

BACK IN TIME

Applegate Grange

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

I recall the first time, probably at five years of age, going with my parents, John and Pearl Byrne, to the Applegate Grange hall for a dance. My parents and my maternal grandmother, "Lottie" McKee, had become members of this Grange. The hall seemed to be the biggest building I had ever been in. I was afraid to leave my mother's side. Then a little girl came to my rescue. She was Beverly Mee, my age, and ever so friendly.

We danced together and had a great time sliding up and down on the slick dance floor when the music would stop playing. When refreshments were served at midnight, Beverly took me to meet her mother, Martha Mee, who was working in the kitchen with other Grange ladies. I also met Beverly's father, Tom, and her sister, Barbara. When they moved to Medford I spent much time at their home, as Beverly and I went through Medford High School together.

The Grange had their meetings in the large Community Hall, a board-and-batten building on a lot to the south between Pernoll's Store and the Applegate River. Pernoll's Store was located where the Applegate Historical Society building is now and the gardens at Eve's Café was once the Community Hall. The following information came from *Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley*, by John and Marguerite Black. "The history of this hall goes back to the first World War. A so-called Socialist Party was organized in the area. This group raised money in the neighborhood and built a meeting hall. It was not a very successful organization and they disbanded in the early 1920s. Three local men, Chester Kubli, Warren Mee, and Bert Clute, decided to buy the hall and donate it to the school district for meetings and programs. They organized a Community League, which raised money to help pay for the hall. All kinds of activities were held, dances being the most popular. Eventually the school board returned the ownership of the hall to the Community League. The League then gave it over to the Applegate Grange."

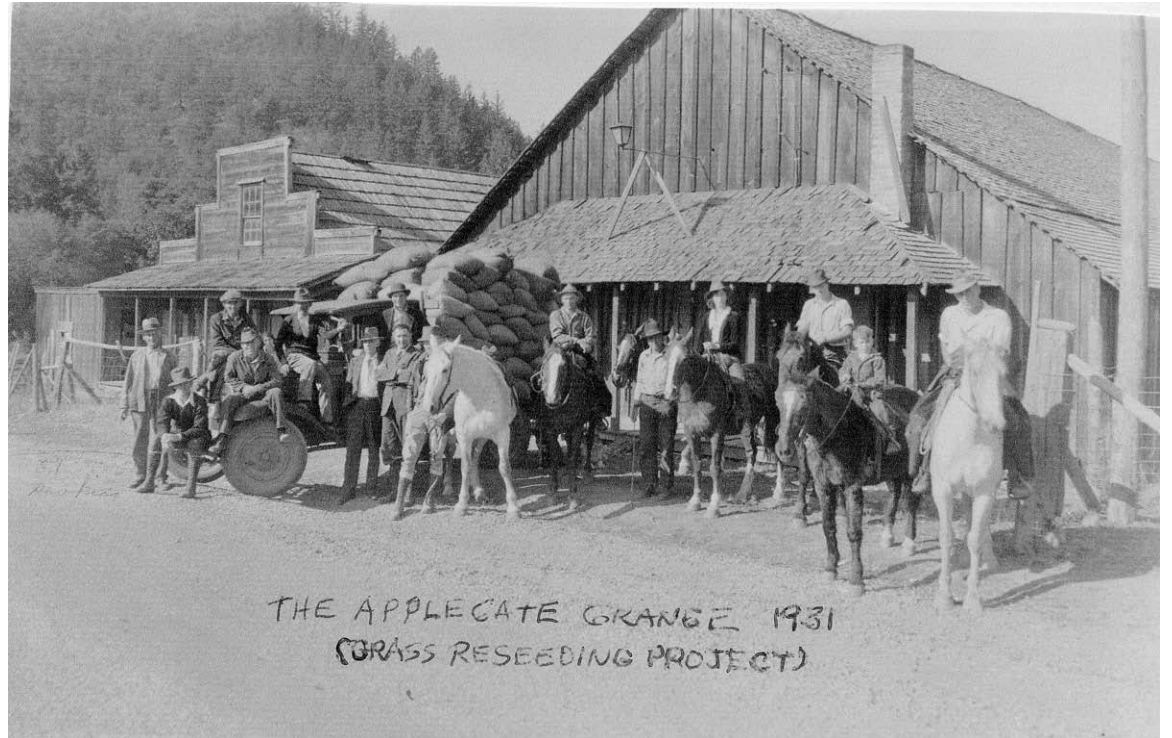
The Applegate Grange was organized September 27, 1930. There were 41 charter members, among them

my aunt Clara O'Brien.

The Grange was very active from its beginning. One of their interesting projects in 1931 was the reseeding of "poa bulbosa" grass following a forest fire that destroyed parts of Humbug Creek and China Gulch. The grass was donated by Charley Hoover, a prominent Central Point farmer. Grange master, Sid Hansen, had his truck stacked high with the sacks of seed and took it to the burned destination, where many grangers helped sow the seed. I wonder if that seed has replenished itself and can be seen there today?

The Grange hall became a busy community center as recorded by Maude Pool in her "Big Applegate News" stories for the Medford *Mail Tribune*, such as a performance from the Jacksonville High School of a two-act operetta, featuring many Applegate students on March 9, 1934. Some of the Applegate performers were: Frank Mee, Henry Head, Gladys Byrne, June Peebler, June Provolt, Alice Madson, Eileen Berry, Lola Fields, Lois Matheny, Marion Roberts, Jack Provolt, and Bud Peebler.

The Rogue River Girl Scouts presented a play at the Grange hall entitled "Ain't Women Wonderful" on February 14, 1935. They also did tap dancing, songs, stunts, and old-fashioned quadrilles. On April, 13, 1935 a one-act comedy entitled "Cabbages" was presented by the Applegate Home Extension Unit at the Applegate hall. On June 6, 1935, "Plans for elaborate observance of Labor Day are under way here by the local grange. A rodeo and barbecue will be held on Thompson Creek, according to arrangements being made by the ways and means committee of which Frank Knutzen is chairman." The list goes on and on of bazaars, fairs, political speakers, and almost always with



a dance to follow. Unless, of course, the dance was the main event.

According to State Grange records, the Applegate Grange dissolved in 1955 and they surrendered their charter. Why such an active Grange of 25 years would dissolve was disheartening. Rumors abounded, one being the consideration to build a new Grange hall of their own, divided the members and the attendance and membership dropped to where they never recovered. From John and Marguerite Black's book *Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley*: "By then the old building was so dilapidated it was falling apart so it was dismantled. In 1989 all that remains is a vacant lot overgrown with trees and bushes."

The Applegate Valley has been categorized as the lower, little, and upper portions of the Applegate. Only the distance and mode of travel in the early days kept them somewhat apart. However, their socializing and friendships were very obvious with their dances, baseball games, picnics and school functions. The Applegate Grange added to this and brought such people as my family from the Upper Applegate to its many educational and recreational events.

Memories abound for me whenever I pass the place where the Grange once

stood. I can still hear the friendly voices, often with laughter, the dance music, grange meetings, somewhat boring for me then, but it is those kind faces who I recall the most. My heart is filled with gratitude in having been with these wonderful people who were once the early settlers in the Applegate Valley. This community is still filled with good people, but the life style has changed to a much faster pace. Socializing is not the "knock on the door, come on in," "you're just in time for dinner or supper," bit. It now seems to require a phone call first to make an appointment, and to sometimes have to enter through a locked gate system. Which is all part of modernization, along with cell phones, automobiles, television, computers, shopping centers, super markets, sports arenas, fast foods and credit cards.

Don't get me wrong, I would not want to change the conveniences I am now enjoying. What I miss is the families, young and old, getting together to socialize as they once did in the Applegate Grange.

Evelyn Byrne Williams
with Janeen Sathre
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"We propose meeting together, talking together, working together, buying together, selling together, and, in general, acting together for our mutual protection and advancement, as occasion may require."

"We proclaim it among our purposes to inculcate a proper appreciation of the abilities and sphere of woman, as in indicated by admitting her to membership and position in our Order."

—1874 Declaration of Purposes of the National Grange

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