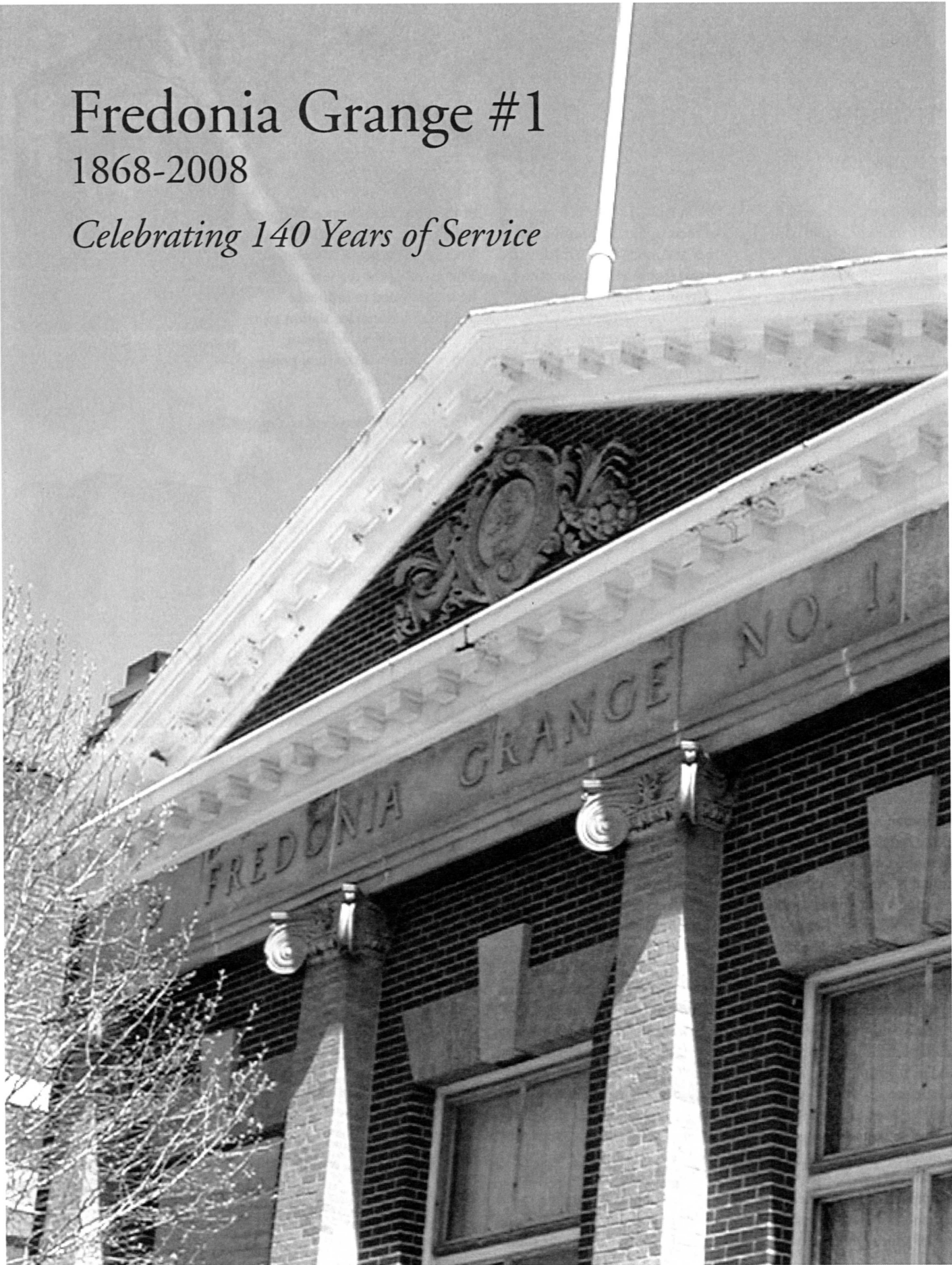


# Fredonia Grange #1

1868-2008

*Celebrating 140 Years of Service*



# History of the Grange

By Michelle Henry

FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR, Mr. Oliver Kelley from Minnesota was appointed by the Department of Agriculture to travel through the southern states to assess damages to their resources and economy that resulted from the war. As Mr. Kelley documented the destruction of plantations and farms, the barren condition of fields, and the devastation of the south's entire economic base, he began to formulate a plan for recovery. The National Grange was his brainchild.

Just after the close of the Civil War, 47% of the country's working public were farmers. Kelley believed that a fraternal organization for farmers and rural residents could heal the great rupture between the North and South. He thought this organization could "stimulate the rural people, both farmer and non-farmer, and dignify as well as enlighten their labor by diffusing knowledge and expanding the human mind."

The fraternal organization he envisioned would promote mutual tolerance, forgiveness, and cooperation between the North and South. Kelley believed this was the best way to revive agriculture, restore fields to fertility, and create a food supply for the nation.

The first formal meeting of the Patrons of Husbandry was held in Washington, D.C. on November 15, 1867. At this meeting, it was agreed to call all local branches Granges since 'grange' means farm or home. In 1868, Mr. A. S. Moss of Fredonia invited Mr. Kelley to visit and assist with the formation of a local grange.

On April 12, 1868, a group of men from the Fredonia area met at Amory Hall (which stood across from the location of the current Grange building) and formed the first local Grange chapter in the world.

By November of the same year it was suggested that ladies be invited to take part in the exercises and on December 16, 1868, twenty-one ladies were initiated into the "Maids degree." The Grange was one of the first organizations to grant equal rights of membership to women and children, and the early minute books from the Fredonia Grange show women serving as Master and in other prominent positions.

In January 1869, the members of Grange #1 voted to select a name for their chapter. Names submitted for consideration included "Excelsior," "Pioneer," "Canadaway," and "Fredonia," with Fredonia selected by a majority of votes. Fredonia Grange #1 grew quickly and in 1915 the Grange Hall at 54-56 West Main Street in Fredonia was erected.

The relationship between government and its people was greatly influenced by the Grange. The organization championed property rights and human rights. It stood up to powerful railroad companies that took advantage of farmers by selling bad stocks, fixing rates, and maintaining transportation monopolies that hurt farmers' ability to get goods to market at a reasonable rate.

The Grange was responsible for initiation of Rural Free Delivery and our Parcel Post System. It fostered the creation

of the Extension Service, and fathered legislation creating the Vocational Agriculture Program. The members of the Grange have continued to influence state and national legislation to improve the lives, well-being, and education of the rural population of this country.

*Michelle Henry has served as Chautauqua County's records management coordinator and county historian since 2000. She earned certification as a New York State Historian in 2005. She holds a master's degree in anthropology and a graduate certificate in museum studies from Arizona State University.*



Hanover Grange Hall



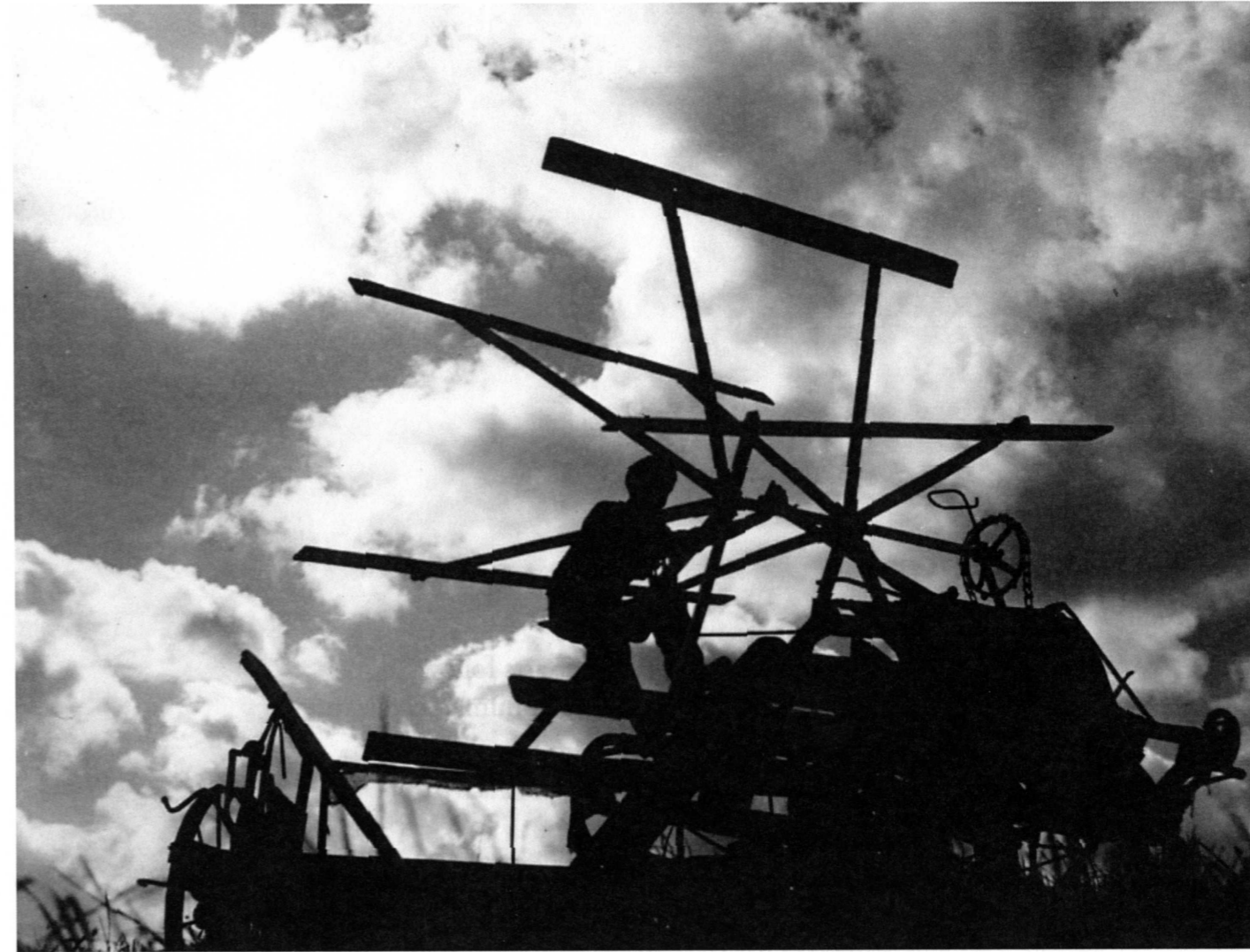
Portland Grange Hall



Watts Flats Grange Hall



Untitled



"Veteran of the Field"



"Potato Field"



Niobe Grange Hall

## About the photographers:

**John O. Bowman**, named the "undisputed box-camera champion of the universe" by the editors of *Colliers' Magazine* in 1946, did more to preserve a record of daily life in Chautauqua County in the mid-20th century than any other person. Similarly, **Mertie Akin** spent her free time travelling the county, photographing churches, schools and grange halls in the 1950s. It is thanks to these two visionaries that we're able to catch a glimpse of life during a more peaceful time.

The Bowman Collection and the Akin Collection are held in trust for the public by the Chautauqua County Historical Society in Westfield NY.