

## A CANDLE-LIT TRIBUTE TO P.E.O. FOUNDERS

A Founders' Day program with a candle-lighting ceremony to honor our Founders.

In the evening sunset afterglow, we sometimes perceive a single star. It might be the very star that inspired our Founders to use its shape and sparkle as a symbol of P.E.O. As the night falls, we often see a myriad of stars in the velvety black sky. Perhaps when our Founders saw these millions of stars, they could imagine hopefully and prophetically that their first star would be followed by many, many more to the extent that hundreds of thousands of beautiful golden P.E.O. stars would adorn worthy women everywhere in the years to come.

Our seven Founders at Iowa Wesleyan at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, were, in 1869, more far-sighted than they knew when they became the originators of our P.E.O. Sisterhood. They were founding not just a campus group, but an organization that would include girls as young as 15, and also many girls and women who gained their wisdom and culture without being a part of college life.

On January 21, 1869, in the music room of Main Hall, Alice Bird, Hattie Briggs, Franc Roads, Mary Allen, Ella Stewart, Suela Pearson, and Alice Coffin organized P.E.O. Alice Bird recorded her feelings this way:

“If there is any virtue in the founding of P.E.O., it is not on account of the founders, for we were all ordinary girls, but on account of the time of the founding. It was the age of vision and reconstruction, not only along national lines, but reconstruction of thoughts, minds, and souls.”

The first ceremony was given a word-picture by Alice Bird in her letter of April, 1913:

“I want to say that in life there are some things that never grow old or ever old fashioned: The seven girls who stood around the old fashioned table: the old fashioned Bible; the girls wearing the quaint after-the war style garments of strong, good dress material with wide, flowing sleeves, clean white collars with big breast pins; and perhaps hoop skirts taking up the empty spaces between us as we stood around the table. There stood Franc Roads, looking artistic enough for a painting and full of energy which has made a rarely successful career; Alice Coffin like a goddess, stately and dignified; Suela Pearson, lovely as a primrose or wood violet; Mary Allen, wholesome and gracious as she is today; Ella Stewart vivacious and interested in all good works, and ready to do them; Hattie Briggs, calm, serene and useful; Alice Bird, with sleeves probably rolled up ready for work. There they stood with old college Bible on the table- old fashioned girls, ready and anxious to subscribe to the old fashioned principles which dignify our order. Thus it was that each girl searched her heart and made her vow. That was a dramatic moment... simple, restrained, precious. Yet, with that simple ceremony, P.E.O. was born.”

Each Founder brought some rare gift to P.E.O., and today each one of our new initiates brings into P.E.O. her own particular attributes and talents.

The first candle ceremony was in 1914. It was not meant as a memorial service, but rather as a loving, glowing tribute to the seven innovative girls who were our Founders. In earlier years, Ella Stewart spoke of the Founders as:

“...those by whose loving, helpful hands the seed (of P.E.O.) was planted, tenderly nourished and cared for, and from which has grown the strong and beautiful tree whose fruits we enjoy.”

The magnificent concept of P.E.O. will always be limited by the human limitations of P.E.O.s themselves. But to remain static is not the nature of P.E.O. Like persons, it is always in a state of becoming. We may have in our hearts many inspired glimpses of the future of P.E.O. and what it shall become; but inspiration is not enough. The courage to take action is a prerequisite for our future growth.

Beaconsfield has said that “action may not always bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action.” The most memorable action of our Founders was the decision on what to include as attributes for our objects and aims. FAITH, LOVE and PURITY were agreed upon by all; but JUSTICE and TRUTH were included only after HOPE and FIDELITY had also been considered.

Could we assign one of these attributes to each of our seven Founders, as we light candles of remembrance?

*(Note: Read each name- then the attribute- then the definition. LIGHT THE CANDLE AS YOU READ THE NAME OF EACH, if this can be done, then continue with ATTRIBUTE AND DEFINITION for each before continuing to the next.*

*You can type or write the above on seven calling cards and prop each against a candle holder, then pick up and read as you go along if you would like. This might be easier than having to refer to the next page each time.)*

1. ALICE BIRD

Faith – The pencil of the Soul.

2. HATTIE BRIGGS

Love – The crowning grace of Humanity.

3. FRANC ROADS

Purity – The feminine form of Honor.

4. MARY ALLEN  
Justice – Moderation regulated by Wisdom.

5. ELLA STEWART  
Truth – The handmaiden of Justice.

6. SUELA PEARSON  
Hope – The mother of Faith

7. ALICE COFFIN  
Fidelity – The sister of Justice.

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Reference: **Out of Heart – a Century of P.E.O. 1869-1969** by Stella Clapp