

## History of the Goshen Grange Hall

Goshen's Grange building has been used for community gatherings since its construction in 1853. Originally known as the Christian Chapel, the structure's first use was as a place of worship. Constructed by a Christian denomination believing in baptism, the building's original location was probably chosen because of its proximity to Rand's Pond. The Goshen Historical Society has a manuscript that details the purchase of pews for the chapel. This manuscript simultaneously documents a small initial membership. Apparently, this small membership was unable to either expand or perpetuate itself for more than about twenty years. The building thereafter stood abandoned for about five years.

A Methodist denomination had existed in Goshen since the early years of the nineteenth century. These believers struggled, however, to keep their denomination intact since they were without their own house of worship. During the 1870s, Methodist religious services were conducted in the Goshen Town Hall. It was the denomination's pastor, Rev. John A. Bowler, who convinced his membership that they could find what they needed by acquiring the abandoned Christian Chapel. A purchase took place in 1878. In this same year, the building was moved, probably by teams of oxen, more than a mile to its new (and present) location in the center of Goshen, then known as "Mill Village." Methodists held services in the relocated building, however, for less than a decade. When a mutually advantageous building-sharing arrangement with the Congregational Society at Goshen Four Corners was concluded, the Methodists abandoned the Mill Village building, for its second time, in 1887.

On April 13, 1892, Sunapee Mountain Grange, No. 144, became the building's third owner, purchasing it from the Methodist Society for a total of \$89.10, including associated expenses. The Sunapee Mountain Grange had been organized on November 29, 1889, by members hailing from Goshen and several surrounding communities. From that date until its 1892 purchase of the Methodist Church building in Goshen, its meetings had been held in rented space in a creamery building. Through the purchase transaction in April of 1892, the local Order of the Grange gained its own meeting hall. The same building that had twice previously been used and deserted by small religious organizations now became the chosen gathering spot for what was to be the town's largest and dominant economic, political, and social organization. To signal its charter as a fraternal-sororal organization, the Grange membership voted on October 15, 1892, to remove the steeple from its new

building. J.P. Gove was given this square box-type steeple in exchange for his labor in removing it.

Sunapee Mountain Grange was Goshen's locally-based branch of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry (national, state, and local units of the Order were all called Granges). In Goshen, as elsewhere, the local Grange proved highly popular. The popularity of the Goshen Grange was such that its membership soared. By 1903, membership in the Grange was recorded as reaching 142 – an impressive number, considering that the Federal Census of 1900 listed Goshen's total population as only 345.



Original one-story Grange Hall, Mill Village, Goshen.

In 1908, the Grange building was raised on its foundation to allow for the addition of an entirely new ground floor. Members turned to John Smart, an accomplished Goshen carpenter, to plan and supervise this ambitious and laborious project. The expanded space provided new accommodations for an expanded membership, including a kitchen and dining room on the ground floor. Meetings continued to be held in the



"Patrons of Husbandry" Grange Hall with ground floor addition. Barn on left was built in 1893 to accommodate 20 horses.

Courtesy Ron Garceau

original hall, which now constituted the second floor of the building. On March 13, 1909, the Grange held its first supper in its new dining room. Through the ensuing years, members vigorously raised funds to further improve and maintain their hall; they purchased furniture and equipment and kept the building up to date with the latest amenities in heating, lighting, and kitchen fixtures.

In Goshen, as in numerous other rural New Hampshire communities, the Grange objective to create better farmers and better citizens was pursued through its regular weekly meetings in the hall. Besides providing “mutual instruction and protection,” these meetings provided the central social occasions in the lives of most members. Outside these meetings, the Order endeavored, often through its Home and Welfare committee, to engage in community betterment activities. In 1942, a branch of the Juvenile Grange was organized, which allowed young people (ages 5 to 14) to become active Grange members. Regular meetings were held for these young people, familiarizing them with Grange objectives and preparing them to become full members. From the 1890s until the conclusion of the Second World War, Goshen’s Grange Hall was at the center of the town’s economic, political, and social life.



Social gathering at the Grange Hall. *Courtesy Ron Garceau*

The Second World War brought dramatic change. Sunapee Mountain Grange membership dropped during wartime. More seriously, by the time that victory had been attained in 1945, the pre-eminence of agriculture in New England’s economy was gone. Between 1945 and 1960, the number of farms in New England declined by more than 50% (J. Ritchie Garrison, “Introduction” to section on Agriculture in *The Encyclopedia of New England*). With improved farm machinery and decreased cost per acre, mid-western farm producers forced many New Englanders to give up farming. In New Hampshire, the decline in family farms led to a

decline in local Granges. Like many other Granges, Goshen’s Grange continued to survive in a greatly reduced role during the final decades of the twentieth century.

When Goshen’s few remaining Grange members finally decided that their organization could not be reinvigorated, they voted to surrender their charter. Of central concern to these members, in concluding their business, was the question of what to do with their long-time meeting hall. The Grangers’ decision was to offer the building as a donation to the town of Goshen. This proposal was presented to Goshen citizens as a warrant article at the annual town meeting in March of 2002, where a lively discussion of the issue took place. Some questioned the wisdom of accepting the donation, citing the possibility of daunting expenses for future repair and maintenance. Supporters of the acquisition held that, through volunteer fund-raising and work, repairs and maintenance of the building could be accomplished without unduly burdening the Goshen taxpayers. When a voice vote was taken, the donation was unanimously accepted.

The most active proponents of the acquisition formed themselves into a group called the “Friends of the Goshen Grange Hall,” which raised money for immediate repairs to the hall. They raised money through flea markets, dinners, breakfasts, raffles, three calendars, and soliciting donations. This money, together with many, many hours of volunteer labor, enabled them to re-shingle the roof, paint the exterior, patch and paint the upstairs meeting room and hall, repair windows, replace granite slabs in the granite foundation, and rebuild a retaining wall near the Sugar River.



Volunteers repair the Grange Hall foundation, 2003.

As an exciting bonus to their work, the volunteers discovered four historic painted theater curtains stored in the upstairs of the old building. These were cleaned



Painted theater curtain by Arthur S. Ives, c. 1930.

and restored as a joint project by the Friends of the Goshen Grange Hall and the Hillsborough Historical Society.

Many volunteers and many hours of volunteer time contributed to the stabilization of the building and its continued maintenance from 2002 to the present time.

In 2003, the Grange building was listed on the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places. Historically, the evolution in use of this building may be said to fit a pattern. Always used for group meetings, the building was originally used for worship by a small Christian denomination. A second use was for a similar purpose, but by a larger Methodist denomination. A third use was by an even larger, more inclusive, and yet still member-only Grange. The Grange used the building for more than a century.



2003 repair of windows and exterior painting of Grange Hall.

If the building is now to finally become a functioning part of the town government, it will in the future become a meeting place for, and a place to conduct the business of, all of Goshen's citizens. By serving all, it may be said to have at last reached a logical end in its long evolution in use as a community building.



Flea Market at the Grange Hall on Old Home Day, 2003.