

**Founders' Day Reader's Theatre (Reviewed May, 2006)**

*Background piano music. Each of the founding characters, upon cue, will add a certain colored flower to a large vase set in center front stage.*

Hostess: On behalf of the sisters of Chapter \_\_\_\_\_ I would like to welcome you and thank you for joining us today to celebrate Founders' Day. I am and members of our program are:

Narrator: P.E.O. - a living drama started 123 years ago with seven good friends - college students who were taken aback by the sorority situation at Iowa Wesleyan College. It didn't seem to these enlightened women that the Greek sororities made the kinds of contributions to society and their members that were significant. They decided to create their own sisterhood to address their concerns for a quality life style. I'd like to introduce our founders:

Narrator: **Ella Stewart**, the daughter of a Methodist minister, attended Iowa Wesleyan for three years, (Ella enters, carrying a blue flower.) She was the local instrumental music teacher around Mt. Pleasant. Her Irish wit and quick repartee were most enjoyable. Ella had an instinct for social service, you know, helping out the needy and tending the the aged and infirmed. So, in 1874 she became a teacher in the Boys Industrial School of Eldora, Iowa - a reformatory. By gaining the confidence of the pupils, she raised their standards of living and gave them higher ideals to attain. So marked was her influence upon the boys that they started a collection of books in her honor, and many of the boys became honorable, useful citizens through her influence.

Ella: I have always valued truth. At school, I would not tolerate the perpetration of untruths by the students. If one lives in truth, one walks with virtue. I bring this blue to symbolize truth and the importance of honesty among sisters.

Narrator: **Alice Bird Babb** was a brilliant student with a real literary flair - she wrote the first P.E.O. Constitution and took the first oath. (Alice enters carrying an orange flower.) P.E.O. was her child and she was in closer touch with it for a longer period than any of the seven. From 1872 to 1876 she taught Latin and Greek at Iowa Wesleyan. After her marriage she instituted the custom of giving class plays at Iowa Wesleyan and directed them for years. She wrote for magazines and was associate editor of the P.E.O. Record. Judge Babb and Alice's homelife was ideal, cultured, hospitable, and generous. It was always open to the lonely, homesick student, who always received encouragement and assistance from a visit with them and their four children. Alice demonstrated that a woman had a right to self-fulfillment along with her home duties.

Alice: If something is to succeed, one must be committed to it. For a successful home, one must be committed to the success of each of the family members. And for a woman to be successful outside of the home she must be committed to the value of her endeavor. I bring this orange as a symbol of our commitment to P.E.O. and to each other.

Narrator: The ritual of our sisterhood would not be complete without music and our opening ode. Here is the first of three versions. (\_\_\_\_\_ will sing to taped music.)

Narrator: **Hattie Briggs Bousquet** had courage and initiative. In fact, she was the one to say, "Let's have a society of our own!" (Hattie enters carrying a white flower.) Her father, being a Methodist preacher, may have had something to do with Hattie being of a serious turn of mind. She was plain of face, with a heart of gold, and true as steel. Her marriage to Henry Bousquet brought two fine sons to Hattie, but not being very rugged, she passed away only eight years after the founding of P.E.O.

Hattie: To ensure the confidence and grace that each of us exemplifies, purity is essential - purity of heart and purity of thought. Purity in terms of oneness, singleness of purpose and value in the process. As a symbol of purity I bring the white \_\_\_\_\_ to add to our bouquet of dreams.

Narrator: **Alice Virginia Coffin** came to Mt. Pleasant as a student of Iowa Wesleyan. (Enter Alice carrying a red flower.) She was a Southern girl and an orphan, tall straight and handsome, always immaculately groomed. She was greatly loved and admired. It was she who proposed the star as our emblem. Alice never married and devoted her time to teaching, and was the inspiration of her pupils for a better and higher education. She often provided money to help deserving students, thus was forerunner of our scholarship funds.

Alice: The greatest of the gifts is love. For love binds us together and allows us the freedom to accept others. To give and receive love makes life worthwhile. This red symbolizes the love that has been given to me, and in turn I give to you.

Narrator: **Suela Pearson Penfield**, the bright, vivacious girl, was the only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Pearson and related to President McKinley (Enter Suela carrying greenery.) She was by far the most beautiful of the founders and was also intelligent, charming and a talented singer. Her marriage brought her wealth and position and she became a leader in philanthropic and social circles of Cleveland.

Suela: Each of us must learn to use the talents we possess. Each of us must contribute to the P.E.O. symphony of talent, and know that our part is important - whether we are the individual blooms or the greenery that binds the bouquet together. Our talents, in concert with others, makes the dream possible.

Narrator: Suela was a talented young woman with a love of music. I think she would have approved of the revision of the opening ode. (\_\_\_\_\_ sings the second version.)

Narrator: **Mary Allen Stafford** studied the classics at Iowa Wesleyan. (Enter Mary carrying a yellow flower..) In 1871 she married Charles Stafford, an ordained minister. Dr. and Mrs. Stafford were always lovers and worked hand in hand among the members of his parish. She was an active participant in P.E.O. all of her life and attended many of the state conventions. She especially enhanced the image of our sisterhood while her husband served as president of Iowa Wesleyan from 1891 to 1899.

Mary: It is faith that keeps the dream alive - faith in ourselves, faith in our sisters, and faith that PEO will continue to be a viable and rewarding organization. This yellow \_\_\_\_\_ symbolizes our faith.

Narrator: **Franc Roads Elliott** was the most progressive and visionary of the founders. (Enter Franc carrying a purple flower.) She taught art in the public schools and even established a model classroom in Aurora, Illinois, that attracted wide attention and pioneered in doing away with stark and unsanitary conditions in the schools. She became an area supervisor in Lincoln, Nebraska, Salt Lake City and in Illinois. Life-long challenges to Franc were the advancement of women and to change social conditions. As a crusader she counted as her friends the great activists, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Frances Willard, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1884 Franc represented Nebraska as assistant commissioner of art at the New Orleans Exposition, the first time that women were named to such a commission. She worked tirelessly to secure for women the right to a seat and a vote in the general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Franc: There is so much injustice in the world that each of us must promote justice and just causes at all times. We must be wary of the influences that sway us from the path of justice. This purple \_\_\_\_\_ symbolizes our quest for justice.

Narrator: It seems simple to me. Seven good friends joined together to form a sisterhood that would have a positive influence on its members and their communities. It was their dream to have others join and strengthen the bonds and influence. We can only pray that their ideals will continue to stand the test of time. One of the ways to insure continuation is to present the ideals in modern, up-to-date formats. The opening ode has once again been given a face lift -- here for your pleasure ~ will sing the newest version.)

Hostess: Our sisterhood is truly noble and worthwhile. We can see that the bouquet of our founders lives in today's chapters of P.E.O. We have come together, each with a contribution and commitment -to ourselves and each other. We have a strong constitution and our mission is stated clearly. To live the P.E.O. aims is the truest way to encourage others to do the same - by example. May God be with us and our sisterhood.

*Written by Gini Hale, Chapter FA, Brighton, CO. Source of the material was the P.E.O. Record and excerpts from other Founder Day programs. Other P.E.O. Chapters are welcome to use this reader's theater and make changes as desired.*



