

Whatever Happened to ... G.L.F.

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The Cooperative Grange League Federation Exchange, or G.L.F., was a unique institution of American business enterprise when it was formed in 1920. It had a distinguished ancestry since one of its lines of descent lay in the post Civil War movement of farmers who were known as the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry - or simply the Grange. The G.L.F. founders actually built an edifice of farmer cooperative business adequate to serve the needs of agriculture for decades.

According to *Seeds that Grew* by Joseph G. Knapp, the real beginning of the cooperative came at a meeting of the Conference Board after a proposal had been presented to the New York State Federation of Farm Bureau Associations. W. L. Bean, the newly-elected Grange president wanted to design a state-wide purchasing association for all farmers in New York State whether they were Grange members or not. After the usual todo, legalities and arguments, the G.L.F. was actually formed on June 22, 1920 when it received its Certificate of Incorporation with its headquarters in I thaca, NY.

Knapp goes on to say, however, that the real beginnings of cooperative marketing and purchase in this region came with the Granger Movement of the 1870s. Some of the associations wet up were significant in size and influence. For example, the Union Grange Trade Association in Monroe County organized to buy necessary farm supplies for cash at reduced rates. The volume of business they generated was over one million dollars in 1882. Locally, the forerunner of such a cooperative was Gilbert Padgham of Macedon who sold feed to area farmers around 1930. According to a diary kept by his wife, he trucked bagged feed from Buffalo and distributed it from a small barn on his farm. We note here that the barn is still standing today.

However, G.L.F. didn't get a foothold in Palmyra until 1932. At that time, the old pickle factory located on North Creek Rd. was used as a temporary storage and distribution point. Shortly afterwards, the Grange Hall, which was built in 1908 as a meeting hall, was revamped so that the first floor could support the extra weight that feed, seed and hardware would create. As the business grew, two additions were built to provide more display space, warehousing and service area. As a matter of note, a

piece of the old G.L.F. still exists. When the building was vacated by G.L.F., Charles Baker took the old space heater for use in his farm shop where it is still in service.

According to Mrs. Padgham's diary, her husband attended a G.L.F. meeting on April 19, 1933, and the following week she reported that he went to the G.L.F. store for feed. We are assuming that perhaps that "meeting" was of the first store committee of which he was a member. However, at this writing there is no exact date known for the opening of the business. The first annual meeting was held on September 1, 1933 with more than 640 people in attendance. There were moving pictures as part of the annual district manager's report and The Palmyra Corn Huskers provided entertainment. That very successful event was the first of more than 65 annual meetings that were to take place in Palmyra.

Pearle Aldrich started hauling feed in bags from the Buffalo feed mill to Palmyra for the cooperative in 1936 and continued in that capacity for 10 years. Then in 1946 he left G.L.F. to "go farming." Ralph VanBortel drove truck in the late 1940's and '50's. Lawrence Weykman began driving the first bulk feed truck for the store in 1956. When the men were asked what make of truck they drove, they said Chevrolet. Aldrich said that Chevy's were the only trucks that G.L.F. used.

It isn't clear when dances were first held in the hall, but a notice in the October 31, 1946 issue of the *Palmyra Courier-Journal* advertised round and square dances sponsored by the V.F.W. Post of Palmyra on November 8 and 22. In case anyone attended any of those particular shindigs, you may remember that admission was 65 cents per person, and that the Fairport Old Timers provided the music. An undated announcement was also found which indicated that starting October 8 and every Saturday there would be a round and square dance at the G.L.F. Hall. Those dances were sponsored by the Palmyra Grange and featured Andy Mincer's Orchestra. Larry Williamson recalls attending square dances at the hall with his parents around 1955, but has lost track of when the last one would have been held.

On Wednesday, November 26, 1948, the Palmyra G.L.F. Farm Store held a Grand Opening event. Coffee and doughnuts were served and patrons were invited to see the new line of farm store merchandise. It is obvious that the range of merchandise available had expanded since the beginning and would include farm household necessities and a little luxury or two as well as feed, seed and farm hardware. One item that the announcement featured was the new 1948 FM & AM radio.

Detailed information about the business's activities to 1948 is scarce, perhaps because of the war, but more than likely because of changes in management at all levels. Then, in 1949 the local media began to carry more news about the co-op. For example, the December 8, 1949 issue of this newspaper carried the news that Alfred Thompson was taking over the farm store's manager's duties after the resignation of Donald Johncox. Johncox had been connected with G.L.F. for seven years and had served as manager of the store since July 1948. He left the position to start his own new business at the Rushville Hardware.

A short while later in June of 1950, the public was notified that Thompson was being transferred to another store. Roy Herrmann then took over the reins of this location. Also reported at that time was a physical change in the store. Previously the Farm Store had been located downstairs, but was being combined with the Service Store with all farm store items upstairs in the display room.

In August 1951, Herrmann was promoted to manager of the G.L.F. Service at Bridgeton, NJ. E. William Kaegebein from the East Aurora store was his successor. It was also reported that Palmyra G.L.F. had an annual volume of 8400 tons and supplied patrons in this area with feed, seed, fertilizer and farm hardware. Services offered were grinding and mixing of feed. On May 31, 1955, Keith Bartlow was named Manager of the store. He had formerly served in Knoxville, PA. Roy Gilbert and Charles Briggs were the two immediately preceding John Aiken who was the longest-serving manager of the store in both G.L.F. and Agway.

A conversation with 80-year-old Herrmann yielded some very interesting information. For example in the days when feed and other farm supply commodities were shipped into Palmyra in bulk on the railroad, the farmers would go to the siding with their trucks, a shovel and a really big pile of bags. They would spend two days shoveling and filling the bags, one at a time, until the car was empty. He also said that Palmyra G.L.F. had a grain cleaner at Walworth Station where they shipped out oats, wheat and other locally produced crops.

He also related a tale about shooting rats. The store was plagued with rats and in order to reduce their number, he would go down into the basement after closing time and sit with a flashlight and his .22. When the rats peeked out he would do them in. He admitted to being a pretty good shot, and after about 10 days he had the problem under control.

He also said that committeeman Cy Packard used to play the musical saw. Packard and Herrmann, with his harmonica, provided the entertainment for annual G.L.F. meetings held while he was manager.

Finally, Herrmann told of coming to Palmyra with a full black beard, which he had grown for the Fillmore Centennial celebration. At first, everyone wanted to know if he was Amish. He wore the beard for about a month after starting to work, and after he had shaved the beard off, the other employees didn't recognize him and thought he was somebody new.

The main stabilizing element in the system seemed to be the Store Committees. Some names that come to the surface here are: Abram Haak, Daniel Chapman, William and Cyrus Packard, William Alderman, Edward Nortier, Raymond DeMay, Fred Alderman, James Padgham, Louis Gerlock, Floyd Sheldon, Wayne Williamson and William Clark. Of course there were mandatory changes of Committeemen, but still, they were local people serving local people, and to use a cliché they knew everybody.

Some employee's names that were mentioned by our sources were Lloyd Haak, Bill Lafave, John Smith, Gary Henry, Robert Hardy and Art and Betty Thompson. Some of them transferred when the co-op changed to Agway in 1964. Agway was the result of the merging of the G.L.F. and Eastern States Farmers Exchange, which was founded in 1918. On July 1, 1965, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Cooperative Association joined Agway. The primary purpose of Agway is stated to provide quality farm production supplies for farmer-members at reasonable cost, and to provide reliable markets for certain farm products. But as the saying goes, that's a whole 'nother story.

Agway operated in the old G.L.F. location for a short time, and then in 1968 they built a new store farther east on the north side of Route 31. The old store was then used in a couple of different capacities. At first it was used for warehousing feed and grain. Then, story has it that a wholesale plumbing and heating supply business had filled the building with goods but never opened for business. Then John Milotta kept a large convenience store there and also sold pizza and subs for about 8 or 9 years from the location. According to Larry Williamson, there was a fire in the building after which it was razed. Now the new Post Office occupies the lot.

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