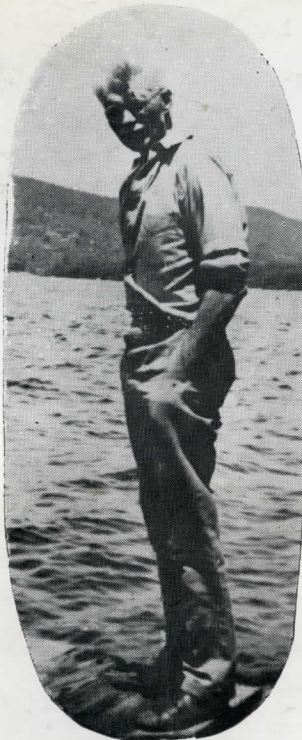


Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

A Scout Salute

TO



WILLIS W. VAIL

"A GOOD SCOUT"

FOUNDER OF
The Quakertown Boy Scout Troop

FEBRUARY 9, 1952

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP SCHOOL

Memories of our Scoutmaster

WILLIS W. Vail is a legend. The works that he did will live after him not only in the minds of we who were privileged to share his time on earth but in our very character—we who blossomed into manhood under his able eye and the Boy Scout flag of the Quakertown troop.

We who had the good fortune to serve under him during his 25 years in scouting quickly learned to love him. It wasn't hard, for next to having a dad, being able to pitch a tent and cook a meal on an open fire out in the woods with Willis Vail as friend and scoutmaster was about the best thing that could happen to a boy. Fortunately, it happened to many of us, and we are the better for it.

We were "Willis's boys" and just as he helped mold our attitudes toward life, so our memories of him were fashioned from the activities we shared with him. Incidents like the time we were roughing it a bit in the late '20's at Culver Lake, a site that was to become a favorite one for roughhouse and fellowship alike as the years swirled by. One of the newcomers, a youngster named Jesse Eichlin, was being initiated. His older companions blindfolded him, rowed him across the lake and put him ashore in the dark of night.



Back at camp the scoutmaster greeted the young jokesters and all sat down to await the victim of the prank. Time passed. No tired and frightened scout appeared. Mr. Vail sent out a second excursion, this time to retrieve the object they had deposited on foreign soil. Somebody probably passed the remark that young Eichlin didn't know enough to come home and had gone to sleep. It wouldn't have been a joke. That is what he had done.

Mr. Vail had acted wisely, as he usually did, probably against the immediate wishes of the less worldly-wise boys. But that is the way he was. He could take a joke with the best of us, but he knew when a joke was no longer a joke.

If we were to ferret out our scoutmaster's best quality, and were to choose "unselfishness"—as many of us probably would—not far behind it would be "patience". Any man who can deal with boys as long as Mr. Vail did with us, to accept our problems as his, to make his time ours, could certainly claim Job's prime quality as his own. He was quick to help, slow to anger.

It wasn't always easy, especially since boys, as the Lord has provided, "will be boys". Like the time young Jack Little caught an eel and the boys decided it should have the privilege of sharing Mr. Vail's bedroll for the night. Or the time Freddie Nixon ran the Vail Model T into a tree at Culver Lake. Or the year a hike to "The Peak" in Knispel's woods was cut short in the middle when the scoutmaster went tumbling into the brook.

As far as anyone knows, Quakertown was without a Scout troop until 1926,

when Mr. Vail decided to take the lads of the area under his wing as Boy Scouts of America. The first meeting place, a 10 by 12 shack in the woods behind the scoutmaster's house, boasted a fine heating plant in the form of a potbellied stove—which usually succeeded in hiding the boys at one end from those at the other in a thick cloud of smoke.

In January of 1929 the Friends Meeting House served as Scout headquarters, as it did for the years to come until Mr. Vail stepped out of the active role of scoutmaster in 1939 to act as supervisor of the troop, then to serve as a member of the district committee right up until his death on August 4, 1951.

At his death Mr. Vail could have boasted something few men can claim. All the memories in the hearts of his scouts were good ones, and it is true largely because he understood us, he knew what we needed, and he gave it to us.

Who could forget the nights under the stars at Camp Buck, Culver Lake, "The Peak", Ringing Rock or the Devil's Tea Table? The hikes through the Pattenburg tunnel, especially the time the hikers met a pusher coming the other way?

The crowded trips to Culver's aboard one of the Vail Model T's or the old Pontiac? The hikes to the fire tower, or betwixt it and High Point? The morning dips in the lake, spring or fall, in which Mr. Vail was always first (the records of the Eagle Patrol vintage 1928, report that one fine morning "The scoutmaster was the only one to take a morning dip," which, as we all know, could happen on a chilly morn.)? The tests passed at Culver's Lake, which rather confused those attempting to pass tracking later in Mr. Vail's career, since the numerous trails from years before were still intact? The row boats hired from across the lake? The scoutmaster's peculiar ability to request that the cocoa be heated up again on the fire, though the scouts were already burning tongues on the liquid in its present molten state? The year Fred Nixon and the scoutmaster took a canoe trip down the Raritan between Budd's lake and Raritan Bay, which it was rumored, took about as much walking as paddling?



And dozens more, each one as fondly memorable as the next. In 1935, in a letter congratulating one of his scouts on his 21st birthday, Mr. Vail noted that "One's capacity is strictly limited, but at the same time one person may have a very much greater capacity than another and, therefore, should be able to accomplish much more . . ." Now, years later, we can see that this description fits its author more so than he might have realized. We who benefitted from his tireless energy cannot but thank God that it was aimed in our direction. Willis Vail is dead, but the fruits of his sowing live on. And there are none more thankful than we, his Scouts.



WE WERE 'WILLIS'S BOYS'—No greater fun was to be had than that offered scouts as Culver Lake, where the Culvermere wasn't the only attraction, despite some stories. Back in 1928 (top photo, left to right) Fred Nixon, Ken Myers, "Snookie" Haver, Gilbert Mann and Harold Merrill enjoyed the pleasures of camp life under canvas. Later, in 1935, the Appalachian Trail was still offering adventure between the fire tower and High Point for such boys as (lower left) Harold Mathews, Albert Leaver, Allen Trout, Anthony Mishuk and Fred Polacsek. By 1939 the cabin forced the old tents into mothballs and Albert Barrick, August Meyer, Alfred Kreidler (standing) and Charles Suydam, Lawrence Trout, Elmer Dalrymple and John Wene were among those finding the fun it afforded.

Life of Willis W. Vail

Willis W. Vail was born in Quakertown, in 1868, the son of a farmer-turned-store-keeper. He attended the old Franklin School (known then as the "Swamp Seminary"), the Franklin Township School in Quakertown. He went on to preparatory school in Swarthmore, Pa., then to Swarthmore College, from which he was graduated in 1889 with a degree in civil engineering.

Beginning work immediately for the Norfolk & Western Railroad, Mr. Vail started a relationship with the firm that was to last more than 30 years, working in the southern states and in others all the way to the west coast. During these years he also worked briefly for the Central Railroad of New Jersey and the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad. While surveying for a new belt line outside Lynchburg, Va., he met Miss Belle Gough, who became Mrs.

Willis Vail in 1922.

In that year he came to Quakertown to retire. Four years later he gathered together his first band of boys as Boy Scouts of America, and from that point on boys took up more time than his other hobbies of travel, photography, stamp-collecting and weather-keeping.

In 1939 he stepped aside to let younger men take the active reins of the by-then-well-established boy scout troop, and supervised the activities of the boys, two years later becoming a member of the District Committee. He maintained that office until his death and also served the community as a member of the Franklin Township School Board of Education and as treasurer of the Township Committee.

He died on August 4, 1951, and the community lost a man it will long remember.