

Alumnae Network

You'll always be a Girl Scout

The Legacy of Helen Osborne Storrow (1864-1944)

By Diane White



Helen Osborne Storrow, Long Pond, 1924

Remembered for her Open Mind and Big Heart

Helen Osborne was born on September 22, 1864 in Auburn, New York. She was the youngest of four children born to David and Eliza Osborne. Helen studied music in Germany after high school and she met her husband-to-be while climbing on a mountain path in Zermatt, Switzerland. In 1891 Helen and James Jackson Storrow II were married and took up residence in Boston. They had one son, James Jackson Storrow III, whom they called Jack.

Helen and Jim were outdoor types who loved to explore and were frequently found hiking and canoeing. They purchased land and built a country home in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Both were very civic-minded and worked to improve the lives of immigrants in the Boston area. Helen taught English, social manners, and American

culture to girls, volunteered at the Boston Public Library, and helped the Saturday Evening Girls Club by financing the business operation of the Paul Revere Pottery.

Helen first heard about Girl Scouts in 1915 and liked the motto "Be Prepared." She started her own troops in Boston and Lincoln, and trained leaders in outdoor skills. In 1917, Helen organized and commanded the first National USA Girl Scout Training School for Girl Scout Leaders at the Winsor School in Boston. Two years later, she offered her property in the Plymouth area of Massachusetts to be the site of the first National Training School for Girl Scouts of the USA. The Edith Macy Center, still in operation today, opened in 1926 and became the second National Girl Scout Training School.

Helen arranged the acquisition of a 76-acre farm for the Massachusetts Girl Scouts. She



personally financed the conversion from farm to Camp Cedar Hill in Waltham, Massachusetts. At the 1923 Cedar Hill dedication, Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, spoke. "The Girl Scouts are to my mind of far greater importance than the Boy Scouts because you see among them the mothers of the future." His wife, Olave Baden-Powell, as well as Juliette Gordon Low (seen here in photo with Helen Storrow at Cedar Hill), attended the dedication. Ninety years later, Cedar Hill remains a premier Girl Scout property, serving as a program camp center and home to the Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill.

Helen continued with her passions after Jim died in 1926. Helen bought and repositioned 18th Century buildings to create a typical New England village. Storrowton, in

Springfield, Massachusetts, features period houses, a school, church, blacksmith shop, law office, and an inn as part of the Eastern States Exposition. Helen felt it was important to showcase women's domestic work and handcrafts because of the significant contribution they were to our culture and our country.

Helen was asked to attend the 1929 Girl Guide-Girl Scout World Committee meeting at The Hague as the substitute USA delegate. She loved hearing about all the activities and offered to "give the house" for international world meetings as long as it was located in her beloved Switzerland. She agreed to donate money for construction and finance the

first four years of operations. Our Chalet, The First World Centre, was dedicated in 1932 and still serves as a vibrant center of international friendship today.

Helen traveled with the Baden-Powells on their world tour and wrote about scouting activities in Egypt, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. When World War II broke out, she sponsored children from England to come to the United States. She also invited her Girl Guide friend, Briggsie (Countess Dorothea Gravina of Italy) and her three young sons to seek refuge with her at her country home in Lincoln for the duration of the war.

Helen donated a great deal of money to redirect the Charles River in Boston to allow for open park space and suitable boating conditions. Today wonderful concerts are held on the Esplanade, there is ample recreation area and plentiful boating on the Charles River. We also have the Storrors to thank for the Boston Community Boat House and as you may suspect, Storrow Drive was named in their honor.



Helen Storrow was a multi-faceted woman, ahead of her time, with a vision for the future, backed by a commitment to philanthropy. Her influence on Juliette Low and the evolution of the Girl Scout Movement in the United States is well documented. Girl Scouts and Girl Guides around the world still benefit from her legacy in the 21st Century.

Portrait of Helen Osborne Storrow, Bermuda (1944)

About the Author... *Diane White of Wayland (center in photo taken at Our Chalet, 2013) is a Lifetime Member of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. She is a Thanks Badge II recipient, Helen Storrow award recipient, past president of Patriots' Trail Girl Scout Council, past board member of Girl Scouts of the USA, member of the Olave Baden Powell Society and a 2012 recipient of the Juliette Low World Friendship Medal. She was also a Girl Scout leader for her daughters' troops and an active member of the Wayland Girl Scout Service Team for many years*



Locally, Diane promotes global awareness through international programs for Girl Scout troops at the Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill. She encourages girls

to be involved in the global dimension of Girl Scouting. Nationally, Diane is a current co-chair of the Friends of Our Chalet Committee, one of five committees of the World Foundation for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts that raise funds and awareness for the Five World Centers and WAGGGS. Internationally, she is an appointed member of the Swiss "Our Chalet" Foundation and the WAGGGS Our Chalet Team.