

The
P.E.O.
Rainbow
Quilt

Margaret Stiles Storm
January 20, 2005
Chapter AC, P.E.O.
Canon City, Colorado

The P.E.O. Rainbow Quilt

Since the dawn of history, a rainbow has signified promise. Through every age man has lifted his eyes to see the rainbow when a shower has ended or a storm was over. Shimmering there in its beauty, it has brought hope - the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Through legend, song and story, it has become a symbol in our lives.

Whenever I see a beautiful quilt like this one, my mind conjures up many thoughts - the hours of work that went into its creation by many hands; the hours of planning, finding just the right pattern, then just the right calico with shades to blend well; the hours of cutting material into different shapes to make a pattern; then finally, all the stitching to create a work of art as lovely as this.

Quilts can bring to mind happy memories to those families who are fortunate enough to own one. Thoughts of women from past generations who would utilize scraps of new material from sewn garments or old pieces from discarded clothing to fashion their families; quilts - many to become heirlooms cherished by succeeding generations. These were truly "labors of love".

Our organization is like that of a quilt's creation - the pattern thought up and stitched by the loving hands of seven very dear sisters whom we remember tonight. Their handiwork has been passed down for generations only to become more cherished and appreciated as the years go by and as our sisterhood increases.

A perfect rainbow is a bright span of color made up of vivid tones and delicate hues; in the same pattern it takes the individual qualities of many different women to form our sisterhood. Sir Isaac Newton proved in 1670 that color evolves from light and that light is refracted as well as dispersed. He designed a color chart for which he chose seven colors - red, orange, yellow, blue, green, violet and purple. He correlated the number of colors with the seven planets known to ancients, and to the seven tones of the diatonic scale. Seven has been a mystic number, and we can add the seven theological pillars of Christianity; Love and Hope, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. Add Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, Patience, Godliness, and Kindness. We then have the mysterious choice of the seven founders in their guiding principles evidenced in our Objects and Aims.

We need strength and driving force as the rainbow needs primary

colors, but we also need tact and gentleness. We need women of action with keen, practical minds, but we must have those who inspire us with their quiet ways. We need the wisdom of age as well as the enthusiasm of youth. We need skilled hands and those with a loving touch. We need leaders, but we could not exist without those who follow.

Then there are those little rainbows: have you seen one glimmer in a dewdrop in the early morning or in the flash of a diamond or in a teardrop before a smile? It takes only a bright shaft of light to bring out their prismatic colors. Just so, the warmth of love and understanding in chapter life brings out the shining qualities sometimes hidden in our sisters. Without the sun there would be no rainbow; without the bright spirit of dedication in the heart of each of us, there could be no P.E.O.

136 years ago, seven girls - fun-loving, happy and carefree - agreed to form a society of their own. For most of them, their college days would soon be over. The years of study, work, and play, when they had shared in joys and sorrows, were almost ended. They had been drawn to each other in their hopes and dreams and ideals; they were held together by strong bonds of respect, trust and affection. Time was as fleeting as the rainbow's glory; they could not always stand shoulder to shoulder, so they joined their hearts in a pledge of lasting friendship. On that January morning in 1869, they took solemn vows together, and the spirit of P.E.O. came into being.

Let's take a look at the cultural climate of the 19th century. It was the height of the Victorian era and in this completely male-dominated society only boys were considered worth educating. The prevailing attitude was that a young lady's primary function was to marry and produce children. "A girl only needs enough reading to study her Bible, enough arithmetic to count her egg money and enough geography to find her way around the kitchen." It is truly remarkable that our seven founders were in college in the first place, a rare, exceptional group of girls.

In making our quilt, these founders with their colorful personalities and shades of various talents seem to blend beautifully to create the pattern for P.E.O. There are seven colors in a rainbow; there were seven founders in P.E.O. Seven girls so individually different, but banded together, they created a perfect whole. Through the colors of the rainbow and the pattern of the quilt, the attributes of these seven come shining through as we honor their memory of that day, January 21, 1869.

Take down ribbon from Founder's picture to correspond to the color about which the speaker is speaking. Light candle of same color.

Red. Red is for power and fire. Red is for Alice Bird Babb. Allie, as she was called, was cheerful and bright, exciting and stimulating with vitality and action. Allie was a writer on many subjects and an avid reader. She prepared our sisterhood's first constitution and composed the oath. She was elected President on that first day and held office for three years. She was Associate Editor of the P.E.O. Record. At age 63, Allie was stricken with a terrible disease that bared the nerves of fingers and was extremely painful. She lived to be 76, a scholar to the end of her days. Alice died November 21, 1926, and was buried in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. In her wisdom and knowledge, she gave inner strength to the structure of our Sisterhood, her life underscored and gave a depth of quality to the charm, sweetness, and talent of the other founders.

Blue. Mary Allen Stafford's blue symbolizes heaven constancy, truth, peace, spirituality and tranquility. Mary was the first to wear the star in public. To her, Christianity was a practical means of solution for all the problems of life. She had great strength of character and yet gave happiness to all about her with her friendly, loving ways. She stressed the importance of proper procedure in conducting the business meetings. She served P.E.O. all her life and was the last of the seven founders to leave us. Mary died at her home in Muscatine, Iowa, July 10, 1927, at the age of 79. It was she who said, "It is for each of us to make the world better and happier. For this, P.E.O. is love in action."

Yellow. Yellow is for Hattie Briggs Bousquet, for her sunshiny quality, courage and initiative. She was the first to dream of P.E.O., suggested the society to a friend and served the first group as treasurer. She was a sweet and understanding woman but lived less than a decade after graduation. Her life was full and happy with her husband and two small sons. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister, and of the seven she was the one most radiant of spirit and greatly loved by all. Hattie died June 22, 1877, at the age of 28 of a mysterious illness.

Green. Green, the symbol of life, spring, hope, joy and tranquility, and music is for Alice Virginia Coffin. It was she who realizing the idea needed life, and the crystallization of a special symbol, suggested the star as our emblem, wearing it with flair - on her shoulder or in her hair. Alice was the first Vice-President and is remembered as strong and independent. She was a tall, graceful girl with a distinguished ancestry, which traced back to the Mayflower. She loved poetry of motion, and it was said "her Methodist foot was in grave danger under the spell of rhythmic motion and general

merriment.” Because she enjoyed dancing, she left the Methodist church to affiliate with the Episcopalians where she was an active participant in church activities. Alice taught for twenty years in the Iowa public schools, always encouraging talent wherever she saw it, and was a source of great inspirations. She often gave money to help deserving students - thus the forerunner of our scholarship funds. Alice suffered from Bright’s disease for many years and died July 28, 1888, at the age of 40.

Orange. Bright orange for Suela (pronounced “Sue—eel—ah”) Pearson Penfield. She was the prettiest of the seven. She had the finest clothes, the most beaus, and the most of this world’s goods. Her father was a physician and her mother was related to President McKinley She was only a sophomore in 1869, yet she was chosen for her cheerful, happy ways and the excellence of her artistic talents. She was a famous hostess and a lady with intuitive nobility. She gave generously of her talents in music and dramatics. Her marriage took her to Ohio, and afterwards was rarely seen by her sisters of the original group. She died September 20, 1920, in Cleveland, Ohio, at the age of 69. It was said of her, “Full well she loved the world, but she loved best whatever in the world was loveliest.”

Purple. For Franc Roads Elliot, the color purple, the color of the law. She was the youngest and perhaps the most brilliant of the sisters. Franc had the mind of a statesman and was progressive to the end of a long and useful life. She had far vision and was years ahead of her time in thought and action. She worked diligently with the famous women of her day who believed in equal rights for Women, and was a friend of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Stanton, Lucy Stone, and reformer, Frances Willard. Franc was also a close friend of poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Franc’s mother designed the aprons for the march into the chapel that introduced P.E.O. to the world. While strolling through the gardens of her son’s home in Chicago, Franc died of a heart attack, August 9, 1924. She was 72. Franc gave to P.E.O. the idea of justice and goals for which to strive. Through her vision for a better womanhood, today we have the Educational Loan Fund, Cottey College, Continuing Education and the International Peace Scholarships.

Violet. Although Ella Stewart chose the colors for the new society, her color is the color violet. This color symbolizes love, dignity, patience and sacrifice. Ella did not marry, but she lived with her widowed mother cheerfully caring for her until her death. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister and her philosophy was service to others. Ella taught for years at the State Industrial School for Boys, reclaiming many for

worthwhile citizenship. Such schools were the forerunner of our present juvenile court system. Ella was the first secretary and often kept the meetings from breaking down into “idle” conversation. She was involved in P.E.O. throughout her life and helped organize both Grand Chapter and Supreme Chapter. Ella Stewart’s P.E.O. pin is the only one of the original seven still in existence today. Ella suffered from a long illness with a lung disorder and died December 12, 1894, at the age of 46. In 1887, however, when she attended the fifth annual convention P.E.O. Grand Chapter, she said, “When I think of the past, look at the present, and dream of the future of P.E.O., I am filled with hope and great expectations lure me onward. I trust that our little effort, like the ripples on a lake, will widen and extend until they shall at last touch a shore whose bounds we cannot see:

What have we accomplished in 136 years? From seven, our membership has grown to more than 250,000. From one chapter in a small town in the Midwest, we now have 6,000 chapters in the United States and Canada. Our influence has gone around the world.

Pause – Tie the ribbons and place on top of the flowers in front of the candles.

Pass out daisies to Chapter members.

Our seven sisters left us with a strong foundation of love which continues to bind us together today just as the border on this quilt does for its pattern. The qualities of faith, love, purity, justice and truth combine to make a life, which, also like an heirloom quilt, is a thing of beauty, usefulness, and satisfaction. Guided by the precepts of our Founders, we follow the Star of P.E.O., for, like the rainbow, it gives promise of a brighter tomorrow.

Let us stand, join hands, and sing one verse of “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” As we sing, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals of P.E.O. - may they continue to inspire us today, as they inspired seven young college girls so many years ago.

Presented January 20, 2005
Margaret Stiles Storm
Chapter AC, Past President
Canon City, Colorado

Approximate time: 25 minutes. Visual aides:

1. Quilt
2. Rainbow colored candles
3. Rainbow framed colored pictures of 7 Founders (8" x 10" size)
4. Rainbow colored ribbons to match candles and frames
5. Candelabra
6. Daisies for table and passing to membership

Program adapted from Chapter programs from the states of New Jersey, Michigan, Virginia, Georgia, and Texas. Also information from "A Society of Our Own" by Heidi Johnson, Associate Editor, The P.E.O. Record was used.

FOUNDER'S DAY INVOCATION (written by Margaret B. Crane)

Our Heavenly Father,

As we are gathered here tonight in memory of our beloved founders, our thoughts turn to Thee in loving gratitude for our countless blessings.

Grant that we may feel our Sisterhood to be one of these blessings, for in endeavoring to understand and keep its vows, we are brought nearer to Thee.

And as our seven founders looked to Thee for guidance in establishing those spiritual ideals for which our Sisterhood stands, so may we look to Thee for guidance in maintaining those ideals.

May we look to Thee as our ever present help in all things, always keeping before us the example of our Master, Christ Jesus.

We know that only "in Thy light shall we see light," and may it be Light which is Thine, not only in P.E.O., but in our daily living.

Let the qualities of Faith, Love, Purity, Justice, and Truth, be established in us, and may Thy Word enrich and govern the life of every P.E.O.

Amen.

