

This Old Building

Vernonia Grange #305 will celebrate National Grange Month with a ceremony on April 23

By Scott Laird

They just don't build them like this anymore! That's what pops in your mind, if you stop to consider it, when you step inside the doors of the Vernonia Grange building on North Street in Vernonia.

The old building was built in 1907 and has withstood at least two floods that we know of, but is still going strong as a community event space. It's a community treasure, with a storied history, and is full of memories. It's a place that connects us to our history and to a time when things were simpler, but not necessarily easier. It's a place worth preserving.

"The pioneers of Vernonia must have built this building – it would have been built by volunteers," says Maggie Peyton, a long-time Grange member for over 25 years who currently serves as one of the Vernonia Grange's officers. In fact, later, in looking at some very old minutes Peyton recently located, some dating back to 1919, we noticed a few of the names of those early community founders – Parker, Treharne, Hall.

April is National Grange Month, so I recently visited the Vernonia Grange with Peyton, to see how this historic building is getting on.

Peyton points out the unique architecture inside the building which incorporates a series of cable support that provide a high and open ceiling. The old, wood floor is definitely showing its age, and the metal roof is rusting and in need of some work, but the building continues to host weekly ballet classes, and has been the site of several concerts and dances in recent years (there's a nice stage at one end of the main room), so those old floor boards still have some life to them. Peyton affectionately says the building has a "Golden Glow."

The Grange as an institution is organized regionally, in community groups, by counties, by states, and nationally. Originally rural in nature, today Granges are found all across the United States – in small towns, in the suburbs, and in urban settings.

Recently the Vernonia Grange has undergone some much needed upgrades and improvements to the



old building, helping to make it more user friendly. Peyton provided a tour of the building and showed off the new, fully accessible restroom and a new exhaust hood over the old griddle in the kitchen. An external ramp, donated by Sandy Welch, has been installed on the side of the building and



joins a new sidewalk, bringing the building up to current code and making the building more accessible.

On Saturday, April 23 the Vernonia Grange will celebrate these upgrades by hosting the Pomona, the Grange organization that provides oversight county-wide, for an initiation ritual, during which several youth will be inducted into the Junior Grange program.

Founded in 1867, the Grange movement is a national organization with its roots (literally!) in agriculture, but with a local, grassroots focus. The organization is based around family, with full membership beginning at the age of 14, and women have been equal members since its inception. Originally formed to help rural people fully participate in citizenship and give them a voice in issues that impacted them – how to get a fair price for their agricultural goods – the Grange continues to teach the values of faith, hope, charity, and fidelity.

The Grange remains old-fashioned in many ways. It was originally organized the same way other old fraternal organizations like the Masons were, although not to the same level. To become a member, you must go through some secret rituals up to the fourth degree (there are a total of seven degrees). The Grange was created to help teach members leadership and citizenship, and continues to be a place for civil discourse, that will "...constantly strive to secure harmony, good will, and brotherhood..." states the original Declaration of Purposes, written by the Grange Founders.

In a proclamation announcing April as National Grange Month, Grange President Betsy E. Huber writes more about Grange values: creating connections between people; developing the potential of families and youth; education, advocacy and agricultural awareness; volunteerism and community service; civic responsibility and involvement; openness to all. "Grange members everywhere wish to celebrate and express their pride in the legacy of their highly respected organization," writes Huber.

And while some of those rituals and values may seem old fashioned, it's clear that many people today are reexamining and embracing some of the old traditions the Grange promotes, like self reliance, food self sufficiency, and civic engagement. Last fall the

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UNWC ANNUAL MEETING

Join us for a free, Zoom optional meeting with an exciting presentation and light refreshments. Family friendly, all are welcome.

Vernonia Grange
Thursday, April 28
5:30 - 7:30 pm

AGENDA

5:30 pm - Call to Order

5:40 pm - PRESENTATION:
A Year in Our Watershed: 2021 Annual Report
- Discussion and Q&A

6:50 pm - Break

6:55 pm - Council Business

- Establish Council membership
- Bylaw Amendments vote
- Board of Directors Elections
 - Member-at-large, 2 yr term
 - Member-at-large, 2 yr term

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