

The Old Scout

History of Scouting in the U.S.A.

105th Anniversary: 2015

This brief history of the Scouting Movement is intended to give young scouts information about the early founders of Scouting and the rich traditions that make up the scouting program as they forge their own paths toward the rank of Eagle Scout.

Our story begins in England...

History of Scouting, Part 1: Robert Baden-Powell

Robert Baden-Powell was born in 1857 in England. He joined the military and rose through the ranks after service in Africa and India. He later became commander in charge of defending a garrison at Mafeking in South Africa during the Boer War. In 1899, he was able to hold off a siege for 217 days. Due, in part, to his own reporting and journals that he was able to send through the blockade lines back to England, he became a popular war hero.

Baden-Powell observed the lack of skills on the part of the young soldiers and endeavored to train them in skills that he practiced in his own youth: tracking, hunting and survival. He wrote a guide called "Aids To Scouting" which he later was surprised to see become popular outside of the military. The pamphlet was being used in England as a guide to outdoor fun.

Baden-Powell and others were concerned about the state of youth in Great Britain, and wanted to reverse what they saw as the moral and physical decline of a generation of boys. In August of 1907, Baden-Powell brought together a group of boys at Brown Sea Island off the coast of southern England for two weeks of what was to become the first "summer camp", and the start of the Boy Scout movement. In 1908, he revised the lessons learned from this experience into a work called "Scouting For Boys", the first scouting handbook, that was issued in several installments.

This was the beginning of the scouting movement in Great Britain. The goal of scouting was to create self disciplined and patriotic young men.

Baden-Powell, who drew many illustrations for the first handbook, retired from the military as a general and became totally involved in the Scouting Movement. He became Chief Scout of the World and saw scouting develop in many nations world wide. Baden-Powell died in 1941. He often signed his name "B-P". It's thought that he immortalized his initials in what was to become the scouting motto: "Be Prepared".