

## Chapter 23 - AMONG THE BOY SCOUTS

A Persuasive Caller...The Great Executive Board...Uncle Dan Beard...A Rule Broken...The Organization...Lesson to A Scouter...Other Outside Jobs...Surprise at the U.S. Treasury

If all my energies had been devoted strictly to magazine details, I might have been a better and more successful editor. Diverging temptations were usually embraced if they seemed likely to make the magazine better known to the farm or advertising public. Each such diversion offered a chance to learn something new, and usually the experiences were more fun than arguing about what we ought to print on page 36. The staff could be trusted to decide that.

Working with the Boy Scouts of America turned out to be the most deeply satisfying of all digressions. A tall, lean, bespectacled man came to the *Country Home* office one day in 1937 and announced that I was wanted for chairmanship of the National Committee on Rural Scouting. His name was Oscar H. Benson. As a county school superintendent in Wright County, Iowa, he had started one of the first rural youth clubs, and had designed the 4-H cloverleaf (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) which became the movement's national emblem. At this time he was director of rural scouting for the Boy Scouts of America. Benson was persuasive and didn't give up easily. He wasn't impressed that I already had a fulltime job and a sideshow or so. He also discounted the fact that that I knew nothing whatever about scouting except that the boys met in troops and on occasion wore uniforms. He displayed figures showing that a vast majority of rural boys belonged to no youth organization and needed one. His clincher emphasized the Lone Scout. A country boy, too far from others to join a troop, could gain all the inspiration and training scouting offered, with the help of a man of his choice.

"The boy," Benson said, "is told to choose the best man he knows as his friend and counselor, his father, or maybe a neighbor. No man ever refuses that boy's nomination."

I agreed to take the job, and the next year was elected to the B.S.A. National Executive Board. This unusual body and its operations are not as well known to the public as it deserves. Among the members in 1938 were Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Marshall Field III, Frank Hoover of the vacuum cleaner firm, Paul Litchfield, builder of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, R. Douglas Stuart of Quaker Oats and later ambassador to Canada. It also included Amory Houghton of Corning Glass and later ambassador to France, Thomas J. Watson, Sr., founder of International Business Machines, Earl Sams, President of J.C. Penney Co., and Daniel Beard, a founder of the scout movement. The total board membership then was fifty-two. Meetings occurred four times a year; and attendance was regularly thirty to forty, All members came when possible. No habitual absentee was reelected.

Being responsible for all the basic policies and general operations of the Boy Scout organization, board members worked as seriously and conscientiously as at their own affairs. Each took part in one or more committees. Committee work usually began on Wednesday morning. Meetings were scheduled through that day and evening, Thursday breakfast, forenoon and lunch, until time for the full board meeting Thursday afternoon. Many committees were necessary because scout activities were wide ranging. Among them were Finance, Scouting Supplies, Boys' Life, Public Relations, Field Operations, Personnel, Health and Safety, Camping, Insignia and Uniform, Merit Badge Requirements and others. Most of the committees included important scouters who were not board members but were especially qualified for their subjects.

At the close of the board meeting those who could stay dined as a group, and occasionally did a little more work. One evening on the way in to dinner I was walking with Dan Beard, who had been sounding me out to know whether I had really ever been a country boy. Uncle Dan," I asked, "have you read this new book by John Bakeless about Daniel Boone?" "Yes," he said. "I read it." He offered no further comment. "You don't sound very enthusiastic about it," I pursued. He explained with emphasis. "Bakeless couldn't write a good book about Boone. Bakeless is a round-faced man and Boone was a long-faced man. A round-faced man can't write a good book about a long-faced man, because he won't understand his subject." Since Uncle Dan was professionally an artist and had for most of his ninety years been a keen observer of people, I had to be impressed, though not necessarily convinced.

I was truly impressed, though, and continued to be through twenty-five years as an active participant, at the assiduity and attention with which the board members studied their committee jobs, and the time they devoted. They worked as faithfully as though the fates of their own multi-million dollar companies were involved. The staff professionals, of course, were able to lay out the groundwork and at times offered recommendations or alternatives. No member of the board received any fee for attending, nor expenses, and all were usually billed for their group meals.

Among those who joined the board in later years were former Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts, Ezra T. Benson, Secretary of Agriculture, Dwight D. Eisenhower while president of Columbia University, Eddie Rickenbacker, Ivan Allen, later mayor of Atlanta, Norton Clapp, president of Weyerhaeuser Timber, Col., Leonard and Roger Firestone. President of the National Council when I came in was Walter W. Head of the General American Insurance Company. Others who succeeded to that office were Amory Houghton of Corning Glass, Kenneth Bechtel of the California contracting company, Ellsworth Augustus, Cleveland industrialist, John M. Schiff, Thomas J. Watson, Jr., and Irving Feist.

To strengthen committees, active scouters, frequently specialists who were not board members, were chosen from various fields. While serving as chairman of the editorial committee I had the help of Doubleday's executive book editor, Ken McCormick, and of Andrew Heiskell from *Time-Life* as examples. The "power structure" of agriculture was represented on the Rural Scouting Committee by men from the Farm Bureau, Grange, the cooperatives, farm press, Future Farmers and 4-H leadership, and from the rural church organizations.

The Rural Affairs committee produced, among others, one innovation in scouting that has been notably useful. Waite Phillips, an Oklahoma oilman, presented to the Boy Scouts of America the Philmont Ranch, 130,000 acres of wonderful wild land in northern New Mexico. To help maintain the ranch he also gave an office building in Tulsa. His dream was that through the scout organization a boy could come to the ranch, camp in the mountains, ride horses, experience a little of the Old West that had helped to make America. Attendance at Philmont year after year crowded the facilities and supervisory capacity, as troops from every state made a Philemon trip one of their goals.

It seemed to me that the scoutmaster, the local man who builds, leads, instructs, watches over and inspires the home troop, had to be the most important man in scouting. It also seemed that he might often be the least appreciated. He was likely to be the sort of man who would be thrilled by a week or so at Philemon, yet probably would never get the chance to go. I proposed the idea of Philemon "scholarships" as awards to faithful rural scoutmasters. While we were discussing this one-day the Committee suddenly got out of hand. Simply because no one likes to be abruptly confronted in the presence of others by a request for money, a tacit but stern precedent of long standing had been that, although money might be the prime solution to a problem, Scouting committee members were never solicited for contributions while in session.

Our talk was interrupted when some one said, "Why don't we get this idea going? I'll give enough to support one scoutmaster at Philmont." Before the chairman could explain the precedent, enough offers were made to provide a Philmont scholarship for one rural scoutmaster from each of the twelve regions. The reactions of the chosen scoutmasters could have been predicted. The idea spread until through donations from Sears Roebuck and Lutheran foundations and individual sources, four to five hundred scoutmasters and their families each year have a week at the ranch.

For administrative purposes B.S.A. was divided into twelve regions under which 508 Councils operated. Each region had its board, an executive and staff, and each council its board and one or more professional workers. Currently nearly 4 million boys are members, served by 4,300 professional workers. Net assets of B.S.A. total \$46 million.

Each scouting unit, whether cub pack, troop or explorer post, must be sponsored by a qualified local institution. About half of these are churches, with civic groups and schools or P.T.A.s next in number. More than thirty church organizations participate, from Protestant and Roman Catholic to Buddhist. As chairman for several years of the Relationships Committee, which dealt with all sponsoring groups, I enjoyed meeting their leaders, especially the clerics. With friends in so many denominations, and having been an impartial chairman, if I ever approach the pearly gates I hope that one of them will be qualified to sponsor me for entrance.

Thomas J. Watson, Sr., invited a few board members to join him one day at a lunch in honor of a visiting Boy Scout troop from Venezuela. Nothing had been said about speeches. The idea occurred to me, however, that if anyone spoke he should address the boys in their own language, and sat wondering whether, if called upon, I could frame a few sentences from scanty memories of school day Spanish. Meantime, Jim West, the chief scout executive, called up Frank Wozencraft, a former mayor of Dallas and then prominent Washington attorney. Wozencraft pulled from his pocket a bit of manuscript and in impeccable Spanish read what he wished to say. West then called upon me; I spoke in English.

After lunch I assailed West for notifying Wozencraft in advance, while giving me no notice at all. "I could have had a Spanish speech ready, too!" West insisted that he had not given Wozencraft advance notice. I asserted that he surely had, for hadn't Frank produced a prepared manuscript? Wozencraft, standing near, overheard my protest, and confirmed that West had given him no warning. "But, Frank! That manuscript!" Wozencraft looked at me soberly, eyes a-twinkle, and replied, "Wheeler, the motto of the Boy Scouts of America is 'Be Prepared.'"

Through all the magazine years I was, technically, a mere hired man, a salary-slave of corporations, though the opposite could be asserted. The corporations were my servants. They provided means and background that opened ways to do things I wanted to do, things that otherwise I would have had no opportunities even to approach. For the time and travel expense often incurred in affairs not strictly editorial, payments came as freely as for toil at the desk. I like to believe that most or all of the "outside" activities reflected advantageously on the magazines.

The interests which might have been thought extra-mural include the 25 years I served as president or chairman of the Farm Chemurgic Council; a few years each as trustee of Rutgers University and of Ohio Northern University; six as director of the National Audubon Society; periods as director of the Farm Foundation, the Agricultural Hall of Fame. One might also mention the two years as president of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture (founded 1785 and still active); fifteen years as a director of the New Jersey Telephone Company and seventeen as a director of the Bankers National Life Insurance Company.

An especially interesting assignment occupied several 1957-58 months. The President's Commission on Increased Industrial Use of Agricultural Products called me in to be its executive director. With information contributed by a hundred knowledgeable members of task forces, and the help of several competent aids, the commission made a report that was printed as a senate document of 135 pages. How much effect it had would be hard to measure, but it had to be useful. Perhaps the most notable fact, though, was that with an appropriation of \$150,000 for the commission's work, \$25,000 of that amount was returned unspent, to the astonishment of the U.S. Treasury.