



Collecting Scouting Handbooks

The ISCA Getting Started Collecting Series

If you are now or were ever a Scout, your first Scouting “collectible” was probably your Cub Scout or Boy Scout handbook. Since Scouting was founded in 1908 and then incorporated in the United States in 1910, there have been millions and millions of Scouting handbooks distributed. In this introductory article we will only talk about Handbooks for the Boy Scouts of America. However, if collecting printed materials from Scouting catches your interest, there are many different possibilities that a collector can consider, from both the United States and around the world. Since 1911, there have been eleven completely different editions of the Boy Scout Handbook. The following is a brief summary of each one.

1910

68,900 copies

The 1910 Handbook, also referred to as the “Original Edition”, was not new material but rather a compilation of existing information from two other sources. Soon after the incorporation of the Boy Scouts of America in February 1910, there was a huge demand for a handbook that could be used to support the efforts of the early United States Scouts. Ernest Thompson Seton, the first Chief Scout of the BSA, offered to prepare a book that could be used until the first “real” handbook could be developed. He took material from Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* that had been published in England in 1908 and his own *Birch Bark Roll* used by the Woodcraft Indians, an earlier outdoor program youth group, and combined them to make the first Boy Scouts of America *Official Handbook*. The picture of the cover shows a boy wearing a typical British Scouting uniform holding a United States flag. The early printings of this volume credit both Seton and Baden-Powell as authors; in later printings Seton listed only his own name on the cover.

1911

300,000 copies

The first Handbook for Boys officially developed by the BSA was printed in 1911. The cover drawing of a Boy Scout waving his hat inviting others to join him in Scouting was done by Gordon Grant. The proof copies and the first three printings had the olive drab cover and the 4th through 10th printings had a maroon cover. Many different expert authors contributed their efforts to the contents of this manual. The BSA helped keep the cost down by selling advertisement space in the front flyleaf page and rear pages of the book to

many different companies selling everything from Shredded Wheat to Bicycles to ponies to knives to shoes to Heinz 57 varieties of sauces.

The boys who used this handbook progressed through the ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Life *and then* Star and Eagle. They participated in the spread of the new Scouting movement throughout the United States and around the world.

1914

3,000,000 copies

This edition is now commonly called the “Second Edition,” but it was originally referred to as the “Revised Edition”. The famous cover drawing by J.C. Leyendecker portrays two Scouts signaling and the first printings had four errors that were corrected one-by-one in subsequent editions: (1) the position of the Scout does not represent any letter or numeral in the semaphore code, (2) the design of the flags is not the type used in semaphore signaling, they are the design of Morse code wig-wag flags, (3) the patrol colors are on the wrong shoulder of the uniform, and (4) the First Class badge has no knot attached to the bottom of the scroll. The cover color was initially gray, and then it was changed to rose, then red, then pale green, and finally to various shades of olive green.

Millions of Scouts studied this manual and used its skills at home and in Europe in the service of their country during the Great World War (now known as World War I).

1927

4,000,000 copies

We call it the “Third Edition” (although it was then still referred to as the “Revised Edition”) and it features a cover drawing by a then young artist named Norman Rockwell entitled “Famous Americans.” A young Scout watches the future with George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Boone, a Native American, and Theodore Roosevelt. In a late change to the drawing, a Spanish conquistador just behind the Scout was replaced with Charles Lindbergh who had just finished the first non-stop flight over the Atlantic Ocean earlier that year. Advertisements were still an integral part of the handbook and most printings include one for United States Bicycle Tires on the back cover.

The Scouts who used this manual found purpose and direction that carried them through the world-wide Great Depression. In the midst of those times, the Scouting movement

thrived and celebrated its Silver Anniversary in 1935 and held its first National Jamboree in 1937.

1940

3,000,000 copies

The “Fourth Edition” was still designated as the “Revised Edition” and was a continuation of the 1927 volume but with a new painting by the now famous Norman Rockwell. It portrays a Boy Scout, a Cub Scout, and a Sea Scout in full uniform. Earlier printings included 16 full color pages in the front of the book showing flags, uniforms and Scouting badges. The color was eliminated and the size of the book was reduced in later years to save ink and paper as a part of the World War II conservation measures.

Millions of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines used the Scouting skills of their youth to survive the perils of war and bring home the victory. Their younger brother Scouts stayed at home and participated in scrap drives, wastepaper collections, messenger service, and hundreds of other tasks that supported the wartime efforts of their country.

1948 and 1949

6,000,000 copies

The Fifth Edition (now designated as such by the BSA) originally featured a very impressionistic cover painting of hiking Scouts by an unknown artist. Perhaps this was too different from the more realistic Norman Rockwell illustrations, because in 1950, the cover drawing was changed to the scene of a two Scouts and an Explorer Scout seated around a campfire with the spirit of an Indian Chief being formed by the smoke. The general size and content of this edition maintained the features introduced during World War II.

The Scouting movement grew very rapidly in the decade following World War II as the United States faced the early years of the cold war with Russia and the hot war in Korea. Scouts were trained in citizenship to understand the danger of the spread of communism around the world. Three National Jamborees (1950, 1953, and 1957) were attended by thousands of Scouts and leaders during this time period.

1959

4,000,000 copies

The Sixth Edition was released just in time to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the BSA in February 1960. The cover, once again the work of Norman Rockwell, features a fully uniformed Scout carrying a copy of this new handbook with other hiking and camping scenes in the background. The size and content of the handbook were expanded and revised, and this edition was the last one to include paid advertisements. Color illustrations are used throughout the book and the cost was now the great sum of \$1.00.

The Scouts who used this edition of the handbook to help lead their local troops have led our nation during the past 25 years. This was a tense period for the USA with the nuclear arms race, the Cuban missile crisis, and the expansion of the war in Vietnam. Scouting was a vital part of the lives of America's youth during this time. The 1960 National Jamboree and 50th Anniversary celebration in Colorado Springs was a high point for many Scouts.

1965

4,375,000 copies

The Seventh Edition shows a picture of several hiking Scouts with camp scenes in the background drawn by new artist Don Lupo. Scouting was reaching out to boys with a new program called "Boypower/Manpower". During the printing of this edition, the BSA hosted its first and only World Jamboree to date (1967) and the 7th National Jamboree (1969) at Farragut State Park in Idaho. The whole world of Scouting came to the USA for a visit.

Many of the fathers and uncles of today's Scouts used this edition and the one that followed to earn their Eagle Scout badges. During this exciting period of our nation's history, an Eagle Scout would be the first man to set foot on the moon. Scouting helped stabilize the lives of many young men as they dealt with the controversy surrounding the war in Vietnam and the demonstrations for peace and racial equality back home.

1972 and 1976

3,700,000 copies

The Eighth Edition was issued simultaneously with major changes in the Scouting movement and organization in the United States. The first cover of two shades of green

showed a group of Scouts in red berets looking at the moon through a telescope. The second cover issued during the bicentennial year of the USA features a racially and ethnically diverse group of Scouts engaged in all sorts of interesting activities. The BSA consolidated operations by reducing the number of regions from 12 to 6. The 1973 National Jamboree was held simultaneously on both the east and west coasts and was attended by over 70,000 Scouts and leaders – the largest attendance ever.

The youth who were Scouts during this period of change were introduced to skill awards, many new merit badges, and the Leadership Corps program. The slogan of this era was “Scouting today is a lot more than you think.”

1979

2,750,000 copies

The Ninth Edition marked a return by the BSA to the outdoor fundamentals of Scouting. William Hillcourt, known around the world as “Green Bar Bill”, a veteran Scouter and personal friend of Baden-Powell, served as the editor. His years of Scouting experience made this edition one of the best outdoor guides ever written. The new cover picture of a Scoutmaster and his Scouts camping by a lake was once again by Norman Rockwell. Both Hillcourt and Rockwell would end their careers with the BSA with this handbook edition.

The youth who learned the principles of Scouting and followed the “Trail to Eagle” found in this handbook are now making their mark in our society as the leaders of the new information age. Their children are the ones beginning to fill the ranks of Scouting today.

1990

3,150,000 copies

The Tenth Edition introduced the “New Scout” program and a completely revised set of requirements for advancement from Tenderfoot to First Class Scout. The cover was the first to feature actual pictures of real Scouts engaged in challenging outdoor activities. The content of this edition was expanded to include much more information about Scouting skills of all types and was designed to encourage Scouts to pursue opportunities for service in their communities as well as to have fun in the outdoors.

The “Trail to Eagle” is the subtitle featured on the cover of this manual and a well-worn copy of this handbook is often on the display table of Scouts who are now completing their Eagle Scout requirements. These young men will be our first Scouting leaders of the new millennium and the future of our nation and the Scouting movement is in good hands.

1998

3,000,000 copies to date

The Eleventh Edition features a new look, a new size, and a new content. Topics include the latest information on low impact camping, the latest and safest first aid procedures, personal development guidelines, and the power of the internet. The picture on the back cover showing a Scout kayaking was taken on a mountain river in North Carolina. The front cover picture is a composite of several different scenes from around the United States woven together by computer aided graphic technology.

Despite its “state of the art” creation and publication, Scouts of the 21st century will still find in this handbook the exact same Scout Oath, Scout Law, and Scout Motto as their brother Scouts found in those first handbooks of 1910 and 1911.

Except for the Original Edition and the first two BSA editions, the cost of collecting Boy Scout Handbooks is not prohibitive. A new collector can purchase nice copies of each edition and each cover variation of the Third through the Eleventh for a total investment of less than \$200. A nice second edition printing would add \$50-75. The first edition printings range from \$200 to over \$1000 each, and nice Original Editions can cost from \$500 to \$2000. For those who can accept a more recent reprint of the more expensive editions, those are available for less about \$25 each.

A display of Boy Scout Handbooks always draws a lot of interest. Especially from Dads and Grandpas showing their sons the handbooks they used when they were Scouts.

-- Russell Smart