



# National 4-H History Preservation Program

## Celebrating 10 Years of Preserving and Sharing National 4-H History

### November 2017 Newsletter

Volume VIII Number VIII

### National 4-H Congress – Chicago

*This is the second in a series on the history of National 4-H Congress, an event which began in 1921, though its inception dates to 1916. Over the next several issues of the National 4-H History Newsletter we will feature various aspects of the Chicago Congress, a very important event in national 4-H history.*

*We welcome your comments at: [info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com](mailto:info@4-HHistoryPreservation.com)*

### An Idea that Started a Century Ago

The germ of an idea for a special experience for rural boys and girls in Chicago during the time of the famous International Livestock Exposition morphed over a period of six years. The result was the National 4-H Club Congress which was held annually in Chicago for over 70 years.

The Union Stockyard and Transit Company operated the world's largest livestock exposition which started in 1900. Judging events for swine, cattle, sheep, draft horses and poultry were held during the day; horse shows provided evening entertainment. It was 1916 when the "International" first started to offer judging classes for rural girls and boys.

It was at this 1916 Exposition that Thomas E. Wilson, president of Wilson & Co., one of the nation's top meat packers, observed a group of club boys leaning over a wooden pen examining the animals. He decided to stop and talk with them, sensing that they, like himself, were interested in livestock and perhaps he could help them in some way. He started that very day by inviting the 11 boys and their leader to lunch with him, the very first of the annual Wilson Day dinners – a program highlight of National 4-H Congresses to come which grew to well over 2,000 dinner guests annually.

During 1917 and 1918 the interest of state leaders as well as members heightened, and packing companies and railroads started sponsoring trips to

Chicago for rural youth in their geographic areas. Convinced of the educational value this experience offered, state 4-H leaders began bringing to Chicago not only youngsters with animals to exhibit, but state and county winners who had done outstanding work in other club projects. As individual club leaders began contacting business firms for financial aid and assistance in arranging accommodations and Chicago tours – often duplicating contacts made by other leaders – it became increasingly clear that some coordination of effort was needed.



Artist's sketch of the first Thomas E. Wilson Breakfast done several decades after the event. (May not be an accurate representation.)

It was probably at that 1918 Exposition that G. L. Noble of Armour and Co. ran into 4-H leaders Ray Turner of Michigan, T. A. Erickson of Minnesota and Paul C. Taff, Iowa. They discussed the enthusiasm for boys and girls club work and the opportunity to visit this great event. It started the Armour employee on his dream of a national committee to coordinate support from business and industry to award trips to the Exposition and perhaps serve this youth movement in other ways. Noble convinced his employer to appropriate \$5,000 to sponsor 40 trips for boys and girls to the 1919 International Livestock Exposition. This became the first annual club tour. Noble opened the tour up to other youth sponsored by Swift, Wilson, Meredith and several railroads, and state-sponsored delegates, bringing the total to 211 club members.



# National 4-H History Preservation Program



1920 National 4-H Club tour at the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago, from the early pages of National 4-H Congress history.

Club work was still so little known in those days, that Noble had trouble at first convincing the management of the 1919 International Show to furnish free Exposition passes to the eager young people. The group however soon attracted the attention of Chicagoans. Led by Armour's "Jackie Girls Band" the club members marched down Exchange Avenue to visit the Armour packing plants. Traveling by elevated trains, they visited Marshall Field, the Chicago Art Institute, the Chicago Board of Trade and the Chicago Post Office. As guests of Edwin T. Meredith (founder of Meredith Corporation and soon to become Secretary of Agriculture) the young club members saw the movie "The Heart of the Hills" starring Mary Pickford. Everyone agreed the first club tour was a great success. Business had found a good program for helping young people; however, an organization for carrying it out was needed also.

Noble's 1920 Junior Club Tour would be even better



than the first one in 1919. Apparently, word got around that the Junior Club Tour was worthwhile, because in the 1920 tour 10 or more states came with 475 club members. Thomas E. Wilson once again played host to the group on the Monday night of the tour. The tour was expanded to include a big Loop bank with its piles of gold (a sight denied in later years) and the twine mills

and binder plant of International Harvester, plus good meals and rousing meetings. They also had free rein exploring the many activities of the Exposition. Remember, just a year earlier Guy Noble

had difficulty securing one-time passes for the 1919 delegates.

1921 was a busy year with plans and discussion on establishing a national committee to coordinate the Chicago tour and channel funding and support from business into the 4-H program. As Chicago was playing host to over 500 club champions and their leaders from 26 states at the December Club Tour during the Livestock Expo, business leaders and Extension were formally setting up a National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work (now National 4-H Council). Edwin Meredith became president (so long as Thomas E. Wilson would become vice president) and Guy Noble became the Director (the Committee's only staff member). 1922 officially became the 2<sup>nd</sup> National 4-H Club Congress, designating the 1921 past event as the first. National 4-H Congress had arrived and, over the years, grew to exceed everyone's expectations.

The website segment on the history of "National 4-H Congress – Chicago" is near completion and will be in the National 4-H History section (at the bottom under 4-H Program Events) on the History Preservation website [http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com/History\\_National.asp](http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com/History_National.asp)

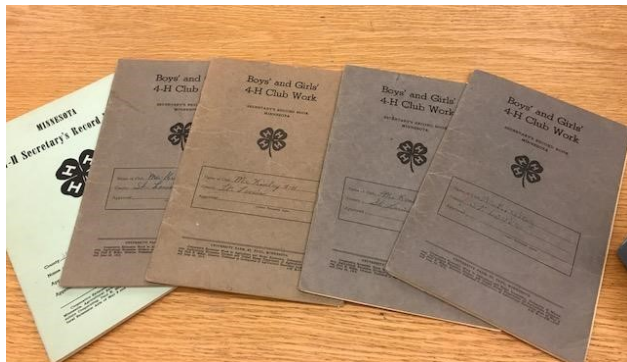
## Saving Minnesota 4-H History

By Bill Svendsgaard, Minnesota 4-H staff, retired

In Minnesota, a few years ago, retired state and county 4-H staff organized an informal group called "Minnesota Vintage 4-H." It began as a social *keep-in-touch* gathering but over the years we have emerged into a group with interests also in the on-going 4-H program, frequently inviting current 4-H



staff as presenters when we meet. It meets twice a year and five members of the Vintage 4-H group became the catalyst to create the “**Minnesota 4-H History Preservation Team.**” We have outlined our goals, established plans of action, met with collaborating organizations and have produced guidelines for discovering and collecting/saving our present and historical 4-H history. Discussions are on-going on who can be our partners to assist us in mobilizing the whole state to join in on saving our Minnesota 4-H history.



Researching local club records in the library or museum.

### Suggestions for creating your own “4-H History Saving Team”

**A. A county team:** Four or five members – people with a passion for history or connections to the past, such as

- a retired 4-H staff member,
- a current 4-H club volunteer,
- a couple of 4-H teen leaders, and
- maybe yourself.

It would also be great if on the team,

- one member has expertise in researching,
- another has computer skills,
- one knows past 4-H volunteers,
- one is familiar with county history organizations, and
- one knows ways of recruiting a donor to cover costs.

It is necessary to be trained in:

- what from years past should be found and saved,
- where to find these items,
- how to collect them, where to store them,
- what can be disposed, and
- what to save today for retaining our current history.

**B. A state team:** Four or five members –

- current 4-H staff,
- retired 4-H staff, and

- possibly a 4-H donor or community leader who has a strong connection to 4-H.

The team would:

- learn the same skills needed as stated for the county team plus a focus on their role of programs and events created at the state level,
- research what may already exist in their own University Archives or other museums,
- develop ways of displaying historical materials for the purpose of creating interest and appreciation of our 4-H history and its relevance to our ongoing 4-H history, and
- coordinate all team's activity with any existing county efforts with their collecting and saving our 4-H history.

### Hands-on-History 4-H Centennial Clubs

The first 4-H clubs started in the early 1900s and since then, thousands of 4-H clubs and groups have been established across the country. But you may be surprised to learn that some of those early 4-H clubs have continued to exist for 100 years and more. Here are some examples of those 4-H Centennial Clubs.

#### **Arcata Bottom 4-H Club, CA**

In 1913, Humboldt County established the first farm bureau in California. Andrew Christiansen was hired as the state's first Cooperative Extension agent in July. With Christianson in office, the Arcata Bottom 4-H Club, the first 4-H club in California, was created in October of that year. According to the club's website, their members are involved in Archery, Gardening, Arts and Crafts, Beef, Bees, Chess, Cooking, Dairy Cows, Horse, Meat Goats, Mini 4-H, Poultry, Public Speaking, Rabbits, Swine, Sheep and more.

#### **New Alexandria Home Economics 4-H Club, PA**

The oldest 4-H Club in Pennsylvania, the New Alexandria Home Economics 4-H Club has been active since 1915. According to their Facebook page, the club has 30 members working in projects including cooking, sewing, needlework, knitting, crocheting, woodworking, photography, rocketry and geology.

#### **Linn 4-H Club, WI**

The Linn 4-H Club started as the Linn Junior Farmers on October 30, 1914. It was the first club in Wisconsin. It began with four boys and three girls, but it grew to 21 in its first year. Their projects

included livestock, crops, gardening, canning and sewing. Today the club has 60 members.



Photo by Paul Fehrenbach, The Historical Marker Database

### **Barrineau Park 4-H Club, FL**

Ten boys joined the Barrineau Park 4-H Club in Escambia County in 1914. They held their meetings in various places in the community. Their projects included tomatoes and corn, gardening, sewing, and raising poultry and livestock. The club now has about 20 members who are active in leadership, citizenship, livestock, horses, food and nutrition, environmental education, marine science, shooting sports, public speaking and swine projects.

### **Silverleaf Let's Go Ag 4-H Club and Silverleaf 4-H Clubs, IL**

In response to the call to raise food to support the troops in World War I, 4-H clubs were created in McLean County under the guidance of county school official William Brigham to grow gardens and livestock. Among them were these neighboring 4-H clubs in the Bloomington area that were established in 1917. The clubs started with traditional cooking, sewing and livestock projects.

### **Hands-on-History (HOH)**

Do you know the history of your own 4-H group? Find out when it started, who the first leaders were,

how many youth joined and what their projects were. It would be a good project for you to research the oldest 4-H groups in your county and learn more about them to share with the 4-H members in your club and county. You could also nominate the club to be on the 4-H History Map at <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com/Map/>

**To make a contribution to the National 4-H History Preservation Program;** please go to <http://4-HHistoryPreservation.com>



or mail a check payable to  
**National 4-H Council** to:  
National 4-H History Preservation Program  
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Baltimore, MD 21297-3560

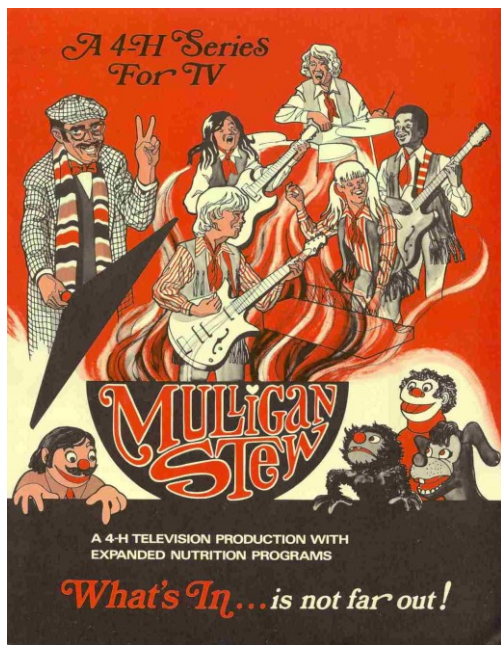
Please write **4-H History Preservation** on your check.

### **45 Years Ago in 4-H History 4-H Television Program "Mulligan Stew" Released**

*The following story is taken from the National Compendium of 4-H Promotion and Visibility on the National 4-H History Website at [http://4-HHistory.com/?h=4-H\\_Promotion](http://4-HHistory.com/?h=4-H_Promotion)*

From the mid-1960s up through the mid-1980s, television was a major form of 4-H programming, particularly reaching new audiences not familiar with 4-H before. Some of the series were state-produced, and used nationwide, while a few were produced at the national level.

The most successful of these programs was produced in 1972 and made available in 1973. It was called "Mulligan Stew," and centered around a five-piece kid's rock group that turns on to good nutrition by solving a different type of nutrition problem in each of the six half-hour TV programs. The series was developed by Extension Service, USDA, and filmed by USDA Motion Picture Service. It was developed based on plans and design proposals by Developmental Committees and Iowa State University Extension Service 4-H Nutrition Television Programs.



This poster as well as a video promo piece, advertised this 4-H television series.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) provided a grant to produce the series. Eleanor L. Wilson, national 4-H TV coordinator, represented 4-H Extension as technical advisor on the programs working with Ira Klugerman, who was hired to direct the series. Klugerman came from a background of children's television in Pittsburg. Wilson remembers that the project consumed her and whatever staff she could involve. The budget, always a precarious item, had to be watched with dogged attention. At the same time, the nutrition subject matter had to meet the standards of a host of home economists who did not always agree. Klugerman insisted that the production be entertaining as well as educational, but was unwilling to let pedantic issues dominate the series.

Wilson herself was without much direct experience in TV production but she did know about Extension and she was convinced that if the show was to be a success it would have to be a compromise effort. And it was most definitely successful. Geared to 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders with special emphasis on low-income urban youth, the series reached millions of new 4-H'ers. It was well received by the television station programming directors, by the schools and by Extension.

The Mulligan Stew series was promoted and distributed through the National 4-H Service Committee (now National 4-H Council) and the Committee's Television Specialist Larry Krug recalls

the story of printing the member project manual which was a comic book that supported the series. When Krug contacted the printer, Shaw-Barton, in Ohio, the printing rep hesitated at an initial order of one million copies. 4-H had never ordered more than a 50,000 run of any literature. The rep questioned the number but went ahead preparing the print run. "Before we got the comic book off the presses, I had to call back and order another one and one-half million," Krug said. By the time the series was completed over seven million Mulligan Stew comic books had been sold. This was the largest volume distribution of any single piece of sales literature in the history of 4-H.

### **Miriam's Dream and a 4-H Peace Corps Story – Final Chapter**

*This is the third and final part of a serialized story that we've run the past two months. In the early 1960s, the National 4-H Club Foundation, now National 4-H Council, was asked to recruit US 4-H and Extension professionals to strengthen the agricultural extension service of Brazil and create 4-S clubs there, the beginnings of Peace Corps in Brazil. Francis Pressly, later National 4-H Council Director of International Programs, coordinated the program of those 4-H Extension workers in Brazil. This is the story of one Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, a 4-H alum who went back to Brazil after 50 years to find his family and see whether his work with 4-S clubs had survived.*

*You'll recall last month we learned that Joe met his Peace Corps family and visited some of the members who were involved in "his" 4-S clubs, poring over treasured pictures of that memorable time. Two of his host family brothers and their wives traveled to the US for three weeks to visit Joe and his family.*

### **A 50-year Reunion of Friendship and Memories** By Joe Thigpen, Brazil VI, 1963-1965

Over the next three weeks [in the US], we introduced them to their first game of golf. I entered us in the Alachua Women's Club Scramble tournament. We may have been terrible, but I think no team had more fun. We took them to see alligators in Payne's Prairie; we kayaked the *Ichetucknee* River; we flew them out to Los Angeles and Hollywood; and we took them to the outlet malls of Orlando, Florida, which may have been their favorite place to visit. I think the evening dinners with family and friends turned out to be the most special time of all, and after three weeks we were still loving our time together. Before they left, they achieved the miracle of getting my brother [Larry] and his family to agree to visit them in Brazil the following year.



It was soon clear, as the plan for the visit took form, that the 50-year reunion with the 4-S “kids” was in the works, and I redoubled my efforts to improve my Portuguese. Larry even started to learn basic Portuguese, and his daughters, Susan and Lisa decided to relearn their high-school Spanish, believing that was an easier pathway to getting around basic language challenges in Brazil. Becky and Glenda, Larry’s wife, took on the task of selecting gifts and making sure the details of the trip were clear and understood. Just as point of reference, this was Larry’s first experience sleeping in a bed in a country other than the United States.

We arrived in *Florianópolis*, SC, Brazil on March 10, and we spent our first week with family members living near the coast. Juliana, Jota’s daughter, is a chef and owns *Terraço Bistro*, an elegant restaurant in *Balneário-Camboriú*. She and her boyfriend, Luis Felipe, joined us for great meals, local adventures, and tall tales of their fathers’ childhood. Tânia and her family also invited us over for an evening of friendship and family stories. On the sixth day, we headed to Zezo’s town of *Curitibanos*. His son, Anderson, and his daughter, Tathi, now had their own families there and work with Zezo in the family construction and development firm. Except for the common complaints about Brazil’s internet service, we again enjoyed local sights, family meals, and great conversations.



“The *Doin* – Thigpen Family” - 2017

In the few days before the reunion, it was evident that this event was to be bigger than I had imagined. Marlo, from the local *Ouro*, SC, radio show, called to interview me and to work out arrangements with Zezo. Zélia emailed over a copy of her presentation, and my anxiety level increased as I began to practice my Portuguese in earnest. Soon I learned that the Mayor would open the event and a couple of the “kids” and town leaders would speak as well. It was clear by now that my image of a few people

sitting around the dining room embracing old memories needed to be updated. The reunion turned out to be over 200 people from all ages, including over 20 people from my extended family, who had secured T-shirts that read, “The *Doin* – Thigpen Family.

It was pleasing to hear the various dignitaries speak of the impact our work had in their communities and in Brazil. You could tell that they were speaking with sincerity and conviction. It was difficult, though, to listen to the now-adult 4-S Club members speak about the difference our Peace Corps work with them and the agricultural extension service had made in their lives. Their appreciation and gratitude were powerful and touching and it was impossible not to fully accept and embrace their words.

Even more surprising were the individuals who came to us afterwards to express personal appreciation for touching their lives in some special way. Moreover, several children and grandchildren came up to describe how their lives were different in some meaningful way.

To end the program, I played a short slideshow with photos covering our work with the “kids” over 50 years ago, as well as how the reunion came to be. My choice of music was “*Va, pensiero, sull’ali dorate*” from Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*, sung in Italian by the choir that [host mother] Miriam belonged to. Since many of the attendees were of Italian ancestry, I hoped it had special significance for them. Becky tells me that more than a few had tears in their eyes as the photos quickly passed the screen. It is difficult to fully express the deep feelings of appreciation, joy, and admiration I experienced as we parted to return to more normal moments, but suffice it to say it was a very powerful and touching celebration of our time together and the impact that time had upon all our lives.



On stage with the 4-S guys from the 1960s

### Three Lessons

In closing, allow me to offer three compelling lessons this reunion with my Brazilian family and colleagues pounded into my heart and head.

1. You never really know the difference you make in the lives of others. Whether it is my extended Brazilian family, the youth I worked with and their extended families, or myself, I learned that influence spreads in ways you never imagined.
2. Once again, I am vividly reminded that who you are as a person is as important as what you do. When I was in the Peace Corps, I focused my attention on doing my work with competence and dedication. I thought little of how I connected with people and the example I set as a person. Yet much of the appreciation and gratitude I received was not actually about the work we did, but it was about a shared experience and personal connections.

3. Finally, I am learning ever so slowly to accept, embrace and give appreciation and gratitude as deeply as possible. My Brazilian family and "The Peace Corps kids" forced me to feel deeply their appreciation in ways that will stay with me always. In return, I am deeply grateful to them for their gifts to me. It is my intent to remember this lesson as I move forward with my life.

I am confident that my story represents many Peace Corps Volunteers and the differences they made over three generations, even though few may have received the affection and appreciation I did, especially with a 50-year celebration reunion. I will never forget the graciousness and kindness shown me by these special people that shared two wonderful years with me while I was in the Peace Corps.

### Contact the 4-H History Preservation Team:

**Sue Benedetti, Chair;** *4-H National Headquarters, USDA, retired*  
**Larry L. Krug, Vice Chair;** *National 4-H Council, retired*  
**Eleanor L. Wilson;** *4-H National Headquarters, USDA, retired*  
**Jim Kahler;** *Maryland Volunteer 4-H Leader*  
**Kendra Wells;** *University of Maryland 4-H, retired*  
**Tom Tate;** *Extension Service, USDA, retired*  
**Chad Proudfoot;** *University of West Virginia 4-H*  
**Melvin J. Thompson;** *National 4-H Council, retired*  
**Ron Drum;** *University of Maine and National 4-H Council, former staff*  
**John Wells;** *USDA, Retired*  
**David E. Benedetti, Secretary;** *National 4-H Council, retired*  
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