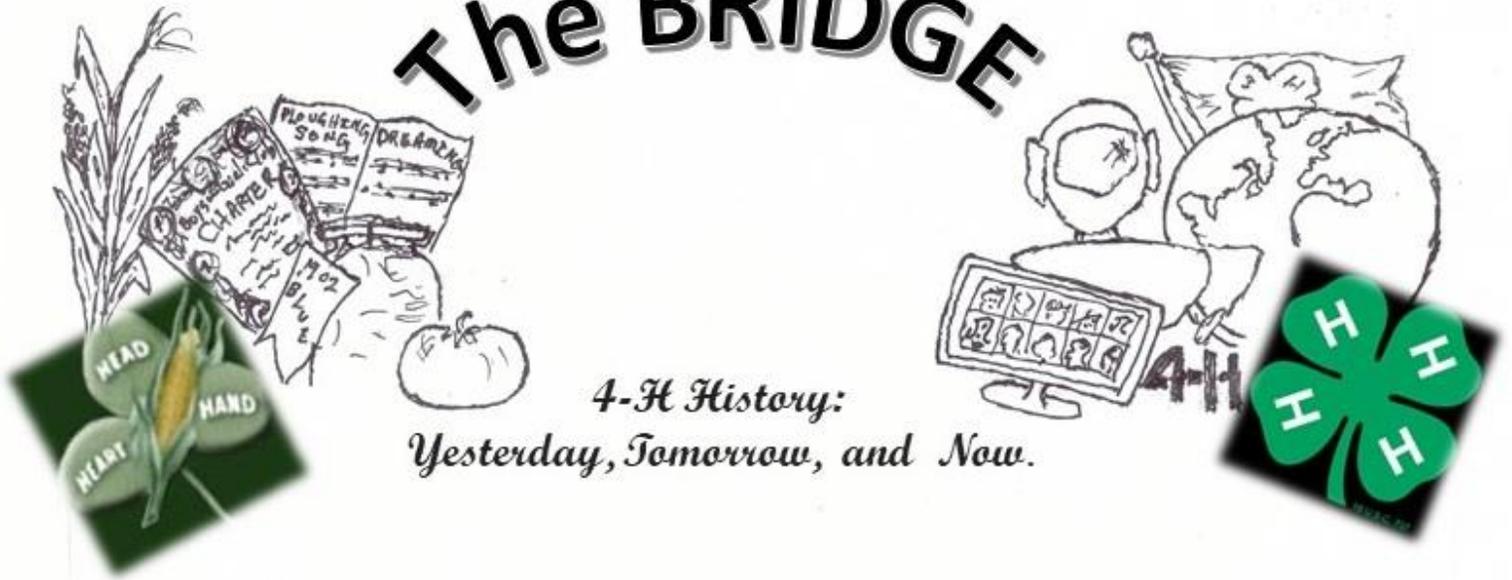


# The BRIDGE



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

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## **In this issue:**

- ✿ **The Evolution of Citizenship Washington Focus: Honoring the Past, Igniting the Future** by Max Tuck, Coordinator, Events and Youth Experiences, National 4-H Council and Sadaf Baig, VP, Events and Youth Experiences, National 4-H Council
- ✿ **CWF Blasts From the Past: 1959, 1980, and 1986**
- ✿ **4-H Fun FACT** and **Tell Us Your 4-H History Story**

## **The Evolution of Citizenship Washington Focus: Honoring the Past, Igniting the Future**

**Max Tuck**, Coordinator, Events and Youth Experiences, National 4-H Council

**Sadaf Baig**, VP, Events and Youth Experiences, National 4-H Council

Back in the summer of 1960, 4-H members from across the country gathered at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. They weren't just visiting the nation's capital; they were stepping into their roles as young leaders. Through meaningful discussions, Capitol tours, and hands-on learning, they explored how their voices could shape their communities.

For more than sixty years, Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF)<sup>1</sup> has helped teens understand government, public service, and their responsibilities as engaged citizens. From mock city councils to national landmark visits, CWF has empowered youth with the courage to speak in public, build lasting friendships, and find their purpose. In recent years, interactive workshops on advocacy, civil discourse, and the First Amendment have given participants critical skills and meaningful peer connections. That sense of purpose comes through in Lead to Change Action Plans, a platform that empowers teens to make a real difference in their communities. Through CWF, many participants have gone on to lead lasting change in their hometowns and beyond.

*"Being a student at Ignite<sup>2</sup> 2024 paved the way for me to be a Program Assistant,"* shared Sean McConoughey (NJ), 4-H Program Assistant Summer 2024. *"It reinforced the core principles of 4-H and brought clarity to what's fundamentally necessary for a positive and fun youth development experience."*

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*<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>*

CWF participation changes in recent years has exposed a need to expand and create shared national moments. The transition of CWF into Ignite by 4-H marks a bold step forward, uniting young leaders around civic engagement, leadership, and purpose.

Starting in 2026, CWF will be a dedicated track within Ignite, held March 24–29 at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. This national experience will help teens discover their spark, build career and life skills, and prepare for the future.

This change is not an end, but a powerful new beginning. CWF @ Ignite will continue hands-on learning about advocacy, visits to national monuments, meetings with lawmakers, and opportunities to grow in public speaking and leadership. And yes, Program Assistants<sup>3</sup> are here to stay, continuing their legacy of mentorship and impact.

For Ivan Haskan (NE), Lead to Change Winner and 4-H Program Assistant 2024/2025, the connection between Ignite and CWF is deeply personal. *“From my first Ignite in 2024 as an attendee to guiding others and bringing CWF to life as a Program Assistant, then returning to Ignite as a Lead Chaperone, these programs have shaped who I am. Ignite and CWF empower youth, build leadership, and create lifelong friendships.”*

*“The summer in D.C. was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life,”* said Weston Penny (AR), 4-H Program Assistant 2025. *“It was a true ‘learn by doing’ experience that strengthened my leadership, deepened my sense of purpose, and showed me what’s possible when people believe in each other.”*

CWF is evolving, but its mission remains the same: to help young people become informed and active leaders in their communities. Join us in this next chapter, share your memories, stay connected, and help inspire tomorrow’s leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> History of CWF See <https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/CWF/#TOC-05>

<sup>2</sup> Ignite by 4-H is a national annual experience for teens to find their spark in areas such as Agriscience, STEM, and healthy living, while building essential leadership, career, and life skills. Launched in 2023, Ignite has grown to welcome more than 1,600 participants from all U.S. states and territories, offering opportunities for connection, discovery, and youth leadership to create future positive impact in their communities. For more information visit: <https://4-h.org/events/ignite-by-4-h/>

<sup>3</sup> Program Assistants are part-time Council staff members who implement Council’s educational programs. PAs are usually 4-H alumni usually between the ages of 18-25.



## **CWF Blasts From the Past: 1959, 1980, and 1986**

**In 1959**, a new citizenship education program was implemented by National 4-H Council, then called National 4-H Foundation. That event not only “opened” the National 4-H Center by being the first educational event held there, but it “birthed” the program that was originally called Citizenship Short Course (CSC) and, in 1979, renamed Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF). The photo is a little fuzzy, but the image still allows us to see the first step toward a citizenship education program that has helped tens-of-thousands of young people gain a new perspective on what it means to be a U.S. Citizen.

The image and explanation seen below was published on page 4 of the National 4-H History Preservation Team’s June 2015 newsletter (Volume VI Number V)

[https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/PDF/4HHPP\\_Newsletter\\_v06\\_n05\\_2015-06.pdf](https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/PDF/4HHPP_Newsletter_v06_n05_2015-06.pdf)

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In 1959, Iowa 4-H'ers travelled by bus for an exchange program with Kentucky 4-H. Since the National 4-H Center had just been opened they decided to keep going to see what was there and asked 4-H Center staff to plan a program for them. And the rest, as they say, is history. That trip resulted in the development of Citizenship Short Course (CSC) as it was called until the early 1970s when it was renamed Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF).



In 1980, Eye Care was one of the topics participants learned about while attending that year's version of CWF. The October 1980 edition of the National 4-H News magazine (v58, #8, p. 20), included an article entitled, "Citizenship – Washington Focus '80. The caption of the photograph reads, "Citizenship– Washington Focus Eye Care Workshop.

The article reads:

*More than 5,500 4-H'ers, their leaders and Extension staffers participated in the 1980 Citizenship-Washington Focus Program. Throughout the summer, they gathered at the National 4-H Center in Washington, D.C. for a week-long schedule of first-hand leadership and citizenship experiences. Participants visited with legislators on Capitol Hill, toured agencies of the federal government, and saw the historic sights of the nation's capital. They learned about the election process by conducting their own spirited political campaigns and elections. Participants also prepared plans of action to put their newly-strengthened citizenship and leadership skills to work in their hometowns.*

In 1986, the National 4-H News included an article that reads very much like the 1980 version, but this time it included several photos as well. Below we see page 11 of the August/September 1986 edition of the magazine (v64, no. 6). In the upper left photo, we see 4-H'ers visiting the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The bottom left photo shows 4-H'ers on Capitol Hill. In the upper right photo, a 4-H'er casts her vote in a voting booth of that time. The middle two photos are of Program Assistant John Leubke, MN, teaching a session on government (L) and meeting with representatives of his sponsor, Checks Direct, Inc. (R). In the lower right photo we see CWF delegate Linda Doliente visiting the Vietnam War Memorial.

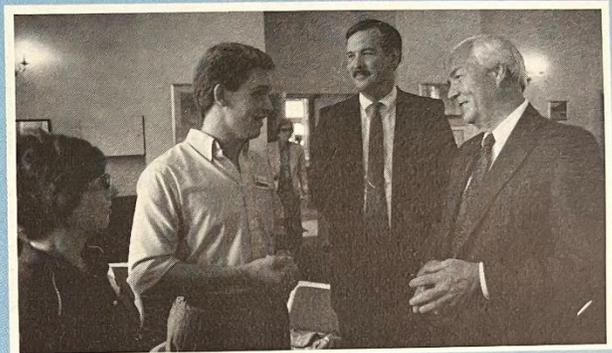
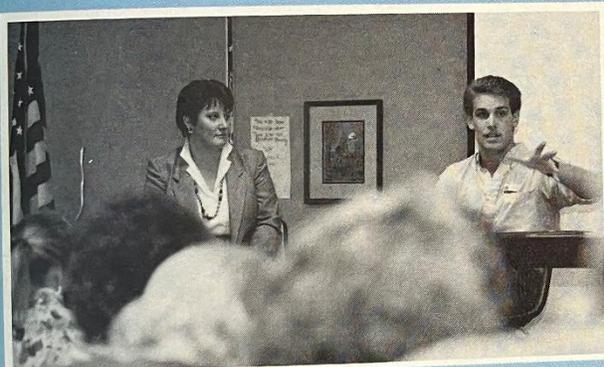
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During a visit to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, CWF delegates present a 4-H T-shirt to Tom Mader (c), Executive Director, Friends of the Kennedy Center. Friends of the Kennedy Center provide active support for the CWF program. (l to r) DeWayne Mitchell, Michigan; Kim Samson, Missouri; Scott Kehn, South Dakota; Mader; Cyndi Horn, California; Linda Dollente, California; and Michael Knutsen, South Dakota.



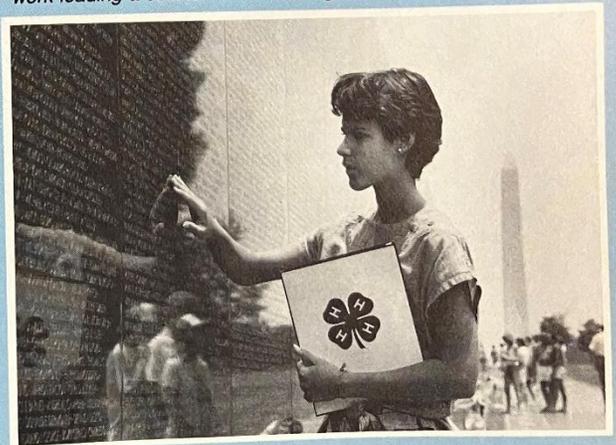
Delegates learn first-hand the power of the ballot as they cast their votes on a variety of issues affecting their futures.



Program assistants, who work with delegates throughout the week in workshops and hands-on learning experiences, are a vital resource in training our young citizens. Above, program assistant John Leubke (l), Minnesota, meets with officials of his sponsoring organization, Randy Lehmann (c), vice president, and John Phillips (r), president, Checks Direct, Inc. In addition to sponsorship of John's fellowship, Checks Direct, Inc. has established a partnership with the Campaign for 4-H to underwrite the citizenship program. Left, John is hard at work leading a session on how our government works.



One highlight of the program is a day on Capitol Hill. Far more meaningful than the usual tourist visit, the occasion gives delegates an opportunity to meet with their elected representatives to present their views on today's issues.



Visits to other monuments round out the week's activities. Here, Linda Dollente spends a thoughtful moment at the Vietnam War Memorial.



# 4-H Fun FACT

Jennifer Sirangelo’s reason for supporting the 80-25 4-H History Book project provided during an interview by Bo Ryles, Jo Turner, and Ron Drum. May 13, 2023.

*...being a newcomer to 4-H, when I joined Council, the (4-H) history books were extremely valuable to me. And as a leader, they're probably even more valuable as I've read through the books and seen where I was before I interviewed for CEO. I read through the history books, and I saw that, as an example, some of the issues we deal with are not new, you know, there are things that other leaders have dealt with. So, I felt less alone and less isolated, and like "What's wrong with me, why is this happening?" It was great to see the context and to see the commitment of the leaders through the years, and so that I could align as a newcomer with their values. I literally used the former history books. A year ago, when I met with our board in September of 2022 for what was a historic vote on how to use the proceeds of the landmark gift we received from philanthropist McKenzie Scott, I pulled those old books out and shared them with our board. The ideas we brought forth to them with Cooperative Extension were very consistent with what happened in the past and the consistent values through the years of leaders in 4-H. So, I personally have, as a leader, utilized and found value in 4-H's recorded history, and I wanted to create this for the next generation of leaders in 4-H."*

## 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](mailto: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, 2025!*



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