

# BLUE GRASS COUNCIL

## COMPLETE HISTORY

— BY TIM BROWN —

### BSA Beginnings

As it must be with most councils in the Boy Scouts of America, the history of The Blue Grass Council is a long and storied history. The Blue Grass Council that exists today is the culmination of many factors over a long period of time. Factors such as geography, demographics, and economics... as well as council mergers, policy changes, and the use of long-term camps, all play an important role in the eventual success or failure of a council. Identifying and understanding these factors is critical to the formation of a council's true and accurate history. Thus, the historical evolution of the Blue Grass Council must commence with the earliest beginnings of the Scouting movement in central, eastern, and southeastern Kentucky. That story is as follows...

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was incorporated on February 8, 1910. The new organization was modeled after Britain's successful 'The Boy Scouts Association' founded in 1907 by Lord Robert Baden-Powell and introduced into this country by American businessman William D. Boyce. Prior to the BSA's arrival, a few Boy Scout troops began to appear in this country as an extension of the British program. One such troop was located in Frankfort, Kentucky, and existed as early as October of 1908 (see photo above). That date makes it Kentucky's first Scout troop and likely one of the first Scout troops in the nation. The troop was founded by local YMCA Director Stanley A. 'Stan' Harris. Mr. Harris had read about Britain's Scouting Association, and was greatly intrigued by its program and the benefits it offered to young boys. Mr. Harris subsequently wrote a letter to the organization's founder (Lord Baden-Powell), and inquired as to how he may initiate such a troop in this country. Soon, Mr. Harris was



the recipient of a wealth of correspondence and information from Lord Baden-Powell, including a troop charter (dated 1909), and an official appointment as Scoutmaster. Over the next year, the troop and its program flourished under Mr. Harris' direction and attracted scores of youth from the local area.

Once America's version of Boy Scouting was established in 1910, most every other Scouting organization in the county converted to that of the Boy Scouts of America. Many Boy Scout troops were chartered that first year, including the one started by Stanley A. Harris in Frankfort, Kentucky. His troop was given the distinction of being called Kentucky's Troop 1, and is recognized today by the BSA as being one of the first 40 Scout troops to receive a charter that inaugural year.

Stanley A. Harris was truly a Scouting pioneer, not only in Kentucky, but in the United States. In 1912 he was made one of the nation's first field commissioners (a volunteer position), and charged with organizing Scout troops throughout the State of Kentucky. In 1914 the BSA organized its national field structure into six districts, each led by a district commissioner. Kentucky was assigned to the Midwest District, and led by District Commissioner Judson P. Freeman. Stanley A. Harris (still a volunteer), was selected to serve as the first district commissioner of the new Southern District, which covered 14 states of the south and southwest. As his involvement in the Scouting program deepened, so too did his desire to do more. Thus in 1917, Mr. Harris began a career in Scouting as a BSA National Field Commissioner. He was responsible for the spread of Scouting across the Southern District, primarily through the organization and financing of local councils.

Due to the continued growth of the Scouting movement, the BSA National Council restructured its six district system into a twelve region system effective November 1920. For ease of identification, the newly formed regions were numbered rather than named. The BSA's new organizational system would exist in this manner for over fifty years from 1920-1972, and come to be known as the 'original' twelve regions. The Midwest District was divided into multiple regions, and along with the states of Ohio and West Virginia, Kentucky was assigned to Region 4. The former Southern District was also divided into multiple regions, and Stanley A. Harris became the first Regional Executive of Region 5, serving in that capacity from 1920-1926 (see photo above). Mr. Harris served the BSA for 30 years, retiring in 1947 as its



Assistant Director of Operations. Of all of his many Scouting accomplishments, Stanley A. Harris will be forever known as the 'Founder' of Kentucky's Scouting movement.

### **Kentucky's BSA Council Development**

As the number of troops per state continued to increase, the BSA began dividing states into geographic 'councils' to better service the troops and further promote the Scouting program. Headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky, the BSA officially chartered the Lexington Council in 1917. This new council serviced the Scout troops (see photo of Scout at right) in the central Kentucky area, which was locally known as the Blue Grass Region. The council's headquarters was first established in the 'Old Kitchen' building on the campus of Transylvania University located at 253 Market Street in Lexington. The Lexington Council was continuously chartered from 1917 until 1928, at which time the name was changed to the Blue Grass Council. During its early years, the council flourished under the direction of its first Scout Executive Lester (Les) Ray Bucher.



In 1929, the BSA expanded the Blue Grass Council's geographic service territory to include two earlier, short-lived Kentucky councils. The council consolidation included the renamed Isaac Shelby Council (formerly known as the Frankfort Council, 1916-1925), and the Kentucky, Daniel Boone Council (Winchester). The Isaac Shelby Council had existed from 1925-1929, and the Kentucky, Daniel Boone Council had existed from 1924-1929. Sometime after the 1929 council consolidation, the council name was changed to the Blue Grass Area Council. Then around 1940 for reasons unknown, the council name reverted back to simply the Blue Grass Council. Although its name has been changed several times and geographically it's much larger than it was when originally chartered, the Blue Grass Council has been an actively chartered BSA council every year since 1917. Other Blue Grass Council office addresses in Lexington, Kentucky include: 137½ North Mill Street; 133½ W. Short Street; 131 W. Short Street; 975 Liberty Road; 415 North Broadway; 3445 Richmond Road, and 2134 Nicholasville Road (Suites 3 & 4).

Around the time the Blue Grass Council (formerly the Lexington Council) was getting started, the Scouting movement was also developing in other parts of Kentucky. The BSA chartered two councils in southeastern Kentucky, and these two councils were the Harlan Council, and the Upper Cumberland Area Council. The Harlan Council existed for only a single year in 1918. However, the Upper

Cumberland Area Council existed for 20 years from 1929-1949. Beginning in 1949, the Upper Cumberland Area Council's name was officially changed to simply the Cumberland Council. Headquartered in Middlesboro, Kentucky, the Cumberland Council was actively chartered from 1949-1963, and was comprised of eight counties...six from Kentucky (Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Laurel, and Whitley), and two from Tennessee (Campbell and Claiborne). In order to provide a better Scouting program to the youth of Southeastern Kentucky, the Cumberland Council merged with the Blue Grass Council on August 15, 1963. Prior to the merger, the Blue Grass Council had been comprised of 34 Kentucky counties (Anderson, Bath, Bourbon, Boyle, Casey, Clark, Clinton, Elliot, Estill, Fayette, Franklin, Garrard, Harrison, Jackson, Jessamine, Lee, Lincoln, Madison, McCreary, Menifee, Mercer, Montgomery, Morgan, Nicholas, Owsley, Powell, Pulaski, Rockcastle, Rowan, Russell, Scott, Wayne, Wolfe, and Woodford). The merger with the Cumberland Council afforded the Blue Grass Council the opportunity to acquire the six Kentucky counties, while leaving the two Tennessee counties to be absorbed by another BSA Council (Great Smoky Mountain Council). This brought the total number of counties within the Blue Grass Council's service area to 40.

Subsequent to forming councils in central and southeastern Kentucky, the BSA chartered a council in eastern Kentucky. This council was known as the Lonesome Pine Council. Headquartered in Pikeville, Kentucky, the Lonesome Pine Council was actively chartered from January 5, 1934-1979, and was comprised of 15 counties; 10 from Kentucky (Breathitt, Floyd, Johnson, Knott, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Perry, and Pike), and five from Virginia (Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, and Wise). The Lonesome Pine Council merged with the Blue Grass Council in 1979. Prior to the merger, the Blue Grass Council had been comprised of 40 Kentucky counties. As it had done with the previous council merger, the Blue Grass Council acquired the 10 Kentucky counties and left the five Virginia counties to be absorbed by another BSA council (Sequoyah Council). This brought the total number of counties within the Blue Grass Council's service area to 50.

The most recent acquisition of Kentucky counties by the Blue Grass Council occurred in 2009. The Blue Grass Council acquired five counties (Bracken, Fleming, Lewis, Mason, and Robertson), in Northern Kentucky from the Simon Kenton Council, which is headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. The reason for the transfer of counties by the Simon Kenton Council was geographic in nature, but was further agreed upon by both parties to provide these counties with an increase in logistical professional service. The transfer now brings the total number of counties within the Blue Grass Council's service area to an all-time high of 55.

## Council Use of the 'Long-Term' Camp

Historically, the Scouting movement has always emphasized camping as its means for developing a Scout's outdoor skills, as well as their appreciation and understanding of the natural world around them. The use of the 'long-term' camp or 'summer' camp was the ideal tool to accomplish this methodology. In the early years, most BSA councils quickly found access to wilderness areas to establish these long-term or summer camps, and their usage was then (as it is today), viewed as extremely popular. The BSA councils of central, eastern, and southeastern Kentucky all had long term or summer camps available to the Scouts and Scouters who lived in their respective service areas.

The first official Scout camp in the Blue Grass Area of Kentucky was Camp Offutt. Camp Offutt was located on the Kentucky River in Woodford County near Tyrone, Kentucky. The camp serviced the Scouts and Scouters of central Kentucky from 1923-1959. The land for the camp was purchased and developed by the Rotary Club of Lexington, Kentucky, and named for fellow Rotarians and brothers Dr. William Nelson Offutt, Jr. and Mitchum Webb Offutt. The Offutt family had long been a strong supporter of Scouting and was subsequently honored with the naming of the camp. Mitchum Webb Offutt was further honored by the Blue Grass Council for his service to youth by becoming its first Silver Beaver Award recipient (1931).

Located in Montgomery and Powell Counties near Mt. Sterling, Kentucky lies the Blue Grass Council's current Scout camp... the McKee Scout Reservation. Local residents Dr. P.L. and Gertrude P. McKee donated the original 330 acres of land for the camp to the Blue Grass Council on March 31, 1943. In appreciation for their generosity, the camp was named in their honor. The Blue Grass Council has acquired additional adjoining lands over the years more than doubling the camp's total acreage to a little more than 700 acres. Although it had been used by various troops for primitive camping and camporees since it was acquired, Camp McKee (as it's commonly known), welcomed its first 'official' summer campers in 1959. During that inaugural year, campers could either attend one of the two weeks of camp being offered at McKee Scout Reservation, or one of the six weeks of camp being



offered at Camp Offutt during its final year. Beginning in 1960, McKee Scout Reservation became the Blue Grass Council's only 'official' Scout camp. The camp has remained an active Boy Scout camp every year since that time.

The Cumberland Council's (formerly the Upper Cumberland Area Council) first 'official' Scout Camp was Camp Blanton. Located in Harlan County near Wallins, Kentucky, the property was originally owned by Grover, Oxie, Jesse M., and Francis Blanton. On August 13, 1933, the Blanton family gave the property to Will Ward Duffield and O.M. Hoskins, trustees of the Harlan County Boy Scouts of America, for the purpose of a Boy Scout camp, which operated from 1934-1988. For his life-long support of the Scouting program, Will Ward Duffield became the Cumberland Council's first Silver Beaver Award recipient (1931). The Cumberland Council also had another Scout camp (Camp Sequoyah) located on Norris Lake near Lafollette, Tennessee. Camp Sequoyah operated as a Boy Scout camp from 1948-1967.

Camp Arrowhead was the Lonesome Pine Council's first 'official' Scout camp. The camp was located on the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River in rural Pike County near Pikeville, Kentucky. H.E. Greer was instrumental in the development of Camp Arrowhead, which operated as a Boy Scout camp from 1936-1952. Mr. Greer was also an early President of the Lonesome Pine Council. In recognition of his Scouting support efforts, H.E. Greer became the first recipient of the Lonesome Pine Council's Silver Beaver Award (1936). The Lonesome Pine Council also had another Scout camp (Camp Shawnee) located on Dewey Lake in rural Floyd County near Endicott, Kentucky. Camp Shawnee serviced the Scouts and Scouters of the Lonesome Pine Council's service area from 1951-1979.