

## **Physically Strong, Mentally Awake, and Morally Straight: 100 Years of Boy Scouts at First Presbyterian Church, Hastings, Nebraska**

Dr. Will Locke, former Scoutmaster Troop 200

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### **Dedication and Credits:**

This brief history of a century of scouting at First Presbyterian Church is dedicated to the late Dr. Charles Evans and other scout leaders who have so faithfully served. We stand on their shoulders. The following scouts and scout leaders have contributed directly to this history: Dr. Charles Evans (used notes he prepared for a Troop 200 program we did several years ago), Dave Stewart, Larry Nowka, Dr. Jeff Howard, Dr. Harvey Freetly, Mike Sidlo, Terry Beahm, and Kenneth Locke. Dorothy Weyer Creigh and Penny Lungren wrote about Boy Scouts at First Presbyterian Church in their histories of the church. First Presbyterian Church has officially supported Boy Scouts for exactly a century. The Session proposed chartering Troop 4 in 1918 and Troop 200 in 1936. Every year the Session has renewed the charter and we trust this will continue.

### **The First Scouts at First Presbyterian Church in 1918:**

The Guns were still booming on the Western Front when session member Edgerton moved, "...that we as a church take charge of Boy Scouts in the City of Hastings, and here appoint Curtis Galt Scoutmaster, with Willard Brown as his assistant." (Session minutes, Dec. 20, 1917). The Boy Scouts of America came to the USA in 1910 and the same year the Hastings YMCA discussed establishing a Boy Scout organization. (Hastings Tribune Nov. 4, 1910, p. 6). Troop 4 was thus chartered in 1918 by First Presbyterian Church and we know that the church sponsored the Troop for several years. The Hastings Tribune ran a photo November 22, 1928, featuring Troop 4 in front of the YMCA preparing to distribute Sunnyside bags. We know that in 1931 Scouts helped Hastings Museum Curator A. M. Brooking install a flat marker in a pasture south of Hastings recognizing the Simonton-Smith freight train grave site. No records have been discovered that described other activities of this Troop.

### **Troop 200 Is Chartered in 1936:**

January 9, 1936, in the midst of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, the session moved that the Pastor appoint a committee to form a Boy Scout Troop. The committee included Dr. R. H. Cowger chm., R. A. Watson, Elvan McClenahan, and Francis Robertson. R. A. Watson (Watson School) kept the session informed of progress toward the goal. Under the leadership of Francis Robertson, the first and longest serving scoutmaster, and Elvan McClenahan the Troop became very active. Activities during these early years included weekend campouts, Camp Augustine programs, and even national Scout Jamborees (Creigh, 69). In these early years, the Troop established the tradition of hiking, backpacking, and camping in Poudre Canyon, Colorado. Scouts attended the U Bar U Scout Ranch in the canyon. Watson, Robertson, and McClenahan

expanded scouting to include Cub Scouts, Webelos, and Explorer Scouts. The older boys joined the Explorer Post which existed until at least 1960. The uniforms were dark blue and were worn with a white web belt and dark brown tie. From the beginning Troop 200 has welcomed all boys and has worked to make it possible for every scout to participate fully. The practice of inclusion has evolved over the decades.

**Bill Gedney, in 1937, was the first Troop 200 scout to earn Eagle.**

### **The World War II Legacy (1940's to Early 1960's):**

Equipment was often WWII "surplus" and olive drab in color. Packs were rucksacks or home-made wood strung with rope cords. Each boy carried ½ of a pup tent and olive drab military ponchos were often used. Boots were often paratrooper boots or infantry boots with buckled leather tops. Cook kits and pots were used for boiling and frying raw foods. Hamburger, stew meat, vegetables, eggs, bacon, etc. were "cooked." Cooking was usually done in patrol groups. Patrols functioned according to a mentor system. As younger boys came into the patrol at the Tenderfoot level, the older boys taught them and led them up through the ranks of Second and First Class, Star and Life, and the coveted Eagle award.

Activities in Poudre Canyon expanded to include camping at Cameron Pass and climbing 12,940' Mt. Richthofen. This basin is the head of the Michigan River which is one of the major tributaries of the North Platte River. Michael Forsberg, the photographer/writer considers this area the spiritual head of the North Platte because it was sacred to several Indian tribes. For many years Troop 200 leaders negotiated a few miles of steep road south of the Poudre River in order to reach a high trail head where they launched a challenging backpack up to Crown Point and over a high divide to Estes Park. The route has been described by many scouts and leaders as immensely challenging. The reward of fun, food, and ice cream in Estes Park was a powerful motivation.

Scouts often cut live branches for flag poles, tent supports, bridges, and other uses. We preached "wool" to stay warm and dry and "If your feet are cold put on your hat."

Larry Nowka was a Cub Scout in 1950 and he states: "1950 is when scouts dug out the space under the Memorial Room with shovels and buckets and turned the new space into a scout room." He remembers that Francis Robertson and Lester 'Red' Pederson were the leaders and that Jerry Hazelrigg (Hazelrigg Student Union at Hastings College) was one of the scouts.

**By 1965, 90 Troop 200 boys had earned the rank of Eagle.**

### **The Backpacking/Environmental Stewardship Era (Late 1960's to 1980's):**

The focus of scouting began to change in the late sixties. There was less stress on discipline and military skills, and more enjoyment of the outdoors and stewardship of nature. Open fires were discouraged and often not allowed in National Parks and National Forests. Cutting of live wood or polluting streams was never allowed at any campout from this era on. Equipment became

lightweight and individualized. Backpack frames were aluminum and nylon packs (available in red and blue) with numerous compartments and zippers were available. Tents were light weight rip stop nylon with collapsible poles that were rated as three season and even four season. Boots were heavy leather with thick Vibram soles. Leaders taught the boys how to wax and oil these boots. Light weight and breathable Gore-tex material was used for outer wear and for light weight boots.

Cooking gear consisted of nests of containers and the Sierra cup. Tiny and light weight back pack stoves burned butane or Coleman fuel. Food was dehydrated and powdered. Examples included Tang, instant oatmeal, powdered milk, cocoa, and coffee. An instant entrée (many were available from camping stores), instant pudding, and instant hot drink all happened in the Sierra cup. Just pour dehydrated contents into the cup and add boiling water. Winter campouts were held at "Golger's" (actually a Bohlke farm) on Flat Creek northeast of Hastings and the Bob Howard place south of town near the Little Blue River. Scouts worked on winter camping skills and merit badges. Scouts learned to cook and bake in big iron Dutch ovens. They learned to make stew, chili, Spanish rice, corn bread, and fruit cobbler.

Every summer in this era scouts hiked, backpacked, and climbed in the Colorado high country. Mt. of the Holy Cross (14,001') has been a favorite over the years. The cross couloir was made famous by the W. H. Jackson photo. The boys and the author did an 18 mile trail run in the Holy Cross Wilderness Area negotiating two high passes and 13,000 foot Notch Mountain. We still talk about this particular set of trials. After the challenging activities were completed, our first stop on the way home was usually the Vail McDonalds along I-70.

We also climbed 14,360' La Plata Peak (fifth highest in Colorado) that can be viewed from the highway on the way to Independence Pass. "A silver mine is above timberline ten times out of nine." On that trip we also climbed 13,996' Grizzly Peak. We used Chambers Lake near Cameron Pass as a jumping off place for back packing and climbing in the Rawah Wilderness which is the source of the Laramie River. The scouts (and most of the leaders) loved these challenges. Participants endured blisters, sore muscles, cold temperatures, and partially cooked food. We always always always stayed together. There was never any serious complaining. The guiding theme was to provide challenging activities that would fully engage the boys and lead to a sense of accomplishment.

Several of the boys enjoyed bicycling and so we did a ride to Ft. Kearny which turned out to be another major test. Part of the route was loose gravel and we were all riding road bikes. Cyclocross and "gravel" bikes were uncommon in those days. We were fed up with the loose gravel so on the way home we took Highway 6 where we struggled against gale force east winds. We refused to phone for help. A favorite was pedaling up the smooth asphalt of Hwy 14 in Poudre Canyon with a rest stop at the Foote cabin.

Every summer the Troop drove north into the Sand Hills to canoe the Calamus, Dismal, Loup, and Niobrara rivers. We often camped at Al Blessing's (a local attorney and school board member) farm on the Calamus River northwest of Burwell. This area is now inundated by the

Calamus Reservoir. The area ranchers came to know us and welcome us. Gaylord Wallace and his wife, owners of the Downstream Ranch on the Calamus River, would meet us at the river bank with cookies and Kool Aid. We also viewed grouse “booming” on their ranch. Del Swingle built a canoe trailer that held 8 canoes and equipment.

Shared challenges produced teamwork and character. Many of the challenges were related to bad weather. According to the author’s journal, a group of 29 scouts and family members canoed an 18 mile segment of the Niobrara on Saturday, June 14, 1980. Families have always been involved in camping and canoeing, but this event was more than we bargained for. Paddling into a strong east wind, it took over six hours to get to the take out bridge. Tired paddlers rested near the bridge while the drivers went to get the vehicles. A fierce wall cloud battered the group with severe wind and large hail. It damaged the vehicles and flooded and washed out the access roads up and down the river valley. The folks waiting at the bridge tried to use the canoes and the bridge as protection but some suffered welts from the hail. We walked to rancher Roy Breucklander’s summer trailer house downstream and he graciously let us stay the night on the floor of his trailer. He happened to have a stock of peaches and cocoa which we devoured because we had only a little snack food left over from the long day in the canoes. Roy gave us everything he had! Everyone helped each other and did the best they could. There was no complaining. We read in Monday papers that this storm spawned numerous tornadoes as it moved across northern Nebraska counties.

Penny Lungren (*Twenty-Five Years Past the Century Mark*, p. 30) tells this story:

Some Scouts remember the Blue Nose Campout in Russell Golgert’s pasture in 1971 when they woke up to such deep snow the National Guard had to be called to the rescue!

Jeff Howard remembers that Dave Stewart created the “Order of the Blue Nose” award.

Hastings College Professors Charles Evans and Dennis Storer taught Citizenship in the Nation and Citizenship in the World merit badges during this era. The general philosophy of the Troop was to respect all peoples. Leaders and older scouts modeled respectful behavior and language.

**By 1979, 158 Troop 200 boys had earned the rank of Eagle Scout.**

### **The Modern Era (1990’s to 2018):**

Troop 200 continued to be well organized and active. It faithfully carried on the traditions that had been established in the preceding eras. In the 1990’s, incoming Webelos scouts were formed into a new patrol and encouraged to reach the rank of First Class by the end of the first year. Then they could move to another patrol if they wished. Patrol leaders had responsibility for mentoring younger scouts and for planning campouts and other activities. The Troop was run by the Scouts serving in elected positions that they held for a period of six months. Family involvement was encouraged with parent meetings held the first Monday of each month. Each parent picked a month and helped the Scouts organize that month’s campout. “A campout

took place every month except December rain or shine.” A trailer was used to move all the supplies and equipment needed for a campout.

Campout locations in the modern era included state parks such as Mormon Island, Windmill, Chadron, and Fort Kearny. Other locations included Liberty Cove, Prairie Lake, Waubonsie State Park, IA, Halsey Forest, Hastings College Observatory, Strategic Air Command Museum, and Henry Doorly Zoo. A bigger trailer was purchased around 2010 to help move gear.

Summer camps were important and involved a combination of the following camps: Augustine, NE; Cedar, NE; Lewis and Clark Scout Camp near Yankton, SD; Jayhawk, KS; Medicine Mountain Scout Camp near Rapid City, SD; and San Isabel Scout Camp near Rye, Colorado (southwest of Pueblo in the shadow of Greenhorn Mountain).

High Adventure trips attended by Troop 200 included Philmont Scout Ranch, Boundary Waters, and National Jamboree. The goal was to give the boys a variety of experiences. Participation in Camp Augustine programs has been a constant since its construction in 1950. Many of the activities were just plain fun such as swimming and archery. There were opportunities to earn merit badges and challenging programs were provided such as the 50 mile “Inter-Island Adventure” (Locke) and “Mirage” (Stewart). The 50 Mile “inter-Island Adventure was designed to be challenging even for advanced scouts. Participants hiked islands of the Platte River and “lived off the land,” eating wild berries, onions, and asparagus, while carrying only a sheet of plastic for shelter, a small bag of Bisquick and a few survival tools. The final meal required the boys to “process” live chickens! Dave Steward created the “Mirage” activity at Camp Augustine, allowing imaginative boys to come up with fun ways to surprise and amuse rank and file campers. For generations, Troop 200 leaders have promoted fundraising projects so that all boys could attend. Through the generations certain members of FPC have anonymously contributed funds so that all scouts could participate in all activities. Troop leaders in the modern era have been mindful that the cost of uniforms, equipment, fees, etc. have continued to increase and have worked hard to make it possible for all boys to participate fully. On January 1, 2014, after years of discussion, the BSA National Council approved a resolution to remove a restriction denying membership to youth on the basis of sexual orientation. Troop 200, like the national organization, has remained steadfastly apolitical, but has always tried to practice inclusion.

**246 boys have earned the rank of Eagle Scout as of August, 2018.**

### **God and Country Award – A Scout Is Reverent:**

Sponsorship by First Presbyterian Church plus encouragement of leaders and parents motivated scouts to tackle the rigorous God and Country program. Associate pastors typically provided the guidance. Pat Kleiber’s mother, Louise Billings, taught God and Country from 1955 to 1957. Sadly, we cannot find a list of boys who completed the God and Country program. Jeff Howard writes:

Two years(!) of Saturday mornings at the church....We had a workbook with weekly assignments to complete. Bible study. Memorization. Devotional reflection. Dave and

I did custodial chores at church with custodian Wally Huff. Hours!...We often found ourselves in the church office folding bulletins and stuffing envelopes under the eye of secretary Winnie Vaughan.

There are 100's of medals related to God and Country listed on the Scout website. Nearly every religion and denomination is listed. A partial listing includes most of the Protestant denominations, Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic, Polish National Catholic, Salvation Army, Quaker, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Buddhist, Islam, and so forth. At some point, perhaps in the 1960's or 1970's, the BSA organization decided to be more culturally inclusive.

### **Examples of Service – “To serve, to strive, and not to yield” (Tennyson):**

(not a complete list and not in chronological order)

- Planted NRD trees on area farms.
- Picked up trash around Heartwell Lake.
- Helped install Oregon Trail markers in Adams County (e.g., 32 Mile Station).
- Planted trees on Arbor Day.
- Raked leaves for free will offering and donated proceeds to Healthy Beginnings.
- Sold popcorn and soda at the pro wrestling programs at the City Auditorium. Profits were used to help scouts pay for the Camp Augustine week.
- Visited retirement homes and mingled, played games, and sang.
- Worked on a Habitat for Humanity house.
- Cleaned military headstones.
- Built a gazebo.
- Installed playground equipment at Alcott school.
- Painted fire hydrants.
- Thinned trees and painted picnic shelter at Halsey Forest State Park.

### **Examples of Eagle Service Projects:**

246 Troop 200 Boy Scouts have earned the rank of Eagle as of August, 2018. This requires earning a total of 21 merit badges including 13 from a required list. A major service project is also required. The project must demonstrate leadership and organization. Examples of Eagle service projects are (not a complete list):

- 1971 Jon Jorgenson – Distributed Goodfellows food at Christmas.
- 1979 Ken Locke – Planted 50+trees at the west end of Lake Hastings.
- 1979 Todd Wilson –Made major improvements to Rader Park.
- 1983 Troy Wilson – Implemented Phase 2 of improvements to Rader Park.
- 1983 Timm Wilson – Worked with Mary Helen McCormick to move food pantries from churches to GSV. Included a canned food drive.
- 1997 Brian Johnson – Built/installed cabinets for Little League equipment room at Duncan Field.
- 2002 Blake Hyde – Installed plywood on walls of metal building and painted at the Hitting Facility.
- 2005 Rob Shoemaker – installed storm drain markers that discourage dumping into storm drains that go to streams. 2007 Thomas Freetly – Installed approx. 100 tree identification posts and plaques on Hastings College campus.

- 2007 Thomas Freetly – Installed approx. 100 tree identification posts with plaques at the Hastings College Arboretum.
- 2010 Cody Newlun – Installed benches along bike path.
- 2011 Mason Spilinek – photo documented tomb stones in Juniata Cemetery and uploaded to Nebraska genealogical website.
- 2012 Collin Spilinek – restored kitchen annex at First United Methodist Church.
- 2016 Alexander Kleinjan – Refurbished American Legion Park.

**Closing:** Most boys are motivated by extrinsic rewards such as badges and medals. But eventually intrinsic motivation takes over and drives advancement. Through the process of advancement, scouts are introduced to many skills and career paths. Character traits of service, integrity, leadership, and environmental stewardship are developed with every step on the journey. They live the scout oath and the scout laws every day. As Penny Lungren says (p. 30), “These boys exemplify the high ideals of scouting: ‘to keep physically strong, mentally awake, and morally strong.’”

Attachments: Scoutmaster list, Eagle Scout list, testimonials of Troop 200 scouts.

### **Troop 200 Scoutmasters**

FPC Session Minutes state that Curtis Galt was to be the first Scoutmaster of Troop 4. We have been unable to locate records that name other Troop 4 scoutmasters who served. Penny Lundgren offers the list for Troop 200 through Mike Sidlo (p. 30, Twenty Five Years Past the Century Mark 1973-1998). Harvey Freetly supplied the rest of the names.

Francis Robertson  
 Walter Jones  
 Robert Zook  
 William Fink  
 Dave Stewart  
 John Scholtz  
 Will Locke  
 Roger Pitney  
 Jack Sandeen  
 Michael Kleppinger  
 George White  
 Tim Johnson  
 Mike Sidlo  
 Ron Hill  
 Harvey Freetly  
 David Patterson  
 Tom Kleinjan