

# The BRIDGE



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

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November 2025

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## **Joyce Kilmer's Poem "Trees" and the NAEA President's Gavel**

By Betty Gottler, National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP) Archivist  
With legends from New Jersey Association Members

At each NAE4-HYDP Business Meeting, the President brings the meeting to order with the sounding of the gavel. This long tradition passes by most of us without realizing the history of the gavel and those who have used it.

A 300-year-old white oak that had a 120-foot limb spread stood near the Rutgers Labor Education Center on the Rutgers New Brunswick Cook Campus. The historic campus oak supposedly was Kilmer's inspiration for his 12-verse poem, "[Trees](#),"<sup>1</sup> that many of us memorized in school, written while he was a student at Rutgers, from 1904-06. The huge tree of which the poet wrote that "only God can make," died of old age and was removed by a team of five tree surgeons in the 1960's.<sup>2</sup>

That is where the story of the NAEA<sup>3</sup> President's Gavel begins. The oral history of this adventure weaves within the oral history of NAEA. As with much oral history, believe what you will and enjoy the memories.

NAEA did not have a gavel in the early years of the association. Each president brought their own or "made do" at the meeting. New York and New Jersey members decided that this needed to be changed. Since members from these states

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represented several of the early association presidents, the states wanted to commemorate that fact with a permanent gavel.

The wood from the Kilmer Oak had been stored on Rutgers campus. No details are given (but there are legends) on how a limb found its way into the hands of NJ 4-H Agent Ken Pickett. His hobby was woodworking, and he crafted what became the Kilmer Gavel.

John Hassert, NJ, NAEA President (1966-67), accepted the Kilmer Gavel on behalf of the Association. A brass plate on the gavel reads: *Made from Rutgers Kilmer Oak. Presented by NJAA<sup>4</sup> to NAEA, November 1967.*

There is yet more to the story. Most gavels have a “sounding block” bringing a rich loud bang when the gavel is brought down. The NAEA gavel needed one. Betty Wingerter, OH, served as NAE4-HA<sup>5</sup> President in 2007-08. In her office was a block of wood she used as a sounding block. Wingerter presented it to the association at the end of her term, and it has continued to be used by each president thereafter. The block reads: *OEAA, Ohio Extension Agents Association.*

Since the presentation of the Kilmer Gavel in 1967, 58 association presidents from 29 states have used it to call meetings to order, gavel votes, and adjourn the proceedings. On October 27, 2025, the Kilmer Gavel was forced into retirement during the NAE4-HYDP Conference in Atlanta GA. While in use during the 2024 NAE4-HYDP Conference in Boise, Idaho, the handle cracked. Realizing the Kilmer Gavel had served a long and good life, the Association decided it was time to let it begin its well-earned, and honored, retirement. The gavel was asked to give one last tap to call the first business meeting of the 2025 NAE4-HYDP Conference in Atlanta to order, and then it was nestled deep into the soft lining of a special box made just for it: a poetic end for a wonderful piece of history

A new gavel engraved NAE4-HYDP, October 27, 2025, now begins building a new history of honoring the #4HBeyondReady Youth Development Professionals who spend their careers nurturing youth through 4-H, much as the Earth nourished the oak tree in Joyce Kilmer’s poem, Trees.



*Editor’s note:*

*Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, was founded in 1766 as Queen’s College. It was renamed in 1825 as Rutgers College in honor of Revolutionary War hero and college benefactor Col. Henry Rutgers. The school became a Land-grant College in 1864 and the state designated Rutgers as the state university in 1956.*

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*NAE4-HYDP began as the National Association of County Club Agents (NACCA) in 1947. By 1971 it was called the National Association of 4-H Extension Agents, abbreviated as NAEA. By 1986 the name being used was National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) and in 2019 the name changed again, this time to National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP). The organization, however, was always working for the betterment of the Extension 4-H youth professional, no matter what the name.*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12744/trees>

<sup>2</sup> The New York Times Archives, December 5, 1986

<sup>3</sup> National Association of 4-H Extension Agents, a predecessor of NAE4-HYDP

<sup>4</sup> New Jersey Agents Association

<sup>5</sup> National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, a predecessor of NAE4-HYDP



## **Writing 4-H History: A 1980-2025 4-H History Book Progress Update**

by Ron Drum, Pennsylvania 4-H Member 1967-1977



In the May issue of 2023, this newsletter announced that a new history of 4-H was being written. Since then, co-authors Jo Turner and Ron Drum have been reading documents (books, reports, meeting minutes, letters, journal articles), viewing web pages, interviewing 4-H luminaries, interpreting charts and graphs, and collecting information in any way they could about the progress of 4-H over the last 45 years. However, knowing the job was huge, they also recruited experts who lived and worked 4-H during these past 45 years to help them.

To date, 115 experts have contributed research and helped document the slice of 4-H that they were most involved in. Their contributions have been extensive and extraordinary.

Utilizing all this information, the co-authors have produced a manuscript. The first draft was reviewed by a panel of 4-H experts this summer. The panel shared both compliments and suggestions for correction and addition which the co-authors have used to create a second draft of the history.

With most of the writing process completed, the History Book team of Leah Wooddall, Bo Ryles, Jo Turner, and Ron Drum are now moving to the next phase, preparation for publishing the work. This phase is more extensive than was at first realized. Presently, while still adding to and editing their work, the team is exploring how best to publish the work to the book's best advantage, the Extension system's best advantage, and the best advantage of 4-H itself. One of the questions our modern world has presented us with that earlier authors did not struggle with is the interaction between a hard copy edition and information posted on a web site.

Yet to be managed is the way photographs and graphics will be included and even which photographs and graphics those will be. The various stakeholders have not yet had a chance to review and have input into the manuscript's content. An Editor/Publisher still needs to weigh in as well. Needless to say, much is yet to be done, and therefore it may be a few more years before the book becomes a reality. However, the completion of a manuscript, even if it is still in draft form, was the highest hill to climb. That it was climbed successfully was only made possible by the support, hard work, and effort that so many members of the 4-H Community have given, and continue to give, to the project.



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## Programs that made a difference –

### Highlighted Journal of Extension Article:

#### Youth GIS Partnerships in Action: Alert, Evacuate, and Shelter

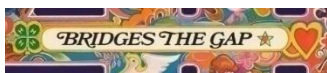
by Jeff Sallee and Kevin Allen, Oklahoma State University

Journal of Extension, October 2011, Volume 49, Number 5, Article Number 5IAW3

To read the article, go to: <https://open.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3191&context=joe>

#### Article Abstract:

Across the state of Oklahoma, teams of youth and adults have formed to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to help prepare their communities for potential emergencies. Oklahoma 4-H teams have selected projects ranging from locating storm sirens to distributing emergency maps. Each of these teams has partnered with a local EMS agency to address a community need while developing their geospatial skills. When conducting 4-H GIS, two goals should be kept in mind: public service and youth development. Partnerships are important to the success of youth and GIS. This program would not be as successful and effective without these partnerships.



## The National 4-H History Preservation Team Update

The National 4-H History Preservation Team (N4-HHPT) continues its vital work to safeguard and share the rich legacy of 4-H. Recent efforts include digitizing historic documents and memorabilia in partnership with the National Agricultural Library, ensuring these treasured materials are preserved and accessible for future generations.

N4-HHPT is also authoring a new 4-H History Book covering 1980–2025, capturing the program’s evolution and impact over the past 45 years. A redesigned 4-H History Preservation website is underway, featuring an updated look and improved navigation for exploring 4-H’s national story.

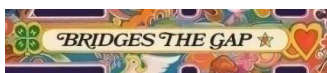
To strengthen collaboration, team members are connecting with 4-H History contacts in each state and maintaining communication with NAE4-HYDP life members. The team also produces a regular 4-H History Newsletter to share project updates and highlight stories from across the country.

This October, N4-HHPT represented 4-H History at the NAE4-HYDP Conference in Atlanta. Team members Bo Ryles, Jo Turner, and Ron Drum spoke during the NAE4-HYDP Life Member Luncheon and members Jim Rutledge, Kendra Wells, Tina Veal, Leah Wooddall, along with Ryles, Turner, and Drum took turns hosting a booth in the exhibit hall showcasing the team’s work and building new connections.

Stay connected and informed about 4-H History projects and news by registering at: <https://form.jotform.com/252954833943165>



The N4-HHPT booth at the 2025 NAE4-HYDP Conference. Two Conference attendees on the left discuss 4-H History with (L-R) Jo Turner, Tina Veal, and Kendra Wells



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## 4-H Fun FACT

In 1958, the National 4-H Foundation moved into its new home in Turner Hall, one of the buildings of the National 4-H Center. Although the Center was physically located in Chevy Chase, Maryland, their postal address was “7100 Connecticut Avenue, Washington 15 D.C.” because they were in a District Postal Delivery Area. Their new telephone number was “Oliver 6-9000”.

### *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!*



***The BRIDGE Editorial Board:***

*Sue Benedetti, Gwen El Sawi, Tom Tate, Jane Jopling, Bonita Williams, Betty Gottler,  
Linda Horn, Deborah Ryome, Ron Drum*

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