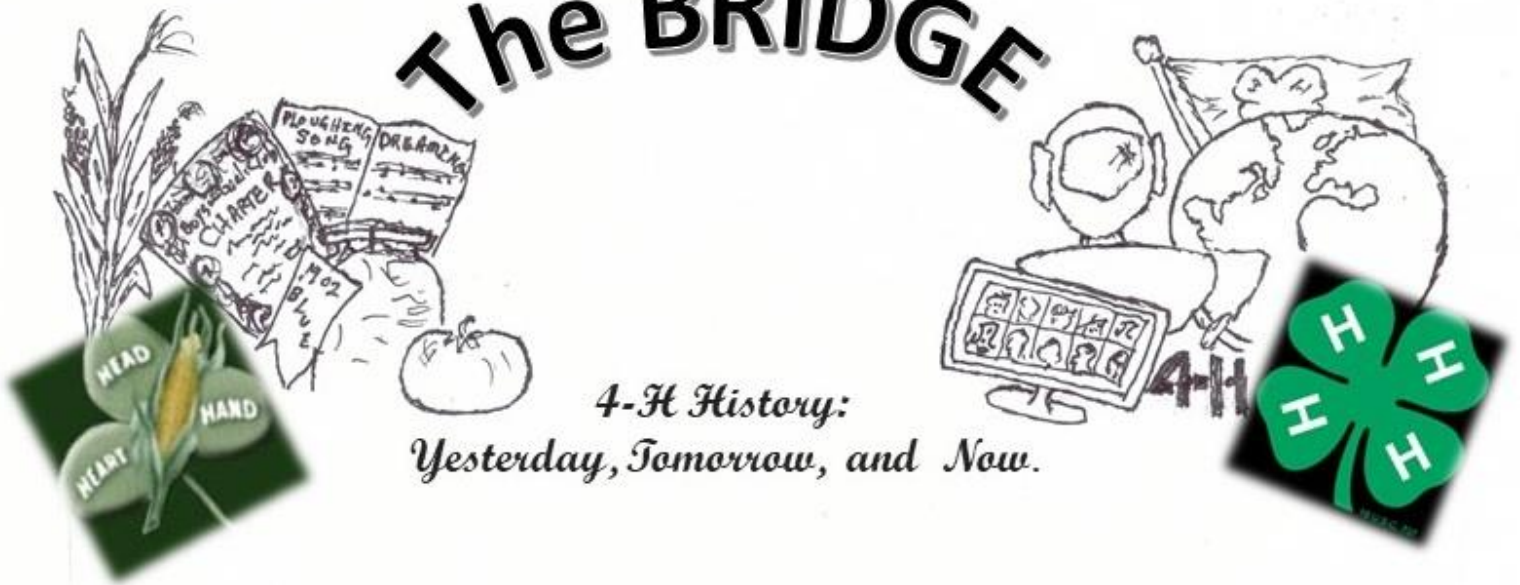


The BRIDGE



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

Vol. 15, No. 2

May 2026

How will YOU celebrate the 125th birthday of 4-H?

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Don't Let the Memories Fade: Archiving 4-H History

By Linda Horn, National 4-H History Preservation Team Volunteer

Each person and every location in the world has a history! Each one is unique and individual in their story, but together those histories can create an enriched and powerful view of that subject.

The 4-H program is multi-layered in its history as well. The experiences of an individual young person within the program, the multitude of programs and opportunities offered within a county or state, as well as national youth and adult involvement all present small segments and experiences which together form the history of the 4-H program. It can be overwhelming to delve into the boxes of photos, programs, oral histories, and more that are stored in home or office closets to make sense of what has occurred in the past.

Last October, members of the National 4-H History Preservation Team spoke with 4-H professionals at the NAE4-HYDP conference in Atlanta. There was clearly a lot of interest from all who visited in learning more about how to preserve 4-H history within their own counties or states; however, the stumbling block was always how to get started! Most already had full schedules within their workday; how would it be possible to fit in the task of researching 4-H history or opening the box of 'archives' that lived in the storage closet on top everything else!

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Listening to these concerns, the history team developed a series of online learning sessions which were initially offered to those who indicated interest at the conference. Session one provided an overview of the history team; how it came to be, its purpose, and highlighted some of the preservation projects the team have completed. Sources for getting started in history preservation were shared, including the rich information that can be found at the history preservation website located at <https://4-hhistorypreservation.com>.

Session two offered a guide for preserving 4-H history, including tips for what to save and what to toss; formats for storing items, whether that be physical or digital, and how to recruit others to help with the efforts. Ideas included forming a 4-H history club and incorporating volunteers to assist with collection at events that are already occurring such as fairs, award nights and more.

During session three, partnerships were discussed. Participants were encouraged to investigate their individual university's archives, perhaps getting assistance from the archivist or someone at their university library. Partnering with local historical societies or museums would potentially provide a place to house displays of 4-H history as well.

Guest speakers from the Universities of Georgia, Minnesota, Illinois, and South Carolina provided detailed information about their processes for preserving history, including formation of state history teams and steps they took not only to preserve history, but to train others within their states.

More than 80 participants representing over 30 states participated in these sessions. The sessions are available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/@4-HHistory>. As a result of these sessions and interest, a pilot project providing mini-grants to preserve 4-H history was offered to those who attended the sessions. Successful applicants will be working on their projects starting this summer, and the history team hopes to offer additional mini grants in the future.

With support and ideas from a growing network of 4-H history buffs, preserving 4-H history can be accomplished. All it takes is that first step.



Partnerships for Preserving 4-H History: A UMD INFO CAFe and N4-HHPT Case Study

By Gwen El Sawi, N4-HHPT Volunteer

Partnerships are a key strategy for preserving history, and preserving 4-H history is certainly no exception. As America celebrates 250 years since the beginning of its inception as a country, 4-H nears 125 years of positive youth development, focusing on helping youth develop skills and competencies through “hands-on experiential learning” contributing to overall development (Head, Heart, Hands, Health) and their ability to be contributing members of their homes, clubs, communities, country, and world. At the heart of all 4-H programs are partnerships between youth; parents; adult leaders; county, state, and national Extension staff; Land-Grant Universities; and organizations such as State 4-H Foundations/Centers, National 4-H Council, NAE4-HYDP, and the donors supporting 4-H programs at all levels. The following describes a partnership between the National 4-H History Preservation Team (N4-HHPT) and the University of Maryland (UMD), College of Information (INFO), the Center for Archival Futures (CAFe). A natural partnership exists as 4-H assesses items that tell the 4-H story, with the knowledge and experiences of people dedicated to documenting and preserving the history of our country and culture.

It began at a reception when Tom Tate, Chairman of the National 4-H History Preservation Team, met Dr. Katrina Fenlon, PhD, MLIS, Assistant Professor, College of Information (INFO). When the National 4-H Center suddenly closed, the National 4-H History Preservation Team found itself struggling with sorting through, and preserving, approximately 100 boxes of documents, media, and memorabilia rescued from the National 4-H Center. Items were moved to a storage unit (without climate control) while the team worked out what to save and where it should go long term. The Maryland 4-H

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Center provided workspace for the 4-H History Preservation volunteers to sort through items to send to the National Agricultural Library. Dr. Fenlon was looking for “hands-on learning” archival experiences for the students in her class. It seemed like a great opportunity that would benefit the students while providing the N4-HHPT with help in analyzing, sorting, and documenting 4-H historic documents and memorabilia.

The first class, Fall 2022, took on the task of identifying and describing materials from unsorted boxes of items, developing a spreadsheet describing items, making recommendations for the disposition of items, and digitizing some of the items. The class worked in groups of 5-10 with each group working on 1-2 boxes of items. They needed to agree on the terms used in each field of the spreadsheet that described the items they reviewed.

This work was valuable to the N4-HHPT as it helped us refine how we were describing and categorizing items in the boxes. Types of categories included: books, magazines, films, curriculum materials, audio or video tapes, newsletters, scrapbooks, photos, and memorabilia.

This is a “first order” task of every preservation project. “What do we have? How do we describe it so others can identify it in the future? How do we document items so they can easily be found in the future? The N4-HHPT used handwritten worksheets to categorize the type of items, date of origin, title, description, subject area, and suggested disposition of the items in boxes with labels. The students further refined the categories and descriptions into spreadsheets that could be sorted by date, description, type, or subject area. It was a beautiful example of providing students with an actual preservation and archival project while assisting the N4-HHPT further refine documenting items consistent with archival procedures. The partnership was strengthened by oversight and guidance from archivists of the National Agricultural Library (NAL), where the items will reside in the future.

Student reports indicated that the group process of identifying categories and describing items is an important part of the process. Furthermore, accurately identifying the actual description or title of an item was equally challenging and important. They also pointed out how important it is to include and label where items can be found after they were documented as a second part of their class assignment was to digitize selected documents. Thus, it became very clear how important it was to be able to find the document to digitize after it had been documented.

By the end of this class, ten of the boxes had been documented and were ready to be transferred to NAL. The N4-HHPT refined the process of documenting and describing documents, as well as labeling boxes with the items included. By then, the N4-HHPT was sorting documents into boxes that had materials relevant to the history of 4-H from 1980-2020 that might be useful to researchers preparing to document the history of 4-H in that time period, since the previous written history of 4-H culminated in 1980.

In the fall of 2023, Dr. Fenlon had another class undertake documenting 4-H items from the 1980-2020 time period, with additional focus on students' digitization experience. These items were subsequently transferred to NAL with spreadsheets documenting the items. The work of this group of students resulted in another 15 boxes being categorized, described, and documented, and labeled by box, as well as additional items digitized.

Another outgrowth of this partnership between the N4-HHPT and the UMD INFO CAFe was a summer internship in 2024. Materials identified as high priority in support of the 1980-2025 4-H History Book preparation and for reference were digitized by a graduate student hired by the N4-HHPT through National 4-H Council.

None of this preservation could have happened without partnerships. National 4-H Council originally housed the items to be preserved and helped the N4-HHPT manage their funding and projects. After the Center closed, the University of Maryland Extension Service and Maryland 4-H Center were key partners in providing space to store and sort items. Dr. Fenlon, UMD INFO CAFe provided students with a real archival project, with most students having their first contact with the 4-H programs. The National Agricultural Library has provided invaluable help to the all-volunteer N4-HHPT with preserving 4-H materials and has become the National 4-H archival repository. Preserving 4-H history is truly a partnership of people coming together with a shared goal of preserving the history of 4-H with the goal of providing a

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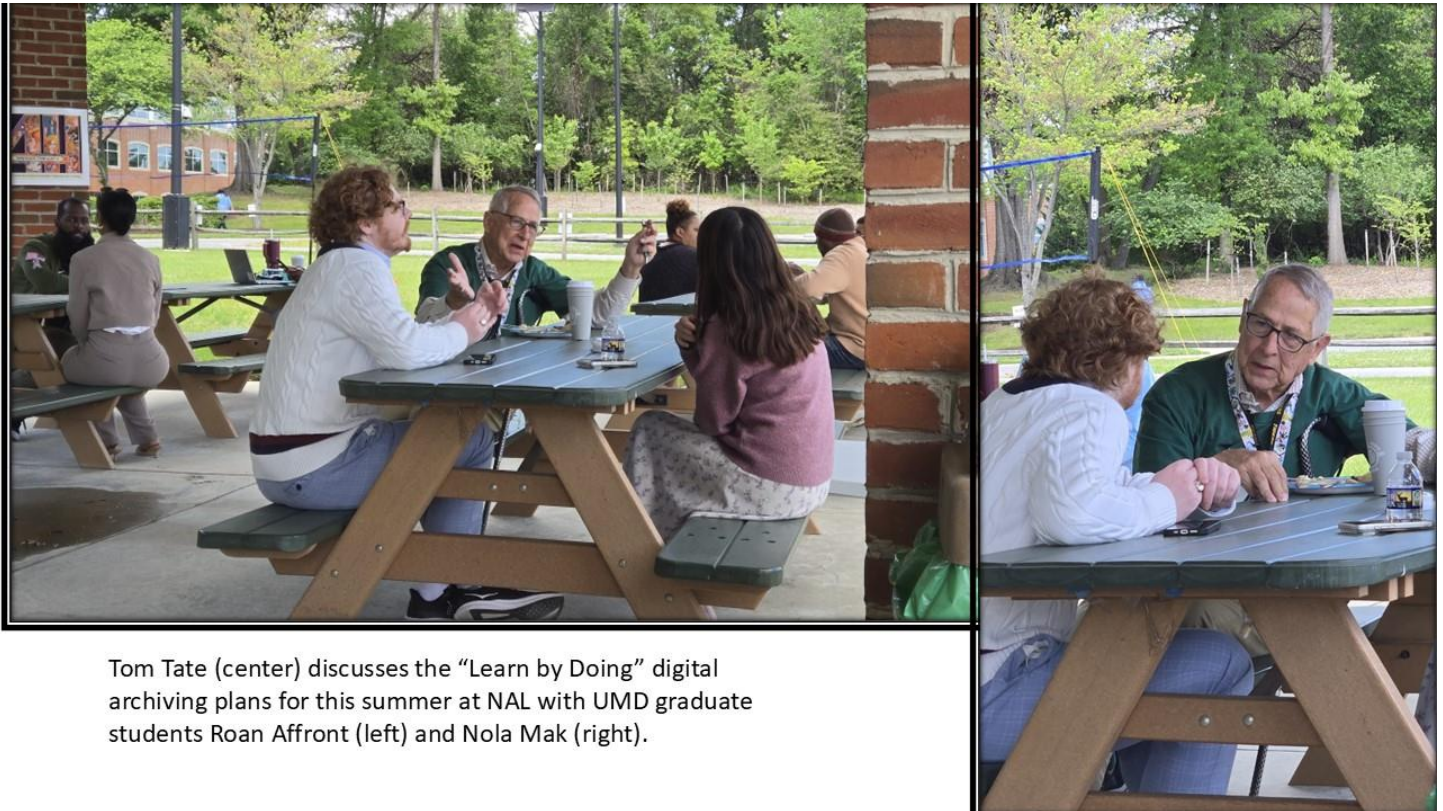
foundation for the future. This is only one example of many partnerships that exist around the nation. We know that several states are working in partnership with University Archives, State and County museums. Minnesota, Georgia, North Carolina, and West Virginia are a few that the author hopes will share their partnership stories in future editions so that we can all learn from each other as history continues to be made!



4-H History to become more accessible through Digital Archiving

By Tom Tate, National 4-H History Preservation Team Volunteer

Digital Archiving is the process of converting paper documents and other media into digital documents that can be retrieved online by users using the Internet. The National Agricultural Library (NAL), United States Department of Agriculture, a partner of the 4-H History Preservation team, has begun selecting 4-H publications and documents presently held in their collections to be made available on Archive.org



Tom Tate (center) discusses the “Learn by Doing” digital archiving plans for this summer at NAL with UMD graduate students Roan Affront (left) and Nola Mak (right).

Paper documents from the NAL Elsie Carper Collection on Extension Service, Home Economics, and 4-H, will be digitally archived during 2026.

Discover the Legacy of USDA 's Extension Service with 4-H Publications on Archive.org

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Explore the rich history of 4-H with an incredible digital collection from the USDA National Agricultural Library. This online archive is a treasure trove of 4-H periodicals, and offers a glimpse into the programs and projects that shaped generations of youth. You'll find a diverse array of digitized materials including:

- Project Materials
- Leader Handbooks
- Circulars and Reports
- Radio Programs
- 4-H Club Songs
- Photographs & Illustrations

And there's more to come. Look out for more historical content from the National Agricultural Library as we approach the 125th anniversary of 4-H in 2027.

The special collection of 4-H material can be visited in person by appointment at NAL Special Collections, 10301 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville, MD 20705. Contact: NALSpecialCollections@usda.gov



The National 4-H History Preservation Team Update

Preserving the Legacy of 4-H: National Webinar Series and Mini Grants Support History Projects

By Tina Veal, National 4-H History Preservation Team Volunteer, Illinois

As 4-H approaches its 125th anniversary in 2027, the importance of preserving and sharing the history of the program has never been greater. Across the country, countless stories, photographs, documents, artifacts, and personal memories reflect the lasting impact of 4-H on youth, families, and communities for more than a century. To support this effort, the National 4-H History Preservation Committee have launched several national initiatives during 2026, including a three-part History Preservation Orientation Webinar Series and a new History Preservation Mini Grant Program designed to help volunteers, alumni, Extension professionals, and supporters document and share local and state 4-H history. More than 80 participants representing over 30 states participated in the orientation series, demonstrating strong national interest in strengthening and expanding 4-H history preservation efforts ahead of the 125th anniversary celebration.

The orientation webinar series introduced participants to the goals of the national history preservation initiative and highlighted how local stories contribute to the broader national narrative of 4-H youth development. The three-part webinar series highlighted the importance of preserving local and state 4-H history while providing practical examples and resources for states beginning or expanding preservation efforts. Session 1 introduced the goals of the National 4-H History Preservation Program and emphasized the importance of documenting photographs, records, oral histories, memorabilia, and personal stories before they are lost. Participant polling revealed that many states lack formal preservation efforts and identified key needs including examples from other states, digitization training, volunteer recruitment, and guidance on organizing historical materials.

Session 2 featured state initiatives from Illinois and North Carolina, showcasing strategies for organizing archives, collecting oral histories, digitizing materials, and engaging alumni and volunteers in preservation efforts. Session 3 continued with presentations from Minnesota and Georgia, highlighting additional approaches to storytelling, volunteer engagement, exhibits, and digital outreach designed to preserve and share 4-H history with future generations.

To further support local and state preservation efforts, the National 4-H History Preservation Team launched a History Preservation Mini Grant Program to help communities begin or expand projects focused on documenting and sharing 4-H history. Grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 were made available to support projects such as digitizing photographs and

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documents, collecting oral histories, creating exhibits or displays, preserving camp and county histories, and developing educational presentations or online resources highlighting the story of 4-H within local communities and states.

The National 4-H History Preservation Team and National 4-H Council are pleased to announce that projects in five states have been awarded National 4-H History Preservation Mini Grants. Funded projects include *Follow the Clover* at the University of Georgia; *Preserving the Alcona County 4-H Legacy* through the Michigan 4-H Foundation; *Show-Me 4-H History* with the Missouri 4-H Foundation; the *Montana 4-H History Project* through the Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development; and the *North Carolina 4-H History and Learning Center Oral History Project* at North Carolina State University. Over the next 12 months, each project will share its work publicly through social media, conferences, trainings, publications, exhibits, and other outreach efforts designed to help preserve and share the story of 4-H.

The National 4-H History Preservation Team, with support from National 4-H Council and generous donors, congratulates these awardees and looks forward to the impact these projects will have in preserving local and state 4-H history for future generations.

The National 4-H History Preservation Committee continues to encourage individuals, volunteers, alumni, and Extension professionals to become involved in documenting and preserving 4-H history in their communities and states. Orientation session recordings and preservation resources are available through the National 4-H History Preservation YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/@4-HHistory>

Individuals interested in contributing to this national effort or learning more about preservation initiatives may contact the National 4-H History Preservation Team at info4hhistory@gmail.com.

Together, these efforts are helping ensure that the remarkable story of 4-H — its people, traditions, innovations, and impact — is documented, preserved, and shared for generations to come as the organization prepares to celebrate 125 years of empowering youth in 2027.

We encourage you to stay connected and engaged with the National 4-H History Preservation Team through the following resources:

- **National 4-H History Preservation Team Website:**
<https://4-h.org/about/history/>
- **National 4-H History Facebook Page:**
<https://www.facebook.com/4H.History/>
- **“The Bridge” Newsletter:**
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>
- **National 4-H History Instagram:**
<https://www.instagram.com/4hhistory>

Together, through shared learning and collaboration, we can continue to preserve and celebrate the stories that define 4-H.



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CORRECTION:

In the February 2026 edition of The BRIDGE, the third person from the left in this photo was inadvertently identified as John Rutledge. The correct name is Jim Rutledge. We apologize for any inconvenience caused by this error.



"Blast from the Past" 4-H Photo



March 5, 1963 - John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States (left), receives a copy of the 1963 Report to the Nation and the World Atlas of 4-H from 4-H'ers Alice Todd, Alabama (center) and Don Weeks, Indiana (right).

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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!

We welcome all stories about our 4-H history. The Editorial Board reviews all submissions and determines if, and when, a submission will be published. Submissions should be approximately 500 words in length. The Editor reserves the right to edit all submissions. The Editor will work with the author when changes are needed. Authors will be asked to review their article and give final approval before it is published.

Send your articles, questions, and comments to: 4hhistorynews@gmail.com. Please note that this is a new email address, different from the address that was listed in previous editions of this newsletter.

To visit this edition of The BRIDGE and all previous editions of the National 4-H History Preservation Team's newsletters online, scan this QR code or visit:

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



Scan this QR code or visit: <https://www.instagram.com/4hhistory> and join the National 4-H History Preservation Team on Instagram

4HHISTORY

Thanks for reading The BRIDGE. Look for our next issue August 15, 2026!



The BRIDGE Editorial Board:

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

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