

Scouting Through the Eyes of a Collector

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Scouting in the United States began in 1910 when William Boyce brought over the idea from England. Together with Ernest Thompson Seton and Dan Beard, Scouting grew from a small experiment to a national organization. In 1916 the United States Congress granted a Federal Charter to the Boy Scouts of America. Today, over eighty-five years later, Scouting is the largest youth movement in the nation. (More 1995)

Since the beginning patches have been a part of the Scouting program. The first patches produced in the United States were badges of rank that were taken from Baden Powell's English program. The Committee on Badges, Ranks, and Equipment soon expanded the badges to include fifty-seven "badges of merit". (Bearce and Myers 1989)

The purpose of this paper is to look at the relationship between Scouting and patches. Obviously, patches have been a part of the program since the beginning. However, because of their unique history and attachment to people and events, collecting Boy Scout patches and other Scout memorabilia has grown to be a huge hobby. The popular hobby supports weekend trade shows all over the country, a host of sale and auction lists, as well as new literature

and research annually. The popularity of Scout patch collecting has been a mixed blessing.

Whenever something in our society becomes commercialized it loses something of its innocence and what makes it special. How many times have you heard people lament that Christmas and other religious holidays have been corrupted by commercialization. How parents must force their children to see through Santa and the Easter Bunny to understand the true meaning of a holiday. We see this same thing happening today with opening up vast tracts of western desert to tourism. Does popularity and putting a dollar value on something corrupt it?

Boy Scout patches are being affected with the same disease. On one hand, true Scouters feel that the popularity of collecting patches and therefore associating a value to a patch that was earned as being a sin. In that same boat are the patch collectors who have seen their hobby afflicted by counterfeit patches, fund raiser patches, and special limited patches that are all taking advantage of a hobby whose roots are very humble.

This paper will attempt to trace some of the roots of the relationship between Scouting and patch collecting. Attention will be paid to detailing the breadth of the hobby and how it walks hand in hand with Scouting. There will be

some discussion on the pros and cons of the hobby. The paper will conclude by summarizing the relationship between scouting and collecting.

Patches have gone through an evolution in technology and quality as manufacturing process have changed. The earliest patches were often of felt background with a silk-screened or flocked design. These badges appeared generally between 1910 and 1940. The early national issued patches were square twill with embroidery. During the years from 1935 to 1950 many of the felt base patches were being embroidered. The chenille patch, which resembles a high school letter in material, appeared from 1940-1950.

The real step in evolution for the modern Scout patch came with the post war introduction of Swiss embroidery. Although the technology is of nineteenth century vintage, it produced a much more desirable product. Swiss embroidered patches had superior durability, laundering qualities, and beauty. A later improvement on this technology was fully embroidered patches. Debuting in the 1960s these patches covered the entire base material in embroidery and allowed for even more durable patches with increased design potential. Swiss embroidered patches were introduced after World War II and are very common today.

Another interesting type of patch is a woven patch. Introduced in the 1960s these patches used a unique manufacturing technology which allowed for very intricate designs. The draw-back of woven patches is that they do not stand up to wearing and washing. Therefore, their use has been only as a novelty since their early introduction.

It is only in the last 10 to 15 years that patch making technology has changed again. Many patches today are made through the use of computers. These computers control the stitching machines and allow for very intricate detail. Another benefit of these "computer patches" is that they can be ordered in any quantity. A draw-back to for this style is that the patches are generally much thinner than the classic swill embroidered ones.

Boy Scout patches are a part of the scout uniform. In the most basic sense this is the reason why the movement has patches: to recognize where a scout is from and what he has accomplished. Every Boy Scout patch has some designated place on the Scout uniform. Council patches, troop numbers, position patches, and patrol medallions all have a place on the shoulder of the uniform. The right side of the front shirt holds Jamboree patches, interpreter strips, Order of the Arrow flaps(OA), and temporary insignia. The left side

of the front shirt is where the universal emblem, adult knots, scout rank badge, and Arrow of Light belong.

There are many badges made that are not meant to be worn on a uniform. Many Scout councils or Order of the Arrow lodges produce backpatches that are designed to go on the back of a jacket. The Philmont Bull is a variation on a backpatch because it is designed to be worn on the upper left hand corner of the red wool jacket. Some trail patches are designed to be sewn onto hiking packs. Snorkeling BSA and Mile Swim BSA patches may be worn on bathing suits.

An interesting twist on this subject is the story of the Order of the Arrow flap shaped patch that is currently worn on the right pocket flap. The earliest emblems for Order of the Arrow lodges were actually worn on their Indian regalia. In these early days that Order of the Arrow was an experiment and was not an official part of the Boy Scouts of America. Therefore, as OA lodges created patches for themselves there was no official place on the uniform designated for them. OA badges were worn on breech cloths, costume regalia, right pocket, merit badge sash, above the right pocket, on jackets, on armbands, sewn onto neckerchiefs and even sewn on to the O.A. felt sash. There seemed to be no consensus on where to place the emblems.

The first Order of the Arrow handbook came out in 1948. In the handbook the national organization authorized the wear production and wear of lodge emblems. They did not however designate a place for the emblems to be worn. On page 21 was a picture of some sample lodge emblems. At the bottom of the picture was a curious looking patch from Ajapeu Lodge 33 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The patch was unmistakably in the shape of a pocket flap. There was no other Boy Scout patch worn on the pocket flap. The idea caught on slowly with other lodges. However, it was not well received by the national office.

National had decided the only official place for an OA badge was the right shirt pocket which is the location of all temporary insignia. There policy was partly in response to the Ajapeu badge. The 1950 printing of the O.A. Handbook shows another picture of sample OA emblems. This time however the Lodge 33 pocket flap badge was replaced with a round badge from another lodge. The policy decision by the National Insignia Committee had come to late. Many lodges were already going with flap shaped badges. When the 1953 National Scout Jamboree convened in California the flap shaped badges were popular with many lodges. Instead of rocking the boat the committee relented and in 1954 the

right pocket flap became the official place for OA insignia. (Topkis and Morley, 1992)

Scouting insignia is the basis of patch collecting in one sense because these are the true scout patches. These are patches that earned by scouts or worn by them on their uniform. The patches become collectable because of design changes that are easily researched by old scout catalogs. With this resource collecting scouting insignia has been a growing area in the hobby.

Perhaps the earliest form of a BSA patch is the rank patch. The rank system has changed very little since 1910. Prior to 1927 the rank of Life came before Star. Otherwise, the same order of badges has survived the years. There has been a great variety of patches issued for the ranks. The most sought after of the rank patches is the Eagle rank. The Eagle rank represents the highest achievement in scouting and the emblem to signify this rank is both treasured as it is scarce.

The early rank badges were embroidered square twill patches. When fully Swiss embroidered patches became popular in the 1960s the rank badges saw their design change to keep up with the times. The color of the badges has changed to match the uniform. The modern rank patch is a

good example of this. The background of all rank patches save Eagle is khaki to match the modern scout uniform.

The merit badge program has been a part of Scouting since the beginning. The program has changed considerable over the years as new merit badges have been added and old ones dropped out. The actual badges themselves tell an interesting history of this part of the advancement program.

The early merit badges may be considered the basic ones that are associated with scout skills. However, in the 1920s scouting was reaching out to rural areas. Many of the new merit badges during that period of time catered to this group. Merit badges such as Corn Farming, Cotton Farming, Farm Layout, Hog Production, and were aimed towards the rural Scouts where Scouting was making footholds. Today, many of the agricultural badges have been discontinued. As times changed merit badges such as Computers, Atomic Energy, and White Water Rafting were created.

The design of merit badges has also changed to keep pace with the times. The design for Aviation merit badge has a picture of a jet airplane. Before that, the design featured a propeller plane and even before that simply a propeller. Journalism merit badge began with a feather pen in a bottle of ink. It then evolved to the letter "J" on a typewriter key. Today it has a radio microphone and a

television camera on it. Computers merit badge began with a design that showed a representation of a binary computer. The new design features a personal computer. (Jensen 1993)

Patrol medallions are also another basic part of the Scout uniform that has undergone change. The first patrol identification was colored ribbons attached at the top. Pinned to the shoulder of the uniform the color combinations designated the patrol of a scout. The first patches were red felt with a silk screened emblem. Following the change in patch technology this later developed into a red twill patch with black embroidery. The modern patrol patch is khaki twill with embroidery.

Council patches are an important part of the Scout uniform. They indicate where a Scout is from. In the early days red twill shoulder strips designated the community a Scout was from. These strips were accompanied by a smaller strip with the two letter state abbreviation. In many councils either jamboree troops or the council professional staff wore the first true council strips. This makes sense because these people were representing the council and not a local community. These early strips called "red and whites" developed out of the community strips with the red twill and white embroidered writing.

Modern council strips are designed to hug the upper seam of the left sleeve. Many council strips are unique because their design incorporates local symbols into the design. For example, take the Pee Dee Area Council shoulder strip from Florence, SC. This strip features brown sand hills with a river flowing from it (the Pee Dee River), a fox and a gamecock representing two revolutionary war generals, Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter. It also has a swamp in the foreground representing the swamps of the river valley. Symbolism such as this is found in many council shoulder strips.

Order of the Arrow patches are the most popular and treasured of Scout patches. This distinction comes from a couple of factors. One reason is that the patches are usually of the highest quality in design and production. Another reason is that members of the Order of the Arrow are already the older Scouts who are more committed to the program. They are the ones who are most likely to become collectors anyway so it makes sense that they would collect their own badges.

There are a multitude of patches available for Order of the Arrow brothers. The lodge flap is the most obvious piece of memorabilia for an OA brother. Lodges also produce patches for their weekend fellowships, different levels of

membership, special service projects, and for wear on jackets.

In addition to local lodge issues there are sectional and national events which issue patches. The conclave is a gathering of O.A. lodges from geographic area sometimes bigger than a state. Every two years the National Order of the Arrow Conference is held at a university. All of these events are well attended and the patches are very collectable.

Patches issued for Scout camps and other council activities are locally treasured items. In the early days camp patches may have been awards that were only given to Scouts who achieved some standard or accomplishment in camp. Over time camps have issued patches for things such as camp staff, first-year campers, Scoutmaster merit badges, honor troops, special camp activities, and Cub Scouts.

Councils issue patches for just about anything. The most common is the camporee patch. Whether they are organized by districts or council wide, camporees seem to always have a patch. Most Scout shows or Scout expos have a patch. Often scout round-ups will offer a special patch as an incentive for a boy who becomes a recruiter.

Many councils today are exploiting the hobby by issuing patches with for fund-raisers. They create a special patch

which has no function other than to raise money. Usually it is a regular patch with a different border. These patches have artificial value based on their quantity produced or sale price. They are a black eye for the hobby because they are a result of the popularity of Scout patch collecting. If no one was willing to buy a \$100 council donation flap then the council would never produce one. They know that certain people will buy the patch to keep their collection current even though the patch is no attachment to an actual event that occurred or an achievement earned.

National BSA has come out with a special square knot called the James E. West Award for those people who donate \$1000 to Scouting. If the national organization is infected with this habit then that demonstrates how money can corrupt a good thing.

One of the enduring qualities about Scout patches is that they are a concrete piece of history. Often times in Scouting records are lost or destroyed. If it was not for the patch that is left behind many of the obscure pieces of Scouting history would be lost. There are several examples of OA lodges or pre-Order of the Arrow organizations that would be forgotten if not for the badges that were discovered by a collector, a Scout getting his grandfather's patches, or by antique dealers.

Scout patch collectors are often time the only people who work at saving and passing on the history of Scouting. There are many Scout museums sprinkled around the country. Usually a collection served as the foundation for the museum with people donating to fill in the holes. Since patches are a visual representation of the history they really make Scout museums attractive and popular than if the museum just had old pictures or paperwork.

Many collectors have been active in researching Scout history. Usually what happens is that a collector focuses in on one type of patch whether it be National Jamboree patches or the local Scout camp. If that person works really hard to find out everything there is to know on the subject, if they do a lot of genuine research, then many times they will publish their findings in a book. There are books on almost any aspect of Scouting history that has been researched and written by patch collectors. Here are some examples.

- *The Merit Badge Price Guide*, 1994 by Chris Jensen.
- *National Jamboree Memorabilia Guide Book*, 1995 by Chris Jensen and Jim Ellis.
- *First Flaps*, 1992 by William Topkis and Jeffrey Morley.
- *The Blue Book*, 1996 by the American Scouting Historical Society.

- *Conclave Handbook Volume 1 and 2*, by Frank Dingwerth and Chris Jensen.
- *A History of the Order of the Arrow Through Insignia*, 1996 by Albertus Hoogeveen.
- *Council Shoulder Patch Collection and Price Guide*, 1995 by George Sovers and Robert Sovers.
- *Collecting Scouting Literature*, 1990 by Chuck Fisk and Doug Bearce.
- *OA Patch Guide*, 1994 by Roy More.
- *Patch Collector's Handbook*, 1989 by Paul Myers and Doug Bearce.

Patch trading is an opportunity for friendship and fellowship in Scouting. Often times camps, OA functions, and national events will set aside time for trading. At the National Jamboree or the National Order of the Arrow Conference (NOAC) there is almost always a camp wide trading item. In recent years it has been a set of cards. If there are 12 cards in the set then each scout receives 12 of one card. He has to go out and trade for the other 11 cards that he needs. Exchanging of address and telephone numbers is encouraged during this time to build Scout spirit. Isn't this what patch traders do all the time?

At the National Jamboree Scouts line the streets of the jamboree site with their blankets and their patches. For

many this is an opportunity to trade for neat badges and actually talk to someone from different parts of the country and even different parts of the world. On a smaller scale local council events have a similar scene. Often times more talking and fellowship goes on than actual trading.

On any given weekend except for holidays you could fly somewhere in the United States and attend a trade-o-ree. These are Friday-Saturday Boy Scout trading shows. Some of them are organized by troops or posts as fund-raisers and held in church gyms. Some are large events that attract hundreds of people from all over the nation and are held in convention centers.

The atmosphere in a trade-o-ree is buzzing. Since dealers come and set up tables, not unlike any other collector show, many items are up for sale. There are two qualities of these shows that stand out. One is that there are a lot of old fashioned trades taking place. Whether it be between visitors and dealers or within each group, trading is still very common at these events. The other is that the spirit of fellowship that makes Scouting special is alive. People are renewing old friendships, sharing camp stories, and reminiscing about that time it was snowing during the campout or when a typhoon hit the site of the

World Jamboree. Trading and collecting Scout badges builds the spirit of Scouting in many ways.

One of the things which is seen as negative about patch collecting is that it has become more and more a money making venture. At trade-o-rees and through the mail lists there are multitudes of things to buy. Sometimes these patches can be bought at a good price and sometimes for top dollar. This is not the awful sin many Scouters think it is.

Take for example a trade-o-ree. Sometimes at trade-o-rees people will sell off their collection of Scout patches. Money is the goal of the deal but usually they are just trying to get back the money they put into the collection. This allows people to get real bargains. Many collectors end up selling their collections to pay for engagement rings, their children's college tuition, or to pay off a debt of some kind. The seller gets what he needs and the buyer usually gets a bargain and hopefully even a treasured addition to his collection.

Another way to look at this is that a trade can often times be worked out with a little cash and some dealing. Say you wanted to get an item you really wanted for your collection. You are willing to trade a twenty dollar patch for it but the person you are dealing with doesn't need any

of the patches you have to trade. One thing you could do is find something at the trade-o-ree or through the sales list that you could buy that the person does need and then trade them that. Often times people will give the benefit of the doubt and say, you owe me on the next trade. (1989 Myers and Bearce)

How much a patch is worth is used as a meter to help in trades. Money is the common denominator. So if both parties agree that an item is worth a given price then they can then agree on which combination of patches would be a fair trade for an item. No money has exchanged hands but putting a dollar value on the patch helps everyone to feel like they have gotten a fair deal.

It has been the aim of this paper to show how patch collecting is a natural part of Scouting. The two are joined at the hip and the relationship is a beneficial one. Scout patch collecting preserves the history of Scouting, retains the interest of older boys in the program, and provides a wonderful opportunity for friendship and fellowship. Through patch auctions troops, councils, and Order of the Arrow lodges have raised a lot of money to pay for worthy service projects.

Some people may wonder, why patch collecting? What would possess someone to get so interested in these items.

I think the answer is simple. Kids don't live baseball cards. They read but don't live comics. They don't grow from video games. Scouting is something that people live. They experience it when they go in the outdoors. They share stories about it to other people and they are proud of their accomplishments. If people develop this strong bond with scouting then collecting scout patches is something that is a natural extension of that commitment and attachment.

If you remember your years on camp staff as the best time of your life then it only seems natural that the patch for that summer will mean something to you. The same scout patch is not issued by five different companies as they are in card collecting. Scout patches are not issued bi-weekly in the summer as comics are. Scout patches are places and events that happen or ranks that are earned or badges that identify what a scout belongs to. They have a connection to the person that few other hobbies can match.

Perhaps the negative myths about patch collecting have been dispelled. Certainly money is going to be a part of the hobby. It is a part of any collecting hobby, but so too is a desire to learn more about scouting history and pass that down to the next generation.

Works Cited

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