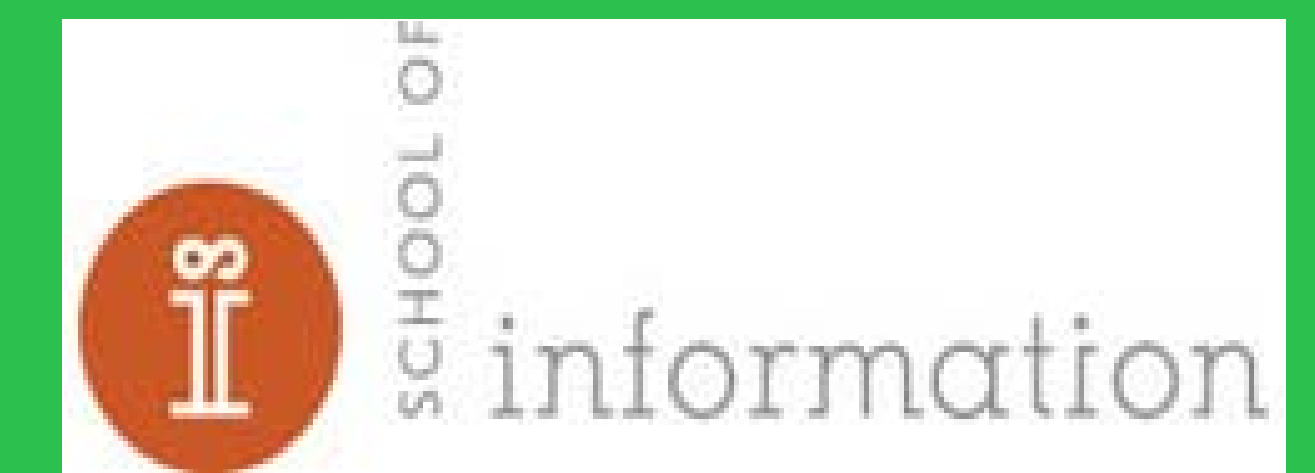




A Sponsor of Literacy: The 4-H Club and Everyday Writing, 1900 - 1930

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Introduction

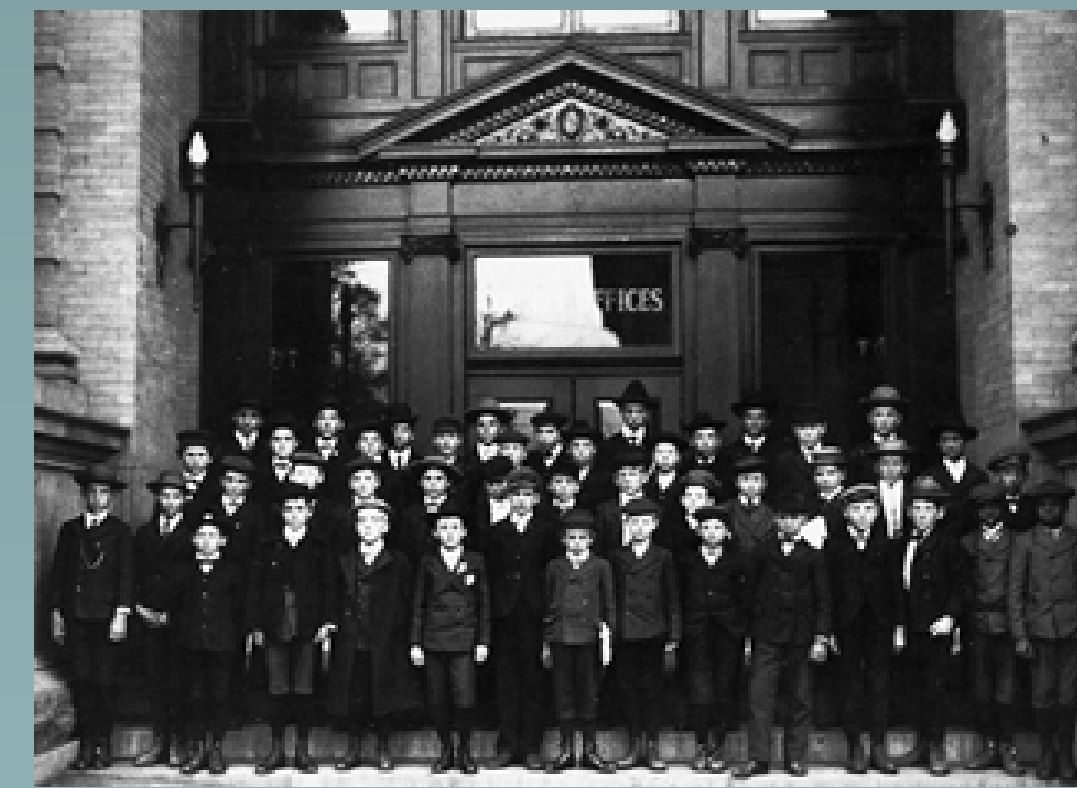
This research study examines a particular social context in which children and young adults are taught how to create and use everyday documents. 4-H (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) is a volunteer and youth movement that has its origins in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Initially begun as Junior Extension, Girls' Home Demonstration and Boys' and Girls' Clubs that sought to connect rural youth with hands-on agricultural education, 4-H has developed into a community for young people to learn citizenship, leadership, and life skills. Administered by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Cooperative Extension Service of the land grant colleges, 4-H is said to be the largest out of school program in the United States with a membership of between six and a half and seven million young people, a staff of over 3,500, and over half a million volunteers.

Research Focus

Building on prior research into the 4-H movement, the role of the agricultural extension service, rural life and school reform in the United States in the early 20th century, this research project is an historical study of the beginning of the 4-H movement during the progressive era, with a particular focus on uncovering the role that writing and recordkeeping played in the contests and the clubs for rural girls and boys that emerged during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In particular, this research documents some of the key exogenous and endogenous forces at play during the progressive era that impacted the literacy practices of the 4-H movement.

This study tackles such fundamental questions as what it means for children and young adults to be literate at a particular place and time, how institutions other than schools support literacy and literacy practices, and how young people themselves engage with, transform, and are transformed by everyday written literacies.

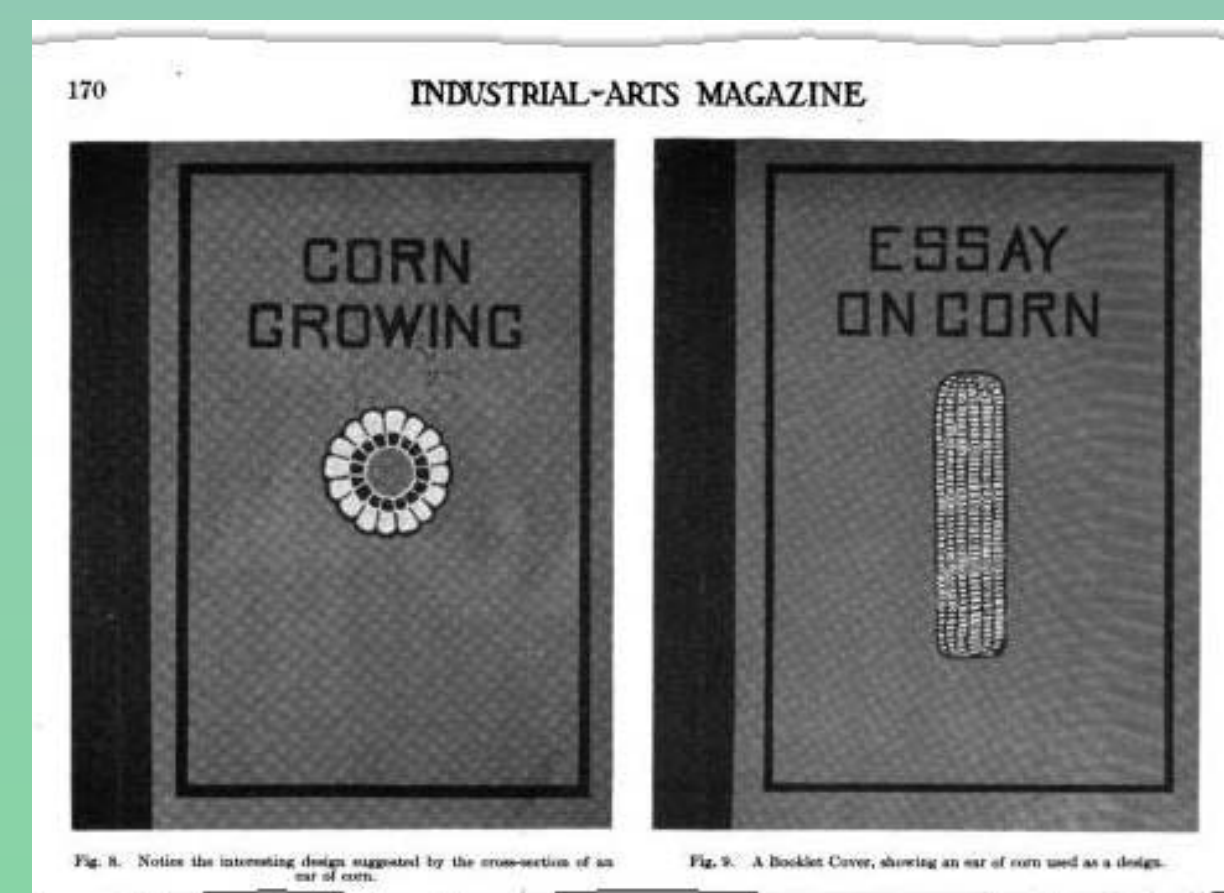
Images



Starting at the Beginning.....
Members of the first 'Boys and Girls' Club - started by A. B. Graham in Springfield, OH in 1902 - in front of the Clark County Courthouse. Image from the Ohio 4-H Centennial Timeline

Tomato Booklets.—Boys and girls in the National Corn, Potato, Poultry, Canning and other clubs are to make a booklet as a regular part of their requirement for winning. It has been suggested that, for school work, we mark the booklets as follows:	
1. Contents	20 per cent.
2. Neatness	20 per cent.
3. Originality	20 per cent.
4. Amount	20 per cent.
5. Arrangement	20 per cent.

Reproduced from Cromwell, Arthur D., and Kary Cadmus Davis. 1915. Agriculture and life; a text-book for normal schools and teachers' reading circles. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company. P. 335.



Booklets for a corn growing contest in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, 1914. Essays were written during the first two weeks in October and were illustrated with the boys' photographs of the corn during various stages of growth. Industrial Arts Magazine: An Educational Monthly. 1915.

Analytical Framework

This study fits within the interdisciplinary framework of New Literacy Studies which posits that the study of reading and writing is best understood in relation to the social, cultural, political, economic and historical practices of which it is a part. This study also draws from an analytical framework developed by Deborah Brandt. Brandt's framework rests upon the notion that there are agents in society who act as "sponsors" of literacy, supporting or discouraging literacy learning and development as "ulterior motives in their own struggles for economic or political gain" (Brandt 2001). In viewing the 4-H movement as a sponsor of literacy attention is being paid to the interconnected social, political, and economic forces within government, agriculture, education and business that had a vested interest in young people's everyday writing and recordkeeping. The second half of the study focuses on a more micro perspective - documenting the particular activities and events and associated literacy practices in the contests and the clubs for rural girls and boys that emerged during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and which formed part of the early 4-H movement. A particular emphasis is placed on examining the role and development of the 4-H record books that were kept by 4-H members, and at looking at these record books as a form of genre.

* Brandt, Deborah. 2001. Literacy in American Lives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Why this Research?

This project adds to a growing body of research into the meaning and use of literacy and literacy practices in particular social and cultural contexts. This research project expands LIS research on literacy by focusing on what has been called the "extension" or "flip side" of reading as a literacy practice - the very act of writing and recording. This focus on the study of records and documents also adds an archival voice to the emerging research community of documentation studies - researchers who focus on the study of the technical, social, and cultural aspects of documents, documentation, and documentary practices.