History Book Committee Presents

P.E.O. IN TEXAS

Presented at the 2013 Convention of Texas State Chapter
May 4, 2013 – Tyler

Cast

Mary Florence Cowell, A, president  Jane Minkley-Baker, AK
Ruth Delzell, B, first vice president  Suzon Adam, P
Vassie Shafer, H, second vice president  Gloria Hall, DX
Alvina Mottinger, N, organizer  Annette Nall, Z
Edith Henderson, E, recording secretary  Pam Walker, FI
Mae McLarn, G, corresponding secretary  Janice Langley, HY
Nellie Chenoweth, L, treasurer  Nell Belanger, HD
Reporter, Houston Chronicle, Mrs. Field  Tracy Fiers, FS
Rebecca Simpson Cowell, young, older  Aileen Gauntt, DE
Helen Lapat, P, song leader  Carol Wiener, AC
Power point/usher  Jean Hillyer, IA

Scene One. Patio of the Warwick Hotel, March 25, 1930

[When using the skit without the power point, a narrator should give a short introduction to the skit.  Power point instructions are in blue and can be ignored if only using the skit.]

Narrator. In 1930, Texas State Chapter held its first convention in Houston, Texas, at the newly opened Warwick Hotel. Texas P.E.O.s came together for the second time, the first being at the convocation of 1928 in Whitesboro. The Houston Chronicle reported this special event on March 26, 1930. Our skit today details the interview and photograph made on March 25, 1930, the opening day of convention.

[Microphones carried in by Mrs. Field and Mrs. Henderson, if done in a small group, no microphones would be necessary]

1. Opening Slide up on screen during break
2. Before committee moves to the stage click one time to go to blank blue slide
3. As Aileen, Annette, Neva and Carol begin to move on stage and take seats, click for title page again and then immediately go on to click for slide 2
4. Slide 2,3,4,5: Images of Houston and hotel Each of these 10 seconds on screen.

[Officers enter from stage left – Mrs. Field from stage right.]

When Mrs. Field says her first line click for Slide 6: newspaper clippings

Mrs. Field.  Mrs. Cowell, I am Mrs. Field from the Houston Chronicle. I have set up for the photo over here.  You sit in the center.

[Officers sit on front row and stand on second row for photo]
Mrs. Field makes adjustments and takes the position for making a photo. As she pushes the button, a click is heard and a flash appears on screen.

{Slide 7: when the click is heard and a flash of light and then a blue screen appears.}
{Immediately click}
{Slide 8: photo of the officers appears}

[Front row remains seated except for Mrs. Cowell back row sits as Mrs. Cowell and Mrs. Field move to left stage]

Mrs. Cowell. [To Mrs. Field]
It is very nice to meet you. Can we do the interview over there? The officers need to return to the convention hall.

[Officers remain in place, seated]

Mrs. Field. Thank you for taking time from the proceedings for a photo and to visit with me. First let me be sure we have the names of the officers for the article. On the back row:
Mrs. Cowell. First was Edith Henderson, Chapter E, Houston, recording secretary

{Slide 9, Edith}
[Edith stands in place]

Edith. “If P.E.O. means more to any of you, if the vision is clearer, if we have been able to maintain unity and to feel in all things charity, we have grown in the grace of our Sisterhood. The progress of our Sisterhood is the idealism, loyalty and devotion of its vast membership.”
[Edith O. Henderson, 1934 Annual Report of the President of Texas State Chapter.]

Mrs. Cowell. Next was Mae McLarn, Chapter G, Fort Worth, corresponding secretary

{Slide 10, Mae}
[Mae stands in place]

Mae. “This year will always stand out in my memory. I shall never be able to tuck it away in my cedar chest of memories but shall have to keep it sitting on top like a rare ornament.”
[Mae McLarn, 1937 Annual Report of the President of Texas State Chapter.]

Mrs. Cowell. Next was Alvina Mottinger, Chapter N, El Paso, organizer

{Slide 11, Alvina}
[Alvina stands in place]
**Alvina.** “The state board is a collection of jewels. Every member has been loyal, helpful and sympathetic. Our ‘round robin’ letters have been a source of joy and helpfulness. They have made it possible for us to become intimately acquainted. We have established friendships which will last always.”
[Alvina Mottinger, 1936 Annual Report of the President of Texas State Chapter.]

**Mrs. Cowell.** Last on the back row was Nellie Chenoweth, Chapter L, San Benito, treasurer.

{Slide 12, Nellie}
[Nellie stands in place.]

**Nellie.**

Beginning Balance November 24, 1928, received from Supreme Chapter - $250.00.
Total Receipts From October 25, 1928 to March 24, 1930 - $3547.25
Total Disbursements same dates - $2007.36
Balance on hand, March 24, 1930 - $1,539.89

**Mrs. Cowell.** On the front row on my right was Ruth Delzell, Chapter B, Amarillo, first vice president.

{Slide 13, Ruth}
[Ruth stands in place]

**Ruth.** “The members of the executive board live between 600 and 1,000 miles away, the latter being the distance from the Treasurer’s home. There are now four chapters in the state that are more than 1,000 miles away from the president’s office. These matters of distance must always be considered in our state program.”
[Ruth Delzell, 1931 Annual Report of the President of Texas State Chapter]

**Mrs. Cowell.** On my left was Vassie Shafer, Chapter H, San Antonio, second vice president.

{Slide 14, Vassie}
[Vassie stands in place]

**Vassie.** “Growth is not so much the organization of chapters and the initiation of members; growth is rather a development of ideals, the strengthening of character, a development of confidence, loyalty and love. It is these intangible things, the soul-satisfying things, that make our Sisterhood so worthwhile. We know that the successes of tomorrow depend upon the experiences of today. Success is not a destination; it is a journey. As we go along in our journey in P.E.O., the details and anxieties of work are forgotten; the memory of the good things remains; we are strengthened and helped for the days to come.”
[Vassie Shafer, 1932 Annual Report of the President of Texas State Chapter]
Mrs. Field. Thank you. Would you begin by telling me a little about your self and your family? Where are you from?

{Slide 15, Photo of Mary Florence Cowell, 1930}

Mrs. Cowell. I was born in Vernon County, Missouri in 1860. My father was a pioneer physician in Missouri. I married Mr. Silas Cowell in 1887 when I was 27. We have one son, Harry, born in 1888.

Mrs. Field. When did you arrive in Texas?

{Slide 16: Photo of Mary Florence Cowell, 1902}

Mrs. Cowell. In 1902, Mr. Cowell came to work in the bank in Whitesboro. Whitesboro had about 1,000 people then. When we moved, our son, Harry, was 14 and was anxious to make friends. The first week we arrived, three sisters, the Simpson girls, were having a party and they invited Harry. He made friends right away.

{Slide 17: Photo of Simpson girls with initiation dates} click on this when I say Simpson girls above and leave until I end the next sentence “tells this story.” Then click to 18.

Harry and Rebecca Simpson were closest in age and became friends and later Rebecca tells this story.

{Slide 18: Photo of young Rebecca}
[Rebecca walks to the microphone at a podium]

Rebecca. “I remember when Mr. and Mrs. Cowell came to Texas and to our small town of Whitesboro accompanied by their young son, Harry. I was about 13 years old; and, of course, to all the young girls in town a new boy was very exciting. I was planning a party for Friday night, so I extended an invitation to the new boy. Well, I was a little sorry because I had planned a “tacky party,” but all the kids were getting tacky costumes so I went on with the plans. Harry had been in town only a few days so had no time to plan; but showing his ingenuity; he just wore his coat wrong side out. I looked tacky with my hair in pigtails and bows.”

[Rebecca remains at podium for next part]

Mrs. Cowell. Harry and Rebecca married in 1910 and I have two granddaughters, Mary Elizabeth, “Libby” and Josephine Harriet, “Joharrie.”

{Slide 19: Photo of Rebecca and girls} click on this slide when I begin with “Harry and Rebecca …” Leave it up until after the laughter of Mrs. Field.
I hope they will become P.E.O.s when they finish college. Maybe there will be future generations, too. [Laughter]

{Slide 20: Photo Libby and Joharrie, 1920} Click on this as soon as Rebecca begins “Harry and I”

Rebecca. Harry and I have two daughters, Mary Elizabeth, Libby, and Josephine Harriet, Joharrie. Both became P.E.O.s. Our daughter Libby married George Ponsford in 1936 and they have one daughter, Mary Jo Ponsford who was initiated in 1974.

{Slide 21: Photo of Mary Jo Melby in 1974} Leave up until she ends sentence with “Mary Florence Cowell.”

Rebecca. Mary Jo has a son and two daughters, Katherine Elizabeth Melby and Mary Victoria Melby, great-great granddaughters of Mary Florence Cowell.

{Slide 22: Photo of generations}

Rebecca. In 1989, the great-great granddaughters became P.E.O.s. [Rebecca returns to her seat] [Small pause]

Mrs. Field. When did you become a P.E.O.?

{Slide 23: Photo of Mary Florence, 1899; image from The Record}

Mrs. Cowell. I was initiated into P.E.O. in April 1899, in Garden City, Missouri, Chapter G. I could tell from the beginning that P.E.O. was a worthwhile organization – one that taught the highest ideals and principles to women. I was elected as treasurer of the Missouri Grand Chapter in 1900 and served until August 1901. Several months later, Mr. Cowell and I moved to Whitesboro, TX.

The principles of P.E.O. were not known in TX and I wanted to start a P.E.O. chapter right away but it was several months before I met and knew the women that would be the charter members.

{Slide 24: Photo of Mary Florence, 1902}

Mrs. Field. Now tell me about organizing the state chapter. It was 17 months ago, correct?

{Slide 25: Photo of charter, wait for all chapters to appear} 17 seconds
{Slide 26: Photo of charter, button and program} 7 seconds
Mrs. Cowell. Yes, in Whitesboro. Fourteen Texas chapters organized, Chapters A through O, except for Chapter C that had disbanded in 1921. In the past 17 months, our business has been conducted entirely by letter. My officers have met only twice, once when we organized in Whitesboro and the second time here. You could say we hardly recognize one another.

Mrs. Field. Why did it take 26 years to organize a state chapter?

{Slide 27: Map of chapters, wait for all to load}

Mrs. Cowell. Three main reasons: Distances in Texas are so great, economic hardship of our times, and very few P.E.O.s came to Texas in the early part of the 1900s. We organized only 3 chapters between 1902 and 1920 and one of those disbanded. All three of those chapters were organized in very small towns many miles apart. It wasn’t until the 1920s that P.E.O.s began to arrive in the state in larger numbers and P.E.O. could begin to grow in the larger cities. We organized four chapters in 1921 and two more in 1922. The economic hard times of the 20s placed financial stresses on the individual chapters making it hard to organize a state chapter.

Finally, by 1928, we were strong enough in numbers to organize. I dreamed of a state chapter for many years. I was 42 when Chapter A was organized and now I am 70. It has been a great honor to be the 1st president of Texas State Chapter.

{Slide 28: P.E.O.s in Texas in 1928}10 seconds

Mrs. Field. Tell me about Texas State Chapter now after 17 months.

Mrs. Cowell. We organized three new chapters, P and Q in Houston and Chapter R in Austin.

{Slide 29: Photos of first presidents of P, Q, & R}

We now have 470 active members in Texas
Chapter B, Amarillo is our largest Chapter with 69 members
Chapter O, San Antonio is our fastest growing chapter.
Mrs. Mottinger, our organizer, has a list of another 125 unaffiliated P.E.O.s in Texas so we still have work to do.
At this convention we have 29 delegates, 7 officers and 2 guests – 38
Sixteen of our 17 chapters are present.
Coming up after this break we have the reports of the officers.

[Music begins softly and is played several times as committee sets up to sing.]

Mrs. Field. That is a familiar tune, a Civil War song, I think.
Mrs. Cowell. Yes, it is a P.E.O. tradition to use familiar tunes and write P.E.O. words. The delegates at the convocation used that tune. They wrote new words to show their pride in the new state chapter and also their hope for the future. I must join them now.

Mrs. Field. Thank you for the interview.

[Mrs. Field and Mrs. Cowell move to center stage and all members of the committee join them. Mrs. Lapat moves to the microphone stage right to lead the singing.]

Scene Two. Convention Hall, March 25, 1930

Mrs. Lapat. Please rise. Now we will sing “Texas Will Shine”
Written by the delegates to the convocation in 1928. It is printed in your program. We will sing it two times through and feel free to hold hands at the appropriate time.

[Committee is in line across the stage and holds hands with the line “we’re leading hand in hand”]

Mrs. Lapat. Please be seated.

Mrs. Cowell.
Madam President, Guests of Honor, Members of Convention:
Seventeen months have passed since you, by faith, entrusted to me the care of Texas State Chapter. The joy, that is akin to ecstasy was mine, because twenty-eight years ago I came to your state, where the principles of P.E.O. were not known. From September 4, 1902, till this time, P.E.O. has been both pioneering and prospecting. Pioneering, in extending the territory where our objects and aims have been planted, and prospecting, for the pure gold of our womanhood – as evidenced by the seventeen chapters now in a territory equal to all of the New England states.

I count it an historical event that Chapter A, Texas, was organized in my home and I directed its destiny for the first years of its life.

We hear the term “Magnificent distance.”
You have not experienced it unless you have traveled across Texas. We were therefore a “Magnificent distance” apart.

The business of the year has been carried on exclusively by letter. It being the first year of the Texas State Chapter, there have been no accumulated funds to pass into our treasury. We have been haunted by the fear that our funds would not meet the running expenses. Therefore our watchword has been “economy.”

These fine officers have been most wonderful in all things, business and otherwise. A perfect sympathy, understanding and cooperation has been given me at all times. Though I doubt we should recognize one another, we are the best of friends. A fellowship and friendship has been built up until its precious memory will be carried through life.

The growth in Texas has been gratifying. In the months of May and June came a call from our state organizer for the granting of three dispensations. Texas now outranks or equals nine other State Chapters in the number of active chapters and outnumber six of these states in active membership.

It is the wish of your president and associate officers that each delegate present shall manifest an earnestness of purpose in all deliberations. Let each member listen carefully to each report. You will soon close the doors of this convention, read what is written, that you may be the more able to carry the imprisoned splendor of P.E.O. to others.

Over three doors of the Milan Cathedral are inscribed these words:

“All that which pleases us is for the moment; all that which troubles us is for the moment; that only is important, which is eternal.” The principles of P.E.O. are eternal.

We feel the boundless love of P.E.O. has folded its wings about us for our comfort, should shadows fall across your sunshine.

I now say “Farewell, a word that must be and has been a sound that makes us linger – yet – farewell.”
[All committee members stand and form a line across the stage. Take a bow.]
[On screen Texas Will Shine words]
[Piano begins and committee and audience will sing once through]
[Another bow while last four slides are shown; then off the stage!]

{Slide 41: 85th Anniversary} 5 seconds
{Slide 42: committee} 17 seconds to load
{Slide 43: photo credits} 10 seconds
{Slide 44: 85th Anniversary} 5 seconds