

By JIM FOX

Court of Honor Showmanship



A COURT OF HONOR IS A SHOW. If Scoutmasters, their assistants, and troop committee members keep this idea paramount when planning an awards night, they can strike a blow for Scouting that is hard to match. If they forget it, they can damage the image of Scouting considerably.

Unlike many other phases of show business, the court of honor is a 1-night stand and there won't be opportunities for doctoring following performances if the "opening night" is not a success. For this reason, the court of honor should be well planned and well staged. Despite the fact that most of the people attending are mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who are basically sympathetic with Scouting, they expect and have a right to be entertained.

This does not mean that the court must be a carnival-type production. On the contrary, it can and should be a serious performance, emphasizing the values of Scouting. As the legitimate theater has shown, significant ideas can be dramatized so that the audience is not only entertained, but also impressed with the message the actors impart.

If your court of honor audience leaves with many persons muttering such things as, "I thought it would never end" or "I couldn't hear what was going on" or "Why did the treasurer give such a long-winded report?" your performance has been a flop. And, what is worse, many of them won't be back.

But if they leave smiling, commenting on the impressive investiture ceremony or the pertinent remarks of the award presenters, you have a hit and can start thinking about standing room only for the next court.

Be brief

A key factor to remember in planning an awards night is brevity. As a rule of thumb, no court of honor should last more than an hour. After all, entire television dramas are put on in this time (not counting 12 minutes for commercials), so troop leaders should make every effort to pack an impressive, interesting and entertaining court into the same time span.

Things to avoid like the plague are involved reports which are of interest primarily to the committee, speaker who want to use the court as a forum to express their views on everything from politics to juvenile delinquency, and airing of troop problems, such as whether to camp at Lake Whoosiz or Camp Swampy.

Most of the people in the audience are there for one thing, to see their own son, brother, or grandson honored. How much they will tolerate in good humor beyond this depends on your skill as a showman.

The first objective of any producer is to ensure a

“good house” This is of great importance to the actors, in this case the Scouts who are to be honored.

Anyone who has seen much service in Scouting has probably observed the sad spectacle of a court of honor with 10 or 15 parents attending, largely out of a sense of duty. This happens in troops of 30 or 40 boys; troops that should draw a minimum audience of 60, and can, with a little effort, top 100.

Leaders learn that depending on their boys alone to invite parents to a court of honor can be disastrous. Somehow, something is lost in the translation. The boys forget to tell dad and mom, or they tell them at the dinner table on the night of the big event.

Letters to parents

Many troops that consistently draw crowds to their courts back up the boys' invitations by a letter to parents well before the court of honor is held.

This serves several purposes. Most of us are human enough to feel flattered and important if we got a letter from the Scoutmaster personally inviting us to attend. The letter should point out the important role parents play in their son's success in Scouting. Some boys may not be getting any awards. The letter gives the Scoutmaster a chance to suggest to their parents that after the court of honor he can discuss with them what can be done to help their sons receive an award at the next court.

The Scoutmaster signed each one, and the letters are on their way far enough in advance of the court to make it difficult for even the most reluctant parent to say he had “a previous engagement.”

It has been found that the audience and the Scouts appreciated programs which listed the awards, the order of presentation, and a roster of the troop. A Scout with artistic talent drew a simple Scout design to dress up the program. Our ushers derived a sense of importance in handing them out as they led people to their seats. The programs also kept the audience on schedule as to what is going on, and many took them home after the court as keepsakes.

Staging the show

Once the night of the court arrives, there are a few points of staging to keep the show moving.

Be sure to start on time! If your invitation and program said 7:30, be prepared to start at 7:30. While most of the audience won't mind a few minutes delay, you will always have a few clock watchers who will begin to fret and stew as soon as the hands pass the appointed hour.

A good starter is a “march in” by the troop to the stage, the pledge to the colors led by the senior patrol leader or some other junior officer, then an invitation to the audience and Scouts to be seated.

Under most circumstances, the chairman of the troop committee should function as master of -

ceremonies but if he finds public speaking burdensome, his feelings probably won't be bruised if you get someone else on the committee to fill in. Your MC must be able to do a sprightly, audible job, so don't let personal feelings let you put the wrong man on the spot and get the show hogged down before it starts.

Brief introductions of the Scoutmaster, his assistants and the committee are in order. Because you will probably have a few parents attending their first court of honor and wondering who all those important-looking people are at stage center. (We arranged the Scouts in banks of chairs on either side of the awards table with the Scouters behind the table.)

The awards can be laid out in an attractive, orderly fashion on the table. This not only catches the eyes of Scouts and parents, but makes it easy for the presenters to pick up the proper badges.

Investiture ceremony

After seeing and helping plan many courts of honor, I am convinced that a sure-fire opener is an investiture ceremony.

The candles on the altar of Scouting in the darkened room: the room gradually becoming brighter as each candle, signifying a point of the Scout Law, is lighted; the intoning of the 12 points of the Law in their entirety; and the repeating of the Scout Oath by the candidate Scouts as their parents stand behind them lend a note of dignity and solemnity to a court of honor that cannot be surpassed.

I know parents who have seen this ceremony a dozen times and have never tired of it or failed to be moved by it. Each Troop has its own format for investiture, but the basic ingredients would be the same.

The investiture should be well rehearsed. Nothing is more damaging to a serious ceremony than having the lines botched, or some of the participants stumbling about not sure where they are to be when.

Our script was typed and read over a public-address system by a man standing out of view of the audience. He was picked especially for the quality of his voice and ability to put feeling into what he was reading. The candidates followed his instructions and the lighting of the candles, pinning on of Tenderfoot badges, and affixing of neckerchiefs to the new Scouts were: duties handled by silent “actors.”

Presenting the awards

Following the investiture, awards can be made according to rank: Second, First, Star, and Life. If there are Eagle recipients, they should be saved until last.

Choosing the men to make the awards must be done with care. Each should know enough about Scouting to give a knowledgeable briefing to the audience on what is required to attain the rank he is

awarding. This can be done in less than 2 minutes.

It is disheartening to see a well-meaning man get up to give an award who has absolutely no background on what it involves. Usually he mumbles a few cliches to the honored Scouts, his voice trails off, he shoves the badges into the boys' hands, and flees back to his chair. This is terribly unfair to the man, the Scouts, and the audience, and can cost you a few friends.

Presenters should address their remarks not only to the Scouts, but also to the audience, in loud clear tones. If they know the Scouts well enough to make some personal references, this adds a touch of warmth and sometimes humor. Of course, the parents should be standing with their boys to share the moments of glory, especially when higher ranks are involved.

Merit badges

Next come the merit badge awards, and any special awards that might be on tap (patrol leader stripes service stars, and other forms of Scouting recognition).

For all its tremendous value, the merit badge program seems little understood by many parents. If time permits, the man handing out the badges should give a short explanation on just what a merit badge means and what a boy must do to earn one.

Eagle highlight

Finally, comes the high spot of the night, the award that wraps up the Scouting tableau which started with the investiture ceremony.

The Eagle Award, if properly presented, not only does great honor to the boy or boys receiving it, but can act as a stimulant to other boys in the troop who hope, someday to earn the coveted badge.

Unfortunately, some presenters labor under the delusion that they are the center of attraction and can kill an otherwise fine court of honor with a dull, pompous half-hour address.

Scoutmasters soon learn to avoid these men, regardless of how fine the motives may be, and pick the ones who will give a 5- or 10-minute talk on the values of Eagle, and the attainments of the boys receiving the badge. With the parents standing with their boys, this climaxes the court in excellent fashion.

Odds and ends

Despite the many awards given, and our troop has run the gauntlet on many occasions, all can be accomplished in 30 or 40 minutes with the investiture ceremony and the Eagle Presentation getting the lion's share of the time.

As a closer, any brief reports that the parents

should know about can be given. However, unless they are relevant, they should be avoided.

Too many courts have ran out of gas when they degenerated into a tiresome series of accounts on how much money was earned in the paper drive or which mothers will serve at the father-son banquet. These are committee matters, and most of your audience will be satisfied to know one thing—whether the troop is solvent.

The Scoutmaster concludes the festivities with a short announcement generally related to boy activities and what the Troop has coming up. Depending on the time of year, these may range from plans for summer camp to the Christmas party.

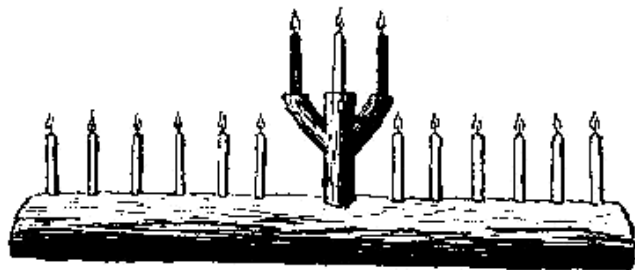
We found a pleasant topper to the evening was a refreshment period; coffee for the adults, soft drink for the Scouts and other youngsters present, and doughnuts for all.

Visit with parents

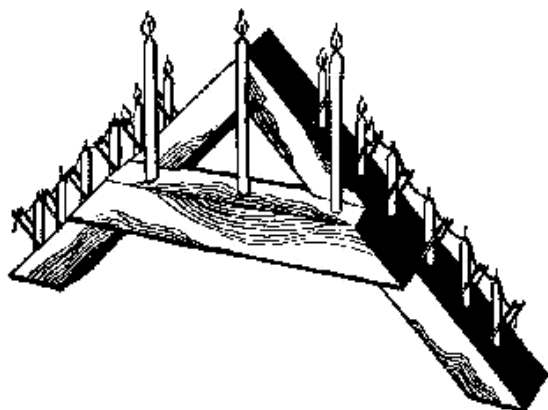
Recalling that offer made in the invitational letter, it is during this social period that the Scoutmaster and his assistants can visit with parents and discuss how Johnny is doing. Many questions about Scouting that parents want to ask can be taken care of at this time on a personal basis, without burdening the entire audience with each parent's individual problems.

Most parents and Scouts will begin drifting home after the short refreshment period; but if you have a few stragglers, your Scouts can be put to work stacking chairs, picking up bottles, and doing kitchen cleanup. Such hints will usually empty the hall.

Scouting is a fun, adventure, and skills - program little related to the theater, but on court of honor nights it is well to remember Ethel Merman's brassy voiced admonition: "There's No Business Like Show Business!"

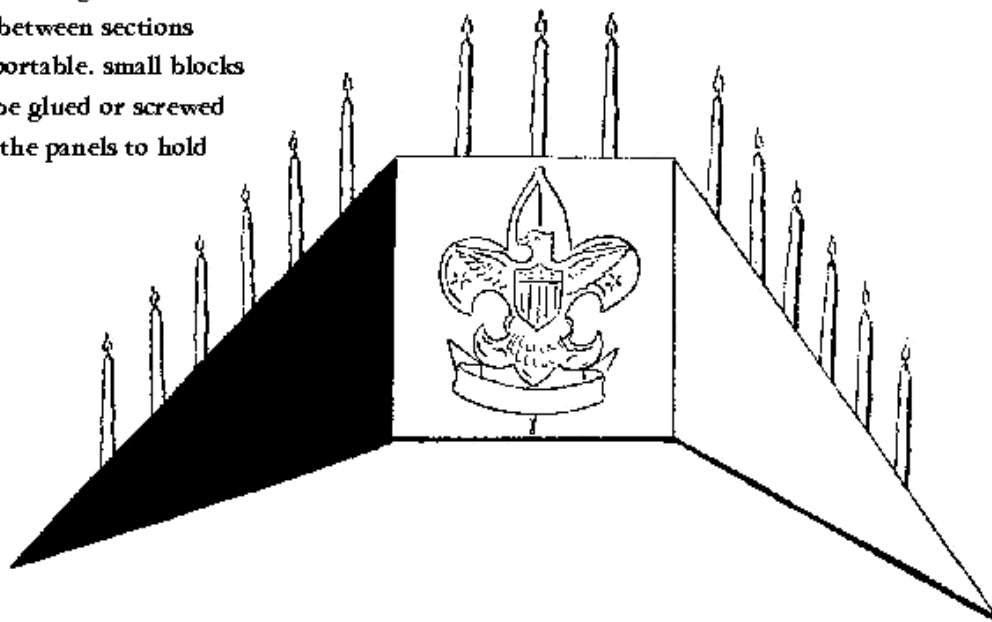


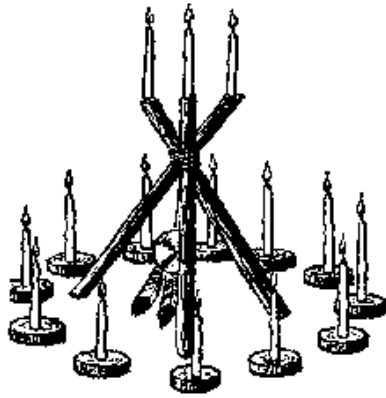
An investiture log (above left) is simple yet effective. The rustic three prong branch in the center holds candles representing the three parts of the Scout Oath. Three 12 smaller candles represents the Scout Law. In another arrangement three half logs (above) represent the Oath and candles still symbolize the Law. A more formal arrangement is shown here. (left)



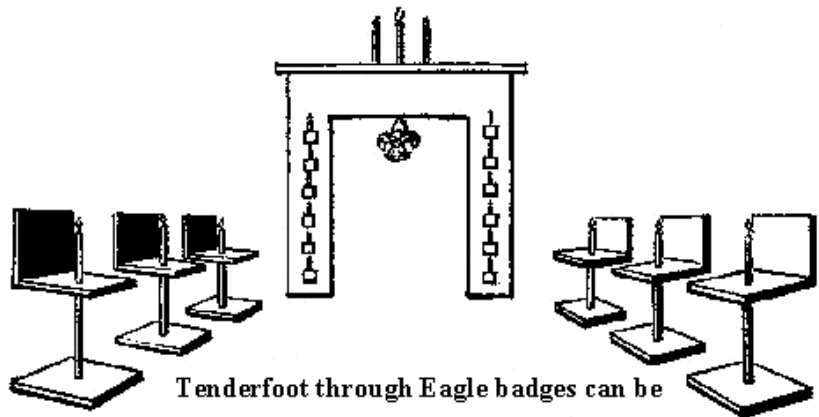
"A"-shaped investiture set (left) uses 3 10-inch candles, 12 4-inch candles. The $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch holes should be 1 - inch deep. Holes for small candles should be a 3 - inch intervals. Use at least 3 - by 3 - inch wood for this set.

Front view of a folding candelabra (below) Hinges between sections make it easily portable. small blocks of wood must be glued or screwed on the back of the panels to hold

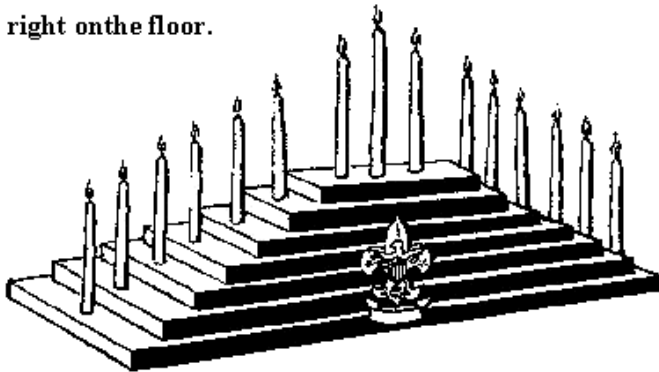




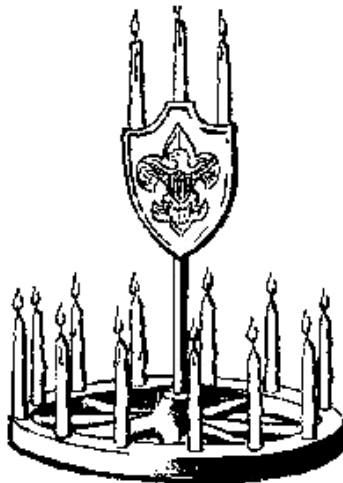
Three candles, mounted on a tripod (*above*) are surrounded by 12 smaller candles in individual holders. This can be used on a tabletop or larger version can be used right on the floor.



Tenderfoot through Eagle badges can be pasted on the six standers (*above*) that stand on either side of a large 3-foot by 4-foot investiture arch. Candles on each standard can be lighted as badges of that

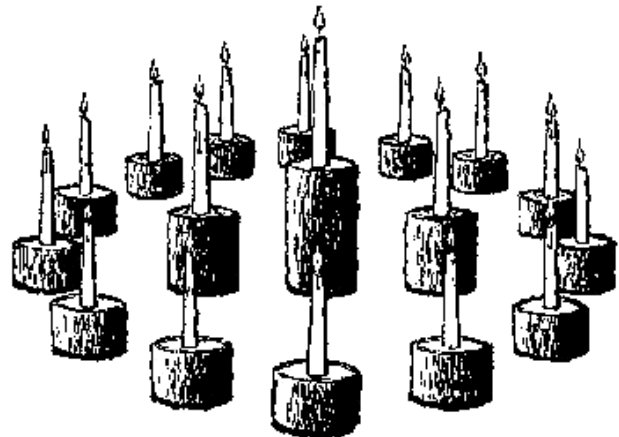


Another very simple investiture setup (*left*) uses seven "steps" plus acutout of a Scout badge. Here is a chance touse some of that scrap lumber cluttering up your garage. Add a little paint and you have an attractive cermonial device.

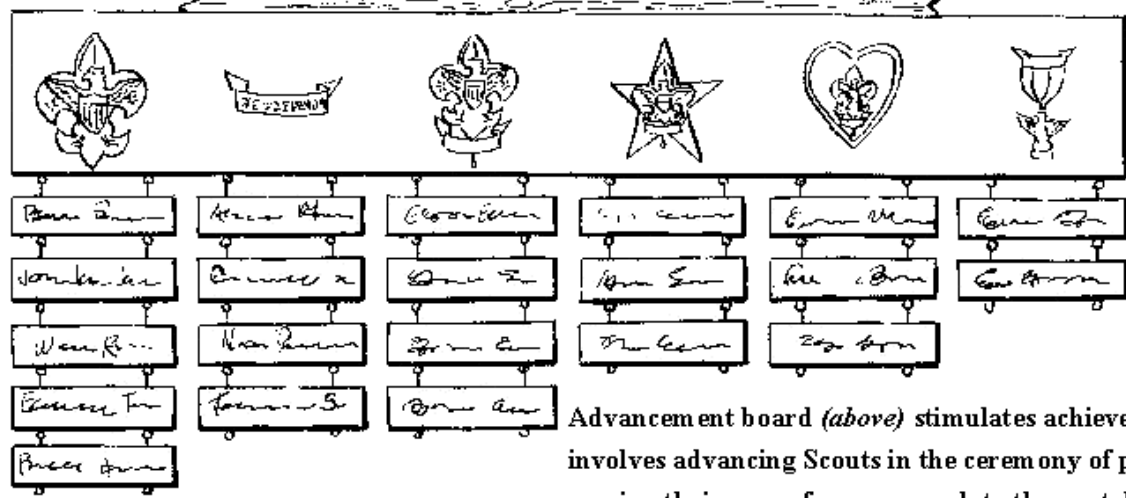


Wagon- wheel investiture arrangement (*above*) is exactly that. Mount the wheel on a simple stand, drill 12 holes in it, and build a centerpiece in the middle of the wheel for the three Scout Oath candles.

As simple as you can get. Fifteen "slices" (*below*) Complete with candles and your troop is ready to open any court of Honor. The 3 "slices" in the center should be taller than the surrounding 12.

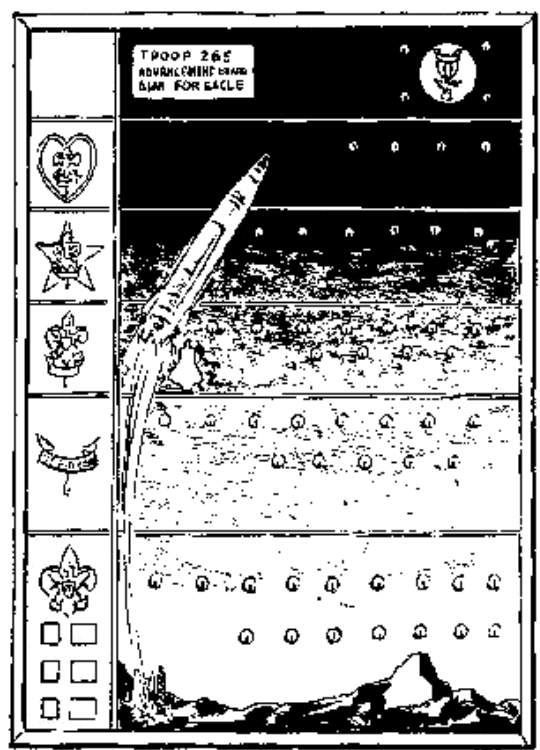


SCOUTING IS ADVANCING



Advancement board (*above*) stimulates achievement and involves advancing Scouts in the ceremony of physically moving their name from one rank to the next during a court of honor. The small name boards are hung under each badge according to the rank achieved

Another board (*below*) Utilizes the space theme. Each Scout in the troop has a "capsule" that advances up the board as he advances in rank (the Eagle badge is the moon). Each patrol has a different color capsule. Capsules hang on small hooks or nails.



The advancement chart (*below*) is merely a large version of Troop Advancement Chart, No. 3400. The name and complete record of each troop member is on a separate detachable piece of wood. Pieces are clamped by three 1/4-inch bolts. Various colored thumbtacks show the Scout's progress through the ranks and merit badges. Boys can add tacks at courts of honor.

