



Connecticut State Grange

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State Master's Address **120st Annual Session • October 20, 2004**

To the Officers and Members of the Connecticut State Grange:

Where has the year gone? Last October 16th I started my first report as your State Master by emphasizing how important a part of my life our wonderful organization has been and continues to be. We can all relate to stories of how during certain times in our life our Grange Ritual has helped us, whether you are enjoying a beautiful day, making a difficult decision or feeling a comforting word during times of grief. Not always a conscious thought, but there in the back of our minds giving a helping hand.

The slogan for my first year was "Building a Bridge to the Future" followed by this year's slogan of "Follow the Road to Success". The idea was to take all the positive points that have made our Grange such a success and build on them to keep our organization moving forward and where necessary make a change to improve it and move it into the 21st century. Last year we adopted a Mission Statement to define the road our State Grange would take. Our first Mission Statement is, "The mission of the Connecticut State Grange, a fraternal organization with roots in rural and agricultural history and the Grange Ritual, is to serve as a unifying and supportive organization of community and district Granges in programs of community service, family activities, legislation and other activities relevant to local communities". It is a living document not a piece of paper to be written and placed on a shelf. We should look at it each year and to see if it needs modifications. The State Committees were charged to define their goals for the year with the mission statement in mind. Our State Grange has established goals to make our organization interesting, challenging and demanding in an effort to attract new members and keep our current members active.

Now it is up to each Subordinate and Pomona Grange to develop goals and programs to move your Grange forward. Have you tried new ideas such as having an open meeting during the month without a business meeting that may include a potluck supper or an educational program? Have you talked to the leaders in your community to see how your Grange can be of assistance in your community? The Dictionary Project has been very successful in many communities. I thank all those Granges who have undertaken this very worthwhile project. Have you given people a reason to join? Or are you just having the same meetings as always doing the same thing you have always done to help in your community and using your gate as a barrier to new members. It is easy to stay in our comfort zone by doing what we have always done. The challenge is to build on that and try new things. The examples I gave above have helped Granges in our State to grow and attract new members. These are not the only ways, but ideas to build on. The easiest way to fail is to never try.

Your State Grange tried some changes and new ideas this year. We had Brother Ed Luttrell our National Leadership, Development and Membership Director into the State where he conducted 2 seminars, one on each side of the state on Leadership open to all our members and a seminar on organizing and reorganizing Granges for the Deputy Force and Membership Committee. Schools of Instruction were changed to talk about the role of each officer. At our spring Pink Sash Day we had a presentation challenging the Pink Sash Family to think about what direction our State Grange should take? We have also made changes to this year's State Grange Session from realigning session committees, new election procedure and a presentation on the Medicare Prescription Drug Card. All in the interest of improving the session and making it more interesting. Brother Luttrell said it best in one of his presentations I attended, "Change Always Happens... But, Survival is not Mandatory. The future of our Grange is our Choice!"

Again this year there have been many exciting and happy times. During this past Grange year; I had the honor of presenting several 50 year certificates as well as many 55, 60, 65, 70 and 75 year seals. I also had the unique honor of presenting another 80 year letter from the National Master to Sister Mary Warren of Manchester Grange. I was so impressed by this inspirational lady who not only walked to the altar to receive her letter but last year took on the job of Chaplain for the first time and memorized the part. So I guess we are never too old to learn a new role and part.

Sister Maureen and I also had the chance to travel and represent our State at the National Session in Burlington, Vermont, the New England Leader's Conference at Lake Morey, Vermont, the New England Lecturer's Conference in Poultney, Vermont; we sure know how to get around Vermont now. A special honor was conferred on me, but more importantly on the Connecticut State Grange when I was elected National Treasurer, this past November in Burlington. The first elected National Officer from Connecticut in over 35 years. It is truly special to have our State Grange honored this way. We also attended the Master's Meeting in Kansas City in February. It is always a pleasure and honor to represent our State Grange.

There have also been some sad times during the past year. Many Granges have suffered through hard times and some have had to make the difficult decision to end its existence or consolidate with another Grange. This usually is caused by a lack of active members but sometimes it is a 'burn out' of those who have been running the Grange for so long. We need to look at ways of revitalizing those Granges before they reach this point and bring in new members. Five Granges turned in their charters last year; West Hartford #58, Woodbridge #108, Wethersfield #114, Madison #120 and Ledyard #167. Some members joined other Granges but many were lost. Three Granges also decided to consolidate with another Grange; Durham #57 with Hemlock #182, Hamden #99 with Cheshire #23 and Farmill River #130 with Harmony #92. This procedure makes the consolidated Granges stronger and keeps all the members, but a community loses its Grange and we lose a presence in the community.

In my presentation to those present at the Spring Pink Sash Meeting, I asked three rhetorical questions.

- What direction do you want our State Grange to go?
- Can we continue on the same path we are on now?
- What are we willing to do?

I now ask this of all the members of the Connecticut State Grange. Because if the answer is "Nothing"; then our Grange will slowly die out. Not next year but in the foreseeable future. We must all live up to the challenge.

Has your Grange looked at implementing some of the changes passed as suggestions by the National Grange? These include no longer requiring the taking of the Annual Word, no longer working your way in and out of the Hall, and the alternate opening and closing ceremonies to streamline your meetings? This was left up to each Grange. I am not saying these have to be done but if we never look at them, how will we know if they work? We should not change for change sake but should not be afraid of change if it helps our Granges.

OFFICERS

We are lucky in Connecticut to have such a dedicated elected officer force. Whenever I call, they are always willing to help out. Thank you for your service as you continue to do all you can to move our State Grange forward.

GRANGE CENTRAL OFFICE

The Grange Central Office is the nerve center of our State Grange. This office keeps Granges in our State up to date on important issues of the Grange and ensures that the reports are done on time. Sister Marion Beecher always seems to know how to find me. We talk several times a week about State Grange matters. Marion, thank you for your service

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Last year the delegate body changed the day to day control of the State Grange from the Executive Committee to a Board of Directors which includes the Overseer and Treasurer with the traditional Executive Committee and this has worked out very well. As explained last year the major concerns in the interim between State Sessions are the financial condition of the State Grange and ensuring that the By-Laws of the Grange are followed. It seems that this year one of the major issues that the Board had to address each month at their meetings was the sale of a Grange Hall. We often hear, "I don't

want the State Grange to get our money". The By-Laws state that whenever a hall is sold, the proceeds must be kept in a separate fund controlled by the State Grange in case there is a need for a new hall. This Board of Directors has tried to meet the charitable donations desired by a Grange when their hall was sold, ensured that any interest from the fund is given back to an active Grange to help with ongoing expenses and stay within the By-Laws.. It is not their wish to take your money, but their fiduciary responsibility to follow the By-Laws.

We should all thank the members of the Board of Directors for all their hard work.

DEPUTIES

Every State Master looks at his Deputy Force and is sure they are the best and most dedicated team ever put together. I surly agree with this assessment of my team. This dedicated group serves the order with pride and distinction under the leadership of General Deputy, George Russell. They performed their usual duties of Inspections and Schools of Instruction as well as filling in for me when I couldn't attend a Grange. Two Deputies will be leaving our ranks after this State Session. Brother Dick Chapman is stepping down as the Special Deputy for the Action Granges and Brother Richard Mann, Deputy of Central #1, has moved to Virginia. Thank you both for your service. You both will be missed.

We all know how difficult the Deputies duties are; thank you all for your dedicated work.

LEGISLATIVE

This is an important part of our Grange operations. The Grange worked as part of a group that was successful in saving the Department of Agriculture last year. A tremendous victory for all agriculture in our state.

Under the leadership of Gordon Gibson, Director, this hard working group has put together an excellent legislative handbook for our elected officials, testified at public hearings, participated in the New England Regional Legislative/ Agriculture Meetings, and continued its efforts with the Working Lands Alliance. All done in a non partisan way. My thanks to this hard working group.

COMMITTEE ON WOMENS ACTIVITIES

This year's theme was "Putting our best foot forward". When does this energetic hard-working group ever not put their best foot forward representing the Connecticut State Grange? Led by Sister Betty Jane Gardiner, this group has conducted contest on a New England Regional Basis and State Contests. The New England Regional Contests include many Needlework items and the Chocolate Chip Cookie Baking Contest. It was nice seeing our entries as winners at the Big E again this year. On the State level we have the craft contest, the usual monetary donations and donations of both money and hats and mittens to the Hanahoe Memorial Clinic, I am sure that all of you will be as impressed as I am when they give their report and we see all the donations being presented.

Thank you Sister Betty Jane and your committee for once again putting your best foot forward.

AGRICULTURE

The importance of Agriculture to our order must never be forgotten. It is the base on which our Fraternity is founded. The committee had an excellent display for Ag Day at the Capitol and everyone enjoyed the cookies, as usual. I am looking forward to seeing the Mini-Scarecrow Centerpieces. It's such a unique contest. I also want to extend my congratulations to the winners of the Young Farmer, Outstanding Farmer and Production Farmer of the Year.

Brother Mike Molodich and his committee also participated in the New England Legislative/Agriculture Meeting. My thanks to the Committee for their hard work.

YOUTH COMMITTEE

The Youth this year under the leadership of Director Jodi Ann Cameron walked M.I.L.E.S. (Many Individuals Let Everyone Succeed) for the Youth in Connecticut. Their ideas of the new Poster Contest, Collection Jugs along with the traditional Bowl-A-Thon, Ambassador Program and Youth Night Program made for an exciting year for our Youth.

Allyson Malo our Past Youth Representative assisted at National this year with the Ambassador Program. It shows the respect that the National Program has for our Youth.

The Youth will once again be closing the Friday night Session and also hosting the Hospitality Room. Thank you for all your time and effort.

I am sorry to report that Sister Jodi Ann as well as Sister Kay Ruff have resigned from the Youth Committee. I thank them for their past service and their experience and energy will be missed.

To all the Committee, we thank you for your hard work.

JUNIORS

I am always impressed by the scope of the Junior Program in our state and by the ability of its Director Sister Joanne Cipriano to come up with new and unique contests and craft items each year. I know that we all look forward to seeing the Juniors on Saturday afternoon and seeing the true joy that the kids have when winning an award. The true reward for each of them is that they learn from doing the projects, as well as from the teaching and work of their dedicated leaders. I enjoyed seeing the tic-tac-toe projects at the Big E this year and it was suggested to me that this could be a Junior Project to raise money for the Grange Building as many people were asking if they could buy one of the sets, something for the New England Leaders to discuss.

The Junior Deputies once again had a booth at the Connecticut Agricultural Fair where they sold pies, soda, water and clam chowder. Thanks to all who donated pies to the Booth as well as the workers there.

We need to find ways of growing our Junior Granges. Do you have an idea? Pass it on to Sister Joanne or myself. I ask all of you to help out at one of our Junior Granges.

Sister Joan Mann, Junior Deputy of Central Pomona has moved and will be stepping down as Junior Deputy. I just want to say thank you Joan for your past service, and best of luck to you and Richard.

My deepest appreciation to all those dedicated leaders, Junior Deputies and most of all to Sister Joanne.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

As I have said many times in the past and in the beginning of this report; There is nothing more important to the future of our Organization than our work in community service. We need to use it as a tool to improve our membership.

The special quality of our Community Service Project is its diversity and the ability of each Subordinate Grange to use its project to meet the needs of the Community. When identifying a project look for help from your community to make it a bigger success.

Once again this year we partnered with the Patrons Group on a Habitat for Humanity House in Manchester. It is such a joy to assist on this because you see the results of your efforts immediately. My thanks to Brother Russell Gray who coordinated this effort, and to all those Granges that participated.

Another project suggested by National that many Grangers can work on is the "Words for Thirds" or "Dictionary Project". This is a great way to help the education system. I know some Granges have participated but I urge those that haven't to

give it a try.

I am once again looking forward to hearing about the winners and seeing their reports when the results are announced on Thursday night.

Thanks to Bob and Marge Sendewicz for handling this important contest again this year.

MEMBERSHIP/LEADERSHIP

The challenge facing all our Granges is to increase our membership. This includes not only pure membership but active members who are participating in your Grange. Last year, I challenged each Grange to create a new reason for members to join. This year at the start of this report, I gave some examples Granges have used. Has your Grange tried anything new? So many times when members are at the altar receiving a 50 year or higher honor they talk about the fun times they have had at their Granges. Are your Granges having fun? This is how you will keep active members busy and having fun.

As mentioned, we had 2 Leadership Seminars this past year and are planning more in the future. Team Building; empowering others to do the work and leadership was stressed. Hopefully they were helpful to some Granges.

To Brother Brockett and his team thank you for your work. Remember they are available to assist your Grange.

CODE READING

More and more Granges are obligating their candidates and we see the Degrees less and less. That is why it is so important to know how to read the code book and understand its meaning. Sisters Mildred Bell and Gertrude Prelli and Brothers Carlton Platt and Marvin Wilber are always happy to help anyone in learning the Code.

The Code Book is the key to the ritualism of our Order.

PUBLICITY

How many of you have seen our new website? It is impressive and ever changing. It is the newest way of getting the word out. Publicity is the lifeline that informs others about our great organization.

We must also continue to use the traditional methods we have always used. Newspaper, cable access, and weekly publications will inform members and the community of our programs and activities. But they can only publicize them if we tell them about it. Also don't forget to thank a reporter when they do an article and be positive.

Thanks to Brother Carl Bernhardt and his committee for their continuing efforts.

CONNECTICUT GRANGER

I feel that we have the best paper in the Country and look forward to reading it each month. It tells about the activities of our order as well as having National information and information from each Subordinate and Pomona Grange. We need to continue our effort to have this paper reach every Grange household. Is your Grange a 100% subscriber? Ask Todd how to become one.

Thanks to Todd Gelineau and the Connecticut Granger group for a job well done.

CAMP MAUD ISBELL BERGER

Our Junior Camp will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary next year and I know that we are all looking forward to joining in on the festivities. The Camp continues to try to attract children to it each year. They revised the brochure this year, have a new web site and tried a new poster approach. All in an effort to attract more campers.

I want to thank all those who participated in clean-up this year. There was a good crowd and the work was mostly completed before lunch. It was amazing that people were looking for leaves to rake. Areas were cleaned that haven't been done in the 50 year history of camp.

We cannot take our Camp for granted but must continue to work to increase participation. It is a great deal. If you know any children looking to have fun at a great camp, for a good price send them to Camp Berger, or at least give them a brochure.

Thanks to Brother Bud Beecher and the Trustees for the outstanding job they do.

CREDIT UNION

Last November it was voted to merge the Connecticut State Grange Federal Credit Union with the Nutmeg State Federal Credit Union. One of the reasons for the merger was the expanded programs available at Nutmeg. Have you looked into this? They will be presenting a report later at our session. Being a Grange member entitles you to all the programs at the Credit Union. It is a great benefit for our members.

CONNECTICUT AGRICULTURAL FAIR

The weather was much better this year than in the past at the Fair. The only rainy day was Friday and boy did it rain. It was a great Fair, with fine entertainment, good exhibits, great food and fun for all. So much work is packed into this busy weekend, it was good to see it be successful.

Nice job to President Todd Gelineau and the Officers and Directors of the Fair.

STUDENT LOAN & SCHOLARSHIP

This was a difficult year for our Student Loan Trustees as its Chairman Sister Alma Brooks was not available for most of the year. We all miss Alma's leadership. The other members of the Committee have picked up the slack and thanks to Brother John Waterhouse, and Sister Nancy Weissmuller for doing a fine job and making sure the job was done.

Last year the delegate body passed a resolution to appoint a committee and report on how we can expand and redefine our scholarship program. A committee was appointed but I failed to get them together. I accept full responsibility for this oversight but will work on it and have a report for next year.

POMONA GRANGE

I have been asked; is it time to look at the make up of our Pomona Granges? Some Pomonas are having trouble getting Officers and attendance at meetings is down. Let me state that I am not recommending any changes at this time, but if a question is raised, we should at least consider it. How does the delegate body feel? Do we need to consolidate to 5 or 6 new Pomonas? Or is the current set up the way we want to continue? Should we appoint a group to look into it?

As I stated, I am not recommending a change but would like to have feedback.

IN MEMORIAM

Our Worthy Chaplain will pay tribute to the many Brothers and Sisters who passed away during the past Grange year at his Memorial Service. We will truly miss Brother Alden Ives who did so much work as the leader of the Grange Service Office and Treasurer of the Credit Union. His smile and sense of humor will also be missed at the Annual Insurance Breakfast.

I wish my deepest sympathy to the families of all who lost someone this year.

IN CONCLUSION

As I stated last year and reiterate this year; I could not do this job without the help of Sister Maureen. She is the force that keeps me centered by reminding me of the needs of others and to do my work, and is a great listener when problems get me down. Thank you for being there for me.

Continuing on my idea of basing our motto on the infrastructure of road and bridges, next years motto will be "Take a Road Less Traveled", stealing from Robert Frost but understanding we must all try new challenges if we want our Grange to grow.

*Respectfully submitted,
F. Phillip Prelli, Master
Connecticut State Grange*