

WOMEN OF THE GRANGE

FUN GRANGE FACT!
SUSAN B ANTHONY SPOKE ON EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AT THE
1903 NATIONAL GRANGE CONVENTION IN NY.
IT IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN HER LAST PUBLIC APPEARANCE.



HISTORIC VALENTOWN MUSEUM GRANGE BOOKLET

BOOKLET No. 6 of 6 – Women of the Grange

Sources: "Woman of the Grange" by Jean F. Hankins, "VernaBelle 'VB' Pickering Freund" by Philip Freund based on notes from John M. Freund. Documents and images owned by the Victor Historical Society. Research compiled by Lynne D. Perry.

The Role of Women in the Grange

The Grange was the first fraternal organization to make the wise move of admitting women to the membership with full and equal equality as the men. When it was decided to invite the women to join it seemed desirable to create certain offices for them. The need of a Lady Assistant Steward, for instance, was obvious, and in addition the Founders called upon Roman mythology for the names of three women officers for the fifth, sixth and seventh degrees of membership. These officer names were selected from the goddesses whose functions were the protection of growing things, though the ritualism itself is based on Greek mythology.

CERES was the goddess who presented to mankind the great gift of grain upon which we depend to such a large extent for our sustenance. She had care over the cereals which are named after her, and over the grower of the grains.

POMONA was the goddess who presided over fruits, and to whom the fruit growers appealed for protection of their products and for an abundant yield.

FLORA was the goddess of flowers and of Spring, and to her was due the fact that the earth is so beautifully adorned with flowers.

More than equality has been given women, as it will be seen, for while a woman can hold any office in the Grange, there are four of the offices that are not open to men.

In 1903, thirty-six years after Oliver Hudson Kelley first conceived of the Grange, **Susan B. Anthony** stated that she could always recognize a *“Grange woman as far off as she could see her, because of her air of feeling herself as good as a man.”*

In fact, women’s equality was never as simple as that. It was, after all, the male organizers of the Grange who established the women’s role in the first place. While the founders believed that the participation of women was essential, they also believed in separate spheres for the two sexes.

National Grange founder Kelley was convinced, for example, that women should restrict their activities to the home or an extension of the home; he insisted that outdoor work stifled development of women’s higher qualities.

The Reverend Aaron Grosh, another National Grange founder, reflected the male attitude of the day, too, when he stated that the woman member would raise the standards with her “gentle influence, her innate tact in all matters of good taste and propriety, her instinctive perceptions of righteousness and parity.”

In short, the Grange founding men placed the woman on a pedestal and expected her to stay there. The idea that men and women were equal but separate was reinforced by separate ceremonies for degrees for men and women, a practice that continued until 1889.

Besides elevating the social tone of Grange meetings, Grange women contributed in four ways: They did much of the routine work of the subordinate Granges; they contributed far more than their share to Grange publications, and increasingly, as speakers on the local level; they assumed leadership of Juvenile Granges, Committees on Women’s Work, and Household Economy Committees; and they moved the agenda of the Grange toward educational and social goals.

Eliza Gifford, an early feminist, in 1894 called the Grange the “greatest equality club the world has ever known”

Yet women Grangers made slow progress in attaining true equal status in leadership positions. In California, for example, it was ruled in 1873 that any woman could run for office in the State Grange, but it was three more years before a woman candidate actually emerged.

The first woman master of the Howard County (Indiana) subordinate Grange was Flora Kimball in 1877.

From 1881-86 Sallie Back was Lecturer for the Indiana State Grange.

But not until 1895 did any woman become Master of a State Grange, and until the twentieth century, never did more than seven women hold the top Grange offices in any one year.

A year later in 1896, the first woman became a member of the National Executive Committee, and two years later, in 1897, the first woman was elected Lecturer of the National Grange.



**All-women Degree team, Excelsior Grange #5
Poland, Maine**

Beginning with Caroline Hall, Kelley's niece, who served as her uncle's record-keeping assistant and secretary, women did much of the Order's routine work. In 1880 a California Granger commented that "one lady is equal to six men and a span of horses." But from the outset, women "cleaned Grange halls, devised entertainments, often planned entire programs and prepared meals." These tasks could be viewed as an extension of the traditional homemaker's sphere- the setting was different, but the work was much the same.

The slow movement of women into leadership also suggests that Grange women were traditionalists. Historian Donald Marti states that most Grange women were content to leave the farm problems to the men. However, though slow to move into the top positions, they were *especially apt* and suited to assume the important offices of secretary and lecturers of the subordinate Granges.

Though Charles W. Ford, one of the founding fathers of the **Victor Grange**, was the original Secretary, soon afterwards the position was more frequently held by women as demonstrated by the following roster of women secretaries for the **Victor Grange**. The first female Secretary elected in the Victor Grange was also a founding member of that Grange - Dr. Jane "Jennie" A. Pickering - and over the next 27 years she held the position often.

Year	Master	Secretary
1879-1880	John Olney	Mrs. J. A. Pickering
1883-1885	Charles Ford	Abbie Benson
1888-1889	N. A. Baker	Miss Abbie Benson
1892-1893	G. B. Pickering	Mrs. J. A. Pickering
1894	A. R. Shilling	Mrs. J. A. Pickering
1905-1906	G. B. Pickering	Mrs. J. A. Pickering
1931	John Schrader	Mrs. Eva Cronk
1932	John Shrader	Mrs. Marguerite Wiley
1933	Frank S. McLaughlin	Mrs. Marguerite Wiley
1935	Leo P. Wiley	Mrs. Herman Gibke
1936	Leo P. Wiley	Mrs. Herman Gibke
1937	Raymond C. Phillips	Mrs. Herman Gibke
1938	Raymond C. Phillips	Mrs. Maude Gibke
1939	John E. Damaske	Mrs. Maude Gibke
1940	John E. Damaske	Mrs. Maude Gibke

By 1901, according to a historian, women held most of the important Lecturer's positions in local Granges, and it was in this capacity that women were influential in helping "mold the policy and activity of the Grange."

Finally, during the 1980s women's leadership role in the Grange expanded rapidly, doubtless due to an increase in better educated women members and "overall changes in the attitude of the general population." Near the end of the twentieth century, Donald Marti commented that "the boundary between women's and men's spheres, which Grange women could always cross at some points, is now more permeable than ever."

4th Generation Daughter of the Victor Grange Founders

VernaBelle Pickering was born August 1918 on the family farm on Baker Hill in Perinton NY to Howard Baker Pickering and Louisa Mabel (Aldrich) Pickering. Howard Pickering was a progressive farmer who specialized in raising upland potatoes. The vicinity of Baker Hill was a major potato-growing area in the United States between 1880 and the 1920s.

VernaBelle was the granddaughter of Victor Grange founders Willis and Mary Belle Baker Pickering, and the great granddaughter of both Victor Grange founding couples Nathan C. and Mary B. Baker, and Phineas and Letitia Pickering.

Her father Howard died at the age of 34 leaving her mother Louisa to raise four children aged between 17 months and 7 years with the limited assistance that her elderly parents and her sister could provide. She somehow accomplished this without losing the farm.

At the age of six, VernaBelle began her schooling in the Victor District 7 schoolhouse (Cobblestone School) on High Street. Three previous generations of her family had attended that school. In 1929, VernaBelle transferred to the junior high school in the village of Fairport across the street from her grandparents' house so that she could help her partially crippled grandmother after classes. She went home on weekends.

VernaBelle graduated from Fairport High School in June 1936 and was elected permanent class secretary. She wanted to continue her education but lacked the resources to attend college. As a result, she went back to Fairport High School for postgraduate courses during the 1936-37 school year where among other courses, she took mechanical drafting.



**Howard & Louisa
Pickering**

She was hired at Eastman Kodak's Camera Works in 1939 and became an early member of the team working on the proximity fuse program for the US Navy. After WWII she became assistant foreman of the electronics model shop and worked there until she resigned in 1951 upon her marriage.

Following in the tradition of their forbears, VernaBelle, her brother Wesley, and their mother joined the Fairport Grange, in which Wesley became very active. VernaBelle maintained her membership for 70 years, until after Wesley died in 1976.

VernaBelle married John M. Freund, a native of New York City and an engineer at Kodak, in May 1951. In 1951, they bought a 30-acre farm at 321 Valentown Road, Victor, from the estate of a distant cousin, Terry Aldridge. They lived on the Pickering home farm while they modernized the

house. This house is on the site of the house in which her father Howard Pickering was born. They lived there from late March 1952 until the end of July 2010, when health conditions made it necessary for them to move into a single floor living situation. They moved into an apartment at the "Legacy at the Fairways" on High Street in Victor but retained ownership of the farm.

John and VernaBelle had one son who lived with them on Valentown Road and attended school in Victor until he graduated in 1972 when he moved away to attend college.

VernaBelle became interested in handweaving during the late 1950s. She joined the Rochester Weavers Guild and served two years as president in the mid-1960s. She also practiced China painting, at which she became quite adept. She spent considerable effort as a teacher's aide while her son was in the lower grades and sewed the costumes for class plays for several years. VernaBelle was a member of the Clover Garden Club in Pittsford NY from the mid-1950s until its dissolution in the early 1990s serving as its president for two years.

In the late 1970s, VernaBelle developed an interest in making bobbin lace and set the weaving projects aside. She helped found the Genesee Country Lace Guild in 1981, and served as coordinator (i.e., president) in 1985-1986 and again from 1998 until about 2010. Later, she took up spinning. Her hobbies of gardening, lace making, China painting, and spinning kept her busy for the rest of her life.

VernaBelle passed away in the Crest Manor nursing home at the end of April 2015 at the age of 96.



Historic Valentown Museum

The Historic Valentown Museum, owned and operated by the **Victor Historical Society**, promotes, preserves and teaches the history of the **Historic Valentown** site, including the 1879 structure known as Valentown Hall, its collection of related artifacts and the history of the surrounding community.

Using the **Historic Valentown** site, we teach by using exhibits, giving tours and through promoting community. Our goal is to teach the public the concepts and applications of American commerce and the community story, past, present and potential future. Our mission is to create interest and instill appreciation for hometown business and community using our historic collection of documents, our knowledge of the people and generations that came before us, the American made artifacts housed within Valentown Hall, and other settings on the site.

Historic Valentown Museum

P.O. Box 472

267 High St.

Victor, New York 14564

(585) 924-4170

<https://HistoricValentownMuseum.org>

info@historicvalentownmuseum.org

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