

HISTORY OF THE MARGUERITE

Have you ever wondered about the origin of our flower and which one of the Founders was responsible for its selection. One of our members decided to search for an answer. First she went to "Out of the Heart", but nothing was found by casually looking through. Next she went to some old P.E.O. Records. Surely one of the Founder's Day programs would tell about the marguerite. No luck. After a period of time, she was looking through more old Records and found an article with the answer. The following information was condensed from the January, 1982 issue.

In the very beginning of our Founder's society, Alice Bird wrote the oath and constitution and Alice Coffin chose the star as an emblem. But there was no floral emblem, no marguerite.

During the early years, P.E.O. grew and flourished so that by the late Victorian era - the Gay 90's - there were almost 3,000 members in 67 chapters in 10 states but still no floral emblem.

The Victorian era was a time known for its opulence, graciousness, lavish and very ornate decorations. "Gingerbread" houses were surrounded by colorful gardens and window boxes held flowering plants. As beautiful as these homes were, they were really very uncomfortable - usually sooty in the winter and sweltering in the summer. To create a sort of oasis inside the homes, people began to fill the rooms with plants.

Picture a Victorian parlor - it was filled with very ornate furniture and lots of flowering and foliage plants. Interest grew in proper flower arrangements and flowers were sometimes chosen for their symbolic meanings - roses for beauty, pansies for thoughts, daisies meant innocence and so on. An arrangement could convey a message to its recipient.

Clothing was elaborate and elegant as well. Remember the beautiful big hats trimmed with flowers and feathers. Usually only artificial flowers made of silk were worn but ladies did carry bouquets called nosegays for special occasions.

In the midst of this flower conscious time, the P.E.O. Record in November, 1892 carried the first suggestion that there be a P.E.O. flower. It was reported that Mrs. Siddie Richard, a member of Chapter Z, Waterloo, Iowa brought up the subject of choosing a flower. It was decided to adopt one, the corresponding secretary securing the votes of the chapters to forward to the Supreme Grand Chapter during the year, and the flower in the majority will become our floral emblem. I assume this must have taken place at the Iowa State Chapter Convention in 1892. Siddie Richard became the editor of the Record the following year and held that position for the next four years.

The P.E.O. colors had been chosen just a few years before in 1888 and so were still fresh on everyone's mind. They did ask for suggestions before the convention, did not have much response and so asked for nominations from the floor. The marguerite, yellow and white roses, cosmos, calla lily, yellow and white chrysanthemums, and daisy were proposed and the marguerite was chosen.

The 1893 report of the Supreme Convention in the Record made a somewhat confusing statement by saying, "As it (the marguerite) and the daisy are essentially the same, whoever has one of them may not fear but that she has the floral emblem, and all pictures of one, or drawings will answer the purpose." There seems to have been some confusion about the two flowers ever since.

The name daisy is a general term for any flower with a central "eye" and a ring of petals surrounding it. There are dozens of flowers that fit this definition. There are four daisy type flowers which are called "marguerite daisy" or simply marguerite - one blue, one yellow and two different white. One of the white ones is the "ox-eye" which blooms profusely during the summer in temperate regions all across the country blanketing the fields. It has short petals and a large - not quite clear - yellow eye. This plant has a rather stiff appearance.

The true marguerite chosen as the official P.E.O. emblem is sometimes known as the Paris daisy, or *chrysanthemum frutescens*, and is native to the Canary Islands. It has been in cultivation in Europe since the 1600s and adopted by royalty as their emblem. The true marguerite has long been a favorite florist flower and would be used for cut flowers and in planters in the 1890s.

It was chosen for the color - pristine white and clear, bright yellow - and the soft fine foliage and graceful stems gives it elegance. The marguerite daisy also has special symbolism. Another name for it was "Measure of Love" probably from the "he loves me, loves me not" test. A Celtic legend considers it sacred to infancy and so it represents purity and innocence. It was used to decorate graves and so the saying "pushing up the daisies" in reference to death. The name marguerite was derived from two saints, St. Margaret of Antioch and St. Margaret of Cortona who were sainted because of their many virtues. So it seemed fitting that this flower named for women of superior merit should be the one to represent P.E.O.

I checked the Sunset Western Garden Book and found the following description for the Paris daisy marguerite: "Plant, in full sun, in light soil with good drainage. It is drought resistant and has few pests. For continued bloom, prune lightly at frequent intervals. Replace every 2-3 years with new plants."

I was struck by the similarity of that description and P.E.O. Our Sisterhood thrives like the hearty perennial and its members bloom and shine with a minimum of care. Our chapters, like the plant, do benefit by division and the new tender chapter quickly flourishes and grows. There is even the reminder to add new plants every 2-3 years.

Those delegates to the Supreme Chapter in 1892 really made a wise choice when they chose the marguerite for our flower.

Source: "A Flower for P.E.O." by Marion Ruff Sheehan, AP, FL., P.E.O. Record, January 1982