

A Century of Scouting

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Clockwise from top: Boy Scouts help line the route during a royal visit in the early 1900s; lending a hand on Apple Day; Scouts participate in an Ottawa parade.

A hundred years ago, the Boy Scouts came to Canada. And since its arrival on our shores, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have done their best to “be prepared”, by embracing the movement’s values of honour, integrity and good citizenship.

In that time, The Royal Canadian Legion has forged strong ties with the Scouts. In fact, 300 Legion branches across Canada sponsor Scout and Girl Guide troops, according to a recent Dominion Command survey. Among the troops sponsored is 1st Merrickville Scout Troop located southwest of Ottawa, and founded in 1908. “We believe in taking care of our youth,” explains Valerie Brown of the Legion’s Merrickville Branch. “They’re our future, and besides, they’re always more than happy to help out. All we have to do is ask, and the Scouts are there for us.”

In the same vein, the Canadian Scouting movement, like the various cadet organizations, has given back to veterans over the years. Its best-known contributions involve providing assistance at Remembrance Day ceremonies and during the Legion’s annual poppy campaign. However, when you dig into the history books, you’ll find story after story of Scouts doing their bit for Canada as a whole, and for our troops during wartime.

Lord Baden-Powell: The Man behind the Boy Scouts

The Chief Scout, inspiration, and driving force behind Scouting was Lord Robert Baden-Powell, whose name has grown to be one of the most recognized names in the world. A British officer who distinguished himself during the Boer War, and who retired with the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1910, Baden-Powell was an adept military scout and an ingenious improviser and cool-headed commander.

Ironically, the man who became the youngest major-general in British history and the creator of the Scouts didn't initially intend to launch such a movement. However, so popular was his 1899 military instruction book, titled *Aids to Scouting for N.C.O.s & Men*, that civilians started using it to teach their boys outdoors skills.

Browsing through the Canadian War Museum's copy of this small, red cloth-bound book, one can see why *Aids to Scouting* caught the public's imagination. Simply put, *Aids to Scouting* is full of smart and savvy outdoorsman information, as valid today as it was in 1899.

An example: "When riding to head-quarters' camp with dispatches in the night, I had guided myself by the stars, and had ridden, as I calculated, a distance such as should have brought me to the camp, but I could see nothing of it," writes Baden-Powell. "Rather than overshoot it, I had proposed to myself to dismount and sit tight till dawn, when a distant spark caught my eye for a moment. I remounted, and made my way to where I had seen it, and there found a sentry and the camp I was in search of." That spark had been caused by the sentry lighting his pipe; a tiny detail that the future Chief Scout's eyes nevertheless caught.

"This one little spark thus saved three or four hours in the delivery of my dispatches," he wrote, "and also, by the way, saved me from a drenching, for I was no sooner under cover in camp than a heavy rainstorm swept over the country."

Baden-Powell rewrote this book for children under the title *Scouting for Boys*. It was published in 1908 in six parts. However, early troops based upon the principle in *Aids to Scouting* were founded in England as early as 1906. Baden-Powell himself took 22 boys from different social classes and camped on Brownsea Island in 1907; an event the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper described as "the most successful camping trip of all time."

Inspired by *Scouting for Boys*, Scout troops started to form themselves around England; with Lord Baden-Powell eventually taking charge of the movement he had inadvertently created. The Girl Guides were founded in 1910, under the auspices of Agnes Baden-Powell, his sister.

Scouting Comes to Canada

It didn't take long for Scouting fever to cross the pond, with 1907 having been recognized by Scouts Canada as the earliest it happened.

So which troop was first? On this point, there's some debate. What the records do show is that three Scout troops were established in Canada in 1908 in Merrickville, Port Morien, N.S., and St. Catharines, Ont. Today, all three troops believe they were the first not just in Canada, but in all of North America.

The 1st Merrickville troop was founded by Methodist pastor Rev. Ernest Thomas. Having learned about the Boy Scouts while vacationing in England, he organized the 1st Merrickville troop upon his return home. "There were about 30 boys in that first troop, according to Joe Hutton ... one of the three original members still residing in the area." So says the commemorative book titled *75 Years of Scouting in Canada*, which Scouts Canada published in 1982. "Activities then were much the same as now, with Mr. Thomas giving instruction in knot-tying, outdoor survival, fire-building, and the host of other endeavours for which the Boy Scouts have become famous."

The same book reports that the St. Catharines Boy Scout troop met in a henhouse on Harris Neelon's backyard in 1908, according to a 1955 letter written by former troop member Merrick O'Laughlin. "Harris got the gang together and it was Harris who wrote to Baden-Powell and got permission to form the Scouts," O'Laughlin wrote to his sister. "I distinctly remember him saying we were the first in Canada."

Meanwhile, "In 1908, just one year after Lord Baden-Powell began England's Scouting Movement, William Glover, a coal company official, organized a troop of 10 young boys at Port Morien," notes a 1995 book written by Kenneth MacDonald and titled *Port Morien, Pages from the Past*. "In 1983, the Glace Bay District Scouting Council constructed and dedicated a monument marking the troop's 75th anniversary of their founding."

Whoever was first, one thing is clear: Scouting spread like wildfire across Canada. When Lord Baden-Powell arrived at Toronto's Union Station on Monday Aug. 29, 1910, "Three hundred Boy Scouts lined the stairway leading to the waiting room," states the book *Celebrating 90 Years of Scouting in Ontario*. Baden-Powell's visit "was for the purpose of opening the National Exhibition at which there was to be a review of several thousand Boy Scouts, according to the advertisement (for the event)." Across the country there were approximately 5,000 boys in Scouting just two years after the first troops had been established. "By 1914 there were 14,477 Boy Scouts in Canada," says Susie Mackie, Scouts Canada's internal communications specialist. "The movement hit an all-time high of 319,938 members in 1965."

Scouting and War

Given Baden-Powell's background, the military roots of the Scouting movement, and the British Empire's fervent patriotism, it is no surprise that Scouts wanted to do their part when World War I broke out. This is why nearly 1,300 Scouts kept watch on Britain's coasts by September 1914, according to the historical website www.scouting.milestones.btinternet.co.uk/redfeather.htm. "Coast Watching Scouts were officially recognised (sic) by the Admiralty and performed outstanding service, not least in relieving the adult Coastguards (sic) for service in the Navy," it states.

Meanwhile, Baden-Powell pushed the British government to deploy Scout-based military units at the front. “As you know, I went to Lord Kitchener and he is averse to forming any special irregular Corps, but I have no doubt whatever that he would gladly accept a unit for his Army formed from our Organization,” Baden-Powell wrote to Colonel Ulick de Burgh on Sept. 3, 1914. “I suggest that it might be in two contingents—one formed of those desirous of going abroad and the other of those who could only undertake Home Defence. I am not well up in the details as to age and condition of Service demanded by the latest regulations for his Forces, but I will gladly issue an appeal to all in the Boy Scouts to join such contingents, making the conditions to agree with those issued by authority.”

Kitchener didn't go for this idea, nor would he heed Baden-Powell's pleas to be sent to France on active service. Refusing to give up, Baden-Powell organized some 3,300 United Kingdom Scouts into the Scouts Defence Corps. Also known as the Red Feathers, these Boy Scouts drilled in small arms fire, and were meant to repel German invaders. However, lack of official recognition from the War Office—probably due to competition with the military's own Army Cadets—deprived the Red Feathers of access to rifles and ammunition; thus scuttling the military aspect of this movement.

Undeterred, the Chief Scout urged Boy Scouts everywhere to do their duty to the Empire.

“Let us all take a new resolve—namely to do a little bit extra this year in helping towards winning the war,” he wrote in *A Message From The Chief Scout*, published in 1918. “Don't let any of us see the end of it without having a badge earned to show later that we did our bit in the late war.”

Such honours included the 100 Days War Service badge. These were given to Scouts “who have served on farms for three months without pay,” wrote Frederick L. Perrott, acting organizing secretary of the Boys Scouts Association Canadian General Council, as published in the magazine *Canadian Boy* in 1918.

That's not all: “Boys assisted by meeting trains carrying casualties from overseas, winding thousands of rolls of bandages, selling War Bonds, and many other inconspicuous acts of service,” notes *Celebrating 90 Years of Scouting in Ontario*. “A Boy Scout hut for recreational purposes was erected at the Canadian lines near Ypres in March 1916, and was moved with the Canadian troops to the Somme. The hut was purchased by 10-cent subscriptions from Canadian Scouts and proved a great attraction to the men overseas.”

When WW II broke out, Canada's Boy Scouts once again pitched in to help. Adorned with Boy Scouts National Service armbands, they cut lawns, hoed gardens, and did other odd jobs under the Good Turn Service for Soldiers' Families campaign. Canada's Boy Scouts also acted as members of Air Raid Precaution Committees: “In the event of air raids, Three Rivers Boy Scouts will be fully prepared, and eight first aid stations are being organized,” reported Quebec's *St. Maurice Valley Chronicle* newspaper.

Nationwide, Canadian Boy Scouts helped sell Victory Bonds. Nine year-old Cub Scout Teddy Pazder even took the \$50 he had saved for a bicycle, and bought a Victory Bond instead to help his country. Boy Scouts collected tons of paper, metal, and bottles, glass, hemp, twine, bones and other waste products in Canada; donating money from sales to the Red Cross and other service funds.

Scouts also personally delivered receipts for donations to the Red Cross, saving two cents per donation.

In addition, Canadian Boy Scouts collected “hundreds of thousands of cans of food, which were delivered to the Red Cross for distribution to refugees,” notes Celebrating 90 Years of Scouting in Ontario. “When a shortage of medicine bottles for military establishments was reported, they organized a collection campaign and filled the need. In addition, they collected coat hangers and magazines for military hospitals and camps.” Ontario Scouts also organized a “B-P Chins Up” fund for Scouts in blitzed areas of Britain; raising \$49,761.10 by the time the fund closed in 1946.

Not surprisingly, lots of War Service badges were awarded to Canadian Boy Scouts. For instance, Scout Ian McPhail of the 40th Hamilton troop qualified for his 700-hour badge in 1945; earned by collecting salvage, working on farms, at armed forces canteens, and assisting the Red Cross.

McPhail’s 700 hours of service made a real contribution to Canada’s war effort, as did the hundreds of thousands of hours volunteered by other Scouts. Meanwhile, Scouting leaders and older Scouts did their part on the front lines. “1,965 men and women who were actively engaged in Scouting joined the Services,” reports Celebrating 90 Years of Scouting in Ontario. “Of these 109 gave their lives.”

Scouts Today

It is fair to say that many Canadian Scouts of yesteryear are the veterans of today. Even those who were too young to fight helped on the Home Front, as history proves.

Today, Legion branches as well as other community organizations across Canada play a major role in keeping the Scouting movement—which has encompassed girls as well as boys since 1998—alive. In Merrickville, for example, Legionnaires are determined “that no child should ever miss out on Scouting for financial reasons,” says 1st Merrickville Scout Troop chairman Allan Yates. “As a result, the branch provides us with \$3,000 to \$5,000 annually to help defray the cost of equipment and activities, to ensure that every Scout can take part in everything we do.”

For its part, Scouts Canada works closely with the Legion and Veterans Affairs Canada to bring today’s Scouts and veterans together. During 2005’s Year of the Veteran, for instance, “we produced over 150,000 commemorative badges, which our Scouts presented to veterans as a way of saying thank you for all they have done for us and this country,” says Scouts Canada Executive Director Ross Francis. “More recently, we established six Pass the Torch Remembrance Trails at our Scout camps. These are interpretive trails featuring information about six periods of Canada’s military contributions, where our Scouts can meet and talk with veteran volunteers.

“For the future, we’d like to create an ongoing program...where our Scouts would learn about Canada’s contributions during war and peace, then act as ‘youth ambassadors’ by telling schoolchildren about it,” Francis adds. “This would help to create stronger bonds between young Canadians and our veterans who have done so much for them.”

When Lord Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts a century ago, his goal was to help youth bring out the best in themselves, and in doing so do their duty to their King and country. 100 years on, this dream is still alive in Scouts Canada, which is an association of Beavers, boys and girls ages five to seven; Cubs, boys and girls ages eight to 10; Scouts, boys and girls ages 11-14 (with an option to remain until age 16); Venturers, young men and women ages 14-17 and Rovers, men and women ages 18-26. It has also introduced something called SCOUTS about for boys and girls ages five to 10 and Extreme Adventure for young men and women ages 14-17. The Girl Guides is a sister organization run independently from Scouts.

It is also interesting to note that every Governor General of Canada since about 1914 has served as Chief Scout of Canada. Earlier this year, British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo spoke of the benefits Scouting brings to Canadian communities. She also pointed out the opportunities the movement presents for environmental stewardship. She drew her audience's attention to a recent book written by Richard Louv, titled *Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*.

She said the book "argues persuasively that rather than wringing our hands in despair over the enormity of meeting climate change and global warming, we embrace hope instead and find the means to re-engage our children to the natural world, from which most of them have been subtly and blatantly withdrawn...."

"The result is that children have retreated to a virtual world rather than engaging in the real world in which they live.... The whole world is being called to action today to work to save the planet from the effects of our excesses. Without a vision of the future, that future remains in jeopardy. Through Scouting, Guiding and its many evocations, there remains possibility of forging dynamic interaction between the human family and our natural surroundings."

Whether it is a morning of planting trees or time spent camping in the woods or in the snow, Scouting does give young people the opportunity to connect with nature, and when that is viewed against a backdrop of community service, the benefits of this 100-year-old organization remain obvious.