

CHARLES THOMAS "TOMMIE" GOOLSBY
(February 11, 1913 - July 10, 1928)

Charles Thomas "Tommie" Goolsby, son of Charles Hayes Goolsby and Sarah Jane Matthews Goolsby was born in Decherd, Tennessee on February 11, 1913. He had four older siblings, Vivian, Marjorie, Yvonne, and Louis. The family moved from Decherd to Paint Rock Valley, Alabama, then to the cedar forests of Georgia. The elder Goolsby worked in a pencil slat mill near Valdosta and in the early 1920s moved the family to Fort Myers, Florida.

They lived in a big house on Fowler Street. Thomas seemed to fit very well in his new tropical environment. In time, he obtained a job as an usher at the Arcade Theater and joined scouting as a member of the first Troop formed in Fort Myers, Troop 1. He worked upon, and won, every merit badge available at the time.

In June of 1928 Thomas and about another 100 other Boy Scouts went to Cuba for a Jamboree. President Gerardo Machado awarded Eagle Scout badges to those who were eligible. Thomas was one of those so honored. He was the first Eagle Scout in Troop 1 and thus the first Eagle scout of Fort Myers and of Lee County.

There was speculation in the family that Thomas contracted the infection that killed him later, either on the ship to, or in, Cuba. On his return, Thomas sickened rapidly and died on July 10, 1928 of spinal meningitis.

There was a community outpouring of sadness and affection for the loss of the golden boy "Tommie". A monument to the universally loved and respected young Scout was proposed. The Fort Myers Civitan Club sponsored the project. All of the materials were donated by the seven Fort Myers contractors of the time and all the labor to build it was volunteered.

The Thomas Goolsby Memorial Building was built in city hall park at Heitman and First streets. That was near the end of 1928. The building was dedicated February 11, 1929 and was used thereafter as a meeting place for Boy Scouts and office space for H. O. Kight, Scout executive of the Royal Palm Council, comprising Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Desoto, Glades, and Hendry counties. Later it was used as the office for the Fort Myers based Field Scout Executive of the Sunny Land Council. In its final years, it was used for storage by the city then razed, it is believed, about 1973. There is no family record that Fort Myers city officials made any attempt to notify or consult the remaining Goolsby family as to the disposition of the building and its contents. The property became a parking lot. There was a bronze plaque affixed to the building with the dedicatory words on it. Its location is unknown as of this date.

This portrait of Tommie is the original photomontage mounted in the building in 1929. That portrait hung over the fireplace during the lifetime of the building. It was lost to family knowledge until John Douglas Bartleson, Jr., a former Scout, recognized it in the Troop 1 meeting room in the St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Cleveland Ave in Fort Myers in 2002. Mr. Tom Burgess, another local Scout, retrieved the portrait and shipped it to Dr Thomas Stewart, a nephew of Tommie. Dr Stewart had the portrait digitized, edited, and mounted in the original frame and returned to the St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

Thomas Goolsby Stewart
Lebanon Oregon
Monday, February 22, 2010