

FOUNDERS' DAY TRIBUTE

Remembering our seven founders with roses

Once again we meet to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of our Sisterhood and to pay tribute to our founders.

Journey back with me to that day in January of the year 1869 to the campus of Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where seven girls, all close and dear friends, were talking together and one said, "Let's form a Society" – and "What shall we call this Society? We'll call it P.E.O. We need a Constitution. Our badge will be a golden star with P.E.O. with black enameled letters in the center. Our object shall be general improvement. We need to work out an oath." And thus our beloved Sisterhood was born. But, wait! Linger with me for just a few moments longer and let's take a closer look at these seven extraordinary young women.

Oh, look, there's Mary Allen with her charming smile and ready good humor, a handsome woman who loved her friends, was popular in society and active in all parts of religious work in the college, and was loved by the whole student body. She later married her college sweetheart and bore four lovely children—a truly Christian woman beloved by all.

---Our first rose in memory of Mary Allen---

No one of our founders is spoken of more lovingly than Ella Stewart who served as the first secretary of our Society. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister who was reared in an atmosphere of service for others, a gifted pianist and teacher who worked with delinquent boys at a school in Iowa. Hers was a life of service, glorified by a spirit of joy in that service.

---Our second rose in memory of Ella Stewart---

Allie Bird was the literary one of the girls and to her was given the task of writing an oath and brief constitution when our Sisterhood was decided upon. She served as its first president. Allie possessed a keen wit and was a charming conversationalist and always a student of people and events.

---Our next rose in remembrance of Allie Bird---

Suela Pearson was the prettiest and youngest of the seven girls with bright brown eyes, pink cheeks, and dancing curls. She was active in all the college entertainments and was noted for her beautiful singing voice and dramatic ability. The charm of her personality and her social graces brought to her many friends not only in college but also in her later life.

--Our next rose in memory of Suela Pearson---

Hattie Briggs was also the daughter of a pioneer Methodist minister and served as the first treasurer of P.E.O. Hers was a happy, sunny disposition, her face always radiant with a smile. She only wore the P.E.O. pin for seven years, as she was to die at an early age. In her few short years, she brought to our Sisterhood a “note of joy and youth that has grown sweeter and stronger as the years have come and gone.”

---A rose in memory of Hattie Briggs---

Franc Roads was the girl with the far vision. Way ahead of her time, she was artistic and very beautiful not only in looks, but in spirit. Franc was a tireless worker in the Methodist church and one of the early champions of “equal rights” for women, especially equal opportunity in the various vocations and professions. To her every day was a challenge and a world made new.

--Our next rose in remembrance of Franc Roads---

Alice Virginia Coffin was a southern girl, tall, handsome, well poised and always beautifully gowned. It was she who suggested a star for our emblem. Alice was a dedicated teacher and a constant source of great inspiration. She always encouraged talent wherever she saw it, giving kindness and aid to the less fortunate children with whom she worked, all with a delicacy and tact indicative of a great heart.

---Our final rose in tribute and memory of Alice Virginia Coffin---

(Stage Direction – Pause and look over to roses)

But wait a moment; something is missing in our flower arrangement. What of those who came after our beloved founders? Surely we must recognize them also. No organization, no matter how strong its foundation, can go on building with just its original founders. It is only as strong as each and every new member who is added, who contributes her time and talent and love to make our Sisterhood grow ever stronger. So here is our tribute to the over 200,000 women of P.E.O. who have made our Sisterhood the great organization it is today. We lovingly and tenderly surround our “roses” with these, the “living greens.” *(Stage Direction: Hold up spring of greens.)*

Our promise and pledge to our founders for our continued love and interest—the promise of eternal life and the future growth of our Sisterhood.

(Stage Direction – Step behind the table and place greens – then back to podium for final closing lines.)

Now, at last, it is complete – This – our bouquet of P.E.O. roses.

Personnel, Props and State Directions

PROPS

1. Seven medium length white roses.
2. Several sprigs of "bouquet greens." Ours happened to be fern, which made a nice finishing touch, but most any other "floral greens" could be used.
3. A pretty drop-leaf table (or smaller type table so it will not dwarf vase of roses). Table covered with a card table size white cloth placed diamond shaped on table.
4. Rose vase. I used an "antique" silver rose vase that just held seven roses and bits of greens comfortable. This vase was about 13 inches tall. Whatever type vase used should not be too wide at "mouth top" opening (ours was about 1-3/4" wide) or roses will fall to one side and will spoil effect of building a "bouquet of roses." I placed several sprigs of greens at base of vase to add color and for use later on. This vase is to be placed in center of table on the white cloth.
5. We had a small podium set off to one side within a few steps of table equipped with microphone and reading light as our program was presented in a fairly large type living/reception room at our State University Faculty Club, and we had a guest speaker who was to use the podium later on.

PERSONNEL

The seven officers of my chapter served to represent the seven founders. We dressed in the white robes we use for our initiation ceremony along with white shoes and no jewelry. (If robes not available, white dresses could be used.)

A reader – (I wore a white wool suit.)

Pianist - We had the use of a piano so a member of our chapter softly played appropriate piano selections for background effect. Some other type of soft music could be used, if desired.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

The seven girls, reader and pianist were seated in front row (near table set up) before entire program started. They stepped behind the table to form a slight semi-circle when the tribute was announced (by chairman of Founders' Day). Reader stepped to podium first and pianist to piano.

Each of the seven girls carried one white rose, held in right hand – then gracefully laid rose across the back of left hand at about waist height.

Reader carried one sprig of “greens” to podium to hold up for illustrative purposes at later point of service where it says, “We lovingly and tenderly surround our “roses” with these, the “living greens.” Hold up greens for all to see.

Presentation of Roses – when reader says, “our first rose in memory of Mary Allen” the first girl in line stepped behind table and placed single rose in vase, then continued on past others and quietly took her place in front row. The others followed suit so that at the end of the biographical “sketches” of the seven founders, no one was left standing behind the table. We felt this made for a more “dramatic” touch.

After reader has shown “living greens” to audience and goes on with “Our promise and pledge to our founders of our continued love and interest – the promise of eternal life and future growth of our Sisterhood” reader steps behind table and adds all the greens (those laying at base of vase) behind roses (carefully) to finish the bouquet. Then reader returns to podium for the final closing line – “now, at last, it is complete – this our bouquet of P.E.O. roses.”

GENERAL NOTES

Please feel free to add or take away anything deemed necessary to make the service as you desire and according to your particular room set up, such as lighting effects (candles could be used, but not on table), music, podium, etc.

Written by Joan G. Polk, DH, Columbus

Presented for Columbus Founders’ Day, January, 1966 – Chapter DH