

Founders' Day Observance

Two narrators are at each end of the candles.

First Reader: Let us take a long look back. We see in 1869, on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan University in Mount Pleasant Iowa, seven young girls filled with exuberance and vitality, planning and working to form a society of their own. Too often we lose sight of the fact that these girls were young and ambitious, filled with the enthusiasm and ability to accomplish great things in a short space of time – the blessing of youth. These young women were set apart by the very fact that they were seeking a college education in a day when few women had the courage to make such an effort. Each girl had strength of character and insight beyond her years and experience. As the seven young girls met that afternoon of January 21, 1869, in the music room of Old Main on the college campus, they were pioneers, also, in even attempting to organize a women's society, for at that time there were few such groupings of women in the entire world.

Second Reader: We celebrate more than 100 years of association by thousands of women in a lasting relationship – a relationship which emerges as unique – because it is guided by the basic strength of the seven founders. The candles which we light tonight are an old-fashioned symbol. They belong not to our fast-moving culture, but to an era when they served an important function, along with such necessities as horse-drawn buggies, the pot-bellied stove, iron pots and high-topped shoes, and music boxes. Most of these useful old things have long ago been discarded by us. Change is a rule of life.

First Reader: **P.E.O.** soon chose to expand off campus. Today, P.E.O. has grown from that tiny membership of seven to more than a quarter of a million members, in chapters throughout the U.S. and Canada, with headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa. Some things do not change – they will always remain the same. We have always had the same name, the same star, and the same intangible characteristics in our association with each other. This is still the same, a quality maintained since its introduction into the first chapter by our seven founders.

Second Reader: To this organization of P.E.O., each founder brought her own special gift of character and personality. So strong has been the power of each gift that these characteristics remain today a vital and important part of each chapter and each member.

First Reader lights first candle, and continues reading.

Hattie Briggs was the first to dream of P.E.O. Calm, winning of manner, quiet, an eager follower, she brings the willingness to serve. Hattie had the courage of conviction. It was she who said, "Let's form a society of our own!", then on that very day helped assemble the seven dear friends to make plans for organization.

Four years later Hattie Briggs married Henry L. Bousquet, a cashier at the Pella

National Bank of Iowa. Hattie's father, the Rev. E.F. Briggs, officiated at the ceremony. Hattie was shy, but she enjoyed debate and quick repartee with never a sting of malice. As a trained musician she put "soul" into a hymn, and filled her home with love and song. She lived in P.E.O. but eight years, the first to leave the earthly circle.

Second Reader: We understand people better when we know the conditions shaping their thoughts and actions. While Hattie Briggs dreamed of a new organization, who were the national and world-wide leaders serving their countries? Andrew Johnson was just ending his term as 17th president and Ulysses S. Grant was inaugurated. Napoleon III ruled France, and Victoria ruled Great Britain with advice from that able statesman, William Gladstone.

First Reader lights 2nd candle, and reads:

Alice Virginia Coffin was a southern blonde who was poised and always beautifully groomed. Alice, of idealistic nature, is credited with choosing the star as the talisman of our society. She made a career of teaching and often provided funds from her own purse to help deserving scholars. These gifts were always given in such a way that would not embarrass the recipient. The inspiration of Alice Virginia Coffin was as enduring as our flower, the marguerite.

Second Reader: McGuffey's Readers were used in the schools, and McGuffey himself was teaching moral philosophy at the University of Virginia. Two men who became prominent educators later were living then: John Dewey was 10 years old and Booker T. Washington had only recently been freed from slavery.

First Reader lights 3rd candle, and reads:

Ella Stewart was enthusiastic and energetic. She worked in the rehabilitation of delinquent boys. She brings us joy and love in giving of ourselves for others. Sturdy and graceful was Ella Stewart, the daughter of a Methodist minister, who was reared in an atmosphere of service to others. Ella was the founder who proposed great things, then entered heart and soul into carrying them to conclusion. She administered the pledge to Alice Bird and installed her as the first president. Then Alice presided at the initiation of the other six.

Ella attended Iowa Wesleyan for 3 years, then became a teacher of instrumental music in Mt. Pleasant and surrounding towns. In 1874 she became a teacher in the Boys' Industrial School of Eldora, Iowa, a "reformatory" that represented an innovation in education for its time. Ella's teaching and example inspired many a delinquent boy to become a man of honor.

Second Reader: One of the most delinquent boys of all times was going strong that year. Jesse James was robbing banks, but hadn't yet started on trains. However, on the other side of law and order, a young man at the beginning of a brilliant career as lawyer

and jurist was Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The 14th Amendment giving freedom to the slaves had just been passed.

First Reader lights 4th candle, and reads:

Franc Roads was a woman of vision who, with her keen intellect and humor would have made a fine modern woman. She planned a model schoolroom and taught art. She brings us the gift of culture. Franc was the girl of far vision and progressive spirit, a beauty with classic features and artistic nature. She taught art in the public schools, establishing a model classroom in Aurora, Illinois, that pioneered in doing away with stark and unsanitary conditions in the schools. Later, she served as supervisor of art in Lincoln, Nebraska, in Salt Lake City, and in Chicago.

In 1884 Franc was appointed a representative of Nebraska on the Commission for the New Orleans World Exposition, one of the first women to serve in such a capacity. She was among the leaders who labored for seventeen years to see women admitted to the General Council of the Methodist Church.

Franc Roads married Simon E. Elliott, son of Dr. Charles Elliott, who was twice president of Iowa Wesleyan College. Neither financial reverses nor the care of an invalid husband quenched her enthusiasm for life. Throughout her 72 years, she continued to draw about her forward-thinking men and women, both young and old.

Second Reader: Also in the field of fine arts, Charles Dickens was nearing the end of an illustrious career. We do not ordinarily include inventors in lists of artists and writers, but inventors dream dreams, too, and one inventor who was seeing his dream materialize that year was Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the reaper.

First Reader lights 5th candle, and reads:

Suela Pearson brings us gracious living. She was a belle and a beauty, with a lovely voice and a gay and tender attitude toward life. She was the group's beauty, with brown eyes and dancing curls. Her social grace, intelligence, and singing made her a favorite of all. Shortly after she was graduated from Iowa Wesleyan, she and her family moved East, where Suela continued musical studies and voice training.

We are told that Suela was riding on a street car in Cleveland when a Mr. Penfield saw her and became so enamored with her charms that he hurriedly arranged an introduction, and followed through with a devoted courtship that led to their marriage. With wealth and position Suela Pearson Penfield soon became a leader in philanthropic and social circles at Cleveland.

Second Reader: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the poet, had many of his poems set to music. Mrs. Pearson may have sung his "Crossing the Bar" or "Ring Out, Wild Bells."

First Reader lights 6th candle, and reads:

Mary Allen approached the problems of life from a spiritual point of view. Her faith in God gave her stability, and a gift for friendship, as well as a sense of humor. Her

gift is faith.

Mary was beautiful, tall, slender, graceful and poised. Much of the early P.E.O. happened in the Allen home at Mt. Pleasant. She received an AB degree from Iowa Wesleyan and was granted an honorary AM degree by her alma mater in 1872, a customary procedure providing graduates had been successful in their chosen field of endeavor the 3 years following graduation. She married Mr. Stafford, also an Iowa Wesleyan graduate and an ordained Methodist minister. They served 56 wonderful, useful years together. Dr. Stafford also served as president of Iowa Wesleyan from 1891-1899. Mary's delightful sense of humor brought joy into their home and ministry.

They had 4 children. They lived in 10 different towns in Iowa during their lifetime. Many of these towns had no P.E.O. Chapters, but Mary maintained her interest in P.E.O. Mary belonged to 4 Iowa chapters and was a beloved member of each. She often stressed the importance of proper procedure in conducting business meetings and the necessity for good order. At one time she stated, "We are but undisciplined if we cannot endure the quiet restraint of listening." Practical Christianity was a natural way of life for Mary.

Second Reader: It is too bad that Mary Allen with her deep faith in God and interest in mankind did not know two great humanitarians who blossomed a few years later. Marie Curie was 2 years old that year, and the Mayo brothers were 4 and 7 years of age.

First Reader lights 7th candle and reads:

Alice Bird had a scholar's mind, and talent in writing and speaking. She was witty and youthful all her life. She teaches us love of learning. It was she who created the vow and the constitution of our sisterhood – to give expression to the dreams of others. Alice, with her dark hair, was the literary one, with charming wit and happy humor. Since she could recite entire pages from the classics by memory, she had the vocabulary and ready pen to write that first constitution, the pledge of membership.

After Alice became the wife of Washington Irving Babb, their home was a mecca for the literary of Mt. Pleasant throughout the 52 years of their married life. Alice instigated the custom of giving class plays at Iowa Wesleyan and directed them for 17 years. She was associate editor of The P.E.O. Record for many years, writing under the pen name of Avis. Alice Bird Babb knew that "Whoever acquired knowledge and does not use it, resembles she who plows her garden and leaves it unsown."

Second Reader: It has been said if you want to know what was going on in a country at any particular time, read the great poetry of that age. There were a number of great poets living during this era. To the name of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, add Emily Dickinson who was 39 that year, and Walt Whitman, age 50. Older but still actively writing were Henry W. Longfellow and John Greenleaf Whittier, the "Quaker Poet." The very next year Whittier would die as would Charles Dickens.

First Reader: The seven were just girls, but the maturity of their idea belies their ages. There is always a reason something survives and reaches greatness – simplicity,

sincerity, universal need and longing may make it so. Thus these seven left a heritage to the world: Joy, Love of Learning, Idealism, Service, Gracious Living, Culture, and Faith in God.

Second Reader: Let us pledge anew our devotion to the dream, and to each other as sisters, and to the generations to come, knowing that if we can only plant the idea in the spring of each generation, human relationships will be better, and love will inherit the world.

The End

Chapter O of Colorado has asked that this program be added to the State Files. It was written by an Iowa P.E.O., Helen Johnston of Chapter KI, and adapted by Ruth Jones, Chapter O.

For a large program (Reciprocity or Convention, for instance) seven women should represent the Founders, each lighting her candle as the part is read.

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