



Honored at the Wills Grange #1690 80th anniversary celebration were from left, Elmira Knepper and Leon Knepper, the organization's two, 50-year members. Next is Wills Grange master, Bill Ringler, then Mary Hiller, first lady and her husband, Gordon Hiller, master of the Pennsylvania State Grange and John Scott, past national and Pennsylvania state grange master.

Wills Grange Celebrates 80th

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WILLS (Somerset County) —

The Wills Grange \$1690, in celebrating its 80th anniversary at the Faith Lutheran Church, was not merely an evening when approximately 75 persons did nothing but reminisce, although they certainly did that, but they looked, as well, to the future. And "future," to the grange is synonymous with today's young adult population.

Guest speaker Gordon Hiller, the Pennsylvania state grange master, said that keeping the grange strong is essential. "Seventy years ago there were twice as many grange members as today," he said. "The grange needs to be strong."

"We need to think like young people," he said. "Challenge young people between 18 and 30 to become grangers."

As a trustee at Penn State, Hiller has opportunities to stay abreast of advancing communications and a world of technology that spins change almost faster than a turning crystal ball.

Recently, when the president was on the Penn State campus to address the graduating class, Hiller and others had an opportunity to talk with Pres. Clinton. Hiller said he was surprised when the commander-in-chief knew about the grange.

Further, the president's idea for the grange to launch a \$500 scholarship for a young person who does community service, to be matched by the federal government, impressed Hiller, who was accompanied by his wife, first lady, Mary Hiller, to the Wills celebration.

"You look back, and know you have to do better, today. We are developing communications today as they did 80 years ago," he said. "We have the talent, tools, and technology to do better." He observed that early grangers didn't know stress in the way that stress affects people today.

He also discussed the potential problems. "The two challenges are animal rights and animal preservation," he stated, adding that these threaten property rights. Grangers need to stand tall in support of agriculture, he told them.

Hiller also said that freedom of speech and freedom of religion are being threatened, citing as an example a male Penn State student who was almost, but not quite, denied his right to publicly thank

God for his blessings.

"I advise you," he told his listeners, "to continue to thank God, and do it publicly."

Hiller's speech had followed several religious and patriotic anthems such as "How Great Thou Art," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and others.

Wills Grange master William Ringler introduced John Scott, the past national and past PA state grange master; Mildred Shultz, past lecturer of the state grange; Mabel Shultz, the Somerset County state deputy master and William R. Lloyd, state representative of the 69th District, who read a proclamation from the state House of Representatives. A second proclamation, coming from the Somerset County commissioners was also read, although commissioner Robert Will was unable to make the official presentation.

A commemorative flag from United States congressman John P. Murtha, was also presented in celebration of the Wills' 80th occasion.

Joining the Wills Grange in 1946 were Leon Knepper and Elmira Knepper. They were recognized for 50 years of membership.

The 25-year members are Lois Dupstadt, Robert Dupstadt, Helen Handwork, Robert Handwork and Karen Walker.

"Memories of Grandma's Apron," was aptly presented in the form of a skit by Kathryn Brown, Dorothy Glessner, Meryl Miller, Rachel Miller, Mildred Ringler, Jean Torrence, Emily Weaver and Mary Wilk.

With dustcap in place, each lady entered wearing her own version of Grandma's apron to delightfully illustrate, the numerous uses to which grandma put her utilitarian covering with its vast pockets.

Among those demonstrated were hauling wood, grabbing hot skillet, handling hot plates, drying tears of children, allowing them (children) refuge in its folds, dusting, gathering eggs or fresh veggies from the garden, rescuing pins, marbles and odd puzzle pieces, relocating a kitten litter, and wiping sweat. If her neighbor was espied coming up the walk, grandma quickly reversed her apron so only the clean side was exposed toward her guest.

Wills Grange, with a membership of some 51 persons, is one of eight in Somerset County. Its first meeting was held on May 30, 1916, at the Wills School House.

J.B.W. Stufft, then state deputy, organized it and installed officers.

Harvey F. Menser, grandfather to the current master Ringler, was the first master. There were 28 charter members of whom the last, Mae Menser Ringler, after 66 years in the Wills Grange, died in 1982.

The grange hall got under construction in December 1916 on land donated by Charles C. Mosgrave. For approximately \$200, the stone wall with dimensions of 24 by 36 feet and nine feet high was built with donated labor. On May 24, 1917, the first meeting was held in it. By year's end the membership had climbed to 48 grangers.

In 1924, after purchasing land from John Winters, the structure was moved across the road to its current location. The bills incurred totaled \$1,100.

Wills Grange programs have included such diverse topics as political issues, health, wellness, medications and drugs, hip and knee replacements, canned foods labeling, Habitat For Humanity, acid mine drainage, deaf awareness, estate planning and preparing a living will; and tours and travel.

Community service projects find Wills Grange involved with the American Red Cross, the former Somerset State Hospital, American Cancer Society and the Salvation Army.

The Wills Juvenile Grange #441 held its first recorded meeting on October 9, 1920. Later disbanded, a reorganization took place in 1955 and a number was given. Today it is called the Junior grange and Esther Mowry serves as junior matron.

Besides Ringler, Charles Glessner is overseer; Lorraine Glessner, lecturer; Esther Mowry, assistant lecturer; Ted Glessner, steward; James Torrence, assistant steward; Mary Wilk, lady assistant steward; Dorothy Glessner, chaplain; James Mowry, treasurer; Barbara Handwork, secretary; Wilmer Coughenour, gatekeeper; Meryl Miller, ceres; Rachel Miller, pomona; Dorothy Reffner, flora, and Kathryn Brown, pianist.

As Hiller said, grange representation on government and ag advisory boards is necessary and an effective tool for influencing policy-making of government officials.

"The grange has provided an opportunity for leaders to emerge," said Hiller.

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