



## Lord Baden-Powell Benefactor of Boyhood B-P and Freemasonry

---

*Many Scouters express interest in whether or not B-P was a Freemason. The values of Scouting are said to closely parallel those of Freemasonry and many of B-P's contemporaries were members of the fraternity. In researching this subject, I became acquainted with a long-time Scouter and Mason, who has devoted considerable effort to the question. His researches have included correspondence with the United Grand Lodge of England, the competent Masonic body in England, and with Brother Scouters and Masons in Belgium, England, Australia and the United States. His research leads him to the conclusion that B-P, most probably, was not a Freemason.*

*The author, now in his 80's, is a 32° Mason, an Eagle Scout, and a member of the Order of the Arrow. He has generously given permission for the publication of the conclusions of his research, requesting only that his manuscript be published without direct attribution, as he feels he is of an age and time when he does not feel able to respond to correspondence and would not wish to appear ungracious. He devotes most of his energy in continued research and writing on Freemasonry. An article edited from this manuscript has appeared in Masonic publications.*

---

## Lord Baden-Powell, Benefactor of Boyhood

During the mid-1920's, you may have stood with me, among myriads of Scouts from outlying areas of Chicago, in the Stockyard Pavilion, welcoming the founder of the Boy Scout movement, Sir Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, Baron of Gilwell, Lord Baden-Powell, affectionately known to us as "B.-P." Sir Robert was born in London on February 22, 1857, the 125th anniversary of the birth of our Masonic Brother, George Washington. Truly, Lord Baden-Powell's name may be

counted among the great benefactors and philanthropists of humanity celebrated by Freemasons everywhere.

There is an inspiring legend that found its way into the Boy Scout Handbook at that time, 1927, possibly attributable to Henry Van Dyke, famed allegorical and religious writer, who was serving on the editorial board of the Boy Scouts of America. It is the story of an unknown boy who appeared in the London fog to an American publisher and philanthropist, William Dickson Boyce (1858-1929.) Boyce was looking for an address. The boy identified himself as a Scout and, offering to carry his briefcase, cheerfully guided him to the location of his appointment without accepting a reward, explaining that his service was his good turn for the day.

Deeply impressed, Boyce learned from the boy the location of his organization, but he disappeared into the fog before Boyce could ask his name, and to this day he remains the "Unknown Scout."

Profoundly inspired by this incident, Boyce met with "B.-P." in 1909 to learn all he could about the Boy Scouts. When he returned home to America, he searched for ways to organize the Scouts here, and, when he had found a way, he gave of his own resources to establish Scouting in the United States.

He found two groups for boys already interested in nature lore, "The Woodcraft Indians" of Ernest Thompson Seton and the "Sons of Daniel Boone" created by Daniel Carter Beard who wrote and illustrated many books on woodcraft and animal lore. Boyce brought the Seton and Beard groups into his plan, thereby establishing the Boy Scouts of America, appointing Seton as Chief Scout and Beard as National Scout Commissioner. The group was chartered on February 8, 1910.

Soon he became aware that boys in rural areas and small towns were unable to find sufficient numbers to assemble patrols and troops. Then, through Baden-Powell in 1913, he learned of Lone Scouting underway in England. He incorporated this group in America on January 19, 1915, and soon united it with the Boy Scouts of America.

Boyce gave freely of his time and energy to establish the B.S.A., insisting that it must include all boys of whatever race or creed. Any violation of this tenet was a deviation from the intent of its founding fathers.

My neighbor, an older boy, introduced me to the troop and taught me the "Tenderfoot" requirements. The trail of achievement to honors was open to all boys in our community. Scouting was a dominant experience in my life leading toward my petition for Degrees in Freemasonry. In "trailing the Eagle" through tests of merit, I met many mentors who reviewed my world and knowledge. They were prominent men of our community. They were also Masons.

Their example deeply impressed me. During my senior year in high school, our principal, who was accustomed to select a youth to attend Rotary Club with him, chose me. Many of the Rotarians I met were also

Masons and the same men who had certified the steps I had taken along the Scouting trail. I still remember my joy as I stood among these men of high achievement, joined with them to form the symbolic wheel of Rotary, and sang "Firm Bound in Brotherhood." Had I been a Mason then, I would have associated all this with the moral and spiritual symbolism of Masonry.

The organizational pattern of achievement in Scouting and the Scottish Rite are similar: Tenderfoot, First Degree; Second Class, Second Degree; First Class, Third Degree; followed by stages of merit, like Chapters or Degrees, the one culminating in the Eagle, while the other culminating in the Double Eagle.

That the pattern in Scouting achievement resembles advancement in Freemasonry is no surprise. A scholar has pointed out that "the founder of the Boy Scouts, Lord Baden-Powell, was very closely inspired by the Masonic model, a fact that allowed the French Boy Scout organization to preserve its unity while grouping together Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and lay associations." Scouts "trail," Masons "travel." To one who has experienced the progressive movement of both, the similarities of "trailing" and "traveling" are self-evident.

"B.-P." began military service at the age of nineteen, in India, and, later, served in Africa. It is possible that in those years he became a Mason in some Lodge whose records are lost. My search of records in the Grand Lodge of England has not revealed his membership. At the turn of the century his heroic leadership attracted popular attention, and a book he had written about improving preparation of young men entering the military field attracted wide notice. This led to his study of a group of camping boys, resulting in *Scouting for Boys*, published in 1908. By 1910 the group had become so large that Baden-Powell retired from the army to devote full time to what became an international organization. At a "Jamboree" in 1920 he was given the title of Chief Scout of the World. He had happily seen his work become a world brotherhood.

A close friend of "B.-P.:" the poet Rudyard Kipling, was made a Mason in India. Their friendship led "B.-P." to use Kipling's series of stories in *The Jungle Book* as the background theme for Cub Scouting. In England a number of Masonic Lodges have membership predominately composed of Brethren associated with Scouting. They hold an annual reunion in London, sponsored by one of the Lodges, where they wear their Scout uniforms and display their Masonic regalia.

It is, of course, perfectly true that the structure of Scouting and Freemasonry are archetypal and could have evolved independently. In any case, "B. P." embodies in his life and work the true spirit of brotherhood and influenced its incorporation into the hearts and minds of young people everywhere. Sir Robert S. S. Baden-Powell died in Nyeri, Kenya Colony, East Africa, on January 8, 1941. His life and work affirm the words of Brother Luther Burbank: "I believe in the immortality of influence."



Letter from the Secretary of the Library and Museum of the [United Grand Lodge of England](#), July 9, 1990



Excerpt from a letter from a Belgian Scouter and Freemason in Antwerp citing an article "[Origines de Scoutisme](#)" ("Origins of Scouting") in a French Masonic research journal, September 25, 1994.



"[Freemasonry and Baden-Powell](#)," an article by Edward Robinson, MM, Westminster Lodge 308, appears on the web site of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, A. F. & A. M. The article has material from *Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076*, the English Lodge of Research, some background on Kipling and the Baden-Powell family, as well as a listing of active Lodges in the British Commonwealth named for Baden-Powell.



[Return to the Baden-Powell Home Page](#)



[Return to the Pine Tree Web Home Page](#)

Your feedback, comments and suggestions are appreciated.  
Please write to: [Lewis P. Orans](#)



**THE PINE TREE WEB**



Copyright © Lewis P. Orans, 1997  
Last Modified: 11:45 PM on July 31, 1997

