

Chapter 3 – What are Sea Scouts, and What is Sea Scouting?

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I am proud to say I am the skipper of a Sea Scout ship. “What is a Sea Scout ship or Sea Scouting?” you ask. The best short definition of Sea Scouting I’ve heard came from my Boatswain’s Mate (equivalent of a land Scout Assistant Senior Patrol Leader) when he answered the question by saying, “Sea Scouting is Boy Scouting plus water and girls.”

Sea Scouts are often heard to joke that, “Sea Scouting is the B.S.A.’s best kept secret.” It is unlikely that the Boy Scouts of America keeps secrets, but it is true that Sea Scouting is not very well known to the general public. This is surprising in that Sea Scouting has been around for a long, long time – over ninety years, in fact.

The Sea Scout program is the oldest B.S.A. program for older youth, first organized in 1912, only two years after the founding of the B.S.A. itself in 1910. It far predates the better-known Cub Scout program for younger boys started in 1930¹ and the Explorer Scout program for older boys approved by the National Council, B.S.A. in 1933.²

Sea Scouts today are members of the Venturing Division of the Boy Scouts of America. The program is open to both boys and girls of high school age through age 21. To begin to understand Sea Scouting, you must first begin to understand the customs and practices of sailors and the sea services.

In Sea Scouting, individual Sea Scout units are called ships, and each one has a unit number, just as individual land Scout or Boy Scout units are called troops and have a unit number. Therefore, a Sea Scout Ship is a functional unit of youth and leaders rather than a physical sea-going vessel. Unlike land Scout units, however, most Sea Scout Ships also adopt a name for their unit that has special significance for the group, and it is by that ship’s name that the unit is often referred to. For example, the Sea Scout unit currently chartered to Messiah United Methodist Church in North York is technically Sea Scout Ship 64 and is known as SSS YORKTOWN. A crew member might say, “I’m a crew member of the YORKTOWN,” or he might say, “I belong to Ship 64.” This practice is a substantial parallel to the naval ships having both a name and a number, such as the destroyer USS EDSON (DD-946), except that in the case of Sea Scouts, there is no physical ship involved.

This is not to suggest that Sea Scout Ships don’t use all manner of watercraft in the Sea Scouting program. Virtually anything that floats, from simple log rafts to retired Coast Guard cutters, have been used over the years to get Sea Scouts out on the water. Today the names of Sea Scout vessels are commonly prefixed by SSTV (meaning Sea Scout Training Vessel) as in *SSTV der PeLiKan*, the name of a 46’ Morgan ketch owned by

¹ Troop 49 of Charlotte, NC, *Important Dates in the History of the Boy Scouts of America*, No Date. <<http://www.troop49.org/information/documents/Scout%20History.pdf>> [5 February 2003].

² Michael W. Bowman, *Explorer Scouts (1933-1949)* October 21, 2002. <<http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Falls/8826/explorerscouts.html>> [5 February 2003].

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Friends of Sea Scouting of Maryland, Inc. that is available for use by all Sea Scout Ships in the northern Chesapeake Bay area. In September of 1949, after researching the needs of older boys, the then Senior Scouting program was changed into the Explorer program. Explorer Scouts became Explorers. Air Scouts became Air Explorers. Sea Scouts became Sea Explorers.³ The labels Sea Explorers and Sea Explorer Ship (SES) were used from 1949 until the formation of the Venturing Division of the B.S.A. in 1998 when names Sea Scouts and Sea Scout Ships (SSS) returned.

Keeping the nautical theme, various equivalencies are observed. Whereas the adult leader of a land Scout troop is a scoutmaster, the adult leader of a Sea Scout ship is a skipper. Assistant scoutmasters are known as mates. A senior patrol leader is a ship's boatswain, an assistant senior patrol leader is a boatswain's mate, a patrol is a crew, a patrol leader is a coxswain, a scribe is a yeoman, a land Scout quartermaster is a storekeeper, and a treasurer is the ship's purser. Whereas land Scouts have the familiar advancement ladder from tenderfoot to eagle, Sea Scouts follow a course from apprentice to ordinary seaman to able seaman to quartermaster, with a quartermaster being the Sea Scout equivalent of an eagle Scout.

Sea Scouts are first and foremost Scouts. We are bound by the traditional Boy Scout oath and law. In addition, all Sea Scouts subscribe to the Sea Promise:

*As a Sea Scout I promise to do my best
To guard against water accidents;
To know the location and proper use of the lifesaving devices on
every boat I board;
To be prepared to render aid to those in need; and
To seek to preserve the Motto of the Sea: Women and Children First.*

Nautical format is also used when referring to the various groupings of Sea Scout ships. The Sea Scout ships within a council are referred to as a squadron. The squadrons of the various councils comprising a B.S.A. region are referred to as a flotilla, and the flotillas of the various B.S.A. regions collectively make up the national Sea Scout fleet.⁴ The chairman of each council's Sea Scout committee is that council's squadron commodore. Similarly, there are regional commodores, and one national Sea Scout commodore.

The follows is my attempt to give a brief account of the development of Sea Scouting in the York-Adams Area Council, or in Sea Scout terminology, the York-Adams Area Squadron. For information on the development of Sea Scouting at the national level, from its beginnings in Great Britain to its resurgence today in the United States, see a separate document I prepared entitled [A Chronology of Sea Scouting in the United States](#)⁵.

/s/ George Hay Kain, III

³ Michael W. Bowman, *Explorers (1949-1958)*, 4 September 2002.
<<http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Falls/8826/explorers.html>> [5 February 2003].

⁴ *The Sea Scout Manual*, 6th Edition, second printing May 1941, p. 175.

⁵ On the web at <http://ship25bsa.org/a_chronology.html>.