



Central Virginia Boy Scouting Preservation Project

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

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At the End of the Segregation Era: a Black Boy Scout Troop in Orange, Virginia

BY RAY EZELL, VIRGINIA HEADWATERS COUNCIL HISTORIAN

****Author's Note:** I'd like to especially acknowledge and thank Mr. James (Bruce) Monroe III who gave a thoughtful presentation of his Scouting days in Boy Scout Troop No. 111 at the meeting of the Orange County African-American Historical Society on January 27, 2019.

Sixteen of his former Troop No. 111 mates were also in attendance to hear his presentation and

rekindle old memories. Bruce provided recollections on how his Scouting days shaped his life and also shed light on why a Boy Scout Troop was an avenue for black youth to find acceptance and a sense of belonging when segregation was nearing its end in the late 1960s Orange, Virginia. A portion of this essay summarizes that presentation by Mr. Monroe.**

In the mid-1960s in Orange, Virginia, public facilities and social activities were separated by color. Black children and teens were commonly excluded from the same amenities that whites freely enjoyed access to. In the realm of recreation, black children had to adapt and be creative to enjoy many of the same sports as whites. For instance, a cow pasture became a baseball field or an empty street with a home-made hoop on a pole became a basketball court. However a unifying presence in the lives of blacks in Orange was the Church. The Church provided organization and opportunity that general society did not. This was the era of Vietnam, Civil Rights, and separation in education. Traditional black sections in and around the Town of Orange were; Little Petersburg, Little Zion, Church Street, and Lindsey Drive among others. In what certainly was a reaction to the prevailing social conditions, a group of thoughtful black community members decided in the fall of 1967 to organize Orange County's only black Boy Scout troop (Troop No. 111).

In order to put the establishment of Troop No. 111 into its fitting context, we must first examine the awkward (and little acknowledged) racial history of the Boy Scout movement since its earliest days. The intent of this essay is not to pass judgement on the by-gone days of Scouting, but to shine a light into this little-known corner of the history organization to increase awareness and appreciation of how the movement has developed over the previous 109 years.

Since almost immediately after the founding of the Boy Scouts of America, Scouting was not immune to racial division. Scouting then (and for a number of decades thereafter) reflected the prevailing social attitudes of the communities that it served and flourished in. In 1911, the Chief Scout Executive, James E. West, admitted that the only acceptable way to deal with the presence of black Boy Scouts in the deep south (or otherwise in areas where Jim Crow was the order of the day), would be to handle the admission of black Boy Scouts (and troops) in a similar fashion to how the segregated South implemented its bifurcated educational system...separate and divided. West proposed a completely separate system of Scouting that attended to black scouts, including black leaders, facilities, and administrators (Rowan 2005: 49). West eventually decided that each council would follow the local "custom" in how it dealt with the admission of black scout troops. This said nothing for the numerous scout troops that did not come under the immediate jurisdiction of local councils during the formative years of the movement. These units applied directly to the National office in New York for their organizational credentials. It would be several more years before (white) Boy Scout councils in the South began to formally sanction black troops under their jurisdictions.

Closer to home in central Virginia, "colored" Boy Scout troops existed in Staunton and Charlottesville as early as 1915. They were apparently affiliated with fraternal, African-American Knights of Pythias chapters. Unfortunately it is not known how long these units operated and how many other black troops existed in the region (and they surely did). A scout camp for black scout troops may have operated in Albemarle County as early as 1921 as well. In comparison, the

earliest black troops in Richmond may have only dated to as early as 1925 or 1926, and the first black Troop in Norfolk was organized in 1928. One particularly infamous moment in black Scouting history was when James Edward Jackson, Jr. of Richmond became Virginia's first black Eagle Scout in 1932 (some say the first black Eagle Scout in the South, but this is incorrect). During the award presentation ceremony, the then Governor of Virginia, John Garland Pollard who was presenting advancement awards to a group of scouts on stage, refused to pin the Eagle medal on Jackson's uniform. He simply tossed the award at Jackson—a truly embarrassing moment for Jackson.

Some historians report that of the 108 black troops *with* black scoutmasters in 1926, only five were located in the South (the author doubts the veracity of this statement and thinks it's many more). By the end of 1927, the number of black troops in the region had been increased to 32 localities in the South. During this period, the BSA actively promoted a separate but equal policy (extending to leader training, Courts of Honor, summer camps, rallies, etc.) reflecting the social condition of the times. The national office left the final decision on exactly how to handle black Scouting to the local councils. This policy was not limited only to the Jim Crow south but extended to some northern states as well.

As embarrassing as these circumstances are by today's standards, there were instances of white Boy Scouts stepping in to directly assist black scouts. During the 1925 or 1926 encampment at Camp Mishawakwa, an integrated scout summer camp near Stone City, Iowa, a Ku Klux Klan cross-burning attempted to intimidate scouts and camp staff. Rather, the next morning in a show of unity, white and black troops at the camp mounted horses and rode together through the town to show their solidarity and to eliminate any thoughts that the intimidation worked. In Kentucky, there are recorded instances of white Boy Scouts attending Eagle Scout ceremonies of black Boy Scouts to congratulate them and show support. White scouts are known to have collected uniforms and other equipment to help supply black troops in parts of the South as well.



Troop No. 111 During Boy Scout Anniversary Week (from *Orange Review*, February 11, 1971)

Turning our attention back to this place, at the formation of Troop No. 111 in November 1967, the first leaders were committee members; William H. Alexander, Joseph Coleman, and Isaiah Coleman. John T. Bracy was scoutmaster, and Harold Johnson was assistant scoutmaster. This

group, almost to the man, formed the nucleus of the Troop's leadership for several years to come. The founding scouts were recorded as Harry L. Gilmore, Joseph D. Gilmore, Dennis A. Hopkins, John E. Hopkins, Christopher H. Johnson, William A. Johnson, William Quarles, Jr., Delbert R. Walker, Robert Williams, Edward Jones, and Robert Shultz. Within six months, dozens of other black youth joined the troop quickly bringing its membership to well over 40 Boy Scouts by early 1968. Family names of these additional scouts were well known in Orange County and included; Barbour, Francis, Garland, Milton, Palmer, Turner, White, Williams, Frye, Gentry, Humes, Monroe, Towles, Washington, Carter, and Churchman to name a few.

According to former scout Bruce Monroe, he joined Troop No. 111 in April 1968 when he was in 7th grade. At that time, Monroe remembers that the Prospect Heights school in Orange included 1st thru 7th grades. The public school system in Orange was integrated in 1967. Although Monroe did not directly know the reasons why the unit was established, the organizers of the troop obviously viewed Scouting as a vehicle to provide under-served black youth opportunities for betterment, character development, and positive influences in a time when they had been excluded from many of Orange County's social and recreational opportunities. With the recent integration of Orange County's education establishment, it's not too hard to imagine that black's now wanted to enjoy the same benefits of Scouting for their sons, just as the parents of white scouts had done during the preceding decades (the all-white Troop No. 14 had operated in Orange since 1915).

Bruce Monroe recollected that every scout meeting, held in the basement of the Nazareth Baptist Church on Church street, began with the Scout Oath and Law. These meetings were not merely informal gatherings of neighborhood boys to keep them off the streets. Meetings had structure and provided challenges to the young minds in attendance. Meetings were spent practicing close order drills and marching, developing their Scoutcraft skills, and preparing for upcoming hiking and camping trips.

A full uniform was a top priority in Troop No. 111. Every member was expected to wear a full uniform at every meeting and Scouting function. Newly inducted scouts were sent to see Mr. Coleman at Leggett's Department store on Main Street, where they would be taken to the 2nd floor to purchase their uniform pants, shirt, hat, neckerchief, belt, and other equipment. The troop took much pride in wearing the scout uniform completely and correctly. The picture below demonstrates their dedication to wearing a complete scout uniform.



Troop No. 111 in Full Uniform and Parade Formation before the Orange Fireman's Parade 1968 (courtesy of *Phil Audibert*)

Bruce Monroe vividly remembers his troop leaders. These men were impactful on him and provided the adult role models that he and his fellow scouts were seeking. John Thomas Bracy, an ex-military man, was the first scoutmaster from the troop's formation in late 1967 until the end of 1968 when Harold Johnson, also an ex-military man, was appointed the troop's second scoutmaster. Assistant scoutmasters recollected by Monroe were Joe Coleman, Isaiah Coleman, and Hunter Tibbs (who Monroe remembers as a very quiet man). William Alexander, with a voice like a "drill sergeant", was the charter organization representative to the Nazareth Baptist Church—which at the time was under the leadership of Pastor Stanton. The Nazareth Baptist Church sponsored the troop and provided its meeting space. Monroe remembers that Joe Coleman may have been the person who planted the initial seed to organize a black Boy Scout troop in Orange. He was well-respected within the black community and is remembered as always well dressed, in a suit and tie.



Troop No. 111 Leaders: (from left) William Alexander (Charter Organization Representative), Harold Johnson (Scoutmaster), Isaiah Coleman (Asst. Scoutmaster), Hunter Tibbs (Asst. Scoutmaster), Joe Coleman (Asst. Scoutmaster), (Woodberry Forest student advisors) Brad Rousse, Monty Blanchard, and Tom Lewis (from *Orange Review*, March 6, 1969)

Monroe remembered the adult leaders of the Troop as men who promoted teamwork and genuinely cared about each scout. They ensured that the troop performed regular community service as a way to teach the value of improving their community. Monroe admitted that his

biggest regret from his Scouting days was that he failed to fully thank all of his adult mentors for their time and attention.

From the Summer 1968 through the Summer 1969, three Woodberry Forest School students assisted Troop No. 111 as unofficial leaders or advisers. These students were Brad Rouse, Monty Blanchard (an Eagle Scout and Order of the Arrow member from North Carolina), and Tom Lewis (from Flint Hill, Va.). The Fall 1968 *Woodberry Forest Alumni Bulletin* reported that the Woodberry Service Committee was formed in 1967 as a way to specifically involve students in the “social problems of the region”. The 1969 Woodberry Forest School yearbook, the *Fir Tree*, also reported that student advisers were assigned to assist the all-black Troop No. 111 and the all-white Troop No. 14. Blanchard, Rouse, and Lewis assisted Troop No. 111 in a variety of ways and shared their knowledge of wilderness survival, outdoor skills, swimming, as well as a love of nature. Their on-the-ground assistance allowed the troop to implement a robust outdoor program and provided essential guidance for the inexperienced scouts that may have not been possible otherwise. Monty Blanchard recently recollected that in Spring or early Summer 1969, the troop traveled to the beach for an encampment and that one of the proudest moments of his life was teaching a group of scouts how to swim in the open water when it was clear to him that they had never swam in the ocean before.

Additionally, two Woodberry professors, Travis Tysinger and Paul Gallis, organized and led the first black Cub Scout pack in Orange from 1970-1972. Pack 106 met in the Emmanuel Baptist Church, across Church Street from the Nazareth Baptist Church. Two other Woodberry students, William Hayes and John Lynch, were assigned by the Woodberry Service Committee to Orange Troop No. 14 and taught merit badges and other Scouting skills to the scouts in this troop. Apparently the Woodberry Forest School took more than a passing interest in the black youth in Orange and hosted them at recreational facilities on their campus at a time when they could not access similar facilities in Town.

“We marched in a lot of parades,” Monroe remembered. Troop No. 111 made regular appearances in parades in Charlottesville, Gordonsville, and Orange, and their leaders demanded precision when on full community display. According to Monroe, they practiced parading in empty parking lots and on Church Street. All of this practice paid off. In 1968, the troop was given a special commendation by the Charlottesville Dogwood Festival Parade for their participation as the largest scout troop to march. Monroe joked that all this marching helped him after he enlisted in the Air Force. While stationed at Dover AFB, he would spend a lot of time marching as a member of the Dover AFB Honor Guard.



Troop No. 111 Marching in the 1969 Fireman's Parade in Gordonsville (from *Orange Review*, Sept. 4, 1969)

In addition to the parades, Troop No. 111 spent time camping—just like any other Boy Scout troop. They camped on the Rapidan River in Somerset, in Madison County on the William Turner property, and on other properties in the surrounding countryside. Monroe remembered vividly the home-cooked breakfasts that Mrs. William Turner served to the scouts. However, before they were allowed to eat, Mrs. Turner required that they read a Bible verse (a small price for a good meal). The troop also attended district camporees at Warrenton, Travellians in Louisa County, Uno in Madison County, and summer camp at Camp Shenandoah near Swope in Augusta County. The memories of summer camp are especially beloved by Monroe. At the spring camporee in May 1969 in Madison County, Troop No. 111's Flaming Arrow patrol received an Honorable Mention award for its performance in the Scoutcraft competition; while the Hawk patrol won third place in the Funcraft games. At the 1969 fall camporee, the troop won an Honorable Mention award for its pioneering project.



Troop No. 111 before leaving for Summer Camp at Camp Shenandoah (from *Orange Review*, July 3, 1969).

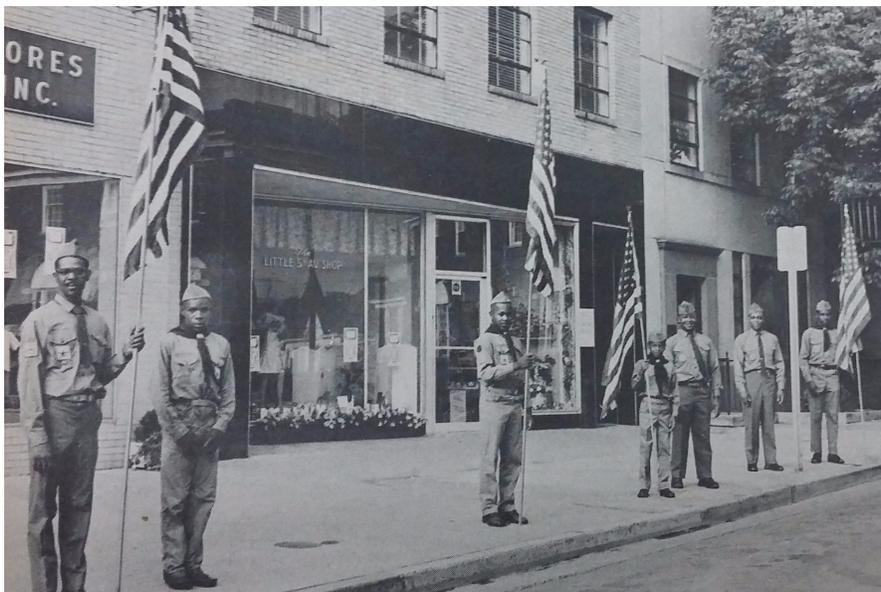
At the Stonewall Jackson Area Council's spring camporee in May 1970, the Troop's hard work and preparation in Scoutcraft and other outdoor skills finally paid off. Against 160 patrols from about 50 regional troops (approximately 1200 scouts) Troop No. 111's Flaming Arrow patrol won first place as the top scoring patrol. They competed in a variety of skills and tests ranging from plant and tree identification, search and rescue, fire building, and first-aid to name a few.

Boy leaders of the troop were composed of several patrol leaders who led patrols of about 6-8 scouts each and a Senior Patrol Leader who was the top boy leader in the unit. In 1968, Troop No. 111 patrol leaders participated in a farewell program honoring outgoing Prospect Heights School principal, J.H. Lynch. Obviously Lynch had a very high opinion of these scouts and them of him. These scouts, including Bruce Monroe, are pictured below. Also pictured is Charles Francis, 16 years old at the time, who served as the Troop's Senior Patrol Leader.



Troop No. 111 Patrol Leaders with Principal J.H. Lynch at Prospect Heights School in 1968: (from left) Wilbur Dade, James Monroe, Harry Gilmore, Charles Francis, Delmar Jackson, and Anthony Garland (from *Orange Review*, June 13, 1968).

Troop No. 111 took seriously its role to provide community service. When the unit noticed that only six Main Street businesses displayed United States flags on Flag Day on June 14, 1972, the troop placed U.S. flags in front of almost every business along Main Street in observance of the Fourth of July later that summer. The unit also performed beautification projects in the community. In 1970, the troop planted trees in front of the Nazareth Baptist Church; and in 1971, in the parking lot between Main Street and the former A & P grocery store.



Troop No. 111 Placing Flags Along Main St. for the Fourth of July. (from left) Hunter Tibbs (Scoutmaster), Joseph Jones,

Myron Smith, Albert Graves, and Asst. Scoutmasters Joe Coleman, Isaiah Coleman, and Eugene Turner (from *Orange Review*, July 9, 1970).

The troop also took opportunities to recognize its deserving supporters. One such occasion was at the unit's awards banquet in November 1969 when Mr. William Turner received the troop's Outstanding Father award in recognition of the assistance he provided during the year. Special recognition of deserving parents, leaders, mothers, and friends would be an annual occurrence in the troop.



William Turner Receiving the Troop No. 111 Outstanding Father Award in 1969. (from left) Isaiah Coleman, Hunter Tibbs (obscured), Sammy Walker, Joe Coleman, and Harold Johnson. (from *Orange Review*, November 27, 1969)

Lastly, but certainly not least, the women of Orange's black community also came together and fully supported the operation of the troop in a variety of ways that made the scouts' experiences much richer. These highly motivated ladies included; Leticia Franklin, Catherine Palmer, Edith Johnson, Molly Turner, and Gladys Tibbs. There were certainly others as well that could not be remembered. This cadre of active mothers and concerned women provided a necessary and strong support network for the troop during its early years. The photo below shows one of these support efforts by the troop ladies—which I'm sure was appreciated greatly by these scouts.



Troop No. 111 Mothers Serving a Meal to Scouts in 1968 (courtesy of *Phil Audibert*)

As Bruce Monroe told the crowd gathered to hear his presentation, Troop No. 111 provided what these young men needed, at the right time in their lives. I offer that the camaraderie of friends, the uniforms and collective purpose, the new and challenging outdoor experiences, as well as the support of the caring adults around them helped these scouts to develop the character traits and a self-reliance that influenced them through their youth and adulthood.



Troop No. 111 Alumni at a Meeting of the Orange Co. African-American Historical Society. Bruce Monroe in Front Center (January 2019)

Footnote: It's not often that a comprehensive summary of a scout troop in a rural community can be compiled primarily from newspaper articles and photos. This is the case with Troop No. 111. Special thanks are extended (after the fact) to the leaders of Troop No. 111 and the Orange Review reporters and editor who understood the importance of media exposure as a way to document the doings of a black Boy scout troop for immediate publicity and as a record for future generations to appreciate. Without their foresight, the documentary record for Troop No. 111 would be much, much thinner and their exploits largely unknown or forgotten.

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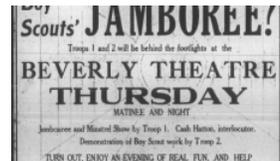
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2 thoughts on “At the End of the Segregation Era: a Black Boy Scout Troop in Orange, Virginia”



Sally Tibbs Watkins April 5, 2019 — 4:47 pm

Mr. Hunter Tibbs Sr

I remember when he would some time to pick the guys up a take them home. Mr. Hunter Tibbs didn't mind working with the young guys teaching them a trade that he knew. He took his scout leadership farther than just a leader. To me he was acting more like)as he would word it) taking them under his wing . I can remember he would have them over his house . They play pool, baseball kickball to keep them out of trouble. I can recall him saying. There wasn't no bad boys. They just wanted a little tension. Being in the boyscout they got just that. My father Mr. Hunter Tibbs the troop 111 they all respect him and all the Scout Troop Master. They also had Jumberead in the yard. They might not got to attend the white boy scout functions. But they did have a lot of gun. Even whety they sat up camp and we had that hard rain and some of the tents was wash away. But nobody was hurt. But they still camp out. Not there but they still had fun evi in the mud. Mr . Hunter Tibbs died 1/09/2016

I think he was the last Scout Master to died.

I SLUTE TO ALL THE SCOUT MASTER OF TROOP 111. WHAT A FONE JOB THEY DONE.

Liked by you

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historyofscoutinginorange April 6, 2019 — 9:38 am

Mrs. Watkins,
thanks for your memories of your father...

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