

We are gathered here today to honor the Founders of P.E.O., and to celebrate the anniversary of its beginning. At the time of its origin, January of 1869, P.E.O. was the second National Society to be organized, a pioneer society in a pioneer college in the pioneer state of Iowa. The Civil War had recently ended. The country was still chaotic, trying to readjust itself after the turmoil of the war. New ways of life among its people seemed desirable and possible.

A new type of woman was emerging from the experiences of the war. The spirit of individual effort in the newer fields, and of organizations for women, was gaining ground. These were the days of Julia Ward Howe, Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard.

The little mid-western town of Mount Pleasant, Iowa was a thriving educational and cultural center. Not only was it the home of Iowa Wesleyan College, the first co-educational college west of the Mississippi River, but also there was also Howe's Academy, the pioneer school of the west, and the Young Ladies' Seminary.

From this background of Christian education and culture came the seven young women whom we honor today. Their ages ranged from 17 to 21. These seven women were leaders in social and college activities. They were close friends with a deep love for each other. They desired to remain friends through their lives, and in forming P.E.O., they pledged us to that same desire.

They were trained in their homes, in their school, and in their community to achieve a virtuous life. P.E.O. was the outgrowth of their desire to promote among all women the five virtues of faith, love, purity, justice and truth.

The P.E.O. they envisioned one with eyes of Faith, lips that speak the Truth, ears that listen only to that which is Pure and of good report, arms that Love, and feet that trod the path of Justice. The very nature of these seven women and the qualities they possessed, dictated these eternal standards and principals.

In the earliest history of P.E.O., everything was secret and mysterious. No one except the members knew where or when they would meet. No one outside the chapter knew who the officers were. All members who were absent from a meeting without a reasonable excuse were fined. Hattie Briggs suggested the name. She drew her sisters around her and whispered it's meaning.

When the seven founders first had their emblems made by Mr. Crane in Mount Pleasant, they swore him to secrecy until the pins were first worn. There was no initiation fee and so each member bought her own pin. They were large and flat and made of yellow gold. There was no engraving on the back and no law concerning who could wear them. So we find there were instances of other jewelers who copied them and women, other than P.E.O.'s, who bought them and wore them. The Founders and early initiates would sometimes wear their pins in their hair, on their hats, or at their throats, but they always wore them. At one time the pins were draped in black for 21 days after the death of a member.

In 1904, our star emblem was made convex so it would appear smaller, and in 1915 the small star was made. Hundreds of P.E.O.'s traded in their large emblems for the smaller size. Many have regretted doing so.

There has been one jeweled pin in P.E.O. It was presented to Alice Bird Babb in 1902, given to her on the 33rd anniversary of the founding of P.E.O. by Chapter Original A in Mount Pleasant. Mrs. Babb was the only one of the Founders to retain active membership continuously in Chapter Original A. This pin can be seen in the Memorial Library.

Alice Bird Babb wrote the Oath. This was used as their initiation ceremony for ten years. In the early balloting, every member of a chapter voted on each name proposed. She sent a sealed ballot if she was not able to attend the meeting.

The seven founders had a project. Filled with a desire to do something nice for the town of Mount Pleasant, they decided to pay for the building of a plank sidewalk to Forest Lawn Cemetery. It was a big and costly undertaking for many blocks needed this improvement. They raised the money by giving home-talent plays. Three of the seven founders are buried in this cemetery.

During the first fourteen years of P.E.O., the chapters were without a governing body. The members of the chapters kept in touch with each other by the exchange of letters. At the time there were only 5 chapters in P.E.O. So in 1883 when seven chapters had been formed, they met together in their first convention and the Grand Chapter of P.E.O. was organized. Official business then had to be sent to all chapters. This was done in longhand and was a real hardship for the recording secretary of Grand Chapter. Out of that need came THE P.E.O. RECORD. The decision to publish a "Society Paper," as it was referred to, came at the 6th annual convention of Grand Chapter in 1888.

The first issue of THE P.E.O. RECORD was printed in January 1889, twenty years after the founding of P.E.O. Faith and \$500 were the backing. Mrs. Effie Hoffman Rogers, who was serving as Grand Chapter President was selected as Editor-in-chief at a salary of \$40.00 per month. She wrote in the first issue, "We intend to give you 16 pages of good reading matter, pure, clean and helpful." Subscription price was 75 cents per year -- payable in advance. It was up to each member to subscribe or not. The magazine had a hard time financially for the first 5 years. Then in 1895, Mrs. Siddie Richards, then editor, recommended the subscription to THE P.E.O. RECORD be a part of the annual dues of all members. The amount used from dues was 25 cents per member. In 1908 THE P.E.O. RECORD was enlarged to its present size.

The first "model meeting" was held in 1913. The state of Oregon used it as a form of entertainment at their Oregon State Convention. Officers and members were so pleased with the idea, that they urged all states to adopt it for convention.

The first candle-lighting ceremony was presented in 1914. A P.E.O. member in New York City -- making last minute preparations for a Founders' Day program, decided to use her 7-branch candelabra and light a candle for each of the Founders. The ceremony was so impressive that

the word spread to other chapters and today it is used by a number of chapters in the Sisterhood.

Reciprocity groups have met since 1889 when Chapter Original A in Mount Pleasant invited the nearby chapters to a tea.

The Educational Loan Fund was established in 1907. The nucleus of the fund was \$658.88 leftover from P.E.O. Day at the Louisiana Exposition. The idea was that the money be used to purchase scholarships for worthy young women. Later the motion was made that the money be used for a revolving loan fund for the education of young women.

In the early days of P.E.O. chapter meetings and conventions, two hymns were sung to open and close meetings. "Blest be the Tie That Binds?" and "God Be With You 'Till We Meet Again". In 1921 the P.E.O. Ode was adopted at the convention of Supreme Chapter in Kansas City. Caroline Kettle, Chapter G, Colorado wrote the words and the composer was a Mr. Reynolds.

As far back as 1890 there is a record of B.I.L.'s in connection with our sisterhood. About that time in Nebraska, they called themselves the M.M.'s to stand for "Married Martyrs." Two of the Founders never married, Alice Coffin and Ella Stewart.

The Founders

1. Who is the woman who leads the way?

We need no intuition to know,

Her disposition is as sunny as a lovely sunny day.

It is Hattie Briggs, to whom the inspiration came to form a group,

And then to name it as the Sisterhood is known today!

2. Who is the stocky woman

Who wears an apron white with unconfined delight

And waves a banner of her own design?

Oh, that is Franc Roads, a pioneer

For women's rights, and schools with lots of air and lights.

3. Who is the beauty coming now?

So youthful and vivacious, so colorful and gracious!

What a picture she would make!

Oh, this lovely Suela Pearson,

A hostess known both far and wide

Her voice and charm a source of pride.

4. Who is the scholarly brunette with tailor-made attire

And poise we all admire?

Why that is Allie Bird.

She spoke with resolution, and she wrote our constitution.

She was first to be a P.E.O.

5. Who is the classy-looking one?

A blonde with lots of glamour, for whom the men should clamor?

Oh, this is Alice Coffin.

Her students fell for this southern belle,

Whose looks and love were parallel.

She fashioned our pin -- the shining star.

6. Who is the blonde of Christian bearing?

She has something she's not sharing.

This is Mary Allen.

She's waiting for her college beau;

She'll be a pastor's wife, you know,

And prototype for every P.E.O.

7. Who's the woman with the auburn hair?

The one who's hustling as she walks,

Who's always tatting as she talks?

Oh, this is Ella Stewart.

Miss Ellie teaches wayward youth,

The joy and righteousness of truth.

'Tis her choice of colors that we share.

*They never quite leave us, these founders who have passed
Through the shadows of death to the sunlight above;
A thousand sweet memories are holding them fast
To the places they blessed with their wisdom and love!*

Evelyn Ross, V, WY, 1975