

# tools of the trade

Jim Long, "TT" editor  
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## 4-H: An American Idea

*4-H: An American Idea, 1900-1980, A History of 4-H. Thomas and Marilyn Wessel. Chevy Chase, Maryland: National 4-H Council, 1982. 353 pp. \$12.00. (Available from: The National 4-H Service Committee, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999)*

For the historian, this book is a well-documented chronology of a long-established American institution. For the sociologist, this book is a presentation of the development of one of the most successful educational efforts. For 4-H—whether member, leader, or professional, this book is a fascinating account of a unique 20th century phenomenon.

*4-H: An American Idea* is the culmination of careful research by the Wessels. They include not only basic facts, facts that would have been lost in a few more years, but also a great deal of background information.

Each of the 12 chapters is written about a specific theme—organizing 4-H, learning by doing, and international 4-H, for example. The appendix includes an added value—a 15-page chronology of 4-H.

In addition to the many achievements of 4-H, the authors also freely discuss past racial segregation in 4-H, the problem of moving away from being just a rural youth agency, difficulty of low-member retention, and internal controversies that at times plagued 4-H.

The Wessels' 4-H history is an excellent companion piece to Reck's *The 4-H Story*—a 1951 book about establishing the 4-H movement.

Maurice Johnson  
University of Idaho

*Editor's Note:* In the letter that accompanied this review, Johnson added another interesting perspective. "As I began reading the

Wessels' history of 4-H, I soon realized I was also reading much of my own personal history. Having joined 4-H as a club member in the early 1940s, I became aware of the 4-H World War II efforts. The background about National 4-H Congress, National 4-H Camp, and the International Farm Youth Exchange added to my knowledge of events in which I had participated. Since 1958, I've been associated professionally with 4-H. I'm sure my gratitude to the Wessels for their presentation of the 4-H history will be shared by hundreds as they read this recent document. Many, of course, will have known or will recognize the key players."

*JL*

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