

History and Future of Scouting Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

How the badge has both stayed the same and changed over the years.

**Created by Brian Jones
San Jose Stamp Club**

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A Brief History of Scouting

- 1908: The Scouting movement started in England by William Baden Powell.
- 1910: The Boys Scouts of America (BSA) was founded by William D. Boyce.
- 1935: “Senior Scout” was created for boys over 15. This grew and migrated into what is know today as Venturing. They added young women in 1971.
- 2018: Changed to “Scouts BSA” and started admitting young women. Also, troops associated with Mormon churches left and formed “Children and Youth”
- The Scout oath & promise have remained unchanged



History of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge



- The stamp collecting merit badge was introduced in 1931.
- A major rewrite of the requirements was done in 1951 with the addition of topical collecting.
- It reached its peak of popularity in 1961.
- A full color edition of the merit badge pamphlet was introduced in 2008.
- The merit badge requirements are designed to teach the basic principles to become a stamp collector.

Early History of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

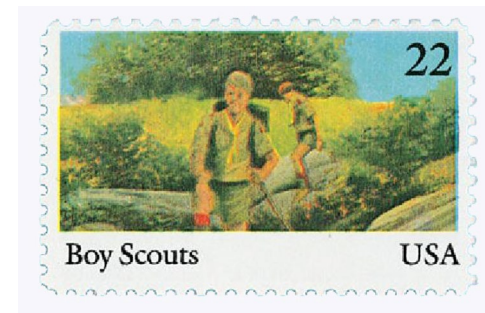
- The stamp collecting merit badge was introduced in 1930 and first awarded in 1931.
- Most of the original merit badges focused on outdoor activities and stamp collecting was added due to the popularity of the hobby.
- A sample of the first badge is shown in Figure 1. This is a rare badge as it was only produced for 3 years before it was changed.
- Coin collecting merit badge was added in 1938



Fig. 1
Type A Badge

Boy Scouts on US Stamps

- Scouting is honored on several US stamps:
 - The first stamp honoring Boy Scouts was issued in 1950 at the 2nd National Jamboree in Valley Forge, PA.
 - The 50th Anniv was honored on a 4c stamp simply depicting uniformed Scout giving a salute. The stamp was designed by Norman Rockwell.
 - International Youth Year, 1985, was celebrated with a block of 4 stamps that included a stamp recognizing the 75th anniversary of the Boy Scouts.



Boy Scouts on US Stamps, pt 2

- In 1998, the 1910 sheet of the Celebrate the Century included a stamp honoring the creation of Boy and Girl Scouts on a 32c stamp.
- The 100th Anniv. of Scouting was celebrated in 2010.
 - A 44c stamp was issued with two scout figures looking out the view. It was designed by Craig Frazier of Mill Valley, CA.



Girl Scouts on US Stamps

- In 1948, a stamp honoring Juliette Low for founding the Girl Scouts of America.
- The 100th Anniv. of Girl Scouts was celebrated in 2012.
 - The Forever stamp was issued with two scout figures in design very similar to the stamp issued for the Boy Scouts. It was also designed by Craig Frazier of Mill Valley, CA.



Early Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

- While the goal of offering the stamp collecting merit badge has always been to introduce stamp collecting to young people, the requirements have changed substantially over the years.



Fig. 1
Type A Badge



Fig 2. Initial Manual Cover



Fig 3. Initial Badge Requirements

Early Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

- The 1931 stamp collecting merit badge book was written by Prescott Holden Thorp, who is better known for his definitive work with US Postal Stationary. It is presumed his 1929 “Stamp Collecting - Why and How” written for Scott Stamp & Coin Co. in 1929 and his “How to Build a Stamp Collection” were factors in selecting Thorp for this task.
- Req #1: The initial collection required was for 500 stamps from 50 different countries or 500 stamps from one country.
 - Comment: This was particularly challenging considering the relatively few quantity of affordable stamps that had been issued by 1931. For example, the US had only 700 catalog numbers at that point and some of those are had value beyond the scope of a youth collection. Today, an international collection needs to be 250 stamps from 15 countries or 100 stamps from one country. Topical collecting is added asking for 75 stamps on the topic.



Fig. 1
Type A Badge

Early Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

- Req. #2: Exhibit one stamp from at least six of the following groups: Surcharged, Imperforate, Perforate, Precancelled, Flat Plate, Rotary Press, Commemorative, Envelope, Semi-Postal, Occupation, Provisional
 - Comment: One can only imagine how challenging it must have been for a new collector to find all these types of stamps. It was a LOT to ask beginners to identify a flat plate printed stamp from a rotary press. Even experienced collectors find this difficult.
- Req. #3: Exhibit and explain one stamp from at least 6 of the following classifications: Postage, air mail, postage due, registration, parcel post, special delivery, revenue, private proprietary, war tax, newspaper, & official.
 - Comment: This requirement has been updated over time to reflect the current stamps. This now includes: perforated, & imperforate; mint & used; sheet, booklet, & coil; plate block & other marginal markings; definitive, commemorative, semipostal, & airmail
- Req. #4: Exhibit and explain cancellations and their relation to the value of a stamp, including each of the following: a) Pen, b) Office (town), c) Killer, d) Colored, e) “Tied to Cover”
 - Comment: Yikes! Happy to report this requirement has been eliminated. It is replaced by being able to read a catalog and understand “condition”.

Early Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge

- Req. #5: Explain the following terms used by stamp collectors:
 - a) Wove, laid, granite & silk paper; b) watermarks; c) engraved, typographed, lithographed, d) perforation, rouletting.
 - Comment: These would be pretty tough for most of experienced collectors today. One can only imagine how difficult this was for young Scouts 90 years ago. Today's Scouts have a requirement focused using the tools of stamp collecting.
- Req. #6: Exhibit the indicated number of each type US Stamps:
 - 10 commemorative, 10 present issues, 4 present envelopes, 1 memorial, 1 flat plate, 1 rotary press & 3 airmail stamps.
 - Comment: Another requirement that today's Scouts can be glad has been completely changed. Early leaders put a huge emphasis on knowing flat plate from rotary press printed stamps that was eliminated years later. Today's requirement is focused on how to use an album and mount stamps.

Early Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge



- Req #7: Demonstrate the ability to “catalogue” accurately five stamps which are furnished by the counselor.
 - Comment: Stamp condition is still an important requirement and part of req #4 today.
- Req #8: Explain in full how the “condition” of a stamp affects its value.
 - Comment: This still another requirement that hasn’t changed. Today’s requirement incorporate it in #4 along with understanding how to read a catalog.
- While the details of these requirements have been substantially updated since 1931, the spirit and intention of the requirements continue to be on teaching the basic principles of the hobby, it’s tools, language, and types of stamps. The early focus on technical details has been lessened over the years.

Modern Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge



- New Req. #1a: Discuss how you can better understand people, places, institutions, history, and geology as a result of collecting stamps.
 - Comment: This requirement is relatively new and really resonates with the parents in the room. Sometimes young people sign-up for this badge just to get a badge that they think is “easy”. Understanding these concepts can make this something they want to continue after completing the badge.
- New Req. 1b: Briefly describe some aspects of the history, growth, and development of the United States postal system. Tell how is it different from postal systems in other countries.
 - It’s important to know that how we do things here in the USA isn’t necessarily how things are done in other parts of the world. A favorite subject is depicting living people on stamps.
- New Req. #2: Define topical collecting. Name and describe 3 other types of stamp collections.
 - Comment: As topical collecting is the most popular today, this is very important.

Modern Requirements of the Stamp Collecting Merit Badge



- The most significant changes in requirements over the years is lessen the emphasis on technical details and increase & modernize the collecting options.
- Understanding the tools, resources, and language of collecting remain the basis of the badge.
- The collection requirement previously required 500 stamps from around the world or one country. Now there 5 options including lowing the worldwide collection to 250 stamps and 100 from one country. An option of 75 stamps on a topic is a newer option.
- While the details of these requirements have been substantially updated since 1931, the spirit and intention of the requirements continue to be on teaching the basic principles of the hobby, it's tools, language, and types of stamps.

History of the Badge

- The badge a Scout earns has changed very little over the years. Someone who earned it back in 1932 would recognize the badge awarded today.
 - Scouting has modified the process for manufacturing merit badges over the years.
 - They've tried to make them last and keep them inexpensive.
 - WWII forced a lighter weight cloth with much finer weave and lighter tan color because the heavier material was needed to make uniforms.



Type A
"Original"



Type B
Crimped Edge



Type C
Used 1936 - 1942

History of the Badge, pt 2

- The manufacturing of merit badges has continued over the years.
- While the design of many badges has changed over the years, the Stamp Collecting badge design has remained largely the same.
 - The Type E badge was introduced in 1947 when war restrictions were over and used a darker green. These were used until 1960.
 - In 1995 Scouting introduced badges with “computer designs”
 - The “J” type is in use today and includes branding on the back



Type E
Used 1947 to 1960



Type 1
Used 1993 to 2002



Type J
Front



Type J
Back w logo

Status of SCMB



- The current requirements are well written and reflect the current collecting norms.
- Under 1000 boys a year stamp collecting merit badge.
- Of the 138 merit badges, only 2 have fewer boys earn it each year.
- For comparison, coin collecting has approximately 5,000 boys a year earn it.
- The key problem is the lack of programs being offered.

Stamp Merit Badge Earn Rate

- Stamp collecting was once a very popular merit badge to earn.
- In 1941, 3,795 Scouts earned the badge.
- Earn rate remained in the same range through the 1950s.
- In 1961, the badge peaked at 13,496.
- It has declined ever since.

| Year | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 2006 | 2009 | 2024 | Grand Total |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|---------------|---------------------|
| Stamp Merit Badges Earned | 13,496 | 7,129 | 3,385 | 1,112 | 982 | Less than 900 | Over 400,000 (est.) |

SCMB At Risk

- The earn rate of this badge continues to sag from over 1k to now under 1k.
 - Instead of merely being ranked in the bottom 10, it is now 3 from the bottom (only Sustainability and Bugling get fewer earns).
- To keep the merit badge program fresh, the leaders of Scouting USA add new badges and eliminate those which have become stale or unpopular.
 - SCMB's status as one of the least earned, it should be considered at risk for cancellation.
- While there is no immediate plan to eliminate this badge, but it's near last place status shouldn't be ignored.

SCMB At Risk

- It is essential that the philatelic community reverse the downward trend or risk stamp collecting becoming an option for the Collecting badge.
 - We should expect much of the special flavor of stamp collecting would be lost.
 - Philately would lose an important entry point for young people. This would be doubly impactful now that both young men and women can earn this merit badge.

Not All Is Lost



- The philatelic community should take up the challenge to offer more dynamic youth programs.
 - If a class is offered and presented as fun, Scouts will sign up
- Yes, if programs are offered, young people will come.
 - The key is to make it fun by offering fun topicals and encouraging Scouts to collect a country that their family has heritage.
 - This is a great opportunity to put the millions of low value stamps to a good purpose.

Action Plan for SCMB



- Support is needed to help encourage more clubs and collectors to offer merit badge programs.
 - Offer a PowerPoint presentation to teach with
 - Advice and tips on how to organize a merit badge workshop
 - Packages of stamps to help with requirement #8
 - Advice on how to work with local scout councils to get help from registered merit badge counselors.
 - Develop strategies for promoting the merit badge workshop
 - Get council help to have announcement emailed to Scout families
 - Get fliers into Scout shops and district roundtables

Action Plan for SCMB cont.

- Involve whole philatelic community
 - The APS needs to get seriously involved instead of sitting on the sidelines expecting others to do the work.
 - It will take a serious commitment from a new regime of leadership to energize to leading growth of the badge.
 - Get all stamp groups involved
 - Solicit support from local and large national dealers
- A commitment from local clubs & shows is critical.
 - Providing a “play book” on how to do this, more clubs to take up this serious challenge