

Harris, Stanley Austin ^[1]

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by Dorothy Long, 1988

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Stanley Austin Harris, Boy Scouts of America executive, son of the Reverend William Jacob and Rachel Martitia Netherly Harris, was born in Trade, Tenn., but his family soon moved to Avery County ^[2], N.C. After attending the local schools, he went to what is now Tennessee Wesleyan College in Athens and was graduated in 1903. He taught for a year at Cove Creek Academy in Avery County, became a salesman for a while, and then took a position as secretary of the YMCA ^[3] in Frankfort, Ky.

Harris began taking a group of boys on hikes, and, after reading about the Boy Scout ^[4] movement in England, he applied to Lord Baden-Powell for a charter. In 1908, he organized the first Boy Scout troop in the United States. In 1910 Harris became a charter member of the national Boy Scouts of America organization, and in the next year was appointed a Scout commissioner for Kentucky. Seven years later he joined the national staff in New York City; because of his experience in helping councils in his area solve the problems involved in making scouting available to the Black population, he was given the special assignment of promoting interracial scouting in the southeastern states. The first Black Boy Scout troop had been started in Louisville, Ky., and soon there were others. Later Harris became director of the Boy Scouts of America Inter-Racial Service, and expanded his work to include American Indian and Mexican-American boys. The first American Indian troop was started in 1927. In recognition of his accomplishments, Harris was given an honorary doctor of humanities degree by Tuskegee Institute.

Until his retirement in 1947, Harris worked out of the Boy Scout headquarters in New York City; he also maintained a home in Watauga County ^[5], first at Sugar Grove and later in Boone. After retiring to Boone, he helped to raise money for building the town's outdoor theater, was treasurer for the outdoor drama ^[6], "Horn in the West," and served for ten years as secretary of the Boone Chamber of Commerce. He was also president of the Rotary Club and board chairman of the local hospital. Harris was a founder and director of Watauga Citizens, Inc., and Watauga Developer, Inc., two community corporations organized to promote existing industry and to attract new industry to the county. He remained active in local Boy Scout work until 1975, when, because of his wife's failing health, he moved to the Friends' Home in Greensboro where he lived until his death. His funeral service was held in the United Methodist Church in Boone, and he was buried in the cemetery there.

He was survived by his wife, Mary Swift Harris; a son, Stanley Austin Harris, Jr. ^[7], of Boone; and a daughter, Martha Harris Farthing of Greensboro.

References:

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