

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 5, 1954

The Girl Scouts

Because Monterey Peninsula has always been interested in the Girl Scouts of America and because there has recently been created more interest in the National Trust for Historic Preservation since the gift of the Casa Amesti by the late Mrs. Frances Elkins to that organization, we are telling a story which affects both groups.

The Girl Scouts have demonstrated their patriotic desire to become part of our nationwide movement to preserve the architectural and historical treasures of our country by embarking upon the preservation of the birthplace and girlhood of their founder Juliette Gordon Low.

This handsome, ante-bellum mansion in Savannah, Ga., was to be sold to settle an estate and because of its valuable location near the expanding business district, was in immediate danger of being razed to make way for commercial development. Members of the Gordon family generously delayed negotiations with the commercial interests, so that the national board of directors of the Girl Scouts could bring the purchase of their founder's birthplace before the national convention where the project was wholeheartedly supported.

The earlier history of this noted house is recorded on a plaque on Oglethorpe avenue in Savannah:

"...The residence opposite this site known as the Gordon House was built between 1819-1821. A fine example of regency architecture, it was designed by the eminent architect, William Jay. The third story and side porch was later added.

"The house was originally owned by James N. Wayne, one of Georgia's most illustrious public men. After service as mayor of Savannah, judge of the Eastern Circuit, and as congressman he was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States by President Jackson in 1835. An able and courageous jurist Wayne served on the highest court with distinction until his death in 1867 in Washington.

"Though devoted to his native state Judge was a strong Unionist. Opposing secession he remained on the Supreme Court after Georgia left the union, a decision sharply contrasting with the course of his son Henry C.

Wayne who resigned his commission in the U.S. Army in 1860 on the approach of war to serve Georgia as Adjutant General.

"The Wayne residence was purchased in 1831 by a distinguished Savannahian William Washington Gordon (1796-1841), organizer and first president of the Central of Georgia railroad. President Taft was a guest there in 1909.

But for Girl Scouts, the most important date in the history of the house was 1860, when Juliette Gordon was born there. Shortly thereafter her father, William Washington Gordon, left Savannah to serve as a general in the Confederate Army. This information will no doubt soon appear upon another plaque at the home, as well as the fact that Juliette was the founder of the Girl Scouts.

While in England years later, after her marriage, Juliette Gordon Low became acquainted with Sir Robert Baden-Powell, originator of the scouting movement for both boys and girls, and she conceived the idea of establishing a Girl Scout movement in the United States.

Immediately on her return to Savannah in 1912, she set about building the new organization and enrolled her own niece, Daisy Gordon, as the first recruit. Others quickly followed, until today, 40 years later the Girl Scouts organization number more than 2,000,000 members who represent all 48 states, every Territory and U.S. possession. Furthermore there are almost 600 U.S.A. Girl Scout troops on foreign soil, in 41 countries.

The distinguished Georgian received many honors for her role as founder; among them the issue of the commemorative stamp by the U.S. Post Office in 1948, and in 1950 by the granting of a Congressional Charter to the Girl Scout organization. Perhaps though, the greatest tribute of all, is the plan of the Girl Scouts to acquire and restore their founder's birthplace.

To the Quarterly of the National Times for Historic Preservation we are indebted for the information concerning this most recent acquisition of historic interest.