

# Intro

**Mary Wesley:** Hi From the Mic listeners!

Mary here, wishing you a lovely fall season. As you might have seen in the title this is a bit of a special episode. I'm sharing an interview that I recorded with David Kaynor of Montague, MA in 2011, ten years before his passing.

I'm sure many of you knew David as a fiddler, caller, dance organizer, and a beloved and influential person in the world of contra dance and traditional music. This was certainly true in my life. David was one of the first people to hire me for a full evening dance when I was getting started as a caller. Although he felt the need to warn me that his Friday night dance at the Guiding Star Grange was, and I quote: "the smallest in the Greenfield scene" at that time and that "most of today's in-crowd don't attend."

That email gave me my first inkling that David had big feelings about the changes he'd witnessed in the dance community over the years. Around the time when I came to Greenfield to call his dance I had also become newly interested in oral history, so I asked David if he would let me interview him. After the dance he put me up in his spare room. In the morning, after breakfast and tea, I got out the microphone and recorder I was just learning to use and we chatted for an hour.

David's encouragement for my calling, and his willingness to share about his experiences and perspectives on music, dance, community, and change, had a profound effect on me that I cherish. We had a lot of conversations over the years we knew each other, but this is the only one I recorded. I've wanted to find a way to share this recording for a while and I feel like From the Mic is the right place. I'm excited for you to hear it.

Of course, I was not making this podcast at the time of our conversation. David was actually the first person I ever interviewed! But I start off in the same way that a lot of my interviews do, asking him to tell me how he came to be involved in music and dance. And he touches on a lot of things I like to ask people about on this show: how he got started playing fiddle and even the story of the first time he found himself at the caller's mic. But the focus of this interview is actually about the relationship between contra dancers and the Grange - two hugely important communities and touchstones in David's life.

For a bit more context, David was deeply involved with making contra dancing happen at both the Guiding Star Grange and the Montague Grange in Massachusetts. These are both buildings, but in case you don't know, the Grange is also the name of the social organization that meets in a Grange hall.

The National Grange was formed after the Civil War to protect the economic and political interests of farmers and provide a social and informational hub for rural communities. Today there are still about 2,000 active granges throughout the country and a lot of them have gone through or are still in the midst of a process of redefining their purpose in the 21st century.

I started dancing in Montpelier, VT where dancing has been happening in the Capital City Grange since the 1980s. At some point chatting with some of the dance organizers I learned that in the early 2000s the current members of the Grange were considering putting the building up for sale. Their membership was aging and dwindling and maintaining the space was becoming a challenge. What they didn't anticipate was the reaction of their most regular tenants: contra dancers!

What followed was a surprising union as Montpelier contra dancers rallied to save the best dance floor in town and the Grangers carefully considered accepting these tenants into their membership. And part of what made this possible in Vermont was the encouragement of David Kaynor, who had been very involved in bringing contra dancers and grange members together in Massachusetts. And I wanted to learn more about that story from David. So, that's where our conversation begins.

You'll hear the full, unedited recording, my fumbling questions and all. And also a few interruptions from David's landline telephone.

## David's Interview

**Mary Wesley** So. All right where it goes. So it's March 12th and then Montague, Massachusetts, with David Kaynor. We're going to talk about contra dancing and the Grange. So maybe can you first just tell me how you started dancing and playing music?

**David Kaynor** Well, how long have we got?

**Mary Wesley** Well, my aim is to get to, you know, hear a little bit about your background with dancing.

**David Kaynor** And you want to get all the way to the present.

**Mary Wesley** And then get to the present, so. Well, I know that's hard.

**David Kaynor** I think it was around 1956 or so that my dad took me to a square dance that was being led by one of his favorite graduate students who had decided he wanted to try being a square dance caller. And we went to this school auditorium in Wilbraham, which is down near Springfield, Massachusetts. And it was really fun. This young guy, this young red haired guy with records, which is what Western style square dancers always used at that time, at least around where I was. And it was really fun. And so when I found out that there were square dances in the summer in Harpswell, Maine, where my mom's family had property and we used to go and stay there every summer, I started going with my cousins. And whenever we were there in the summer, we'd go to at least one square dance, sometimes more. And they were really fun.

And this was before this was back when I was, you know, pre-adolescent. And I didn't have any concepts about anything that happened after the dance. And so we just went had a great time. And I did that all the way up through high school in the summers. And then when I was in college, I got involved in summer jobs and wasn't in Maine so much in the summers. And so that was the end of, I guess, 1966 or maybe even earlier was the end of my summer square dancing. But it was a really good...you know, it left a very lasting impression on me. And when I started contra dancing in Vermont around the Burlington area with the Arm and Hammer String Band in 1973, a lot of that experience, both the technical aspects of it and the sort of emotional, spiritual, artistic nuances—that all felt really good to me and all felt really...a combination of new and exciting and sort of familiar, and almost like like coming home. And so that was, that's sort of my early development and I've been playing and dancing...I have been playing at dances since the first dance to which the Arm and Hammer String Band invited me to come and both dance and sit in. They said, "We won't give you a microphone, but you can sit behind the band and play along." And that was that was how I got started playing that music at dances. I knew a few tunes already that we played in our little folk group in bars, but that was when I really got started actually playing at dances and having this combined experience of dancing and playing all in one evening.

**Mary Wesley** And when did you start becoming involved with organizing dances in this area and in western Massachusetts?

**David Kaynor** Well, it was gradual. I played in bands where other people organized dances, and I got more and more interested in all of the different aspects of it. And we had some real challenges around here because a number of the halls were hard to rent. You know, the proprietors of the halls, which in Northfield was the selectboard. In Montague, it was the Grange themselves, the Grange organization. A lot of these places the proprietors were real dubious about having contra dancing. In some cases, they were afraid of it damaging the floor. In some cases they were afraid of it, kind of damaging the building itself because, you know, they were afraid it would get rowdy and there would be drunken brawls, which apparently there had been back in the 40s and 50s. And then in some cases, they just simply didn't want to have...there was this great

quote, there was this selectboard member in Northfield, Massachusetts, who was really hostile to the dance. And when she got elected to the select board, apparently she said she was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "I'm going to get those smelly hippies out of the town hall if it's the last thing I do in office."

I mean, they really there were a lot of different feelings about contra dancers, and some of them were were kind of justified to some extent. I mean, we were in many ways a pretty motley crew. And so anyway, I got more and more interested in that from having to be part of a sort of diplomatic mission to go to select board meetings and say, "Well, we may look like hippies, but we're really very pure and, you know, nothing questionable or unwise or illegal ever crosses our lips. And we're really just sort of like a bunch of monks and nuns," you know. And that was sort of necessary to stay in their good graces. So it was really interesting starting to get a glimpse of all that as a band member who was having to take on a bigger role than just showing up and playing tunes. And I you know, I had some experience with sound gear, so I was sort of aware of and interested in the role of sound gear and in dances and how to use it, when and why and all that.

And around...well I think it was in 1980 that Jordy Williams's parents started the Greenfield dance and Ralph Sweet was the caller. And I was in band. And in September, Ralph said, "Well, I don't want to do it anymore." And I asked some of the other callers and nobody wanted to do it consistently. You know, I asked my cousin Cam, and he said, "Well, I got a lot of other interests," and George Marshall and Tim Van Egmond said the same thing. They were sort of the hot numbers in Swallowtail, which was a really big fish in the music scene at the time. And the Vermont callers that I knew, like the Applejack folks, Michael McKernan and Andy Toepfer weren't really interested either.

And so it was, and this was my one really kind of steady gig that, that where I could play with some people who I really wanted to play with who weren't going to ever play with some of the established bands. And so I said, "Well, heck, if I'm...if the dance is going to keep going and nobody's willing to commit to being the caller, maybe I better do it. Otherwise, it's just going to have to stop." And so with no experience at all, I started calling. And it was a long, rough road. I mean, talk about trial and error and. But anyway, that was 1980 and that was how I somewhat abruptly started trying to be an organizer.

**Mary Wesley** And at that point, were you renting the hall from the Grange?

**David Kaynor** Oh yeah. Yeah, and still are.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah.

**David Kaynor** Yeah, we still are.

**Mary Wesley** And who who was the liaison at that point? Who managed that relationship?

**David Kaynor** Well, you know what would have been great? I should have shown you the first guest book from 1986, because our liaison person after Judy and Greg Williams kind of, you know, they let go of the dance and said, "Well, we're going to come dancing, but we're not the organizers." [ phone rings ] Boy, my phone has been jumping off the hook today. So it became me, basically. And the the Grange person was this very nice old guy named Clarence Turner, who at various times was the Grange janitor. And he was also, in the mid 80s, he was the master of the Grange, which means like the presiding officer. And he used to come and he would stay there every night for the whole dance. And that was one of the conditions of us having the dance was that there had to be a Grange member present to make sure that everything was on the up and up.

And lo and behold, he really enjoyed it. And there's a chair, there's a there's a sort of a chair up on the stage with sort of round arms and a rounded back, which Becky Hollingsworth was sitting in some last night. That was always Clarence's chair. And he would sit in the corner—he was quite overweight and didn't ever feel like dancing—but he said he danced all the time as a kid. He used to go dancing 4 or 5 nights right in the Greenfield area, square dancing, which in those days was not Western style. It was it was Eastern style with a live band. And they mixed in squares and contras and other kinds of dances. And the dances were at least minimally taught and called and and they were open to everybody. You didn't have to, you know, take classes and pass tests. You could just go on. And he was part of that for many years.

And so he he said he loved to sit there and watch people dance. And there would be nights where we'd have like eight guys sitting around looking at each other and one or two women would look in the door and see these eight guys turn right around and go. And he would...I would say, "Well, Clarence, we're going to give up. We're going to give up tonight and we're going to give up the dance." And he would say, "Don't give up." You know, "Just just give me something for the heat and light and then try it again in two weeks," you know? And so so I did. And, you know, and that went on for a couple of years and it eventually, kind of, it was like...we kept planting in the same soil and finally we learned some new planting techniques and sort of, cultivating techniques and it actually grew. And one of the big reasons was that there was this really sweet old guy from the Grange who, in his position as Grange representative, would sometimes tell us, "Don't worry about the rent," you know, "Just just give us what you can and come back."

**Mary Wesley** Why do you think he said that?

**David Kaynor** Well, you know, it's a good question. And this was at a time when, like in Northfield, in Montague, it was really, really hard to get the proprietors to let us have a dance. And so why was the Guiding Star Grange different? And they weren't all like that. I mean, there were really some pretty grouchy people in that organization. And I

don't think they were unanimously in favor of even having a dance, let alone being sort of proactively hospitable toward it. But Clarence was, and I think he must have felt like he had a certain amount of latitude to do that because he did it a number of times. And even after we were well established, he still came every night. He opened the hall for us and stayed the whole night and then closed up and he became really a fixture. I mean, people really liked him and they would...a lot of the women sort of adopted him. You know, he wouldn't dance, but they would go and sit next to him and talk to him. And so he would sit there and he would have a lot of company over the course of an evening. I think it was a real kind of a nice night out for him.

And then he would clean up at the end, and he and I would usually clean up together. And then in 1986, I think it was either 85 or 86, he died unexpectedly. He had a heart attack. And, you know, in retrospect, I think he he he looked like a heart attack candidate and he took him right out. And at that point, the Grange said, well, we'd like to try just having you open and close the hall yourself and just drop off the rent at one of the neighboring Grange member's houses. And that was kind of unprecedented that we would be given that much autonomy because, like, it was really...we had to have somebody open up for us at Northfield and and Montague. And they gave me a key. And that was a real...I mean, that was a real, that was a real thrill for me. It was a degree of sort of validation, I guess, that I hadn't I hadn't realized what it would feel like, and it felt really, really good. And I took it pretty seriously. And when we had a better night where we really made a lot more money than we expected, I used, I would throw some extra in the rent check. Sort of an acknowledgment of all those times—and there were a lot of times when Clarence would would give us a break.

And so that was that was the start. Well that wasn't the start, but that was like a real major, like waypoint in the relationship between the Grange and the dance. And it's interesting that there was a time—this is actually a pretty uncomfortable topic. There was a time when we were paying cash. We were paying the rent in cash and the person to whom I was giving the cash didn't give the Grange all of that cash. And when that came to light, the Grange felt enough trust in me that they said they said, "Well, there's been a serious misunderstanding or miscommunication or something with regard to the rent, but we want you to keep renting. So what we want from now on is we want you to write a check, and write it to the Grange."

And, you know, and to be, I guess, to be given that amount of confidence from the Grange, considering that it was, like my word, against the Grange members about the rent money. That really also meant a lot to me. I hadn't experienced that kind of confidence before—really in anything, from relationships of any kind. And it was really quite a quite an important experience. And so I started paying the rent by check and I retained my key and that was just another...it was an important, like waypoint in this this whole journey. And it was just, I think it was just a few months before he died that Clarence had me come and play music at an annual Grange event, which is the installation of officers, which is very cool. And he had me come and play at it. And it was really quite, quite an amazing experience for me, to watch—the amount of the ritual that I was allowed to watch as a nonmember at that time—and to watch and hear all of the

stuff that gets said and done relative to each of us. And it sort of gave me a bigger picture of the Grange in a, a larger perspective of time, you know, because a lot of this stuff goes back to the 1800s and some of it actually is related to old Masonic ritual, which goes back like, thousands of years. So it was really it was really, really interesting.

And then in 1990, gosh, it was sometime around... I joined Montague Grange in 19...what was it, 89 or 90 or something like that. And my memory started to have some holes in it. And I was thinking about becoming an affiliate member in Greenfield because I knew that the membership was dropping and that, you know, old people were either dying or disappearing because they didn't like what was going on in the Grange or whatever. And so I started going to meetings and I became an affiliate member. And there was a lot of, at that time, the building had enormous repair and maintenance issues and they had just a very small number of active members and people on paper who were in nursing homes in Florida and things like that. But they had a very small number of active members and most of them are older. And I felt that if we were going to keep this building for dancing, we needed to have...the Grange needed a younger and more vigorous membership that had a real, like, gut level feeling of investment in the well-being of the hall.

A lot of these old folks said, "Ah we could meet in the senior center." You know, I mean, "We wouldn't have to deal with all of these issues. We could just meet in the senior center and just have our meetings be fun rather than have to be essentially property managers for a really monstrous, you know, nest of projects and problems," which just makes total sense. And so I started trying to get people to join me in joining the Grange. And they all said, "Oh no, it's too much ritual or it's too Christian or it's too nationalistic or it's just too much time or..."

**Mary Wesley** These people were contra dancers? Friends? Yeah.

**David Kaynor** Yeah, mostly contra answers because I thought that was who would really have the most, you know, the most concrete investment in the place. And nobody was interested. The other musicians weren't interested. And then finally, the newly elected master of the Grange said, "You know, we are just beating our heads against the wall with this building. We're not able to even really be a grange because all we're doing is dealing with the building. So let's sell it. And if we have to close the Grange," because the Grange is very small, the membership is very small. And she and she felt like, "Well, you know, if we have to close the Grange, let's just get it over with." You know, let's not draw this out. And I thought, well, this is it. And I put the word out to a lot of the other musicians and some dancers and lo and behold, a bunch of them all joined.

And, you know, there are some really nationalistic things in the ritual. We're supposed to say the Pledge of Allegiance and sing The Star-Spangled Banner, you know, which, you know, we all have different opinions about doing those things. It's sort of like...it's like pageantry that means different things to different people. And it isn't all good. And then—actually, the word "God" doesn't come up too much. "Almighty Father" comes up, but God doesn't come up too much. And the only time Jesus comes up is in this

particular ceremony when somebody dies and the chaplain leads everybody in the Lord's Prayer, which of course was supposedly taught to the world by Jesus. But that's really the only time that it's kind of explicitly Christian. It's just sort of...more it's just sort of like, spiritual in a Judeo-Christian sense.

But that was too much for a lot of people. So and there was this one guy, this really interesting elderly guy who joined earlier was thinking about joining. And he said, "You know, I just don't...I'm too uncomfortable with the nationalistic parts." And I said, "Well, you know, it's that...I kind of do that because a lot of these old Grangers are old veterans. They're guys who, really the only way they got through life as well as they did was that they got jobs in the military industrial complex and it enabled them to kind of do and be what they want to do. And and, you know, I don't want to work like that, but I feel like this is a way that I can sort of have a bridge to them is to participate in this part of the ritual and see it as bridge building." And this guy said, and I always thought of him as just kind of an old hippie left winger, you know, and he said, "Well," he said, "You know, I myself am a World War II veteran, and I myself worked for Boeing for many years." And I had no idea. And I just said sort of, "Oh."

And so he went, he actually sat down with one of the old Grangers and expressed his concerns. He said, "You know, I just I don't feel comfortable doing this, the nationalistic pageantry. You know, I've been there and done that and I'm convinced that it's not what I should be doing." And then this elderly Granger said "You know, we really want you here, so why don't you take part in the part of the ritual that you're comfortable with? Not say or do anything that you're uncomfortable with, and we'll call it good." And, you know, I was really impressed by that because, like, there really were a lot of grouchy people in the Grange and people who really, just wouldn't tolerate a significantly different view in the organization. And it was so wonderful when this this elderly Granger sort of came off of that and said, "No, we want you here. It's really important to us that you be here and that you feel comfortable."

### **Mary Wesley Wow.**

**David Kaynor** And that was a great experience. And I would not have imagined myself ever being able to do that. You know, if I were in a similar position. You know, it was kind of like, what would I do? And it was sort of humbling. But anyway, that was just one of the ways that the bridges kind of got built between the dance crowd and the Grange and a bunch of people joined. And as you can probably imagine, the first few meetings were really big. And then the population of the meeting tailed down. And now we're down to the same, you know, 12 to 15 people every time. But I think they're experiencing that in Montpelier as well. Like, you know, I was there when 65 people got initiated, got brought in full ritual. It was a very powerful experience. And Capital Gity Grange pulled out all the stops. They got the Grangers from all over the state of Vermont to come to that and it was really fantastic. It was beautifully done and it was great. I was the caller that night and I had never made up a grand march before, but I made up a grand march. I was thinking, "Oh, what can these some of these infirm old Grangers do without either tripping and falling or having a heart attack or whatever?" And so I led this, what would



you say, a disabled, accessible grand march. And it was totally wonderful. Totally wonderful. But there, as well as here, there are all these people joined but in fact only a very small percentage of them actually attend meetings. So that's what we have here. We have a lot of members on paper.

**Mary Wesley** And in Greenfield did you have a similar sort of mass induction? And did you...how did that happen? Did you orchestrate that? How did the two groups approach each other?

**David Kaynor** I think what happened was I put the word out to the other dance organizers at the time. At the time the schedule of dances was was different. I mean, there were some other people involved in organizing and I just, I put the word out and said, you know, we could lose the hall and it could happen fairly soon. And, you know, you guys just have got to decide. If it's bigger than your individual reservations about the ritual or about being in an organization or going to meetings, then you better join in. And if your issues are bigger than them, then do what you got to do, but with the understanding that if we lose the hall, you weren't part of the effort to save it. And if we do keep the hall, you weren't part of the effort to keep it.

And lo and behold, a bunch of them joined. And not all, but a bunch of them. And some of them stayed. Most of them didn't. But like, David Cantini and Ann Percival are always there when they're around. Becky Hollingsworth is. Stewart is often there. Stewart Kenney, he's not always there, but he's often there. He was one of the first ones; he was in that first wave. I would say of that first wave the people who are still there are David and Ann and Becky and Liz Toffee. Rick Kelly, he's who did clean up last night. He's sort of the cleanup crew chief. He's the kitchen the kitchen manager as well. And, a couple of others. But I got to say, most of them don't come to meetings, you know.

**Mary Wesley** But when they joined, when the contra dancers joined, it made a difference. I mean, they didn't sell the hall. The Grange continued.

**David Kaynor** Yup.

**Mary Wesley** And how did that infusion of support manifest itself?

**David Kaynor** Well, there were several ways. One is that at least for a while, the meetings were a lot more energetic and lively. And there were a lot of like, there was a lot of voluntary taking on of repairs and maintenance stuff. One of the things which happened was I think Michael Pattavina was one of the first people to think of this, I'm not sure, but a related organization got formed. "The Friends of the Guiding Star Grange." And Granges can't legal legally become tax deductible. They're 501(c)(8) or something like that. I don't remember the exact designation. But a tax deductible organization is a 501(c)(3) and there's there's some specific criteria for becoming one. The Grange couldn't, but the Friends of the Grange could by writing its bylaws. There has to be like an educational component or community resource component or something like that, which the Grange in fact has. But because of being a fraternal

organization, it's sort of limited in the the status it can get. Whereas the Friends of the Grange became a 501(c)(3) and that meant that people could contribute to the Friends and have their contributions be deductible, which was a big deal for people who itemized deductions and then benefit from being able to deduct some of their money and have it go into something that they believe in and which they get benefits. So people could make donations. And that made a big difference.

And the Friends had this...the original mandate was to fund capital improvements to the Grange hall, which I think was a mistake because a capital improvement is different from a repair. So a capital improvement is where you actually add something to the building, okay. Like if you...when we added the new addition, that was a capital improvement. And so were the accessible bathrooms and the commercial kitchen. But dealing with the fire alarm system, which has cost us thousands of dollars, can't be funded by the Friends because it's not a capital improvement. It's a maintenance issue. Replacing the floor will be a capital improvement. But repairing things that are broken is not a capital improvement.

**Mary Wesley** So that has to happen through the Grange.

**David Kaynor** Yeah. And that's still a source of pain for me because I think that the mandate, the bylaws could have been written so that the organization could just fund the repair, maintenance and capital improvements. But that was not the way it was worked out in the beginning. But be that as it may, a number of people joined the Friends and the Friends created a bunch of projects through the year, which include the Fall Frolic, which is this big event in the fall, which I used to be part of regularly. I no longer am for a variety of reasons, most of them negative. But, but, we were all part of those early ones. I think the first one brought in something like \$8,000 or something like that. So a lot of people joined the Friends and that became a way to recruit both physical participation and money. And it's thanks to that that a lot of the a lot of the stuff around the Grange has been done. And the relationship between the two is often kind of murky. There are still a lot of people who think that they're the same.

**Mary Wesley** The Grange and the Friends.

**David Kaynor** Yeah.

**Mary Wesley** And for you and for the other contra dancers who joined, I mean, besides preserving your dance space, do you think people get something more out of being part of the Grange?

**David Kaynor** I did.

**Mary Wesley** Yes.

**David Kaynor** But I think a lot of them didn't, and that's why they either don't come to meetings or in some cases just let their memberships lapse, you know, lapse and

expire. For me, one of the reasons I joined the Montague Grange, which is the first Grange I joined, was to have better access to renting, because I felt that if they knew me, if I was a regular at meetings, that it would become a lot easier to rent the hall without having to have every single month voted on. You know, every single month I didn't know if I could have the dance until after they had voted on it at a meeting. And if they forgot to vote, you know, they just had all this stuff come up and they forgot to vote on the dance, then it couldn't happen. And I'd have to skip a month. So I felt that that was that was clearly a way that I could have better communications. And I also felt, rightly, as it turned out, that if I showed up in meetings and put in some time around the hall, which I wanted to do, that they would feel better about me and, you know, maybe we'd get past this. And we did.

But I also found that, you know, I was a musician and I had this really different lifestyle and different values. I lived in this town, and I felt very connected to it in an aesthetic sense. I really liked, like, running on the roads and trails and looking at the houses, and yet I didn't really feel like in a personal sense, I had a lot of friends here other than the people who are also into music and dance. And I just felt at some point like, I mean, I got to try to find a way to feel more connected to a broader element, a broader percentage of the village. And, that meant, you know, finding some common ground with people with whom I had really fundamental differences. Because otherwise I just wasn't going to have any contact with them. And you know, I'd always be this sort of mysterious outsider and, you know, fundamentally untrustworthy. And so when I joined the Grange, it really did become a bridge to people with really, really different social and political views and values, really different lifestyles. And it's not that I wanted to become like them, but I wanted to like them. I wanted to find some ways, something about them that I could like. And I wanted them to find something about me that they could like, you know, over and above disagreements. And I think it worked.

**Mary Wesley** Where was your common ground? What did you find?

**David Kaynor** Ah! Well, we found Grange. Found this this whole experience. The ritual is an experience, you know? I mean, it really is an experience. It's different on different nights. But it's an experience. And everybody who's doing it is experiencing it together. And there's something about that which you just can't get sitting around in your living room thinking about it. You got to actually go and do it. And I would go and do it and I'd sit next to this, you know, crusty, old Republican...would be sitting right next to me. And we'd do the ritual together. And it was great, you know, it was totally great. And for those 90 minutes or however long we were in the meeting, we were just in the meeting. And we would do the opening ritual, then we'd go through all the different items on the standard meeting agenda, and we would vote on some decisions about the hall and about what the organization was going to do. And then we would have a lecturers program and we would either listen to somebody explain something or describe something, or we would look at slides or we'd see a little skit or somebody would come and tell us about something or we'd have games. I mean, there were just all these different things. And there I'd be sitting with these people with whom I had almost nothing in common other than the fact that we live in the same geography. And for those

90 minutes, and sometimes beyond those 90 minutes, we would actually have something that we would share that would feel good. And I felt like I was in the village. And that doesn't work for everybody, you know, But it did work for me. And so I got to be really fond of all these old people. They were all really different. But I got to be really fond of them.

And they all died. Which is really, really painful. And even now, I, you know, sometimes when I'm over in the Grange Hall, I have these sort of moments where I just want all those people back. You know, it's like, I want my parents and my sister back. I, I mean, I, I just go there and I don't care about the fact that they may have gone on to a heavenly home or whatever, and that this is just the way of life, and I got to get real and deal with it. I just sit there and I want them back. And it's as simple as that. And I feel that way, I feel that way about about friends who've moved away and dancers who no longer come to dances. I mean, it's just all this stuff where I just...at some sort of gut level, non intellectual level, I just...I just want them back, you know. And I feel that way in the Grange halls. About old Grangers, you know, and they people who I had nothing in common with politically or socially even. But I just want them back.

**Mary Wesley** Do you think there's something similar in your values? I mean, how do you think that they perceived you?

**David Kaynor** [laughter] Oh, I think a lot of them, I think it took a lot of work for some of them. But I think but the thing was that, you know, they could think of me as some sort of a, you know, old hippie socialist type. But if there was a project around the building and I showed up and worked on it, you know, that really counted with them. And the fact that I would go there [phone rings] and now there goes my phone again. And then I would go there and I would, you know, I would do the whole ritual with them. Now, I would say the Pledge of Allegiance. And I could sing The Star-Spangled Banner on key, which a lot of them couldn't. And so it was like, they would say, "I wonder if he smokes pot?" Or, "I wonder if he sleeps around," or, "I wonder if he votes Democratic." You know, I mean, there's all these different things they could say. "I wonder if he wears underwear," I mean, just all these different things that people wonder about people who are different. And yet, if I was right there and doing the ritual with them. If I was right there raking leaves or washing the floor or, you know, just doing all these kind of...scrubbing toilets or you name it. While I was doing it they would say, "Oh, now maybe he wears his underwear inside out after it's dirty, but at least he's here scrubbing the toilets!" You know, and I think that's...

I remember when one of my friends in the Green Mountain Volunteers went out for a walk and the rest of us, I don't know what the rest of us were doing. He went out and he said that some guy was moving rocks to clear a space in his yard. And he stopped and moved rocks with him. And he said, you know, "We couldn't really talk. He'd say something to me," I think we're in Yugoslavia, he said, "He'd say something to me, and something that might have been Serbo-Croatian, and I'd say something to him in English. Neither of us understood the other, but we understood moving rocks. And it was really fun." And I feel like that happens when you when you work on something like

a Grange hall or when you work on something like keeping an organization going or finding a way to be connected to the past and involved in the present both at once. Which really can, it can make a lot of people have fun being together who otherwise would, you know, put a lot of energy into avoiding each other. So I feel like it's been—for me, it's been really, really good. And, well, like I say: I really miss all the old Grangers.

**Mary Wesley** And what did they transmit to you about what the Grange meant to them? I mean, so these are older members who have been in the Grange for a long time. I mean, did you learn anything about what it was like for them, you know, seeing the Grange sort of approach the dawn of the 21st century? I imagine there's some changes, a lot of changes that happened there in terms of what the Grange meant and what its mission was and...

**David Kaynor** Well, right now, the Grange's missions in both Greenfield and Montague are primarily to keep the buildings going. And that is not what a lot of the old Grangers were in it for.

**Mary Wesley** Right.

**David Kaynor** They were in it for this combination of a social experience—a recreational experience. This is going back to before we had as many ways of going out and recreating, or staying in our homes and recreating. And so for them, the Grange was really where it was at. I mean, that was really where most of the social action was and where a lot of other stimulations were. I mean, like Granges would have movies and lectures and games and all these other things that that you just didn't find anywhere else. And so that was really different, like in the 30s and 40s and 50s from today. And historically, the Grange was a very politically risk-taking organization, but it became a lot less so, I think partly as a result of the war. You know it's that old standard political thing, as soon as you wave the flag, everybody's got to fall in line.

And if you...well, it's like when we started the, quote, "War on terror." If you criticized the government, you were unpatriotic, you know, and back in the old days, the old Grangers, I mean, back in the late 1800s thought, "No, that's really what a patriot is supposed to do." But, you know, that all changed in the wars. And I think that for a lot of them when it stopped being the organization of their youth they lost the desire to be in it. And so some of them even still keep their membership on paper, but they never come to meetings. We have several elderly Grangers who've been Grange members for like 60 years or longer, 70 years, and they don't come to meetings. And it's not because they're not able they're physically able to come, but it just isn't what they want to do anymore.

So I don't know. I don't know where that goes in terms of your question. But I think that the Grange right now...the Granges aren't like, really active in the community other than to just sort of keep a building available, which I think personally...I think is actually a very important thing to do. But like, we are doing a lot of activities through the year and we're not...like we don't take part in the Franklin County Fair anymore. And we don't go to State Grange events like the old Grangers did. They used to get together with Grangers

from all over the state and periodically from all over the country. And it was this really big deal. And they all had these common ties that bind, you know, this belief in the ideal of the organization as a source of support and gathering and connecting for people, especially in rural communities. Not exclusively, but especially in rural communities, providing a combination of education and a kind of spiritual concept, even if you weren't a specifically a Protestant or something like that. There was this kind of reasonably welcoming spiritual concept that you could experience as a Grange member. And we've lost a lot of that. We really have.

There's big discussions afoot, both officially in the Grange and within our local Grange that's about, you know, how badly do we want to be Grangers? Do we want to do the things that the state and National Grange require in order to retain a charter? And if we don't, what happens to our buildings? You know, and it's interesting that for most people, the question is, "What happens to our buildings," more than, "What happens to us?" You know, and for me, it's partly what happens to me because I think of myself as a Granger. I think of myself as being part of this multi-generational, not just organization, but, experience.

And, you know, I'd get by without it. It wouldn't be like, the end of myself or anything like that. But it's important to me and I think it's still got a lot of potential value—and not just for me, but for a lot of other people in the years to come. And then, of course, there is the building. I mean, I would not be myself really the way I am now if I didn't have these places where I could have dances and concerts and, you know, a building I can feel some ownership in. I'm a poor tenant, you know, I've just been a poor tenant all my life. And and yet I feel a sense of ownership. I think the real word, the best word is "stewardship" rather than ownership. But I feel a real strong sense of stewardship in the Grange halls, both of them. And I even feel some in the Montpelier Grange hall, the Capital City Grange hall, even though I'm not frequently there. You know, I, I feel a sense of, when I go in there and I see... Like when I saw the new entrance, I saw the new bathroom, I mean, that was more to me than just sort of admiring a nice new development. I mean, I really felt sort of at a gut level, I felt like this really mattered to me. And I, you know, I would hate to lose that. It's been a really good experience.

**Mary Wesley** And how did you come to be asked to participate in the induction ceremony in Montpelier? And what have your ties to that Grange been?

**David Kaynor** Well, I wasn't actually officially asked to be part of it. But when when the plans were made to have it, I mean, I was already on the schedule as calling the dance that night. I mean, that had...I think Todd and Cindy had booked me to call that dance before the plans were made for this event. And I think it was either Tim [Schwartz] or somebody else said, "Hey, why don't you why don't you show up early and come to the, come to the big initiation." And I probably said, "Wow, that sounds like really fun." And so I did.

But it wasn't like I had an official role in it. My only official role was in the dance. But I think it was somebody like Tim, somebody said, "Could we do a grand march?" And I

said, "Sure!" Then I said, "I wonder how does one lead a grand march?" [laughter]. But then I thought, well, I've played for grand marches, I've walked in grand marches, I can make something up. And so I did. And it went fine. It wasn't very complicated. But I think for a lot of people to just march around, arm-in-arm was like, totally cool.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah. And this was dancers and Grangers? They stayed for that?

**David Kaynor** Oh yeah! Yeah. It was terrific. Well, there was a dinner, there was a potluck supper. And then, you know, it was so great to see some of these old Grangers from all over the state of Vermont, some of them not very vigorous. I mean, there were some people moving pretty slowly and carefully, but it was so great after this whole initiation, which was, I think, quite a big experience for a lot of people to just have this beautiful music playing and just walk along arm-in-arm with somebody who is like, 40 years older. Or for some of the old Grangers. SLike, some of the old guys were just beaming as their are walking along with these cute young women on their arms. You know, they were just...it was wonderful. And I'm so glad I got to be part of it. But it was really more or less just, the way it worked out, it was just more or less happenstance.

I mean, in fact, unless I had been specifically told not to, I would have really wanted to be there. Because I felt a real strong sense of investment in the well-being of the Grange. Because I think it had been Tim, Tim Swartz, or somebody had had passed on to me some of the essence of the discussions they'd had in the Grange about selling the building to somebody that wanted to either build a restaurant or something else. And I personally, because of being a music and dance person and partly just because of my, sort of my optimistic view of the future of the Grange in our world, I thought, "No, I hope that they can head this off and get the Grange back on its feet," you know, and get it going in a good direction. And so I really wanted it to succeed. And I wanted to witness this event. And I'm so glad that I got to be part of it, in a sense. Although I wasn't, I didn't have a role in the actual official ritual. I was just an observer.

**Mary Wesley** What was that like?

**David Kaynor** Oh it great because, well, I'd been through it both as when I was initiated into the Grange, and then I'd been part of many initiation rituals. They're called "The degrees." And the first four degrees correspond to the seasons. And I've been part of that many times, you know, since I had joined the Grange. So I knew everything that was coming. But, I mean, I don't have it memorized, but but it's all very familiar now. And yet I was so impressed by the beauty with which the old Vermont Grangers pulled it off. I mean, I'm used to people sort of, you know, kind of carefully reciting and needing prompting. Or like me reading. I have to read because I haven't memorized. I have to read. I'm a good reader but I sill have to read. And it was so amazing to watch these elderly old Vermonters, some of them had to be real careful as they walked around, you know, canes and stuff. But they they cranked it right out, you know, with conviction and passion. And they didn't just sort of stare at the ceiling while they recited a memorized part. They, like, looked around the room and gestured and really did it with energy. And it was absolutely...it was totally inspiring to watch.

**Mary Wesley** And how many people joined them, do you remember?

**David Kaynor** I think they were like 65. That's the number that sticks in my head. I think it was 65. It was, I mean, it was really, really impressive. There's this line...I mean you know what that hall looks like. It's about 50, 60ft long. And there was this line of chairs for the new members that was the whole length of the hall. It was really amazing.

**Mary Wesley** And then what better than a grand march to bring those groups together?

**David Kaynor** Oh it felt so good.

**Mary Wesley** Yeah.

**David Kaynor** It felt so incredibly good. I'm really, really...it's a high point for me, and it's been...it's really a high point in my life. So.

**Mary Wesley** And are you still going to the Grange here in Montague? Still a member here?

**David Kaynor** I'm an officer.

**Mary Wesley** Officer.

**David Kaynor** I was Master for 12 years.

**Mary Wesley** Oh I didn't know, ok.

**David Kaynor** Before that I was on the executive committee, and at one point, I think I was the Assistant Steward. And then after, nobody wanted to be Master, but several people took turns being Secretary and they realized they didn't really want to be Secretary. And we, you've got to have a Secretary to have a charter. You can't be a Grange without a Secretary. And so we got to the point where nobody else to do it. And I said, "Well, who wants to be Master?" And nobody wanted to be Master. And I said, well, basically, if nobody's going to be Secretary, I'm willing to be Secretary, but somebody is going to have to be Master because I can't be both. And so finally, one of the others agreed to be Master.

And, you know, we're not using the ritual these days, which really...which I really miss. But I'm the Secretary and boy, is it a lot of work. It's a lot of work. It's not fun. And it's really, really hard to keep doing it when I'm not having fun in the Grange. I'm not having fun at meetings. So it's really kind of a crisis of conscience for me right now. Do I keep doing it? If I refuse to do it, it may be the end of the organization. And yet I'm really not having fun. So what do I do?

**Mary Wesley** Do people within the Grange talk about the future of the organization?



**David Kaynor** As little as possible. But we're going to, actually right now...I said, you know, we gotta...we're talking about taking out loans to do major work on the building, which it really needs. It's a beautiful old 1830s building built by the area's first independent black contractor, whose name I forgot. It's really a cool story. And it's a beautiful dance space. It's very small. It's only about a third of the size of the Guiding Star Grange Hall. It's way smaller than Capital City Grange.

But it's got a great floor. Wonderful acoustics. Charming. And it really means a lot to me to have that. Both for myself and for others and for my general view of life in a village. And I don't know what's going to happen. And so one of these days we're going to have a non-Grange meeting of Grangers where we can sit around and legally drink beer and just get right down to it. And not follow a meeting agenda, but just say, look, we just got to talk about what we want. You know, and it's going to...I think it's going to be a pretty interesting, hopefully fruitful discussion. Because I think we're at that point where we have to we have to decide how badly do we want this, you know? And I want it really badly. But I don't have enough, I couldn't buy the building. If I could...

**Mary Wesley** Problem solved.

**David Kaynor** Yeah, but I couldn't.

**Mary Wesley** Well, we'll see what happens.

**David Kaynor** Yeah.

**Mary Wesley** All right. I think I'm going to wrap it up for today.

## Closing

Thank you David for talking with me, thanks CDSS for letting me make this special episode, and thank you, From the Mic listeners, for tuning in.

I also want to extend special thanks to Becky Hollingsworth for filling me in on some details about what's happened with the Montague Grange Hall since I spoke with David in 2011.

The Montague Grange did eventually turn in its charter, meaning it ceased to operate as a Grange organization—a decision David voted against. However, a new entity was quickly formed to care for the building and manage the space: the Montague Common Hall Corporation. David joined the board immediately. Back in 2020, when David was still around to appreciate it, they named the main hall after David.

Today Hall continues to need a lot of work and the board is actively fundraising for building improvements. In fact Becky told me there was a fundraiser contra dance just this past week and they raised a match of \$2500! Here's what Becky said in her email:

As important as fundraising is, the event itself was an exemplar of what the hall is all about—people under 10 and people over 70, people who have been dancing for decades and people who had never danced before, ever, all dancing together and looking quite happy about the whole thing. David would have loved it.

To learn more about the Montague Common Hall and if you're curious what's going on now with the other Granges I've mentioned - check out our show notes at [cdss.org/podcasts](http://cdss.org/podcasts) for an update!

I've got some new interviews in the works for the next episode. Until then, happy dancing!

This project is supported by CDSS, The Country Dance and Song Society and is produced by Ben Williams and me, Mary Wesley.

Thanks to Great Meadow Music for the use of tunes from the album Old New England by Bob McQuillen, Jane Orzechowski & Deanna Stiles.

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