

FD-12 DIARIES OF OUR FOUNDERS 1981

5 p.

By Evelyn Cranston, DX Texas. Narrator and seven Founders in costume (if possible); antique desk or table with a quill pen, album, large portraits of Founders (can be from International website) Each Founder writes in the album as narrator talks and picture is shown. Well written program. Retyped and edited 2008

A Program for Founder's Day
P.E.O. Sisterhood
"Diaries of our Founders"

Suggestions:

Narrator is dressed in fashion of late 1800's seated in an antique chair at an antique desk or table. Using an old type (quill?) pen, be writing in an old book (velvet album?). Script concealed in pages of book.

This is more effective if a portrait of each Founder be shown on screen via computer or other media. Pictures are available for download from International website.

MARY ALLEN'S DIARY

Dear Diary,

I must write quickly so that I can get to reading that new book by Mr. Charles Darwin. I have been called "Victorian" – a new term evidently meaning conservative. But I think I am really very modern! I find Mr. Darwin's theories on evolution stimulating, exciting.

Funniest thing happened this morning at College. Our preceptress, at prayers, caught her hoops on a reading desk. I thought she was going to take a tumble. It certainly did upset her aplomb! I could not keep my straight face.

The six girls just left after our P.E.O. Society meeting. They have to walk so far out to my house and to wander around singly in different directions to escape the curious ones. We want to keep our meetings secret. We practiced our code to write to one another, our secret hand clasp, and the touching our star with right fore finger to signal "Lady-in-distress". We will probably one use that signal to be rescued from some dull male companion.

We have such a splendid group! We could have ordinary frumps. But no, we are really special girls. We have created so unique a club, so permanent! I believe P.E.O. is meant for the ages.

ALICE BIRD'S DIARY

Dear Diary,

I shouldn't have worn my brown silk to Literary Society tonight; it does nothing for my coloring, makes me look yellow. Mary Allen and I spoke at our Society, on Cicero. Mary's face poor Dear, was all swollen from toothache. We turned the lamp wicks down low so that the audience could not see our faces. How she laughed afterward; she can see a joke in anything!

Father just returned from the Doceots' Conference in Philadelphia this afternoon – a hard trip by stage he brought much news. Everyone is talking about cabinet member Seward's foolish purchase of the Alaska Territory – paid Russia 2 cents per acre and there is nothing there but glaciers and polar bears. Mrs. Lincoln has finally been granted a pension - \$5,000. The Transcontinental Rail Line is completed. Maybe now there won't

be so many homesteaders streaming through Mr. Pleasant in their covered wagons. We of New England ancestry like our quietness, our culture. Thank goodness we know nothing of sod houses and windblown plains. The trains, Father heard, are frequently stopped for hours by herds of buffalo on the tracks, but Buffalo Bill Cody has killed more than 4,000 this year. Indians should be no more a problem out West; Father says General Custer has them under control.

I was amazed at the elegant furnishing Father brought back for redecorating our house. The first wool carpet in Mr. Pleasant – jet black Brussels with bouquets of red roses – and six mahogany chairs to be set exactly equal distance apart around the walls of the parlor.

Today was a special meeting for the seven of us girls in the music room with the door locked. I am so glad I refused to join the I.C.'s. Impossible to leave my dearest friends - earlier, I had sat out in our summer house, near our Crooked Tree croquet ground, wintry day though it was, wrapped in a shawl to write the vows and constitution of our new Society. I love to write! The girls were so dear to say "Just splendid!" and insist I be the first to take our vows which Ella Steward administered.

Maybe we have something larger than we realize. We must hold it close, not grow too fast or carelessly, and become just another club. The most important thing to remember is to be kind. Be kind! Be kind!

HARRIET BRIGGS DIARY

Dear Diary,

There is so much to do! I shouldn't stop to write in my book. I feel driven to hurry on to so many things I want to accomplish soon. I have a feeling of time running out!

I need to help Father in his ministerial work and as Trustee of the College. And I must help Mother and the hired girl. Then there are all my courses at School I must finish. Science is so difficult but I love it. And I never have enough time for my painting, drawing, and music as I would like.

When Franc Rhodes and I sat on the stile at the entrances of Iowa Wesleyan, long skirts blowing in the wind, sharing our red cape, (wish I weren't so tall!), I felt guilty at time passing so quickly. But I deeply felt the importance of holding my friends close. And I thought "Why not have a Society of our own, and then we can always be together. This would be a bond for forever!"

My thinking of the meaning for the letters of our name was true inspiration. It will be the most solemn secret of our lives, never told to anyone – even husbands who no doubt will tease us.

Now I must get a tub full of clothes put to soak, before I go to bed.

ALICE VIRGINIA COFFIN'S DIARY

Dear Diary,

I should change into a robe and slippers and save this velvet walking suit. The lower flounce got quite wet. Good thing my long underwear is woolen. It is so cold I will have to break ice in my water pitcher in the morning. I am feeling very grateful tonight for Ella Stewart's having me live in her home so that I can go to Iowa Wesleyan. I love being here! Now that the awful War is over and we are trying to pick up the pieces, it

generally isn't thought necessary for girls to have higher education. But Iowa Wesleyan is one of the first colleges to admit women and the first college west of the Mississippi to give them a degree.

It has been hard being from the South although the Amnesty Act has granted citizenship to all of us Southerners but about 500. My horror of war goes all the way back through my Quaker ancestors to Tristram Coffin, first governor of Nantucket Island, 1660, before the family moved south to Kentucky.

And I grieve for my Mother. Perhaps if she had lived she would have helped me curb my temper and my inclination to get into mischief... How I love to dance! Since dancing is taboo in Mother's church I have had to join another. I do try to be more sedate. It helps if I carry her Bible in the beige velvet case that was hers.

I am working hard to become a teacher ever since I heard some friends say I am a born teacher whom girls will copy and boys secretly adore. Since I broke my engagement to Will Pearson, dear Suela's brother, I have decided I will never marry. I shall teach always!

I am indeed blessed with my group of good friends. When I am with the six, I feel surrounded by sunshine! I am glad they approve my choice of our Society's symbol – the star – although I don't believe they approve of my wearing it in my hair. But it looks pretty there – my hair is so long and golden.

SUELA PERSON – HER DIARY

Dear Diary,

I just got home from Demosthenes Debating Society where I was invited by that Certain Person who was debating tonight. I met him in my elocution class. It is so cold but I was quite warm in my fur tippet. I know I shouldn't dote on clothes so much. Most girls have a wardrobe of only three – velvet for Sunday, serge for every day and a calico for at home. But my dressmaker is clever copying patterns from Goday's Lady Book.

Father insisted on taking me before his office hours tonight with his spanking team of young horses. That College rule that escorting young ladies by young gentlemen, or even standing talking together in halls is prohibited, is really a nuisance. But never mind, I have more beaux than I could ever want. I hear I am called a little flirt, a butterfly, but I really am not. I just smile at the boys. I can understand, however, why Iowa Wesleyan is dubbed "The Match Factory".

Our P.E.O. Society met this afternoon, secretly of course, out at Mary Allen's house to practice our yell:

"Who are... Who are... What are we?
We are... We are ... We are the
P.E.O. People! P.E.O. People!"

We talked about our rivalry with the I.C.'s. the President of College told us today we must give up our pins to be deposited in the bank vault for awhile. We decided we just would not be able to find our pins! We will not wear them in sight for a couple of days, but pin them on our under waists, because we are pledged to wear them at all times. Glad our pins are not as large as dinner plates as the I.C.s are!

I am so proud that the girls took me into P.E.O. I am only a sophomore. How I love them! I will really try to be a serious member.

I hope our Society will endure for a long time, perhaps grow so that women of all ages, all positions in life could be members, chosen only for the worth and dignity of their character.

FRANCES ELIZABETH RHODES

Dear Diary,

I am sure that “Franc” suits me better; I am such a crusader! Since I am not a man, although I like to wear pantaloons and bloomers, I at least will work for causes I believe in as long as I have breath – especially for the Feminist Movement, for liberation of women.

Inflation is bad now. Everything is so expensive; wages are so low. Textile mill workers make \$2.00 for a ten hour day; women get less. Susan B. Anthony is forming “Women’s Protective Association”. I want to help her but doubt if unions ever can be successful. I do admire her, Julia Ward Howe, Frances Willard! (Frances organized the Christian Women’s Temperance Union) Maybe I can talk to John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker poet. Mr. Whittier is such a good friend. He could help me in writing protests against organized religion and social conventions. I could use my drawings for illustrations. I am pleased that the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals got organized, but an abused child just had to be put into its care. No protection yet for children!

I worked again today on my study of “the causes of war”. Our hearts flutter when we see the boys returning, but I regret the handsome uniform is a symbol war which I deplore! Women bear great burden of war; we should have voice in decisions. We must have suffrage! If women could vote, war would be no more, nor saloons, cigars, cuspidors. (Spittoon)

Perhaps P.E.O. could grow to be a force for peace. We must take in new members to carry on after we graduate, or maybe we can take P.E.O. with us and form new Societies wherever we go to live.

I have had a small part in organizing our P.E.O. Society after Hattie and I thought of it. Mother helped us make our ruffled aprons, finest percale at 75 cents a yard, with the flap on the bib to display our star.

But I plan to work for greater things for P.E.O. I would love to raise a fund to help girls go to college. May found a college of our own!

P.E.O. is just beginning. It must grow!

ELLA STEWARD, HER DIARY

Dear Diary,

It is late. I am so tired, but must keep my book up to date. A sniff of my favorite scent of violets will help. I left for classes very early this morning, I had to work hard this evening – make butter. (Love using the mold with the acorns and oak left imprint), clean lamp chimneys and stuff the bed ticks full of straw for the boarders. The cold comes right through tonight!

Then Mother called me to help with my sick little brother. I am glad I can but John Ruskin’s Essays may have to wait until tomorrow night and my beloved Dickens

until Saturday. I hear there are crowds waiting to hear Dickens in Steinway Hall. Wish I could go to hear him but like the other six of us, I have never been more than 50 miles from Mt. Pleasant and probably never will. I am reconciled to spending my life with Mother and hope to teach in the Reform School or the Boys' Industrial School or in some kind of social service. I have known love once and will never again!

I forgot to write about our P.E.O. Society's proud entrance into Chapel the other day. We had crowded into the small janitor's closet just outside the Chapel door and as the last stroke of the bell rang we marched into Chapel wearing our pins and our pretty white aprons, ahead of the I.C.'s in their plain blue calico!

We lack many things to be a proper Society. We don't even have a gavel and use a large crochet hook. But we are working hard! I am pleased the Sisters accepted my suggestions for our colors – my favorites.

I feel sure our Society will endure of our life time. But I wonder if P.E.O. will die with us?

Stand to read the following poem:

Across the years we reach our hands
And holding yours we walk in memory
And friendship eer stronger grows.
We speak of you with love, behold the star glow
That lights all our heats.
In buoyant life, you journey with us still
Assured and proud that we your hopes fulfill;
A challenge to us every day.

And so, today we have remembered!

Evelyn Cranston
Chapter DX, Texas
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