EAGLE SCOUT ROLL OF HONOR

National Eagle Scout Registry





The National Eagle Scout Association
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BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

The History of the Eagle Scout Award

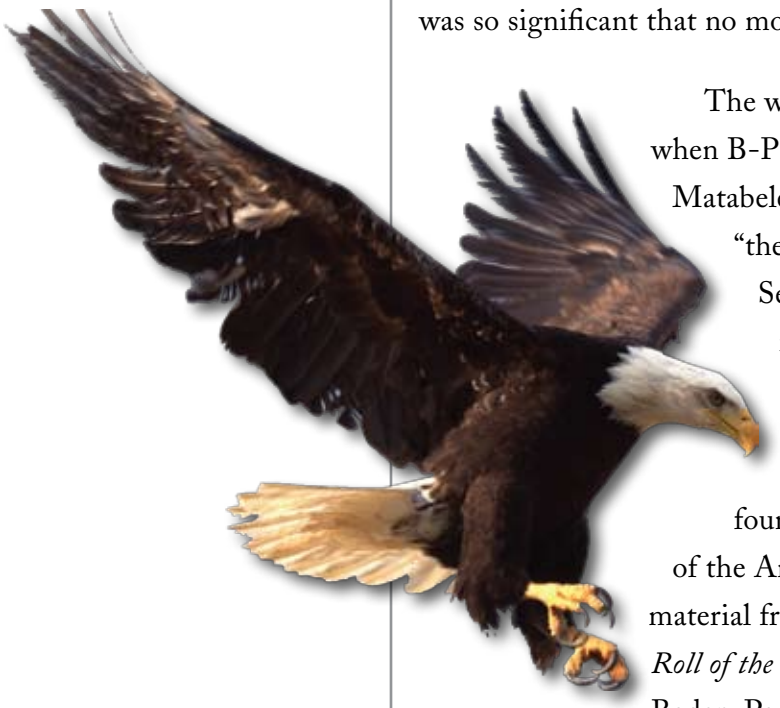
The Eagle Scout Award. It's Scouting's highest rank and among its most familiar icons. Men who have earned it count it among their most treasured possessions. Those who missed it by a whisker remember exactly which requirement they didn't complete. Americans from all walks of life know that being an Eagle Scout is a great honor, even if they don't know just what the badge means.

The award is more than a badge. It's a state of being. You *are* an Eagle Scout—never *were.* You may have received the badge as a boy, but you earn it every day as a man. In the words of the Eagle Scout Promise, you do your best each day to make your training and example, your rank and your influence count strongly for better Scouting and for better citizenship in your troop, in your community, and in your contacts with other people. And to this you pledge your sacred honor.



The Genesis of the Eagle Scout Award

Given the Eagle Scout rank's prominence, it might be surprising that it had no place in the original Boy Scout advancement program. *Scouting for Boys,* Robert Baden-Powell's 1908 Scout handbook, included just three classes of Scouts—Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class—along with the Wolf badge, which was "a reward for very special distinction." This badge was so significant that no more than one would be granted each year.

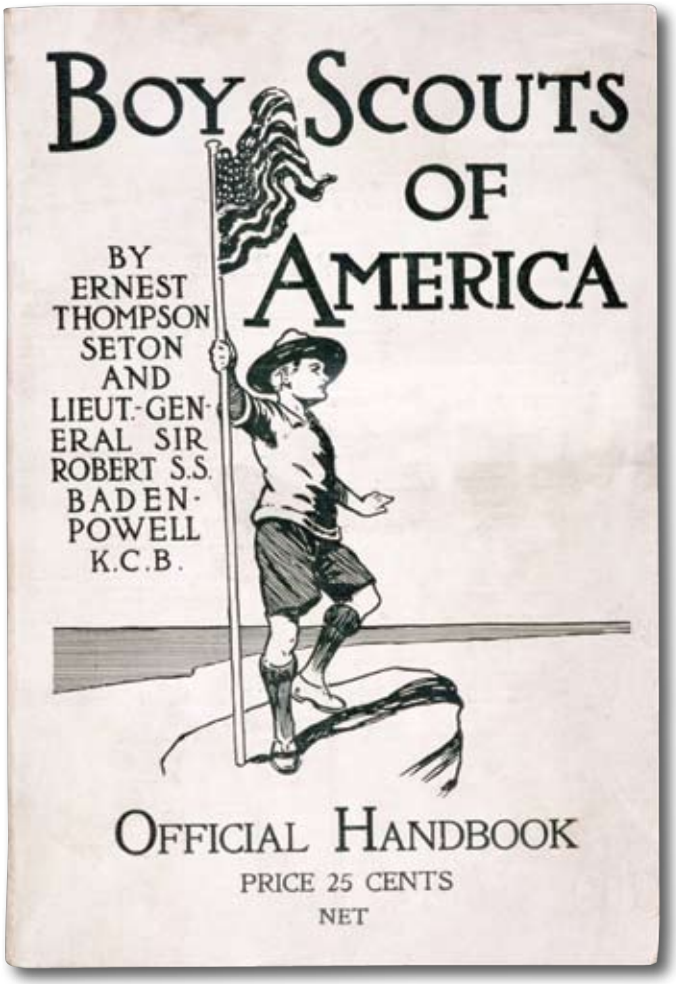


The wolf seemed an appropriate symbol. In 1896, when B-P was fighting in what is now Zimbabwe, Matabele tribesmen nicknamed him *Impeesa,* meaning "the wolf that never sleeps." Ernest Thompson Seton, whose Woodcraft Indians program helped inspire the creation of Scouting, called himself Black Wolf.

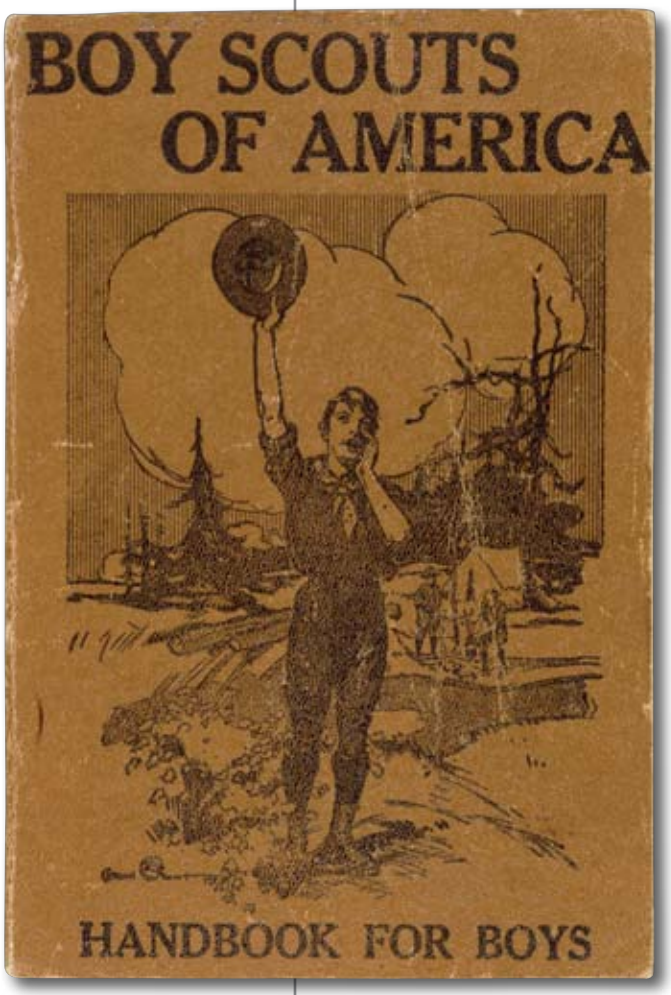
After the Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910, Seton created a proof edition of the American *Handbook for Boys* that combined material from *Scouting for Boys* and his own *Birch-Bark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians.* The handbook incorporated Baden-Powell's advancement scheme—but with a twist. The Silver Wolf Award would go to any First Class Scout who earned all 14 "badges of merit": Ambulance, Clerk, Cyclist, Electrician, Fireman, Gardener, Horseman, Pioneer, Marksman, Master-at-Arms, Musician, Signaller, Seaman, and Stalker.

The Silver Wolf and the badges of merit were never produced. People who reviewed the proof handbook suggested that—founders' nicknames notwithstanding—America's national bird should grace Scouting's highest award. The 1911 *Handbook for Boys,* the first publicly available edition, introduced the Eagle Scout Award, as well as two lesser awards: Life Scout and Star Scout.

At first, Life, Star, and Eagle were not considered ranks. Instead, they were special awards for earning merit badges—roughly equivalent to today's Eagle Palms. The Life Scout badge went to First Class Scouts who earned five specific merit badges: First Aid, Athletics, Lifesaving, Personal Health, and Public Health. (Note how all five relate to life in some way.) The Star Scout badge required another five elective merit badges. The Eagle Scout badge—which the handbook called "the highest scout merit badge"—required a total of 21 merit badges.



Cover of Baden-Powell's 1908 **Scouting for Boys**



Cover of 1911 **Handbook for Boys**





In 1911, Scouts had 57 merit badges to choose from. Like today, these badges covered basic Scouting skills (Camping, Cooking, Swimming), trades and careers (Business, Firemanship, Poultry Farming), science and nature (Chemistry, Conservation, Ornithology), and hobbies (Angling, Handicraft, Music). The Aviation merit badge demanded a working knowledge of "aeroplanes, balloons, and dirigibles." Invention required the Scout to obtain a patent. The requirements for one badge, Scholarship, hadn't been determined when the book went to press.

That wasn't the only thing that hadn't been determined at press time. Page 43 of the *Handbook for Boys* described the Eagle Scout badge as "an eagle's head in silver," but the same page showed a very different (and, to modern eyes, very unfamiliar) medal: an eagle in flight suspended from a broad, single-color ribbon.



The illustration of the Eagle Scout badge in the 1911 **Handbook for Boys**

The First Eagle Scout

The confusion over the Eagle badge's design lingered into 1912. In fact, the first badge wasn't produced until the first Scout had already earned it. That Scout, Arthur Rose Eldred, was a member of Troop 1 in Oceanside, New York, a troop his brother Hubert had founded in November 1910. The younger Eldred earned his 21st merit badge in April 1912 at the age of 16. All that remained was an appearance before a board of review (then called a court of honor).



Courtesy, Gary Twite

The First Eagle Scout, Arthur Eldred, in uniform

Since there were no provisions for local reviews in those early days, Eldred was examined by perhaps the most exalted and intimidating board of review in Scouting history: Chief Scout Executive James E. West, Chief Scout Ernest Thompson Seton, National Scout Commissioner Daniel Carter Beard (another BSA founder), and Wilbert E. Longfellow of the U.S. Volunteer Life Saving Corps, who had written the *Handbook*'s sections on swimming and lifesaving.

Eldred survived his high-powered grilling. On August 21, 1912, West notified him that he was the BSA's first Eagle Scout. However, he would have to wait until Labor Day to receive his badge because the dies for making the metal badge hadn't been created yet.

Eldred's Eagle medal, now on display at the National Scouting Museum, was rather crudely modeled, and the silver coating easily wore off the bronze scroll and pendant. Nevertheless, the medal had an impressive and dignified look that's been retained, with only minor variations, for nearly 100 years.



Arthur Eldred's medal



Present-day medal

The Eagle Scout Award's First Decade



Pocket patches through the years

Through Scouting's first decade and into the early 1920s, the advancement requirements remained fairly constant. The 1915 *Handbook for Boys* offered alternatives for two Life Scout merit badges: Scouts could substitute Physical Development for Athletics and Pioneering for Lifesaving. Moreover, the Eagle Scout candidate now had to earn 11 specific badges—First Aid, Physical Development, Lifesaving, Personal Health, Public Health, Cooking, Camping, Bird Study, Pathfinding, Pioneering, and Athletics—along with 10 badges of his choice. A slight change the next year added Civics to the list of required badges and allowed the Scout to choose either Athletics or Physical Development.

Despite the strengthening of the Eagle Scout requirements, the number of Eagle Scouts increased steadily. Just 23 Scouts had earned the Eagle badge in 1912; more than 2,000 earned it in 1922. This remarkable increase soon encouraged Scout officials to refine and strengthen the badge's requirements.

History doesn't record why Bird Study rose to such prominence among the merit badges. However, the badge's requirements demonstrate Scouting's early emphasis on conservation. In addition to identifying 50 species of wild birds, the Scout had to make bird boxes and feeding tables and tell "what he has done to protect birds from wicked and unjust slaughter; to promote long, close seasons for vanishing species; and to promote the creation of bird preserves and sanctuaries."

Roaring Into the Twenties

In 1924, BSA officials made two changes, one that seemed obvious at the time and one that seems obvious in retrospect. First, they made the Swimming merit badge a prerequisite for Lifesaving, meaning that 12 of the 21 badges for Eagle were now effectively predetermined. Second, they reversed the order of the Life and Star ranks.

With the annual number of new Eagle Scouts pushing past 3,000, officials also considered more drastic changes—including the idea of creating another rank beyond Eagle. Any such award would be based on civic service and participating citizenship, not just on earning merit badges.





Cover of 1927 **Handbook for Boys**

Fortunately, tradition prevailed, and the Eagle Scout Award retained its position of prominence, although with a new set of requirements. These requirements, which appeared in the *Handbook for Boys* in 1927, added a service component to the Star, Life, and Eagle ranks.

To become a Star Scout, a First Class Scout had to furnish "satisfactory evidence" that he had been living the ideals of Scouting and had made an "earnest effort" to develop his leadership ability. He also had to earn five merit badges of his choosing. The Life Scout requirements were identical, except that the Scout had to earn 10 merit badges (including the badges long associated with this rank). Finally, the Eagle Scout Award required a full year's service as a First Class Scout, along with a total of 21 merit badges as before.

That 1927 *Handbook for Boys* also introduced the concept of Eagle Scout Palms—a compromise gesture to those who wanted to create a rank beyond Eagle. Much like today, a Scout could earn a Palm for earning five additional merit badges, continuing to live out the ideals of Scouting, and maintaining "an active service relationship to Scouting." The Bronze Palm represented five merit badges, the Gold Palm 10, and the Silver Palm 15.



Star Scout



Life Scout

Through the Depression and War



Despite the strengthened requirements, the number of Eagle Scouts continued to grow. In 1927, the annual rate was 4,500. By 1932, that number had more than doubled to 9,200.

For the next six years, however, the annual number of Eagle Scouts fluctuated around 7,000, probably because of the upheaval in society caused by the Great Depression (although the number did jump to 10,000 in 1939). As countless Scoutmasters—and countless Eagle Scouts—left home to fight in World War II, numbers continued to fluctuate.

The Eagle rank's requirements remained relatively steady, however. In the early 1930s, the year of tenure required to become an Eagle Scout was split into parts: three months as a First Class Scout, three months as a Star Scout, and six months as a Life Scout. At the same time, the Safety merit badge was added to the list of required merit badges.

One thing that had changed greatly over the years was the assortment of merit badges Scouts could choose from. The 1943 *Handbook for Boys* listed 111 merit badges, including 23 related to agriculture and four related to aviation, a subject that was constantly in the news that year. But even the required merit badges taught timely skills. According to the handbook, "Such skills have great value in times of emergency when resourcefulness and knowing how to carry on are called for." It further emphasized that "Scouts have always been found eager and prepared to accept responsibility both in local and national emergencies."



Handbook for Boys, circa 1943



New Requirements for a New Decade

The postwar years led to a boom in involvement in Scouting, with more than 14,000 Scouts becoming Eagles each year during the mid-1950s. The era also saw a complete overhaul of the advancement program.



Merit badges from the post–World War II era

Back in 1911, the first *Handbook for Boys* had described the Eagle Scout as "the all-round perfect Scout." In 1948, the BSA set out to make sure Eagles were well-rounded, too. That year, Scouting's 100 merit badges were grouped into 15 subject areas: animal husbandry, aquatics, arts, building, campcraft, citizenship, communication, conservation, crafts and collections, nature, outdoor sports, personal development, plant cultivation, public service, and transportation. An Eagle Scout candidate still had to earn a core group of merit badges, which now comprised Camping, Swimming, Nature, Public Health, Firemanship, Cooking, Lifesaving, Personal Fitness, Safety, and First Aid. In addition, he had to earn six badges from specified groups. These included one from conservation, three from citizenship, one from outdoor sports, and one from animal husbandry, plant cultivation, communication, transportation, or building. (His remaining five badges could come from any group.)

The 1948 requirements also spelled out in more detail what else an Eagle Scout candidate had to do. Rather than just having a six-month record of "satisfactory service" as a Life Scout, he now had to work actively as a leader in his troop's meetings, outdoor activities, and projects; do his best to help in his home, school, place of worship, and community; and take care of things that belonged to him and respect the property of others. These seemingly innocuous changes, which remained in place throughout the 1950s, foreshadowed the next major step in the Eagle Scout Award's evolution.

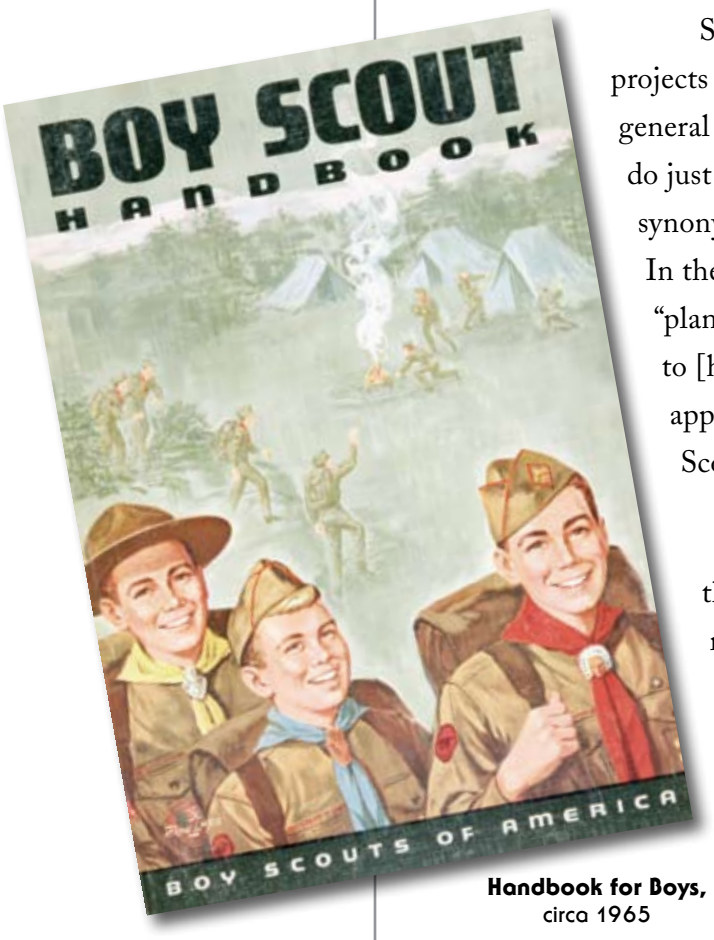


One other change was made in the postwar years. For four decades, adult leaders had been allowed to participate in the advancement program, but that practice ended in 1952. After that year, all requirements had to be completed by the Scout's 18th birthday. Starting in 1965, an exception was made for overaged Scouts with mental disabilities, an exception that now applies to Scouts with other permanent disabilities. Disabled Scouts can also, in some situations, pursue alternative merit badges to those required for the Eagle Scout Award.

Emphasizing Leadership and Service

Many copies of the *Boy Scout Handbook* printed in 1965 included two sets of advancement requirements: those requirements that had been in effect with few changes for 17 years and those that would take effect on October 1, 1965. The differences were extensive. Virtually every requirement for every rank was changed, and the merit badge groups were eliminated.

Perhaps the most far-reaching changes appeared in the Star, Life, and Eagle rank requirements. Each rank, including the lower ranks, now required a personal conference with the Scoutmaster to discuss Scouting ideals and the Scout's future plans. Each rank now required the Scout to serve as a "troop warrant officer"—patrol leader, senior patrol leader, quartermaster, etc. In addition, each rank now required participation in service projects.



Handbook for Boys,
circa 1965

Star and Life candidates had to participate in two projects for each rank: a conservation project and a more general community service project. Eagle candidates had to do just one, but it was a special project that would become synonymous with the Eagle Scout Award in years to come. In the words of the 1965 handbook, the Scout had to "plan, develop, and carry out a service project helpful to [his] church or synagogue, school, or community approved in advance by [his] Scoutmaster." The Eagle Scout leadership service project had been born.

Despite the stiffened requirements, Scouts by the thousands continued to earn Scouting's highest rank. In 1963, 27,000 Eagle badges were awarded. By the end of the decade, that number had topped 30,000. But more changes were on the horizon.

Making Scouting Relevant



In the early 1970s, the United States was reeling. After a decade of war, civil unrest, and social upheaval, traditional institutions like Scouting seemed woefully behind the times. In an effort to make Scouting more relevant and appealing in an increasingly urban culture, the BSA introduced the Improved Scouting Program. The cornerstone of this program was a new advancement system that offered Scouts unprecedented flexibility.



Skill awards

To earn Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class, Scouts no longer completed specific requirements (take a hike, sharpen an ax, describe the American flag, etc.). Instead, they chose eight of 12 skill awards—belt loops in specific subjects—of which only Citizenship and First Aid were specified. Tenure requirements were also added for each rank.

The Star, Life, and Eagle requirements looked much as they had before, but the list of Eagle-required merit badges was significantly different. In keeping with the Improved Scouting Program, the list deemphasized some traditional skills. Gone were the Camping, Cooking, and Nature merit badges. Swimming and Lifesaving were still on the list, but Scouts could take Personal Fitness or Sports instead of Swimming and Emergency Preparedness instead of Lifesaving. To the chagrin of many longtime Scout leaders, a boy could, in theory, become an Eagle Scout without ever going camping, hiking, or swimming.

The 1972 requirements also increased the number of merit badges required for Eagle to 24—the only increase since 1911. However, just 10 badges were required, letting Scouts choose 14 elective badges from a list that now included Space Exploration, Computers, and Environmental Science.



Back to the Basics

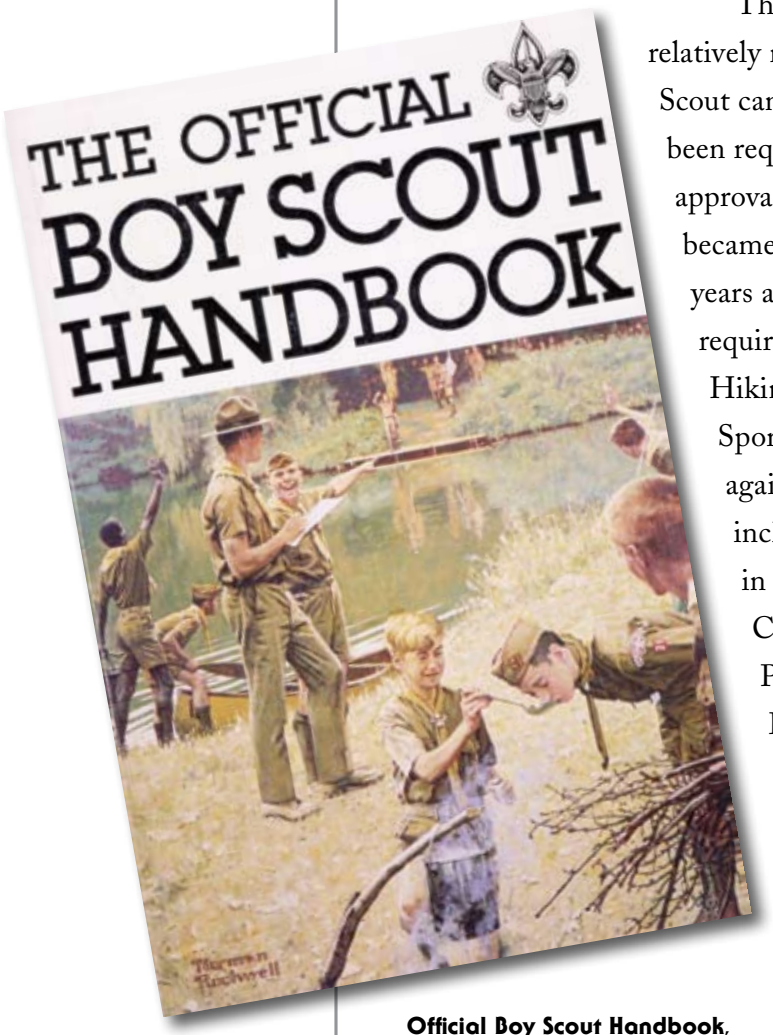
The Improved Scouting Program turned out to be a short-lived experiment. The 1979 *Official Boy Scout Handbook*—written by Baden-Powell protégé Bill Hillcourt—retained the skill awards program but specified that Scouts had to earn the awards for Citizenship, Hiking, First Aid, Camping, and Cooking. The number of Eagle-required merit badges returned to 21, and the list reemphasized core skills (although recent innovations weren't completely abandoned). Scouts now had to earn First Aid, Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Citizenship in the World, Communications, Safety, Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving, Environmental Science, Personal Management, Personal Fitness or Swimming or Sports, and Camping.



Alexander Holsinger, the one-millionth Eagle Scout

It was during this time that the BSA reached a major milestone. In 1982, Alexander Holsinger of Normal, Illinois, became the one-millionth Eagle Scout. Holsinger was one of 25,573 Scouts who became Eagles that year.

By the time the next handbook appeared, in 1990, skill awards had gone the way of berets, and the Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class requirements looked much as they had a generation before. To become a First Class Scout, a boy again had to master basic skills in camping, cooking, first aid, swimming, and nature study.



Official Boy Scout Handbook, circa 1990

The only changes since 1990 have been relatively minor. A workbook to document the Eagle Scout candidate's leadership service project has been required since 1991, and district or council approval is now part of the process. Family Life became a required merit badge in 1994, just three years after its introduction. In 1999, the list of required badges changed slightly again when Hiking and Cycling were added, Safety and Sports were dropped, and Personal Fitness again became mandatory. As of 2008, the list included these badges: First Aid, Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Citizenship in the World, Communications, Personal Fitness, Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving, Environmental Science, Personal Management, Swimming or Hiking or Cycling, Camping, and Family Life.



Moving Into the Future

More Scouts than ever—more than 50,000—now earn the Eagle Scout Award each year. Sometime in 2009, the two-millionth Eagle Scout will be named, and somewhere in the United States—in a church basement or school auditorium or union hall—that young man will stand and repeat words that echo across time and space:



I reaffirm my allegiance
To the three promises of the Scout Oath.
I thoughtfully recognize
And take upon myself
The obligations and responsibilities
Of an Eagle Scout.
On my honor I will do my best
To make my training and example,
My rank and my influence
Count strongly for better Scouting
And for better citizenship
In my troop,
In my community,
And in my contacts with other people.
To this I pledge my sacred honor.

Just like Arthur Eldred and Alexander Holsinger, just like Gerald R. Ford and Neil Armstrong—that young man will know that he *is* an Eagle Scout.


NATIONAL EAGLE SCOUT ASSOCIATION