

Edgerton Grange Hall (1930, altered 1930s)

404 E. Nelson St. - Edgerton

Register of Historic Kansas Places

The Edgerton Grange Hall, located at the east end of Nelson Street, is an important reminder of Johnson County's agricultural roots. Since its construction in 1904, the hall has been the most prominent structure in Edgerton. The Grange organization was founded as the Patrons of Husbandry in 1867. It started during reconstruction after the Civil War in response to a sudden and rapid decline in grain prices. Advances in industrial technology made large scale farming more profitable than ever before. Unfortunately the new equipment was prohibitively expensive for small farmers. In order to take advantage of new technologies and to strengthen their buying power, midwestern farmers joined together in Grange cooperatives.



This brick structure was constructed in 1904 for the Edgerton Grange. The Grange occupied the second story and the first floor was rented out to local merchants. Today few Grange organizations remain in the Midwest. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

The Grange came to Kansas in the 1870's and quickly became an important part of the social and economic livelihood of many Kansas communities. In 1873 the first Johnson County Grange was established in Gardner. In 1873 and 1874, a total of 36 Granges were organized in the county. The Grange in Edgerton was the 436th Grange in the United States. Known by the number 436, it is unclear exactly when this Grange chapter was started. For its first thirty years, Edgerton's Grange members met in a frame building.

The current brick structure was constructed in 1904, after a fire destroyed the downtown earlier that year. The second story was designed for use by the Grange, while the first floor commercial space was rented to local merchants. The overall architectural style is reminiscent of a restrained Romanesque revival influence popularized in the United States by Henry Hobson Richardson. There is also a subtle influence from the commercial Italianate style. The Italianate style dominated mid to late nineteenth century commercial architectural design in the midwestern United States. The legacy is visible in transitional styles through the turn of the twentieth century. In Johnson County, the height of the Grange activity was in 1874. It remained a strong voice for the small-town farmer well into the twentieth century. Mechanized farming and trucking reduced the need for the Grange. Today few Grange organizations remain in the Midwest.

The city of Edgerton acquired the building from the Grangers in 1938 for \$450. The city continues to occupy the structure, using it for city offices and meeting space.

**Reprinted from the Johnson County Museum's newsletter ALBUM,
Vol. X #3, Summer 1997. <http://www.jocomuseum.org>*

