

JOHN A. MCSPARRAN

6th MASTER OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANGE (1914-1924)



The Person:

- Son of James G. and Sarah Collins McSparran born October 22, 1873 on a farm in southern Lancaster County. His father was a Charter member and first Master of Fulton Grange #66. James served as State Overseer and was active in the State Grange for many years.
- John was educated in common schools and graduated from Lafayette College at the age of 20. While in College, he was a member of the glee and mandolin clubs, sang in the college quartette and played varsity football.
- He lived his entire life on the farm where he was born and joined Fulton Grange at age 14. He served as Master four times in addition to holding other offices. He served on the State Legislative Committee at an early age and served on it for many years. He was honest and straightforward with a charming personality.
- His speaking ability brought him recognition as one of the foremost public speakers in the Commonwealth. He was instrumental in the founding of the PA Federated Legislative Committee on temperance, serving as Vice-President for his life. He was also Vice-President of the Lancaster County Men's Christian Temperance League. He was a local minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He served as a Director and Vice-President of Farmers & Traders Life Insurance in Syracuse, NY.
- In 1922 he ran on the Democratic ticket for Governor. Gifford Pinchot, Republican, was elected and upon election to his second term, he appointed Mr. McSparran as Secretary of Agriculture, serving for four years.
- He first married Betty Godwin from Blackstone, VA and they had four children – Sarah Margaret, Lacy Isabell, Charles Goodwin, and John Collins. Betty died in 1920.
- In 1922 he married Sara Holland of Millis, MA who he divorced.
- He then married Laura M. Anderson and they had two children – Donald Harry and Gary Fleming.
- Mr. McSparran died at the age of 71 on January 17, 1944.

Of Note:

- During his ten years as Master, the State Grange made notable progress and achieved some of the most substantial successes. The total membership reached 96,000, the highest in its history.
- December 1916 State Session held for the first time in Philadelphia at the Academy of Music with 3,000 in attendance.
- Authorized opening of office in Harrisburg to keep membership informed of legislative and government affairs.
- 1916 membership showed 852 Subordinate Granges, 6,086 new members, but 5,575 were dropped from the roll, leaving a net gain of 511.
- At the 1918 State Grange election of officers, Fred Brenckman was elected as Secretary and combined the duties of Secretary and work of the Harrisburg Office.

- Beginning in 1919 and continuing for several years there was a steady increase in membership. The total membership in 1919 was 68,000 and by the end of 1921 the total membership was 93,000. The net gain in 1921 was 10,000 members. PA had more than one-ninth of all the Grange members in the US.
- There were amendments regarding Pomona Granges and the amount of dues payable to the State Grange. Action was taken that Pomona Granges were an essential link in the Order and all Subordinates should contribute to their support.
- Minimum dues in Subordinate Granges was raised from \$1.20 to \$1.50 per year. Annual dues to State Grange increased from \$.28 to \$.56 per year. The State Grange sent Pomona Granges \$.20 per year on each Subordinate Grange member in the Pomona jurisdiction in lieu of minimum dues in a Pomona.
- With the establishment of farm cooperatives associations during 1919, it retarded the growth of the Grange in sections of PA.
- During the 1920 Annual Session it was reported that 52 new Granges were organized and eight were reorganized during the agricultural depression. Seven Juvenile Granges were organized and one Pomona. The net gain in membership was 8,000 with a total membership of 83,000.
- A net gain in membership in 1922 during the four preceding years indicated 28,000 new members and the total membership reaching 96,000.
- Recognized that there had been a great improvement in the ritualistic work that was attributed to the changed system of financing Pomona Granges in 1919 and ultimately led to the improved work in Subordinate Granges.
- Delegates authorized the appointment of a Committee in reference to the building of a dormitory for girls at State College and the State Grange pledged to raise funds for the completion of the project.
- The 50th Anniversary was celebrated at the 1923 Annual Session held in Pittsburgh during November coinciding with the National Grange Session. This was the third time PA had hosted the National Grange Session
- There were 963 Subordinate Granges, 57 Pomona Granges with a total membership of 93,000 and a loss of 3,000 during the year. However considering the five preceding years, there was still a net increase of 25,000 members, nearly equal to the total membership in the state in 1876.
- During the National Session in 1923 L. J. Taber, OH Past Master, was elected National Master and served for a period of 18 years.
- The Seventh Degree was conferred on a class of 4,000, falling below expectations.
- The State Grange closed with a Golden Jubilee program, a historical pageant in three episodes.
- United State Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace addressed the joint meetings of the State and National Granges.
- W. F. Hill, Past State Master, wrote "A Brief History of the Grange Movement in PA" in recognition of the 50th Anniversary. This appeared in the PA Grange News and was reprinted in pamphlet form.
- Master McSparran voluntarily retired at the Annual Session in Reading in 1924.
- Past Master W. F. Hill proposed an amendment to the Constitution that no officers should be printed on the ballot for an office with the exception of the Treasurer and Secretary if that person has held the same office continuously for six years in succession. The amendment was approved but repealed the following year.

Legislative:

- During McSparran's first year as Master, the State Legislative Committee succeeded in securing the enactment of a bill providing for the appointment of an agriculture committee to make a plan for better coordination between the State Department of Agriculture and the PA State College. It was noted that the College should handle all matters of education, experimental work done at the experiment station connected with the College. The Department of Agriculture should look after regulatory matters, administration of agriculture laws, gathering of statistics and public investigation falling in their realm.
- The State Grange was disappointed in the actions of the State Legislature in 1915 noting the following:
- Asked for more equal taxation and had the expenses of primaries put back on counties and a bonus for dirt roads entirely rejected.
- The Grange formulated a road system after the school system and Governor Martin Brumbaugh instructed the Grange to leave the Highway Department alone.
- The Grange asked the State to pay the debt it owed townships for roads by statute and received \$1 ½ million on account and were told to ask for no more.
- The Grange asked the legislature to vote on legalizing rum and received a rebuff.
- The Grange asked for larger appropriations for the public schools and for State College and instead money poured into the coffers of institutions that the State had no statutory responsibility.
- The Grange asked for listing of hazardous occupations in the Workmen's Compensation Law and received an exemption that would probably be declared unconstitutional.
- The Grange asked for control of children in the Child Labor Law and received an exemption.
- In 1915 entered into a contract with Farmers & Traders Life Insurance Company, organized by Grange leaders in NY and PA. From the beginning the company was managed by Grange members and a majority of stockholders have been Grange members. Funds largely vested in farm mortgages.
- At the December 1916 Annual Session, World War I had been in progress for two plus years and people complained about high prices. Urban people complained that prices were too high and the farmers contended that prices they received for products had not advanced as much as prices of feed, fertilizer, machinery, etc.
- State Grange advocated for the establishment of a League of Nations to preserve peace.
- Legislative Committee contended that agriculture was being discriminated against by the State Governor and cited:
 - Cutting off appropriations for dirt roads.
 - Failure to provide aid, granted by law, for eradication of bovine tuberculosis.
 - Putting the cost of conducting primary elections on the counties when a law had been enacted for the costs to be assumed by the State.
 - Decreased appropriations to County Fairs.
 - Decreasing rate for maintenance of public schools.
 - Additional exactions of State Departments on country people.
 - Grange went on record in favor of woman's suffrage in the State and Nation.
- Grange, along with all Americans were in favor of remaining neutral in the European War if it could be done without sacrificing vital interests and the honor of the National.
- With the sinking of the Lusitania and loss of American lives, US declared war on German April 6, 1917. The US lacked Merchant Marine ships as it had depended on other nations. When the War began, England and other countries the US depended on pulled their Merchant vessels for war leaving the US stranded and crippling foreign commerce. Ag producers were hit harder than any other group.

- December 1917 State Session it was noted that the farmers in the US produced more food per man during the War than had ever been grown in the same space of time in the history of the world. Agriculture also supplied its fair share of fighting men.
- The Grange supported every phase of the War. Granges vied with each other in supporting the Red Cross and in purchasing Government Bonds.
- The Legislature appropriated \$1,750,000 toward the sum due the townships for roads and effort would be made at the next session that effort would be made to secure the remainder due of approximately \$1,500,000.
- Grange recommended heavy excess profits tax and high income tax in upper brackets to raise money needed by the Federal Government to fund the War.
- Resolution to authorize the State Master to appoint a committee to survey forest resources and devise a program for better conservation of timberlands. Appointed Gifford Pinchot, William T. Creasy and Fred Brenckman to the Committee.
- State Grange was unhappy with National Grange that they had not taken active and positive steps in protecting and promoting agricultural interests. Master McSparran, William T. Creasy, and Gifford Pinchot took the lead in the establishment of the National Board of Farm Organizations in 1917.
- The Armistice was signed ending World War I prior to the December 1918 Annual Session.
- During 1918 Executive Officers of the State Grange attended meetings under the National Board of Farm Organizations to speed the War effort and bring unity among various organized farm groups in the country.
- Planned for the construction of a Temple of Agriculture to be the permanent headquarters for farm interests in Washington, DC. Proposed cost \$1 million to be proportionately distributed among several states. PA's share was \$46,000. State Grange endorsed the plan recommended by the Legislative Committee. The residence of John Wanamaker was purchased for \$60,000.
- National Farm Organization functioned for approximately 12 years with the State Grange and some individuals raising \$30,000 toward the purchase of the building and expenses of the Organization. WA and ID combined raised an equal amount and other states contributed very little and the mortgage was never fully paid. The National Cooperative Milk Producers Federation paid off the debt and secured the title to the building.
- The 1919 Annual Session of the State Grange brought the Grange's full support to the ratification of the 18th and 19th Amendments to the Constitution of the US. The 18th Amendment dealt with Prohibition and the 19th Amendment Woman's Suffrage. Both were ratified by PA but there was no enforcement of the Prohibition Amendment due to the lack of enforcement by the Federal Government.
- The 1920 Annual Session reported no peace treaty had been signed with Germany making it impossible to trade with Germany and the Central Powers. Agricultural products suffered and helped to depress farm prices. Contributing to the level of farm prices was the fact that the Federal Government was engaged in a crusade to bring down the cost of living and the farmer became a victim.
- The Federal Reserve Board raised discount rates and restricted credit making it difficult for farmers in getting money to market their products. They were forced to throw their crops and livestock on a demoralized market for any price they could get for them. The Department of Justice prosecuted leaders of farm cooperatives charging them with violating the anti-trust laws because they fixed the prices on selling their goods.

- The State Grange in conjunction with other farm groups urged the enactment of the Capper-Volstead bill, legalizing cooperative marketing among farmers. The bill was drafted by John D. Miller of Dairymen's League, and a life-long member of Thompson Grange in Susquehanna County.
- The Home Ec Committee called attention to demoralizing effects of side shows at County Fairs in the state pleading for their elimination. The Grange played a leading part in correcting the situation during the Pinchot Administration.
- The 1921 State Grange Legislative Committee summarized the activities of the Grange in connection with the work of the State Legislature.
 - Grange led fight against the Edmonds bill providing for daylight savings time during the summer.
 - Grange was victorious in opposing the Marshall bill, providing for the assessment and collection of taxes with the county as a unit.
 - Urged passage of a series of four bills for forestry and conservation which were all enacted.
 - Advocated the enactment of providing for the establishment of a State Fair. It passed with an appropriation of \$15,000 to defray expenses of a Commission to do the preliminary work of establishing the Fair.
 - Strongly protected further centralization of affairs of government. Took away the freedom of citizens to control local affairs by local elected officials.
 - Grange led the fight in the 1921 primary elections against calling for a constitutional convention. Received strong support from the PA Federation of Labor. The proposal was defeated by a 100,000 majority.
- During the 50th Anniversary session in 1923, the Grange fought many unsound tax proposals and succeeded in getting a small levy imposed on the net profits of manufacturing corporations. The levy was made self-repealing at the end of two years.
- Helped prevent the passage of a branch banking bill.
- Bills passes benefiting the dairy industry including anti-filled milk bill, the skim milk bill, and the ice cream bill all passed in 1923.
- P. H. Dewey of Tioga County elected Master in 1924.