

The History of Scouting in the Southeast Wisconsin Council

In order to fully understand the beginnings of Boy Scouts in Kenosha, we must understand Kenosha in 1910. Here's a snapshot of the Kenosha Community in 1910.

The city of Kenosha dominated the county and had about 25,000 in population. Measles and Tuberculosis were becoming a major problem. Mary D. Bradford was hired as School Board Superintendent. Mr. Simmons and Mr. Jeffery both died in 1910 leaving a void in the business leadership of Kenosha.

The Playground Society was discussing the creation of playgrounds at the public schools. Social clubs such as the Blue Lodge Masons, Order of the Eastern Star, YMCA, Royal Arch Masons, Knights of Pythius, Modern Woodman of America, The Moose Club, The Elks Club, The Danish Brotherhood, The Knights of Columbus, The Womans Club, and several gardening clubs had sprung up around Kenosha.

The major sports in town were boxing, baseball and golf. The YMCA had an active sports program for youth. The Boys Brigade of the Congregational Church had an active military program for boys. They also had the Girls Guild for girls.

Petty crime in Kenosha was a big problem. In 1910, a law was passed making it illegal to steal scrap metal. Many teen boys were arrested for participating in this activity. Assaults and fights by teen boys were also at an increase.

Something needed to be done. Several interesting articles detail a chain of events that led to the founding of the Boy Scouts of America in Kenosha. These events are taken directly from the Kenosha Telegraph-Courier and the Kenosha Evening News.

On April 14, 1910, a Social and Regular Meeting at the First Congregational Church was held. A discussion of a recent article titled "Our Island Empire" was held.

On May 5, 1910, the Boys Brigade held a military and sports related event for their Company B.

On May 12, 1910, a banquet was held jointly by the Girls Guild and Boys Brigade.

Throughout this time, on a nearly weekly basis, there would be a news article about the YMCA and the building of it's youth program. It seems like a competition was forming to see who could do more for the youth of the city.

Thursday, September 22, 1910 was a key date in Kenosha. That's the first time anything was specifically mentioned about the Boy Scouts of America. A large article was published in the Telegraph-Courier which outlined the newly formed national group.

To Organize Boys

Boy Scout Movement Rapidly
Spreading and Organization
Is Growing

Kenosha may get in line

This long article talked about the purpose of the BSA and what it means to the local community. It explored the virtues of Scouting, the need for an organization to occupy the boys of the community. The training the Scouts would receive, the woods craft skills the boys would learn were also mentioned. It was a fine article.

Nov. 17, 1910 showed an article where a man by the name of Reverend Farrill, from the First Congregational Church, was interested in forming a committee to organize all the clubs and groups in the city into a central bureau with specific committees to aid relief work in Kenosha.

He was elected the Chair of the Provident Association to handle this aid relief work. on Nov 24, 1910.

On Dec 1, 1910, The Congregationalists of Wisconsin appointed a special committee to investigate plans and methods of church work among young people. Rev. Farrill chaired this committee.

Then on Saturday, January 6, 1911 this article appeared in the Kenosha Evening News. It also appeared later that week in the weekly Kenosha Telegraph-Courier on Thursday January 11, 1911:

Kenosha Boy Scouts

The "Tri Mus" boy's class club of the First Congregational Church Sunday School, had a "Fire Place Squat" at the Manse last evening and formed the first "Patrol" in Kenosha of the Boy Scouts Of America.

The patrol chose an otter as its patrol animal.
The "Patrol Leader" elected was Roscoe Musser.

Rev. Edgar T. Farrill is the "Scout Master" and Superintendent of the club, whose officers are as Follows: President, Paul Windsheim, Vice President,

Lawrence Eastman, Secretary, Ewald York,
Treasurer, Herbert Curtis, Boost Committee, Irwin
Mainland, Chair Guy Clark,
Roscoe Musser and Sidney Nunn

Thus, the first Boy Scout Troop is the Otter Patrol of the First Congregational Church which was organized on January 5, 1911. This Troop was later assigned the title Troop 7 when in 1917, the Kenosha Council was formed and later changed to 507 when the Kenosha Council merged with the Racine Council.

Rev. Edgar T. Farrill, the first Scoutmaster in Kenosha, received his Scoutmaster Certificate in January of 1911. It was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft.

Prior to 1919, Scouts and Troops were not required to be registered with the national office of the BSA. Hence, there are no official BSA records from that time period.

Boy Scouts in 1917 were seen as a youth work force as the country was gearing up to enter WWI. Plans were made in November of 1917 to utilize boy power in the war effort. Boy Scouts were expected to help in the harvest of crops. They were housed in special camps which were under the supervision of the County Council of Defense.

Boy Scouts were also used to notify Draft Inductees of their induction into the Armed Forces.

By December of 1917, there were 9 Boy Scout Troops in Kenosha:

Troop 1 chartered to Frank School

Troop 2 chartered to St. James Church

Troop 3 chartered to Frank School

Troop 4 chartered to Bain School

Troop 5 chartered to Lincoln School

Troop 6 chartered to the Chamber of Commerce (also called the Southport Troop)

Troop 7 chartered to the First Congregational Church

Troop 8 chartered to Columbus School

Troop 9 chartered to Wieskopf School

The first Troop in Racine was organized by T.S. Reese in 1912. The Racine Council was formed in 1918.

Camp Ohdakota

Camp Oh-da-ko-ta was a gift of Charles Nash. In 1929, Nash purchased 73 acres on Dyer lake and placed it in trust for the Kenosha Council. Oh-da-ko-ta is a Sioux indian name meaning "Friendly", which had been the camp site named at previous rented camps. The dining hall,

pump house and 9 sleeping cabins were built the first year. For 12 years, Scouts from the Northwest Suburban Council attended summer camp at Camp Oh-da-ko-ta as they had no camp of their own.

In 1940, Mr. Nash donated 2500 shares of Nash Motors stock to the Kenosha Council with instructions for the council to sell the stock and place the proceeds in trust for maintenance and improvements to Camp Oh-da-ko-ta.

In 1953, the local labor unions built a new Pioneer Village consisting of 6 sleeping cabins and a dining hall.

In 1956 Snap-on donated another 19 acres of land known as Coon Valley.

The US NAval Reserve built the beachhead in 1956 and constructed two general purpose buildings.

In 1960 the Carl Johnson Cabin was constructed in honor of the veteran Scoutleader.

A group of citizens raised the money to purchase the 97 acre Fay farm which adjoins Camp Oh-da-ko-ta to the west and continues to Highway P.

1961 the Administration Building was completed.

2010 Camp Thundercloud was rescued from the ravages of time Mother Nature. The campsite located in the far Southeastern edge of camp was part of the original camping facilities of Camp Ohdakota. Generations of Scouts had camped at this long-forgotten campsite. When the Fay farm addition to Camp Ohdakota was acquired, this original part of camp was abandoned and turned into a garbage dump. It has now been returned to a campsite.

Camp Robert S. Lyle

The 640 acres of land that became Camp Robert S. Lyle was donated by the Lyle Foundation in July, 1962

When the Racine and Kenosha Councils merged on November 1, 1971, Racine Camps Chippecotten and Ka-Ha-Gon and Kenosha Camp Deerhaven were sold.

A Roller Coaster Ride for Troop 507

In 1936, due to the lack of a Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmasters, Troop 7 was dissolved. The investigating committee of the Kenosha Council noted that the Troop was "tolerated, rather than appreciated". Times looked tough for Troop 7. Many Scouts either quit Scouting or transferred to other units.

Walter Hammond, transferred the charter of Troop 7 to St. Mark's Catholic Church. He brought with him a few of the remaining Scouts. It's been at St. Marks ever since.

Scouting at St. Marks had a steady growth through the years. By the mid 1950's there were so many boys in Scouting that they were organised into Troops 7, 37 and 47, Packs 11, 16 and 18 as well as Explorer Post 7.

By the late 1960's, Scouting had changed focus, fewer Scouts signed up. By the year 1971, when the Kenosha and Racine Councils merged to form the Southeast Wisconsin Council, only Troop 7 remained of the three Troops at St. Marks and it was renamed Troop 507.

Scouting at St. Marks hit another high point in the late 1970's with good enrollment and several Silver Beaver Award winners. By the late 1990's it was evident that membership and interest in Scouting was waning. For only the second time, Troop 507 dissolved in 2001.

Since it's resurrection in 2002, Troop 507 has seen steady growth. The Troop was rechartered with 5 boys and has seen it's ranks swell. Each year new boys join Troop 507 from outside of Scouting and crossover at annual Blue and Gold Banquets.

Troop 507 celebrates it's 100 anniversary in 2011 by serving 46 Boy Scouts.