



National 4-H History Preservation Program

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4-H History and Christmas

The National Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony, which began on Christmas Eve in 1923, is one of America's oldest holiday traditions. At the time, President Calvin Coolidge lit a Christmas tree in front of 3,000 spectators on the Ellipse in President's Park. Since then, each succeeding president has carried on the tradition of what now has become a month-long event presented by the National Park Foundation and National Park Service.

As the first Honorary Chairman of the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work (now National 4-H Council), President Calvin Coolidge issued the following 1925 Christmas Address to Boys and Girls:

"As you are representative of the organizations of the boys and girls of America who live in or are interested in the open country ... I want to extend to all of you a Christmas greeting. It seems a very short time ago that I was a boy and in the midst of farm life, myself, helping to do the chores at the barn, working in the corn and potato fields, getting in the hay and in the springtime ... making maple sugar.

"I did not have any chance to profit by joining a scout organization or a 4-H Club. That chance ought to be a great help to the boys and girls of the present day. It brings them into association with each other in a way where they learn to think not only of themselves, but of other people. It teaches them to be unselfish. It trains them to obedience and gives them self-control. It is in all these ways that boys and girls are learning to be men and women, to be respectful to their parents, to be patriotic to their country, and to be reverent to God. It is because of the great chance that American boys and girls have

in all these directions that to them, more than to the youth of any other country, there should be a Merry Christmas."

Calvin Coolidge



Montana 4-H Member lights US Capitol Christmas Tree in 2008

In 2008, as in many previous years, the US Capitol Christmas tree checked in for a three-night stay at National 4-H Youth Conference Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. On November 21, the 70-foot tree from Montana's Bitterroot Forest stopped at National 4-H Youth Conference Center before traveling to the US Capitol to become the Capitol Christmas Tree (on the Capitol grounds, not the White House Ellipse). Chris Gabrielson, a 4-H member from Havre, MT, joined Nancy Pelosi, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, to host the official lighting ceremony on December 2, 2008.

Each year, hundreds of students from the Capitol Christmas Tree's home state enter the Capitol Christmas Tree drawing to receive a free trip to Washington, D.C. and assist the Speaker in lighting the tree. Gabrielson was the lucky winner of the 2008 drawing.

However, Gabrielson wasn't the only 4-H'er involved with the Capitol tree that year; he and other students in the state of Montana (65 percent of whom were 4-H members) used recyclable materials to create over 5,000 handmade ornaments that decorated the tree. The ornaments reflected the theme "Sharing Montana's Treasures:" Mountains, Moons and Stars; Big Sky Country; Montana wild flower; Montana's Wildlife, and some included the 4-H Clover.

Ever Make a Historic 4-H Christmas Ornament?



Notice how this recently created 4-H ornament blends right in with other 1970s ornaments.

Nancy Johnson, Scott County 4-H Youth agent, made a historically correct (at that time) ornament this year when she was asked by the local museum to decorate a Christmas tree with a 1970s theme for the entrance of their building. Where did she get the inspiration? "From the stone fireplace in the Southwest VA 4-H Center;" she said. (See photo in next column.)



4-H clover that appeared on national posters and publications in the early 1970s was "saved in stone" in a Virginia 4-H Center.

She contacted the 4-H History Preservation team to verify that this clover was indeed recognized nationally during the 1970s. We verified that the first National 4-H Poster carrying this stylized clover appeared in 1971. The last poster carrying this form of the clover was in 1974. The first year this clover was used is also the first year that the national poster art and theme "4-H Bridges the Gap" came from poster designs created by 4-H members from across the country, instead of being drawn from adults on the National 4-H Headquarters staff. This project was one of the first activities coordinated by your editor when she joined the National 4-H staff in the early 70s. (Note that while this version is historically correct, the current 4-H clover is governed by US Law 18USC707 and cannot be represented in any other way than specified therein.)

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