

THE FOUNDERS REVISITED – THEIR LATER YEARS

The lives of our founders after they left Iowa Wesleyan College

It is interesting to follow our founders through the years after graduation, sometimes happy, sometimes tragic times. Each had a pioneer and religious background with a strong interest in education.

Two years after graduation from Iowa Wesleyan, Mary Allen was married to Charles Lewis Stafford, a Methodist minister, and they shared 56 wonderful, useful years in the ministry. Dr. Stafford served Iowa Wesleyan as president for 8 very successful years. Mary loved those years at Wesleyan. She was a wonderful homemaker, hospitable and full of fun. Their home was a place where friends liked to gather. There were 4 children, three boys and one girl. The little girl died of scarlet fever at the age of 4. One of the boys died one year after graduating from the University of Wisconsin. The other two boys were successful in law and ranching. Mary maintained her interest in P.E.O., and joined chapters whenever possible. Practical Christianity was a way of life with her. She treasured her friends and was adored and respected by family and friends. She was 79 when she died and is buried in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

Alice Bird was a brilliant student, an intellectual. She entered Wesleyan at the age of 15. Four years after graduation she married Washington Irving Babb, a Civil War veteran and Wesleyan faculty member. He later practiced law and was a trustee of Iowa Wesleyan until his death. There were four children. Two of the boys were associated with the Allis Chalmers Farm Machinery Company of Milwaukee. Daughter, Clarabelle, died at the age of 7 and Alice, a graduate of Northwestern University, is the only living child of any of the founders. She and her husband live in Aurora, Illinois. Alice Bird Babb was an enthusiastic participant in P.E.O. She made tremendous contributions to Grand Chapter, notably in the preparation of resolutions, laws, and ceremonies. She was a superb letter writer and was Associate Editor of the P.E.O. Record during the first 3 years of its existence. She died in Aurora, Illinois at the age of 70.

Hattie Briggs had that great gift of making everyone near feel comfortable. She was a natural leader in church and social activities. Every one loved her cheerful and democratic ways. After graduation she lived with her parents and taught music and art. One Sunday morning following church service, Hattie and Henri Bousquet were married by her father, the Rev. Elias Briggs. It was a complete surprise to most of the congregation. Henri and Hattie made their home in Pella, Iowa and two sons were born to them. Hattie loved her role as wife and mother, but enjoyed that role less than 5 years for she was only 28 when she died.

Alice Coffin was tall and handsome, delightful company, sometimes meditative, almost aloof. During her college years she became engaged to Will Pearson, the brother of Suela, but she broke the engagement to devote her life to teaching, which she did, until the last year of her life. Alice had been a Methodist, but while teaching she changed to

the Episcopal Church for 2 reasons. One, she liked the rituals and ceremonies of the Episcopal Church and two, she liked to dance, which was frowned upon by the Methodists. She was a devoted and imaginative teacher. She believed in developing the total child; his physical and emotional needs, scholastic ability and his attitude toward learning. She even helped some financially. She was the kind of teacher the girls copied and the boys worshipped. She died at the home of her sister in Newton, Iowa at the age of 40 and as she requested, was buried there at sunset.

Franc Roads was a dark haired beauty, with great personality, progressive in her thinking, far ahead of her time. She was the youngest of the founders, christened Frances Elizabeth; she preferred to be called FRANC. Franc married Simon Elliot. They lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, where Mr. Elliot operated a china store. Franc learned the art of china painting, which they sold in their store. Their son became a professor of medicine at Northwestern U. and daughter Stella became head of the Physical Education Department for women at O.S.U. Franc Elliot was an intellectual, a great reader of classical as well as contemporary literature. Through most of her life she studied and practiced art as her profession. When faced with financial disaster, she turned to her profession and became Art Supervisor in the schools in order to keep their son in medical school. She lectured extensively and often spoke at P.E.O. conventions. Her main interest was the P.E.O. Educational Loan Fund. She believed in, and was active in, the rights and advancement of women. Her ideas were a forerunner of today's Women's Liberation movement. She was dynamic, always in search of learning, strong willed and got from life the things worthwhile. She died at the home of her son, in Chicago at the age of 72.

Suela Pearson was talented and charming. She loved music and dramatics. The other girls considered her the most beautiful and popular of the group. She was born in Cleveland, Ohio where her father was a doctor of medicine. Suela married Frank Penfield of Cleveland, who was associated with Standard Oil. They lived in Cleveland for many happy years in a lovely home and had 2 children. They enjoyed business stability and a high place in Cleveland society. This was exactly the kind of life Suela was trained to lead. She was a lovable person and a perfect hostess. Their daughter was educated in finishing schools in Cleveland and Boston. Their son died following surgery while a student at Yale. Troubles followed troubles and Suela measured up to the heartbreaking tasks that faced her. Financial reverses, illness and family complications all took their toll. The glow and shine had gone from Suela's world and after a long illness she died at the age of 69 and is buried in Cleveland.

Ella Stewart's life was one of devoted service to others, always quick to respond to those in need. Ella's father was a pioneer Methodist minister for many years. Later he became the financial agent for Iowa Wesleyan. Disaster came to the family in Keokuk, Iowa with the death of Mr. Stewart. There were 5 children and another soon to be born. Ella was 16 at the time and had to assume much of the responsibility of the household. Mrs. Stewart started a boarding house for students and with the help of her children continued the business for many years. Ella entered Iowa Wesleyan, but because she was so needed at home, it was impossible for her to carry the assignments or attend

regularly. She was the only one of the founders who did not graduate. Ella helped at home, was active in church work, P.E.O. meetings and civic activities. True to her instinct for social service, she sought the needy, aged and infirm. She taught music but this work was not very remunerative and so she had to make a change. She became interested in wayward boys and began teaching at Iowa Industrial School. She devoted 8 wonderful, rewarding years to those troubled boys, inspiring them to become good men. These years gave purpose to Ella's life and only ill health forced her to give up that position. She developed a lung disorder, which caused her long months of uncertainty and pain. She died at the age of 46 and is buried at Mt. Pleasant. Her P.E.O. pin is the only one of the original 7 pins in existence. It is now in Memorial Hall, Mt. Pleasant.

Our founders gave us a way of life that is a design for living in any age.

“We know without reservation
The world has been enriched
Because they passed through
And now, the spirit of P.E.O.
Dwells in our hearts
And not by chance.”

Written by Chapter DQ