

I am Natalia Drozdoff. I'm a Glencoe Girl Scout and I'm writing this as part of my silver award project. There are many topics I could have chosen but I picked Little House because it is an important part of the community that does not always receive the recognition it deserves. Little House is enhancing its marketing plan and I hope that this history will be useful for the website, the board and the people who use Little House. As a short aside, Little House has a log gazebo on the property and current board members wanted to know about its origins.

I have had a great deal of help in finding information and writing this history. I am grateful for the help I received from the current Little House board. I would also like to thank former board members who agreed to be interviewed specifically, John Tuohy, Virginia Sprowl, Dorothy Fosse, Marilyn Black and Virginia Lawless. I could not have done this without their help as well as the help of my parents, my scout leader Laurie Morse, the Glencoe Girl Scouts and the Glencoe Historical society.

Little House has an interesting early history, which spans from 1946 until 1973. I owe a great debt to Virginia Sprowl and her document on the early history of Girl Scouting in Glencoe in the files of the Glencoe Historical Society. Little House and Girl Scouts were closely linked in the early years and there is a significant amount of information on the early years of Little House in her document.

Little House was started by the Girl Scouts. The Girl Scouts in Glencoe were having some problems with a lack of interest. They felt that the cause of the drop in numbers was the fact that the girl scouts did not have very many overnights in nice places. They thought that they could build a few buildings on a nice site that was

relatively near the village. They began to work on the idea, and eventually they decided to do it, and picked a site. They estimated the cost at 7,500 dollars. In the end, the original plan of building several houses was abandoned in favor of building one large cabin.

In 1947, 6,816 dollars were raised by Girl Scouts and their families for the project. In 1948, ground was formally broken. About fifty or sixty brownies and Girl Scouts came to the ceremony. Part way into construction, the project began to have money problems. Some of the promised donations of tools were not delivered. As a result the Girls Scouts had a deficit. They solved the problem by using money from cookie sales well as money that had originally been intended for furniture. They later raised 1,022 dollars to help maintain the Little House of Glencoe.

Little House hosted its first event, Girls Scout Court of Awards in June 1949. By November of the same year, Girl Scouts had decided that responsible village groups could use the site and not just Girl Scouts. In 1949, the furniture for the cabin was ordered.

The first major program at Little House was a two week long day camp for Girl Scouts in the summer of 1949. The camp eventually had 102 campers. The New Trier Square Dance Group held some dances there. Various community citizens and business made donations to Little House. Meyer Paving donated free gravel to pave the driveway and a citizen donated a piano. At this point the day camp summer program had over 216 Scouts and Brownies. The Evaporated Milk Association made movie at Little House starring the Girl Scouts.

Vandalism became a significant problem for Little House. Vandals broke into the cabin twice in one week and sawed carvings and shutters. Windows were smashed, kids shot arrows into the wall, the shattered light fixtures. The Girl Scouts constantly needed to get the house repaired.

The Scouts loved Little House, but they eventually needed to give it up. Area Council Coverage became mandatory for girl scouts, and area council could not maintain Little House financially. Local Girl Scout leaders helped set up an independent volunteer board for Little House of Glencoe in 1962. It included representatives from Village Hall, Girl Scouts, the Glencoe Park District, interested citizens, the District 35 Board of Education, parents, and teachers. The first board was comprised of Mrs. Irwin A. Fosse, Mrs. C.H. Lilienfeld, Mr. Seymour Graham, Lt. George B. Griswold, Mrs. William J. McAllen, Mrs. Robert Haas, Mrs. Edgar Corry, Mrs. George Ragland, Jr., and Mrs. Charles R. (Virginia) Sprowl, as well as Stanton Schuman, who represented the Boy Scouts. The Forest preserve owns the property, while the Little House Board takes care of the building.

The information in Mrs. Sprowl's Girl Scout history ended in 1973. To to create a more expanded history I needed to look elsewhere. I interviewed people who had been closely involved with Little House including former Board Members and former board Presidents and then typed them up.

John Tuohy was one of those presidents. He was president of the board of little House from the early 80's until about 2007. John worked at Chapman and Cutler Law firm until he retired, and he was kind enough to take some time to talk to me about his time on the Board of Little House. These are some of the memories he shared with me.

“I got involved because of Dey Watts. (Dey Watts was an important force in the Glencoe community. He was the son of Amos Watts, for whom the Watts center is named. The family has lived in Glencoe for many years, and both Dey and Amos worked at Chapman and Cutler Law firm. Dey was on the board at little house from near the beginning.) He was a friend of mine from the law firm where I work. He had been on the board for a long time and wanted to finish. He had me take his place.

Working for Little House did require some volunteer time. During a good year, we had a few meetings to take care of things and not much else. We had to take more time when there were problems. When Little House needed money or improvements, it translated into more time. When I was president of the Board I was the person they called when there were problems. One time, the Sunday before Christmas, I was called because the pipes froze, because there was no heat. I had to go take care of that. Once the pipes thawed, they burst and Little House started flooding. I was there for a while that time. There are about a half a dozen people working for little house. We hire cleaners to come in about once a week but other than that it's just that half dozen. A large percentage of the budget is spent on insurance. We sometimes went over budget, but we usually had a cushion.

Reservations were a big job. It was tiring because the person doing that job had to take care of the keys and making the reservations etc. The park district offered to take on that job in exchange for being able to use the facility for little to know cost. They used it like that for a while, but eventually that deal stopped. Public safety now handles the keys. A reading club used it for a while, and it services 8-10 suburbs of girl scouts. Boy scouts use it but not as often for overnights. For a while there was a deal with Jocelyn Clinic, a

mental health facility. They brought clients there because it was a more comfortable environment.

Summer is a slow period. There was a day camp for a while, but there are just so many things going on then that little house just doesn't get a lot of use.

Although there have been a lot of events held at Little House, one stood out to me. There was a gathering in honor of Nannette Ferry. She was a supporter of Little House and Girl Scouts. It was a very nice event. Nannette passed away a few years ago.”

Is there anything else you can tell me?

“Little house is a hidden Jewel. We often worry about how to get the word out.” One year we got the village to put it on the parking stickers. We charge a very low fee so we need a lot of people to use it. In a good year, we got about 200-250 uses.

6/21/2010

Virginia Sprowl is another important person in the History of Little House. Sources say that she was the driving force that allowed Little House to become privately managed.

Mrs. Sprowl was a very active Girl Scout leader, and it was this that lead to her involvement with Little House. When the national Girl Scout council started disbanding the smaller Girl Scout councils she worried that the facility would end up in disuse and disrepair. She thought that the Council might give it away, so she formed a new board to take care of Little House. These are a few of her recollections.

“Most of the events held at Little House were camping or birthday related. My daughter-in-law had her children's birthday's there. It was open to everyone who wanted to use it.

One of the buildings on the property, the gazebo, we got because of Dorothy Fosse. Dorothy Fosse became aware that an estate was planning on getting rid of the gazebo and she asked them if Little House could have it as a place for children to play other than the main cabin.”

She notes that the police and board are very helpful in ensuring that the cabin is safe for everyone. Once, Mrs. Sprowl went out to look at the cabin and she found poison ivy. When she brought it to the attention of the police they took care of it.

. 7/20/10

Another person that I interviewed was Dorothy Fosse. Dorothy Fosse was very active in the Glencoe Girl Scouts, the Glencoe Women’s club and in the broader Glencoe community. She was the first President of the independent Board after Little House separated from Girl Scouts.

She was a Girl Scout leader for many years. She kept her troop going through high school. She was interested in the woods and cabin at Little House. One of her daughters was a counselor and the other was a camper,

Dorothy Fosse remembers that the Girl Scouts held a day camp every summer for 6 weeks. They used the gazebo for crafts slept overnight on weekends. For approximately 5 to 7 years 60 girls went to the beach and had sailing lessons. Then they had bag lunches in the park. After that they went to Little House to do crafts and other fun activities. On Friday they had a campfire and pitched tents to stay overnight.

During the summers she was there every day and sometimes overnight while campers were there. During the school year the Girl Scout troop she lead came out to

Little House and she came with them. She helped refurbish the kitchen and furnishings, make new curtains and mend broken screens.

Dorothy was instrumental in the acquisition of the gazebo. It was a gift from a family that lived on Sheridan Road south of Harbor Street. They were planning on getting rid of it so they asked if Mrs. Fosse wanted it. Little House got permission from the village to move it to South Avenue. The Skokie country club took down their fenced so that the gazebo could be moved directly across to little house, where they had already poured a concrete foundation. They used the gazebo for crafts.

They used to have a totem pole near a path to the west of Little House. They held events, skits, and had fun in the woods collecting plants and berries near the totem pole.

7/22/2010

Marilyn Black is an important member of the Glencoe Community. She was active in both Scouting and with Little House. She took some time on a Sunday evening to tell me about her memories of Little House.

“I started working on the Little House board in the sixties. I was a Girl Scout leader at the time. The Little House was still an independent organization when I entered. A little over 20 years ago the board temporarily ceded management to the park district. The Forest Preserve owns the land. The board was mainly in control of maintenance and reservations.

The park district ran a day camp that used Little House as a site. There was no alcohol allowed, so that cut back on the types of groups using it. It was used for some reunions and birthday parties. because they were the ones who did and had the most publicity. The art show for Glencoe was held there once early on.

The Girl Scouts used Little House the most. The cub scouts used it as well, but the girl scouts had the most publicity. There were a few troops from out of town. The scouts used it the most because it was hard to find out about it if you weren't involved with the scouts. You just had to hear about it by word of mouth.

We found several uses for the gazebo in the lot during the camps and events. We used the gazebo to park bikes and put the bags and other items that children brought there. Little House had several playing fields for games. One was in front and there was another out back.

We held monthly meetings but because we really only worried about reservations and maintenance it did not take that much time. When we needed some painting or significant cleaning done, the girl scouts would do it.

We did have an electrical fire. It caused significant problems. We had some trouble dealing with the insurance company at first. Eventually we got a settlement, but it took awhile for that. We had to rebuild parts of Little House. It was originally just a big room but they added the counters when they rebuilt.

6/18/2010

Virginia Lawless, like all of the people already mentioned, was and is an important part of Little House history. She is a current and long-time board member.

"I got involved with Little House because I was a scout leader. My daughter was a scout and in 1974 a lot of Scout parents were involved with the board. The Board had about fifteen people and it was active. The board handled reservations and cleaning. At one point we were not getting enough money to pay for the liability and other expenses

so the board got involved with United Way. United Way recommended that Little House rent to other non-profits and private parties and that helped Little House deal with the money issues they were having. The biggest expense was liability insurance.

A lot of troops meet there and had campout every season. An explorer troop did a leadership conference there every year around Christmas time. School groups used it in addition to both boy scouts and girl scouts. They used it as a reading room and for hiking. Little House has such a low budget that most improvements were done by scouts going for gold and eagle awards. The scouts handled painting, tiling, new campfire rings and trails as well as making curtains. They would discuss project ideas with the board and then raise the money to carry them out. For a long time there was no hot water heater and one Girl Scout troop donated a small one for the sink. Teachers and School groups, the club Amigos, use Little House in addition to the scouts.

For years a family had Christmas and a family had thanksgiving. One woman who had been a girl scout in her youth had her wedding and reception at little house. North Shore Special Ed used it. A cub scout troop with a few disabled kids used Little House for cookouts and meetings because it was wheelchair accessible. It was convenient. It is also very safe because it is so close to town in case of medical emergencies.

Keeping Little House going does require some volunteer time. There is a meeting the 1st Tuesday of every month and when things come up. Sometimes we get calls at 1 in morning for various emergencies. Once a water pipe broke and another time the furnace stop working. There was a rash of vandalism in 70's and a few more over the years but there are very few problems for most part.

The remodeling was done by the board. The acoustical ceilings and roof which were falling apart were fixed by the board. They added beams when they started to fix the ceiling and they found that there wasn't enough support for the roof. They had two poles in room holding the ceiling so they built in the stage around those poles to make it look nicer.”

8/3/2010

John Tuohy was a predecessor to Mitch Kiesler. Mr. Tuohy asked Mr. Kiesler to serve on the board because of the connections that Mr. Kiesler had to the boy scouts. Mr. Kiesler's time on the board takes us to the present. It currently takes about 10 hours a month of service to be a part of the Little House board. This is a couple hours a meeting and a few hours whenever things come up. The issues that Little House has are mostly involved with maintenance, and time for rentals. Little House was recently inspected by the county and they had to do some remodeling to bring the building up to the county's standards. For example, the bathroom needed to be made handicap accessible and the kitchen needed improvement.

Little House is a beautiful part of the community that has been here for many years. It is important that it be maintained so that future generations have the chance to spend time there. It is a part of what makes Glencoe special and unique.

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