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Historical Women in 4-H

In 1987 March was named National Women's History Month and is celebrated by women across the country today. As March is beginning to wrap up, I would like to highlight three historical women who made 4-H what it is today. Jesse Field Shambaugh, Gertrude Warren, and Fannie R. Buchanan all had different interests, lived in different places, and made different impacts on the 4-H program.

Jessie Field Shambaugh, known as the "mother of 4-H," was born on June 26, 1881 and later died on January 15, 1971. Jessie grew up in rural Iowa, attended Tabor College and became a teacher at Goldenrod School in Fremont Township, Iowa. It was here that Shambaugh organized boys' and girls' clubs that became models for 4-H club movements in the U.S. Her two clubs were the Girls' Home Club and Boys' Corn Club, with the girls learning cooking, canning and housework as the boys learned farming and outdoors. In 1906 Shambaugh became the superintendent of all rural schools in Page County and started boys' and girls' clubs in each of the schools. She even won attention of the national commissioner of education and after he visited a few of her schools he stated, "these were the best rural schools in the United States." Shambaugh did not stop there, in 1910 she designed a 3-leaf clover with the motto, "learning by doing, to make the best better" which would later be used to start 4-H nationally.

Gertrude Warren, known as the "guardian angel of 4-H," was born just three years after Shambaugh on November 17, 1884, and would later pass away on September 11, 1979. Warren also went to college for teaching at the State Teachers College at Geneseo but decided in 1917 to start working in extension. She was instrumental in founding the National 4-H Camp in Washington, D.C., and in the establishment of the National 4-H Center. Warren was an advocate for more home economics projects for girls to participate in through 4-H. When she began her work in 1917, canning was the only

project for girl 4-H members to showcase in home economics. Today, home economics is one of the largest participated in departments at county fairs and state fairs, including projects such as clothing, room improvement, upcycle and more. She was well supported by many, including Eleanor Roosevelt who wrote about Warren often in her “My Day” column.

Last, but not least, Fannie R. Buchanan grew up in rural Iowa and had a passion for music at a young age. She brought classical music, folk music, vocal instructions, and dance instructions not rural Iowans during World War I. People at that time living in rural America had little opportunity for recreation during the tough times of the war, so Buchanan’s music brought a lot of joy and comfort to these Americans. She also conducted music projects for the Iowa State College Extension Service. After World War I, she organized rural choruses and staged pageants, promoted musical activities in 4-H Clubs, and wrote many songs that now have been designated as official 4-H songs and are still sung today. Buchanan lived a life around music which she incorporated into her 4-H programs.

These are just three out of the many women who have made an impact on the national 4-H program.

Jesse Field Shambaugh, Gertrude Warren, and Fannie R. Buchanan all lived differently, just as the women in 4-H do today, but everyone can make a great impact. If you see a woman that has impacted you, through 4-H, don’t forget to thank them in honor of National Women in History Month!

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