



Eagle Scouts

at the Virginia School for the Deaf in Staunton
(1930's to 1990's)

Since the time when scouting began at VSDB, a total of twenty-five scouts attained the rank of Eagle Scout, which was quite an accomplishment for VSDB deaf scouts. Eagle Scouts are (in alphabetic order):

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Arthur Allen | 14. Ralph Kiser |
| 2. Warren Blackwell | 15. Edward McGann |
| 3. William Brightwell | 16. Lacie Mullens |
| 4. William Brizendine | 17. Paul Nelson |
| 5. Frank Bruce | 18. Fred Norman |
| 6. Warren Challin | 19. Ray Parks |
| 7. Olin Creasy | 20. Paul Powers |
| 8. Joe Dawson | 21. Jan Repass |
| 9. Darrell Drake | 22. Lewis Roop, Jr. |
| 10. Albert Fletcher | 23. Flae Shook |
| 11. Marshall Garrette | 24. Ryland Thomas |
| 12. Mack Harris | 25. Leo Yates |
| 13. Clarence Jennings | |

Sadly, the scouting program was disbanded when all students began to go home every weekend and opportunities for scouting activities during the week were not available.

—*History of the Education of the Deaf in Virginia*

Central Virginia Boy Scouting Preservation Project

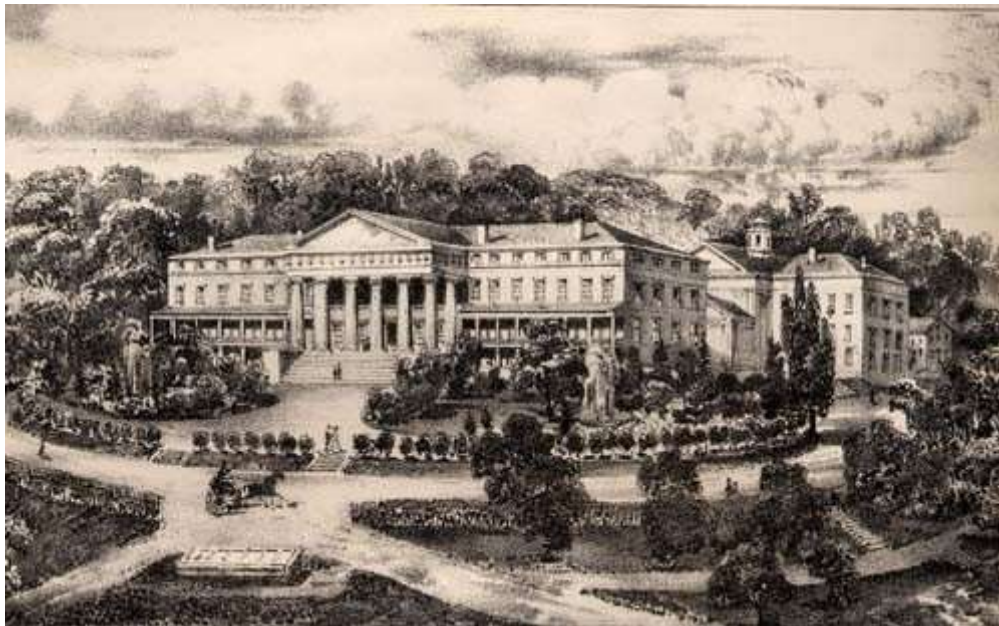
Researching and Preserving the Nostalgic History of Scouting in Virginia Since 1910

Five Deaf Eagle Scouts in Virginia

Posted on December 12, 2020 January 2, 2021 by Ray Ezell

by Ray Ezell, Assistant Southern Region-Area 7 Commissioner

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) was established by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on March 31, 1838 and officially opened in 1839. It is located on a 73-acre tract in historic Staunton, Virginia in the Great Valley of Virginia, and it is one of the oldest schools in the Commonwealth. The school was fully co-educational from the time of its founding although it only accepted white students. The first superintendent was Joseph D. Tyler. The first teacher hired was Job Turner, who served the school for 40 years. J. C. M. Merrilat, a native of Bordeaux, France, served as the first principal of the Blind Department. He became superintendent of both the Deaf and Blind departments in 1852. The school was used as a hospital during the Civil War.



Virginia Institution for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind (now Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind)

Robert Aumon Bass, who was deaf himself, graduated from the VSDB in 1908 and became a faculty member in 1925. He quickly became involved in Scouting at the school, first as assistant scoutmaster, then as scoutmaster of Troop No. 2. In 1948, Bass wrote the *History of the Education of the Deaf in Virginia* which provides details of Scouting at that institution. The information presented in this essay summarizes the Scouting information contained in Chapter 26 of Bass' publication, among other sources.

Troop No. 2 was first organized (without a charter from the BSA) in October 1925 under Scoutmaster Tovio Lindholm, and R. Aumon Bass and T. Carlton Lewellyn were assistant scoutmasters. Lewellyn was the first Physical Education director of the school, and he served from 1913-1962. The unit operated under this organization until February 1927 when it received a formal charter from BSA Headquarters in New York City. The troop was popular, quickly growing to a membership of 40 scouts. Scout Louis Cohen was the first scribe of Troop No. 2 and provided faithful, descriptive reports which were included in the regular Scouting section of the Staunton newspaper. The troop established four patrols: Lion, Eagle, Tiger, and Kangaroo.

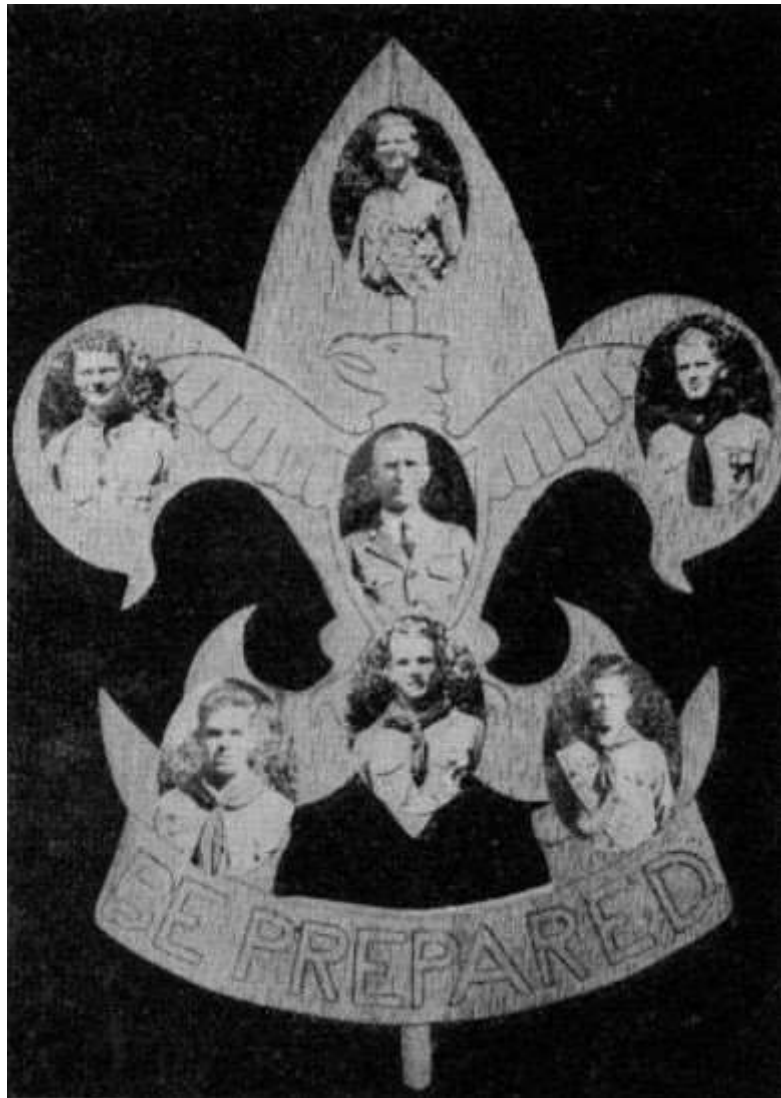
In October 1927, a second troop (No. 10) was organized at the VSDB under Scoutmaster Bass and Asst. Scoutmaster Lewellyn. Scout Lewis Ellio was appointed as the first scribe of this troop. Scout Flae Shook was elected patrol leader of the Pine Tree patrol of Troop No. 10.

During the Easter holiday of 1928, Troop Nos. 2 and 10 held a joint encampment at Grand Caverns, Virginia, and according to a description included in the April 26, 1928 edition of *The News Leader*, a total of 17 scouts were present at the 3-day excursion.

In 1929, a decision was made to enroll all deaf scouts in Troop No. 2 and all blind scouts were enrolled in Troop No. 10. Tovio Lindholm left the VSDB in 1929, and Aumon Bass was installed as scoutmaster of Troop No. 2. Charles A. Bradford, a new faculty member in 1929, was made the new scoutmaster of VSDB Troop No. 10. He continued as its scoutmaster through 1935. By the Spring of 1930, Troop 10 had two blind Life scouts, Clifton Virts and George Corrie—two of the first blind scouts to reach this advanced rank in the country. The May 15, 1931 issue of *The News Leader* reported that George Corrie earned the rank of Eagle Scout. He was the first Eagle Scout at the VSDB. Corrie would also be awarded distinction in leadership during the VSDB commencement in June 1931.

On May 16, 1931, Troop No. 2 erected and presented a 40-ft. flag pole near Swanson Hall on the campus. Two flags were presented and accepted for the school by Superintendent McManaway (and former president of the Stonewall Jackson Council). In June 1931, Troop No. 2 gained special recognition from the Stonewall Jackson Area Council for its delivery of Scouting. The troop was presented with the overall points trophy for efficiency in scout work for the Staunton District and the overall points silver cup trophy for the entire council, which was presented by Executive J.W. Fix.

At the commencement of the VSDB on June 1, 1932 a tremendous milestone was reached for the VSDB. Five deaf scouts of Troop No. 2 were presented with the rank of Eagle Scout. Stonewall Jackson Council President John J. Grava made the presentations to scouts Albert Fletcher (Winchester, Va.), Clarence Jennings (Cliffview, Va.), Lacie Mullins (Grundy, Va.), Fred Norman (Norfolk, Va.), and Flae Shook (Ellerson, Va.). Eagle Scout Fletcher was a charter member of the troop, enrolling in February 1927. Eagle Scout Jennings joined the troop the following June. Eagle Scout Mullins was also a charter member of the troop. Eagle Scout Norman joined the troop in June 1927, and Eagle Scout Shook also joined the troop in June 1927. He also served a troop scribe for a year.



Six Eagle Scouts from Troop No. 2: Warren Blackwell, Arthur Allen, William Brightwell, Marshall Garree, Paul Powers, & Ralph Kiser; Scoutmaster Aumon Bass at center (from *Boys' Life* 1940)

Deaf boys at VSDB were in no way handicapped in the field of Scouting, as evidenced by the fact that the troop has to its credit eight troops presidential awards beginning in 1935, the highest award bestowed by the Stonewall Jackson Area Council for outstanding unit performance each year. By 1932, forty percent of all deaf boys in the school had spent time in the troop, and, according to an article in the June 4, 1932 edition of *The News Leader*, twenty-eight of these scouts advanced beyond the rank of First Class. During the Summer of 1939 two Eagle Scouts from Troop No. 2, Arthur Allen and Warren Blackwell, joined a group of scouts of Stonewall Jackson Council who visited the World's Fair. By April of 1940, there had been a total of 11 deaf Eagle Scouts in the troop (as well as 40 deaf Life scouts).

On November 23, 1940, Troop No. 2 Eagle Scouts made and presented a large log cabin squirrel house to Virginia Governor James H. Price. For a time, it was displayed in a tree in the yard of the Governor's Mansion on capitol square in Richmond.



VSDB Troop No. 2 Eagle Scouts William Brightwell and Warren Blackwell with Virginia Governor James H. Price and Scoutmaster R. Aumon Bass (from *History of the Education of the Deaf in Virginia*, p. 76)

Another notable distinction achieved by a VSDB Scout was when President Roosevelt visited Staunton in 1941 and delivered a speech at the dedication of Woodrow Wilson's birthplace. One of Troop No. 2's Eagle Scouts was on guard, flanking the Chief Executive's podium at the front of the crowd during the address.



Troop No. 2 Scout (far right) Flanking FDR's Podium at Woodrow Wilson's Birthplace, May 4, 1941
(courtesy of PresidentialHistory.com)

The methods of Boy Scouting also were incorporated into the curriculum for the education of deaf students generally at the school. A February 16, 1949 article in *The News Leader* reported that the Boy Scout Oath and Law were taught by both sign language and the manual alphabet under Aumon Bass.

The deaf troop at the VSDB continued for many years with great effect in delivering the promise of Scouting. Many of the accolades and accomplishments of Troop No. 2 are on display at the Deaf History Museum on the VSDB campus, providing an historical archive of the unit. This unique story of Scouting, in a somewhat non-traditional seeing, is deserved to be remembered and retold.



Troop No. 2 Memorabilia and Artifacts at the Deaf History Museum at the VSDB