

## FOUNDER'S DAY PROGRAM THE FOUNDING OF COTTEY COLLEGE

*This program is not about the original seven, but about the founding of Cottey College and its presentations as a gift to the P.E.O. Sisterhood.*

### *Person 1*

While I may look confident, I am more than a little nervous. This is a big step for me – let me first introduce myself. I am Virginia Alice Cottey.

You see, I have a dream – a dream I've had for a long time – that of founding a school for young women. Toward that end, my sisters and brothers and I have pooled \$3,000, but I know that isn't enough.

I have spent all summer writing letters to people in many different towns to inquire of their interest in having a women's college. Actually, the best offer came from Fort Worth, Texas, where the city has agreed to donate eight acres of land and erect a \$10,000 building if my family will furnish and take charge of it, but I'm pursuing some options closer to home.

It's November 19, 1883. I have been given the day off from teaching my classes at Central Female College in Lexington, Missouri to come here with my sister to Nevada, Missouri and tour the area with the Rev. McClure and Mayor Moore, looking for possible sites.

I have spent a good deal of time this morning writing out my propositions for the business leaders and citizens, so I can present this afternoon. The men seem quite interested in my proposal. They have suggested I present my proposition in the daily newspaper, which, of course, I am prepared to do at once.

*(Remove hat and gloves – end of person 1)*

The rest of its beginning is a remarkable story for the history books. On the historic night of November 23, 1883, the town agreed to buy the land by raising subscriptions to it. The school was to be called Vernon Seminary in honor of the county that had bought the land and supported Alice in her dream. Soon ads for the new school began to appear in the newspaper.

Alice adopted the motto, "All things with God" and threw her energy into producing catalogues and soliciting funds. While she had other help, her family and two close friends provided her main "faculty strength" teaching in all areas of the curriculum.

Less than one year later, on September 8, 1884, with their building completed, 28 young women were enrolled – 12 of them boarders. By the end of that year, enrollment had reached 72.

Within two years, an annex had been added to the original building, and the name of the college was officially changed to Cottey College. The people of Nevada, from the first, refused to call it Vernon Seminary but always spoke of it as Cottey Girls' School or Cottey College.

Virginia Alice Cottey was an amazing person – full of energy, intelligence, vision and determination. She sold scholarships, recruited new students, planned the curriculum, hired the faculty, disciplined the students, raised money for new buildings, taught, and presided over all.

In addition, Alice had many family responsibilities:

1. At age 42, Alice married Sam Stockard who had three elementary school aged children. He helped Alice with recruiting before he died suddenly, leaving her with his family to raise, which Alice did.
2. A number of years later, Kate, one of Sam's daughters, came to visit with her twin boys and young daughter. Kate died while there. Alice raised those three little children as well, getting up at 5:00 a.m. to make them a special breakfast and play with them before the daily college activities began.
3. And if there were ever a family emergency, Alice was the one called
  - 3 more nieces and nephews to raise
  - an aging mother to watch over
  - a sister's death to endure
  - nieces and cousins who came as students to watch over

And yet, with all of these family responsibilities, truly Alice dominated and shaped the first quarter century school. However, adequate endowment and accreditation were always the school's two continuing urgent needs.

Alice worked long hours exploring untapped possibilities to find ways to fund the school. As she grew older, this became a terrible concern to her. Finally she attempted to give the school to Missouri Methodist Conference, but that did not work out.

In May 1927, Virginia Alice Cottey Stockard, at the age of 78, was initiated into P.E.O., Chapter DW of Missouri. The similarities of her ideals and those of P.E.O amazed her.

If you believe in divine providence, surely the signs were there:

1. The school's colors were yellow and white, and the school's flower was the Marguerite.
2. At that very moment, 40,000 P.E.O.'s were raising \$1million for a loan fund for female college students.
3. P.E.O. was an organization dedicated to education and service, her twin angels.

Alice wrote up a proposal and sent it to Alice Scott, President of Supreme, including all the necessary facts indicating Cottey College was solvent and indeed thriving. She

presented her offer to the biennial convention of Supreme Chapter at its meeting on October 4, 1927.

The little white-haired woman in the black satin dress took the convention by storm. Since she had prepared a careful report of the college that was in the hands of each of the delegates, she made only a short presentation and answered questions from the floor. She spoke of her vision of the great future of Cottey College maintained by the P.E.O. Sisterhood.

While most of the delegates stayed up the greater part of the night discussing the proposal, Alice went to bed and slept soundly, leaving the decision to the members of P.E.O. and being watched over by the God who had always seen her through.

The following morning, the Convention members had voted by a good majority to accept the gift. The ownership of Cottey College passed from the hands of one woman into the hands of 40,000 - the P.E.O. Sisterhood.

If Virginia Alice Cottey Stockard were here today to see how Cottey College and P.E.O. have both endured and flourished, she would be very pleased and proud.

January 23, 1989 – Author Anonymous