



Girl Scouts – More Than Cookies

by Gail Nickerson

This year the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. are celebrating their Centennial. A hundred years ago, before the Titanic sank, Girl Scouting was founded.

One night in March, 1912, Juliette Gordon Low, nicknamed Daisy, the almost totally deaf, divorced daughter of a Confederate Civil War officer, who loved to try new things and was interested in just about everything, had an epiphany. She would bring Girl Scouting to this country.



The Girl Guides had already been active in England and Scotland for a couple of years, which Juliette had seen firsthand while she lived overseas. Juliette called her cousin and between the two of them they recruited girls from such diverse places as the Female Orphan Asylum, the Synagogue Mickve Israel and the daughters of powerful and influential families of Savannah.

They met on the steps of Christ Church and founded the Girl Scouts of America. That very first troop consisted of 18 girls.

A mere ten years later, the Girl Scout movement had reached Harwich and the first troop was organized here, designated the "Red Rose" Troop since they didn't have numbers at first. There have been active Girl Scouts in Harwich ever since.

Starting on June 16, the Harwich Historical Society, located in the Brooks Academy Building on Parallel Street, will be offering a display honoring the Girl Scouts and their history in Harwich.

One of the places the Girl Scouts met to have their weekly meetings was the Old Exchange Building, which used to be at the corner of Main Street and Pleasant Lake Avenue in Harwich Center. The display contains black and white photographs of these gatherings, showing girls of every color in their full uniforms.

Nowadays, Girl Scout troops meet in all sorts of venues around town: school cafeterias, church fellowship halls, Brooks Library and even Senior Citizens activity rooms, as well as the Recreation Center.

At the exhibit, you will see photos of our town's scouts throughout the last nine decades and the activities in which they have participated.

They started out selling only shortbread cookies, named the Trefoils, which the girls baked themselves and sold by the bag. The original recipe is on display at Brooks Academy, and at the opening reception, local troops will be serving some of these home-baked treats.

Most of their activities have involved community service of some kind, like cleaning up the bicycle paths, planting flowers at the Welcome to Harwich signs, distributing used Christmas trees on the beaches to quell erosion, and participating in patriotic events such as the Veterans Day ceremony at Island Pond Cemetery.

There will be interviews conducted with local women who were once scouts, recounting their memories of their scouting years. These will be available to listen to, courtesy of Harwich Channel 18 and the local Cadette troop.



There is a display of Girl Scout uniforms from the twenties and thirties up until the present day; the original dress, which was common up until the 70's, and the vests and sashes that are usually worn now, complete with badges earned. There is also a recording of all the 'official' Girl Scout songs.

The Harwich Ambassador and Senior troop was asked to collect information so that volunteers from the Historical Society could create a timeline of Scouting. The troop voted to take on that responsibility themselves.

The girls worked with a younger Scout troop to design several beautiful posters that are now on display, showing a timeline from 1912 to the present, marking milestones of both Girl Scouts U.S.A. and the Girl Scouts of Harwich.

And yes, Girl Scouts do still sell cookies. Since 1917, Scouts have been selling cookies as their major fundraiser, with over 200 million boxes are sold annually.



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Eventually, Girl Scout cookies branched out into the cookies we know today: Thin Mints, Do-Si-Dos, Tagalongs, and Samoas, among others. There have been many varieties and many different names for cookies offered over the years. The girls used to go door-to-door to take orders for the cookies and then deliver them later, but due to safety issues many troops now order in bulk and then sell at pre-arranged venues, like grocery stores.

The Girl Scout organization has, from the start, tried to encourage and empower girls and young women to be all that they can be, to try new things, to offer service to their communities, to help others and to be leaders.

They learn how to camp in the summer and in the winter, they ride horses, and they shoot the rapids. They've even learned how to sail the H.M.S. Bounty. They can earn badges for cooking, sewing, and running a chain saw, and hundreds of other things, as they choose.

These girls, the Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes, Ambassadors and Seniors, and the women that they become, along with their Troop Leaders, were and are wonderful assets to our communities.

Please come and see their history, presented by the Harwich Historical Society at the Brooks Academy Museum, June 16 through October 6.

Gail Nickerson has lived in Harwich for over twenty years where she and her husband raised two daughters.

She is currently working on a cozy murder mystery and also on an historical fiction novel about the Salem Witch Trials.

GIRL SCOUTS SALUTE 100 YEARS!

An exhibition of the history of
Girl Scouting in Harwich,
celebrating this milestone.

June 16 through October 6
Thurs 1-6pm, Fri & Sat 1-4pm

Opening Reception: June 16, 1-4pm

Brooks Academy Museum
80 Parallel Street, Harwich
508-432-8089

www.harwichhistoricalsociety.org