

GIRL SCOUTS



1912 - TODAY

Biographical Sketch of
Juliette Gordon Low



Juliette Gordon Low, founder of Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., was born October 31, 1860, in Savannah, Georgia, and died there January 17, 1927.

Daisy, as she was known to family and friends, was the second of six children of William Washington Gordon and Eleanor Kinzie Gordon. Her father's family were early settlers in Georgia and her mother's family played an important part in the founding of Chicago.

A sensitive and talented youngster, Daisy spent a happy childhood in her large Savannah home, which has been purchased and restored by Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Now known as the Juliette Gordon Low Girl Scout National Center, the handsome Regency house has designated a Registered Historic Landmark in 1965.

Young Daisy developed what was to become a lifetime interest in the arts. She wrote poems, sketched, wrote and acted in plays, and later became a skilled painter and sculptor.

In her teens, Daisy attended private schools in Virginia and later a French school in New York City. Following her school years she traveled extensively in the United States and Europe, broadening her education.

On the date of her parents' 29th wedding anniversary, December 21, 1886, Juliette Gordon married William Mackay Low, a wealthy Englishman, and the couple moved to England. Juliette found time to continue her travels, dividing her time between the British Isles and America.

During the Spanish-American War, she returned to aid her country. With her mother she helped organize a convalescent hospital for soldiers in Florida, where her father, who had been a captain in the Confederate Army, was stationed as a general in the U.S. Army. At the end of the war she returned to England.

Juliette's husband died in 1905. In 1911 she met Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and became interested in the new youth movement. One year later she returned to the United States and made her historic phone call to a friend, saying "I've got something for the girls of Savannah, and all America, and all the world, and we're going to start it tonight." Thus, on March 12, 1912, Juliette Low gathered 18 girls together to organize the first two American Girl Guide troops. Daisy Gordon, her niece, was the first registered member. The name of the organization was changed to Girl Scouts the following year.

Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas

In developing the Girl Scout movement in the United States, Mrs. Low brought girls of all backgrounds into the out-of-doors, giving them an opportunity to learn about nature and develop self-reliance and resourcefulness. She encouraged girls to prepare themselves not only for traditional homemaking roles, but also for possible future roles as professional women in the arts, sciences, and business, and for active citizenship outside the home. Girls with disabilities were welcomed into Girl Scouting at a time when they were excluded from many other activities. This seemed quite natural to Juliette Low, who never let her own deafness keep her from full participation in life.

From an initial 18 girls in 1912, Girl Scouting has grown to a girl and adult membership of more than three million in the 1990s. The Girl Scout organization is the world's largest volunteer organization for girls and has influenced the lives of the more than 50 million girls, women and men who have been members.

Juliette Low accumulated friends and admirers of all ages, nationalities and from many walks of life. By maintaining contacts with overseas Girl Guides and Girl Scouts during World War I, she helped lay the foundation for today's World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. After her death in 1927, her friends honored her by establishing the Juliette Low World Friendship Fund, which finances international projects among Girl Guides and Girl Scouts throughout the world.

On July 3, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill authorizing a three-cent commemorative stamp in honor of Juliette Gordon Low. The stamp was one of the few dedicated to a woman. During World War II, a liberty ship was named in her honor, and in 1954, the city of Savannah honored her by naming a new school for her.

On October 28, 1979, Juliette Gordon Low was installed in the Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. The purpose of the Women's Hall of Fame is "to honor in perpetuity those women, citizens of the United States of America, whose contributions to the arts, athletics, business, education, government, the humanities, philanthropy, and science have been of greatest value to the development of their country."

On December 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill naming a new federal building in Savannah, Georgia, for Juliette Gordon Low. It was only the second federal building in history to be named for a woman.