

Ira E. Shea

Name: Ira E. Shea Date or Year, Place
Born: May 12, 1895; Depuyer, Montana
Date or Year, Place Died: August 19, 1987;
Cheney, Washington Residence as an
Adult: Cheney, Washington; Seattle,
Washington

Biography:

Ira E. Shea joined Malo Grange #679 in Ferry County, Washington in December 1921 and it didn't take long for him to begin to make his mark. In 1923 Ira was a first-time delegate to the Washington State Grange convention and was later that year elected Master of Ferry County Pomona Grange. In 1924, then State Master Albert S. Goss appointed Shea as a Washington State Grange Deputy Master and in 1925 Ira organized his first Grange. As a Deputy Master for the Washington State Grange, Shea received five dollars per day and five cents per mile for the use of his Model T Ford.

On December 23, 1928 Ira married Jennie Betz and together they traveled many miles throughout Washington, then other states, organizing Granges. Together Ira and Jennie had two sons, Robert and Donald.

In 1932 Brother Shea was appointed a National Grange Deputy by then National Master Louis J. Taber and in 1939 he was elected Lecturer of the Washington State Grange, a position he held for seven years.

Brother Shea is quoted as saying, "My first love was the actual work of organizing a new Grange," and organize new Granges was what Ira E. Shea did better than maybe anyone else in the history of the Grange. Overall, Brother Shea organized 143 Granges in six states (Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Arizona). 135 of those Granges were organized between 1925 and 1942, with 22 in 1930 alone. Between 1976 and 1980 he attended FIFTY 50th anniversaries of Granges whose charters bore his name!

Brother Shea was one of the key leaders of the public power movement that adopted the PUD initiative in Washington State in 1930 and then continued to get the Bonneville Project Act signed by President Roosevelt in 1937, bringing light to rural residents. Fifty years later in 1987, and just over a week before his death, he received the Power Pioneer Award from the federal Bonneville Power Administration in recognition of his efforts to see electrical power developed in the Northwest and made available to rural customers.



In 1964 Brother Shea was awarded the Washington State Grange Leader of the Year Award.

In 1983 Shea wrote his autobiography, "The Grange Was My Life", which he closes with the following, "Today the Grange faces its greatest challenge and by the same token, its greatest opportunity. We must not falter. My main purpose in writing this book indeed it is my earnest prayer that some young reader or readers will be inspired to take my place and go out and tell the Grange story 'just as it is.'"

Bibliography:

- Norwood, Gus. "Washington Grangers Celebrate a Century". Seattle, Washington: Washington State Grange. 1988.
- Shea, Ira E. "The Grange Was My Life". Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press. 1983.
- Shea, Robert. Cheney, Washington. Interview, 2021.