

The History of the Kentucky Association of Extension 4-H Agents

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During the years of assistant agents, youth workers were able to join the agriculture or home economics agents' professional associations. At the time, there was no professional association in Kentucky for youth workers, although the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents had been organized in 1946.

In 1967, with Dr. Ranta's blessing, a "conference" was held at North Central 4-H Camp. That meeting started the process of forming a professional association for 4-H in Kentucky, with ties to the national organization. Although Dr. Ranta became Director of Extension Personnel later that year, Dr. Jerry Macklin who was named Head of 4-H supported the efforts of forming a professional association for 4-H agents.

Agents began doing preliminary work. A draft constitution and bylaws were written by Paul Claiborne, Paul Mills, Jerry Klement, George Mountjoy, Willard Gray, Ken Rase, Harold Rice, Fred Watson, John Rickett and Faith Niday.

A committee of three agents—John Swack, Warren County; Paul Claiborne, Laurel County, and Jerry Klement, Boone County—met with Dr. Macklin and Dr. Schneider, Associate Director of Extension. The idea wasn't well received by Dr. Schneider or by some within the ranks of county agents. The opponents basically felt that participation in the agriculture or home economics associations should suffice. Dr. Schneider wanted Extension agents to form one organization with sub-committees for the program areas—agriculture, home economics, and 4-H. Dr. Macklin was not opposed to the formation of a 4-H agents association. Other administrators discouraged it.

Undeterred, agents continued to lay the groundwork for a 4-H association. The first nominating committee was made up of Walter Jones, Ken Rase, Jo Nelda Cole, Ed May, and Dick Lemaster. The first officers were President Paul Claiborne, 1st Vice President Wayne Baxter, 2nd Vice President Jerold Rose, and Secretary Betty Vernon.

Differences were eventually worked through. Acting chairman Paul Claiborne sent out a letter on February 21, 1968, announcing the organizational meeting. A meeting was held in Elizabethtown on March 15, 1968, to formally mark the founding of Kentucky Association of Extension 4-H Agents (KAE4-HA). It was held at the Cardinal Restaurant; lunch was \$2.25; annual dues for membership were \$10. Extension area directors were to code the travel requests as "official leave without expenses."

A letter written by the first secretary/treasurer of the association includes a list of the first 36 members. These were:

Jo Nelda Cole, Madison County
Freda Ellis, McLean County

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John Swack, Warren County
George Montjoy, Metcalfe County
Wayne Baxter, Taylor County
Glenn McNabb, Madison County
Joe B. Steely, Clay County
Luther Whitaker, Lincoln County
Paul Claiborne, Laurel County
Edward May, Casey County
Doyle Brown, Harrison County
Duncan Stanford, Fayette County
Ruth Ann Eadens, Logan County
Bruce Kell, Christian County
Richard LeMaster, Jefferson County
Walter Jones, Webster County
Jerry Klement, Campbell County (Urban)
Betty Vernon, Campbell County (Urban)
Emma Lou Hartlage, McCracken County
Gerald Rose, Scott County
Lou Ann Moss, Fayette County
Ray Morgan, Kenton County
T. A. Curtsinger, Washington County
A. G. Sims, Calloway County
Graham Wilkins, Graves County
Harold Grooms, Bourbon County
Earl Thurman, Hardin County
Jack D. Niece, Perry County
Frederick Watson, Franklin County
Garland VanZant, Mercer County
Dauveen Roper, Graves County
Faith Plummer, Rockcastle County
Wallace Halcomb, Whitley County
Charles Salisburg, Bracken County
Kenneth Race, Fleming County
Bob Crouch, Campbell County

When Dr. Charles Barnhart became Dean of the College of Agriculture at UK, the area system was transitioned back to a county-based system. Administrators changed the official position title to "County Extension Agent for 4-H" on January 1, 1970.

Perhaps because of the struggle, KAE4-HA has been known for many years as one of the strongest 4-H associations across the country. The strong commitment to professional development was obvious at state and national meetings. Workshops were carefully planned and ideas were shared and put into practice in other counties. Although more casual clothing was permitted in everyday 4-H responsibilities, suits and briefcases were standard attire at professional meetings.

Up until the mid-1990s, all professional improvement expenses were paid by the individual member. One agent relates, “During my first year as an agent, my salary was \$9,500. I was actively involved in state association meetings and attended my first national meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado. When I calculated my expenses that year, I had spent almost \$1,000 on professional development. That was over 10 percent of my salary.” That commitment to professional development, even at great personal expense, was common among Kentucky’s agents.

For a number of years, KAE4-HA met in conjunction with the annual in-service training held at Barren River State Park. The in-service was mandatory but association participation was optional. Most 4-H agents stayed for KAE4-HA meetings. During the 1980s and 1990s, two 1½ day meetings were held; most of the time was devoted to workshops and idea sharing. Officers and committee chairs faithfully passed notebooks of proceedings from one year to the next. Even at personal expense, committee work and participation was high among agents.

Kentucky agents banded together and hosted the 1975 NAE4-HA Conference in Louisville. Almost 1,000 agents from across the country attended. As far as Kentucky agents were concerned, it set the bar for all conferences to follow. Kentucky agents worked five years to plan the conference. Twenty-three years later, they did it again, hosting the 1998 conference at the Galt House. With Louisville being central to a high percentage of the national membership and memories of a fantastic 1975 conference, attendance hit almost 1,400 in 1998. In 2002, many agents helped Virginia host the 2002 NAE4-HA Conference, which marked the 100th anniversary of 4-H across the United States. **More... [\(Link to Sidebar on NAE4-HA Conferences Themes and Years\)](#)**

KAE4-HA has continued to grow and thrive over the years. The year 2008 marked the 40th anniversary of KAE4-HA.

KAE4-HA Officers—**More . . . [Link to Excel List of KAE4-HA officers\)](#)**