

J. AUDLEY BOAK

9th MASTER OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANGE (1932-1938)



The Person:

- He was born on June 10, 1873 on a Slippery Rock Township farm in Lawrence County. He was the son of Scotch-Irish descendants, and his mother died when he was 9 years old.
- After completing grade school, he attended Rose Point Academy. He then taught for six years.
- He married a Crawford County teacher Tilly Kelly on November 14, 1900. They had four children; C. Everett, J. Francis, Mrs. Martha Chamberlain, and Mrs. Edna McEwen.
- The homestead farm had been in the family since 1929 and contained 330 acres of land devoted to production of fruit and livestock, all without government aid. He also raised Chester White swine and Shropshire sheep.
- During 1873-74 there were seven Granges organized in Lawrence County, but within a few years they ceased to exist. Because of the strong Grange hold in Crawford County where Mrs. Boak came from, it was felt the Grange would do the same in Lawrence County. With assistance of Clarion County Deputy S. S. Blyholder, Plain Grove and Willard Granges were organized, and the Boaks became Charter members of Willard Grange where he was elected Overseer on March 10, 1910. He later served as Master and various other officers. He assisted in organizing numerous Granges in Lawrence County as well as the Pomona Grange serving as Pomona Master for eight years.
- December 1926 he was elected State Overseer.
- Following the resignation of State Master P. H. Dewey on February 2, 1927, he became Master until the following December. He preferred to complete his term as Overseer so declined to be a candidate for Master.
- E. B. Dorsett was elected to fill Mr. Dewey's unexpired term retiring in 1932.
- Mr. Boak was elected Master at the 60th Session held in Williamsport and served until 1938. He also served as National Assistant Steward from 1935-1939.
- During Master Boak's term, State Grange successfully opposed the call for a new Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention.
- Master Boak helped organize the Wheat Growers' Association of Pennsylvania and was elected President of the organization.

Of Note:

- During the Boak Administration, membership loss was halted and a healthy growth followed. During his term as Master and aided by the officers group, the Sixth Degree was conferred on approximately 10,000 members.
- In 1933 there were 830 Granges with a total membership of 62,000 compared to 67,205 at the end of 1932.
- In 1935 there was a net gain in excess of 2,000 members.

- The Annual meeting held in Hershey in 1934 indicated 11 new Granges had been organized and 14 reorganized with a gain of 1,544 members.
- Master Boak directed a letter to Subordinate Masters suggesting the appointment of membership committees in every Grange and mapped out a plan for systematic canvassing for new members.
- In 1935 Pennsylvania, in conjunction with other states, assisted in raising funds for the purchase of the O. H. Kelley Farm in Elk River, MN.
- The total membership in 1936 was 66,447 showing a net gain for the year.
- Pennsylvania hosted the National Grange session held in Harrisburg in conjunction with the Annual Pennsylvania Session in 1937.
- Prior to the 1937 Annual Session, 16 special Sixth Degree conferrals were held across the state conferring the Degree on 4,363 candidates. During the Annual Meeting, 798 additional members received the Sixth Degree bringing the total to 5,141. The Seventh Degree was conferred on 6,715 candidates compared to the 4,000 in Pittsburgh in 1923.
- National Grange Officers and Delegates were taken to the Gettysburg National Cemetery that was planned and designed by William Saunders, the first Master of the National Grange. Mr. Saunders was chosen for this project by a Conference of Governors of States loyal to the Union at a meeting held in Altoona, PA. The dedication of the cemetery took place on November 19, 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln.
- Two Civil War nurses, Anna Morris Holstein and Mary Thropp Cone encouraged the preservation of the Encampment Ground at Valley Forge.

Legislative:

- In 1933 there was a regular and a special session of the Legislature held. State Grange contended that the State Highway Department should be responsible for damages in the relocation of roads. A bill containing this provision passed and was signed by Governor Pinchot.
- Efforts were pursued to receive more state support for third and fourth class school districts but was not adopted.
- Legislation providing for the return of a portion of the funds accrued from gas tax be returned to the townships which was adopted.
- The Grange brought about influence to defeat the call for a Constitutional Convention which was defeated by more than 267,000 votes in 1935.
- In 1935 the State Legislative Committee urged the repeal of the Federal Potato Control Act, a stringent and unconstitutional measure passed by Congress. The U.S. Supreme Court voided the processing tax imposed under the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the Potato Control Act was repealed.
- In 1936 the Public Service Commission announced they would no longer cooperate with the Joint Committee on Rural Electrification.
- State and National Grange testified before the Judicial Hearings of the Senate in opposition to the passage of a bill to pack the Supreme Court.
- During the 1938 Annual Session the Agriculture Committee endorsed sound soil conservation practices but was not in favor of Federal Subsidies in the process.
- Kenzie S. Bagshaw of Blair County elected Master.