

The History of Commissioner Service in the Boy Scouts of America.

The Boy Scouts of America was created on February 8, 1910 by W. D. Boyce . On June 21, a group of 34 representatives from around the nation met and developed organizational plans. This group opened a temporary national headquarters in New York using a local YMCA office. In September, Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, visited the U.S. and described the program.



Daniel Carter Beard, from cover illustration by Joseph Chase for Boy's Life Magazine, February 1925



Uniform from 1919

In the early days of the BSA, units were organized by resourceful individuals who sometimes had to acquire the materials from England and other places to make it happen. These first organizers were commissioners.

The newly formed troops didn't communicate well and as a result there were many inconsistencies. The new National Office struggled to manage the variations in the program. One area that was an obvious inconsistency was uniforming.

Some units used military uniforms while others created their own either by referencing images of English Scout uniforms (from the English Scout Handbook) or by simply putting pieces of "scout-like" items together to form an ad-hoc uniform.

Daniel Carter Beard was asked to be the first National Commissioner. Part of his duties were to create a uniform standard as well as standards for program and field operations. With a National Commissioner at the helm and new standards, the would-be commissioners already in the field would need to become official.

The first "official" Field Commissioners were appointed in 1914. These field representatives issued special awards (like Life, Star, Eagle, and Lifesaving) as well as, the authority to both create new units and to remove commissions from volunteers as needed.



Dan Beard and Baden-Powell 1936

After a couple of years (in 1916) some of these early commissioners were asked to become Scout Executives. A few accepted the position and the Field Executive position was born. This shift eventually led to the separation of the roles of the executive and the commissioner. This began a partnership between volunteers and professionals that exists still today.



Early ADC Patch

(Note the "wreath of service" on all commissioner and professional's position patches. This wreath is a symbol for the service rendered to units. It also symbolizes the continued partnership between volunteers and professionals. The Wreath of Service represents the unending commitment, on the part of Commissioners, to program and unit service. The position of Commissioner is the oldest in Scouting and is the origin of the professional Scouting positions, which is why professional Scouters wear the Wreath of Service as well. As a direct result of the importance of unit service to the successful delivery of the Scouting program, there are Commissioners at every level of Scouting)

The first commissioners were Council commissioners. As councils grew, more help was needed. The councils began to divide the workload into manageable districts where the district commissioner structure emerged. One Commissioner could handle a few units, but as districts grew, so did the structure of the Commissioner Corps.



Commish Collar Device



Early Neighborhood Commissioner patch

In the 1940's the structure of commissioner service began to evolve. A need for unit serving commissioners was apparent. The workload on District commissioners and Deputy DC's was too heavy, and a more personal touch was needed. The position of Neighborhood Commissioner was created to fill this gap. These Neighborhood commissioner would usually serve only up to four units.

By the 1960's the terminology changed as did the structure. Neighborhood Commissioners were now known as Unit Commissioners and only served a maximum of three units. All Deputy positions were changed to Assistant Commissioner Service as we know it today began to take shape.

Experimentation in the 1970's brought us a short lived Zone Commissioner as well as Stovepiping some of the Commissioner positions. In the 1980's these were dropped and by 1990 a new plan with a new National Commissioner position to create the Commissioner structure now in place.

Today organization from the national level, Boy Scouts of America has a National Commissioner. Reflective of national, each Council has a Council Commissioner and Assistant Council Commissioners to ease the work load. It is at the District level that you will find most of BSA's Commissioners serving. Whether as District Commissioner, Assistant District Commissioners, Roundtable Commissioners, or Unit Commissioners. The Unit Commissioner being the most important of all the rest because of the unit service they provide. Without that service, we would have no reason to have the other positions.

From Cimarron Council BSA