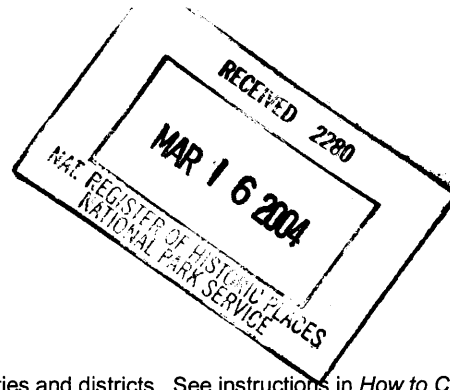


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Benton Grange #458
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Corner of River Road and School Drive N/A not for publication
city or town Benton N/A vicinity
state Maine code ME county Kennebec code 011 zip code 04901

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ernie S. Fredson 2/24/04
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Stepu
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 4/28/04
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

BENTON GRANGE
Name of Property

KENNEBEC CO., MAINE
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)
 private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)
 building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)
Contributing Noncontributing

_____ 1 _____ buildings
_____ sites
_____ structures
_____ objects
_____ 1 0 _____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
SOCIAL / Meeting Hall
GOVERNMENT / Town Hall

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
SOCIAL / Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS / Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation Concrete
walls Synthetics / Vinyl
roof Metal / Steel
other _____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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BENTON GRANGE

KENNEBEC CO., MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

DESCRIPTION

The Benton Grange is a large, rectangular, yellow-painted frame building located in the heart of Benton Station, the largest and western most village in Benton, Maine. Constructed to serve as the meeting Hall for the Benton Grange, (Patrons of Husbandry), #458 in 1915, this two story, south facing structure is one of the most imposing structures in the overwhelmingly residential town. Benton Station is a small community that developed on the east side of the Kennebec River across from Waterville and Fairfield, and just north of Winslow, all of which were 19th century manufacturing centers. In Benton Station, the presence of the Main Central Railroad and United Paper Board Company factory echoed the industry of its neighbors, yet beyond the Station Village Benton was primarily an agriculture town. The location of the Grange was related to the availability of affordable land offered by a grange member.

The Grange building is located at the northeast corner of Neck and Benton Roads, on a 1.7 acre lot that which is essentially un-landscaped and utilized extensively for parking. Rising from a low ornamental concrete block foundation, the rectangular building faces south with a narrow facade. The building is essentially Colonial Revival in stylistic temperament, but its somewhat austere facade is embellished by a Queen Anne-esque wooden porch and a hipped-roof dormer backed by a steel-covered, hipped roof. This simply arranged structure further features three one-over-one sash windows spaced evenly across the second floor of the facade, while a wooden sign stating "Benton Grange 1915" decorates the dormer. Double five-panel entry doors provide the only break in first floor wall under the porch, which itself is decorated with spindlework supports, gingerbread spandrels and widely spaced balusters. Wooden steps lead to a concrete walkway across the front lawn, while lattice work under the porch complete the building's facade.

Partially obscured by the porch roof is a slightly flared, shingled coarse that surrounds the building and visually separates the first and second stories, both of which were clapboarded. The east and west elevations are five bays wide, with graduated windows from bottom to top: four light fixed sash are placed in the basement, one-over-one sash on the first floor, and elongated one-over-one sash on the upper story. The building's two chimneys are best viewed on the eastern elevation: one near the southern end at the ridge, and the other rising from the northern plane of the hipped roof. A wooden fire escape is positioned under the northern-most window on the second floor. The rear of the building contains two one-over-one windows on either side of a door on the first floor.

The interior of the Benton Grange contains spaces specifically designed to meet to various activities and function of the Grange establishment. On the first floor the entrance doors yield access to a large central lobby flanked by a coat room and cellar stairs to the west, two bathrooms and the second floor staircase to the east, and a set of double doors leading into the dining room to the north. The lobby is finished with varnished tongue-and-groove wainscoting and painted plaster walls, hardwood floors, five cross panel doors with bull's eye corner blocks and molded trim. Two small ticket windows are located on either side of the lobby, one of which opens into the coat room and the other into the women's

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BENTON GRANGE

KENNEBEC CO., MAINE

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wash room.¹ The wide staircase features a restrained, Arts and Crafts influenced turned newel posts at each of its three turns, all of which are varnished.

The dining room lacks the wainscoting found in the lobby, however the hardwood floors and mouldings are present, and are accented by a tongue-and-groove ceiling punctuated by laterally cased beams supported on metal posts. At the northern end of the room, a wooden cupboard unit containing four sets of shelves and sixteen drawers is built into the wall and accessible from both the dining room and the kitchen. This latter room stretches across the northern end of the building and contains a substantial number of features dating to the buildings construction, including a ten foot tin sink, and several long freestanding counters, all mounted on period bases. A door in the north wall of the kitchen provides access to the exterior of the building, while a small staircase in the northeast corner climbs to the back stage area on the second floor.

Although the sharing of meals are important events in a Grange, it is the second level of the Benton Grange which has the best public room. At the top of the staircase a second, more expansive and well lite lobby opens at the top of the staircase. To the west of the lobby is another coat room, which like the lobby itself and the coat room downs stairs contains a running band of hooks and shelves around the room's walls. Both the lobby and the coat room contain the same varnished woodwork as the first floor, and in each room are striking, stamped and painted metal ceilings featuring a border of urns and swags surrounding an interior field of coffered blocks. At the north ends of the lobby and coat room, five-panel double folding doors open into the main hall. The northern end of this large room is dominated by the varnished, classical proscenium arch and stage. The hand painted stage curtain depicts a rural scene set among advertising placards for local businesses, c. 1940². The hall ceiling features the same pattern as the front rooms, however at the center of the design is a special square panel which depicts Grange symbols, and is decorated with sixteen colored light bulbs surrounding a hanging fixture. This structure was built after Benton received electricity, and as such there are five original milk glass light fixtures dangling from rounded ceiling shields.

Although for financial reasons, vinyl siding was applied over the original clapboards in 1980 and wooden replacement windows installed in 1997, there have been almost no changes to the material fabric of the Benton Grange since it opened in 1915. Described by newspapers at that time as one of the nicest Granges in Maine, the Benton Grange exhibits a high degree if interior integrity through its plan, materials and style.

¹Although the Grange was originally built with bathroom facilities for both men and women, initially the basic provisions for the men were located in the cellar. Consequently the first women's washroom has been rearranged to accommodate both genders.

²The date of the curtain has been approximated by consulting the Maine Register to determine when all the enterprises listed were in business at the same time.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A-D: Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A-G: owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes. removed from its original location. a birthplace or a grave. a cemetery. a reconstructed building, object, or structure. a commemorative property. less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

POLITICS / GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1915 - 1954

Significant Dates

1915

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Possibly Frank M. Gifford, (1858-1916)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Criteria: preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. previously listed in the National Register. previously determined eligible by the National Register. designated a National Historic Landmark. recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey. recorded by Historic American Engineering Record.

Primary location of additional data:

- Criteria: State Historic Preservation Office. Other State agency. Federal agency. Local government. University. Other. Name of repository:

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KENNEBEC CO., MAINE

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Benton Grange # 458 is an organization established in Benton Maine in 1906 as a subordinate entity within the Patrons of Husbandry agriculturally-focused fraternal system. Initially the men and women of this Grange held their meetings in the Benton Station School, but by 1910 they laid plans to construct a building to harbor their activities. In the spring of 1915 the group voted to accept the plans of Frank M. Gifford of Fairfield for a two story, rectangular building with a hall on the upper floor. In October of 1915 the Benton Grange Hall (locally known as "The Grange") opened in time to host the annual Grange fair which included arts and craft displays, food, produce and school exhibits, sporting contests, lectures, awards, and suppers all of which were conducted in and around the new hall. The official dedication of the Benton Grange occurred on December 3, 1915, as described by the *Waterville Morning Sentinel* the next day:

"The Benton Grange hall, which is considered the best in the state, with the exception of one in Houlton, and which was completed on the 13th day of October, 1915, was most fittingly dedicated yesterday afternoon, and evening. The hall is a large yellow structure and is situated on the Neck Road at West Benton. It is one of the most expensive halls in the state and this grange boasts of some 200 members. Ten years ago Benton grange was organized and has been rapidly growing in membership and has been financially successful every year since that time...The first speaker, W.J. Thompson was then introduced and said that he never came into a new grange hall unless he thought [t] of the architecture. The fact stands for expression for your tastes, desires and religion and it means a great deal to think of the architecture. The grange hall of today is much different than that of 30 years ago, said Mr. Thompson. The meetings were held in schoolhouses or any other building to be had with little or no expense...This grange hall could have been constructed much less expensively, but it shows that you were earnest in having a large building and it shows that there is a desire to have other grange members visit the grange and other new members. When the grangers [sic] build a hall like this one it is much credit to the grange and community."

(December 4, 1915.)

The history of the Grange has its basis in post-Civil War agricultural crises. The following two paragraphs are from a brochure announcing the photographic exhibit titled: "Ritual and Community: The Maine Grange."

The Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, is an agriculturally-based secret society founded in 1867. The Order, open to both men and women, was designed to meet the economic, social, and educational needs of a class of Americans - the small farmer - whose day to day lives were being irrevocably transformed in the post-Civil War period. The proliferation of the railroad, the mass production of farm machinery, and the increasing control of a new class of business men known as "speculators" or "middle-men" over the sale and distribution of farm products were a few of the many influences which led to widespread enthusiasm for the Grange in the 1870s. National membership in the Grange grew to over 1 million members in the wake of the 1873 depression, when farmers joined the organization as a means of buying and selling farm goods at wholesale

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prices. In the mid-1870s, membership plummeted as most Grange cooperative ventures failed to meet members' expectations.

By the 1880s, however, Grange membership in Maine was on the increase, part of what has been dubbed "the second Grange movement" centered in the Northeast; by 1887, Maine had the largest Grange membership in the nation. The focus of the second movement was an emphasis on the Grange's educational and social benefits. (Brown, 1992)

The Town of Benton is located adjacent to three industrialized municipalities on the Kennebec River: Waterville, Fairfield and Winslow. According to town chroniclers Kingsbury and Dayo, this was not the case in Benton at the end of the 19th century.

"Agriculture is now the principal occupation of the inhabitants of Benton. Fifty years and more ago, flourishing saw, grist, carding and dye mills, were clustered on the banks of the sinuous Sebesticook, at the upper and lower falls; but the proximity of Fairfield and Waterville caused the gradual diversion of most of these channels of industry to those places, and at the present time scarcely a trace of the sites of the old mills can be discerned. The placid stream now flows silently through the town to its trysting place with its larger sister, the Kennebec, broken only by the dam of the Kennebec Fiber Company at Benton Falls, which for a moment says on it onward course." (P. 1219).

In 1909, three years after the Benton Grange was chartered, the local town register enumerated the occupations for 298 heads of households (including retirees and widows): 94, or thirty-one percent of them, were farmers. Many of the charter members of the Benton Grange had formerly joined the Grange in Clinton, but shifted their allegiance to the new chapter.

The local or subordinate hall is the focus for most of the activities of the Grange. Each of these structures feature large gathering rooms where the rituals and meetings are held, and many also contain a stage and/or a dining room.

"In Grange halls farm families share their social activities, discuss their mutual problems, plan programs and fearlessly face conditions which call for skillful leadership, and out of which many a betterment project is evolved.

Here in these meeting halls, rural people through their Granges have formulated and carried out projects of far-reaching effect to themselves and to their city neighbors. Starting in Grange meetings, often in good-natured discussion, have been such great undertakings as delivery of mail to farm homes, rural electrification, improved highways, better schools and countless other worthy achievements, which perhaps never would have been attempted but for the nucleus of promotion created in alert Subordinate Granges." (Gardner, pp. 366-367.)

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Grange buildings were built at the prerogative of local or subordinate granges. Although most Grange's have dining and kitchen facilities, coat rooms, halls and stages, neither the State nor National Grange organizations dictated the form or style for any Grange building. As a result, each of the Grange buildings in Maine reflects both regional and temporal styles specific to their location and the desire of the membership. Indeed, many of the Granges share floor plans, materials, and style with the town halls and public social halls built during the four decades surrounding 1900. In many ways, although the Benton Grange is a membership organization, the structure under consideration in the nomination functions in a larger context for the town of Benton. As one of the largest gathering spaces in town, the Benton Grange has been utilized by the community for parties and weddings, stage performances, dinners and celebrations. The Benton Boy Scouts have been associated with this Grange periodically, and until from 1915-1990, the second floor hall hosted the Annual Town Meeting. Voting was held in the upstairs cloak room.

Over the years the town of Benton has slowly lost its agricultural economy and the annual Grange fairs ended in the 1940s. Yet today the Benton Grange continues to maintain a membership of over 100 active members. Historically and currently, the Benton Grange is an important and significant structure at the heart of this community. Plans are under way to provide handicapped accessibility to the hall on the second floor so that annual Town Meetings and voting can once again be held in the building. The Benton Grange is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance within the context of Benton's Social History, and for its long time association with the Politics and Government of the village as the site of its Annual Meeting and polling place.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.7

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 19 453566 4937271
Zone Easting Northing

3 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 6 January 2004

street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town AUGUSTA state ME zip code 04333 -0065

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is fully described by the Town of Benton Tax Map 16, Lot 7.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The above cited map and lot contain the Grange building and associated land, (used for parking and outdoor activities) owned by the Benton Grange Corporation as documented above, in the fall of 2003.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
30 December 2003
Exterior, south facade; facing north.

Photograph 2 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
30 December 2003
Interior, kitchen; facing southwest.

Photograph 3 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
30 December 2003
Interior, second floor lobby, facing northeast.

Photograph 4 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
30 December 2003
Interior, hall and stage, facing north.