



# National 4-H History Preservation Program

**April, 2013 Newsletter**  
Volume IV Issue IV



Linda Tripp, 4-H Youth Development, Hudson, NY (right) stopped by the “Voices” exhibit during National 4-H Conference to check out our new exhibit and talk to Sue Benedetti (left) about the “Voices” webinar in which she participated February 22.

## “Voices of 4-H History” Program Reaches Out at National Conference

National 4-H Conference delegates and chaperones had a chance to learn more about the “Voices of 4-H History” program and sign up to receive further information from the National 4-H History Preservation Team by stopping by the exhibit (above) during the Conference.

For those of you who weren’t at the Conference; you can get a similar experience by clicking on <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com/Voices> to view a 4-H alumni memory from a Missouri delegate to the first National 4-H Camp in 1927 on the grounds of the Washington Monument.

If you or others in your community have 4-H memories to share, please join us on an upcoming conference call on April 18 at 1 pm Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) and Webinar on May 7 at 3 pm EDT. Contact Tom Tate [tateace@aol.com](mailto:tateace@aol.com) or Kendra

Wells [kendrawells@gmail.com](mailto:kendrawells@gmail.com) to sign up for the April and/or May discussions.

## Earliest National Event

Otwell's Farmer Boys national roundup of corn growing contestants in 1905 in Carlinville, Illinois, may not have been the first organized national event for farm boys and girls, but it perhaps was the most significant one to date.

This is the story of that event and all of the trials and tribulations that led up to it during the six preceding years.

Will B. Otwell had been active in the Macoupin County (Illinois) Farmers' Institute from the beginning in 1898. As a local nurseryman, he was elected secretary of the group in February, 1898. For their first “Institute Day,” held later that same month, the officers engaged speakers of state-wide reputation to talk on farm subjects. Otwell promoted the Institute extensively, advertising in 13 county papers and instructed the janitor of the courthouse to open the doors early to accommodate the crowd. But when the doors of the courthouse opened, the only ones to enter the hall were the officers and the Chaplain.

The next year the officers changed their tactics. They decided to send out personal gilt-edged invitations to farmers, but the result wasn't much better. They found that few farmers seemed interested in attending meetings; perhaps two dozen at most attended. The officers were disgusted, the president resigned, and the secretary (Otwell) was elected president.

Otwell, now president of the Institute, decided that something drastic must be done to improve attendance. Fortunately, he was as resourceful as

he was persistent. Consequently, he decided to ignore the parents and concentrate on farm young people. It was bold, original, and successful.

First, he wrote to leading corn growers in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois and procured 12 samples of first-class seed corn. He then called 12 farmers into the parlors of a local bank and asked them to select the variety best adapted to the soil of Macoupin county. This done, he bought several bushels of the seed corn at \$2 per bushel. Next, he solicited \$40 in cash and divided it into \$1 premiums. A plow company gave a two-horse plow for a sweep-stakes premium. Otwell then published a notice in the county papers that every boy under 18 who would send in his name and address would receive a package of seed corn - all that could be mailed for one cent postage. The response was considerable; 500 young boys requested seed corn for the contest and during the summer these youthful contestants advertised the forthcoming Farmers' Institute as no other medium could have done. Otwell tells his own story of the result of his approach to farm youth:

*"I decided not to advertise the Institute in the papers any more than just to give the dates. The farmers were politely told they could stay away if they preferred. When I reached the courthouse on the morning of the Institute, there were scores of boys waiting for the doors to open. They had their prize corn with them, some of it in boxes, some of it in coffee sacks, tied up with binder twine, shoe strings, bed cord. When I called the meeting to order at the appointed time, I was confronted by 500 farmers. And Professor Stevenson of Champaign, who scored the corn, said he had never seen a nicer display of yellow corn. I knew I had solved the problem...." (from 1904 USDA Yearbook of Agriculture)*

By 1901 Otwell's annual corn growing contest had attracted 1,500 boys. Soon equipment manufacturers offered premiums to contest winners: a three-wheeled riding plow, a walking cultivator, fanning mill, a high-grade bicycle, a double harrow, a washing machine, a one-hole corn sheller, a box of 100 bars of soap, and even a windmill. The attendance in 1901 set a record and that of 1902 surpassed it, with the result that Otwell and his county Institute became known all over the state of Illinois.

The summer that followed was a dry one, and the president of the Institute was fearful that the contest would not amount to much. But one of the objects for which he was striving had already been accomplished - the farmers of the county were interested. The fathers of the 1,500 boys donated the best spots on their farms for the growing of this corn - the hog lots, calf pastures, clover fields - and all the time the boys were studying deep and shallow cultivation and fertilizers of all kinds, and were becoming more interested in farming. When the time for the Farmers' Institute came there were 1,500 farmers in constant attendance and a display of corn which, according to the judge who distributed the prizes, was finer than any he had ever seen at state fairs in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas or Iowa.



Corn clubs and corn growing contests, which were among the earliest beginnings of club work, involved thousands of young people. These "Farmer Boys" parading in 1905 in Macoupin County, Illinois, were organized by Will B. Otwell, early youth leader. (*The 4-H Story*, p 18.)

Mr. Otwell said of this meeting: "Farmers who a short time before would not attend, and who boldly asserted that 'they had forgotten more than these speakers would ever find out,' were on the front seat and helping in every possible way. Besides the fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts, there were more than 300 farmer boys in attendance at this Institute, and with no friction and the utmost enthusiasm and good will, we closed the largest and best Farmers' Institute I have ever attended. The corn was simply immense. And so were the boys. And when I mentioned the name of

the poor little fellow in blue overalls, who lived on a thin, worn-out piece of white land, and who had carried water all through the long summer to water his corn, and had thereby been awarded the first prize (bicycle), no governor of the State of Illinois ever received a heartier ovation than he.”

Over Otwell's protest, Governor Richard Yates gave the responsibility of creating an exhibit representing Illinois at the great 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. The prospect appalled the farm-bred man from Carlinville. He knew that famed artists would create beautiful displays for other states. What could he do to match them?

Then he struck upon the idea of holding a boys' corn contest, this time state-wide. Otwell expanded the contest to include 50,000 entrants. In the fall of 1903, Otwell and his associates in Carlinville were busy opening 10-ear entries of corn, drying them out, and repacking them for shipment to the Agricultural Palace at St. Louis. They sent down the best 1,250 samples from the contestants along with 600 photographs of the young farmers. This made up the bulk of the exhibit. Exhibition visitors came upon the sight of two huge pyramids of corn, one of yellow corn, the other of white, arranged neatly in 10-ear samples. Above the pyramids were signs reading: "Grown by the farmer boys of Illinois!" And, on a huge banner were the words: "8,000 Farm Boys in Contest." The fact that hundreds of the samples were adorned with the pictures of the boys who grew them added the personal touch. The result: the Illinois corn display literally stole the show from the other states.

Newspapermen at the World's Fair learned that each morning Otwell was getting approximately a bushel basket full of mail from his contestants, which literally overwhelmed him for stories. The newspapers and magazines from around the country carried about 2,000 special articles about the pyramid of corn from Illinois. The display received so much attention that Otwell received offers from foreign countries to stage similar contests there.

Always "raising the bar," the next year, in 1905 Otwell invited farm youth from anywhere in the country to Carlinville, Illinois, for a national roundup of corn growing contestants in his home town. Before this, he had held county roundups, but this one would include farm youngsters from anywhere in the United States. Otwell broadcast his invitation, instructing his followers that they were to parade on horseback, the boys to wear a blue crepe paper sash hanging from the shoulder, the girls to wear a sash of gold.

The results were astonishing; families migrated to Carlinville from 40 counties in eight states, their saddle horses hitched to their buggies. When the parade was formed, Otwell recalls in an interview with E. I. Pilchard, Illinois Extension that it measured four miles in length, four horsemen abreast.

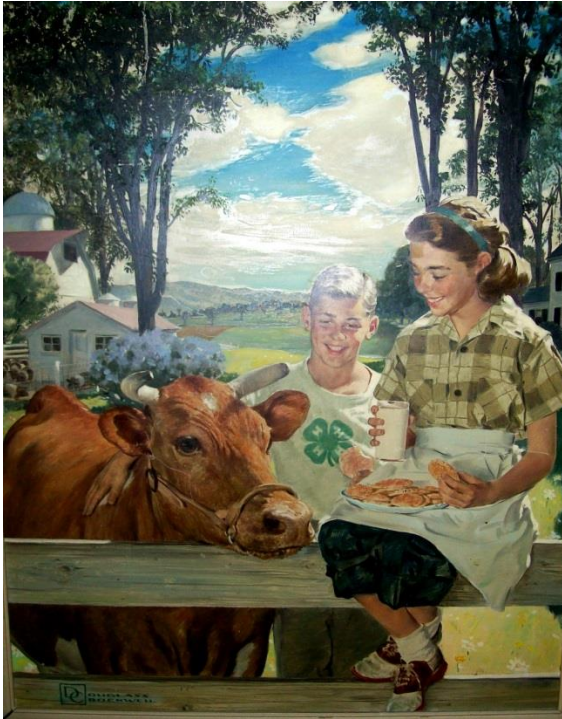
Mounted on a black charger, Otwell led the Boys' Horseback Brigade past the reviewing stand. There proudly stood Illinois Governor Richard Yates. Alongside Yates was the former Vice President of the United States, Adlai Stevenson, watching as young men and women from near and far paraded past the reviewing stand. Vice President Stevenson, with tears in his eyes, said it was the most inspiring sight he had ever seen.

Otwell's contests were not club work. He formed no local groups and required no regular meetings. He did, however, help create wide interest in better seed corn. Most important of all, from the standpoint of the future 4-H movement, he proved how wholeheartedly the hitherto neglected farm boy would respond to public recognition and encouragement.

*[written primarily from "The 4-H Story" by Franklin Reck and "4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980, A History of 4-H" by Thomas Wessel and Marilyn Wessel and the 1904 USDA Yearbook of Agriculture feature, "Boys' Agricultural Clubs" by Dick J. Crosby]*

Please mark your calendar now for **April 18, 2013, 1:00 pm** Eastern Daylight Time to participate in the next "Voices of 4-H History" Conference call. RSVP by email to [tateace@aol.com](mailto:tateace@aol.com).

## Historic 4-H Calendar Art Receives Gift



This 1951 National 4-H Calendar commissioned by the Shaw-Barton calendar company is the oldest piece of original calendar art belonging to the National 4-H Council.

Thirty-three paintings and one charcoal/pencil study of the more than one hundred pieces produced during the 1940s through 1980s belong to the National 4-H Council. The DC Alumni Chapter of Phi Upsilon Omicron (Phi U), Family and Consumer Science Honorary, has generously started a new push to restore and/or preserve these important pieces of 4-H history before they deteriorate further. The Phi U group has contributed \$150 toward restoration of the oldest piece owned by National 4-H Council (art featured above). More than 80% of the members voting on this decision are 4-H Alumni.

This group has been a friend of 4-H history preservation since before the current National 4-H History Preservation Team was organized. They were the initial donors who started the Kathleen Flom Memorial fund in 2004. Their initial gift helped the fund grow to over \$50,000 which went to not only preserve the memory of Kathleen Flom, one of this group's long time members, but to also research and construct a permanent timeline mural

of the first 100 years of 4-H in the US as well as the creation of the National 4-H Center. One other piece of the historic calendar art was restored as a part of that project because it features the two reasons that the 4-H Center was created: to house the National 4-H Conference (Citizenship Education) and the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE) program.

National 4-H History Team Members Sue Benedetti and Eleanor Wilson, Vice President of the DC Phi U Alumni Chapter, selected three oil paintings containing family and consumer science themes for this Phi U group to view during their Founder's Day Meeting in Kathleen's Corner at the National 4-H Youth Conference Center. They also explained the 4-H calendar program and the restoration and preservation processes needed to save these particular pieces of art.

You are invited to contribute to the restoration and preservation of one of the other wonderful works of 4-H history and art. Visit <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com> and click on the "donate" button. To learn more about the 4-H Calendar Program, please visit <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com/calendar/>.

**To make a contribution to the National 4-H History Preservation Program;** please go to <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com> to see your options, or mail a check payable to **National 4-H Council at:**

National 4-H History Preservation Program  
National 4-H Council  
PO Box 37560  
Baltimore, MD 21275-5375

Please write **4-H History Preservation Program** on the memo line of your check.

Also mark your calendar for **May 7, 2013, 3:00 pm** Eastern Daylight Time to participate in another "Voices of 4-H History" webinar. RSVP by email to [tateace@aol.com](mailto:tateace@aol.com).



## 4-H Calendar art “Model” Seeks Information



“Plan and Plant for Beauty” was the name given to the 1967 National 4-H Calendar produced by the Shaw-Barton Calendar Company. The original art was given to the National 4-H Club Foundation, (now National 4-H Council) by the calendar company.

Just as the History Preservation Team was in the process of inventorying and documenting the original 4-H Calendar Art at the National 4-H Center we received an e-mail from a 4-H alumnus who was trying to find out the year the calendar was published, for which he and other members of his club had posed in the 1960s. He wanted to tell his grandchildren about the print of the art that he had framed and kept since the ‘60s. Luckily for all of us we were able to tell him the date and he was able to give us information about the “models,” location of the beautification project, and the artist.

The National 4-H History Preservation Team received information in 2012 from Dennis Schmidt: “I have had a copy of what I understood for many years was a National 4-H Club Calendar from the 1960s, because I was one of the participants that posed for some photographs that the artist used to create the picture. He took pictures of several of us 4-H’ers near the Salt Lake County Extension offices. The gentleman pictured in the center of the print (in ‘civilian’ clothes) is Mel Burningham, one of the County Extension Agents. The kid standing with boot on the wheel barrow is me.” He continued, “My brother is the boy with the trash can.” In relation to our enquiry about the artist, Schmidt said, “Mr. Friberg was a Salt Lake City area artist. Mr. Friberg passed away only a couple of years ago. He was best known for doing work for the movie ‘The Ten Commandments’, a very long time ago.”

The History Team has also heard hints here and there about someone’s aunt that was the girl in one of the paintings and she went on to study Home Economics and became an Extension Agent. We heard from someone else who described a calendar that featured an urban garden. We don’t have this art but your information could help us to find it or an old calendar that we could photograph for our electronic archives at <http://4-HHistorypreservation.com/History?Calendars/> . If you have heard stories or know something about one of the pieces of calendar art, please write to us about it at [info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com](mailto:info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com) .

### Contact the 4-H History Preservation Team

Email: [info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com](mailto:info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com)

Visit: <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com>

Tweet: @4H\_History

