

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.

History of Scouting, Part II: William Boyce

William Boyce (1858-1929) was a Chicago businessman who made his fortune in the newspaper industry. He was in London in 1909, making plans for a safari to Africa. The legend goes that he was lost in the fog one night, and a young man came up to him and offered to help him find his destination. When Boyce tried to offer the young man a tip, he refused, saying he was a scout, and would not take pay for doing a good deed. Boyce was so impressed with this, that he contacted the scouting office in London and brought pamphlets and information about scouting along with him on his safari.

When Boyce returned to the United States, he shared the ideas of the Scouting Movement with others, and incorporated the Boy Scouts of America on February 8, 1910. This date is the official start of scouting in the United States. Boyce did not actively participate in scouting beyond using his influence to insure that scouting got off to a solid start. For many years he contributed money to help scouting become established.

Boyce, nor anyone else, ever learned the identity of the scout who assisted him that foggy night in London. This scout has been called the “unknown scout”, and years later a monument was placed in his honor in London. The “unknown scout” has been credited with bringing scouting to the United States.