

The BRIDGE



*4-H History:
Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Now.*

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Anita and Ike

By Ron Drum, PA 4-H Member, 1967 – 1977; Bo Ryles, Sr. Director, National 4-H Council

The thought does sort of give one pause.

You are just moments away from saying “hello” to a President of the United States!

Now that you’ve allowed that thought to settle in your mind, let’s ramp it up a bit.

Before he was president, he was that five-star general, you know, the one who led the Allied Nations of the world to victory in Europe during the Second World War. Yeah. That guy. Now, just 14 years after he did that, you get to meet him. Oh, and did I mention you are only 18 years old? What would you do?

“I remember walking on the stones of the open porch trying to be by myself; I was getting myself ready. I was concentrating on what I had to say and not stumbling over my words that I had written all out.” That’s what Anita Hollmer Hodson was doing before she met President Dwight D. Eisenhower. She had been chosen as one of four 4-H’ers from New York to attend the 1959 National 4-H Conference by the Associate State 4-H Leader, Martha E. Leighton. Anita didn’t know it then, but the new National 4-H Center was going to be dedicated during that Conference by none other than President Eisenhower and who would be standing beside him? Anita.



As a 4-H'er, Anita had been an officer of the Riverview 4-H Club, so named because of the Hudson River that flowed nearby. Her projects included, among others, Canning and Clothing. She gave 4-H Demonstrations and, a few years before she met Ike, was asked to give her demonstration throughout the day in the 4-H building at the New York State Fair "so people would hear things about 4-H when they entered the building", she explained. In 1958 her work in 4-H Safety won her a national award and a trip to Chicago to participate in the National 4-H Congress. Leighton knew Anita was a leader who could speak well in public. So, when Leighton was charged with organizing the Opening Ceremony, she made sure Anita was interviewed, and Anita was chosen. "I'm not sure that I knew that this was what I was interviewing for," she said.

"The program began just before noon, but the President didn't arrive until 12:03. It wasn't cold. I was wearing my 4-H Uniform. We all wore uniforms then. Larry Dilda, the boy in the photo, was wearing a green nylon-shell jacket over short sleeves. I've had contact with him over the years but lost contact with him recently."

"The media was all there, but this was in the days when they had those huge reels and were up on tripods and it was a whole line-up of media people that were behind the guests." The guests were the 4-H Members and other invited dignitaries.

"Everything was timed to the minute, the half-minute! When the President would arrive. When the introductions would begin. You know. One 4-H'er opened the door and another walked him to the podium. I welcomed everybody and gave the significance of the day. As protocol would have it, I didn't get to introduce the president. I introduced Ezra Taft Benson, the Secretary of Agriculture. He introduced President Eisenhower. The president didn't speak long. He basically said that he loved 4-H'ers and was a country-boy at heart. He didn't hang around for socializing. There is a photo of me shaking his hand, but I think that was staged. Sue Fisher told me many years later, when I asked why the program was on shiny paper, it was because they used special paper for the event. Sue Benedetti told me that when they were setting up (the conference room known as) Kathleen's Corner at the 4-H Center, they removed the photo from its frame and found Ike had signed the photo. I don't really remember much about what happened after he spoke but what does one do after they have met the president?"

Asked if she got the president's autograph, Anita replied, "No. You know, I wouldn't have done that. It's not, it's not what, no, I didn't do that."

When asked if she spoke with him, her response was much the same.

“No. Not really. It wasn’t, the answer is no. But it might have been the era. Nowadays you might feel comfortable speaking with a president, President Biden or President George W. Bush. But I was only 18. I wasn’t going to pretend, be folksy with a five-star general. He was more awing than we’ve had since then. That’s why he won! People were in awe of him!”

Of course, the facility that Anita helped open that day has since been sold. When asked about that she replied,

“The Center was like my second home. If I went to D.C. and didn’t stop by, I’d feel bad. In 1959, Grant Shrum was at the Center then. He was Mr. Everything. Come to realize he was just 33 then! He had good leadership qualities. I didn’t know Dick Sauer as well, but Don Floyd was always very personable with me, as is Jennifer Sirangelo. But, you know, we always felt like we were part of the Center so we could just drop in. I mean, it was a place of work for people, so I didn’t want to infringe on them, but it was always a pleasure to be there. Too bad times change but they do.”

“Did meeting Ike change you in any way?” we asked.

“Meeting the President, well it’s kind of like a ghost. It’s always there. People know I met him. It’s kind of how I am now remembered. I don’t mention it, talk about it, but he was the president! I can say that in my darkest moments that I had done this. I mean my parents were proud. It brought honor to our family which was very nice.”

And then she added, “It was a happy moment that happened that I’ve held tight to all these years.”

Editors Note: The authors are grateful to Anita Hodson for being so generous of her time to sit with us, even if we had to do so by phone, and tell us her story. Shrum, Sauer, Floyd, and Sirangelo each have held the title “National 4-H Council President and CEO”; Sirangelo being in that position presently. Sue Fisher and Sue Benedetti each held various national 4-H Extension leadership roles and, along with Gwen El Sawi and Eleanor Wilson, founded the National 4-H History Preservation Team.

You can read more about the National 4-H Center events of June 16, 1959, including portions of President Eisenhower’s speech that he gave that day, by visiting the N4-HHPT website at:

https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/4-H_Center/.

But we ask again, “what does one do after they have met the president?”

About my career: I graduated from Tufts University School of Medicine, did residencies in internal medicine (before the days of Emergency Medicine as a specialty) and spent 36 years as an Emergency Room doctor at what is now Christiana Care in Newark, DE. As a trauma, cardiac and neurological center, as well as the usual day to day cases, we trained residents to become future ER docs. I got into medicine as another way to help others. I worked as a summer student dietitian and realized that the medical aspect fascinated me.

I was widowed in 2015. Over a year later I met a childhood acquaintance. Bob is a retired pilot (whose parents were my first 4-H leaders). This is me now: a new life after 50 years of marriage. The plane is Bob’s. It belonged to his dad and is the plane he learned to fly nearly 70 years ago. Bob converted it from a landplane to a seaplane some 20 years ago. So, now I am just an educated passenger!



The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team

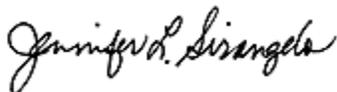
Speaking of Changing Times: National 4-H Council Leadership Transition Announced

Message from Jennifer Sirangelo, President and CEO of National 4-H Council

After 17 years at National 4-H Council and nearly 10 as President and CEO, I will be leaving National 4-H Council on August 18th to continue my professional journey as the President and CEO of Points of Light. It has been an honor to lead National 4-H Council, preparing America's young people to thrive through the incredible 4-H programs that you help us support.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment, passion, and dedication to the mission and vision of 4-H enabling us to deliver programming to more young people across the country. During my tenure, 4-H has placed millions of young people on a positive youth development trajectory for a thriving future. I am immensely grateful for your contributions and leave knowing that 4-H will continue creating opportunity for all of America's youth for years to come.

With much appreciation,



Jennifer L. Sirangelo
President and CEO
National 4-H Council

Message from Jill Bramble, incoming President and CEO of National 4-H Council



I cannot begin to convey how honored and excited I feel to take the reins as President and CEO of National 4-H Council, an organization that has been my professional home for the majority of my career.

I have to start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to Jennifer Sirangelo for her outstanding leadership and dedication to National 4-H Council. Under her leadership, 4-H has achieved remarkable growth and made a lasting impact on communities across the nation. I am truly fortunate to have such a strong foundation to build upon as President and CEO thanks to Jennifer's legacy

In me, you have someone who is a fourth generation 4-H'er and deeply committed to increasing the impact of 4-H to provide even more opportunities to all of America's youth. I am a true believer in the leadership of the next generation and the role of 4-H programs in preparing them to meet unprecedented social, technological, and economic challenges. It is at this critical juncture that we need to move with purpose to equip young people with the tools to succeed in the modern workplace and tackle the big issues facing our communities, country, and world.

None of this would be possible without your belief in America's youth. Your generosity and investment in 4-H have scaled life-changing positive youth development programs to every zip code in our nation. Thank you for being champions of creating opportunity for all youth through 4-H.



We Can Laugh About It Now

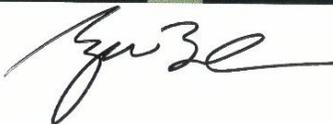
By Don Floyd, President and CEO, National 4-H Council, Retired

Editor's Note: The National 4-H Center was filled with memories. Some people found their true loves there, some people started their careers there, and like Anita, some people even met U. S. Presidents there! What was YOUR "historic" story about the National 4-H Center? **Send your story to:** Editor@4-HHistory.com. Here is one sent to us by Don Floyd. He too, met a U. S. President at the National 4-H Center! The date was October 10, 2006. The story, according to Don:

President George W. Bush held a gun violence conference at the National 4-H Center. This occurred following several young people being killed in Amish country, maybe Lancaster County, PA. So, he is speaking on stage in Aiton Auditorium and a loud sound like metal breaking happens and everyone jumps including the Secret Service. Well, First Lady Laura Bush was sitting in the audience, center seat, 2nd row, and the metal frame of her auditorium chair broke. Oh my gosh what a moment. We moved her, of course. Eventually we had all the chairs replaced.



*To Donald Floyd
With best wishes,*



Why is the 4-H Emblem a Four-leaf Clover and What Does That Have to do With Studying History??

It's all about documentation. Actually, it's all about CONTEMPORARY documentation. Recently the National 4-H History Preservation Team came into possession of files once belonging to 4-H luminary Oscar Herman Benson.

O. H. Benson was born on a farm in Delaware County, Iowa, in 1875. During a farm wood-sawing accident, young Benson lost two fingers which caused him to decide to leave the farm and get a college education.¹ He studied teaching and soon became an Iowa schoolteacher. In 1906, he became the Wright County, IA Superintendent of Schools. Seeking ways to keep education relevant in his students' lives, he organized out-of-school agriculture clubs.² It was then, he said, that he chose the clover.

Due to this history, Benson called himself "the originator of 4-H Clubs and its emblems"³ Of course, the problem is that in the next county over, Page County, during the same time-period (they both became superintendents in 1906) the superintendent was Celestia Josephine "Jessie" Field, and she, too, has been credited as being the originator of 4-H Clubs and, by using a clover as her club's symbol, creating the 4-H Clover emblem.

On top of that, the Superintendent of Schools for Springfield Township, Clark County, Ohio also has been credited with forming an early 4-H Club. However, his club began in 1902. His name was Albert Belmont Graham. Well, at least A. B. Graham isn't credited with creating the clover. We know Jessie and Oscar did work on things together, so Benson may have given Field the clover idea, but whether he did or not is just not clear.



O. H. Benson's files

On April 10, 1949, Benson wrote a memo that included the following story about the clover. However, why did he feel the need to tell this story in 1949 when it happened in 1906? We know that in 1949 Franklin Reck was heavily into researching the history of 4-H for his upcoming book, the first history of 4-H to be written.⁴ Called The 4-H Story; it was published in 1951. Was Benson trying to help Reck? Oddly enough, Reck does not include this story in his book, perhaps because he could not find any supporting contemporary documentation. But then, Benson doesn't say he is writing to tell Reck the story. Benson states he is writing:

In the interest of 4H Club Members and their Leaders:

For the first time in the history of 4H Club work, this story of 4H Club origins, has been released to the press. This is being done because of the ever increasing interest by the public and the over fourteen million former club members. The author of this article and originator of 4H Clubs and its emblems, is unable to answer the increasing number of letters coming to him every week, asking questions now answered in this article.

In the interest of 4H Club members and their leaders, we hereby release this article for use by all who are friends of the 4H Club movement both here and abroad.⁵

Apparently, he just wanted to tell the story. So, why a clover? In his words:

While driving through the county on school supervision work in June 1906, I came to a country school during the morning recess period. I found the schoolteacher and her group of eleven children out in a clover field hunting 4-leaf clovers. As I approached them, both teacher and pupils started out to meet me bearing with them their good luck clovers. The teacher turned to the children and said, "We have found our good luck clovers. What do you say? Let's give our County Superintendent a bouquet of good luck." With this invitation, they all surrendered their 4-leaf clovers and placed them into my hands. Fourteen perfect 4-leaf clovers. The teacher then rang the school-bell, and the pupils took their seats. I followed into the school room bearing with me the handful of good luck. Just before closing the half-day session for the noon-day period, the teacher asked me if I did not have a message for the school. With my good luck bouquet in one hand, chalk in the other, I took my position in front of the children. In this little speech I outlined on the blackboard for the first time the 4-H Emblem and its Good Luck story. I told them I had been looking for an emblem for the agricultural clubs and schools of the county and that they had given it to me. So, out of the hearts, hands and needs of these farm children was born this significant 4-H Emblem which bears so effectively for old and young the message of 4-H or "four square" training.⁶



It is a nice story, but one wonders, without a secondary source to confirm the facts, if it is totally factual. Memories do have a way of altering facts over time. For instance, it is hard to believe that these 11 children and one adult, during one recess break, found FOURTEEN four-leaf clovers; that, after finding them, they willingly gave them up to Benson; that Benson sat holding them in his hand until the end of the morning class period; and then carried them with him to the front of the room to make his presentation. However, forty-three years later, he said it was so.

¹ Reck, Franklin M., The 4-H Story (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1963), p. 43
https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/eMedia/eBooks/The_4-H_Story.pdf accessed 13 June 2023

² **Folks Who Helped Make 4-H Great: O. H. Benson**,
<http://news.4-hhistorypreservation.com/2015/11/10/folks-who-helped-make-4-h-great-o-h-benson/> accessed 5/30/2023.

³ Benson, O. H., Four H Club Work and Its Emblem, unpublished memorandum dated April 10, 1949.

⁴ Reck, Franklin M., "Introduction" in: The 4-H Story, p. ix

⁵ Benson, O. H.

⁶ Benson, O. H.





4-H Fun FACT

Norman Rockwell

Painted *The County Agent* for the cover of the July 24, 1948 edition of the Saturday Evening Post. The people in the painting were painted from live models. Left to right, they are (in the barn) hired hand Arlie Champ; Jefferson Livewires 4-H Club Member Gama Steed Fuller; Jay County, Indiana County Agent Herald K. Rippey; JL4-HC Member Larry Steed; JL4-HC Member Sharon Steed Smith; Mrs. Don Steed, and Farmer Don Steed. No word on what the names were for the calf, dog, cats, chickens, or horse.



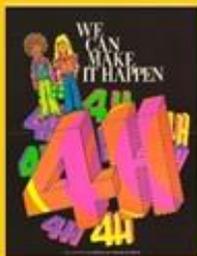
Tell Us Your 4-H History Story

Share your photos and stories of the history YOU made in 4-H!

We know you've made 4-H History. So, tell us about it! The world wants to know YOUR 4-H history! Send your articles to: Editor@4-HHistory.com

Submissions longer than 500 words must include a 500-words or less summary. The in-depth articles will be posted to our web-site and linked to the summary that will appear in the newsletter.

Thanks for reading The BRIDGE. Look for our next issue November 15, 2023!



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