

P.E.O. 1986 FOUNDERS' DAY

This program is about the founding of P.E.O. and a brief biography of each of the Founders.

Today we think back to the year 1869, _____ years ago. Just think – what was it like to live then? It was everyday life without the modern technology we now take for granted. No television, air travel, home computers, microwave ovens and VCR's. It was the year that the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads joined at Promontory Point, Utah. Businessmen were interested in the opening of the Suez Canal. People everywhere were reading Little Women and singing the popular songs, "Sweet Genevieve" and "Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me." More specifically, education was becoming more important. Girls were allowed to think instead of just learning a smattering of the classics and doing needlework.

Iowa Wesleyan College, located in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, was the first college west of the Mississippi to grant degrees in the Classics or Sciences, and the seven girls who founded P.E.O. were among the brightest in their class. They studied three years of Latin and Greek, chemistry, astronomy, trigonometry, rhetoric and English composition. Our founders were young women. Franc Roads entered college at the age of 14 and graduated in three years, and many early members of P.E.O. were initiated at the ages of 13, 14 or 15.

The seven girls had become good friends at the college when their group was threatened by the organization of a small chapter of I.C. Sorosis. Only some of their group was invited to join the new sorority, and the girls came up with the logical solution of forming a society of their own so that they could stay together and commemorate their special friendship. So, 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. at Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Alice Bird was given the job of writing the constitution for the new P.E.O. She was a natural for the job, as she was a brilliant student and often in demand as a speaker at literary functions. She was also elected the first president of P.E.O. Only five years after graduation, she became the chairman of Latin and Greek at Iowa Wesleyan. Her husband was on the faculty, too, so Alice remained active in P.E.O. and helped to form the Grand Chapter in 1883.

Hattie Briggs possessed the rare quality of making everyone near her feel comfortable. She was a natural-born leader, active in church and campus activities. Everyone knew her and looked up to her. After her graduation, Hattie taught art and music. She was married in 1873 and became a devoted wife and mother for a sadly short five years. She died at the age of 28 in Pella, Iowa.

Franc Roads was christened Frances, but everyone knew she preferred to be called Franc. She was rather quiet and was known as the girl with far vision, a great one for trying to change social conditions and work for women's rights. She counted as her

friends Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others interested in the Feminist Movement. Although she received her degree in the sciences, she became well known as an art supervisor in the public schools. One of her main contributions to P.E.O. was her tremendous interest in the P.E.O. Educational Loan Fund for young women.

Mary Allen was a beautiful young woman; tall, slender, graceful and poised. She was born in Mount Pleasant. Her father was prominent in business there, and his name can be found on many property abstracts of the area. She married a man who became a Methodist minister and together they served for 56 years. During that time, she was a member of four different P.E.O. chapters and was always interested in the Sisterhood. She gave loving interpretations to the groups of the various P.E.O. laws and activities, and she helped greatly to form the spirit of P.E.O. She especially emphasized the importance of proper procedure in conducting business meetings and the necessity for good order. It is Mary who stated, "We are but undisciplined if we cannot endure the quiet restraint of listening."

Ella Stewart's life was one of devoted service to others. She loved all people and readily identified with every person she met. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister who served the Mount Pleasant district, so the family lived in an apartment at what was later called Pioneer Hall of Iowa Wesleyan. Sadly her father died and the family needed Ella at home, so she became the only founder not to graduate from the college. She did continue to audit classes, however, so she remained in touch with P.E.O. The sisters continued to keep in touch with Ella after she moved to Eldora to teach in a school for delinquent boys. She never married, but devoted her life to helping her students.

Suela Pearson was a very pretty, even-tempered, popular girl with a lovely singing voice. She was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and when she graduated from Iowa Wesleyan and was married, she again lived in Cleveland. Her home was on Euclid Avenue, near the home of the Rockefellers. Suela was always a lovable person and an accomplished hostess, and even when the family suffered financial losses and deaths, she was an inspiration to all. She is buried in Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland.

Alice Coffin was tall, blonde and handsome, and was said to be delightful company though sometimes quick to anger and quick to forgive. She must have had a complex and attractive personality. She and Will Pearson, the brother of Suela, made a striking couple during their college years, and they were engaged to be married. Later, Alice broke the engagement and chose to remain single for her lifetime. She was a devoted teacher who was always concerned about the development of the "whole child." She inspired her students to do well academically and to maintain high ethics. She even helped some of them financially.

It is a privilege and pleasure to remember these special young women. They deserve our thankfulness and tribute for their warmth and sincerity of friendships, for their devotion to religion and education, and for their vision which devised an organization

that would last, and grow, and prosper for _____ years and will do so for many years yet to come. We pay tribute to the founders of P.E.O.: (*light candle for each*)

Alice Bird
Hattie Briggs
Franc Roads
Mary Allen
Ella Stewart
Suela Pearson
Alice Coffin

Karla Westlake
Chapter J, Ohio