

National 4-H Hall of Fame 2006

Georgia



Otis Samuel O'Neal **County Extension Agent - Founded "Ham & Egg" Shows**

Home: Fort Valley, GA

Nominated by: Georgia 4-H

Major 4-H Efforts:

Served as the Negro County Extension Agent in Houston and Peach Counties from 1914-1948. Staged the first of what would become known as the "Ham and Egg Show" at Fort Valley in 1916 for farmers and 4-H members so that thrifty farmers could demonstrate their meat-raising and curing techniques for other farmers. In one GA county, the Ham and Egg Show continues today.

Honors:

In 1979 the O'Neal Veterinary Technology Building was constructed at Fort Valley State University, the 1890 land grant institution, in his honor.

Biography:

In 1914, when the Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension Service, Otis O'Neal became the Negro County Extension Agent in Houston and Peach Counties. As corn projects grew, it was natural for black families to feed out a few hogs and butcher them for a year-round supply of meat. Hen houses began to spring up in backyards, providing a supply of eggs. In 1916 O'Neal staged the first of what would become famous as "Ham and Egg" shows at Fort Valley. O'Neal said that he started the show so that thrifty farmers could demonstrate their meat-raising and curing techniques for other farmers. The first show had 37 hams and 17 dozen eggs.

The events grew in size and popularity and eventually were held in 22 GA counties, climaxing with a big show in Fort Valley. The famous shows made Life Magazine and national television. From the start, 4-H youth participated in the shows - the first competitive events for black youth in GA. O'Neal was integral in starting the black Folk Music Festival in 1940 which was held in conjunction with the Ham and Egg Show because it drew in people from the entire region. In one GA county, the Ham and Egg Show continues today. In 1979 the O'Neal Veterinary Technology Building was constructed at Fort Valley State University to honor Otis Samuel O'Neal.