

Houlton Grange, Once World's Largest, Was Founded Here In 1874

The Houlton Grange, one of the older organizations of its kind in Maine, at one time held the distinction of being the largest grange in the world. Founded here in 1874, it is, this year, observing the 83rd consecutive year of its existence. This is a distinguished record. It is by no means one that could be taken for granted. Less than five years after it had been organized, surrender of its char-

ter and dissolution of the chapter was avoided by the narrow margin of a single vote.

So, as we view with respect and pride, an organization that has established such a distinguished record in our midst for more than four score years, we ought, also, to yield our gratitude to the one courageous and stubborn member who cast that crucial vote way back in 1879.

He is an unknown hero who

probably will never receive the credit he deserves. But he is, to all intents and purposes, the patron saint of the Houlton Grange of this day.

It was on April 16, 1874 that a determined little band of 18 men and eight women came together in the building known as Liberty Hall, which then stood on the site now occupied by the Central building, as we know it today.

They were inspired by the idea that the aims and objectives of the National Grange were such as to commend the establishment of a group in Houlton; they felt the influence of a Houlton Grange would be of benefit to the community and, more especially, to the rural population.

Present for the occasion was A. R. Walker of Hampden who installed Maine's 16th Grange organization, the first and therefore the oldest, in Aroostook County.

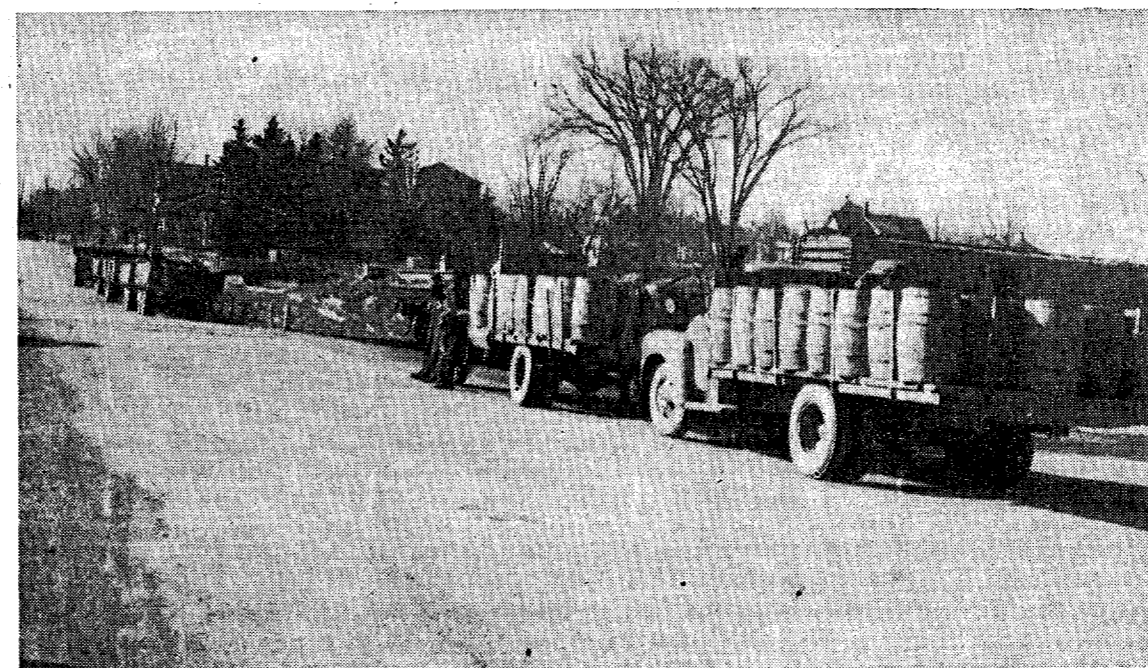
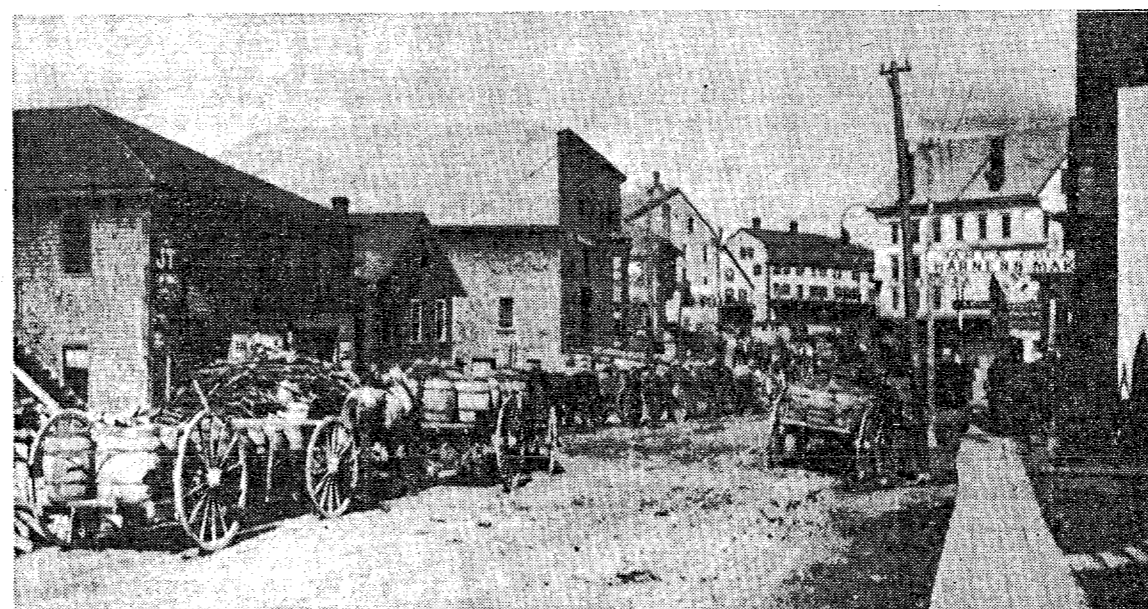
Although all the members of that original group have long since passed to their reward, they will always be held in high esteem by their fellow Grangers who have followed after them.

FIRST GRANGE OFFICERS

The first officers of Houlton Grange were: Master, Charles E. Gilman; Overseer, R. M. Mansur; Lecturer, W. S. Gilman; Steward, E. A. Low; Assistant Steward, A. P. Haskell; Lady Assistant Steward, Mrs. James A. Ebbett; Chaplain, G. W. Washburn; Secretary, Charles D. Merritt; Treasurer, Jabez Young; Gate Keeper, George F. Merritt; Cereus, Mrs. C. W. G. Withee; Pomona, Mrs. W. S. Gilman; Flora, Mrs. Charles D. Merritt.

The other charter members, taken in this same evening were: James A. Ebbett, George L. Pennington, Ezekiel Merritt, John R. Slipp, Bernard Gidney, Wentworth Fall, Andrew Porter, Freeman Hiscock, R. S. Torry, Mrs. J. R. Slipp, Mrs. Wentworth Fall, Mrs. John Braden and Mrs. Geo. F. Merritt.

The first master, Charles E. Gilman is reported to have been



More than 65 years elapsed between these two pictures. Above shows wagons laden with potatoes lined up on Bangor street, Houlton, waiting to get into the starch factory. Time is some time prior to 1895. The Cogan block is shown at right foreground and, in the distance, the Snell House and Market Square. Lower scene was taken on Franklin street, Houlton, one morning in early 1957 showing only part of the line-up of trucks laden with potatoes waiting to get into the starch factories. Other trucks were ahead of these and still others behind, extending east on Military street and around the corner on Kendall.

the leading force in inaugurating the organization here. Before his ultimate retirement, he was to hold the position during seven years, at various times.

THIRTY INITIATED

The first officers had a busy time in the opening year, being called upon to initiate 30 new members. This might have indicated a healthy growth but it is sad to note that the new members added were more than offset by depletions from the rolls caus-

Both these men served as master and both were towers of strength in holding the organization together. Francis Barnes later had the distinction of being the first member of Houlton Grange to serve as lecturer of the State organization.

MOST HONORED MEMBER

One of Houlton Grange's most recognized members and also the most honored, was the late Harry B. Crawford. After making substantial contributions to the

too small. Again Ira J. Porter headed a committee to select and purchase a lot and cause to be erected, a larger building. In August 1895 we find an official lodge vote calling for a building 30 feet by 50 feet and two stories in height.

NEW HALL BUILT

Plans submitted by John Chadwick, calling for an expenditure of \$1700, were accepted. The old hall was sold to George Auber

and remodeled it as a dwelling. The new hall was built in 1897, a veranda was added in 1906 and, in 1907, electric lights were installed.

Extensive repairs were made in 1911, including raising of the building and the placing of a cement wall, the installation of toilet facilities and other improvements.

At about the time the present Grange building was in readiness to receive its members, the proposal to establish a local Grange store began to crystallize. A slow start was indicated so a section of the north end of the first floor of the small lodge building was partitioned off to be used for the sale of miscellaneous stock of groceries and hardware. Other merchandise was added as demand and space warranted.

Geo. F. Auber was the first manager, or purchasing agent, as he was called. He was followed by Geo. F. Merritt who was in charge in 1902 when it became apparent the backroom facilities would never do for the growing business of the Houlton Grange store.

NEW STORE BUILDING

In April of that year we find the record of a vote to erect a store building and, of course, we also find the name of Ira J. Porter as chairman of the committee to secure plans and contract for the material and labor.

It was decided to erect a building 30 by 80 feet, one and one-half stories high, with a basement under the north half, on a lot just east of the Grange Hall lot, and a contract was made with Judson Brewer to do the job for \$1850.

The store was ready for business in June, 1902, and opened with a full stock of merchandise with Albert G. Merritt as purchasing agent. Sales the first year exceeded \$32,000. In June of the following year Merritt was succeeded by Edwin McIntosh as purchasing agent. He remained in charge of the business for the ensuing 11 years.

The business expanded rapidly. In 1906 it was necessary to complete the basement in order to provide additional space. Two years later the Grange was obliged to buy the lot adjoining that of the original store, on the east, and erect thereon an addition to the store building, 50 by 100 feet, one and a half stories high, with a full storied basement fronting on Grange street. The basement had machinery installed for

was completed at a cost of \$5000, far more than the original building had cost.

OPEN EVERY DAY

In the beginning it was decreed that the Grange store would be kept open on Wednesdays and Saturdays only. As its manager, Albert Merritt was paid the munificent sum of \$200 for his services. The following year the demand was such it was necessary to keep open every day in the week. When Ed McIntosh left the store in 1914, the volume had increased to such a point that several clerks were required to wait on the trade. McIntosh received a salary of \$1,500.

A shoe department and a men's clothing department were added just before McIntosh retired and Albion A. Stewart then took over for two years. Albert G. Merritt returned again in 1916 for three years.

During World War One the Houlton Grange made one of its greatest expansions when, in response to the call for the government for more foodstuffs to feed our own soldiers as well as our Allies, it spent \$38,160 for a lot in back of its store, facing on Bangor street for the erection of a large and modern roller flour mill.

This addition served its purpose well and was long a profitable venture. It was sold last year to the Wirthmore Feed Company who now occupy it.

In 1919, under a new policy adopted by the lodge, a committee was appointed to hire a purchasing agent instead of having the membership do it. Byron R. Stewart took over the management of the Houlton Grange in that year and supervised it with great success until his death in 1943.

FLOOR SPACE INCREASED

During those years the interior display facilities were greatly improved, partitions were removed and a total floor area of 6000 square feet was made available for merchandise and display, as well as ample storage space.

The Grange, following the trend of the times, got into the gasoline selling business in 1915. This department increased rapidly with the result that it was

1947 ————— 1957

10 YEARS IS BUT
A SHORT TIME . . .

. . . as compared to 150, that is . . . but it has been a privilege to have been in business here that long . . . a privilege, too, to add our . . .

Congratulations Houlton
. . . and to the Pioneer Times
for 100 years of service.

AROOSTOOK LINOLEUM
KENDALL ST. HOULTON

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY CHANGES SINCE the days of

AROOSTOOK

Compliments
of
HAT'S



The days of
CROQUET
and
HANDLE-BAR
MUSTACHES

But—

EATING is still a part of everyday life.

... while we are still youngsters in the HOULTON business picture ... there has always been an eating place in the same location for over 25 years.

But we do wish to take this opportunity to say to the residents of HOULTON ... Happy Birthday ... in this year of your 150th Anniversary.

DANA'S FOOD SHOPS
MARKET SQUARE HOULTON

MAKE THIS YOUR HEADQUARTERS DURING SESQUICENTENNIAL

sad to note that the new members added were more than offset by depletions from the rolls caused by suspensions for non-payment of dues, withdrawals and for other reasons. At the end of four years, in 1878, the membership stood at 24, two less than the number of charter members.

It was in 1879 that the crisis arose which caused a later historian to comment that "no one should disparage the power of a single vote." The fate of Houlton Grange held by a slender thread on that memorable night.

There were 13 members present at this critical meeting. This may have been, and probably was, the entire membership. In any event, some discouraged member offered the motion that would have brought an abrupt end to any Grange organization in Houlton. The narrowness of the margin made it somewhat of a hollow victory, but at least those determined to keep the order alive here, prevailed.

For the next few years the organization just about held its own, setting up no great claims to distinction. During that time Mr. and Mrs. Ira J. Porter and Mr. and Mrs. Francis Barnes became members and it would seem the order's uphill fight for existence became a little easier from that time on.

most honored, was the late Harry B. Crawford. After making substantial contributions to the Houlton lodge during his several years as master, he moved up to the state level, to become State Master in 1929 and later went even further to become chaplain of the National Grange. He is the only member of Houlton Grange ever to be State Master and also to hold an office in the national organization.

Houlton Grange has also had two other state officers. Hartley Stewart served as State Lecturer for several years and Rev. Royal Brown was State Chaplain during part of the time he was pastor of the Methodist Church here.

In spite of it being the 16th Grange to be organized in Maine Houlton Grange has only once been host to the State organization and that was back in 1885.

First rumblings of the movement that ultimately was to bring into existence a Grange Hall in Houlton, began in 1888. For the first two years the members met at the Town Hall, and from then until 1886, Liberty Hall became the regular meeting place until that building was moved to make way for the Central school building. Obligated to move again, quarters were shifted to Cary's Hall and later to the second floor of the Nickerson Cheese factory on the Barnes farm.

These makeshift arrangements were by no means satisfactory and the result was the appointment of a committee early in 1888 to see if a suitable lot could be secured on which a building could be erected.

BUILDING STARTED

In May, 1888, Houlton Grange was incorporated as it was about to become the owner of a building. The committee had arranged with Dennis McElwee for a plot of land on Green street, adjoining the site of the present Grange Hall. The following month, at a meeting on June 22, 1888, Ira J. Porter reported for the building committee that a building 20 feet by 35 feet, with posts ten feet high, was being erected on the site that had been chosen and he announced that the bills for the same would amount to \$173.79.

It was March 30, 1889 before the first meeting was held in the newly completed Grange Hall. There were 18 members present at this meeting, which was followed by several years of such prosperous growth that, in 1895 the realization came that the hall was

wick, calling for an expenditure of \$1700, were accepted. The old hall was sold to George Auber who moved it to Bangor street

a well storied basement fronting on Grange street. The basement had machinery installed for grinding feeds and Guy C. Porter became its first superintendent. It

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HAT'S
DRIVE-IN



SIGN OF THE
PUREST,
MOST POWERFUL
GASOLINE

TIDEWATER OIL COMPANY ...

THE BEST REFINERY MAKES THE BEST GASOLINE

GENTLE and COLBATH

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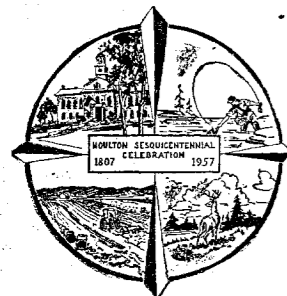
C. P. R.

HOULTON

CONGRATULATIONS
HOULTON ... on your
150th BIRTHDAY ...



and to the
HOULTON PIONEER TIMES
for 100 Years Service
in Aroostook County



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150th BIRTHDAY

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