

# Juliette Gordon Low Biography

Founder of Girl Scouts of the USA



Juliette Gordon Low, founder of Girl Scouts of the USA, was born Juliette Magill Kinzie Gordon on October 31, 1860, in Savannah, Georgia.

"Daisy," as she was affectionately called by family and friends, was the second of six children of William Washington Gordon and Eleanor Kinzie Gordon. Family members on her father's side were early settlers in Georgia, and her mother's family played an important role in the founding of Chicago, Illinois.

A sensitive and talented youngster, Daisy Gordon spent a happy childhood in her large Savannah home, which was purchased and restored by Girl Scouts of the USA in 1953. Now known as the Juliette Gordon Low Girl Scout National Center, or often referred to as the Birthplace, the handsome English Regency house was designated a registered National Historic Landmark in 1965.

Young Daisy Gordon 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. She had many pets throughout her life and was particularly fond of exotic birds, Georgia mockingbirds, and dogs. Daisy was also known for her great sense of humor.

## Early Adulthood

In her teens, Daisy attended boarding school at Virginia Female Institute (now Stuart Hall School) in Staunton, Va., and later attended Mesdemoiselles Charbonniers, a French finishing school in New York City.

Following her school years, Juliette Gordon traveled extensively in the United States and Europe.

On December 21, 1886, her parents' 29th wedding anniversary, Juliette married William Mackay Low, a wealthy Englishman, at Christ Church in Savannah, Georgia. Although the couple moved to England, Juliette continued her travels and divided her time between the British Isles and America.

Before her marriage, Juliette had suffered from chronic ear infections. She had lost most of her hearing in one ear because of improper treatment. At her wedding, when she was 26, she lost hearing in her other ear after a grain of good-luck rice thrown at the event lodged in her ear, puncturing the eardrum and resulting in an infection and total loss of hearing in that ear.

During the Spanish-American War, Juliette came back to America to aid in the war effort. She helped her mother organize a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers returning from Cuba. Her father, who had been a captain in the Confederate army, was commissioned as a general in the U.S. Army and served on the Puerto Rican Peace Commission. At the end of the war, Juliette returned to England and to a disintegrating marriage. The Lows were separated at the time of her husband's death in 1905.



*Daisy Gordon, age 10.*



*The S.S. Juliette Low, launched May 12, 1944. Pictured here in the Southeastern Ship Yards, Savannah, Georgia.*



*Dick Platt, Juliette Gordon Low's great nephew, with Olivia Graham of the GSUSA National Board of Directors, at the Juliette Gordon Low commemorative medallion, part of the Extra Mile-Points of Light Volunteer Pathway in Washington, D.C.*

## Girl Scout Life

Juliette Gordon Low spent several years searching for something useful to do with her life. Her search ended in 1911, when she met Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and became interested in the new youth movement. Afterwards, she channeled all her considerable energies into the fledgling movement.

Less than a year later, she returned to the United States and made her historic telephone call to a friend (a distant cousin), saying, "I've got something for the girls of Savannah, and all of America, and all the world, and we're going to start it tonight!" On March 12, 1912, Juliette Low gathered 18 girls to register the first troop of American Girl Guides. Margaret "Daisy Doots" Gordon, her niece and namesake, was the first registered member. The name of the organization was changed to Girl Scouts the following year.

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

From the original 18 girls, Girl Scouting has grown to 3.7 million members. Girl Scouts is the largest educational organization for girls in the world and has influenced the more than 50 million girls, women and men who have belonged to it.

Juliette Gordon Low accumulated admirers and friends of all ages, nationalities and walks of life. By maintaining contact with overseas Girl Guides and Girl Scouts during World War I, she helped lay the foundation for the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. After her death from breast cancer in 1927, her friends honored her by establishing the Juliette Low World Friendship Fund, which finances international projects for Girl Scouts and Girl Guides around the world. Juliette Gordon Low died at her Savannah, Georgia, home on Lafayette Square January 17, 1927. She is buried at Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah.

- On July 3, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed a bill authorizing a **stamp in honor of Juliette Gordon Low**. The stamp was one of the few dedicated to women.
- During World War II, she had a "**Liberty Ship**" named in her honor.
- In 1954, in Georgia, the city of Savannah honored her by **naming a school for her**. A Juliette Low School also exists in Anaheim, California.
- On October 28, 1979, Juliette Low was inducted into the **National Women's Hall of Fame** in Seneca Falls, New York.
- On December 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill naming a new **federal building in Savannah in honor of Juliette Low**. It was the second federal building in history to be named after a woman.
- In 1992, a Georgia non-profit honored Juliette Low as one of the first **Georgia Women of Achievement**. A bust of Juliette Low is displayed in the State Capitol. In 2000, The Deaf World in Wax, a traveling exhibit, featured her as a famous deaf American.
- On October 14, 2005, Juliette Low's life work was immortalized in a commemorative, bronze-and-granite medallion as part of a new national monument in Washington, D.C. The [Extra Mile Points of Light Volunteer Pathway](#) pays tribute to great Americans who built their dreams into movements that have created enduring change in America. The monument's medallions, laid into sidewalks adjacent to the White House, form a one-mile walking path.

## When Juliette Was a Girl

Girl Scouting in the USA has a long history starting with Juliette Gordon Low. Find out more about Girl Scouts' founder.

### My Life

Hi! My name is Juliette Gordon. My nickname is Daisy. I grew up to start Girl Scouts of the USA.

I was born in Savannah, Georgia, on October 31, 1860. I am the second of six kids in my family—I have three sisters and two brothers.

When I was young, I went to a boarding school in Virginia. When I got older, I went to a French School in New York City. I loved the arts—I designed my own clothes, painted china, and performed skits with my friends.

But I was also a tomboy—roughhousing with my brothers, getting my hair braided with taffy, even cementing my fingers to a soap dish!

I always loved animals—I was always coming home with a stray cat or dog. Well, to be honest, they weren't always strays—some belonged to people, but I felt that they were being neglected, so I took them home. Momma always made me take them back.

### A Turkey Tale

When I was a kid, cooking was very different from what it is like now. If you wanted a turkey dinner, you'd have to go outside and get a live turkey—then cut its head off, pluck off the feathers, and cook it. That was the only way to get fresh meat! See, we only had cold storage, but no real fridge or freezer. When our ice melted, food went bad.

One year for Thanksgiving, we raised a turkey and all became very fond of him—even called him "old Tom." When the day came for Tom to become Thanksgiving dinner, I begged my papa for the turkey's life, and, if not, then at least for anesthesia.

So we got some chloroform, put poor Tom to sleep, plucked him, and put him in the cold storage. We did not, however, cut off his head. So the next morning when we went to get him for cooking, he was very much alive and very, very mad. He chased Mama and the cook round and round, until finally he was caught, and had to lose his head. It really was a Thanksgiving to remember!

Want to find out more? Learn about How Girl Scouts Began and gave girls everywhere the chance to do lots of fun things!

## How Girl Scouts Began

Ever wonder how Girl Scouting began? Let Juliette Gordon Low tell you the story!

I married William Low when I was 26 years old. He was an Englishman, so we lived in Great Britain during most of our years of marriage. While I was in Scotland in 1911, I met two very important people—Sir Robert Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes. We became very close and remained friends for the next 16 years. Sir Robert started the Boy Scouts in England and it seemed like such a purposeful activity that girls would be interested in it too. And so they started the Girl Guides. I ran my own Girl Guide "troop" that year.



*Daisy Gordon at age 9.*



*The Gordon children circa 1876. Juliette is at top left.*



*Sir Robert Baden-Powell and his wife Olave.*

## My Own Girl Guide "Troop" in Scotland

My original idea was that girls could learn the same things boys were learning—knot tying, signaling, first aid, etc. But while people saw such military skills as being beneficial to boys, they viewed them as frivolous for girls.

The area where I lived was very poor, and many girls had to leave their homes and go into the cities for work in order to help their families make a living. City factories were very filthy and unsafe back then. I thought that there ought to be some way the girls could help their families earn money without having to leave home. I thought that they might raise poultry to feed the rich people who stayed at the nearby hunting lodges. This was very successful. We branched out and learned how to spin wool which the girls went on to sell.

## How I Started Girl Scouting in the U.S.

When I came back to America, I called my cousin and told her that I had "...something for the girls of Savannah, and all America, and all the world..." and that we had to get started on it right away. And we did!

It wasn't easy—people seemed convinced that this would be one more thing I'd start and then lose interest. And money was always a concern. At one point I even sold my pearls to finance the organization.

But I never had any doubts that it would be successful. After all, I knew that girls could do anything they set their minds to. What started out as a group of girls meeting to study nature or learn to play basketball in my backyard grew quickly.

When America entered into World War I, I wrote to President Wilson and offered him the Girl Scouts' services. Girls went to help out the Red Cross, planted victory gardens, and helped to sell millions of war bonds.



*Juliette Gordon Low with some of the nation's first Girl Scouts. "Come right over!" she said. "I have something for all the girls of Savannah, and all America, and all the world, and we're going to start it tonight."*

## Watching the Seed Grow

I had 15 years to watch my program grow. In January 1927, I lost my battle to cancer. I had been fighting it for the last few years, and had kept it a secret from all but my closest friends. I found that I had to spend less and less time actually running the Girl Scouts, and more time creating an organizational structure that would ensure that the Movement didn't die with me. I guess I succeeded. In 1927 there were 167,925 Girl Scouts and now there are over 3.7 million girls and adults!

If you want to learn more, come visit the house I grew up in! It's called the Birthplace. It's a national center in Savannah, Georgia. When you are here, you can try things I did when I was your age.

## **All About Me – Juliette Gordon Low**

(from GSUSA's Girls Only website - <http://www.gogirlsonly.org/>)

Some people have called me an "eccentric" (ik-sen-trik), a person who has an unusual personality. I was a very determined—some say stubborn!—person, which had both good and bad effects on my life. Here are some stories about my original "take" on things.

### **My Watch**

I wore my favorite watch most days. The fact that it only had one hand, and couldn't really tell the time, never really bothered me.

### **Ear Problems**

I had a lot of ear infections and was losing patience with "traditional" medicine. I had heard that silver nitrate was the "newest" treatment, and I insisted that the doctor use it on me. Unfortunately, it was too powerful, and it caused me to go deaf in that ear.

Later on, at my wedding, a truly freaky thing happened—some of the rice people threw got stuck in my other ear. I didn't want to take the time to see a doctor, since I was leaving on my honeymoon. Well, the rice caused a bad infection in my good ear. When the rice was finally removed, the instrument they used to take it out made me deaf in that ear too.

### **The Wrong Fish**

I was out trout fishing one night and felt a tug on my line. I fought hard for quite a while to try and "land" my catch. What I didn't realize was that I hadn't hooked a fish—rather, I had hooked one of my guests straight through the ear. I was too deaf to hear his screams, and I was so determined to land the "fish" I never noticed that it was a person instead.

### **Fishing with Kipling**

I was bored at one of the parties I was attending, and so pulled Rudyard Kipling—the author of the famous book *Just So Stories*—away from his friends and took him fishing. He kept complaining that we weren't dressed for it (we were both in formal attire), but I never saw what difference that made—it wasn't as if our clothes were the bait we were using!

### **Turkey Dinner**

When I was little, people raised and killed their own Thanksgiving turkeys. Just before they cut off our turkey's head, I convinced my family that the turkey should be given something to knock him out first, so he wouldn't feel anything. They finally gave in and agreed to do just that. We plucked the turkey and put him in the icebox—an old-fashioned word for refrigerator. When we opened the icebox the next day, the bird was wide awake and hopped right out! The cook, thinking the bird had been dead, freaked out and jumped up on top of the stove.

### **Strays**

I always loved animals. I was constantly coming home with stray dogs, cats and even horses. Sometimes they weren't strays, but I felt that their owners were neglecting them.

Once I showed up at my sister's with a baby rabbit. I had bought it from some children because I felt sorry for it—its ears were so cold! I put the rabbit on a hot water bottle and massaged its ears for quite a while. After all, I knew that all healthy animals had warm ears.

### **Taffy**

Most girls in my time had very long hair. Because my hair was the same soft brown color as taffy, I let my cousin braid some of the sugary candy into my hair. Mama had to chop it all off. She was so mad!

# Another Juliette Low Story

(simplified for Girl Scout Daisies)

You are a Girl Scout Daisy and are named after "Daisy" Gordon Low. Daisy Low started Girl Scouts a long time ago in 1912. Her real name was Juliette, but most people called her "Daisy".

Juliette was born in 1860 on Halloween in a place called Savannah, Georgia. Her uncle gave her the name "Daisy" when she was a baby. He looked at her one day and said "I bet she's going to be a daisy!" He thought she was some 'baby!' Ever since then people called her Daisy.

Daisy had an older sister named Nellie and four younger sisters and brothers named Alice, Willy, Mabel and Arthur. Her father was a cotton trader, and her mother was a homemaker, busy taking care of all the children, the family and their house. They lived in a big house in Savannah (it is now a Girl Scout program center).

As a young girl, Daisy did many things. She liked to climb trees, play with her brothers, sisters and cousins, take care of animals, start and run clubs, write stories, draw pictures, tell jokes, write and be in plays, explore places, and do many other things.

One time she saved a kitten from being drowned in a flood. Another time she kept a cow from getting really sick by putting her mother's blanket on the cow overnight. Her mother did not like that too much, because the blanket fell off the cow in the morning and the cow stepped on it. But at least the cow didn't get sick!

Daisy's father and grandmother know that she loved animals, especially horses. When they thought she was old enough to take care of one, they bought her a horse. She named the horse Fire and spent many hours riding him, grooming him and talking to him. He was black with four white feet. Daisy was very, very, happy to have a horse and took very good care of him.

Later on, Daisy grew up and married a man named Willy Low. They went to live in England and Scotland, countries on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

They lived together for several years, but then Willy died. Other sad things happened to Daisy, too. She had problems with her ears and became partially deaf.

Even with these sad events in her life, she went on to do many wonderful things. She heard about Boy Scouts and Girl Guides from her friend Lord Robert Baden Powell. Daisy decided to start the same thing for girls in the United States. After leading a few troops of Girl Guides in Scotland, she came back to the United States and started Girl Scouts. On March 12, 1912 the first troop met. That is why March 12th is the Girl Scout birthday.

## Additional Resources

- **Getting to know Juliette Gordon Low:** [http://www.girlscouts.org/for\\_adults/leader\\_magazine/2006\\_spring/getting\\_to\\_know\\_jgl.asp](http://www.girlscouts.org/for_adults/leader_magazine/2006_spring/getting_to_know_jgl.asp)
- **Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace:** [http://www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/history/birthplace/default.asp](http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/history/birthplace/default.asp) and <http://www.juliettegordonlowbirthplace.org/>
- **Juliette Low World Friendship Fund:** [http://www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/global/juliette\\_low\\_fund.asp](http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/global/juliette_low_fund.asp)
- **How Juliette Low Started Girl Scouts Skit:** <http://www.scoutingweb.com/ScoutingWeb/SubPages/HowJulietteStartGS.htm>
- **Juliette Low Candle Ceremony** (lit candles not recommended for Girl Scout Daisies or Brownies): <http://www.scoutingweb.com/ScoutingWeb/SubPages/JulLowEternalFimCere.htm>
- **Juliette Low Wide Game, Action Stories and Mad Libs:** <http://www.scoutingweb.com/ScoutingWeb/SubPages/JulLowGames.htm>
- **Juliette Low Right Left Story:** <http://www.scoutingweb.com/ScoutingWeb/SubPages/RightLeftStories.htm>