

# History of Commissioner Service: The First 100 Years

## Royal Beginnings

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The word “commission” dates back to 1344, when it was derived from the Latin word *commissionem*, meaning “delegation of business.” Monarchs delegated authority to a deserving few.

## Baden-Powell’s Gentlemen (1908)



Robert Baden-Powell

Individuals identified by the monarch to be commissioners had to qualify as a “gentleman.” As legally defined, a gentleman earned his income from property, and as such was independently wealthy with time to devote to other agendas. It was exactly these kind of men that Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, wanted

as his volunteer commissioners—those of money and leisure.

Some of Baden-Powell’s early commissioners included W. F. de Bois MacLaren, who donated Gilwell Park, and Rudyard Kipling, author of *The Jungle Book*.



Rudyard Kipling

## The BSA Needs a Few Good Men (1910)

As communities formed more troops, it became evident that some form of leadership was needed to maintain standards, provide camping opportunities, recruit leaders, facilitate training, establish local courts of honor, and stimulate local Scouting. This person was the commissioner.

## The Scout Commissioner (1911)

While originally serving as a volunteer, some areas of a community were able to raise enough funds for the Scout commissioner to become a salaried position. The areas with paid leadership, known as the Scout executive or executive secretary, became identified as First Class Councils. Meanwhile, those areas with a volunteer head called the Scout commissioner were known as Second Class Councils.



The deputy Scout commissioner (left) and Scout commissioner badges. The Scout commissioner badge was one of the originals.

## Wreath of Service (1914)

Today, our society is less connected to military tradition, and the commissioned wreath insignia is thought of more as “the wreath of service” that surrounds all commissioner and professional position badges. This wreath is a symbol for the service rendered to units. It also symbolizes the continued partnership between volunteers and professionals. The wreath represents the commissioner and executive commitment to program and unit service.



The 1914 Scout commissioner (left) and Scout executive insignia featured the wreath of service for the first time.

## National Field Commissioners (1910–20)

Volunteer national field commissioners were available as early as 1910 to help communities organize their local council and troops. There were 68 volunteer field commissioners in 1913.

Many of the volunteer field commissioners worked for other agencies and traveled extensively, helping with Scouting wherever they went. Besides organizing new councils, they had to spend time correcting “false starts” and restraining those who wanted to implement their own brand of Scouting.



Guided by the Scout Commissioners Handbook, volunteer national field commissioners traveled throughout the United States overseeing the early stages of the Boy Scouts of America movement.

## James West's Influence



James West

Chief Scout Executive James West, speaking at the first National Conference of Scout Executives in 1920, suggested that the Scout executive should be the general in the background with the Scout commissioner, as the ranking uniformed officer, giving leadership to Scoutmasters and acting as the ranking officer in public appearances. West recognized that Scout executives moved around and that the

council would benefit from finding and developing a good Scout commissioner.

## The District Commissioner (1931)

District commissioners were introduced in 1931 as an outgrowth of the deputy Scout commissioner position. The book, *Adventures of a District Commissioner*, was the first printed material from the BSA for guiding commissioners.



## Howdy, Neighbor (1933)

The growth of Scouting overloaded the district commissioner and his deputy. This made it necessary to add commissioners to serve specific troops, ships, packs, and Rover crews. Scouting at that time was very community focused, so the neighborhood commissioner position was conceived to serve up to four units in his immediate local area.

## Local Field Commissioners (1930s)

Field commissioners were specialized representatives of the council and served a functional responsibility such as Cubbing, Senior Scouting, Catholic Scouting, Camping, Emergency Service Corps, or Sea Scouts. He was "on call" to the district or neighborhood commissioners as a technical expert in his program. Later, Exploring posts had commissioners known as the Service Team.



Field commissioner for Cubbing



Assistant field commissioner for Cubbing



Exploring Service Team

## The Commissioner Manual (1943)

Councils developed their own commissioner manuals. Following a four-year study, a manual was finally produced by the national office in 1943 that was meant to be used alongside the council's version. Most manuals contained forms and reference materials that a commissioner may need.



Commissioner's manuals from Sir William Johnson Council (1939), national office (1943), and Transatlantic Council (1976).

## Commissioner Arrowhead (1952)

The silver Arrowhead Honor was introduced in 1952. It is now unique to the commissioner service and is unusual in that it requires the application of the knowledge learned in basic commissioner training. The Arrowhead Honor was changed to white in 1970.



## The Commissioner Council (1950s and 1960s)

The Scout commissioner at this point became the council commissioner. The position was still honorary in many councils. However, it was beginning to transition into a job with active leadership of the commissioner staff.



## Unit Focus (1970-72)

The neighborhood commissioner evolved into the unit commissioner, and the mission of the commissioner became clear: Help units succeed. The *Commissioner Fieldbook* was introduced in a handy loose-leaf design to be able to place in a binder and replace pages as needed.



## Commissioners of the Roundtable (1970s)

From early on, district commissioners were expected to hold a monthly meeting of the “District Scouters Round Table.” Eventually, this became too much for the district commissioner to handle, and was delegated to a roundtable leader. Later, an ADC was designated for the task. In the 1970s, the roundtable commissioner became an official title. This also completed the district commissioner’s evolution into an administrative commissioner.



## Experimentation Continues (1975)

In 1975, an alternative was offered whereby councils could have their commissioners specialize in a program area. Both organizational structures remained focused on the unit. By 1980, the optional plan disappeared from the manuals.



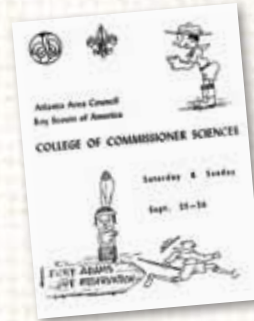
## Female Commissioners (1973–76)

Women were allowed to become Cub Scout unit commissioners or Cub Scout roundtable commissioners in 1973. Three years later, women could hold any commissioner position and were given the khaki uniform to wear.



## Commissioner College (1976)

The first College of Commissioner Sciences was held in Atlanta in 1976. Course topics included physical education, staging roll call and inspections, and exciting charter presentation ceremonies.



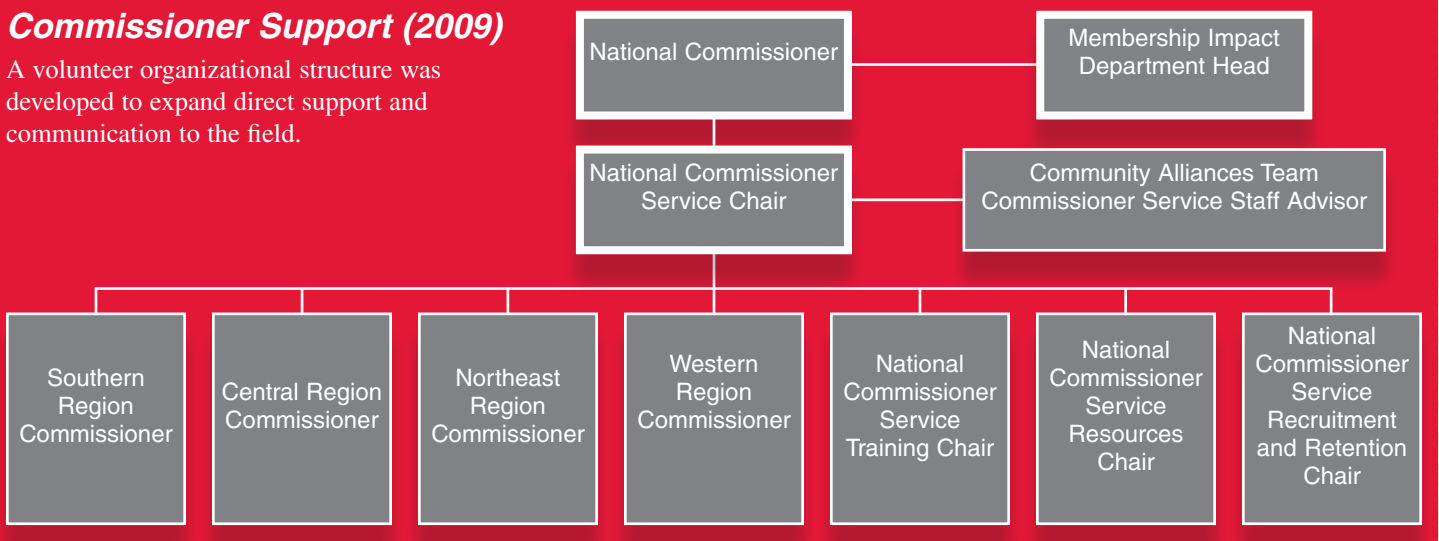
## Commissioner Service is Reborn (2008)

Today, council commissioners are accountable for the unit service program in their councils. The appointment of area and regional commissioners expands the direct support to the council and demonstrates—that at all levels of the organization—the importance of commissioner service is being recognized.



## Commissioner Support (2009)

A volunteer organizational structure was developed to expand direct support and communication to the field.





*Tico Perez, National Commissioner*

### **National Commissioners**

- 2008–present Tico Perez
- 2004–2008 Donald D. Belcher
- 1999–2004 William F. “Rick” Cronk
- 1995–1999 Frances Olmstead
- 1990–1995 Earl G. Graves
- 1943–1960 George J. Fisher
- 1910–1941 Daniel Carter Beard
- 1910–1911 Peter S. Bomus
- 1910–1911 William Verbeck

### **Role of the National Commissioner**



*National commissioner badge used today*

Dan Beard was the chairman of the National Court of Honor. He became a known symbol of and cheerleader for Scouting. Today’s national commissioner, Tico Perez, while still a cheerleader for Scouting, has a much more participatory role in improving commissioner service and leading the commissioner corps.

*National commissioner badge from the 1930s used by Dan Beard*



### **The International Commissioner**

The Boy Scouts of America is represented in world contacts and developments by the volunteer international commissioner. The first international commissioner was Mortimer Schiff.



### **Famous Commissioners**

#### **Theodore Roosevelt**

- Scout commissioner of the Nassau County Council
- President of the United States
- First (and only) Chief Scout Citizen



#### **George J. Fisher**

- National commissioner
- Inventor of volleyball

#### **“Uncle” Dan Beard**

- National commissioner
- Illustrator of Mark Twain books



*“Uncle Dan’s” 90th birthday celebration, Boy Scout Day, New York World’s Fair, 1940*

# A Century of Service

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Baden-Powell



Daniel Carter Beard



Teddy Roosevelt



Earl Graves



Rick Cronk



Don Belcher



Tico Perez

- 1344** The word *commissionem* is introduced to the English language during the rein of Edward III.
- 1908** Baden-Powell appoints the first volunteer commissioners.
- 1910** Daniel Carter Beard is named national commissioner. Local council Scout commissioners are named.
- 1911** A national field commissioner is named.
- 1914** The wreath of service is added to the commissioner insignia.
- 1917** First British Conference of Scout Commissioners at Matlock. First British commissioner manual is introduced. Teddy Roosevelt is named Scout commissioner of the Nassau County Council.
- 1931** The district commissioner position is introduced.
- 1933** *Adventures of a District Commissioner* is published. The neighborhood commissioner position is introduced.
- 1936** All councils become first class councils headed by professional staff.
- 1941** Daniel Carter Beard passes away at 90 years of age.
- 1943** A commissioner's training course is introduced. The *Commissioner Service* manual is introduced. George Fisher is named national commissioner.
- 1948** First international commissioners meeting at Kandersteg International Scout Centre in Switzerland.
- 1951** First commissioner training at Philmont Training Center.
- 1952** Commissioner Arrowhead award introduced.
- 1973** Women are allowed to become Cub Scout unit commissioners or Cub Scout roundtable commissioners.
- 1975** Alternative council's commissioner structure is offered based on program areas.
- 1976** Women are allowed to hold any commissioner position. First Commissioner College is held in Atlanta.
- 1989** The Distinguished Commissioner Award is introduced.
- 1990** National commissioner position is restructured. Earl Graves is named national commissioner.
- 1991** *The Commissioner* quarterly national commissioner newsletter is started.
- 1995** Frances Olmstead Jr. is named national commissioner.
- 1999** Rick Cronk is named national commissioner.
- 2003** The national commissioner Web site is activated. A line of commissioner products is offered.
- 2004** Don Belcher is named national commissioner.
- 2008** Tico Perez is named national commissioner. Area and regional commissioner positions are established. The College of Commissioner Science doctorate square knot is introduced. The Unit Visitation Tracking System is officially launched.
- 2009** Introduction of volunteer national commissioner service support staff.
- 2010** Commissioners celebrate 100 years of service to units!

## Commissioner Titles/Positions Through The Years



- AREA COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT COUNCIL COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT DEPUTY SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT DISTRICT SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT FIELD COMMISSIONER
- ASSISTANT ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- BOY SCOUT ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- CAMP COMMISSIONER
- COMMUNITY COMMISSIONER
- COUNCIL COMMISSIONER
- CUB ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- CUB ROUNDTABLE STAFF
- CUB SCOUT ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
- DEPUTY SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT ASSISTANT CUB SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT ASSISTANT SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DEPUTY SPECIAL NATIONAL FIELD SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT CUB SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DISTRICT SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- DIVISION COMMISSIONER
- EXPLORING ZONE COMMISSIONER
- FIELD COMMISSIONER
- INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONER
- INTERNATIONAL SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- NATIONAL FIELD SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- NATIONAL SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- NATIONAL COMMISSIONER
- NATIONAL COMMISSIONER SERVICE CHAIRMAN
- NATIONAL COMMISSIONER SERVICE SUPPORT STAFF
- NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONER
- NEIGHBORHOOD SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- PACK COMMISSIONER
- REGIONAL COMMISSIONER
- ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- SCOUT ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- SPECIAL NATIONAL FIELD SCOUT COMMISSIONER
- TROOP COMMISSIONER
- UNIT COMMISSIONER
- VARSITY HUDDLE ROUNDTABLE COMMISSIONER
- ZONE COMMISSIONER
- ZONE COMMISSIONER VARSITY SCOUT

## Looking into the Future



During all these years, commissioner service was the one unifying factor that made Scouting permanent. The commissioner has remained the line of service from council to unit and chartered organization. With your help, commissioner service will continue to be the catalyst for growth and quality in the BSA for the next hundred years.

