

The BRIDGE



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

Vol. 15, No. 3

August 2026

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

In this issue:

- ✿ **The National Conversations on Youth Development – 4-H’s 100th Anniversary Gift to the Nation**, By Jo Turner, N4-HHPT Member and Co-Author of the 1980-2025 4-H History Book
- ✿ **Of course, the 100th birthday celebration of 4-H was not all just talk!** By Ron Drum, N4-HHPT Member and Co-Author of the 1980-2025 4-H History Book
- ✿ **Just about everyone got into the celebration spirit!** By Linda Horn, N4-HHPT Member
- ✿ **Speaking of the Bicentennial, just how DID 4-H Celebrate the Country’s Bicentennial?** By Jane Jopling, N4-HHPT Member and Ron Drum
- ✿ **The National 4-H History Preservation Team Update**, by Tina Veal, N4-HHPT
- ✿ **4-H Fun FACT, A Revolutionary Quote of Note**, and **Tell Us Your 4-H History Story**

Editor’s note: So many celebrations! So little time! In 2026 the United States is celebrating its 250th birthday, also called America’s Semiquincentennial. Fifty years ago, in 1976, America was celebrating its Bicentennial; its 200th birthday. One question this newsletter begins to answer is how 4-H celebrated the Bicentennial. We hope that in future letters you will help us know how you celebrated America’s Bicentennial and Semiquincentennial.

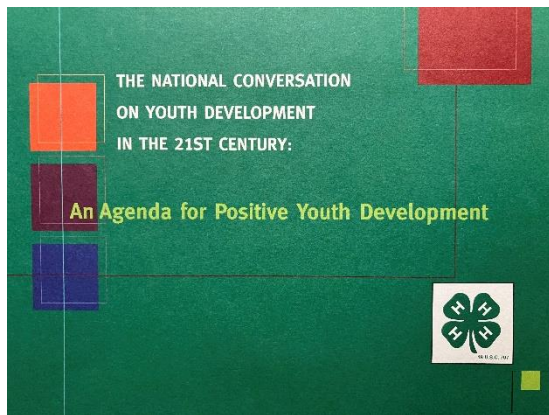
On top of that, 2027 marks the year 4-H chooses to celebrate its 125th birthday. As we know, 4-H began in various locations around the country in the years between 1890 and 1910. 4-H chooses to celebrate its birth using the year 1902 as the “first” year. That made 2002 the year of the 4-H Centennial, 100 years of 4-H, and 2027, of course, its 125th. This letter also begins to answer how 4-H celebrated its 100th birthday in 2002 and, like above, asks how you plan to celebrate its 125th next year. Our November letter will delve deeper into those plans as well.

So, read on and enjoy the celebrations!!

The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>

The National Conversations on Youth Development – 4-H's 100th Anniversary Gift to the Nation

By Jo Turner, N4-HHPT Member and Co-Author of the 1980-2025 4-H History Book



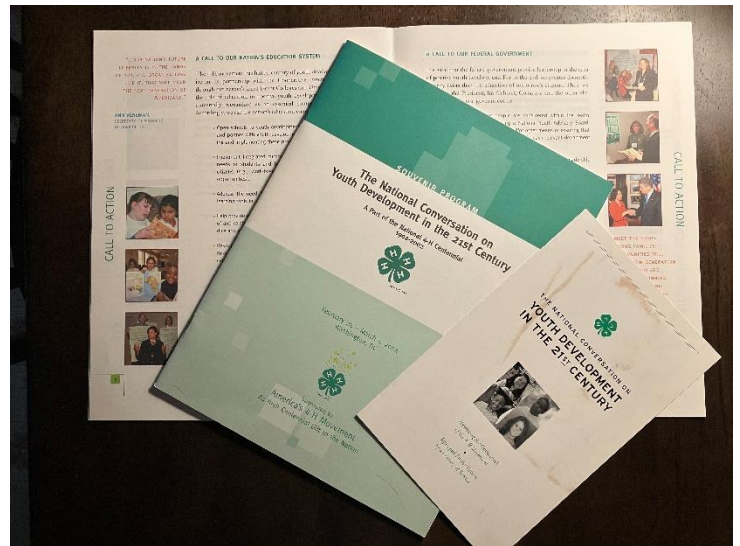
When most people think of birthday and anniversary parties, they think of sharing memories, opening gifts, and eating cake. For the 100th anniversary of the founding of 4-H, partners wanted to do more than celebrate the past. They wanted to identify bold ideas for the future. Steve Gunderson, 4-H alum and former U.S. Congressman who worked with 4-H to plan and implement the celebration summed it up eloquently: *It was important that on the 100th Anniversary of 4-H that we give a gift to our country; young peoples' view of the future.* The gift the 4-H national leaders chose to give was to have a conversation!

Guided by a national planning team, this strategic-planning initiative, called the National Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century, began in the Autumn of 2001. A total of 1,577 local conversations were held by Extension Educators engaging nearly 50,000 people of various ages and backgrounds resulting in more than 10,000 ideas. Then, 63 land-grant universities led state Conversations that reviewed, and added to, these ideas. On February 28 and March 1, 2002, 1,200 youth and adults, representing over 600 organizations, gathered in Washington, D.C. for the *National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century*.

President George W. Bush commemorated the event in a letter saying, *“the mission of 4-H, helping young people to build life skills and to become productive citizens, will remain as important as ever.”* Building on his comment, Alma Hobbs, USDA 4-H National Program Leader, welcomed the delegates and noted the historic importance of the Conversation saying, *“Your investment today will sow the seeds for a better tomorrow. This provides an opportunity for all of us to serve and make a difference when the history is written.”*

The National Conversation's final report summarized the 10's of thousands of ideas for action that were suggested by the local, state, and national Conversations into 21 priority strategies for creating a positive youth development agenda in America. A key recommendation was to engage young people in creating policy and making decisions about the future of the country. Participants also made personal commitments to become active in several realms—the environment, mentoring, hunger, literacy, tolerance, helping senior citizens, local community development, reaching the disabled, and other areas.

The 4-H Centennial and the *National Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century* brought new opportunities for 4-H programs to amplify youth voices and build youth-adult partnerships. A quarter of a century later, many stakeholders believe that The National Conversations established 4-H as a national voice for youth development policy at local, state, and federal levels.



The final report on the National Conversations on Youth Development in the 21st Century began with the end in mind: *... we see young people as assets and partners, colleagues working together to improve the quality of life for today and tomorrow. <This report> is the result of one common goal from every participant: “A nation where every young person must matter.”*

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

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

The full report was published in 2002 and can be found at:

https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/eMedia/eOneTimeReports/4H_National_Conversation.pdf

Of course, the 100th birthday celebration of 4-H was not all just talk!

by Ron Drum, N4-HHPT Member and Co-Author of the 1980-2025 4-H History Book

Photos by Jim Rutledge

According to Jim Rutledge, a member of the 2002 4-H Conversations Steering Committee, there was also a 4-H Centennial committee appointed by USDA for which Rutledge served as Chair. *“That committee had no budget and only a communication mission so there was not a lot of output other than sharing what each of the states was doing locally”* Rutledge explained. *“When Council decided to jump in it made a big difference....”* Council not only conducted the Conversations, Council also helped celebrate by creating and selling various pieces of 4-H Centennial memorabilia.

One difference they made was inviting **Garfield the Cat** to the celebration. He donned a 4-H T-shirt and learned the 4-H Pledge, all through special arrangement with Garfield creator and Indiana 4-H alum Jim Davis’s company Paws, Inc. In 1987 Davis allowed Indiana 4-H to use the Garfield image on 4-H posters, place mats, and stickers to promote Indiana 4-H. In 2001 Edwin M. Gershon, Council Senior Vice President of Licensing and Merchandising, met with Davis at a trade show in New York. The result of that meeting was a licensing agreement for the 4-H Supply Service to handle a Garfield 4-H product line. Soon 4-H Supply Service customers were purchasing Garfield 4-H T-shirts, stuffed 4-H Garfields, bean bag 4-H Garfields, Garfield 4-H cookie jars, Garfield 4-H coffee mugs, limited-edition Garfield 4-H holiday ornaments and even a limited edition print of Garfield saying the 4-H Pledge.



In addition to Garfield, among other things, there was a commemorative 4-H coin that featured a special centennial logo and a commemorative U.S. Postmark.

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

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



In case you can't read the message in the commemorative envelope folio, it says:

For a century, 4-H has led communities and their leaders in recognizing the power and promise of America's youth. Today, more than 6.8 million youth, ages 5 to 19, are involved in 4-H educational programs ranging from aerospace to zoology. These "learn by doing" educational experiences provide young people with the skills they need to be successful throughout life.

The 4-H Youth Development Movement spans all of America - from family farms to urban centers. Acting on a commitment to inclusivity and collaboration, today's 4-H program shows more than 35% of 4-H participants living in urban communities and 30% representing minority racial, cultural and ethnic populations. The 4-H Youth Development Program is active in all of the nation's 3,067 counties (including every state, U.S. territory and the District of Columbia). As part of the United States Department of Agriculture and the Cooperative Extension System of state land-grant universities and colleges, the 4-H Youth Development Program is built on the nation's best research, education, and practice.

Just about everyone got into the celebration spirit!

by Linda Horn, N4-HHPT member

Photos by Linda Horn

In addition to the national celebration, many state and local celebrations were held throughout the country. The many celebration activities and events that occurred in 2002 included 4-H Clubs decorating floats and participating in local parades, 4-H flags being prominently displayed at state capitols and on legislative buildings during National 4-H Week, special displays of photos and past 4-H exhibits at sports events, fairs, local events, and many more. In May of 2002 the University of Massachusetts held a celebration on the Amherst campus celebrating 100 years of 4-H which featured historic 4-H memorabilia from the University and Extension archives. In addition, 4-H members were part of a 4-H centennial celebration at the State House in Boston that "honored individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to the UMass Extension 4-H Youth & Family Development Program."

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

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

In Connecticut, the 4-H program partnered with the University of Connecticut dairy bar to create a special centennial ice cream. The 4-H Empower-Mint vanilla based, mint ice cream was featured at many special events for the centennial and became a fan favorite throughout the year.

People from Calhoun County 4-H of Alabama remember celebrating the centennial with a 4-H Day at the local park eating lots of Blue Bell ice cream! In Knox County, Tennessee, a 4-H alum recalls a celebration where her mom made 100 green frosted cupcakes, and her dad built a 3-tiered stand to hold all of them.

The National Association of Extension 4-H Agents celebrated by establishing a National 4-H Hall of Fame, inducting 100 4-H Laureates. Florida 4-H did likewise, establishing their Hall of Fame by also inducting 100 honorees that special year of 2002. Since that initial event, the Florida HoF continues to induct 3 to 5 individuals yearly. Campers attending Kentucky 4-H camps celebrated the centennial each week throughout the summer by enjoying a yummy sheet cake!

Many items were made available for purchase as mementos of the 4-H Centennial year, especially by National 4-H Council. A special logo contest was held, resulting in the “4-H - The Power of Youth” logo - a 4-H Clover with shooting stars bursting from the top as can be seen in the commemorative coin shown above, the ornament/medallion to the right and the small Clip Pin in the photo to the left.



And those are just SOME of the many ways 4-H celebrated its 100th birthday in 2002!

A lot has changed in the 4-H program since 2002. Twenty-five years later, the program looks forward to celebrating the 125th year in 2027. Perhaps clubs or states might draw some inspiration from the past to create or incorporate their celebrations into existing events. Possibly there will be some new, innovative ideas that can now be shared on social media or with partner groups. How will your club, county, state or region celebrate the 125th mark in 4-H history? Send us your story! Drop an email to 4hhistorynews@gmail.com with all the details - words and pictures! We look forward to hearing all about it and perhaps including it in a future issue of the 4-H BRIDGE newsletter!



Speaking of the Bicentennial, just how DID 4-H Celebrate the Country's Bicentennial?

by Jane Jopling, N4-HHPT Member

In fifty years from now, what will you remember about America's 2026 Semiquincentennial (250) Celebration? Some of us remember the bicentennial (200) celebrations of fifty years ago. Were you around for America's Bicentennial Celebration of 1976? We celebrate milestones in our country like we celebrate milestones in our lives. Celebrating birthdays and anniversaries help us look back to reflect and rejoice in seeing how far we have come, whether individuals, organizations, or nations, and how we celebrate is just as important as celebrating.

In 1973, the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) submitted a report to Congress called "Planning for America's Bicentennial". They proposed that the American people be called upon to celebrate the Bicentennial

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

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

locally, in their small towns and communities. One of the many groups requested specifically to prepare for this special time were 4-H Clubs. The original plan called for youth to be involved in their “school systems and other walks of life”, writing compositions, creating art, and participating in programs, shows, and parades. In 1974, the format included “institutions of higher learning along with projects for Boys and Girls, Scouts, and the 4-H Clubs”

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produced several leaflets, now archived in the Gerald R. Ford Presidential library, instructing how 4-H could recognize America’s 200th birthday. They encouraged signs, posters, community programs-even how to plant a Bicentennial Garden.

In cooperation with National 4-H Council, Coats and Clark (<https://coatsnclark.com/>) sponsored a 4-H poster contest with three winners from each state chosen to have their poster exhibited at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, MD. Another Council donor, Eastman Kodak Company (<https://www.kodak.com/en/>), sponsored a nationwide photo contest, with photos provided from each state 4-H program.

The Bicentennial planners wanted grass-roots recognition for the 200th birthday of this vast nation and received it from youth groups, such as 4-H, who made it happen. Their celebrations included parades, compositions, projects, exhibits, memorabilia, and America-themed summer camps spread throughout the nation.

You may not remember 1976, but this year, 2026, we are celebrating America’s 250th birthday. We are sure the 4-H of today is also making a mark on this history. What did your 4-H program do, or is planning to do, this year? Did we celebrate differently in this modern age of technology? How did you reach out to serve our communities in the name of this milestone year? What will we read about this time during the next celebration 50 years from now?



A patch many 4-H’ers wore while celebrating America’s bicentennial in 1976.

We would love to know how you honored our 250 years. Drop an email to 4hhistorynews@gmail.com with all the details - words and pictures! Fifty years from now our descendants will be asking, “How did they celebrate the nation’s Semiquincentennial “back then”? Help us tell them!

An example of how one 4-H Club, the Sugarloaf Valley 4-H Club, Luzerne County, PA, celebrated in 1976.
by Ron Drum, N4-HHPT Member

The Sugarloaf Valley 4-H Club members were very excited. Afterall, it was the Bicentennial of the United States! Some of the members didn’t know what a “bicentennial” was. When they learned it meant the country’s 200th birthday, and most of them were only 10 – 15 years old, they were amazed! They decided they needed to celebrate this birthday in a BIG way! Some members wanted to create an exhibit of artifacts from years past that people could look at and learn from. Other members wanted to participate in the various community parades and events being planned to celebrate the bicentennial throughout the area. Their 4-H Volunteer Leader suggested they do both!

The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>



With the help of a few volunteer dads, some members made an exhibit. The club had mostly photos and newspapers they wanted to display so the exhibit was designed to help them do just that, providing wide areas to lay out the items and plexiglass covers to hold the items in place and keep them safe. They called their exhibit "Days Gone By". A local bank in Conyngham agreed to allow the 4-H Club Members to place their exhibit in the bank lobby through the summer and fall. Every two weeks, from Memorial Day until Veteran's Day, 4-H Members would visit the bank, remove the previous display and replace it with new content.

The 4-H Club Leader made a scrapbook of all of the club's activities. The photo to the left is part of one of the scrapbook's pages showing four photos of the exhibit. Although we know the year was 1976, the volunteer did not include specific dates for when each photo was taken. She did not explain the word written between the photos, either. However, the photos do give us hints for when they were taken.

The upper-left photo in the grouping may have been the first display placed in the bank on Memorial Day. It

included a small side table in addition to the exhibit display. On the table is a World War I helmet and dog-tags that were worn by a grandfather of one of the 4-H Members. Included with the helmet is a vintage postcard and a photo. The postcard, to the left of the helmet, shows President Woodrow Wilson in front of a patriotic scene. The photo, to the right of the helmet, is of the grandfather in his uniform taken during the war. The display content included newspaper clippings from area newspapers printed during WW I and WW II. Each of the displays thereafter included clippings, photos, and other similar items saved from, not Days, but Years gone by! One display, although not shown in these photos, included reproductions of the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution.

The other three photos in the above group show 4-H Members changing the display as the year progressed. In the lower right photo, an advertisement can be seen in the window behind the exhibit that advertises a local community fair called Valley Day and shows that event's date as August 7. The photo on the lower left of the group may have been the Veteran's Day display, the last display of the season, because the 4-H Members in that photo are wearing warm coats.

The Club Members did participate in parades in the local towns of Conyngham, Freeland, and West Hazleton, as well. The Club Members marched behind their banner in Conyngham and, as can be seen in the top two photos in the group to the right, Freeland (along with their club's volunteers dressed up like pioneers). In W. Hazleton, they rode on a flatbed truck-and-wagon float (newspaper clipping below right). On the float was the slogan, "4-H is America, America is 4-H".



The Sugarloaf 4-H Club featured youth in a prosperous America.

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

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

The National 4-H History Preservation Team Update

Preserving 4-H History as We Prepare for a Milestone Year

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

The National 4-H History Preservation Committee continues to expand its efforts to document, preserve, and share the stories, people, programs, and traditions that have shaped 4-H across the country. Several exciting projects are underway, with many opportunities for 4-H professionals, volunteers, alumni, and supporters to become involved.

One important initiative is a new partnership with the National 4-H Geospatial Leadership Team designed to identify when 4-H began in each state and county. Although 4-H has deep roots in communities throughout the United States, the beginning dates and early stories vary by location. This project will help gather and visually map that information, creating a national picture of how 4-H developed and expanded. Counties and states may be asked to contribute historical dates, documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, or other sources that help verify their local 4-H beginnings.

The committee is also working to identify where 4-H historical materials, collections, archives, and displays are located in each state. These materials may be housed in Extension offices, university archives, museums, libraries, 4-H camps, fairgrounds, or private collections. Creating a national inventory will help connect people with available resources, encourage collaboration, identify materials that may need additional preservation. It will also make it easier for researchers, educators, alumni, and local programs to locate photographs, documents, artifacts, publications, and stories that illustrate the impact of 4-H. Discussions have also begun about what can be done with artifacts and memorabilia that have not yet been included in an “official” collection. These discussions may result in the establishment of a national 4-H museum/collection.

This fall, the committee looks forward to hosting a booth at the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals conference in Kansas City. Conference participants are encouraged to stop by and learn more about current history preservation projects and share information about the history work taking place in their states. The booth will also provide opportunities to explore resources, exchange ideas, and discover ways to become involved with the committee’s work.

Illinois and Ohio 4-H professionals will also host a workshop during the national conference focused on alumni relations and history preservation. The session will highlight strategies, programs, and lessons learned from both states, demonstrating how alumni engagement and historical preservation can work together to strengthen lifelong connections to 4-H. Participants will gain practical ideas for identifying alumni, collecting and sharing stories, preserving historical resources, and building greater awareness of 4-H’s lasting impact.

Another year of the National 4-H History Preservation mini-grant program will be announced soon. The mini-grants are designed to support local and state initiatives that preserve, organize, digitize, document, or share 4-H history. Projects may include collecting oral histories, developing displays, digitizing photographs and records, preserving artifacts, creating timelines, or making historical resources more accessible. Additional information about eligibility, application requirements, deadlines, and available funding will be shared in the coming months.

Individuals who are passionate about preserving the 4-H legacy may also support the National 4-H History Preservation program through a charitable contribution at <https://4h.org/donate> and identify your donation for the National 4-H History Preservation efforts. Donations help protect important historical materials, strengthen educational resources, support preservation projects, and ensure that the experiences of 4-H members, volunteers, professionals, families, and supporters are preserved for future generations.

These efforts are especially meaningful as 4-H prepares to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2027. This milestone will provide an opportunity to honor the people and programs that built 4-H while also looking ahead to its continued impact on young people and communities. Watch for additional details, resources, activities, and opportunities to help celebrate 125 years of 4-H.

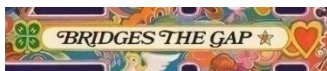
The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team

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

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

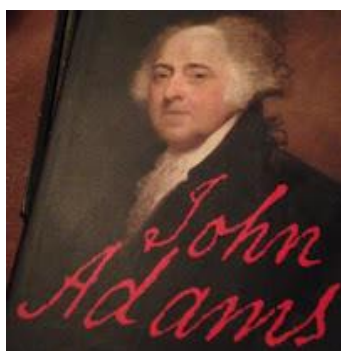
- **National 4-H History Preservation Team Website:**
<https://4-h.org/about/history/>
- **National 4-H History Facebook Page:**
<https://www.facebook.com/4H.History/>
- **“The Bridge” Newsletter:**
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>
- **National 4-H History Instagram:**
<https://www.instagram.com/4hhistory>

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



4-H Fun FACT

Although the country's bicentennial occurred in 1976, the delegates to the 1975 National 4-H Congress got the celebration started early. The Congress theme that year was “4-H – ‘76... Spirit of Tomorrow.” The Opening Assembly on Sunday afternoon was highlighted by a visual presentation entitled “4-H ‘76... Spirit of Tomorrow” which traced the progress of 4-H - and the nation - through the years. The Monday International Harvester luncheon entertainment was the Fred Waring and his New Young Pennsylvanians orchestra. In 1975 Waring celebrated his 60th year in show business and 40 years of 4-H entertainment. The theme for the Tuesday morning National 4-H Dress Revue hosted by Simplicity Pattern Co. Inc. was “The Declaration of Fashion.” Madeleine Greene, educational stylist, Simplicity, narrator for the show, in keeping with the theme, made comments about the patriotic red, white and blue influences in the individual garments. Wednesday evening Westinghouse hosted all delegates and leaders to “Celebration ‘76,” a musical revue, in the Hilton's International Ballroom, that paid tribute in song and dance to the United State's 200th birthday. And that was just the beginning of 4-H's bicentennial celebration!



A Revolutionary Quote of Note:

1774: I thank God I have a head, a heart, and hands, which if fully executed altogether, will succeed in the world.

John Adams, obviously a man ahead of his times, was also, among other things, a Founding Father, serving as a delegate to the Continental Congress 1774 and again 1775-1778 when he helped write the Declaration of Independence in 1776; a diplomat serving in the United Kingdom (1785-1788) and Netherlands (1788); the first Vice-President of the United States during the presidency of George Washington (1789-1797); and the second President of the United States (1797-1801).

John Adams began his career, right after graduating from Harvard College, by taking the position of schoolmaster running a one-room schoolhouse in Worcester, Massachusetts, from **1755 to 1758**.

The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>



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

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



The official Newsletter of the National 4-H History Preservation Team
<https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/>