

QUONONCHONAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

CASSANDRA and DAVID CRANDALL

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Interviewed by Anne Doyle

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DOYLE: The Crandalls have been members of the Quonnie Grange and also are continuing their membership in the Grange. Cassandra, could you and David just state your name and maybe when you were born.

CASSAN: Cassandra Crandall, and I was born in Newport in 1947.

DAVID: Dave Crandall, and I was born in 1940.

DOYLE: Well, we're here this morning mainly to get the history of the Quonnie Grange, because we're trying to establish a fund for maintenance and so forth, so we can improve the Grange. And the committee that's doing this has requested to know more about the history of the Grange. So that's our purpose.

Cassandra or David, could you just start by telling us about the Quonnie Grange, even before the present Quonnie Grange was built.

CASSAN: OK. First of all, National Grange started right after the Civil War; it was formed in 1867, by seven founding members. Actually you could almost say eight, because the eighth one was a woman. And it was founded as a family fraternal organization, with the idea of giving farmers and other people who lived in rural communities a voice in the government, by lobbying; and also, to help encourage improvements in rural communities. They were eventually important in getting Rural Free Delivery and in bringing electricity to rural communities, too, among other things.

And in 1887 the Rhode Island State Grange formed; and there were a lot of small granges, community granges, that formed at that time. One of them was Charlestown, Number Five, and unfortunately, like a lot of other Rhode Island granges, had a brief membership and then folded. Some of the other granges did re-organize and are still going. Charlestown Number

Five did not re-organize; instead, they decided to have Quonochontaug Grange. And that was formed in 1911.

DOYLE: Can I ask why they folded? Was there a reason?

CASSAN: The reason that was given was – lack of payment of dues! But I think what happened was that people got excited about it and they went to it; and the meetings were at least twice a month. Plus, then there were community ones, Pomona meetings, another Saturday of the month. And probably it took up too much time. Do you have any idea?

DAVID: I heard politics, and clashes of minds; temperance and in-temperance and that sort of thing.

DOYLE: Now what about the Quonnie Grange, the original Quonnie Grange? Unless you want to say more about anything else before we get into that.

CASSAN: Um—no; I guess [not]. At first Quonochontaug Grange met in people's homes; they didn't have a building. And several people who were members offered land in 1914, 15, and 16. And it wasn't until late in 1916 that they purchased property, called the Doherty land and buildings for \$1000 dollars. And they received a house, which needed a little remodeling, and a barn, that was 22 by 36 feet, which needed a lot of renovation to be a meeting hall.

So they continued to meet in people's homes until 1917, and then they had the building ready for meetings. They had volunteer workers – it's confusing; it [source not mentioned] says they got 40 cents per hour at 4% interest, which doesn't make too much sense if they were volunteering. And there was one hired man who was paid cash. And the project, including the purchase of the land and remodeling, was \$1,519 and 79 cents.

DOYLE: And where was the location?

CASSAN: OK it's located just off the corner of Route One--

DAVE: [At Route] 216—behind RicciDon's

DOYLE: And it's still there!

CASSAN: The structure is still there.

DOYLE: Is it being used?

DAVID: It's a rental; it was turned into a duplex.

CASSAN: And they ended up equipping – they had to spend another \$121 and 84 cents to equip the hall for occupancy and protect it from fire and indemnify the Grange in case of fire damage, and to clean up the yard in

the rear to allow for parking of teams and automobiles. They equipped the house, which they called the Annex, with tables and seats for suppers. They borrowed a wood stove and purchased a piano.

DOYLE: Now the Annex house--that was a house originally – is that what you're saying? Is that still there too?

DAVID: I have no idea.

CASSAN: I'm not sure.

DOYLE: OK; That's all right.

CASSAN: This was again in 1917. In 1922, they voted to enlarge the hall. And they sold the Annex house for \$600. In 1924 they wired the hall; in 1928 they dug a new well, and in the 1930's they had a big grange wedding there that made a lot of grange history: Quonochontaug Master W. Munroe Hoxie married Perryville's lecturer, Elizabeth Browning, at Perryville. Let's see: 1940, water was piped into the kitchen [so] they didn't have to use the hand pump, and a new sink was installed. In 1945 they had a ladies' degree team organized, and in 1946 a juvenile grange was organized. Juvenile grange goes from ages 6 through 14, I believe.

DOYLE: This is still at the old Grange--?

CASSAN: Still at the old grange hall And, they started discussing building a new hall, because they thought it was becoming a little too crowded at the old one. [To David] You could tell a little about the old hall, as you remember it.

DAVID: Well, it still had the old wood stove in it, as I remember it. And when they had square dances, it took two guys with two sticks to pick the stove up and march it outside so they wouldn't get burned while they were dancing. The outhouse was out in the middle of the lot. I do remember the kitchen after xxx; I don't remember the pub. It was a nice hall; we had movies there every Saturday morning, for the kids, free. And popcorn was extra - - or something like that. It was great to go to and good for the Grange.

DOYLE: It was a real community center.

DAVID: It was a community center, yes.

CASSAN: And the meetings were twice a month on Saturday, in the evening. And a lot of the time they had afternoon events, too.

DAVID: And normally when the subordinates got upstairs, the juveniles got downstairs. You know, it was a family oriented—

DOYLE: Kind of like church—

DAVID: Kind of like church.

DOYLE: Now, what other functions would they have?

DAVID: They put on turkey suppers even in the old Grange, and it was thirty cents or something like that. And they'd serve a hundred-- Remember? And that was their source of income. We had -- I can remember clambakes in the back—the real ones: dig a pit, bring in the seaweed. But that was for Grangers, you know. XXX There was a lot of good times there. Then xxx the moving.

DOYLE: We get into that, too.

CASSAN: In 1946, when they were talking about getting a new--building a new, larger hall—thirty people at the meetings. I guess, and five of them opposed to it. They wanted to stay where they were. Vernon and Emma Hutchins offered land on the Post Road for \$600.00, for the building site: 200 feet by 500 feet. This is what we purchased in January of '47; and we sold the existing hall to Anna Richardson for \$3500, with the agreement that they could continue to meet there until July of 1948. We had a Building Committee, with brothers Charles Ross, Sylvester Capalbo, and W. Munro Hoxie, and secured a loan from Industrial Trust for \$10,000. We cleared the land, dug a well and cesspool, dug the cellar and poured the footings. In 1948 the hall was actually built; they had a lot of volunteers, and a lot of the supplies were donated.

DOYLE: Can I ask: you mentioned Richardson --? What was that all about? She owned it?

CASSAN: Oh, she purchased the old--

DAVID: The old hall.

DOYLE: Oh the old hall. I'm sorry; I didn't understand.

CASSAN: The first meeting in the new hall was held in July of 1948. And in August they voted to borrow an additional \$2500 to complete the hall. Meetings in 1954 were changed from Saturdays to Thursdays—on the second and fourth Thursdays, at 8:00. In 1961, they had their 40th Anniversary party and burned the mortgage at the altar. And they presented an anniversary program, and the youth presented a pig.

DOYLE: Were you present during that?

CASSAN: No. [To David] Were you?

DAVID: No. I didn't xxxxx.

CASSAN: OK. Let's see: in 1964, they promoted having a secondary fire station in Quonochontaug. Much opposition came, however, from the Cross' Mills

Fire Department, overextending the Dunn's Corners District into Charlestown. However, legislation was passed; and Dunn's Corners Number 2, first of all, leased the land in 1965, before it was turned over to them. When funding for the fire station seemed unavailable, they started thinking about having the Grange dining hall used, if the District would renovate it so that a fire truck could be put down there. But that never came to be. More funds did come in, and they decided that they could build a separate building.

In 1968, many improvements to the hall, especially to the outside, began, continuing through 1972.

DOYLE: Do you remember what that might have included?

CASSAN: Well, it says they had – they put on a new roof, and they did general repairs and sprucing up. The fire escape was re-done, walkways, window boxes, shrubs, trees, and back door.

DOYLE: I had heard that there was an entrance in the back for –

CASSAN: I thought that the way the doors were downstairs, on the one side that faces the fire station, that they had thought about bringing a truck in that way.

DOYLE: That clears that up –fine.

CASSAN: Let's see: In 1971 they had their 60th Anniversary party for the Grange, and 200 attended an open meeting. Birthday cake shaped like a book was presented. In 1973, Quonochontaug Grange deeded over the land to the Dunn's Corners Fire District, to allow for expansion of their building. In 1981 the juvenile grange was re-activated.

DOYLE: Can I just ask a question there? In 1973 it was turned over to the—

CASSAN: The land that the fire-station building is on was deeded over --

DOYLE: Oh; not the Grange.

CASSAN: No.

DOYLE: It was just the land. I understand.

CASSAN: Just the land.

DAVID: The land in back, where they stretch the hoses out.

CASSAN: And – in 1986 they had their 75th Anniversary, and the Hall was filled to capacity with Grangers from throughout Rhode Island and some visitors from Connecticut. Woodrow Tucker, High Priest of the Demeter of the National Grange was the keynote speaker.

In 1999, Quonochontaug [Grange] sold its hall to the Dunn's Corners Fire District, with the agreement that they could continue to meet there for ten years. The District has made many repairs and improvements to the hall, and it continues to be used as a community center.

In 2001, just two months after its 90th anniversary, Quonochontaug surrendered its charter. Our membership was 43, and it was given a blanket demit to Perryville Grange. Our funds were turned over to the Rhode Island State Grange, as directed by Grange By-laws. And we set up an annual scholarship. We were allowed to direct donations to non-profits, on an annual basis, including the Alvin Kelley Farm in Minnesota and Rhode Island Patrons in xxx. Over the years, we had nearly a thousand people in the community who belonged to the Quonochontaug Grange.

DOYLE: Is that what you remember – that it was that large?

CASSAN: I don't know. I was a member. In the '70's it was about a hundred and fifty.

DAVID: Yeah; a hundred and fifty.

CASSAN: In the book. And a lot of them did come to the Grange. It was nothing to have a meeting with 70 to 80 people present. And towards the end we couldn't get a quorum of 7. So -

DOYLE: I don't know if you're going to go into this, but I'd be interested to know what happened within the Grange. What kind of activities --

CASSAN: Oh! I thought you meant why did they fold.

DOYLE: Oh –well, you can say that too.

CASSAN: Well, some of the activities, besides what David said before: we had – in addition to the regular turkey suppers, we had an annual Calendar Supper. I guess they did in the old hall too.

DAVID: Yeah.

CASSAN: Calendar Suppers –A member is assigned, or selects, a table, like , we'll say, "January." And then you decorate it accordingly, and at one time you had to sell twelve tickets for that table and also provide a dessert.

DOYLE: That was a fund-raiser.

CASSAN: It was a fund-raiser. And we hosted antiques shows, flea markets—

DOYLE: In the Grange or outside?

CASSAN: Inside. Flea markets outside. Auctions inside. We participated at the Washington County Fair, which is run by the Grange; talent shows,

minstrels, barbecues. We always donated to local and non-local charities—we've had --

DAVID: We let churches—that's where St. Andrews started --

CASSAN: St. Andrews, right.

DOYLE: Really? -- I mean that wasn't part of the Grange name --

DAVID: No; they met there before they built the building.

DOYLE: Oh, I see. There were other churches that used it too, is that right?

CASSAN: Yes.

DOYLE: Do you know which ones?

DAVID: That one in particular.

CASSAN: Well, the Baptist Church would hold its Easter Sunday breakfasts there. And also we had blood drives there, and hearing tests. It was open for -- we tried to stay non-political. The Grange is not supposed to get involved with politics. But sometimes they allowed various speakers on topics of interest.

DAVID: When Greenacres was going through that summer, the State had sent a speaker down and the community could come and listen to it.

DOYLE: What's Greenacres?

DAVID: When they were condemning all the land on the barrier beach.

CASSAN: To protect it.

DAVID: To protect it. You know, it was an information center.

CASSAN: Also voting was held there, downstairs you know; all the great big voting machines were brought in and set up.

DAVID: That was when United Nuclear was being talked about -- no, not United Nuclear but the power plant -- the nuclear power plant. They had several meetings there. And Doctor -- whatever his name was --spoke several times there, against it.

DOYLE: Now were the meetings mostly upstairs, or were they downstairs?

DAVID: Upstairs.

CASSAN: Upstairs, unless they involved food. Food was always served downstairs.

DOYLE: There's something that I'd really like to get into: what was the kitchen like at that time?

DAVID: We served turkey suppers to 250 people.

CASSAN: In one evening.

DAVID: In one evening.

DOYLE: And you used – I mean there were all the facilities there to do that –

CA & DA: Oh yeah.

CASSAN: Beach Associations in the area met there, too. AARP met there before they went to Ninigret. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts –

DAVID: Brownies--

CASSAN: Brownies-- Many people – well, members were allowed to use the Grange hall free of charge, but they had things like parties for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings held there; there were a lot of different things going on. Non-members could also rent the hall for those things.

DOYLE: And they would pay the Grange directly –

CASSAN: Right. It was mainly so that they would clean up afterwards. And, it's been used for commuter parking.

DOYLE: Was there --Is there a charge for that?

CA & DA: No.

DOYLE: No!

CASSAN: And Civil Defense/Red Cross shelter was there; they had a whole bunch of cots up in the attic, that could be used for snow. They want to – over on the other side of Route One--

DOYLE: Do you seen any of those former uses coming back? If they improve the building --?

CASSAN: I don't know.

DAVID: 'Cause right up to 10 years ago, they used to put a water buffalo on the back of every hurricane, so people could go there and draw water. But since the Fire Department's taken over, I haven't seen that done.

CASSAN: I believe too that some of the emergency helicopters have landed in the back field, to transport--.

DAVID: Right. And I think we've had a hundred cots upstairs to set up—

DOYLE: Where did you store those?

CASSAN: Up in the attic.

DOYLE: There's an attic?

CASSAN: Oh yes.

DOYLE: How do you get up to the attic?

CASSAN: Stairs. There's—

DOYLE: Beside the stage there?

CASSAN: No; on the other end. Over the coatroom, on the other side there's a set of stairs that go up. And that's where they had the projector—there were slits in the wall, where the projector xxx, because they continued to show movies there too.

DAVID: And the little window there? Used to charge admission.

DOYLE: No kidding! [Laughter] What would you like to see happen? I mean, what is your personal vision?

CASSAN: It 'd be nice to have it continue to be a community center, that people could use for some of these same things again: meetings, for example. And if they wanted to rent it for—well—parties are difficult, that's true in this day and age. But if they had it supervised by someone—even if they had to pay to have somebody there to just oversee—

DOYLE: There could be no liquor involved—is that a law?

CASSAN: Well, it wouldn't be now, I guess. But for the Grange there was a law about that. A lot of people didn't obey it, but—[laughter] XXXXX.

DOYLE: Did you all help with the painting and maintenance of the building and all that, or did you pay somebody to do it?

CASSAN: Oh yes; all the work was volunteer at that time.

DAVID: Anything xxx—if we had people who could do it, we did it. I always liked the roof to be hired out, but—

CASSAN: Well Clifford Pendleton re-did the windows that time, and members were janitors if you will— as far as maintaining the lawn--

DAVID: Oh yes; I mowed the lawn for five or six years, shoveled the walk for five or six years

CASSAN: We had a member who used to come down and plow snow plow. So we've had—most everything was taken care of. But as people got older and busier, and the young people had more and more things to do and became very mobile once they got to be sixteen and driving and all, organizations kind of took a big hit.

DOYLE: Times are continually changing, and that's what's happening now. It's hard, but life is always in flux.

CASSAN: But people still need a place that they can meet.

DOYLE: Um hm.

CASSAN: And --It's wonderful [that the Grange] still could be for antiques shows and for craft shows and sales—fundraisers--

DAVID: For years, the Washington County Pomona Fair princess contests were held here, because of the stage.

CASSAN: Right. Very few places have a stage.

DOYLE: That's true!

DAVID: The girls put on their finery to be on the stage --

DOYLE: You know, we've [the Quonnie Historical Society] been doing musicals, and if you didn't have that stage --we wouldn't be able to do it!

DAVID: Right, right. And it's a nice stage.

CASSAN: And it's good-sized.

DOYLE: Um hm!

CASSAN: The stairs that go down from the stage area used to go down into the kitchen.

DOYLE: Does it still do that?

DAVID: It should.

CASSAN: Yes -- unless they removed it.

DAVID: It's a very narrow stairway.

CASSAN: It's not a very safe stairway; they probably had it blocked off. But actually what the idea had been was to have a dressing room downstairs near the bathrooms, and they'd have that blocked off from the kitchen. But then they never did that, because they needed more space for the kitchen.

DOYLE: Were there any really big issues in terms of the maintenance end things or was it just the regular painting, windows, roof --?

DAVID: Yeah, really.

DOYLE: What about the flooring? It's such a nice floor --

DAVID: We had the -- we've done [it]several times. Professionally.

CASSAN: Professionally. And then it was just maintained like we do with Perryville and xxx –different things that David sent down after Perryville.

DAVID: But they fill when they move the sander in, then we'd finish it. And you know, the fill would last five or six years. With a little bit of care it could last ten years.

DOYLE: Because when you had dances – do you still have square dances here?

DAVID: No.

CASSAN: Perryville is a smaller hall. It would be difficult. It's set up very much like the Quonochontaug Hall.

DOYLE: Is this like a – do they use this plan for most granges?

DAVID: It seems that way.

CASSAN: But there are other variations, around. If you think of Richmond Grange, it's set up somewhat like that. But if you go to Exeter or to Rocky Hill, they're different. And Slocum's different too.

DOYLE: And they are buildings built around the same time period?

CASSAN: Not necessarily.

DAVID: A lot of them like --Hope Valley I think was a church. But that's got a stage; it's a nice building.

CASSAN: Potentially.

DAVID: Hope Valley is a boy scout building. Converted. A lot of them are converted houses, converted churches. Odd Fellow halls, whatever was available.

DOYLE: Now you must have had to designate somebody to schedule all these things within the organization.

DAVID: Secretary.

CASSAN: Seems once you become a secretary, you're in that for a long time. The person that was in there before me was in there for over 50 years, as secretary.

DOYLE: Are you secretary over in Perryville?

CASSAN: Um hm! [Laughter] Lucky me!

DOYLE: Once you have a skill, the fun is if you use it!

CASSAN: It seems like everything comes to the secretary first, and then the secretary has to get it to the right people.

DOYLE: Um hm! Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

CASSAN: I know they mentioned about the kitchen, and I think the kitchen would be a major problem in this day and age. Because after the Station Fire, there've been so many extra rules about—

DOYLE: The station fire? Oh, you're talking about the Station Fire in Providence – [in 2003]

CASSAN: Yes, I'm sorry -- not the Dunn's Corner [fire station] --after that happened, a lot of rules came down from the State, that make it somewhat difficult for organizations to meet the xxx, to have food served. And then they've also increased – the Health Department has increased regulations, too. You have to have a certified food handler--

DAVID: A certified kitchen, too.

CASSAN: And a certified kitchen.

DOYLE: I think they've been talking about maybe having what they call a catering kitchen?

CASSAN: Right; that would make more sense.

DOYLE: At least at the beginning. I think that, you know, re-doing the whole kitchen won't be done right away.

CASSAN: That would be very, very expensive, I think. Because they no longer have the big refrigerator, I guess, from what I saw in the report. I think that's gone. I don't know if the big stove is still there.

DAVID: No; there's none there.

CASSAN: They would need to re-do the sink situation. That wasn't too handy even when we were there.

DOYLE: And the bathrooms really need attention, too. That's what they said.

CASSAN: They're much better than they were before, so I don't know. they're handicapped accessible and everything.

DOYLE: Via the downstairs [entrance]. It's not handicapped accessible for somebody that's up on the upper level—

CASSAN: Right; you'd have to go outside and then around; that would be a problem. But – um – a catering kitchen I think would work out pretty well for everybody. Years ago, most of the volunteer firemen were Grangers, too.

DAVID: Yes.

CASSAN: So you know, it all interlaced; all worked together.

DOYLE: Was a memorial ribbon – maybe I would show it to you –

CASSAN: One side is black, and the other side is red, white and blue probably –

DOYLE: Yes. Now what was the significance of that? When somebody in the Grange died? They wore these?

DAVID: Proper attire.

DOYLE: At meetings? Or--?

DAVID: Red, white and blue at regular meetings; you turned it over at the funeral. When somebody passed away. It was black.

CASSAN: Because they do have a funeral service.

DOYLE: Do they still do that?

CASSAN: If requested. And we also draped the charter in our meetings, when somebody has passed away in our group.

DOYLE: [You mean like the Hutchins?] I don't know.

CASSAN: They were members of the Grange.

DOYLE: Yeah, they were. And then Dick, of course—Dick is still living.

DAVID: And unfortunately they tried to buy Swanson's farm, East and West, and Swanson wasn't going to sell it. So Vern started buying up property that wasn't farmable. It was buildable but not farmable.

DOYLE: Are any of these wetlands, though?

DAVID: No; no. Just walking. It just wasn't conducive to growing hay. Unfortunate for Vern that Swanson would never sell it.

DOYLE: He probably would have kept on –

DAVID: I don't know; you get tired of farming.

DOYLE: How old he was –

DAVID: He drove a school bus for two or three years before he went to Florida.

CASSAN: Yes, a lot of the people were active in many fields that became Grange members. They weren't all farmers though.

DOYLE: Originally everybody was probably in farming though –

DAVID: Yeah; pretty close.

DOYLE: I guess times changed.

CASSAN: And the Grange, our National Grange, too. It's purposing not only on agriculture but also on community service. We have a lot of committees that do community service. Some of them are women's activities committees, and some of them are death and health awareness committees.

DOYLE: Can you give me an example of the women's network. What would that involve?

CASSAN: They do things like make the baby hats for the newborns, and make lapboards for nursing homes, and food banks.

DOYLE: So the Perryville Grange does things like that.

CASSAN: Oh yes; 'cause the National Grange has a bunch of committees that's passed on.

DOYLE: Well, thank you very much; we really appreciate your coming and talking about this.

END OF RECORDING

