

# LOOKING BACK

Stories From The San Ramon Valley

By Beverly Lane

## The Patrons Of Husbandry Danville Grange No. 85 Part II Grange Halls In The Valley

This is the second of three articles on the Grange, an important organization in the San Ramon Valley for over 130 years.

### THE FIRST GRANGE HALL

After the Danville Grange was founded in 1873, members and families first met in the Danville School House on Front Street. There was such enthusiasm for the new organization that they came into town every Saturday for meetings in the morning and afternoon, with a pot luck for lunch.

Soon the number of members and their families swelled beyond the school house space and they discussed building a hall. From 1859-1868, the Union Academy sat on the border between Alamo and Danville and served as a boarding high school and a place to meet. But after it burned down, there were no large meeting spaces in the valley.

So a Grange Hall was built, just west of Danville's Front Street. C. E. Howard built the hall with \$1,383.70 which was collected for the land and building.

The *Pacific Rural Press* of July 11, 1874 noted: The frame of the new hall for the Danville Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, 30 by 60 feet upon the ground, is already up.

Grange Halls were constructed all over the country. They became the hubs of community life. According to Grange historian Inez Butz

It is hard for us today to realize the dreariness of farm life a century ago. Visits to the market were few and neighbors were often miles apart.... Into this dull life of the farmer and his family the Grange brought social contacts, news of the outside world, and the pleasure of laughing, talking and eating with new and old friends and neighbors. Programs were established items in the order of business. People who had never spoken, sung, or debated before an audience could now have that opportunity and experience.

For 40 years, the Grange Hall was the largest meeting room in the valley and served as a community center. All kinds of meetings, speeches, plays, parties, church services and graduations were held there. The Grange park around the school, church and hall was the site for many outdoor parties.

The Harvest Feast in 1887 in Danville



1874 Grange Hall

was a huge event. As reported in the *Pacific Rural Press* "four to five hundred teams and vehicles from all parts of the country strung along the highway. It was estimated that at least 1500 people were in attendance" at the picnic grounds, enclosed by the Grange hall, Presbyterian Church and school house.

### 1913 A FRATERNAL AND SOCIAL HALL

The need for a larger meeting space was recognized by the turn of the century. In 1911, spearheaded by Minnie Coxhead Lynch and the San Ramon Ladies Association, the San Ramon Community Hall was built near the San Ramon school house and general store. It became the center of social life in San Ramon and served as a meeting, party, dance and graduation location.

Several Danville organizations also wanted a bigger hall. The IOOF had been meeting for some time in an upstairs room in a two-story building on Front Street. So in 1913, the Odd Fellows and Grangers jointly built the Fraternal and Social Hall. The Grange building was turned and became the second story and a large auditorium was created to the west. A Dedication Ball on November 28, 1913 celebrated its opening. The large room was used for various purposes, including high school basketball games and movies.

Today the building is owned by the Town of Danville and is called the Village Theatre. It was a movie theater after World War II and the Zion Fellowship Church for several years before its rehabilitation by the Town beginning in 1988.

It is interesting to observe how residents recycled buildings and spaces in this period. Not only did the 1874 Grange move to the second floor, but the old Odd Fellows rooms were re-used for high school classes. One newspaper article discussed the renovations which were done to these rooms, so that the classes could move from the small house (on Church Street) to the Front Street site. The new SRV Union High School was completed in 1916.

### THE NEW GRANGE HALL

The Grange membership gradually decreased in size and lost ownership in the Social Hall in the 1920s. They were left without a meeting place. But in 1946 former Grange Worthy Master Will Stewart, at the humorous suggestion made by Grange brothers and sisters, agreed to donate 97/100 acre of his land to the Grange for a new hall.

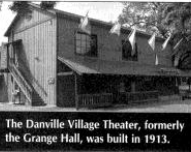
Fundraising began, donations were solicited and the new Grange Hall on Diablo Road opened in 1952. This popular building near Vista Grande Elementary School is used by many different groups and provides an ongoing presence for the Grange in the twenty-first century.

Next month: Leaders of the Grange.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is located at 205 Railroad Ave., Danville and is open from 10-1 Tues.-Sat. for July and August (summer hours). For information call 925-837-3750. (museumsv.org) A museum store offers unique gifts. During July and August Depot Days at the museum provide model trains, railroad exhibits, story hours and special programs for families.



The "New" Grange Hall, Diablo Road.



The Danville Village Theater, formerly the Grange Hall, was built in 1913.

# Danville Grange



Dedicated  
2005

*Members listen to the presentation*



*Mayor Mike Doyle cuts the ribbon*