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When We Were Boy Scouts

By W. Joseph Wyatt



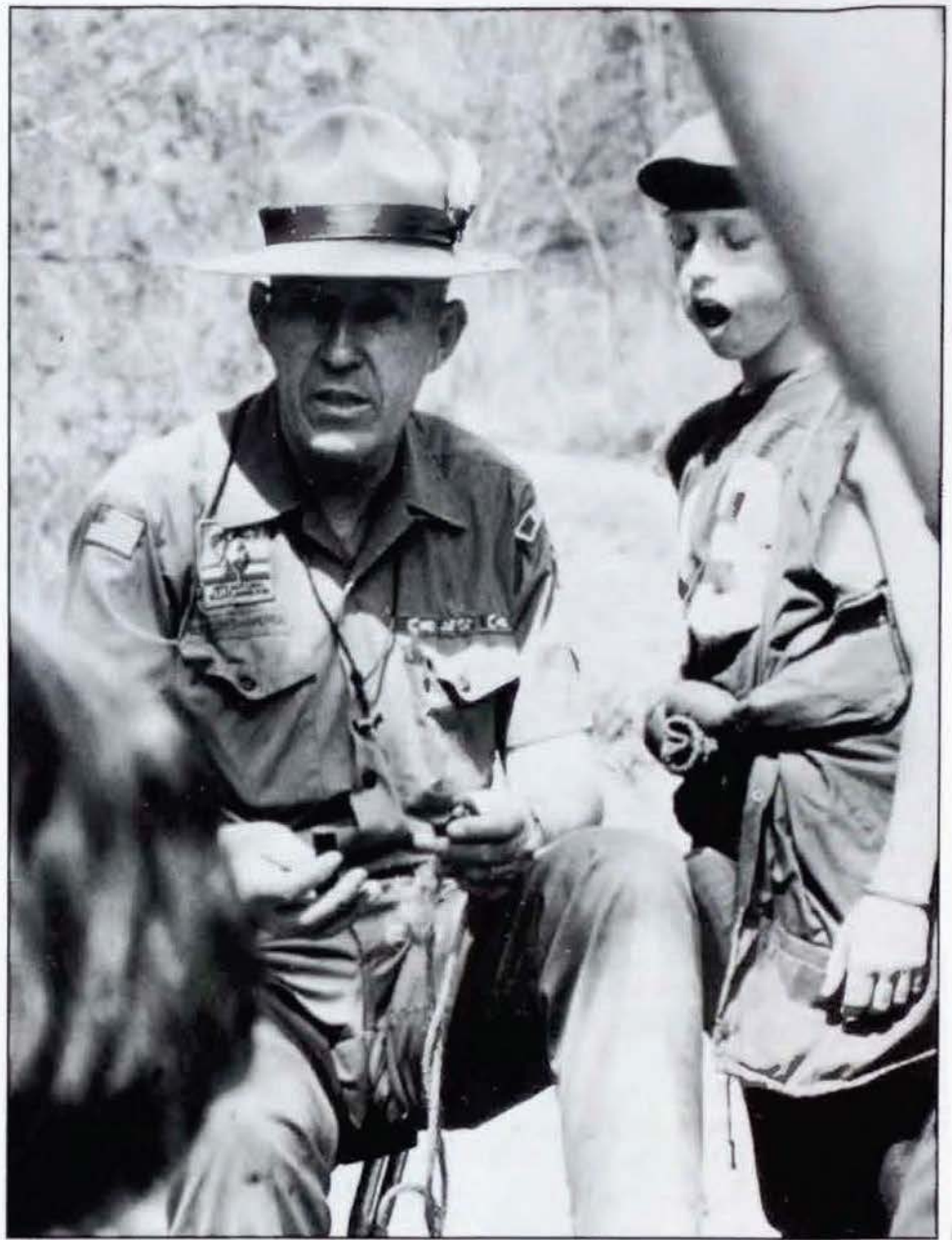
William H. "Bill" Wyatt of Charleston was dedicated to the Boy Scouts for more than 65 years. He is shown here, bugling, in about 1935.

Before I was old enough to be a Boy Scout, I yearned in vain to join my scoutmaster-dad as he departed on day hikes and weekend camping trips with the boys and other leaders of Troop 146 in St. Albans. When I moved out of the Cub Scouts at age 11, at last I was in Dad's troop. Today, I recall those times with my father as a special part of my life.

William H. "Bill" Wyatt was a scouter, boy and man, even until the day he died. I remember vividly the last time we helped him out of bed and into the front room, in mid-December 1999. At 81, and weak from a long battle with cancer that would claim him a month later, he sat proudly in his scoutmaster's uniform one last time, as we anticipated a visit from several officials of the local office of the Buckskin Council. The gentlemen arrived and made some small talk. Then they told my father that the local Boy Scout office would be re-dedicated in his name. It was a signature act of respect for my father, honoring his lifetime of devotion to local scouting.

Dad had been a Boy Scout in Troop 71 on Charleston's West Side in the 1930's. Later, upon returning from World War II, he began a 21-year stint as scoutmaster of Troop 146. Following that, he involved himself in troop and Buckskin Council committee work, volunteered at National Jamborees, and led a local scout museum project.

Dad always referred to "Mr. Guice" with reverence. Charles P. Guice is thought to have organized the first Boy Scout troop in West Virginia, when he was commissioned a scoutmaster on December 10, 1910, in Barrackville, Marion County. After moving to St. Albans, where



As an adult, Bill Wyatt served as a scoutmaster for 21 years and in other leadership roles in the Buckskin Council. Here, he teaches knot tying to some young scouts, date unknown.

he became the first superintendent of schools in 1913, Guice organized the first Boy Scout camp in Kanawha County, located on the banks of the Coal River.

An entry in Guice's diary reveals the perils of the early days. According to the diary, a scout named Nancarrow was bitten by a copperhead snake while at the camp. Guice was horrified to learn that the troop's first-aid kit had inadvertently been left behind. There was no physician closer than Madison and no good road on which to quickly seek help. Fortunately, Guice had carried his personal first-aid kit and was able to clean the

wound with hydrogen peroxide and apply a tourniquet. Nancarrow survived and later became a successful Ravenswood businessman. Charles P. Guice served scouting all his life and was the first person to be awarded the Silver Beaver Award, scouting's highest honor for a volunteer at the local level.

I often heard my father talk about another man, one whom he considered to have been his mentor in scouting. M.H.F. Kinsey was hired in 1919 as the first scout executive in the Buckskin Council. There had been a number of troops in the area, such as Guice's Troop 3 in St. Albans,



Charles P. Guice was an early leader in the local scouting movement and was thought to have organized the first Boy Scout troop in West Virginia in Marion County in 1910. He later organized the first Boy Scout camp in Kanawha County. He is shown here in 1917, at age 35.

but there was no formal council organization. That changed in 1919 with Kinsey's hiring.

Kinsey was an organizer. During the World War II years, he mobilized the Boy Scouts to conduct scrap metal drives, hold paper drives, and grow victory gardens. Another of his projects was the start-up of a "Trail Blazers" hiking club. He awarded patches when members had hiked distances of 100, 250, 500, 750, and 1,000 miles. Of all my father's accomplishments in scouting, his award from Kinsey as the first to receive the 1,000 Mile Award was one of which he was most proud. My father told me that the only hikes that counted toward the award were those led by the outdoorsy Kinsey himself. Truly, Kinsey was supremely devoted to Boy Scouts.

For Kinsey, and later for my father, scouting was all about turning boys

into responsible men. As a boy listening to my father talk about Kinsey, I guessed correctly that Kinsey had become like a second father to my dad.

M.H.F. Kinsey oversaw the development of several of the Buckskin Council's official summer camps. The first, Camp Pequoni (Pe-KONE-ee), was established in 1920 and was located 28 miles up the Elk River from Charleston, in Clay County, near the community of Porter. The scouts had obtained a lease on six acres of land from the B&O railroad. On arriving to begin construction of the camp, Kinsey discovered that crops had been planted by squatters who were living on the land. The scouts settled with the squatters for \$150, plowed the crops under, and built the camp. It opened on July 7, 1920.

Although no scouts were ever seriously injured at Camp Pequoni, Kinsey's memoir provides an indication of what could have happened in such a remote location. Around 10:00 one morning, a distraught woman ran into the camp, exclaiming that she was dying. She screamed that she had been bitten by a copperhead. Her arm was swelling and turning a dark color. The scouts applied first aid, but the woman clearly needed professional medical help. The camp was accessible only by rail, but

fortunately a crew of section hands was nearby. They agreed to allow the scouts to use their handcar, and two scouts pumped the car to Clendenin, where the woman was successfully treated.

Camp Pequoni served as a camping home to hundreds of scouts until 1926, when a camp closer to Charleston was sought.

I recall my father's tales of his camping days at the new location, Camp Walhonde (Wal-HAWN-dee), located on Alum Creek, about five miles south of Charleston, which served local scouts from 1926 until 1945. My father and his brothers, Noble and Stanley, camped there during numerous summers in the 1930's. As I write this, I glance at the shelf beside my desk, where rests the bugle on which my father played "Taps" at Camp Walhonde. Seeing it there, not quite as shiny as it was 70 years ago, reminds me of my father's anecdotes of the camp, such as how he and Noble played "Echoing Taps" each evening. I can almost hear the comforting tune as it must have fallen on the ears of hundreds of Boy Scouts, in their beds and with sleep closing in, and the faint smell of campfire smoke lingering in the still night air.

Camp Walhonde had many advantages, in addition to proximity.



M.H.F. Kinsey was the first scout executive hired by the Buckskin Council. He served as executive director from 1919-46.



Hiking has always been integral to the Boy Scout program. These scouts hiked from St. Albans to Point Pleasant in 1924. Photograph courtesy of West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), St. Albans Historical Society Collection.

There was a great deal of flat land, and the Coal River was available for swimming. Despite its advantages, Walhonde was to be replaced. In late 1945, physician Clifton F. McClintic gave the scouts a camp in Greenbrier County. In the spring of 1946, Camp Walhonde was sold to Union Carbide for \$20,000, and its name was changed to Camp Cliffside.

Camp McClintic, located about six miles west of Lewisburg, served many southern West Virginia scouts from 1946 to 1959. "McClintic" was in some ways more primitive than Walhonde. Most of the scouts lived in tents built upon wooden platforms. In contrast, most of the camping at Walhonde had been in frame buildings, although, at times, excessive numbers of scouts had necessitated tent camping, as well. Many former McClintic campers still feel a shiver as they vividly recall the extremely cold water in which they swam. The water flowed out of mountain caves that the scouts frequently explored.

Because Camp McClintic was lack-

ing sufficient flat land, it was decided that another camp was needed. So it was that Buckskin Scout Reservation came into existence, holding its first camping season in 1960. Buckskin, as it is usually termed — many older scouts and leaders call it Dilley's Mill — consists of 1,800 acres split by State Route 28 in Pocahontas County. This

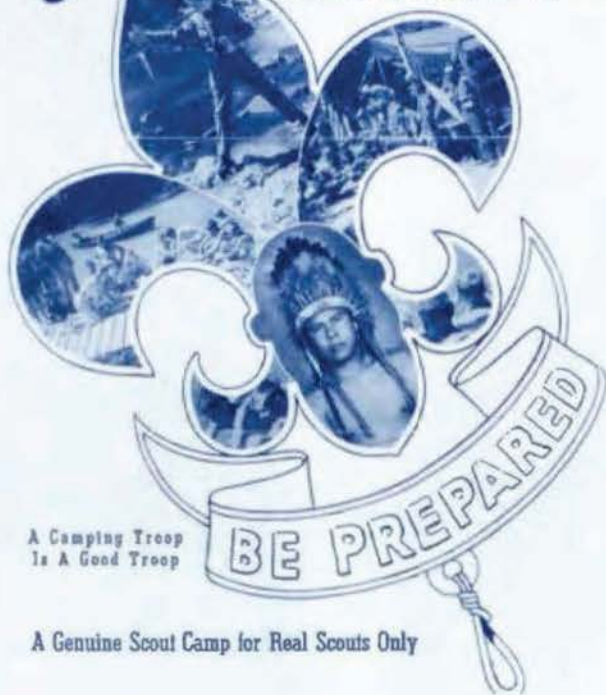
beautiful camp has served scouts of southern West Virginia longer than all the other camps combined. It remains in use today and features many fine improvements, including a large dining hall, chapel, trading post, activities shelter, improved swimming area, and a 16-acre lake. Camping is done in platform tents



Boy Scouts conduct a flag ceremony at Camp Pequoni, near Porter, Clay County, in about 1920.

Camp Clifton McClintic

For the Season of Nineteen-fifty-three



Summer program cover for Camp McClintic, located west of Lewisburg in Greenbrier County. This camp was in use from 1945-59.

in wooded areas that surround the lake. Tens of thousands of scouts have spent one, or more, weeks at Buckskin.

I first camped at Buckskin in

we all enjoyed that evening as we congratulated each other for making it!

Buckskin Reservation is also the place where I joined the Order of the

1961. This was a place where we worked on advancement. While there, I recall earning meritbadges for nature studies, soil and water conservation, and othersubjects. And I'll not forget the large lake and how, around the age of 15, several buddies and I earned the Boy Scout Mile Swim Award. Four lengths of the quarter-mile lake had to be traversed, without stopping to rest. Each swimmer was accompanied by a rowboat, in case exhaustion overcame us. We all made it, as I recall. I have forgotten how long it took me to complete that mile. I am guessing it must have been an hour, or more. But what a feeling of accomplishment

Arrow, an honor camper organization. Candidates are chosen either by their scoutmasters or by vote of their fellow Boy Scouts in their local troops. Joining OA is contingent upon completion of an "ordeal," a term more than apt to describe what one must do in order to become a member.

At an evening campfire, each newly elected candidate is called out and then taken to a remote area of the woods, where he must sleep alone. He is picked up the next morning and led to an area where he is given some uncooked breakfast food, along with two matches. If he can't get a fire started, he will go hungry. Another rule is that a candidate may not speak during the two-day ordeal. Thus, asking for help is not done. Fortunately, I got my fire going and ate well enough. Then we were put to work. We filled potholes in the roads, built check dams to stop erosion, and did whatever else was demanded of us. We walked in crews of about eight candidates and, when walking from one job site to the next, always had to move in single file and "linked up" with one hand on the shoulder of the scout in front of us. By evening, we were treated to a meal in the camp's dining hall,



Scouting and camping go together. These young campers are lined up for food, no doubt cooked over an open fire, in 1947. They are members of Troop 6 of Beckley. Pictured at right is scoutmaster Albert Allen, Jr. Photograph courtesy of WVSA, Albert Allen, Jr., Collection.



Author W. Joseph "Joe" Wyatt as a Boy Scout in 1963.

although still we could not speak. By the third day, the ordeal was over, and we could forever say that we were "in OA."

"Be prepared," the Scout Motto tells us. It is a tribute to the scouting program that first aid and other preparedness skills are taught. There have been many scouts who have acted heroically when their duty called. Boy Scouts Berry Rogers and Wade Myers, both of South Charleston, were expecting to lead a routine Webelos Cub Scout meeting in 1974 when leader William S. Jones fell to the floor. He had suffered a heart attack. To make matters worse, Jones had a severe cut and was bleeding profusely. The Scouts administered CPR and controlled the bleeding. Ultimately, help arrived, and Jones was saved. He was thankful and able to be present weeks later, when both boys were awarded the Boy Scouts of America Medal of Merit.

A recent act of heroism occurred in 2004 and was accomplished by scout Andy Morrison of Troop 68 in Cross Lanes. While riding bikes with

several buddies, he saw one of them, William Smoot, miss a curve and fly off the road and into a telephone guy wire. The wire all but amputated Smoot's foot. "In Boy Scouts, they give you first-aid training and tell you what to do," Morrison told *The Charleston Sunday Gazette-Mail*. "I was scared half to death." Scared or not, Morrison applied pressure by wrapping a towel tightly around the injured foot and held on while a neighbor called 911. Medical professionals credited Morrison with saving Smoot's life. Morrison later received the Boy Scout Heroism Award.

Although acts of heroism receive a great deal of public attention, the routine

activities of scouting life are what most of us recall. I remember the weekly meetings in which I learned skills, such as first aid, knot tying, campcraft and more. Day hikes and weekend camporees were highlights for me, as well.

One of my lasting memories is of a winter camporee in Putnam County, when the nighttime temperature dipped to seven degrees. Even before leaving home, the proper layers of insulated clothing — especially the boots — had prepared us for what was to come. On arriving at the campsite, we swept away six inches of snow and set up our tents, with the temperature around 20 degrees. Then we quickly dragged together a large stack of firewood. Soon, we were warming ourselves by our campfire. As the sun dipped behind the horizon and the temperature dropped, we spread straw inside our tents to better insulate ourselves against the severe weather. That night, snug inside my sleeping bag, I did not get cold. As I look back on such experiences, I understand how those days



The Order of the Arrow is an elite organization within the Boy Scouts, designed for accomplished campers. These scouts, wearing their "OA" sashes, pack for a trip in about 1950. Scouts Roger Burns and Paul McManamay from Troop 6, Beckley, are visible at left, along with scoutmaster Albert Allen, Jr. The other scout is unidentified. Photograph courtesy of WWSA, Albert Allen, Jr., Collection



Cub Scouts attempt to cross a rope bridge at a camporee in the 1970's. Photograph by Frank Wilkin, courtesy of WWSA.

shaped my realization that I could not only endure hardship, but could overcome it with proper planning and work.

At times, scout activities involve unusual, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. One of those was a 1949 trip by canoe from Charleston to Cincinnati. Twelve older scouts launched from the steps of the State Capitol building. The scouts hailed from Charleston, Clay, Boomer, South Charleston, St. Albans, and Rupert. The group paddled by day and camped along the riverbank at night. "Everyone's in tip-top shape — not a paddle blister in the crowd," said Thomas A. Beaver, a field executive who led the trip, upon their arrival in Cincinnati. "Best day's mileage was 45 miles between Manchester and New

Richmond," recalled trip historian James Dillon, in a newspaper article of the day.

James Dillon; his father, Wesley; and brothers James and Donald became part of scouting history in 1950 when all four were awarded the Eagle badge on the same day. It seems strange now, but until the late 1950's, there was no age limit on when one could achieve the scout ranks. Wesley Dillon, a leader of Explorer Post 48 in South Charleston, and his three sons had made a pact that they would all work to earn scouting's highest rank — and they did. It is unknown whether this "dad and three sons — same day" award is a national record, but I would not be surprised if it is so.

Another of those who made the

canoe trip was Jack Lanier, who was a few years ahead of me in Troop 146. Lanier had earned our troop's first Eagle badge in 1949. He describes the trip to me in a recent phone conversation from his home in Maryland: "I was working at Camp McClintic that summer when I got wind of the canoe excursion. I was anxious to make the trip, but there was a complication. The trip was scheduled for the last two weeks of the summer, precisely when I would be expected at football practice. I was a first-stringer on the St. Albans High team and would be required to attend daily practice in preparation for the team's first game."

Lanier continues: "I doubted that my coach would excuse me from practices, so I put the matter aside.



The Wyatt family is all smiles as son Joe receives his Eagle Scout badge in St. Albans in December 1963. At left is father Bill Wyatt; at right is mother Gerry.

Quite by accident, I found myself in a Lewisburg restaurant on my weekly evening off from my duties at scout camp, when I walked the coach, Dick Sidebottom, who was in the area on a fishing trip. Seizing the opportunity, I approached the coach, who was glad to see me. After some small talk about scout camp and football, I broached the subject of the canoe trip. Coach Sidebottom sensed the direction in which my heart pulled. He thought about the unusual request, then said, 'Jack, after

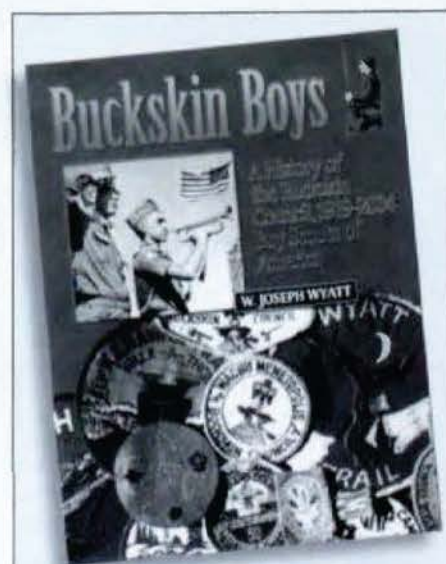
paddling a canoe from Charleston to Cincinnati, you'll be in better shape than you would after two weeks of football practice, so go ahead.' And I made the trip."

Scouting days have been, and continue to be, the best of days to many young people. So it was for my dad and me, fortunate as I was to have grown up with a scoutmaster-father. My dad had hoped to write a history of local scouting, but cancer pre-empted his project. About three years ago, I found several boxes of photos

and clippings he had accumulated in order to write the book. I took up the project and saw it to completion. The book, titled *Buckskin Boys: A History of the Buckskin Council, 1919-2004*, was published by Pictorial Histories Publishing Company in 2004. The work includes many stories my dad had told me, combined with my own scouting experiences. It provided me with a unique perspective on the people and events that have made local scouting what it is. And, if Dad is looking down now, I trust that he feels I have done "my best, to do my duty," as the Scout Oath says. 🍁

The Wyatt Scout Museum is located in Charleston at 2829 Kanawha Boulevard East, in the basement of the William H. "Bill" Wyatt Buckskin Council office. The museum is open by appointment; phone (304)340-3663.

W. JOSEPH WYATT was born and raised in St. Albans and now lives in Hurricane, Putnam County. He earned graduate degrees from the University of Miami in Florida and West Virginia University, and currently teaches psychology at Marshall University. In addition to his book on Boy Scouts, Joe has published a novel and a psychology textbook. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Buckskin Boys: A History of the Buckskin Council, 1919-2004 was begun by Bill Wyatt and completed by son Joe in 2004. It is available as a large-format paperback from Joe Wyatt, P.O. Box 844, Hurricane, WV 25526, for \$24.95, plus \$3 shipping.