

Oliver Wilson (1849-1924)

Oliver Wilson was a life-long Illinois farmer and devout Quaker. At the age of 1½, he came with his parents from his native Belmont County, Ohio to an unimproved prairie farm in Putnam County, Illinois. As a young man, he was a schoolteacher for 4 years while still working on the farm in summer.

In 1873 he became a charter member of Magnolia Grange #179 in Putnam County, Illinois holding various offices. He was elected Lecturer of the Illinois State Grange, serving from 1886 to 1892. He was a member of the Executive Committee in 1893 and then elected State Master, serving from 1894-1910. He helped organize 12 Granges in Illinois. He was a founding director of the Illinois Farmers' Institute, created in 1895, and named its first Superintendent in 1897.

On the National Grange level, Mr. Wilson was Priest Annalist from 1901 to 1905 and Lecturer from 1909 to 1911. He was then elected Master of the National Grange, serving from 1911 to 1919. He served as National Master during the Golden Jubilee in Washington, DC. During his tenure as National Master a record 3,339 new Granges were established, and he guided the Grange with remarkable skill through the trials of World War I. At the 1913 National Session a class of 5,459 Seventh Degree candidates received the Degree, doubling the previous record. He served as Priest Archon from 1919 until his death in 1924.

Very prestigious positions held by Mr. Wilson prove the leadership qualities the Grange recognized. He emphasized the recognition of women and home economics in Granges and even in the Federal Food Administration.

Many National Grange policies became federal law under his tenure; for example, the 17th Amendment, Farm Credit Act, Federal Highway Act, and more. He was the first Illinois State Superintendent for Farmers Institute. He had some teaching experience but always was a farmer and understood the importance of standing up for the people, especially the farmer.

Considered one of the "greats" among Grange leaders, Mr. Wilson was devoted to the principles of the Grange and was always well versed in the affairs and problems of agriculture.