

CHARLES HODDE AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM OF THE WASHINGTON STATE GRANGE

The Washington State Grange is an organization which grew up with the state of Washington. Formed by progressive farmers just as the state constitution was being written, it has played an important role in the development of the state. Grange historian Gus Norwood notes that, "Early on, the Grange reached beyond a mere concern about farm issues to matters of broad public interest. Much of the reputation of the organization resulted from legislative efforts that affected every citizen of the state. The Grange has a wide range of interests and new subjects are always coming up. It has evolved into a broad, public interest organization."

Although the Grange was at heart a fraternal order, albeit one that admitted women as full members long before other orders, its activities went beyond the promotion of a neighborly social life for rural dwellers. It was created in 1867 by Oliver Kelley as a way to address a deeply divided farm community reeling from the disruption of the Civil War. Kelley modeled the new organization's structure on the ritual of the Masons to overcome the hostility rife between North and South. From the beginning, the Grange had a higher purpose. The state organizations, notably the Washington State Grange, took this message of fostering "the greater good" as its inspiration.

As a young man just beginning his agricultural career in the Colville area in the late 1920s, Charlie was told, "...if I was going to be a farmer I had to belong to the Grange. All farmers there belonged to the Grange. So I joined the Grange, and a few months later they appointed me lecturer to fill out the term, and a year from the time I bought the cows I was elected Master of that Grange, and I got involved in their work." Hodde poured himself into Grange activities and was quickly recognized as a leader.

The Grange already had a history of supporting progressive causes when Hodde joined. They had been involved in campaigns for women's suffrage, prohibition, free rural delivery of mail, tax reform, rural credit and good roads. Grangers had fought for a direct primary law to wrest the choosing of candidates from political party "bosses" back to the people in 1907 and the passage of the initiative, referendum and recall measure in 1911. They gave support with labor groups for the Workmen's Compensation Act and the eight-hour day for women workers. They were part of a legislative lobbying coalition with the Direct Legislative League of Washington, the Washington Federation of Labor and the Farmers' Union that pressured the Legislature for laws to benefit ordinary working families as well as farmers. Under Masters such as Carey Kegley, the Grange fought against



Charles Hodde, Grange Lobbyist, 1932

View Turning Point: Statehood, 1889

Other Voices from the Grange: Ira Shea



"Through this process [legislative lobbying at state and federal levels by the Grange] the people of this nation have Grange diligence to thank for any number of laws, services, departments that we take for granted today. During the 1870s and 1880s there was reform legislation passed on a national level known as the Granger Laws...We have the rural free delivery of mails, parcel post, the direct election of United States Senators, land grant colleges and the agricultural extension service, all sponsored by the Grange." [Shea, p.23]

Ira Shea recounts how 'old time Granger' Chester Thompson recalled the early days of Grange lobbying: "Railroads, timber interests, fish and whiskey were in the saddle in the legislative halls in Olympia in the first two decades of this century," he said. "Tremendous rates of interest, high and discriminate freight rates, taxes and poor schools of only three month's duration in the rural areas were the order of the day." It took courage for Fred Chamberlin and State Master Kegley to serve on the Grange Legislative Committee in those days in Olympia. Brother Kegley carried a loaded pistol for his personal protection. The story is told that one day a legislator on the floor of the House of Representatives cried out, "There's Fred Chamberlin sitting up there in the gallery. In the summertime he raises berries and in the wintertime he raises hell with the Legislature!" [Shea, p.102]

what they saw as the corrupting influences as the “Fish, Sawdust and Whiskey Ring” and their undue suasion of the Legislature.

By the eve of the Depression, the Grange was involved in discussions to bring electric power to rural areas. Several Washington cities were powered by municipally-owned systems which delivered cheap electricity to homes and businesses within their boundaries while outlying areas had to rely on private utilities for their service. This service was often much more expensive where it existed at all. Many farms were without any service long after cities and towns were fully electrified. A measure known as the Bone Bill, for its sponsor State Representative Homer T. Bone, that would have allowed city systems to sell power outside their limits was defeated in 1924. The Grange, under State Master Albert Goss, called for the right to organize rural power districts much as the municipal systems were operated. They filed an initiative to the Legislature in 1928, which was voted down by the State Senate, sending the measure to the vote of the people on the 1930 ballot. Charlie Hodde notes that campaign as his first involvement on the political activities of the Grange. The success of the Grange with this initiative led to years of involvement for the organization—and Charlie Hodde—in the movement to establish and expand the powers of public utility districts.

The Grange had supported the adoption of an income tax for years, but when the Depression deepened the economic distress of farmers, their interest was heightened. Hodde explains: “...our tax system in Washington State then was virtually just a property tax. We had a small inheritance tax and a few corporation fees. Everything else was tax on property and of course, farmers are great property owners. Some of them weren’t paying. We had a law at that time that allowed taxes to go delinquent for five years before they could foreclose. So the counties and everybody was running out of money. Everybody was on warrants. School teachers were being paid with warrants that couldn’t be cashed for several months unless they took a big discount and things of this type. So tax reform was really a big deal...”

State Master Goss next assigned Hodde to work on two initiative campaigns, one for a forty-mill limit on the property tax rate, and one for a graduated income tax measure on the ballot. Hodde recalled that Goss “asked me if I couldn’t get someone to milk my cows—they weren’t worth milking anyhow—and come over to Seattle and help campaign for the income tax.” The Grange teamed with labor, education and other groups to run a successful signature-gathering and public education campaign. Voters approved the measure in large numbers but two lawsuits were filed against it. Eventually, the issue was brought to the State Supreme Court where it was declared unconstitutional. Tax issues would interest Hodde for the rest of his career.

View Turning Point: The Grange Power Bill, 1930

Other Voices from the Grange: Ira Shea

“In addition to organizing Granges in the summer and fall of 1930, I was one of four men representing the State Grange that traveled all over the state speaking for Initiative No. 1, which was the law that gave the rural districts the same right to go into the power business that the city people had enjoyed for years. The Private Power companies fought the measure with all their might and main, but the Grange prevailed in the election of November 1930, largely because justice was on our side. [Shea, p.108]



Ira Shea's Ford used during the Public Power Campaign

View Turning Point: The Income Tax, 1932 View Turning Point: The 40-Mill Limit, 1932

As a member of a small farming community, Hodde was deeply aware of the problems faced by rural school districts. As Grange lobbyist in 1933, Hodde witnessed the passage of what was called the Showalter Bill, named for Superintendent Noah Showalter. The bill attempted to put the schools on a new financial foundation. Hodde was not satisfied that the Showalter Bill fully addressed the needs of Grange families. He noted, "One of my major projects in the '35 session, representing the Grange, was to get a school equalization measure through...one that would, in effect, distribute state money in what we call inverse ratio to the local taxing ability per child....We proposed that we reduce the payments to the districts with the high tax base, and raise them for the districts with the low tax base." Despite his efforts, the bill died before passage, chiefly due, according to Hodde, to the influence of Representative Pearl Wanamaker.

The following session of 1937, Hodde became a member of the House of Representatives—still loyal to the Grange program, but not working as a lobbyist this session. He again pushed for relief for rural school districts, but still faced the opposition of Pearl Wanamaker, now a member of the State Senate. They were able to strike a compromise that "did not take money away from the richer districts—those above average—but it added money to those not quite up to average, but those substantially below average got quite a bit of money, quite a bit of help out of it." Hodde noted, somewhat wryly, that Senator Wanamaker's solution cost the state much more than his; again he was only looking for fairness for his constituents and Grange supporters. Hodde continued to address school funding issues and their relation to the state tax structure for decades.

Another initiative campaign involving Hodde and the Grange also had a far-reaching impact on the state's political system: the Blanket Primary campaign of 1935. Hodde explains that, "The Grange didn't like the election process here. At the time that I first starting voting in this state, when you went into vote in the primary, you said, 'I'm a Democrat or I'm a Republican.' Or you didn't get a ticket to vote on. Then when you voted, you could only vote for Democrats or you could only vote for Republicans. Nobody else got on the ticket. Minor parties could have a convention and nominate, but it never showed up in the primary. The primary, we felt, was where decisions were largely made." As a nonpartisan organization, and one with historical ties to third parties, the Grange had a distinct interest in this measure. Again, the campaign was successful, and this time the measure stayed in effect until challenged in 2003.

View Turning Point: School Equalization: The Showalter Bill, 1933

Wanamaker School Equalization Bill, 1937

Senator Wanamaker introduced Senate Bill 169, entitled "An Act relating to education, creating a school equalization fund, providing for budgeting and distributing same..." and pushed it through the Senate. The Senate resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole and passed the Senate 38 to 5, with 5 members not voting. A motion to reconsider the following day was defeated. It was sent to the House where it was considered in the Education Committee, of which Charlie Hodde was a member. Although the majority of the Committee, including Hodde, voted the bill "do pass" Hodde proposed amendments during the Second Reading: [see amendments House Journal, 1937 p.515-516]

The bill was sent back to the Senate where Senator Wanamaker moved that the Senate not concur with the amendments and sent it back to the House demanding they "recede therefrom" whereupon Representative Yantis refused and asked for a conference committee. One was duly formed, of which Hodde was not a member, and a compromise was reached on the last day of the session. [see Senate Journal p.742]

The bill was then passed in both Houses and signed into law. [Session law of 1937:]

View Turning Point: The Blanket Primary, 1935

Other Voices from the Grange: Ira Shea

"In the early thirties the State Grange session was always passing resolutions and then we would draw up an initiative to the people or to the State Legislature. Some years we would have more than one initiative—in 1930 the State Grange sponsored and the voters approved the Public Utility District Law. In 1934 we sponsored the Blanket Primary Law Initiative and the voters approved it. This law allowed the voters to vote for the candidate of their choice in the primaries regardless of party—in other words, they could cross party lines...Naturally, it is not popular with the political parties because it allows the voter to vote for the person instead of the political party's candidate. In the winter of 1933 Jennie and I were appointed members of the State Grange Lobby Committee and were in Olympia for the entire legislative session. This was a real experience; our job being to contact members of the Legislature, asking them to support our Grange-sponsored bills. That session our main concern was our proposal for a Blanket Primary Law. Our original bill called for the two highest candidates who received the most votes for any office to oppose each other in the general election. This would undermine political parties as sometimes both candidates would be from the same party. The Legislature would not go for that version of the bill, so Brother Denman and I were appointed to rewrite the bill, which we did, and when the law was finally passed it was, and is today, [1983] exactly as rewritten by Denman and myself." [Shea, p.127]

Charlie Hodde continued to support and promote Grange measures throughout his career in government. In the 1970s Hodde helped draft the Family Farm Initiative for the Grange which restricted the amount of land that public waters could be appropriated for, a measure designed to restrict the growth of corporate farms. He explains his involvement: "My involvement with the Grange has remained pretty much one of counsel. They carry me as what they call a special deputy and at times I headed up committees for them. It was during this period when I was doing consulting work here between '70 and '76 that I got quite involved with the Grange again in the Family Farm Water Act and helped draft and prepare literature to explain it. I didn't actually conduct a campaign, but had quite a hand in putting it together and making it go. Just as like the present [1983] I am chairman of the special committee to try to determine a position for the Grange on the whole PUD/WPPSS debt issue."

Gus Norwood outlines Hodde's contributions as a Grange legislative leader:

"Outstanding among the many Grangers who have served in the Washington State Legislature has been Charles William Hodde...He became Master of Fort Colville Grange and attended the 1931 State Grange session in Bellingham. Goss asked Hodde to campaign for the 40 mill limit on property tax, to seek enactment of a state income tax and to serve as Grange representative during legislative sessions. The 40 mill tax limit and the income tax were passed, but the Supreme Court declared the income tax unconstitutional. Hodde served as State Grange lecturer 1933 to 1937. In 1935, he lobbied the blanket primary initiative through the Legislature. He was State Grange overseer 1953-1957 and again 1971-1972. He served in the State House of Representatives 1937-38 and again between 1943 and 1952, the last four years as Speaker. Few fields of legislation have missed his touch, but mainly he was regarded as an authority on taxes and finance, as a public power supporter, a friend of better education for rural areas, good roads and forestry. After failing in his try for the governorship in 1952, he served on numerous state commissions and in administrative capacities both federal and state. In 1962, he received the State Grange Leadership Award."

The Grange helped inform and shape Charles Hodde's basic political philosophy of fairness for all, with special attention being paid to rural dwellers. In turn, he devoted his prodigious energy and abilities to furthering the vision of the Grange for the betterment of Washington State.

Initiative to the Legislature No. 59

(Shall new appropriations of public water for non-public agricultural irrigation be limited to farms of 2,000 acres or less?) Filed August 16, 1976 by Ray Hill of Seattle. 191,012 signatures were filed and found sufficient. The measure was certified to the Legislature on January 14, 1977. The Legislature failed to take action, and as provided by the state constitution, the measure was submitted to the voters at the November 8, 1977 state general election. It was approved by the following vote: For - 457,054 Against - 437,682.

Charlie Hodde's political philosophy:



"I think the Democrats would phrase it that they recognize the inability of the family to meet all the situations that occur in a fair manner. So they have said, 'Have more public education. Let's haul the kids to school, don't make them ride a horse. Let's feed them at lunchtime, no matter if they can afford it or not. Let's have food stamps for poor people.' We recognize that everybody else was chipping in to help. That they tend to be the sponsors and supporters of the programs that say leaving it with the family and the relatives and the community isn't going to result in fair treatment. And the Republicans say that what we've done is we've absolved people of the responsibility. They no longer try like they should. That there is a certain amount of basic good and integrity that is only spawned by accepting responsibility and going out and saying, 'Look, even if I have to drop my membership in the Kiwanis, I'm going to keep my kids in this position.' I don't argue that there aren't any merits on both sides of the question. I think that the fact that these questions have to be argued is what keeps us in a course that is acceptable. That we have to have a system where both sides, even if they are a little bit unreasonable, can be presented in order to reach a reasonable and acceptable middle ground...I've made the statement that taxes are the greatest social invention ever made, you know. That volunteer contributions never solved the problem. You have to have involuntary contributions and call them taxes...if we didn't have tax systems where we could legally collect from you to support somebody who needs it worse, social programs would be a nothing." [Hodde, 1985]

Sources for Further Study

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For current news of Grange programs and legislative activities, see their website: <http://www.wa-grange.org/>