

## OUR FOUNDERS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT A JOURNEY BACK IN TIME

It has been said that once a schoolteacher, always a teacher. So, if this today sounds like a history lesson, so be it. One redeeming factor: You will not be tested.

1. If you have attended a Founders' Day Event, please raise your hand.
2. If you have ever heard that there were seven founders, please raise your hand.
3. If you have ever heard their names, please raise your hand.

Good.....but a brief review:

- ☆ **Hattie Briggs** – It was her idea to organize
- ☆ **Alice Virginia Coffin** – She chose the star as our emblem
- ☆ **Ella Stewart** – When she was selected to read the oath, no Bible was in the room. She would not accept a substitute book and I quote, “They all lumbered up to the chapel and brought the family Bible” to use. My source did not say whose family it was.
- ☆ **Suela Pearson** brought gaiety, charm and sociability to the group. Her interest was music and drama. She later married, moved to Cleveland, Ohio where she lived on Euclid Avenue.
- ☆ **Mary Ellen Stafford** had great poise. She was a minister’s wife and dimited most often. She was in five chapters.
- ☆ **Alice Bird** had a literary bent...she wrote the first constitution and the oath.
- ☆ **Franc Roads** was a woman of vision and progressiveness. An artist, she studied at eight schools. Franc was called “a crusading spirit”.

And those were our founders.

You know WHO they were

The WHEN was 1869

The WHERE was Mt. Pleasant, Iowa

But WHAT was their world like at that time?

We invite you to come with us on a journey. Most journeys are FORWARD in direction... involve planning...packing... and among other things tickets.

WE are taking the opposite route of most journeys....We are going BACKWARD...on a brief journey into the past.

Your tickets today came from three sources:

1. Marjorie Mehl, DO, whose expertise on the internet gave much information
2. The people at the reference desk of The Hudson Library
3. And from a delightful young lady by the name of Lynn Ellsworth. Lynn is the director of Archives for Iowa Wesleyan College

**1869**

Andrew Johnson was president of U.S.

Victoria was Queen of England

Napoleon III ruled in France.

There were 37 states in the Union.

The War Between the States was four years in the past.

Population of the U.S. was less than 50 million.

The Industrial Revolution in the U.S. had begun and a secret society was formed in Philadelphia that later became a National Labor Union.

The writings of Charles Dickens had been well received.

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women and Horatio Alger's book Ragged Duck made the best seller list.

Music of Stephen Foster was popular.

Billy the Kid was ravaging in the West.

Mahatma Gandhi and Frank Lloyd Wright were born in 1869.

Lister introduced the first antiseptic surgery.

Colgate introduced laundry soap in convenient and economical sizes.

The typewriter was one year old...there were few available....no ballpoint pens.

Sewing machines had been introduced but not readily available.

No telephone. Yes, the telegraph.

In Promontory, Utah, the Golden Spike was driven in to mark the completion of railroads across the continent. There was no air conditioning so cars were cooled by opening windows. Coal and wood used for fuel created cinders and ashes.

Small stoves heated the individual passenger cars.

No....Custer had not made his last stand.

Yes....the Alamo had happened.

No...Mrs. O'Leary's cow had not kicked over the lantern, so the Chicago fire had not occurred.

Yes...the Gold Rush had taken place.

No....San Francisco earthquake

No...Sears Roebuck catalog.

Very few jobs were available to young women.....mostly cooks, housekeepers, seamstresses, nursery governesses.

The Women's Suffrage Movement was gaining strength...in SPITE of opinions such as those expressed in a Massachusetts newspaper...and I quote, "The effort now being made to give women the right to vote if successful...would demoralize the world more than any event since Eve was induced to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden."

These were some of the things going on in our nation at the time P.E.O. was founded. Remember, we were not a global society then.

**Now, let's go to the town WHERE it all began: Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.**

Mt. Pleasant is in the southeastern corner of Iowa...about 60 miles west of the Mississippi River. After 1856 the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad...which extended from Chicago to Omaha....with direct Union Pacific Railroad connections to California provided GOOD transportation to Mt. Pleasant.

Population increased rapidly in 1869. The Iowa census listed the population of Mt. Pleasant as 4425. Free land drew thousands west...immigration brought more. Many people of German origins settled in the heartland.

Three private educational institutions attracted more. Often those who graduated from Iowa Wesleyan University remained...

The school had several names....early on it was called The Institute. It is now Iowa Wesleyan College.

Mt. Pleasant had:

2 banks

4 hotels and 3 boarding houses

Many stores....a lot of them sold farm implements

There were flour mills and a grain elevator.

2 manufacturing facilities: Howe Coast Carriage and Wagon factory and Cole Brothers, lightning rods, pumps and later Cole stoves

7 blacksmiths

It was the county seat.

There were:

11 attorneys

1 abstractor of titles

2 dentists

9 physicians

9 insurance agents

4 notary public

13 churches

For a small community, it had many advantages of a larger city. Its citizens were very progressive.

In 1869, Arabella Babb Mansfield, an Iowa Wesleyan University graduate, was the first woman to pass the bar exam in the U.S.

Such was the environment around the college chosen by our seven founders.

Had these young women lived in Ohio, they might have chosen one of 26 colleges or universities available at that time.

Some were coed from the beginning...some were men's schools with separate sister schools. Ohio University was first....1804.

Oberlin had women from the beginning and I quote, "They had to cook and clean for men but still got to attend classes".

Iowa Wesleyan consisted of:

2 buildings

20 acre campus

Tuition was \$10.00 a term and \$30.00 for a full year.

An additional fee of \$5.00 for each term for instruction in art, music, or a foreign language.

Out-of-town students boarded with local families for \$3.00 or \$4.00 a week....or banded together to provide their own meals.

In 1869 Iowa Wesleyan University had completed 23 years as a preparatory academy and 15 years as a collegiate institution. Five of our seven founders were among 24 graduates in the class of 1869.

In June of 1869 for the first time an Alumni Banquet was held. It was announced that for the first time ever there was a surplus in the Iowa Wesleyan operation budget. Nine faculty members taught both preparatory and college courses.

This, then, was the world, town and college in which our seven founders lived. They were favored above most of the young women of their generation.

Is it any wonder that our seven founders were "ahead of their time"?

They were YOUNG women.

Mary Alice Stafford was 21 years old. Alice Bird was 19 years old. Hattie Briggs was 20 years old. Alice Virginia Coffin, 21 years old. Suela Pearson was 18 years old. Ella Stewart was 21 and Franc Roads was 17.

They were young indeed.  
Would you have their WISDOM?  
Would you have their COURAGE?

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Akron Reciprocity Founders' Day  
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Hudson Country Club

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