

# The Old Scout

## History of Scouting in the U.S.A.

### *105<sup>th</sup> 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 VII: Merit Badges

Merit badges were part of the scouting program right from the beginning. The first Eagle Scout in the United States, Arthur Eldred, earned 21 badges to attain the rank of Eagle Scout in 1912, the same that is required today.

Merit badges are an additional training program in scouting. They are not part of the rank requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class or First Class, but scouts of all ranks can work on them and earn them. Unlike most rank requirements, scouts can choose which badges interest them from a wide variety of subjects. Of the 21 badges necessary to attain the rank of Eagle Scout, only 13 badges are considered “required”, and there is flexibility in choosing among the 13 as well. There is no time limit on completing merit badges, as long as they are earned by a scout's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Scouts earn merit badges by contacting an approved merit badge counselor, and completing the requirements listed in the merit badge pamphlet. Some merit badges require the scout to “make”, “do” or “demonstrate”, while others require them to “visit”, “attend” or “explain”. The counselor may not change the requirements, and all scouts have an equal advantage in earning a merit badge. Some are more challenging than others, but all merit badges are intended to generate interest in a particular field or subject that will appeal to different scouts.

Many scouts earn merit badges at summer camp, though it was never intended for a scout to earn most or all of his merit badges this way. By contacting a counselor on his own outside of summer camp, a scout learns to do things for himself and interact with adults (the counselors) who are anxious to pass on their own interest and expertise in a subject.

Requirements for merit badges have changed over the years, as have the merit badges themselves. Some of the original merit badges included:

- Poultry Farming
- Taxidermy
- Interpreting
- Blacksmithing
- Angling (now called Fishing)

First Aid to Animals (one requirement: How do you treat a horse with colic?)  
Aviation (still a current badge, but the original merit badge illustrated an early bi-winged airplane)

Examples of requirements from the 1939 edition of First Aid merit badge include:

- How do you treat a man found lying across the power rail of an electrified railway?
- How do you treat a wound resulting from a rusty pitchfork?

Some newer badges which could not have been imagined in 1910 include:

Computers  
Space Exploration  
Nuclear Science  
Composite Materials

In 2010, as a special recognition of Scouting's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, four "historical" badges from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition handbook were re-introduced:

- Pathfinding
- Tracking
- Signaling
- Carpentry

Many scouts in Troop 201 earned these historical merit badges.

New merit badges continue to be added as new fields of technology expand the world. Merit badges are one more way that scouting prepares a boy for life.