

Narrator

To quote the announcer of the old Lone Ranger radio program (and I refuse to believe some of you were not fans when children), "return with me to those thrilling days of yesteryear!" Instead of a clatter of hooves, a cloud of dust, and the hearty "Hi, ho Silver, away" let us eavesdrop for a few minutes on a group of 7 young women. Most of us have heard the story of how 3 members of this close knit group, invited to join a college sorority, and instead decided to form their own group, so none of them would be left out. This was the beginning of P.E.O.

Alice Bird

(Enter center)

(Leave center)

Who were these women? What was their world like? What were they like?

I am Alice Bird. Mount Pleasant, Iowa, in 1869, was really very civilized. The days of the prairie and sod houses had been over for probably 20 years or more. Good-sized towns with large homes were the rule, not the exception. There were many churches, schools, academies and, even, a few colleges. The transcontinental railroad was finished in 1869, and we had a telegraph service and postal service. You will see, as Hattie Briggs will confirm, even if we didn't have radio, television, or telephones, we were not isolated.

Hattie Briggs

(Enter center)

(Leave center)

Alice, remember how it was thought fairly important for a boy to go to college, but not a priority for a girl at all! Most of all the colleges were church supported, so naturally religion was stressed in the curriculum. There were no courses in business administration, political science, space technology or computer science. As Franc Roads will tell you, college was to bring the culture and beauty of the ages to a newly found wilderness. Subjects taught included history, Latin, Greek, English, mathematics, modern languages, physical education, biological sciences and philosophy.

France Roads

(Enter center)

(Leave center)

If you could see inside our home, you would see Brussels carpet on the floors, crimson plush or black horsehair sofas, elaborately carved wood chests, music boxes, pianos, and organs. This was not early Little House on the Prairie!

Narrator

There were washstands in the bedrooms. The cook stove in the kitchen had to be filled with wood several times a day to be sure there was always enough hot water readily available. There was no central heating, electricity, no refrigeration and no running water throughout the house.

Suela Pearson

(Enter center)

(Leave center)

My mother always said, "Suela Pearson, slow down so you won't trip!" Our clothes were so pretty then. Skirts were long and graceful. Blouses were tiny at the waist with tucks, shirring and puffed sleeves. Our petticoats had flounces, ruffles and pleats. But, oh, those cold winters, when we had to wear long woolen underwear. Our shoes were high topped and buttoned. And those stockings were so heavy and coarse.

Narrator

Here we are on (today's date), but think back to Mount Pleasant, January 21, 1869 -- \* years ago, when P.E.O. was founded. Who were these women and who did they become? Let's start with Hattie Briggs!

Hattie Briggs

(Enter center)

My father was a Methodist minister and I was active in church and campus activities. Mary Allen, remember, I was the first to say "Let's have a society all our own."

Mary Allen

Hattie was the best-hearted women who ever lived! Everyone who came near her felt comfortable. She was average size with light brown hair, expressive blue eyes and a radiant smile.

Hattie Briggs

(Remains center)

(Leave center)

I started in the classical course but then switched to the scientific one. After graduation, I taught art and music until I married Henry Bousquet, a businessman who later became a banker. We played a great joke on our friends when we got married. No one outside the family knew we were serious, until Father announced in church one Sunday that he had a duty to perform and, if the parties concerned would come forward, he would perform it. Henry and I met at the altar and were married.

Mary Allen

Hattie and her Henry had two fine sons but Hattie, never very strong, only lived 8 years after P.E.O. was founded. She died in 1877.

Alice Bird

(Enter center)

I really think it was an accident that I, Alice Bird, got into any sorority, even P.E.O. I am not a joiner, and, really, I would never have had the patience to be either a State or Supreme President. My father was a doctor. I entered college when I was 15 and after graduation I taught high school for 4 years. Then I joined the faculty at Iowa Wesleyan and taught Latin, Greek, and elocution. I married Washington Babb. He became an attorney after returning from the Civil War.

He, too, later taught at Iowa Wesleyan. He taught Law. The judge and I had 4 children, but I must say, I always felt I had another child - P.E.O. You see, I was the one delegated to write the original oath and the original constitution. I often said on my tombstone could be the words "Here lies one who would not spend 10 cents for a special delivery stamp, when 2 cents would accomplish the same end and save 8 cents for the P.E.O. Educational Fund." Remember, Franc!

Franc Roads

Allie, you were a brilliant student! You had a tremendous knowledge of literature and what seemed to me like total recall. One only had to mention a character in some book, and you could describe the setting and quote long passages from the book.

Alice Bird

(Remains center)

(Leave center)

I wanted to manage life, not just let it flow through me. I found it hard to be patient, and it did seem to me that my later years were filled with sickness - just one thing after another. Once my minister, Dr. John Holland, was trying to reconcile me to a particularly painful period of suffering and I challenged him. He was saying that perhaps God was trying to teach me patience through suffering. I told him I had read the book of Job and how in all his trials he had said, "though He slay me, yet I will trust him" (meaning God). However, I really wondered if Job actually had said this while everything was going wrong during his sufferings or if he put it in later when he was writing up the whole story after it was over.

Hattie Briggs

(Pulls Ella to center &  
leaves)

Now, Ella Stewart was Irish and didn't try to hide it. Her wit and repartee made her a general favorite at all social gatherings. She was small with curly auburn hair and deep blue eyes. One male classmate, I remember, commented that she always wore earrings and smelled like violets.

Ella Stewart

(Remains center)

I was the only founder who didn't graduate from Iowa Wesleyan. My father died when I was sixteen and I had to help my mother since I was the eldest of 6 children. Mother ran a boarding house for students, so I could only attend classes at college during certain hours. I was able to keep up my music and later I taught music classes. I was able to be involved in some church and civic activities and I enjoyed giving talks on P.E.O. history. I really loved people, all people. I loved teaching them, being with them, encouraging them.

Hattie Briggs

Ella's life was one of devoted service to others. She sought out the needy, the aged, the infirm. She talked with them, read to them, and took food to them.

Ella Stewart

(Remains center)

My favorite job was when I taught at the Iowa Industrial School for Wayward Boys in Eldora for 8 years. How fond I was of those boys! I was able to gain their confidence so I could then show them a higher standard of living and teach them that they could achieve any goal by striving toward high ideals. I had to leave the school because of my health, but I always hoped I could go back. Those dear boys---many of them have become honorable, useful citizens, you know.

Suela Pearson

(Brings Alice center  
and leaves)

Alice Coffin was tall, blonde, and handsome. She was always immaculate in her grooming, carrying herself with an air of distinction, almost aloofness. She was cheerful, kind, and generous, too. Quick to anger, but quick to forgive. She was greatly loved and admired. She never married, but devoted her life to teaching.

Alice Coffin

(Remains center)

Well, it's true I was an "old-maid schoolteacher" as they used to say, but I had my chances. In college I dated Suela's brother, Will. Why, we were even engaged, but I broke it off. That's my business, of course. I did have other offers later, but I didn't fancy them.

Suela Pearson

A dedicated and imaginative person, one pupil wrote of her, "she was the kind of teacher that the girls copy and the boys silently worship."

Alice Coffin

(Leaves center and  
pulls Suela into  
center)

Now, Suela Pearson -- the very name makes me smile. She was so beautiful and charming. It was as if a fairy godmother had waved a wand and said, "She will have charm, grace, talent, and virtue in overflowing measure." She was an excellent musician and always the belle of the ball. Right after graduation, Suela's family moved to Washington, D.C. She never came back. Later, I heard she married an executive with Standard Oil, had 2 children and moved in the first society of Cleveland, Ohio, but, to us, she will always remain the young, beautiful and talented Suela.

Suela Pearson

(Pulls Mary Allen into  
center & leaves)

Mary Allen was tall, slender, poised and carried herself with a sense of dignity. She had a delightful sense of humor and treasured all her friends. She wrote much about P.E.O. and was especially careful to give accurate details.

Mary Allen  
(Remains center)  
(Leaves center)

I married a Methodist minister and had 4 children. We lived in at least 8 different towns and I always tried to be active in P.E.O. wherever I went. I tried to be good wife and help my husband with his parish work, and I think I succeeded, too. We were married for 56 years. He was President of Iowa Wesleyan at one time, which was a joy for me. Dr. Stafford always loved to recall how a Methodist brother had tried to dissuade him from marrying me by telling him I was too worldly and frivolous to make a good minister's wife. "We certainly proved him wrong," my dear husband would say.

Ella Stewart  
(France enters center)

Franc Roads was beautiful with dark hair and eyes that danced - full of the joy of life.

Franc Roads  
(Remains center)

I was the youngest since I came to college when I was 14. I was christened Frances Elizabeth, but I refused to be called anything but Franc. I took the scientific course, but added extra math, astronomy and surveying. I graduated in 3 years, then taught for a few years before marrying Mr. Elliot. Some people called me an intellectual because I was always reading. Others said I was artistic. The truth is I wanted to be always learning, and I didn't see why I couldn't learn, maybe even teach, anything I set my mind to. I took art lessons at Columbia, the University of Chicago, and wherever, whenever I was in a large city. Later I taught private lessons in painting and drawing. Why not?

Ella Stewart

Franc's daughter would say, "Mother is a dynamic person, always on the search for learning, a woman of indomitable will, with courage and ability to get from life the worthwhile things that appealed to her." Franc was a crusader. She was especially interested in the advancement of women.

Franc Roads  
(Remains center)

I said some called me intellectual or artistic, others called me a politician. I saw no reason why a qualified woman could not have the same rights and privileges as a man. I am proud I was active in the Women's Movement of my day. I am proud that I was able to influence matters so that women were able to serve as delegates to the General Conference of the Methodist Church, and I am especially proud of my P.E.O. sisters.

Narrator  
(Each girl comes center  
as her name is said)

7 young women - what did they bring us? Mary Allen brought us a sense of poise. Alice Bird encourages our literacy bent; Hattie Briggs remind us of the underlying importance of all our

homemaking efforts; Alice Coffin prompts our dedication to women's education; Suela Pearson with her gaiety and charm, reminds us of the importance of being sociable. From Franc Roads we received our vision and interest in being progressive, and Ella Stewart reminds us of the need and rewards inherent in social service.

Narrator

All actors curtsy

Thank you, Founders, for all these gifts lovingly given in P.E.O. And thank you, P.E.O. sisters, for being here with us today!

Source: Linda DeMars, A, GA., 1996.