

New York 2004

Martha Van Rensselaer

First Leader of NY 4-H Club Program



Hometown: Randolph, NY
Nominated by: Cornell
Cooperative Extension 4-H
Youth Development and New
York State Association of
CCE 4-H Educators
Year Inducted: 2004

4-H Statistics: Invited in 1900 to organize an extension program for NY rural women; over 20,000 women were enrolled in under five years. Invited with Flora Rose to head Cornell Department of Home Economics, 1908. President of American Home Economics Association, 1914-1916. First leader of NYS 4-H program. Co-wrote "A Manual of Home Making," 1919. Home economics editor of Delineator magazine, 1920-26. Wrote regularly for Ladies Home Journal, Children's Magazine, and Boys and Girls. Directed Home Conservation Division, U.S. Food Administration during WWI. 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection and 1931 President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership participant. League of Women Voters recognized her in 1923 as one of America's 12 most important women.

While growing up in Randolph, New York, Martha's mother's active involvement in the suffrage and temperance movements convinced her that women could effect change in America. After high school, Martha held various teaching positions before she was elected Cattaraugus County school commissioner, a position usually held by men. She was introduced to Cornell's small agricultural extension program, designed to educate farmers in the latest scientific advances. In 1900, Liberty Hyde Bailey invited her to organize an extension program for rural women. She believed that women could ease the burdens of farm life by adopting new scientific strategies to their daily tasks. Under her leadership, the extension program blossomed to more than 20,000 women in under five years.

Due to her successes, Cornell started full-time home economics courses in 1908, and Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose were invited to head the Department of Home Economics. Martha was American Home Economics Association president from 1914-1916. During this time she headed the NYS 4-H program. Martha was influential in developing pamphlets on nutrition and other home economics areas used in early 4-H programs for girls. Van Rensselaer was considered a leading authority on women and families issues, and she published many texts and articles. During WWI, she directed the Home Conservation Division, U.S. Food Administration. She participated in several White House Conferences on youth and families. In 1923 the League of Women Voters recognized her as one of America's 12 most important women.