

## The Origins of Scouting

Today there are more than 28 million youth who are part of the worldwide youth organization known as Scouting. Boy Scouting was founded by Robert S. S. Baden-Powell, a prolific writer, artist, and visionary.

Baden-Powell would come to be known as Lord Robert Baden-Powell. He was a retired British general and was a hero of the siege of Mafeking during the Boer War (1899-1902). Baden-Powell had written a book in 1899 entitled *Aids to Scouting*, which was designed for training skills useful for men during military service.

Baden-Powell had a knack for telling stories, often of his own experiences, in an easy-to-understand manner. He supported them with his own illustrations. His book had captured the attention and imagination of boys and fans of the Boer war. Many young readers wanted to become “scouts”. When Baden-Powell returned to England in 1903, he learned that his book had sold over 100,000 copies.

Several leaders who served youth organizations urged Baden-Powell to revise the book and make it a training manual for boys. He did, including the careful removal of military references. His book *Scouting for Boys* is considered the original “Boy Scout handbook”. When writing the book, Baden-Powell was influenced not only by his own experiences, but also by the Boys’ Brigade in England, Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Camp Games*, and Dan Beard’s *Boy Pioneers* in the United States.

*Scouting for Boys* was published in 1908. Prior to this, Baden-Powell tested his “Boy Scout” idea in August of 1907 by taking members of the Boys’ Brigade camping for one week at Brownsea Island. His recruits included 13 boys from upper-class schools and nine working class youth. This was the first group of “Boy Scouts” who were testing Baden-Powell’s scheme of organizing the boys into patrols and allowing them to elect a patrol leader.

Tens of thousands of copies of *Scouting for Boys* were sold in the first year. The book introduced the Scout Promise, Scout Law, motto, badge, Scout sign and salute, and the handshake. Boys could also learn how to hike and camp, tie knots, do pioneering projects, and track and stalk animals. Instructions for earning advancement and badges were included, as well as outdoor games that could ultimately help them be better citizens and serve their country.

Boy Scouting was no longer simply a program supplement to an existing organization such as the Boys’ Brigade, but an organization with enough structure and popularity to function independently.

## ***Rapid Development of the Boy Scout Organization in America***

From its beginning, the design of the Boy Scouts of America was based on the organization developed by Baden-Powell.

In the early 1900's, few organized activities were available for Scout-age boys. The United States was becoming increasingly urbanized. Activities outside of school were limited. Some cities had municipal playgrounds. Only a handful of groups, such as the Park Life group in Dubuque, the Boys Club, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), offered structured activities.

B. J. Horchem, an educator and principle of Audubon Elementary School, started the Park Life program in 1907 for Dubuque boys. The program was Horchem's way of keeping boys involved with positive activities over the summer. It served as an outdoor camp where boys planted gardens, studied nature, slept in tents, and went on nature hikes.

The YMCA was already an established forerunner to the Boy Scout movement in America. The YMCA actively promoted the Boy Scouts in its early years, and even adopted it as part of its programs for boys. Many of the YMCA leaders as well as local YMCA's were instrumental in developing Boy Scout troops. By 1912, for example, over 6% of the Boy Scout troops nationally were chartered by the YMCA.

Significant contributors to the early formation of the Boy Scouts of America included:

- Ernest Thompson Seton
- Dan Beard
- William D. Boyce
- Edgar M. Robinson
- James E. West

**Ernest Thompson Seton** founded the **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Woodcraft League in 1902. Seton authored *The Birchbark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians*, and many YMCA camps used this book and ideas from it for their program. Seton's ideas centered around a romanticized American Indian theme where local boys formed tribes and practiced woodcraft.

Seton developed much of what was used for the advancement program in the Boy Scouts of America. His ideas heavily influenced the advancement and awards that were also part of Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*. Beginning in 1911, Seton held the official title of Chief Scout. The title was later revoked, however, when the BSA felt its "Chief Scout" should be an American, and Seton refused to switch his Canadian citizenship.

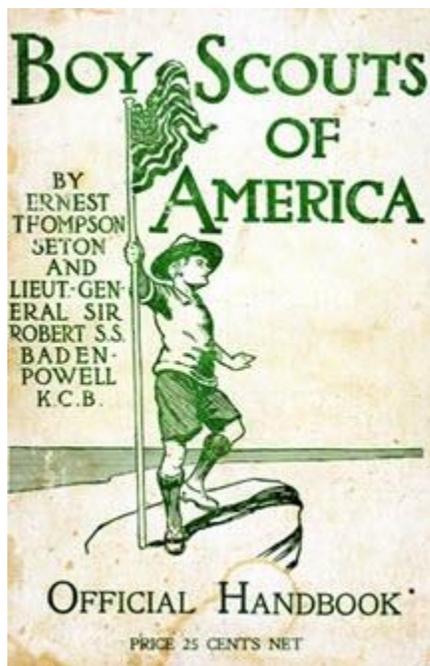


Figure. Ernest Thompson Seton rushed out the first copy of the handbook of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. A sticker inside the handbook noted the following:

*On account of the very fast spread of the Boy Scout Movement in this country, the urgent demand for a working handbook necessitated a somewhat hasty compilation of the present Official Manual. Large blocks of the material thus used were taken from General Baden Powell's English book, "Scouting for Boys." While fitting admirably the existing conditions in England, much of this is not adapted to the very difficult conditions existent in this country.*

*The Official Handbook is now being revised and thoroughly Americanized, and made to fit more exactly into American Life and conditions.*

**Daniel Beard** founded the Sons of Daniel Boone organization in 1905. The aim of Beard's organization was to introduce boys to nature and to instill the spirit of the pioneers in them. Beard became the BSA National Scout Commissioner in 1911.

While Baden-Powell founded the Worldwide Scouting movement, Seton and Beard deserve much of the credit for the program ideas that resulted in what was to become the Boy Scouts of America.

**William D. Boyce** was a Chicago publisher who first encountered Baden-Powell's Scouting while on a business trip to London. After reading *Scouting for Boys*, he brought back with him to America a trunk load of books, badges, and uniforms.

Unlike Seton and Beard, whose involvement with Boy Scouts was very much a hands-on involvement, Boyce had minimal contact with the members of the organization he helped to charter. He was a publisher who *employed* thousands of boys to deliver newspapers.

Boyce of Chicago filed incorporation papers for the Boy Scouts of America in the District of Columbia on February 8, 1910. He owned the title of the Boy Scouts of

America, but it had no members and no organization. That, of course, would soon change.

Boyce also incorporated the Lone Scouts of America in January of 1915. Lone Scouts brought Scouting to boys in rural areas who had no hope of joining a troop. The Lone Scouts organization would later merge with the Boy Scouts of America.

**Edgar M. Robinson** was one of three YMCA leaders who approached W.D. Boyce soon after he had incorporated the Boy Scouts of America. Robinson offered to help plan and administer this new organization. One of the three, Edgar M. Robinson, was at the time the senior boys work secretary at the YMCA's International Committee in New York. Robinson was instrumental in building a permanent organization with the help of 25 youth and social agencies. He would become the first acting Chief Scout Executive. Although Robinson was offered the job on a permanent basis, he turned it down in order to remain with the YMCA.

**James E. West** was an attorney who was making a name for himself in youth work. West, who spent his childhood in an orphanage and was crippled with tuberculosis of the hip and knee, knew first hand some of the problems of the young. Still, these handicaps had not prevented him from working his way through high school, college, and law school.

Late in 1910, Robinson convinced West to take the job of 'executive secretary' of the Boy Scouts of America for 6 months, beginning in January, 1911. The six months lasted 32 years: West retired as Chief Scout Executive in 1943.

Within one decade, the Scouting movement became an American institution. The Boy Scouts of America grew from no members in 1910 to 361,000 boys and 32,000 Scoutmasters by 1919.

Seton and Beard had brought to Scouting the magic of the campfire and the love of the outdoors. Robinson provided organizational leadership during the infancy of the organization in America. Boyce incorporated the Boy Scouts of America, and provided crucial financial support during the BSA's first year. West brought limitless vision and administrative talent.

## ***Growing Pains***

Expansion of the Boy Scout movement was rapid and without precedent among 'social agencies'. The rapid growth of the Boy Scout movement provided challenges to the National Council in terms of providing a structure that could efficiently support local troops. Requests for uniforms, books, badges, training material for leaders arrived from all over the country. As the quantity of Scouts and Scout troops increased, it became impractical to serve troops in numerous cities directly from the National Council Headquarters in New York City.

Early emphasis by the National Council was to establish 'city' councils that would serve troops within a city. The next geographic emphasis was to organize a Boy Scout council by county, and later to establish 'area' councils so that counties with relatively small boy populations could be serviced by a council.

In the first two decades, the Boy Scouts of America classified a council as either a first class council or a second class council.

First class councils had a paid Scout Executive or an Executive Secretary and were considered by the National Council to be 'permanent' councils. The National Council assigned an identification number to each first class council. The Dubuque Council, which would later become the Dubuque Area Council and finally the Northeast Iowa Council, was assigned number 178.

The National Council considered a second class council as a provisional council. Volunteer help or part-time help staffed the second class councils. Often second class councils served a city, a rural county, or a district (several counties).

As the number of councils and their need for support from the National Council increased, the National Council aligned local councils within a region. The original 12 regions were established in 1921. The regional boundaries matched the geographic boundaries used by the Federal Reserve System. The Dubuque Council was part of Region 8, which was also known as the "Great Central West".

The structure of a Boy Scout council, proved both beneficial and necessary to the long-term growth of the Boy Scout movement. The Northeast Iowa Council currently serves Scouts in Allamakee, Clayton, Delaware, and Dubuque counties, as well as East Dubuque, Illinois. In various other times throughout its history, the Council has also serviced troops in Jackson and Clinton counties in Iowa, as well as New Diggings, Wisconsin and Galena, Illinois.