

COTTEY WELL...VIRGINIA ALICE...THAT IS

In 1816 Martin Luther Eads was converted in Virginia. He became a Reverend Circuit Rider in Kentucky, and in 1839 at the age of 46 was called to preach in Missouri. Seven of his 8 children, 3 of whom were married, moved with him. His married daughter, Sarah, stayed with her husband, Ira Cottey, in Kentucky. Sarah and Ira cared for his ill father, going to Missouri a year later. Their first child was born in 1842 and died. Mary Ruth was born in 1841; a son in 1844; a second daughter died in 1845; in 1846 a son was born; on March 27, 1848 Virginia Alice was born. VIRGINIA ALICE COTTEY. By 1851 there were 9 children living in a two-story house in Edina, Missouri. This became Bee Ridge Farm, the family home.

Alice was 12 when Abraham Lincoln was elected president and the War Between the States began. The area of Missouri where she lived experienced almost no battles or military encounters. Alice's life continued much as it had before the war. After the war Sarah and Ira wanted education for their children. Daughter Alice wanted to be a teacher by age 17. She was enrolled in the only school available - a convent school. She learned a great deal about music and in 1869 had her first teaching job. She made learning interesting. They sang in Geography to learn the capitals of the states. In arithmetic the analysis and solution of an example preceded each problem so one could learn to reason through the process and understand the result. She had spelling bees and literary societies.

In 1876 Alice taught at Central Female College in Lexington, Missouri. At first she taught French and Mathematics. After two years she taught just math: algebra, geometry, trigonometry, analytical geometry and calculus - advanced for one who had attended only secondary schools, but had evidently studied while teaching lower grades.

In 1883 she became intensely interested in the possibility of founding her own school for young women. She began to make plans, following in the steps of Mary Lyon, founder of Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, who said: "wisdom, money management, and dependence on God are first." Alice's goal was to have a college of high standing, low cost, with labor done by students and teachers. She began to raise money for building by telling all her plans.

Two of Alice's sisters said: "You are 36. You have always talked about this. Do it now. We each have \$1000. We will help." They each had earned degrees at the new KIRKSVILLE NORMAL.

First Alice had to find a town with interest in a college. She wanted to stay in Missouri. On November 17, a committee of citizens of Nevada, Missouri agreed to donate six acres as the site for the school. Virginia planned her first building and raised the money to pay for it by selling subscriptions (future scholarships). By December 29 a contract was let for a building to be 46 x 40, two stories high, with a full basement. The completion date was to be July 18, 1884. The school was named "Vernon Seminary" for the county of its location. Alice offered, in the newspaper, transferable scholarships for \$80 for three years tuition for the purchaser, or for a pupil of the purchaser's choice. This was the chief method of financing the college throughout her life. There were four on the faculty: Alice, two of her sisters, and Olive Harrison who taught

music. Alice recommended each of her teachers. This was continued indefinitely for Alice felt that the school was only as good as the faculty. A graduate would receive "Mistress of Literature". Tuition and boarding was \$140. Tuition alone was \$40. All bills paid during the first month received a 10% discount. Ministers' daughters and orphans and women studying for the mission field were admitted free of charge to carry out the theory of opening the door of education for the student of capabilities but no cash. Work scholarships were later provided. On the first day there were 28 women, 12 of them boarders. By the end of the first year there were 72. In 1886, after raising the funds, an annex was added, doubling capacity. In 1887 Nevada residents insisted the school name be changed to COTTEY COLLEGE. Miss V.A. Cottey was now President; another sister and a cousin came to teach. True to the age, there was no electricity, central heating, or plumbing. The big outhouse was dubbed "congress". Bells rang for each daily change. Students walked in double lines to each activity. (Girls at Cottey today still walk in double lines when there is a TRADITION.)

By taking turns as housekeepers, young women were trained to develop into all around women. All wore the same style of dress for all public occasions. Trimming could not exceed two yards for a soloist at graduation.

There was an intimate teacher-pupil relationship.

In 1883 sister Dora got married. Alice was lonely. Another addition was needed. She plunged into raising money for a third story, a tower (which she felt a school had to have to be prestigious), and a front porch and wing. In the new building area there were to be bathrooms, lighting by gas, and hot and cold water. In 1889 a literary society was organized to publish a college newspaper. This was the fifth year. During this time Mr. Stockard, father of a student, often came on weekends. There was no Christmas vacation due to slowness of train travel and all always came back with colds. Alice took in Mr. Stockard's three motherless children, including two boys. In 1890 Alice and Mr. Stockard were married - she was 42 years old. They continued to have their home in the college building.

In 1892 tennis and croquet courts were added. At graduation any student with 95% in scholarship, punctuality, and deportment, received her tuition for one half of the following year. In 1893 the first alum association meeting was held.

Alice wanted to build the music department, but academics, needs to plan for raising money to install a new steam heating system, and a trip for her church conference missionary society (in which she had been very active for many years) made 1893 a grueling year. After visits to Vanderbilt University in Nashville and Wards Seminary, she got several pointers for improvement of her own school, and hired Dr. and Madame Edouard Blitz to teach music.

In 1896 Alice was teaching 5 classes, plus directing the school. Her husband traveled for a general merchandise company. Since he could not be home for Thanksgiving he invited all the clerks in the store to dinner, a wonderful and happy time. At 3:00 that afternoon he died of a heart attack.

At this time in American history, a local newspaper told of a lecturer who said electricity would supersede steam on the railroad and sewing machines would be run by electricity, and who talked of x-rays.

In 1898 Cottey's course of study included 5 years of primary, 2 intermediate, 4 college, 2 years advanced. Names were always changing at the school. Sick room became the infirmary; Bachelor of Science replaced Mistress of Literature; and Bachelor of Arts replaced Mistress of Art. The faculty was enlarged and Alice listed the College Courses under SCHOOLS: school of Latin, etc. She wished there were a central place in the state that would decide what degrees should be given.

By 1898, the new south wing was completed except for the roof. Alice had used \$3000 raised by the sale of scholarships.

In ten years, Alice had married, was 52 years old, had raised her husband's three children, one of whom was now studying the ministry and music in Europe. She had lost her husband, and again was bearing her burdens alone with only the help of her sisters and her God.

In 1890 Alice's sister Mary built a house for their Mother (Sara Eads Cottey), for sister Annie, and for herself at Austin and College streets for \$1420.

In 1904 Alice began to raise money for a new west building housing an auditorium and stage. This was to celebrate the 25th year of the college in 1909. There were also to be practice rooms and SUITES for girls to live in. A FIRST. An annex was being built for a home for herself.

In March of 1909 Alice visited eastern women's colleges. Cottey was better, except it had no reception rooms or library. That was soon taken care of.

Alice realized the college had to have an endowment fund, and Cottey Clubs all over the nation raised over \$1500, but \$20,000 was the first goal.

Cottey was fully accredited as a junior college in 1910. Alums were trying now to raise \$50,000 before the president had to retire. As usual Alice was planning a new building' BUT' development of the students was always more important to Alice than the erection of new buildings. In 1901 the Chinese government sent a student to Cottey to study modern education methods. This was Cottey's first foreign student.

Mother Sarah lived to be 98. She was always well cared for by Alice, to the extent that Alice's health permitted.

When Alice was 68 her daughter died and she took in the daughter's three children to raise. In 1917 sisters Rose and Mary died. The new west building was complete and named ROSEMARY HALL.

In World War I some college women married. However no dates were allowed with the nearby soldiers. If found out, the women were expelled and sent home in the next hour. This had always been the procedure for infractions, like sending notes to boys in town.

After 1917 the women were finally allowed to dance and to invite men to parties.

In 1918 Cottey got a chapter of the honor society PHI THETA KAPPA FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES.

When the war was over in 1919, Alice was tired and went to California for a vacation with family living there her first in 35 years.

In 1921, after much soul searching, Alice realized something had to be done to keep Cottey going when she was gone. At her request, Mr. James C. Harmon became President of the College. Alice was President Emeritus and Business Manager. After three years Mr. Harmon resigned and Alice was again President at age 76. It was part of her life, not a burden but an asset.

Alice thought often of plans for continuation of Cottey. In 1907 she had set up a corporation called TRUSTEES OF COTTEY COLLEGE, NEVADA, MISSOURI. She offered the college to the Methodist Episcopal church, but she really didn't want it run by any church. Circumstances changed her mind and she withdrew the offer. Alice was now 80 years old. She knew endowment was needed for current expenses, for expansion, for new equipment, for scholarships. Nevada businessmen contributed funds and Neale Hall was built. The money in the endowment fund was reduced, then started to build up again. Enrollment was 276. In 1927 the college was free of debt. The endowment was back to 20,000. A wall was built between Old Main and Rosemary and encompassed the new library.

May 19, 1926 - Alice was initiated into chapter DW, P.E.O. She was at once struck with the similarities of the ideals, standards, and purpose she had always had for Cottey College and those of P.E.O. By a strange coincidence the colors of yellow and white were the same for the school and for P.E.O. She wore her gold star, the emblem of P.E.O. with pride.

At a P.E.O. chapter program in November 1926, the educational day program revealed to Alice the extent of the educational purpose. She learned of their aid to women who needed education and it occurred to her that Cottey College might become a real asset. At once a correspondence with the president of Supreme Chapter, Mrs. Alice Scott, began. All possible details were given; a committee came to inspect the college. Correspondence with board members so widely separated was almost intolerably slow, especially to one who had been accustomed to quick decisions made by a board in her town. It looked as if the offer would have to wait another two years for another convention. One week before the 1927 Supreme Convention Alice met with a committee in Kansas City. All the committee members were in favor of accepting the college. It was decided that Alice should present the gift herself, telling the story of the school. She knew she could not postpone for another two years. She prayed and began a little white-haired, blue-eyed woman dressed in a simple dark blue dress presenting her life's work, an achievement that grew more astounding each minute. At the close of her speech there was a second of quiet and then applause. Mrs. Scott, Supreme President, announced that no action would be taken until the next morning, and banged the gavel for close of meeting. The committee began working to get the needed votes. Rooms were noisy with talking and many missed dinner as they talked.

The next morning she stuck to her "NOW OR NEVER". She had answers for all the objections. The vote was taken and counted and a majority vote was counted for acceptance.

There was much work in the next few years, but Alice finally had help. At the celebration of the fiftieth year of the college she was 85 and able to enjoy the honors heaped upon her. She was a frail woman who had to carefully monitor her activities, finally having long bed rests. By the summer of 1940, at age 92, her conscious hours were less frequent and on the sixteenth of July she quietly stopped living stopped in a physical sense only. As long as college women pass through the door of Main Hall, they will be the proof that her spirit still lives?the spirit of a woman whose dream fulfilled is Cottey College.

Source: Joanne Spivey, Chapter AT, TN, 2001