

Charles A. Keadle



Charles Alexander Keadle, of Monroe County, was an educator and agriculture advocate. Through his teaching, being elected superintendent of Monroe County Schools, serving as vice-president of the Monroe County Agriculture Society and as judge and guide for the corn clubs, he set in motion a program that was to become 4-H for boys and girls.

In 1907, at a Farmer's Institute sponsored by the State Board of Agriculture at Pickaway, Monroe County, Mr. Keadle, then county superintendent of schools, suggested a boys' corn contest. Professors D. W. Working and T. C. Atkenson of WVU arranged a plan of cooperation with the public spirited farmers of the community. The seed corn was provided by the Extension Department and the farmers conducted the contest. Seventy-one school children were given 100 grains of corn each and on November 7, 1908, 46 boys and girls exhibited their corn at the Monroe County Courthouse in Union. This was the first such contest in West Virginia.

Mr. Keadle served as a Sweet Springs district judge. C. M. Dunsmore, President of the Farmers' Institute, and Mr. Keadle felt that since Monroe was the first county in the State to inaugurate such a contest, they must not allow the pioneer efforts to lag behind. They called an organizational meeting in 1909 at Union. Farmers young and old attended and officers were chosen. The executive committee made arrangements for girls' contests. After the annual show of 1909, a permanent committee was chosen and a constitution was drafted for the Monroe County Agricultural Society. Mr. Keadle was elected vice-president. This group made arrangements for the Annual Union Corn Show, furnished prizes and speakers, in cooperation with the Extension Department of Agriculture at WVU.

A 1953 article in *The Monroe Watchman* also credited Mr. Keadle for helping to promote county fairs. The State Division of Culture and History recognized Mr. Keadle's contribution by erecting the historical marker at the Pickaway School where the first Corn Club was organized. The efforts of Mr. Keadle take on added significance when one realizes that his strivings were always on his own time. His accomplishments came about not as a result of his job, but rather his desire to offer better education and opportunity to his students and their families. It's clear that Keadle's work had a large impact. Monroe was one of the first counties to organize a county 4-H camp and its residents built the second cottage at Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp. Its 4-H program remains one of the strongest in the State, with 600 youth and 100 adults participating in three dozen clubs. The 4-H club is a vital educational and participatory organization for children in rural areas across the United States and Canada, who often cannot participate in school activities because of their isolation. Community clubs, the level where Keadle served, provide children opportunities for leadership, entrepreneurial skills, citizenship and service to their hometowns. It's clear that Mr. Keadle recognized the importance of those opportunities when he founded the Corn Clubs.