

## Journals of Yesteryear

### Boy Scouting Came to Sarasota County in 1913

[Send to a friend](#) | [Print](#) | [Go Back](#)

#### Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910

Author: Ann A. Shank, former County Historian  
 Email: [jlahurd@scgov.net](mailto:jlahurd@scgov.net)  
 Source: Sarasota County History Center

Three years after the founding of the Boy Scouts of America, community leaders organized the first Sarasota troop in 1913. Boys of ages 10 to 18 were invited to join the program, which was advertised as one to develop good citizens. Men already recognized in the community for their business, educational and professional leadership formed the local council, which was charged with overseeing the scouting program. Within the first year, Col. John Hamilton Gillespie, Sarasota's first mayor and a British scoutmaster, agreed to be an adviser to the group when he was in town. Mrs. Potter Palmer demonstrated her support with a donation of \$100.



The *Sarasota Times* frequently carried stories about the activities of the local Scout troop. A 1914 article described a Thursday camp-out. After a hike out to the country, each boy cooked his meal over the camp fire, spread his blanket on the ground by the fire, and then awakened at 4:30 a.m. for breakfast and the march back to town in time for school. Later that year, the 14 members of the Stag and Raven Patrols went to Longboat Key for "drills and other exercises."

The above photograph came from the collection of Russell B. Woodfin, Sarasota County Council Boy Scout executive for a number of years around 1930. By the time this photo was taken, scout groups had formed around the county. The Osprey troop shown here was Troop 6, led by C.W. Webb. Its clubhouse was dedicated in late 1928.

Although the Sarasota County Council Boy Scouts used Camp Flying Eagle in Manatee County, they also established a more local Camp Tonkawa. Its first site was in a wooded area on the northwest side of Phillippi Creek, about a half mile east of Tamiami Trail, on land made available by Sarasota developer Lewis Combs. Before the camp opened in June 1928, the *Sarasota Herald* printed a list of needed supplies. Army mosquito nets and mosquito dope were preceded only by cots at the top of the list. Alva Johnson's memories of camping there as a Scout include clouds of mosquitoes so thick the boys just brushed them away. There were too many to swat. The Scouts slept in Army type tents on wooden floors. Canoeing and swimming, the favorite activities, were in Phillippi Creek.

After a number of the boys caught typhoid fever at the Phillippi Creek site, Camp Tonkawa opened in June 1931 at a new site on, Siesta Key near Blind Pass. The following month, the camp was host to approximately 50 Scouts and leaders from Havana, Cuba. For several years in the early 1930s, while Woodfin was Scout executive, Sarasota and Havana Scouts exchanged visits.

Over the years the Boy Scouts have participated in a wide variety of community service activities. Perhaps the most unusual for the Sarasota Scouts took place after the September 1928 hurricane that caused nearly 2,000 deaths when Lake Okeechobee overran its banks. Alva Johnson remembers going with the Scouts to the lake area to help recover the bodies. That was a sickening experience for him.

If you can fill in the gaps in the Scout file at the Sarasota County History Center, please call them at 941-861-6090.

Special Thanks to Ann A. Shank, Sarasota County Historian, Sarasota County History Center for her research and time devoted to writing this article.

#### Rate This Article

★★★★★ Total Votes: 2 Avg Vote: 4

#### Comments

You must be [logged in](#) to leave a comment.



advertisement

### Featured Journals

#### The Landing of the Scots

In the 1880s, the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company had invested in Florida and was looking for colonizers to settle in Sarasota. Articles had been placed in newspapers in Scotland exclaiming the wonders of Sarasota. Scots John Browning, John Lawrie and others read these articles and were convinced that this was their future.

[Read More »](#)

#### Holidays Have a History in Sarasota

Although a balmy December day in Sarasota may not trigger childhood holiday memories for all of us, Sarasotans have a long and proud tradition of holiday celebration. The following is a partial account of some notable events that occurred here at Christmas time.

[Read More »](#)

#### Siesta Key Architecture a Natural

A theme woven through the development history of Siesta Key is a strong connection with nature. And today, Siesta Key has some of the whitest sand in the country and sunsets that are spectacular. Not surprisingly, many of the early accommodations on the Key also highlighted the natural beauty of the island in their designs and promotions.[Read More »](#)