

Multnomah Grange no longer fallow



Bill Dodds has helped bring Multnomah Grange No. 71 back to life in the community of Orient, near Gresham. He said his dog, Jackie, serves as the grange's director of public relations. (Eric Apalategui, Special to The Oregonian)



By **Eric Apalategui** | For The Oregonian/OregonLive

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For about three years, it looked like Multnomah Grange No. 71 would follow the path into history that so many granges before it have taken. The signs were weathered beyond readable, the siding blowing off in chunks, the shingle roof so full of holes that when it rained outside, it rained inside.

Bill Dodds lives just down the road in [Orient](#), a rural community just east of [Gresham](#), so he practically had a front-row seat to watch the building deteriorate.

"It just tore my heart out to see that old building go to seed," said Dodds, a 55-year-old Vietnam veteran and railroad retiree who has lived in the area about 20 years.

He and his wife had come to the grange often when it hosted bluegrass bands and stopped in once for a production by the Gresham Little Theater, which had called the grange's great hall home for many children's plays through the years.

Practically the next thing Dodds knew, he and fellow resident Dave Durfee were up on the steep roof, first covering the leaks with in tar paper and later affixing metal roofing material to most of the top. Dodds spent \$6,000 from his own pocket on the roof alone, and at least another \$1,000 here and there.

"Maybe I could've bought another boat with some of the money I spent on the roof," he said. "This whole community is just coalescing into this thing. It's the most phenomenal thing I've ever seen. The community loves this old building."

Long history

The Orient and Pleasant Home communities in the rural area are home to a couple thousand people, said Susan Lorain, whose grandparents donated the sliver of land where the grange sits today. The building itself was moved eastward from Gresham, but Dodds and Lorain couldn't recall the exact year.

Multnomah Grange organized in 1905, and its number means it is the 71st grange out of more than 900 originally organized in Oregon.

So many of the early granges have closed that today it is the fourth-oldest of the roughly 175 active granges in the state, said Phyllis Wilson, secretary of the [Oregon State Grange](#). It also is the oldest functioning grange in the try-county area.

When Dodds approached the Oregon grange about reorganizing the local group, the state organization hadn't yet figured out what to do with old Multnomah No. 71.

"Multnomah kind of went on the back burner for a while," Wilson said. "One of the concerns we had was the condition of the building."

The state organization found a way to stop another grange from vanishing when Dodds jumped in.

"Damned if they didn't accuse me of being the grange master," he said with a smile.

Lorain, 76, the granddaughter of the grange's land donors, showed an early interest in helping with the reorganization and almost immediately was named secretary.

"How many things connect us anymore as a community? We don't talk to our neighbors," she said. "I just think it would be a warm place to be."

Durfee, who worked side by side with Dodds on the roof, recently moved up to overseer, which is like vice president to the master's president role.

"It's a lot of fun getting that grange going, and it's a lot of work, too," Lorain said.

Reviving a tradition

The grange, formally known as the [Order of Patrons of Husbandry](#), has roots dating back to the 1860s America and dates to the 1870s in Oregon. Meetings are ritualistic and spiritual, but in Orient they are still learning how to go through the formal motions that include series of hand motions and occasional gaveling. In the warmth of a wood stove on a cold fall night, the atmosphere in Orient is casual.

At their November meeting, for example, member Michele Brouse Peoples chose "Feeling Groovy" for the opening song. Later, after all of the members lifted their hands in a vote, Dodds declared, "OK, looks like we've got a sweep."

Peoples was the creative force behind the Gresham Little Theater, which staged children's productions at the grange until the rain started falling inside and the cardboard-like wall covering began slumping off.

She hopes to bring the theater back to life along with the grange, and bluegrass groups already have expressed an interest in returning as well. Other activities and group meetings are expected to follow.

With agriculture changing, today the grange's main purpose will be to serve as a community center in an area served by churches and schools but no building that caters to everyone.

Music flowed from the old building earlier this month during a community sale that raised nearly \$900 for the grange's coffers. It's still near the beginning of a long road of fund-raising and nail-hammering ahead, said Dodds, who figures about \$50,000 is still needed.

"This is going to work," he said. "We can bring the old gal back to where she's serviceable again."

-- Eric Apalategu

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