

History of Delaware 4-H Links

The first 4-H club work was organized in Kent County in 1914. Dewey Sapp was the first 4-H member in Delaware. The first 4-H club short course was held at the University of Delaware during the Christmas holiday in 1917.

Delaware's first state 4-H Leader was H.T. Ruhl, who was appointed in 1914 and served for one year. Theodore Martin, who served from 1918 to 1921, succeeded him. He, in turn, was succeeded by A.D. Cobb, former County Agent in Kent County, who is remembered by 4-H club members and leaders of that time as "Dad Cobb".

In 1927, when 4-H work in Delaware was only 13 years old, Dad Cobb, who was still the State 4-H Leader, realized the fact that when 4-Hers became too old for 4-H work, they had no place to display their leadership qualities. Most of them got married or started farming and let it go at that.

Dad Cobb had the opportunity to see older 4-H organizations at work at the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts. Maryland had organized an older 4-H organization called the All-Stars and other states had organized similar groups under a variety of names. These people had been selected on a basis of personality and character rather than on achievements. The function of these organizations consisted mostly of play and not of training.

Dad Cobb got many ideas from the other state organizations and saw a chance for a similar set up here in Delaware. He saw that there was a lack of leadership in rural people as a whole.

At that time, the Extension Service consisted of only the three county agents, Mr. Cobb, and an extension poultry man.

In 1926 – 1927, an organization was formed and named “The Order of Links in the 4-H Club Chain in Delaware”. Members were selected on the basis of good 4-H membership.

Dad Cobb decided that each County could bring in two 4-H members per year and could nominate one 4-H club member a year. By this method, two members from each county and two former members at large.

Dewey Sapp, having been the first 4-H member in Delaware, was called the “Ring in the Wall” to which the other “Links” were attached. The idea was that the chain would grow longer each year.

The county agents and Dad Cobb selected the first members. At the initiation ceremony each year, to be held at the short course, it would be the custom to sing, “Follow the Gleam”. This was to be the official Link song.

In 1931, a convention was called in the Old State House in Dover to write a Link Constitution. At this time, there were about 40 Link members. The constitution provided for state officers; a president, secretary, treasurer and historian. It also provided for a County Link Association in each county, with a president of each of these county chapters to act also as vice presidents in the state organization.

The State Link organization continued to operate under this constitution until 1965 when it was revised to better fit the needs of the organization. For at this time not only were the Links an active state organization, but each county was active as a separate organization, and this called for different guidelines of operation.

It was under this revised constitution that the Links would operate the next decade. The revisions maintained the criteria for Link selection as: leadership, character, cooperation, achievement and community service.

Link members and local leaders in each county would make selections.

As time progressed, county Link organizations became more and more active as the state organization became somewhat less active. Each county's membership was built up so as to provide a working basis for their programs and for all practical purposes the State Link Organization had little to do.

In 1976, the state organization underwent reorganization, as the constitution was once again revised and the position of historian was eliminated. At this time, it was decided that the State Link Organization should continue to function and provide the county 4-H councils with assistance in running statewide events, such as Fun Day and the Christmas Dinner-Dance.

The Order of Links has done much toward promoting rural leadership, better 4-H club work and provided opportunities for leadership in many areas. No other organization in Delaware has done so much in advancing leadership in and among 4-H youth.

There is little financial reward or honor that goes with working with this organization. The real reward is the satisfaction one may gain from seeing his efforts help someone somewhere to become a more understanding citizen and a better leader to this, "The Greatest Nation in the World".

On April 27, 1995, the Kent County 4-H Links Association was awarded a Governor's Outstanding Volunteer Award. This award was sponsored by then Governor, Thomas R. Carper. Ted Palmer, Extension 4-H Agent, nominated the Links.