



Rise Studio

Nellie Zabel Willhite and her airplane, "Pard."

a Sunday School Class in Waco, Texas. On his graduation he was succeeded by another Baylor U. student, the son of deaf parents, who led the class as an undergraduate. The young man's name was Louie J. Fant.

## Milestone

Juliette Gordon Low, (1860-1927), the founder of Girl Scouts, died during the decade. On her wedding day a grain of rice lodged in her ear and after its removal she was deaf in that ear. She had married a wealthy Englishman and they moved to Scotland where she organized a group of girls called Girl Guides. On her return to the United States she organized another group in 1912. A year later the name was changed to Girl Scouts. In 1917 the Girl Scouts began to include handicapped girls in the program. In 1919 a Girl Scout troop was organized at the Illinois School for the Deaf.

## Deaf Pilots

When Charles A. Lindberg flew *The Spirit of St. Louis* alone across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927 he stimulated great interest in flying. Among those to catch the

"flying bug" was a young deaf woman in Yankton, South Dakota, named Nellie Zabel Willhite. She had been deaf since the age of four due to a bout with measles.

Willhite realized that she had to overcome two barriers in order to pursue her interest in flying. First, she was a woman and second, she was deaf. Female pilots were almost unheard of in those days, much less a *deaf female* pilot. Nevertheless, she enrolled in a class and after thirteen hours of instruction she soloed on January 13, 1928. She became the first woman in South Dakota and most likely the first deaf person in the world to become a pilot.

Her father gave her a plane as a gift and she became a barnstormer, flying in air shows and participating in air races throughout the Midwest. She took passengers aloft at country fairs charging children fifty cents and adults a dollar. Willhite was a charter member of the Ninety Nines, a women's pilot organization of which Amelia Earhart was one of the founding members.

Willhite's feats in the air earned her a folk heroine status in her home state. The original propeller of her plane, an Eagle Rock, which she named the "Pard" after her father, is on permanent display in the Taylor Museum at Hill City, South Dakota.

In May, 1929 Edward T. Payne, a resident of Ontario, Canada, earned his pilot's license. Many per-