

## "Founders' Day" A Program

Narrator: This program has been adapted from one written by Emily Haymes, Chapter AD, PA, in 1974. An article in the January 1992 RECORD also served as source of information for this program.

Today we celebrate the \_\_\_\_ \* \_\_\_\_ anniversary of the founding of P.E.O. What were the conditions and events of 1869, the year P.E.O. was founded?

Reader 1:

- The Civil War had ended in 1865 and Lincoln had been assassinated when five of our founders entered Iowa Wesleyan in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

While they were in college:

- Johnson faced impeachment during the reconstruction years.
- Grant was elected president in 1868.
- Alaska was purchased in 1867. People thought it was a dreary, frozen region infested with polar bears and glaciers and inhabited only by savages.
- David Livingston went missing while searching for the source of the Nile.
- The Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first salaried baseball team.
- Gold speculation led to financial panic on "Black Friday".
- The Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads met in Utah in 1869. Driving the Golden Spike marked the completion of the transcontinental railroad.
- The first bridge was constructed of concrete.
- Supplies for building bridges and railroads were moved by wagons, and Indian attacks were frequent.

Reader 2:

- Camp meetings were very popular -- families gathered and set up teams in the woods for a week of intensive religious service.
- Temperance became a regular crusade - both religious and political.
- Charles Dickens made his second visit to the US in 1868. Crowds were eager to see him even though he had irritated people on his first visit by talking down to Americans, and treating them as barbarians.
- Louisa May Alcott published Little Women in 1868.
- Magazines of the time included Harper's, Scribners, Appletons, Harpers Weekly Youth Companion, The Nation, The Galaxy, and Godney's Lady Book.
- Among those living in 1869 were Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, VanGogh, Rodin, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Edvard Grieg, Peter Ilyich Tachikovsky, and Johannes Brahms.

Narrator: What was college like?

Reader 3:

- Daily chapel services were compulsory. Men sat on one side and women on the other.
- Students had to furnish testimonials of good moral character in order to matriculate.
- A few daring men would walk or talk with a woman without permission. If spotted, they were called before the faculty and their department grades were lowered.

- Strictly prohibited were - making or receiving visits during study hours, amusements on the Sabbath, absence from rooms after study hours at night, leaving town without permission of the college presidents, contracting debts without knowledge and consent of one's parents, unnecessary noise in college buildings.

- The college year was divided into three semesters, fall, winter and spring. Students had a few days off between terms, and vacations included summer break from the third week in June until the first of September, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Narrator: What was it like at Iowa Wesleyan in 1869?

Reader 4:

- There were no electric lights, telephones, automobiles or radios.

- Still the students had fun! There were taffy pulls, sleigh rides, oyster suppers, dinner parties, receptions, banquets, a strawberry party for the parents and a calico party. There were skating parties on Skunk River, and picnics in Saunder's Grove. Men furnished the buggies and women the baskets.

- Women's suffrage was widely discussed during this time. Harper's carried a commentary in opposition to suffrage by Catherine Beecher. She stated "Woman's distinctive profession includes three departments: the training of the mind in childhood, the nursing of infants and the sick, and the handicrafts and management of the family state."

Reader 5:

- Women's rights leaders Anna Dickinson, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott and others were appearing on lecture platforms. The Nation carried an editorial about the dress, manners, and behavior suitable and unsuitable to the "female lecturer".

- "She should sit while speaking for the world is not ready to see her with any pleasure or profit, or attempting anything approaching energy of manner in public. The declamatory and passionate style of oratory is not suited to her voice or upper limbs." Moreover, the article continues, "It is a mistake for her to wear pantaloons, or bloomers, or other sensible clothes on the rostrum".

"We might suggest that at least one of our seven founders, Franc Roads, was a feminist at heart, and perhaps others were too. Anna Dickinson delivered her famous lecture at Mt. Pleasant on "paupers, idiots, and women" and many of our founders admired her short heavy curling hair. They dared one another to look like Anna Dickinson and had their long luxuriant hair cut short and shingled.

Narrator: What preceded the founding of P.E.O.?

Reader 6:

- Beta Theta Phi appeared on campus in 1868. Pi Beta Phi was organized in December 1868. Several of our founders were invited to join, but not all. This prompted several of the women to think seriously of forming what Hattie Briggs called a "group of our own".

- Thus on January 21, 1869, seven women, Mary Allen, Alice Bird, Hattie Briggs, Alice Coffin, Suela Pearson, Franc Roads, and Ella Stewart, met in the Music Room of Main Hall and P.E.O. was founded.

- At this very first meeting the oath, written by Alice Bird, was read to each of the seven

founders, the society was named P.E.O., and the star, suggested by Alice Coffin, was chosen as the emblem of the society. Alice Bird was designated to prepare a constitution for the next meeting, which was held at Mary Allen's home on January 23.

- Unfortunately the minutes of the meetings for the first 15 months of P.E.O. were lost. We do know at the first business meeting they spent part of the time working on the Constitution, which was to consist of a preamble and three articles.
- Early meetings were secret.

#### Reader 7:

- Announcement was made of the new society by marching into chapel wearing aprons with the P.E.O. star pinned to the left shoulder. The P.E.O.s had made the aprons the night before with the help of Franc Roads' mother.
- These women loved and admired each other and expressed their devotion by taking vows to be true to their high ideals and to each other. They had no idea that they were creating an organization that would grow and grow, and be passed on from generation to generation. These women of hardy pioneer stock had firm religious convictions, zeal, and enthusiasm. Their constitution reveals much about their personal philosophies and ideals. Now more than 300,000 women have taken those vows and subscribed to the constitution.
- When Franc Roads addressed a convention in 1907, she said, "Truly loyalty to those gone before you in P.E.O. lies in improving on the unfinished, which the founders bequeathed to you."
- It is fitting that we set aside time today to honor our seven founders, who \_\_\_\_\* \_\_\_\_ years ago fashioned a gift we share - the gift of P.E.O.

\* Enter the number of years since 1869.

Source: Chapter B, PA, 1999