

## History of the Order of the Arrow

The Order of the Arrow was founded during the summer of 1915 at Treasure Island, the Philadelphia Council Scout Camp, by Dr. E. Urner Goodman, camp director, and Carroll A. Edson, his assistant. These two men, working with their staff at Treasure Island, originated the ideas that became the basis for this national brotherhood of honored campers of the Boy Scouts of America. Edison served in Scouting for a number of years, and then entered public service work in New York.

Treasure Island, located north of Trenton, NJ in the Delaware River was an early camping ground of the Lenni-Lenape or Delaware Indians. It was part of the original grant of land to William Penn by Charles II of England.

Goodman and Edison wanted some definite form of recognition for those Scouts in their camp who best exemplified the spirit of the Scout Oath and Law in their daily lives. Since the valley of the Delaware was rich in Indian tradition and the site was an island used in bygone days as a camping ground of the Indians, it seemed only natural to base this brotherhood of honored campers on the legend and traditions of the Delaware Indians.

Goodman had been a Scoutmaster in Philadelphia and had considerable experience in Scouting and camping. Edison was a graduate of Dartmouth College and had been in Scouting for a number of years. They both were dedicated to their jobs, and they spent many hours together planning summer activities. In preparation for summer camp, Goodman read several books on camp. One book impressed him with its description of a camp brotherhood which had been used to continue the traditions and ideals of the camp from season to season. Goodman and Edison agreed that they would try to establish a program of this type in their camp.

Shortly after Edison became assistant camp director, he attended a dinner at which Ernest Thompson Seton, Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts of America, described the success he had with the use of Indian ceremonies at summer camp. Seton's experience had been with boys in the Woodcraft Indians, a forerunner of the Scouting movement. For Goodman and Edison, this crystallized their ideas of using lore and legends of the Delaware Indians who once lived on Treasure Island.

As a result, they prepared a simple yet effective ceremony that, in turn, led to the organization of what was later to become known as the Order of the Arrow. It was agreed from the beginning that the procedures and programs of the organization were to be based on the ideals of democracy. In their initial decisions, Goodman and Edison reflected those ideals by planning to elect members into the first lodge from the troops encamped at Treasure Island. Thus, from the beginning, a unique custom was established in that the members were elected by nonmembers. There has been no change in this since that time. Norace W. Ralston, a Philadelphia Scouter, suggested the original name, Wimachtendienk, Wingolauchsik, Witahemui. Ralston and Horace P. Kern had done most of the research on the Delaware Indians.

Friday, July 16, 1915 dawned bright and clear on Treasure Island. In addition to the heavy heat which often hangs over the valley of the Delaware, there was something else in the air. It was an almost indescribable feeling of expectancy and mystery. By sundown the air was charged with a tense excitement. Those who were present will always remember the first induction into what is now the Order of the Arrow.

As darkness fell, the campers were lined up in a single file line by Harry Yoder, who acted as guide and guardian of the trail. In total silence the campers followed the guide by a roundabout route through the woods to the site of the council fire. The path led down a small ravine across which lay an old fallen tree. The boys were unaware that they were approaching the council fire until it was suddenly revealed. It was built in a triangular shape. Behind it, in long black robes, stood the cofounders of the Order of the Arrow (E. Urner Goodman, chief of the fire, and Carroll A. Edson, vice-chief of the fire). The chief wore on his robe a turtle superimposed upon a triangle, denoting leadership. The vice-chief of the fire, then called Sachem, wore a turtle without the triangle. (The turtle is now the totem of Unami Lodge).

The original ceremony was quite different from that which developed later. There were three lessons taught that night:

- 1) The candidate attempted to encircle a large tree, individually, with outstretched arms. Having failed, he then was joined by several of the brothers who together had no difficulty encircling the large tree, thus teaching lesson # 1, Brotherhood.

## History of the OA (continued)

- 2) The candidate was directed to endeavor to scale a steep bank at the edge of the council ring. Failing in this, he again was assisted by the brothers, with whose help he was able to climb the elevation, thus teaching Service.
- 3) The candidate then was given a bundle of twigs and told to place some on the council fire, where the twigs caught fire and blazed brightly, thus showing Cheerfulness.

In the first year, 25 members were inducted in the brotherhood. Many of the members wore a black sash with a white arrow on it. The black sash was used because it offered an excellent contrast to the white arrow. In the original plans there were two degrees: the first was much like a combination of the Ordeal and Brotherhood memberships, and the second an early version of the Vigil Honor.

To perpetuate the brotherhood, a membership meeting was held on November 23, 1915. George W. Chapman, the first lodge chief of Unami Lodge, served as chairman of the organization committee. This marked the first formal founding of the Order of the Arrow. Goodman and Edison served as Advisers to the committee.

By 1917 news of the organization, Wimachtendienk, Wingolauchsik, Witahemui, spread to other Scout camps and inquiries began. Goodman spoke to many interested Scouts and Scouters, and as a result, lodges were established in New Jersey, Maryland, New York, and Illinois.

From 1915 until 1921 the Order grew slowly. World War I kept Scouts and leaders busy with many other problems and projects. In 1921 steps were taken to establish the Order on a national basis. The early years had produced sufficient experience to form a foundation on sound basic policies.

The first national convention was held on October 7, 1921 in Philadelphia, at which a national lodge was formed, composed of four delegates from each of the local lodges. This group adopted a constitution and a statement of policies. Committees were appointed to develop plans for making the Order effective as a national honored camper's brotherhood.

Following the convention there was a steady growth in lodges and membership. At the suggestion of the national lodge meeting in Reading, PA, the Order of the Arrow became an official program experiment of the Boy Scouts of America in 1922.

For several years conventions of the national lodge were held annually. After 1927 they were held at 2-year intervals. During the Philadelphia convention of 1929 it was suggested that the Order become an official part of the Boy Scouts of America and a component of its program. At the session of the national lodge in 1933, held at the Owasippe Camps of the Chicago Council, this proposal was made and ratified by the delegates.

On June 2, 1934 at the National Council Annual meeting in Buffalo, NY, the National Council approved the Order of the Arrow program.

In May 1948 the Executive Board, upon recommendation of its Committee on Camping, officially integrated the Order of the Arrow into the Scouting movement. The Order's national lodge was dissolved and supervision shifted to the Boy Scouts of America.

The executive committee of the national lodge became the National Committee on the Order of the Arrow, a subcommittee of the national committee on Camping and Engineering, and a staff member was employed as national executive secretary. In the 1974 reorganization of the Boy Scouts of America, the Order of the Arrow committee became a subcommittee of the national Boy Scout committee.

The growth of the Order of the Arrow through the years has never been based on an aggressive promotional plan. It came because councils believed in the ideals expressed by the Order and voluntarily requested that lodges be formed. The soundness of providing a single workable honored camper's brotherhood, rather than many, is evident. Over 1 million Boy Scouts, Explorers, Venturers, and Scouters have been inducted into the Order of the Arrow during the past 50 years. There are now over 200,000 active members.

This coverage of the nation makes possible a unified approach. It provides for transfer of membership, standard books and supplies, national training plans, and a coordinated scheme for building strength in local units through regional and national service. All of these add color, enthusiasm, and quality to the camping program of Scouting.