

Scouting and Freemasonry

By Matthew Phillippi

Matt Phillippi was raised in 2023 in Rockingham Union Lodge No. 27 of the Grand Lodge of Virginia AF&AM where he is currently the Senior Deacon. He also serves as the Council Commissioner for his local Boy Scouts of America council and is a life member of the National Association of Masonic Scouters.

Freemasonry has had an influence on Scouting since the earliest days. As we look at the history of these groups and their relationship in modern day it is important to recognize the connections between them. Both are global movements that exist in many different countries around the world that are connected through a British nexus: the United Grand Lodge of England and the World Organization of Scouting Movements. In the United States, both groups have had a major impact on our government, society, and culture. The American connections between the Craft and Scouting are deep and understanding those connections better could help both organizations grow as they support each other in the 21st century.

Over the years there have been many people claiming that Lord Robert

Baden-Powell, founder of the global Scouting movement, was a Freemason. Unfortunately, he is not someone we can claim among Brethren. That does not mean that he was against the Craft. He was great friends with Rudyard Kipling, for instance, who influenced much of his work and most especially his themes for Cub Scouts which were pulled almost directly from Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Baden-Powell began his movement with the consideration that the youth of Britain were not active enough or knowledgeable enough about the outdoors and teaching them the skills he had taught his soldiers during the Boer Wars would be beneficial to the British Empire. It would not be unreasonable to suspect that the influence of Brother Kipling may have helped shape the values Baden-Powell ingrained in the movement.

While the founder of the Scouting movement was not himself a Mason, it took a Mason to bring his movement to the United States. Newspaperman William D. Boyce is credited with the founding of the Boy Scouts of America which instituted Baden-Powell's model of Scouting in the United States. There is an apocryphal tale where Brother Boyce is was lost in the London fog and one of Baden-Powell's Scouts helped him find his destination. He was so enamored with the virtues of this young man who

refused compensation that he sought out the Scout office and gathered all the literature he could. This was an oft repeated story that likely holds little, if any truth within it. Regardless, Brother Boyce took the movement home with him and incorporated the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) on February 8, 1910.

At this time there were already Scouting groups in existence in the country. What made Brother Boyce's effort more successful was those that he surrounded himself with. In 1902 a group called the Woodcraft Indians was founded by Ernest Thompson Seton and in 1905 the Sons of Daniel Boone were founded by Daniel Carter Beard. The work of these two heavily influence Baden-Powell as he transformed his military manuals to the youth-focused materials it eventually became so their inclusion in the early days of the BSA was an important part of the process. Seton was announced as the Chief Scout, and Beard was named the first National Commissioner of the BSA. These two helped form the Scouting model at the time and were pivotal in growing the movement as they folded their members into the larger organization. In those early days, it became clear that there would also need to be a paid staff involved in the organization. It was decided that James E. West would become the first Chief Scout Executive.

Of these three men that Brother Boyce called on to run the organization, Beard and West were both also Masons.

Brother Beard grew up during the Civil War and admired the frontiersman mentality and lifestyle. That was what brought him to form the Sons of Daniel Boone. He studied to be an engineer, but the life of an artist called to him as it had many of those in his family. He moved to New York city to attend art school and become an illustrator and it was during this time that he became a part of the Craft, being raised in Mariner's Lodge No. 67. He continued to draw and write, publishing his own books about enjoying the outdoors as well as illustrating other works, such as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Brother Beard's work was highly influential in the Scouting movement as a whole, but especially in American Scouting where the members of the BSA would refer to him affectionately as "Uncle Dan."

Brother West had a bit of a different background. He was orphaned at the age of six and fought a bout of tuberculosis at the age of eight that left him with a difficulty in walking that he would carry throughout his life. He was a natural leader in the orphanage where he grew up and his experiences there led him to become a lawyer, fighting for the rights of children to have a childhood,

essentially. It was this devotion to young people that led the young BSA organization to hire him on as the professional at the helm. He was not known as the easiest man to work for or with, but he was passionate about what he did and the impact the movement could have on the lives of our nation's youth.

These two were known to be at odds with each other quite regularly during the early years of the BSA, but their desire to instill the virtues of Scouting in the children of the United States is without a doubt. It is because of this that it can be of little surprise that the values of Freemasonry and Scouting so closely align. The Scout Law—A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent—lines up very well with the virtues that we, as Freemasons, aspire to hold ourselves to each and every day.

There are other ways in which our organizations align and there are efforts to carry that into the present day. There is a National Association of Masonic Scouters that brings Scouting volunteers together from across the country to join in fellowship at Scouting events. We gathered just last year at The Summit during the National Scout Jamboree. There are Scouters' Lodges in certain

jurisdictions. There are recognitions for Eagle Scouts and volunteers alike.

While there are Masonic youth organizations and the BSA is not one of them, it is connected to Freemasonry in ways many never realize. It would be easy for some to consider the BSA in competition with groups like DeMolay, but the reality is that they can co-exist. As we move forward in the 21st century, we need to rely on the bonds that we have between these organizations and not fall into competition. We need to build each other up and recognize the shared heritage and importance in American society. We will all be stronger for it.

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