

The Eagle Scout Award has an interesting History. In fact, Robert Baden Powell's "Scouting for Boys" only included three ranks; Tenderfoot, second Class and First Class. Ernest Thompson Seton modified this for America by adding the Silver Wolf Award, which was awarded to any scout who earned 14 badges of merit: Ambulance, Fireman, Stalker, Cyclist, Clerk, Signaler, Pioneer, Seaman, Marksman, Master at Arms, Gardener, Horseman, Electrician, and Musician. By the time the first Boy Scout Handbook (June 1911) was ready to print, several changes were made. The August 1911 Boy Scout Handbook included the following changes: The addition of 57 merit badges, the addition of Life and Star (in that order) ranks, and the replacement of the Silver Wolf with the Eagle. No one earned the Silver Wolf.

According to the August 1911 Handbook, "any First Class Scout qualifying for 21 merit badges will be entitled to wear the highest Scout Merit Badge. This was an Eagle's head in Silver, representing the all-round perfect scout."

On August 21, 1912, Arthur R. Elred, of Troop 1, Rockville Center, N.Y. became the first person to earn the Eagle Rank, six months after the award was announced. Boy Scouts of America (BSA), assuming it would take several years for any boy to earn the required 21 merit badges, hadn't yet devised a final review system for Eagle candidates; they hadn't even settled on a design for the medal. Unsure how to proceed after Elred qualified for all the badges, the BSA ordered him to come down to its headquarters in Manhattan and put him through what had to be the most intimidating board of review in scouting history—led by the BSA's founders themselves.

Through the years, attaining the rank of Eagle Scout is a challenge even with the many alterations of the requirements. At first, Scouts did not have to earn any specific badges but in 1915, 11 specific merit badges were required for Eagle, along with 10 elective merit badges. The required merit badges were: First Aid, Lifesaving, Personal Health, Public Health, Cooking, Camping, Civics, Bird Study, Pathfinding, Pioneering, and Athletics or Physical Development.

In 1925 Star and Life Ranks were reversed with Life being just prior to Eagle. Also a Scout had to serve as a First Class Scout for a year, "showing that he has put into practice the Scouting Ideals...and made an earnest effort to develop his leadership ability."

By 1965, three requirements were added that helped define the Eagle Scout Award into its present meaning. An Eagle Candidate had to serve at least six months in an official leadership position. He also had to plan, develop, lead and carry out a service project that was useful to the community. Finally, a Scoutmaster Conference to discuss the Scout's future in Scouting, what an Eagle meant to the Scout and the ideals of Scouting were added.

A few other changes occurred. For instance from 1972-1979, 24 merit badges were required. In 1979, it was reduced back to 21. In 1994, Family Life was added to the required merit badge list. The other required merit badges were: Personal Finances, Camping, Citizenship in the World, Citizenship in the Nation, Citizenship in the Community, First Aid, Environmental Science, Communication, Emergency Preparation (or the standard—Lifesaving), Safety, Personal Fitness (or Swimming or Sports),

As of January 1, 1999, the Eagle Scout Requirements have again been changed. Personal Fitness returned as a required merit badge. The physically fit section of the Eagle required badges were amended to a choice of one of the following. Cycling, Swimming or Hiking. Sports and Safety were no longer required merit badges.