



The History of the 4-Leaf Clover Emblem

The green and white four-leaf clover emblem of 4-H is one of the most widely recognized insignia of any organization. It evolved during the early days of the youth movement.

Historians have traced the clover symbol back to 1903 in Iowa. Two educators, Jessie Field and O.H. Benson, are credited with introducing a three-leaf clover in the form of pins and pennants which they presented to their high school students who did well in agricultural and domestic science projects. Each leaf contained an imprinted H, representing the head, heart and hands.

Later, some other states began displaying the clover to identify products produced by youth agricultural clubs. It was usually used with a grain of corn or a tomato at its center.

However, its first general use came several years later with the advent of girls canning clubs. The girls adopted the clover as a standard and easily recognizable emblem for the labels on canned goods they were selling in stores.

The now-familiar four-leaf clover emblem – the fourth leaf representing health – replaced the three-leaf insignia in 1911.

Benson, the Iowa teacher, had been appointed a USDA field agent for demonstration work with young people, and he brought the successful insignia to Washington with him in 1910.

Another USDA field agent, O.B. Martin, proposed the formal adoption of the four-leaf clover as the official insignia of the youth organization at a conference for Education in the South in Richmond, Virginia, in 1913. It was approved unanimously.

Gertrude Warren is given credit for giving the name 4-H to the program. She joined USDA in 1917 to organize expansion of canning demonstrations and promote food conservation during World War I.

The clover symbol had been in use for several years by then, but the term 4-H was more a shorthand name than an identification of the national youth movement. Ms. Warren used the name in a publication in 1918, and promoted its usage thereafter.

Some leaders preferred the name “Junior Extension Work,” but by 1924, 4-H was recognized nationwide as the name of the organization.