

Utopia Clubs

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According to old Extension records, the first Utopia Club in Kentucky was formed in 1930. Utopia Clubs offered a way for 4-H'ers who wanted to continue a similar experience beyond age 18 to do so. It's not known how many Utopia Clubs still exist in 2009.

Warren County's history indicates that a Utopia Club was first organized in that county in 1933. The club existed for a couple of years and was reorganized in 1938. They met at the Honey Krust Hostess House. Members attended the Country Life meeting in Lexington, camped at Earlington, and directed folk games at the county fair. In 1939 they had programs on keeping home and personal accounts, home improvement, and recreation. In 1940, the young women studied clothing, color, and arrangements; young men produced hybrid seed corn on a commercial basis. In 1941, the club helped with the aluminum can campaign and other defense activities. By 1942, the war effort took precedence over club activities as several members joined the armed forces or took defense jobs. Automobile tires became scarce and gas was rationed. Monthly meetings were reduced to quarterly meetings and eventually discontinued for the duration of the war. The Utopia Club was restarted in 1946 and continued for about 3 years.

In 1951, a new group of six members reorganized the Utopia Club. Floyd Ellis was elected President, Henry Moss was Vice President, Sarah Ellis served as 2nd Vice President and Mrs. Dennis Wheeley was Secretary/Treasurer. The club was recognized as Kentucky's Outstanding Utopia Club in 1961.¹

While working on the history of Kentucky 4-H in 2008, I called Minnie Swack, wife of former 4-H agent John Swack, to see if the club still exists. She laughed and said, "We're having a meeting at noon today."

The Swacks moved to Warren County in 1956 and joined the club in order to get to know people in the community. It was made up of about ten young farm couples. At one point (1963), the club bought 14 acres of property on Scottsville Road for a clubhouse. The club grew to about 35 during those years. Among other activities, field agent Phene Ross taught members to square dance. Eventually the clubhouse was sold and members began to meet in their homes. As their children got involved in 4-H, they became 4-H volunteers.

Seven of the early club members have been actively involved in the club for 50+ years: Minnie Swack, David and Wavie Runner, Jimmy and Ruth Stewart, Chuck and Billie Schults. Now, monthly meetings are held at members' homes and they go on trips together. Several are retired and are pursuing other interests; for example, Minnie Swack is working toward a degree in history at Western Kentucky University. The grandchildren of club members are now involved in 4-H.

¹ Swack, John, and Martha Welch. 1987. History of 4-H in Warren County, KY 1909-1987.