

PATCH IT UP EDITION

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Millions of patches pour into the Scouting movement every year, brightening uniforms with recognition and color to celebrate events, units, and individual achievements. It's a vibrant flood of fabric and thread with a history as interesting as some of the patches themselves.

MAKING OF A PATCH

In the centuries before Scouting, patches were embroidered by hand, which meant there weren't many patches. Machines were devised in the late 1800s so that one operator guiding each stitch could replicate that action with a hundred needles, slowly producing a hundred patches at a time. Most patterns were simple and used only a few colors.



1912-1919 Athletics merit badge

Scouts awarded early insignia such as this Athletics merit badge trimmed the badge with scissors or, like the Star Scout emblem, folded the edges under before sewing it to a uniform.



Early Star Scout award

As production technology advanced, patches became more detailed, shown here in the evolution of the Eagle Scout patch:



Today, the largest licensed supplier of embroidery for the Boy Scouts of America is A-B Emblem in Weaverville, North Carolina. Computerized production allows the firm to fill orders for thousands of different patches.



A-B Emblems photo

A-B Emblem specialists bring patch ideas to life

For example, the Cornhusker Council's OA lodge asked for a 2013 Jamboree patch that would honor their state. The dramatic finished emblem features *The Sower*, the statue atop the Nebraska state capitol, wearing an Order of the Arrow brotherhood sash.



Library of Congress - Carol M. Highsmith Archive

The capitol building in Lincoln, Nebraska



The Sower, the 30-foot statue atop the capitol.



The Golden Sun Lodge 2013 Jamboree Patch

Details of the Golden Sun Lodge design were programmed into computers that calculated each of the 20,000 stitches required to produce a single patch. High speed embroidery machines kicked into action, sewing dozens of patches a minute.



A-B Emblem photo

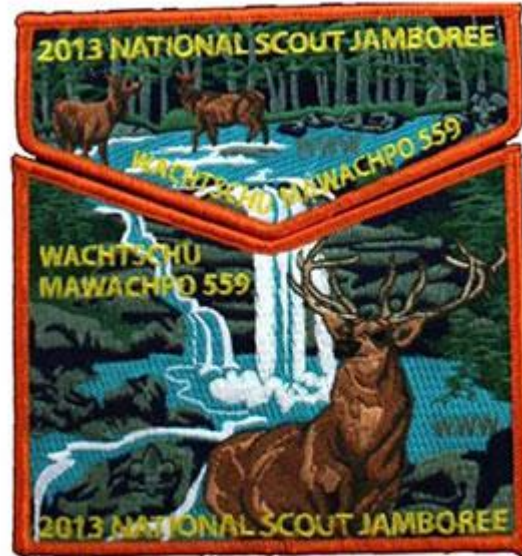
Thread feeds into needles stitching designs onto moving bolts of cloth



A-B Emblem photo

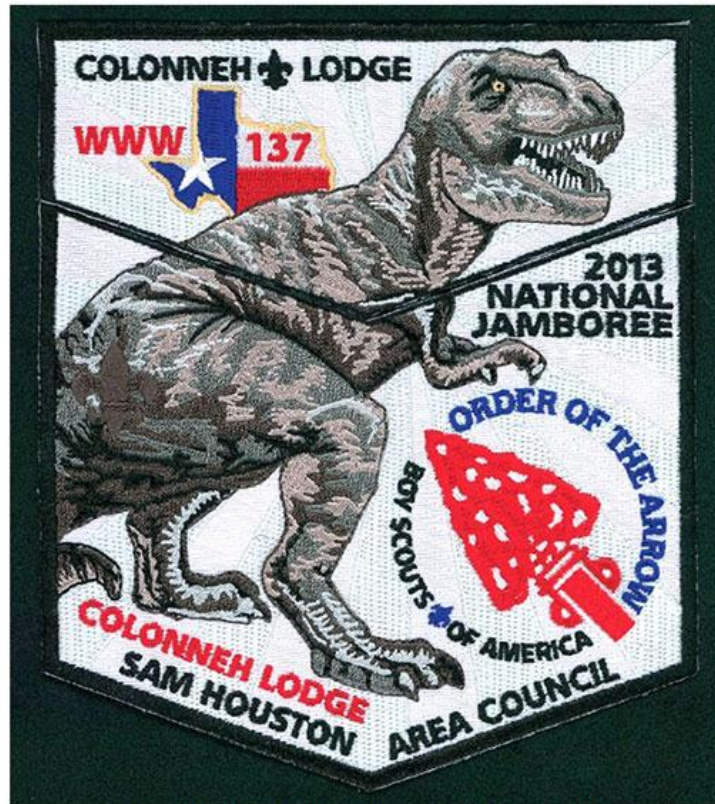
Finished patches are cut from backing cloth and sent to customers

The Golden Sun Lodge Jamboree design is a *two-piece patch* intended to cover both the right pocket flap of a BSA uniform shirt and the pocket itself. That style gives artists a large canvas to develop an image.



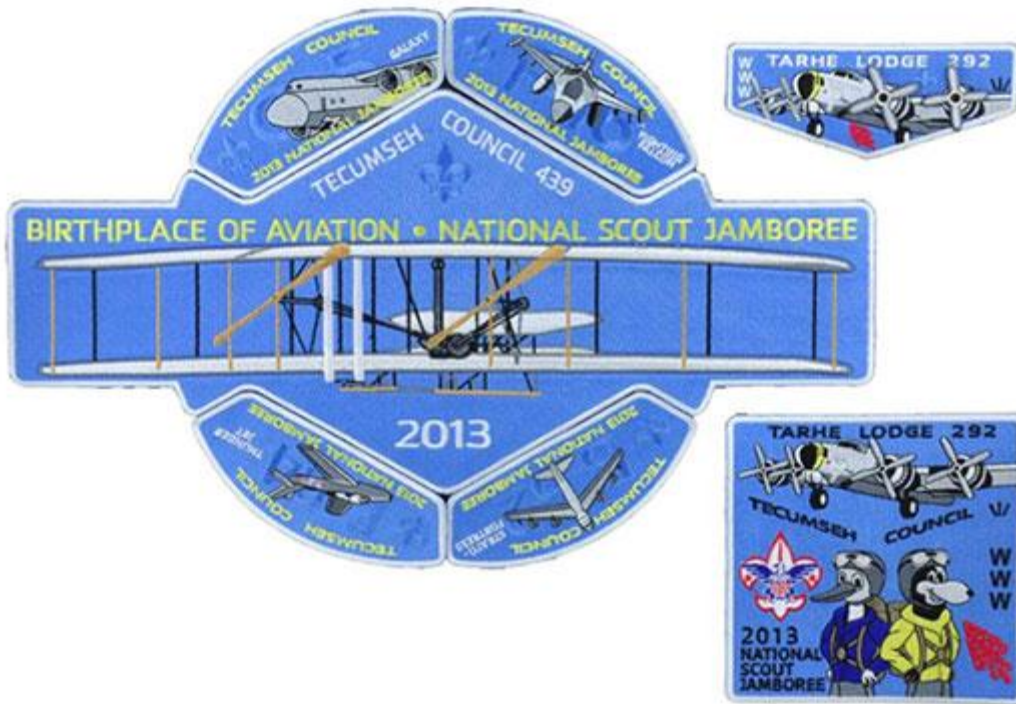
The Potomac Council drew on cartoon art for their OA patch. Arkansas's Westark Area Council chose an Ozarks woodland scene.

The Sam Houston Area Council's Colonneh Lodge asked to have a dinosaur stride across their patch. Did it ever!



Sam Houston Area Council OA Jamboree 2013 two-part patch

Some embroidered sets include a jacket patch, shoulder patches, and two-piece OA pocket patches. This collection for Ohio's Tecumseh Council also had propellers that turned.



A temporary patch with a button loop joins pocket and shoulder patches complete this set for the Suwannee Area Council's Salute to Veterans:



PATCH VESTS

If you've been a BSA member very long, you probably have more patches than you have space on your Scout shirt to display. A patch vest, available from scoutstuff.org, is just right for showing off some of your favorites. (Vests are for casual wear, not as part of the official uniform.)



SEWING KITS

Need to stitch a patch onto a vest? Put a button on a shirt? Repair a torn tent in the field? For decades, sewing kits have provided the tools Scouts need to deal with everyday mending and emergencies patching, too.



The sewing kit owned by a 1940s Scout named Sebring had a leather case with snaps to hold it closed. The sleeve on the outside displayed a card with the owner's name. Inside Sebring's kit were scissors, needles, safety pins, thread, and extra buttons.



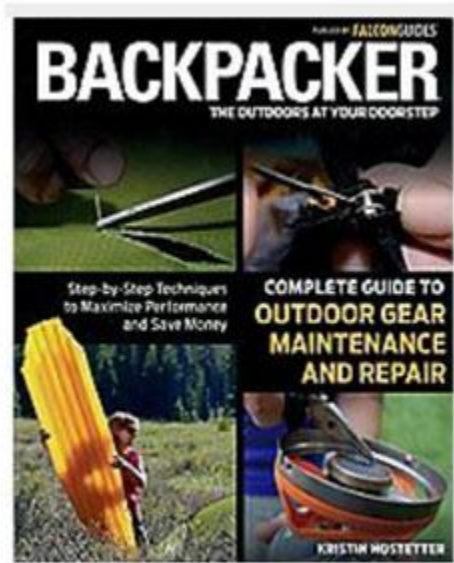
Scout Sebring's 1940s sewing kit

Today's sewing kit from scoutstuff.org contains most of the same tools as its 1940s ancestor. Slip them into a self-sealing plastic bag and you'll have what you need without the weight of the case.



Scout Stuff Sewing Kit

For guidance on patching clothing and equipment, check out the Backpacker book *Complete Guide to Outdoor Gear Maintenance and Repair*, also available from scoutstuff.org.



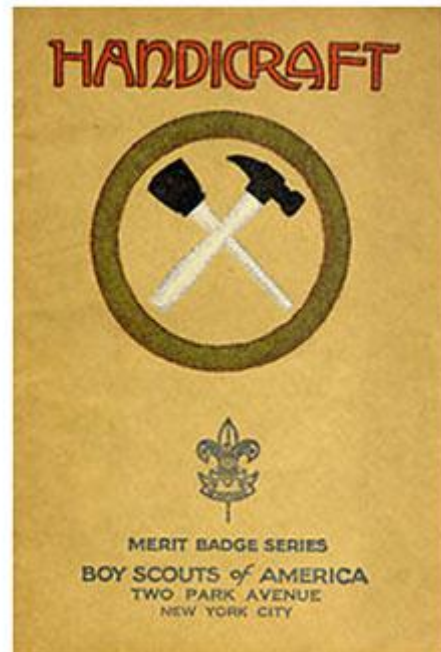
HOME REPAIRS MERIT BADGE

Patch up a damaged wall. Fix a broken lamp. Repair a stopped-up toilet or a door that's loose on its hinges. Home Repairs merit badge can teach you all of that and more - life skills fun to learn, satisfying to practice, and useful wherever you go.



Home Repairs Merit Badge

One of the original BSA merit badges at the dawn of Scouting was Handicraft. The merit badge pamphlet showed a crossed hammer and paint brush, the design still used today for Home Repairs.



1920s Handicraft Merit Badge Pamphlet

The requirements for that early badge asked Scouts to demonstrate mastery of thirteen kinds of household repair:

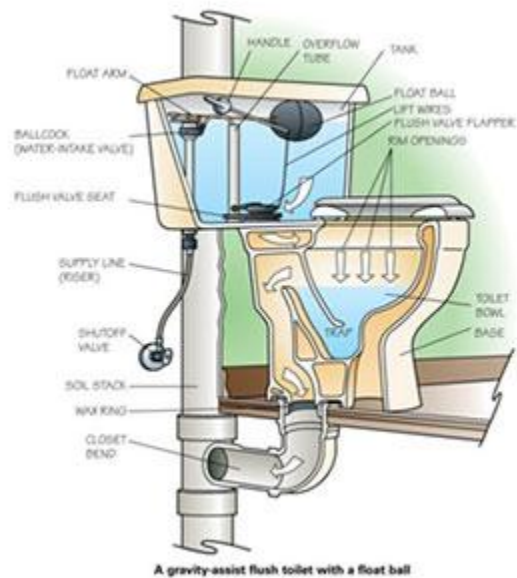
1. **Be able to paint a door.**
2. **Whitewash a ceiling.**
3. **Repair gas fittings, sash lines, window and door fastenings.**
4. **Replace gas mantles, washers, and electric light bulbs.**
5. **Solder.**
6. **Hang pictures and curtains.**
7. **Repair blinds.**
8. **Fix curtains, portiere rods, blind fixtures.**
9. **Lay carpets and mend clothing and upholstery.**
10. **Repair furniture and china.**
11. **Sharpen knives.**
12. **Repair gates.**
13. **Fix screens on windows and doors.**

The name of the Handicrafts merit badge was changed in 1942 to Home Repairs. Many of the requirements stayed the same. Others changed to reflect changing times. For example, fixing gas mantles has been replaced with repairing electrical fittings. Instead of repairing a gate, Scouts can waterproof a basement.



A Scout repairs a home electrical system

A terrific aspect of the Home Repairs merit badge is the opportunity to gain an understanding of how a home plumbing system operates. Knowing what to do if a sink leaks or a toilet threatens to overflow can be a satisfying step toward being prepared.



As for the name *Handicraft*, it is still used in Scouting to recognize a set of merit badges including Woodwork, Wood Carving, Basketry, Pottery, Metalwork, and Leatherwork.



A SPECIAL PATCH OF LAND

Seventy-five years ago, Waite Phillips gave Scouting a large property of mountain and prairie in northern New Mexico. With Mr. Phillips' encouragement, the BSA developed it into the Philturn Rockymountain Scoutcamp, and then Philmont Scout Ranch, the organization's first national high adventure base.



Philmont Scout Ranch

Robert Birdby photo

Since then, tens of thousands of Scouts have set off on ten-day treks, meeting the challenge of the backcountry and finding life-changing adventures along the way.



Robert Birkbyphoto

Scouts from Richland, Washington, pause on their trek across Philmont

Of course there is a special edition of the traditional Philmont arrowhead patch. With a silver border and the number 75 stitched over the Tooth of Time, it is a reminder of the great generosity of Waite Phillips, and of the tremendous opportunities for Scouts that have unfolded since his time.



Philmont 75th Anniversary Patch

(This edition of the *Be Prepared Newsletter* was developed and written by Robert Birkby, author of the current editions of the *Boy Scout Handbook*, *Fieldbook* and *Eagle Scouts: A Centennial History*.)