

National 4-H Hall of Fame 2006

Virginia

Lizzie Arabella Jenkins **First African American Home Demonstration Agent**

Home: Hampton, VA

Nominated by: Virginia 4-H

Major 4-H Efforts:

Graduate and teacher at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University, it was the 1890 land grant institution in VA until 1930). Became the first African American Home Demonstration Agent in May, 1913; later served as Assistant District Agent In Charge of Negro Home Demonstration Clubs. Organized clubs for girls and women in Southeastern VA, teaching gardening, canning, sewing and cooking. This work was the foundation for 4-H clubs and extension work with African American women and families in VA.

Biography:

A student and graduate of Hampton Institute, Lizzie Jenkins taught at the college until she was appointed the first African American Home Demonstration Agent in 1913. Her primary job was to organize and conduct canning clubs among African American girls in heavily settled counties of southeastern VA. Under her supervision, individuals known as "Jeannes' Teachers" began assisting families in the summer. Her influence assisted both rural youth and mothers. She noted in her 1915 annual report that "women hesitated about joining the clubs until they saw what was being accomplished by the girls and women."

Jenkins reported in 1916 that there were 2,416 girls enrolled as members of garden, canning, sewing and cooking clubs, plus 246 in poultry clubs - the forerunners of 4-H clubs. During WWI, VA African American families contributed greatly to the war effort. In 1918, as a result of the growing canning movement, they preserved 500,000 qt. of vegetables and fruits. Jenkins' work laid the foundation for future extension work with African American youth. Jenkins exemplified superior citizenship, leadership and character, and her successful work expanded to other communities and counties throughout VA.

Quote:

Jenkins' 1916 report describes her efforts: "Since December 1, 1915, I have traveled 12,405 miles by rail, 1,384 by team or other conveyance, attended 114 meetings with an estimated attendance of 15,149, at most of these meetings I have spoken, visited 245 club members, and 90 schools, made 74 visits to Supervisors and 150 visits to homes, sent 718 letters, and 1,283 circular letters." "It is most gratifying to see how women are becoming more and more interested each year...Many of them have told us that they became interested in the work because of information brought home by their daughters...and they are no longer content to be left out of the worth while things."