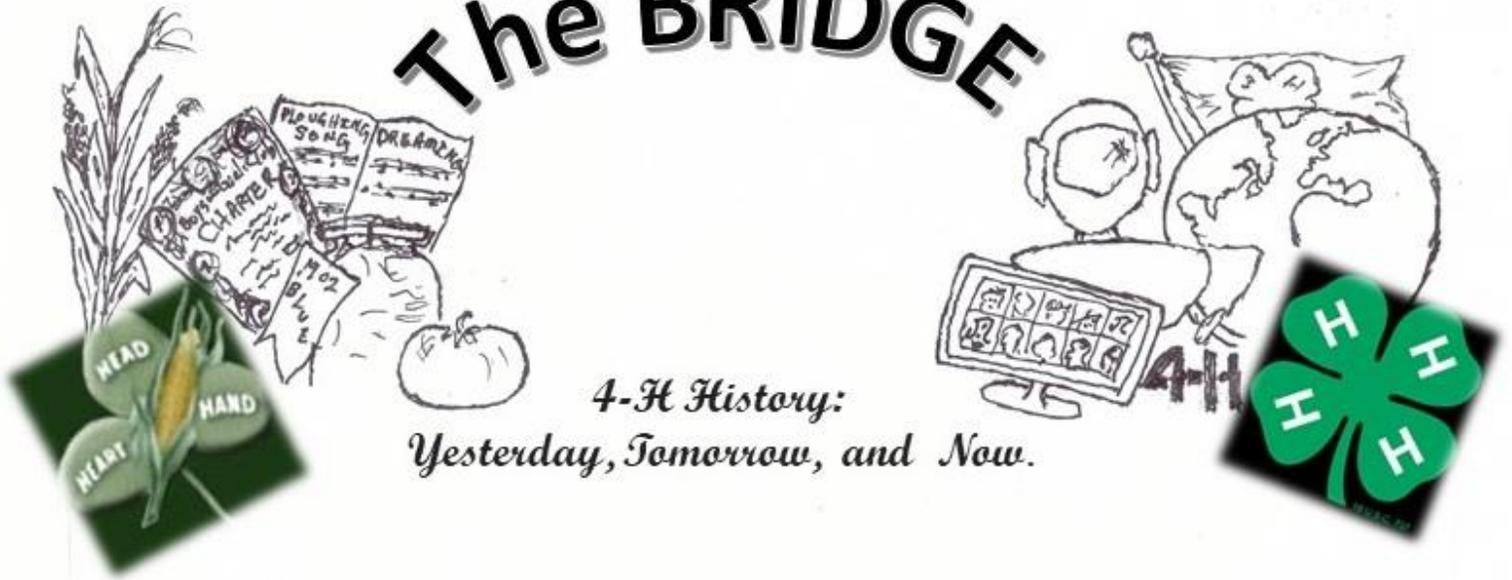


The BRIDGE



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

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4-H On Stage

By Bo Ryles, EdD., Sr. Director, National 4-H Council and Gracie Rowe, Georgia 4-H Alumna & Volunteer

Singing and performing have been part of 4-H throughout our history. Whether singing, dancing, acting, and/or playing music, 4-H'ers have found that 4-H provides a perfect stage for young people to perfect their craft and pursue their passion as performers.

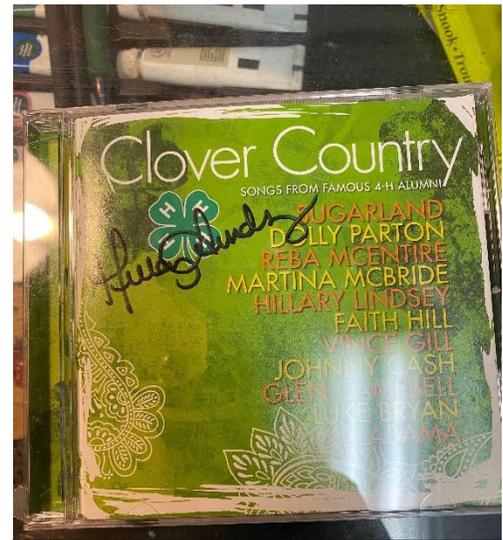
Some 4-H'ers have even made their passion into a career. 4-H alumni are found at the top of the music charts, on television, in movies, and on stages from the local fair to Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera house, and beyond.

Recently, American Idol partnered with National 4-H Council, auditioning hundreds of 4-H'ers from across the nation. In addition to American Idol, 4-H performers have appeared on the Voice, Rising Star, and Duets.

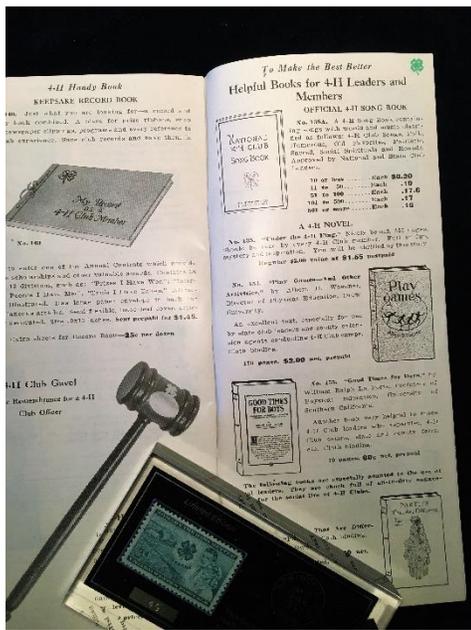
Before the advent of television singing competitions, some of the biggest names in the music industry got their start in 4-H. Dolly Parton, Jennifer Nettles, Reba McEntire, Trisha Yearwood, Hillary Lindsey, Carla Hall, Luke Bryan, Callista Clark, and many more celebrities were all 4-H'ers. This month, Tennessee 4-H alumna Carla Hall represented 4-H on Celebrity Wheel of Fortune.

Many states have performing arts groups. While the size and type of experience vary, in every location, young people engage in positive youth development and gain performing arts skills. Examples are Georgia, Indiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia. During the past decade, ten states sent 4-H'ers to the Music Education Matters Summit, where they interacted with and learned from professional musicians.

Performing Arts was part of 4-H almost from the beginning. Beginning around the turn of the century, the concept of 4-H spread and grew over the next 20 years until 4-H-like programming was being implemented in most states. Around 1924 the program began to be known nationally as 4-H. Things began to change with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The dust bowls and low incomes of the 1930's made life tough for farming families. To help raise spirits, the National 4-H Committee issued a series of 4-H skits and plays, adaptable to 4-H club meetings. It published its first 4-H Songbook in 1929. Their radio programs and the National 4-H Club News magazine provided tips on inexpensive recreation. For 4-H clubs to remain relevant in the changing times, competitive sports and musical groups were encouraged. Many versions of 4-H songbooks are archived in the National Agricultural Library collection.



In 2008 National 4-H Council partnered with EMI Music to create "Clover Country: Songs from Famous 4-H Alumni" - the first-of-its-kind country music compilation CD featuring famous 4-H alumni. This CD included a song by Hillary Lindsey called "The Clown". Lindsey, a Georgia 4-H alumna and Grammy Award winner, contributed this never before released song exclusively for this CD. The photo is of Bo Ryles's personal copy autographed by Lindsey. For more information on the CD, visit the N4-HHPT website at: <https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Music/>.



In this photo of a page in the Committee's 1931 (6th Edition) Handy Book, we see them offering a National 4-H Club Song Book; only 20¢ each for ten or less copies. Also offered is a 4-H novel entitled Under the 4-H Flag and a book of games, Play Games – and Other Activities, 176 cloth bound pages for \$2.00.

During the '30s, the National 4-H Club Music Hour was broadcast on 976 stations. The show ran for ten years and reached more than 25,000 listeners during its peak years. A 1939 4-H publication illustrated how music was a means for families to join in positive activity and take their minds off the Great Depression.

A present-day parallel to the 1930s Music Hour was National 4-H Council's "4-H@Home", a response to the COVID quarantine. This package included a campfire playlist and a 4-H YouTube performance of "Stand By Me". 4-H@Home was a valuable tool for leaders during the 2020-2022 pandemic.



Around campfires and in 4-H meetings, a silly song, a patriotic medley, or a familiar folk tune is often the first way leaders get young people involved in a program. This week, somewhere on a 4-H stage, another star is being born.

In the photo: Internationally known star Jennifer Nettles mentoring a young Callista Clark. Clark is now an internationally known star as well. Nettles and Clark are both Georgia 4-H alumni.

Reference:

- National 4-H History Preservation Team: https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/Great_Depression/
- National 4-H Council @Home.
- 4-H Clovers & Co with 4-H@home: Stand by Me. <https://youtu.be/RUHRGla4LGE>
- 4-H Camp Spotify Playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4xyXMf0hBVlljA4HKQLUdU?si=VxPDtNPSQGyq3UhZOwOEEw>



As if There Isn't Enough Drama in 4-H Already! 4-H Plays, Skits, and Drama

Editor's Note: One thing we learn from our 4-H History is that 4-H'ers sure are talented! And they sure like to show it! Some 4-H Clubs elect a Song Leader along with their President, Secretary and other officers. Many 4-H Clubs enjoy club-member created skits and plays. The 4-H Club I was a member of in the 1970's had its own band: **The Sugarloaf Valley 4-H Club Marching, but Mostly Sitting, Band**. I played trombone. My friend, April Boock, started her own club and called it the **4-H Fine Arts Club**. I joined that club too. In fact, here are a few photos from those clubs in action!



The 4-H Fine Arts Club usually provided "fine" art theatrical performances. Unfortunately, the only photo I have of us is of a less than "fine" Jug Band performance we gave at a local Fair. I am the person standing with the microphone, announcing the next selection. April is sitting next to me. No one is throwing tomatoes so we must have been doing fairly well!



Here we see the Sugarloaf Valley 4-H Club Marching, but mostly sitting, Band. That's what the sign hanging my brother's back says. He is the conductor. We were all about "good" music played in a humorous way. That is why we are dressed in funny clothing. I am on the right playing trombone.

We have evidence of performing arts scattered throughout our 4-H History. Here is a photo of participants attending the 1941 National Boys' and Girls' Club Congress, the event that in later years became known as the National 4-H Congress. The 4-H'ers are standing in front of the International Harvester Company in Chicago.



Note that there is a band on either end of the crowd. It isn't clear if it is one band or two, but the group on the left side of the photo has a drum. What can be read on the drum is "Wide-A-Wake 4-H Band". It looks like the town and state are there too but it can't be made out in the photo. The point is, they were there at the event and probably performed, too. The National 4-H History Preservation web site has more information about 4-H Performing Arts. Go to: https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History_National.asp and scroll through the topics for the various entries relevant to performing arts.

The story below was taken from the website: https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/Plays_Skits/.

It is entitled: **4-H Plays, Skits, and Drama.**

Historically, providing local 4-H clubs with ideas for entertaining their club members was an important service from the national level, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. Often it was an expanded audience including parents, other family members, and the community at large.

The National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work (now National 4-H Council), pushed many of these efforts. The leader magazine, National 4-H Club News, carried promotions for short plays and skits in nearly every issue. The 4-H Handy Book, forerunner to the National 4-H Supply Service catalog, promoted plays, skits and drama. The National Committee often contracted with various writers and educators to create new plays and skits for 4-H audiences. National 4-H events - including National 4-H Club Congress in Chicago and the National 4-H Camp on the Mall in Washington, D.C. - often premiered these plays and dramatic presentations. When delegates and chaperones saw these plays and skits performed at the national events, they went back to their respective states and counties and replicated them in their own clubs, at local and state 4-H camps and at county fairs and achievement nights.

In addition to the plays written specifically for 4-H, the National Committee also promoted and sold other plays written for a wider audience, but appropriate for 4-H groups, as well.

We are fortunate to still have the scripts for a number of these presentations. They speak for themselves in conveying the history of this important part of 4-H. Some of the plays representative of the decades of the 1920s, 30s and 40s are described below in the same wordage as they were promoted by the National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work 70 or 80 years ago:



4-H boys perform an original skit they created themselves at the 1937 Illinois State Meet in Urbana.

In addition to the many plays offered nationally by 4-H through the years, many 4-H clubs selected other plays on the general market, buying the scripts and putting on productions. There is little historic information as to exactly how broad this 4-H activity became but it can easily be estimated that hundreds, if not thousands of clubs put on one or more production each year. What a broadening experience this must have been for young rural boys and girls to successfully participate in these plays before live audiences in their communities and beyond. One cannot help but wonder if any of these budding actors and actresses ever became successful in Hollywood or on Broadway. The decade of the 1930s seems to be the pinnacle for the 4-H plays and acting activities, however records show 4-Hers performing plays in the years prior to 1920. Of course, the 1940s ushered in the years of World War II and much of the 4-H club effort was refocused to the war effort. Once the war was over, it seems like other activities may have replaced the 4-H play activities in many clubs and states.



Tell Us Your 4-H History Story

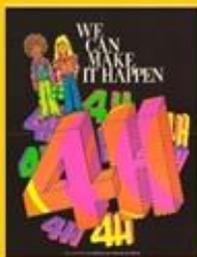
Share your photos and stories of the history YOU made in 4-H!

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

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 February 15, 2023!



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