

## 4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980

Mason E. Miller

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## 4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980

### Abstract

A review of *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980*, by Thomas and Marilyn Wessel.

Miller, 4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980

At the nine centers, there are 34 men and 9 women senior staff members; 8 men and 3 women are heads [CIAT has a head of communication support (male) and a head of library and documentation (female); IITA has an assistant director of public affairs (U.S.) and a head of communication and information (Nigeria), both male; ILRAD does not denote a head]. Thus, of the total male staff members, less than one-fourth (8 out of 24) are heads; but of the total females, fully one-third (3 out of 9) are heads. Over 25 percent (11 out of 43) of the total staff are "heads," leaving 75 percent senior staff workers.

Women hold 27 percent of the positions of communication director and represent almost 21 percent of the total senior communication staff. U.S. women in particular hold 18 percent of the total head positions. Of the nine women senior staff members, three were formerly employed in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaii.

Thus, it appears that right now U.S. women in agricultural communications are well represented in the IARCs and the CGIAR system. It would be interesting to know how their salaries and benefits compare with their male colleagues.

Cynthia L. Garver,  
CIAT, with Olivia  
Vent, CGIAR

# Reviews

**Thomas and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980*. National 4-H Council, 7100 Connecticut Ave., Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815. 1982. (\$15 individual hardcover copies, \$12 each in lots of 5 or more.)**

I was afraid this would be a stuffy book. It isn't. It hooked me.

It might not hook some people so fast — if they hadn't lived through a lot of what is reported in this book, and had some familiarity with names and events. But then it might.

Probably the biggest audience will be those who have been involved with 4-H in some way — even peripherally is enough.

But that isn't the only audience. Anyone interested in youth, in politics, in the history of our country, in change, in organizational development, in social movements — this book has something for you.

For 4-H is a part of all of these. And reflects in its own history the impact of all of these areas on 4-H, and on America.

Marilyn Wessel is former director of information for the National 4-H Council. Thomas Wessel is professor of history and head of the Department of History and Philosophy at Montana State University. They covered an enormous number of documents and did numerous interviews to collect their information. The book looks to me to be soundly researched. And I know that for me the information is interestingly presented.

The first two chapters include a summary of the earlier book *The 4-H Story* written by Franklin M. Reck and published in 1951. It covered 1900 through the 1940s. These chapters take extension back to its roots — and show how 4-H came about as part of our country's early development. The rest of the book then builds on that base to present the 4-H of more modern times.

And what a story it is — of states rights, civil rights, individualism, competition and its place in the program, the development of the individual, the war on poverty, urbanization, the expanding attention to things International . . . 4-H has been involved in them all — buffeted by them, part of the problem and part of the solution, able to gain from some and loss from others. The chronicling of the struggles of 4-H often is the chronicling of what was happening to all of us in our country over the years. And of the changes we have undergone. I got started reading the book for the history part related to 4-H, extension, the land-grant and USDA system. I recognized names and events, some of the efforts that have taken place. And that was enough to keep me going through the book. But I gradually realized how much I was at the same time reading the history of our country during those same times.

Titles of the chapters after the base of the first two chapters are indicative of content: Reaching Maturity, Learning by Doing, Training for Tomorrow, International 4-H, Paying the Price (move into desegregation), Edging Toward

Urban America Forgotten, 4-Hers for a New Generation, The Private Life of 4-H, and The Search for Consensus.

There's a chronology of important dates and events in 4-H, an adequate index mainly of names and organizations and programs, and addresses of the State 4-H offices.

Agricultural communicators should read this book to get a better perspective on an area of extension that has played a very important and often overlooked role in extension as a whole. There are lots of names and dates. But most of these are presented for a purpose — to further the telling of the intricate ups and downs of 4-H as it has struggled over the years to be a vital, important, relevant youth organization and program.

**Mason E. Miller  
CSRS-USDA**