studies,” especially 243, 244.

³ *Ibid.*, 242.

Why Fredonia Grange?

Once the author determined that Grange members could be very revealing subjects through which to examine her research questions (What brought them to and kept them in the Grange? What did they gain from it and it from them? How did they, as individuals and as a group, interact with their communities and what did each side derive from this?), the next task was to determine which Granges and members should receive the primary focus. As she conceived this study, she weighed developing it in different ways. She considered trying to do a general overview of the Grange in Michigan, making contacts and conducting brief observations at Granges throughout the state. Such a plan ultimately seemed far from ideal because the then forty-seven Michigan Granges were spread throughout the lower and upper peninsulas of Michigan, often at considerable distances from the author's base. Since research was a one-person effort, without funding, sponsorship, or unlimited time, this approach appeared intractable. In addition, many apparently desirable contacts would not agree to talk with the author: they did not respond to preliminary overtures, backed out of initial agreements to meet, or did not follow through on later commitments. In many ways this lack of receptivity was salutary, since it nudged the author to adopt her other plan—to focus more intensively on a particular Grange, studying members' myriad connections both with one another and with greater communities. This has surely produced a more nuanced work. But why were many reluctant to talk with the author? What lay behind that?

⁴ Ibid., 243.

The Specter of Secrecy

From the outset, the researcher made it clear that she would not join the Grange. She declared and demonstrated her willingness, indeed her eagerness, to help Granges and individual Grangers on projects, particularly when she could employ the communication training and skills that filled such a void in the Grange. The researcher developed close, satisfying relationships with a number of Grange members. But she could not swear allegiance to an organization that demanded from its initiates uncritical and unquestioning loyalty and a promise to keep its core teachings secret. Although the researcher esteems many of the people and activities of some of the Granges, there is much in the current organization, especially in its national and state manifestations, that she finds deeply disturbing. Further, the researcher could not make a long-term commitment to the Grange. Although she fully expected that her friendships with some members would continue, she knew that as her research on the Grange wound down, her intense involvement with it would diminish, then stop. So throughout the study, when asked about joining (an issue that recurred regularly), the researcher's mantra was always, "I cannot join: I am a researcher and it would be a conflict of interest. I want to share the Grange's story with others and cannot do that as a member. But I believe in the good work that the Grange is accomplishing and would like to help in ways that I can by using my communication training." Some members were able to accept this, embracing the researcher on these terms. Others never gave up trying to convert her, although they did not seem uncomfortable with her role of researcher and chronicler—they just seemed to want the added connection that the familiarity of the membership concept would bring.

A number of Grange members, however, were suspicious and, at times, outright hostile to the author. There is probably no way of telling how widespread this feeling was. Unless people know each other well and, in the heat of the moment, begin to denounce one another, one generally does not walk up to another person and say, “I have some real problems with you because. . . .” One is more likely to avoid the people or, if that is impossible, to demonstrate, by the frigidity of one’s actions, that the person does not really exist. Why did the author elicit these visceral, angry reactions from some members? Did those who got to know her come to dislike her? While this is always possible, it seemed, predominantly, not to be a decisive factor. The people who seemed to have the most difficulty accepting the author were precisely those who did not know her—in fact, many had never spoken with her. No, the animosity seemed to stem from what the author represented to them: an outside challenge to a hidden tradition that they cherished and did not want questioned or changed. A number of Grange members with whom the author had contact exhibited a siege mentality. Harkening back to the early days of the Grange and tales that they had heard about efforts to undermine and discredit it, they believed that outside forces were still bent on destroying the Grange and would expend considerable efforts and resources to do so.⁵ Other Grange members ruefully scoffed at this, questioning why any individual or group would commit time or resources to destroying a husk of an organization that gave every indication that it was quite capable of destroying itself with no outside intervention.⁶

⁵ Patty Carncross, long-time member and officer (since childhood) of the Grange at the local, state, and national levels, conversation with author, February 9, 2002, Edmore, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

⁶ This oppositional belief has been expressed by a number of Fredonia Grange members in conversations with the author during the years since the Edmore conversation.

Membership Clinic, Edmore Michigan: Intimations of Hostility

The author first became acutely aware of how inhospitable Grange members could be early on in her research when she attended the annual Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic at Edmore, Michigan on February 9, 2002. She had obtained a list of officers of local Michigan Granges and sent letters to a large number of them, identifying herself as a researcher, explaining her plan to do research on the historical and contemporary Grange, and asking them if they would be willing to talk with her about their Grange experiences. Although she received few responses, one was from a member of the Michigan State Grange Membership Committee, who invited the author to attend the membership clinic.⁷

When the author first arrived at the clinic, before she could exit her car, she was met by a man who looked at her quizzically, since she was clearly unknown to him, and asked to what Grange she belonged.⁸ When the author explained that she did not belong to any Grange but that Patty Carncross had invited her since she was a researcher studying the Grange, the man pondered for a few moments and then with apparent reluctance said that she could go inside if she wished. As the author came into the church hall where the meeting was being held, she noticed dozens of people milling around, talking with one another. She did not see anyone whom she knew, but since she had not made many Grange contacts up to that point, that was not surprising.

⁷ Patty Carncross, e-mail messages to author, January 23, 2002, January 24, 2002, January 25, 2002, in author's possession. After giving some of the logistical details of the clinic—date, time, location—she continued: "You are totally welcome to attend. We are a very friendly bunch."

⁸ The author learned that although Michigan Grange members nominally number around 1,500, there are far fewer of them who are active. The latter constitute a fairly small community whose individuals are all well known to one another.

The author noticed that people were wearing name tags and apparently writing their names on a sign-up sheet. She stood in line to do the same. When she arrived at the head of the line, she explained to the man in charge of registration that she was not a Grange member but that she had been invited to attend the conference since she was doing research on the Grange. The man did not reply for about a minute, trying to decide how to handle this. Finally, he said that the author could not really register—she could not be eligible for things like the door prizes, since she was not a member. He told her that she could, though, take a name tag and note pad. The author internally mused that this could be a long day. She truly had no desire for a door prize. But she recoiled at how blatantly the organization was underlining that she was not a member, was not welcome or accepted, was not wanted. What an effective strategy to highlight that she was not one of them. She cringed at the thought of how this would make a curious, neutral observer feel—someone with an interest in learning more about the Grange and what it might mean in his or her life—not someone who was committed to doing research as effectively as possible, despite rudeness and a lack of cordiality. It seemed all the more egregious that this should be taking place at a membership clinic in which people were trying to devise and share strategies on ways to pull more people into the Grange. The author was the only non-Grange member at the clinic. Yet there was no effort to make her feel welcome, to include her in discussions, to demonstrate what the Grange could offer to her. Throughout the day, the author marveled as she heard Grange members congratulate themselves on what a splendid organization they have. Further, they praised themselves on being accepting and open.

As the author was filling in her name tag, she heard a voice behind her call her name. It was Rich Hazen, Chair of Fredonia Grange, a man whom she had met three weeks before. He was cordial and clearly glad to see the author. She asked if she might sit with him, and he acquiesced. As people stopped by to greet Rich, the author introduced herself and thus did manage to meet a few people. No one took the initiative to meet the author or to introduce her to anyone else.

The National Grange had sent its Membership/Leadership Director, Ed Luttrell, to conduct some workshops at the clinic. During his presentations, Luttrell sounded a recurring theme: We are all Grange members here; we have the best possible organization; we just have to let people know all the wonderful things that the Grange does and be truly welcoming, and people will flock to our doors. During a break from the program, the author encountered Luttrell. She introduced herself, explaining her interest in the Grange, her desire to learn more about the Grange and to help others do so. She expressed her desire to help foster improved relationships between the State Grange and the state land-grant university. Luttrell stated that that sort of partnership would not work in his native state of Oregon. The author noted, in passing, that she did not belong to the Grange, so the continued references to all attendees being members was not quite accurate. She also mused that other nonmembers might come to such gatherings to learn more about the Grange and explore whether it was an organization for them. Luttrell responded, "But you will belong by the end of the day." The author replied that she could not join because of research integrity. At that, Luttrell turned and walked away.

The author stayed throughout the workshop. As a nonmember, she was largely invisible. The role of unheeded observer was an advantageous one for observing

interactions among devoted Grange members. With seeming sincerity, they professed their openness to one and all—apparently unconscious of how their actions belied their words. In the wake of the clinic, the author wrote to nine people whom she had met there, expressing her pleasure at meeting them and seeking to continue contact with them. She received no replies.⁹

Further Echoes of Antipathy

About a week later, the author visited a Grange friend, Beulah Winter, who had recently undergone heart surgery and had thus been unable to attend the membership clinic. She asked the author to depict the event in detail. When the author described how unfriendly the majority of Grange members had been, her friend seemed dismayed but not truly surprised. Searching for an explanation, Beulah ventured that the Grange had been self-sufficient for so long that people did not know what to make of an outsider and so were inherently suspicious and distrustful. She continued that Grange members would like to like the author and would be able to do so if she would just join the organization. Beulah concluded that this should be done as soon as possible. The author reminded Beulah that she could not join because she was conducting research on the Grange and becoming a member would compromise her ability to do that. Beulah replied that the author could join their Grange and they would tell no one. She said that no harm would come of it; “Who would know?” The author replied that the point was not whether or not her joining would be discovered—whether publicized or secret, her membership would still have an effect. No matter who else would be privy to the knowledge, the author

⁹ This account is based on the author’s notes from the Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic, Edmore, Michigan, February 9, 2002, in author’s possession.

would know—and therein would be the difference.¹⁰ Beulah's level of activity in the Grange over a prolonged period has led to her acquaintance with many Grange members, making her privy to their thoughts and opinions. During the years that the author has known Beulah, she has found her to be quite accepting of the author's research and, though deeply committed to the Grange and its positions, generally fair. So the author believed that Beulah was accurately characterizing the thinking of some members.

This was confirmed some months later. The author became aware that the Michigan State Grange could not adequately store its precious Grange records and artifacts, some going back many decades. It was looking for a suitable repository for them: one that would preserve and protect them, while affording continued access to Grange members and the general public. Beulah and her husband, Roland, had been appointed Michigan State Grange Historians because of their keen interest in Grange history and the splendid private collection of Grange materials that they had amassed. Representatives of the University of Michigan had contacted them, seeking whatever Grange records and materials the Michigan State Grange would donate. The author asked why there was not a continued relationship between the State Grange and the state land-grant college, Michigan State University (MSU). The Winters replied that they had contacted MSU some years before about the old records, and representatives there were not interested.

Through her research on the Grange, the author had established contacts with employees in the MSU library and museum. She arranged for MSU representatives to

¹⁰ Beulah Winter, Secretary, Home Grange, officer of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, Michigan State Grange Deaf Awareness Director, Michigan State Grange Historical Collections Committee member, active at the local, county, state and national Grange levels for more than fifty years, community activist, interview by author, February 18, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Beulah has continued to sound this theme, upon occasion, in the years since this meeting. She has stated that there are Grange members who "have problems" with the author because she has sought to help the Grange without

meet with the Winters and others from the State Grange on March 10, 2003.¹¹ The author did attend this meeting. Five Grange members involved with its historical artifacts met with five representatives from MSU who deal with old materials—staff from the library, archives, and museum. The meeting went well: the people from MSU were clearly thrilled with the artifacts that the Grange wished to donate, and the Grange members were proud and pleased to show off their horde to such an appreciative audience. The author hoped that this meeting might serve as both a bridge for and a catalyst to improved ties between MSU and the Grange. Back in the days when both were young institutions, the ties between the two had been strong; the two had helped each other survive and thrive. But in recent years, the connections had withered. There was the hope that the two could once again help each other. This was a trope that had often appeared during the author's conversations with Roland Winter. He touched upon it again during this meeting day. All involved in the meeting seemed buoyed by its promise.

As the author stopped by the office of Michigan State Grange Master Jeff Swainston to take her leave, they chatted briefly about the potential that they hoped this meeting would help tap. Jeff thanked the author for her efforts. She replied that she was happy to do what she could—that her contacts with the two institutions put in her in a perfect position to be a conduit between them and she could not ignore the possibilities. He continued that many Grange members had talked with him about her because they had “real problems with” her. Appalled at the thought, she asked, “Why?” He responded,

joining and many members “only want help from their own.” Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, October 27, 2002, in author's possession, is characteristic.

¹¹ Jeanne Drewes, assistant director, Access and Preservation, MSU Library, e-mail to author, March 10, 2003, in author's possession; Anita Ezzo, Food Science and Technology Librarian, MSU Library, e-mail to author, March 11, 2003, in author's possession; Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, March 11, 2003, in author's possession.

simply, “Because you’re not a member. They say, ‘If she wants to be involved, why doesn’t she join?’” Nonplused not so much by the sentiments as by his apparent need to express them even in the midst of this positive meeting, the author asked, “What do you say?” Jeff answered, “I say that you must have your reasons.” Jeff knew the strictures placed upon the author by her position as a researcher. But he did not share this information with others.¹²

Yearning to be Self-Sufficient and Isolated

The Grange was founded in 1867 as a fraternal organization with an attendant secret ritualism. This was a popular associational type of the times.¹³ Today, nearly 140 years later, a culture of secrecy continues to permeate the Grange institutionally. There was a time when an “us versus them” mindset might have made sense: the Grange was much bigger, represented a much larger proportion of the population, and may have needed a period of separation and isolation in which to develop. Even then, no group could be completely self-sufficient, existing alone and in a vacuum. Today, an attempt at such a position is completely untenable, humorous if it were not so poignant. In an era of globalization, when traditional barriers of time and space and customary borders are turning out to be mutable and permeable, Donne’s words that no person—or group—is an

¹² Meeting of the Michigan State Grange Historical Committee and Representatives of MSU about Donating Grange Materials, March 10, 2003, Haslett, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

¹³ Ben Fulton, “Masonic Waves: Myths Persist. Membership Ages. But the Granddaddy of All Fraternal Organizations Sticks to Tradition,” *Salt Lake City Weekly*, June 20, 2002, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>; David Van Biema, “Endangered Conspirators,” *Time*, May 25, 1998, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>; Dan Pine, “Jews and Freemasons—A Not-So-Secret Brotherhood,” *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, September 5, 2003, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>; “Britain: Fewer on the Square; Freemasonry,” *Economist*, March 2, 2002, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>. Grange history, secrecy, and ritualism will be examined in the next chapter.

island ring truer than ever. Those Granges that persist in sending to learn for whom the bell tolls may discover that it tolls for them.¹⁴

Some Granges, consciously and at times explicitly, realize this. They respect the Grange's past, but are trying to create a different present—one responsive to contemporary needs and realities—in order to ensure that it has a future. A number of these Granges have made a formal commitment to trying to take the Grange from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first.¹⁵ A few of these Granges are in Michigan.

A Flock of Black Sheep

Fredonia Grange, located in Fredonia Township, greater Marshall, Michigan, one of the largest (in terms of membership) and most active Michigan Granges, is one of the Granges committed to change. Despite, or perhaps at the root of, its prominence, the majority of the members of Fredonia Grange have always considered themselves the black sheep of the Grange, a band of eccentrics who would be hard pressed to fit into another Grange, a collection of iconoclasts uneasily allied with the Grange hierarchy and who maintain tenuous ties with the greater organization only because they are allowed near complete autonomy.¹⁶ In their capacity as Grange members, those who belong to Fredonia Grange lead a schizophrenic existence. The leadership of Fredonia, as well as

¹⁴ The entire passage runs: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." This last reference is to church bells tolling at someone's death and burial. John Donne, "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, 17," in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 236:19.

¹⁵ There will be a fuller discussion of this program in the next chapter, which gives a history of the Grange.

¹⁶ These thoughts are expressed too frequently, by too many Fredonia Grange members, to cite each instance productively here. Therefore, only the first pungent pronouncement, which aptly captures the flavor and intent of the ensuing ones, is cited here. Helen Peck, muse, matriarch, and conscience of Fredonia Grange, active in the Grange at the local, county, state, and national levels for more than sixty

many of its members, are committed to seeing the national organization survive. But they have their own perspectives on how this can happen and what effects this should have on local Granges, often differing from the hierarchical view.¹⁷

At the same time, these Grange members are highly pragmatic. Although, as is probably true of most organizations, they are interested in expanding their membership, they do not stand on formalities. If people want to help with a project, want to contribute time or expertise, Fredonia Grange welcomes their efforts, whether or not they are members. There are women who have been gathering at the Grange hall for years to sew for the needy; some of the ladies are members, some are not. All are embraced—and claimed—by Fredonia Grange. When Fredonia holds its major fund-raising events, the activities that raise the funds to keep it operational, it gets a large portion of its help from nonmembers. In some respects, Fredonia views membership as a formality.¹⁸ Member or not, if one is willing to make a commitment to Fredonia Grange, it will reciprocate. Fredonia Grange members proudly claim that one does not need to be an officer to lead their Grange. They acknowledge that some of their most valued “members” are not,

years, community activist, interview by author, November 6, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁷ Again, these are frequently expressed sentiments, so only a salient instance is offered here. Athol Hazen, Jr., Secretary, Fredonia Community Grange, Master, Calhoun County Pomona Grange, active in the Grange at the local, county, and state levels for more than fifty years, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Richard Hazen, Chair, Fredonia Community Grange, active in the Grange for more than forty years (since joining the Juvenile Grange at age five), advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, Community-Service Director, Fredonia Community Grange, active in the Grange for nearly forty years, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Randy Nail, Cochair, Fredonia Grange, member, Michigan State Grange Executive Committee, active in the Grange at the local, county, and state levels since joining in about 2000, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁸ It was Randy Nail who first stated this position to the author. One of the initial recorded instances was during a meeting on April 23, 2003. He has said this many times since and his philosophy has been echoed

strictly speaking, members at all, since they have never formally joined or signed a membership card. But they are loyal and devoted to Fredonia Grange, supporting it with their time and talents, always there when needed, and are thus a valued part of this Grange's family.¹⁹ Fredonia Grange is an interesting hybrid: it is of the Grange, yet it transcends it, reaching out to its community and building bridges with members and nonmembers alike, helping to pull people in to achieve a common purpose.

Fredonia Grange is not a typical Grange: the staunch allegiance that its members have to it often seems to have little to do with its being a Grange and everything to do with the people who belong to it and the activities that they perform. Many members do not have allegiance to the Grange *per se*: they feel no connection to other Granges, whether local, state, or national. This atypicality might be a handicap were the study's purpose to chronicle the Grange. But the intent is to explore community and some of the individuals, groups, and beliefs that contribute to creating it. So Fredonia Grange's ability to transcend traditional Grange barriers to communal identity and interaction makes it an all the more fitting subject of study and makes it more likely that the results of this study will be relevant to and adaptable for other organizations.

Fredonia Grange is thirty miles from the author's home base—one of the closest in the state to her. The route between them, over rural roads, could be challenging when traveled in the dark or during inclement weather. Still, it was close enough to make possible the sorts of continued, frequent interactions that could lead to dense personal

by other Fredonia Grange members. Randy Nail, meeting with author, April 23, 2003, Charlotte, MI, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁹ This was a frequent source of discussion during the potlucks that preceded the semi-monthly meetings. During an interview, Athol Hazen, Jr., eloquently expressed the view. Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. Athol declared that those with familiarity of Fredonia Grange agreed that one did not have to be an officer to run it. The author countered that one did not even have to be a *member* to run it.

relationships and the intricate understandings necessary to explore the complex questions about community and its constituent groups and members that the author wished to probe. The relative physical proximity and logistics were powerful inducements. Even more critical, however, were the openness and receptivity of many of Fredonia Grange's leadership and members.

When the author encountered Fredonia Grange, it was stable and holding its own. But a number of members felt a deep unease. The membership and much of the leadership, overall, was aging and not being replaced by younger members. There was concern that if they did not redefine themselves, connect with their community in new and necessary ways, and become more relevant, they would cease to exist within the next decade. From the outset, Fredonia Grange members have been excited about and supportive of the author's research. They have been eager to help disseminate the story of their Grange, as well as their personal stories as Grangers: they have given the author complete access to their meetings and activities; they have shared revealing, personal, thoughtful, poignant insights with the author in countless conversations, e-mails, oral-history interviews, and focus-group interviews. When they learned of the author's training and previous work in such communication areas as: writing and productively distributing press releases and articles; performing communication audits; facilitating brainstorming, analysis, and goal-setting sessions; holding communication workshops; and researching, developing, moderating, analyzing, and reporting focus groups, they were eager to have her help. Although the goal of this research was not to save the Grange in general, or Fredonia Grange in particular, the intent was to devise tools, strategies, and answers pertaining to community and group membership, activities, and

viability that could be useful to any number of constituencies, including Granges.

Members of Fredonia Grange assert that the research process and its findings have been beneficial to them.²⁰

Participant Observation/Ethnography

As Stake asserts in his guidelines, case study research is also a manifestation of ethnography and participant observation. This case study possesses the following features usually present in ethnography:

- A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
- A tendency to work primarily with “unstructured” data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories
- Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one in detail.
- Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal

²⁰ As she reflected on her research with Fredonia Grange and pondered what effects it has had, the author asked some of those with whom she has worked most closely for their perspectives on the research processes. All were very positive about the experiences, replying at length and in detail about the benefits to be reaped and lamenting that other Granges were not open to these strategies. Mary Houghton, e-mail to author, April 24, 2004, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, e-mail to author, April 25, 2004, in author's possession; Randy Nail, e-mail to author, April 25, 2004, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, Chairperson, Fredonia Community Grange and a Grange member since age five, advocate of the Action Grange movement, community activist, e-mail to author, April 26, 2004, in author's possession. Shortly thereafter, annoyed at the hostility that many within the Grange have exhibited toward the author, Rich Hazen urged her to give up working with the Grange, admonishing, “You can't save people who don't want to be saved. Quit beating your head against the wall.” Rich Hazen, meeting with author, May 22, 2004, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. The author agrees that people have to be willing to accept help to be helped. Her goal in her research, however, was to study and gain insight, help if possible, but not try to lead a group to a promised land—her role was not to be so intrusive. She wanted to share some effective tools with the willing but not assume a place of leadership or create dependency. The antipathy that many within the Grange seem to hold toward outsiders and the idea of change has definitely shaped the author's work. This is a fact, in and of itself neither good nor bad. In its way it speaks as eloquently about group

descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.²¹

The researcher believes that one can never be a total, disinterested, and objective observer; one must be in life to observe it, and as such will of necessity have some degree of involvement in it. She makes no claims of scientific detachment and distance, contending that those are antithetical to good ethnography: one must share something of oneself, relate to people on a human level, if one wishes others to be open and to reveal their thoughts and motives. On the other hand, the researcher is ever aware that she is just that—a researcher, and that one of the prime goals of her research is to learn from this case and share this knowledge so that others can, as well. She has a scholarly obligation not to go native or be co-opted by the group that she is studying. Yet she also needs to take pains to behave ethically and not mislead the people whom she is observing. As has been noted, she made it clear that she is a researcher. She shared the general direction of her research with her subjects. She engaged in some of the group's community-service activities and assisted in some of their projects; but she did not become a member of the organization, believing it important to maintain some differentiation. This last is very important, because even though some might have

adaptation, survival, and relevance as does the access afforded by Fredonia Grange. So it, too, has made a valuable contribution to this study.

²¹ Atkinson and Hammersley, "Ethnography and Participant Observation," 248. As Peter Vandergeest, an assistant professor at the University of Victoria and a senior fellow at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, Canada, and E. Melanie DuPuis, a policy analyst in the Environment Unit at the New York State Department of Economic Development, highlight, it is important to note the separation between the everyday lives of many policy "writers and activists and the places about which they write and argue. . . . International organizations located in global centers contribute important knowledge about the global effects of local activities. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that this knowledge is not usually based on local meanings; such meanings seldom fit the abstract dichotomies presented in many modern critiques." Peter Vandergeest and E. Melanie DuPuis, "Introduction," in *Creating the Countryside: The Politics of Rural and Environmental Discourse*, edited by E. Melanie DuPuis and Peter Vandergeest (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 19. This proposed study is an attempt to uncover some of those local meanings, which it doubts will fit into neat abstractions or tidy dichotomies.

viewed her as an insider, when the research was completed, although she maintained some contact, the period of intense interaction ended. Walking this fine line is essential, and in keeping with Atkinson and Hammersley's participant observation typology.²²

Many of the experiences described focus on Fredonia Grange. Fredonia's actions, however, need to be examined and understood in a fuller context—not just how it functions within its greater geographical community, but how it operates in, and how typical it is of, the greater Grange community. So the study also describes events that took place within a larger Grange context.

Asking for the Answers

One needs to establish rapport and relationships with people over a period of time, building up a reservoir of trust and goodwill. One can certainly gain insights by observing people in action: one can see how people interact, learn what activities they deem suitable for their participation. But one is unlikely to gain much of the desired in-depth information on thoughts, feelings, and motives through casual interaction. As the researcher's high school acquaintances used to say, one does not generally walk up to someone and say, "Hello, how are you, let me tell you the meaning of life." One of this study's goals is to probe some complex and deeply rooted concepts: concepts that are difficult to grasp and with which some of the subjects may have never tried to wrestle. The surest way to gain this information is to ask people. But the questioning itself needs

²² Atkinson and Hammersley, in recounting the history of ethnography and participant observation as a discipline, reveal how and why the method's foundation, upon which later work built, was fashioned. "Most important of all, historians posed the methodological problem of whether and how other cultures could be understood, a problem that still lies at the heart of modern ethnography. . . . Social research was distinct from physical science because in seeking to understand human actions and institutions we could draw on our own experience and cultural knowledge, and through that reach understanding based on what we share with other human beings, despite cultural differences." Atkinson and Hammersley, "Ethnography and Participant Observation," 249, 250.

to be in a guided and deliberate way, asking open-ended questions that will build on prior ones, lead to succeeding ones, and help people uncover their own thoughts and feelings about the designated issues.

Fredonia Grange has more than 150 members. The researcher could not tell all their stories. She tried to trace major trends and developments, highlighting the impact of influential members. The study used two related methods to do this, two forms of interviews: oral history and focus groups.

Oral History

Fredonia Grange is an active organization. At its meetings and fund-raisers, people are in constant motion. These venues are not conducive to protracted, nuanced discussion. An effective way to get below the surface busy-ness to the underlying “why” was to conduct oral history interviews with some members.²³ Donald Ritchie, the dean of

²³ The author was fortunate to be referred to Jeffrey Charnley, Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, Michigan State University and Director of the Michigan State University Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the university in 2005. Once he learned of the author’s research, Jeff was enthusiastically supportive, providing a crash course in doing oral history. He helped the author decide on adequate equipment for her meager budget: a RadioShack cassette recorder, two external unidirectional table microphones, a splitter, a power adapter, and decent hour-long cassette tapes. Jeff suggested that the recorder use standard cassettes, not micro, have voice activation, variable playback, battery power and recording level indicator, jack for external microphone, and capacity to use either batteries or electrical current from a wall outlet. He explained that the tapes did not have to be stereo quality (the human voice does not need the range capacity of music), but that they should be fairly good—they should cost at least one dollar each. The tapes should be no longer than sixty minutes—thirty minutes per side. Longer tapes (ninety and one-hundred-twenty minutes) are thinner and break more easily. Also, turning the tape over or replacing it every thirty minutes can serve as a welcome respite for interviewer and interviewee alike. Jeff admonished to get tapes whose cassettes are held together with screws: that way, if a tape should become unwound, it is easy to open it and rewind.

Jeff suggested numerous helpful strategies, such as starting with a practice interview with a family member or close friend; conducting no more than two interviews a day (the amount, intensity, and concentration of work entailed makes them exhausting); taking plenty of backup tapes and batteries with one into the field; checking the tapes to be sure that they are recording; starting each taped interview with a brief introduction to include the interviewee’s name, the date, and the location; making brief notes after each interview; popping out the tabs of cassette taps to prevent accidental erasure; making back-up copies of tapes; transcribing the tapes promptly; storing the original tapes in a safe place and always working from a backup copy. These guidelines are corroborated by other sources that the author consulted after this meeting, while she prepared to conduct oral histories. There is more on these sources in the next several notes. Jeff also gave advice on undergoing the internal review process.

Oral History, describes the practice in this way: “An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange on audio or videotape. Tapes of the interview are transcribed. . . . The interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication. . . .”²⁴ The researcher sought out, in particular, those with a long association with the Grange who could offer a broad perspective on its attractions, influence, and impact. Selection was also dictated by those who had the willingness, time, and comfort level to participate. The interviewer conducted the interviews in quiet, nonthreatening places of the interviewees’ choice: generally their homes. The interviewer asked people to commit, initially, one hour of their time for the interview. This commitment was flexible and was adjusted and adapted as conditions and opportunities presented themselves. If the interview seemed to be tiring or upsetting the interviewee, the interviewer thought that it would be best to conclude it early, with the option of continuing it another time. On the other hand, if at

Jeff discussed transcribing the oral history tapes, a vital and integral part of the entire process. In a project with no budget or staff, it would be up to the author to do the transcriptions. Jeff cautioned that although transcribing could be tedious (to which the author now can readily attest), it is necessary and can often be an invaluable way to relive the interview and review what was said. Jeff also shared some of his own horror stories from years in the field: goofs and gaffs that, while excruciating at the time, are an inevitable fact of life for anyone who conducts a number of oral histories. (This was to hearten the author when she made her own blunders—and blunder she did.)

Jeff has been a consistent and exemplary mentor. Since the author’s first meeting with him on September 24, 2001, he has been a constant source of support, knowledge, and inspiration. He has lent her equipment, been a responsive sounding board, and answered questions that were sometimes inchoate. In addition to recommending many of the sources that the author has used for guidance, he suggested that the author subscribe to the H-Oralhist Listserv, <http://www.h-net.org/~oralhist/>, which has served the author as a source of encouragement and enlightenment for a number of years, now. Most of all, and through everything, Jeff has assured the author that her work is important, that it needs to be disseminated, and that her comfort and skill with oral history would grow. Jeffrey Charnley, initial meeting with author, September 24, 2001, East Lansing, MI, notes, in author’s possession. There have been continued meetings and correspondence throughout the intervening years.

²⁴ Ritchie is well respected in the field for his experiences and work. Among his credentials: he is associate historian, United States Senate Office, he teaches in the Cornell in Washington program, he is a past president and continuing valued contributor to the Oral History Association, and he has more than twenty years experience as an oral history interviewer and as a leader of oral history workshops throughout the country. Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Twayne’s Oral History Series No. 15, edited by Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Twayne Publishers, an Imprint of Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 1.

the end of the hour the interview was going well and appeared to have barely scratched the surface, the interviewer planned to ask to continue it then or make arrangements to continue it at a future time, depending on the willingness and availability of interviewee and interviewer.²⁵

Ritchie's basic guidelines on doing oral history, to which the researcher endeavored to adhere, are worth repeating. "Fundamental rules and principles apply to all types of oral history interviewing: do your homework; be prepared; construct meaningful but open-ended questions; do not interrupt responses; follow up on what you have heard; know your equipment thoroughly; promptly process your tapes; and always keep in mind and practice the ethics of interviewing."²⁶

In keeping with that last point, the instruments used in the oral histories were submitted to Michigan State University's (MSU) internal review board, the University

²⁵ None of the interviewees appeared to become upset by the interviews. The shortest interview was with a ninety-eight-year-old lady in frail health. She was eager and alert and seemed to enjoy sharing her memories. The interviewer, however, had promised to take up no more than an hour of her time; when, at the end of the hour, great-grandchildren arrived from another state for a visit, the interviewer deemed it prudent to leave. All of the other interviews lasted well beyond the asked-for hour. To a person, the interviewees seemed to enjoy the chance to share their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes the most difficult part of the interview was finding a delicate way to end it. The author found Jeff Charnley to be correct: conducting oral history interviews can be exhilarating because of what one learns; they can also be exhausting, since one is concentrating all one's senses, intently, on eliciting the interviewee's story. It is impossible to maintain that degree of hypersensitivity beyond a few hours.

²⁶ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 57. The Baylor University Institute for Oral History, a leader in its field, delineates these ethical concerns well. "1. Each oral history interviewer should commit herself/himself to producing the highest quality interview possible. The interviewer should realize that the life of the tape extends far beyond the immediate use and should strive to gather information that will be relevant to future users. 2. The interviewee should be informed of her/his rights and interests, the purposes of the program/project, interview and transcribing procedures, final location of tapes and transcripts, and potential use of the memoir. 3. Interviewers should guard against any possible exploitation of interviewees and be sensitive to ways in which interviews might be used. 4. Interviewers should be sensitive to the communities from which they have collected their oral histories, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes or to bring undue notoriety to the communities. The resulting interviews should be made accessible to the communities. 5. Interviewees should be given the opportunity to respond to questions as freely as possible and not be subjected to stereotyped assumptions. 6. Interviewers should make every effort to place completed interviews in an archives or repository where they can be used by other interested researchers." Baylor University Institute for Oral History, "Introduction to Oral History: Ethical and Legal Considerations," Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Ethicalrev.htm (accessed July 9, 2004).

Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), to ensure the rights and protection of interviewees. Before being interviewed, each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form that: described, in brief, the study and its goals; assured the interviewee that he or she was in control of the process—he or she could stop it any time or ask that comments not be used; and gave contact information so that the interviewee could contact the researcher, the researcher's faculty supervisor, or the head of the internal review board with any questions or concerns. It was made clear that interviewees could, if they wished, receive copies of their oral history tapes or transcripts. Copies of the instruments used in the oral history interviews are attached in an appendix to this study.

The cassette tapes from the oral history interviews provide invaluable insight into the human condition, community, voluntary associations, and the hopes, dreams, and aspirations that people have and seek to fulfill by coming together and seeking to address community needs. Many of the interviewees reflect upon ways of life that are gone forever. Perhaps most poignantly, simply, and eloquently, many of the interviewees spoke from the heart, reflecting very basic human needs. For these and myriad other reasons, these interviews are a priceless resource. Because of this, when the author has finished her work with the tapes, she plans to donate them to an archive where they will be preserved and made accessible to the public.²⁷

²⁷ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 131–58. Jeff Charnley has also discussed donating the tapes with the author. He feels that MSU, which is currently involved in digitizing and making available through the Internet, a number of audio resources, would make a suitable repository for the tapes. Baylor University Institute for Oral History touches upon this as well on many of its Web pages, including: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, "Introduction to Oral History: What Is Oral History?" Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/WhatIs.htm (accessed July 9, 2004).

Baylor is in the forefront of doing oral history. Working through the entire online workshop is a fairly quick, inexpensive way to develop knowledge of oral history. It touches upon such areas as: defining oral history; developing and managing an oral history project; ethical and legal considerations; equipment considerations; interviewing tips; do's and don'ts of oral history interviewing; transcribing; and outcomes of oral history research. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, "Introduction to Oral History:

Focus Groups

In past decades, what are now called “focus groups” were commonly referred to as “focused interviews” or “group interviews.”²⁸ There is a strong element of collective interviewing in this study’s use of focus groups. One of the beauties of talking with people in small groups is that it reflects the way that people, who are social and interactive beings, tend to function, process information, and develop ideas and perceptions. This study used focus groups to explore two multifaceted issues. 1) How do

Developing and Managing an Oral History Project,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Projectdesign.htm (accessed July 9, 2004); Baylor University Institute for Oral History, “Introduction to Oral History: Equipment Considerations,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Equipmentrev.htm (accessed July 9, 2004); Baylor University Institute for Oral History, “Introduction to Oral History: Interviewing Tips,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Tips.htm (accessed July 9, 2004); Baylor University Institute for Oral History, “Introduction to Oral History: Do’s and Don’ts of Oral History Interviewing,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Do%27srev.htm (accessed July 9, 2004); Baylor University Institute for Oral History, “Introduction to Oral History: Outcomes of Oral History Research,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Publicprog.htm (accessed July 9, 2004).

These guidelines make valid points about transcribing. The author has already alluded to how onerous this job can be. Baylor makes these points, warning how difficult it can be: “It is time-consuming. While the skills and interests of the transcriber may affect transcribing time, it is estimated that each hour of tape takes anywhere from 4–6 hours just for one rough copy transcription. Total processing time for one hour of tape is over 10–12 hours. . . . Transcribing is a long, arduous task which requires intense concentration.” It can also be distorting: although the transcriber tries to render the interview as accurately as possible and can insert parenthetical remarks to try to capture tone of voice, laughter, etc., a person who was not at the original interview will not get the full flavor from a transcription. But since the author was also the transcriber, she could relive the interviews as she played them back and carefully noted each word. The process of listening to the tapes, transcribing them, and then rereading the transcriptions seemed to etch each word, thought, and emotion into her mind. As Baylor said, it was an arduous process. But it was also an invaluable one. It was made more feasible by using a real transcription machine (not just a cassette recorder) with a foot pedal to control tape playback. Baylor University Institute for Oral History, “Introduction to Oral History: Transcribing,” Web page in *Oral History Workshop on the Web*, http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Transcribingrev.htm (accessed July 9, 2004).

The Oral History Association makes its “Oral History Evaluation Guidelines” pamphlet available online. It, too, is a useful document, filled with suggestions on such areas as: Program/Project Guidelines; Ethical/Legal Guidelines; Recording Preservation Guidelines; Tape/Transcript Processing Guidelines; Interview Content Guidelines; Interview Conduct Guidelines; Independent/Unaffiliated Researcher Guidelines; Educator and Student Guidelines. To the extent that these guidelines apply to the present study, the researcher has adhered to them. Oral History Association, “Oral History Evaluation Guidelines,” http://www.dickinson.edu/oha/pub_eg.html (accessed July 9, 2004).

members of a community define it, perceive its needs, feel that its shortcomings can be addressed, and believe that local individuals and small groups can make a positive difference in its daily life? 2) Why do people join a group? Why do they continue to belong? What appeals to them about the community-service aspects of the group? Why do they work to serve other's needs?

The classic focus group is characterized by the following features, all of which are pertinent to the study at hand.

- First, it is a socially oriented research procedure. People are social creatures who interact with others. They are influenced by the comments of others and make decisions after listening to the advice and counsel of people around them. . . .
- The second advantage of focus group discussions is that the format allows the moderator to probe. This flexibility to explore unanticipated issues is not possible within the more structured questioning sequences typical of mail-out surveys.
- A third advantage is that focus group discussions have high face validity. . . . The technique is easily understood and the results seem believable to those using the information. . . .
- A fourth advantage is that focus group discussions can be relatively low cost.²⁹

²⁸ Robert K. Merton, Marjorie Fiske, and Patricia L. Kendall, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*, A Report of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956).

²⁹ Richard A. Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 34-35. In his capacity as professor and Extension Evaluation Leader at the University of Minnesota, Krueger has gained much experience with focus groups. Hoping to see focus-group applications increase, he wrote the first edition of this book, in the 1980s, specifically in response to a perceived lack of materials that would help those in the public and nonprofit sectors (as opposed to marketers). Usage did expand and continues to do so. The present study is a small part of this evolution.

The study held two sets of focus groups. One series was with members of Fredonia Grange's surrounding geographical community to ascertain their perspectives on what the community needs and how the Grange does and can address these needs. This series was to consist of three sessions of four to eight people each. Participants were recruited from among members of the community who were perceived as active in and committed to the community's well being. Participants were not paid for their contributions, although they did receive such honoraria as homemade bread and bluebird nesting boxes—as well as famous Grange refreshments.³⁰

The other series of focus groups was held with members of Fredonia Grange. In addition to the questions about community, community service, community needs, and effective organizations that were posed to community members, the question path for these focus groups also included questions asking Grange members such things as what the Grange means to them, why they belong to the Grange, and what their vision for the Grange is. Like many other organizations, Fredonia Grange has a number of members who are not active: county or state officials, for example, may find it convenient to pay their minimal dues and have a nominal connection to the Grange, but are not truly involved. Participants were recruited from those with a more active commitment to the Grange. There was an effort to intermingle members who had belonged to the Grange for

³⁰ These procedures follow Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 1-99. The participants were not lured to the focus groups by promises of honoraria: the tokens were presented only at the close of the groups and came as a complete surprise to the happy attendees. Granges and Grangers are famous for the delicious food that they prepare. In fact, at times they fear that this is the *only* thing for which they are known. There will be more on this food focus in later chapters.

a long time with those who had joined more recently.³¹ Ideally, this series would also consist of three sessions of four to eight people each.³²

The focus groups were held, not in a clinical setting, but in a community location. The author wanted to create a relaxed, comfortable, homey atmosphere, something akin to a group of friends getting together to visit and share ideas; in fact, this often appeared to be the case. Any grouping occasioned by an outside force (i.e., these people did not just “happen” to come together but were specifically recruited to come share their thoughts at a set time) that is guided, no matter how gently, by overarching, open-ended questions will, of necessity, have a certain degree of irreality in it. Having a group of community members interact in a comfortable environment within the community, however, can make the process as natural and pleasurable as possible. Taking people out of their usual environs, placing them in a laboratory venue, observing them as specimens through two-way glass—and then, amid the inevitable trauma that such strangeness is bound to occasion, expecting them to fluently articulate their thoughts and feelings on community, is ludicrous. If one wants people to speak their minds and hearts, one must make it easy for them to do so. Holding the discussions in a familiar, reassuring community landmark did just that. This departure from the once traditional institutional,

³¹ Ibid.

³² Although, officially, the number of members of Fredonia Grange stands at more than 150, those who are active, involved members are far fewer. Further, those who are active in the Grange also tend to be active in other organizations: many play important roles in churches, youth groups, other civic organizations. The old adage of “If you want something done, ask a busy person” contains more than a few kernels of truth. Considering the modest number of involved, committed members and the demands on their time, the author realized that the ideal of three focus groups with four to eight members each might be unrealistic or impossible. Since the process here, however, had more the sense of collective, group interviewing in which each voice was retained because it was unique and valued, rather than an attempt to try to derive homogeneity or an artificially constructed, false typicality, the study adapted to the exigencies of reality instead of anguishing over trying, unsuccessfully, to impose some externally dictated ideal standard.

sterile setting is in keeping with current variations and elaborations on customary focus-group methods.³³

As was true with the oral history interviews, all instruments used in the focus groups were submitted to MSU's UCRIHS beforehand in order to ensure compliance with ethical standards and to protect participants' rights. Again, all participants signed consent forms before participating in a session. These consent forms: gave an encapsulation of the project and its goals; affirmed that interviewees ultimately controlled their participation and could terminate it at any time or ask that their remarks be omitted from any final report; and provided contact information for the researcher, her faculty supervisor, and the head of UCRIHS so that participants could obtain answers to any future questions that they might have. In addition, community members were assured that their identities would not be disclosed in reports. The unique identity and organizational relationships of each Grange member is vital to this study, however, so it was made clear that their identities might be shared. Copies of the instruments used in the focus groups are attached in an appendix to the study.

After the focus groups were completed, the researcher did a complete and literal transcription of the audio tapes and used this "most rigorous and time-intensive"³⁴

³³ In the words of Alison Stein Wellner, who writes about using focus groups to test products, "To help consumers relax and thereby elicit more authentic responses, qualitative researchers have been turning to approaches proven effective in ethnographic research. . . ." The president of a qualitative research firm states that "'I've always been a big believer in using environments that are much more comfortable and that are more adaptive to the product. . . ." She finds it more effective, for example, to speak to women about female health products in a living room setting rather than at a conference table, and to speak to children in a room arranged like a play area." Alison Stein Wellner, "The New Science of Focus Groups," *American Demographics* Special Report (March 2003), 32.

³⁴ In the preface to his second edition, Krueger admits that although he initially deemed transcript-based focus-group analysis the sine qua non, in the intervening years, the imperatives that practitioners confront in focus-group daily application have made him rethink his position. Realizing that many situations cannot support this painstaking, slow, protracted, intensive process, he now offers a number of strategies that can be sampled and adapted to the particular case. Although the researcher heartily concurs with every descriptor of transcript-based analysis as onerous, she must also acknowledge that no other method—not

method to analyze the results. She then carefully read through the transcripts, coding and noting salient points that spoke to the overarching questions that had served as catalysts for the focus groups. The researcher was looking, not so much for key terms, as for more complex thoughts and feelings that emerged through the interactive dialogues (and, at times, soliloquies and monologues) forged in the focus-group crucible.³⁵

Summary

This research has used a case study of Fredonia Grange to explore its questions on community and community-service organizations. It chose Fredonia Grange because of its accessibility, both in a geographical and in a psychic, philosophical sense. (Since the researcher was not a Grange member, traditional vestiges of Grange secrecy closed a number of research doors to her. For the iconoclasts of Fredonia Grange, however, nonmembership did not prove to be a significant barrier.) Because of the superb opportunity to learn thus afforded and the substantial time that the researcher was therefore able to spend on site, this research was able to “learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but . . . describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings”³⁶ and apply them to their own relevant situations.

The most effective case-study research does not rely upon a single approach to gather data, to seek understanding. Rather, it advocates employing a variety of methods to weave a tapestry with as many strands of experience as possible—rendering the fabric of

tape-based, note-based, or memory-based analysis—or hybrid combination could have captured the depth and richness of information so necessary for this study that transcription did. Krueger, *Focus Groups*, viii–x, 143–44.

³⁵ Ibid., 140–60.

³⁶ Stake, “Case Study,” 243.

life more nuanced and textured. This study used ethnography and participant observation, oral history interviews, and focus groups to enrich its perspectives.

The study, which sought to interact with people in their own, customary settings, is a manifestation of ethnography and participant observation. It possesses the following features usually present in ethnography:

- A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
- A tendency to work primarily with “unstructured” data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories.
- Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one in detail.
- Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.³⁷

At times research used oral history interviews, a process that “generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange on audio or videotape. Tapes of the interview are transcribed. . . . The interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication. . . .”³⁸ The study complied with the following well-accepted oral-history guidelines. “Fundamental rules and principles apply to all types of oral history interviewing: do your homework; be prepared; construct meaningful but open-ended questions; do not interrupt responses; follow up on what you

³⁷ Atkinson and Hammersley, “Ethnography and Participant Observation,” 248.

have heard; know your equipment thoroughly; promptly process your tapes; and always keep in mind and practice the ethics of interviewing.”³⁹

The study utilized focus groups, conducting two series: one with members of the larger community; one with Fredonia Grange members. In doing so, it incorporated both old and new elements: in some senses, the focus groups were true to the old concept of group interviews; the study also embraced the newer approach of holding the focus groups in a nontraditional, noninstitutional venue. Still, as was true with the classic forms, the study’s focus groups did embody and exploit the following features:

- First, it is a socially oriented research procedure. People are social creatures who interact with others. They are influenced by the comments of others and make decisions after listening to the advice and counsel of people around them. . . .
- The second advantage of focus group discussions is that the format allows the moderator to probe. This flexibility to explore unanticipated issues is not possible within the more structured questioning sequences typical of mail-out surveys.
- A third advantage is that focus group discussions have high face validity. . . . The technique is easily understood and the results seem believable to those using the information. . . .
- A fourth advantage is that focus group discussions can be relatively low cost.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 34-35.

CHAPTER 5

GENESIS: BRIEF GRANGE HISTORY

The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, more familiarly known as the Grange, arose from rural conditions during the post Civil War depression. In 1866, Oliver Hudson Kelley, originally from Boston and a sometime Minnesota farmer, was commissioned by President Andrew Johnson to travel throughout the South and survey conditions among the farmers there. Although Kelley was obviously a Northerner, he found that his membership in the Masons, an organization whose numbers were on the ascendance, earned him ready access and acceptance among southern farmers. He was struck by the rural people's social, economic, educational, legal, and political isolation. Further travel and experience convinced him that these conditions were not regional but had parallels throughout rural America—North and Midwest, as well as the developing West, in addition to the South. This was a period in which the embryos of unions were starting to develop to advance the interests of urban labor. Kelley envisioned a sort of rural counterpart to these, a fraternal organization that would bring farmers together in order to learn from one another, socialize, cooperate economically, find their voices, become a legal and legislative force, and assert the inherent godliness and purity of a rural way of life that too often was denigrated by urban people and was losing its younger generations to the attractions of the city.¹

¹ D. Sven Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867- 1900* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1974), 3–5, 7, 8–10; Charles M. Gardner, High Priest Emeritus, *The Grange—Friend of the Farmer, 1867–1947: A Concise History of America's Oldest Farm Organization, and the Only Rural Fraternity in the World* (Washington, DC: The National Grange, 1949) 3–43, 191–95, 196–200; Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866–1920*, Contributions in Women's Studies, Number 124 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 2. The consensus is that the appellation “Grange” pays tribute to old English estates, which were sometimes called granges. The Patrons of Husbandry sought to emulate its connotations of “shelter, granary, country seat, farm complex, self-sustaining compound” in their organization. Initially, the lodges in which members met were called

With the encouragement of such trusted advisors as Caroline Hall (Kelley's niece and one-time secretary), Aaron B. Grosh (first Chaplain of the National Grange), and Anson Bartlett, an Ohio dairy farmer (first Overseer of the National Grange), Kelley included a truly revolutionary idea in his conception: women were to be admitted to the Grange as full and equal members. Up to this time, most male-dominated organizations may have tolerated a female presence, but it was in a tangential, auxiliary role. The Grange was one of the first organizations in the United States to accord women anything approximating equality.²

Grange Founders: An Uneasy Blend of Radicals and Conservatives

Of the seven founders whom the Grange acknowledges, Oliver Hudson Kelley is generally credited with the original conception. His was a restless spirit that took him from Boston, to Minnesota, to Washington, DC, to the rural south, back to Minnesota, again to Washington—and on and on. He was passionate about farming and an ardent

"granges." In an incidence of economical metonymy, the structure's term came to be used for the entire organization. The Grange's homage to old England carried over to the titles and interpretations of many of its offices, such as master, overseer, steward, assistant stewards, and gatekeeper. Other office titles, such as lecturer, treasurer, secretary, and chaplain, were more familiar to and more frequently employed by contemporary Americans. The three graces: Pomona, Flora, and Ceres, were ancient Roman goddesses associated with agriculture. Women always filled these latter positions. Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 253-58.

² Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 5; Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 19-21; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 191-200. Although Kelley wholeheartedly embraced the idea, he gave complete credit to Caroline Hall for initially conceiving and promoting it. In the early years of the Grange, Hall was unstinting in her contributions of time, talent, and funds. The Grange officially recognizes seven founders—all male. But Hall enjoys a special, quasi-official status as a keystone in the order's success. Beulah Winter, interview by author, July 19, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Roland Winter, Master, Home Grange, officer of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, Michigan State Grange Executive Committee member, Michigan State Grange Historical Collections Committee member, National Grange Historical Preservation Committee, active at the local, county, state and national Grange levels for more than fifty years, community activist, interview by author, July 19, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Beulah Winter, interview by author, August 24, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Roland Winter, interview by author, August 24, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. The National Grange actually does acknowledge Hall's status and stature on its Web site: National Grange, "2004 National Grange Youth Programs," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/departments/>

believer in progress: he sought to grow the latest varieties of crops and use the most current technology. A series of events and conditions combined to make his farming enterprise unsuccessful: he continually had to find alternative ways to gain income. He worked as a journalist in Minnesota and Washington; he worked for the fledgling Department of Agriculture as a writer, clerk, observer, and information gatherer. Kelley was a great believer in agricultural associations: in 1852, he founded the Benton County (Minnesota) Agricultural Society, an incubator in which he birthed and nurtured many of the concepts that he brought to the Grange. It was not until he made his trip through the South visiting farmers, when his Masonic connections opened doors that would have otherwise been closed to a Northerner, however, that Kelley decided to incorporate fraternal elements into any future farming organization. As he sought to develop his plans and bring them to fruition, he reached out to friends and acquaintances.

The other founders were men whom Kelley recruited during his stays in Washington. Some were kindred spirits, close advisors and friends during at least the early days of the Grange. Others were far more conservative than the frequently radicalized Kelley and often took opposing views on issues and actions. But all made significant contributions to the organization; all had an influence.

Among their contemporaries, William Saunders was probably considered the most influential: indeed, some perceived *him* as most responsible for the society's creation. Saunders, a native of Scotland, was chief pomologist and horticulturist in the Department of Agriculture. He made two especially substantive contributions to the establishment and future of the Grange. He drafted a general organizational plan that stratified the

YouthProgram.htm#CarolineHall (accessed August 3, 2004). In 1892 the National Grange voted to recognize Hall as the equal to the founders—although it did not accord her the status of that title. Gardner,

Grange into local, county, state, and national chapters; this structure was adopted largely unchanged, and continues in effect. Saunders also had a national reputation, making him well-known among the country's leading fruit growers and gardeners. As such, his contacts paved the way for some of the Grange's state-by-state organizing. Saunders served as the first national master, from 1867 to 1873. He followed this with a term on the National Grange Executive Committee, 1873–1875.³

As Kelley struggled to incorporate the right degree of ritualism, he turned to John R. Thompson, a high-degree Mason, the first of the other founders with whom he discussed the Grange. Although Thompson grew up on farms in New Hampshire and Vermont, after serving in the Civil War, he obtained a position at the Treasury Department in Washington. It was there that he met Kelley. Thompson was immediately and enthusiastically interested in Kelley's ideas for a fraternal agricultural society. Drawing upon his familiarity with Masonic ritual, he revised Kelley's work on the lower degrees (local and county) and drafted rites for the sixth (state level) and seventh (national level) degrees. Thompson was the first National Grange Lecturer, serving in that position from 1867 until 1872.⁴

William M. Ireland, a Pennsylvania native, spent a considerable portion of his life in Washington, DC, working as, among other things, the chief clerk for a department of the Post Office Department. His expertise lay in parliamentary procedures and expository writing. He drafted the organization's constitution and bylaws, prepared such promulgating, proselytizing materials as journals of proceedings and pamphlets for printing, and checked proofs. Although he was offered the position of National Grange

Grange—Friend of the Farmer, 448–49.

³ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 6; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 436–40.

Master when the organization was first formed, he declined it because he was not a practicing agriculturalist; he recommended Saunders instead. Ireland served as the first National Grange Treasurer from 1867 until 1872; he took over as National Grange Secretary from Oliver H. Kelley in 1878 and served until 1885. At that time he went to work for the Masons, which proved so consuming that he drifted away from the Grange.⁵

Aaron B. Grosh, a minister, added spiritual and musical elements to Grange ritual and meetings. He wrote prayers and adapted familiar songs for use at Grange gatherings. Another native of Pennsylvania, Grosh worked on a farm in his youth and taught school before entering the ministry. All his ministerial assignments were in rural areas; he was interested in everything pertaining to farms and their problems. Ill health forced him to give up active ministry; he accepted a clerkship at the newly formed Department of Agriculture, where he became a friend of William Saunders, made the acquaintance of Kelley and the rest of the founders, and grew into an ardent supporter of the Grange. He was best known to contemporary Grangers for his book *Mentor in the Granges and Homes of Patrons of Husbandry*, which aided “Patrons to be better members of families, of the Order and of society.”⁶ Grosh was the first National Grange Chaplain, serving from 1868 until 1875.⁷

John Trimble, a native of New Jersey, earned a doctor of divinity and became an active Episcopal minister. Like Grosh, his health forced him to retire from the clergy and work in education. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he moved to Washington, DC, where he worked for the Treasury Department for a number of years. He was the self-

⁴ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 440–41.

⁵ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 441–42.

⁶ Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 446.

⁷ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 445–47.

appointed critic of the Grange founders' group. Although his caustic comments often went unappreciated at the time, he did not hesitate to critique those elements of the organization that he believed were faulty. Although his partners dubbed him a "wet blanket," he made them aware of many potential Grange weaknesses and caused them to correct countless flaws. Despite his role of curmudgeon, he was one of the most esteemed of the founders: contemporaries regarded him with a mixture of affection and admiration. Although he resisted holding any official office in the Grange for years, he was unanimously elected secretary in 1885; he held that position until his death in 1902.⁸

Francis M. McDowell was the financial expert of the group. He had a career at a banking and brokerage firm in New York City until a serious illness led him to retire to his native upstate New York, where he became active in the region's fledgling grape-growing cultivation. McDowell met Saunders at a fruit fair in New York. They had an instant rapport; Saunders was a guest at McDowell's home, where he discussed the embryonic Grange movement. McDowell was intensely interested: he went to Washington to meet the other principals in the endeavor and became active in the organization. McDowell was adamant that the new order should have a sound financial footing: more than once he propped it up with his own funds. He served as National Grange Treasurer from 1873 until November 1893, only four months before his death.⁹

The National Grange honors all the founders, but it particularly venerates Kelley. His picture adorns many Grange halls. The Grange, at many levels, has worked hard through the years to help the Minnesota Historical Society preserve the Kelley Farm as an historic

⁸ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 443–44.

⁹ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 444–45.

site.¹⁰ It also honors the memories of the other founders, however, particularly in its youth education programs. It bestows achievement awards for various skills that are historically associated with the individual founders and Caroline Hall, the “eighth founder.” Those who receive the awards learn the history of the namesakes.¹¹

Some modern historians have worried that Kelley has been given too much credit; others anguish that he has not been valued enough. Kelley did have the original idea of the agricultural, fraternal organization. But much of its subsequent conceptualization, development, and realization were influenced by the other able men (and women) whom Kelley had enlisted. Eva S. McDowell, the wife of Grange founder Francis M. McDowell and herself the fourth treasurer of the National Grange, described the founders in this way: “To sum up, we have here a propagandist [Kelley], an organizer [Saunders], a ritualist [Thompson], a parliamentarian and journalist [Ireland], a man of God [Grosh], a critic [Trimble], and a financier [McDowell].”¹²

¹⁰ The farm was in the Kelley family from 1850 (when Oliver Hudson Kelley established it) until 1901. The National Grange purchased the farm in 1935 and donated it to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1961. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964. During the summer, when the farm is open and alive with living history demonstrations, the National Grange frequently sponsors a picnic to which all Grange members are invited. During recent years, Minnesota has been having fiscal difficulties and was considering closing down a number of its historic sites, including the Kelley Farm. Many Grangers, as well as other friends of the Kelley Farm, held fund-raising events and sent contributions to keep the farm open and insure its viability for some time to come. The National Grange Web site has a page advertising Kelley Farm Commemorative Coins as a courtesy to the Minnesota Historical Society. One can print out an order form, to be sent with payment directly to the Kelley Farm. Minnesota Historical Society, “About the Kelley Farm,” State Historic Sites: Twin Cities Metro, <http://www.mnhs.org/places/sites/ohkf/aboutkelley.html> (accessed August 3, 2004); National Grange, “O. H. Kelley Farm Coins,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/departments/KellyCoin.htm> (accessed August 3, 2004); Athol Hazen, Jr., “Minutes from December 6, 2003 Regular Fredonia Grange Meeting,” e-mail to author, December 7, 2003, in author’s possession.

¹¹ National Grange, “2004 National Grange Youth Programs,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/departments/YouthProgram.htm> (accessed August 3, 2004).

¹² Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 7. Nordin, an historian and scholar of the Grange, set out to diminish the Kelley hagiography. In his words: “Kelley’s role as the ‘father of the Grange’ has been exaggerated because, without the aid of associates, his dream might not have been materialized. In reality he had been unable to formulate satisfactory plans for an agricultural fraternity by himself; the task was too formidable for him. He wisely recognized his limitations and turned to friends for assistance. They each contributed in some way to the general refinement of Kelley’s initial plans.” Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 6. Thomas A. Woods, who works for the Minnesota Historical Society and was site manager for the Kelley Farm, viewed Kelley

Grange Factionalism: A Clash of Ideologies

From the outset, the Grange was split into two factions: a conservative wing and a more radical element. The conservatives included nearly all the founders who worked in Washington. William Saunders led this group of William Ireland, John R. Thompson, and Aaron B. Grosh. John Trimble was too inactive to take part in the factionalism. This group saw the Grange as an educational and social entity. They staunchly supported individualism and capitalism, shying away from cooperatives. Under pressure from the majority of the Grange membership, this wing ultimately moderated its stand and accepted limited cooperative efforts for buying and selling.¹³

Perhaps because he was himself a practicing farmer, Kelley had an activist, somewhat radical agenda for his agricultural society. He knew that many contemporary farmers, who were being crushed by debt and overwork, were seeking an organization that was willing to work for dramatic social change: they wanted the tyranny of monopoly capitalism overthrown; they wanted cooperatives to sell their products and buy what they needed at the best possible rate. This put him at odds with the more conservative wing of

differently. "To illustrate how the ideas and beliefs that formed the core of the early Grange evolved, I will use a biographical model which will follow the agricultural and organizational career of Oliver Kelley. Kelley's life is intended to serve as an example of the problems and paradoxes faced by other farmers in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although his experience was not necessarily representative of the experience of other farmers, it is an important example of the cognitive dissonance of their experience. His response to the challenges of his environment illustrate that ideology is a flexible and complex web of inherited personal and cultural attitudes that are constantly modified in response to the contemporary situation. Such modifications often led Kelley into intellectual conflict and paradox, but they also formed the ideological basis for the early Grange." Thomas A. Woods, *Knights of the Plow: Oliver H. Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology*, Henry A. Wallace Series on Agricultural History and Rural Studies, edited by Richard S. Kirkendall (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1991), xxii. At the time that he wrote his history of the Grange, Charles M. Gardner had been a member for more than fifty years. He held the highest National Grange ritual office, High Priest of Demeter, for more than thirty years. He is clearly, unabashedly, and unapologetically partisan. He reveres all the founders and finds something of merit about each. Yet his work chronicling the Grange from 1867 through 1947 is invaluable and has been used unstintingly by all subsequent researchers.

¹³ Woods, *Knights of the Plow*, 95–96.

the Grange, although he was joined in his activism by fellow Grange founder Francis McDowell (also a practicing farmer), as well as state Grange leaders/farmers. Since he was out in the field, he could give the people there unofficial guidance, support, and approval. But this very obvious and personal alliance with the everyday farmer estranged him from the conservative leadership. Also, since he was often away from the base of power in Washington, he was not there to defend himself from accusations or give corrected accounts. Far from being venerated, he was viewed as a gadfly by many in the hierarchy, an embarrassment of which they would be well rid. Radicalized farmers, desperate for a way to combine against monopolists and level the playing (farming?) field, looked to organizations willing to take strong, controversial stands. They searched for a viable third party that might lead them from the crushing loads of debt and blight under which they labored. At one point, in the early 1870s, it appeared that the Grange might be this organization—particularly if it adopted and promulgated Kelley's positions. But the conservative Grange leadership in Washington, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually far removed from the true plights of farmers (they were intellectually but not viscerally committed to farming), distanced itself from any radical social agenda. They saw the Grange as a social and educational tool, not an economic or political force. So the militant farmers looked elsewhere and the Grange's membership dropped precipitously.¹⁴

¹⁴ Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 3–37; Woods, *Knights of the Plow*, passim. The following is particularly apposite: "The decline of the Grange [in the nineteenth century] was a result of its abandonment of the liberal republican critique of monopoly capitalism. After incorporation in 1873, the Grange rapidly became a much more cautious and conservative organization under the influence of leaders like William Saunders, who dominated the powerful executive committee through the critical mid-1870s. The complete confidence these leaders had in the liberal tradition—the idea that society as a whole would benefit from the pursuit of self-interest by the individual—and their insistence that each American still had equal opportunities to succeed in the America of the 1870s derailed the Grange's former radical opposition to monopoly capitalism and its ambitious advocacy of cooperative buying, selling, processing and

The Grange was and is a conservative organization. Its primary successes have been with its educational and social programs. According to D. Sven Nordin, an historian and scholar of the Grange, some confusion arises from historians' use of the term "granger" when applying it to those of the 1870s. It is employed then to refer not so much to a member of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry "as to farmers whose desires for change were so great during the 1870s that they constituted a movement of protest against alleged oppressors."¹⁵ Thus, the Granger Movement of this era included people who were never members of the Order. The Granger Laws were brought about by a coalition that consisted of more than the Patrons, including some far more radical and assertive than the former were ever willing to be. But the appellation is confusing and obscuring. One continues to hear contemporary Patrons claim the achievements of the Granger Laws as theirs and theirs alone.¹⁶ Nordin concludes: "In the final analysis, the Grange aided the cause of much legislation but was solely responsible for little."¹⁷ The characterization is probably still accurate.

manufacturing, and government regulation of the pursuit of self-interest. Their concern for avoiding controversial policies that would benefit one section of the country at the expense of the others probably helped make the Grange a more viable national organization and perhaps ensured its survival through the turbulent and divisive farm protests of the nineteenth century. But the conservatism that helped the Grange survive in the nineteenth century also alienated the very men who had organized most of the subordinate granges around the country and who had worked hard to popularize the radical cause through an ambitious grass roots media campaign." Woods, *Knights of the Plow*, 206–7.

¹⁵ Woods, *Knights of the Plow*, vii.

¹⁶ This has occurred on numerous occasions. One of the more public is cited as typical. Ed Luttrell, National Grange Membership/Leadership Director, remarks at Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic, Edmore, Michigan, February 9, 2002, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁷ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 213.

The Grange in Michigan¹⁸

The Grange began to make inroads into Michigan in 1871. In the fall of 1871, Edwin M. Jones of Perry, Dallas County, Iowa came to visit relatives at Burnside in Lapeer County, Michigan. Jones was an avid Granger who persuaded farmers in the area to organize a Grange. He got a deputy's commission from the National Grange and officially organized Burnside Grange, Number 1, on January 10, 1872, with an initial membership of nine men and four women.¹⁹ Burnside Grange soon failed. It was reorganized and continued for a year or two. Then a local, influential minister preached that it was sinful to belong to a secret society—a concept under which the Grange, with

¹⁸ This section draws heavily from the work of Fred Trump, a writer on the editorial staff of *The Michigan Farmer* from 1949, who, in 1963, wrote a history of the first ninety years of the Michigan Grange: 1873–1963. To do this, he examined nearly ninety years worth of *Michigan State Grange Annual Proceedings*, the records of the annual State Grange conventions and the reports of the officers and directors that are given there. This was a prodigious task. The results may be dry at times, but do offer great insights into the vicissitudes and achievements of the Michigan Grange during those years. There has been nothing like this for the past forty years. The Michigan State Grange does continue to maintain a full set of *Journals of Proceedings*. Many of the other State Grange records have become lost or destroyed, however. Some records were destroyed by a fire at the home of the Michigan State Grange Secretary in 1943. Some records were thrown away when the then Michigan State Grange Secretary, unaware of their historic value, threw away huge quantities to make it easier to move the state office from Lansing to Haslett. As Granges have become dormant and closed, their records and artifacts are supposed to be turned in to the state office. But this requires overworked people to take the time to gather the records and deliver or retrieve them. Often, it did not happen, and the records were lost. Some records wound up in private hands, with family members, stashed away in attic or basement boxes; others were given to institutions such as libraries, archives, and historical societies. The current Agriculture and Rural Life in Michigan: 1820-1945 project is attempting to track down these old Grange materials—but it is a tortuous and protracted endeavor. The Michigan State Grange is now blessed to have an Historical Collections Committee made up of people (Roland Winter, Beulah Winter, Phil Swainston, Luanna Swainston) cognizant of the value of its records and dedicated to preserving them, either within the Grange or in suitable repositories so that they will be accessible to both Grange members and nonmembers for the future; they are busily engaged in preservation work. Fred Trump, *The Grange in Michigan: An Agricultural History of Michigan over the Past 90 Years* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fred Trump, 1963), v, vi.

¹⁹ The numbering system for the Granges in each state starts with the first Grange chartered, and progresses consecutively from there. If a Grange becomes dormant but does not give up its charter and later becomes active again, it retains the original charter number. If a Grange surrenders its charter and a new Grange is later organized in the same area, it may be given the same charter number. All Granges have numbers. The number does not indicate that there were ever at any one time that many Granges in the state; it only demonstrates that there have been that many Granges over the course of Grange history in the state, even though some may have been ephemeral. *Ibid.*, 6.

its secret ritual, fell. So members voted to surrender their charter.²⁰ In 1958, the Michigan Historical Commission placed a commemorative marker on the lawn of the Lapeer County Courthouse in honor of Burnside Grange, Michigan's first. After this faltering start, and as rural economic distress increased, the Grange began to spread in late 1872. On November 19, 1872, Eureka Grange, Number 2, was organized in Waterloo Township, Jackson County. This Grange had sixteen men and eleven women. During March and April of 1873, ten more Granges were organized. The Michigan State Grange was organized during a meeting in Kalamazoo on April 15, 1873, the date usually accepted as the real start of the Michigan State Grange.²¹ On April 15, 2000, an historical marker was placed at the intersection of Water and Burdick Streets, Kalamazoo, on the present-day campus of Kalamazoo Valley Community College, to commemorate the Michigan State Grange organization.²²

Fred Trump, the Michigan State Grange historian, notes, perhaps unintentionally, that the State Grange's achievements have been those of influence and cooperation—not formulating original policy and legislation that it has pushed through to enactment.

The influence of the Grange has been educational in large measure and the organization has cooperated with and placed its strength behind other forms of farm movement organizations, including the Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan State College and similar institutions. The influence and cooperation of the Grange appear

²⁰ So from the very start, the issue of secrecy has bedeviled the Grange. Trump protests that "most of the secrets of the Grange, like the secrets of living, are acquired with learning and experience." *Ibid.*, 6. But if there is nothing to the secrecy business, why does the Grange not open up the ritual? By retaining a ritual that it is off limits to all who are not degree members, a ritual of which the outside world has only sketchy knowledge and which is typified by anachronistic-looking movements, language, and attire, the Grange opens itself up to charges of superstition and occultism.

²¹ Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 6-10; Beulah Winter and Tom Frankland, eds., *Heritage: A Michigan State Grange Sesquicentennial Book* (Haslett, Michigan: Michigan State Grange, 1987), 19.

²² Beulah Winter, Chairperson, One-hundred-twenty-fifth Anniversary Committee, "One-hundred-twenty-fifth Anniversary Rededication Ceremony," copy of unpublished script of ceremony for the dedication of the Michigan Historical Marker on April 15, 2000, Kalamazoo, Michigan (written October 1997), in author's possession.

repeatedly in the history of social movements, in promotion of temperance and in the records of legislation affecting rural life. Some of the objectives toward which the Grange has exerted a steady influence include: good roads legislation; pure food laws; rural free delivery; parcel post and postal savings banks; child welfare laws; inheritance tax and national income tax; pioneer work toward establishing the office of state tax commissioner and state tax commission; in behalf of the imposition of a gas tax to relieve general property of the burden of road building; proper regulation of railroads and public utilities; the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence waterways; and a host of other measures that have at different times been outstanding progressive issues.²³

A Legacy of Leadership: Michigan Women in the Grange

The Michigan Grange nurtured a number of women who became nationally prominent for their leadership and vision. One was Mary Mayo (1845–1903) of Battle Creek. She and her husband, Perry, both farmers, joined the Grange in the late 1870s. Mary soon began writing for the *Grange Visitor*, the official newspaper for the Michigan State Grange. She also began to speak and organize on behalf of the Grange. She was a fervent proponent of education for farmers. Mary was a driving force behind the fresh air movement that brought city people—children, overworked young people, people who had no conception of the country—to spend a few summer weeks on a farm. This was seen as a way for Grange farmers to help those less fortunate and also to make their organization better known. She lobbied for a women’s course of study at Michigan Agricultural College and was influential in bringing it to pass. In 1931, the college honored her by dedicating Mary Mayo Hall, a dormitory for women.²⁴

Jennie Buell (1863–1935) was a younger contemporary of Mary Mayo. Although she was born in rural southwestern Michigan, she lived most of her adult life in Ann Arbor, an urban environment, and never married. She became connected with the Grange as a young woman when J. T. Cobb, who was then Secretary of the Michigan State Grange

²³ Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 2.

and editor of the *Grange Visitor*, asked her to write for the journal. She became his assistant as both secretary and editor, then held a series of offices in the State Grange almost continuously from 1890 until 1934, the year before she died. She was active in the Farmer's Institutes and Extension programs and helped to direct the Michigan State Grange campaign for an equal suffrage amendment. Jennie wrote two books for the Grange and a Lecturers' column for the *National Grange Monthly*. She also was a frequent contributor to national magazines.²⁵

Dora Stockman (1872–1948) was somewhat younger than Mary Mayo or Jennie Buell, but followed in their path of strong leadership and achievements. Like them, she was uncommonly well educated and literary, using her writing talents to promote ideas. She wrote children's rhymes, skits, songs, a rural novel. She is believed to have organized more Granges than any other person in the history of the Michigan Grange. She worked toward a doctorate in sociology at Michigan State College. Although she never completed it, she was the first woman to receive, in 1934, an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from there. She served in the Michigan House of Representatives and is credited with organizing both Michigan Blue Cross-Blue Shield and an organization for rural youth called the Four-Leaf Clover Clubs that the Grange proudly claims became the 4-H Club.²⁶

²⁴ Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 45–48, 88, 93–95; Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 32, 34, 35, 39, 41, 46–47, 48, 51, 53–54, 55, 58, 65, 70, 72, 73, 160; Winter and Frankland, *Heritage*, 61–62.

²⁵ Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 48–49, 118–19; Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 34, 44–45, 95, 125–26, 137–38, 143, 149, 160, 169, 171, 172; Winter and Frankland, *Heritage*, 63.

²⁶ Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 126–29; Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 101, 89–90, 100, 101, 106, 113, 118, 123, 130, 133–34, 136, 139–40, 143, 146, 155, 157–58, 171–72, 180, 182, 183, 186, 200; Winter and Frankland, *Heritage*, 65; Gardner, *Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 216; Beulah Winter, Michigan State Grange Historian, e-mail to author, August 7, 2004.

The Michigan State Grange experienced ebbs and flows of membership, as did the Grange overall. At one point, there were Granges in every county of Michigan, for a total of 871 in 1910. Every farming community seemed to have at least one Grange. People were not highly mobile and looked within their own neighborhoods for entertainment, education, and socializing. But in time, at first subtly and then with increasing rapidity and number, changes occurred. Transportation improved; farm boys went off to fight in World War I—if they returned, they were profoundly changed; communication evolved; technology revolutionized farming. During its early years, the Michigan State Grange had a stable constituency and little competition, save local churches, with which it tried to work in harmony. But then all that changed.²⁷

Decline—And Action

Membership of the Grange as a whole reflected the country's population. It arose as an organization based in an agricultural way of life. As the nation advanced into the twentieth century and its demographics shifted,²⁸ the Grange's membership base began to erode. Through the middle of the twentieth century, the Grange experienced periodic surges in membership by offering tangible benefits, such as health insurance, to those who would join. A large portion of those who joined for such a purpose were not interested in other aspects of the Grange, many of which were intangible. Thus, when

²⁷ Trump, *Grange in Michigan*, 88, 98–124, 132–35, 237, 252–55.

²⁸ Throughout the first several centuries of the United States' history, most of its population were farmers. The 1920 census was the first one that listed more people living in urban areas than rural. Since that time, the trend has continued and accelerated. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Edition, part 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), A 43–72.

they had a chance to obtain the incentive in some other way, without Grange mediation, they terminated their membership.²⁹

The Grange began to hemorrhage members: people were leaving at a much more rapid rate than they were joining.³⁰ As early as the 1960s, the National Grange commissioned a study that concluded that the Grange had to make profound changes or it was not likely to see the turn of the century. However, no action was taken.³¹ Although the Grange did still exist at the end of the 1990s, it was a shell of its former self, with an aging, declining membership, difficulties in attracting new and younger members, and an identity crisis—both publicly and internally. Although the Grange continued to be interested in agriculture, it could no longer be tied exclusively to farmers and remain viable:

²⁹ This has been a frequent topic of discussion at local Grange, Statewide Michigan Action Grange, and Michigan State Grange meetings. People often talk, for example, of the large number of nominal members that the Michigan State Grange had when Grange membership was one of the most convenient ways to obtain Blue Cross-Blue Shield health insurance – a perk otherwise denied to many. The ranks of the insured so burgeoned that Blue Cross-Blue Shield severed its ties with the Michigan State Grange. The National Grange still offers a number of benefits to members, such as: Choice Hotels Discount Program; Mutual of Omaha Medicare Supplement Insurance; Great American Long Term Care Insurance; Web Hosting Service; Grange Credit Card; Beltone Hearing Products; Cancer Protection Plan for Grange Members. The description of these benefits indicates that many of them are specifically aimed at older people: a reflection of the older members who are currently the backbone of the Grange. National Grange, National Grange Web Site, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/memberbenefits/memben.htm>. According to a representative of the National Grange, it no longer promotes material benefits as a reason for joining. It does not want “artificial Granges.” They do see the benefits as “great tools for retention.” Ed Luttrell, National Grange Membership/Leadership Director, “Adding Value to Grange Membership,” presentation at Michigan State Grange Membership Conference, April 26, 2003, Haslett, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

³⁰ At its peak in 1912, the Michigan State Grange consisted of 52,836 members in 850 Granges spread throughout 82 of Michigan’s 83 counties. Trump, *The Grange in Michigan*, 93, 99. Athol Hazen claims that when he first joined the Grange in 1954, there were close to 40,000 members—although he ruefully adds that many of these were “insurance members.” Athol Hazen, Jr., Secretary, Fredonia Community Grange, Master, Calhoun County Pomona Grange, active at local, county, and state Grange levels for the past fifty years, advocate of the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession. By the time that the author first wrote about the Grange in December 2001, those numbers had declined to 53 active subordinate (local), 12 Pomona (county), and 6 junior (children’s) Granges, with 1641 subordinate members. (These figures are from September 2001.) Peggy Johnston, Secretary, Michigan State Grange, e-mail to author, December 5, 2001, in author’s possession. As of December 2003, these numbers had continued to fall to 47 subordinate, 10 Pomona, and 4 junior Granges, with 1515 subordinate members. Peggy Johnston, e-mail to author, February 12, 2004, in author’s possession.

³¹ Robert Clouse, Chairman, National Grange Executive Committee, remarks at the Michigan State Grange 129th Annual Convention, October 17, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

technology has reduced the numbers of those directly involved in production agriculture to only a small percentage of the population. Urban and suburban sprawl has swallowed farmland: some once-rural Grange halls now stand in urban environments. Even those Granges that continue to exist in rural areas are apt to have few farmers as members.³²

But the Grange has always been about more than farming: besides at least a general belief in the importance of agriculture,³³ the other mainstay of Grange life is involvement in community service. A difficulty was that the Grange and its surrounding communities had lost touch with one another. Many outside the Grange did not know what it was: some had never heard of it; others thought of it as an historical entity only, with no current existence;³⁴ even many of those from communities in which Granges are located tended to associate the Grange with only a singular activity, not the range of functions that many current Granges fulfill.³⁵

The National Grange decided on a bold move. From its inception, the Grange had considered itself a grassroots organization: in theory, at least, power originated with

³² David H. Howard, *People, Pride and Progress: 125 Years of the Grange in America*, foreword by Honorable Thomas S. Foley, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, afterword by Robert E. Barrow, Master of the National Grange (Washington, DC: National Grange, 1992), 235–42, 303–8. Howard has had family members in the Grange since the nineteenth century and has belonged to and worked for the Grange for decades.

³³ One frequently hears Grangers say, “Everyone has an interest in agriculture because everyone eats.”

³⁴ Kirk Heinze, Chairperson, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Education and Communication Systems, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, meeting with author, September 17, 2001, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession. This department works closely with Extension Education and Outreach; it claims to have close ties with and concern for the agricultural and resource learning needs of the people of Michigan. The author, who had begun research on the Grange before this meeting, was therefore surprised when Heinze calmly asserted that there was no longer an existing Grange in Michigan.

³⁵ A dedicated member of Fredonia Grange, one of the largest, most active, and most visible Granges in Michigan, says that he thinks that many nonmembers from the surrounding area may know that Fredonia exists, but if asked to characterize the Grange, would label them the “food people.” This results from Fredonia’s visibility throughout the Marshall area at food-based fund-raisers. This is how Fredonia raises most of its operating expenses, such as the funds necessary to maintain its hall, as well as money to finance its many community-service activities. The wide range of additional Grange activities, however, is unknown to many outside the organization. Richard Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

individual Grangers at the local level, passed through to county Granges, then on to the state, and finally to the national organization. Once again, it looked to its membership for answers. It appointed a Task Force of Grange members who represented a number of states. After studying the problem and conferring, the group recommended that the National Grange try an “Action Grange” program. Local Granges would be invited to apply for this pilot project. They had to explain why they wished to take part, pay a fee, commit to attend several seminars (run by a Grange-employed facilitator), fill out quarterly progress reports. In exchange, Action Granges would be given broad discretionary powers to make changes in their Granges. The National Grange specified only a few features that must be retained. Action Granges were free to experiment with everything else as they sought to uncover ways to attract more members. This was to be a pilot project lasting three years. At the end of that time, the National Grange was to sort out what worked, what did not, and where they should go from there. In essence, these Granges were being asked to derive the salvation of the Grange, to reverse a downward spiral of many decades, in a three-year span—a daunting task. Still, a number of Granges did apply and were accepted.³⁶

The Strategic Planning Task Force drafted some remarkable documents: they looked candidly at the Grange, assessing where it was and where it needed to be. They declared that the Grange needed to be renewed.

Renewal is a key word and understanding its meaning will mean you understand our intent. We are looking for ways to bring back, make relevant and create a new beginning for our organization. We are doing so because we have not taken the time

³⁶Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 8, 2003, in author’s possession; Strategic Planning Task Force, “Position Papers,” National Grange, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 15, 2004).

we should have to periodically revisit our mission and goals and to keep the Grange in touch with today and today's changing world.

It's clear, that when only five American workers in 100 are farmers, that we are not relevant as an agricultural advocacy group and the "Patrons of Husbandry" meaning is lost on 95% of our citizens. So we need to value our roots, prize what we need to retain, but turn a careful and thoughtful eye to the future.³⁷

The Task Force took a hard look at contemporary Granges and portrayed the current reality that they perceived:

- A steady loss of membership lasting four decades
- Untrained, inconsistent leadership
- Lack of relevance in the community
- Unappealing to younger members
- Poor organizational structure
- Secretive and ritualistic
- Missing important communications' technology
- Halls in poor shape
- Unable to attract new members
- Missing tools that could help
- Dues so low they could not cover expenses
- No plans and few ideas
- No optimism and little help available
- Resistance to change³⁸

Starting with these daunting realities, the Task Force debated where to go from there.

They "determined that a strategy that helped the most able, most ready, most interested and best equipped Granges to make even greater progress, promised all Granges a plan and a strategy they might embrace." It was from this point that they conceived the idea of the Action Granges.³⁹

³⁷ Strategic Planning Task Force, "A Strategy for Renewing the National Grange: The Rationale and Importance of the Action Grange Program" (prepared November 2000), the National Grange, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 15, 2004).

³⁸ Ibid. From the outset, the Task Force ardently advocated doing away with the secrecy surrounding the degrees—but only the first four—those of the local level. Perhaps they figured that there would be too much resistance at the county, state, and national levels, at least initially. Perhaps they judged that it would be necessary to give the openness a trial at the grassroots stage first; then, if it was as successful as they hoped, they could point this out to the larger membership, noting that lifting the veil of secrecy had lost nothing and gained much.

³⁹ Ibid.

The Task Force also drafted a “Vision Statement for the Grange.” It states that the “Grange in the twenty-first century will be a preeminent organization. . . . The Grange will be a relevant, caring and involved part of the community in which its members are located. . . .” It reiterated that the Grange is a grassroots organization whose national leadership is “accountable to and supportive of the leadership and membership at the local Grange. . . .” Significantly, it does not tie the Grange to agriculture or rural life. That National Grange has posted this document on its Web site.⁴⁰

During the initial three-year span of the Action Grange program, many of the Granges in the program grappled with complex and vexatious issues: they analyzed the meaning and merits of the ritual, secrecy, all the old traditions, the very definition, philosophy, and vision of the Grange. They sent their reports back to the National Grange and waited, as the task force had suggested, for the National Grange to sort through their work and share the best as a plan and strategy that all Granges could embrace. But that did not happen. In fairness, it would be very, very difficult to formulate one overarching plan that would be relevant and applicable to the broad array of Granges throughout the country: the best that the Grange could probably do would have been to share promising findings and leave the subtle interpretations and implementation to local Granges. But that did not happen, either. The National Grange did not really pronounce any sort of valedictory on this phase of the Action Grange movement. Instead, it rolled out Action Grange II.

Action Grange II pulled back from the questioning, challenging honesty of the first phase. This was no longer to be an analytical movement that wrestled with sensitive Grange issues. Potential Grange participants were recruited by being told that this was a

⁴⁰ National Grange, “Vision Statement,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/about/vision.htm> (accessed August 6, 2004).

way to take “action to get their membership and their communities involved in projects and programs that establish a name for their local organization, and build interest and support for the Grange itself.”⁴¹ It was no longer that the Grange needed to change: it just needed to be better at making itself known. Although the Strategic Planning Task Force crafted a vision statement for the Grange that never mentions “agriculture,” “rural,” or “farming,” and although it explicitly noted that the Grange needs to broaden its appeal in order to continue to be relevant, the National Grange continues to define the organization as a “national agricultural organization” that provides “service to agriculture and rural areas on a wide variety of issues.”⁴²

History of Fredonia Grange⁴³

Fredonia Grange was chartered on January 22, 1925. In the beginning, the meetings were held at members’ homes. After a few years, the Fredonia Township Board allowed the Grange to meet at the township hall. For rent, members furnished the wood to heat the building for the township meetings. In 1947, Fredonia Grange bought the Fredonia Township Congregational Church.⁴⁴ In order to make it usable, members had to replace the leaky roof. The building had electricity but no running water, well, or plumbing. Members responded by building a concrete block outhouse, with men accommodated on

⁴¹ National Grange, “Grange Action Program,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed August 6, 2004).

⁴² National Grange, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/about/FAQ.htm> (accessed August 6, 2004).

⁴³ This section is based on countless conversations with Athol Hazen, Jr., Fredonia Grange historian, from 2001 through 2004, as well as a series of e-mails. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 20, 2003, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, February 11, 2004, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, March 9, 2004, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, March 10, 2004, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 1, 2004, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, August 8, 2004, in author’s possession.

⁴⁴ This is a lovely stone structure built in 1913. It has a beautiful stained-glass window, with its original glass intact, on the north side of the building; there are smaller stained-glass windows on the east and the

one side and women on the other. They lugged all needed water in containers from elsewhere. Because there were no pipes to keep thawed and because keeping a fire running all winter with no one on hand to use it most of the time was a luxury and a risk, members often shunned the hall during cold weather, meeting instead in a home.

In the early days of Fredonia Grange, the potlucks that precede every meeting were not held until about 8:00 p.m. This was so that those members who were dairy farmers could do their evening milking before coming to Grange. The meetings that followed often did not start until 9:00 p.m. and could easily last until 11:00 p.m. or later. This was particularly hard on families with young children. Initially, the meetings were on Wednesday evenings; they were later changed to Fridays, then finally moved to Saturdays. Also, as was true with the National Grange and the country at large, Fredonia Grange's demographics started to change. Fewer and fewer members were farmers; those who did farm usually did not keep dairy cattle that required evening milking. So the potluck and meeting times gradually became earlier: today's potlucks start at 6:00 p.m., followed by meetings at 7:00 p.m.

Through the years the friends and members of Fredonia Grange have continued to make improvements to their hall. In 1960 they did major renovations: using only hand shovels and wheelbarrows, they dug out a basement beneath the old church building to make a kitchen and a dining room. Every ounce of dirt was loaded onto a Model-A dump truck and, with the county's permission, dumped in a low spot along one of the roads. With the professional help and guidance of LaFountain Brothers, they built a basement of

west of the building. A late afternoon winter sunset gives the glass a special glow and rich patina that, once seen, can never be forgotten.

concrete blocks with a poured floor.⁴⁵ A fuel-oil furnace was installed to replace the coal- and-wood-burning one that had come with the building. This seemed the height of convenience to Grange members: it was easier to purchase fuel oil than it was to cut wood, and it was no longer necessary to build a fire every time the Grange hall was used. LaFountain Brothers then replaced the old floor joists and put in a new plywood subfloor. The Grange purchased a load of maple flooring that had once graced a dance hall. Before they could lay down the boards, they had to scrape years of accumulated wax from the tongues and grooves.⁴⁶

Fredonia Grange members have a long history of drawing upon their own resources to provide the labor and funds for these renovations and improvements. On several occasions, members have lent money; Fredonia Grange has issued notes and a repayment schedule, and always repaid the debts on time if not before.

In the early 1970s, Fredonia Community Grange turned to its members once more to help make improvements to the hall. This time they installed a kitchen, indoor bathrooms, small conference room, well, and septic tank. Few were sorry to give up the outhouse, although it did stand for a while longer as a source of jests.

In 1991, the members of Fredonia Grange decided that their building, as a public resource, should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and be handicapped accessible. Long-time Grange member Reuben LaFountain drew up plans for a covered ramp that would gently slope, rising one inch per foot. A wonder of ingenuity, this ramp

⁴⁵ LaFountain Brothers were long-time Grange member Reuben LaFountain's brothers, Lyle and Harold. At that time, they had a construction business specializing in roofing and barn repair. They had been known to build houses, too. Shortly after the work on the Grange hall, Reuben bought out his brother, Harold. When Reuben's sons were old enough to help him, he also bought out Lyle. There is more on some of the projects to which Reuben lent his construction expertise in the chapter on oral history. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, August 8, 2004, in author's possession.

consists of four levels and has three resting areas along the way. This was also when storage areas for the kitchen and upstairs sewing room were added. As usual, most of the labor for this project was voluntary. This time, however, the Grange did not have to borrow money from members: proceeds from their environmental activities were sufficient to cover the cost of materials.

There are a few events that are indelibly associated with Fredonia Grange. At the top of that list would have to be the Calhoun County Fair. Fredonia has been a fixture there since 1961. At that time, two young Grange members, Helen Hazen and Mary LaFountain, came up with a wild scheme for Fredonia Grange to make some money: they proposed that the Grange serve food at the Calhoun County Fair. Many of the older members were skeptical, but they voted to give the women a chance—although a number were certain that they would fall on their faces. The women had limited resources, so they decided to start out on a modest level: they would serve hot dogs, chips, pie, and pop in a ten foot by ten foot booth. That first year was especially difficult: even the preparations seemed accursed. As Helen and Mary prepared to bake their carefully made apple pies, a severe summer storm came up and they lost power. Collectively, they had seven small children with them, who became cold and hungry. They had to build a fire in the backyard to warm and feed the children. But the pies finally did get baked. The first year, they made a modest profit of \$200. But it was enough to show the rest of the Grange that this was a worthwhile project. They resolved to return the next year and do better. They have kept returning every year since. That single booth size has grown into the equivalent of seven booths, to better serve more people. For a number of generations,

⁴⁶ The floor is still in place, beautiful and functional—the perfect surface on which to dance every Wednesday night while area musicians play old-fashioned stringed instrument music.

it just would not be the fair without wholesome, delicious Fredonia Grange food.

Fredonia Grange members consider serving nutritious, reasonably priced food at the fair a community service. All the countless hours of labor behind the effort are donated. The profits from this endeavor support some of Fredonia's numerous community-service projects and help maintain their historic hall.

Also since 1961, Fredonia Grange has been very active in improving the facilities at the Calhoun County Fairgrounds. In 1980, they started a program replacing trees there. Over 150 trees were planted; approximately 100 are still growing. Their work on the Old Boys and Girls' Building has included building a ramp and renovating and encasing the plaques that honor those who contributed funds in 1923 to finance the structure. In 1976, they constructed a pavilion and furnished it with picnic tables for use by those attending events. They donated funds to the Calhoun County Draft Horse Breeders' Association to help them finance their barn at the fairgrounds.

A number of people in Calhoun County eagerly await the semi-annual Fredonia Grange pancake brunches, held every spring and fall. Fredonia Grange members began their brunches back in the early 1970s, when the men, overjoyed by their new Grange kitchen, decided to christen it. They wanted to do something nice for the women, who had faithfully fed them as they worked on the Grange improvements, so they put on a pancake supper for them. The results got rave reviews all around. When members of the greater community heard about this, they asked if they, too, could attend. So the events were opened to the public. As the events grew, the women were no longer guests—they had to work right along with the men. They could still eat free—after they worked. For a number of years, the Grange served the meals at its historic hall, experiencing a number

of memorable incidents along the way. Perhaps the most traumatic was the year that members were just preparing to start serving when the Grange lost electrical power. A frantic check revealed that it was not a Grange wiring problem—a transformer outside had blown. So the members managed to locate kerosene lanterns and generators; cooking was done on gas grills. Guests dined by lamplight; the ambiance thrilled them. Members had just finished the clean up when the power was restored. In recent years, the meals have been served at the B. E. Henry Community Building on Marshall Avenue in Marshall and have been transformed into brunches. Fredonia Grange uses some of the brunch profits to help with specific community-service projects: at various times, they have assisted a family who was burnt out of their home; a family whose uninsured breadwinner was injured in a serious accident; a family support group for those with servicepeople in Iraq; the Marshall Area Relay for Life.

In 2001, Fredonia Grange applied for and was accepted into the Action Grange program. Although a majority of Fredonia Grange members voted to take part in this, a number were vehemently opposed to it; others were skeptical. But a core of the faithful saw it as an effort to make adaptations in the Grange to keep it relevant to its communities and viable and vibrant into the twenty-first century and beyond. So members of its Action Grange Team attended regional conferences and hosted Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meetings. They believe that participation in the Action Grange program has given Fredonia Grange an infusion of energy and ideas and has been a catalyst for even more community service, outreach, partnerships, and openness.

Summary

The Grange arose in 1867 in the wake of the post Civil War depression and as agricultural unrest spread in the face of intensifying, glaring disparities between urban and rural life. Although, initially, one wing of the organization flirted with radical policies and economic measures, the Order was and is essentially a conservative entity with a basic foundation and orientation of social and educational programs. While this led to mass defections during the late nineteenth century, as disaffected farmers sought more activist solutions, it has probably contributed to the Grange's longevity: the oldest agricultural organization in the United States. Despite its overall conservatism, but influenced by the inherent egalitarianism of subsistence agriculture, the Grange adopted some extremely progressive social positions: among them that women should be valued as highly as men and were to be accorded full and equal membership in the organization.

In the twentieth century, as the country's demographics shifted and a rapidly diminishing percentage of the population was engaged in production agriculture, the very traits that had enabled the Grange to endure became severe threats to its continued existence, as conservatism hardened into rigidity. It was partially shielded from the repercussions by the Great Depression and the surrounding two world wars, which saw more people return or remain on the land. But by the 1950s, as farms mechanized and consolidated and there was a massive exodus of farm workers into urban areas, the Grange began to hemorrhage members. Some lonely prophets urged the Grange to reexamine and redefine itself—or perish. They were not heeded for decades, however, and the Grange became a shell of its former self. The history of the Michigan Granges roughly parallels that of the national organization, replete with attendant vicissitudes,

although Fredonia Grange weathered them better than most—perhaps because it was rather iconoclastic.

By 1999, the Grange leadership had to acknowledge that if the Order were to continue as an organization, in any sense of the word, into the twenty-first century, they had to take drastic measures. They appointed a Task Force to analyze its current state, to take a long, hard look at where it was and where it needed to go. The Task Force did not flinch from what must have been an onerous and unpopular duty. With considerable dispassion, they analyzed every facet of the contemporary Grange, painting a portrait of the current, typical Grange that was extremely unflattering. Their assessment found a Grange with: “a steady loss of membership lasting four decades; untrained, inconsistent leadership; lack of relevance in the community . . . ; poor organizational structure; secretive and ritualistic . . . ; unable to attract new members . . . ; no plans and few ideas; no optimism and little help; resistance to change.”⁴⁷ The wonder was not so much why the Grange was in trouble, as how it had survived to that point.

This appraisal called for drastic action if the Grange were to continue as more than a name and a memory. Heeding the Task Force’s recommendations, the National Grange leadership decided to give those Granges that were most progressive, most viable and amenable to adaptation broad discretion to experiment with and change most Grange elements pertaining to the local level. This was at least a tacit acknowledgment that the most successful Granges were probably already selectively interpreting and applying Grange observances, customizing them for their local constituencies and needs. During this initial phase, some Grangers questioned the very rationale and belief system of the

Grange itself, examining every tradition, holding nothing sacred. Those involved in the movement sent in periodic reports, chronicling what worked, what did not, what held particular promise. They waited for the National (and state) Grange leadership to share the fruits of the Action Grange labors as they had promised to do, to take a stand—to lead. But that did not happen.

The leadership backed away from the significant reconceptualization and reorientation that Action Grange I mandated and affirmed. Action Grange I indicated that Grangers would have to leave their comfort zones, make hard choices, and engage in the risky and discomfiting business of reimagining their organization and their place within it. The leadership retreated from this stance to Action Grange II: a palliative effort enforcing that the Grange needed to continue its traditional tasks but be better at disseminating information about them. Those Granges that had participated in Action Grange I were left in limbo, with no clear indication of where they were expected to go from there. Even in the case of Action Grange II, the safer alternative, Grange leadership was markedly deficient at effective advocacy or even in supplying requisite information.⁴⁸

The Grange is undergoing nothing less than a struggle over its identity—its heart and soul. What is it, ultimately, that makes the Grange the Grange? This is an organization steeped in tradition. What do they need to change and what should be retained? Some traditionalists maintain that nothing must be changed. Others point to their thinning

⁴⁷ Strategic Planning Task Force, “A Strategy for Renewing the National Grange: The Rationale and Importance of the Action Grange Program” (prepared November 2000), the National Grange, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 15, 2004).

⁴⁸ Jeff Swainston, Master, Michigan State Grange, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Jeff Swainston, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, September 7, 2003, Ann Arbor, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Jeff Swainston, remarks at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 17, 2004, Marshall,

ranks and say that they were not meant to be living-history museums. They argue that change is inevitable and that they must adapt to the times in order to remain relevant. They contend that this is the most effective way to fulfill their mission of service to the community and agriculture/the environment.⁴⁹ The future of the Grange lies in the balance: the course that it pursues, the philosophy that gains ascendancy over the next few years will determine whether it survives as a viable, relevant national entity.

Michigan, notes, in author's possession. There is more information about the Action Grange, including observations from some of its meetings, in chapter six.

⁴⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Helen Hazen, Flora, Fredonia Community Grange, Chaplain, Calhoun County Pomona Grange, active in the Grange for more than fifty years at the local, county, and state levels, advocate of the Action Grange movement, community activist, interview by author, October 25, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

CHAPTER 6

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION/ETHNOGRAPHY: THE STRUGGLE FOR AN ORGANIZATION'S SOUL

Fredonia Grange: Striving to Fill Community Needs

Fredonia Grange is an active organization—amazingly so, given the number of participating members. Every week (except holidays and fair week), the Monday Ladies and Wednesday Ladies gather at the Grange hall.¹ They are a mixture of Grange members and nonmembers, primarily retired women or those who do not work outside the home, since they meet from 10:00 a.m. until at least 2:00 p.m. They come together to sew, knit—and talk. The women, who bring a snack to eat during the day, have a social and productive time. They produce such items as: lap robes for people in nursing homes, homeless shelters, shelters from domestic violence, and the developmentally disabled; hats for premature babies and cancer patients; cage pads for the pens at the local Humane Society shelter; tote bags for the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek so that the indigent patients will have a means to transport their medicine and other necessities. The women have never had to buy materials for their good works: they always seem to receive timely donations. Each item bears a label stating that it was made for the recipient, with care, by Fredonia Grange.

Four times a year, Fredonia Grange is one of twelve organizations that take a rotating turn providing snacks and a visit to patients at the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek. The program is set up so that the veterans have a visit every Wednesday evening for a few hours. The participating visiting groups stock a snack cart with a variety of items that the VA staff suggests: juice, soda, chips, candy, cookies. More than the snacks, the

veterans seem to enjoy having someone come to talk with them for a few hours every week. When Fredonia Grange first became involved with the program, the VA provided a large metal cart for the organizations to use. This was difficult for even a large man to push; by the end of the visit, the person with the cart would be completely exhausted. So Fredonia asked the VA if it could donate a new cart. The VA was delighted. In 2004, Fredonia donated a cart that can be pushed with one finger.

During the last few years, as newer and younger members have become involved in Fredonia Grange, it has built additional partnerships and connections with the community, while continuing to maintain many of its traditional ties. It now partners with the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department to sponsor the annual Family Outdoor Safety Day. This is an event, held at a local township hall, at which one can learn all about outdoor safety. There are a number of exhibits, demonstrating everything from boating, hunting, and fishing safety, to outdoor power tool use, motocross skills, and conservation strategies involving native plants and such wildlife as bluebirds and monarch butterflies. Children get into the event free; adults pay \$5.00. All have unlimited access to the exhibits and the food, the latter of which is donated and served by Fredonia Grange. Children come from the surrounding elementary schools by the busloads. Area merchants help defray costs by sponsoring groups of children. The event was conceived by Calhoun County Deputy Sheriff Todd Turner as a way to raise money to purchase trigger locks to prevent accidental or impulsive use of a firearm.²

¹ They meet, of course, on the respective days from which they derive their names. There is considerable, but not complete, overlap of membership in the two groups.

² The impetus behind this began some years before. Todd teaches free hunter safety classes under the aegis of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. When he began teaching, the classes could be very large and he did not get to know many of the students. At a point after he completed teaching a class, Todd was contacted by the parents of one of his former students, saying that their son had committed suicide with a firearm and asking if they could meet with him. Wracked with guilt and dread, Todd agreed. The

Members of Fredonia Grange believe that there are not enough reasonably priced opportunities for families to have a good time together. So in 2003 they launched an annual event: Family Night Out. They reasoned that during late January and February, the dead of winter, after the elation of the holiday season has worn off, families would be looking for an enjoyable way to pass a Saturday night. So they rented the B. E. Henry Community Building, centrally located in downtown Marshall, for an evening. They offered something for all generations: bingo and euchre for adults; crafts, cookie baking, quiet games, and active games for children; a disc jockey and dancing upstairs for the young and young at heart; light refreshments; door prizes. There was no charge, but freewill donations were accepted. The event was promoted through fliers distributed to local schools, posters displayed throughout the greater Marshall area, and press releases in the local papers. The first such event, in January 2003, exceeded expectations: well over 100 people attended. Spurred by that success, Fredonia decided to hold another that same winter, which it did in March 2003. This followed too soon after the first, however:

parents, Robert and Janet Reynolds, did not come to blame Todd; instead, they were motivated by their son Brett's death. They wanted something positive to emerge from their misery, to help other families keep from experiencing their pain. So they determined to buy trigger locks and asked Todd if he would pass them out at his hunter safety classes. Todd eagerly acquiesced. He also was galvanized to change his classes: gone are the huge numbers. He now makes sure that he gets to know each student. He also makes his contact information—both business and personal—available to his students so that they can reach him if they have a problem. The Reynoldses set up a local community foundation to handle the trigger lock funds. So far, they have contributed more than \$2,000 of their own money. Todd launched the annual outdoor safety day so that they could attain their goal of widely proliferating trigger locks, sooner, and so that the Reynoldses would not have to absorb all the expenses. In April 2004, the Calhoun County Pomona Grange honored Todd and the Reynoldses with its annual community-service award. Todd Turner, Calhoun County Deputy Sheriff, remarks at the Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, January 4, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Todd Turner, e-mail to author, January 6, 2003, in author's possession; Todd Turner, e-mail to author, February 3, 2004, in author's possession; Todd Turner, remarks at the Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, February 7, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, February 21, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Calhoun County Pomona Grange Rural-Urban Banquet, April 22, 2004, Ceresco, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

attendance was markedly down. So members decided to hold the event only once a year. Family Night Out 2004 was even more successful than the inaugural event.

Fredonia Grange has gotten much positive feedback from hosting this event. Older people comment that they enjoy the chance to interact with youth. Parents of young children, many of whom no longer live close to older generations of family members, like for their children to be able to spend time in the steady, reassuring presence of elders. Fredonia Grange has lost money on each of the events: they cost many hundreds of dollars and the donations seldom equal one hundred. To the Grange members, however, that is largely irrelevant. They conceived and hold the event to fill a community void. They view the positive community response as an affirmation that their perceptions and solution are correct. An added bonus is that a few attendees have been so impressed with Fredonia Grange that they have been influenced to become members.³

Fredonia Grange has continued to look for ways to address community needs. It has formed an alliance with the Calhoun Conservation District, working with them on a number of projects. The Grange has become a participant in the annual Greater Marshall Relay for Life, an event to honor cancer survivors and victims and to raise money for the American Cancer Society. For the past several years, Fredonia Grange has donated and served lunch to the urban fourth-grade children who attend the annual Agriculture Literacy Day at the fairgrounds each October; they work to make this event possible together with the Olivet High School Future Farmers of America. The thank-you notes from the children to the Grange are delightful: some are on paper shaped like the hot dogs

³ Fredonia Grange's Family Night Out, January 25, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003; Fredonia Grange's Family Night Out, March 29, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, January 25, 2004, in author's possession.

that the Grange serves. Many children state that they wish that the Grange served their school lunches.⁴ Fredonia Grange has become involved in the Dictionary Project, a movement to kindle children's desire to learn and to read by making sure that every third-grade student has a dictionary of his or her very own. Fredonia has provided this service to a number of the surrounding school districts. In 2004, Fredonia Grange stepped in to fill a void left when the local Jaycees disbanded: it revived the community Easter egg hunt, running the event and providing eggs and prizes for all. Also in 2004, Fredonia began what it hopes will be an annual event: a community picnic, complete with old-fashioned games and fun. This event was also a homecoming for those who attended the historic Houston School, a one-room schoolhouse that belongs to the Grange and stands adjacent to it. Built in the nineteenth century, it remained an active schoolhouse until the 1960s, when it fell prey to school consolidation. Because it is still structurally sound and typifies a significant aspect of rural culture, Fredonia members strongly feel that it should be preserved and have taken steps to see that this is done. They have offered the schoolhouse to the Calhoun Agricultural and Industrial Society (CCAIS), the governing body of the Calhoun County Fairgrounds. The CCAIS has accepted the gift and has agreed on a space for the building on the fairgrounds. But because it is financially strapped, it cannot help to move the school to the site. So Fredonia has publicized the situation, helped to found a group to raise funds for this purpose—and is meeting with interest and some success.

For many years, the members of Fredonia Grange have been active in the Michigan State Grange Deaf Awareness program. Hearing awareness was the National Grange's

⁴ Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, November 15, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

health project for decades. Although the National Grange decided to broaden its health activities in recent years, Michigan Granges and those of some other Grange states continued their deaf awareness programs. The local Granges distribute deaf awareness and sign language materials to area schools. They also have a special relationship with the Michigan School for the Deaf in Flint. Under the guidance of Beulah Winter, Michigan State Grange Deaf Awareness Director,⁵ Granges “adopt” some of the economically disadvantaged students who attend the school. The school gives Beulah a list of those who are in dire financial straits; she then matches children with those Granges that are willing to sponsor children. Beulah tries to get a thumbnail sketch of each child for his or her supporting Grange—the name, age, birthday, interests, desires. The Granges are then urged to communicate with “their” children, sending them cards and notes throughout the year, particularly at holidays and their birthdays. Most Granges send a check along with the birthday card. At Christmas, the Granges are permitted to buy gifts for their children that total up to \$75.00. Granges try to buy the students what they need and what they want: it is not unusual to find a warm winter coat, boots, underwear, slacks, and tops with something more fanciful. For some of the children, these are the first real Christmas presents that they have ever had. The Grange presents the gifts at a pizza and soda party that it throws for the children, at Flint, a few weeks before Christmas. As many Grange members as possible attend. To a person they find that seeing the looks of utter rapture on the children’s faces as they open *their* gifts, observing the expressions of delight on students able to eat their fill of pizza, and feeling the warmth, love, and joy that the students lavish upon the Grangers make this an

⁵ Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, December 15, 2002, in author’s possession; Beulah Winter, interview by author, December 18, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; National Grange, *25 Years:*

unforgettable experience. Without hesitation, Grange members state that they receive far more in this exchange than they give. For many years, Fredonia Grange, as one of the more prosperous Granges, has adopted two children. They always send some members to the party and frequently provide the soda.

In early 2004, after members of Fredonia Grange distributed hearing awareness materials to area schools, they were asked by one of the principals if they could put on a hearing awareness program. Fredonia Grange members approved this, enabling its Deaf Awareness Committee to enlist the services of Linda Sykora, who is herself deaf, and who runs Deaf Link in Battle Creek, supervising twelve interpreters. On May 5, 2004, Linda, along with a student who was deaf and the girl's mother, conducted a program at three area schools, showing a video and performing a puppet show for hundreds. The Fredonia Grange Women's Activities Committee made felt pins, a hand formed in the sign "I Love You," to give to all those who attended. These were well received, as were the pencils saying Deaf Awareness on one side, and Fredonia Grange on the other.⁶

Fredonia Grange members view their hall as a community resource. People can "rent" the hall for any alcohol-free event. There is no charge but the Grange does accept freewill offerings. Use of the hall includes use of the fully equipped kitchen and dining area. One drawback is that the dining room can only adequately accommodate sixty to seventy people. The alcohol prohibition actually seems to be an attraction to a number of people seeking a wholesome atmosphere for a family gathering. A number of Fredonia's members are affiliated with such organizations as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and 4-H. Fredonia frequently sponsors these groups' activities, underwriting field trips, food

Grange Deaf Activities, 1970-1995 (National Grange: Washington, DC, nd).

⁶ Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, May 1, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

sales. The scouts often use the Grange hall and grounds for sleep-overs and camping out. 4-H clubs hold their meetings at the hall. The Red Cross has designated the Grange hall an emergency shelter.⁷

The Grange hall is also the scene of more regularly scheduled activities. There is a card party (pedro or euchre) on the last Saturday afternoon of the month, except during the summer. Every Wednesday evening, the hall hosts old-fashioned stringed instrument music. There is a nominal, \$1.00 charge for both the card party and the music.

Another of Fredonia Grange member's signature, long-standing projects are their efforts to bring back the bluebirds to Calhoun County, a nearly two-decades-long labor of love. Their involvement started quietly. In 1985, the Grange nominated Helen Hazen to attend a bluebird festival at Jackson Community College. Helen returned with plans for building bluebird houses. The late Harold Baum, who was the first chair of the Bluebird House Committee, decided to build one house as a trial, paying \$3.00 for materials. Since that time, the committee has not had to pay for additional lumber: all that they have used has been donated; sometimes they have torn down unsafe, unwanted structures to get the wood; one member donated some trees, which his brother sawed into lumber. Through the years, many different Grange members have participated in this project.

Grange members did not get involved in this effort as a moneymaking activity: their interest was in restoring bluebird habitat. So they have continued to charge the same low prices for the boxes: \$3.50 each, or three for \$10.00. Members measure their success by the number of nesting boxes that they have sold or given away—now around 13,000. This project has provided nesting areas for cavity-nesting birds, which, besides bluebirds, include such beneficial species as tree swallows, titmice, chickadees, and wrens. This

⁷ Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, November 1, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

project is a productive way to use scrap lumber, rather than have it clog landfills. Even though the project's impetus is not to raise money, since the labor and materials are all donated, proceeds from sales are pure profit and have financed the covered ramp at the Fredonia Grange hall, contributed toward the cost of the fully equipped kitchen at the Calhoun County Fairgrounds, and helped pay for an upgrade to the Grange's heating and cooling system.⁸

If one played a game of word association with people from Calhoun County and asked them the first thing that comes to mind when they hear "Fredonia Grange," they would be likely to respond "food." Grange members themselves readily acknowledge the connection. In general, they like to eat and take pride in the food that they prepare. This is one of the constants of the organization. It is also the way that a number of Granges earn the funds to stay solvent and operational. In this, Fredonia Grange is exemplary. Members' efforts to use food as a fund-raising device began in earnest in the 1960s when some of them began a food booth at the Calhoun County Fair. This has continued and expanded through all the intervening years. In the 1970s, they added semiannual pancake brunches. In 2002, they began to serve food at the three-day, Fourth-of-July weekend Marshall Cruise to the Fountain (a celebration of old cars). Fredonia members also cater a number of dinners during the warmer months, including the annual Calhoun County Farm Bureau banquet. Fredonia members have determined that, for their numbers and levels of skills, preparing and serving food is their most efficient and lucrative way to earn money. The net profits from these events do make up the bulk of their operating funds and are what enable them to address community needs. There is a concern, though,

⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, June 1, 2002, in author's possession; members of the Fredonia Grange Bluebird House Committee (especially Athol Hazen, Jr. and Paul Jones), conversations with author,

that food will be so closely identified with Fredonia Grange that it will be viewed as a one-dimensional entity. That is one reason that there has been such a concerted effort to disseminate information about some of Fredonia's many other projects. Members do not want to be viewed as a bunch of kitchen drudges.⁹

Meetings

Grange life is filled with meetings. The local Granges are required to meet at least once a month; many meet twice a month. If the local Granges are part of a county Grange organization, that meets once a month. If one is an active Granger, one is sure to be on a number of Grange committees at the local level; these meet with varying frequency, depending upon their mandates and effectiveness. Since Grange participation has dwindled, those who are active at the grassroots level are likely to be tapped to serve at state and national Grange levels, as well. The Grange can easily become a bottomless abyss, swallowing all one's time. When people cannot participate, they are not ostracized, but are welcomed all the more heartily when they return to the fold. The

2002–2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁹ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Lois Hazen, Grange member from age five, former Master of Fredonia Grange, focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. During the time that the author attended Fredonia Grange meetings, Lois did not. During the time when Rich and his other siblings and contemporaries left the Grange, Lois maintained her connection, pouring her efforts into keeping it going for her father, Athol's, sake, and because she loves the organization. But the labor took its toll and burned her out. In addition, a long-standing, deep relationship that she had had with another Grange member ended badly, with strained feelings on both sides. Since the other member continued to attend meetings, Lois mostly did not. She did occasionally come to special events, kept working at fund-raisers, and took part in one of the Fredonia Grange Member Focus Groups, where her devotion to the Grange was obvious. She has said repeatedly that she will return—that she can never leave completely, try as she may.

There will be a fuller discussion of the fair food booth and the pancake brunches in the chapter on oral history. From 2002 through 2004, the author worked with Grange members at these events. It was a good way to get to know Grange members, establish rapport, and observe a surprisingly broad spectrum of humanity pass by. These events are remarkable, in addition, for the way that non-Grange members who are friends of Fredonia Grange and believe in their work but who, for whatever reason cannot or will not join outright, turn out to work. At the end of the busy fund-raising season, Fredonia Grange hosts a huge

culture of Fredonia Grange, for one, engenders guilt in people when they do not join their comrades to help with an activity. Although no one directly mentions those who do not participate, those people know that in their absence, those who are left, already stretched thin, must shoulder more of the burden of work.¹⁰

Regular Fredonia Grange Meetings

Fredonia Grange meets the first and third Saturday nights of every month but August; the Calhoun County Fair takes place during the regularly scheduled second Saturday meeting, so during that month, Fredonia has only one formal meeting.¹¹ Every regular Grange meeting is preceded by a potluck supper. In general, Grange members love to eat and take pride in the food that they prepare. A recurring theme that one frequently hears from Grange members is that if one goes to a Grange event, one can count on eating well. Grange members boast that when one goes to a county fair, one should always seek out the Grange food booth: that guarantees one the best possible food. Every Grange does not follow the potluck-before-the-meeting practice, but for Fredonia it is a hallowed tradition. Looking over the contented group sharing food and talking, Athol Hazen, the institutional memory of Fredonia Grange, has periodically remarked that at one point, Fredonia members tried to eliminate the potlucks. But when they did, attendance dropped way off, so they had to reinstate them. Members really look forward to the meals, commenting that, in a hurried world that often pulls people apart for work, school,

appreciation dinner for all who helped through the year—member and nonmember alike. This is the cook's night off: the dinner is either catered or in a private room at a restaurant.

¹⁰ Knowing that each person is needed and valued is a two-edged sword: it can be very liberating; it can also impose a heavy responsibility. This is a periodic comment. Mary Houghton, for example, has articulated this well. Mary Houghton, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004.

¹¹ Much of the information for this section, unless explicitly noted to the contrary, comes from a series of e-mails from Athol Hazen, Fredonia Grange's current historian and expert. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to

and other demands, it is nice to be able to count on two good, home-cooked meals a month—sometimes the only ones that they get.

Attendance varies a great deal. Bad weather can affect the number at meetings, but so can good: during the winter, hazardous driving makes people reluctant to venture out; during the summer, there are the additional enticements of vacations, family reunions, and the joys of outdoor activities. A special, seasonal meal, such as turkey for Thanksgiving and ham for Christmas, can draw a crowd, as can an attractive enrichment program scheduled for the meeting. During the last few years, Fredonia Grange has made a concerted effort to invite the community to its notable meals and programs, publishing press-release invitations in the local newspapers. This has met with some success and has enhanced and expanded Fredonia's reputation.

During Fredonia's earlier years, the potluck suppers did not start until 8:00 p.m. so that the members who were dairy farmers could complete their evening milking before coming. Meetings, thus, did not start until 9:00 p.m. or so and could easily run until 11:00 p.m. or later. Fredonia experimented with meetings on different nights. At one time, they met on Wednesdays. This was difficult for those with children or those who had to get up early for work. So the meetings were moved to Fridays, then Saturdays. As the number of farmers, and particularly dairy farmers, both in the overall population and in the Grange diminished, supper and meeting times could be earlier. Although there is always some leeway, potluck suppers now start at 6:00 p.m., with the meeting following at around 7:00 p.m.

author, March 9, 2004, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, March 10, 2004, in author's possession.

Although Fredonia Grange, as an Action Grange, has permission to modify the Grange ritual, it still usually runs its meetings as a customarily observant Grange, going through the ceremonial and still largely traditional opening and closing—what Grangers refer to as “opening and closing in form.” During the Grange meeting, the officers wear sashes of blue velvet with gold trim and the initial of their office. They wear the sashes over their right shoulders so that the garments cross their bodies and hang to the left. Although Fredonia has changed the titles of some of the officers, this is not reflected in the initials on the sashes: even though the head of the Grange is now called “chair,” for example, his sash still bears the “M” for master. The officers are arranged around the room at stations: wooden desks that hold the tools of their offices. Fredonia Grange has collected all the officers (gatekeeper/greeter, overseer/cochair, steward, assistant stewards) who sit at the entrance to the hall and arranges them at a single large table, rather than at individual desks, but their seating locations are largely unchanged. The three graces—the offices that reflect the Roman goddesses of agriculture, Pomona, Flora, and Ceres—sit at a table at the front of the room. The table used to be on the stage, but Fredonia has moved it down to the meeting room floor to make it easier for some of the older members to access it; also, it makes those officers feel less separated and more a part of the meeting. The other officers sit along the sides of the room: the chaplain, executive committee (three members), master/chair, secretary, treasurer, and lecturer/enrichment director. Although the pianist, who sits at the piano on the stage, is not an officer, she is deemed an essential part of a meeting. Grange meetings make use of music as a unifying and uplifting force.

The chair/master runs the meetings with a gavel: for example, so many raps mean that all should rise, another number means that all can sit. The chair calls the meeting to order by intoning a ritual introduction.¹² “The hour of labor is at hand and the work of another day demands our attention.” The ritual is supposed to evoke agriculture, which the Grange deems the noblest and first of all occupations. So many of the symbols invoked are of an agricultural nature. The steward and assistant stewards carry staffs topped by replicas of agricultural tools. The steward carries a staff surmounted by a spud; the assistant steward has one topped by a pruning hook: both were used in nineteenth century agriculture to cultivate crops and are characteristic of a man’s second degree position of cultivator. The lady assistant steward bears a staff whose end is a shepherd’s crook, symbolizing her second degree rank of shepherdess. These ceremonial designations are replete with symbolism, going beyond the agricultural to the spiritual and psychological. After the leader’s opening statement, the stewards take up their staffs and march forward, to the middle of the room, where they open a Bible, that lies closed on a stand, to a random page. The steward, carrying his staff, also marches forward to present the leader with the implement case: a velvet-lined case that contains small, metal, two-dimensional replicas of such agricultural implements as an ax, plow, harrow, spade, hoe, pruning knife, and sickle. These implements are demonstrated during the first three

¹² As a participant in the Action Grange I program, Fredonia was permitted to make changes to the Grange ritual that opens and closes each meeting. Fredonia did make some slight changes in wording, but kept the core, sense, and spirit of the ceremony essentially untouched. Fredonia’s opening and closing could be easily recognized and used in any traditional Grange. The Fredonia Grange Action Committee rewrote the opening and closing right after joining the program—so, sometime in 2001. They make their version, contained on both sides of a sheet of paper, available to all who attend Fredonia Grange meetings. When the author started attending meetings in March 2002, she received such a sheet, which she still has and uses. The direct quotations from the ritual opening and closing come from this sheet. Fredonia Grange Action Committee, “Revised Ritual for Grange Meeting Openings and Closings,” sheet prepared for and used to guide Fredonia Grange through a Grange meeting with slightly modified openings and closings (Marshall, MI: Fredonia Grange, 2001).

degrees: the first four—ax, plow, harrow, and spade—during the first degree; the next two—hoe and pruning knife—during the second degree; and the last—the sickle—during the third degree.¹³ The assemblage then either sings the National Anthem or recites the Pledge of Allegiance. After this, the chaplain says a prayer: sometimes this is the standard version; sometimes it is customized for the occasion.¹⁴ The prayer, in general, contains such elements as thanking God for permitting them to come together and for their “glorious cause.” It asks God to grant them prudence and wisdom so that their work will be good and acceptable in God’s sight and blessed with a bountiful harvest. The opening continues, “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 the welcome plaudit ‘Well done good and faithful servants.’” Fredonia has not rewritten other portions of the ritual, such as the service for draping the Grange charter (which will be draped for thirty days) when one of its Grange members dies. In that ceremony the chaplain prays, in part, “Seen through the eyes of Faith, we remember our (Brother/Sister) not as one dead—(he/she) has only gone on before us through the gates of the *Grange Above*, where dwells the Great *Master* of us all.”¹⁵

After the opening prayer, if there is a pianist present, Grange members sing an opening song. The Grange has its own, contemporary songbook, the latest in a memorable series. Some of the songs included are adaptations of familiar standards: Grange-oriented words are set to a traditional tune. One good example is “It’s a Good Thing to Be a Granger,” with words commensurate with the title, sung to the music of

¹³ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 21, 2004, in author’s possession.

¹⁴ If Marjorie Trine, a certified lay minister and Fredonia’s elected chaplain, is there, the prayer is usually composed extemporaneously to suit the occasion. Substitutes tend to stick with the standardized version.

“It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.” The songbook has sections with traditional Christian hymns. There is also a large helping of what the Grange terms “Sing Along Songs”: the sorts of songs that choruses sang forty and more years ago.¹⁶ A Grange meeting may be one of the few places where one can find several generations collectively singing such once standard ditties as: “In the Good Old Summertime” and “When You Wore a Tulip.” Fredonia has few really good singers, but all the members seem to enjoy lifting up their voices and hearts; the opening and closing songs serve as unifiers for them; it can also wake up those who may be drowsing from a big meal.

Grange members then enact the Grange salutation, a sort of Grange pledge or declaration. Traditionally, the Grange master would recite the words and the rest of the members would silently make the appropriate, symbolic signs. Fredonia Grange has modified this exercise so that everyone now recites the words.¹⁷ The master/chair then opens the implement case and asks the cochair to declare the Grange open. The cochair proclaims, “I proclaim this Grange opened for promoting the welfare of our country and of mankind and for advancing the interests, elevating the characters, and increasing the influence of all members and guests of this organization, by properly transacting our

¹⁵ National Grange, *Manual of Subordinate Granges of the Patrons of Husbandry*, 44th ed. (Washington, DC: National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, 1995), 126 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ National Grange, *The Grange Songbook: The Official Songbook of the National Grange* (Washington, DC: National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, 1983). The pianist also plays appropriate marching music when the assistant stewards march to the Bible to open it, and during the Penny March during the Grange’s closing.

¹⁷ When Randy Nail first came to the Grange, he was mystified when the members started soundlessly making gestures; he found it so alienating that he could not really apprehend what the master was saying. After he joined the Grange and became more comfortable, and particularly after Fredonia Grange became an Action Grange and could make changes to the ritual legally, he shared his observations about the salutation. As a result, Fredonia changed its practice. Some of the longer term members, long accustomed to the Grange traditions, continue to make the signs as they say the words. “A good Granger places Faith in God, nurtures Hope, dispenses Charity, and is noted for Fidelity.”

business and by exemplifying our principles in Faith, in Hope, in Charity, and with Fidelity.”¹⁸

There is a standard order of business to which many Granges adhere. They start with the *Roll Call of Officers*. Local Granges have sixteen officers; Grange regulations state that in order for a Grange meeting to be deemed valid, seven officers need to be present: master, overseer, steward, assistant steward, gatekeeper, chaplain, and secretary. The guidelines state that if any of those elected to those offices are missing, the positions should be filled by substitutes. As the roll call of offices is read, those filling the office rise and give their names. If there are substitutes for offices, the people give their names and add, “pro tem.” Fredonia Grange always has enough people to fill the crucial positions; members do not always bother to explicitly state who is substituting for whom, particularly if the Grange does not open and close in form.¹⁹

Athol Hazen is currently Secretary of Fredonia and has been, on a recurring basis, for a number of years. As is true with many of the older Grange members featured in this study, he has eagerly embraced information technology.²⁰ Although Athol takes notes

¹⁸ Fredonia Grange Action Grange Committee, “Revised Ritual for Grange Meeting Openings and Closings.”

¹⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 21, 2004, in author’s possession.

²⁰ This belies popular stereotypes that people who are not highly educated, rural people, and older people are reluctant to welcome information technology. In late December 2001, the author was talking on the telephone with an old friend, the wife of an anthropologist who had been fighting to increase understanding of other peoples and overturn stereotypes for decades. During the call, the author, whose computer is connected to the Internet by cable modem, received an e-mail from a Grange contact, telling her that another cherished Grange member had died. The author shared the news with her friend. The friend asked how the author could have just learned this: there clearly had been no new call. When the author explained that the information was in an e-mail, her friend was astounded. She could not believe that elderly rural people would utilize technology so effectively. When the author shared this story with Grange members, they chuckled ruefully: they are familiar with being perceived as hicks. They told the author that her friend might be interested to learn that most of them now had indoor plumbing and even motor vehicles. Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, December 29, 2001, in author’s possession. In his roles as secretary, head of the information and communication committee, and head of the resolution committee, Athol handles much of the communication both among Fredonia Grangers and between Fredonia Grange and the outside world—other Granges and more. Athol, who lives in Eckford Township, served as its supervisor for years. He credits the Grange with developing his leadership potential to enable him to do this. When the township

during the meetings, initially, in longhand, he later transfers them to his computer, elaborating on them as he does. Most Fredonia Grange members have e-mail accounts. Athol prefers to e-mail the *Minutes from the Last Meeting* to all possible as soon as he has typed them. That way, recipients can read them at their convenience and notify him of any additions or corrections, before the next meeting. Athol does still make a limited number of copies of the minutes available on the table by the entry to the meeting room, but there are few who now need to utilize them. Since most people have already read the minutes and sent in their corrections, if any, the minutes are usually approved without further comment, with the condition that there can always be future additions, deletions, or corrections.

The next order of business is *Applications for Membership*. Anyone fourteen years old or older can join a local Grange by filling out an application and submitting it to the Grange secretary. The National Grange provides a generic form; Fredonia Grange has adapted this to its purposes: it has, for example, removed all mention that members are subject to National and State Grange regulations. Applicants no longer have to be recommended, sponsored, or evaluated by a membership committee: Grange members realize that if people are interested enough in the organization to join, they will probably have something to offer. If there are new applicants for membership, the secretary tells the members, at this time, who they are. If there is time, the applicants are voted upon right then. Fredonia Grange still has the old wooden ballot box that it has traditionally

purchased a computer in 1989, Athol entered the computer age, taking basic lessons at the local community college. In addition to the meeting minutes that are widely distributed, Athol publishes a monthly newsletter, the Fredonia Grange *Innovator*. He has been doing this for at least nine years. The newsletter consists of eight pages (four sheets, printed on both sides). It contains synopses of the previous month's meetings, news of upcoming and previous events, information on Pomona, State, and National Grange activities. Too often, there are memorials for Grangers who have died. Athol fills the rest of the space with

used for this purpose. In the past, while the applicants sat outside in the hallway with their sponsors, who explained what was happening, members voted by dropping a white marble, for yes, or a black marble, for no, into the box. At one time, a single black ball was enough to reject an applicant. Now it takes over fifty percent. Perhaps because of the stigma associated with being “black balled,” Fredonia instituted the use of black cubes for the “no” vote counters. During his fifty years in Fredonia Grange, Athol Hazen has seen no applicant rejected, although people who belonged when he joined told him that there was one person who was not accepted. This cost Fredonia members, since the applicant’s sponsors, angered at the rejection, left the Grange. Today, the way that Fredonia handles voting on membership applications depends largely on the time available during the meeting. According to Athol, if there is time, they still use the wooden ballot box.²¹ In the years that the author attended Fredonia Grange meetings, however, this never happened. If possible, applicants were voted upon during the same meeting that their applications were proclaimed. If applicants were present, they did not have to leave the room during voting. They were asked to tell those present a little about themselves. Voting was then done by a show of hands and tended to be unanimous.²² The new members were then welcomed into the fold with a round of applause.

The next official order of business is *Obligation or Conferring of Degrees*. Many of the newer members have no experience with either of these aspects of the Grange. According to Athol Hazen, “We talk about doing the first four degrees, but it seems there

jokes, stories, and quizzes. People frequently tell Athol that they love the *Innovator* for its jokes. The back page has a calendar of events. Athol Hazen, e-mail to author, July 23, 2004, in author’s possession.

²¹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 23, 2004, in author’s possession.

²² There was never any record of any nays.

is never time. An obligation ceremony was instituted when the Granges got so busy they were not able to do the degree work. We have neglected to do this also.”²³

Reports of Standing and Special Committees come next. These can take a long time. Some of the younger (in their forties and fifties) members contend that contemporary people feel rushed and are not going to sit through meetings with hours of committee reports. They have urged the respective committees to meet individually and conduct most of their business then, giving only brief reports at the meetings. But old habits die hard. Many people need the affirmation and approval that comes from speaking before an appreciative, supportive group. Once they get the floor, it is hard for them to relinquish it. Fredonia Grange has many committees, including:

Agriculture/Conservation; Bluebird; Budget; Building and Beautification; Card Parties; Community Service; Educational Fund; Fair; Health/Deaf Activities; Historical; Information and Communication; Insurance; Legislative; Membership/Action; Pancake Brunch; Relay for Life; Resolutions; Women’s Activities; Youth. Every committee does not report at every meeting; some hardly ever report. But enough do to consume substantial time, particularly when the speakers tend to digress.

Communications, the next item of business, is a broad category: it can include notices from the State and National Granges, announcements from businesses with whom Fredonia deals, letters of appreciation for good works that Fredonia has done. Since Fredonia is active helping a variety of groups, the thank yous tend to stream in. If there are only a few communications, Athol, in his capacity as secretary, may read them all; if there are many, he will read some and summarize others.

²³ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 23, 2004.

The treasurer gives a report about once a month. Everyone present, including guests, receives a printout of the spreadsheets that display, in minute detail, Fredonia's income and outlay. Fredonia Grange has checking, saving, and CD accounts in a local bank. During the last few years, members have tried to make a budget, projecting income and expenses for the coming year, although it has been an imprecise exercise. As spring draws to a close, records usually indicate that Fredonia Grange is spending more money than it is making, but this seldom causes concern. Fredonia makes the bulk of its operating expenses with its summer fund-raisers, most particularly with its food booth at the Calhoun County Fair. This major effort goes far toward keeping Fredonia solvent over the following year.

One of the three Grange goddesses is Flora, the goddess of flowers. In Fredonia Grange, it is the person who fills this office who is responsible for visiting the sick and the bereaved. She buys cards, flowers, and gifts from her *Floral Fund*. At every Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, she gives a report of what she has spent since the last meeting and the balance currently in the fund. Fredonia Grange concludes every meeting with a *Penny March*, taken up to replenish the Floral Fund. In the early days of the Grange, people contributed a penny or whatever they could spare. That is still the case, although contributions now tend to consist primarily of paper money.

The meeting moves on to *Unfinished Business*, then *New Business*. These categories can include almost anything that is not covered by one of the preceding topics. During New Business, members are likely to propose new activities that they think that Fredonia should undertake.

Next, the chair/master poses the question: *Is There Any Member Who Is Sick or in Distress?* This portion is primarily filled with a litany of illnesses of members, including: who has seen the sick, what the diagnosis is, and the prospect of recovery.

Suggested Grange guidelines state that this should be the place for the *Enrichment Program*. Fredonia Grange used to try to reserve one of its monthly meetings for a special enrichment program, restricting the Grange business conducted then to a minimum. In practice, this did not work: members could not constrain themselves to only one business session per month. Keeping the enrichment program until almost the last item of business, however, also does not work well: after several hours of business transactions, people are more numb than receptive. When Fredonia has a special enrichment program—a guest doing a presentation about monarch butterflies, hand spinning, gardening with Michigan native wildflowers, historic one-room schoolhouses, to name a few—to which it has particularly invited the public, members realize that most guests are not going to have the fortitude to sit through hours of Grange business to get to the program. So Fredonia usually reschedules the program for early in the meeting—right after approval of minutes from the last meeting, for example. Fredonia’s enrichment director always tries to offer some sort of program, even if it is only sharing fun facts or an inspirational reading. But if the meeting is running exceptionally long or people seem particularly tired, the program may be canceled.

The last official order of business, before closing the Grange, is *Suggestions for the Good of the Order*. At Fredonia, these often consist of such heartfelt expressions as “Let’s go home!”²⁴

²⁴ The meetings start at 7:00 p.m.; by this time, it can easily be 9:30 or 10:00.

The Grange closes in form by having the chair ask the cochair if the labors of the day are completed. When told that they are, he tells the stewards to prepare the Grange for closing; the assistant stewards march forward to close the Bible; the assistant steward collects the implement case. The chair admonishes the members to remember the teachings of the Grange, giving them in some detail. Then there is a closing song. The cochair declares the Grange closed, the chaplain gives the benediction, and there is a *Penny March*.

The ritual is strongly Christian, although the Grange declares that it is open and nondenominational. Prayers usually include an at least passing reference to Jesus Christ. Even though some members of Fredonia Grange profess that they are not religious, most are at least tacitly Christian. They seem comfortable with the Grange's religiosity. Their membership includes a few lay ministers. Patriotism evokes even stronger emotions: people are proud of their country; they are eager to profess their allegiance.

The agricultural ritualism poses more of an understanding problem. People say the formulaic words and make the stylized movements awkwardly, self-consciously. Those who have been in the Grange for a long time often seem to do these actions automatically, without cognizance of the underlying meaning. Those who are new to the Grange usually have little idea of what they are doing and why. The Granges in this study are stretched too thin to put on degree work. With all available effort channeled into keeping going, there is little time or energy to explain Grange subtleties. In Fredonia Grange, people follow along using the Opening and Closing the Grange sheet; few consult a Grange manual or read other sources for Grange history.

Fredonia Grange meetings can elicit a mixture of bemusement, awe, and frustration from outsiders. In May 2002, Nea, a friend of the author's, attended a meeting with her. It was a typical Fredonia meeting. The head of the legislative committee gave a long, circuitous report. He began by talking about local school redistricting. He moved on to talk about the library's need to raise money and the desire for a new county juvenile home. Then he abruptly shifted his focus to national matters. He mentioned the debate about whether President Bush knew about the September 11 attacks beforehand. He concluded that he was not from Mr. Bush's party, but that he did not like for him to be unjustly accused. Nea remarked later that she was astounded that he managed to incorporate all this into his report. Later, one of the youngest Grange members, a youth of about twenty, rose to give a report on himself—something like bearing testimony in a church. He felt that he needed to update the members on his transferring to another school, the clubs that he had joined, the conference that he would attend over the summer. None of this was, really, Grange related, but the youth continued to share the developments in his life, going into detail. Those present listened politely.

After the meeting, Nea asked the author about the “mumbo-jumbo” that began and ended the meeting—the opening and closing ritual. She was unclear what it represented and how it connected to the rest of the meeting. When the author explained, she asked why Fredonia did not highlight this agricultural, environmental heritage and integrate it better into their other activities and business transactions. She thought that it was both touching and maddening that “extraordinarily inarticulate people” should feel that they had the right—nay, the duty—to go on at length about personal matters and observations in what was ostensibly an organization's business meeting. One of the realizations to

emerge from this meeting, which has often been confirmed since then, is that the Grange can provide a safe haven, a secure atmosphere in which people who might otherwise be overlooked or discounted have an opportunity to feel significant and that they and what they do matters to others.²⁵

Action Grange I: A Limited and Temporary License to Change

In January 2002, the Action Grange program was just beginning to hit its stride.²⁶ During the previous summer, representatives from many of the Granges taking part in the program had attended regional seminars to learn about the program and gain inspiration and ideas to take back to their Granges. Most seemed unsure what they were to accomplish. They had the distinct feeling that the hopes and future of the Grange lay with them, that they were responsible for saving the Grange and taking it into the twenty-first century, and beyond. But how? They needed to change—but change what, when? Where should they begin? How could they apply the concepts discussed at the seminars and develop their own strategies to become vital, relevant, integral parts of their own unique communities? Those Granges who had not joined the Action Grange program

²⁵ Nea's reaction probably says at least as much about herself as it does about Fredonia Grange members or meetings. She has spent all her adult life working, living, and socializing in academia. Hers is a world in which people analyze and verbalize every thought, action, and motivation. People are gauged by their agility of expression. Superficially, there is an unbridgeable abyss that separates Harvard yard from rural Michigan. But, in truth, people in both places seek the same essential things: to feel that they make a difference, that their existence has been worthwhile, that they are valued and valuable. The fact that the people of Fredonia Grange not verbalize themselves and their needs in expository prose does not make their formulations less valid or inherently worthy. This interaction does manifest a salient point, however. No community or community-service organization exists in a vacuum: it must interrelate with and obtain things from other entities, often powerful institutions such as government, academia, healthcare systems, the judiciary, global markets, communication networks, transportation matrices. Many of these institutions are driven by information and ideas. In order for the local community or community-service group to retain its quintessential core, it needs to be articulate enough to ascertain what it is for itself, express it to its members (thereby unifying them), and enunciate it to the outside world and institutions, engaging them and making a compelling case for its continued support, maintenance, and viability. Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, May 18, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

were skeptical about what could or should be achieved. Some members of the Granges that had signed on to the Action Grange program were resistant. Even the Action Grange advocates were beset with doubts. There was little guidance from the national or State Grange levels: this was, after all, to be a grassroots initiative; further, beyond the concept of turning to the local Granges, the National Grange had few ideas—it was looking for answers, not dispensing them.

Confronted by an abrogation of leadership and responsibility at the national and state levels, affronted by the hostility of peer Granges who viewed Grange change as anathema and any who questioned Grange traditions as heretics, some of the Action Granges sought support and affirmation from one another. This was the case in Michigan. On January 19, 2002, the Michigan Action Granges held their first statewide meeting at Fredonia Grange.²⁷ Members of all four of the Granges participating in the program—Fredonia,

²⁶ There is more on Action Grange in the chapter on Grange history and later in this chapter under Action Grange II.

²⁷ This was the first Grange meeting that the author attended. In early January 2002, she received a roster of key members (heads of committees, officers, contact people) of the Michigan state Granges, along with their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses if available. On January 14, 2002, she sent an e-mail to all those members for whom she had an address. In it she explained that she had received their names and contact information from Peggy Johnston, Secretary, Michigan State Grange, that she had been doing research on the Grange as an historical entity for a number of months, assisted by Beulah and Roland Winter, but that she had discovered that the Grange as a contemporary organization was an even more exciting entity than was its historical embodiment. She further explained that she was working on her doctorate at Michigan State University and thought that the Grange would make a compelling thesis topic. She continued that she was hoping that they would agree to share some of their Grange perceptions and experiences with her. The author noted, in the subject line of the e-mails, that Beulah and Roland Winter had suggested that she contact them; although the author thought that her e-mail address's ending in .edu might persuade some to open her letter, she was concerned that many, seeing an e-mail from a stranger, simply would delete it. So she prominently included the mention of Beulah and Roland, who were known to all Grange members, whose Grange credentials were impeccable, and whose endorsement was widely valued. One of the few people who did respond was Mary Houghton of Fredonia Grange. Mary agreed to an interview, but went on to say that she could do even better than that. "This Saturday, January 19th, at Fredonia Grange we are hosting a meeting of the 4 Action Granges in Michigan. The Action Grange Program was initiated at the national level to generate new ideas, programs and procedures to bring the Grange into the 21st century. The Granges and committee members involved with this program are deeply committed to preserving the essence of the Grange while making it serve the needs of today's families. We would be delighted to have you attend. This would give you an opportunity to meet and talk to the 'movers and shakers' of the Michigan Grange and see how we work together to improve our great organization." Mary Houghton, e-mail to author, January 14, 2002, in author's possession. Mary and the author then

Mosherville, Pittsfield-Union, and West Oshtemo—attended this meeting. In addition, Sue Withers, master of Georgetown Grange, near Grand Rapids, came. She was keenly interested in the Action Grange movement, although her small Grange had not been able to make the commitment to join the program just then. Bob Brown, Master of the Michigan State Grange, was also there.

Mosherville Grange: A Combination of Hope and Despair

The Granges represented posed some interesting contrasts. Mosherville lay in Hillsdale County, in the heart of farm country.²⁸ It had a tiny number of even nominal members. The members were predominantly female and elderly: the younger ones were in their seventies; a number of them were in nursing homes. But those few members who were able to be active were frenetically so. They sponsored square dances in their hall the first, third, and fifth Saturdays of every month. Every year they hosted a free health fair. They held such fund-raisers as ice cream socials (with homemade ice cream as well

spoke on the phone: Mary gave directions to the Fredonia Grange hall (it is located in a very rural area) and said that, should the author wish to stay for the regular Fredonia Grange meeting that was to follow the Action Grange session, she would be welcome to spend the night at Mary's so that she would not have to make the trip home late at night. Mary has continued to be hospitable, receptive, dedicated to the Grange and community, but open to change.

Unless specifically noted, the information about the first Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting and those who participated in it comes from notes taken then. Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

²⁸ After the author met some of the Mosherville Grange members and told them about her research, they invited her to come to one of their meetings and share some of the information on the Grange that she was uncovering. So the author, Mary Houghton, and the author's dog, Commie, attended a meeting at Mosherville on September 14, 2002. There were six people at this meeting, a typical turnout. They were extraordinarily hospitable and served a prodigious amount of delicious food. The meeting was downstairs, in the dining area, since there were not enough people for a strictly valid Grange meeting: it was not deemed worthwhile to hold it upstairs, where their tiny numbers would be more noticeable. On that night, those present were all in their seventies, eighties, and nineties; there were one man and five women. Attending the meeting was a sobering, poignant experience. The Mosherville members intermingle the emotions of despair and hope. In some ways, they seem resigned to fading: this is singularly reticent group whose members are reluctant to overtly ask anyone to join—they do not want to exert pressure. On the other hand, they are thoroughly committed to the Grange and have unshakable faith that it can make a positive difference in people's lives. They hope that if they can just do a bit more, just get their message

as homemade pies and hot sandwiches) every month of the summer; in the winter months, they put on Swiss steak suppers. So they were in good fiscal health. They made huge quantities of toys to donate to local chapters and were active in the Grange's deaf awareness work. Every year they mounted a traditional Grange display at the county fair: this consisted of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, all in perfect condition and artfully arranged. Setting up the tableau took several people a day's work. One of Mosherville's prime assets was its hall, which members wanted the community to view as a local resource. They lamented that the community in which the hall was located now housed primarily transient people—people, they said, who felt no tie to the community, so how could they be expected to join an organization like the Grange? Some of the non-Mosherville attendees asked why the people who came to the square dances did not join. The Mosherville members quickly replied that most of the square dancers came from too far away—some traveled as much as two hours each way. It would be too difficult for these people to take part in Grange activities regularly. The Mosherville members readily admitted that when they had joined the Action Grange program, they did not understand it: they thought that the National Grange was going to give them a program replete with the answers and solutions to their withering, aging membership. They were nonplused to learn that it was the National Grange that was relying on them to do this. Although, on many levels, they seemed reconciled to becoming extinct, they still had a spark of hope that something might help them survive.

out there a little better, the new members will walk through their doors. Mosherville Grange Regular

West Oshtemo Grange: Saved by the Pumpkin Man

West Oshtemo Grange, located in greater Kalamazoo, had experienced ebbs and flows of fortune.²⁹ That Grange was founded in about 1917; it got its own hall in 1918 or 1919. Around December 20, 1936, the Grange hall burned to the ground. By the first week of March, 1937, the hall was rebuilt and the members held a meeting therein—despite the fact that it was a very severe winter. This Grange, like many others, was a pillar in people's lives, second, perhaps, only to the church in significance. In an era without easy, plentiful access to reasonably priced, family entertainment, the Grange was a focal point where men, women, and children, young and old, could gather and socialize. At one point, West Oshtemo's membership was over 200; belonging was essential for those prominent in the community: members of the Upjohn family (a prominent pharmaceutical company with local headquarters), politicians, business people, as well as the expected farmers, all belonged. But over the years, people became more mobile; they lost their ties to the local community; the demographics shifted. West Oshtemo's membership aged and died off; as older members left, they were not replaced. As its membership declined, West Oshtemo Grange fell upon hard financial times. Faced with difficulties paying the taxes, the then-leaders of West Oshtemo panicked and sold the Grange hall to the township. The Grange was to retain the right to hold its meetings there for as long as it wished or existed. But the hall was no longer its own. Gene Rhodes, the current West Oshtemo Grange President, who belonged as a youth, still

Meeting, September 14, 2002, Mosherville, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

²⁹ Information about West Oshtemo Grange also comes from an interview that the author conducted with its president. Gene Rhodes, President, West Oshtemo Grange, active in the Grange at the local, county, and state levels, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, lifelong farmer, Pumpkin Man, interview by author, January 28, 2002, Kalamazoo, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

grieves over this choice. He did not then belong to the Grange but declares that if the leadership had approached him and a number of others in the community, he is sure that they could have gotten the money needed to keep the Grange hall. Gene came back to the Grange in 1987. Although the leadership had been flagging for some time, it was then in true crisis mode. Membership had elected a woman as master who was so abrasive, so obsessed with the power of her position, that she was making arbitrary moves, spending Grange funds wildly, and causing a mass exodus of those members who still remained. State Grange leadership came to a West Oshtemo meeting to try to intercede; it removed the woman from office. Gene attended that meeting and has not missed many since. He soon assumed the leadership role; he believes that there is no one else in his Grange who could really fulfill this position.

Gene Rhodes is the Pumpkin Man, a figure well known in southwestern Michigan. On the centennial farm that has been in his family well over a century, Gene has raised pumpkins for decades. During September and October of every year, people converge on the farm like locusts to buy his pumpkins, Indian corn—and enjoy the character of the Pumpkin Man. Everything on the farm and in the house is orange and has a pumpkin theme. Gene dresses in orange and drives an orange car. He is well known in his community. Still, there was a void in his life. He wanted to feel that he was giving something back, that he was making a positive difference in his community—beyond selling autumn vegetables. So West Oshtemo's need coincided with his own: its members needed him, and he them. They allowed him to assume a leadership role limited only by his imagination.

Gene Rhodes is a businessman and a marketer extraordinaire. His fertile mind is always thinking of ways to involve his Grange, the Grange with the community. West Oshtemo Grange hosts frequent jam sessions at which musicians play, people dance, and all enjoy good Grange food. Members continue the tradition of hosting Halloween and Christmas parties open to the community. They have become involved in a community garden. Every summer West Oshtemo hosts a picnic, open to members of the community by invitation only. The Grange furnishes everything; actually, Gene Rhodes pays for a good deal of the food and furnishes the picnic area on his farm. West Oshtemo has donated a series of videos on farm life and work safety awareness to the local elementary school system. The videos prominently acknowledge that they are the gift of West Oshtemo Grange. West Oshtemo is very active in the Deaf Awareness program, in part, perhaps, because Gene himself is very hard of hearing. West Oshtemo's events are once more packing their hall and their membership is increasing.

Pittsfield-Union Grange: Dancing into the Future as a Redefined, Urban Grange

Pittsfield-Union Grange, unlike the other Michigan Granges in the Action Grange program, is an urban Grange.³⁰ Although it was once in a rural area, the city has moved

³⁰ In addition to the information derived from the statewide Michigan Action Grange meeting, this portrait of Pittsfield-Union Grange draws from the unpublished paper, from the 1990s, of a University of Michigan student. Although it was tantalizingly terse, it was helpful and did fill in some gaps. Shannan Gibb-Randall, "Pittsfield Union Grange, No. 882: An Exploration of a People and Their Landscape," (paper for master's program in Landscape Architecture, School of Natural Resources, University of Michigan, April 9, 1996). It is derived, as well, from the author's experiences at a Pittsfield-Union Grange regular Grange meeting. After meeting the author and learning of her research, Joan Hellmann, then the Pittsfield-Union Enrichment Director, asked the author to come do a presentation at one of its meetings. The author, Mary Houghton, and the author's dog, Commie, attended Pittsfield-Union's May 15, 2002 meeting. About a dozen members attended, half from the traditional base, and half from the dance community. Most of the members knew little about Grange history; they were extremely interested in that part of the presentation, particularly the prospects of preserving historic Michigan Grange records. Although this group was more cosmopolitan than the one from Mosherville, they, too, wanted the author's thoughts on what the Grange needed to do to renew itself. Pittsfield-Union Grange Regular Meeting, May 15, 2002, Ann Arbor, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

out to swallow the surrounding farmland, and it now sits on a five-lane road in Ann Arbor, near an interstate highway, adjacent to a Meijer supermarket. Its location is very choice and coveted by developers. Pittsfield-Union Grange was spawned by the rural environment in which it once was located. It was founded in 1901 and at one time, like most of the Grange, had a membership that consisted mainly of those who worked in agriculture. As demographics shifted, membership eligibility was broadened to include anyone with an interest in agriculture; Pittsfield-Union Grangers, as other Grangers everywhere, were quick to point out that this includes everyone who eats.

For Pittsfield-Union's first thirty years, members met in one another's homes. By this time, the Grange was financially secure enough to build its own hall. The new hall had a large kitchen and eating area downstairs, with a large meeting room, complete with wooden floor and stage, upstairs. Through the years, there were some minor changes to the building: rudimentary indoor plumbing and bathrooms were added, for example. But the electrical and septic systems remained largely as they were when they were originally installed. The huge, wooden-floored hall remained in mint condition; since the only means of ingress to it continued to be by narrow, steep, rickety stairs, however, its access was restricted to the nimble.

Through the fifties and into the sixties, Pittsfield-Union retained membership and continued to be very active in the community. It reached out to the surrounding community, volunteering at hospitals, with 4-H, and helping to educate people about hearing loss, the Grange's national health project. In order to raise funds, Pittsfield-Union held a number of events, for a nominal fee, open to the public. When an area group wanted to hold a meeting and have a meal, they would rent the hall and have the

Grange cater the food. The Grange held frequent square dances and euchre tournaments. To this day, people will appear at Grange events, seek out current members, and thank the Grange, saying, typically, "I met my husband/wife at a dance here." This was true for members and nonmembers alike.

As it moved into the seventies, Pittsfield-Union began to feel new, acute pressures. The number of local farmers was dwindling rapidly. But the Grange failed to effectively tap another constituency. The membership aged and died without attracting replacements; it got down to only a few active members, clinging desperately to their hall. Ah—the hall! For many in the area, that remained an irresistible magnet. Many traditional dancers would rather dance on a wooden floor than any other sort: it has a yielding quality that is unmatched. Besides the Grange hall, the only other large wooden floor in the area was at the University of Michigan. One could rent the latter, but only for many times what the Grange charged to rent its hall. So Pittsfield-Union began to do a booming business, renting out its hall to a broad spectrum of dance groups. There was hardly a weekend that did not have every day booked. Because of this, Pittsfield-Union was in solid fiscal condition. Yet its members continued to bleed away.

Finally, Herman Koenn, Master of Pittsfield-Union, a Grange member for many decades, decided to talk with the dance community about Pittsfield-Union's grim realities. He pointed out that if Pittsfield-Union's membership continued to decline as it had been (and there was no indication that if they continued in their present course, anything would stop the trajectory), soon there would not be enough Grange members to support the hall. They would have to sell the property. If that happened, it was likely that either the hall would be torn down and the land developed or, if the hall remained, it

would be much more difficult and costly to rent. Some of the dance community did respond, drawn, at first, by the allure of a beautiful wooden floor. But as they got to know more about the Grange, they found that it had other attractions. Most of the dance community were professionals: a number of them were professors and staff at the University of Michigan; others worked with information technology. Yet most of them, even those who lived in a highly urbanized environment, had a feeling of kinship for the earth, a desire to assist in its protection, preservation, and renewal. They also had a passion to serve the surrounding community, although often not in traditional Grange ways. Many professional women, working demanding, full-time jobs, for example, did not have the time, skills, or inclination to take part in such customary Grange “women’s activities” as making stuffed cloth toys for charity. But they found other ways to serve. Perhaps most compelling for each member of the dance community who became a committed, active Grange member was the certain knowledge that Pittsfield-Union Grange needed him or her. The Grange needed each person’s unique talents, what he or she alone could do for it, and was open to accepting them—even if they diverged widely from customary Grange skills. Like a modified Uncle Sam poster, Pittsfield-Union’s Master made it explicit to each that “We need *you*!” Dancers responded, moved by this opportunity to make a difference.

The changes have not always been easy, particularly for some of the long-time Pittsfield-Union members. Some have balked at moving away from Grange traditions. Those who have come to Pittsfield-Union via the dance community tend to be an iconoclastic group. They view the Grange ritual as, at most, an interesting historical artifact to be dusted off and reenacted once or twice a year. Many are uncomfortable

with the traditional Grange emphasis on Christianity and patriotism. Since it is an institution closely tied to the United States, they can accept a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at meetings. But a group that includes persons of non-Christian faiths, agnostics, and atheists is uneasy with a meeting that must begin and end with the opening and closing of the Bible. Why not also the Torah and the Koran, they ask? The members of Pittsfield-Union seldom meet upstairs in their hall. They generally have their once-a-month, Wednesday evening meeting in the basement after clearing away the dishes from a potluck supper. They do not recite the Grange ritual to open and close meetings. They do try to combine their business meeting with some sort of enrichment program that can range from sustainable agriculture to the complexities of physics. They advertise these programs in the local paper and have had some from the surrounding community attend.

Those from the dance community have gradually assumed more and more of the leadership positions and roles. They have sought to continue such Pittsfield-Union Grange customs as participating in the agricultural-education days for grade-school children held every spring at the local fairgrounds; the Grange provides and serves popcorn, helps with the children, and sponsors one class's attendance, paying for their transportation. (This is a class at the nearest elementary school, with whom Pittsfield-Union has forged partnerships. One of its members teaches there; it is his class that the Grange sponsors.)

Other activities are newer innovations. The Grange has taken part in several Family Math and Science Nights at their partner school. The goal of these is to show children—and their parents—that math and science are cool and fun through games and activities. This has been a natural medium, particularly for several of the members who

teach math and science at the University of Michigan. Every May the Grange holds a garage sale and plant exchange on the Grange grounds. One of the members, who has a spinning wheel, has teamed up with the local 4-H to do “sheep-to-shawl” demonstrations. For the last few summers, Pittsfield-Union has had a booth at the Chelsea Fair. This staffed booth serves as a showcase for Grange activities. At times there are demonstrations, such as spinning or apple pressing on a homemade cider press. One of the highlights of Pittsfield-Union’s year is the annual Apple Day, held every September. This is an event that families from the surrounding area eagerly await. The Grange arranges with a local apple grower to bring a truck laden with excellent juice apples to the Grange hall. People buy the apples and Grange members help them turn the fruit into delectable delights. They can press their own cider from one of two cider presses; they can make apple butter, stirring it in a huge cauldron over an open fire; they can make other apple confections. Children and the young at heart can participate in apple crafts. Pittsfield-Union feels that these events raise their profile within the community, let people know who and where they are, what a resource they can be.³¹

Action Grange: Transcending Barriers, Embracing All

It was extraordinary to see how people from the different Granges interacted, transcending such traditional and purportedly immutable barriers as class, education, age,

³¹ Thanks to Herman Koenn’s prescience, Pittsfield-Union Grange will probably continue to be viable for some time. With a secure financial base of income from hall rentals and an influx of younger members from the dance community, its future, at least in the short term, looks secure, if nontraditional.

From the outset, the people of Pittsfield-Union Grange were interested in and supportive of the author’s work. They continually invited her to functions at their Grange, making her welcome and urging her to attend whenever she could. One major barrier to the author’s frequent interaction with Pittsfield-Union Grange was the distance between their hall and the author’s home base: the trip was at least ninety minutes each way, on heavily congested roads. An additional serious obstacle, both for the author and others, is that the Pittsfield-Union Grange hall is extremely inaccessible: the only way to reach the

geography. Many of those from Pittsfield-Union had doctorates; some from other Granges had not even finished high school. The community issues that each Grange faced differed vastly: Pittsfield-Union's were much more cosmopolitan than those of the other Granges. Yet when a representative of any of the Granges spoke, all others listened attentively, gleaning possible applications that could work in their own environments, offering support and suggestions to the speaker. Despite the apparently wide gaps and differences between them, they were united by the commonalities: the desire that their own Granges, and all Granges, should survive and thrive and continue to effectively serve and revitalize their respective communities.

The Michigan Action Granges continued to hold these statewide meetings about three times a year, through January 2004 (they usually met in January, April or May, and September or October).³² Despite the notoriously changeable Michigan weather, no meeting had to be canceled and few people missed meetings because of the weather. All but one of the meetings was at Fredonia Grange, on Saturday afternoons. This sometimes made for conflicts of interest, since Mosherville and Pittsfield-Union Granges generally had square dances at their halls the nights of the meetings. Still, representatives from most of the Granges attended. Members from West Oshtemo only came to the first and last meetings (January 2002 and January 2004). The number of people that the other Granges sent varied. Mosherville usually sent at least two people: Doris Buehrer and Irma Egger. Occasionally some of Pittsfield-Union's longer term members, such as Herman Koenn (Master for many years) and Willis and Ardis Hassett, attended; four of

wonderful upstairs hall is by a set of stairs so narrow and steep that they resemble a ladder. So it was not ultimately practicable for the author to have a long-term, intensive relationship with that Grange.

the newer, dance-community members generally attended: Joan Hellmann, Richard Raymond, Robin Warner, and Helen Welford. Fredonia had many members at the early meetings: Tom and Katrina Rome, Andrea Peck, Rich Hazen, Athol Hazen, Mary Houghton, Randy Nail. In time, some of these discontinued attending. But Rich, Athol, Mary, and Randy were typically there. Randy was Fredonia Grange's Action Grange team leader. Randy was an intensely shy person who, by his own admission, found conversation difficult. He admitted that he had difficulty expressing himself. But he was thrilled to have the chance to develop leadership skills that Fredonia afforded him. It was intriguing to see him grow into the position and become more comfortable.³³

As the usual host, Fredonia Grange in particular urged other Granges to attend the meetings, stressing that all were welcome. In one instance, four members of other Granges did come. Only one, Roland Winter, from nearby Home Grange in Ceresco, came more than that once.

Sue Withers attended every meeting. Sue has been a member of Georgetown Grange, near Grand Rapids, all her life: her parents took her to her first meeting when she was a few weeks old. She is currently Master of Georgetown Grange. Sue has held a number of positions at the state level; she is currently Michigan State Grange Ceres. Sue has close ties to many of the Grange members who belong to Fredonia Grange. She has

³² The author attended every one of these sessions. The general observations come from an overview of the notes that she took at every session. There is indication that the meetings will continue, at least on an irregular basis, but the January 2004 meeting was the last one held before this study concluded.

³³ Randy touched upon this frequently. During the Grange members focus groups, when Athol said that the Grange could take one as far as one wanted to go, as far as one asked, Randy declared that he had never asked the Grange to take him anywhere, but that he was pleased with where it was leading him. Randy Nail, focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Randy Nail, focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. Despite this, Randy continued to be frustrated and self-conscious about his ability to verbalize. "I do apologize for not responding. I know how frustrating that can be. I seem to have a hard

known the Hazens all her life; she went to Grange camp with the children; she used to date Rich Hazen; Lois Hazen remains one of her closest friends. So she was comfortable coming to events at Fredonia Grange. She has also been deeply concerned about the fate of the Grange and convinced that it needs to take drastic steps to avoid extinction. Therefore, she came to the Action Grange meetings with cautious optimism, hoping to learn something that she could take back to Georgetown that would help to revitalize it.

The Master of the Michigan State Grange attended every one of the Michigan Action Grange statewide meetings. Through 2002 this was Bob Brown—even though Bob made it clear that he was skeptical about the program to the point of hostility. He had been to the regional seminar the summer before, disliked the facilitator, and thought that the Action Granges were “jumping off the deep end.”³⁴ Bob was in his sixth year in office and had decided not to run again. Some of the Grange members commented that Bob was a uniter, not a divider, because he could pull everyone together by alienating them—he was an equal-opportunity offender. At times he would try to assert his power, saying that all the Action Granges must pass everything through him (this was not part of the Action Grange mandate). He said that no other Granges were authorized to do anything that was not strictly according to the letter of Grange law—and that if he learned that they were, he might just pull their charters.³⁵

time figuring out what to say. You put things so well and I tend to agree with everything you say.” Randy Nail, e-mail to author, May 25, 2004, in author’s possession.

³⁴ Bob Brown, former Michigan State Grange Master, Master, Burr Oak Grange, active in the Grange at the local, county, state, and national levels for decades, remarks made at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

³⁵ When a Grange is founded, it applies for a charter from the National Grange, demonstrating that it fulfills all requirements. It is this charter that makes it a legal Grange. When a Grange becomes dormant and is then closed, it surrenders its charter. If a Grange were to revive, it would take up that same charter. Without the charter, the group is not a Grange. It holds great symbolic import. So intimating that one’s charter might be pulled was a devastating threat. At first those in attendance seemed shocked: What was the purpose? Then some of those present protested: When the Grange was already on such shaky footing

In October 2002, Jeff Swainston, who had previously held the second highest rank in the Michigan State Grange, and who was the only person actively seeking to become master, was elected. From that point, he attended every one of the statewide Action Grange meetings. He seemed less openly hostile to the movement. He acknowledged that the Grange's reputation for secrecy hurt it. But he never took a strong stance on the need for change. He appeared more comfortable with Action Grange II, the next wave of the program that distanced itself from making difficult, structural and conceptual changes to the Grange and instead emphasized publicizing what the Granges were already doing. He was pleased at the publicity that Fredonia and Home Granges were able to garner; indeed, he told them that he had bragged to the National Grange hierarchy that the Calhoun County Granges had the press "in their hip pocket."³⁶ Like his predecessor, he had trouble accepting help from non-Grange members. More problematic, he did not

and was fighting to attain and retain every member possible, what would the point be to close down Granges who were trying to survive, even if they were not quite capable of complying with all the rules at this time?

The threat struck a chord with many of those present. Granges were supposed to meet at least once a month and in order for a meeting to be legal, seven members had to be present. Although tiny Mosherville Grange met twice a month, they seldom had as many as seven members. Pittsfield-Union Grange met once a month, but at their meetings they did not display the two things that the National Grange said were mandatory for every Grange: a Bible and the United States flag. Georgetown Grange did not hold formal meetings during the summer—members might get together for picnics or other socials, but that was it. Sue Withers, in particular, was inflamed by Bob's remarks. She felt that he had directed them squarely at her, trying to keep her in her place, trying to discourage her from renewing her Grange. During most of the Grange's existence, it had allowed people to belong to only one Grange. But this sometimes was a hardship. Frequently, a man from one Grange married a woman from another. To whom did they owe allegiance? How could they divide their loyalties? So the Grange made it possible for someone to belong to two Granges: one would be the primary Grange, the other would be subordinate. Sue could not and would not renounce Georgetown Grange. But she decided to join Fredonia Grange as her auxiliary Grange. In that way, she could legitimately (according to Grange law) be part of the Action Grange movement. Bob Brown, remarks at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Sue Withers, lifelong Grange member, Master, Georgetown Grange, Ceres, Michigan State Grange, active at the local, county, and state Grange levels for decades, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Sue Withers, e-mail to author, April 25, 2002, in author's possession.

seem to comprehend the hard choices that Granges had to make, the adaptations and shifts in perspective, in order to survive and thrive. Although Jeff put little notices in the State Grange newsletter, the *Michigan Grange News*, advocating that Granges join the Action Grange II program, he never gave a compelling reason why they should. He did not embody this advice: his own local Grange was in serious trouble, was undergoing a major identity crisis, but did not join the program. In conversation, he never argued persuasively on its behalf; moreover, he ultimately did not lend crucial support to those Granges that were in the program.³⁷

Action Grange Special Programs

The statewide Michigan Action Grange meetings usually had no set agenda. Twice, however, there were special programs.

An Expert Assessment—And an Offer of Help

On April 20, 2002, Brenda Wrigley, then Assistant Professor, Public Relations, Department of Advertising, Michigan State University, attended the meeting. She had become interested in the Grange when Grange members participated in one of her classes in March. At that time, she had offered to share some of her public relations insights with the Grange as a form of community outreach. So they had invited her to attend the April statewide Action Grange meeting, to observe and comment. After listening for about ninety minutes, Brenda led everyone through an exercise. She had them each take

³⁶ Jeff Swainston, lifelong Grange member, active at the local, county, state, and national levels for decades, Master, Michigan State Grange, remarks at the Calhoun County Pomona Rural-Urban Banquet, April 29, 2004, Ceresco, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

³⁷ Randy Nail, e-mail to author, April 26, 2004, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, meeting with author, May 22 2004, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Randy Nail, meeting with author, June 5, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, meeting with author, June 5, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

a slip of paper and write down the type of car with which they would equate the Grange now. Then they passed the slips to her, and she read through them. Brenda shared some of the opinions with the group. They might have been humorous were they not so poignant. People reified the Grange as a Studebaker, an Edsel, a fifties Chevy with four flat tires. No one saw the Grange as a sports car, a luxury sedan, or a powerful, durable SUV or pickup. No two responses were alike; Brenda said that this did not surprise her—clearly the Grange was made up of a collection of unique individuals—its great strength appeared to be its people.

Brenda then made some trenchant comments, prefacing them by saying that she would speak bluntly. She said that it appeared that the Grange was undergoing an identity crisis. It needed to become clear on what it was and what it wanted to accomplish in order to move forward. Brenda made several suggestions on how to accomplish this. She advised that the Granges conduct SWOT analyses among their members. The acronym stands for: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. She stated that each member should make his or her own list of what belonged under each category, then the members should come together to share their ideas and build an overarching list. Brenda said that they needed to determine what they thought were the most salient things on which to work. She noted that every year she taught a public-relations class that required that students conduct communication audits and do other work with nonprofit groups; she would be happy to have some of her students work with the Grange. She pointed out the State Grange office, in Haslett, was only a few miles from MSU and championed a closer relationship between the two. As a land-grant

institution, she noted, part of MSU's mission and mandate was to reach out and help strengthen communities—and particularly to help others to do so.

Up to this point, when the Grange thought of alliances with MSU, they were oriented toward the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, with whom they had had an historic relationship. But Brenda described the benefits that the Grange could reap from closer contact with the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. She mentioned, for example, that the college housed WKAR public radio and television. She could envision a partnership between the Grange and WKAR that would result in documentaries featuring memorable Grangers and their stories. She declared that people would be fascinated by these, explained the deep yearning that many had for what they perceived as the simpler, saner, better time of traditional rural life—rural pastoralism, à la Andy Griffith and Mayberry. Brenda suggested that each Grange, if possible, have one person to handle communication, both within the Grange (with members) and without (handling things like external correspondence, press releases, etc.). Finally, she urged the Granges to conduct focus groups with members of their communities in order to ascertain how the Granges were perceived and how they could interact more effectively in their larger society. She concluded by exhorting them to tap the talents of the author, who was then one of her students.³⁸

³⁸ Brenda Wrigley, Assistant Professor, Public Relations, Department of Advertising, Michigan State University, Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Fredonia Grange did make use of some of the author's training. At Randy Nail's insistence, Ann Grahek, Michigan State Grange Membership Director, did invite the author to speak at the April 2003 membership conference. No other Granges tapped anyone from MSU for communication or organization help.

Fredonia Grange and the author did conduct a series of focus groups. A detailed description of this process follows in a later chapter. The author was also able to help Fredonia Grange by performing a communication audit and by writing and disseminating press releases and media articles. Since the author did not belong to Fredonia Grange and thus had no official standing, it was infeasible for her to handle communication with members or official communications with other Granges or entities. But over the

Preserving the Past

Jeanne Drewes, Assistant Director, Access and Preservation, Michigan State University Libraries, had been interested in the Grange since first hearing about its members in April 2001. After the author met Jeanne and Anita Ezzo, Food Science and Technology Librarian at the same institution, in October 2002, they became even more intrigued by the organization and the wealth of records and artifacts that it might have produced, many of which it might still possess. When they met a number of Grange members at the State Grange office in March 2003, Jeanne and Anita had their fondest hopes confirmed: the Grange really did have a wealth of materials, an archivist or librarian's dream. But they became convinced that the contemporary Grangers, the community service that they do, the stories that they can tell, the experiences that they have had, are every bit as important, if not more so, than the records of the past, outstanding as it may be. To show their appreciation and support, Jeanne and Anita conceived the idea to conduct a workshop for the Grange. Anita would talk about the work that a team from MSU was spearheading, under the aegis of the United States Agricultural Information Network's National Preservation Project, a National-

course of about eighteen months, she was able to craft dozens of press releases for Fredonia. These were stories about community-service projects, fund-raisers, and Fredonia Grange events to which the community was invited (for example, enrichment programs, holiday meals) or that were held specifically for the community (the Easter egg hunt, the community picnic). By sending the pieces to the local, free, shopper papers that are delivered to every home, Fredonia and the author were able to saturate a large part of the county with information about the Grange. They met with good success in this effort. When there was a week without a Fredonia Grange article, people would ask Grange members why there was nothing in the paper. The other local Grange also benefited from Fredonia's prominence: for April (Grange month) 2004, the local paper, accustomed to Fredonia's frequent stories, asked it to furnish a Grange article for each week. Not wanting to appear biased, the paper also asked for stories from Home Grange, the other Calhoun County branch of the organization. Many Fredonia members commented that the publicity was helpful and made them proud. Although the remarks are too frequent to cite, one by Russ Clutter is typical. He said that when he went anywhere in the county and people discovered that he belonged to Fredonia Grange, they would say, "Oh, you're the people who are always doing something." He added that it made

Endowment-for-the-Humanities-funded effort to identify and preserve state and local literature relating to agriculture and rural life in America between 1820 and 1945. They were working to identify and preserve (on microfilm) significant literature from that period. The librarians, the Grange's, and the author's interests overlapped on this, since much of the agricultural literature was Grange literature.

Anita explained the project and its goals in some detail and informed the audience of the progress that it was having preserving Grange literature. She told the group that the grants that MSU had received from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were awarded only for the preservation part of their mission—not for access. Therefore, the preserved documents, at present, were being microfilmed only: to access them, one would have to go to MSU and use a microfilm reader. Anita added, however, that since she had become acquainted with the Grange, she had been struck by the enormous potential of making the texts more widely available. She had the dream of having them digitized so that they could be put on the World Wide Web and thus be available to anyone using a computer, anytime, anywhere. So she and Jeanne had gotten permission from the NEH to microfilm the documents using an extraordinarily high-quality process that could be converted easily to a digital format in the future. Anita brought samples of old books, and particularly old Grange books, with her.

Jeanne talked about preserving old documents and photos. She explained that in her position, she often got calls from people who were heartbroken because they believed that a photo or document was irreparably damaged from water, mildew, mold, sunlight, etc. Jeanne reassured them that things could often be salvaged. She advised that a better

him proud. Russ Clutter, focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

strategy, though, was to take some preventative steps to avoid disaster. She suggested ways to more effectively display items. Roland Winter, in particular, seemed to get many good ideas for organizing and displaying items in the personal Grange museum that he has in the basement of his house. All attendees received booklets with information about preserving documents, photos, and other artifacts. Jeanne also offered to come back and do a program on bookbinding (one of her hobbies), especially with the Junior Grange. But because the Fredonia Junior Grange has been in a state of disarray, which was exacerbated at this time when the former Junior Grange leader stepped down, there was no one to ever follow up on this.³⁹

The Grange Goes to School

In the spring of 2002, the author took part in a seminar on gender, race, and class. One of the requirements was that each participant teach a session on something that would fall under this broad aegis. Participants had wide latitude about how they should proceed and what they could include. The author believed that the Grange, with its history and reality of surmounting and its potential to transcend such purportedly

³⁹ Jeanne Drewes, presentation, Preservation Workshop at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Anita Ezzo, presentation, Preservation Workshop at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Although the workshop was featured in the *Michigan Grange News*, the newsletter that all Michigan Grange members receive, in an article that described the program and invited all to attend, Roland Winter was the only person from a non-Action Grange to come.

Both Jeanne and Anita have fond rural memories. Jeanne used to spend wonderful times on her grandparents' dairy farm in Minnesota. As a child, Jeanne says that she always tried to help her grandfather with the milking; but in retrospect, she believes that she was probably more of a hindrance than a help. While growing up, Anita spent summers on her aunt's farm; her job there, which she loved, was collecting, washing, and grading eggs. Anita sometimes spent eight hours a day doing this. She remarked that she should probably hate chickens after this, but instead she finds that she has a special fondness for them—which has carried over to the poultry collection that the MSU library has recently acquired. After the workshop, the author took Jeanne and Anita to Roland Winter's Grange Museum, which they loved. As the author drove them home, they were filled with ideas on things that the Grange could do to help renew itself. The women have continued a degree of Grange involvement. They have worked at a number of Grange fund-raising events, receive Grange newsletters, and have become associate Grange members.

immutable barriers as age, class, gender, disability, would be an enlightening subject for the class.⁴⁰ She thought that, rather than spend all the time talking herself, the topic would become much more vivid if some of the Grange members whom she was starting to know came to discuss the organization. The author's session was scheduled for March 13, 2002, from 6:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. The Grange members whom the author knew the longest and best, Beulah and Roland Winter, were not able to come: Beulah had recently had open-heart surgery and was now convalescing at home with Roland nursing her. The author had known a few of the other Grange members since the previous October; most she had known only since January. She knew, however, that some of the Action Grange members seemed eager to reach out to new audiences with information about the Grange; so she decided to ask some of them to come speak. The author asked Rich Hazen, Athol Hazen, and Mary Houghton from Fredonia Grange; Helen Welford and Joan Hellmann from Pittsfield-Union Grange; and Sue Withers from Georgetown Grange (and soon Fredonia Grange).

The author could foresee several possible problems. One was distance: the closest Grange was in Marshall, a drive of over one hour each way. Those from Pittsfield-Union would have to come at least ninety minutes one way. Sue Withers, who lived on the far side of Grand Rapids, would have a drive of about two hours each way. The time of day might be difficult: Athol and Helen were retired, but everyone else still worked: would they be able to get to the class on time? The weather in March might be problematic. Further, how comfortable and willing would these people be to talk with a class of doctoral students? Helen had worked and Joan still worked at a university. The rest of

⁴⁰ Unless explicitly noted to the contrary, information for this section comes from: Grange Panel Discussion, Seminar on Gender, Race, and Class, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and

the people had high school educations and little familiarity with academe. Would the prospects of coming to the class seem too daunting or unappealing? Much to the author's delight, all those whom she asked agreed to come. Rich, who was then working second shift, took the night off from work. Sue agreed to come right from work; although this would make her a bit late, she was reassured that that would be fine. Athol, who normally went to the stringed instrument music at the Grange hall every Wednesday agreed to forego it that one night.

The author asked the Grange members to bring materials that they thought would help teach people, many of whom would have had no previous knowledge, about the Grange. Sue Withers brought materials on deaf awareness and old photos from the days when Rich, Mary, and Sue attended Grange camps together with Sue's mother as leader. Joan and Helen brought Pittsfield-Union's community-service book. Rich Hazen, as Sue Withers put it, brought the entire contents of Fredonia Grange. This was, of course, an exaggeration, but with Rich, Athol, and Mary to carry things, they managed to squeeze much into their van. They brought: community-service books, old photos of and articles about cherished Grangers, ceremonial sashes; such items essential to the ritual as the case with replicas of agriculture implements, the staffs that the gatekeeper, steward, assistant steward, and lady assistant steward carry, Grange manuals, Grange songbooks, the key to the Grange unwritten work; the old wooden ballot box, complete with white balls and black dice, used to vote on prospective members. The Grangers spread out the artifacts on a large table so that people could examine them at break; they were available to field questions and talk about the Grange.

After the author made some introductory remarks, she asked all present to introduce themselves. Of those from MSU, only Brenda Wrigley, the class instructor, had previously heard of the Grange. Even Brenda's contact was poignant: she had lived in a small town in New York that had had a Grange. But as the members aged and were not replaced, the Grange was going dormant. They were concerned that their beautiful old Grange hall would be lost. So they arranged for the local historical society to take it over so that the building, at least, would be preserved.

All the Grangers spoke, in their own ways, eloquently about salient characteristics of the Grange. Judging by class reaction, perhaps Athol had the greatest impact. When the author suggested that her classmates were probably wondering what the Grange really is, Athol stood and recited, from memory, the charge that the master of the Grange gives in the ritual, in which he talks about the importance of agriculture, the equality of women, lessons to lead a good life. He did stumble in a few places. Rich got a *Subordinate Grange Manual* so that he could refer to the few places that were fuzzy. He did a fine job. When he finished, he ruefully said that he used to know it by heart but that his memory was no longer what it had been. Rich was obviously proud of his dad, explaining what he had just recited.⁴¹ Athol talked about the philosophy of the Grange,

⁴¹ What Athol recited from memory was the opening address given at the installation of Grange officers. "Since God placed man on earth, agriculture has existed. There is no occupation that precedes it, no order or association that can rank with the tillers of the soil. Before literature existed, before governments were known, agriculture was the calling of man. And all the fruits of social progress since then grew from the brown soil. Agricultural toilers, therefore, 'claim this precedence over royal dynasties and titles of nobility—that they represent the oldest and most indisputable lineage, and hold a patent that issues from the ancient gates of Eden.'

"The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry is the only association whose teachings accompany its members in their daily pursuits. They form part of the farmer's life. They do not call him from his work to put his mind upon any other subject, but furnish recreation in his daily duties, and, by cheerful instruction, lighten and elevate his labor. These teachings are the loftiest that man can seek. Nor does our Order interfere with his religious or political views, but in morality it seeks the highest standard. Honesty is inculcated, education nurtured, temperance supported, brotherly love cultivated, and charity made an essential characteristic. Thus our Order binds us together in fraternity, and, by encouraging education, will

living one's life guided by Faith, Hope, Charity, and Fidelity. He said that when one thought about that, those were good ideals to which to adhere. As he named the four cardinal virtues, he showed the four hand signals, starting with the right arm bent up towards the heavens, then lowered but bent, so that it was parallel to the floor, then brought before one to clasp the left hand, then placed over one's heart. The author, who was sitting beside Athol, could see that speaking before the group was difficult for him. As he spoke, he twisted the piece of paper containing the class outline that the author had given him, to shreds. He did allude to this later in the class, saying that until he had joined the Grange, he could never have imagined that he would be able to get up in front of a group like this and speak. He said that he only had a twelfth-grade education, but that something for which he had a knack and which he used to do more often than now was to write political resolutions for the Grange. He said that he had one that had passed at the local level, then at the county level, the state level, and ultimately was accepted by the National Grange—the only change that was made in it was the name of the Grange. He said that that was the ultimate.

advance to a higher state of perfection the science of agriculture. We encourage the planting of trees, fruits and flowers, by which to enhance the value and increase the attractions of our home; adorning them with those beauties so lavishly given us by the God of Nature. There is no calling more elevating to the mind than agriculture, when viewed as presented in our Order. God, in the beginning, made it honorable, and it is our duty to sustain it as such.

“Discarding the principles which exclude woman from a knowledge of the mysteries, we open wide the door and bid her welcome. In so doing we claim a high precedent, for God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’ Thus ours is truly a social Order—one in which all can find something to enjoy; and we believe there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. It is from the hand of God.

“We ask none to join us who cannot see good in their fellow beings; but to all interested in Agriculture, who have generous hearts and open hands to help the needy, raise the fallen, and aid in making the labors of this life cheerful, we say, ‘Welcome to the Grange.’” This address has been part of Grange ritual and philosophy since the beginning. Whether its present form, without modification or addition, best characterizes an organization seeking to define itself and its mission and maintain its relevance in the twenty-first century and beyond is a matter of much debate. National Grange, *Manual of Subordinate Granges of the Patrons of Husbandry*, 95–97.

The class sat in rapt attention. When there was a break, they carefully examined the artifacts that the Grangers had brought. Rich and Sue demonstrated how the staffs were carried and the use of some of the recitations. Those from MSU had many questions. All the Grangers seemed to learn from one another. The aspects of the Grange that seemed most riveting for the MSU contingent were that people would make those long trips, with no compensation, to talk with them; that these people who might be classified, by external standards, as powerless, were so empowered; and that the Grangers had such a strong sense of community and the need to reach out and help it. Throughout the rest of the term, classmates fondly referred back to this session.

Conferences: Trying to Rally the Troops

The Michigan State Grange tends to hold a series of conferences every spring. Directors of such State Grange departments as Community Service, Deaf Awareness, Juniors, Lecturer, Women's Activities, Youth/Young Adults hold sessions. There are also Grange bowling and golf outings. Things can get hectic with departments jockeying for position to schedule their conferences on the few available Saturdays. Selecting a good time can be difficult: if a conference is scheduled too early in the spring, it risks being snowed or iced out. On the other hand, if it is not scheduled until late April or May, it competes with the allure of being outdoors in the brief, rare Michigan spring.

Membership is perhaps one of the Grange's most important departments and areas: but it is also one of the most vexatious ones. Learning about herbs or making the perfect pot (Women's Activities), hearing about the Grange's good work with the hard-of-hearing community (Deaf Awareness), and finding out about providing dictionaries to third-graders (Community Service) are pleasant, stimulating, affirming of what a good

organization the Grange is. Membership is a more sensitive issue: grappling with hemorrhaging membership requires people to acknowledge a serious problem, try to ascertain its cause, and commit to the hard work and change necessary to improve. This type of conference will be more contentious and disturbing than the other, pat-on-the-back sort.

When Jeff Swainston became Michigan State Grange Master in October 2002, most of the state department directors resigned so that he could appoint people in harmony with his outlook and philosophy. There were a few holdovers, such as Beulah Winter in Deaf Awareness and Judy Bowers in Women's Activities. But, for the most part, Jeff appointed new department heads. One of these was Ann Grahek, his cousin and a member of his local Grange, as Michigan State Grange Membership Director. The previous director, Ardith Merten, was about twice Ann's age. Ardith had been in the Grange for many years; she, her husband, her brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and her children and grandchildren were mainstays of the Grange; they had been active for decades. Ardith had credibility because, in addition to her long Grange involvement, she was a leader in a very active local Grange. Thanks to the dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm of Ardith, her husband, Herb, her brother-in-law, Gordon, and her sister-in-law, Janice, their Grange, Oceana Center, had blossomed, becoming well integrated into their community, forging useful contacts, and developing their hall as a community resource. Oceana Center's roster had swelled with associate members.⁴² When she held

⁴² Associate members pay membership dues but do not actively participate in the Grange. It is a popular form of Grange connection for people, such as politicians and businesspeople, who want to cultivate Grange contact but cannot be or do not wish to be involved. If people buy an ad in Grange publications such as the *Journal of Proceedings*, which describes the annual state convention (including resolutions proposed and actions taken) in detail, part of the cost of the ad is applied toward a membership. Since Herb and Gordon Merten are marvelous, irrepressible salesmen who obtain many paid ads for the Grange, they get to claim many new members in this way. Those from other Granges contend that such members, many

her last membership conference in February 2002, it was in a central portion of the state. Members came from all over the lower peninsula; the National Grange sent a representative, Ed Luttrell, Membership/Leadership Director. The February day on which it was held had a breath of spring, making for good travel; the hall was filled with at least sixty to eighty Grange members.⁴³

The 2003 Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic was held April 26, 2003 at Capital Grange in Haslett, Michigan. This is in the same complex where the Michigan State Grange office is located. Capital Grange has extensive land holdings. It has built senior housing there, particularly for Grange members. It also donated a plot of land within the complex as the site for the State Grange office. This conference came towards the end of a long conference season, when people may have been feeling slightly burned out. Also, Ann had not yet really established herself; she was not well known. Those who did know Ann knew that she belonged to one of the Grange's "family" Granges: a Grange that is sustained only by an extensive family who are members. That is the way that it was with Kinney Grange, the Grange to which Ann, Jeff Swainston, his wife and daughters, and his mother, for example, belonged. They did acknowledge and lament this fact and talked, during the several years of this project, about doing something to change that. They pointed out that none of their members came anymore from the local community in which their hall was located; so it was hard for them to relate to the community in their daily lives. From time to time, they mentioned the possibility of

of whom do not even know that they have purchased this tie, should not be counted toward overall membership numbers. Whatever its absolute membership numbers should be, the fact remains that Oceana Center is one of the more viable, energetic Granges in the state whose hall rings with activity and laughter.

⁴³ The February 9, 2002 Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

relocating the Grange to a more hospitable environment. But as the study drew to a close, they were still mired in a morass of inertia.⁴⁴

April 26, 2003 was one of the first real spring days of the season: sunny, warm, and clear. Grangers may have wanted to seize the opportunity to clear away the detritus of winter. For whatever reason, only about two dozen people attended the conference.⁴⁵ About one-quarter of these were from Ann's Grange, there to show support. The rest of the people came from the most active and successful Granges in the state—the ones that least needed help with membership.

Gordon Merten, Master, Oceana Center Grange, and Randy Nail, Cochair, Fredonia Grange, were both on the Michigan State Grange Membership Committee. Ann asked both of them to speak at the meeting. Randy has a special status in the Grange. The majority of those active in the Grange now came into it as youths, have been in it for decades, or married into it. Randy does not fit that profile. Rich Hazen recruited Randy, his wife, Jody, and their two children. After attending his first meeting, Randy had mixed feelings: he thought that the ritual was “the hokiest thing” he “had ever seen.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Both Ann and Jeff talked about this many times, in many different fora. A recent instance, in which Ann readily acknowledged their deficiency, is characteristic. Ann Grahek, Michigan State Grange Membership Director, remarks at Action Grange II Seminar, May 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁴⁵ There was discussion after the event about why it was so poorly attended. Athol Hazen noted that Ann was new and unproven; he pointed out that Ardith did not have a large crowd at her early membership clinics. Athol Hazen, Jr., conversation with author, April 26, 2003, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Beulah Winter cited this factor, as well as the weather. Then she cut to the heart of the matter by noting that grappling with membership was neither fun nor glamorous. It was difficult to acknowledge that there even was a problem, much less to try to address it. Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, April 28, 2003, in author's possession. It was not surprising that the Granges who sent representatives to the conference were those who needed it least, the ones who explicitly recognized that they needed to put forth great effort to gain new members. As Lucy from the *Peanuts* comic strip used to tell her patients, the mere fact of knowing that one has a problem indicates that one is not lost, that one can try to take steps to reverse the damage.

⁴⁶ This vignette about Randy is based largely on a conversation a few days before the membership clinic and upon observations and conversations at the clinic itself. Randy Nail, meeting with author, April 23, 2003, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Randy Nail, remarks and conversation at the

He was completely nonplused by the Grange salutation, in which members silently make a number of signs. But he saw something of substance beneath the strangeness, so he went back—and continued to do so. Randy moved up in the Grange rapidly. Although he admitted that he was ill at ease and felt inadequate writing and speaking, he offered a fresh perspective, spoke the truth as he saw it, worked hard for the Grange, and was dependable: when he gave his word, it was his bond. He was at the forefront of the Michigan Action Grange movement. Despite this and the animosity that it raised among traditional Grangers, he pored such efforts into helping the Grange grow and prosper that he was elected to the executive committee (the governing board) of the Michigan State Grange in October 2003.⁴⁷

Randy was nervous about what he would say at the clinic. He wanted to say something strong to stress the urgency of the situation. But he did not want to be so strong that he would alienate his listeners and close their ears in the process. A few days before the meeting, he came to see the author to talk about communication strategies. His talk turned out to be one of the more effective ones at the clinic. He began with an interactive exercise, giving ranges of years people may have belonged to the Grange. There were several in the sixty-or-more-year category. There continued to be sizable proportions in the following categories of fifty-to-sixty, forty-to-fifty, thirty-to-forty, twenty-to-thirty, and ten-to-twenty. There was no one but Randy who had belonged less than ten years; the majority of those present were clustered at the other end of the time

Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic, April 26, 2003, Haslett, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁴⁷ There is controversy over how much power the executive committee has over the master's wishes. During the October 2003 convention, there were not enough people who wanted to run for the positions. Gordon Merten asked Randy if he would stand for one of the spots. The executive committee's function, and Randy's place on it, has been the subject of numerous conversations between the author and Beulah and Roland Winter and Athol Hazen.

spectrum. It was an effective, visual way of helping people realize how entrenched the current Grange leadership was. Randy then quietly highlighted that that was one of the chief problems with the membership and leadership.

Randy had urged the rest of the membership committee to ask the author to do a workshop on writing press releases, which they did do. Although, again, the author was the only non-Grange member present, she now knew more of the Grangers; in addition, she knew more what to expect after last year's session. So it was a less awkward situation. The presentation, drawing upon experiences with Fredonia's press releases, did draw some polite interest.

As in 2002, Ed Luttrell, National Grange Membership/Leadership Director, presented several workshops. At the end of the conference, as a rousing call to action and to send the troops back into the field with a sense of purpose, he asked some of those present what was the one thing that they had learned at this clinic that they would take back to their home granges that they thought could make a difference. Ed likes to make his presentations interactive and get everyone to speak. Yet even in such a small group, there were some who had said little or nothing. One of these was Athol Hazen. Athol is often very quiet in groups, preferring to listen and learn rather than talk. He will, however, not hesitate to speak up when he has something to say. Ed turned his attention to Athol, asking him what he had learned from the meeting that he would take back to his Grange and implement in the coming week. From the back of the room, Athol stood to address Ed and calmly replied that he had learned nothing that he would seek to execute. There was a faint gasp throughout the room. Athol placidly continued. He said that he had already learned what he needed to do to increase membership, to help the Grange

prosper, and to better serve the community, thanks to the focus groups that the author had helped Fredonia Grange conduct. Warming to the subject, he described the community focus groups, championing them enthusiastically and recommending them to all Granges. He concluded by saying that when the author had asked the focus-group participants to describe their vision of the ideal organization, they had described the Grange, although they did not realize this. He saw the Grange's mission as helping communities realize this and all that the Grange could do for them; this would help the Grange grow, enabling it to do and help still more. There was a deafening silence. Athol gazed serenely at Ed, not looking like a man who had just dropped a bombshell. Ed seemed unable to think of a reply. No one else asked any questions. So Athol sat down. Ed continued to stammer for something to say. The quiet man who had found the answers to Grange membership woes without Ed's tips left him at a loss. Finally, Jeff Swainston stepped forward and concluded the meeting.

The Michigan State Grange Convention: Rewarding the Faithful

During the third week of October of every year, the Michigan State Grange holds a convention.⁴⁸ In recent years, the conventions have lasted only three days, down from the four or five days of previous times. This has been a cost-cutting move and has been in response to the dire financial straits in which the Michigan State Grange finds itself. As the membership base has eroded, the State Grange, which receives only a portion of Grange members' annual dues (the balance is sent to the National Grange), has seen its

⁴⁸ Unless explicitly noted to the contrary, information about the Michigan State Grange Conventions is based on the author's experiences at the 2002 session. Michigan State Grange 129 Annual Convention, October 17–19, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

income slashed.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, it has seen its financial needs grow: in order to function as a viable organization, it needs updated information technology and its leaders must be able to travel to interact with policy-makers. The State Grange has tried a number of strategies, including raffles that are held at the annual convention. For the last several years, the Grange has purchased and then sold tickets for a John Deere Gator throughout the summer leading up to the convention. This has been very successful.

The convention is always hosted or sponsored by a local Grange. As the number of Granges has dwindled, there are fewer to shoulder the duty. The local Grange is responsible, along with the state organization, for handling the logistics: finding a meeting place, arranging for discounted accommodations and meals. Every local Grange can send three voting delegates: two regular delegates and a youth delegate.

Traditionally, the regular delegates were the Grange's master and his wife; this is not always the current reality. "Youth" in the Grange is relative term: it spans the ages fourteen to thirty-five. So some of the youth delegates can be quite mature. Pomona (county) Granges can also send three delegates. In addition, the officers and department directors of the Michigan State Grange are nonvoting delegates.⁵⁰ The State Grange has

⁴⁹ Within the last few years, the National Grange doubled the amount of money that state Granges were to send for each Granger, from \$4.00 to \$8.00. At that time, the Michigan State Grange, unable to absorb this loss in income, raised the amount that local Granges must send in for each member from \$25.00 to \$29.00. So the Michigan State Grange receives \$21.00 for each member, in theory. However, there are membership categories other than full, single memberships, such as family memberships, that offer discounted rates. Even if each member did translate into a net income of \$21.00 for the State Grange, for an organization of roughly 1,500 members, that would only equal \$31,500. That is not much to pay the cost of a full-time secretary, half-time master, and maintain a state office. So the State Grange, like its local branches, is in a continual cycle of fund-raising efforts. When the State Grange raised its dues, Fredonia Grange did not want to pass the increase along to its members. It has continued to charge members \$25.00 and absorbs the extra \$4.00 per member from its own funds. As Fredonia Grange members wryly comment, Fredonia more than gets this money back by working it out of them. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 23, 2004, in author's possession.

⁵⁰ The reality is that most people who are prominent enough to be Michigan State Grange officers or department directors are also likely to be delegates from a local Grange. In the latter capacity, they can vote.

the same officer positions as the local Granges except that the executive committee has more members: seven, rather than three. Department directors are Community Service; Deaf Awareness; Information; Junior; Membership; Pianist; Women's Activities; Youth/Young Adults. Some of the directorships are held by two people; some people hold more than one position. Delegates have to pay \$10.00 to register for the convention. Other Grange members who want to attend the convention are welcome to do so. They can sit in on everything, but they cannot vote. They pay a nominal registration fee. Although attendees are on their own for some meals, there are a number of Grange meals at the convention. People register for these in advance, when they sign up to attend the convention. They indicate which meals they want, and pay the overall total. The price of the meals can be fairly steep, depending on whether a local Grange helps with them or they are produced by a hotel or convention center. Some of the more memorable meals are the Women's Activities Luncheon on Friday, the Junior Grange Luncheon on Saturday, and the banquet on Saturday night.⁵¹

Although there are meetings of the Michigan State Grange Executive Committee and officers earlier in the day, the convention opens officially early Thursday afternoon. The State Grange convention opens and closes in the sixth degree—the level of ritual for the state. Although nonmembers have been, at least tacitly, permitted to view the first four (local) degrees in recent years, the upper three degrees—fifth, county; sixth, state; and seventh, national—are still to be viewed only by the initiated. Even Grange members who have not gone through the fifth and sixth degree ceremonies are not allowed inside. There is a gatekeeper, literally, positioned at the door, who takes up the password. Every year the National Grange chooses a new password. It is sent out to the secretaries or

⁵¹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 23, 2004, in author's possession.

masters of the local Granges so that they can pass it along to their members. Few local Granges request the password anymore, but it is still required at the state and national levels. This harkens back to a time when the exclusivity of a password known only by the chosen could be an attraction and when the Grange was a powerful enough force that it had equally powerful enemies who would have liked to infiltrate it and bring it down. Today, however, demanding the password can create embarrassing and ludicrous situations. The Michigan Grange is a fairly small organization; all the active members know one another. It is very unlikely that an unknown member will materialize at the gate. It is still more unlikely that another group would expend the energy and thought necessary to infiltrate an organization that is struggling to survive. So demanding the password becomes a charade—sometimes an awkward one, when the attendees do not remember the password and the state master must be summoned and whisper clues to them so that they can come up with the answer.

At the 2002 convention, the gatekeeper neglected to close the door—the “outer gate.” Those waiting in the hall could see those inside marching, making movements and signs. The city dignitaries waiting to welcome the convention stood wide-eyed, but made no comment. After the ritual opening in the sixth degree, the balance of the meeting, up until the closing, is held in the fourth degree, so outsiders can attend.⁵² The exceptions are the fifth and sixth degrees, which are conferred on Friday night. One of the few Michigan Pomona Granges performs the fifth degree; the state officers do the sixth. This gives people from the local Granges, who would like to receive the higher degrees, the opportunity to do so. In recent years, there have been few candidates. Most of the

⁵² The author was the only nonmember who stayed for any length of time. Others came to speak, then left.

delegates are people who have been in the Grange for a long time and who have long since become sixth degree members.

The steward and assistant stewards are the traffic cops of the convention. They escort any official visitors both in and out. When Grange members must leave the ongoing session, they are asked to approach the steward's station and make a sign and movement before leaving. The session begins with welcoming remarks from local officials, the State Grange Master, and a representative from the National Grange. Then the proposed budget is distributed and discussed. This discussion can be contentious. Some in the local Granges, such as Athol and Rich Hazen, believe that the State Grange has been profligate and must start living within its means and not continue to dip into trust funds. There is spirited debate among a few over how much salary and how big an expense account the master should get. The bulk of the people, though, usually seem eager to approve the budget and get it out of the way.

Although the local Granges elect officers every year, the State Grange officers have longer terms. Still, there are always positions to be filled at every convention. So before the delegates divide into work groups, people are asked to nominate candidates for the office openings. Those who are nominated are asked, in private, if they would be willing to serve. If they agree, their nomination is made public. Elections are then held early Friday morning.

One of the Grange's proud claims of distinction, one of the things that it says separates it from mere social clubs, is its strong interest in legislation and its effort to have a voice in policy-making. Throughout the year, local Granges draft resolutions on a myriad of issues, from Grange-specific things (putting the degree work on multimedia) to

areas of national concern (such as trying to prevent toxic Canadian waste from entering the United States). If the resolutions are passed by the local Grange membership, they are forwarded on to the State Grange. At the state convention, the delegates are divided into different deliberating committees, such as: legislation, agriculture, bylaws, health, education. Grange delegates who are thought to have expertise in these areas are asked to chair the various committees. When delegates register, they can request to serve on a particular committee. The State Grange has divided up the resolutions forwarded beforehand between the appropriate committees. It is also possible to introduce resolutions at the convention. After the welcoming speeches and nominating candidates for available offices, delegates split up into their appropriate committees and begin deliberating on the proposed resolutions. This deliberating can continue, as time permits, throughout much of the rest of the convention. Some committees have fewer resolutions than others, hence they finish sooner. When a committee has finished, it returns to the floor of the convention to report on its work. Some resolutions do not make it out of committee; others are modified; still others are passed along, essentially intact. The chair explains the rationale for these moves. Then the resolutions that the committee has approved are voted upon by the delegates. If a local Grange's resolution has not made it out of committee, its delegates can reintroduce the resolution on the convention floor and call for a vote by the delegates. If the resolutions pass by a simple majority, they become State Grange policy. They are, in turn, presented at the National Grange Convention, in November, by the Michigan State Grange Master. The goal is to have the Michigan resolutions adopted as National Grange policy.

There are usually a few non-Grange guest speakers on Friday. The Women's Activities Luncheon also takes place on Friday. The Michigan State Grange Women's Activities Committee sponsors many contests in all sorts of home economics categories: there are all manner of crafts and cooking classifications. There are some classes of competition specifically for children, youth, and men. One of this group's goals is to collect Grange-made stuffed toys for hospitals and shelters; an annual goal is for individual Grange members to make at least fifty stuffed toys. There are Grange members who have been meeting or exceeding this goal for decades. At the luncheon, award winners are honored with congratulations, certificates, ribbons, and gifts. Most people who enter the contests win something. The items that they have entered are displayed in an exhibit room at the convention. The baked goods and other perishables are often raffled off to raise money for the State Grange. The Michigan State Grange Lecturer/Enrichment Director holds contests for creative writing, photography, artwork, and other forms of self-expression. Winners get ribbons and prizes. Each Grange is asked to submit a notebook recording its community-service efforts for the past year. Community service is seen as one of the most, if not *the* most, significant reasons for the Grange's existence. The Michigan State Grange Community-Service Director evaluates all the community-service notebooks submitted, ranks them, and awards prizes for them. For the last several years, Fredonia Grange's book has taken first place.⁵³ Up through 2001, the states sent their first-place entries on to the competition at the National Grange Convention. In that last year, Fredonia Grange's book took top honors in the country.

⁵³ Mary Houghton has produced Fredonia Grange's book for the last several years. Mary is a photographer and graphic artist whose visual imagery is always stunning. Her skill at capturing the essence of an event, when employed to graphically render Fredonia's many community activities, has created an unbeatable chronicle.

Then the National Grange stopped providing this recognition—belying the leadership’s protestations that they continue to be fully committed to the absolute value of community service. Awards are also bestowed for giving the State Grange voluntary assistance and for making any sort of progress with overall membership goals. So much time can be consumed by award presentations.⁵⁴

Saturday morning, traditionally, has been a celebration of the Junior Grange. As the Grange has dwindled and the membership has aged, the number of Junior Granges has fallen precipitously. The 2004 Michigan State Grange roster lists five Junior Granges.⁵⁵ One of these is Fredonia Grange’s, which has become dormant for lack of leadership. Nevertheless, a few children do continue to come and participate in activities such as talent contests, public speaking, and craft displays. The activities culminate in a “kids” luncheon of hot dogs and macaroni and cheese.⁵⁶ On Saturday afternoon there are Deaf Awareness Committee activities, such as the “Sign a Song” contest and awards. Committees finish their work and present their resolutions to the delegate body for evaluation. Then the convention adjourns in the sixth degree. Before delegates and attendees head for home, they celebrate with a banquet, complete with guest speaker.

⁵⁴ Grange members tend to take polarizing stances on this. One older delegate at the 2002 convention remarked to the author that the Grange will give one an award if one is still breathing. In October 2003, Athol Hazen began to speak out forcefully against the time lavished on awards, which, he contended, siphon off precious time that could be used to consider policy. Athol Hazen, e-mail to author, October 20, 2003, in author’s possession. On the other hand, through the years, Beulah Winter has maintained that one of the essential functions of the State Grange Convention is to give recognition to those who would not have it in any other venue. She believes that one of the Grange’s essential functions is to develop—to allow to develop—the potential in each person. She and Roland have often said that other organizations only wanted finished, polished diamonds; the Grange takes lumps of coals and helps them to become all that they hardly dare to dream—even brilliant gems. One conversation is characteristic. Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

⁵⁵ Michigan State Grange, *Michigan State Grange 2004 Roster* (Haslett, MI: Michigan State Grange, 2004), 4.

Action Grange Presentation

Despite his misgivings about the Action Grange movement, then Michigan State Grange Master Bob Brown asked those Granges who were participating in the program to make a presentation at the 2002 state convention. West Oshtemo was unable to participate: Gene Rhodes was the driving force for his Grange; October, when the conventions are always held, are busy times for his alter ego, the Pumpkin Man; he seldom attends the conventions. Without his push, his Grange had no presence in the presentation. Helen Welford of Pittsfield-Union Grange helped organize the presentation. Helen had recently retired from her job at the University of Michigan and thus, in theory, had more time to devote to this than others. She asked those Granges who planned to participate to collect photos that they felt characterized their Grange and send them along to her. Her husband, Robin, who was a computer whiz, would transfer them to a CD so that they could have a slide show of compelling Grange activities as participants spoke. Helen asked the author if she would be part of the presentation, commenting upon the merits of Action Grange from a communication perspective; the author, who had planned to attend the convention anyway, agreed. The plan was to have Helen give introductory remarks about the Action Grange in general, followed by Randy Nail talking about Fredonia, then Doris Buehrer with comments on Mosherville, the author, and finally Helen again with specific remarks on Pittsfield-Union and some concluding remarks on the Action Grange. Then there would be a question-and-answer session. At the actual convention, Bob Clouse, the National Grange representative, had come out in favor of the Action Grange movement during his opening remarks on Thursday, when he acknowledged that Grange members needed to make changes to their

⁵⁶ The cuisine is aimed at children, but adults also attend.

organization if they wanted it to be there for their children and grandchildren. The presenters were thus hoping that he had paved the way for a positive reception.

Although some delegates were cloistered, laboring on their committee work, attendance was fairly good. Helen made some introductory remarks.

Then Randy talked about the need for relevance and change. He spoke of how suggestive terminology can be, how embarrassed he was when he first joined the Grange to introduce people that he knew to the “master” of Fredonia Grange. He read a long letter that Mary Houghton had written the previous May about the pernicious effects that secrecy continued to have on the Grange.

Doris Buehrer, with touching honesty, admitted that Mosherville members had not hesitated to apply to the Action Grange program, but were surprised that they were accepted since they have so few members. She also confessed that they did not know what they were getting into: they thought that the National Grange was going to give them the solutions to their eroding, aging membership. When they went to the regional seminar, they learned that it was they who were supposed to develop the answers for the National Grange. Mosherville’s conflicting but intertwined feelings of hope and despair emerged in the presentation. In one sense, they were almost angry at what was happening to them: they were already doing so much—what more could they do? On the other hand, they dreamed that one more activity might be “the one” that would capture more members. Doris concluded “We keep in mind that Hope and Perseverance will eventually pay off and keep Mosherville Grange #1351 alive so that we can celebrate 100 years in the year of 2009.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Doris Buehrer, Secretary, Treasurer, Mosherville Grange, noncontinuous member of the Grange since youth, active at the local, county, and state levels of the Grange, cautious advocate of the Action Grange

The author said that the Grange was too much of a well-kept secret: those who were not members or who were not direct beneficiaries of the Grange's activities were not liable to know who and what it was. She mused upon how much larger and more active it might be if more people knew of it. She viewed the Action Grange movement as an affirmation by the National Grange that the Grange needed to change and that its strength was at the grassroots. She found that the program facilitated communication on many levels: within the individual Grange, it prompted vigorous debate, with some members pro and others very con; between Granges, it had spurred sharing, support, and exchange of ideas; it was serving as a catalyst for Granges to reach out and interact more openly and fully with their communities, truly trying to ascertain their needs. She touched upon the focus groups that they were starting in Calhoun County, a method that they felt would help other Granges as well.

Helen Welford concluded by saying, first, what the Action Grange had meant to her Grange. Their explicit interpretation of Action Grange differed most blatantly from the embodiment of the traditional Grange. For Pittsfield-Union, the program meant freedom:

- Freedom to explore organizational models more widely used by younger organizations.
- Freedom to invite guests without having to ask them to leave during portions of the meeting.
- Ability to be more open and communicative with prospective members.
- Ability to conduct Grange activities in a manner which can flex to meet our particular community's needs and interests—activities which are meaningful and relevant to both the established farmer, and the urban professionals and their families who make up the community.
- Ability to decline participation in contests and activities which are less relevant to the community in which we find ourselves.
- Ability to bring terminology up to date.
- Freedom to grow in ways that seem best for our increasingly urban Grange.

movement, community activist, remarks during the Michigan Action Grange Presentation, Michigan State Grange 129 Annual Convention, October 17–19, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

- Focusing programs and activities on participation rather than attendance.⁵⁸

Helen concluded by saying that the Action Granges are the guinea pigs for change. Although she did not say that they were to be the saviors of the Grange, the implication was there. She felt that the National Grange would evaluate the successful Action Granges, culling their productive strategies and fashioning a suggested model or approach that all Granges might use to improve.⁵⁹

Reaction to the presentation was mixed. During the presentation itself, one woman, a member of Fredonia Grange who was attending as the then master of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, vocally expressed her disapproval. She had previously and recurrently said that she would rather see the Grange die than change. She had been among those most severely and steadfastly hostile to the author. When the author was giving her part of the presentation, this woman turned to those around her saying “Don’t listen to her! You don’t have to listen to her! She’s not a member!” During the rest of the talk, the woman sat with arms folded across her chest, glaring ahead, looking like a thundercloud—until she caught a glimpse of her granddaughter in one of the Grange slides. At that point, she again turned to those around her, urging them to look at her exceptional progeny.⁶⁰ When the presentation had concluded, Bob Brown thanked all the

⁵⁸ Helen Welford, Secretary, Pittsfield-Union Grange, dancer, active at local, county, and state Grange levels, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, remarks during the Michigan Action Grange Presentation, Michigan State Grange 129 Annual Convention, October 17–19, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

⁵⁹ Ibid. One problem with a universal strategy is that it would have to be so broad and general that it might prove meaningless and ineffective. As Helen noted, perhaps inadvertently, even the diminished number of Granges spanned diverse demographics: some Granges were rural and even frontier, others were urban; occupations ranged from farmers and other resource extractors to professors, doctors, and lawyers. The Grange might conceivably offer an aegis, a unifying vision for such variety; specific, concrete strategies could be another matter. The National Grange was all but acknowledging this by instituting the Action Grange program.

⁶⁰ Jody Nail, Fredonia Grange youth delegate to the Michigan State Grange 129 Annual Convention, October 17–19, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession. Jody was not the speaker, but was

Grange members who had participated in the presentation, then called a brief recess so that the room could be rearranged. A few people approached the presenters to congratulate them and give support, among them Beulah Winter and Alvin Thelen, who were anxious to see the Grange revitalized, although skeptical of the sweep and potential of Action Grange. The chaplain of the State Grange, who had married into the organization, confessed that her church had real issues with the Grange over its ritual and secrecy and that she walked a fine and conflicted line in belonging.

During the question-and-answer session at the end of the presentation, Bob Clouse, Chair of the National Grange Executive Committee, said that the National Grange could use the author's work. There was a murmur from the audience. After the discussion portion, as people took a break, Bob approached the author and asked for a business card with contact information. He said several times that the National Grange would be in touch. They never have been, which has been a bone of contention among Fredonia Grange members ever since. They question the National Grange's sincerity, commitment, leadership, vision, openness.⁶¹

Randy and Rich said that a few people came to speak with them about the Action Grange program during the balance of the convention. The author had just the opposite experience. On Thursday, the first day of the convention, she had sought out some of the people to whom she had previously communicated (but without results) about being interviewed. They had seemed receptive, acting cordial, friendly, and smiling, inquiring about the author's work, and had asked the author to talk more with them the next

sitting by the woman who was; Jody shared the story with the author. The anecdote characterizes the woman's prior and subsequent actions.

⁶¹ Citing every instance of this frequent refrain is not a productive use of time and space; therefore, only one characteristic reference is given. Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, May 20, 2004, in author's possession.

afternoon so that they could set up dates and times. But when the author did seek them out on Friday afternoon, after the presentation, they refused to speak—at all. They would not explain what had so diametrically changed their behavior. They met the author's attempt to engage them in conversation with stony silence; then, walking around her, they stalked off. After waiting a few days, the author, thinking that perhaps she had caught the people at a bad time, did follow up, saying that she was sorry that they had not had a chance to talk more at the convention but that she would still be very interested in interviewing them and could accommodate their schedules and come to them. They never replied.⁶²

Action Grange II: Get the Word Out, but Leave the Core Alone

The original Action Grange program was chartered for three years. It was not made clear what would happen at the end of that time—there were vague statements about evaluating the results to determine where to go from there. When Bob Clouse, the head of the National Grange Executive Committee, spoke at the 2002 Michigan State Grange Convention, he came out strongly in favor of Action Grange and stated, unofficially, that the program would continue and expand.⁶³ So members of Action Grange I and those who wished to join the program, eagerly awaited word of the newest developments.

In 2003, the National Grange announced that it was beginning the next phase of the Action Grange program: Action Grange II.⁶⁴ Action Grange I had authorized Granges to

⁶² Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to J and L, October 19, 2002, in author's possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to J and L, October 23, 2002, in author's possession.

⁶³ Robert Clouse, Chair, National Grange Executive Committee, remarks at the Michigan State Grange 129 Annual Convention, October 17–19, 2002, Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁶⁴ Information on the background of the Action Grange II program comes from the National Grange Web site. The National Grange, "Grange Action Program," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/>

explore the difficult questions and choices confronting the Grange, such as: What is the Grange's purpose? How does it justify its continued existence? What, essentially, is the Grange? What is its mission and vision? What traditions should it retain, what should change, and what should be discarded?⁶⁵ Tackling these delicate subjects trod on many Grangers' sensibilities, as the Action Grange Presentation at the 2002 Michigan State Grange Convention indicates. As a result of Action Grange I, the National Grange did allow more flexibility and openness among local Granges. But it backed off from the sorts of sweeping changes, particularly about secrecy, ritual, and emphasis, that many Action Granges recommended. Instead it chose to focus on symptoms of the Grange's problems—not causes. Action Grange II would concentrate on ways to get Granges involved in local programs and projects that would serve the community, draw

tf2k.htm (accessed July 23, 2004); The National Grange, "Grange Action Program Facilitator," *Grange Action Program*, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/Sallybio.htm> (accessed July 23, 2004); The National Grange, "Grange Action Weekend Seminar Schedule," *Grange Action Program*, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/ActionGrangeIISeminar.htm> (accessed July 23, 2004).

⁶⁵ The National Grange's Strategic Planning Task Force, which prepared "A Strategy for Renewing the National Grange: The Rationale and Importance of the Action Grange Program," was an extraordinarily visionary, courageous group who recommended such things as doing away with all secret work to make the Grange open and inviting to all; rethinking programs so that they were not so contest-focused; putting more emphasis on evaluating and developing leadership in the Grange. The strategic plan talked about mission and vision, but did not elaborate. It did state that with the changed demographics of the country, the Grange needed a different or additional base, beyond agriculture. National Grange Strategic Planning Task Force, "Position Papers," National Grange, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 28, 2004); National Grange Strategic Planning Task Force, "Strategic Plan," National Grange, <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 28, 2004).

The National Grange now has a Vision Statement that talks about developing leadership potential, being committed to its membership, and being a relevant part of its communities. National Grange, "Vision Statement," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/> (accessed July 28, 2004). But, under the Frequently Asked Questions page, where the leadership has a chance to define the Grange, to say what it is and which communities and individuals it seeks to serve, it does so in this way: "1. What is the Grange? The National Grange is the nation's oldest national agricultural organization, with grassroots units established in 3,600 local communities in 37 states. 2. What does the Grange do? Its 300,000 members provide service to agriculture and rural areas on a wide variety of issues, including economic development, education, family endeavors, and legislation designed to assure a strong and viable Rural America." So the orientation is still solely to rural, farming America, although the task force, back in 1999, explicitly indicated that the Grange needed an additional or modified orientation. National Grange, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/> (accessed July 28, 2004).

recognition, and attract members: it would not touch or strive to ascertain the essence of what the Grange is.

The National Grange hired a new facilitator to conduct Action Grange II seminars; the Action Grange I facilitator had been polarizing. Worse, he offered a homogeneous, generic seminar that included nothing Grange specific, nothing that was particularly relevant for Grange members: the seminar might just as well have had a target audience of longshoremen or brain surgeons. The facilitator further bragged about how the Grange was making him rich.⁶⁶ So the National Grange sought someone who would be more amenable to attendees. It settled on Sally Crosiar, a woman who had a long history of presentations and personal coaching with such organizations as 4-H, Extension, and the YMCA. The strong relationship that Sally had established with the New York State Grange, one of the more influential state Grange bodies, paved the way for her hire by the national organization. Sally developed a weekend seminar to offer Granges that would take them through exercises such as a SWOT analysis, goal-setting, understanding change, and developing and sharing a sense of urgency.

The National Grange then invited Granges to sign up for this program. It did not, however, make a compelling case for why a Grange should do this—what it would truly gain from the experience, why it should commit time and money to the program.⁶⁷ There

⁶⁶ No Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting passed without at least one mention of this first facilitator. The references were always scathing. As Richard Raymond asked incredulously, "How can you go to a three-day seminar on the Grange and never hear the words 'agriculture' and 'environment'?" The perception was that the facilitator was recycling old, stale seminar materials, making no effort to customize them for the Grange's unique issues, and was thus reaping substantial financial rewards for which the Grange was getting no substantive results. Richard Raymond, Steward, Pittsfield-Union Grange, dancer, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁶⁷ By the time that the Grange recruited for Action Grange II, the emphasis had shifted. It invited applicants to join them in this way: "This is an invitation for your Grange to enter into the renewal programs of the 21st century. Become part of the growing number of Granges that are taking action to get

were problems from the outset, including a serious lack of communication that continued to plague the enterprise. Once Granges applied for the program, they were supposed to receive feedback and guidance. They were also supposed to be given a choice of regional seminars that they could attend. But months went by with applicants hearing nothing—not even if they had been accepted into the program. Grange applicants turned to their state leaders to try to get some answers. Finally, Michigan applicants were told that they must send at least four representatives to a distant part of Iowa in only a few weeks. This was not enough notice for the Granges to arrange such a trip, and in exasperation and disappointment, they prepared to drop out of the program. The National Grange, anxious to keep those few Granges that had applied for the program, hastily scheduled another midwest seminar, this time with more notice and with more flexibility on the number who must attend. This time, representatives of the two Michigan Granges, Georgetown and Plymouth, as well as Jeff Swainston, Michigan State Grange Master, attended.

Reactions varied. Sue Withers, who had pushed her Georgetown Grange to join Action Grange II and who had been one of the delegates to the seminar, thought that it was an adequate seminar, but nothing special; she stated that she had participated in just these sorts of things many times at work. She confessed that what she was really looking for was Action Grange I: she wanted to be able to work on significant and substantive changes in the Grange. Jeff, on the other hand, seemed dazzled by the process. This was

their membership and their communities involved in projects and programs that establish a name for their local organization, and build interest and support for the Grange itself.” Granges are asked to pay \$100.00 per Grange and told that they will get professionally run seminars, ideas, and encouragement. Gone are the questioning, analyzing, and identity-seeking of the first phase. In this phase, people are told that it is simply a matter of degree, not of kind: that the base does not have to change, but that they need to do more. National Grange, “Grange Action Program,” <http://www.nationalgrange.org/ActionGrange/tf2k.htm> (accessed July 28, 2004).

Action Grange that he and, he thought, most Michigan Grangers could find palatable. He saw it not as entailing real change to the Grange but as being better at letting others know what the Grange is and does.⁶⁸

Spurred by this thought, Jeff proposed to the Action Grange I members that Michigan host an Action Grange II Regional Seminar, proposing this at the January Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting. When he got a positive response, he pushed further, suggesting that since Fredonia Grange was so adept at preparing food, perhaps the seminar could be held in Marshall and Fredonia could provide the food. Fredonia agreed to ask its members, who approved. The existing Action Grange II members considered sending more delegates. Action Grange I participants could take part by paying \$25 each to cover materials. Pittsfield-Union and Mosherville said that they would send representatives. Jeff said that he hoped to recruit many other Granges from Michigan to take part. There was some anticipation over the prospect of meeting and sharing ideas with Grangers from other states in the region. Athol Hazen was a bit anxious, wondering if they could accommodate more than sixty for meals. Fredonia rented the B. E. Henry Community Building, in central Marshall, for the weekend of May 14–16, 2004, when the conference was scheduled. Members of Fredonia arranged for a special Grange seminar discount at a nearby hotel. They waited expectantly for the anticipated large group, eager to show their hospitality.

⁶⁸ Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, September 7, 2003, Ann Arbor, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Sue Withers, e-mail to author, November 26, 2003, in author's possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 17, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Jeff Swainston, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 17, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

But the event began to unravel, even before it started. Neither the National nor the State Grange promoted the event well. They did not provide information or support. Jeff Swainston did mention the upcoming conference several times in his master's column in the *Michigan Grange News* newsletter, which is sent to all Michigan Grange members. But neither he in the newsletter or on the State Grange Web site, or the National Grange on its Web site, ever made a compelling case for why a Grange should invest the people, time, money, and other resources to join the program. They never made it clear what the program would do for the Granges, why they needed it, what made it urgent, how it was different from past programs—that led nowhere. Jeff was not able to sell the movement, even in small-group conversations with familiar Grangers. He did not personalize the information, take it to those Granges who really needed it; he did not lead them to this as something that could give them hope and revitalization. Further, and revealingly, his own local Grange did not join.⁶⁹ The National Grange further undercut the Michigan seminar by scheduling another Midwest regional seminar in Zanesville, Ohio, for October 2004. Other than providing a date for the seminar and saying that the facilitator would appear then, both the national and state Granges took a hands-off approach. There was no preregistration or effort to ascertain how many people would attend—and hence, how many meals Fredonia needed to plan and prepare.

Although, as a non-Grange member, the author would have a tenuous status at such a seminar, the members of Fredonia Grange asked if she would attend with their delegates, to which she agreed.⁷⁰ The author was unable to attend the Friday evening introduction

⁶⁹ Randy Nail, e-mail to author, April 26, 2004, in author's possession.

⁷⁰ Most of the information about the Michigan Action Grange II Seminar comes from notes that the author took as a participant. Exceptions are specifically noted. Action Grange II Seminar, May 14–16, 2004,

to the program, but arrived Saturday morning for the day's sessions. When she got to the B. E. Henry Building, she was surprised to find the parking lot relatively empty; she had been concerned about finding a parking place, but this was not a problem. Although the first session was not supposed to start until 9:00 a.m., people who came from out of town for the entire session were supposed to receive their meals, as well; the group should have been inside then eating breakfast. The author had wondered if it would be difficult to slip into the crowd for the workshops. As she was getting out of her car, Paul and Marilyn Jones and Rich Hazen, all of Fredonia Grange, saw her from the kitchen and came out to the parking lot to fill her in on what had happened so far. None of them were participating in the actual seminar: they had volunteered to prepare meals for the attendees. Shortly before the seminar, Athol had told the author that at least six Michigan Granges would have people there. He did not mention anyone from out of state.⁷¹

The author now asked Paul, Marilyn, and Rich where everyone was. They replied that no one had come. The author was incredulous. They continued that because the National Grange had scheduled an October seminar in Ohio, no one from out of state had come. Pittsfield-Union, Plymouth, and Mosherville Granges were supposed to send people, but none had so far. (They never did, either.) So the only Granges participating were Fredonia Grange, with three members and the author, and two Granges new to the program: Home Grange, the other Grange in Calhoun County, who sent six people; and Burr Oak Grange, the Grange of which former Michigan State Grange Master Bob Brown was the leader. Bob had come to believe that Action Grange, or at least Action Grange II, was a good idea. He and his wife, Peg, were the two delegates from that

Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Additional information for this portion from: Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 11, 2004, in author's possession.

Grange.⁷² Ann Grahek, the Michigan State Grange Membership Director, was also there to represent the State Grange. The author was appalled, knowing how hard the people from Fredonia had worked to get ready for this, how much food they had bought, how much preparation they had lavished. Paul was philosophical, saying that it was a hard time of year to get people to attend anything. The author asked them if Jeff Swainston was there. They answered that he had been there last night, but that he would probably not be back. They then urged the author to go inside, saying that the next session would be starting. The author entered through the kitchen, passing still more Fredonia Grange members working on the meals for lunch and supper. Fredonia Grange members were determined to feed whoever attended well—they absorbed the disappointment of the small turnout and put forth their best effort.

All of the other participants were already there except Mary Houghton of Fredonia Grange, who arrived a few minutes later. Those present greeted the author cordially—they were glad to have someone to increase their ranks. The author knew everyone there but Sally Crosiar, the facilitator, and one of Home Grange's delegates. Sally gave the author a packet of materials and a name tag. It became obvious that the author had been expected. After Sally welcomed the author, she began the day's program.

Although Sally had to admit that this was the smallest seminar that she had held, she made the most of it. She declared that the good news was that those Granges represented were really active and that they would be able to go back to their areas and, indeed, throughout the state, and share and spread their successes. She remained positive and

⁷¹ Athol Hazen, e-mail to author, May 11, 2004.

upbeat throughout. She was very much an “accentuate the positive” person. Throughout the day, she led the participants through interactive exercises to help them assess the current realities of their Granges; identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; see the positive possibilities; develop a vision; budget time and money; build a guiding team; and set short- and long-term goals. Fredonia Grange had already moved beyond most of these activities, although the vision exercise, during which each Grange had an opportunity to brainstorm, was beneficial. The other Granges seemed to find the activities more groundbreaking. Ann Grahek hoped to take some of what she learned in the seminar and condense it into a one-day workshop that she could take to Granges around the state.

Sally guided people fairly skillfully through the seminar. She illustrated the exercises with anecdotes and examples from previous Action Grange II seminars. She told the Michigan participants that she would be adding some of their good ideas to her repertoire as well. Sally could occasionally be insensitive to her audience. At one point, she talked about her conversation with the head of one Grange who proudly declared that he had been the leader for forty years. Sally said that she was just incredulous at that news; she said that she hoped that her mouth did not just gape open. She asked how an organization could be its best if it were not open to new ideas, perspectives, leadership. How could it expect to attract new, dynamic people if it did not give them a chance to develop their potential? It is not clear if Sally said this to shake any sense of complacency among those now present, or if it genuinely did not occur to her that some of the Granges represented at this seminar might be in a similar situation. Whatever the motivation, the

⁷² This did not comply with the National Grange’s guidelines that each Grange send three to four people, but with such a sparse group, strictures were relaxed.

remarks struck close to home. Roland Winter, who was then nearing seventy-eight, had been the head of Home Grange almost continuously since he was in his early twenties. The author feared that this comment would alienate those from Home Grange. Indeed, Bernadine Bishop, Roland's sister, and Martha Laupp, Roland's sister-in-law, rushed to the defense to say that of course someone who had been master for forty, fifty, or more years could remain fresh and vital in the office. Yet apparently this did not affect the participants' positive feelings about the seminar.⁷³

Shortly after this discussion, the talk turned to the listserv on the National Grange Web site: why was it restricted, not just to Grange members, but specifically to those who had attended an Action Grange II Seminar? What would be the harm if nonmembers learned that the Grange was helping its communities and reaching out? This led Mary Houghton into a soliloquy on secrecy and its deleterious effects. She strongly advocated that the ritual should be opened to all with interest—it could even be a recruiting tool. After speaking passionately for several minutes, Mary apologized and said that she should not get started on the subject. Sally began to speak cautiously about the ritual. She said then and later that she could see that the ritual had been a means that had helped some Grangers feel connected. But she believed that it was the connection that people valued, not the method. She had come to feel that a generations-old tool might not be the best one to use with current generations.⁷⁴ At that, Roland Winter spoke up and said that because of the ritual, a Grange member had friends all over the country. Without that

⁷³ When the author mentioned "insensitive comments" to Beulah Winter, who did not attend the seminar, Beulah replied that no one from Home Grange had said anything about such remarks—they were all very positive about it. She also said that everyone from the conference voiced disapproval of the poor communication from the National and State Granges about the conference. Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, May 27, 2004, in author's possession.

⁷⁴ Sally Crosiar, Action Grange II Facilitator, e-mail to author, May 26, 2004, in author's possession.

ritual, they would no longer be friends. Without hesitation, Sally replied, “Or perhaps you would discover that everyone is your friend.” She softened her stance slightly by saying that she did not know that this would be the case—but she thought that it was an issue that needed to be explored.

Athol Hazen, Mary Houghton, and Randy Nail were the Fredonia Grange participants. During the preceding evening, and again during the interactive exercises, they touted the focus groups that the author had conducted among members of the community and Grange members. Sally was clearly intrigued. She began to ask the Fredonia delegation questions about the discussions; the Fredonia members deferred to the author. So the author described them briefly. Sally brought the focus groups up several more times. She said repeatedly that she thought that they could be a great boon for other Granges. She declared that the author and the rest of the Fredonia team should do presentations at both the State and National Grange conventions. When Sally sounded the theme in a private conversation with the author, the author responded that she would like to share her research but that the logistics might be difficult. When Grange members are delegates to a Grange convention, their Grange pays for them; if they are doing work for a state or national Grange, those Granges fund them. Sally was hired as an outside expert; but in order for her to be acceptable to Grange members, she first had to join the Grange as an associate member. Particularly in light of her previous experiences with the State and National Granges, the author believed that her non-Grange membership status and her critical analysis of the Grange would make her work and observations unacceptable to a majority of Grange members—or at least those in the power hierarchy.

But this was too complex a matter to explain to Sally within the time constraints and lack of privacy of the seminar.

After the sessions ended Saturday evening, however, a group of Grange members—Rich Hazen, Mary Houghton, Randy Nail, Ann Grahek—decided to go out for drinks and asked Sally to join them. Sally admitted that this was a new experience to have at a seminar; but she readily agreed to join them. As people relaxed over a few beers and talked about the Michigan Grange and its future, the Grangers told Sally that although the author had worked with and on behalf of the Grange for a number of years, she was not a Grange member; this factor seemed to cause consternation among many Grangers, who did not appear to know how to deal with her.⁷⁵

Those who attended the seminar seemed to enjoy and gain much from it. People went with different agendas, which influenced their overall impressions. Randy Nail, who had been feeling burned out by Grange, was hoping to get a boost of enthusiasm. He had believed that Fredonia Grange was beyond Sally's teachings, and had that confirmed. He was, however, hoping to get ideas for ways that he could help Ann Grahek work on membership within Michigan. Randy believed that what the old-time members wanted in the organization were "new old timers" and that, if things continued as they were, the Michigan State Grange, at least, would not exist in fifteen to twenty years. Randy feels that one of the most injurious statements is the one in the closing that says that as the members are about to part and go back into the community, they should keep themselves

⁷⁵ Rich Hazen, meeting with author, May 22, 2004, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Randy Nail, e-mail to author, May 25, 2004, in author's possession.

unspotted from the world. He thinks that this typifies the fortress, siege mentality that Granges must keep themselves aloof and are not really a part of the world.⁷⁶

Beulah Winter said that the Home Grange bunch came away from the seminar “very excited. They . . . are already planning some new things.”⁷⁷ Athol Hazen mused that he thought that one of the past state masters, Roland Winter or Bob Brown, would step forward to act as host. Since they did not (and since Fredonia was really hosting the program, protocol or no), Athol assumed that role. To the author he stated: “So we got thru [*sic*] it. Our Grange did their part. We furnished the place, the food, the snacks and were good hosts. Also we got a lot of good out of the conference.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Randy is a member of the Michigan State Grange Membership Committee. The closing paragraph that he thinks manifests many of the Grange’s problems and exhibits its siege mentality is read by the Grange master/chair at the end of the meeting. Randy Nail, e-mail to author, May 25, 2004, in author’s possession. “Friends, as we are again to separate and mingle with the world, let us not forget the precepts of our organization. Let us add dignity to labor, and in our dealings with our fellow man, 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 those who are less fortunate, and keeping ourselves *unspotted from the world*.” (Emphasis added.) Fredonia Grange Action Grange Committee, “Revised Ritual for Grange Meeting Openings and Closings.”

⁷⁷ Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, May 27, 2004, in author’s possession.

⁷⁸ Athol, ever the secretary and chronicler, wrote a report of the seminar that he printed in Fredonia Grange’s next newsletter. He framed it as Fredonia Grange having “goofed” for not having more of its members attend, yet he was really addressing other Granges and their leaders. “Urgency!!! We goofed!!! Yes, we did by having only a few members attend the Action Team Seminar held in Marshall this week end [*sic*]. The conference was informative. It also was an affirmation that what Fredonia Grange is doing will lead to the continuance of the Grange in Calhoun County. But we missed the opportunity to have other key members receive the satisfaction of knowing that we are not only an important organization in our local community but also in the Calhoun County Pomona, Michigan State and National Grange. Sally Crosiar was the moderator. The meeting moved, we accomplished a lot, and no one was bored. Communication is one of the keys that have [*sic*] to be used to get our message out. Those attending were amazed when we spoke of the Grange coverage in the Marshall Advisor during Grange Month.

“The Urgency is: Membership is dropping in the Grange. It is disappearing at a rapid pace and some of the estimates are that the Grange will cease to exist by 2020. This will occur if we don’t get busy and spread the word that the Grange is still an active, viable organization and has a lot to offer to people. The Grange will continue to be a viable organization if all of our members spread the word. It is not going to be done by the few who have been elected to office in the Community, Pomona, State and National Grange. It has to be done by every one [*sic*]. We need to show that we have pride in our organization. The pride needs to be expressed every time that we talk about the Grange. There are many things that the Grange has accomplished since its inception. Do you know what they are? You will not find them here. You will hear about them when you talk to your members. Search their minds for the things that the Grange has accomplished in your community, at the State Level and at the National Level. The information is out there lets [*sic*] not lose it by waiting to [*sic*] long then have to recognize that we should

A few days after the seminar concluded, Sally Crosiar sent a report on it to Bill Steel, Master of the National Grange. She sent copies to Athol, Randy, and the author.

Bill

The seminar in Michigan went well—but was perhaps the least well attended so far. 13 most of the time.

One exciting thing though is that all four Granges represented are actually pretty strong—and getting stronger. One—Fredonia—was in Action I and has done a project that other folks ought to hear a lot about! They conducted Focus Groups in their community—several with non-member community leaders and then several with Grangers—and the results have been remarkable. I think it would be great to have them do a workshop at National Convention. One wrinkle is that the person who has been a leader in the effort is working on her doctorate at MSU and in order to maintain her research objectivity in this project—has not and will not become a member at this time. Probably she will after her Ph.D. is completed, but that's not for a while yet. Apparently, Fredonia members had some conversation with Ed Luttrell about showcasing the focus group work, and as soon as Ed found out that Jacqui was not a member, Ed wasn't interested. As reported to me and of course the way it was perceived may not be the way Ed intended it to be. At any rate, I think the work has been incredibly valuable to this Grange—and might have tremendous potential to be replicated in other places with equal value. And I'd strongly encourage consideration of these folks for a national presentation.

The key folks to contact would be Randy Nail nai025@cs.com, Jacqui Lowman lowmanja@msu.edu, and Athol Hazen atholhazen@aol.com

have asked when our members were alive. Do it now. Plan a program and reminisce. Go further and tape the conversations, then record them and make them a part of your minutes and your Grange history.

“Go a step Further: Establish in your mind those (with) whom you would like to share your Grange experiences. Then go out and ask them to attend a Grange meeting as your guest. Be their host. Let them be themselves but be sure they are aware of what is going to happen. Introduce them to members with whom you feel they are compatible but don't neglect their introduction to the other members. If you are an officer find someone to take your place. If it is impossible to find some one [*sic*] to fill your position ask a Grange member to sit with you [*sic*] guests and answer any questions. Make them welcome.”

Sally Crosiar had talked about instilling a sense of urgency, which Athol sought to convey. Athol's article did not immediately receive a larger airing, such as in the *Michigan Grange News*. Ann Grahek's article about the seminar was upbeat, urging people to join, to be the sort of Grange that attendees envisioned, and stating that she would be bringing miniseminars around the state. But it communicated no sense of imperative need. It appeared in the June *Michigan Grange News*, while the seminar was still fresh news. The *Michigan Grange News* did print an abridged version of Athol's article in its August issue. This version omitted any acknowledgment that the seminar had been something of a debacle, that the lack of promotion and support had been a goof. In truth, Fredonia members probably did not need the affirmation to continue doing what they are doing. The goof was on the part of the State and National Granges, not Fredonia. Ann Grahek, “Action Days,” *Michigan Grange News*, June/July 2004, 8–9; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 18, 2004, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., “Urgency!” *Innovator*, June 2004, 1; Athol Hazen, Jr., “Editorial,” *Michigan Grange News*, August 2004, 13.

If I can shed any further light, please be in touch!

Sally⁷⁹

The author replied to Sally, thanking her for extolling the focus groups. She also explained, among other things, that her friends in Fredonia Grange were skeptical about a response from the National Grange, describing her previous interactions with Ed Luttrell and Bob Clouse. At the seminar there had been talk of secrecy and the ritual, which the author touched upon in her communication. Sally replied, copying the Fredonia Grange team as well as Bill Steel and Jeff Swainston. She noted that her position in the Grange was that of an employee. She could only recommend practices, but had no authority to carry them through. Still, she strongly urged the State and National Granges to utilize the communication strategies and tools that she felt were so helping Fredonia.

I could sense that what you say about Fredonia Grange is absolutely true. I got an open and welcoming feeling there as well. Alliances and partnerships serve Fredonia well—and have seemed to be a new idea for many of the participants in the Action Grange seminars I've led. And Fredonia is clearly being responsive to—and serving—the community. That, too, is a key ingredient of success.

As I said in the seminar, I've come to believe that the ritual has been a tool that has helped some people feel connected to Grangers across the country. But when it comes right down to it, I think it's the connection that people value—and that perhaps a generations-old tool is not the best one to use with our current generations. Certainly the connection among Fredonia Grangers was quite evident—and I know that ritual has not been the tool that has forged that connection.⁸⁰

In response to Sally's forwarding the e-mail exchange to him, Bill Steel also e-mailed the author.

Dear Jacqui,

First of all, thanks for your comments to Sally, a copy of which I have received. . .

⁷⁹ Sally Crosiar, e-mail to Bill Steel, Master, National Grange, May 18, 2004, in author's possession.

⁸⁰ Sally Crosiar, e-mail to author, May 26, 2004, in author's possession.

When we get real success stories, either to me directly or to Sally, or to any of the State Masters, they are distributed via email to participants. Sorry to say that these items are few and far between. Only a very small percentage of the Granges in the country are like Fredonia.

Several years ago the National Grange made a conscious decision to work with “well” Granges, instead of only working with terminal cases. Thus the Action Program got started. We restricted participation at first to about 120 Granges out of 3000. Resources, interest, ability to adapt to change were used as guidelines for acceptance into the program. As these Granges began to thrive and grow, it was our hope that others would want to become involved and get into the program. So far, three years into the programs, we have a little over 300 Granges enrolled.

The program itself has changed with the engagement of Sally Crosiar as the coordinator of seminars. *The focus has become one of helping local leaders to understand themselves and those around them, the art of working with people to get things done.* I sincerely believe this is a positive change.

I suspect that we will enroll no more than 500 Granges at most, sorry to say, as the rest are just not interested in doing much more than they currently are—just existing. So, from here, we have developed a program to begin to establish new Granges in several areas of the country. Our growth will have to come from such as these.

The “secrecy” battle wages on. We’ve come a long way in the past couple years. But to give it all up is to cease to exist as a unique organization. Families settle things within the family. Clubs and associations discuss the private stuff within their membership. Fredonia accepted you as someone who was willing to help, study, and support activities. Sorry to say that a great percentage of our membership is not as open to such a volunteer. Fredonia is way ahead of most organizations.

I expect that this dialogue will continue.

Bill⁸¹

The Tenacious Specter of Secrecy⁸²

From the time that the author had first begun to talk with younger Grange members—those in their thirties, forties, and fifties—about the Grange, they had expressed frustration and dissatisfaction over the Grange’s continued clinging to secrecy. Repeatedly, they castigated secrecy as something that no longer had a place in the

⁸¹ So the emphasis, the burden, and the responsibility are now on the individual, not the organization. Bill is loath to give up some of the secret aspects of the Grange, seeing in them the Grange’s unique identity. Bill Steel, e-mail to author, May 27, 2004, in author’s possession (emphasis added). The aftermath of this is discussed in chapter nine, which considers the research results.

⁸² The majority of information for this section comes from Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, May 4, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; and Athol and Helen Hazen’s Fiftieth Wedding

Grange, as the hallmark of those bound by outmoded traditions, but a barrier that they had transcended.⁸³ They were appalled at how alienating it might be to an outsider and vowed that they would never be a party to such alienation. They visibly shuddered at turning someone away who did not know the password or making someone who was not a member sit outside while the Grange opened and closed in form. One of their galvanizing issues was how to win over other Grangers who did not share these views. From the time that the author had had her first round of interviews about Helen Peck, the spirit and conscience of Fredonia Grange, she had been told that in Fredonia Grange, everything was open.

The author began to attend the semimonthly Fredonia Grange regular meetings in March 2002. As she got to know the members, they reminded her that the first weekend in May would be a busy one: Saturday night would be the regular Grange meeting; the next day was Athol and Helen Hazen's fiftieth wedding anniversary open house at the Grange hall. She was urged to attend both, which she promised to do.

The May 4, 2002 meeting seemed like the others that the author had attended. The author took her customary seat in a back corner, behind the master's station, with her dog, Commie, by her side.⁸⁴ Commie liked having a little cave in the corner, and the

Anniversary Open House, May 5, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Exceptions and additions are noted.

⁸³ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion, Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author's possession; Helen Welford, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion, Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author's possession; Joan Hellmann, Program Director, Pittsfield-Union Grange, dancer, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion, Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author's possession.

⁸⁴ When the author was first urged to attend Fredonia Grange meetings, she explained that she could only do so in the warm weather if Commie could come inside; he went with her on all trips; he could stay outside in the car for a while in cool weather, but not when it got very warm. Because some of her fieldwork entailed traveling long distances, through remote areas, late at night, she treasured Commie's

author could observe and take part, to a limited extent, without being too obtrusive. Just before the meeting began, Athol Hazen, in his capacity as secretary, came over to Rich Hazen, as chair, and said that this might be a good night “to give people the word.” Rich agreed and the meeting began. The author, who had frequently heard that expression used to mean informing people on some issue, thought no more about it. The meeting proceeded through the orders of business.

Then, when it reached New Business, Rich said that as much as he hated to do this, he had to ask their guest to leave. The author, who was writing madly to keep up with the flow of events, was totally unprepared. It took a few moments for her to grasp what was happening; at first she did not realize that it was she to whom he was referring. She looked up, and saw Rich staring at her intently. Then she noticed that everyone else in the hall—between thirty and forty people—was, as well. She looked back to Rich questioningly, but his face was impassive. She struggled to think, wondering what was happening, and why. She was so surprised that words failed her—she could not think what to ask. Rich continued his expressionless gaze. Trying to comprehend, the author believed that she was being asked to leave the hall for the evening, and perhaps forever. So she began to gather her things, fumbling as she did so. The author has mobility impairments, so she moves with difficulty and is slow, in the best of circumstances. With an audience, she felt as though she were moving in slow motion in a bad dream. Someone across the hall called out, “You can come back. You just have to leave for a while.” So the author bent over to take Commie’s leash and lead him out into the hall. Another voice called, “The dog can stay—it’s just you that has to go!” There was

company. She assured the Grangers that he would cause no trouble: that he would lie quietly by the author’s side on his towel. They agreed that Commie could come in and be an honored guest. He has

laughter, then dead silence. Although the author would have preferred to take Commie with her, she knew that it would be difficult to thread her way alone through the hall, much less lead Commie, who balked at crossing the wooden floor; she realized that she was expected to make an expeditious exit. She arose alone and began her passage.

Fredonia Grange is known as a small hall. But on that night, it seemed huge. The author walks with a cane, haltingly. Because she was in the far back corner, she had to walk the length of the hall, climbing over all the people seated along that side. It seemed to take hours, although it could not have been more than a few minutes. At last she was in the hallway; she closed the door behind her and took a seat along the wall. As she sat there, trying to grasp what had happened, she did not think about the larger ramifications; the one thought that was foremost in her mind was that she was going to have to crawl back through the hall to her seat again. She would have liked to have left right then and avoided running the gantlet again, but could not without Commie and her gear. She went into the restroom for a moment. When she came out, she met Paul Jones, who was then cochair of Fredonia Grange; he had been sent to get her.

She must have looked ghastly, because he asked if she was okay. She shook her head numbly. He said, "Didn't he tell you that he was going to do that?" Again, she shook her head. Paul, distressed, continued, "Oh, he should have told you. I would never have left someone so flat-footed. He shouldn't have given out the password that way. I would have had everyone come up and whispered it to 'em. It doesn't *mean* anything; it is just one of their little antiquated ways." Paul is a big, gruff man. The author had chatted with him since she had been coming to Fredonia Grange. He had always been pleasant. His astuteness and support buoyed the author, and she reentered the hall with him.

developed an avid following and enjoys the chance to socialize.

The author made it back over the seated group to her place. The meeting continued; the author resumed taking notes, her hand moving automatically. Then the meeting ended and the Penny March began. The author gathered up her things. Rich came to sit beside her to chat, but she was unable to do so; she needed time to absorb what had happened, along with its ramifications. She collected her things and left quietly. Later that night, Rich e-mailed the author, apologizing for his actions, saying that he had realized too late that he had acted according to his Grange upbringing and had not thought of the consequences or that it would make a nonmember feel like an outsider. He concluded that he still hoped to see the author the next day at the open house.⁸⁵

The author did go to the open house, as she had promised. Rich asked to speak with her before she left. They went out into the hallway where she had sat alone the night before. He was contrite, saying that he could not believe that after all the months of talk, he had done the very thing that he had said was the Grange's worst offense: making a nonmember feel like an outsider. He said that since he had come back to the Grange, no one had given out the password; this was the old way that it had been done. He said that after the incident had happened, all the way home he had thought of different ways that he could have handled the situation. He vowed that he would try to never make another nonmember feel so unwelcome and apart.

Before the author left, Mary Houghton also spoke with her about the previous night's incident. She asked the author if, after she had written up her fieldwork notes, she would share the portion that dealt with the incident—Mary thought that it was important to capture the feelings, among other things, to remind Grangers of how devastating such practices could be. The author did this. In response, Mary wrote a letter that she sent to

⁸⁵ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, May 4, 2002, in author's possession.

all Grangers for whom she had e-mail addresses. Randy Nail, in turn, sent an e-mail to the same people, voicing support. It was this letter that Randy read during the Action Grange presentation at the 129 Michigan State Grange Annual Convention.⁸⁶

Summary

As the Grange enters the twenty-first century, it is a shell of its former self: the overall number of Granges is down, membership is down, and, especially, the number of active members is down. Some Granges are urgently striving to reverse these trends. Through programs such as the Action Grange movement, they are seeking to renew and

⁸⁶ "Dear Grangers and Grange Friends,

"This letter is in response to Worthy Master Bob Brown's column in the May issue of the *Michigan Grange News* and is prompted by a recent incident in our Grange. . . . When I first read Brother Bob's column, my response was negative because I felt he was undermining what the Action Granges were trying to do. Upon subsequent readings I found that I am, for the most part, in agreement with his stand on the ritual. The ritual, with all of its faults, flaws and antiquated language, distinguishes and defines our organization. It is a unique expression of who we are and why we come together. . . .

"The ritual, however, is not our problem. The single greatest obstacle to growth of the Grange, both growth in influence and growth in membership, is *SECRECY*. What are we hiding and why are we hiding it? Every part of the ritual, from the lowest to the highest degree, would serve the Grange better if presented openly. What are we protecting: the sanctity of a pageant? Wisdom or philosophy that other, less enlightened people would not understand? Or simply secret words or signs that have absolutely no relevance in today's Grange? Symbolism IS important but why hide it? What does this say about our attitudes toward each other? What does this say about our attitudes toward "outsiders"? Secrecy creates an environment of separation and elitist arrogance. From the outside, our secret ritual appears cultish; a furtive dance of deception. If we are protecting our heritage and organizational integrity, we are protecting ourselves out of existence.

"An even greater shame is that we also hide from each other. A Seventh Degree member is *forbidden* to discuss that degree with members holding only a lower degree. Again I have to ask, "Why?" What purpose does secrecy serve? In all of my conversations with Grangers from local to national officers over a period of thirty-five years, I have not heard a reason for preserving the veil of secrecy that I felt was compelling and valid.

"I believe it is possible for the essence of our secret work to be presented in a manner which not only preserves our historical integrity, but also presents a positive unifying message of support to members and non-members alike. A prime example is our password. Traditionally, the word selected reflects strength of character and positive values. Using it reminded us on a regular basis to employ these characteristics in our daily lives, certainly a worthy objective. But the use of a secret password suggests a hidden objective and promotes a segregation of 'us' from 'them' mentality. I would prefer to see the password and its negative connotations eliminated altogether. Knowing that this is not likely to be acceptable at this time, I suggest as an alternative that we make our password a watchword to be used openly, publicly, and effectively to convey a unifying uplifting message. . . .

"These suggestions are made in an honest effort to improve the appeal of the Grange to a wider range of people. There are many problems facing the Grange today. In my opinion the issue of secrecy is

maintain relevance by reaching out to their unique communities, ascertaining their needs, and fulfilling them while helping their members realize their own potentials. The number of Granges who constitute this segment, however, is a mere handful of the total. The others seemed trapped in a time warp, venerating the past, avoiding the present, and ignoring the future.

Beyond the local level, Grange leadership seem profoundly ambivalent about the need to and the advisability of change. Although they have cautiously stated that the Grange should change, they have not defined what they mean by “change.” Even more important and essential, they have not sought to define the Grange itself: what it is, what it can and should be, what its role is and may be in the lives of its members and its communities. They authorized the Action Grange I program, permitting Granges to experiment with Grange structure; then they pulled back from the ramifications. They then mandated Action Grange II, a watered-down version that said, essentially, that the Granges should be themselves but be better at letting the outside world know what they were doing. They have not provided significant guidance and support on how participating Granges should implement any of these mandates, but have adopted a passive attitude of wait and see.

This chapter has described some of the vicissitudes that some of the Michigan Action Granges—and particularly Fredonia Grange—are facing. In the face of the indifference, ignorance, or hostility of their peer Granges, they have attempted to continue to serve their communities, blending new approaches with the tried and true. Sometimes they have been singularly successful; at other times their attempts have been ill-conceived,

foremost among them.” Mary Houghton, Letter to the Michigan Grange about Secrecy, June 8, 2002, copy, in author’s possession.

regrettable, and forgettable. But in the face of discouragement, they have remained remarkably persistent. Perhaps more surprisingly, they continue to be committed to helping other Granges survive—to having them “wake up and smell the roses.”⁸⁷

Members of the Michigan Action Granges have said frequently that time is not on the Grange’s side. It cannot wait five, ten, or more years to alter and adapt: it must change now, change radically—or die. Consequently, they are committed to doing whatever it takes to make and keep the Grange viable in and for their own communities. They learn from their successes; they learn, perhaps, even more from their failures. Experience can be a harsh teacher and exacts a toll. But they keep trying. Michigan Action Grange members have stated repeatedly that they are the guinea pigs—but also the potential salvation of the Grange. Such a statement is dramatic, eye-catching, and may seem hyperbolic. Yet is hard to imagine that the Grange will continue as a meaningful national entity without these “movers and shakers”⁸⁸ playing a significant role.

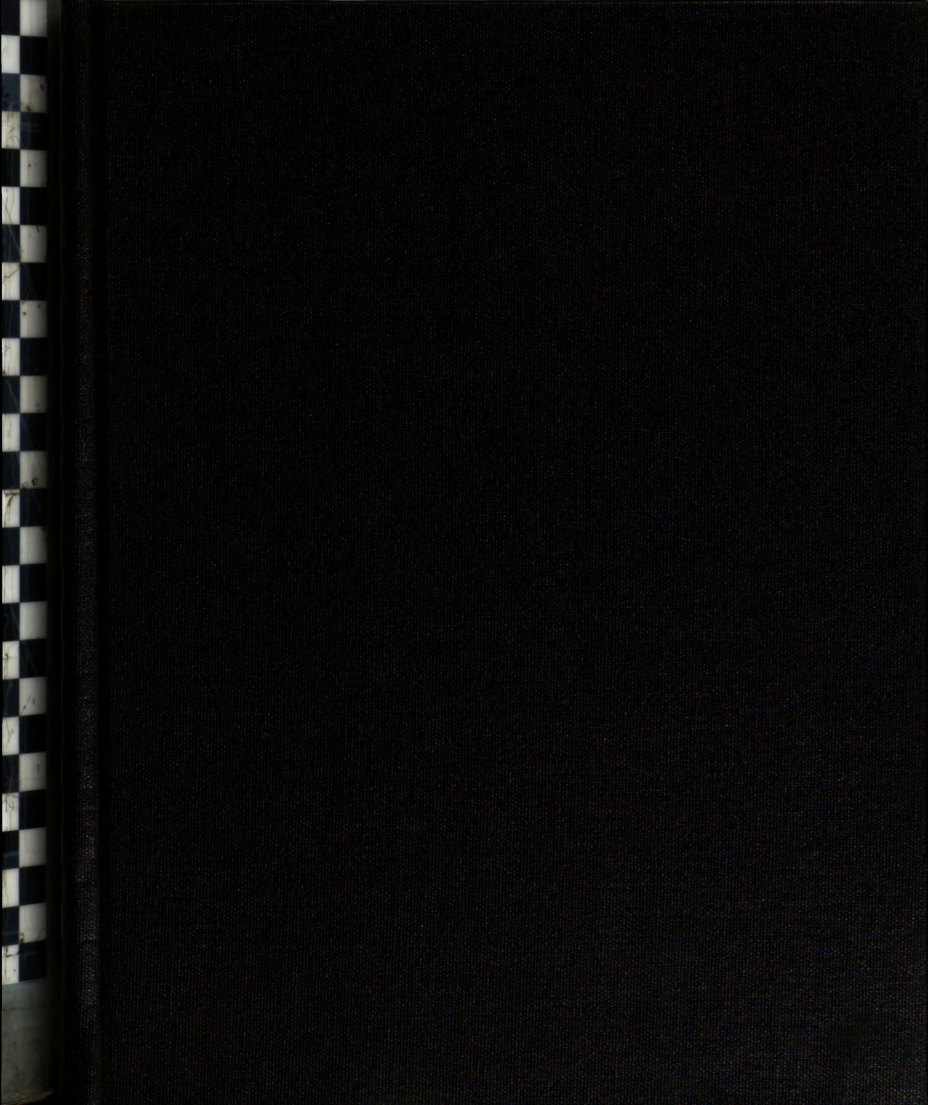
⁸⁷ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, May 30, 2004, in author’s possession.

⁸⁸ Mary Houghton, e-mail to author, January 14, 2002, in author’s possession.

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A CASE STUDY OF A MICHIGAN GRANGE

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IF NOT ME, WHO? WHY A GROUP CONTINUES TO COME TOGETHER TO
ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF A MICHIGAN GRANGE

VOLUME II

By

Jacquelyn Ann Lowman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mass Media Ph.D. Program

2004

ORAL HISTORY: YO

Everyone has a story to tell.

It's own unique delights

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CHAPTER 7

ORAL HISTORY: YOU CAN DO IT! DO NOT LET THE GRANGE DIE!

Everyone has a story to tell. Every oral history interview conducted for this study held its own, unique delights and enriched the project immeasurably, adding texture, color, and luster to the tapestry being woven. If the study had been able to interview every Fredonia Grange member, it would have garnered a vast and vivid set of reflections on people's lives and what role the Grange has played in them. It was beyond the scope of the study to do this, however.

Further, the goal was not so much to limn a portrait of a particular Grange, or of the Grange in general, as to examine individuals and groups' interrelationships with community, using Fredonia Grange as an exemplar. The point was not to learn everything about the Grange, but to learn enough about it so that it could be determined how much, if anything, in these community relationships resulted from a unique Grange influence, and how much might be applicable to and juxtaposed with other constituencies, groups, and communities. Therefore, the study sought out people with long Grange and community involvement, people whose lives, over a protracted period, could be said to have been changed by these experiences. These are not all the oral histories done during this research—but they are among the most revelatory.¹

¹ The quotations given are in the speakers' words: nonstandard spelling and grammar give a hint of the flavor of the dialect spoken. These are not errors or critiques of the vernacular but are an attempt to reflect the verbalized reality of people's daily lives. This note obviates the distraction of inserting [*sic*] throughout the direct speech passages.

Helen

The author's first oral history was at the end of the summer of 1969 on the Granger. Since that time of the tape did not include Granger who was someone who had been in the author's life.

"I have made conscience
 my guide and trail. She has
 lived in the Grange and
 seen much of the evolution
 through her own
 eyes for readers than a

The winners were given
certificates and monetary
prizes, on October 22
at the Grange, with

1. The first step is to identify the problem.
 2. The second step is to define the problem.
 3. The third step is to analyze the problem.
 4. The fourth step is to develop a solution.
 5. The fifth step is to implement the solution.
 6. The sixth step is to evaluate the solution.
 7. The seventh step is to monitor the solution.
 8. The eighth step is to maintain the solution.
 9. The ninth step is to improve the solution.
 10. The tenth step is to document the solution.

Helen Peck: I Stopped Feeling Sorry for Myself²

The author's first oral history interviews dealt with Helen Peck. As the researcher neared the end of the summer of 2001, she was still casting about for a suitable subject for a paper on the Grange, something or someone who would reduce the enormous scale and breadth of the topic down to a human, manageable size. She was looking for a memorable Granger who seemed to embody the organization's philosophy and highest ideals, someone who had been a community activist over a long period. Beulah and Roland Winter, the author's then primary Grange contacts, suggested Helen Peck, the matriarch, muse, conscience, and visionary of Fredonia Grange who was then ninety-eight and quite frail. She had lived in Calhoun County all her life and had been a mainstay in the Grange and the community since her early adulthood. Her life had spanned much of the evolution of the Grange. Tracing the Grange's development and change through her own seemed to be a manageable approach, one that might have more meaning for readers than a mere recitation of facts, figures, and names.

The Winters were glad to share their thoughts on Helen Peck, remembering her achievements and her influence upon them. The author interviewed each of them, separately, on October 22, 2001. Beulah referred the author to Athol and Helen Hazen, of Fredonia Grange, who had been friends of Helen Peck for nearly fifty years. They also

² Unless explicitly noted, this sketch of Helen Peck's life is based on: Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Mary LaFountain, active in the Grange for decades, community activist, musician, daughter of Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Reuben LaFountain, active in the Grange for decades, community activist, builder extraordinaire, son-in-law of Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Virginia (Ginny) Van Sickle, Grange

graduate with the author

There was concern that Hele's

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agreed to talk with the author and share their perspectives, doing so on October 25, 2001. There was concern that Helen Peck, herself, might not be strong enough or have enough short-term memory to withstand an interview. The Hazens, in particular, suggested that the author contact Mary LaFountain, one of Helen Peck's younger daughters, with whom she then lived. Mary's husband, Reuben, was terminally ill with cancer and her caring for him was consuming. Reuben did have times of remission, however, and the Hazens thought that if the author were able to speak with her then, she could add additional texture to the fabric of Helen Peck's life.

The author called Mary LaFountain on Sunday, October 28, 2001, to ask if she might agree to an interview to talk about her mother; Mary replied by asking the author why she did not ask the questions of Helen Peck herself. The author was thrilled at the prospect; she explained that she had not asked to do this initially since the other interviewees had been concerned that an interview would be too much for her mother. Mary explained that her mother's short-term memory was poor, but that she could remember things of fifty and sixty years ago as though they were yesterday. Since it was these past memories in which the author was most interested, Helen's lack of recent memories would pose no problem. Mary told the author that her mother's best times were on Tuesdays and Fridays from about 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Also, she did tire rather easily. Helen was visiting another of her daughters, Ginny Van Sickle, right then, but would be back for the week of November 5, 2001. The author made an appointment to go to see Helen on

supporter for decades, community activist, musician, daughter of Helen Peck, e-mail to author, June 23, 2002, in author's possession.

2229 November 6, 2001

informed Van that she was

The first thing I noticed
 when I stepped out of the
 train was the smell of
 fresh air. It felt like I
 had been in a closed room
 for years. The sun was
 shining brightly, and the
 birds were singing. I
 took a deep breath and
 felt a sense of peace.
 I had finally found a
 place where I could
 breathe.

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THESE ARE THE RESULTS OF THE
RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
AND THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
IN CONNECTION WITH THE
RECENT ACTS OF VIOLENCE
AND THE DESTRUCTION OF
PROPERTY IN THE
CITY OF NEW YORK.

The following table shows the results of the survey for the year 1998. The data is presented in a table with 4 columns: Country, Number of respondents, Percentage of respondents, and Comments.

Country	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Comments
USA	10	100%	
Canada	5	100%	
UK	3	100%	
France	2	100%	
Germany	1	100%	
Italy	1	100%	
Spain	1	100%	
Japan	1	100%	
China	1	100%	
India	1	100%	
South Africa	1	100%	
Other countries	1	100%	

Tuesday, November 6, 2001. In order to keep from tiring her mother, the author promised Mary that she would keep the interview to an hour.³

³The first four oral history interviews had gone well. Helen Peck had clearly had a profound impact on the lives of the four interviewees. The author's equipment had all worked well. Because of the locations of the interviews, at a distance from power sources, she had run her tape recorder with batteries. When she went to interview Helen Peck, the author was excited and filled with anticipation. This was a stroke of luck that she had not expected. During the previous two weeks, the author had conducted oral history interviews *about* Helen Peck with Beulah and Roland Winter and Athol and Helen Hazen. These were all done in the interviewees' homes. Despite some background interference, the sound quality had come out fairly well. So the author was confident of her equipment and her ability to use it. Mindful of Jeff Charnley's admonitions, she set off for the Helen Peck interview laden with plenty of backup batteries and extra tapes. At the interview, the author met two of Helen Peck's daughters, Mary and Ginny, as well as Helen herself. Knowing that she had to work quickly in order to avoid tiring out Helen, the author accepted Mary and Ginny's help in setting up her equipment. The women suggested using the electrical current adapter; it worked beautifully, powering the tape through the interview. Intent on accomplishing the interview before Helen became too fatigued, the author plunged in—without running a test or noting if the "recording" light was glowing as they spoke.

When the author got home and eagerly attempted to play back the tape, she discovered that it was—*blank!* This was the lowest point of her oral history experiences. What should she do? Here was the focal point of her research to date, a priceless opportunity—lost! She was sick over the loss and angry with herself over her stupidity in being so complacently confident. In the long term, she resolved that if she did any more oral history interviews, she would always set up and check the equipment herself and run a test on it before beginning the actual interview. In the near term, once the shock had worn off, she realized that the opportunity was not completely lost: she had taken copious notes from the interview. Moreover, the entire conversation, less than an hour old, was still fresh in her mind. So she sat down to her computer and spent the rest of the day writing up her notes. The result was a circumscribed reflection of the interview—but nonetheless, a vivid glimpse into the heart and soul of Helen Peck. That, combined with the other interviewees' recollections, etched a silhouette of a remarkable life that had a profound impact on many whose paths she crossed.

The author was unable to interview Helen Peck again—that avenue was closed. She now had a choice: indulge in self-flagellation and refuse to move forward, self-pityingly pronouncing that she was not meant to do oral histories since she had failed to maximize this opportunity. There was a strong inclination to give up in disgust. But she had already seen how liberating subjects found oral history interviews. Most of these people had never been interviewed before. They were, uniformly, a bit nervous when the process began. But then, again universally, they warmed to the experience, carefully considered the questions being asked (many of which dealt with abstractions with which they had never before grappled), and seemed to enjoy the attention, the feeling of being valued and esteemed and of having their opinions matter. They also seemed to find it cathartic to be coaxed and coached into expressing complex, deeply held thoughts and feelings.

Each interview afforded breathtaking insights into the human condition, motivations, the need to bond and connect with others, the necessity of creating community, a sense of worth and purpose. Talking about these things seemed to reify them, helped people better conceptualize their goals and work toward attaining and adapting them. In actuality, then, there really *was* no question: the author had to continue conducting oral history interviews. She did learn something, however, from her mistakes: she has stuck with her resolve and now always sets up and checks her equipment. In addition, she never fails to run a quick test on everything before beginning in earnest. Since the Helen Peck interview, there have been no more tape failures. But any time that the author begins to feel a shade complacent and tempted to circumvent the testing steps, she thinks back to the awful feeling when she realized that the record of Helen Peck's actual voice during the interview was lost. That is always more than enough impetus for her to continue rigorously testing her recording system.

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When the author went to interview Helen Peck on Tuesday, November 6, 2001, she first met Helen's daughter, Mary, and son-in-law, Reuben LaFountain, with whom she lived. Another daughter, Ginny, had stopped by to see her mother that morning. They asked about the author's work and apologized that their mother was not feeling very well that morning. The author gently asked if they thought that their mother was up to the interview. They thought that we should try—they had told their mother about it and she was looking forward to it. They felt that we should proceed, but take the cues from Helen herself—if she seemed to be fading, we would go no further.

When Helen left her farm and came to live with Mary and Reuben, they built an apartment onto the back of their house so that all of them could retain their privacy. The apartment was a large, cheerful room with many windows. Hanging just outside many of these were bird feeders of various types. The room was filled with a bed, table, chairs, other furnishings, and shelves of books and sewing materials.

Helen was sitting at a table with a piece of her latest sewing project. She was wearing a pretty print blouse, loosely buttoned, over a camisole. She also wore slacks and socks—no shoes. Her short, curly hair still showed much brown. She was slim and fairly tall, with bright, alert eyes that looked out at the world from behind bifocals. She appeared remarkably young: looking at her, one would have thought that she was, at most, in her seventies, rather than the ninety-eight that her birth certificate declared. She began by having her daughters show the author her latest sewing project—a gorgeous star quilt that she was piecing by hand. Although her hands were severely gnarled by arthritis, she still did exquisite work.

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Helen asked the author about her project, what she was doing, and why. The author explained her interest in the Grange and community and further noted that whenever people talked about how these topics were embodied in Calhoun County, they invariably mentioned Helen Peck. It seemed that her story would in many ways be a microcosm of these larger entities. So the author was asking Helen to share some of her insights.

Silhouette of a Life

Helen Peck was born in Eckford, Michigan, a village now considered part of Marshall, Michigan, on September 7, 1903, which, she said, “makes me a few years old.” Her father was a tenant farmer: he would “rent” a farm by sharing a portion of the crops that he produced with the farm’s owner. He grew a number of crops. The farm where Helen was born and lived her earliest years had been settled by an unusual pioneer: the man had planted a lovely orchard that was still producing. Every autumn Helen’s father would harvest apples: he would pick them all, lay them around the bases of the trees, and cover them with cornstalks. Then, after he had finished harvesting his other crops, he would uncover the apples, wrap each one in a page from the Montgomery Ward catalogue, pack them in barrels that held a few bushels, and send them off to be sold in places such as Chicago.

During Helen’s youth, farmers with modest means on small farms still did all their own farm work “by hand and by horse”: crops, like corn, were cut by hand; all plowing and transporting of crops was done by horse. They were not generally able to utilize contemporary farm machinery or employ hired help, and so the amount of acreage that they could cultivate was limited. As Helen’s brothers grew older and were able to help her father, the latter, looking to improve his family’s prospects, moved them to a larger

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farm near Albion, Michigan. This was one of the Sheldon Farms, famous in the area for their beauty. It was in Albion that Helen served as president of the 4-H—the first chapter organized in the township. Later that same year, Helen married Emil A. Tech. They moved to and worked a tenant farm in Lee Township in the north-central portion of Calhoun County, near the city of Marshall. By 1933 she had seven children—seven children in nine years, she emphasized.

Also by then, they were in the Depression. Helen says that people who did not live through that time cannot imagine what it was like. Emil worked hard and was good at what he did, so they always had enough to eat, a comfortable home, and clothes to wear. But they had no money. Although they loved agriculture and rural life, Helen and her husband thought that there must be a way for country people to have a better life. That was when, in 1936, Helen and Emil joined the Grange. The next year, in 1937, Helen became involved, through the Grange, with the Calhoun County Fair. From then through the time of the interview, Helen never missed attending the fair.⁴

When World War II started, times were still hard, but there were more economic opportunities. Emil got a job at Eaton Manufacturing, making automobile parts. Since Helen's children were no longer tiny, she, too, got a job. She worked in Battle Creek packing rations—at a Post cereal plant that had been converted for the war effort to produce provisions for the troops overseas. Since the Techs were no longer working their tenant farm full-time, when their lease came up for renewal, the owner said that they must make a choice: farm full-time or leave. Unable to give up the economic benefits of

⁴ Helen was instrumental in having the fair's directorship changed from the township supervisors, who would plow any profits from the fair back into the townships, to an independent fair board, who had the fair's best interests at heart. As she says, "I was always one to speak my mind." Since then, the fair and its

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factory work, the Techs reluctantly left the farm. However, by careful saving, they were able to accumulate enough money to buy their own farm in Eckford Township in 1942. But just when it seemed that life was improving and the family could lead the rural life of their dreams, tragedy struck: Emil was killed in 1947. Unable to keep the farm, Helen was forced to sell and moved to Marshall.

This was a difficult time for Helen. A number of her children, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-three, were still at home and dependent. Helen struggled to keep the family together, at one point working for Beryl Henry, the Calhoun County Extension Agent.⁵ All through the years, Helen maintained her Grange membership. Eventually she met a man from another Grange, Vern Peck, and they “began to keep company.” She married Vern in 1949 and she and her dependent children moved back to a farm to live with him and his bachelor brother, Leon. Helen stayed on that farm into the 1990s, when she, Vern, and Leon were also all in their nineties. Then Vern died; Leon’s death followed about a year later. Helen was unable to maintain the seventeen-room brick farmhouse and the surrounding farm acreage. So she sold the farm, using some of the profits to help her daughter, Mary, and son-in-law, Reuben, build an apartment onto their Marshall home so that Helen could live with them, while allowing everyone to preserve independence and privacy.⁶ Although Helen was no longer able to participate much

grounds have been renewed, improved, expanded, made prosperous. Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001.

⁵ This led to lifelong friendship and fruitful collaboration on Extension, 4-H, and other community projects. Please see note seven.

⁶ Vern Peck died in 1994; Leon Peck’s death followed in 1995; Helen sold the farm in 1996. Ginny Van Sickle, e-mail to author, June 23, 2002, in author’s possession.

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physically in her many community interests and projects, she continued to support them financially, with contributions from proceeds from the farm's sale.⁷

A Perfect Fit

Helen felt that she and the Grange were a perfect fit. Immediately after she joined Partello Grange in 1936, she took charge of the kitchen. In those days, the Granges put on exhibits at the county fairs. During the first year of Helen's membership, Partello Grange's Master wanted a suitable display for the Grange exhibit. As Helen tells it, "this was right up my alley." She went home, made an elaborate motif of crepe paper, and got the job.⁸ Helen became very involved with the Grange very quickly: if there was something that needed doing, she did it. Both Helen and other interviewees candidly admitted that this was sometimes difficult for Helen's children to accept. The children knew that at times, at least, the Grange took precedence in Helen's thoughts, energies, and efforts.⁹ But Helen believed that her Grange involvement was ultimately good for all of them as well, even for those who had no current Grange connections. She claimed

⁷ In addition to contributions to local, county, State, and National Grange projects, Helen has given to her church, the Newton United Methodist Church, to help with renovations, and to the B. E. Henry Building, helping with the latter's maintenance and improvement. The B. E. Henry Building, named in honor of Beryl Henry, former Calhoun County Extension Agent, is a community building built to serve the interests and needs of rural groups throughout Calhoun County. Helen played a fundamental role in getting it built, and for decades served on its board. B. E. Henry Association, *History of B. E. Henry Community Building Association, Marshall, Michigan: 1950-1972*, miscellaneous board meeting minutes and newspaper clippings, loose-leaf notebook (Marshall, Michigan: B. E. Henry Building Association, n.d., ca. 1972).

⁸ Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001.

⁹ Mary LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Reuben LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001. Mary LaFountain described herself as a "table baby." When she was young, parents did not leave their children with baby sitters, nor did they forego Grange meetings. They would take the children with them, and when it got late, they would put the children in a room that was not being used, laying them on a table, so that they could sleep. Upon hearing this story, the author asked Mary if parents had placed anything on the table to soften it. She replied that they did not. "I can see that the Grange makes tough people." "That's right."

Initially, when the author did not know that Helen Peck could be interviewed, fearing that she was too frail, both Helen and Athol Hazen thought that Mary LaFountain would be the best of Helen's children to talk with, since she herself is a Granger and has the most knowledge of and positive feelings for the

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proudly that although her children may not have understood at the time, they were now the same types of people: strong people, doers, take-charge folks.¹⁰

When Helen married Vern and moved to the Peck family farm, she changed her Grange membership to Fredonia Grange, the Grange closest to her new home, the one to which Vern and Leon belonged. Through the years she held a number of positions in the Grange, among them Master of Fredonia Grange, Matron of the Junior Grange, and, at various times, Lecturer, Treasurer, and Chaplain of the Pomona Grange. Helen also served as Michigan State Grange Women's Activities Director, stepping down when her mother's health failed and she wanted to spend more time with her.¹¹

When asked what being a Grange member meant to her, Helen paused, looking off into space, peering back into time. Then she smiled at the recollection, looked into the author's eyes, and began to speak. She said that she had wanted to continue on in school

Grange. Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001; Athol Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

¹⁰ Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001. Helen Hazen offers an additional insight into Helen Peck's indomitable will. She tells of an incident that took place when Helen was at the Calhoun County Fair, peeling potatoes for the Grange food concession. "I remember, oh she must have been in her eighties," and a younger man whom she knew came in, "and he said to her, he said, knelt down beside her, he said 'How much longer are you going to do this?' And he called it nonsense. And she said, 'Just as long as I can, and if I die down here peeling potatoes, I will die happy!' So that's the kind of a person she is, even yet." Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

¹¹ Tom Isham, "Vern and Helen Peck: At Home in the Grange," *Community AD-VISOR*, January 18, 1984; Helen Peck, "Home Economics Committee Report," *Journal of Proceedings* (Eighty-fifth Annual Convention, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, Armory, Cadillac, Michigan, October 15, 16, 17, 18, 1958): 61-65; Helen Peck, "Home Economics Report," *Journal of Proceedings* (Eighty-sixth Annual Convention, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, Bancroft Hotel, Saginaw, Michigan, October 20-21-22-23-24, 1959): 77-82; Helen Peck, "Home Economics Report," *Journal of Proceedings* (Ninety-second Annual Session, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, St. Joseph School, St. Johns, Michigan, October 20-21-22-23, 1965): 41-44; Helen Peck, "Home Economics Report," *Journal of Proceedings* (Ninety-third Annual Session, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, Griswold Auditorium, Allegan, Michigan, October 19, 20, 21, 22, 1966): 39-41; Helen Peck, "Interim C. W. A. (Home Economics) Committee Report," *Journal of Proceedings* (Ninety-fifth Annual Session, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, Ridge Auditorium, Adrian, Michigan, October 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 1968): 43-45; Helen Peck, "Interim C. W. A. Report 1968-1969," *Journal of Proceedings* (Ninety-sixth Annual Session, Michigan State Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, Armory, Ionia, Michigan, October 15, 16, 17, 18, 1969): 37-39; Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Athol Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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with her whole heart, but that her family was too poor to permit that. There was just no way that her father could afford to send her to high school in town. But he did not think that she should be out of school at such a young age, so she repeated the eighth grade, although she did not have to take the examinations again. She always felt very inferior and secretly grieved. She joined the Grange and found it a perfect fit. She became the Women's Activities Director for Fredonia Grange, then for the State Grange. When she held that office, she had to do a lot of correspondence. In time, she noticed that her writing was more lucid and had fewer grammatical errors and misspellings than most that she received. At that point, she said, "I stopped feeling sorry for myself!" She finally lost her feelings of inadequacy. She credited the Grange with making this possible.

The Gift of Music

Music plays an important part in the Grange: every meeting incorporates music, to some degree. Helen's musical talents made an important contribution to the Grange for many years. Helen came from a musical family: her father was a country fiddler. When Helen's parents married, her grandmother gave her parents a pump organ as a wedding gift. Neither of Helen's parents was able to take music lessons: her father wanted something more for Helen. When Helen was a very young child, still living in Eckford, a local music teacher would take the train out from Marshall once a week to teach a group of children that included her. As Helen's skill grew, her father traded the organ for a piano. When the family moved to Albion, Helen took lessons from a woman who taught music at Albion College. Her father also enrolled her in a music correspondence course. Lessons consisted of a history of each piece, exercises to work through, drills on chords, etc. The lessons grew increasingly complex. Although Helen remarked ruefully that she

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never did complete the course (it had levels from first grade through the end of high school), she learned enough that she was able to teach music in three country schools as an adult. In addition, she gave private music lessons.¹²

Helen also played for the Grange at local, county, and state levels. Memories of Helen's playing at Grange functions were among other interviewees' most vivid. Up into her eighties, or perhaps even into her nineties, Helen continued to play for Fredonia Grange and the Pomona Grange. All of Helen's children play musical instruments. They never had formal lessons, but picked up music on their own, with Helen ready to correct them and give them guidance. Through the time of the interview, the family would gather every Thursday afternoon to make music, taking turns as host. Helen always presided, sometimes playing the piano in accompaniment.¹³

¹² Among others, Helen taught Athol and Helen Hazen's children. Whenever the children went for lessons, Helen would give them some of her famous molasses cookies. Everyone interviewed raved about those cookies, tasting them again as they spoke. Athol laments that his children did not continue with their music. As he remarks, he guesses that the lessons' main attraction was the cookies: without them there was no incentive for the children to continue. Athol Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

¹³ Athol Hazen notes that Helen had a rare gift: her piano playing was among the easiest to which march—very important in Grange ritual. He tells the story of being at a National Grange Convention with Helen Peck and hearing a special march connected with the seventh degree. Helen asked the National High Priest of Demeter, who is the leader of the ritual work of the Grange, if the march had been published—she wanted to get a copy. He said that it had not. So Helen listened carefully, and when she returned to Michigan, she was able to play it by heart. Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Mary LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Reuben LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001.

Helen Hazen shares some vignettes about Helen Peck's music-making that reveal something of the latter's will and attitudes. "She must have been—I know she was in her eighties when she was still playing the piano for us at Grange. Finding a piano player is not the easiest thing to do. And her poor fingers are so with arthritis, so bent and out of shape, and—but she was still doing it for us, and we—oh gosh, maybe she was doing it up until she was almost ninety, but then it just got—it was too much for her. She'd set up there on the piano bench, finally we got her convinced that she didn't have to sit on the piano bench, that she could set on a chair next to the piano, it would be more comfortable, and she did that for a while. But finally she just said, 'I can't do it anymore.'"

The other memory clearly evoked strong emotion from Helen Hazen. "She made me feel real good. She has atrial fibrillation, and her heart will go real fast. Doesn't tell anybody much of anything. And I'm an ex-RN, and we were at a Grange meeting, and she was playing the piano, and she gets up and walks out and goes like this to me [shows a beckoning sign]. And I follow her out and she says, 'My heart's doing that funny thing again.' And I said, 'Should I call somebody, do you want to go to the hospital?' 'What? No, I'll just lay down.' Rolled up a couple of coats as a pillow, we had a set of chairs right there in the

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A Vibrant, Comforting Past

When Helen first joined Fredonia Grange, they had no hall. They used to meet in the township hall. Then, one day, the Grange Master and the township supervisor got into a “tussle.” So they were no longer able to meet at the township site. For a time they met at members’ homes. There was an old church in the area that had been empty for about ten years. The church was headquartered in Lansing. Vern was instrumental in finding out if the church were for sale. It had an old schoolhouse adjacent. Helen thought that it is remarkable that in all the years in which it stood abandoned, not a single window was broken. This, despite all the delinquency of which one hears. She spoke of the lovely stained glass windows, how beautiful they were from the inside with the sun shining through, bathing the room in soft, diffused light.

As soon as they took over the building in 1947, all the members went to work. The men put on a new roof. The women did a thorough cleaning. They found a building with a maple, hardwood floor that they bought. Then the members worked all winter refinishing and laying the floor. Helen said that to this day they have the loveliest floor. She chuckled, asserting that she always said that Fredonia Grange is the most beautiful Grange in Michigan. “And you have seen quite a number of Granges.” “Yes, I have.” In response to the comment that it must have been a cold job, working on the floor over the winter, she replied that it was not—that they always had a fire in the cook stove. She also

other room, and she laid down. I paced the floor, and debated whether I should do something, or just *be* there. And ah, when she said ‘No, it’ll be all right,’ you just kinda had to believe her. And ah, finally she said, ‘It’s getting better now.’ And she held her hand out, and I took hold of her hand and she said, ‘You know, you’re a comfort.’ And *nobody* could’ve said *anything* any better. I was a nervous *wreck*. But ‘you’re a comfort.’ Didn’t want to disturb the meeting. Just ‘it’ll be all right in a minute. Just, just stay here with me, and it’ll be all right.’ And it was all right, it was all right.” Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001. Ginny Van Sickle comments that it was tachycardia that caused her mother’s rapid heartbeats. Whatever the condition, the impact of this incident on Helen Hazen does not change.

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noted that they had excavated a basement beneath the church/hall, and finished it with concrete, where they now had their kitchen and dining room.

The interviewer asked Helen who she thought were the most remarkable, the most memorable people whom she had known at the Fredonia Grange. She answered immediately, "My husband, Vern Peck." For many years, he kept the Grange going. If it were not for him, there would no longer be a Fredonia Grange.¹⁴

Helen thought a bit more, and told a story that had stayed in her mind through the years. She said that there was a German family who had belonged to their Grange. She could not remember to what church they belonged, but they observed Lent by abstaining from meat part of the time. The Grange was having a special dinner at which ham was served. A platter of ham was being passed around the table. When it came to the little boy of this German family, he took a piece. His father said something to him, sharply, in German. The little boy cringed and made as if to put the slice of ham back. Then the father, seeing his son's stricken reaction, softened and said, in English, "If it does not kill you, it will probably not kill me, either." So he, too, took a slice of ham. That little boy is now a grown man who lives in Lansing. Helen had not seen him in at least fifteen years. His sister lives in Battle Creek; Helen had not seen her in probably twenty years. Brother and sister had decided to meet at the Calhoun County Fair over the previous summer. Helen had lunch with them. It was one of the high points of the fair for her.

¹⁴ This sentiment has been echoed many times through the intervening years in conversations that the author has had with people who have been involved with Fredonia Grange for a long time, such as the Hazens and the Winters. They attest that on several occasions, when Fredonia Grange members could not scrape together the necessary dues to be sent on to the state and national Granges that would allow them to continue to be designated a legitimate Grange, Vern Peck made up the shortfall from his own funds. Whenever Fredonia was in need, Vern, his brother, Leon, and Helen were there to fill the void. Although he has been gone for a decade, his presence remains a powerful spiritual force within Fredonia Grange.

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A Muse and a Visionary

Helen kept a collection of books on her table. Several of these pertained to the Grange. As she talked about the ritual, she shuffled through them, but could not find exactly what she sought. She did, however, give the author two books on the Grange: *The Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, by Charles M. Gardner, and *The Grange in Michigan*, by Fred Trump.¹⁵ This led to a discussion on reading in general. Helen was a voracious reader. She was currently reading a contemporary best seller about President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his involvement with the espionage community during World War II. She asked the author if she liked to read and when the author answered yes, asked if she had read any Jan Karon. When the author shook her head, Helen asked if she knew who Jan Karon was. When the author again shook her head, Helen exclaimed, “My goodness, woman—where have you been all your life!” She leaped up from the table with amazing energy, grabbed her walker, and hurried over to her bookshelves where she began to scan the shelves. As she did so, she continually talked to herself, under her breath. After a few minutes, she returned to the table and the seated author, proffering a book. It was *A Light in the Window*, by Jan Karon, book two in the Mitford Years series. With relief, the author was able to say that she *had* heard of Mitford and Father Tim, its hero. Helen apologized that she could not locate book one—she explained that she must have lent it to someone. So she pressed this one on the author instead, saying that it was easy, entertaining reading. The author demurred, saying

¹⁵ The author has them still, doubly cherished because they were Helen Peck's. They have proved invaluable to this study.

that she did not know when she would be able to read and return it. Helen would have none of that: she was insistent, saying that the author could keep it as long as she liked.¹⁶

Helen thought that the Grange ritual was beautiful and that as many people as possible should be exposed to it—even non-Grange members. At Vern's and her instigation, Fredonia Grange had for some time allowed nonmembers into their meetings, where they could observe the ritual. Part of this may have been a proselytizing tool, but part also stemmed from a sincere desire to share something of perceived great value as widely as possible.¹⁷ Helen thought that the secrecy part of the Grange was now ridiculous. She was delighted when the National Master replied to her letter castigating secrecy as outmoded with the words, "Dear Sister Peck, as my grandchildren would say, you are right on!"¹⁸ Helen believed that he shared her opinions, but that he had to be careful because he served all Grangers, among them those who are bound to tradition. Helen said that she was ninety-eight years young, and that she thought that one must change to keep up with this century. She said that she imagined that there may have been a purpose for the secrecy back when the Grange was first organized in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, but that now it was a century out of date.

Helen was a visionary, progressive, forward-looking woman. Although the past was vivid to her, she did not wish or choose to live in it. She was passionately committed to

¹⁶ The author will always treasure this: a reminder of a beautiful autumn afternoon with a vibrant, prescient lady who was ninety-eight years young.

¹⁷ Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Mary LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Reuben LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Athol Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001. Helen Peck wrote a special ritual ceremony, explaining the significance of the seven Grange degrees, to commemorate the National Grange's centenary in 1967. It was performed that year at the Michigan State Grange Convention in Sturgis, Michigan. Helen Peck, "One-Hundredth Anniversary of the National Grange," in *Grange Memories: To Commemorate the 125th Anniversary of the Michigan State Grange, 1998*, edited by Beulah L. Winter, Chairman, Florence Bixby, Eugene Buel, Dale Moore, Iris Stout, and Luanna Swainston (Haslett, Michigan: Michigan State Grange, 1998), 2–3.

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Denouement

The tape ran out at just the right time. Mary called in, asking if we were done, and ushered in a young man and woman, offspring of Ginny's, from Indiana. They were up visiting family; Ginny had told them that the interview should be over in an hour. Reuben had been gone during the interview, but returned as the author was preparing to leave. Mary asked the author if she had gotten what she wanted and needed from her mother. The author replied that it was all wonderful, but that she hoped that she had not tired Helen too much. Mary responded that at ninety-eight, it probably was not a bad thing to have something over which to be tired.

Like Helen, Mary and Reuben were very committed to helping the Grange change to keep it relevant for society. This was all the more remarkable, since Reuben was then very ill with cancer: lymphoma and leukemia. That was another reason that the author

¹⁹ Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001.

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had not known if she would be able to interview Helen Peck; at one point, Reuben had not been expected to last the summer. Yet, although he was clearly dying, Reuben continued to expend much of his remaining time and energy on the Grange. He remained an ardent proselytizer on its behalf. When people asked him how he could live in town and still belong to the Grange, he was quick to point out that the Grange should be a part of everyone's life because everyone who eats is vitally interconnected with farmers.

The author pointed out how poorly known the Grange was outside its traditional circles. Mary, Reuben, and she discussed different options for getting the word out: press, other media, Internet. As was true with Helen, Mary and Reuben believed that the Grange ritual should be as widely shared as possible. They asked the author if she had read it. When they learned that she had not and that Helen Peck had not been able to locate a text, Mary gave the author her copy of the *Manual: Subordinate Grange*.²⁰

Legacy

Helen Peck has had a profound influence on many people's lives. It was the love and regard that Beulah and Roland Winter and Athol and Helen Hazen had for Helen that inspired this aspect of the study. Yet each of these individuals interpreted Helen Peck's life and teachings differently, in a way that accorded with a personal Grange philosophy. In terms of the Grange, in general, the Winters tend to be more conservative: they view themselves as *keepers* of the flame, and are cautious about changes to the Grange. The Hazens are more progressive: one of their chief concerns is *passing on* the torch to future

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ This has been another invaluable tool. National Grange, *Manual of Subordinate Granges*.

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A Great Encourager

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generations, widening the Grange's reach, helping it to remain relevant.²¹ Beyond the overlap and commonalties of their collective memories of Helen Peck, each had a unique perspective on what knowing Helen Peck had meant.

A Great Encourager

Beulah Winter had known Helen Peck since the 1940s. Their first contacts were probably when they were both working in the Calhoun County Pomona Grange. Their friendship deepened when they both held office in the State Grange. Beulah commented upon Helen's intuitive understanding of human nature—revealing her thoughts, as well.

I was elected Lecturer of the State Grange in 1964, and at that time Helen was Women's Activities Director. And so, also at that time the State Grange would go from what was then called district to district and cover the entire state, including the Upper Peninsula, to present the various Grange programs, to meet people and to try to motivate them to work with some of the programs, such as Women's Activities and the others, to take a lot of information to them. But one of the things—I was Lecturer of the State Grange, which meant that I was Program Director, and it was quite a busy department, a lot of things happened. And I planned programs and promoted programs, so that Granges would have things to work with, and they would do the same thing. And one year I was saying, I don't really know what to put into my State Program that would really work, that people would be interested in, that perhaps would cause growth within the local Granges. And Helen said, "Give them something they don't know they want." And if you think about it you think, "Oh wow, what is it that they don't know they want?" I have never forgotten that, and it works. And when I was Lecturer of the Calhoun County Pomona Grange, I always remembered that and had programs that I *guess* people really enjoyed. But if you think about it, you can *apply* that to other things, too, besides the Grange.²²

²¹ As with any sort of categorization, this one is somewhat artificial and over-simplistic. Certainly the Winters want the Grange to continue, and are constantly seeking to recruit new members. The Hazens, for their part, are proud of the Grange's heritage. Still, the Winters *do* tend to look at change cautiously, while the Hazens are more focused on change and adaptation than on the past. Beulah Winter, interviews by author, July 19, 2001, August 24, 2001, September 7, 2001, September 26, 2001, October 19, 2001, October 22, 2001, November 1, 2001, November 30, 2001, Marshall, Michigan and Ceresco, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Roland Winter, interviews by author, July 19, 2001, August 24, 2001, September 7, 2001, September 26, 2001, October 19, 2001, October 22, 2001, November 1, 2001, November 30, 2001, Marshall, Michigan and Ceresco, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

²² Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001.

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Beulah mused that it seems that everything that Helen did, she did well. She recalled Helen's prowess at cooking: those delicious molasses cookies, the potato salad that has become a Fredonia staple, the way that she always prepared ahead and froze meals for Vern and Leon when Grange business took her away from the farm. Beulah spoke of Helen's remarkable sewing ability: in addition to quilts, she made many of her own clothes, sewed for charity. When Helen was not Michigan State Grange Women's Activities Director, she would enter their sewing contests; although all the other women tried, good-naturedly, to beat her, they seldom could. Then there were the ladies' dresses for the fifth degree, the year of the Michigan State Grange's one-hundredth anniversary, when the convention was held in Marshall.

But for the degree dresses . . . we made them . . . they were like a Victorian dress made out of . . . polyester crepe material, which looked pretty silky, and for the bodice of the dress there was a yoke . . . that . . . had little tucks in it, and we all looked at the pattern—I'm sure Helen chose the pattern—and we looked at that, and we thought, "Ooh, I don't know if I want to do that yoke or not. It looks pretty difficult." But in the process, Helen made all the yokes for the dresses—would have been maybe fifteen or twenty, gave them the yokes to be passed to the other people like myself that were doing the sewing. But that just really made that dress, it had little buttons down the front of the yoke, and had lace at the neck, a stand-up neck with lace, and lace on the sleeves. The dresses fit everyone that wore one perfectly . . . and they were just absolutely beautiful dresses on each of the women who wore them. Helen making the yokes was very typical of her leadership and how she helped people. Had it been left up to me, I probably would just have had a plain top on that dress, [laughter] because the yokes would have been quite difficult to make.²³

At the end of our interview, Beulah reflected upon the influence that she believes that Helen Peck's life has had on her and the community. As she thought deeply and spoke, it was obvious that she was choking back emotion.

²³ Ibid.

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Well, Helen has certainly led by example, and that's true in my own life. She's a tremendous *encourager*. Well, I've mentioned the B. E. Henry Building, that it was named after Beryl Henry, and probably Helen, at least except for the Peck Family Kitchen, doesn't have any building named after her, but she's no doubt touched this community in as many important ways as anyone else who may have a building built after them or possibly a college dormitory named after them. I think she's made a tremendous difference in the lives of anyone—all the people that she's ever touched, whether it is her family, Grange members, or people around the community. I think that her interaction with the various ages of people, myself included—would be more important even than the money that she's given. The way, the *way* she's touched people's lives. And I would include myself in that. She just—is an outstanding person, has been an outstanding person . . . who has worked well with people, who has and does love people, and certainly that has made a lot of difference.²⁴

A Mentor and an Exemplar of Community Values

Roland Winter is a quiet man. When he is in a group, he is apt to be silent and let others do the talking. But because his interview was conducted one-on-one, this study has been enriched by his carefully formulated philosophy. The Grange has been perhaps *the* major influence in Roland's life. Those people who have exemplified the Grange to him have had a commensurately strong impact.

Well, I guess I'd say that the Grange has always been a big part of our life, and, my life. I grew up in the Grange and was there from the time I was a small child. When I became involved in the Grange, and some of the leadership of the Grange, there's always people I guess that you kind of look up to, and try to help you along as you go along, and Vern and Helen were those people in this county that we kind of looked up to. Vern and Helen it seemed like were always there whenever we needed advice,

²⁴ Since the 1960s, Fredonia Grange has run a food concession at the Calhoun County Fair: it is one of the major ways that they raise funds to maintain their Grange and give back to the community. For most of these years, members of the Grange would cook the food at home or at the B. E. Henry Building, and then have to carry the heavy kettles of food a substantial distance to the site of the food concession. Finally, this got to be too much for some of the members, and they decided that they should ask the fair board if they could build a kitchen on the fairgrounds, adjoining their concession site. The board approved, and the Grange set about raising the necessary funds. Helen Peck donated \$15,000 toward the project. When the kitchen was completed, Fredonia Grange members voted to name it "The Peck Family Kitchen"—not so much to commemorate Helen's onetime generous donation, but to recognize the decades in which Helen, Vern, and Leon had sustained Fredonia Grange. As several interviewees said, without the Pecks, the Grange would have failed. Beulah's reference to having a memorial college dormitory is an allusion to Mary Mayo, a famous Michigan Grange woman who was active during the second half of the nineteenth century and for whom Mary Mayo Hall at Michigan State University is named. Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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Photo & text interview by

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whenever I needed advice about something, either talk to Helen or Vern. I knew that they always wanted to do things right and the way things should be done and . . . they were just seemed to us natural leaders. And they would give us the advice, and we tried to follow their advice, and just wanted to be that type of people I guess.²⁵

To Roland, Helen was the archetype of community values, of community service. He is humbly aware of the number of lives that Helen has touched, and hopes that he might do the same for even a small number of people.

Well, I think it's been a good . . . influence. This is a rural community, and you look at rural people, you think about, at least I guess I think about people that are honest and friendly and. . . . I guess I think that Helen typified all of those things, all of those things that are good about a community and about people. And as far as her giving, she was always, whenever there was something to do that needed being done, she was involved in her community. Whatever was needed, I'm sure she would volunteer for anything that she thought needed to be done, and she was a great community person. And I'm sure that rubbed off on us, and on me, and a lot of other people that she was involved with. A lot of people in the Grange today, older people like us know that, you know, that were really involved with her, but as the younger ones come in, we hope that we can rub off on them also. . . . We hope that we can do some of the things she did. We looked up to her, and we hope that others can look up to us. We hope we can give as good counsel as Helen did.²⁶

A Void Too Painful to Contemplate

Both Athol and Helen Hazen told stories of how Helen Peck and Athol regarded one another as mother and son.²⁷ Athol spoke knowledgeably and fluently about Helen's early involvement with the Grange, about what a dynamic presence she has been. He continually said that without Helen and Vern's support, Fredonia Grange would no longer exist. He recalled that Helen and Vern Peck took him and Helen Hazen "under their wings," making it possible for them to become deeply involved in the Grange very quickly. Athol credits Helen and Vern's influence with inspiring the Hazens to go to

²⁵ Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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their first National Grange Convention in Colorado Springs, Colorado in November 1957. While they were in Colorado it snowed, which was beautiful. But as they set out for home, driving (flying was much rarer then), they became snowbound in Lincoln, Nebraska. They bought chains for the car tires, but the trip home was still arduous.

We vowed we'd never drive through Nebraska again in November, but we did . . . quite a few years later, it was in Denver, the National Grange session, and Helen and Vern went with us. And we stopped at various landmarks, went to a bird sanctuary. They were very conservation-minded people, both Helen and Vern. And they enjoyed the ducks, the geese, the swans that were there. Vern and Helen were involved with the Calhoun County Conservation District, Vern was a director, their farm was chosen . . . as one of the premier farms by them in the county. They got trips to Arizona because of the involvement there. And ah, just well-rounded people. Active, interesting people to meet, to talk to. And staunch Grangers.²⁸

Helen's apparent ability to handle any situation was etched so strongly into Athol's mind, that he seemed unable to accept any diminishment in Helen's capacity, incapable of contemplating a future without Helen as a part of it.

As I say, even today, it is a pleasure to know her, and to know what she's capable of doing, and to talk to her about her experiences. Not only from the fact of her lifetime but also from the time that we've known her. Because she was born in this area. She was raised on a farm that's about a mile from here. And ah, again, they were the kind of farmers that had to use everything that they could get. They didn't throw anything away, they used it, and she continued that type of philosophy all of her life.²⁹

Athol spoke at length about the Grange in general and Fredonia Grange in particular.³⁰ Although it seemed that he might avoid answering the question of how knowing Helen has influenced his life, suddenly, toward the end of the interview, in the midst of considering the projects that Helen might "dream up" for the Grange someday, he began to talk about Helen's impact.

²⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Athol's was the longest of the interviews dealing specifically with Helen Peck.

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I think one of the things that—by knowing Pecks and knowing the Grange, with the job I had, was instrumental in my being able to take over as Supervisor of Eckford Township for a certain length of time. . . . It's what I learned through the Grange. My speaking ability wasn't very good until I got into the Grange, when I had to get up and talk, that type of thing, so. . . . And because of their involvement, we did become leaders in the Grange, and continue to be leaders in the Grange. And will continue to be, hopefully passing this on to the younger generation so they can, too, be leaders.³¹

You Can Do It! You Can Do It!

All the Grange interviewees emphasized that the Grange is like a family. Despite the fraternal unity, one of its strengths has been and is that every voice has a chance to be heard. People in the Grange can agree to disagree.³² Yet as in any family, there are occasional murmurs of discontent. Committed Grange members attempt to live by its principles, but they are human, and discord can arise, such as when some people fill strong leadership roles. Helen Hazen addresses such an instance.

Somebody said, whatever Vern and Helen wanted, got done; well, it needed to be done. Somebody had to come up with the ideas. And Helen was good at it, and she was good as State Women's Activities Director.³³

Helen Hazen is the quieter member of the couple. Several times during her interview, she turned to her husband for suggestions. The interviewer gently remonstrated that this interview was for *her* thoughts and perceptions. Moderate encouragement led her to share warm, revealing anecdotes, many pertaining to her work with Helen Peck on projects through the years.

³¹ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001.

³² Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001; Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

³³ Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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She had some nieces in Chicago—not nieces, granddaughters. And they would come up to grandma's, and go to the fair. And she put them to peeling potatoes one time. [Laughs at the memory.] And she really sputtered, she did not want square potatoes! "Somebody should teach those girls how to peel potatoes!" [Helen Hazen and interviewer laugh.] One of our ladies was fussing the other day and she said, "I do like that woman, I really do, but she is hard to work for. Here we're setting here peeling potatoes, and she'll say, 'You're peeling those kind of thick, aren't ya, May?'" [Again, Helen and interviewer laugh.] And also, when—one time, she wanted a dishrag wrung out. Handed her a dishrag, she said, "When I say I want it wrung out, I want it wrung out, you do it this way!" [Helen Hazen pantomimes wringing out tightly. Laughs.] But I'm not giving you an impression that she was hard to work with, she wasn't. But there was a right way and a wrong way, and ah, you pretty much did it her way. She wasn't mean about it but, ah. . . . And we could laugh about it, and enjoy it, and enjoy working with her because she knew what she was doing. And if you were preparing food for the fair, it was done right. And if she was in charge of the State Grange Women's Activities Committee, it was done right, and it was done well. Ah, she was a special lady, a special lady.³⁴

These stories and others provide glimpses into a strong character, a hard-working, take-charge person who demanded much from people, not least of all herself.

Helen Hazen's personality, life in the Grange, and vision of the Grange's present and future differ diametrically from Beulah Winter's. Despite this, like Beulah, she believes that one of Helen Peck's most important legacies is that of encourager.³⁵

Well, she convinced me that I could do things that I never thought I could do. You know, "I can't do *that*, I can't *do* that." "Oh, yes you can. You can be Junior Leader. You can do it!" And working with her at the B. E. Henry and for the fair, one year she said, "I've had enough of this, you're gonna do it." And I said, "No I'm not." And she said, "Oh yeah, I'm done." And so, I—if anybody had ever told me years ago that I was in charge of the cooking for that booth, I'd a told them they were *crazy*! You know, "You can do it, you can do it!" And I did it. And now it's somebody else's turn. And she's done that to other people, too, you know, "You can do it!" Encourage you to—I don't know whether you'd say stretch your wings or what, but always, always ready to encourage and help.³⁶

It was Helen Hazen who offered an apt crystallization of Helen Peck's vision and life:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001; Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001. Although they may agree on the message, their interpretations differ.

³⁶ Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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Within a week of her hospitalization, all the symptoms they thought were going up if there were a infection, she asked the doctor's colon—and, in fact, the bowel, and further, passing throughout her system. She remained calm and talk about Helen's physical health. But's presence has come the author, who has pro-

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The Grange is changing, and she has advocated change for some time, because we're losing members. And she said some of this stuff—of course, the Grange was a secret organization, it started as a secret organization, but it was back after the Civil War when the railroads were just—gypping the farmers, the farmers couldn't ship their produce, they couldn't make a living at it, and you had to have a secret. . . . But she said, "We don't need that anymore. We don't *need* a password. What do we need a *password* for?" So even though she's that age, she's progressive, she's "Let's get on with it, let's bring it up to today, not a hundred years ago." That's what kind of a woman she is, and has been all her life. Tremendous lady.³⁷

Coda

Within a week of her interview, in November 2001, Helen Peck was rushed to the hospital, critically ill. No one expected her to live, so her family gathered around her to say what they thought would be their last good-byes. But Helen had no intention of giving up if there were any alternatives. Despite her advanced age and frail physical condition, she asked the doctors to try surgery. They did so, removing a blockage from Helen's colon—and, incredibly, she survived. A biopsy revealed that Helen had cancer of the bowel, and further tests indicated that it had spread to her liver and was rapidly advancing throughout her body. Helen was sent to a nursing home to recuperate from the surgery.³⁸ She remained comfortable, alert, and eager to receive visitors, share her love with them, and talk about the Grange.³⁹

Helen's physical body died on December 29, 2001.⁴⁰ But in many ways, Helen Peck's presence has continued, her legacy lives. One of the people whom Helen inspired is the author, who has presented Helen's story in several venues, illustrating it with

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ginny Van Sickle, e-mail to author, June 23, 2002, in author's possession.

³⁹ Beulah Winter, e-mails to author, November 22, 2001, November 23, 2001, November 26, 2001, December 5, 2001, in author's possession; Beulah Winter, interview by author, November 30, 2001, Ceresco, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Roland Winter, interview by author, November 30, 2001, Ceresco, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁴⁰ "We all dread the day when she leaves us—she'll leave a big hole!" Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001; Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, December 29, 2001, in author's possession.

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artifacts—old photos, the last quilt block that Helen made in the autumn before she died at ninety-eight. A number of Helen’s family members and friends were able to be present at one of the presentations. After this talk, the author returned the items to Helen’s daughter, Ginny, who had so generously lent her priceless treasures. As the quilt block was returned, Ginny and Mary reminisced, recalling that last summer of their mother’s life, when they all quilted together. Inspired by their mother, who did not start quilting until she was sixty-five but who managed to complete thirty-eight quilts, all pieced by hand, during an extremely busy life, Mary and Ginny also took up quilting later in their lives. Unlike their mother, though, they did their quilting with sewing machines; they were so successful that they had started a small home business. Fingering the block, the two women reflected that Helen had given many of her quilts to charity; the others were highly sought after by family members; even distant relatives wanted a memento, so compelling was Helen’s impact. Ginny mused that this final quilt block could be turned into a lovely quilted pillow. That was in November 2003.

On March 14, 2004, the author attended the annual spring Fredonia Grange Pancake Brunch. As was usual with Helen Peck’s children, all of whom had returned to the area to live, most attended the brunch. Ginny came in to the foyer where the author was sitting, carrying a shopping bag with a tissue wrapped package. When the author asked if she should safeguard the parcel while Ginny ate, Ginny replied that it was for her. It was the pillow made from Helen’s last quilt block, along with a beautiful card! Ginny said that she and Mary had talked it over and decided that the block could not have a better home than with the author. This, of course, remains a deeply cherished possession.⁴¹

⁴¹ “Helen I. (Hakes) (Tech) Peck,” Obituary, *Battle Creek Enquirer*, January 3, 2002; Ginny Van Sickle, remarks at Michigan State University Library Colloquium, November 4, 2003, East Lansing, Michigan.

notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Mary LaFountain, remarks at Michigan State University Library Colloquium, November 4, 2003, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Fredonia Grange Spring Pancake Brunch, March 14, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. (Only the presentation that is immediately relevant to this vignette is cited here.)

The card said, in part, "Mary and I would like you to have this pillow that Mom made. We appreciate the effort you have put into promoting her life. . . . It is satisfying to us that you have preserved her accomplishments in a very special way." Ginny Van Sickle, card to author, March 13, 2004, in author's possession.

Profoundly touched by the gift, the author wrote to thank Ginny and Mary, striving to explain the immeasurable effect that meeting Helen Peck had had on her—how that experience and those subsequent that it set in motion changed her research—and, in truth, her life. Both women replied. "You are most welcome for the pillow. Mary and I talked about it and decided that we could not find a better place for that block. Mom was impressed with you and didn't hesitate to tell us. She always felt inadequate in her schooling and so when you were so impressed with her and interested in telling her life story, she felt special and with her life experiences she seemed to finally realize that she had a lot to offer. We thank you for giving her that." Ginny Van Sickle, e-mail to author, March 16, 2004, in author's possession. "I will never be able to thank you enough for giving Mom such a boost when she needed it the most. She knew that something was wrong and when I wanted her to go to the dr. she said, NO in no uncertain terms. When you came to see her and wanted to write about her life, it gave her entire life purpose and that is something special. She was a special lady and I am so thankful that, like you, I had a chance to get to know my Mom as a person not just as a Mom." Mary LaFountain, e-mail to author, March 18, 2004, in author's possession. This experience was an affirmation of the author's belief that the oral history process can offer incalculable benefits, not only or primarily for those who will read or hear them after the fact, but also for those who participate in recording the history.

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Richard (Rich) Hazen: Do Not Let the Grange *Die!*⁴²

Rich Hazen is currently Chair, Fredonia Grange #1713. During the early phase of the study, he was the most accessible and responsive of the interviewees. Although he acknowledged that it would not be easy for him to speak before a group of academics, he immediately agreed to do so when asked, took time off from work in order to be there, and brought a vast assortment of Grange materials—demonstrating many of them—that served as a catalyst for interaction between Grange members and participants in a graduate seminar called: “Gender, Race, and Class.”⁴³

⁴² After the Helen Peck phase of research convinced the author that oral histories with Grangers held great potential insights into individual motivations for and empowerment through coming together as a group and working to serve the greater community, she sought out additional likely sources. Not surprisingly, particularly in light of the diminished pool of Grangers, these later interviewees all had a strong Helen Peck connection; all felt her influence. The balance of this chapter consists of excerpts from the most illustrative of these interviews. They follow in chronological order.

Rich Hazen was the first in this group of interviewees. The author interviewed him at the Fredonia Grange Hall on Saturday, February 16, 2002. The interview was to be squeezed in between that morning’s sausage-making for the semiannual March pancake brunch and that evening’s regular Grange meeting. The interview had to be on Saturday because Rich was then working second shift at an extrusion company in Coldwater, Michigan. The author had met Rich, briefly, twice before: they had been introduced at the Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting in Marshall, Michigan, on January 19, 2002; they had chatted a bit, again, at the Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic at Edmore, Michigan, on February 9, 2002. Although Rich agreed to be interviewed, he seemed nervous about the prospect, saying repeatedly that he had never been interviewed before, that he feared that he would not be much help with the research, that he was a man of few words, not gifted to talk long on any one subject. He seemed to enjoy the interview, although he frequently struggled to put his feelings into words. He volunteered that he had been “as shy as all get out” as a child and that those feelings of inadequacy still lingered. As a manifestation of this, he often hesitantly whispered answers, turned his head away as he spoke, and nervously tapped the head of the microphone. Not surprisingly, this affected the quality of the recording: there are places that are difficult or impossible to decipher. This interview took longer, per minute of tape, than any other to transcribe.

When the author explained her difficulty in understanding the tape of some of Rich’s comments, he offered to listen to a copy to try to fill in some of the gaps. He did manage to clarify some things. The balance was beyond Rich and the interviewer’s efforts. In actuality, though, the garbled portions make up a relatively small percentage of the interview. They do little to lessen its value. The interviewer also resolved to be more assertive at keeping the microphone close to people’s mouths—but away from pounding hands. She learned to guide all who were physically able to do so to speak above a whisper. Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, comments on February 16, 2002 interview, April 17, 2002, notes, in author’s possession.

⁴³ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, February 7, 2002, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic, February 9, 2002, Edmore, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Grange Pancake Brunch, March 10, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author’s possession. In the

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Rich is dedicated to the “good of the Order.”⁴⁴ The seeds for this were planted even before he was born: he confesses that he was conceived at either a Michigan State or a National Grange convention—an assertion that his father cheerfully corroborates.⁴⁵ Although all of the local Granges do not have a special organization for children, Fredonia did when Rich was young, called the Juvenile Grange.⁴⁶ Although a Juvenile/Junior Grange is always affiliated with an adult Grange, it does have separate parliamentary procedures and degree work, holds its own meetings (led by the Juvenile [now Junior] Matron or Patron), has its own distinct manual, and conducts some of its own community-service activities. The children also assist with some of the larger Grange’s work. Children can be members from ages five through fourteen. At that point, they can join the regular Grange. When Rich joined as a child of five, his mother, Helen Hazen, was matron. During the next nine years, Rich experienced the nurturing guidance of two other women who have played significant and formative roles in his life: Helen Peck and her daughter, Mary LaFountain.⁴⁷

conversations and e-mails cited throughout this section, Rich shared his ideas for making the Grange a broader based, more inclusive organization. Among these are joining local chambers of commerce; having a more informative sign at the Grange Hall, announcing such things as meeting times and events; creating and maintaining a Web site that would include electronic versions of Fredonia Grange’s monthly newsletters; advertising in newspapers.

⁴⁴ This concept recurs throughout Grange writings and discussion. Possible citations are too numerous to list here. Part of the typical order of business of any local Grange meeting is to solicit and consider “Suggestions for the Good of the Order”—under whose aegis could, conceivably, come nearly anything. National Grange, *Manual of Subordinate Granges*, 6.

⁴⁵ Rich Hazen, Grange Panel Discussion, March 13, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author’s possession.

⁴⁶ Fredonia Grange continues, at least nominally, to have such an organization; it is now called the Junior Grange. Extending the generational continuity, Rich’s youngest son, Zachary, is a member.

⁴⁷ Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Action Grange Committee Meeting, April 6, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, April 25, 2002, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Fredonia Action Grange Committee Meeting, April 6, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, April 25, 2002, in author’s possession.

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ProQuest interview by author
1964 April 17, 2012
ProQuest interview by author

When Rich turned fourteen, he became a member of the regular Fredonia Grange and also entered the Grange's "youth/young adult" category that has spanned ages fourteen to thirty-five. Rich believes that he attended a few Grange camps during his last years as a Juvenile Grange member, but the summer camps that are most memorable to him are those from his days as a youth. He reminisces fondly about the large numbers of adolescents who attended, the experiences that they had, the fun that they enjoyed together, the enduring friendships that they forged. Like the few of his contemporaries who have stayed with the Grange, Rich is perplexed that most of the people whom he knew from Grange camp have not remained active members. Even Rich, with those deep ties, drifted away from the Grange for a few decades.⁴⁸ For a year, he lived outside the area. When he returned to Marshall, he was preoccupied with raising a family. He continued to assist with Fredonia Grange's fund-raising, food-serving events—but he was not an active member, involved with its meetings and day-to-day functioning. Then, in 2000, Rich returned to the Grange, becoming very active and being elected its chairperson in June 2001. Why did he rejoin?

Because I *saw* something that was happening in the Grange. Grange members were getting old; they needed younger people to get *active* and involved again. *That's* why I came back. . . . I don't know if it's just something in my *heart* which *brought* me back. Well, I don't know if anybody's told you *this*, but it was at one of our pancake brunches I talked to Helen Peck. She said, "Richard, do not let the Grange *die*!" Well, you know [laughs]—Helen Peck is a *big* influence on my life, so—I said, okay—so here I am. Doing what *I* can to keep the Grange going.⁴⁹

Rich takes his pledge to keep the Grange viable seriously. He has been very committed to the Grange's growth and prosperity. To this point, most of his efforts have

⁴⁸ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Rich Hazen, comments on February 16, 2002 interview, April 17, 2002.

⁴⁹ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002.

been concentrated on Fredonia Grange; the Grange has a long tradition of work and activism from the local, grassroots level, up. Not coincidentally, Fredonia Grange is one of the largest and most vital Granges in the state, due in large measure to the vision, flexibility, and openness of the past few generations, such as Helen Peck and those she so directly influenced: Mary LaFountain and her husband, Reuben, Athol Hazen and his wife, Helen. But Rich looks beyond Fredonia, to the state level, with concern. Grange membership is down to about 1,500 members statewide. He believes that addressing their shrinking numbers should be a top priority of the state office.⁵⁰ Yet, during a recent Michigan State Grange Convention, Rich believes that valuable time was squandered in drafting legislative resolutions that other, larger, stronger organizations have already proposed. This prompted him to write a letter to state officers, contending that the key to the Grange's survival lies in raising its profile, reaching out, broadening its community base, embracing diverse groups, being responsive to current and potential constituents—getting more members.

If the Michigan State Grange wants to survive, they have to start looking ahead on the changes that have to be made to be a relevant organization again. The way we are going it will be dead in five years. No, let me reiterate that, it will be dead in 2 years. . . . What I am asking of the Officers and Members of this fine Organization is to make a promise like I did. Do what it takes to make this a relevant organization again. Make changes in your Grange to make it more appealing to new members. Start a Junior Grange again. Talk to people to see what would interest them in

⁵⁰ Rich Hazen, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Rich Hazen, comments on February 16, 2002 interview, April 17, 2002; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, March 2, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Action Grange Committee Meeting, April 6, 2002; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, April 6, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Grange Fair Committee Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

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Rich never got a formal, written response to his letter. However, on February 9, 2002, the Michigan State Grange held a membership clinic in Edmore, Michigan. It consisted of a daylong series of workshops addressing some of the concerns that Rich had raised.⁵²

Rich credits the Grange with helping him to become the person whom he is today—one who enjoys interacting with people, who is able to speak before a group of strangers—transcending an early fear of public speaking and the fact that as a child “I was shyder than all get out.”⁵³ To him, the Grange is something that can fulfill needs—both of its members and of the larger communities that it serves. When asked how he would answer the question, “Should I join the Grange?” he responds:

Say, do you have *needs*? Do you have *concerns*? If you *do*, come voice ‘em at our Grange. I’ll ask you to become a member. If you have a *need*, if you want a place to *belong*, come to our Grange, we’ll make you feel *welcome*.⁵⁴

Rich tells a story of how Fredonia Grange, by filling a need for a potential member, also filled a void of its own. Rich grew up in rural Eckford, Michigan and attended country schools. Although the school system operated under serious budget strictures, the children did gain some enrichment from Betty Dukavas, who traveled from school to school, teaching students music and dance. Even after she retired from teaching, Betty stayed in the Marshall area with her husband. Then, a few years ago, Betty’s husband

⁵¹ Rich Hazen, letter to the officers of the Michigan State Grange, October 20, 2001, copy in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002.

⁵² Rich Hazen, remarks at Michigan State Grange Membership Clinic, February 9, 2002; Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002.

⁵³ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Most of the Fredonia Grange members with whom the author has had contact would try to make a guest welcome. But trying to cope with so many unknown people and an unknown and unclear ritual and meeting format could take a toll on guests, particularly since there has been no one who would sit with the

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Music plays an important role in Grange meetings. Fredonia Grange’s official pianist had grandchildren in two other states and was frequently absent on visits. Fredonia missed the music. Then Rich saw Betty at the October 2001 Fredonia Grange Pancake Brunch. He approached her.

I says, “I’ve been thinkin’ about you a lot.” “You have.” “We need a pianist at the Grange.” She joined up. We have music now. She isn’t here every meeting. But when she’s here, it’s just—it makes my *heart—wonderful!* And her and Helen⁵⁶--they play the same type of music, and it’s just, I’m really *happy*.⁵⁷

Rich concludes by sharing his vision of what the Grange is and what he wants it to be.

In doing so, he renews his promise to Helen Peck.

The Grange wants *everybody* who wants to become a member. . . . To me I see this as an organization people can belong to who don’t feel comfortable belonging to another organization. . . . I want this to be an organization that *survives*. That survives into the next century. Somehow, some way, to be community service, to be *known* in the community as an organization that gives *help* to make—a person *better*. So [intense whisper]—*that’s what I want to see*. I want to keep it alive for *Helen Peck*. Because she—her vision was better than mine—she could it put it in better words than I *can*. . . . I want it to *survive*. So—I’ll do it any way I can.⁵⁸

newcomer(s) to explain the meeting and answer any questions. As will be discussed more in chapter nine, no matter what Fredonia’s intent and actions, all who enter its hall do not feel welcome.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ This refers to Helen Peck, who was Fredonia Grange’s pianist for decades, well into the 1990s.

⁵⁷ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Rich Hazen, comments on February 16, 2002 interview, April 17, 2002.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Mary Houghton: I Have an Influence Bigger than Myself⁵⁹

Mary Houghton is Community-Service Director, Fredonia Grange #1713. Mary first joined the Grange when she was sixteen, during the summer between her junior and senior years in high school. Although she was originally from Marshall, her father had moved Mary's mother, her siblings, and her to Boca Raton, Florida, a highly urbanized area. Mary, a self-professed country girl, was desperately unhappy. Both at the time and in her memory, that summer spent with Mary's Aunt Helen on her farm was nothing short of idyllic.⁶⁰ Every summer the Michigan Grange sponsored a Grange camp for youth. The week before Mary was to attend, while she was mowing the yard, a piece of metal lodged in her leg. Thus, when she went to camp, her leg was heavily bandaged and the adults thought that she would be unable to march and take part in the ritual work.

And I was determined that I was going to do it regardless of whether I could or not, and I did. And so maybe that's—I was perceived as the—fairly outspoken, the thing about the marijuana, arguing that on the floor also. [Mary had said earlier that when she went to Grange camp as a new member in the mid-1960s, she had argued on behalf of legalizing marijuana.] So, coming from living where I was, not being involved with kids hardly at all other than just a few friends, I was in chorus and things like that but—my senior class had 300 people in it. A lot of people, and you don't get to know very many, you know, you don't—I didn't fit in anyway. And so there were just a very limited few things that I did there, and coming up to a group like this where you could say and do *anything* you wanted, basically, was liberating for me, to be *accepted* into a group like that was liberating to me. And, I made lifelong friends, lifelong friends.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Unless noted to the contrary, this section is based on Mary Houghton, Community-Service Director, Fredonia Grange #1713, active in the Grange for nearly forty years, advocate for the Action Grange movement, community activist, interview by author, February 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, interview by author, March 24, 2002, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁶⁰ Mary's "Aunt Helen" is the late Helen Peck, Grange member for sixty-five years at the local, county, state, and national levels, community activist, rural music teacher, whom the author interviewed and about whom the author has previously written and who is featured earlier in this chapter.

⁶¹ Mary Houghton, interviews by author, February 23, 2002, March 24, 2002.

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Mary comments that many of the people whom she met at Grange camp are no longer Grange members. She is haunted by questions: Why did they drift away? What would get them to come back? What does the Grange have to offer today?

Mary did continue her membership for a time. It was difficult to do so in Florida—most of the members were older retirees. The closest Grange was some distance from her home. The rest of her nuclear family were not members. But she persisted. Mary returned to Marshall for a time after she graduated from high school, renewing her ties to Fredonia Grange. Then she returned to Florida, got married, moved around the country, and became inactive as a Grange member. She returned to Marshall in 1990, rejoined Fredonia Grange, and has been active in it ever since.

Mary is on Fredonia's Action Grange Committee: a group designated to conceive and help implement changes in Fredonia Grange that will enable it to become more relevant and indispensable to its community. The idea has been to formulate concepts and actions at the grass-roots level that could be shared and effectuated on the state and national level.⁶² Mary tells a story that she thinks is prescient. She was at a Grange youth conference in Florida at which the State Master (highest official of the State Grange) was presiding. Mary was at the back of the room and admits that she was not paying attention. The state master realized this, and thinking to jolt her back to attention asked her how she would describe the Grange in one word to a stranger.

⁶² National Grange Strategic Planning Task Force, "Position Papers"; National Grange Strategic Planning Task Force, "Strategic Plan"; National Grange Strategic Planning Task Force, "A Strategy for Renewing the National Grange: The Rationale and Importance of the Action Grange Program"; various speakers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; various speakers, remarks at Fredonia Action Grange Committee Meeting, April 6, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; various speakers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. The Action Granges believed that they had received a mandate to change and to experiment with many things. Some

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And I looked up and I said, “Action. . . .” And . . . that was, to me, what the Grange *is*, it’s action, it’s people in action, it’s an organization in action, it’s a community in action. But we were trying to put into action *then*, and still can’t do it. Why, why twenty years later are we still having that same problem?⁶³

Although Mary returned to Fredonia Grange in 1990, and felt accepted, she did not fit easily into such traditional Grange roles as preparing food and clothing for the community. As Mary mentioned several times, it was not that she could not do such things, but since her time was extremely finite, she felt that she could better serve the Grange through other means.⁶⁴ Mary is a talented photographer and graphic artist. About six years prior to our interviews she was “entrusted” with the position of community-service⁶⁵ director. She feels that from this point, other Grange members began to perceive her differently, to consider her as a person capable of handling significant responsibility.

I have been able to *provide* something for the Grange that nobody else has been able to do. And in that respect, I guess, I’ve earned my *niche*. . . . I feel like I can *give*

tried to dispel the aura of secrecy, the traditional formality—to make the Grange more welcoming and open.

⁶³ Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002. Actually, at the time of the interview, more than thirty years had elapsed from the time when Mary first made her “action” comment.

⁶⁴ Mary has won National Grange competitions with her needlework and is a good cook. She is also the single mother of four children: much of her time since returning to the Marshall area has been spent in parenting to her children, working without and within the home to provide for their needs.

⁶⁵ “Community service” is a term that one hears in almost any conversation with almost any Granger. Interpretations vary, depending upon the Grange and the community that it serves. Most Grange members will admit that one thing that they do well and for which they are renowned is feeding people. Most of the Granges with whom the author has had contact also do sewing projects: stuffed toys for needy children; quilts, blankets, hats, mittens, for indigent, premature, or stillborn babies. The Granges try to ascertain their communities’ needs and fulfill them. Some interviewees view community service as the *raison d’être* for the Grange. More specific instances of community service are cited as appropriate throughout the paper. The term “community-service director” may be misleading. Much of what the membership of any Grange does could come under the rubric “community service”: any member can propose a project for the Grange’s consideration—they do not really need to be directed. But they do need a chronicler, someone who notes and encourages the activities in a community-service book. All Michigan Granges are asked to submit them for evaluation a month prior to the Michigan State Grange Convention; winners are announced at the convention. For several years Fredonia Grange has placed first or second in this category. Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, April 26, 2002, in author’s possession; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, April 26, 2002, in author’s possession.

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something unique to—my own talents—with the photography, with the book design, and that kind of stuff. I can't compete with the cooks, don't want to compete with the cooks, or the seamstresses, or any of the other—they have more *time* than I do to devote to other things, doing dinners and things like that. That's just—for me is not as important to do.⁶⁶

Mary has several ideas to help people learn more about the Grange. She went to the Marshall Chamber of Commerce and asked them specifically for the packet of information that they distribute to newcomers. Among the materials was a three-page list of local organizations: just their name, address, and a contact person, but no descriptive information. Mary thinks that it would be useful to desktop publish a five-inch-by-seven-inch booklet in which each of these organizations is given a page to use as it wishes. Once it was published, each organization would get copies to distribute to its members and audience; she would also give copies to the chamber of commerce. She believes that this would be a useful networking tool and a splendid way to build synergy among local community-service groups.

Another one of Mary's ideas involves the Grange ritual. The Grange was very much a product of its times: it arose at a time when secret fraternal organizations were prevalent. The secrecy was a way to ward off a frequently hostile outside world. The ritual, embodied particularly in the opening and closing ceremonies of the Grange and in its degree work, paid homage to the natural world and to the primacy of agriculture in the life of every living creature. (As Grange members like to say, "If you need to eat—and who does not?—you need agriculture.") Each of the first four Grange degrees highlights a different season and virtue: Spring—Faith; Summer—Hope; Fall—Charity;

⁶⁶ Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002.

Winter—Fidelity. The ritual lays out precepts for leading a good life.⁶⁷ Interviewees shared stories of degree teams that traveled to various Granges, performing the degrees using prescribed words, music, marching, and stylized movement. Mary fears that today's potential audience is too technologically sophisticated to be captured by or interested in such a performance. She envisions a multimedia production, with beautiful music, images from nature, natural sounds, lots of light. She says that she has raised this idea in many fora in the Grange; people's reaction tends to be "that would be too expensive" or "it is up to the National Grange to implement this." Mary believes that it would be relatively easy to obtain the necessary equipment on loan from a college or a university. She feels that the biggest problem is that people simply cannot comprehend what she is describing, and that she must create at least a partial prototype to gain their support. Mary believes that this work should no longer be secret—that it should be promulgated as widely as possible, making it available, for example, online.⁶⁸

In an effort to garner new adherents, the Grange has been emphasizing some of the tangible benefits that membership can bring, such as a cancer-protection plan, Beltone hearing aids, and hotel discounts.⁶⁹ Mary feels that this is not the most effective strategy—that someone else will always be able to offer a better rate on these things. She

⁶⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, April 28, 2002, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002; Rich Hazen, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, April 27, 2002, in author's possession.

⁶⁸ Mary Houghton, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002; Mary Houghton, interview by author, March 10, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Mary Houghton, interview by author, March 24, 2002.

⁶⁹ National Grange, "Grange Insurance," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/memberbenefits/insurance.htm>; National Grange, "Beltone Hearing Products," <http://www.nationalgrange.org/memberbenefits/Beltone.htm>; National Grange, "Hotel Discounts," http://www.nationalgrange.org/memberbenefits/hotel_discounts.htm.

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Mary reveals that she was
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Mary's statement of what
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To me it's about being com-
munity, and it's about making
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Verdugo, interview by author

believes that the Grange's great and unique strength lies in the intangibles that it offers its members. She tells the story of her son, Jeremy, a shy boy who was not very social. But when he was a youth ambassador to a National Grange Convention, it changed his life.

It just opened up a whole new world for him, enabled him to do things that he wasn't able to do other places. And taught him a lot about leadership and public speaking and being a part of a group like that. And it has to do with . . . self-confidence and the ability to go into a group of people that you don't know and make yourself a part of it—not wait for somebody to come up and make you feel a part of it, but to make yourself feel a part of it. And that's part of . . . what Grange gives kids, it's one of those things that you can't see. It's not something that they would go there *looking* for, but it teaches kids that they can speak up in a room full of adults and be listened to, that they can hold an office, right next to the adults and be as respected as the adults in that office.⁷⁰

Mary reveals that she was a “shy kid,” too, and that she never would have considered getting up before a large group to speak if the Grange had not given her the opportunity to develop this skill. But because of this, she has been able to address sizable audiences, such as a gathering at the National Grange Convention. Mary believes that the Grange offers people a place

to do what *they* want to do—not what the Grange wants them to do, and not what . . . they can do *for* the Grange, but living their life to their fullest. . . . People tend to be narrow-minded . . . they don't want to get out of their comfort zone very much. . . . I guess the Grange gives you a safe place to do that, if you let it.⁷¹

Mary's statement of what the Grange means to her and the influence that it has had on her life is an eloquent testament to the value of Grange membership to a committed member.

To me it's about being *connected*, about being a part of something bigger than myself, and it's about making myself into something better than I thought I could be. And making a difference in things that matter, and it doesn't have to be—things that

⁷⁰ Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002.

⁷¹ Ibid.

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matter aren't just on a *state* level or on a *national* level or something that would make you *famous* or something that would be a major invention that would influence people or better your way of life. . . . It's about the little things that make people better people, and the little things that make every day better for me. And if I can do that for one other person, and that person does it for someone else, then I have an influence bigger than myself. Even though I may not see it, it's there. And it's a part of making, in however way I can, things better than I found it. But it's just as important to me to do *that* and we won the award, as it is country to country, or with or without recognition, it doesn't matter. It's just as important to do. And this organization gives me a chance to do that.⁷²

⁷² Fredonia Grange's community-service notebooks, chronicling the year's community-service efforts, have won numerous awards at the state and national levels. Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002; Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, March 2, 2002, Marshall Michigan, notes, in author's possession; various speakers, remarks at Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, April 26, 2002; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, April 26, 2002.

Susan (Sue) Withers: I'll *Always* Be a Grange Member⁷³

Susan (Sue) Withers is the Master of Georgetown Grange #458 in Hudsonville, Michigan, west of Grand Rapids. In 2002, after a lifelong association with Fredonia

⁷³ The author arranged to interview Sue at her home in Jenison, Michigan, just to the west of Grand Rapids, on February 28, 2002. February can be a treacherous travel month in Michigan, but the author had a deadline for this phase of the project, so she could not wait until the weather would be more predictably reliable. Michigan touches four of the five Great Lakes, which have a major influence on its weather. It experiences something called "lake-effect snow": the interior of the state may be dry and clear, while the coasts experience considerable snow. This is perhaps most pronounced on the west side of the state, near Lake Michigan. The author had never experienced this to any extent—until she set off on this interview. She continually checked the weather reports and maps on that day. It was a beautiful sunny day in the central portion of the state where she lives; nothing major was forecast for the coast. So she set off on the ninety-mile trip. The initial stages of the trip were fine. But when she got within fifty miles of her destination, it was as though she had driven through a curtain. The snow began and continued to thicken. The author thought that it might diminish; instead it intensified. By then, she was over halfway there—the point of no return. So she continued, at times through near whiteout conditions. Since the interview was set for 5:30 p.m., there was much rush-hour traffic. Finding Jenison was not difficult, but finding the way through the development in which Sue lived was: few roads went through or were straight; there were many cul-de-sacs and dead-ends. The author did finally manage to find the house; she wondered what it would be like to try to find her way out in the dark.

Sue had invited the author to meet her family and have dinner with them. She introduced her husband, Rick/Red, her daughter, Teressa, her son, Casey, and her hyperactive Airedale, Rosie. She also informed the author that they would have to be quick with the meal and the interview since she had just found out that morning that Teressa had a band concert that night that she and Rick had to attend. She apologized, saying that she had not learned this in time to postpone the interview. Rick prepared the meal, which was eaten quickly. Then Sue and the author moved to the living room for the interview.

Sue's was the shortest interview of the group: about forty-five minutes of tape. The tape has interesting background noises: the sounds of Rosie scratching, whining, and crying to come in from the sun porch and demand attention; Teressa leaving for her band concert. The interview began well enough. But then the author choked, apparently on some dust. She began to cough uncontrollably. Sue kept calmly talking, while the author gasped for breath. Finally, as the tears rolled down the author's face, Sue asked her if she could breathe. The author nodded. Then Sue asked if she would like some water. Again, the author nodded. The water and a lozenge helped reduce the severe coughing to periodic wheezing, but the author could not talk without causing fresh paroxysms. Sue asked the author if there were additional questions that she would like answered. The author had brought a sheet of guidelines with her. So she pointed to a few questions that she felt were especially pertinent. Sue brightly continued, reading the question and then answering it.

By this time, Sue and Rick were anxious to get to the concert. So the author packed up her equipment and prepared to depart. The snow had lessened but had left a substantial accumulation. Sue and Rick asked the author how she would get back to the highway. She read them her directions; they tried to give a shortcut. Then they sped off to the concert. The development was poorly lit and the author got lost for a time. When she made it to the highway, she found it poorly plowed; it was thick with a slushy, salty, icy mix. For the first forty miles, visibility was poor and travel was treacherous; she could not go over 40 mph. Then she drove through the curtain again and the rest of the trip was calm on a lovely night.

Since that night, Sue and the author have frequently seen one another, talking and becoming acquainted. In hindsight, Sue decided that she handled the trip to the band concert poorly. She often marvels that the author would still speak to her after being dumped out into the blizzard so that Sue and Rick could make it to the musical. It has become something of a legendary saga and a never-ending source of laughter. Also, surprisingly, the tape really did not turn out so badly. Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002, Jenison, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

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Grange, she joined it as well.⁷⁴ Sue was taken to her first Grange meeting when she was two weeks old. Although she does not remember that, she *does* remember being taken to Grange square dances from a very young age. Her parents would take her on Saturday nights; as she recalls, when Lawrence Welk came on the television, it was time to go. The Grange ladies would bring sandwiches and soda. People would dance for a time; there would be a break to eat and drink; then they would throw more sawdust on the floor and dance some more. Sometimes Sue would have other children with whom to dance; sometimes she would be the only child there, and would dance alone. But regardless the number of children, she had fun.⁷⁵

Georgetown Grange is unusual in that it meets on Sundays—the fourth Sunday afternoon of the month. They start out with a potluck dinner at 1:00 p.m.; at the

⁷⁴ “We have my brother and sister-in-law, who—my brother has always belonged to Georgetown Grange. In recent years, we got a resolution and it passed in the state where we can belong to *more* than one Grange in the state of Michigan, and so my brother happens to belong to both Georgetown Grange *and* Home Grange. And, when they joined . . . my sister-in-law *also* joined Georgetown Grange, so at the same time that my brother joined *Home* Grange, my sister-in-law joined *Georgetown* Grange.” Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002. Sue sometimes comes to visit and stay with her brother, Dick, who lives in Marshall. When it coincides with a Fredonia Grange meeting, she attends. So although Sue lives ninety miles from Fredonia, she does make it to some meetings. She also follows its activities by reading the e-mailed copies of the meeting minutes and the monthly Fredonia Grange newsletter that she receives.

⁷⁵ Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002. Georgetown Grange did not join the original Action Grange program: its members are interested in the ideas and actions that are developed and are eager to implement changes that will make them relevant and better suited to meet the needs of their community, but they did not feel that they could make the commitment to the program at that time. However, Sue has attended most statewide Action Grange meetings and her input is solicited and valued. Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, October 5, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 4, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, May 10, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, September 7, 2003, Ann Arbor, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Sue Withers, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, January 17, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession. In 2003, when the National Grange began the next phase of the Action Grange program, Action Grange II, Georgetown Grange, at Sue’s behest, did join the program. Because Georgetown was not one of the original Action Granges, it had to retain the traditional Grange titles. Thus Sue, who was her Grange’s highest officer, was still called “master.” (In September

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conclusion of the meeting, there is usually a raffle, featuring items donated by their Lecturer, Terry Grooters. Although Sunday strikes many other Grangers as an odd time to meet, it works for Georgetown.

We did try for a time, because we have some younger members that were having difficulty in meeting on Sunday and they wanted to meet during the week, so we traded to move to a weeknight, we tried, for a while, I think it was probably we gave it a six-month period of time where we tried meeting on a Monday night, we tried a Thursday night. I believe we even tried Saturday, for a while, and, what we were doing is that we were getting some of the younger members, but the tradeoff, we were not getting some of the older members because they didn't want to travel at *night*. So, we weren't really *gaining* anything by . . . trading, and then, even then some of the younger members started to not come as well because then their children started getting involved in *sports*. And we felt that it was a better fit to move the meeting back to Sunday, and let the older members that *had* been members and put in their *time* . . . preferred to have the meeting on Sunday, so we moved it *back*.⁷⁶

So Georgetown has done a good job of being responsive to its members' needs and predilections. It continually seeks new members, but does not take the long-term members for granted or cease to value them.

It was Sue's mother, Mary Jane Wagner, a former Michigan State Grange Youth Director, who ran the summer Grange camps that Mary Houghton and Rich Hazen recall so fondly.⁷⁷ When Sue was young, she had to stay behind while her mother took a week's vacation from work and went off to Grange camp. Then, when Sue was older,

2004, Sue and her husband divorced and Sue resumed her maiden name of "Wagner." But during all the conversations, interactions, and e-mails cited it was still in effect, so it is treated herein as a current reality.)

⁷⁶ Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002.

⁷⁷ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002. Both of these interviewees told the author that she *must* interview Mary Jane Wagner, Sue's mother. Sue was one of the participants in the Grange Panel Discussion for the Gender, Race, and Class Seminar at Michigan State University. Mary Houghton and Rich Hazen also participated. After the discussion, Mary gathered all the class members and Grange participants together so that she could take several photos—part of her work as Community-Service Director. While she was doing this, Sue commented that at least we did not have to wait while Mary took ninety-nine photos, as her mom had done. During their days of Grange youth camp, it was not feasible to get multiple copies of a group photo quickly. So Mary Jane made the children stay posed while she took ninety-nine Polaroids so that each could go home with one of his or her own. Sue Withers, Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes and videotape, in author's possession.

she would help her mother

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she would help her mother prepare for the camp at the beginning of the week, and participate with the other children when they arrived later in the week.

And so my mom had anywhere from ten kids to a *hundred* kids that were there at any given time that she had to *entertain*, she had to . . . teach . . . all . . . Grange things. She would teach Grange *history*, and do *workshops*, and art projects, and pile us all into a car and take us all swimming, and play *baseball*. . . . For many years we had an Olympics, like where we had to carry water in a spoon, and fill a jug of water [both laugh], and the first one to fill . . . the little cup of water, that team would *win*. And we never *got* anything for it, it wasn't like it was for any great, big prize, but it was . . . just . . . carrying a spoon with a feather on it, or . . . carrying an egg. . . . I have a picture of Rich Hazen where . . . we had to walk from one end of the hall to the other: he had a sucker in his mouth and he had two rolls of toilet paper under his arms, and he had a roll of paper toweling between his *knees*, and he was carrying a pan of water or something in his—the concentration on his face with that big ol' sucker in his mouth. . . .⁷⁸

Sue reflects on some of the other people associated with Grange camp. She begins by explaining that at the time of our interview, the Michigan State Grange Youth Directorship was shared by two people: her brother and her sister-in-law.

My dad was never a part of the codirectorship, but my dad was always *there*, he was the one that was always fixin' the *bunk beds* or doin' somethin' to make sure that things behind the scenes was running smoothly. She had Helen Peck . . . she was one of the cooks, and she was a *marvelous* piano player, and she would play the marches for us to practice marching. Oh, we had such *grand* fun . . . we *all* looked so forward to coming back together for the week, and then we had weekends, and oh, it was just *grand, grand fun*. And the amazing thing is, . . . it doesn't *matter* how long of a period it is between the time that we *see* each other, when we get back together we can pick up—it's just like we can pick up right where we left off. . . . And a lot of us still stay in touch with each other. That's the really *cool* thing, even though it's been thirty years. You know, sometimes it's just a *Christmas* card, but other times—now especially with e-mail, it's so easy to just drop a line and say, “Hey, how you doin'?” And the bond that we have, not only with each other, but with each other's family. I'm just as close to Rich's mom and *dad*, as I am to him. . . .⁷⁹

Unlike the other interviewees who belonged to the Grange in their youth, Sue has never really left the Grange. During her early twenties, when she was a newly married

⁷⁸ Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002.

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woman, she was not so active: Georgetown Grange meets on Sunday afternoons, and often it seemed that that was her one opportunity to be with her husband, who was not then a Grange member. But after Sue's children were born and she became a "stay-at-home mom," she became more active in the Grange again. Sue's husband, Rick, joined the Grange about fourteen years ago. According to Sue, "he doesn't come from a family that was a member of *anything*." But at that time, Rick wanted to participate in a Grange bowling tournament; the only way that one could do that was if one was a Grange member who had earned the first four degrees. "So he became a Grange member, that's truly the . . . whole reason that he became a member."⁸⁰ Now he attends Grange meetings and is steward of Georgetown Grange. Their children, Teressa, nineteen, and Casey, seventeen, are also deeply involved in Grange: up until the time that Teressa left for college, they acted as assistant steward and lady assistant steward and participated in Grange activities, including youth camps. Casey continues with his involvement. Sue notes with concern that the numbers of youth who attend the camps have dwindled. She states that the last year that her daughter attended camp, there were only seven children. She continues that "you know there's not as many to pick from to be fond of, to make the kind of bonds that we had when we were younger. . . . We hope to be able to build that program for the youth, so that they can experience what we did."⁸¹

One vital role that Sue thinks that the Grange should play in the twenty-first century is as an environmental steward. One of her particular interests is safe drinking water, free

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

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from toxic runoff from agriculture and other potential polluters.⁸² She also envisions the Grange as a common ground on which to bring together politicians and local residents.

If the Grange can offer a *way* of communicating with people in the *community*, by opening the hall for a gathering of thoughts. . . . I can see that we would be beneficial in that type of situation, if we can bring people *together* with the politicians, and help them find that path of getting *involved*. . . maybe bring people back to their front porch, instead of their back porch.⁸³

To Sue the Grange is not a structure—not something concrete, but something ineffable that, once it has taken root, one carries with one always. She looks to the Grange's future, not with fear, but with the quiet determination that this gift must be shared as widely as possible.

I've always been a Grange member, so I can't imagine *not* being. If the Grange *doesn't exist* any more, the people that I *know* through the Grange—that's not going to *change*. Maybe the reasons that we meet, maybe the *dates* that we meet or the *occasions* that we meet will be different, but I can't imagine that those people will not *mean* anything to me any more. So I'm not *nervous*, as some people are *nervous* about the Grange not being in *existence* anymore. I'm not *nervous* about that *because* it isn't going to be the Grange *meeting* that is going to keep me *involved* with those people. Maybe the reasons and the dates will change. But I'll *always* be a Grange member, regardless of whether I have a Grange to go to or not. I will *always* be—that's just deep-rooted in me. That's what we'd like to be able to bring to those who aren't members, and we just have to find a way *how*.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid. Mary Houghton also sees the Grange as a key to stewardship of the land. When Mary raised this theme at the Grange Panel Discussion, Brenda Wrigley, Assistant Professor, Public Relations, suggested that disseminating information about the Grange's environmental activities could garner new members—members from segments not traditionally associated with the Grange. Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002; Mary Houghton, Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002. Brenda Wrigley, Assistant Professor, Public Relations, Department of Advertising, Michigan State University, remarks to Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

⁸³ Sue Withers, interview by author, February, 28, 2002.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

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Athol and Helen Hazen⁸⁵

When the author had interviewed Athol and Helen Hazen in October 2001, the focus had been largely on Helen Peck. As the author became more familiar with Fredonia Grange, she grew to realize that, collectively, Athol and Helen were the institutional memory of Fredonia Grange for the past half century. They complemented one another admirably. Athol was the detail person: he could recall facts, figures, dates without apparent effort; but his forte was not capturing the essence of a situation with a telling anecdote. Helen was the natural raconteur of the two: she could capture local color and recount dialogue, using different voices, so vividly that one felt that one was a witness to the interactions. She had a wonderful ear for a story, but her grasp of such factual information as explicit dates and times was shaky. In combination, however, Athol and Helen provided a priceless window into the life and times of Fredonia Grange over the past fifty years.

Although Jeff Charnley had advised the author that it was generally best to interview the members of a couple individually, she decided that in this instance, a collaborative strategy would be most effective.⁸⁶ It worked out very well. The Hazens piggybacked on

⁸⁵ There are so many block quotations and passages of dialogue in the Athol and Helen Hazen interview that these portions have been double-spaced for ease of reading. They can be discerned from the text narrative because they are uniformly indented. (This differs from the treatment of the more occasional block quotations in the other oral histories of this chapter, which follow the conventions of indentation and single spacing.)

⁸⁶ Jeffrey Charnley, initial meeting with author, September 24, 2001. The author respects the wisdom of this seasoned oral historian. During this meeting, however, and in subsequent meetings and e-mails, Jeff made clear that no rules or guidelines should be carved in stone—that one needed to be flexible and adapt to current circumstances. In addition, the author was getting very good results from focus groups conducted with Marshall community members, which were really collective interviews. The author is convinced that interviewing Athol and Helen together produced an interview that was fuller, richer, more nuanced, more revealing, more insightful, more evocative of the true essence of Fredonia Grange, than would the sum of two individual interviews with the principals. Unless explicitly noted, this section is based on: Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

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one another's thoughts, but were respectful of each other's right to speak and complete thoughts. They did not interrupt one another or finish one another's sentences; rather, they added shading and subtlety to one another's thoughts. They were able to gently correct one another and enhance one another's stories—yet refrain from becoming angry or intimidated. Sometimes one remembered an event better; sometimes the other. Observing how they interacted gave clues to how they had maintained such a productive union over fifty-one years. They had preserved unique identities, maintained different strengths, but also developed the gift of working synergistically, effortlessly, with each other. The author recalled Betty Dukavas, Pianist, Fredonia Grange, and a longtime family friend, saying that she was always impressed by how well Athol and Helen worked together. Theirs is an enduring love based on mutual respect and appreciation for one another's strengths—and weaknesses.

Helen Hazen has more of a Grange history than does Athol. As a child, her parents belonged to Leighton Grange in Allegan County, Michigan. She remembers how her parents came to join the Grange.

I remember the neighbors coming and asking my father to *join*. Him and Mom talked it over and *decided* it sounded like a *good organization* and it was a *good* thing to do and so—we *joined*.⁸⁷

At one point, her father was Master and her mother was Lecturer. Leighton Grange had no separate Juvenile or Junior Grange, so as a child, when Helen and her sisters went

⁸⁷ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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to Grange with her parents, they “just hung out” with other girls downstairs while their parents were meeting.⁸⁸

When Dad took over as *Master*, he said, “The officers are going to *march* in.” And they had a big anteroom, and lined up the officers, and we marched in. And he said, “It wakes ‘em up!”⁸⁹

When Helen was fourteen, the youngest age at which one can belong to the regular Grange, she, too, became a member. Every year, she would attend a Grange youth conference at Michigan State University (MSU).

I . . . had to come back and *report* to the Grange. At that point in time I hadn’t done *anything* like that so it was quite an *experience*! And at that point in time I was not *good* at doing that. And my father said, “They’re not gonna *bite*!” [Laughter.] Well, I did the *report*—and he said, “See—it was all right wasn’t it?” [Laughs.]⁹⁰

Helen recalls that Leighton Grange was active: they always had a booth at the Allegan County Fair featuring canned goods and handwork. Helen continued to belong to Leighton Grange through high school. Then she went away to nursing school, outside the area, and her membership was not kept up. Helen and Athol married and lived in Kalamazoo—too far to continue in Leighton Grange. Athol began to work for the Production Credit Association, lending money to farmers. Under the influence of an aunt and uncle of Helen’s, Leslie and Myrl Haskins, who were Farm Bureau members, they, too, joined the Farm Bureau. Although the Haskins had also belonged to the Grange,

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

they were not active. When

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Helen: And they were

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they were not active. When Athol got transferred to Marshall, they moved to the area (Eckford Township). There, at a local Farm Bureau meeting, they met Will and Eugenia Barnes, who instantly befriended the Hazens.

Helen: And they were living in Eckford at that time. And she said, “Oh, you guys gotta join the Grange! You just gotta join the Grange! We *need* you!”⁹¹

Athol: Well, in reality, what we started out doing was to take—we *took* them to Grange—we were not *members*. . . . They were older people. . . . And—didn’t like to drive at night, so we *took* them *over* there. . . . And they would go in to *open* the Grange, and we had to set outside because we were not *members*. . . . And then finally, I more or less *decided* that one of the reasons for joining is so that we wouldn’t have to be outside while they were *opening*. . . . But the other thing that sort of stimulated my *joining* was the fact that I was working for the Production Credit Association, making loans to *farmers*—and there was a lot of farmers that belonged to the *Grange*. And so I joined so that I could get to know the farmers in Calhoun County.⁹²

Because the Grange had many farmers as members, meetings were held when it was convenient for them to attend. Since most of the farmers when Helen and Athol joined in 1954 raised dairy cattle, they needed to do their evening milking before attending a meeting. So at that time, the potluck suppers that have always preceded every Fredonia Grange meeting were held at 8:00 p.m. Then the meetings would start about 9:00 p.m.;

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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they could easily last until 11:00 p.m. or midnight. When the Hazens first joined, the meetings were traditionally held on Wednesday evenings; there were no families with small children, and since the cows never took a day off, one day was probably similar to another for the farmers. The late meeting times went on for at least ten years. Then farming methods changed: small dairy farmers moved out; bigger dairy farmers came in with more cows. So most of the Grange members who had had dairy cows got rid of them. At that point, the potlucks and meeting times became earlier and the meeting day was changed to Saturday. At the time of this writing, the potluck is scheduled for around 6:00 p.m., with the meeting following at about 7:00 p.m. The idea behind this was to have the meetings finish earlier in the evening. It often seems, though, that people think that they now just have more time in which to talk—the meetings tend not to end much earlier. Also, the earlier eating time makes it difficult for those who work on Saturdays to make it to supper on time.

Athol and Helen proudly proclaim that they had only been in the Grange for a few years when they were elected to represent the Calhoun County Pomona Grange at the Michigan State Grange Convention in Petoskey.⁹³ Petoskey did not have the vast array of accommodations then that it does now, so the Hazens wound up staying in a private home. In between their Grange duties, they found time to take a boat tour under the Mackinac Bridge while it was being built. Part of the Hazens' responsibilities was to go to each Grange when they returned and give a report on the convention, as well as install the new year's officers. The author commented on the Hazens' meteoric rise to

⁹³ Things go full circle. In 2003, when the Michigan State Grange was again held at Petoskey, Athol and Helen were the Pomona Grange delegates once more.

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Helen Hazen, interview
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leadership. Helen replied: “They were ready for somebody else to take over. Like we are at that point now—I am.”⁹⁴

Athol said that the conventions then were much larger than those now because the Grange had 40,000 members. Since most of the Granges sent delegates, they needed a large building in which to meet. Although the Hazens do not recall where the convention in Petoskey was, a few years later, when it was held in Cadillac, they met at the armory. The Hazens were delegates from either Pomona or Fredonia, while another couple from Helen’s aunts and uncles who were either representing Wayland Grange or Allegan County Pomona Grange were also delegates. They were at least thirty years older than Athol and Helen, but they all stayed together in a cabin and really got to know one another. Helen reflects on her Uncle Harrison: “He was—kind of *stern* and—my *sisters* didn’t feel that way, but I—you know, I—was on my best behavior with Uncle Harrison. He was a *neat* guy. And he would set and talk with Athol all night *long* once we got back to where we were staying.”⁹⁵

Fredonia at the Fair

If people in Calhoun County know Fredonia Grange for only one reason, it is likely to be the food booth that they have had at the Calhoun County Fair since 1961. This was Helen and Mary LaFountain’s brainchild. Athol and Reuben offered moral support, but could not do much physically because they were both working full-time. Helen and Mary were not working outside their homes: Helen had four small children, while Mary had three. The two women decided to raise money for the Grange by selling hot dogs,

⁹⁴ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

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homemade pie, potato chips, soda pop, coffee, and iced tea at the fair. Helen tells what happened when Mary came to Helen's house before that first fair so that they could make their allotment of apple pies.

We had about—I don't know—ten, twelve pies ready to go in the oven. And the electricity went off. We had four kids, she had her three. It rained, it thundered and lightnined. . . . Turned cold. It really turned cold. . . . After it quit raining—you know—the *front* went through and it was *cool*. . . . And these kids—and they got *hungry*. [Laughter.] No electricity. And we ended up building a fire out in the backyard to fix something for the kids to keep warm. . . . And I don't know how long the electricity was off. We did manage to get the kids set around so that they didn't *freeze* to death—and *starve* to death. . . . I don't really remember how we ended up getting all those pies baked. . . . But—we did get the pies *baked*. . . . And to this *day* I *hate* to make an *apple pie*! If I can do *anything* but an *apple pie*, I'm fine.⁹⁶

The Fredonia Grange booth was in the old Merchants' Building; a newer one has since replaced it. That first year, they had a ten-foot-by-ten-foot booth. Their week's work netted a modest profit of about \$200. But the women were encouraged: they felt good about what they had done and wanted to do it again—only better. Helen and Athol recalled that at that time, they and the LaFountains were among the newer, younger members. The older, more established Grangers said that the food booth would not work—that they could not do it. When they first proposed the idea at a meeting, many of the members were skeptical. Wisely, however, the older members let them try new things, even though they were doubtful. They decided to stand back and let the younger

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ones experiment, seeing if they would fall on their faces or make a success of it. That is what the elder Hazens are now trying to do. They will lend support but are trying to step aside from active leadership. This is particularly hard for Athol—and, perhaps to some extent, unnecessary and even unwise.

Once the older members saw that the food booth would work, they became more supportive. Fredonia moved to a better location in the Merchants' Building—directly inside the large entry doors, where they could not be missed. They expanded the size of their booth; they expanded their menu. In the 1960s, Fredonia had tables set up; Grange people would take the seated customers' orders, which would be prepared especially for and served to them. It was labor intensive. Breakfast was a big item then. One of their members worked at the Kellogg's plant in Battle Creek.⁹⁷ Every morning, when his shift finished at 6:00 a.m., he would bring a group of ten to fifteen people to the booth for breakfast. Helen Hazen remembers that one of their big sellers for lunch and dinner was hot beef sandwiches with mashed potatoes and gravy. They had a restaurant roast the meat; Grangers made the gravy from the juice.

At the end of the week, you kind of run out of stuff to make gravy. And I remember making gravy with bouillon cubes [laughter in voice] and water, and salt and pepper. And some Kitchen Bouquet to darken it up. And I don't know why it *sold*. It wasn't the *best*, but it wasn't the *worst* either. . . . At the *beginning*—on *Monday* when we started serving hot beef sandwiches, we [Helen and Mary LaFountain] had the first one. If the gravy wasn't *hot*, they got told. If it needed more salt—we were the taste

⁹⁶ Ibid.

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John Hazen, Jr., interview

testers. And if we wouldn't *buy* it, we wouldn't *sell* it. And that's the way we ran the booth. We had—we wanted *good food*. And we encouraged people if things weren't right—come and tell us, don't tell your neighbors.⁹⁸

Fredonia's fair menu continued to evolve. Members discontinued serving breakfast when the Calhoun County Pomona Grange decided to have a pancake booth so that it could raise money to host the one-hundredth-anniversary celebration of the Michigan State Grange. The hot beef sandwiches were labor-intensive. Helen Peck, by then solidly behind the food booth, developed Fredonia's two signature fair specialties: sloppy joes and potato salad. She did this at home, testing countless batches before getting the tastes just right. For a time, Helen Peck cooked and cooled all the potatoes at her home and brought them to the fairgrounds. Fredonia had a freezer in a little shed by the Merchants' Building. Some of the women used the freezer as a work surface to make coleslaw. Athol describes how they gradually began to collect more equipment:

Homer Jaycees had a booth on—outside of the Merchants' Building, on the north side of the building. They decided to give it up, so we *bought* it from them for fifty bucks. And they had four or five refrigerators in it and a couple of coolers. And we moved it around to that side of the building where we had our booth and then we used *that* to *produce* more food. So that gave us someplace else to work in.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ At one time, Battle Creek, Michigan, ten miles from Marshall, was the breakfast cereal capital of the world. The main operations of two of the major cereal companies, Kellogg and Post, were located there. These plants employed generations of people from the surrounding county.

⁹⁸ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

⁹⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Cooking the huge number of requisite potatoes got to be too much for Helen Peck. So the Grange rented the kitchen at the B. E. Henry Community Building, about an eighth of a mile away. But this was far from satisfactory: it required constant running back and forth between the B. E. Henry Building and the food booth. When the booth was getting low on something, someone would have to hurry down the hill to the kitchen to get a large kettle of food and drive it back up to the booth. The Hazens reflected that the hardest thing to transport was the soup. Fredonia's ham and bean soup and beef vegetable soup are eagerly awaited, year after year. Athol explains how Fredonia entered the soup business:

We had *baked beans* that had brown sugar and stuff in them. *Beautiful baked beans*—nobody was *buying* them. . . . But we decided, all right, we're going to sell *soup*. So we added *water* to it, made soup. We were charging . . . maybe fifty cents a *bowl* for *beans*. And we raised it to seventy-five to sell *soup*—and sold out!

[Laughter.] My oldest son . . . he was *helping* at that time . . . he just shook his head: "And there's one time somebody was paying a whole lot of money for extra *water*!"

[Laughter.] But that was about the time that people—health conscious; soup was better *for them* than baked beans.¹⁰⁰

In the 1970s, a member was at another fair and saw a booth that was making a good profit serving scalloped potatoes and ham. She suggested that Fredonia do the same. Fredonia experimented and adapted: at first, it served them on only one day—Wednesday, Senior Citizens' Day. It evolved to the point where Helen Hazen and Mary LaFountain would go up to the Greenville area and load up the Hazen suburban

with a half ton of potatoes
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Helen describes a recent

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with a half ton of potatoes, divided into fifty-pound bags. They would store the potatoes in the Pecks' basement, bringing them to the fairgrounds as they needed them. But in time, they discovered that it was easier to buy the potatoes in ten-pound bags, since their recipes called for so many pounds of potatoes (in increments of ten) per roaster for scalloped potatoes, so many pounds of potatoes for a square keeper of potato salad. Helen describes a recent foray to a nearby produce market to buy potatoes for the fair:

I found somebody to help us and I wanted four-hundred pounds of potatoes. "No, no, no!" Couldn't get four-hundred pounds of potatoes. And—what are you going to do? I mean, we needed *potatoes* like the next *day*! And finally I said, "Could I have *forty* of those *bags*?" "Oh, yeah, no *problem*." [Laughter.] So we got *forty ten-pound bags* of potatoes—but we couldn't have *four-hundred pounds*! [Laughs.]¹⁰¹

For fifteen to twenty years, Fredonia members and friends discussed how good it would be to have a kitchen right at the fairgrounds. At one point they proposed building a completely separate building. Two of the biggest stumbling blocks were getting the money to do the job and getting approval from the fair board. Finally, it came down to who would pay for the sewage hookup. But they worked that out and Fredonia was given approval in 2000. There was a rule that an architect had to draw up the plans for any new structure out of which people would be served. Mary and Reuben LaFountain's son, Dan, was working for an architect in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who drew up the plans for the Grange at no charge. Fredonia received some small donations and Helen Peck donated \$15,000 from the sale of her farm. Nearly all the labor was volunteered; Fredonia figures

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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that it took 4,000 hours of labor. Figuring conservatively at \$10 an hour, Grangers compute that the labor alone on the kitchen was worth \$40,000. Fredonia members calculated that it would be a two-year project. They began work in April 2000. They finished in August 2000 and served out of it that year—120 days later! The only real task that they could not do themselves was dig out the basement—they hired someone to do that. The city brought in the sewer and water lines at no charge. After the fair, that September, Fredonia held its annual appreciation dinner to thank all those who had helped the Grange throughout the year. They decided to hold it right there in the Merchants' Building and asked Home Grange to do it, agreeing to pay them for this. Home Grange refused to take money, saying that it was an expression of thanks for what Fredonia has done at the fairgrounds. Fredonia did make a \$200 contribution to the Michigan State Grange Foundation in honor of Home Grange. The dinner was around the time of Helen Peck's birthday, so Fredonia combined the dinner with a birthday party. There was just a hint of irony in this, since Helen Peck was not supportive at first. As Athol explains:

When we voted to do it, everybody voted for it *except* Helen. . . . I *think* she was in favor of it, but I don't think she thought we could *do* it. . . . And—but then, when we got started and started doing it—Mary would bring Helen Peck *down*. . . . As we were building it. And she saw it going up—and changed her mind *completely*.¹⁰²

Memorable Grangers

The Hazens have known hundreds, if not thousands, of people through the Grange. So trying to get them to focus on a handful of the most memorable is difficult. When

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asked, they mentioned a number of people, including Bill Brake, who was the state master when they joined, Beulah Winter, with whom they have worked at the county level for decades, and, of course, Helen and Vern Peck. The majority of the people who live most vividly in their memories and anecdotes have been Fredonia Grange members—like part of an extended family.

Chief among these would be Mary and Reuben LaFountain, who have been like a brother and sister to the Hazens. Mary and Reuben joined the Grange (since Mary had belonged as an adolescent, she actually *rejoined* the Grange) a few years after Athol and Helen did. Athol began to tell how this came about.

Athol: They joined in fifty-nine. Reuben and Mary—when *we* came here, they were living in Manchester [Michigan]. And—well, Reuben got work in *Albion* so they moved up to a farm here just southeast of us. And of course, they were that close, then Helen and Vern were going to be *insisting* they were going to become *Grange* members. [Chuckles.] You go ahead [to Helen] and tell ‘em the—what Mary said about *us*—what her mother kept telling her about *us*. . . . before we knew *them*.¹⁰³

Helen: Yeah. I didn’t like her. . . . I hadn’t even met her. . . . Because this member of our Grange kept saying what good *taste* she had and all that good stuff, you know. . . . And I just knew I didn’t like her. Well, come to find out, she didn’t like us *either*, because Helen [Peck] kept telling *her* about Helen [Hazen] and *Athol* and what good *kids* they had. . . . And neither one of us liked each other before we ever *met*

¹⁰² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

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each other. . . . We had *perfect kids*. And [Mary had] *immaculate* taste. And all I could think of was—whoa!¹⁰⁴

Athol and Helen began to reminisce about other people whom they feel they have been fortunate to know. Athol: “So—there’s a lot of memories out there. There’s a *lot* of good people that we’ve met.”¹⁰⁵ Helen: “Do you—ask about memorable people—most of them were *Grange* people.”¹⁰⁶ Many of the people had died; but they continued to live vividly in the Hazens’ thoughts.

The Hazens began talking about Wendell Fountain, who had died the previous October. He and his wife, Mary Jane, had belonged to the Grange when they were first married and lived in Pennsylvania. Then they moved, and did not rejoin a Grange. Wendell did not return to the Grange until he was in his seventies; a farmer, he had passed on some of the more active work to his children and so had more time. When he and Mary Jane did come back, he threw himself into Fredonia’s activities with gusto. People still reminisce about Wendell putting on his chef’s hat and apron to work at the pancake brunches. Helen Hazen is a kindly, caring, maternal figure who tends to mother people. Her Grange office of Flora gives her an official mandate to visit the sick and the bereaved—something that meshes well with her natural inclinations. She went to see Wendell just before he died and carries an indelible memory from that meeting.

I saw Wendell a couple [days] before he passed away—went down to the hospital. . . .

But—ah—he wanted me to stay until Mary Jane came back. And it was no *problem*,

I stayed. And he thanked me for staying when Mary Jane and their daughter got

¹⁰⁴ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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back. I said, “No problem.” I said, “Well, I’ll see ya.” He said, “Either here or there.” Either here or there. . . . He was a *neat* guy. . . . He loved to tease people.¹⁰⁷

Thinking of Wendell Fountain and the Grange projects on which he worked, such as the Bluebird House Committee, brought other Grangers to mind.

Helen: And Harold *Baum* was another one that had special memories with the *bluebird* Harold and I went to the bluebird festival together. . . . He had a rare sense of humor, too. But, they did have a lunch—you could get a lunch there, a light lunch or whatever, and I was gonna go ahead and get my lunch, and he said, “No, when I go with a lady, *I* pay.” So he paid for my lunch. . . . And he was also the one that would—here you would be *busy* as all get out and trying to do sixteen things at hand—at one time, and he’d be in the kitchen and he’d come up stand beside me, and he’d say, “Little faster if you could stand it.” [Helen and Athol both laugh.] That was one of his *favorite, favorite* deals. . . . I’d finally say, “Harold, it’s the *wrong time!*” And he’d go off and leave you alone. And then later he’d come up and, “A little faster if you could stand it,” or whatever.¹⁰⁸

Athol: Harold Baum helped us when we first started planting trees down at the fairgrounds. . . . He’d had *farming* in his background. He had a tractor with a backhoe on it. And we took the tractor down there and dug holes to plant the first trees down at the fairgrounds. Then later on all we did was use a shovel and plant them. But he was there and some of those trees have [now] got to be—thirty, forty

¹⁰⁶ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

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foot tall. . . . But that was a good project that the Grange took on. . . . We got those from Reuben and Mary's farm over in Kalamazoo County. We just went over and dug them up.¹⁰⁹

Talking about Fredonia's tree-planting at the Calhoun County Fairgrounds made the author think of a story told some time before about a tree that was not transplanted so gently. She asks the Hazens about the tree that was torn out by the roots. Athol: "Well, I think maybe we were telling you about Jay Williams, who—where the walnut tree—that we went out there in the spring, we were planting these trees and he wanted to give us one, so he hooks his tractor to this walnut tree . . . and he pulls it out by the roots—didn't dig around it or anything. Took it down there, and planted it, and it's still growing."¹¹⁰ Helen: "Those nut trees have a tap root that goes—*forever*. But—it *survived*. . . . A lot of fascinating people."¹¹¹

The author had met and talked with the widows of Wendell Fountain, Harold Baum, and Jay Williams. But next the Hazens shared stories about people who no longer have kin affiliated with Fredonia Grange. Still, they had made such an impression that the author had heard frequent anecdotes that featured them—and in which they seemed to live again.

Athol: Well, one that we really haven't mentioned that was just an *excellent* Grange member, and that was Elwin Foote—and his wife, Elizabeth. . . . The Grange had a 4-H Nut Club. . . . And one *summer*, we had a Grange picnic over at the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary. They had a lodge over there, and we rented the lodge. And we advertised

¹⁰⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

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that Corwin Davis was going to be there to talk about nut propagation. . . . Elwin and Elizabeth came over. They were not Grange members. They lived in Fredonia Township. And—but unfortunately for some reason or other, I think Corwin got sick and he didn't show *up*. But anyway, we talked to them, and it wasn't long and they joined the Grange. And they were very active. Just *wonderful* people. And a lot of the finishing work done on the kitchen area and the sewing room was done by Elwin Foote and Roy Eagly—two retirees. They'd go over there and spend all day and work by themselves and just. . . . He was also—he brewed his own *beer*. . . . If you went there, you could have a bottle.¹¹²

Helen: He made the *stands* for the *staffs*.¹¹³ [People had proudly pointed out the beautiful hardwood stands for the staffs of office at Fredonia since the author had first come to the Grange.]

Athol: And another thing he *made* . . . he would cut walnuts . . . the nut itself . . . into very thin—*sheets*. And the holes were all there—then he'd glue them together and make *baskets*. . . .¹¹⁴

Helen: They're still using the one at Home Grange, I think. . . . He was a *neat guy*.¹¹⁵

Athol: And the—*sign* that's on the northwest corner of the fairgrounds that says "Calhoun County Fair—Oldest Fair in Michigan"—those boards, those letters were—he made out of old barn boards. And we had them *up* there with no *paint* on

¹¹¹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹³ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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them. But somebody finally painted them because they didn't realize what they *were*.¹¹⁶

Helen: They had—what—two sons and a daughter. And Elizabeth said they used to go camping weekends. He worked at Post—a troubleshooter. He said when he was sitting in a chair and leaning back in a chair, Post was making money. If something went wrong and he had to go to work, they were *losing* money. But they didn't have a lot of money and they would go camping—go north somewhere. And she said, “Well, we'd see how much money we got, we'd go until half of it was gone, and then we'd turn around and come back.” And she said, “You know those were the *best times* we ever had.” *Neat people!* Elizabeth is *still* a member—she's in a nursing home. I should go see her again. Ah, she probably won't *know* me. . . . She's over *ninety*—she's ninety-two or -three, at least. . . . Kind of a—she was a feisty lady. She's *still* feisty. And she never wasted any time getting from here to there. . . . I mean, when she was ready to go some place—when she took off, she took *off*. “Why stand around—why go slow? Get where you want to go, then you can do what you want to *do!*” Was kind of—and she always—well, yeah, she was kinda—some years we didn't take many *awards* at state session, you know. And we had to get on the *ball!* [Laughter.] “Well—it's about time!” you know. Well!¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹⁷ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Athol: And her name was “Elizabeth.” You didn’t call her anything but “Elizabeth.” Not “Betty,” not “Lizzie.” She was “Elizabeth,” and she let you *know* that it was “Elizabeth.”¹¹⁸

Helen: And I *loved* her just to *death*. She was just the neatest—in a way she reminded me—not in *looks*, but being outspoken and—she reminded me I guess of my Grandmother Jackson. Because she was outspoken. But she’s *buzz* off—and just . . . a treasure, a treasure.¹¹⁹

The reputation of another Granger preceded him. Before the Hazens met him, they heard what a dreadful man he was.

Athol: And another one that got to be real good friends, his name was Karl Katz, his wife’s name was Rita. And when we first joined the Grange and we were getting to know people—and they kept telling me what an *awful* person Karl Katz was. You *wouldn’t* like him, he was just—a total grouch. . . . A troublemaker, and all of this. Well, he’d come to Grange a little bit—not too much, but—the more I got to know him, the more I *liked* him, and basically we got along fine. But I remember the night that we passed a resolution in the Grange about the TB sanitarium they had in Battle Creek. We passed a resolution recommending that it be turned into a *nursing home* for *seniors*. Passed it, advertised it, sent the thing into the commissioners. And that week they practically—it was the week they voted to *do* that. . . . But Karl hadn’t

¹¹⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹¹⁹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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been at the meeting. And when he found *out* that we'd passed that *resolution*, he very seldom missed a meeting.¹²⁰

Interviewer: Now would he be related—there was a lady who came—it was for either Thanksgiving or Christmas—she was a Katz.

Athol: Yeah, Letha Katz. . . . That was her brother-in-law. He'd been in the Grange—I can't remember. . . . He joined in the early years and had been a member—was a member for more than fifty *years*. He also insisted that I should belong to the Masons. So I did join the Masons because of his influence. And I was a member of them as long as he was *alive*. When he passed away, then I *dropped* the membership.¹²¹

Helen: He didn't have any *children*. Used to come over to the feed mill down here in Eckford. And sometimes he would come up and *visit*. And—all by himself, set here at the dining-room table. And half the time, I really couldn't follow what all he was talking about, but I *listened*. [Laughter.] And—just—he'd just come to visit. . . . And when he'd get ready to *go*, I'd walk out to the car with him. And I always had to have a taste of his apricot brandy. He carried it in back of the—he almost *insisted*. [Laughter.] I had to have a little of his apricot brandy.¹²²

Interviewer: You had to drink out of the *bottle*?

¹²⁰ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Helen: Oh, yes. We drank out of the bottle. My word—he didn’t carry a *cup*. . . .

And, it was all right. I could have a sip of his apricot brandy. His wife was totally against all kinds of alcohol, Rita was.¹²³

Athol: So he didn’t *have any* in the *house*.¹²⁴

Helen: He had it in the truck. He had it on the farm. There were times when he’d had too much of it and would get in a ditch once in a while. . . . Well, he always offered me his apricot *brandy*. Well, Charles Katz, his brother, always offered me *snuff*. [Laughing.] I could *handle* the brandy but not the *snuff*. He really thought I ought to have some snuff. He’d always ask—always offered me some snuff. “No, I don’t think so, Charles.” “It’s *good* for you,” he’d say. I said, “Yeah, that’s all right, but I don’t think I’ll *have any*.”¹²⁵

Athol: And one of the worst trips we had coming home from *Grange*, was one night it got real foggy. Well, Karl was over there. He was blind—he had—one of his eyes was knocked out, so he only had one eye. Here he had this *old* truck, the lights did not, did not shine together. . . . Oh, God, he must have been in his *eighties*! So—we couldn’t let him drive home. And that was the night, I drove his truck home, Helen followed me. . . . And—when you got to some place where you thought you should be turning, you had to get out to find if you had the right road.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹²⁵ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹²⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Helen: You almost had to get out and walk to get it.¹²⁷

Athol: We finally got him *home*.¹²⁸

Helen: Well, the *two* of 'em—yeah. Karl and Rita, *both*.¹²⁹

Athol: And they offered to let us stay.¹³⁰

Helen: They *wanted* us to say the night.¹³¹

Athol: We wanted to come home, so we drove home. And it was the same way all the way home . . . several miles.¹³²

Helen: And one of the things I remember that night, we got to Twenty-Two Mile Road, and was heading home, and a car passed us. . . . A crazy person passed us that night.¹³³

Athol: So—there's a thousand and *more* memories.¹³⁴

A Need for Progress

At various times, Athol had mentioned that he had at one time belonged to the Farm Bureau and the Masons, as well as the Grange. The only membership that he continued—and it is now at fifty years and counting—is to the Grange. The author asked Athol and Helen why they still belong to the Grange.

¹²⁷ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹²⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹²⁹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³⁰ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³¹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³³ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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¹ Athol Hazen, Jr.
² Ibid.
³ Helen Hazen, inte
⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr.
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Athol: It's *doing* something. [There is no pause or hesitation.] All the time. All the time. We've got some activity going.¹³⁵

Helen: And not only that—ah, Mary LaFountain says our Grange has something that most Granges don't have—we're a *family*. We disagree—we don't always agree. We have our *differences*, just like any family does. But she said, "Our Grange is a *family*—it's a *Grange* family." And you're right—we're always doing something. And even when Helen couldn't, she could get us—keep us moving. . . . It's the people, it's the people. . . . So *many*—great people.¹³⁶

Athol: But the thing about it is—it's a *progression*. And our Grange is progressing.¹³⁷

Helen: Oh yeah, we aren't standing *still*.¹³⁸

Athol: Now you mentioned the other two organizations [the Farm Bureau and the Masons]. The reason we dropped Farm Bureau, basically, we were having insurance. One of the reasons I dropped their membership was back many years ago when they had this PCB situation, where they put some fire retardant—they had a Farm Bureau *plant* and mixed it with cattle feed . . . inadvertently. Helen's cousin, who was a

¹³⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹³⁸ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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¹⁴² Athol Hazen, Jr., in
¹⁴³ Ibid.
¹⁴⁴ Helen Hazen, inter
¹⁴⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., in
¹⁴⁶ Helen Hazen, inter
¹⁴⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., in

veterinary in Battle Creek, he was—it was one of his farm people that he did the veterinary work for was the first ones that discovered what it was.¹³⁹

Interviewer: Did all the cattle die?

Athol: No. But they—they dropped production and all this.¹⁴⁰

Helen: They got real *sick*. And they had to be destroyed—they destroyed *herds*.¹⁴¹

Athol: A lot of them, yeah. But they got some of this feed *back*—and remixed it. . . . But the cattle wouldn't eat it, of course. Or if they ate some of it, but not as much as they would have ordinarily. But at that time Farm Bureau raised their dues to forty-five dollars a year. And I—if they would have taken that *money* and helped the farmers out, I'd a probably still been a member. But as it was, I dropped the membership because I felt the Farm Bureau—because of the connection to the owners that they had—even the membership group had some responsibility to those *farmers*.¹⁴²

Helen: And we knew—wasn't Elton Smith on the board of directors?¹⁴³

Athol: He was president of the Farm Bureau.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴³ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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⁴² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview.
⁴³ Helen Hazen, interview.
⁴⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview.

Helen: He was president of the Farm Bureau in Michigan. . . . And for some reason, he sold all his jerseys [a type of cow]. Before a lot of this came out to the public, he got rid of all his cattle.¹⁴⁵

Athol: And the reason I dropped the Masons—there was nothing going on—*nothing*—they'd have meetings and you'd go through the ritual, and that was it. Then come home. . . . They didn't have any *projects*. . . . Didn't have anything—*nothing* that interested me. Just to go there and have a meeting and then come home—it was. . . . [Author asks how they got people to come.] Well, it used to be a status symbol. But then again, not *all* Masons—the local groups are not all that way. Because they've got a big Mason group at Bedford that has got a brand new *hall* and puts on *meals* and does a lot of community-service work. . . . But the other factor was that the women don't belong. . . . They have what they call the Eastern Star that the ladies and men belong to. But the Masonic Order—no women belong to the Masonic Order. . . . They have a DeMoloy that boys can belong to.¹⁴⁶

Helen: DeMolay, yeah.¹⁴⁷

Athol: And Rainbow for the girls. . . . And then at twenty-one, they join the other.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003. Helen said this in a voice heavy with sarcasm. The clear implication is that Elton Smith, who had insider information from his privileged position, and who could thus foresee the crisis that lay ahead for the dairy industry in Michigan, sold off his holdings before the bottom fell out of the market. While this would have enabled him to profit handsomely, he did not in turn utilize his organization to help his former dairy colleagues, who were devastated by the feed catastrophe. Helen had known Elton Smith from childhood: they had both belonged to Leighton Grange as youths. Helen and Athol concluded that the Farm Bureau did not truly have the interest of family farmers at heart

¹⁴⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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¹ Helen Hazen, interview

Helen: This is what we liked about the *Grange*. We could go—I could—we could go *together*. We could take our *kids*. And when our kids were growing up, of course we had young kids, teenagers. We had people older than we were—and parents. And you learned to work with all ages. Some of them adapted—I don’t know how to say it—to working with the younger kids. . . . And that’s what *excited*—what makes me so *happy*—to see the Family Night with all *ages*. There was the *old folks* doing *cards*, there was the *kids* doing *games*, there was other kids making Valentines for the military. There was cookie decorating. And they *weren’t* segregated. . . . And that’s, I think, our whole society has done away with that. And I don’t think—I think that’s *bad*, that’s *bad*. . . . I had the advantage of having a grandmother live with us after grandfather died. And we had a small *house*. And we got *along*. [Author remarks that this does not happen very often anymore.] No, it doesn’t—it doesn’t. There isn’t the interaction between grandparents—Martha Rocco has it. . . .

They don’t live there, but my word her grandkids and great-grandkids are there. I called over there one morning, and this little voice answered. And I said, “Is gramma there?” “Nope, she just left.” And I said, “Okay, I’ll call back.” “Okay.” Hung up. . . . But it’s a *special family*.¹⁴⁹

This leads to a conversation about Martha Rocco. At that time, Martha was head of the Women’s Activities Committee for Fredonia Grange. Whenever the Grange was having a food event, Martha would marshal the troops to help prepare it. Helen and Athol remark that Martha is the only person that they know who can use a carrot/potato peeler to peel going in both directions. The author was astounded to learn that Martha

¹⁴⁹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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was then well into her eighties—she seemed so youthful. She had had eleven children, most of whom had stayed in the area, along with their children, grandchildren—and on into great-grandchildren. Martha had run the farm while her husband, Roy, who is now deceased, worked in town. The big stained glass window in Fredonia Grange Hall is a memorial window, crafted from donations made in memory of two of Roy Rocco's grandparents. Roy had also belonged to Fredonia Grange. Martha now lived alone, but had several children living very close by. Paul Jones used to say that if Martha Rocco got just some of her family to join the Grange, Fredonia could go on forever. During the time that the author was doing her research, at least three of Martha's children, along with their spouses and any dependents, had joined Fredonia Grange.

Why People Should Join the Grange: Friendship, Support, Extended Family

The Hazens discussed the changes that were taking place in the State Grange. After six years with Bob Brown at the helm, Jeff Swainston had taken over in October 2002. They talked about how Bob did not reach out to other institutions, like MSU. The Hazens said that Bob had put too much emphasis on accouterments: at the state sessions, he wanted the meals served on china, with crystal and silver accents. He wanted the events held at five-star hotels. Helen quoted Helen Peck on the subject: "It's not necessary. You can get your point across and do what you have to do without spending all that *money!*"¹⁵⁰ To the Hazens, artificial elegance is not the essence of the Grange.

Helen: I belonged to the Mothers' Club and I forgot what on earth it was. . . . And they were a bunch of old *biddies!* I'm sorry. . . . Because they had a meeting at somebody's house. And if there was a speck of dust or a cobweb, it got

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mentioned—after the meeting, you know. And had a—a committee meeting, some committee meeting of the Grange. And I think it was—I’m not even sure where it was. But it didn’t make any difference—they came to have a committee meeting. If you had a cobweb, well, that was all right—it didn’t bother *them any* if it didn’t bother *you*! You know? You were comfortable with them. . . .

After we moved over here, I attended a nurses’ convention in Marquette. And you would think a nurses’ convention—it would be a friendly, congenial place. It *wasn’t*. You felt absolutely *out of place* and *absolutely uncomfortable*! Which *shouldn’t have been*! And I wasn’t the only one that felt that way. And then you go to a *Grange convention*, “Hi, how are ya?” And everybody’s friends. Absolute *turnaround*. Of course, this was back in fifty-three. But just the same. . . .¹⁵¹

The interviewer asked the Hazens if they would recommend that people join the Grange. As a follow-up, she asked, if they would endorse the Grange, why would they do so and what could a member expect to gain from the association.

Helen: You bet I’d recommend it—in a minute! Because—the *fellowship*, the opportunity to work together for a good cause with other people who *also* are working for the same cause. Ah—friendships—long-time friendships. You become an extended *family*.¹⁵²

Athol: One of the things that the we haven’t covered as far as Grange membership is the writing of resolutions. . . . The influence we can have *by writing* resolutions and

¹⁵⁰ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

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⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr.

⁶ Helen Hazen, Jr.

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⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr.

⁹ Helen Hazen, inte

sending them on to our legislatures and *that* type of thing. That's an important part of the Grange philosophy. . . . It's the ability to work together for a common cause with a lot of people from all over. And, of course, probably—but the main thing is—you're working in a family *environment*, you're working with people of all *ages*—all types of *schooling*, also. And friendly—and you can have *fun*—and that's one of the big things—you can have fun with older people, you can have fun with younger people. And you can get to know your neighbors, if they *belong*. . . . And it's a tremendous opportunity to—be a member of a community. But you gotta *apply* yourself.¹⁵³

Helen: You get into it—you get out of it what you put into it. You go to a meeting and set there, go through the meeting and leave immediately after—and you're not going to get much out of it. You aren't going to feel *comfortable*. And sometimes we have a meeting and people are reluctant to go home—they're standing around *visiting* and visit—and you know you had a good meeting. . . .¹⁵⁴

Athol: That's an excellent thing. Things occur. . . .¹⁵⁵

Helen: Stan Fenner—you didn't know Stan Fenner—he was a minister. His wife worked over at the Federal Center in Battle Creek. He said, "You know, the Grange is your *church*."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁵⁴ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003. Since this is usually the case after Fredonia Grange meetings, they must always be good.

¹⁵⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Athol: Well—it *is*. Because it's—we're using it in basically that aspect. It's something else out of the home. But it's a—if we're using it as a church, it's *different* than any church because it doesn't have the restrictive *things* that the churches *advocate*. . . . And some of the churches are freeing up. But the Grange is freeing up also. *Some* of the Granges. But—I can't belong to a religious order that says that the Grange is a *demonic organization*. . . . I mean, basically, if *Andrea* [Peck, Fredonia Grange Lecturer/Enrichment Director] lived up to the tenets of the church that she *goes* to, she would not be a Grange member.¹⁵⁷

Helen: Secret organization. . . . Ah—Margaret Reinke. They belong to the Lutheran Church. And—they belong to the Grange—Judd and Margaret. They don't come to many *meetings* if any, but they help with the *projects* and pay their dues, and—super *people*. He was fire chief of Fredonia for a while. And he had a key to the hall in case of whatever. And somebody said to Margaret, one time, she said—well, she was secretary at the church. And said, “How on *earth* can you belong to the Grange?” Because the *Lutherans* don't believe in anything like *that*. And she said, “Well, I don't tell 'em *everything* I do.” [Laughter.] “I don't tell 'em everything I do!”¹⁵⁸

Inevitable Change

The formal interview concluded with the author asking the Hazens whether they thought that it was necessary for the Grange to change. She asked them to support their answer. Also, if they thought that it needed to change, she asked for their vision of how.

¹⁵⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁵⁸ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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Helen: I don't know *how*. . . . But it's necessary. . . . Because—I don't know how to say it. They're losing *ground*. And they're losing—and the *values* and the things they stand for are being *lost* and that's *too bad*.¹⁵⁹

Athol: Ah—change is inevitable. . . . On the larger scale. And the Grange has to *meet* the changes that are apparent within our *society*. . . . We've got to keep up with today's—the things that people are interested in *today*! And without *changing* and keeping our ideas what they were fifty years *ago*—we're just stagnating. We've got to get something going that people are going to be interested in and maybe it's even going *back* to some of the old *ideas* such as *family*—getting them *together*. But yet, in a different *context* than it was fifty years ago. . . . It's a different *generation*.

They've got different *ideas*. And we've got to find out *what* those ideas *are*, what they *want*, and change so we can *give* it to them. . . . And it might be—it's hard to say *what* those *are*. But it's kind of *amazing* how *our* Grange has accepted the *focus* programs. It's been an enlightening *experience* and we'll—and as we go *deeper* into it, it's going to change some *thoughts* of people. [Author comments how supportive the majority of Fredonia Grange members have been of the focus groups—even some of those members whom some thought would be opposed.] Well, that's the thing of it. They're—and because they are, our Grange is *progressing* faster than almost any other Grange in the State of Michigan. [Author notes that there are few Fredonia Grange members who are vocally oppositional.] No. No. There—some of them,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

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yes—we got people in the Grange that just as soon see the status quo stay where it is.¹⁶⁰

Helen: Well—it worked for fifty *years*—why can't it just *continue* that way—quote, unquote.¹⁶¹

Athol: But there's no people *out* there—or very few people *out* there that want to live like it was fifty years *ago*. . . . Because, I mean, we've gone from—an outside john to air conditioning.¹⁶²

The Hazens ended the conversation by musing upon what might lie ahead for the Grange, for other community-service organizations—indeed, for community itself.

Athol: Well—the future in it perhaps—and it's something that we maybe haven't *looked at* is the fact that—we're getting a change in the philosophy of our people—they've gone back to families, they've gone back to this type of thing. And this is what they're looking for. They're not looking for—oh, what the fifties and sixties—that generation was looking for. These—the newer generation—and maybe even some of them that were born in the fifties and sixties—they've gone *through* something that didn't *work* and now they're looking for something *better*.¹⁶³

Athol and Helen clearly believe that the Grange is and can be that “something better.” To them the Grange is an organization that sees no limitations, only possibilities and

¹⁶⁰ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁶¹ Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁶² Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

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* Hazen Hazen, interview

potentialities. They feel that it has had an enormous, positive impact on their lives; they have no doubts that if others will give the Grange a chance, it will do the same for them.

Summary

Collectively, the occurrences portrayed in this chapter represent hundreds of years of Grange membership. Although each person depicted is unique, with singular perspectives, there are certain common characteristics that emerge from their Grange experiences that help to account for such longevity.

These people believe that **the Grange helped them to realize their truest selves, to become**, under its aegis, **more than they could have ever been without its nurturance and guidance**. Helen Peck credited the Grange with helping her to overcome the feelings of inadequacy that came from her never being able to attend high school. Athol Hazen attributes his ability to become township supervisor to the leadership development that he encountered in the Grange. Helen Hazen was able to accomplish undreamed of things—being Junior Grange leader, being in charge of the Fredonia Grange fair food booth, becoming the expert and chief instigator behind the Fredonia Grange bluebird project—because the Grange saw her potential and key Grangers encouraged and incubated it—allowing her to “spread her wings.”¹⁶⁴

Universally, the interviewees **value the relationships that they have with other Grange members**. Rich Hazen came back to the Grange because he cared about the people and what would happen to their organization. Sue Withers vows that she will always be a Grange member—with or without a formal organization; if the Grange ceased to exist, her feelings of affection and esteem for her Grange friends would not

¹⁶⁴ Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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¹ Rich Hazen, Letter to
² Rich Hazen, conversat
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change, the bonds would not be broken—only the venue in which to continually renew them. Mary LaFountain asserts that Fredonia Grange is like an extended family—a sentiment with which all the other interviewees, explicitly or implicitly, concurred.

The Fredonia Grange members represented here proudly claim that **Fredonia remains a vital, vibrant, relevant organization because it is progressive and active.** Athol Hazen left the Masons because, in his opinion, they did not *do* anything but have meetings; for him, an organization needs a more compelling purpose—it needs to reach out into its community and make a positive difference, address significant needs. With nearly her dying breath, Helen Peck was exhorting Grangers to jettison secrecy, cease trying to operate as they did a hundred years ago, and bring the organization into the twenty-first century. Rich Hazen wrote to the leaders of the Michigan State Grange, noting that clinging to the past would bring certain extinction and urging them to “change, change, change.”¹⁶⁵ As a youth, more than thirty years before the interview, Mary Houghton had had a vision of the Grange as an organization in action, serving communities in action; she remains committed to realizing this vision.

After learning about the Grange and hearing some of its members’ stories, a colleague remarked that one might think, in the abstract, that these would not be very empowered people—not what might be described as “movers and shakers.” Many live in rural areas, do not hold advanced academic degrees or societally influential jobs, do not have large financial resources. As some have good-naturedly remarked, they are an almost classic caricature of the rural rube, cherishing God and country.¹⁶⁶ Yet these people are

¹⁶⁵ Rich Hazen, Letter to the Officers of the Michigan State Grange, October 20, 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Rich Hazen, conversation with author, April 17, 2002, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

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incredibly empowered.¹⁶⁷ They do not suffer from the modern curse of anomie: they know that they make a difference. They are interested in world affairs, but they do not anguish that they are not in the position to make global policy. Their theater of action is closer to home: they reach out with help, situation by situation, person to person. There is a recurring thread that interweaves all the interviews: *I cannot make nation-to-nation connections. I cannot do great things. But I can do small things—I can reach out to someone in need, give a helping hand, show that someone cares. The Grange gives me an opportunity to be part of something that is greater than I could ever be alone. If I can touch one other life in a positive way, and that person touches one other life, and so on, like a pebble in a pond, continuing the cycle—well, pretty soon the whole world will be united with bonds of caring.*¹⁶⁸ In truth, in time the slow, steady, continual accumulation of the small things can become huge.

¹⁶⁷ Brenda Wrigley, discussion in Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, April 17, 2002, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Brenda Wrigley, remarks at Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002. A number of Fredonia Grange members are eager to build bridges to nontraditional constituencies and receptive to unaccustomed strategies to do so. That was at least a partial catalyst for their participation in the Grange Panel Discussion for the Gender, Race, and Class Seminar at Michigan State University. At the close of the session, Brenda Wrigley, the instructor of the course, an assistant professor in and past practitioner of public relations, explained that her job included an outreach component, and that she would be happy to offer some suggestions for how Granges could become more effective at disseminating their message—and to help them clarify what that message really is. This delighted the Grange members, who immediately invited her to attend the next Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting. Brenda did so, listening to the discussion among representatives of several Granges, then offering myriad ideas for things that the Granges could do, both on their own and in conjunction with an institution such as Michigan State University (with its vast resources), to assess their strengths and weaknesses, ascertain their opportunities and threats, determine their identities, and then promulgate this to receptive audiences (giving them tools to discover who these publics might be). Although representatives of the Michigan State Grange and several local Granges attended the meeting and seemed initially and superficially enthusiastic about the possibilities that Brenda proposed, only Fredonia Grange went on to implement any of them. Brenda Wrigley, remarks to Grange Panel Discussion for Gender, Race, and Class Seminar, March 13, 2002; Brenda Wrigley, Statewide Michigan Action Grange Meeting, April 20, 2002.

¹⁶⁸ Beulah Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Roland Winter, interview by author, October 22, 2001; Athol Hazen, Jr., interviews by author, October 25, 2001 and January 30, 2003; Helen Hazen, interviews by author, October 25, 2001 and January 30, 2003; Helen Peck, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Mary LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Reuben LaFountain, interview by author, November 6, 2001; Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002; Sue Withers, interview by author, February 28, 2002.

CHAPTER 8

FOCUS GROUPS: THIS TABLE FULL OF PEOPLE COULD . . . DO ANYTHING

This study seeks to explore the ways that people voluntarily come together to form groups to address community needs and how the organizations that they form in order to do so can continually renew themselves and remain viable. In doing so, it must parse and gloss the components of the concepts, striving to define and understand such aspects as: How is “community” perceived? How is “need” discerned? What do members of the group gain from addressing these needs? What are some of the benefits that communities can reap from having voluntary groups seek to resolve some of their needs? Are there needs that a community-service organization can continue to alleviate? One of the most effective strategies to probe these questions was to discuss them with members of a voluntary community-service organization and with members of its greater community. So the author determined that, given her resources, these sorts of complex, multilayered questions could effectively be addressed by conducting two sets of focus groups. One series would be with members of the greater Marshall community; the other series would be with members of Fredonia Grange. The information gathered would contribute much to the author’s research; at least some of it could also be helpful to Fredonia Grange, whose assistance she was seeking in the project. Therefore, she agreed to prepare a brief, summary report of the focus groups, along with recommendations stemming from them, for Fredonia.

The Search for Assistance

The author lived thirty miles from Marshall, the scene of the study. She had made frequent trips there to do fieldwork and acquired some familiarity with the area, its issues, and its people. Still, she was very much an outsider—something no amount of nonjudgmental interest, fascination with and dedication to rural life, desire to help, and expertise could erase. In order for the project to be fruitful, there also had to be an insider, someone who: had long experience both in the Grange and in the community; would lend legitimacy and credence for both Grange members and the local community; would know, understand, and be able to successfully navigate local customs and practices; would serve as a local contact. The Grange assistant would act as assistant moderator, helping to greet participants as they arrived and seeing that they made a safe departure, being responsible for equipment and refreshments, taking notes, providing a summary of the discussion, distributing honoraria, taking part in the debriefing, providing feedback on the focus-group report.

Initially, the author's closest contact in Fredonia Grange was Rich Hazen.¹ Rich had been born and raised in the Grange; he was thoroughly involved with it until after he graduated from high school and began to work. When the factory that employed him closed down its Marshall division, Rich was among those who were asked to relocate to its Chicago branch. During his year there, Rich lost touch with the Grange. He married a woman there with a diametrically different background: her immediate, biological family was not the large, close kind in which Rich had been reared; they belonged to no

¹ The author has learned much about Rich Hazen and his history and background in countless conversations through the years 2002–2004; the instances are too numerous to productively cite here—doing so would be an inefficient use of time and space. Therefore, only the initial one, upon which most of the following

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organizations that served as an extended family, offering support, acceptance, companionship, an opportunity to realize oneself and one's potential as one served others—a group such as Rich found the Grange to be. Having grown up in a rural area and far from his base of support and identity, Rich was deeply homesick. Since his wife, J., had no close ties to Chicago, she agreed to return with him to Marshall. Rich tried to integrate J. into the Grange; she did go to at least one meeting. But she did not feel welcome; she found the Grange, with its ritualism, “cultish”; she found support for this by the way that it seemed to monopolize Rich's thoughts and time. So Rich stayed away for a number of years; he was still technically a member, though, since his father continued to pay his dues. Gradually, he began to help with Grange fund-raisers. Then, when Helen Peck asked him not to let the Grange die, he began to attend meetings regularly in 2000. He was elected chair in June 2001.

Rich plunged back into all things Grange. He was involved in every meeting, every fund-raiser, every activity. He was in the forefront of the Action Grange movement. He began to attend Michigan State Grange functions. He became treasurer for the B. E. Henry Community Building Association, an organization with which Fredonia Grange is closely tied and whose building Fredonia uses frequently. Collectively, this meant that Rich was out many nights every week and frequently on weekend days, as well. The Grange was the venue for Rich's greatest success and fulfillment: he found it a more apt vehicle for his energies and plans than his job.

Rich eagerly embraced and advocated the focus-group concept. He insisted that he would be the Grange contact and intermediary in the enterprise. The author, aware that

account is based, is cited: Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002. Explicit additions and amplifications are also cited.

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so much Grange involvement must be onerous to a partner who was anti-Grange, continually asked Rich if he were sure that conducting the focus groups would not put too much strain on his marriage and personal life. For his part, Rich continually replied that he was completely committed to the focus groups and that his wife would just have to understand how important this was to him—he could not truly be himself without the Grange, he was growing, and she would need to grow, too. So the author began the long process of preparing for the focus groups. She spent countless hours reading pertinent literature and designing the instruments that would be used: focus-group question path; promotional literature; focus-group room requirements; rules for assistant moderators; telephone recruiting script; guidelines for further contact with focus-group sign-ups; focus-group confirmation letter; focus-group confirmation phone call script; consent form; moderator and assistant moderator debriefing guidelines; focus-group participant thank-you form.

The author had a meeting scheduled with the chair of her guidance committee for July 16, 2002; it was at this meeting that she planned to discuss doing focus groups with members of Fredonia Grange's larger community as a component of her research on community and on group formation as a factor in serving community. She met with Rich the day before to review with him the focus group instruments that she had designed and to gauge his continued allegiance to the project. He professed an irrevocable commitment. The meeting with her chair went well: she supported the project, becoming increasingly enthused as they spoke. The author immediately went to her computer to e-mail Rich with the good news that the "last" barrier to conducting the focus groups had been removed. But a bigger obstacle awaited: there was an e-mail from Rich, saying that

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he regretted that he was going to have to withdraw from the project—J. had “reached her limit” and Rich had to curtail all but a minimum of Grange activities.²

Although the author had always suspected that this could happen, after the constant reassurances, she had been hopeful that they could complete the project. She had already poured a great deal of work into the project. But more than that, she was very convinced that doing this sort of focus group could produce enormously valuable insights and data. So she hated to give it all up. But what else could she do—what were her alternatives? She knew many of the other Fredonia Grange members casually, but not well enough to know if they would be dependable and assets to the project. There was also an element of awkwardness: anyone else whom the author might tap to work on the project would know how deeply enmeshed Rich had been in the project. How could one delicately explain why he had suddenly withdrawn without making provisions for the project’s continuance? Because Fredonia Grange truly *is* like an extended family, everyone in it is, to some degree, either related to or a friend of everyone else. So in reaching out to others, the author had to walk a fine line. Convinced, though, that the process and its results could be incomparably valuable both for Fredonia and for a broad spectrum of other organizations and groups, the author decided that there must be someone else with whom she could partner.

The author resolved to contact the two other leading figures in Fredonia Grange who seemed most devoted to both the future and welfare of Fredonia Grange and the Grange in general: Athol Hazen, Jr., Secretary, Fredonia Grange and Randy Nail, Cochair, Fredonia Grange. This was a ticklish business: the author needed to emphasize the continued value of conducting the focus groups and her need for a Grange contact in

² Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, July 16, 2002.

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order to do so most effectively; she needed to lightly touch upon Rich's retreat without expressing dismay or criticism—after all, he was one man's son and the other's friend—while she was a relative stranger. She did not attend the regular Fredonia Grange Meeting of July 20, 2002, but she did receive an e-mail copy of its minutes. In them, Athol, as secretary, mentioned Fredonia's continued commitment to the focus groups. This gave the author an opening through which to approach the two men. She e-mailed them, underlining some of the benefits of holding the discussions, her continued commitment to moderating them, (briefly) Rich's need to withdraw, and her need for assistance; she asked if they recommend someone who could help her.³ Both men replied, reaffirming Fredonia's support for the enterprise and offering their help.⁴

Randy Nail was new to the Grange, having joined it a few years before. He was, by his admission, not comfortable making small talk or taking notes—two important skills for the assistant moderator. Athol Hazen was one of the ablest communicators in the Grange, a prolific note-taker, a pillar of the Grange and the community, someone respected by most who knew him. At this point, Athol had been in the Grange for nearly fifty years and, outside of his family, it was the paramount thing in his life. If he were involved in the focus groups, would he be able to refrain from using them as a bully pulpit from which to proselytize for the Grange? Randy, in his late thirties, had his own business and a young family to support. Athol, in his late seventies and retired, theoretically had more time to give to the project. However, his days were very filled with Grange work and other civic activities. Would he have the stamina and the

³ Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Athol Hazen, Jr., July 21, 2002, in author's possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Randy Nail, July 21, 2002, in author's possession.

⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 22, 2002, in author's possession; Randy Nail, e-mail to author, July 22, 2002, in author's possession.

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commitment to take on more? Neither man met the textbook requirements of the ideal assistant. But in the reality of the present project, if it were going to proceed, it would have to rely on one or both of these men.

The arrangement worked out beautifully; the two men's skills and strengths complemented one another perfectly. Both were exceptionally steady and trustworthy. Athol, the inveterate record-keeper, the more articulate of the two, sent out all the correspondence pertaining to the focus groups, made all the recruiting phone calls, helped shop for supplies, made and served refreshments, wrote on the flip chart, offered a summary of each group, distributed honoraria. Randy set up and ran the equipment, did the hard set-up labor (such as carrying the heavy trestle tables upstairs from the dining room—and back), served refreshments, interacted with the groups, asked them some questions, distributed honoraria. They were able to give more of their time, thought, and energy to the Grange than Rich could ever have done. The study has been thus commensurately enriched.

Building Momentum

Recruiting began slowly: a few people filled out sign-up sheets at some of the events in which Fredonia Grange participated.⁵ These sheets described the project, asking people to sign up if they thought that they would like to participate in a future focus group. The author especially hoped to generate interest and support during the Calhoun County Fair in August. This is Fredonia Grange's major fund-raiser of the year: members are present at it all day, every day, serving food and visiting with friends and

⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Calhoun County Farm and Outdoor Expo., June 15, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

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neighbors. However, it turned out to be a poor venue for promoting focus groups: all available energies are needed for the hard work of preparing and serving food. Conversation consists of a few snatched phrases during an off moment. August is spent getting ready for, participating in, and recovering from the fair. So September arrived and the focus group team was not appreciably closer to conducting the focus groups.

Although the researcher was reluctant to abandon the focus group component of her study, she prepared to do so. Because of her research demands and schedule, she could not leave the project open-ended forever. She determined that if there were no movement on it by the end of the year, it would have to be postponed until another time and place. She communicated this to Athol.

On September 21, 2002, the Fredonia Action Grange Committee held a meeting to decide on what projects they should focus now that the flurry of summer was subsiding. People brought up a number of areas. Athol stated that the focus groups should have priority. Other members wavered and digressed. Athol was persistent, saying that it was important that they move forward with it now. He succeeded in getting the rest of the team to move focus groups to the top of the Action Grange Committee's list of priority projects. At the Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting that evening, after the committee gave a report of their earlier meeting, everyone was asked to propose the name of at least one person whom he or she thought would be a good candidate for the focus groups. In order to help people make informed suggestions, the author explained focus groups in general and what the team hoped to accomplish with these in particular. Most people were able to contribute at least one name. Once they began, there was a snowball effect—the names came faster and faster. There was an almost quiz-show atmosphere: frequently,

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when someone said a name, the rest of the members would say approving things, such as “good choice,” “great idea,” “oh, he [or she] will be good!” By the end of this round robin, there were nearly thirty names—more than enough for several focus groups—if they would agree to participate.⁶

Fredonia Grange is a voluntary organization, a number of whose members are of very modest means: many are seniors on fixed incomes; many others are working class, struggling to meet the demands (and expenses) of raising families. Fredonia keeps its membership dues low so that almost anyone can afford to belong. Fredonia actually loses a bit on each membership: it must send more money to the State Grange per member than it receives in dues. But, as those who set policy for Fredonia Grange are quick to note, they see this practice not as a losing proposition but as an investment. They point out that they make up the deficit and more by the work that members (and nonmembers) contribute to fund-raising efforts.⁷

None of Fredonia’s operating budget comes from dues, then. It must raise the funds that it needs to pay its bills (hall utilities, insurance, maintenance) and to alleviate community needs in some other way. So the people of Fredonia Grange are in the food business. They determined that an organization with its active membership and expertise could make more profit per hour of labor preparing and selling food than any other way. In addition, they believe that serving wholesome, nutritious food at public events is a community service, since otherwise people would be relegated to a menu of junk food. Further, members and nonmembers come together to work at these events because they

⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Fredonia Action Grange Meeting, September 21, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; various speakers, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, September 21, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 19, 2003, in author’s possession.

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enjoy the camaraderie engendered in successfully feeding the masses. They also like the opportunity to interact with friends and neighbors in these venues.

Back in 1961, Fredonia Grange members began one of their first food endeavors with a diminutive booth at the Calhoun County Fair from which they served hot dogs, pie, and beverages. Encouraged by their modest profit, members resolved to return and expand. They have not missed a year since. Through the years, the menu has evolved and broadened. Fredonia has built facilities at the fairground to make food preparation and serving more healthful and efficient, as well as easier. Fredonia now serves food at other fairground events. It also handles a number of private dinners. Most of these activities are tied to the warm spring, summer, and fall months, a period of feverish work. A productive season earns enough to keep Fredonia solvent and operating well for another year.⁸ But since Fredonia has a fine appreciation for how much work lies behind every dollar of income, expenses are closely watched. The Fredonia Grange Treasurer prepares and presents to the entire Grange detailed income and expense statements every month.

Athol and Randy asked for a focus group budget. The researcher responded that any figures would be extremely conjectural: there were, at first, too many unknowns. Would a neutral facility have to be rented? There were equipment needs. How should refreshments be handled? Written communications would require paper, ink, postage, envelopes. Athol believed that he should ask for a small budget for the focus groups. He felt that a modest request would have the most chance of approval, particularly since people were still cautious and unfamiliar with the entire focus group concept. He believed that having a small initial budget would be a great selling point for future such

⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003.

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efforts: the focus group team could always argue that they should do another round since they were able to accomplish so much for so little. Further, the budget could be loosely construed: it would be used for a substantial purchase, such as a different microphone or a flip chart easel and pad. As secretary and information contact, he could take out expenditures for paper, pens, postage, etc., from general operating expenses.

Refreshments could come from leftovers from the fair or members of the focus group team. So Athol proposed requesting a budget of \$150. He did this at the Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting of October 19, 2002. There was a light turnout for this meeting since most members were attending the Michigan State Grange Convention in Lansing: only seven members and the author were present at the Fredonia Grange Hall. This barely passed as a legal meeting, since seven members are required for that. Athol did make a motion that the focus group project be allocated a budget of \$150. The motion carried—probably more easily than it would have usually, since so few came that night.⁹

A Bit More on Methodology

Many of the strategies that the author learned for recording and processing oral history interviews proved equally valid for focus groups. Focus groups do, however, have some variations in characteristics from one-on-one interviews that led to the following methodological modifications.

⁹Since the minimum seven members were present, they could conduct business and pass motions with just as much authority and legitimacy as if it had been a meeting of thirty or forty. Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Focus Group Planning Meeting, October 8, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, October 19, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

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Equipment

The researcher's cassette recorder, with power adapter and batteries, continued to serve her in good stead. She continued to use the same sort of tapes—Radio Shack, adequate for voice, in screw cases. But, at Krueger's explicit recommendation, she now used ninety-minute rather than sixty-minute tapes.¹⁰ With a group it would be harder than with a single interviewee to stop the conversation while a tape was changed; taking breaks every thirty minutes could chop up conversation arbitrarily, but pausing every forty-five minutes could provide a welcome respite.

The focus group interviews also required a different microphone system. Having only two microphones to try to pass around to be shared by all the participants would be unwieldy and inefficient: there would be certain to be people who spoke without a microphone helping to capture their voices. So Krueger recommended using an omnidirectional microphone: one that could pick up sound within a considerable radius around it.¹¹ Again, Radio Shack came to the rescue: it sells a model for around \$50 that worked superbly: it did an impressive job of picking up voices, even when people got up to go to the refreshment table or when Athol wrote on the flip chart and was standing with his back to the rest of the group—and the microphone. As with the oral histories, the researcher was careful to always take extra power cords, batteries, and tapes with her into the field. She checked the tapes, both at the beginning and during the discussions, to ensure that they were recording. Tapes were labeled by title, date, number, and length recorded. Tabs were popped out to prevent accidental erasure.

¹⁰ Krueger cautions against using tapes that are 120 minutes long, as they are so thin that they break easily. Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 112.

¹¹ Ibid., 113.

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The researcher had made lists of desired equipment and focus group room requirements. She had incorporated some interactive exercises into the focus group question path: at a key juncture, participants would be asked to offer their visions of the ideal community-service organization and the best possible community of five years into the future. As a change of pace, the assistant moderator would write their suggestions on a flip chart. So this would require an easel and pad. Most of the other equipment needs were relatively minor: cassette tapes, notepads, pens, index cards, markers. On November 7, 2002, Athol and the researcher met to spend their budget. By being cautious, they were able to get everything needed and stay close to their limit. Athol felt that most of the other expenses (postage, envelopes, printer paper) could come out of the information budget that was under his purview.

Processing

There are many similarities between processing focus group interview tapes and processing oral history interview tapes. Several copies of each master tape were made: archival copies, copies for those who requested them, and a work copy. The master tape, appropriately labeled "Master," was then stored in a safe place. The researcher always did her transcription from a work copy. All copies were labeled for title, date, number, length; their tabs were popped out to avoid re-recording. The tapes were processed promptly, by the researcher, using her transcription machine with foot pedal control. This made it easy to play back a tape portion as often as necessary to attain understanding and accuracy in the transcript. Transcribing the focus groups was even more challenging than transcribing the oral histories. Here the transcriber needed to be able to discern eight to eleven different voices and attribute remarks accordingly. Although participants

generally tried to adhere to the request to speak only one at a time, during times of animated discussion, a number people might all talk at once. There were also sometimes private conversations between two people, conducted in hushed tones, but which the microphone picked up, garbling the recording of the general discussion. As with the oral histories, however, the transcriber was able to prepare complete and literal transcriptions of the focus groups. Again, as with the oral histories, this was an incomparable way to relive the focus groups and review their salient points and insights.

Where and When

The original plan was to conduct the focus groups in a neutral facility in a central location. The Grange hall was initially ruled out because of its strong association with the Grange and its agenda; in addition, the Grange hall is in a rural area of Fredonia Township. Although this is a part of the greater Marshall area, people unfamiliar with the region can find it a challenge to locate. So the team looked into other possibilities. But none of them, including such apparently attractive options as the Calhoun Intermediate School District and the Marshall District Library were possible: the facilities were not available at the times needed.¹²

So the team reconsidered. The Grange hall was a facility that they could use at no additional charge. It had fine facilities with which the team was familiar: it would be easy to prepare and serve refreshments, make people welcome, be certain that all room and equipment needs were met. The team further reasoned that since Athol was doing much of the recruiting from people who knew him and his strong association with the Grange, and since it was made clear at all stages that the Grange was sponsoring these

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discussions, laboring to hold the groups at a location with no Grange association was a wasted, foolish effort. Fredonia Grange's physical manifestations in its hall are understated, not overwhelming. Nonmembers who enter the hall ask questions about this historic building that was built as a Congregational Church in 1913. They rave about its beautiful stained glass windows. Rather than being intimidated at coming to the Grange hall, participants seemed delighted to have a chance to come and explore the old structure, which, with its old photos, records, and other artifacts, is something of a living history museum.¹³

In setting the dates for the focus groups, the team wanted to give people choice. They reasoned that some people might be able to attend only on a weeknight, while others would need to participate on a weekend. They needed to schedule the meetings for times when the hall would be available and before the demands of the busy holiday season made it unlikely that people could participate. By October 2002 they set the dates for the first two groups: Tuesday, November 12, 2002 from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m.; Saturday, November 23, 2002, from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. They wanted to see how the first sessions went before scheduling any additional ones after the first of the year. Ultimately, they did hold one additional group on Tuesday, January 21, 2003 from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. While it was possible to reschedule a group because of bad weather, that was never necessary. Although the researcher would have liked to conduct more than three focus groups, by the time the third one drew to a close, the team's resources

¹² For example, many of the places offered for community meetings at no or low cost were not available after 9:00 p.m. or on weekends

¹³ Various participants, remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; various participants, remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; various participants, remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

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(budget, manpower, recruitment pool) were exhausted. The team reflected that it had more than satisfied Krueger's suggestion of holding at least three groups or continuing them until nothing new emerged from the discussion.¹⁴ By the third group, although perspectives differed, many common themes were emerging.

Connecting with the Community

Every focus group conducted for this study has built upon the preceding ones: it has been a learning and evolutionary process. It was the great success with which they met when doing the community focus groups that encouraged the focus-group team to hold them with Fredonia Grange members. The revelations of each series—the community series, the Grange member series—certainly interrelate and flow into one another. Still, the focus of the two sets was slightly different: those with the community sought, primarily, to ascertain community needs; those with the Fredonia Grange members sought to divine their motivations for being a part of the group and for seeking to answer and alleviate community needs. Thus, as a strategy for better apprehending the lessons offered by each series, they will be discussed separately.¹⁵ This section is devoted to the community focus group sessions.

Substantive Recruiting

One of the most challenging tasks of this phase of the study was recruiting people who would actually follow through on their commitment to attend a focus group. Many people were involved in initial recruitment efforts: suggesting names of potential

¹⁴ They had had a series of electrifying, revealing, inspiring, motivating discussions with a total of fifteen deeply engaged, committed, dynamic community members and activists. Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 88–89.

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participants, talking up the merits of the Fredonia Grange focus groups to the larger community. Grange members tended to nominate people whom they perceived as community leaders—those who had demonstrated a stake in and dedication to the Marshall area.

It was Athol who sent out all the focus group literature (recruiting letter, follow-up letter, thank you, summary of report, recommendations to the Grange based on the focus groups) and who made all the telephone calls, such as recruiting and confirming. Athol had lived in the Marshall area for about fifty years; he had belonged to Fredonia Grange during most of that time, an association that had brought him considerable visibility. Until he retired, he worked for the Production Credit Association (PCA), lending farmers money. His job included traveling the area, visiting with farmers. He got to know the countryside and its residents well. Athol had also been active in local government and civic offices. For a number of years, he was supervisor of Eckford Township, where he lives. He was prominent in the movement to reorganize the Marshall Library and to make it a district library. He had held a number of positions in the Calhoun County Agriculture and Industrial Society (CCAIS), the body that runs the Calhoun County Fairgrounds and its fair. He then represented Eckford on the Homer Fire Board (Eckford is part of the Homer fire district).¹⁵ So Athol knew and was known by many in the greater Marshall area, who tended to hold him in respect as an honorable man, selfless, fair-minded, dedicated to the betterment of his community, one able to transcend Partisanship and regionalism. He was valued as a man who spoke his mind and kept his

¹⁵ There is an acute recognition that all such separations introduce an unrealistic element of artificiality. Yet, as beings with finite understandings, incapable of grasping all around us, we must segment and compartmentalize in order to apprehend at all.

¹⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, October 25, 2001.

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word. His opinion was still being sought by local and regional governmental bodies: one local government official who participated in the Fredonia focus groups candidly admitted that she was doing so as a payback because Athol had agreed to her request to participate in a series of focus groups on how the government of the City of Marshall and the governments of the surrounding townships could better cooperate.¹⁷

Athol was disheartened because everyone whom he asked who agreed to attend a focus group did not do so.¹⁸ However, out of the nineteen people whom he invited who agreed to participate, fifteen did so, giving him a success rate of nearly 79 percent. An additional person, who could not attend any of the sessions, offered detailed comments by phone. The author sought to reassure Athol that this was a very high response rate indeed, one with which many professionals would be thrilled.

The fifteen people who participated in the groups offered an interesting cross-section of the surrounding community. There were six men and nine women; all of those who agreed to come but did not do so were men. Ages ranged from mid-twenties to at least mid-sixties. Participants lived not only in Marshall City and its surrounding townships of Fredonia, Eckford, Marengo, and Marshall, but such nearby towns and townships as Albion, Tekonsha, and Newton. Several of those who came fill positions in government or civil authority: there was a man who is now Calhoun County Sheriff after a career as a

¹⁷ C., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. Here and in other references to focus group participants, initials are used to protect identities. Note that the same initial may refer to more than one person—the date of the reference is critical. Thus, the "C." in this footnote would not be the same person as the "C." from another focus group. If more than one person from a given date's reference has the same initial, subscripts are used to distinguish between them.

¹⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group debriefing remarks, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group debriefing remarks, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group debriefing remarks, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

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state policeman; a woman who had spent many years in law enforcement, including ten as a prison guard; the clerk of one township; the treasurer of another township; the education director for a conservation district. There were two retired teachers. There were a number of farmers: interestingly and contrary to still-common stereotypes, the majority of these were women—the only full-time farmers represented were women. A few people owned businesses. Much of the conversation during the focus groups revolved around caring for others; one participant was a professional caregiver—she cared for six elderly people in her home. Many of these people were active in other groups, including churches, the Farm Bureau, the Moose (an indication of the continued appeal of other fraternal, community-service organizations), Future Farmers of America, the 4-H, Pheasants Forever, the Calhoun County Agricultural and Industrial Society, a spinning group, literacy volunteers, civic theater, farmland, wetland, and habitat preservation. This was a racially homogeneous group, reflecting traditional area demographics. However, a desire was expressed for greater diversity—in its broadest sense—in the community at large.

There were six participants at the first focus group, four at the second, and five at the third. Although it seemed that the second group did not flow as easily as the others did because there were fewer participants, the focus group team was surprised to see that this group provided more data than either of the other two.

The tone, content, and results of the sessions varied markedly from one another. In trying to describe this, the author struggled with nuances of language that can be misleading, connotations of certain terms that can be misconstrued. When the team characterized some sessions or participants as being more optimistic, others as more

pessimistic, the categorizations were along a continuum: they were gradations, not absolutes. In the introduction to the focus group question path, the moderator explicitly says that all points of view are equally valid and that negative comments can be more revealing than positive. The team's first two sessions included extraordinarily hopeful, positive people: people who saw a need and rushed in to fill it. The third group was less positive and probably offered a useful counterpoint to the other groups. There was no individual or group that the team interpreted as being overtly negative or domineering. Indeed, the third group might not have seemed at all pessimistic if it had not been juxtaposed with the two previous, exceptionally positive sessions. In the future, the team might exert more guidance to curtail prolonged laments that could exert undue influence on the rest of the group. But it never found itself in a situation in which it seemed advisable to extricate a participant and ask him or her to leave. If anything, the less positive group seemed a validation of focus groups as community reflection: no community is a Utopia composed solely of altruists, ready and willing to address any need. Yet even the least positive of these groups, as was true of the other two, wanted to address community needs. It was hindered because its activities consisted more of keening over lost opportunities than in acting to reverse undesirable trends. The differences between the groups were more a matter of degree than of type.

The Eureka Moment

Focus group team members learned a great deal through this process. In each case, the group started slowly, with participants seeming to need to feel their ways and establish comfort levels and familiarity with one another. But after working through the preliminary questions and gaining a sense of the group, people seemed to relax, enjoy

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themselves, feed off one another's thoughts and ideas. Then the discussions really caught fire. For the most part, people were polite and managed to wait their turns to speak: there was seldom more than one person speaking at a time or someone cutting someone else off in mid-sentence. The team found it fascinating to watch people's thought processes change and expand as they had the chance to interact and share with one another.

The focus group team planned discussions to fill a two-hour slot, including a period of small talk before beginning the conversations in earnest. In every case, the groups exceeded the two-hour time period. Once they concluded the guided part of the questioning, focus group team members would try to discreetly wind the groups down. But the discussions usually lasted for at least a half-hour after the official conclusion: people were clearly enjoying themselves, feeling empowered by the conversation, and had no desire to leave. Many professed that they had had no idea what the discussion would entail. Others admitted that they had thought that they would be receiving an indoctrination on the Grange or would be participating in a discussion with highly structured and controlled parameters. The open-ended questions and the opportunity for each person to speak and be heard, respected, and valued, no matter what the opinions expressed, seemed to surprise and then liberate participants.

Until the first focus group began to yield a fruitful exchange of ideas, team members secretly wondered if it would really succeed. The results far exceeded their wildest expectations or hopes. Feelings of elation replaced doubt. None of them got much sleep the night following the first group—they were too excited, with a thousand thoughts chasing one another through their minds.¹⁹

¹⁹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 13, 2002, in author's possession.

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As suggested,²⁰ the team concluded each session with a debriefing segment among themselves in which they shared their thoughts on the preceding discussion: What did they think of it? Did it meet their expectations? What important things did they think had emerged? Should they make any changes? How did this focus group compare with the others? The debriefings were taped and became part of the focus group transcript. In addition, the assistants sent written comments, based on their notes and recollections, to the moderator a short time after each focus group.

Analysis and Reporting

Part of the moderator's duties was to prepare a complete, literal transcript of each focus group. Although this took some time, it was considered one of the best ways to begin to deal with the mass of data gathered—simply listening to the tapes would provide impressions that were too cursory.²¹ Single-spaced transcriptions were: Group I—seventy-three pages; Group II—ninety-three pages; Group III—eighty-six pages. The moderator then analyzed the transcriptions by carefully reading them through several times, making copious notes and looking for recurring or significant themes, arresting quotations, provocative ideas. These were condensed into a twenty-one page report sent to Athol and Randy on March 17, 2003 for feedback. The moderator and Athol met for further discussion on March 24, 2003. Athol and Randy submitted written ideas to the

²⁰ Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 148–49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 143–44. Analysis combined a number of options that Krueger suggested: Transcript-Based Analysis; Tape-Based Analysis; Note-Based Analysis; Memory-Based Analysis. Preparing the transcripts entailed rigorous, repeated listening to the tapes. The moderator's assistants gave her copies of their notes from the focus groups so that she could incorporate them into her analysis. In the debriefing immediately after each focus group, members of the focus group team shared their recollections and impressions of what had just occurred: these were incorporated into the data and transcript for analysis. Each time that the researcher read through the transcripts, in addition to uncovering common themes and ideas—as well as those that were aberrant—she gained new depths of understanding and increased respect for and

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moderator on March 24 (Randy) and March 27 (Athol).²² As suggested, the moderator condensed the report to four pages and made a one-page list of recommendations—goals that Fredonia Grange was urged to adopt and begin to implement.²³

Athol and the author did a joint presentation of the focus group report and recommendations at the April 19, 2003 Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting: this presentation filled the slot of that meeting's Enrichment Program.²⁴ The focus-group

appreciation of the data that the groups collected. This wealth of material offers a revealing sketch of contemporary life in a small, Midwestern town.

²² Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Athol Hazen, Jr., March 17, 2003, in author's possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Randy Nail, March 17, 2003, in author's possession; Randy Nail, e-mail to author, March 24, 2003, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Focus Group Report and Recommendations Meeting, March 24, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, March 27, 2003, in author's possession.

²³ The report prepared for Grange members and focus group participants concentrated on things that Fredonia Grange might be able to actually do—so many profound ideas that emerged in discussion were omitted. (The list of recommendations was equally modest; focus group team members decided that it was best to begin with a very finite and reasonable list. Should Fredonia Grange begin to execute some of the recommendations, the list could be adapted, expanded, and made more ambitious.) Focus group thoughts omitted from the Grange report, however, reveal a great deal about rural life, community, needs, desires, perspectives, states of mind—even if many cannot be addressed through any immediate, concrete action by a community-service organization with limited means. Issues raised highlight areas that require well-formulated, concerted, long-term strategies to resolve. Such situations are beyond a group like Fredonia Grange's immediate, independent ability to solve. But by uncovering the issues, increasing awareness of them, and helping to build coalitions to address them, it could help pave the way to their amelioration. Therefore, they will be touched upon in the discussion of focus group data that follows.

²⁴ Each local Grange meeting contains a Lecturer's/Enrichment Program that is supposed to enrich, enlighten, educate, or entertain. These programs hearken back to the days when the Grange was an educational medium for people who were intellectually deprived. The Grange officer responsible for filling this void traditionally was called the Lecturer; in an effort to be more responsive to modern usage, some Action Granges now call the position "Enrichment Director." The office is held in some esteem, ranking third in the Grange hierarchy of sixteen elected offices. Filling the "Lecturer's Hour" has always posed challenges. From the Grange's inception, Lecturers, many of whom were women, would tap other Grange members for assistance, asking them to share interesting articles that they might have read, stories or poetry that they had seen or written, or suggestions for improving life: men could give tips on farming, women on cooking, housework, cleaning, handiwork, children. In days of rural isolation, each Grange had to be quite self-reliant, although the occasional visitor from a state or the National Grange would offer some program relief. As Granges became less separated from the rest of the world, they began to draw on outside speakers for programs. Fredonia Grange generally tries to have something noteworthy for at least one Enrichment Program a month. Since 2002, Fredonia Grange has made a concerted effort to open its Enrichment Programs to the public, promoting them through news articles that describe the programs and that note that all are cordially welcome to attend the programs, the accompanying meetings, and the preceding potluck suppers that feature "famous Grange food." Various authors, "Ladies' Department" column, *Grange Visitor*, 1877–81, passim; Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 85–92; Gardner, *The Grange—Friend of the Farmer*, 411–14; Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 29–31, 128, 129, 136–37, 141–42. During the period between July 2002 and July 2004, the author wrote a series of press releases for about two dozen enrichment programs on such topics as monarch butterflies, special holiday programming, hearing

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team was anxious to officially present its report now that it was completed. They believed that it was important to share this update on the project in order to sustain Fredonia Grange members and participants' interest. It was now five months since the actual discussions had begun. There was concern that people might wonder if the project had simply sputtered to a halt, never to resume. In some respects, the presentation's timing—the night before Easter—was unfortunate: the meeting's attendance was light. However, many of the focus-group team were to be absent from the first meeting in May, which meant that if the report were not given on April 19, it would have to be postponed for another month—a delay judged unacceptable. So the team determined to make the most of the April 19 presentation slot. Athol began by highlighting the contents of the report and saying that anyone who wished could have a full copy. Next he read the recommendations in full, inserting frequent remarks on the merits of the proposals. He then gave his perceptions of the focus-group process and asked the author to do the same. Both were very enthusiastic about the process, asserting that it was an electrifying, indescribable experience.²⁵

The focus-group team employed additional strategies to offset the small number physically present for the focus group report presentation. As planned, each participant

awareness, the National Farmers' Organization, cross symbolism, spinning and felting, Native American religion, one-room schoolhouses, gardening with native wildflowers. In the interest of conserving time and space, the releases are not each individually listed here. The author does have copies of all the releases in her files and will share them upon request.

²⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., presentation of "Fredonia Grange Focus Group Report" and "Fredonia Grange Focus Group Recommendations" to Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, April 19, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Jacquelyn Lowman, presentation of "Fredonia Grange Focus Group Report" and "Fredonia Grange Focus Group Recommendations" to Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, April 19, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

received a thank you and copies of the report and recommendations. The full list of recommendations also appeared in the May issue of the Fredonia Grange *Innovator*.²⁶

Focus Group Specifics: Insights into Community Perceptions

Many of the needs expressed in the focus groups, while fascinating, were beyond the purview or capabilities of the Grange to satisfy. The report prepared for the Grange and all focus group participants emphasized those things that the Grange might feasibly tackle. It did acknowledge that there was much valuable data that had been amassed in the focus groups that did not appear in the report. It explained that this was in no way a commentary on the essential worth of the observations, but rather was a reflection of the Grange's perceived potential and the areas on which its members felt that they might reasonably have an impact.

The Flip Chart Exercises, in particular, which asked participants to offer their visions of the ideal community-service organization and the best possible community for five years into the future, gave the Grange many ideas of community needs. These were frequently boiled down to concrete concepts, so they were easier to comprehend and more accessible than some of the more open-ended issues with which people wrestled during the rest of the discussion. The very act of writing ideas on the flip chart involved condensing and crystallizing—perhaps to an artificially simplistic extent. The bold, crisp, black printing on the white flip chart pad was emblematic of the exercise: It

²⁶ Fredonia Grange had a monthly newsletter that started before 1990. Shirley Gilmore started it as the *Fredonia Grange News*. Athol Hazen had been editing the newsletter, then called the *Innovator*, for at least 1995. Copies went to regular members, associate members, interested friends and supporters, the Michigan State Grange office. Jacquelyn Lowman, "Fredonia Grange Focus Group Recommendations," *Innovator*, May 2003, 6; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, June 18, 2003, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 24, 2003, in author's possession. Copies of the focus group report and the recommendations presented to Fredonia Grange and those who participated in the discussions appear in the instrument and form appendix.

highlighted local issues of importance but drew them in broad strokes, with none of the nuances and shades of gray that make real life so messy. The flip chart provided an outline, a foundation upon which to build complexity.

Each of the focus groups touched upon many of the same areas in its discussions. Yet each group—indeed, each person—added a unique perspective. Despite this, the composite organization-by-committee that participants envisioned is a persuasive testament to focus group synergy. The exercises revealed that people are looking for an organization that promotes respect for and understanding of diversity: they want to be part of a group that reflects the community. It should respect and value its members. It should offer opportunities to develop skills and leadership ability and give members a chance to exercise them. It should provide services to everyone who needs them. It will need many volunteers; by making community service fun, interesting, and fulfilling, it will have a never-ending pool. It should help the people involved with it to build their self-esteem and inspire them to give back. It should work together with other organizations on worthwhile projects and avoid wasteful duplication of effort. It needs to be well informed of the needs of the community. It should clearly express and communicate goals and accomplishments. It should have a mission statement that can be adapted to the changing needs of the community so that it can remain infinitely responsive and flexible, resolving one problem and moving on to another. It should have an organizational chart that can accommodate growth. It should have local chapters every ten miles or so to intensify feelings of community and to make it easy for people to

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be involved on a truly local level. These local chapters will be based in facilities that will serve as focal points and gathering places.²⁷

Focus group team members found that one of the most exciting aspects of the project was observing participants' thought processes evolve and expand during the course of the discussions. As people piggybacked on one another's ideas, they usually were able to use the interaction with others to clarify their own thoughts. At times one could literally see realizations dawn on people: a look of puzzlement would change to one of understanding; an inner light would seem to be lit. On occasion, participants would confess that being a part of the discussions was making them profoundly reevaluate and alter their opinions. People commonly admitted that they had entered the meetings thinking of community as a geographical entity but that, through discussion, they had come to believe that the people involved and their unifying interests were more important than physical location.²⁸ Others acknowledged that the discussion was making them question their own motivations, such as why they belonged to the organizations that they did, what they offered versus what they derived from community service. All those who participated in the focus groups emerged with a clearer, more realistic, more nuanced understanding of community problems and potentialities. While the study may not have produced an epiphany for anyone, it did alter some participants' perspective.²⁹

²⁷ This is a distillation of the flip chart exercises from the three focus groups. Each participant participated to some degree. All participants, remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; all participants, remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; all participants, remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

²⁸ F., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

²⁹ Indications of this recur throughout the focus groups; therefore, only one of the more noteworthy instances is cited. R., remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

Commonalties—But Distinctiveness

While all of the groups sounded certain common, recurring themes, each group did have a distinctive personality. Although no group was completely dominated by any single individual, the course of discussion could be significantly influenced by the person who spoke first, particularly if that person spoke with knowledge and passion. This statement tended to serve as the touchstone for the ensuing discussion.

Other factors that might have affected the conversations were many but are difficult to isolate. Certainly the composition of every group differed, with such things as number of people, male to female ratio, age, profession, place of residence, level of community knowledge and involvement, length of time living in the community as some of the variables that differed widely.³⁰

Nostalgia—Or Irreality?

The third group differed most markedly from the previous two. It was remarkable most distinctly for the aura of nostalgia that pervaded it, its longing for a time past—that may actually have never existed. One of the first speakers went on at some length about this, flavoring the tone of the rest of the discussion.

I think, like, communities way back, families, it was more of a *family* thing. You know, when you went to a dance, the whole family went. When you did things, the whole family did it. Now I think the community is not the family-oriented thing like it used to be. And I think it would be nice if it would go back to that. It's like too

³⁰ Throughout the rest of this chapter, there are extensive direct quotations—soliloquies and dialogues—from the actual focus groups. Because of the concentration, and to facilitate reading, these passages are indented, but are double-spaced (unlike the typical treatment of long quotations, in which the text is indented but single-spaced.)

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many young parents that have their kids, and then they say, “I want my time” so they have their bowling night and their kids are home doing whatever. You know, it’s still a community, but I think we’ve kind of branched off where, it would be nice if we came back to the family-oriented—you know, the mom, and dad, and the kids, instead of so many—try to work things out instead of saying, “I don’t have to take this” and walk away.³¹

This pronouncement seemed to open the floodgates for the others present. This was a theme to which she and the others returned again and again.

The group was haunted by a palpable desire to return to a simpler life that some think is synonymous with country living. Almost every member of this group lamented a perceived deterioration of community and society. In one way or another, all talked about the family, a truly intergenerational family, as the bedrock of community. One participant, who is a professional caregiver, discoursed eloquently upon this:

You know, it would be nice to be a little bit more family—from—I’m talking about—from an infant to, you know, I take care of old people. Having community type of things, picnics and different things that they can get involved in. I mean, I’ve got eighty-year-old people living with me, ninety-year-old people, and they’re still willing to get out there and do things. . . . I’m busy—I’m just busy—I’m busy working, I’m busy taking care of six old people, you know—that’s what I *do*. And ~~t~~hat—if I look at my foster care home, that’s my nucleus, that’s where my family is. ~~A~~nd right now they live with me, they all live with me, since I moved. But that is my

³¹ S., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

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family, I take care of them, you know, and I *love* them, you know. So you gotta start right from there, and then build out. But everybody's gotta be willing to do *something*, part of that family, everybody's gotta be willing to do something.³²

They mourned the loss of family values, which some traced to the advent of women in the labor market. To them, such ills as latchkey kids and single-parent households were the subsequent, inevitable consequences. They also railed against what they saw as a widespread lack of respect in society: children did not respect their parents, parents did not respect their children, and neither side respected teachers. Teachers were castigated as too young and opportunistic, attributed in part to early retirement.

I think . . . a root of a lot of these problems goes right back to public school systems. . . . The school systems basically have seen a metamorphosis. It's gone from respect to the teachers being *buddies*. When I was in school, I raised a lot of heck, you know, there's teachers that I always called Mr. and Mrs. . . . But my kids just come through the public school system. And the lack of *respect* is just even *appalling* to *me*. The teachers are younger now through early retirement. It just seems that the average age of a teacher has dropped down and there's a moral decline among *everybody*. And I think if we had a moral revolution and got the schools right back to where they were demanding *respect*, I think the whole community would notice the effect of it.³³

One member, who had worked in the penal system, strongly asserted the need and value for parents and teachers to be legally able to reinstate corporal punishment.

³² B., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

Like I said, our *laws* have to be changed. . . . And they need to give the teachers the right to take a hold of a child—not *beat* ‘em, but just take a hold of their arm, and say, “Now wait a minute. Sit down here. . . .” Like I said, I worked in a prison, as a guard, for ten years. . . . One guy says, you know, “I just broke into somebody’s house. I didn’t kill anybody.” I shook the unit down—I shook the area down, and I mean I *just* went through it. I says, “There you go. . . .” [After tearing the unit apart, the guard did not reassemble it, as regulations mandate, but left it to the inmate, in order to teach him a lesson.] And when he came back, the kid came up to me and he said, “I guess you made your point.” I said, “Yes. I invaded *your* privacy just like you did somebody else’s. And you had to clean up the mess, just like somebody else did. . . .” A lot of those kids just *wanted* somebody to *care*, but their parents were some place else or their parents were too afraid to do anything. So I really think our laws have to be changed a little bit.³⁴

Neighbors were cited as people who did not care about the character of the local community. Vituperation was heaped upon a generation of young students whom, it was felt, had no feel for either community or community service.³⁵

It was a man high up in law enforcement, one whom people might think would be most cynical about the future and the character of youth and society at large, who offered the most consistent counterpoint to the pessimism. He continually asserted that the glass was half full, not half empty—and declared that he would prove it. He shared his sources

³³ J-2, remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

³⁴ S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

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of knowledge. Because of his high status and connections county-wide, he was able to give insider insight into a number of areas. He talked about the international community that lived at the county jail: they had to learn to respect and understand one another in order to survive. He explained that many youth were actively engaged in community service, as attested in the scholarship applications for his group's college funding. He suggested that focus groups be done with youth. He cited times when the community had pulled together as one single, united entity.

I think it's kind of: How do you want to look at the glass? Is it half full or is it half empty? It's actually half full. Volunteerism is community service in whatever area of service needs to be done. And there's *a lot* of community service going on. You may not *see* it all the time, but there's a lot of it going on. There's a lot of involvement, all for the betterment. It is harder to get volunteers and as F. said, the one person that is busy is asked to be more busy. . . . But . . . if you look at Calhoun County county-wide, it's a great place. We certainly have our issues. I have a six-hundred-person jail, not all from Calhoun County—but that's a community. We have all the same environmental things in the jail as you have outside. We have medical and we have food and we have neighbor arguments—we have a community right there. . . . But at the same time, there's all *kinds* of good things going on. When Albion as a community was impacted by Hayes-Albion leaving with five hundred jobs . . . K-mart was two hundred, and I don't remember what Trillium was, Trillium Hospital. They had three major losses. They were unable to arrive at an agreement with Foote Hospital. . . . So the community got together—*county-wide*, because Battle Creek

³⁵ B., focus group, January 21, 2003; F., focus group, January 21, 2003; J₂, focus group, January 21, 2003;

Health System, Marshall—Oaklawn Hospital—and the community of Albion—they have a new health-care unit sitting there now. . . . And they're going to open probably . . . by the first of February.

So a lot of things happen based on need. And that's really a *positive*, that's a real strength. The *people* are the strength. For whatever *cause*, whatever *issue* you happen to be involved in. So the glass is half *full*, it's not half empty.³⁶

This law enforcement official talked about the extreme transience of children because of broken homes. He was haunted by how difficult it must be to try to work with children in such circumstances—the teacher must be continually assessing a never-ending stream of new students to see how to reach and teach them. This participant had been surprised by this statistic, as were all the rest in the group. It was the sort of statistic that they did not associate with Calhoun County in general, let alone Marshall: and yet, there it was, even in the midst of a community that one participant had said, with a combination of satire and poignancy, “had no problems.”³⁷

You would be amazed at how many students a teacher has at the beginning of the year—say thirty-five—which is probably way too many. And she may end up the year with thirty-five, but in some schools half to three-quarters of that thirty-five are different students than what she started with. Kids are very transient because of . . . single-parent families. Because of—you know, there is some movement because of jobs and changing jobs and those kinds of things, but. . . . There's a lot of it because

S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

³⁶ A., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

³⁷ Ibid.

today the children are with Grandmother and tomorrow they're with Aunt and Uncle and so forth. And it happens even in Marshall. And I continually think about how difficult it must be to *teach* in that environment. Because you must be assessing where those children are at *constantly* to try to teach. So, teachers have a tough lot, too. But a lot of people don't even *realize* that. . . . You'd be amazed at the number of kids that are in the different schools. I had the luxury of going K-12 in the same school system. And that seems to be less and less the norm today, particularly in the metropolitan areas.³⁸

The elementary schools had one counselor—one counselor for over three hundred children. There was no way that this counselor could be there to assist all the troubled students at the first indications of difficulty. The present system depended upon teacher referral—which probably would not come until there were serious behavior issues. The counselor position was vulnerable to funding cuts: in an era of overwhelming class sizes of thirty-five, forty, and more, any position that was not that of a front-line teacher who could alleviate the crowding was apt to be considered a luxury.³⁹ Even the optimistic law enforcer was forced to contrast the rich, dense support network that he had enjoyed as a child with the attenuated, frayed, fragile web that existed now.

I think even—you know, when I grew up, I got spanked as often by the neighbor as I did by my mother and dad. [Laughter.] I wandered out in the street—I'll *never* forget that. And I got my butt tanned because I went out in the street and thumbed my nose at the neighbor. Miss Annabelle said, "Get *out* of the street." And of course

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ A., focus group, January 21, 2003; F., focus group, January 21, 2003.

when you got *home*, if word got out, you got it *again*. Now I don't know whether that was right or wrong, but I *certainly* learned. But there are support systems—not enough. . . . There's *certainly* a need for more. A lot of kids aren't getting it.⁴⁰

This man sees hope in respect for and understanding of diversity. He believes that people's perspectives need to be expanded—that being different from the old traditions is not necessarily being worse than they are. He wants people to try to understand the differing worlds in which people live—understand the worlds as those who live in them do. He envisions a multicultural society.⁴¹

There are divergent views, and respect for one another's views. . . . There's understanding of . . . diversity. . . . If you understand it, you begin—to develop an understanding of the different *cultural* backgrounds—African-American, Mexican, whatever it happens to *be*. There are *differences*. We have—I think *last* week we had forty-four nationalities housed at the jail. You learn to understand the *cultural differences* very quickly.⁴²

Many of this group's solutions for community problems were poignant and had as much relevance for resolving social ills as Don Quixote tilting at windmills. There seemed to be widespread belief that if the clock could just be turned back forty or fifty years, everything would be better—as indeed, they asserted, it *had* been better. They declared that all families should rest upon a base of two-parent households. There was no

⁴⁰ A., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁴¹ Ibid. This may be an unrealistic goal: How can one truly understand and feel what another feels, no matter how empathetic one tries to be? However, working at understanding may provide at least partial insight.

⁴² Ibid.

mention that a truly bad union, including one in which the spouses use the children as pawns to play against one another, is worse than no union at all. Within these two parent households, only one parent would work. The supposition, at first, was that fathers would work and mothers would stay at home to give the children constant supervision. When one member of the group pointed out that this is gender stereotyping, the proposal was altered slightly. Although the contention was still that it was generally the man's place to be the breadwinner while the woman should be the home-bound nurturer, one of the female participants gleefully agreed that she would actually prefer to work and leave her spouse as a house-husband to deal with that area—as she labeled him, “Mr. Mom.”⁴³

Many in this group saw types of telecommunication and media as home-wreckers. They condemned everything from cell phones to television to video games.

B: I think sometimes the parents should turn their TV off. . . . That would be a good help, too. Children with the TV—they spend half their time when they come [home] and either they're playing with their friends, not doing any homework, or they're out there watching TV. And I have Direct TV and I still can't find too much on it myself. [Laughter.] You know, what you find on TV is just horrendous, even these cartoons.⁴⁴

A: Video games.⁴⁵

B: The video games—yeah, the Nintendo and all that.⁴⁶

⁴³ Various participants, remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003; S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁴⁴ B., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁴⁵ A., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁴⁶ B., focus group, January 21, 2003.

A: See, now I'm looking at the half empty glass. Because I think that's a real sore spot for us and our society.⁴⁷

B: Now the thing is *phones*. I don't know if any *grade school* kids have phones, but all the high school kids have *phones*. There would be no way in the world that I would ever have a phone when I was in high school. You know—and a parent says, “Well I want, you know, so-and-so to have it because that way I can get a hold of ‘em.” Well that doesn't mean he has to *answer* it. He's just out of distance, you know. These kids don't need phones, I don't think they need phones. . . . Before it used to be able to—if you wanted to talk to a friend, you'd have to sit there with your *parents* standing there and listening to your *conversation*. Now they go all *over* with those phones. . . .⁴⁸

A: I have a nine-year-old granddaughter—that's going on twenty-five. Reads at the high school level—a senior level. There's *lots* of kids like that. Along with all the ills that the electronic age has brought, there's a lot of *good* that has come out of that, as well. The *kids* are far, far different than they were when *we* were going to school. And I have a grandson who's *thirteen* already, and I personally think he spends *far* too much time on video games. But at the same time, that's the world they live in. And that's what they *see*, and that's what they *emulate*, and that's what they *do*. Now with that I think comes an acceptance of violence and different things. You know, I watch ‘em shooting policemen and things, and you know, that's really *unsettling* to me. . . . And there's a great controversy in society *now* against those that think there

⁴⁷ A., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁴⁸ B., focus group, January 21, 2003.

are too much videos and the violence makes a difference and those that say, “Oh, it’s just a *game*, and we played cops and robbers.” You know, I don’t have all the *answers* to that, but I *certainly* remember entertaining myself with a stick and time, if you will—kids in the neighborhood—for hours on end, and having to be called in and—knowing that you’re supposed to come in when it gets *dark*. And—so I think the world is totally *different*, and I think we may long for it, and maybe that is going to be the change that comes back, the returning to more traditional values and things. But it isn’t there right *now*.⁴⁹

No one in the group pointed out the benefits of these devices. No one declared that it is not the technology, in and of itself, that causes harm but the uses to which it can be put. As one, participants asserted that if the technology genie could just be crammed back into its bottle, life would return to a kinder, gentler society.⁵⁰

One participant carried her longing for times past further than did any of the others. This woman wanted at least one day a week to be spent just with family. She declared that stores and bars should be closed on Sundays and holidays and that one should spend that time only with family. This led to a discussion of the days when much of Michigan, especially in the Grand Rapids area, did adhere to such regulation. Participants chuckled as they recalled how people tried to circumvent the rules: hiding in the basement to watch a ball game by oneself, for example. Other participants pointed out that, due to work and other demands, some people have no choice but to shop on Sundays. The participant who proposed the rule admitted that she herself had been known to shop on Sundays—but never holidays. Some observed that even in those golden halcyon days

⁴⁹ A., focus group, January 21, 2003.

when people supposedly gladly obeyed injunctions against Sabbath activity, they found ways to circumvent them.⁵¹

A: But I do *remember* that, and along with that came things like you couldn't ride your bike. You weren't supposed to go out and play. You know, there was a lot of things that came with that. If you—we never had a TV until I was—ninth grade, I think. But if you went down in the basement and smoked your cigar and watched the ball game—out of sight, out of mind I guess. [Chuckles.]⁵²

S: Well, at least you're *home*. I mean, you're in the....⁵³

Athol: Well, there's still some religions *here* in *Marshall* that they don't—they advocate no TV. In fact, the West Eckford Church still advocates that. And I remember Ken Norton, he would come over to visit—he belonged to that church. And if I had the ball game he never went home until it was *over*. [Laughter.]⁵⁴

S: Oh—I don't care, I don't care—whatever you do on Sunday, as long as you do it as a family, you know. I guess if you all went shoppin' on Sunday as a family—as long as you're *all*—as a family. That's—you know, not somebody going off with Joe Blow, and somebody going off with Sally Lee—they're all together. I guess—everybody's got—no, one person in the household has got a nine-to-five job,

⁵⁰ Various participants, focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁵¹ S., focus group, January 21, 2003; F., focus group, January 21, 2003; A., focus group, January 21, 2003; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

⁵² A., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁵³ S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁵⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at focus group, January 21, 2003.

so the other person has time to go volunteer, like at a hospital or at the school, as long as you're doing something with people to help them.⁵⁵

This focus group was the least optimistic. Most of its participants admitted that they were not hopeful that the kind of community that they desired would be achieved.

B: I still think it all has to do with what's going on in the home and the family and starting from *that*. And having—showing the respect. I don't think we're ever going to have an ideal community because I don't see ever—I don't see kids having any respect—I don't see parents having any respect for their *kids*. I just don't *see* it. I don't want to put it down on a negative note, but—I just don't think that—I don't think families will ever get *back* to the way that they were. Going to grandmother's house for Sunday dinner or whatever. I know families still do that, but the majority of the families don't do that anymore. There's no *family involved*. . . .⁵⁶

S: And I *think* if our economy *breaks*, you may find it goes back to the family, because there won't be the money to go shopping, to . . . the movies, to . . . the mall. And that's a sad thing to say, but maybe that's what would have to *happen*. . . .⁵⁷

They seemed bleakly resigned and more occupied with mourning the past and castigating the present than with working constructively to improve the future. In each group, the initial ideas, when strongly expressed, seemed to flavor the rest of the discussion. Here,

⁵⁵ S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁵⁶ B., focus group, January 21, 2003.

⁵⁷ S., focus group, January 21, 2003.

the participant who first spoke at length had some jaundiced views that were aggressively expressed and, at least superficially, difficult for the other participants to withstand.⁵⁸

Putting Away the Handkerchiefs and Rolling Up One's Sleeves

Although participants in the other groups acknowledged that communities were beset by grievous problems, by and large they did not spend time mourning a purportedly idyllic past: they were too busy taking action to make the present—and hence the future—better. The dynamos behind these take-charge activities and attitudes were middle-aged to older women who had lived in their communities for a long time (at least twenty years), who were deeply integrated into them, and who felt tremendous responsibility for the community: both its people and its geography. Several of the women were farmers with deep ties to the land. They talked about the unwritten but universally acknowledged farmer's creed by which neighbor willingly helps neighbor so that the entire community can prosper.⁵⁹ Two of the women were officials in local governments. One woman owned her own business in the City of Marshall. Many of the women were active in their churches, not just attending services, but participating in such activities as CROP (Christian Rural Overseas Program) Walk, preparing and serving food at a local soup kitchen, visiting local nursing homes. None of these women had small children at home anymore: some had empty nests. They were thus able to pour their

⁵⁸ Ibid. It is impossible to know how much this participant's opening monologue and subsequent observations influenced the rest of the group's thoughts and comments. The law enforcement official remained positive and constructive throughout the session. The rest of the participants were more reticent people whose relative silences left a void that this woman filled. Perhaps the most palpable difference between this group and the others, however, was that it lacked any of the extraordinary, take-charge community activists who were comprised in the other sessions.

⁵⁹ "If a neighbor needs something, the other neighbors are right there to help them. And we find that it's very satisfying to know that if you need help or assistance with something, all you have to do is ask. And they're going to give up their time, whatever they might be doing, to help you." N., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

surplus energies into other organizations. The women tended to be action- rather than group-oriented: they became affiliated with a group based on what it really did rather than on any mission statement or creed.⁶⁰

The first focus group was remarkable because it included four of these activist women. The other two participants fed off their energy and enthusiasm and contributed substantive, complementary suggestions. As a group, they manifested an intense desire to care for those less fortunate. The flow of ideas began when one of the women expressed her frustration that there was no place in Marshall that provided Thanksgiving dinner, on that day, to those in need. She elaborated on this idea, saying that she did not refer only to those in penury: she thought of others with this possible need, such as those who are unable to cook for themselves and who normally receive Meals on Wheels (which does not deliver on holidays) and those who are alone or lonely who would feel even more so on a holiday fraught with so many associations of family, friends, and togetherness.⁶¹ Reacting to this catalyst of thought, one of the women, who volunteered at a soup kitchen in Battle Creek (ten miles from Marshall), admitted that she had heard people in Marshall say, through the years, that Marshall needed a soup kitchen. This prompted a discussion of how one could learn if, realistically, there was such a need, if it would serve enough clients, and how it could gain sufficient support. Another participant

⁶⁰ In the words of one, "I think I tend to support actions rather than groups. I'm more likely to do the Walk for Life (Relay for Life) or the CROP Walk, even though it's not part of my particular church or whatever." A., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

⁶¹ "At the moment I'm sitting being terribly frustrated because there is nobody in the Marshall area who does a Thanksgiving dinner. They do—they used to do two of them in Battle Creek, and the people who do mobile meals in Battle Creek, also do mobile meals for Albion, which means they skip over the area here and go that way. And they do mobile meals here, but they don't do a *Thanksgiving* dinner, and it's just bugging the daylight out of me. And there are people who need it, not just the people who are poor enough so that they might not have it, or even the people on mobile meals who are frequently just not able to get *out* and ought to be fed properly because it's tough for them to get around and actually cook." Ibid.

explained that her church offered soup, bread, and bingo on Wednesdays during Lent and attracted a large group of seniors; but to her knowledge, there was never any effort to expand this. The group agreed that setting up and maintaining a soup kitchen was a very demanding project.⁶² There was a widespread idea that people, at the local level, ought to know how to help one another, as well as those who were passing through: “It is basically such a *small* area geographically, even with the big farms on the outside, that you ought to be able to do that. Everybody out to be able to know where to go, how to send somebody, how to help somebody.”⁶³

There was talk about how difficult it is to feel valuable and worthwhile. They talked of the need for bridges, both physical and metaphorical.

It’s not *just* the recession that I think is affecting the country and the countryside. It is that lack—I’m not sure that *everybody* thinks that what they do is *worthwhile*. What they do for a living—I think that most people who were farmers or are farmers *know* that, but I’m not sure that everybody who works in offices or factories or on computers *knows* that. They don’t see the *bridges* anymore that they built. And they don’t go by and say, “I built that house.”⁶⁴

There was a series of ideas dealing with produce and gardens. People began to talk about the need to understand and appreciate farmers—perhaps have more town and country cooperation. This led someone to suggest a farmers’ market. Many who had lived in the area for a long time recalled previous abortive attempts to have a farmers’

⁶² Various participants, remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁶³ A., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

market. One problem had been that the location was not constant.⁶⁵ In discussing this, people also talked about ways in which urban people or people with no place where they lived to grow vegetables or flowers could have a place to cultivate the earth. The conservation district was going to try to launch a community garden project. This topic in turn led to talk of a Garden Hot Line. Participants discussed the common phenomenon of gardens producing more produce than the gardeners could consume or doing so at times that were inconvenient for the growers. There would be times when the gardener could not effectively pick, preserve, or consume all the ripe produce. At times such as that, participants suggested, there should be a network of volunteers, coordinated by a hot line, who could come to the affected garden in a timely fashion, pick the designated produce, and see that it went to places that could put it to good use. One participant noted that regulations governing food banks had changed so that the banks could now accept homegrown produce.⁶⁶

Participants believed that a community newsletter could serve a vital function for the area. However, they were concerned that obtaining the staff and resources necessary would be difficult. As one participant pointed out, in a small community with very finite reserves, existing businesses are besieged with requests from every local nonprofit organization. After reflecting for a moment, though, she added, "On the other hand, if

⁶⁵ T., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; A, focus group, November 12, 2002; M., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; C., focus group, November 12, 2002; Randy Nail, remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. During the spring and summer of 2003, one of the focus group participants most interested in farmers' markets was instrumental in starting one in a space near the heart of town. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 10, 2003, in author's possession.

⁶⁶ N., focus group, November 12, 2002; A., focus group, November 12, 2002; T., focus group, November 12, 2002; C., focus group, November 12, 2002; M., focus group, November 12, 2002.

your cause is just, good, and exciting, then it probably doesn't make any difference, you're probably going to get funding and paper and whatever."⁶⁷

This group believed that Marshall's reputation worked against it. The city had cultivated an image as an idyllic place. Among group members, there was the perception that a number of people were falling through holes in the safety net. Since many of the participants had spent their adult lives trying to mend these holes, they spoke with authority, knowledge, and deep understanding and conviction.

In Marshall where those statistics fail are, you have a lot of older people who are sitting in homes that are completely paid for that they've built thirty years ago for fifty-thousand dollars, and now, because of where they're sitting and the condition those people have kept them in, are worth two-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars. But there's no way that they're going to have another mortgage to help them pay their health insurance or their food. . . . They'll just do less at the grocery store, or they'll do less with medicine. . . . And those statistics . . . put those people, because their assets are so high, they don't put them in the needy group, and yet they are very, very *cash poor* . . . *cash and attention poor*."⁶⁸

Even in the face of such needs, participants refused to pine for "the good ol' days," but remained hopeful, creative, and energetic, devising ways in which people could be helped to help themselves.

⁶⁷ A., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁶⁸ The term "attention poor" led to some misunderstanding among group members. One member thought that this indicated that people could not pay attention. Others explained that these were people whose lives lacked attention from and interaction with others. C., focus group, November 12, 2002; A., focus group, November 12, 2002; N., focus group, November 12, 2002; Randy Nail, focus group, November 12, 2002; J., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

S: You know, this soup kitchen is going through my mind. Wouldn't it be great if we could come up with a program where, those ones coming in and getting the meals, we could incorporate them into helping prepare the meals? So you would have volunteers, and then they would have a net worth as well. You know—that they've accomplished something.⁶⁹

M: Because there's a lot of people, you know, they want *something* to do. But they don't know how to . . . go about *doing* it. . . .⁷⁰

A: So they [service organizations] inspire people . . . to give back. . . . That's also an interesting way of, maybe helping people bridge the stigma of being registered as needy or whatever: That there's always that possibility that they're going to be able to turn their lives around.⁷¹

This group acknowledged that volunteers could be difficult to attract and retain. But they remained optimistic that it could be done, and offered ideas for doing so.

S: It's got to be something—you've got to somehow get them there, but then after they once get there, have it so they don't want to leave. . . .⁷²

N: If it's going to fill their *need*, I think they would come back. I mean, you've got to get them there to show them that it's going to fill their need, whether they're lonely or whether they need another meal or something.⁷³

⁶⁹ S., remarks at focus group, November 12, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

⁷⁰ M., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷¹ A., focus group, November 12, 2002.

A: Or if they need to serve. . . .⁷⁴

T: And I think that as far as *volunteers*—if you can make them feel like what they did was worthwhile. And lots of thanks and that sort of thing and encouragement to come back. . . .⁷⁵

Participants discussed the need for a neutral, disinterested group, not heavily invested in only one particular area of the region, to coordinate needs and their solutions.

I think one of the needs that I have seen that really needs to come out of this is that we really need a central area to have a lot of this networking happen. And we really don't have that right now. . . . It seems to be very hard for the individual, whether it be the townships, the city, the individual churches, or the individual service organizations, for people to let go of that. And you have to have somebody who's neutral who is willing to come in and fight some of those things to get that started. Athol, the Grange would be wonderful.⁷⁶

Participants viewed Fredonia Grange members as kindred spirits: common people doing uncommon things and making an uncommon difference.

I look at the Grange and they're—I guess the common person. That's why they're doing so much and everything, and really this common person, when you look at so much, this common person doesn't have a chance to *get* in on a lot of these other

⁷² S., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷³ N., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷⁴ A., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷⁵ T., focus group, November 12, 2002.

things, because it's a common person. And I think that if we can get—if you look at many of your boards and everything, and go down through them and see where the people work and everything, see what their net worth is, and all this, but then they're representing us common people. They haven't got—I don't feel they have the same *idea* as what the common person has.⁷⁷

This group concluded on a positive note, figuratively thumbing its nose at the purported “fat cats” whom they allege try to run Marshall. They contend that it is the “common person” who makes the city work, and that, collectively, those common people have a great deal of power.⁷⁸

And I don't know that all the Marshall forwarding and visioning and whatever else, which tends to rely on the people and institutions that have been relied on for some time now, are going to do anywhere near as much good as this kind of a meeting with people who give three hoots in Hades for one thing, and who have the background of service and their community knowledge to be able to pull something off. So I don't think it's one leader that would do it. I think this table full of people could probably do anything they put their heads to.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ C., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷⁷ S., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷⁸ C., focus group, November 12, 2002; A., focus group, November 12, 2002; S., focus group, November 12, 2002; M., focus group, November 12, 2002.

⁷⁹ A., focus group, November 12, 2002. The references to Marshall “forwarding and visioning” are allusions to “Marshall Area in Focus: 2007,” a process begun in 2002 in which the greater Marshall area formulated a five-year plan for its future, using such strategies as neighborhood meetings and community forums. A number of government and corporate sponsors contributed funds to this, making it possible to hire a Colorado firm as consultants and facilitators. Those in charge of the project asserted that it was open to the entire community, that all had a voice, and that they would use focus groups. The initial “focus groups” consisted of meetings of as many as thirty people, run by amateurs with rudimentary written guidance, administering structured questions and questionnaires. Subsequent community-wide meetings were so large that few people's thoughts were heard. Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce, *Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce/Marshall Area in Focus: 2007 Web Site*, available online: <http://www>

Like Pulling Teeth⁸⁰ —But Worth the Effort

The second session was the smallest: only four of the invited participants came. Of these, one was extremely quiet: trying to integrate her into the discussion and help her to establish a comfort level required concerted effort. By the end of the discussion, she was clearly more at ease and was taking part in the conversation. But the exchanges in this group lacked the spontaneous, electrifying flow that had characterized the first one.

The dynamics of the second focus group were far different from those of the first. Two of the participants were young people, still seeking their places within their communities. One was a young man, the son of one of the remarkable, community aware women who attended the first focus group. He was intense, obviously intelligent, and shy, finding it difficult to make eye contact when he spoke. He saw his identity and community, at that point, as predominantly urban, since he lived in Marshall and worked in Kalamazoo. He was a member of the Green Party, an ardent environmentalist, and a frequent contributor to the letters' page of the Battle Creek paper. Certain Grangers and members of the community considered his stances on some issues somewhat radical.⁸¹ The other was a young woman who lived nearby with her husband and four children on a forty-acre farm. She began the meeting by saying that she did not really like to talk very much, but that she was interested in the Grange and would help in any way that she

.marshallareainfocus2007.org. (The Web site has evolved over time. It was accessed most recently on September 1, 2004.) Many of those who participated in the Fredonia Grange focus groups had also taken part in the Marshall 2007 project. Of those who spoke about the project, all said that they gained more from the Fredonia discussion—that they found it empowering and energizing—it gave them inspirations to carry back with them into their daily lives. C., focus group, November 12, 2002; A., focus group, November 12, 2002; Randy Nail, focus group, November 12, 2002; Mary Houghton, remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession; J1, remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

⁸⁰ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 25, 2002, in author's possession.

could. She was clearly ill at ease for some time, particularly when juxtaposed with the other participants who were all quite active in community organizations. She continually apologized that she was so involved with her children right now that she did not feel that she really had time for outside organizations. She later explained her positive feelings for the Grange—feelings so strong that she would place herself in an initially uncomfortable situation in order to try to help them.

I was not really familiar with the Grange *until*—even though I’ve always lived within a *mile* of here—but when my husband was in a very serious accident, like six years ago. The Grange, they had a benefit with one of the breakfasts and helped us out. And we were just, at that time, we just couldn’t *believe* that something that we weren’t even *affiliated* with, would actually want to help someone else out. Since *that*, I have been interested because we were just so *amazed* that they would want to help out.⁸²

By the end of the focus group, this young woman was much more relaxed and was making substantive comments and contributions.

The third participant was someone who had been in the area for only seven years. He was very active in county and regional organizations, but did not yet have a strong feeling of local community. Although he had not previously considered himself much of a joiner, he was a retired teacher who still had the urge to educate others, so he had become active in organizations that would continue to afford him this opportunity.

⁸¹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 18, 2002, in author’s possession.

⁸² J-2, remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

I'm a retired *teacher* and I think I still have an *emotional need* to teach. And so I do that through the Spinners' Flock [a spinners' guild] and also through the Pheasants Forever and of course, through the Albion Area Lifelong Learning [AALL]. So I—what is a service organization? I don't know—*listening* to all you people, it's kind of made me *challenge* the way I *look* at service organizations and just exactly what I think a service organization *is* and right now I'm a little *confused* because—a service organization, I would think, would be something that would be designed to serve the community. I'm not sure that all service organizations *do* that. Certainly not to the same extent. I guess that's as far as I want to go with that thought at this point because I really don't have my thoughts organized yet.⁸³

The fourth individual was another one of those remarkable middle-aged women with long taproots throughout the community. Her family had lived in the area for generations. She worked in local government. She was active in the community through her church and the other organizations to which she belonged. Because of the many levels on which she related to her community, she had deep knowledge and understanding of it. Her life stood as a quiet testament to the positive difference that one person can make. Although she did not monopolize the conversation, she certainly had an acute impact upon it. Throughout the discussion, she offered profound insights into the lives of community residents.

Although the moderator had to work harder during this focus group than any other in this study in order to put the participants at ease and create a comfortable atmosphere in which they would feel secure and stimulated enough to freely exchange ideas, once

⁸³ R., focus group, November 23, 2002.

people did become acclimated, their trickling of insights became a flood. When the transcriber compiled the transcripts, she was intrigued to discover that this focus group's was the longest of the three community sessions—despite having the fewest participants. As the trust grew, so did the synergy: people fed on one another's thoughts, using them as catalysts for more ideas. Some of their observations about community and community service were particularly keen. They talked of the need for community-service organizations to constantly evolve and renew themselves, being sensitive to the changing realities of their constituencies.

J₁: I wonder sometimes whether some organizations might be working to make themselves *obsolete*. To solve the problems they were created to—founded to solve. To take a somewhat obvious example: if the National Organization for Women ever actually *passed* the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, would they disband or reorganize?⁸⁴

R: Yeah. And it would cause an evolution within the organization itself.⁸⁵

S: The thought's crossed my mind—I'm a breast-cancer survivor and the thought has crossed my mind—the *happiest* thing I could see would be down there to Battle Creek Health System, a great big banner across the front: "Going Out of Business!" [Laughter.] They have such a network of people working for it, and they have fundraisers and all that. And *actually* if you really stop and *examine it*, just like the sorority that I participate in, they have the women's shelter. And if they were successful in their aim to be a community service and we no longer had a *need* for a

⁸⁴ J.₁, focus group, November 23, 2002.

women's shelter, you know. . . . Maybe everybody should *say* when you have a service, community project, that your goal is to become *extinct*. [Laughs.] Because you know if your goal is to right something that is *wrong*, or make beautiful something that is *ugly*, then your goal should be to become—Going Out of Business!⁸⁶

J: Then you regroup and find a new cause.⁸⁷

S: In a perfect world, we wouldn't need community service.⁸⁸

People discussed the values that they thought that a community-service organization should promote, as well as the characteristics that attracted them to a group.

J₁: When the service they provide is open to *all* openly. That is a positive trait.⁸⁹

S: I think any of the organizations that I've participated in—in most all of them, I've had the opportunity to—I'm going to "*interview*" the group before I actually joined it and became *active* in it. And I think the thing that attracts me to any one *particular* group is the *human* side of the people that are already *in* that group. If they have—they're friendly, outgoing—they're tolerant of *different* ideas, *different* opinions; if they're not *totally* with blinders on and focused only on *one* particular thing. That they are *welcoming* and they don't have one specific agenda . . . and that's all that they will attack. I think—and the people who are the *nucleus* of that

⁸⁵ R., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁸⁶ S., remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

⁸⁷ J., remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

service group or organization, their personalities and their *type* of leadership, whether it be giving *out* responsibilities or whether they are *determined* that they're—"I'm in charge"—"it's going to be my way." That attitude. I guess my evaluation of the people that are the nucleus of the committee, or the organization . . . might determine whether or not it was something that I wanted to *participate* in. And I use the word "interview" kind of *broadly*, it's not—I *assess* the group before I go in. . . .⁹⁰

R: I think *S.* hit it on the head when she talked about fellowship in an organization. I think that you need to feel like you *belong*, like the Spanish word—*sympatico*. You have to feel a certain *kinship*.⁹¹

J: So you need to feel a . . . *comfort* level. . . .⁹²

J₁: And sometimes that could be expressed in how much *fun* meetings or activities are. Sometimes it could be in terms of how closely you feel yourself as *sharing* the mission or the *values* or whatever of the group. . . .⁹³

J₂: I guess, I should have spoke up when we were writing things down. I guess the *ideal* community organization for *me* as a person would be one that my *whole family* can participate *in*. And I guess that's what I'm sort of *looking* for, right now. That's why I've been *looking* at the Grange per se. You know, something for my *whole family*. Because I like *helping* people, and that's one of the things that I'm trying to

⁸⁸ S., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁸⁹ J.₁, focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹⁰ S., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹¹ R., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹² J., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹³ J.₁, focus group, November 23, 2002.

instill in my kids. And that's why, when the Grange helped us out, I just thought that's *so great*, I want—I would love to be a *part* of that.⁹⁴

This group touched upon related concepts that would be expressed in later groups. Members stated that they were attracted to an organization that was committed to goals that they, too, could embrace. This made them feel valued and as though they could make a difference. The organization must also be committed to its members, helping them to derive satisfaction from belonging. They also spoke about the vital role of communication: they would like a very clear mission statement, along with the steps to its implementation, promulgated both within and without the organization. They talked about building in an organizational capacity to grow by having specializations within the overarching organization and a carefully preplanned organizational chart.

S: Well, I think in an ideal world . . . if this group of people *here* were going to become a community-service organization, that we would discuss some of our *different* goals that we might do. That—on the onset that you would have a flowchart or an organizational chart that would allow you to grow and fill *in* all of your possible niches, such as you would be interested in conservation, you would be interested in home economics, you know, and you would be—and so we would have an organizational *chart* already from the get go that—with *growth*, we would be filling in all these leadership areas. But, being a small, just starting—we wouldn't try to address—you know, you can spread yourself too thin. You need to just *focus*, and then as you *grew*, you could *fill* out all the branches of your tree. . . .⁹⁵

⁹⁴ J., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹⁵ S., focus group, November 23, 2002.

J₁: So, a suitable match between structure and capabilities and goals?⁹⁶

J: So the ability to *adapt*, absorb more *people*, and become—have a hierarchy that you can absorb people to an unlimited extent. And have a committee system. . . .

So along with the chart, our organizational chart to accommodate *growth*, it sounds like something that would be good would be a *way* to—if you *have* this large organization—a way to *draw on* all the people or most of the people and not just have that *core* that always does everything. So a way to *tap* people, develop them⁹⁷.

S., the community activist, was the treasurer for the township in which she lived. She arrived at the focus group first, about fifteen minutes early, and chatted easily with all the focus group team present. She said that she had been busy preparing tax bills to send out. Along with the tax bills, she sent a newsletter that she compiled. It included what she deemed “comfort” material: information on the homeowner’s tax credit, information about other programs that could assist those in need, a preview of coming events and activities that might be of interest to township residents. She talked about a township meeting that she had attended at which the speaker emphasized the importance of getting word of the homeowner’s tax credit to those of modest means. The newsletter was one strategy that she was using.⁹⁸

Once Athol asked this participant to be a part of the focus group discussion, she gave a great deal of thought to the state of her community: what its needs were, how they could be met. After the more guided part of the focus group was over, while people were

⁹⁶ J.₁, focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹⁷ J., focus group, November 23, 2002.

⁹⁸ S., focus group, November 23, 2002.

sharing thoughts on a wide range of interests and areas, she expounded on this, concluding on a hopeful note.

I am a township treasurer—collect property taxes. And it's a very small township area. . . . And I *do* have a *lot* of people that come in and pay their taxes in person. There are many of those who come in, and they sit *down*, and it's *just a chance* to talk. And the *one* thing that I have decided is there are a lot of people in this world that are just very lonely. And they *need* companionship, they *need* somebody who has the time of day to just listen to them. And they also have *need to communicate*. . . . And they *need*, they *need* somebody to connect them with what's going on in the *community*. . . . They have a need for, I guess, maybe making them feel that they're part of the community. . . . There are a lot of people who are *alone*, there are a lot of people who just want somebody to *talk* to. And they *want* to find *connection* to other people. And these services—that would be a project for us to *address* these needs and do something that would serve all those needs. . . . So there's a lot of senior services there, and I think a group could benefit by *being* the communication *link* on a one-to-one basis. . . . But as I was *thinking* about our process today, I *personally* feel that—and it's not that there *isn't* help, there *is* help—but *just* filtering the help to the people that *need* the help.⁹⁹

Secret Philanthropy: Humility or Selfishness—And Extinction?

The township treasurer articulated one of the problems that many community-service organizations face: They want to do good and help others while not appearing immodest by extolling their own virtues and calling attention to what they have done.

My mom told me that if you do a good deed and more than two people know about it, it no longer is a good deed. . . . If I help you with something, you know about it and I know about it, but by the time that I tell you, and you, and you that I *did* that . . . then I've no longer done a good deed.¹⁰⁰

Although at first such humility might seem appealing, it can also be shortsighted and destructive. If one is trying to address a great need but keeps the work that one is doing—and thus the need itself—a secret, help may be limited to one person's efforts—which will have a severely limited effect. In addition, that kind of silence is a form of selfishness: doing good can bring its own feelings of elation. Is it right to keep these feelings to oneself? There is more than enough work—and accompanying glow—to be shared by many. Another participant touched upon this later in the discussion.

Your *mom* said, only two people should know [of a good deed: the doer and the recipient]. The *down* side of that is that if you're *trying* to do something to help people and you want to *pull in* more people so that *they* can get that great feeling from helping people and doing more—if you *keep* it to *yourself*—there's a difference between *bragging* and saying “This wonderful thing—I was able to get this wonderful *feeling* by doing something. *I* can make x number of hats for people. I'm only going to be able to warm so many heads. If we do this *together*. . . .”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid. The speaker's township consisted primarily of farmers of German ancestry.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ J., remarks at focus group, November 23, 2002.

There are those within communities and within community-service organizations who view publicity with distrust, who fear that promoting activities in which they are involved for the betterment of others will make them (appear to be) vain. These are largely people who live in small communities in which how one is perceived by others is very important: one does not want to be viewed as calling attention to oneself. This concern can be alleviated by pointing out that the focus need not be on a particular individual's or group's actions, but on the need and the opportunities that exist for people to address it.

Reaching Out to Members

Almost from the very start, Athol was intrigued and optimistic about the potential benefits of doing focus groups. His faith throughout the process appeared to be unshakable. Even before the team conducted the first discussion, he suggested widening the target population to include sessions with Fredonia Grange members. Before the conclusion of the first focus group, during the debriefing of the focus group team, he began to advocate the additional member discussions even more enthusiastically.¹⁰²

After the three focus groups with community members ended in January 2003, the author's time was consumed by transcribing and reporting those groups, as well as additional research. She was not able to return to the idea of doing focus groups with Fredonia Grange members until the fall of 2003. She and Athol decided that she could adapt the community focus group script and consent form to this different pool. They judged that they would not have to ask for a budget to conduct these additional groups. They already had many of the supplies that they needed: tape recorder, omnidirectional

¹⁰² Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Focus Group Planning Meeting, October 8, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks during Focus Group Supply Trip, November 7, 2002, Marshall and Battle Creek, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, focus group, November 12, 2002.

microphone, easel, flip chart pad, markers, pens. The only additional items that they would need were a battery for the microphone, cassette tapes, and writing tablets. Athol felt that they could be recompensed for these items from the Fredonia Grange Secretary's miscellaneous funds. The author picked up a backup microphone battery and additional cassette tapes; Athol obtained more packs of legal pads. Since they would now be working with Grange members, there were a few changes in the materials distributed to participants. For the first series, Athol had ordered an assortment of Grange brochures; before the discussions began, he placed a set of the literature by each participant's place. Since all taking part in the next series had, presumably, some knowledge of the Grange, the brochures were deemed unnecessary. Because all Fredonia Grange members are entitled to free bluebird nesting boxes, they did not explicitly receive them as honoraria for focus group participation—unlike with the first series. As with the first groups, however, at the end of the sessions, participants did receive a loaf of homemade Athol bread. Also as with the first discussions, the Fredonia Grangers could choose from homemade Athol doughnuts, the author's mother's brownies, coffee, bottled water, and a variety of sodas for refreshments.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ The Grange is famous for its food prowess. Many Granges earn their operating expenses by hosting food events. Within the Grange, the legend is that if one goes to a Grange function, one will never go hungry. Promotional literature for both the focus groups and other Grange enterprises prominently featured mention of "famous Grange food." The home economics division of the Grange fosters this culture by holding contests every fall in various baking categories. In former times, there were baking contests for Grangers in general. Athol, who had always preferred cooking to most farm work and who, as a younger child, had been called upon to help his mother with the housework when she fell off the house porch and broke both her arms, had frequently entered the statewide Grange baking contests, sometimes taking as high as second place. In later years, the State Grange had instituted classes: it had separate divisions for juniors, men, women, and a general, composite one. Athol continued to periodically enter the contests, now in the men's class. In 2001, his doughnuts took first place. Thereafter, he frequently made these for refreshments for Grange functions. A few years before this, he had begun making bread. He almost always brought a few loaves of his coarse, dense white bread to Grange potlucks. Many prized this bread: when the Pomona Grange and Fredonia Grange were trying to raise funds for different projects, they held auctions. Athol provided loaves of bread for these fund-raisers; his loaves brought as much as ten to twelve dollars each. There was a running joke between Athol and the author that the Grange would recompense

Because the Grange members were all community residents, the focus group team was interested in their reflections on community. But since they had already gotten a wealth of insight on this from the previous focus groups, they were even more eager to learn the perceptions and motivations of the Fredonia Grangers pertaining to their organization: Why did they belong? What did it do for them? What would they like it to do? The team would have liked to interview each Grange member. Since this was infeasible, they determined to conduct a series of group interviews/focus groups. Because of the strong oral history aspect of these sessions, and because the participants' Grange identity and background was inextricably intertwined with the information and observations that the focus group team would be eliciting, the Grange members, unlike the community members, would not be anonymous.

At that point, Fredonia Grange had about 150 members, including those with associate memberships—those who paid dues and enjoyed the Grange connection, but who were not active in any functions, did not attend meetings, etc. Even many of the regular members were only sporadically active. So the pool of potential participants was considerably smaller than the membership roster might seem to indicate.

Athol and the author met to plan the second round of focus groups on September 20, 2003. Because of additional time constraints in their lives, they needed to complete the groups before the end of the year. They could not hold any in October because the Michigan State Grange Convention would be held during its third week, and preparing

her for work on its behalf with Athol bread. By his estimation, he had given her about 10 loaves so far, leaving a balance of 99,990. Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 12, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 23, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, January 21, 2003; various speakers, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting/Auction, March 20, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at meeting with author, August 31, 2004, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession. Although neither the

for and recovering from this annual event would consume all available time and energies from then until the end of that month. Further, they determined that it was unlikely that they could hold successful focus groups after Thanksgiving—the pressures and demands of the holidays from then until the end of the year would be too great. So that left a three week window of opportunity in November. After discarding those evenings and weekend days in November during which the Fredonia Grange Hall would be in use, Athol and the author decided that they could realistically plan to hold two sessions during November: one on Tuesday, November 18, 2003, from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m.; the other on Saturday, November 22, 2003, from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. As Secretary of Fredonia Grange, Athol kept the membership roster. He and the author reviewed this, selecting eight people to ask to attend each session. They sought a blend of active and less active members, both genders, differing lengths of time of membership.¹⁰⁴

Disseminating information about and recruiting people for the Fredonia Grange member focus groups was much less involved and elaborate than it was for the community discussions. Most of the Fredonia Grangers gave whole-hearted support to the focus group effort; they had been very proud that they were able to accomplish them and had been pleased with and interested in the results. So there was great receptivity to the idea of doing more sessions with Grange members. Indeed, a number of people who were not among those to be asked volunteered.¹⁰⁵ Athol gave people who were not specifically invited the option to attend if they wished; no one did so, however. Athol

author nor her mother belonged to the Grange, their combined efforts to help the Grange led Fredonia Grangers to claim them as honorary members.

¹⁰⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Fredonia Grange Member Focus Group Planning Meeting, September 20, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁰⁵ Fredonia Grangers expressed interest in being part of the focus groups on numerous occasions; in the interest of time and space, only the first such instance is cited. Various speakers, remarks at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, September 20, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

sent a letter to prospective participants to explain the process. He then followed up with a phone call. The first meeting had a full complement of eight people. The second group was affected by unforeseen misfortunes: there were two deaths—one person's mother, another person's mother-in-law. These happened at the last minute, so there was no time for substitutions. On the other hand, because these were Fredonia Granger focus groups, Athol and Randy were able to participate more actively. So the groups actually tapped the thoughts, feelings, energies, experiences, and collective wisdom of sixteen Grange members—over 10 percent of the total membership.

Many of the perceptions offered during these discussions are breathtakingly revealing. They afford profound insights into the power of group membership and the desire to serve—and to find and make meaning on a personal and communal level by doing so.

Let 'Em Develop, Let 'Em Stumble—And Pick 'Em Up when They Fall

After Athol and the author chose eight people for the first Fredonia Grange member focus group, he remarked that they were all talkers. He anticipated lively discussion, with ideas tumbling over one another. His main concern was that it might be difficult to keep everyone from talking at once.¹⁰⁶ Of the eight original designees, only one was unable to come. Since he learned of this in time, Athol was able to find an alternate. During this meeting, people did share some fascinating vignettes. Yet there was not the electrifying idea exchange that Athol had anticipated.

The Cast

Those who attended this group varied in length and degree of involvement with the Grange. **Rich Hazen**, who was then forty-eight, had been involved with the Grange—with a hiatus during his young adult years—since birth. Despite the strains that it placed on his marriage, he was committed to maintaining and renewing Fredonia Grange; he was a strong advocate for the Action Grange movement. He had been elected Chair of Fredonia Grange in June 2001, and continued to hold that position. He attended most meetings and worked prominently at most Fredonia Grange functions.¹⁰⁷

Avis Williams: She had belonged to Fredonia Grange since 1963. She lived on a farm in Eckford, near Athol and Helen Hazen. Since she no longer felt comfortable driving, particularly at night, she usually came to Grange functions with them. She also attended the Wednesday night stringed instrument musicals at the Fredonia Grange Hall with Athol. Avis had had six children, one of whom had died. She and her husband, the late Jay Williams, were becoming active in the Grange as her children were growing up and leaving home. At the time of the focus group, a few of these children also belonged to Fredonia Grange: her daughter, Andrea Peck, who was Lecturer/Enrichment Director; and her son, Ross Williams, along with his wife, Connie. The latter two no longer attended Grange meetings and functions because they adopted and provided foster care to profoundly physically, mentally, and emotionally disabled children whose care and needs were truly never-ending. They did present a riveting program for a Fredonia Grange enrichment program on “Shaken Baby Syndrome.” Up through 2003, Avis was active in the West Eckford Missionary Church, was a member of the Marshall District Library Board representing Eckford, and belonged to the Oaklawn Hospital (the Marshall

¹⁰⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., Fredonia Grange Member Focus Group Planning Meeting, September 20, 2003.

hospital) auxiliary. After this, because of some health problems, Avis became less active with the library and hospital. The medical issues of her children and grandchildren were also a drain. But the Grange retained a special place in her affections and energies: she seldom missed a meeting or function. From the outset, she fostered the author and always sat with her at the Grange potlucks that the author attended. Avis was then in her late seventies.¹⁰⁸

Betty Dukavas: She had known the Hazen family since Rich and his siblings were small; she had taught music in the country schools that they attended when young. She knew Helen Peck from their mutual teaching days. Even after she retired, she and her husband, Duke, remained in the area, in a country setting; children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren lived nearby. Among other things, Betty and Duke loved to dance: they went out with other couples on many Saturday nights in order to do so. When Duke became seriously ill, Betty and he sold their home to a grandson and moved to a condominium in Marshall. Betty was a full-time caregiver for several years, until Duke died. She was then at a loss: she no longer felt that she fit in with the couples with whom she and Duke had associated. When she came to the Fredonia Grange Pancake Brunch in October 2001, she talked with her old student, Rich Hazen. Something of her loneliness emerged. Seeing her need, Rich shared one of Fredonia's—they needed a pianist—a position that Betty could ably fill. So Betty joined the Grange and both she and Fredonia had found mutual fulfillment in the union.

Betty was an ardent environmentalist: her sister got her involved in raising monarch butterflies, an activity to which she had introduced many of the children of Fredonia

¹⁰⁷ There is much more on Rich Hazen elsewhere in this study, such as in the chapter on oral history and in the chapter discussing the research.

Grange. Betty viewed the traditional Grange ritualism with considerable skepticism—the degree work held no allure for her. But she chose to overlook that because her membership in the Grange allowed her to be active in several areas of concern to her. She noted that there were other organizations that shared some of Fredonia Grange’s environmental interests: bluebird restoration, monarch butterfly preservation, protecting prairie and natural habitat, land use. There were other organizations that might tackle a few of Fredonia’s community-service projects, such sponsoring deaf students; making pet pads for the Humane Society; quilting coverlets for the hospital needy, nursing homes, developmentally disabled, and homeless; producing caps for premature babies and cancer patients; sewing tote bags for indigent patients at the VA Medical Center; providing snacks and visits to disabled veterans; sending school supplies to an inner-city Chicago school; donating dictionaries to area third-graders; hosting holiday dinners (St. Patrick’s Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s) open to the community; running Family Night Out, an opportunity for all generations to socialize and enjoy one another’s company while experiencing activities in a wholesome family atmosphere. Goodwill donations were accepted for this latter, but no one would be kept from participating for lack of funds. Fredonia also contributed material and labor to Family Outdoor Safety Day, partnered with the Calhoun Conservation District on a number of events, reinstated the greater Marshall Easter Egg Hunt. Betty opined that some other organizations, which focused on only one issue, might seem to be more effective, initially, since they were not trying to interweave disparate threads. Betty averred, however, that she did not relish having to deal with such a congeries of organizations in order to attain her goals. As Betty perceived it, other organizations might strive to emulate Fredonia’s actions and

¹⁰⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003, in author’s possession.

might be able to contribute to one or two different issues. But she contended that no other organization so efficaciously dealt with as many of her interests as Fredonia Grange did. At the time of the discussion, Betty was in her late seventies.¹⁰⁹

Charles (Charlie) Letts: He had been involved with the Calhoun County Industrial Society (CCAIS, the nonprofit organization that runs the Calhoun County Fairgrounds) for many years. In that capacity, he had known and interacted with Fredonia Grange for a number of years—but he had not been a Grange member. On March 2, 2002, Charlie and another member of the CCAIS board came to the Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting to thank Fredonia Grange for all that they had done at the fairgrounds and to ask how CCAIS could give back to them—and get some help in return. At that time, Rich Hazen asked the Fredonia Grangers present who were members of CCAIS. Most raised their hands. He then asked who were members of CCAIS but not of Fredonia Grange. Charlie raised his hand. Rich said that he could rectify that oversight, and rushed an application into Charlie's hands. Charlie signed up on the spot. His intense involvement with CCAIS kept him from being active in Fredonia Grange, but he followed their activities with interest, although usually from afar. Charlie had worked for the Michigan State Highway Department for years; he continued to be a member of the Marengo Township Fire Department. His wife Marilyn's parents farmed, and they continued to help with the dairy farm on which they all now lived. Charlie and Marilyn's son was then doing most of the farming. Charlie was in charge of the dairy department at the Calhoun County Fair

¹⁰⁹ Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Betty Dukavas, Pianist, Fredonia Grange, Grange member since 2001, retired music teacher for greater Marshall country schools, community activist, environmentalist, interview by author, July 1, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

for quite some time. His mother-in-law, Vera Laing, supervised the fair's home economics department. Charlie was in his sixties.¹¹⁰

Russell (Russ) Clutter: He had been a Fredonia Grange member since 1990. He did not attend many meetings, but cherished the Grange connection. He was active in a number of other community-service and charitable activities, among them, the Newton United Methodist Church and the CCAIS, on whose boards he currently served. He had been a Pennfield Township Supervisor. He was retired from Post Cereals in Battle Creek, where he had been active in the United Way until he was burned out by that organization's process. Despite this, Russ remained very active in other charitable endeavors. He raised beef cattle with his wife, Shirley, on the farm that she had inherited from her mother's family. Russ was in his sixties.¹¹¹

Paul Jones: He joined the Grange in 1981. He was not very interested in the Grange at first. Then one night, after a Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, Athol and Helen Hazen invited Paul and his wife, Marilyn, out for ice cream. As Athol recalls, "that night they became Grange members."¹¹² (Although they had technically belonged before, Athol believes that it was on that night that they became truly involved.) Paul had been very active in the B. E. Henry Community Building Association before he joined the Grange; that is how he became acquainted with Fredonia Grange. Paul was about ten years younger than Athol, greatly admired him, and was strongly influenced by his example. He called Athol every morning to chat. He was retired from Eaton

¹¹⁰ Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, March 2, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, September 9, 2002, in author's possession.

¹¹¹ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003, in author's possession.

¹¹² Most of the information in this profile comes from observation and conversation with Paul Jones from 2002 through 2004. Some of the specifics also come from Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 18, 2003.

Manufacturing of Marshall and had a strong union allegiance. He was a staunch Democrat. Paul was a large, gruff man, but very goodhearted. He and Marilyn were extremely clever and could do almost any craft. In particular, Paul was an expert woodworker. He was also a collector of many things. He belonged to an antique tractor club. He frequented flea markets, buying and selling. He had gone to auction school and used his talents for charity auctions. He owned bingo equipment and used it to run games for Fredonia Grange and his union.

Paul was the head of the Fredonia Grange Bluebird House Committee and the Legislative Committee. The Grange had given him a forum in which to feel valued, and he had blossomed accordingly. Some of the younger members felt that he could sometimes go on too long giving committee reports, but having the opportunity to speak before a group of supportive friends was psychically very important for him.

Paul was a tireless worker with a generous spirit. At one point, he mentioned to the author that he had built a few bluebird houses out of barn wood. The author stated that if he built any more, she would like to buy one from him. The next time that the author saw him, a week later, he presented her with a beautiful birdhouse of barn wood, with an inscription that it had been made expressly for her by him on a given date. At the time of the focus groups, Paul's mother was mortally ill. He did not think that he could attend the session, but then decided that he needed the break for a few hours. Before his wife, Marilyn, could attend the next session, however, Paul's mother died and Marilyn was too immersed in the funeral to attend the group. Paul was in his mid-sixties.¹¹³

Mary LaFountain: She had been raised in the Grange. When she married and moved away from the region, she was no longer active. When she and her husband,

Reuben, returned to the area, her mother, Helen Peck, and her stepfather, Vern Peck, urged her to come back to the Grange. She did so, rejoining in 1959; Reuben also joined at this time. She, Reuben, and their children forged familial bonds with Athol and Helen Hazen and their children. It was Mary who had helped Helen Hazen start the Fredonia Grange Food Booth at the fair in 1961. Mary, who as one of Helen Peck's children played musical instruments, including the dulcimer, started the stringed instrument music concerts at the Fredonia Grange Hall on Wednesday nights. Nearly every week, a varying number of musicians would gather at the Grange hall to play old-fashioned stringed instrument music—without artificial synthesizers or enhancements. For several hours, the musicians would play and people would dance—square dances, line dances, ballroom dance. It was there that Reuben had a chance to fulfill a dream and learn and practice calling square dances.

Reuben was diagnosed with lymphoma and leukemia in the mid-1990s. Also at that time, Helen Peck's husband and brother-in-law died; unable to maintain the farm alone, she was forced to sell it and move into Marshall to live with Mary and Reuben in an apartment that they constructed with proceeds from its sale. As Helen grew frailer and Reuben became sicker, Mary was unable to remain active in the Grange. Helen Peck died on December 29, 2001; Reuben lost his struggle with cancer on February 15, 2003. For some time after this, Mary was numb with and exhausted from grief. But gradually, she began to plunge back into Grange activities. Mary was then in her early seventies.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Beulah Winter, e-mail to author, December 29, 2001; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Helen Hazen, interview by author, January 30, 2003; Ginny Van Sickle, e-mail to author, February 15, 2003, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, September 9, 2004, in author's possession. Some of the information in this profile comes from conversations with and about Mary LaFountain, 2001–2004.

Judy Dennis: She had worked for the federal government at the Battle Creek Federal Center until her allergies got so bad that she could no longer work. She then lived with one of her daughters, Katrina Rome, along with Katrina's husband, Tom, and Katrina's four children: Stephanie, Jennifer, Thomas, and Deborah. Judy helped Katrina run a daycare center and home-school Katrina's children. In 1987, in the wake of a messy divorce, she read a newspaper article about Fredonia Grange, called Fredonia's then head, Paul Jones, got some information, and attended a meeting. She was nonplused by the ritual and questioned some of the statements in the standard membership application issued by the National Grange. So Fredonia modified the document, creating its own application that Judy and future prospective members would be able to embrace. Judy soon joined and became very active. She persuaded Katrina and her family, as well as another daughter, Tammy Johnson, with her husband, Don, and two children, Deann and Michael, to join also. As the children grew and pursued such additional interests as church activities, scouts, 4-H, and community theater, Judy and her progeny became less involved with the Grange. Fredonia Grange understood the life cycle of demands in families' lives. With no viable Junior Grange or youth programs at that time, it had little to offer children, and accepted that families' foci would be elsewhere as their youngsters grew into adolescence and early adulthood. It was confident, however, that after the children left home to create independent lives, their parents, seeking a different means to continue to relate to and serve the community, would return to Fredonia Grange. Fredonia Grangers also hoped that the children would have positive Grange associations that would lead them back to it some day.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003.

Fun, Family—And Needing to Be Needed

As usual, it took a while for people to become comfortable. Some of the people, such as Judy Dennis and Betty Dukavas, said that they felt odd about being there because they did not have much to say or they had not been members for long. Betty frequently said that she felt like the “new kid on the block.” Rich and Athol hastened to reassure her how important new kids on blocks in general, and this new kid on the block in particular, were. Athol: “I want to just *mention* to *Betty*; I should have mentioned it *before*, Patty Carncross, who is State Director, Community Service, Michigan State Grange, is trying to get our butterfly project, which *you* started, into a national *program*.”¹¹⁶ Rich: “I think that’s what put us over the *top* on community service.”¹¹⁷ (Fredonia took first place for community service in the Michigan State Grange competition of 2003.) Paul said that he was really distracted because his mother was fighting for her life. Rich was probably the quietest one there: he seldom spoke. When asked direct questions about things such as what the Grange is and what it meant to him, he said that he could not answer—his heart was filled with emotion, which he could not articulate.

This focus group provided much useful and insightful information, but it never flowed as some of the community focus groups did. During the beginning questions, things moved along fairly smoothly when participants were asked such things as: What is the Grange? What is Fredonia Grange? What is community? In essence, they were commenting upon what had attracted them to be part of a community-service group, what they derived from it, why they stayed, why they chose to serve the community.

¹¹⁶ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

¹¹⁷ Rich Hazen, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author’s possession.

Moderator: What is the Grange?

Russ: I think it's a *family* that helps other people in the *community* and . . . comes up with *ideas* to make things *better* for people.¹¹⁸

Paul: The *Grange* to *me*—*is*, basically the *people*, the *building*, and the *program*. And a lot of the programs—most of the programs are what the individual people in the Grange do. . . .¹¹⁹

Charlie: Well, the Grange, I feel, is an organization that looks well beyond its own *needs*, it looks to the needs of other organizations that they can benefit by supporting *them*.¹²⁰

Judy: That's what I think—a community-service supporter. If the community in general, no matter which community it is, needs it, and can prove their worth . . . the Grange will step in and *do it*. . . .¹²¹

Betty: To *me* . . . it's really a *community-minded* organization. And I cannot believe all—how *hard* you all work to promote those types of things in our community. Not

¹¹⁸ Russell (Russ) Clutter, Grange member since 1990, community activist, farmer, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹¹⁹ Paul Jones, Fredonia Grange Executive Committee Member, Grange member since 1981, community activist, retired union member, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹²⁰ Charles (Charlie) Letts, Grange member since 2002, retired state employee, farmer, community activist, member of Marengo Township Fire Department, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹²¹ Judy Dennis, Grange member since 1987, early retiree due to medical disability, community activist—particularly with youth, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

just in our community—you're involved in so many things way out there. And I'm
impressed. . . .¹²²

Moderator: What does Fredonia Grange mean to you?

Paul: You know what Fredonia Grange is to me? The opportunity . . . to participate in projects, help plan projects, and actually be something other than just somebody who just punched a time clock and either went to the tavern, golfing, bowling, or home and did nothing. It gave us a chance to do *something* with some *people*. . . . But you know, we worked together. That's one thing, I'll always have to remember is the older ones that I've worked with—the things that we done and how we struggled to get something done. Because, *until* just about 2002, we straightened out *spikes* and used them *over* again and again and again. . . .¹²³

Rich: We see a need and we try to fulfill it.¹²⁴

Charlie: I think one of the things, I think is unique about *this Grange*, and I don't know anything about the other Granges, but—they've done so much, and yet you never, never hear the Grange getting up in front of a group and patting itself on the back. They do it with pride and that's it. They don't ask for a lot of patting on the back.¹²⁵

¹²² Betty Dukavas, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹²³ Paul Jones, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹²⁴ Russ Clutter, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹²⁵ Charlie Letts, focus group, November 18, 2003.

Betty: That's *class*. That's *class*. . . .¹²⁶

Paul: You know one of the things I *feel*? That if I really run into a *real, hard health financial*-type problem, that perhaps the Grange could spearhead helping me get the money to help me pay a particular *bill* for my health.¹²⁷

Russ: They could and would.¹²⁸

Paul: It shouldn't have to *happen*, but it always *could*. And I would do the same.¹²⁹

The moderator asked the group how they construed "community" in general, and Fredonia Grange's community in particular.

Charlie: The boundaries are unlimited. It's wherever the *need* is. That community can *grow* for one project—it can be *large*. The next project, that community can be *small*. But it has no *definite*, defined boundaries. . . . It *touches* the fairgrounds but—what they've done there extends *so far out* from that even, that people touch them in their projects—you can't put *boundaries* on them. . . . That's what makes it so *unique*—so many organizations have their *own, confined area* that they do their projects in. And I belong to some of them—there's nothing wrong with that. But yet, it's so much *better* when you have an organization that can *look* beyond their *own* needs and think of somebody else's. That makes that area—it's so big and vast. . . .

I think that—the *fellowship* of the Grange is—when they do a project—the group is *there*—they're working. The women come in a lot of times and fix a meal. I have

¹²⁶ Betty Dukavas, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹²⁷ Paul Jones, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹²⁸ Russ Clutter, focus group, November 18, 2003.

been so fortunate as to be on both sides of this. Not only working with the Grange, but having the Grange come in and working for *us*. And when I say us—the fairgrounds—what they’ve done—and we’ve always been so fortunate—is that we can *ask* the Grange to help us out when it would have been a lot easier for them to have said no. But they went ahead and said yes. Just for instance, last year during—we were trying to get a project done, and I went in and asked Athol, “Can you fix us a meal—food. I’ve got a crew that’s *hungry*. Can you fix food?” I know that Athol had a lot of things to do other than fixing food for us to *eat*. But the Grange—he stopped and fixed us a meal. And it was greatly appreciated. . . .¹³⁰

The moderator asked participants what being a Grange member meant to them and what they had gained from being members.

Paul: Well, if I come twice a month, basically it’s a good meal. Twice a month I get to come up here and probably at least one of them meetings, I get to listen to somebody. Now, at least *four times* a month, I’m gonna quit. [Laughter.] Because I love to hear. . . . Another thing, though, I go places and they say, “Well, I see Fredonia Grange is doing such and such and such and such and such,” and I’m *real proud* of that. . . . But . . . I’m *proud to be a Grange member*. We got a good organization, we’ve worked hard for it.¹³¹

Mary: Well, I guess most of you know I’ve been away from Grange for a couple of years or so because of family problems. And I *missed the leadership* that I was

¹²⁹ Paul Jones, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹³⁰ Charlie Letts, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹³¹ Paul Jones, focus group, November 18, 2003.

involved in. I *missed* being a part of the decisions that are made. I *missed* the people, of course. And, ah, it's just something that's been a part of my life since I was fourteen, and I can't—I would miss it *horribly* if it wasn't here because of the people that are in it, because of . . . the medium that it gives me to express my ideas and my opinions—regardless of whether you all like 'em or not, they're mine. And that's what it means to me. . . . I have the opportunity to lead and to express and to develop—to do all this *stuff*. . . .¹³²

Randy: I'm from a big *family*. And I'm a lot closer to everybody here than I am to some of my immediate family. And—like—it's been said, the integrity that this organization *has*, it's easy to be proud of. Um—I never really asked the Grange to take me anywhere, but I look forward to where it's taking me. . . .¹³³

Mary: Acceptance is a big part of the Grange. Who you are and what you are is—what you are.¹³⁴

Betty: And I joke because—over the fact that I came here because somebody *nagged* me. [Laughter.] [Many voices, for many know this story.] But I, too, had been a caregiver for a long time. And managed to keep up with some of the things that I was doing and enjoyed. But I came here, really—when I came that first time, I came because, a big part of my life was gone and I needed—I guess I needed to be needed. I think that's one of the most important things in the world is to be needed a little bit.

¹³² Mary LaFountain, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹³³ Randy Nail, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹³⁴ Mary LaFountain, focus group, November 18, 2003.

Well, I found out that here you can be as needed as. . . . [She is interrupted by much laughter. One can hear people calling out, “They’ll take as much as you can do.”] And I don’t give that much to them.¹³⁵

It was after this, when people were asked to be more visionary and to try to create the perfect community and the perfect community-service organization, there were a few responses that really stopped conversation. When the moderator asked people about the ideal community-service organization, Mary LaFountain said that she had it in the Grange—nothing needed to be changed—period. When asked about fashioning the ideal community, Charlie Letts said that he lived in the best possible community—that he had for thirty-eight years. He would change nothing for fear of making it worse. Yet, in both cases, it became clear after the moderator probed that they *would change* some things. People were cautious about offering areas for improvement, however, reluctant to seem less positive than the first speakers. These people all knew one another and their mutual regard mattered to them. So it was not easy for anyone else to say that *he or she* did not live in an ideal community or belong to a perfect organization—they did not want to appear to be complainers or malcontents.

Although some people’s emphatic statements did effectively barricade certain avenues of discussion, many people circumvented the obstacles and shared wonderful stories. Russ Clutter gave thoughtful, carefully examined answers, as his wife had before him. He said that he was briefly involved with the other Calhoun County Grange (Home Grange), which is closer to his home, but that he never felt welcome. Then he came to Fredonia Grange and he immediately felt at home.

¹³⁵ Betty Dukavas, focus group, November 18, 2003.

I drive by another Grange hall every time I come over here. It's a *lot* closer to home for me than this Grange. I did some things in that Grange, gave some horseback rides at picnics and stuff like that. Never felt a part of it. The first time that I came here, I knew *Athol*, I knew of Paul a little bit, but that's about the only people that I *knew* when I came here. And when I came in the door, my wife and I—it was as though we had been—*always here*. That was worth a lot. When I think of projects, I think of that Peck Family Kitchen. When they built that. I started helping on that. I heard that we were still going to prepare the food that year at the B. E. Henry Building. And then have it—bring it up to the kitchen. And I told Reuben, I said “No, let's build it and get it done.” And with Reuben's *guidance* and the help of Paul, and Cecil, and Athol, and a number of other people, we built that sucker and had it approved in about 120 days. And that was fun. And that was *family*.¹³⁶

Russ said that even when he had to stay away for a time because of other commitments, when he was able to come back, he was always welcomed. He said that he was proud to be a Grange member.

Well, I've not been able to attend a lot of the meetings. . . . But the thing I *really appreciate* about the Grange is I can miss two or three months' meetings because of other meetings and still come back and feel like I'm a part—they're glad to see me. It makes you feel good. Not only do they *know* who you are, but they welcome you and they realize that you're busy, can't be here at the time. . . .¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Russ Clutter, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Avis Williams said that the Grange had given her leadership development and made it possible for her to hold other positions, such as on the library board.

Well, I don't know how many years . . . I've belonged to the Grange, but I always put Saturday first, because I kept that *free* because that's Grange, the Grange night. . . . And, it always grows on you, it seems like. [Laughs.] Because of the people you meet, the things you do. And the people you work with, and everything else that you do for the Grange. It's like Mary and Betty said, you know—a lot of things, a lot of things count for you with the Grange. . . . Well, if I hadn't a belonged to the Grange, I probably wouldn't have reached out for other organizations that I belong to. And it helped me, you know—to reach out to other organizations, like—hospital, and the library, and places like that. Get acquainted with other people.¹³⁸

Charlie Letts said that he never dreamed that he was good enough to be a Grange member. He did not think that such a classy organization would accept him. He was thrilled to be asked to join. Charlie's high esteem for the Grange dates back to his early childhood and trips to county fairs.

Well, I guess I'd probably be the first to say that—there always seems like there's a *conflict* of meeting times with me. I've been—as Russ is setting here saying about his organizational things—I started jotting them down—I have nine different things that I *participate* in, and some of them overlap each other. But—what the Grange means to me—it goes back—*way, way* back before I ever became a Grange member

¹³⁸ Avis Williams, Pomona, Fredonia Grange, Grange member since 1963, retired farmer, community activist, focus group, November 18, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

or was ever *asked* to become a Grange member. I always *envied* the Grange. I knew *nothing* about the Grange, but I *envied* it. I'd go out throughout the state, and I would go to a fair, and the first place I would head, even though I was a kid, was to the Grange exhibits. I always was *fascinated* with the exhibits that every county's Grange—all the displays they had up, and all the *canning*—I was brought up in a family that canned everything. And I always wanted—I didn't dare—but I always wanted to have my grandmother go look at some of that canning, because I knew there was—it could look better than what she *did it*. [Laughter.] It was always good eatin'. . . . But you'd go to the Grange, and all the cherries would be lined up, all the beans would be straight in the quart jars, all the meat and gravy. And I was always envious of that, because I always thought, "What a *group of people to do that*." It took me a long time to realize that was only for *show*. [Much laughter.] But I was always impressed. And I always thought the Grange was an organization—I knew nothing about—but I always thought that they *did* so much—they always were involved with the fairgrounds. And that was my whole life for thirty-eight years has been with—the Grange, with their involvement at the fairgrounds. I've seen it [the Fredonia Grange food booth] grow from an old, rickety thing they had over in the corner of the building, to a real modern-looking facility today.

I was kind of railroaded in, in one way, because we was asking the Grange to help us. And someone came along and offered us a couple of memberships one night. And we was so tickled that they thought we was good enough to *join*. But it means to me .

. . it's an organization, I don't feel like I give *enough* to the organization, I try to help when I *can*. . . . I feel grateful that I can be a part of what little bit I do with it.¹³⁹

Charlie returned to the topic of Grange canning by the end of the discussion, saying that he would love to see Fredonia Grange have such an exhibit next year.

During the discussion, some people revealed a great deal about themselves. Athol asked Judy Dennis if she remembered when she first came to the Grange. She did and told those present about it.

Judy: I saw an ad—or I found an advertisement—one of your bulletins, in the *Shopper*. And I was *just* starting—my husband had just left me. And I thought, “I’m not going to invert, I’m going to become an extrovert, to a certain degree.” And so I called the Grange and asked about when there was a meeting. I happened to get Paul. And I’d never been . . . let’s face it, I’d been a recluse for a long time, other than my office job. And I called Paul, and he said, “Well, we’re having a meeting such and such, come to the potluck.” And I came in, and—poor Avis. [Laughs.] I knew, uh—what’s her name? Connie, and Connie had talked to me. We sat through the meeting. And that scared me half to death. Because of all the *ritualism*! You know.¹⁴⁰

Moderator: You came to the potluck first?

Judy: I came to the potluck. Then I sat through the ritualism, and I thought, “There’s *no way I’m getting involved in a cult!*” You know. [Much laughter.] And

¹³⁹ Charlie Letts, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Judy Dennis, focus group, November 18, 2003.

downstairs, Avis said, "So you know Connie!" And I said, "Yeah, she's the woman my husband left me for." [Laughs.] [Others join the laughter.] And I told Paul, I said, "I think I have to have some time to *think* about *this*." [More laughter.] And it was about two or three months later. . . .¹⁴¹

Avis: I was really surprised at you when you said *that*!¹⁴²

Judy: I bet you were. . . . But I was in *shock*! I mean—it hadn't *been*. . . .¹⁴³

Avis: It surprised me—it didn't *bother* me, it just surprised me.¹⁴⁴

Judy: It had only been two or three weeks.¹⁴⁵

Mary: That was long before Ross and Connie were married.¹⁴⁶

Avis: Long before.¹⁴⁷

Paul: One of the things I remember about Judy coming on board. It was like maybe the second year, then got you to be chairman of the community-service book.

Well—it was the first year I was master, which was eighty-eight. And Judy—that community-service book took first prize—in the state.¹⁴⁸

Judy: I remember that. And—what the Grange means to me. I've had to realize an awful lot of my own faults. I don't have a lot of positives right now. [Tears in

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Avis Williams, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴³ Judy Dennis, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁴ Avis Williams, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Judy Dennis, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Mary LaFountain, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Avis Williams, focus group, November 18, 2003.

voice.] And—I'll work through it. With my daughter's involvement—we've got a little bit of stress there. There's not enough of me to go around. There's certainly not enough of *her* to go around. [Paul chuckles.] [Avis chuckles.] And—I hear, “I wish I'd never joined the Grange!” That's when she was the leader—you know, the Junior. Because it was putting a lot of stress on her. And I told her she *had* to pull back. Um—I feel guilty because I don't do anywhere near what I *should* do, what I *could* do—and. . . . When I first joined, I liked the history. And I do—I enjoy the connection with the past. But I also have to realize—that's *dead and gone*. And that's where my problem is. I would *love* to keep the *old*, but if we're going to get the *new* and keep the youth, we have to lose the *old*. And I haven't made that transition yet.¹⁴⁹

The Grange, and particularly Fredonia Grange, clearly meant a great deal to all those present. The meeting concluded with a discussion about how an organization can continually attract new members, renewing itself. Some emphasized the importance of bringing children, while very small, into the organization—that the organization must plant and nurture worthy qualities in youngsters. Others countered that it was not up to an organization to instill values—that those must stem from the home.

Russ: Well, I think—and I didn't *know*, at the beginning, but I think Rich probably had some *real solid foundation*. . . . With Athol and Helen—he watched them—he didn't move away—he didn't move away from the community. . . . [If he] hadn't seen his *parents'* involvement, he probably never would have come back. That's

¹⁴⁸ Paul Jones, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Judy Dennis, focus group, November 18, 2003.

what I *see* when I see Rich, and I'm around him and I hear him *talk*—talk about his dad, and stuff. That foundation was *there*, and Mary hit that—the parents lay the foundation, but they can only go so *far*. You can *hope* that you lay a *good enough* foundation that you won't lose—*track of it*. Because I was that way in the church. I . . . went to church, to start with, because I *had to*. I didn't have a choice—I couldn't do anything else. I had to go to church, twice on Sunday and on Wednesday night when I wanted to be playing *ball*. But I went to church. And after I got on my *own*, I went away from the church for about fifteen years or so. Then I realized that really wasn't such a bad idea after all. [Laughs.] So I went *back*! But my mother laid a good foundation—and a neighbor lady.¹⁵⁰

Charlie: You know, there's an old saying, You can drag the horse to the water, but you can't make it *drink*. But if you make the water *good*, the horse will be back.¹⁵¹

Avis: You're talking about *foundations*—I think it's—only two of us *here* that has children that belong to the Grange—that's Athol and *I*. And my daughter—I don't believe *Andrea* belonged to the Grange—even *came* to Grange when we first started—I think she was. . . .¹⁵²

Mary: A student.¹⁵³

Athol: Nineteen-sixty-three—I think—we had a Junior Grange at that time.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Russ Clutter, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁵¹ Charlie Letts, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁵² Avis Williams, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁵³ Mary LaFountain, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁵⁴ Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 18, 2003.

Avis: Well, she was almost outta high school, then she left for *college*. And her husband was in the *Navy*, and they were *gone* for so many *years*, but the *foundation* was *there* because—when she came *back* she wanted to get—she knew that *I* came to Grange, and she wanted to get *into it, also*. Because she knew that I came all the time, and she was interested in it, and she was very interested in, kind of, what we *do*. And she contributes as much as she *can*, because she works, also. . . .¹⁵⁵

Charlie: So I think that, to develop the *youth*, we have to—as someone else said—I think *Paul* might have once said it—is *let the youth*—let these people—give them something to do, give them the responsibility, and let ‘em go out there. Let ‘em—*challenge* ‘em with their ideas. And let them develop—let them *develop*. But you’ve got to challenge ‘em with it—if they’ve got *ideas*, let them develop them. You can only drag them so far, and the rest of it, you’ve got to be supportive of them. Yeah, they’re gonna stumble, they’re gonna fall, and we’ve got to be there to help pick ‘em up. But we’ve also got to let them *venture* out there on their own. And I think that this type of an organization . . . *can do that*. If you start ‘em out—show ‘em that you got belief in ‘em, that you got confidence in what they’re gonna do is gonna be *right*. . . . I think this organization recognizes the fact is that—our youth . . . really needs some support and needs some help getting them going, getting them involved. . . .¹⁵⁶

Athol: Some of the people that—in the Grange, that I admired the *most* was Mary’s parents and uncle. And they did not join the Grange until their late twenties, early

¹⁵⁵ Avis Williams, focus group, November 18, 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Charlie Letts, focus group, November 18, 2003.

thirties. . . . And yet there's—some people now in leadership positions in the State Grange, who have come up probably from the Junior Grange—come in as five-year-olds, and now is a leader. And—so there's good coming from both directions. But basically, it's what that leadership does with the people who come in. If they make them *welcome*, got something for them to *do*, accept their ideas—you'll have a Grange member.¹⁵⁷

Group Two's Grange: Keeping Them Human, Reaffirming People's Goodness

During the community focus group sessions, the poorest attendance was for the Saturday meeting. This was also the case for the Grange members' focus groups. Although the team planned to do only two, and in light of their past experience would have considered scheduling both for weeknights, some of the participants whom they targeted could only come on a weekend: they lived so far away or their work demands were such that other times were infeasible. Athol contacted the eight designated members, and all agreed to participate. Then, just before the actual meeting, a series of events occurred that radically depleted the ranks.

On the morning of Friday, November 21, 2003, Athol e-mailed the moderator, telling her that Jim Mohn would not be at the Saturday focus group since his mother had died Thursday.¹⁵⁸ She was quite old, well up into her nineties, and had been ill for a number of years. Periodically, she would have a crisis and be hospitalized; when she was released from the hospital, Jim and his wife, Erma, often went to stay with her, help with her therapy, act as caregivers. On that same Friday afternoon, Rich Hazen e-mailed the moderator to tell her that Paul Woods would not be at the focus group because he had

¹⁵⁷ Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 18, 2003.

tickets for the University of Michigan-Ohio State University football game. It was supposed to be a showdown for the ages; tickets were expensive and difficult to obtain—such a windfall could not be ignored.¹⁵⁹ Then, on the morning of Saturday, November 22, 2003 (the day of the focus group), Rich Hazen e-mailed the moderator to tell her that Paul Jones's mother had died the night before so he doubted that Paul's wife, Marilyn, would be at the discussion.¹⁶⁰ Athol had been mentioning Paul's mother in e-mails for the past few months. He had said that she was becoming a burden, having hallucinations, losing quality of life. For a time, she had been back and forth between the hospital and nursing homes. Because of his mother's precarious condition, Paul had not thought that he would be able to attend the Tuesday, November 18, 2003 focus group; but at the last minute, he decided that he needed the break and did come, although he apologized for being distracted. He had been the first to leave that meeting and again apologized for doing so. When a Grange member or a Grange member's close relative dies, it is customary for the Grange to prepare and serve the funeral dinner. The moderator wondered what would happen with the two deaths occurring so close together. Further complicating matters was that the coming week was Thanksgiving, which would alter people's schedules.

Athol had already been concerned that this focus group would be rather quiet; the diminished numbers heightened his anxiety. It was too late to acquire substitute participants. There was the possibility that Mary Houghton might attend. She had said that she would like to be part of the groups, but she had thought that she would be unable to be at Tuesday's session, since she was making a video, filmed at night, for a class that

¹⁵⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 21, 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, November 21, 2003.

she was taking.¹⁶¹ Mary had been distracted, exhausted, and consumed by returning to school. The focus group team wondered how much she would be able to participate, even if she were physically present at a focus group. They anticipated that Athol and Randy would have to play more participatory roles to fill in the expected gaps of this “quieter” group. The team need not have worried: the group was never at a loss for words. One simple measure indicates the depth of these members’ eloquence: the transcript for the first members’ focus group was eighty-seven pages long; that of the second group was one-hundred-fourteen pages long. By many standards, the people involved in the Tuesday focus group were a more garrulous lot. Many did talk at length, disclosing many things. But the participants were not as open; they were not as engaged. Mary LaFountain and Rich’s private conversations were distracting. One member of the Saturday group was fairly quiet. But the others offered thoughtful comments on every area and really helped one another flesh out their thoughts; even the “quiet” member made significant contributions. The obvious depth of feeling that these people had for the Grange was deeply touching. All of them, in their own ways, were passionately devoted to keeping it going.

The Characters

Mary Houghton: Mary first joined the Grange when she was sixteen, while staying with her aunt, the late Helen Peck. Mary managed to maintain her Grange membership even after she returned home to Florida, although the Granges there consisted mostly of retirees. After graduating from high school, Mary lived briefly in Marshall and bolstered her Grange connections. Then Mary married, moved around the country, and let her

¹⁶⁰ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, November 22, 2003.

membership lapse. During a difficult divorce, Mary returned to Marshall and the Grange in 1990. Despite a number of personal strains, such as being the single parent of four children and caring for an aging, fragile parent, Mary had continued to be an active member since that time. Some years after rejoining, Mary was entrusted with the position of Fredonia Grange Community-service Director: the person in charge of chronicling Fredonia's various community-service activities. Over the course of a year, Mary clipped articles, took photos, and wrote reports, pulling them together into a large loose leaf record that she submitted to the Michigan State Grange Community-service Director every September. Since Mary had taken over this function, Fredonia Grange had usually taken first place in community service among Michigan Granges—a source of tremendous satisfaction and validation for her. At the time of the focus groups, Mary was juggling the additional demands of returning to school, trying to acquire the necessary training in graphic arts and video production that would enable her to leave a subsistence job in the photo processing area of Wal*Mart. Mary was in her mid-fifties.¹⁶²

Twylia Webber: This is the one participant whom the moderator had never previously met; she had never seen Twylia at any of the Grange meetings or other functions that she had attended. Twylia had been a Fredonia Grange member since 1976. She was active when she and her husband lived on their farm in Fredonia Township. She had worked at the Battle Creek Federal Center, but was now retired. She appeared to be in her late sixties or early seventies.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Mary did not, in fact, attend the session of Tuesday, November 18, 2003.

¹⁶² Mary Houghton, interview by author, February 23, 2002. Additional information for this profile comes from countless conversations and meetings with Mary between 2002 and 2004. There are additional, vivid vignettes about Mary especially in the chapters on participant observation (chapter six) and oral histories (chapter seven).

¹⁶³ Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003.

Lois Hazen: She is Athol and Helen Hazen's youngest child, born in November 1959. Since the moderator had been doing research on Fredonia Grange (January 2002 through 2004), Lois had not attended Fredonia Grange meetings. She did continue to work at Grange fund-raisers, such as the Fredonia Grange Food Booth at the Calhoun County Fair and the Fredonia Pancake Brunches, until a health crisis and resulting surgery incapacitated her. Unlike her siblings, all of whom had married and divorced, Lois had never married. Also unlike them, she had never left the area. She worked at a factory in nearby Tekonsha and lived in a rented trailer in the country. During the late 1990s, before Rich came back to the Grange and enticed some younger people to join, with an aging membership and with Fredonia Grange struggling to survive, Lois had assumed the leadership role, willing it to continue. This experience, and some personal problems, had left Lois feeling burned out and needing some time away from intense Grange activity. She continually avowed, however, that she knew that she would return to the Grange fold in full: that try as she might to leave it, it was in her blood and she could never stay away from it for long—it was the thing that made her most fully human. Lois was then forty-four.¹⁶⁴

Gwen Combs: She is the daughter of Dorothy and Milford Combs, and elderly couple who were staunch Fredonia Grange members and who had joined the Grange when they were already in their "mature" years. Gwen grew up in the Calhoun County area where her family were farmers; she was a part of the Calhoun County Fair as a child, participating in 4-H projects. At the time of the focus group, she had been teaching at *Three Rivers*, in St. Joseph County, for some time. She and her partner, Jan Armour, had

¹⁶⁴ The data for this profile has been gathered from countless conversations with and observations of Grange members, particularly Lois Hazen and other members of the Hazen family, from 2002 through

computer expertise and always made posters for Fredonia Grange events. Gwen joined the Grange in 1996, although she had helped at the Fredonia Grange Fair Food Booth and with other Grange activities for a number of years before this. Gwen was in her fifties.¹⁶⁵

Jan Armour: Although she was not technically an adopted daughter of Dorothy and Milford Combs, she was considered a member of the family. She was Gwen Combs' partner, sharing her life, residence, and teaching with her at Three Rivers. Jan grew up in Detroit, so her association with rural things and the Grange did not begin until her relationship with Gwen. With Gwen, she lent her computer expertise to Fredonia Grange and prepared posters for their fund-raisers and other events. Like Gwen, she joined the Grange in 1996, although she had helped at the Fredonia Grange Fair Food Booth and with other Grange activities for a number of years before this. Jan may have been slightly younger than Gwen.¹⁶⁶

Don Johnson: He worked for EPI, a custom printer in Battle Creek, Michigan. This connection enabled him to furnish free printer paper to Fredonia Grange. Don had served in the United States Army; that is where he met and married his wife, Tammy. When he got out of the service, he brought his family—Tammy, and their two children, Michael and Deann—to the Marshall area to be near Tammy's family: her mother, Judy Dennis, her sister, Katrina Rome, and Katrina's family. Don continued his military ties,

2004.

¹⁶⁵ The author had gotten to know Gwen slightly during her research. Although Gwen could not regularly attend meetings (Three Rivers is at least an hour from Fredonia Grange), she often spent vacation times (over the holidays, during the summer) at the farm with her parents, and would thus bring them to Grange meetings. Through the years, other Grangers also talked about Gwen from time to time—always in very positive terms. In addition, Athol Hazen provided key information for this profile: Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ The author had gotten to know Jan slightly during her research. Although Jan could not regularly attend meetings (Three Rivers is at least an hour from Fredonia Grange), she often spent vacation times (over the holidays, during the summer) at the farm with Gwen and her parents, and would thus bring them to Grange meetings. Through the years, other Grangers also talked about Jan from time to time—always in very

belonging to a National Guard unit in Jackson. Fredonia Grange donated one-half of the profits from its fall 2003 pancake brunch to this unit's family support group. Don's mother-in-law signed Tammy and him up for the Grange in 2000; they quickly were elected officers. Don was an avid outdoorsman: he had grown up in Utah, where he had hunted and fished. Every fall he killed enough deer to feed the family for the coming year. One of the rites of fall was Don's bringing a prize, slain buck, in the back of his truck, to Grange so that people could examine its rack of antlers. Don credited his Grange membership with familiarizing him with many of the politically prominent people in Calhoun County, making it possible for him to be elected to the board of directors of the CCAIS—an eminent position, particularly for someone relatively new to the area. He was also a Boy Scout leader. Don would have been in his forties.¹⁶⁷

I've Tried to Quit, but I Always Come Back. This Grange Is My Family!

Twylia Webber was the first to arrive. Athol introduced her to Randy and the moderator. He asked how she and her husband had been. Twylia said that she had left her husband working on the farm. She took a cup of coffee, expressing appreciation. It did not seem that Twylia and Athol knew each other well—there were long silences in their conversation. As Twylia and the focus group team sat, waiting for the others, they talked about the ceiling fan, running to distribute the meager heat. Athol chatted about Wayne Gleason, the man who managed to install it in the high ceiling over thirty years before. He was not a licensed electrician but was handy and did excellent work. They

positive terms. In addition, Athol Hazen provided key information for this profile: Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003.

¹⁶⁷ Again, much of the information for this silhouette comes from a distillation of years of conversations and observations with, of, and about Don. Athol Hazen filled in some of the gaps: Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, November 17, 2003.

had had no trouble with it through all the years. Wayne was then very old. His wife, Cecil, for whom he had cared many years, had recently died; Fredonia Grange had done the funeral dinner. Wayne, alone and bent with age, now lived in a nursing home. He obdurately preserved some independence by continuing to drive: the moderator had seen him arrive in his antiquated pickup for Reuben LaFountain's visitation.

Jan and Gwen came next, followed closely by Don Johnson. Don said that he had a terrible headache: he thought that he did not have enough caffeine that morning. He brought a huge mug of Pepsi with him; he was a self-proclaimed Pepsi addict. Jan and Gwen were water drinkers, as was Lois. People asked Don how the hunting was going. He said that they were out in his blind—he and Doug Struble—for four hours that morning, that they both shot does, but that the deer bolted and that they have not been able to find them. One of them ran in front of a neighboring hunter, who brought it down. But the other disappeared. The moderator talked with him about that later. She asked him if the deer always die after being shot. He replied that sometimes they heal right up but other times they bleed slowly for days until they die. The moderator said that she realized that he hunted for food but that she hated to think of the deer suffering for a long time. He agreed. He explained that that was why they spent four hours tracking the deer. He said that he would go back after the group and look some more. He had gotten a buck a few weeks ago and two does the previous Sunday.

Lois was the last expected participant to arrive, although she was not late. She said that it was hard for her to tear herself away from the Michigan-Ohio State football game. There was great interest in this among those present. The majority were cheering for Michigan, although Gwen liked Ohio State. Mary Houghton did come, although quite

late: she missed more than half of the meeting. She took many photos of the session (she was official Fredonia Grange photographer) and did contribute to such areas as the flip chart exercises and the most significant idea that emerged from the discussion.

Since all who had pledged to come had arrived by two o'clock, the discussion began on time. After making her introductory remarks and establishing the ground rules, the moderator led participants through an icebreaking exercise. She then moved on to ask what the Grange, in general, and Fredonia Grange, in particular, were. The passion and commitment that resounded through their words began to delineate why these people were involved with the Grange.

Lois: To me it's *family*. I've grown up in the Grange, I've been *coming* since I was a *baby*—and, I'll admit there have been times I've tried to *quit*—because I've had enough—and I can't. [Laughter. Is it Athol?] I always come *back*. . . . I go away for a while, but I *always* come back, because it's *important to me* because of the impact that we do have in our community—and, well, nationally, also. It saddens me that we don't have the impact or influence—and maybe *influence* isn't quite the *right* word—that we *used to*. But, you know, people just don't *know* the changes that we've helped make in this country. And—that's *part* of the reason why I'm *here*. . . . For *me* it's a group of *people* who *care* what *happens* here in this community, in this county. . . . Because our membership is very *diverse*. . . . We are aware of a lot of *different issues* in the county and the state and we become *passionate* on some of those. And we work to either make it *right* or begin the change or make the community aware of what's going *on*. . . . Like, when we have a fund-raiser with one

of our brunches, like the Odyssey of the Mind. Yes, it's sad that the schools don't support it, but thank goodness there are organizations like us that will.¹⁶⁸

Gwen: I met some *wonderful people in this county* I didn't know *existed*. And it saddens me that many of them are *older*, and they're passing *away*, and *leaving* me. You know, I got very fond of some people that I don't *have* anymore. I'm thankful for the time I had with 'em, but—it's distressing to think that they're *gone now*.¹⁶⁹

There was talk about how fragmented families have become, how riven they were by divorce, with children being shunted from place to place.

Lois: The sad part of it is with the broken families . . . the *Grange* is the perfect *opportunity* to promote family *unity*. Because we are a family oriented organization. The best friends that I *have* I met because of the *Grange*. I wouldn't *have* 'em if I hadn't been a *Grange* member. And—that's the *sad* part, because we can *give* them at least a social *outlet*—it's like—all right, the parent hasn't—their *children* for one weekend, what d'ya do? Give 'em some money, send 'em to the *mall*. Have 'em watch a movie or do *whatever*. And—they could bring them to a *Grange meeting* to meet other people—get involved in the *community*. And that's part of the problem, *too*—is the sense of community *spirit* has *changed* . . . in this *country*. When the *Grange started*, the need *was*—you know, people *needed somewhere, something* to help them git together for the *social* part of it, but also because of the economic

¹⁶⁸ Lois Hazen, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession. The Odyssey of the Mind is an enrichment program for schoolchildren. Chronically underfunded schools have not been able to offer or support such programs, so they have had to seek private funds.

reasons that they *had*. I should say, economic *difficulties* that they *had* at the *time*.

And it was a way for everyone to git *together* to—brainstorm—to figure out how to *change* it. But the social aspect was *also there, too*. You know, kids could meet other *kids*; families could meet other *families*. And it filled a very big *need* at the time.

And—I think the trick for *us* is to figure out a way to fill the needs of *that* particular—problem *now*. No we *don't* have computers here and what not for kids to play on, and that type of thing, but. . . . They can do that at *home*.¹⁷⁰

It was Gwen Combs who touched upon a theme that had echoed throughout most of the focus groups: the importance of an organization's having an overarching vision under whose purview its activities should fall. She spoke hesitantly, wary of offending others.

Gwen: I think it might be partly why the Grange is *losing membership*—because when it was formed it had a *definite—huge need* that it spoke to—you know, the railroad things and farmers and so forth. And then when those things were *settled*, I think that Grange kind of looked around and said, “Well, what are we *about now*?” And, I think maybe that might be contributing some of the—*dropping* of the membership. If there was—not that we *should*—but if we got—like the people who are behind the anti-abortion—they're zealots, and there's very strong *feeling*, and they're not worried about membership because they *have* the membership. And maybe—not that we *should* pick a thing to *focus on*, but maybe that's why we *are* looking at membership *scattering*—because we don't have a—a clear-cut thing that

¹⁶⁹ Gwen Combs, Grange member since 1996, teacher, community activist, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹⁷⁰ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

we're working at *right now*. And not that that's *bad*—I'm not saying we should have one, but—I'm guessing that might be part of the *reason*.¹⁷¹

The moderator hastened to assure Gwen that this need for mission and vision statements had been sounded at the other focus groups, as well. The Fredonia Action Grange Team was preparing to create such embracing conceptions.

People talked about what being Grange members meant to them. They spoke with eloquence about what being a part of a group can do for and mean to people.

Lois: For me, I don't think about it, *because* it's always been a part of my life. Like, some people with their church, you know—they were born, they were raised, they've *always* gone to that church. They can't imagine going to—*any other* church, because this is . . . where their *roots are*. This Grange—um—is my *family*—even though I go *away from it for a while*, every now and again, like I said, I *always* come back because—what we do *and* the people who *belong* to this Grange are that *important* to me. That's why I *can't* give it up. Um—it's more than a community-service organization to me. It's an opportunity to interact with people who have different views than I *do*. Um, it keeps me *human*—it let's me know that—I *don't* know everything, and there are other issues out there that are just—as important to someone else as the issues that I have. But this Grange gives us an opportunity to bring those issues to the forefront. . . . That's what this Grange is to me. My—Fredonia Grange.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁷² Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

Gwen: I keep comin' back and helpin' on things because I think about, "Well, I *can't* just make *those* people *do it!*" You know, that—they can't do it *all*. [Laughter.] You know—I gotta *help* 'em! [More laughter.]¹⁷³

Lois: Is that a little of the *arm-twisting* that we were talking about earlier?¹⁷⁴

Jan: No, I think it's just the *internal* guilt. . . . [Laughter.]¹⁷⁵

Don: I started comin' to Grange three years ago. I grew up knowing that the Grange was *there*, although I don't think it exists anymore in Salt Lake City, but it *used* to be. The community that used to be called "Granger" has been incorporated into a larger community that—now the municipality of West Valley. But I knew there *was* a Grange. I had not heard of Grange for many *years* until my mother-in-law started talkin'. "I can't wait until you get out of the service and you guys can join *Grange!*" [Laughter.] So—when we sold our house in October of 2000—and we were—well, I was here for a month and then I had to go back to Fort Riley. We sold our house in *Kansas*. Brought the family here—she drug us to the first Grange meeting that she *could*. And she paid our dues for the first year. Next thing I know—we're *officers*. [Laughter.] It started out social, and it is still quite social, but—being an officer in the Grange—it's a commitment, too. It's a lot of fun.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Jan Armour, Grange member since 1996, teacher, community activist, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹⁷⁶ Don Johnson, Assistant Steward, Fredonia Grange, Grange member since 2000, National Guard member, community activist, environmentalist, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

Gwen: It always looked like to me that you had *doers* and *takers*—and the Grange people are the *doers*—and we help the *takers*. [Laughter.]¹⁷⁷

Twylia, who had been fairly quiet, did join this portion of the discussion.

Twylia: It's just like going to the fair booth and working—some days maybe you've gone there and you're really *tired*. [Laughs.] But you really feel *good* about what you've *done*—you have another *feeling* inside you. And you get to chit chat with the person that's *next* to you that maybe you haven't seen for a *while*.¹⁷⁸

Lois: That spirit of fellowship.¹⁷⁹

When people were asked what they had gained by being a member, Jan picked up this last theme of fellowship.

Jan: Well, like she said—the *fellowship* of people that *I* never would have *known*, you know—if I had stayed in St. Joe County, or if I hadn't come to Grange. You know—just a whole different *group* of *people*—you get really stagnant if you stay with the *same* people that know the same things that you did—had the same opinions that you did—you know. Just a different group of *people*. . . .¹⁸⁰

Don: For me again, not being from this *area*, not *knowing* anybody—it's, it's kind of upgraded my *status* in the community by being a member here. I started out just knowing a couple *people*. Now I know *several* of these people, I know the groups

¹⁷⁷ Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁷⁸ Twylia Webber, Grange member since 1976, retired farmer, retired federal employee, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹⁷⁹ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

that *they're* associated with, I've become a *board member* on the fair board. I've met the county sheriff who I had no idea who he was—I *still* couldn't tell you who the mayor of Battle Creek *is*. But I know the sheriff *now*. . . . I know Congressman Mark Schauer. I haven't met Wenke yet—he must not be a Grange member. [Laughter. This is Michigan State Representative Lorence Wenke.]¹⁸¹

Athol: Yeah, he is. He's been a Grange member *twice*. He dropped once and he's back again. . . .¹⁸²

Don: But, ah—yeah, I think I've gained a lot of *status* in the community by being in the *Grange*. . . .¹⁸³

Lois: But it's the life *lessons*, the life *experiences*. It encompasses *everything* to me. Not just being involved in the community, but the social part of it, the *friendship*, the *fellowship*. Just the feeling of good spirits. It gives you—sometimes people get—to the point where they don't believe in their fellow human *beings*. And—I guess maybe that's probably *part* of the reason why I come *back* is because I *need* ta—need ta know that there's still *good people here*. [Laughs.] And the Grange is where I come to get that.¹⁸⁴

Gwen: Belonging is a reaffirmation for me—that, there are people out there to serve and are good-natured and good-hearted and kindly *people*, because I was feeling very

¹⁸⁰ Jan Armour, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁸¹ Don Johnson, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁸² Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and tape recordings, in author's possession.

¹⁸³ Don Johnson, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

jaded for a while that—that it was just a rough *dog-eat-dog society out there!* And we weren't what—what you always understood the society *used* to be. And so when I came here and saw these people just—*workin'* their hearts out for other *people*, I said, “Well—it's *alive*, it's still *here*.” And that felt *real comforting*.¹⁸⁵

Lois: Definitely. [In a whisper.]¹⁸⁶

There was talk of other community-service and fraternal organizations, as well as churches, many of whom were also having membership crises. People discussed what lessons Fredonia Grange might glean from those groups that were prospering.

Lois: I just don't want it do *die*!¹⁸⁷

Don: I don't, *either*.¹⁸⁸

Lois: There's, there's a—a *need* in this *country*—and I've *thought* about it for a *long* time. That—and I don't know how to go about it—but, there's a *need* that the Grange can fill. We just have to figure out *how* to go about it. . . . And let people know *exactly*. . . . I want it to stay *alive* and I want people to know that—we're *here* and we can help. . . . We touched on that earlier—the Grange was one that *pulled* all the—Betty Dukavas—you made that analogy. [Betty Dukavas had said that probably no one thing that the Grange did was unique: other organizations were involved with the environment or agriculture or community service. She found the Grange unique because it was not an “either-or” organization: it did not focus on only one of these

¹⁸⁵ Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁸⁶ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

areas, but embraced them all. So, rather than have to belong to a number of different organizations to work on the issues that mattered to her, she felt that she was able to accomplish what she wished through the Grange.] We can pull all these *different things together*. I mean, yeah, you can join the environmental group—but that’s all they *do*! And the Grange touches on *all those* different areas of it. Yeah.¹⁸⁹

Talk turned to how an ideal community-service organization would interact with its community—what its functions would be, how it would interrelate with its greater communities. This spurred discussion of the area’s actual community-service groups and what they did. Some groups, who had received bequests, seemed to seldom intermingle with the community: they would appear, dispense a periodic check, and then disappear once more into their headquarters. They were, at best, a tenuous presence. This prompted the moderator to ask if participants thought that it mattered how a group gained the resources with which it operated and helped others. People agreed that it was actually a blessing for a group to have to work for the funds to keep it viable and with which it did its community service. They believed that it was vital for an organization’s health—physical, psychic, emotional—for its members to work together toward shared goals, forging bonds and fostering mutual feelings of self-worth. Further, they felt that it was important for the groups that they served with donations of time, material, and funds to know how hard Fredonia Grange had to work to accumulate these things. They thought that this was a splendid way to inculcate values, letting people know that they were valued, hoping that the people would thus start to see their own unique inherit value, praying that they would in turn seek to help others as they once had been helped.

¹⁸⁸ Don Johnson, focus group, November 22, 2003.

There follow some of the most substantive concluding thoughts on how an organization needs to interrelate with its greater community.

Gwen: Yeah, it matters [how an organization obtains its funds].¹⁹⁰

Lois: Because we *work* for the contributions that we *make*. I mean, we just can't—say, "Well, okay, here's a check for two thousand dollars." You know, we have to *work* to *supply* that. And in *doing* so—it helps our *own* community. Um, because of that sense of working *together*—therein getting to know the people that *belong* to this ideal organization. Because you can't be *ideal* unless everybody *knows* everybody *else*. And—I think that's very *important*—you have to know the people and like the people that you're *working* with. Otherwise, the *organization's* not gonna—gonna *survive*. . . .¹⁹¹

Gwen: It's important *how* you get the money, too. Because . . . it makes us feel good because we work for it. I know Lion's Club fines members for expletives that they say during a meeting. Or, if they get in the *paper* they have to pay so much money. And I've seen people *leave* that organization because they felt like they were being *drained* of *their money*, just to put someplace else. It wasn't like getting it like *we* do. . . . And they *resented* that! It got the *money*, but it lost the *member*! [Laughs.]¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹⁰ Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹¹ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹² Gwen Combs, focus group, November 22, 2003.

Jan: When we sent money to the school in Chicago¹⁹³ for something—we sent some pictures along, too, of the people here *working*. And I said I thought that was a real important *point* that—that the money wasn't just free flowing—that somebody worked for it to *give* to you. You know, I think that is a—an important thing for people to *know*. . . .¹⁹⁴

Lois: Um-hm. Because one day one of those kids is gonna remember *that*, when they were in *school* there was this organization up in Michigan that sent—*help* to their school so they could *graduate* and possibly git out of—the social situation that they're *in*—which isn't, obviously, very *good*. And—it's—I like to call it the trickle *down* effect. . . . You know—if we touch even one *child* by doing *that*—to me it makes it worth it. . . . So—it's a—I think it's very *important*.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ The school in Chicago is Manierre School, located in inner-city Chicago, in the shadow of the infamous Cabrini Green Housing Project. This is a school like too many others: students lack even such basics as pencils, paper, crayons; computers are a dream. One of Helen Hazen's cousins, Judy Monroe, taught school at Manierre for years. When a beloved mutual aunt and lifelong teacher died in 1992 and both women attended the funeral, Helen Hazen, who had gone through Aunt Gladys's belongings, wondered what to do with her pencil collection. Judy knew just where it belonged: she recounted the story of Manierre School. Thus began a long-term fostering relationship between Fredonia Grange and the school. From then, Fredonia Grange gathered school supplies, toys, magazines, and other things to brighten the children's lives and sent them to Manierre every fall. Since Manierre had no budget for enrichment programs, Fredonia had also sent funds for school field trips. This information comes from ongoing conversations and reports during Fredonia Grange Regular Meetings from 2002 through 2004 and particularly: Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, May 10, 2003, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, teacher and consultant at and advocate for Manierre School in inner-city Chicago, e-mail to author, September 18, 2003, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, e-mail to author, September 19, 2003, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, e-mail to author, September 21, 2003, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, e-mail to author, September 24, 2003a, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, e-mail to author, September 24, 2003b, in author's possession; Judy Monroe, presentation at Fredonia Grange Regular Meeting, October 4, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession.

¹⁹⁴ Jan Armour, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

Jan: It's kind of the idea that if—if you need something and I give something to you, and then I say, “No, don't pay me back—give it to the *next* guy.” You know—that kind of thing.¹⁹⁶

Moderator: We were talking about that earlier. That you . . . help that person that's burned out, and then they help somebody else. And also you're letting them know that you . . . *value* them so much that you're willing to *do* that work. And—raise that money.

Jan: Again, hopefully giving that *person* some pride that—*somebody* thought that they were worth *something*. . . .¹⁹⁷

Athol: Over the years you run into various *situations*. And in *all* states where there's Granges—and organizations—a lot of them *earned* a lot of money. And then, all of a sudden they became *very conservative* with that money. Maybe they pinched it to the point they would *not* spend it. So when you become so instilled with hanging onto that *money*, without getting rid of it—you almost—you've lost your community—you've lost your community and you've lost the ability to get people to join.¹⁹⁸

Lois: Why should they? You're not *doing anything*. You're just sittin' on your *money*!¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Jan Armour, focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 22, 2003.

¹⁹⁹ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

Athol: And . . . this organization—and I’m talking *about* Fredonia Grange—we . . . saw our—not our biggest gains, but we saw good *gains* when we went into debt. ‘Cause we wanted all these other people to help us pay it *off*. [Laughter.] So it’s a—we haven’t had to *do* that for a number of years, but—we were fortunate to get some money *donated* to us—back when we were doing the *kitchen* to help us with that. But yet, we put more of *our* money into it than what the donations came to. So it’s—I think in an ideal situation—in an ideal organization *is*—one that will *use* their resources rather than. . . .²⁰⁰

Lois: Sit on ‘em.²⁰¹

Athol: Horde them.²⁰²

A Tale of Two Focus Groups

When the focus group team debriefed from the second session, Athol said that he was surprised that the later group was better than the first. He stated that although he learned things from the first one, this one had just flowed, as the most productive of our focus groups with the community had done. He puzzled that he did not know why that was so. The moderator asked for Randy’s opinions. He said that he also thought that this later gathering was a better group. He shared a snippet of his notes. During the first focus group, he had written down that they needed a *vision*. From this group, he had written down the passage about feeling *valued* and *valuable*. Mary had talked about the need to make people feel *valued*. Athol had not disagreed, but had said that he thought that it was more important that people feel *valuable*. It is a good distinction. Being valued is an

²⁰⁰ Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 22, 2003.

²⁰¹ Lois Hazen, focus group, November 22, 2003.

²⁰² Athol Hazen, Jr., focus group, November 22, 2003.

external thing—someone else has to value one. Being valuable is inherent—one does not need extrinsic affirmation of this.

As they were groping for the differences between the two groups, the moderator noted that more would become clear as she worked on transcribing them, but that already some things had struck her. In every focus group, the person who spoke first and forcefully set the tone for the rest of the group. When the moderator had asked the first group about the ideal community, she was surprised when Charlie Letts had said that he already had it. Despite her gentle probing, he did not want to acknowledge that there might be any way in which to improve it. (It later became clear that all did think that their purportedly *ideal* communities could stand betterment.) During this debriefing, the moderator pointed out that Charlie had effectively shut down conversation on this—no one wanted to be the one who seemed dissatisfied or complaining. The moderator further observed that Mary LaFountain had also done this when asked how the ideal community-service organization/the Grange could be improved—what else she might want from it. Mary had said that it already gave her everything. Seeming to feel that Mary needed defense, Athol protested that she did not say this until a number of others had talked. The moderator tried to clarify that she was not besmirching Mary: she ardently believed that every person has the right and need to express honest opinions. But some of these responses really shut off conversation. This was not the case with the second Granger focus group: nothing was sacrosanct—this was a group intent on improving everything.

After comparing and contrasting the two groups, Athol declared that if he were recruiting for another focus groups, he would take care not to have “all the positives” at

one.²⁰³ It took the moderator a moment to realize that he meant that a group of people who all claim that they live in Utopia are not going to have constructive ideas for improvement—how does one improve perfection? Yet a large portion of the first Granger focus group was preoccupied with deploring the state of contemporary youth and hand wringing over what would become of them. The second group also touched upon this. But perhaps because it contained two teachers and a scout leader—people who work and interact with children every day—they saw possibilities where the first group had seen only problems. Their envisioned organization would accept, embrace, and absorb the children and their ideas. The use of “positives” to describe the members of the first Grange member focus group was an interesting choice. It would imply that the second group was, somehow, negative. But, if anything, this group was even *more* hopeful, more enthusiastic than the first. They saw goodness and decency in human nature, a desire to help others, a need to be part of something greater than oneself, an inherent dignity and worth in each human being, the collective power of many “little” people. This last focus group, along with the first community group, perhaps best embodied a theme that ran, to some extent, throughout all the discussions: that the human spirit, or better yet, a collectivity of human spirits, can surmount any challenge.

Summary

Conducting focus groups with Fredonia Grangers and members of its surrounding communities was a mutually beneficial and enriching process for the Grange and for the researcher. Fredonia Grange gained knowledge of how it was perceived by its members and its communities, how it could become still more integral to people’s lives, and how it

²⁰³ Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at focus group debriefing, November 22, 2003, Marshall, Michigan, notes and

could foster its continued viability. The researcher obtained some astounding insights into her research questions: Why people came together and formed a group to address community needs. What they gained from the process—how it helped them define their identities, create community and feelings of self-worth, how it enabled them to make meaning in their lives. There were also a number of instances of what communities and the individuals who make them up could garner from these efforts.

The Key to Success

One of the most important factors in working successfully with a voluntary community-service organization such as the Grange is to gain the sustained support of a trusted, highly regarded, well-established, influential member of the group. This is someone who will be able to successfully navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of local and organizational politics, customs, and perceptions. No matter how carefully planned one's study is, it has been created in a sort of vacuum: the realm of the theoretical. When one attempts to implement it among the flesh and blood of the real world, the exigencies of life are going to create unanticipated challenges. Having someone who is both deeply immersed in the local scene and firmly committed to the project will prove invaluable.

The focus group phase of this project would never have been possible without Athol Hazen's support: without him, it would have remained in the talking stages and then gradually faded away. He stepped in and pushed it at a critical juncture, and because he did so, it came to pass: no matter how much work the author did, she could not do the groups alone since she lacked crucial local knowledge and a base of operations.

tape recordings, in author's possession.

It was an unlikely partnership. Athol was a reserved man, one who admitted that it took him a while to get to know people. He was gracious and well mannered, but could be distant. He was also so thoroughly committed to the Grange that he seemed to view all of life through that prism: how did something relate to the Grange, how could it further its agenda? When the author first began to explore doing focus groups with Fredonia Grange, sharing promotional literature for them, Athol modified it, changing its tone from neutral to aggressively pro-Grange. Over the ensuing months, the author worked with Athol, explaining the focus group process, what could be accomplished by it, why a more neutral tone might elicit more valuable community input. It was a fascinating process, this watching another's thought processes adapt and adjust. Although he did not know much about focus groups, Athol came to accept their value, frequently saying that they could give the Grange a "new lease on life." He devoted his time and talents to the groups, putting in countless hours of labor. He became their enthusiastic booster, singing their praises with considerable fervor at every opportunity, particularly after being galvanized by attending the actual groups.²⁰⁴ At the time of this writing, it was not possible to tell whether many of the focus group recommendations would be implemented. A number of factors will feed into this, such as what demands

²⁰⁴ Athol and the author, along with others, attended the 2003 Michigan State Grange Membership Conference, which featured a guest speaker from the National Grange. This man conducted several workshops designed to give those attending ideas for increasing membership of their Granges. At the end of the conference, the official, intent on sending off the troops with a rousing call to arms, asked several members of the audience who had not spoken out during the conference what was something important that they had learned at the conference that they would adopt to increase membership in their Granges. On that day, as often, Athol was quiet in the large group, so the official called upon him. Athol rose slowly and stated that he did not have to implement anything from the conference—that thanks to Jacqui Lowman, Fredonia Grange had conducted a series of focus groups and discovered that the Grange is the ideal community-service organization. It just needs to be better at getting out its message and more agile at responding and adapting to community needs and desires. The stunned official stood there for several moments, mouth agape, in silence. He then stammered a few remarks, concluding his part of the program. This was one of the more salient occasions when Athol used the "new lease on life" motif. Athol Hazen,

are made on Fredonia Grange's resources. If many of the recommendations do move beyond the suggestion stage, it will likely be because Athol has worked to make it so.

A Plus for Research—And for the Local Organization

This phase of the study indicated that it was possible to conduct focus groups in a local community, on a small budget, to elicit information of consequence for research and of interest for a local organization. It was possible because two individuals with combined knowledge of focus groups, the organization in question, and the community were willing to pour time and effort into the project and refused to let it fail.

Those who were involved in this stage of the project were convinced that the process would be beneficial to most organizations for a number of reasons. To begin with, such a project, from its earliest stages, can help the organization itself attain a focus and the shared commitment of making the discussions happen can pull that association together. Conducting the groups increases the organization's visibility within the community: there can be articles in local media, and positive word of mouth from energized participants is a great boon. Conducting focus groups among its members can enable an organization to ascertain what it is doing right, what it is doing wrong, and to adjust its course accordingly. Successfully conducting the groups is a feat in which the entire organization can take pride. The groups seem likely to be able to elicit valuable data that can be analyzed and from which can develop appropriate recommendations that could contribute to the organization's and the community's continued mutual viability.

One now lives in times in which one's feet often seem to be planted in different universes, light years apart. Technology has purportedly shrunk the world. One can

Jr., remarks at the Michigan State Grange Membership Conference, April 26, 2003, Haslett, Michigan,

interact with people electronically whom one never meets face to face. There are some who say that community can be whatever and wherever one wants. Yet at the same time, many people still have a need, a longing for physical community, a community that entails geographical rootedness and personal, flesh-and-blood interaction in addition to common interests. Perhaps it is nostalgia, but perhaps it is something more—a basic, elemental *sine qua non* for human beings. People need these local groups as anchors in the midst of life's tsunami, as they did at the time of the Grange's founding. In order for the groups to remain viable and relevant, they must have a way to take the pulse of their constituents. Focus groups have the potential to offer any local organization such as 4-H, Extension, service groups, clubs, churches, governmental entities a superb way to do this. One of their appealing strengths is that there are few material resource requirements: the only essential ingredient is a few dedicated individuals who are utterly convinced of the worth of the project and will carry it through to the end. The reward of such perseverance is uniquely revealing insights into those people whom the organization most wants to attract and serve. And it is a superb way for a researcher to perceive, to some small degree, community as do those who experience it.

Focus groups are not a quick fix: they are labor and time intensive and require a major commitment. They will not take place without at least a few driving individuals to spearhead the effort. It is entirely possible that there could be situations involving local organizations and communities in which focus groups would be inappropriate. Certainly this study cannot be extrapolated to posit focus groups as a panacea for any contingency. But what it can do is demonstrate that focus groups hold great promise. If an organization wants to get in closer contact with its community, if it really wants to learn

what a constituency thinks, it is worth seriously considering using focus groups. The researcher who helps such an organization will be illimitably enriched, through the journey as well as the final destination.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION: WEAVING THE STRANDS TOGETHER

For decades, the Grange as a national entity has been undergoing a general and far-reaching membership and influence decline that precisely parallels the organizational deterioration that Putnam describes.¹ During the three years that the researcher studied the Grange, the number of active local Granges in Michigan, one of the more viable Grange states, had dwindled from fifty-five to forty-eight. The National Grange had acknowledged that it was in trouble and had turned back to its grassroots, to its local chapters and their relationships with their communities, for salvation.²

Dialogue with the National Grange: Does It Have a Unique Essence?

Chapter six contains a remarkable e-mail from Bill Steel, Master, National Grange, in which he laid out the future course that he foresaw for the Grange. He admitted that there were only a few Granges that were as successful as Fredonia. But then he shied away from exploring what it was that had made Fredonia so successful—the openness; the willingness to accept everyone, even nonmembers; the ability to question, adapt, define, and seek relevance in a new century; the belief that the essence of the Grange lay not in secrecy or ritual but in its reverence for agriculture and the environment, coupled with the ability to empower its members to serve their communities and realize their truest selves. Bill retreated into the familiar, the traditional with: “The ‘secrecy’ battle wages on.

¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, passim.

² For more on the Grange decline and its efforts at renewal, please see chapter five, which gives Grange history, and particularly the section “Decline—And Action,” which offers some background on the Action Grange revitalization movement.

We've come a long way in the past couple years. But to give it all up is to cease to exist as a unique organization.”³

The author had not planned to respond to Bill Steel. She had concluded her fieldwork with the Grange. She was then sifting through it, analyzing, writing, and reflecting upon the insights and answers that her fieldwork was providing for her research questions and how these might serve as catalysts for further productive work. Although she knew that

³ Bill Steel, e-mail to author, May 27, 2004, in author's possession. Whether intentionally or not, Bill apparently sent copies of his e-mail to the other people to whom Sally had copied her message to the author (and which had prompted Bill's response): Jeff Swainston, Mary Houghton, Rich Hazen, and Randy Nail. Assuming, incorrectly, that it was the author who had sent her a copy of Bill's e-mail, and galvanized into action by it, Mary, perhaps Fredonia's most articulate and passionate opponent of secrecy, wrote to Bill, asking him for guidance. "Dear Bill, My name is Mary Houghton, from Fredonia Grange. . . . As one deeply embroiled in the 'secrecy battle' I am trying very hard to understand both sides of this issue. I don't understand some of the things you said about secrecy and how that sets the Grange apart as an organization. You are certainly in a better position to know the inner workings of the Grange. Your insights in this regard would be appreciated.

"In your letter you said, 'But to give it all up is to cease to exist as a unique organization.' Were you referring here to secrecy in general? If so, assuming no other changes were made, the organization, ritual, etc., remains the same, how would the elimination of secrecy affect what the Grange is and does? If it is unique behind closed doors, would it not also be unique with the doors wide open?

"The ritual has always been one of the things I love most about the Grange. It has a strong and relevant message for people who are searching for meaning in their lives and in the organizations they belong to. It is my humble opinion that if people were allowed to see it performed, and performed well, they would be drawn into the Grange. It could be an important membership building tool in the Grange of the future.

"The degree work should still be used to honor new members. But it should be open to the public so that prospective members and friends and family of new members can witness this beautiful message. The unifying effect of the degree work for me came with participating as a degree team member, not as a new member taking the degrees. I remember very little of the first time I witnessed any of them. And why would the degree work cease to be a unifying factor in the Grange if it was open to the public? One would think that just the opposite would be true, that it would be a source of great honor and pride to those who participated in any way.

"Another thing you said about families settling things within the family is not clear to me. While I understand the family dynamic very well, I also know from painful experience that sometimes problems require the assistance of someone outside the family to resolve. Again in my humble opinion, this holds true for the Grange as well.

"You also mentioned that clubs and organizations discuss the private stuff within their membership. This is true of all clubs and organizations, whether they have secret rituals or not. Could you explain how secrecy affects how the Grange does business? Maybe it's because Fredonia is so progressive that I can't see how it is for other Granges. When we have business or issues to deal with we call our members together and take care of business. Since members have more at stake in the decisions made, they have a vested interest in the proceedings as well. Non-members don't often attend but no one is excluded. We don't feel that anything we do needs to be hidden or done in secret. I believe this openness is largely responsible for the respect, trust, and influence our Grange enjoys in the community. . . .

"You are very busy and don't always have time to answer every e-mail so I appreciate your taking the time to read this. I would enjoy hearing back from you if possible." Mary Houghton, e-mail to Bill Steel, May 28, 2004, in author's possession. To the author's knowledge, Mary never received a reply.

she would continue to maintain ties to the true Grange friends that she had made, the author knew that it was time to take the lessons learned from this research and try to apply them to other groups. During her years of Grange research, the author had refrained from expressing her opinions on issues pertaining to the Grange—that was not her role. Now that she was moving beyond the Grange there seemed little point in trying to share some of the insights that her research had afforded, since the hierarchy had given no indication of being receptive—especially to the observations of a nonmember. But after Mary Houghton, trusting that the author had turned to her, had taken a stand in her letter to Bill Steel, the author felt the need to show support. Drawing upon her years of studying the Grange, she, too, wrote to Bill Steel.

Dear Bill,

Thank you for your reply. I appreciate the time, effort, and thought that went into your response. I also appreciate your explanations and insights into the National Grange thought process. I can see from my friend Mary Houghton's e-mail to you that you must have included those whom Sally and I copied in your reply, as well—whether intentionally or not. Thus, I will do this also.

Mary raises many of the points that ran through my mind as I read your e-mail. I am not suggesting or advocating that you renounce, discontinue, abandon, or jettison the ritual. The Grange has a remarkable and illustrious heritage, one of which we all, members and nonmembers alike, should be justly proud. For so long it was light years ahead of much of the rest of the country in its policy, equality, advocacy, legislative work. I have read the ritual and find it beautiful and powerful. If performed with conviction and meaning, perhaps in language and with imagery to which modern audiences could relate, it could be a powerful bond among members and an irresistible recruiting tool. But what I have seen of the ritual—and I am told that this is all too typical—is people reciting words without passion, moving awkwardly, and often acting embarrassed or bewildered by what they are doing. If one is an outsider, one often cannot even understand what the people are saying—it is as though they are in a race If the ritual matters, it should matter enough to have it done properly—it should not be demeaned by having it done in a perfunctory way.

When I first discovered the Grange, it was while doing historical research. I was looking through old agricultural newspapers and came upon the Grange. I began to read and became entranced. What a marvelous organization! I wondered what had happened to such a revolutionary, progressive group. I am a student at the state agricultural college. I went to people there and asked them if there was still a viable

Grange in Michigan. They told me unequivocally No! The state office of the Michigan Grange is perhaps fifteen miles, at most, from Michigan State University, but the people in the College of Agriculture did not know that they existed! How appalling. I kept digging, though, and came upon the National Grange Web site. From there I did some more tracking, finally making contact with the state office. They referred me to Granges and Grangers in Calhoun County. My intention was to write a paper on the historical Grange. But then I met some remarkable Grangers, including a phenomenal lady who was ninety-eight years young and who showed me that the real story with the Grange was not what it had been or even currently was, but what it could be. That encounter changed my work and changed my life. That “one paper” has turned into years of work and research.

Bill, you talk about what it is that makes the Grange unique. Like Mary, I am not sure exactly to what you refer. Being unique can be a fine thing, but it is not enough to justify or ensure continued existence. The dinosaurs were unique as well; but they were incapable of adapting and became extinct. I am not suggesting that the Grange is a dinosaur or is not taking steps to adapt. I am only sadly stating that what does not continue to be relevant ceases to exist.

I know that the Grange has made tremendous efforts to change in these last years, and I applaud them. I also realize that you are leading a group of people with diverse opinions. Language is a tremendously imprecise thing, but for most of us, it is the only vehicle that we have to communicate with one another. We use words with the naïve assumption that we speak a common language and that we all have the same intent and understanding. Some words are particularly loaded with nuances. One that comes to mind is “secrecy.” When one talks about secrecy with some Grange members, they are quick to point out that they no longer take up the password on the local level and they do not have secrets—just unwritten work. But secrecy is not just about a password—it is a mindset. Secrecy has permeated the Grange for a long time: I see it still in most of the Granges that I have encountered. It is a siege mentality, an insular state of mind that says “We, as an organization, are self-sufficient. We do not need anyone else. We have the answers. We know what we do. If you want to come and do that, too, fine. But we are not interested in your thoughts and ideas.” Many of the people in these Granges are very nice people, so it fills me with profound sadness to realize that with such a philosophy, their Granges are going to die.

One question that I ask most Grange members whom I encounter is “What is the Grange?” I have seldom gotten a compelling answer. I am not looking, here, for the stock phrases of how many members, what are the activities, what are some of the cut-and-dried benefits. I am looking for the compelling reason that people pour their hearts and souls into a project to make a difference for someone else. What is it that grabs people, will not let them go, and makes them know that they HAVE to do this? As I ask and listen, a thought returns recurringly: If one does not stand for something, one will fall. It was only when I did focus groups with Fredonia Grange members that I gained real insight into what the Grange really is for its adherents. . . . Fredonia does not enjoy its present success because of ritual or secrecy; it prospers because those who are connected to it are empowered by that relation. They know that they

can make a difference, that they matter, that their lives have meaning. In one way or another, it is that that we all seek. . . .⁴

Aftermath

Sally Crosiar, Rich Hazen, Mary Houghton, Randy Nail, and Sue Withers all received copies of the exchange between the National Grange Master and the author.⁵ Most offered feedback. Sally Crosiar, with whom the author shared some of her focus group materials, continued to press for their wide application in both communities and Granges. She concluded: “I’m glad you have begun a dialogue with Bill Steel, and I hope that continues as well.”⁶ Randy Nail’s reaction was: “All I can say is Wow! I’ll . . . just print it so I can reread it whenever I want. Thank you, Randy.”⁷

Sue Withers, ever the pragmatist, explored how the Grange stacked up against its competition. Although she was thoroughly devoted to the Grange, her vantage point of working in a highly competitive industry allowed her to assess what the Grange had to offer members that other groups did not—what, if anything, continued to make the Grange unique and attractive.

You bring forth excellent points. Jeff, Bill, and Sally are all in a position to find themselves unemployed if they don’t do something about the membership in this

⁴ Jacquelyn Lowman, e-mail to Bill Steel, May 28, 2004, in author’s possession. The author received no reply. Although Bill Steel had concluded his e-mail saying that he expected the dialogue to continue, he seemed to have changed his mind.

⁵ Sue Withers was the first member of Fredonia Grange to attend an Action Grange II seminar: she was part of the Georgetown Grange delegation to the regional seminar held in Illinois in November 2003. So she did not attend the seminar that Fredonia sponsored in May 2004. Therefore, she did not get copies of the correspondence between Sally Crosiar and the author and Bill Steel and the author. Sue is utterly devoted to the Grange. She is cautiously optimistic that the Action Grange movement may revitalize at least some of the Granges. She is also skeptical of the leadership (or lack thereof) that the hierarchy is providing. Throughout the Grange research years, as their relationship warmed, Sue and the author frequently discussed what would become of the Grange. Sue frequently lamented the lack of communication—she felt that the local Granges had no inkling of what the national organization would want next. So it seemed appropriate for Sue to have this glimpse into the leadership’s thought processes.

⁶ Sally Crosiar, e-mail to author, June 9, 2004, in author’s possession.

⁷ Randy Nail, e-mail to author, May 29, 2004, in author’s possession.

organization. If it were my livelihood I would certainly be paying attention. However, it doesn't appear to be the case.

I work for a company that is very cutting edge and I see how things can be done where everyone in the industry is trying to copy our work. The competition will design look-alike products to try to get the business away from us. In the meantime my employer values the people who work for them and they reward them generously. My point in this thought process is that the Grange was possibly an organization that everyone tried to copy in its heyday, but somewhere along the line we let things get stale and we lost what we had to offer. The National Grange used to be huge in what have come to be known as the buying group arena, insurance alliance, sponsorship with companies that saw us as big enough to pay attention to, and our legislative voice. It gave its membership quite a bang for its buck in membership perks. That is no longer the case. I don't know where Bill gets the information that there are 3000 Granges and 300,000 members. I believe that those are exaggerated numbers. Regardless, I am less than satisfied with what I am paying for as a member. The results from the leadership are less than I expect. I hope to be surprised from my Grange leaders but so far I am not impressed.⁸

Rich Hazen wanted the author to send a copy of the e-mail exchange to every possible member of the Michigan Grange. He hoped that it might shake some of the membership into action.

What do we have to lose? Will this make them close their ears even more? I don't think so. They know about Fredonia and the changes that we have proposed for years to make this a more relevant organization. We need to make them realize what the National Master is thinking also.

I am having a hard time knowing that Bill realizes the problem but won't address it. If people are aware of what he is thinking maybe we can shake the bushes, have them e-mail him with rebuttal, make him and maybe Jeff get off the fence and go one way or the other.

If we keep putting the hard truth in front of the membership maybe they will finally come around. We have to keep trying. If I could send this out with my name attached telling them to read it and to wake up and smell the roses, I would do it in a heart beat. I have this feeling that this could do a lot of good. Maybe I am wrong but I would love to take the chance. We are already the outcasts Jacqui, so I don't think this can do us any harm. Fredonia is strong and I hope to keep it that way. We do not need the State or National to keep this one going. We know what we have to do.⁹

⁸ Sue Withers, e-mail to author, June 14, 2004, in author's possession.

⁹ Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, May 30, 2004a, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, May 30, 2004b, in author's possession.

The author replied that those Granges that most needed “shaking up” had been entrenched in their traditions for some time. It would take more than an impersonal e-mail, particularly from the author, to be a catalyst for their change. Perhaps because the author was a nonmember and was perceived as an iconoclast, Bill Steel divulged a great deal of information about the Grange’s philosophy and future direction that he probably did not want to have all Grangers know. Indeed, if he wanted them to know these things, he had ample other fora in which to do so; he did not need to depend on an unauthorized dissemination of his correspondence. He had a rather accurate assessment of his membership: those Granges that were willing to change were few—perhaps a tenth of the current total number. Those who would actually be able to implement change and grow were fewer still. The others would be on life support until they literally died. They had not heard the exhortations to adapt in the past; they would not do so now. They were content to exist, clinging to a legendary past that probably never existed, until they all perished—and so would their Granges. Sending this e-mail would not have been of any help: people could not hear if they would not listen.

It was not clear if Bill was struggling with his beliefs. He was finding it difficult to evaluate some of the Grange traditions and practices to determine what should be retained as is, what should be modified, and what should be remembered as an historical artifact, but discarded.¹⁰ He talked of change but clung to secrecy and the ritual as what made the Grange unique. Bill thought that it was the ritual that attracted and held people.

¹⁰ National Grange, “National Master, William Steel, Bio,” Contact Information, National Officers, http://www.nationalgrange.org/about/national_officers.htm#bio (accessed July 24, 2004). Although Bill had been a Grange member for more than fifty years, it took more than length of membership to make one uncritically in thrall to tradition. Helen Peck and Athol and Helen Hazen had all belonged to the Grange for more than fifty years and were completely devoted to the organization. Yet they considered nothing inviolate and immutable.

But it was not that—at least, not that alone. The ritual symbolized something: people coming together, working together, becoming empowered, and making meaning in their lives by serving others and what they construed as a higher good. That is why people come together as an active Grange—or other organization. They feel responsible for making a difference, know that they can do so, and are enriched and joy filled as a result.

The Strains of Seeking Fulfillment

The Grange envisions itself as a family organization. From its inception, it allowed women to be full members, not auxiliaries, which was a revolutionary concept for its time.¹¹ Members assert that one reason that they have remained an alcohol-free organization is that that promotes a wholesome, family environment. The Grange has a special organization for children, the Junior Grange. These units, with their own ritual, activities, and leadership, are always affiliated with a regular, local Grange. As the Grange overall has struggled, the Junior Grange has fallen into even deeper trouble. Granges composed of members in their seventies, eighties, and nineties, without activities and openness, do not attract young people. In a world of school sports and clubs, computers, and multimedia entertainment, Granges, many located in fairly remote rural areas that have become devoid of young people, are hard pressed to lure youth. As many older members, who grew up in the Grange and who took their young families to the Grange, say, the Grange offered a wonderful venue for economical family entertainment: for the cost of a potluck meal, one could take the whole family for an evening of fun and socializing. But with the demands placed on multijob families and the compulsion to live life in the fast lane, the pleasures offered by the Grange and its meetings: conversation,

¹¹ This is explored in more detail in the discussion of Grange history in chapter five.

getting to know others well, exploring issues, working together to attain worthwhile goals, can seem like a quaint but anachronistic mirage. People may yearn for what appear to be simpler, more enduring virtues—but it may seem that these qualities have little relevance in their own lives, that they have little real chance of realizing them. In the case of Fredonia Grange, though, many people do join and are empowered by the possibilities that this opens for them.¹²

Grange membership works best if one is single or, if one is part of a couple, for both to join and be equally active and committed. Should only one member of the couple be active or, even worse, be a member, this is likely to create intolerable strains on their relationship. The active member will either be heavily involved, causing the spouse to be jealous, or will feel tightly restricted in his or her involvement, causing repressed feelings of resentment that will fester. Either way, there is likely to be an eruption at some point, leading to either much more or much less involvement—and wounded feelings between the spouses.

Rich Hazen was, literally, born into the Grange.¹³ Family lore has it that he was conceived by his parents at either a Michigan State Grange Convention or a National Grange Convention. By the time that Rich was born in August 1955, both of his parents were deeply and consumingly involved with the Grange. Helen Hazen had belonged to the Grange as a young woman, but had drifted away when she left home to go to nursing

¹² There is much more on this in chapter seven on oral histories and chapter eight on focus groups.

¹³ Much of the information about Rich Hazen and his struggle between his personal demands and his loyalty, love, and need for the Grange comes from the author's initial interview with him and subsequent frequent interactions. His father, Athol Hazen, Jr., also has kept the author apprised with frequent personal communications. Since citing all these interactions would prove unwieldy, only a few of the most salient are noted. Rich Hazen, interview by author, February 16, 2002; Rich Hazen, conversation with author after Marshall Cruise to the Fountain, July 6, 2002, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Rich Hazen, meeting with author, January 28, 2004, Charlotte, Michigan, notes, in author's possession; Athol

school and then married. Athol took a job working for the Production Credit Association; he described his job as lending money to farmers. It entailed interviewing those who requested loans, making calls on their farms, checking their credit, and then sending in their applications for loans. In time, Athol, as office manager, could approve some loans without sending them on to the board of directors.

When Athol was assigned to cover the greater Marshall area, he and Helen moved to Eckford Township, a part of Marshall. Athol was interested in joining farmers' organizations as a way to get to know farmers better. At one point he belonged to the Michigan Farm Bureau, where he met Will and Eugenia Barnes, an elderly couple who also belonged to Fredonia Grange, but who were having difficulties attending meetings because they could no longer see to drive at night. The Hazens began taking the couple to meetings. Although Athol and Helen could be present during most of the meeting, they had to sit outside during the opening and closing. As Athol puts it, they soon tired of that, and since they found the Grange appealing, they decided to join. They became very involved very quickly—and the commitment since then has never wavered.¹⁴

Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 21, 2004, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 22, 2004, in author's possession.

¹⁴ Athol took to the Grange right away; Helen was slightly more reserved about a wholehearted commitment: having been in the Grange as a child, she knew that it would require a large time commitment; she had two small children, and another on the way; she was serving on the school board. But when Mary and Reuben LaFountain, who were also raising a family, rejoined the Grange, they became surrogate family and Helen became an indefatigable Grange supporter. Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 21, 2004, in author's possession.

Although Athol found the Grange a perfect fit, the same was not true of the Farm Bureau. He dropped his membership when the Farm Bureau feed company added a fire retardant material to cattle feed. Although this was discovered, the company did not pull the product off the market, but mixed it with other feed, which was then sold to dairy farmers. This had a disastrous effect on dairy production. But instead of trying to help its dairy farmer members, the Farm Bureau increased its dues—with none of the surplus to help the affected group. As Athol says, "I was not opposed to the raise in dues but I thought that they should have used the money to help farmers who fed the fire retardant . . . to their livestock." Athol Hazen, Jr., e-mail to author, July 22, 2004, in author's possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003; Helen Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

So Rich and his siblings grew up attending Grange functions. At age five, each became a member of the Junior (then called “juvenile”) Grange. At fourteen, as soon as they were eligible, they joined the regular Fredonia Grange. As they grew up, they participated in the Grange junior, youth, and young adult activities. One year the Fredonia Junior Grange performed the Junior Grange degree work at the Michigan State Grange annual convention: they won a prize, a Grange rug that still adorns the Fredonia Grange dining room wall. Another year, the four Hazen siblings won the youth talent competition at the state convention. Locally, the Hazen children associated with other Grange children, including those of Mary and Reuben LaFountain, long-time friends of their parents. Most of the Hazen children went to Grange camp, forming lasting friendships with people like Mary Houghton and Sue Withers. During high school, Rich and Sue became one another’s first sweetheart.

But as the Hazen children became adults and left home, their connection to the Grange became attenuated. When the factory for which he worked shut down, Rich, along with his brother, Les, who was recently home from Vietnam, relocated with some of the other employees to its Chicago branch. Rich had no immediate Grange connection there. Away from parental strictures and under the tutelage of his older brother, who had discovered sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll in Vietnam, Rich sowed his wild oats. He also met J., who would become his wife. Rich was intensely homesick. He found the city dirty, noisy, crowded, and inhospitable; he longed for the open spaces of rural Michigan. J. did not have a close relationship with her family, so she agreed to accompany Rich back to Marshall. It must have been a difficult transition for J.: she had lived her entire life in a highly urbanized environment. At first the apparent silence and emptiness nearly

drove her wild. Perhaps even more problematic was Rich's family. Rich comes from a large, close family. Holidays are spent together. At Thanksgiving, sixty or seventy people may gather. Each side of Rich's family has a reunion every summer: more than a hundred may attend each. J. did attend most of these functions, although she did exude the aura that she deemed most of these people benighted hicks to whom she was superior. As Athol commented, "Nothing in J.'s upbringing prepared her for Richard's family."¹⁵

When Rich came back to Marshall, he did not return to the Grange right away. He was busy trying to get established: finding work, a place to live, raising a family. He did persuade J. to attend one Grange meeting. This was before Fredonia had been authorized to make changes. Although they were quite open for a Grange, J. found them off-putting. She was alienated by the ritual; she claimed that the Grange was a cult. She found the members rude rubes with whom she had nothing in common. Were the Grange members really hostile to J.? Did her obvious distaste for the people and the organization have any effect on her reception? The answer to both questions is probably a qualified "yes." Whether one caused the other is probably a chicken-or-the-egg dilemma. Be that as it may, J. would not go back to the Grange, would not give it a further or another try. So Rich, too, stayed away. During his exile, however, Athol continued to pay the annual Grange dues for Rich and his family—including J. Most of the Hazen family hoped that J. would soften her position in time. Instead, it hardened. It became a matter of principle, of pride: she felt that changing her stance would be a sign of weakness, giving in to something that she grew to both hate and fear. She perceived the Grange as a threat to the way that she wanted to live. Sensing that there was a void in Rich's life, she tried

¹⁵ Rich Hazen, conversation with author after Marshall Cruise to the Fountain, July 6, 2002; Athol Hazen, Jr., remarks at Focus Group Planning Meeting, October 8, 2002.

to persuade him to attend church with her. At times she succeeded, but he had little interest or enthusiasm for the services or the church's activities: it could not truly fulfill his needs.

Gradually, Rich began to become involved with the Grange again. It started subtly. He began to help out at some of the Grange's fund-raising events, such as the food booth at the county fair and the semiannual pancake brunches. These events require a great deal of hard, physical labor, and as Fredonia's membership was aging, the physicality was taking more and more of a toll. So Rich stepped in to bridge the gap. It was at one of the brunches that Helen Peck, a significant person and influence in Rich's life, asked him to keep the Grange alive. Helen Peck had been the Junior Grange leader when Rich first started going to Grange; she had taught him piano as a child. He revered her and what she represented: a clear-cut world in which good triumphs over evil as people care for one another, work together, accomplish worthwhile projects, and are valued and esteemed as a result. Helen Peck embodied the Grange as family, a group that provided unquestioning love and support, that made its members feel important, that they mattered, and that they could make a difference. Rich promised Helen that he would do what he could to help.

Thus, Rich started attending Grange meetings once more. Soon he was elected master. A pleasant, congenial person, he was able to recruit additional members who also found that the Grange fulfilled some of their needs. He was an early and eager advocate for Fredonia's joining the Action Grange program. He began to serve on Grange committees. So there were many meetings on many nights. Rich again asked J.

to come to Grange with him, but she refused. Tension increased and took its toll. There were frequent arguments, angry words and tears, and ultimatums.

What J. did not recognize or would not understand was that Rich needed the Grange. Rich had tried college, but had lasted only a few weeks. So he had drifted through a series of jobs, trying to find his niche. With his personable manner, he related well to people and seemed to be a natural salesperson. But he struggled to find the right product, the right company, the situation that would enable him to feel successful. He was not a man of organized religion: he often said that the Grange was his church. Indeed, the Grange was most things to him: it was his family, his social outlet, his community-service vehicle. It gave him an opportunity to sell some of his products. He used it to learn about politics and to seek justice for different causes. It was his laboratory to learn about people, how to interact and get along. The Grange gave Rich an opportunity to develop ideas and helped bring his plans to fruition—even though at times the schemes may have been poorly conceived and left the Grange scrambling to cover them. Rich loved the people of Fredonia Grange, was proud of them and what they accomplished. His connection to Fredonia Grange, particularly leading it, made him feel that his life was not a loss. It was a constant and a positive in his life.

Trying to force Rich to make a choice between Fredonia Grange and his marriage was unrealistic: the Grange was an embodiment of his way of life—without it he would lose himself. There really was no choice. Realizing that their differences were irreconcilable, Rich and J. decided to end their marriage.

At first glance, this may appear to be a story of how the Grange dissolved a marriage. But, to paraphrase firearm advocates, it was not the Grange that ended the marriage, but

the people involved.¹⁶ Like most people, Rich needed a way to forge his identity, find meaning, and make sense of his life. He needed an affirmation that his life was worthwhile. The Grange provided a secure matrix, a womb in which to explore and fulfill these needs. Because he subscribed to a way of life that J. could not countenance, it caused some superficial stress to their marriage. But the real, underlying stressor was that they could not find a mutually compatible way to fulfill their existential needs. If Rich had not been involved with the Grange, he would have had to be engrossed by another group, something that would have been equally absorbing and time consuming. Without something like that, he would have been only a shell of himself.

Fredonia Grange: What It Means and Does for Its Members

The Grange is more than a club: for dedicated members, it is a way of life (as is true with, for example, some churches and ideologies)—it can flavor and influence all else.¹⁷ It can be an obsessive and consuming thing. On the other hand, it can fill tremendous voids in people's lives. Many of the Grange members featured in this study are not inherently, obviously powerful people. Most of them are not highly educated: a high school diploma or less is probably standard, although there are a share of teachers, nurses, and lawyers—the latter usually as associate members. Many of the Grange members do not have prestigious occupations: a number work as retail clerks, salespeople, clerical workers, manual or factory laborers. As at least a partial offshoot of these former characteristics, most members do not have large incomes. They do not dwell in conventional centers of power: these are definitely not people from inside the

¹⁶ The gun advocate slogan is "Guns don't kill people, people do."

Beltway. They do not set social policy or associate with those who do. So if one considered only those factors, it might seem that these would be voiceless, powerless people who, in the words of Thoreau, “lead lives of quiet desperation.”¹⁸

But Fredonia Grange has changed that mindset for many of its members. They feel important, valuable and valued, and that, together, they can make a tremendous difference. They believe that, as a bloc, they can influence legislation. They are eager to ascertain community needs and feel confident that they can alleviate some of them—even if it is bit by bit.

Although some Fredonia Grange members esteem the ritual and are proud of the Grange’s history and heritage, many others know little or nothing about these. What makes it survive and thrive as an organization is what Fredonia Grange does for its members and what it enables them, in turn, to do for the community. The preceding chapters are filled with vivid, sometimes poignant examples of the needs that Fredonia has addressed for its members and those in the community.¹⁹ Members of the first community focus group saw Fredonia as a conduit and coordinator of information for the surrounding communities; the second community focus group highlighted Fredonia’s environmental endeavors, indispensable role as a communication facilitator, as well as extraordinary grace when it raised thousands of dollars to help an uninsured man whom it did not know. For Rich Hazen, the Grange validated his life and purpose, gave him a taste of the success that had eluded him in other areas. Mary Houghton felt that, with the

¹⁷ These sentiments, which the author first heard during her initial conversation with Grange members, continued to reverberate through all of her subsequent research. Beulah Winter, interview by author, July 19, 2001; Roland Winter, interview by author, July 19, 2001.

¹⁸ The full quotation runs: “Most men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.” Henry David Thoreau, “Walden, I, Economy [1854],” in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 506:11.

Grange, she could truly touch and positively affect lives, even if only one at a time—something that could otherwise have been denied to her. Sue Withers had found an anchor and connections for life—even if the formal entity called “the Grange” ceased to exist, they would always be with her. Many members claimed that the Grange had enabled them to transcend barriers that they would otherwise have never been able to surmount. Helen Peck was able to overcome her feelings of inadequacy for lacking a high school diploma. Helen Hazen became a leader—Junior Matron, heading the Fredonia Grange fair kitchen, giving reports to large gatherings of Grangers—and was incredulous at being able to do so. Athol Hazen overcame a lack of education and public speaking experience to write resolutions for the National Grange, speak before large gatherings, interact easily with highly educated people, and assume leadership positions at the local, county, and state level. By belonging to Fredonia Grange, Paul Jones felt that he had become more than just someone who punched a clock and spent his off hours before the television with an empty life: he had come together with others to work for the organization and the community, and believed that all had been enriched thereby. Fredonia Grange had renewed Gwen Combs’s faith in humanity—that there were still good, kind, hardworking people who helped others and who were an affirmation that, somehow, the world was really still all right—despite the prophecies of apocalypse. For Lois Hazen, Fredonia Grange was, quite simply, “everything”: it was her friends, her family, her moral compass, the lessons of life, the force and focus that made her most truly human. The latter two explicitly acknowledged that Fredonia Grange had a

¹⁹ These examples are all delineated in far greater detail in the chapters on oral history and focus groups. This obviates the need to cite them fully here. Please see those chapters for fuller accounts.

palpable hold over them: try as they might, they could never escape its grasp—they had to keep reaching out to try to help others.

It was these things that brought the people of Fredonia Grange together—and that kept them together. It was not anything inherent about the Grange, per se. Fredonia Grange fulfilled a vast range of needs for its members. One could see this reflected in its meetings, which blended elements of a family gathering, support group, revival meeting, and organizational planning session.

What Does the Future Hold for the Grange?

At this point, there is nothing inherently Grange-specific about the viability of some of the chapters of this organization. Their affiliation with the national organization could be, in at least some respects, a drain since the local branches support it with their dues and special contributions.

Those Granges that continue to thrive do so because they fulfill a variety of needs: those of their members, who find empowerment, an essential sense of belonging, an affirmation of their inherent value, and a renewal of their faith in the basic goodness of humanity through their membership; and those of their respective communities, as these local Granges continually take the pulse of their constituencies and make necessary adaptations to their exigencies in order to continue to fulfill community needs.

There is little cause for optimism over the fate of the Grange as a national and state entity. The people at the top of the hierarchy were raised in and are deeply wedded to the old traditions. There is no indication that they have the vision and courage to make the adaptations that can keep the Grange viable into the twenty-first century. A few Grange members have spoken some of the hard truths. The Grange can no longer be tied

exclusively to serving agriculturists—it should also work for stewardship of the environment and actively seek locations in a range of settings, running the gamut from rural to urban. The Grange needs to make its ritual open, transparent, and accessible, making it meaningful and understandable to all; the Grange cannot and should not forget its past and traditions, but neither should it try to live in and on them, trying to freeze itself in the late nineteenth century; the beauty and lessons contained in the ritual could be valuable and effective recruiting tools. The Grange must jettison its secrecy and exclusivity—it has to welcome more than white Christian conservatives; in an increasingly diverse society, insisting in utilizing only Christian prayers and texts alienates an ever-widening percentage of the populace.

The Grange reached a critical juncture in 1999 when it appointed the Strategic Planning Task Force. The task force made a number of bold recommendations. At first it seemed that the National Grange hierarchy might be willing to accept at least some of these. It did take a few tentative steps in this direction by instituting the Action Grange I program. Filled with hope, a number of the more successful, vibrant Granges left in the overall organization did respond and, believing that they had a mandate for true evolution and change, undertook major evaluations of all aspects of the Grange. But then the leaders of the National Grange lost their nerve and retreated, leaving those in the vanguard cut off and without support, guidance, or information. The leaders decided to follow a more cautious strategy, one that posed no threat to Grangers' comfort level, one that told them, in effect, that they were already great and that they just had to be better at letting others know it. There was no resolve to soul-search, to truly define themselves as

an organization, to stake out a unique identity, to reach for the stars.²⁰ They pulled back from a chance at true renewal.

Organizations, like other living organisms, have a life cycle, determined by the components that it comprises. If its elements are continually refreshed and replenished, it can live for an indefinite length of time. But if its constituents are not so renewed, they will run their course, wither, and the entire entity will die. This latter is what is happening to the Grange with increasing rapidity. It has aged dramatically in the last several decades. “Age” here is not a mere measure of chronology: it is more a state of mind. As Rich Hazen pointed out in his interview, some of Fredonia Grange’s most revitalizing thinkers have been Helen Peck, Reuben and Mary LaFountain, Athol and Helen Hazen—when all were at least in their seventies. On the other hand, some of those in leadership positions in the Michigan State Grange, who were born into and raised in the Grange and who revere the traditions as Holy Writ, for their own sake, not to be questioned, whose purpose must not be examined—have the traditionalists’ mindset of a century ago, even though a few may be chronologically young by Grange standards—in their forties.

Those who could renew the Grange and ensure its protracted survival—the ones filled with ideas and enthusiasm who attract like-minded people to the organization—are becoming burned out and discouraged. They have been ignored, discounted, repressed, overlooked, superseded too often. Whatever faith they had in the national and state level organizations is lying in tatters. Too many of them believe that the Grange, as anything

²⁰ “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” Robert Browning, “Andrea del Sarto [1855],” l. 97, in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 493:14.

but their local entity, is dying or dead.²¹ The older generation—those in their upper sixties, seventies, eighties, and more—will continue with the Grange. Many of them were raised in the Grange, at a time when there was less competition for people's loyalty

²¹ Randy Nail, e-mail to author, May 25, 2004, in author's possession, stating that he could easily foresee the demise of the State Grange, that he felt that what the "old timers" in the Grange really wanted was "new old timers," and that he was feeling "burned out" by the Grange. Sue Withers, e-mail to author, June 14, 2004, in author's possession: "The Grange was possibly an organization that everyone tried to copy in its heyday, but somewhere along the line we let things get stale and we lost what we had to offer." When the author followed up with Mary Houghton to see if she had ever gotten a response to her e-mail on secrecy from National Grange Master Bill Steel, she replied: "No, I never heard back from Bill Steel. Don't know what the problem is but it doesn't generate much faith in the office (or rather the office holder)." Mary Houghton, e-mail to author, August 1, 2004, in author's possession.

Despite many personal issues, Rich Hazen did move into a State Grange position on the fund-raising committee. He arranged for the Michigan State Grange to park cars at the B. E. Henry Community Building during the Calhoun County Fair week, with the Grange pocketing a large percentage of the profits. He hoped that a different Grange would send a team to do the parking each day of the fair; he tried to use the lure of a free meal at the Fredonia Grange food booth as an incentive. During the first year, 2003, a few Granges did respond—but only a few. The parking lot was chronically understaffed, causing Fredonia Grange to have to send some of its kitchen crew to park cars—people that were vitally needed for the food booth. Rich wrote a report for the September issue of the *Michigan Grange News*, reporting that the Michigan State Grange had received \$1,635.84 for the week's work. He told the readers that they would be doing it again the following year and asked members to put it on their calendars then. Rich Hazen, "Car Parking at the Calhoun County Fair," *Michigan Grange News*, September 2003, 6. Fredonia had also actively participated in another of the Michigan State Grange's fund-raising efforts: selling raffle tickets on a John Deere Gator. For the 2003 fair, Fredonia had asked to have the Gator on exhibit. That incentive had helped sell many tickets. Rich and a few others had also volunteered to go to the St. Joe County Fair, a bit later in the season, and sell tickets for the Gator one night.

Throughout 2004, Rich made continual pleas for help with the parking at the B. E. Henry Building for August 16 through August 21. When the author saw him at the fair on August 15, she asked him about the parking—did he have enough people. He replied in disgust that he had not even had as many commitments as he had the year before. This meant that Fredonia would be stretched thin, again. This was particularly bad news, since a spate of illnesses and injuries had already depleted the ranks of those who normally worked at the food booth. The author asked if Fredonia would have the Gator on exhibit again for the 2004 fair. Rich and Athol replied no. They said that by the time they requested it, it had already been pledged for somewhere else. The author asked if they were still going to sell tickets, and Athol said that they were; he also said that he would put up some signs to that effect, when he had time. Rich, with intense despair, remarked that "I just don't care anymore, I really don't."

Rich said that he had had a good conversation with Randy Nail a few days before. Randy, who was on the Michigan State Grange Executive Committee, said that the committee had met and talked about what they could cut from the State Grange budget. Rich asked the author what she would think that they would cut. Before she could reply, he rushed on: "Promotion and marketing, of course! The one thing that could get some members!" He said that he and Randy had decided to draft some resolutions—to take it to a higher level. (There is really no higher level to which to take this: both the state and national levels view promotion as an addition, not a necessity. They do not value communication with actions, but only with lip service.) Rich said that he had been talking to one of their newer members the other day and he had said: "The Grange is dead! Fredonia Grange will continue for a while, but at the state and national levels, the Grange is dead!" His father, who was standing nearby and had overheard this, looked bemused. Rich turned to his father, glowering, and said, "That's how I feel!" Athol smiled a sad smile and answered, "I'm not disagreeing with you." Rich Hazen, conversation with his father and author, August 15, 2004,

and time. It is one of *the* major forces and factors in their lives. But they are dying off at an increasing rate. Those who are left cannot work as they did. They have not been able, by and large, to replenish their numbers. There is an air of desiccation to the organization. There is also fear—fear of dying, fear of being irrelevant, fear of losing something of value. With that fear comes a desperate desire for the impossible—to stem the tide of change. So the people cling more tenaciously than ever to the old ways, telling stories of the good old days. Within the next decade, many of the existing Granges are going to go under. Those with only older members will completely disappear. Those with a few younger members with a traditional outlook may totter along for a while longer, but it will be difficult for them to continue to function.

And What of Fredonia?

National Grange Master Bill Steel noted: “Only a very small percentage of the Granges in the country are like Fredonia.”²² The author has seen nothing to make her question this assertion. Fredonia has succeeded not because it is a Grange, but perhaps despite the fact that it is one—it has shown creativity, flexibility, a willingness to bend almost any rule. It has a clear sense of being esteemed and needed by the community. It has been extraordinarily successful at helping its members feel valuable, valued, empowered. Most of these people come from modest backgrounds: for the most part, they do not have high educational or economic attainments. They are not part of a formal power structure. But, working together and on a community level, they feel that there is little that they could not accomplish. They are deeply immersed in multiple layers of

Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession; Athol Hazen, Jr., conversation with Rich Hazen and author, August 15, 2004, Marshall, Michigan, notes, in author’s possession.

²² Bill Steel, e-mail to author, May 27, 2004, in author’s possession.

community, they feel secure in who and what they are, they draw strength and sustenance from one another. There is an old-fashioned family feeling in Fredonia Grange: people report the joys and sorrows in their lives, believing that the other members would want to know—and they do. Bill Steel also remarked: “Fredonia is way ahead of most organizations.”²³ The latter comment may be somewhat hyperbolic; it is impossible to determine its veracity—one cannot study every other organization for corroboration. But Putnam and the numerous newspapers and journals that he cites certainly give the impression that many, many organizations are moribund, having fallen upon hard times and slim membership. In such a climate, Fredonia’s continued ability to attract and retain members is noteworthy.

Fredonia Grange is not Nirvana: sometimes the closeness can be stifling. It is not a very diverse group: at present, it is largely rural, white, working class. The younger members (middle-aged people) face time pressures that their parents did not. They find it difficult to give the time and effort to the Grange that a previous generation did. They often have problems with dependability and responsibility. Fredonia currently does not have a truly dynamic, visionary leader. When its older generation dies, there will be shock waves throughout their organization. But it is likely that it will continue. It continues to draw new members, and most of those whom it draws it retains.²⁴ It does this because of what people derive from being a part of this group. That is the lesson that Fredonia can teach other groups, be they Grange or not. What the National Grange has

²³ Ibid. He said this after commenting on how remarkable it was that Fredonia Grange accepted the author and allowed her to help and have a voice.

²⁴ One problem is that many of these new members are older people. While these people certainly enrich Fredonia Grange, it would be better for Fredonia’s overall life cycle if there were a greater range of ages. Fredonia needs to get better at helping younger people realize that they, too, can realize themselves and their aspirations within it—and ensuring that this promise becomes reality.

failed to comprehend is that the key lies not in rural or urban, but in the self-realization and empowerment that is afforded to people. That is what has made Fredonia Grange so unusually prosperous, among both Granges and groups in general.

So Fredonia Grange will endure for a time—at least until the older generation that has been its guiding spirit, passes—Athol, Helen, Mary LaFountain. But do the younger members—the next generation—have the devotion, passion, character, and fortitude to grasp the torch and run with it, keeping the flame continually kindled? Even if they do manifest the skills to keep their local organization going, will it still be a Grange? The Grange was built on a foundation of grassroots branches throughout the states. If Fredonia became one of only a few branches—or perhaps *the* only branch—in Michigan, if the State Grange continues down its present path of destruction, and if the National Grange remains distant and ineffectual, even if it does still manage to exist—what would Fredonia be then? Would it change its name? What would it lose?

For much of its existence, Fredonia Grange has shown great flexibility in interpreting State and National Grange doctrine. It has managed to maintain ties to the hierarchy, while still going its own way to a great extent. Without consciously realizing or trying, it has been able to satisfy some of the most essential and motivating psychological and emotional needs for which many of its members seek fulfillment in life: a way to define themselves, make meanings in their lives, be part of something greater than themselves, feel that they are valued and valuable, find empowerment, know that they can make a difference, create community, serve others. A group that does this—as long as it does this—can continue to prosper indefinitely.

Much of Fredonia's future lies in how open and responsive it can continue to be to members, prospective members, and communities' needs. The other portion lies in how inextricably intertwined it feels that its destiny is bound to that of other Granges. For many current Fredonia Grange members, their love of the Grange is Fredonia specific—they have no allegiance to any other Grange, any hierarchical arrangement, any ritual. They love the people of Fredonia, the family that they have found in it, all the good work that they accomplish. Fredonia can continue as a fulfilling community-service organization in touch with its community, agriculture, and the environment if it has the flexibility, independence, and courage to persevere alone if necessary. It all depends upon the road that its members choose to take.²⁵

²⁵ "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken [1916]," st. 4, in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan, 17th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), 669:4.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: PRACTICAL ALTRUISM AND A CONTINUING JOURNEY

This study was undertaken to try to find answers to a series of questions, including the following: Why do people voluntarily form groups to address community needs? What do members of the group gain from addressing those needs? What are some of the benefits that communities can reap from having voluntary groups seek to resolve some of their needs? How can a community-service organization remain viable? Are there needs that it can continue to alleviate? Can it adapt its mission and vision to remain relevant? How can it retain members? How can it maintain a coherent sense of purpose? How can it attract new adherents? Why does it matter if people voluntarily seek to ameliorate community needs? The study took the form of a case study of Fredonia Grange. For three years, the researcher studied and interacted with Fredonia Grangers, using participant observation/ethnography, oral histories, and focus groups.

The study learned that many of the Fredonia Grange members came together and stay together because Fredonia Grange has been able to satisfy some of the most essential and motivating psychological and emotional needs for which they seek fulfillment in life: a way to define themselves, make meanings in their lives, be part of something greater than themselves, feel that they are valued and valuable, find empowerment, know that they can make a difference, create community, serve others. Fredonia sees at least one of its roles as bridging gaps, plugging holes in the safety net through which the needy would otherwise fall. Its members step in to try to ameliorate community needs for which there is no ready, existing government or private answer. Their aims and means are modest: they believe in making a difference one person at a time. They visit the sick, elderly,

indigent, and homeless with gifts of food, clothing, and comforters; they raise and give funds to people in dire straits—a family burned out of its home, an injured man or critically ill boy without insurance, a family support group for the relatives of those at war; they work for and educate people about the environment, especially bluebirds and monarch butterflies; they teach people about and financially support hearing awareness; they make critically needed donations to schools, both local and more distant; they work for outdoor safety and gun control; they provide a wholesome food alternative at community events; they host programs on issues of local import, thus making the community more cognizant of them. Those are just some of their more salient activities. So the community benefits in these and many other small but significant ways. The community would continue to function without Fredonia Grange—but it would not be as comforting a place.

Fredonia Grange has prospered because it does bring fulfillment to its members and, to some degree, its community. It is sensitive to its community and has sought to continually maintain contact with it and its changing foci and requisites. It has developed a rudimentary mission statement and has given thought to creating a unifying vision under whose aegis a broad spectrum of functions, goals, and interests can be accommodated. It desperately needs this vision to guide its future development and endeavors. Because of its relatively high profile in the community and the obvious joy that its members take in community service and one another, it has enjoyed considerable success in attracting new adherents. Yet it must do more. Although Fredonia is not explicitly exclusionary—and, indeed, views itself as extraordinarily open and welcoming—it must become more inclusive if it is to remain truly viable. Youth need to

be won over and accommodated, as do most others who are not white, Protestant, rural and small-town conservatives.

Without being overtly aware of it, Fredonia has managed to tap into and satisfy a large number of the existential needs that many seem to feel. It has preserved a great deal of local autonomy, instinctively navigating between the Scylla and Charybdis of Grange hierarchical politics. Its members have supported the state and national organizations financially, but largely gone their own ways. Still, Fredonia has always viewed itself, to some extent, as part of the larger group of Granges. As they dwindle with increasing rapidity, it is being confronted by an identity crisis. This raises further questions that only time and experience can answer. Is being part of a larger Grange network part of the ineluctable, essential core of its identity? If the other Granges, and particularly the Grange hierarchy, dies, will it feel that it is fated to do so, too? Or will it continue as a vibrant, responsive organization that fulfills both its members and its communities' needs? What could it truly mean to be a Grange? If Fredonia did continue under such circumstances, would it still be a Grange?

As the study has argued, there is nothing inherently Grange specific about what Fredonia has been able to do for its members and its communities. As Athol Hazen said many times, Fredonia has prospered because it is a group that *does* things. He is right, to at least some extent. Fredonia Grange is more than a typical club—it is a lifestyle. Adherents come together to work, to socialize, to break bread, to learn, to advocate, to comfort, to mourn. It can be a force in people's lives from cradle to grave and all the way stations in between. It lets people know that they are needed and that whatever they are able and willing to give of their resources—time, knowledge, skills—it will gratefully

accept. Its message to its members, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, is, in the words of Helen Peck: “You can do it!”¹ It gives people the opportunity, but not the compulsion, to grow. Fredonia’s interests are as varied as its membership; members come together to work for a broad range of causes. In this diversity of activity lies its strength. Putnam and his colleagues cite grim statistics and supporting examples of organizations that are dying. By and large, these are organizations that are not vitally integrated into their communities, agilely responsive to community needs, continually looking for new ways to serve and benefit others. An organization that only addresses one particular need, one constrained constituency, does not have a secure base: the least vicissitude may topple it. Athol talked about his years of membership in the Masons and why he left: in his opinion, they didn’t *do* anything but have meetings.² Those organizations that will continue to prosper are the ones that give their members opportunities to tap into their inner reserves and develop in many ways—to have an impact upon some, and not just one, of the many aspects of people’s lives.

Fredonia Grange has brought comfort to a number of people, both members and nonmembers, whose lives it has touched. To some extent, its members embody the Grange principles of faith, hope, charity, and fidelity. All of those interviewed with any real connection to Fredonia asserted that it and its members helped renew their faith that people were still kind, caring, and good. To them, Fredonia embodies the homely virtues that are associated with rural pastoralism. It has helped smooth some of the rough edges

¹ Helen Peck, quoted by Helen Hazen, interview by author, October 25, 2001.

² If an organization has only a meeting to offer, that gathering had better be really extraordinary. In the twenty-first century, there are just too many demands and distractions for an organization that is not truly competitive to remain relevant. In Athol’s view, most Masonic lodges had become irrelevant. Athol Hazen, Jr., interview by author, January 30, 2003.

of life. Yet for all its kindness, Fredonia has not made itself essential to the existence of most in its communities; it has not justified its continued existence. If the Grange, in general, died, most people would not notice. A few would be saddened and disadvantaged, particularly its devoted members and some nonmembers who have benefited from Fredonia's largesse. But life would go on, basically unchanged. There would be gaps and senses of loss in places like Marshall. But the community would survive with little impact; in the nation as a whole, there would be nary a ripple.

The author is very grateful for the insights that her work with Fredonia Grange has afforded. She is eager to apply its lessons and strategies to other groups to determine what is applicable. At this point, she believes that it holds great promise. The research has intimated the enormous power that a group of like-minded people, working as one toward a common goal that they find fulfilling, meaningful, affirming, can have—even those who may seem conventionally powerless, marginalized, and voiceless. It has given a glimpse of the tremendous force that communication, effectively used, can wield, both within and without the organization. With the author's assistance, Fredonia Grange used brainstorming, problem-solving, oral histories, focus groups, press releases, essays, presentations, exhibits to gather and disseminate information about them, their projects, and their causes. These things vastly increased Fredonia's profile within its communities.³ It was able to fashion a public identity and become a part of the

³ During the period between July 2002 and July 2004, the author wrote a series of press releases for about two dozen enrichment programs on such topics as monarch butterflies, special holiday programming, hearing awareness, the National Farmers' Organization, cross symbolism, spinning and felting, Native American religion, one-room schoolhouses, gardening with native wildflowers. Beyond drawing people to the enrichment programs, interviewees believed that the articles raised Fredonia Grange's stature within the greater community. "I've told people before that—I was a member of Fredonia Grange, and all the stuff that we have in the papers, and in the *AD-visor* and in the *Chronicle* and all this stuff. And they say, 'Oh, you're those people who are always doing somethin'.' That's good." Russ Clutter, remarks at focus group, November 18, 2003. "When you're *talking* about getting the *word* out, though—that's one thing, I think,

consciousness of many local residents. It was able to achieve all this, even though it was, at heart, a social organization. Although Fredonia continued to craft resolutions that it sent on to the State Grange and the legislature, the Grange had lost most if not all of its political clout—it was just too small an organization to be an effective lobbying group, to appear on most politician’s radar screens. It had no real effect upon issues that pertained to basic human needs: food, shelter, clothing, safety, health, education, justice.

But what about an organization that did work to address some of these needs? If Fredonia Grange was able to help its members find fulfillment while dealing with adjunct issues, how much more fulfilling might it be for those who banded together to realize some of life’s essences, resolve its compelling needs? The possibilities are infinite; a few of them include: a community or group struggling to maintain its way of life—trying to support the cohesiveness of families and cultures; people trying to retain their traditional homelands, neighborhoods, livelihoods; people trying to maintain their identities, integrity, and a measure of control as they try to obtain necessary goods and services without being co-opted by a huge, bureaucratic system. The author’s research and experience among rural and small-town communities has led her to suspect that, outside the rarefied air of academia, many people have difficulties conceptualizing and articulating the issues and problems that beset them. They lack the ideational background, tools, training, and tradition for this. They need to be able to delineate who and what they are, what they want, what threatens that, and how they can resolve the

our Grange is so *strong* on—is, like—we have the *Marshall AD-visor* and the *Battle Creek Shopper* that come out. So if people can’t even afford a newspaper, they get those once a *week*. And a lot of what’s going *on* are in those. And so—anybody that was—you know, be *interested at all*—they’re knowing that there’s *something* going on all the *time*. . . .” Twylia Webber, remarks at focus group, November 22, 2003. Mary Houghton, e-mail to author, April 24, 2004; Athol Hazen, e-mail to author, April 25, 2004; Randy Nail, e-mail to author, April 25, 2004; Rich Hazen, e-mail to author, April 26, 2004.

difficulties. They need to unite and have their passions kindled by the mutual fire of a significant objective. Working together towards this, finding a way to resolve it, and attaining the goal would be extremely fulfilling. Then they would need to analyze, evaluate, renew, and move on to the next aim.

Reflections on Altruism

Many of those involved in this study expressed the empowerment that they gain from community service. They explained that they receive the most wonderful feeling—that they reap far more than they sow. They would like others to share in the exhilaration of helping others. There is also a pragmatic element to this. These people realize that with all the best intentions in the world, alone, their actions are extremely limited: as individuals, they can only make so many hats and warm so many heads. But as they join together with others who desire to make a difference, they push back the limitations and barriers exponentially. As they pull in more people, they are able to accomplish more. As they accomplish more and their profile rises, they attract more adherents. So it is a beneficent cycle. People who have belonged to a group for a time and who have come to perceive and believe in its efficacy know that they can accomplish more in combination with others than they can alone.

In the first community focus group, during the interactive exercises, when the moderator asked what would characterize the ideal community-service organization, one participant responded “joy.” The speaker was no pious Pollyanna, but was an extraordinarily perceptive and sagacious community activist. She believed that it was morally and ethically imperative for those who could help others to do so—and that so acting, in accordance with one’s beliefs, should make one joyful. But also, from a

strictly practical perspective, she knew that one of the surest ways to perpetuate and expand a group is to make membership in it enjoyable. People who enjoy one another's company can often make even ostensibly onerous jobs fun. People having a good time draw others to them.⁴

There is a limit to just how big any one group can or should be in order to continue to be effective: to be able to keep efficaciously performing community service and giving its members the empowerment, reinforcement, and fulfillment that they need. There is no set number for this upward limit: it will vary with the particular organization, its locale, its membership, etc. A vibrant organization does not want its people to start feeling like nameless numbers instead of core components of the group. Long before that happens, it needs to subdivide into smaller cells that retain the characteristics that drew them to the larger organization initially.

As the author became familiar with a number of Fredonia Grange's activities and the positive influence that these had on its members' greater communities, she reflected on this with some of her close associates. She described the joy that members seemed to derive from performing various community-service activities. One confidante replied in exasperation: "You think that these people are so great, that they do so much good! What do they really do for anyone else? They only do the things that they do because they enjoy them, because those activities make them feel good. They are nothing more than selfish."⁵ This prompted a long discussion and even more thought. Is helping others only a positive thing if it makes one miserable in the process? Does enjoying community service cancel out its benefits? Why should deriving joy by living closer to one's ideals

⁴ A., focus group, November 12, 2002.

be a negative? Perhaps there is an underlying assumption that only martyrs attain paradise; and if they live a life of misery, here, they will be all the more ready for the ultimate departure.

If behaving in certain ways, reaching out to serve others and fill community needs because one feels that that is the “right” way to live is selfish, then perhaps many of those most revered for their good works, frequently described as altruistic, are really nothing more than selfish. Perhaps, also, altruism and selfishness are not diametric opposites, polar ends on a spectrum, but really much closer together, flip sides of the coin, distinguished most of all by their aims and accomplishments. This study neither sought nor found perfect motivations behind community-service actions. It was a study involving flesh and blood people, with all their idiosyncrasies, warts, inconsistencies. Motivations for their activities ran the gamut, with some more selfless than others. But, despite other influences, all those studied did have a genuine desire and need to serve and to fill the void that now exists in community service and were taking concrete steps to do so. Moribund organizations would probably love to have such selfish members.

The Journey Continues

Although this is a chapter of conclusions, in many ways the work and research presaged by this study is just beginning. As has been mentioned, when the author attended a conference in February 2003, she had the opportunity to interact with practitioners and advocates for rural, frontier, and small town community. She learned that the community issues that she was exploring were not just theoretically interesting, but held the potential to be of great use in practical applications by those who strove to

⁵ B., frequent discussions with author about community, altruism, and the Grange, 2002–4, various

create and maintain viable, sustaining communities. Most of the methods and instruments used in this study were designed with short- and longer-term goals in mind. In the short term, a goal was to see whether the methods and instruments would be apposite for this case study, whether they could ascertain aspects of community and community service, while at the same time helping to nurture, support, and empower those very institutions. The reactions of those involved in the case study were overwhelmingly positive. To a large extent, they look upon the strategies of the study as means that have helped them find their voices—and, to some extent, themselves.

One of the great limitations of this study is that it deals with a group that is, to some extent, a voluntary club, one that does not, on a continual basis, address any truly compelling need. Fredonia Grange does address many community needs on a limited basis: it does many things for the public good. It is also true that Fredonia has a modest membership with constrained resources, so its ability to rectify problems is circumscribed. Nevertheless, even within these parameters, Fredonia's causes are notable because they are not consuming, they do not elicit passion among members. There is not the sense that the fate of something important rests with them. Indeed, the Grange has traditionally eschewed controversy.⁶ This has probably contributed, in some ways, to its longevity. But in other ways, it has robbed it, on a larger scale, of vitality and relevance: the group that is for everything is, in essence, for nothing. Fredonia Grange members are not hungry in any sense, they are not consumed by a particular goal, they do not feel that a Grange project on which they work is the most important thing in their lives. Although they work very hard on fund-raisers in order to help charitable causes,

locations, notes, in author's possession.

⁶ Please see chapter five, on Grange history, for more detail on this.

they can, by and large, detach themselves from these causes: they are not places in which the members dwell, they do not impinge significantly upon their lives. The members of Fredonia Grange are, by and large, comfortable with their lives, complacent in their roles and activities. Complacency is inimical to the quest for something better—the search for equality in such areas as justice, fairness, economic opportunities, education, healthcare, resources, governance, transportation, telecommunication, etc. The people of Fredonia Grange, to a great extent, do not wish to leave their comfort zones; to a large degree, it is unnecessary for them to do so. They are not confronted by any significant, palpable challenges to their way of life. The Grange makes life pleasanter for a number of people, members and nonmembers alike. But it does not touch the core of many people or issues.

This study has unearthed possible answers to some questions; but doing so has raised further questions. Among the most impelling to the author: How much more might the methods and tools used in this study accomplish with groups and communities who have far more compelling needs? The author plans to find out. The success of this study (indicating that these methods can work productively in the field, with very little support, and have a very positive effect on those involved) has inspired her to look further afield for applications. She is haunted by people's need, expressed over and over in the laments of communities and organizations in crisis, to be able to conceptualize, formulate, articulate, motivate so that they *can* create and maintain their communities—communities replete with those things that make them viable. They need to be able to discern who, what, and where they are; where they want and need to be; and how they can get from an obstructed present to a promising, hopeful future. They must be able to enunciate these things to themselves, to one another, and to the outside world or

they are not living fully realized lives but are merely existing. In short, they need to be able to communicate so that they can organize, advocate, and attain their meaningful objectives. This researcher is taking steps to address some of these needs.

She is planning a series of workbooks and handbooks that will lead people through the steps of various communication techniques. They will provide a foundation upon which people can build and adapt in order to: hold brainstorming sessions; perform communication audits of their groups and communities; create oral histories to preserve their legacies; conduct focus groups; fashion mission and vision statements that can guide their courses and be adapted to the changing exigencies of their lives. They will also offer strategies for getting people's messages out by such means as transmitting press releases and articles (free media coverage), making presentations and displays in a variety of venues, and looking for cooperative alliances with such institutions as public broadcasting in order to make and disseminate documentaries that chronicle their lives, cultures, and homelands. These guides would be distributed in a series of workshops that would provide much interaction, support, and practical examples. The workshops would cover much of the printed material; the guides would provide convenient future reference. The workshops would also offer tutorials in using the Internet as a practical research tool. High speed Internet access and connectivity is an issue of vital concern to rural areas. It is seen as a parity tool that can help offset, to some degree, the negative aspects of rural isolation. So there is good reason to suspect that many in even very remote areas will have access to the Internet.⁷ They then need support in how to use it effectively. In terms of communication, in particular, the author will demonstrate some

⁷ Rural Development, "President Bush's Broadband Initiative," United States Department of Agriculture, <http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/broadband-initiatives.htm> (accessed October 18, 2004).

of the Internet's uses in disseminating messages: e-mail, including postings to listservs, letters to the editor of newspapers, press releases sent to every paper with an e-mail presence; a Web site, with text, pictures, digital components, such as video and audio of oral histories, activities, etc.

The author envisions a "train the trainer" program. She would get referrals from the network of rural advocates and practitioners whom she first met at the conference in February 2003. They would direct her to local community leaders seeking help to keep their communities and groups vital. She would set up workshops with a group of local leaders. Every area has such individuals, those to whom others look for guidance; they usually fill some local need: a healthcare worker, a teacher, a minister, a businessperson, a leader of the local coop, a banker, a leading farmer, for example. The workshops would draw on people from a region, with the understanding that they would then go home and adapt and utilize the tools and techniques that they had learned. The author would provide channels of communication between herself and workshop participants so that they could continue to get support and the answers to their questions in the aftermath of the sessions. The author would arrange for follow-up evaluation in a given time to help people make advisable adjustments and determine where they should go from there.

The author has contacted some of the groups and communities that are trying to maintain viability, melding tradition and geographical rootedness with the need to adapt, to some degree, to the pressures and demands of modern life. They have a compulsion to eliminate the egregious disparities between rural and urban in socioeconomic status, education, healthcare, transportation, communication. These overtures have met with a favorable response. As one might gather from this litany of deficiency, however, these

groups with such imperative needs lack the resources to adequately address them and to finance the sorts of guides and workshops that the author envisions. So the other prong of this attack is to find adequate funding. There are a number of private funders that might be tapped for this, most notably the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.⁸ The United States Department of Agriculture also has a number of programs under whose aegis these efforts might fall.⁹

Bringing this all together is, to a large extent, a matter of presentation and perseverance. This is not an easy, tidy project, with quick resolutions. But the need is compelling and the possibilities virtually illimitable. So the steps on that thousand-mile journey have begun.

⁸ W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Food Systems and Rural Development General Grantmaking Knowledgebase," <http://www.wkkf.org/Knowledgebase/Grants/Results.aspx?CID=4> (accessed October 18, 2004).

⁹ Rural Development, "Committed to the Future of Rural Communities," United States Department of Agriculture, <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/> (accessed October 18, 2004); Office of Community Development, "Welcome Page," United States Department of Agriculture, <http://ocdweb.sc.egov.usda.gov/> (accessed October 18, 2004).

APPENDIX

ORAL HISTORY QUESTION PATH FOR HELEN PECK

-) Could you tell me where and when you were born?**
 -) Did you grow up there?**
-) Could you tell me about your life then?**
-) When did you join the Grange?**
 -) How old were you then? (Thirty-three, according to Athol?)**
-) What Grange did you join? (Partello?)**
 -) Where was that?**
-) Please tell me about your experiences in that Grange.**
 -) Who were some of the people that you knew? What were they like?**
 -) What were some of the things that you did in that Grange?**
-) Did you continue to belong to that Grange?**
 -) If not, what happened? (Ultimately, Helen joined Fredonia Grange.)**
-) Please tell me about your experiences in Fredonia Grange.**
 -) Tell me about the people you have known.**
 -) Tell me about your activities in that Grange.**
-) What involvement have you had with the State and the National Granges? (State Home Economics Chairman, attendance at State and National Grange Conventions, involvement in conservation.)**
-) Helen and Athol Hazen have told me that you were Fredonia Grange's pianist for years, that you taught music to their children, and that you were a music teacher in the country schools. Could you tell me more about these things and the role that music has played in your life?**
-) Please tell me about your work with B. E. Henry and with the B. E. Henry Building. (Helen worked for B. E. Henry at one point, was instrumental in getting the building built, and served as treasurer for many years of the association.)**
-) Could you tell me what belonging to the Grange has meant to you?**

ORAL HISTORY QUESTION PATH: INTERVIEWS WITH OTHER GRANGERS ABOUT HELEN PECK¹

-) When and how did you first meet Helen Peck?
-) What contact have you had with Helen since then?
-) Could you tell me what you know about Helen's family and home life? (Where she came from, her early years, her husbands, her children [how many, names, ages, where they are now, are they Grangers], the Peck farm, etc.)
-) Could you tell me about your relationship with Helen? (What I am looking for here is the ways that you may have worked with Helen in the Grange and the community.)
-) Would you share some of the experiences that you have had with Helen? (Any anecdotes that you could share about Helen and Fredonia Grange and the Calhoun Pomona Grange, for example, would be wonderful. I was told that Helen was terrific at thinking of projects for the Grange to do.)
-) Please tell me what you know about Helen's work with the Grange, beyond your personal experiences. (This would include things that you might know from other Grangers, for example.)
-) If you know anything about Helen's other community activities, would you share them, please? (B. E. Henry Community Building, Newton United Methodist Church, her work as a music teacher, etc.)
-) What impact has Helen had on your life?
-) What impact do you think Helen has had on the community and on the lives of others? (Helen and Vern as leaders, guides, examples, and inspirations to others. The contributions she made through the sale of her farm to the church, the Grange, and the B. E. Henry Community Building.)

¹ Because of Helen Peck's age and frail health, the author did not know if she would be able to interview her in person. So the interviews *about* Helen Peck preceded the one *with* Helen Peck. Despite this, there really was no redundancy in content—just more strands added to the rich fabric of Helen's life.

ORAL HISTORY QUESTION PATH: GENERAL INTERVIEWS WITH GRANGERS

-) How long have you belonged to the Grange?
 -) When did you first join?
 -) Have you been an active member ever since?
-) Why did you join the Grange?
-) Have you always belonged to the same Grange?
-) Please tell us about the Grange(s) to which you have belonged.
-) Please share some of the experiences that you have had in the Grange. (Activities in which you have participated, offices held, conferences attended, etc.)
-) Please tell us about some of the memorable people whom you have known in the Grange, or because of your Grange membership.
-) Why do you continue to belong to the Grange?
-) How do you think that the Grange can enrich people's lives (both members and non-members?)
 -) Do you recommend that people join the Grange? Why or why not?
-) What roles do you see the Grange playing in the twenty-first century?
 -) Do you think it is necessary for the Grange to change? Why or why not? How?
 -) How do you think that the Grange can continue to be relevant?
-) What does being a Grange member mean to you? What influence has the Grange had on your life?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?²

We need your opinions. ("We" are the Grange, a community-service organization with a strong rural, agricultural heritage, and strong contemporary social and environmental interests, working with a researcher from Michigan State University. We have a passion for improving our community.) What do you think about our community? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? What do you think would make it a better place? Please share your thoughts with us, so that we can make this a better place.

Beginning in November, we are going to have a series of discussion sessions with community members, asking them for their ideas on such topics as these. We would like you to be a part of this process. The sessions will consist of small groups, and should last no more than two hours. They will be held on weekday evenings and Saturdays. We ask you to be a part of only one session. The sessions will be held in Marshall. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on your community. Famous Grange refreshments will be served. In addition, everyone who attends will receive a Grange-made bluebird nesting box. (This is another way that we are seeking to improve our community, by helping to restore this valuable friend of humanity.)

Participating in a discussion group in no way obligates you. No one is trying to sell you anything—no one will be nagging you to do anything. What we want is just what we say—your opinions on how we can better serve community needs. Will you share your thoughts with us, so that we can make this a better place? Please fill out the bottom of this form and turn it in, so that we can schedule you for a discussion session.

If you cannot fill out the form now, you can take it with you, complete it, and send it back to Athol Hazen, Jr., 9890 22 Mile Road, Marshall, MI 49068. You can also call Athol at (269) 781-5204 to sign up or if you have questions about the form or the project.

Thank you for your time in reading this and giving us your consideration. We hope that you will agree to share your valuable thoughts with us. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Name

Address

Telephone No.

E-Mail Address

² Fredonia Grange Community Focus Group Promotional/Sign Up Sheet.

FOCUS GROUP ROOM REQUIREMENTS

-) Quiet, comfortable room, sufficiently lighted, free from distractions
-) Large enough table and comfortable chairs to accommodate all participants
-) Registration forms/guest book to record people's names and addresses (we need to send follow-up thank-yous and a summary of our report)
-) Tape recorder
-) Cassette Tapes—90 minutes
-) Omnidirectional microphone
-) Clock easily seen by moderator
-) Table on side/back of room for refreshments, incentives, Grange materials (display boards, brochures, applications, etc.)
-) Paper and pencils for moderator and assistant moderator's notes
-) Paper and pencils for participants' use—such as suggestions to improve groups, ideas for community and service organization improvement, names to consider for additional focus groups
-) Flip chart easel
-) Flip chart pad
-) Flip chart marker
-) Business cards with contact information
-) Index cards (3 x 5) to make name tents

FURTHER CONTACT WITH FOCUS GROUP SIGN-UPS

After Participants Sign Up

-) **Send a confirming letter**, including **date, time, location, MAP, contact information**.
 -) Mention that in case of bad weather, we will reschedule.
-) **Make a reminder phone call** one to two days before the event to jog participants' memories.
 -) Okay to leave this message on a machine.
 -) Give contact information in case they have to reschedule.
 -) Say that in case of bad weather, we will call and give them an alternate date.

After Focus Groups

-) **Send thank-you letters**
 -) Invite further contact—but leave initiative up to attendees.
-) Send summary of completed report, indicating broad ideas that focus groups revealed.

RECRUITING SCRIPT: CALHOUN COUNTY FOCUS GROUPS

Hello, my name is _____, of Fredonia Community Grange. We need your opinions for ways that community service organizations, like the Grange, can help to make our community better. We are working with a researcher from Michigan State University who is exploring such issues as: What do you think about our community? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? What would improve it?

Beginning in November, we are going to have a series of discussion sessions with community members, asking them for their ideas on such topics as these. We would like you to be a part of this process. The sessions will consist of small groups, and should last no more than two hours. They will be held on weekday evenings and Saturday afternoons. We ask you to be a part of only one session. The sessions will be held at the Fredonia Community Grange hall at 13738 C Drive South in Marshall. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on your community. Famous Grange refreshments will be served. In addition, everyone who attends will receive a bluebird nesting box made by the Grange. (This is another way that we are seeking to improve our community, by helping to restore this valuable friend of humanity.)

Participating in a discussion group in no way obligates you. No one is trying to sell you anything—no one will be nagging you to do anything. What we want is just what we say—your opinions on how we can better serve community needs. Will you share your thoughts with us, so that we can make this a better place?

(If person says cannot participate, thank him/her for time. Give your contact information in case s/he reconsiders.)

(If person agrees to participate, give dates, times, and locations of available sessions and sign person up for one. Try to get commitment now: avoid follow-up if possible—too easy for people to get sidetracked.)

After signing person for a session:

Thank you for agreeing to help us. We will be sending you a letter shortly, confirming the details (date, time, place) of your discussion session. We will also call you the day before the session as a reminder.

Do you know anyone whom you think would like to be a part of a discussion session?

We appreciate your agreeing to share your valuable thoughts with us. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Good bye.

DATE³

DEAR NAME,

It was a pleasure talking with you. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the discussion session scheduled for DATE & TIME. As was mentioned, the discussion will be held at the Fredonia Community Grange Hall, 13738 C Drive South, Marshall. I am enclosing a map to help you find us.

As I noted during our recent conversation, we need your opinions for ways that community-service organizations, like the Grange, can help to make our community better. We are working with a researcher from Michigan State University who is exploring such issues as: What do you think about our community? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? What would improve it?

You have agreed to take part in one of a series of discussion sessions with community members in which we will be asking them for their ideas on such topics as these. We appreciate your willingness to contribute to this process. The sessions will consist of small groups, and should last no more than two hours. We ask you to be a part of only one session. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on your community. Famous Grange refreshments will be served. In addition, everyone who attends will receive a bluebird nesting box made by the Grange. (This is another way that we are seeking to improve our community—by helping to restore this valuable friend of humanity.)

Participating in a discussion group in no way obligates you. No one is trying to sell you anything—no one will be nagging you to do anything. What we want is just what we say—your opinions on how we can better serve community needs. Your sharing your thoughts with us will help us make this a better place.

We will call you the day before the discussion as a reminder. In case of bad weather, we will reschedule. In the meantime, if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas that you would like to share, or if you need clarification of the directions or details of the session, please contact me at: 9890 22 Mile Road, Marshall, MI 49068, (269) 781-5204, atholhazen@aol.com. If you would like to recommend others whom you feel would contribute to these discussions, we would welcome your suggestions.

Thank you for agreeing to share your valuable thoughts with us. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Sincerely,

Athol Hazen, Jr.

³Fredonia Grange Community Focus Group Confirmation Letter.

FOCUS GROUP CONFIRMATION PHONE CALL

Hello, this is _____, of Fredonia Community Grange. I am calling to remind you of the discussion session in which you have agreed to take part tomorrow, DATE, from TIME, at the Fredonia Community Grange Hall at 13738 C Drive South, Marshall. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact us at 781-5204 or atholhazen@aol.com. Thank you for agreeing to share your valuable thoughts with us. We look forward to hearing what you have to say. Good bye.

RULES FOR ASSISTANT MODERATORS⁴

1. **Take responsibility for all equipment.** Ensure that it works and is complete.
 - Tape recorder
 - Microphone
 - Extension cords (power and microphone)
 - Blank tapes
 - Name tents or name tags
 - Honoraria
 - Marking pens
 - Refreshments
 - Duct tape to hold down the cords
 - Spare batteries
 - Visuals or handouts
2. **Take responsibility for refreshments.** Obtain the refreshments and set them up in the room.
3. **Arrange the room.** Rearrange chairs and table so that everyone can see each other. Be attentive to background noises that would affect the audio recording.
4. **Set up the equipment** and verify that it is working properly.
5. **Welcome participants as they arrive.**
6. **Sit in the designated location.** Sit outside the circle, opposite the moderator, and close to the door. If someone arrives after the session begins, meet the person at the door, take him or her outside the room, and give him or her a short briefing about what has happened and the current topic of discussion. Then bring the late participant into the room and show him or her where to sit.
7. **Take notes throughout the discussion.** Be attentive to the following areas of concern:
 - *Well said quotes.* Capture word for word as much of the statement as possible. Listen for sentences or phrases that are particularly enlightening or eloquently express a particular point of view. Place quotation marks around the statement or phrase and indicate the name of the speaker. Place your opinions, thoughts, or ideas in parentheses to keep them separate from participant comments. If a question occurs to you that you would like to ask at the end of the discussion, write it down in a circle or box.
 - *Note the nonverbal activity.* Watch for head nods, physical excitement, eye contact between participants, or other clues that would indicate level of agreement, support, or interest.
 - *Make a sketch of the seating arrangement.*
8. **Monitor recording equipment.** Occasionally glance at the tape recorder to see if the reels are moving. Turn over the tape or insert another tape when appropriate. Attempt to do this as smoothly as possible without drawing attention to the recording equipment. Label the cassette tapes. Indicate date, location, and number each tape.
9. **Do not participate in the discussion!** You talk only if invited by the moderator. Control your nonverbal actions no matter how strongly you feel about an issue.

⁴ Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 124-25.

- 10. Ask questions when invited.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator will invite you to ask questions of amplification or clarification.
- 11. Give an oral summary.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator or assistant should provide a brief summary (about three minutes) of responses to the important questions. Invite participants to offer additions or corrections to the summary.
- 12. Hand out the honoraria and thank the participants.**
- 13. Debrief the session with the moderator.** Following the focus group, participate in the debriefing with the moderator.
- 14. Read and provide feedback on the analysis.**

The Grange, Past and Present: COMMUNITY CONSENT FORM⁵

My name is Jacqui Lowman. I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University. One of my particular research interests is rural and small-town life and community. This has led me to work with the Grange, a community service organization with a strong rural, agricultural heritage, and strong contemporary social and environmental interests. They have a passion for working to improve their communities. I am asking you, as a community member, to share your thoughts on such topics as: What do you think about your community? What are its strengths? Its weaknesses? What do you think would make it a better place?

You are participating in one of a series of discussion sessions with community members, in which they are asked to share their ideas on such areas. Each session consists of a small group of people, and should last no longer than two hours. You are asked to be part of only one session. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on your community. Refreshments (including famous Grange food) will be served. In addition, everyone who attends will receive a bluebird nesting box made by the Grange. (This is another way to improve your community, by helping to restore this valuable friend of humanity.)

Although you are being asked to sign this consent form, you are in complete control of your undergoing this process; you can cut it off at any time and/or refuse to answer any specific questions. If you would like to add to, delete from, change, or talk about your discussion contributions at any point, please feel free to contact me: Jacqui Lowman, 628 Foote Street, Charlotte, MI 48813-1270, (517) 541-3344, lowmanja@msu.edu.

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your identity will remain anonymous in any report of the research findings.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Lucinda Davenport, Professor, Graduate Program Chair of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, 305 Communication Arts and Sciences Building, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 355-6574, ludavenp@msu.edu. In addition, if you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonously, if you wish—Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, e-mail: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

⁵ University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) approval for this project expires July 26, 2005.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION PATH⁶

INTRODUCTION

Good evening/afternoon and welcome to our discussion session. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. My name is Jacqui Lowman. I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University. Assisting me are Athol Hazen and Randy Nail, community advocates. One of my particular research interests is rural and small-town life and community. This has led me to work with the Grange, a community-service organization with a strong rural, agricultural heritage, and strong contemporary social and environmental interests. They have a passion for working to improve their communities. You are being asked, as a community member, to share your thoughts on such topics as: What do you think about your community? What are its strengths? Its weaknesses? What do you think would make it a better place?

You are participating in one of a series of discussion sessions with community members, in which they are asked to share their ideas on such areas. Each session consists of a small group of people. You are asked to be part of only one session. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on your community.

⁶ Flexibility has been built into this script. Some questions in the question path are considered significant, some vital, and some optional: the first type is preceded by no special indicator; the latter two types are preceded by asterisks or question marks, respectively. Thus, if participants spend more time than anticipated on certain questions and the moderator is concerned about staying on schedule, he or she can

Tonight/today you will be sharing your ideas and perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said. Each person's thoughts and feelings are equally valid.

Before we begin, let me share some ground rules. This is strictly a research project: no one is trying to sell you anything; no one is going to nag you to do anything. We need you to please speak up, and to try to talk only one at a time. We are tape-recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. If several people talk at the same time, the tape will be garbled and we will miss your thoughts. We will use first names only tonight/today, and in later reports comments will be anonymous—your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Although it may seem surprising, we are just as interested in negative comments as in positive ones: at times the negative comments are most helpful.

Our session will last about two hours. Let's begin. We have placed name cards around the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out more about one another by going around the room one at a time.

readily judge those questions that are not essential: they provide amplification and nuances, but skipping them will not be fatal. Text written in bold largely is not to be spoken but contains instructions.

OPENING STATEMENT

Let's introduce ourselves, giving our first names and how we feel. I'll start. I'm Jacqui, and I am really, really excited to be here and have the opportunity to learn from you as you share your thoughts and ideas. (**Turn to assistant.**)

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS (15-20 minutes)

****)** What does the word "community" mean to you?

****)** How would you define your community?

) What do you like about your community?

) What do you dislike about your community?

?) What are your community's strengths?

?) What are your community's weaknesses?

?) What are your community's opportunities?

?) What are your community's threats?

TRANSITION QUESTIONS (15-20 minutes)

**) What does the term "community service" mean to you?

) What do you know about local community-service organizations?

) Please give names of some of them, and what they do.

?) What is it that makes each one distinct?

) How important are the ceremonial functions of an organization?

) Do they attract you?

) Do they make you uncomfortable?

*) What values should community-service organizations promote?

*) How could community-service organizations work better together?

KEY QUESTIONS (30 minutes)

-) What are the biggest problems faced by community-service organizations?
- ?) What can community-service organizations do to make the community better?
-) Do you belong to any community-service organizations?
-) Why or why not?
- *) To which community-service organizations would you give time and/or resources if you could?
- ?) What would lead you to become involved with a community-service organization?

Flip Chart/Interactive Exercises

- **) Help me to create the ideal community-service organization.
 -) What is it like?
 -) What does it do?
- **) Now help me to describe the best possible community for five years from now.

) How has the ideal community-service organization helped to bring this about?

) How would you promote the community and the organization to others?

ENDING QUESTIONS (20 minutes)

****)** What do you think was the most important idea to emerge from the discussion?

) What appealed to you the most?

****)** **(Give Summary of Discussion.)** Is this an adequate summary?

OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE OF FOCUS-GROUP STUDY

The Grange grew from rural roots in 1867, and was dedicated to improving the lives of the members of its communities. One hundred thirty-five years later, it continues this mission. At a time when the majority of the population were farmers, so were its members. As the demographics of the country shifted, so, too, did the Grange's. Today, one can find people from all walks of life within the Grange.

The Grange and its programs are open to all, without regard to race, color, gender, religion, national origin, political persuasion, sexual orientation, marital status, handicap, height, weight, veteran status, or age. People can transcend any of these supposed

barriers, interacting with one another and creating a true family environment. All are welcomed, valued, and given a voice in defining and fulfilling the organization's mission.

The Grange, as a whole, is involved in many issues. It remains true to its rural and environmental heritage by working to address such needs as: farmland, wetland, and grassland preservation; conservation of wildlife habitat; protection of environmental quality (air, water, soil); high-speed Internet access for rural areas (which would enhance such aspects as rural education); improved rural healthcare.

The other essential characteristic of the Grange is its deep involvement in community service. Each local Grange strives to serve and reflect the interests of its community. As they work to attain these goals, members can find numerous opportunities for development, growth, and leadership. And, not least, Grange members have a good time for a good cause.

The Grange seeks to continue to be relevant and vital into the twenty-first century, and beyond. That is why we have asked for your opinions on how we can better serve your community's—and your individual—needs and aspirations.

****)** Have We Missed Anything?

***)** What advice do you have for us?

EXPLAIN THE PROCESS—WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We expect to be holding discussions through January or early February. We will then analyze the discussions, comparing and contrasting to find the major themes and ideas that have emerged. After this we will write up a report and make recommendations to the Grange. At least a summary of the report will be available to all those who have participated in the discussions, as well as other interested parties—you are a vital part of this process. Based on the report and recommendations, the Grange will set goals and strive to achieve them. Progress will be evaluated and reported regularly. We see this series of discussions as only the first stage in an ongoing dialogue with members of the community. We plan to hold additional discussions periodically. And we are always open to questions, comments, and suggestions.

****) Thank people for coming. Ask them, if they feel comfortable doing so, to write down the names and addresses of others whom they feel would like to share their opinions.**

MODERATOR AND ASSISTANT MODERATOR DEBRIEFING⁷

Typically, researchers will want to discuss the focus group and this can be most productive if it is tape recorded for use in the subsequent analysis. First impressions are forgotten and the researcher can lose sight of these initial reactions unless they are documented. In the debriefing the moderator team might discuss the following points:

- Most important themes or ideas expressed.
- Most noteworthy quotes.
- Unexpected or unanticipated findings.
- Comparison and contrast of this focus group with other groups or with what they had expected.
- Usefulness of questions and need for revision and adjustment.

⁷ Krueger, *Focus Groups*, 148-49.

DATE⁸

DEAR _____:

Phase one of the community discussions in which you played such a vital part is finally complete. Condensing the wonderful ideas that you shared with us into a brief report was really difficult. In this round, so many of the things that we would like to do had to be omitted from our action recommendations since they do not match our present capabilities. Ultimately, a deciding factor was what we thought that Fredonia Grange might conceivably and realistically tackle. The results are enclosed for your review.

We have found this process to be tremendously informative and empowering. We hope that you have enjoyed it even partially as much as we have. We believe that, because of your generous sharing of thoughts and time, we now have a better understanding of our community's wants and needs. This would not have been possible without your help.

As we mentioned, this is only the conclusion of phase one. Now the real work begins. Fredonia Grange must begin to implement some of the action recommendations that have arisen from these discussions. We plan to set goals and to periodically evaluate our progress toward these goals. We will update you on this accordingly.

As we said when we sat together in discussion, we see this as only the first stage in an ongoing dialogue with members of the community. We hope that you will continue to maintain contact with us and to share your thoughts in whatever way that you wish. We plan to hold additional discussions periodically. And we are always open to questions, comments, and suggestions.

Once again, thank you for the time and interest that you have given to Fredonia Grange. This is playing a vital role in helping us to remain a relevant, responsive, viable community-service organization.

Sincerely,

Athol Hazen, Secretary, Fredonia Community Grange

Jacqui Lowman, Facilitator, Fredonia Community Grange Focus Groups

⁸ Focus group participant thank you—sent upon completion of groups, preparation of report.

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Introduction

Over a period of several months, we held a series of discussions with members of the greater Marshall community to discover what they think about their community. In particular, we sought to learn what they view as community needs and how they think that a community-service organization, such as the Grange, could help address and resolve some of these issues.

We believe that it was an exciting, empowering experience for everyone involved. Each discussion was to last two hours; in each instance, they ran over that time. People found the interactions so stimulating that they did not want them to end. This is especially noteworthy, since many of the people did not previously know one another. Indeed, the people who attended came from across the greater Marshall geographical area and spanned a wide range of ages, backgrounds, occupations, interests, etc. Yet they were united by the beliefs that community is important, that it can be improved, and that individual efforts within it can make a difference.

The discussions were taped. Then a complete transcript of each was prepared, the cumulative total of which amounted to over 250 pages of text. These were analyzed, looking for significant points and common themes.

The following report is, by necessity, an extreme condensation of these discussions. Choosing what to mention and what to omit was very difficult. The final product is not so much a value judgment on the ultimate worth of thoughts expressed, but rather a reflection of what we think is particularly relevant for Fredonia Grange and touches upon issues that we might feasibly tackle.

Summary of Relevant Points

People came in with various definitions of **Community**. But after sharing ideas, the consensus was that a community is a group with common interest(s). People thought that community should be able to overcome narrow geographical constraints. Indeed, they believe that an organization that draws people from a broad spectrum should take the lead in helping to bridge these barriers. In the words of one participant, "Athol, the Grange would be perfect."

People are attracted to an organization that is **Open** and **Friendly**. They want a place where all are welcome. They seek a place in which guests are made to feel not as outsiders, but as though they truly belong. If members and nonmembers are not made continually welcome, they will not stay.

Leadership was continually emphasized. People are looking for an organization that will provide leadership within their communities. They are looking for an organization that is not afraid to tackle difficult problems or to take a principled stand. They are

looking for an organization that provides opportunities to develop leadership skills—and to use them. They believe that leadership should continually renew itself by gaining new ideas, by rotating people into different areas and positions.

Tap Others. Many community-service projects can be most effectively accomplished by collaboration among community-service organizations. This needs to be well coordinated to avoid wasteful duplication of effort. Community-service organizations also need to utilize nonmembers' skills. Although some people will not join an organization, they may still wish to give freely of their talents to it. Organizations must not squander this resource.

Financial Awareness: Another recurring theme is the importance of financial resources. Without funding, a community-service organization can accomplish little. People discussed the strain that this can impose. They also talked about the importance of sound fiscal policies and having financial records that are clear and open to members. An organization must know its sources of income—how it can gain its funds. People underlined simple, hard truths: Don't spend more than you earn; spend wisely, without hasty decisions; have a budget, stick to it, and update it often.

Fellowship is a major reason that people want to be a part of a group, that they will keep coming back. In the words of participants: "You need to feel like you *belong* . . . you have to feel a certain *kinship*." You have to feel "a comfort level. And sometimes that could be expressed in how much *fun* meetings or activities are. Sometimes it could be . . . how closely you feel yourself *sharing* the mission or *values* or whatever of the group."

People feel that the heart of any organization is its members: the organization that has **Loyal, Committed** members can attain almost anything. They also believe that the organization must be **Loyal and Committed** to its members in return—this is the reward members cherish. The organization needs to help all members realize that they matter.

People highlighted the need for a **Mission Statement** and an **Organizational Chart**. In their words: "I think one of the first things an organization would need would be a very clear **Mission Statement**. Which might change. . . . But at any given time, it should know what it's doing. And letting its *people* know what it's doing. And letting the *community* know—it should have *good* relations with the community." "We should have an **Organizational Chart** from the get go . . . with *growth*, we would be filling in all these leadership areas. But . . . just starting . . . you can spread yourself too thin. You need to just *focus*, and then as you *grew*, you could *fill* out all the branches of your tree."

People are looking for a group that is **Diverse**, one in which people are willing to **Overcome** their **Prejudices** and try to get to know, understand, and accept one another as human beings. They want an organization that does not discriminate because of sex, race, ethnicity, age, handicap, religion, marital or family status, class, socioeconomic status, geographical location, etc. They noted that the Grange is very strong in some areas of diversity, very weak in others.

There was much talk about **Family Values**. People feel that many ills of society can be traced to their erosion. People with families are looking for an organization in which their entire family can belong, participate, and interact with other families. Those who do not have an extended family close by are seeking a group that will fill that void—that can become their “family.” Participants emphasized the need for people across the age spectrum, from very young to very old, to interact, share, and learn from one another.

People believe that some community groups need special attention and efforts.

They want to see more programs for **Youth**. This can be a subgroup of or a group affiliated with an adult organization—the youth/children’s group will have definite ties to the parent organization. But the youth/children’s group will be a distinct entity with its own meeting times, governing board, structure, goals, activities.

People noted that many are **Lonely, Isolated**, and with small **Fixed Incomes**. But they are also proud and fall through the holes in the traditional safety net. Their needs require something different from conventional charity. Among the suggested strategies:

1. Hold **Community Dinners** on a regular basis, such as to mark holidays like Easter, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years.
 - They should be at a central location (Marshall?).
 - Offer transportation to those who need it.
 - Potlucks could work with the organization furnishing such items as meat, potatoes, rolls, drinks, place settings.
 - *Giving people the option of bringing something relieves any stigma that they are needy.
 - Also encourage people to give physical help with the meal if they wish.
2. Establish a **Community Center** in the Marshall area. It needs a kitchen, dining area, and facilities for small groups where they can talk, play games, and watch TV.

People noted the importance of having **Local Chapters** of an organization—say every ten to fifteen miles. They believe that it is important for people to be able to gather at a nearby **Facility**—they do not think that most people will regularly travel long distances for meetings. Grange members noted that this is a traditional part of Grange structure.

Participants were very interested in a **Farmers’ Market** and a **Garden Hot Line**. The latter would be a coordinating service so that when people had grown more of an item than they needed, someone would pick the surplus and distribute it to people in need. Several people hoped that the Grange might help in these areas.

There is much interest in **Grange History**; there is also the perception that few outside people know much about it—and that this should change. People suggested that the Grange put on information sessions at which the Grange’s past, present, and future are

discussed. There was particular interest in a recreation of a traditional meeting (circa 100 years ago), complete with enrichment program, in which the participants would explain what they are doing. Nonmembers would learn from this, as would members who would become more familiar with Grange history as they prepared to enact it.

Community Newsletter: This was one of the major items discussed. People feel that there is a tremendous need for others to be connected to what is going on in the community so that they feel a part of it. People do not believe that the existing media do a good enough job of filling this need. They feel that there should be a newsletter that would go to everyone in the area and that would notify them about current and future events and basic information that could help them in their everyday lives, such as where and how to obtain various forms of assistance. Such a newsletter need not be weekly or even monthly, but it must be at regular intervals. It should coordinate and distribute information from a wide range of organizations and sources.

Get the Message Out. People underlined how important it is for organizations to promote themselves and their activities. They suggested using all forms of media: newspapers, radio, television, organizational newsletters, billboards, Web sites, e-mail, regular mail, mass mailings, documentaries, etc. They noted that enthusiasm is infectious and emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication. They suggested that networking and speaking to other organizations about your organization can be effective. There was discussion about doing good anonymously. Someone's mother said that when a good deed is done, only the doer and the recipient should know about it. Someone else responded: "The *down* side of that is that if you're *trying* to do something to help people and you want to *pull in* more people so that *they* can get that great feeling from helping people and doing more—if you *keep* it to *yourself*. . . . There is a difference between *bragging* and saying "This wonderful thing—I was able to get this wonderful *feeling* by doing something. *I* can make *x* number of hats for people. I'm only going to be able to warm so many heads. If we do this *together*. . . ."

Conclusion

Now that we have begun these dialogues with community members, we hope that we can keep them ongoing. To a person, those who have been intimately involved in this process deem it extremely valuable and would like to make conducting focus groups with the community an annual event. We believe that this is one of the best ways to take the pulse of the community and to learn how we are fitting in and can do so even better in the future. Continuing to hold these can help us to remain relevant.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Conduct **Focus Groups** with Fredonia Grange Members.

- Members need to express their views and thoughts.
- The Grange can be strengthened by knowing such things as:
 - *What attracts you to the Grange?
 - *What part of your life does Grange membership fulfill?

Develop a Comprehensive **Mission Statement**.

- Build in the capacity to adapt this as circumstances warrant.
- Use this to guide Grange activities so that Grange efforts are more cohesive and directed to overarching goals.

Formulate a Detailed **Organizational Chart**.

- This builds in the capacity to accommodate growth.
- Depending on the number and interests of members, all positions may not always be filled by different individuals.

Plan and Promote Special **Holiday Events**.

- This can be a special holiday meal or program.
- Plan it far enough ahead so that it can be promoted with press releases/articles.
- Provide transportation to those who might not otherwise be able to attend.

Be Better at **Getting Out Word** of the Grange.

- Plan activities far enough ahead so that they can be promoted.
- Realize that everything that the Grange does is an opportunity to communicate—and do so.
 - *Utilize the media.
 - *Look for opportunities to talk about the Grange to other individuals and groups.

Write a **Community News Column**.

- This is in response to a tremendous, expressed community need to have a communication conduit that will connect everyone with information about community events, organizations, ways to handle community needs. Community members do not think present newspaper coverage does this.
- Do research to learn what is the best method to distribute this—in an existing newspaper (*AD-visor*)? As a separate mailing?
- Determine how often to do this: monthly, quarterly?
- This would be tremendous community service and great networking opportunity.

Periodically **Evaluate Progress** toward These **Goals**.

Maintain Contact with Focus Group Participants.

The Grange, Past and Present: GRANGER CONSENT FORM⁹

My name is Jacqui Lowman. I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University. One of my particular research interests is rural and small-town life and community. This has led me to work with the Grange, a community-service organization with a strong rural, agricultural heritage, and strong contemporary social and environmental interests. Its members have a passion for working to improve their communities. I am asking you, as a Grange member, to share your thoughts on such topics as: What do you think about the Grange? What do you think about its community? What are their strengths? Their weaknesses? What do you think would make them better?

You are participating in one of a series of discussion sessions with Grange members in which they are asked to share their ideas on such areas. Each session consists of a small group of people, and should last no longer than two hours. You are asked to be part of only one session. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on the Grange and the community. Refreshments (including famous Grange food) will be served.

Although you are being asked to sign this consent form, you are in complete control of your undergoing this process; you can cut it off at any time and/or refuse to answer any specific questions. If you would like to add to, delete from, change, or talk about your discussion contributions at any point, please feel free to contact me: Jacqui Lowman, 628 Foote Street, Charlotte, MI 48813-1270, (517) 541-3344, lowmanja@msu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Lucinda Davenport, Professor, Graduate Program Chair of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, 305 Communication Arts and Sciences Building, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 355-6574, ludavenp@msu.edu. In addition, if you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonously, if you wish—Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180; fax: (517) 432-4503; e-mail: ucrihs@msu.edu; or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

⁹ University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) approval for this project expires July 26, 2005.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION PATH –GRANGE MEMBERS

INTRODUCTION.

Good evening/afternoon and welcome to our discussion session. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. I am going to moderate the discussion; Athol and Randy will be assisting me. You are being asked, as a Grange member, to share your thoughts on such topics as: What do you think about the Grange? What do you think about its community? What are their strengths? Their weaknesses? What do you think would make them better?

You are participating in one of a series of discussion sessions with Grange members, in which they are asked to share their ideas on such areas. Each session consists of a small group of people. You are asked to be part of only one session. It will be a pleasant and stimulating opportunity to have a positive impact on the Grange and the community.

Tonight/today you will be sharing your ideas and perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said. Each person's thoughts and feelings are equally valid.

Before we begin, let me share some ground rules. This is strictly a research project: no one is trying to sell you anything; no one is going to nag you to do anything. We need

you to please speak up, and to try to talk only one at a time. We are tape-recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. If several people talk at the same time, the tape will be garbled and we will miss your thoughts. Although it may seem surprising, we are just as interested in negative comments as in positive ones: at times the negative comments are most helpful.

Our session will last about two hours. Let's begin: we'll find out more about one another by going around the room one at a time.

OPENING QUESTION.

Let's introduce ourselves, giving our first names and how we feel. I'll start. I'm Jacqui, and I am really, really excited to be here and have the opportunity to learn from you as you share your thoughts and ideas. (*Turn to assistant.*)

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS. (15-20 minutes)

****)** What is the Grange?

****)** What is Fredonia Grange?

) What are the Grange's *Strengths*?

) What are its *Weaknesses*?

) What are its *Opportunities*?

) What are its *Threats*?

TRANSITION QUESTIONS. (30 minutes)

*) What does “community” mean to you?

) What is your community?

*) What is Fredonia Grange’s community?

*) What is “community service”?

) What values should community-service organizations promote?

) How could community-service organizations work together better?

) What problems do community-service organizations face?

KEY QUESTIONS. (30 minutes)

**) What does being a Grange member mean to you?

****)** What have you gained by being a member?

****)** What would you like to get out of being a member?

Flip Chart/Interactive Exercises

****)** Help me to create the ideal community-service organization.

) What is it like?

) What does it do?

****)** Now help me to describe the best possible community for five years from now.

) How has the ideal community-service organization helped to bring this about?

) How would you promote the community and the organization to others?

ENDING QUESTIONS. (20 minutes)

****)** What do you think was the most important idea to emerge from the discussion?

) What appealed to you the most?

****)** (Give Summary of Discussion.) Is this an adequate summary?

****)** (Give Overview of Purpose of Study.) Have we missed anything?

***)** What advice do you have for us?

Explain the Process—What Happens Next.

After the series of discussions are complete, we will analyze them, comparing and contrasting to find the major themes and ideas that have emerged. After this we will write up a report and make recommendations to the Grange. At least a summary of the report will be available to all those who have participated in the discussions, as well as other interested parties—you are a vital part of this process. Based on the report and recommendations, we hope that the Grange will set goals and strive to achieve them. Progress will be evaluated and reported regularly. We see this series of discussions as only the first stage in an ongoing dialogue with members of the Grange and of the community. We plan to hold additional discussions periodically. And we are always open to questions, comments, and suggestions.

FREDONIA GRANGE MEMBER FOCUS GROUP REPORT¹⁰

Greetings, Folks. I have been poring over the Fredonia Grange Member focus group transcripts again. They are so filled with wonderful thoughts and ideas! I get excited whenever I read them. Probably the most salient concepts for Fredonia's near-term needs, though, boil down to a few major areas. One is the same old song that is always being sung: GET THE WORD OUT! Promote what you do. And market who and what you are—and what you help people become. The people in those focus groups shared the most wonderful stories of what the Grange has done for them, what it has made it possible for them to become, to feel, to realize. In one way or another, that is what you really need to market: the Grange lets one become one's truest self, find empowerment, feel valued and valuable. Grange members don't agonize that they are helpless. They don't become paralyzed thinking that they can't make a difference—they know that they CAN! And they know that collectively they can do much more good and attain many more great feelings and fun, than if they all acted individually.

The flip side of this, and something that comes up recurringly, is that it is vitally important for Fredonia to have both Vision and Mission Statements. They are not really the same thing. A Vision Statement is just what it says: The vision of what you want Fredonia to become—your most cherished hopes for what it can be. The Mission Statement is more the steps/goals that you take along the way that will get you there. The Vision is overarching and does not change readily, while the Mission may adapt to life's exigencies. You need these to help pull together what you do and what you are as an organization. It is a way to give cohesiveness to the group. It can help attract others. People want to know, not just what you do now or have done, but what your plans are—and your dreams. Without this master plan, your activities risk being fragmented: you do one activity over here, another over there. . . . All of them are good, but do they all come together? As you become better known, there will be more and more requests for time, funds, food. You cannot be everything to everyone. You need to decide what the things are that fit in best with your vision.

During the several years that I have been involved with Fredonia, people have been talking, sporadically, about vision and mission statements—about the need for them. But it never goes any further. It is time to take it further—to start working on them. This is a critical time. You are growing, gaining visibility—being sought after. So you need to start developing these guidelines to remain true to what you really want to be. Crafting vision and mission statements is not a quick process—doing them right is hard, vexatious work. But the ultimate prize is something that will stand the test of time and under whose aegis Fredonia can grow and prosper. So you need to begin this process—NOW.

I don't know how you are going to want to go about this. Trying to have everyone in the Grange work on this collectively is probably unwieldy. Even asking for ideas, during a meeting—opening it up to contributions that people can send in—will probably not work. You probably need a fairly small group to do this—either the Membership/Action group or a special committee. Then they can work on it for a while, get something roughed in,

¹⁰ This report took the form of an informal note to the Grange members of the focus group team.

and float it by the entire membership. Even with a small committee of some sort, it is going to take some time. People will need to come together to brainstorm, go their separate ways and think on it, come up with ideas, get back together to share thoughts—and on and on.

So—there you have the most significant points from the focus groups on which Fredonia needs to work first.

The good news is that much of the discussion from the focus groups was a testament to how those who attended love Fredonia and are immeasurably enriched by it. The bad news is that there are too few people who have these feelings, who are members—who really know about you and what being a part of you can do for them. This e-mail report details a few major steps to help rectify that.

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