

## **“DID YOU KNOW?”**

### **FOUNDERS' DAY PROGRAM**

Given by Betty Sterling Chapter B, Hendersonville

Presented at Founders' Day at Carolina Village  
January, 1994

Updated by Sharon Morton, Georgia State Chapter Secretary  
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In planning this Founders' Day program, I wanted something different from the usual history of our seven founders, not that their lives are not interesting, but we have all heard the story and read it ourselves, many times. So, with the help of many back issues of the P.E.O. Record and two books from the President's Box\*, I decided on a program which I will call, "Did You Know?" and through it, I hope to enlighten and entertain you on some of the aspects of P.E.O. as we know it today, and how these came about.....

DID YOU KNOW: That P.E.O. was born \_\_\_\_\_years ago this very day, January 21, 1869 – and further, that it was founded out of anger by seven teenage girls? This is not to disparage our founders, but to emphasize that they were normal young women who had some very human traits. They could, for one thing, get angry, and it was this anger that led to the founding of P.E.O. Hattie Briggs and Franc Rhodes, 16 and 17 years old, were perched on a wooden stile at the entrance to Iowa Wesleyan College that day and they were angry that I.C. Sorosis (a secret society which later became Pi Beta Phi Sorority) had invited two of their group of seven friends to join. This would have broken their friendship so Hattie and Franc decided to retaliate with a group of their own. They gathered together the other five and, in a secret meeting in the Music room of Old Main Hall, in one hour they wrote and administered an oath of secrecy to each other, selected a name and emblem, drafted the beginning of the constitution and decided on the next meeting to be held on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Anger with justification can be a great incentive.....

DID YOU KNOW: They were selfish? The original intent was to have only the seven founders as members. Their purpose was to cement their friendship through all time. This, however, did not hold true, for by the end of 1869 they had initiated 16 new members and the same number in 1870. Chapter B was in existence by 1871.

DID YOU KNOW: That these 7 young girls could be very devious and even vindictive? About two weeks following the founding meeting, they played a game of one-upmanship on the EC's by hiding in a closet and slipping into Chapel just ahead of the IC's, each of them wearing a white apron, ruffled all around, with one shoulder higher than the other to show off proudly their shining gold stars which they had managed to get made in that short length of time. (A picture of the apron is found on page 37 of "Out of the Heart".

DID YOU KNOW: That the early meetings were secret? On the day of a meeting they would each take a different route, detour and even backtrack so their destination would not be known. From the beginning, the meetings were opened with prayer and the singing of the hymn, "Bless Be the Tie That Binds." The meetings were closed with the hymn, "God Be With You." Between 1919 and 1921, the Sisterhood decided to have an Ode of its own. Miss Caroline Kettle of Chapter G in Colorado was asked to write the Ode.

When she submitted the Ode for approval, she stated that she had tried to put into the lines the spirit of P.E.O. and had given the thought ritualistic cadence. It was taken to Howard Reynolds of the Music Department of Colorado State Agricultural College who set it to music. It was first played at the Supreme Chapter Convention in 1921, where it was adopted.

DID YOU KNOW: That in the beginning, new members had to be voted on by every member, and those not present were contacted by a committee to get their vote? Early on a wooden ballot box came into being. It was out of dark wood with brass trimmings, with a slot in the top. The box could be locked with the President keeping the key. This box is still in existence and is on display in the Memory Room on the campus at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

DID YOU KNOW: That the observance of Mother's Day began in P.E.O. long before the establishment of a national Mother's Day? It began in 1889 in Chapter Original A in Mt. Pleasant. A member of the chapter had died, Flora Baugh, and her mother invited Chapter A to meet at her home just as had been their custom during her daughter's life. They met annually with Mrs. Baugh and made it an occasion to entertain their mothers. This annual meeting was always known as "Mother's Day."

DID YOU KNOW: That from the beginning, the pattern of using the alphabet for naming chapters was used? However, state lines were not observed. In 1883, when the Grand Chapter as the governing body of the sisterhood was organized, the lettering was continued within each state alphabetically as to date of organization. Chapter A in Mt. Pleasant in 1911 was designated "Original A" and remains known as that to this day.

DID YOU KNOW: That the governing body of the P.E.O. Sisterhood known as "Grand Chapter," was established in 1883 and in 1884 the first dues were levied on each P.E.O. in the amount of fifty cents? Until this time, there were no dues. When money was needed, each girl was fined the necessary amount and the money was collected. In 1892, the name Supreme was added to the name of the highest body and that name carried until 1909 when it became known as the Supreme Chapter of the P.E.O. Sisterhood. In 1979, the name was changed to International Chapter, as we know it today.

DID YOU KNOW: That the constitution for P.E.O. was written in two days and has formed the basis for all laws and by-laws that have followed? In the early days of P.E.O. it was required that the constitution be read at every meeting. These laws were painstakingly written in a notebook labeled, "The Private Papers of Chapter A." Longhand copies of these were sent to each new chapter as they were formed. It was fortunate that Chapter A requested and was granted the privilege of keeping the

notebook, for in 1887 the Grand Chapter ordered all copies of the constitution and ceremonies to be burned in order to establish uniformity of procedures in the revision of the constitution. Thus, much historical data was destroyed. (See some of the early laws, Page 97 of "Out of the Heart.")

**DID YOU KNOW:** That the emblem has always been a gold star with the black letters P.E.O. in the center? The original pin was flat and with longer points. The correct placement, as stated in the original constitution, was on the left shoulder where "it might be touched as a signal of distress." It was to say to any other sister, "I need you."

Sometimes it was attached to a fancy comb and worn in the hair. Occasionally, it was worn on a collar. Original Chapter A supplied all the pins with the cost varying from \$2.50 to \$3.00. In 1870, after some trouble collecting the fee from an initiate, a by-law was put into effect requiring an initiation fee of \$3.00 and the society would furnish the pin. The wisdom of that pattern has never since been questioned.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That from the very beginning, there was much speculation as to the meaning of the letters, P.E.O. with such guesses as Phemale Enchantress organization, Perfectly Entertaining Organization, Pie Eating Outfit, Previously Enjoyed Opportunity, or Preambulate Every Occasion?

**DID YOU KNOW:** That the first initiation ceremony was the oath of secrecy written by Alice Bird and used that afternoon for the seven founders? It consisted of 35 words and was simply a pledge of secrecy. The regular initiation ceremony was written in 1881 incorporating the original oath. There have been changes from time to time, but all have been minor. The use of the Star Ceremony came into being in 1897 and was approved and adopted in 1899.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That conventions were held almost from the very beginning? The first one was in 1875 in Mt. Pleasant. There were six chapters in existence then. The tradition of a chapter taking on the job of entertaining the convention began with the very first one.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That in the beginning, chapters exchanged letters telling the chapter news such as new members, weddings and such? When Grand Chapter was formed, official information had to be sent to the chapter by letter. After a time, the number of letters became a real hardship. Out of the need for communication, The P.E.O. Record came into existence in 1889. It was to be published monthly with the subscription price to be 75 cents. It consisted of 16 pages, folded, stitched and covered, with the editor doing a great deal of the work. In 1895 it was decided that the magazine be sent to all active members and that five cents of the dues be set aside as subscription to The Record.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That Cottey College was an outright gift to the P.E.O. sisterhood? Virginia Alice Cottey, a teacher and a native of Missouri, firmly believed young women should have the same educational opportunities as those available to men and it was her dream to establish a college for women. A committee from Nevada, MO, who liked her idea, donated six acres of farm land and Cottey College began in

1883. Alice Cottey had never heard of P.E.O., but she chose for her school the marguerite for the colors of yellow and white. For her ideals, she chose the "what-so-ev-ers"... what-so-ever things are true, just, pure, lovely and of good report...and her purpose was the education of women. Alice Cottey did not become a P.E.O. until 1926 when she was initiated into Chapter DW in Nevada, MO. She was delighted to discover the parallel that P.E.O. held with Cottey College in its flower, its colors, and its aim to educate women. In 1927, at the Supreme Chapter convention in Oklahoma City, she made the gift of the college to the P.E.O. Sisterhood, \$350,000 in buildings, all free of debt.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That P.E.O.'s first philanthropy was the Educational Loan Fund established in 1907? The first loan went to a young woman at State Teachers College in Cedar Falls, Iowa in the amount of \$300.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That in the beginning there were no colors or a floral emblem? The colors chosen in 1888 were old gold and white, but in 1903, this was changed to yellow and white. Old gold was considered rather dull. In 1893 at a convention of Grand Chapter, the marguerite was chosen as the floral emblem. The marguerite and the daisy are essentially the same, but the true Marguerite, chosen as the P.E.O. flower, is native to the Canary Islands. Its colors are pristine white and yellow. In olden times, it was called "Day's Eye," hence, Daisy. The true name came from Europe where it was called "herb Margaret," named for two saints, Margaret of Antioch and Margaret of Cortona, later called Marguerite.

**DID YOU KNOW:** That before the end of the second year, in December 1870, our founders gave a BIL party? Of course, they did not call it that, but that is what it was, even though they called it a "Sideral Soiree." Sideral means a relation to the stars and a Soiree means a reception given in the evening. The menu chosen consisted of Roast Turkey, Escalloped Oysters, Mashed Potatoes, Cole Slaw (salads were not known in those days,) with marble Cake and Ice Cream for dessert.

Then the selection of the gentlemen who would be invited. Each P.E.O. suggested a name and then with the approval of all the names, the invitations were sent out. They were simple white cards with the P.E.O. Star near the top and under the Star the invitation which read....(see page 65 of "Out of the Heart.")

The fraternity known as BIL is a family matter without the problems of fraternal relationships. The name BIL was not heard of until the early 1880's. Mr. H. B. Williams of Evanston, Illinois tells an interesting story of how the fraternity began in Iowa: In 1882 in Centerville, Iowa there was a group of seven young men who formed a society known as "AOB," the Ancient Order of Bachelors, with the object being "to keep their hearts with all diligence." When an alumnus of Iowa Wesleyan came to Centerville and organized a chapter of P.E.O., the purpose of AOB lost its force. The P.E.O.s took over the hearts that had been kept with such diligence. In time, bachelors became brother-in-laws to each other and their sisters. Mr. Williams, himself, gave them the name "brothers-in-law" and BIL was born. In later years, the letters were interpreted by P.E.O.s as the "Boys I love."

DID YOU KNOW: That there was a group in Moulton, Iowa, who called themselves the O.E.P.s? Their emblem was “the man in the moon watching over the star.” “The moon is our chosen emblem, as it far outshines the star. The open and closed eyes signify that we always meet on the light or dark of the moon, also that while we sleep, we are always awake to watch over and care for all P.E.O.s wherever they may be. Though P.E.O.s may try to keep their workings secret, that open eye is watching them all the time. The little star that you see hovering so near represents the P.E.O.s and signifies that there is a Man in the Moon who watches over them.”

The BILs today are without organization, but there are certain established precedents. One is that they expect one party at least annually in proof that the P.E.O.s meant it when they interpreted the letters BIL. There also appeared in Nebraska in 1892 a society, the MMs, brothers-in-law of the P.E.O.s. The meaning of the letters was kept secret, but finally the members divulged it as the “Married Martyrs.” But the BIL fraternity remains to this day under the loving interpretation of the P.E.O.s “The Boys I Love.”

In 1949, the BILs gave to Cottey College a 40 acre tract of land known as Bil Hill and on it they built an overnight lodge. The BILs gave to Cottey College the beautiful chapel on its campus. This shows our BIL's interest in P.E.O. (Pictures are found on pages 244 and 245 of “Out of the Heart.”

DID YOU KNOW: That P.E.O. has a connection to Abraham Lincoln? Lincoln's son, Robert, married Mary Harlan from Mt. Pleasant, Iowa and two of their children, Mamie and Jessie, were initiated in Chapter Original A in Mt. Pleasant.

DID YOU KNOW: That Bess Wallace Truman, wife of our President, was a charter member of Chapter S, Washington, D.C.? Chapter S was nicknamed the “Missouri Chapter.”

DID YOU KNOW: P.E.O. left the lower 48 states in 1945 and traveled north to Alaska. In August of 1945 Chapter A was organized in Ketchikan followed immediately by Chapter B in Fairbanks. They are referred to as the twin chapters. In September 2016, Alaska organized the Alaska State Chapter with 18 local chapters.

DID YOU KNOW: That P.E.O. left the United States and went into Canada in 1911? P.E.O left the mainland of the United States in 1930 when a chapter was organized in Hawaii. Although Hawaii now has eleven chapters, they have not yet organized a state chapter.

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DID YOU KNOW: That P.E.O. came to North Carolina in 1929 with the organization of Chapter A in Greensboro? Chapter B in Hendersonville was organized in 1947, with Elizabeth Klick being instrumental in the organization for this chapter, the second in the state and she served as its first president. The State Chapter was organized in 1962 and Elizabeth served as the President of this chapter in 1964.

There is so much more to tell you, but I hope that I have whetted your appetite to learn more. I recommend to you the two books I have used. They are: "Out of the Heart," by Stella Clapp and "The Story of P.E.O." (Two volumes) by Winona Evans Reeves.