

Seven Stars Over Texas
Dallas Area P.E.O. Council
Founders' Day 2009
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Have you ever wondered why our seven Founders' chose the star as the symbol to represent our P.E.O. Sisterhood? There are over 53 verses in the Bible about stars. Over the heart of most of us here today is a shining gold star, which we proudly wear, because it signifies something special to us. Alice Coffin suggested this as our emblem symbolizing the quest for the highest and best thing life has to offer.

Consider the poem by Helen Steiner Rice, entitled, "Ideals are like Stars."

In this world of casual carelessness
it's discouraging to try
To keep our morals and standards
and our IDEALS HIGH...
We are ridiculed and laughed at
by the smart sophisticate
Who proclaims in brittle banter that such
things are out of date...
But no life is worth the living
unless it's built on truth,
And we lay our life's foundation in
the golden years of youth...
So allow no one to stop you
or hinder you from laying
A firm and strong foundation made of FAITH
AND LOVE AND PRAYING...
And remember that IDEALS are like
STARS UP IN THE SKY,
You can never really reach them,
hanging in the heavens high...
But like the mighty mariner who sailed
the storm-tossed sea,
And used the STARS TO CHART HIS COURSE
with skill and certainty,
You too can CHART YOUR COURSE IN LIFE
with HIGH IDEALS AND LOVE,
For HIGH IDEALS ARE LIKE THE STARS
that light the sky above...
You cannot ever reach them, but
LIFT YOUR HEART UP HIGH
And Your LIFE will be as SHINING as
the STARS UP IN THE SKY.

Our **seven** stars, or Founders', established the same ideals as the foundation of our sisterhood 140 years ago on January 21, 1869. As I began to prepare my message for today, you might say I found divine inspiration. I was in church one Sunday and the pastor made a profound statement, "**Seven** is the number for completion or perfection." The number "**7**" is mentioned 54

times in the book of Revelation and 461 times throughout the entire bible. I started to think about how many times the number “7” appears in P.E.O.:

- **Seven** original Founders
- **Seven** local chapter officers
- **Seven** state chapter officers
- **Seven** is the number required to establish a quorum
- **Seven** is the number of International and State projects, until next year

Hmmm...there are only 5 International officers. Do you think that means they are not perfect?

The number **seven** appears again September 4, 1902, in Whitesboro, Texas, with the organization of Chapter A. The story of how P.E.O. came to Texas began when Mary Florence Cowell, her husband and young son, moved from Queen City, Missouri to Whitesboro. When she left Missouri, Mary Florence was president of Chapter G and also treasurer of the Missouri State Chapter. It is written that she gave up her valued positions and cheerfully followed her husband to a new home. She was very saddened by the fact there were no P.E.O. chapters in Texas. Dora Halleck, who lived in Missouri, and just happened to be organizer of Supreme Chapter, came to Texas for a visit. During her visit a decision was made to organize Chapter A in Whitesboro. Mary Florence chose the Charter List carefully and invited **seven** women to join her. The women were:

Vallie Kennedy

Josie Bolton

Cora Marshall,

Rindah Deleshaw

Minnie English Walker

Laura McJunkins

and Jody Abney

Although a small town in north Texas, 75 miles north of Dallas and 35 miles from the Oklahoma border, Whitesboro's location on the Katy Railroad made it a busy farming center. All trains stopped in Whitesboro and there were 16 passenger trains daily. It was 1907 before another chapter was organized; Chapter B, Amarillo.

P.E.O. continued to grow in Texas, however, twenty-one years after the organization of Chapter A there were still only 8 chapters. Mary Florence Cowell was anxious for a Texas State Chapter. After the required **seven** chapters were organized she asked Supreme for permission to do such. They pointed out to her the vastness of Texas and told her to be patient. Finally in 1928, with fourteen chapters in the state, Zora Y. Knight, President of Supreme Chapter, came to visit Texas, and permission was finally granted. Chapter A had always had the dream to be the hostess chapter for the organization of the State Chapter and held steadfastly to the idea. So the Supreme Board granted their request for the convocation to be held October 25 and 26, 1928. Twelve of the fourteen chapters attended and there were about 50 delegates and guests total. Only Chapters I, Canadian, and F, McAllen, were unable to attend. The convocation was very similar to our current state conventions. There was a round-table discussion on “Growth in P.E.O.”, “Why I Wear My Star”, and “Chapter Harmony.” At the end of the first day, after

announcements, the convocation adjourned and went to the home of Laura McJunkins “for a lovely tea, where sisters from the four corners of the state learned to know each other better.” On October 26, after the report of the credentials committee, the following **seven** officers were elected:

President	Mary Florence Cowell, Chapter A, Whitesboro
First Vice President	Ruth Evans Delzell, Chapter B, Amarillo
Second Vice President	Vassie Shafer, Chapter H, San Antonio
Organizer	Alvina Mottinger, Chapter N, El Paso
Recording Secretary	Edith Henderson, Chapter E, Houston
Corresponding Secretary	Mae McLarn, Chapter G, Fort Worth
Treasurer	Nellie Chenoweth, Chapter L, San Benito

Mary Florence was presented the gavel then declared a recess for Memorial Hour, which was conducted by Katherine Mann, organizer of Supreme Chapter. A **seven**-branched candelabrum held white lighted candles in memorial of the **seven** founders. White carnations were inserted in a large fern wreath centered with a star of gold chrysanthemums as the roll for deceased members was called. After lunch, Mary Florence reconvened the convocation, and Ora B. Miller, president of Supreme Chapter, gave the main address of the meeting, “Just Among Ourselves.” Among the first business transactions was the motion by Ruth Delzell that Texas State Chapter donate \$50.00 to Cottey College. The invitation to the first state convention to be held in Houston in April, 1930, was extended and accepted. With the singing of “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” convocation was adjourned. Then, as Carrie Gilbert, who was one of those to attend that original meeting observed, “Delegates said goodbye just as the sun was setting and left all aglow with inspiration and visions of P.E.O. in Texas.” In 2000, a Texas Historical Marker was dedicated at 500 Charter Street the former home of Mary Florence Cowell in Whitesboro. I would like to again recognize 3 members of Chapter A that traveled from Whitesboro to be with us; Elise Blair, President, Kathy Morgan, and Beverly Brown. We also have a connection to Chapter A right here in Dallas. Vallie Abernathy, BZ, is the daughter of Vallie Kennedy, but she was unable to join us today.

Little did they realize the greatness that was to come. We now have 243 chapters in Texas with over 10,000 members. Just in Dallas Area P.E.O. Council we now have 37 chapters represented. That is a lot of stars in Texas.

The **7** Founders of P.E.O. were each very special stars: Mary Allen, Alice Bird, Hattie Briggs, Alice Coffin, Suela Pearson, Franc Roads, and Ella Stewart. As we gather to celebrate the founding of P.E.O. 140 years ago, let us remember our humble beginning.

Our **7** Founders were close friends and considered to be campus leaders. Some were invited to join a sorority, but declined because all of the seven had not been included in the invitation. Hattie Briggs and Franc Roads sat together on a stile near the southeast corner of the campus, discussing the fraternity system in general, and more specifically their own responsibility for the organizational life on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan University in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Hattie Briggs said, “Let’s form a society of our own.” Franc Roads readily agreed. They were so excited about their idea that they hurried to tell their great friend Mary Allen. Whispered

conferences must have taken place so that they could find the other four friends and share their fabulous idea. Can't you just imagine the excitement these women felt as they embarked upon this daring and secret venture? They all had a common interest in music and so naturally chose the music room for their first meeting. During the first meeting they recognized that they needed a bit of pageantry and an oath of allegiance. Alice Bird was the logical choice to compose something suitable because she was an intellectual and had a tremendous knowledge of literature and a flare for the dramatic. They met again that Thursday afternoon and the seven stood around an old fashioned table, with the Bible on it. Alice Bird was the first to take the vow, which was read to her by Ella Stewart. Alice then read the vow to each of the other six. It was a dramatic moment: simple, and restrained. With that ceremony, P.E.O. was born. Other business that day included naming the society P.E.O., and designating Alice Bird to write a Constitution. They also set the next meeting for the following Saturday, to be at the home of Mary Allen. We have come a long way from Alice's one page Constitution. I do have a sample with me today of what the original Constitution probably looked like, because the original document is not longer in existence. At that Saturday business meeting, many items were discussed and many meetings followed to perfect the organization. Officers were elected, a pin was being fashioned by a local jeweler, and they made plans for their dramatic announcement. It was decided that they should march into chapel wearing matching aprons, adorned with their brand new P.E.O. pins. When they found out the rival I.C. Sorosis girls were planning to march into chapel wearing matching dresses, they hurriedly completed their plans and managed to march, single file, into chapter AHEAD of the I.C.'s.

Through the years, the organization has grown in size and scope but our original seven founders will always shine bright in the heart of P.E.O.s. There are also a few other stars that have figured prominently in the growth of P.E.O. that I would like to remind us about today. Effie Hoffman Rogers, who wrote the P.E.O. Creed, Stella Clapp of Chapter BD, Kansas, who wrote "Out of the Heart: A Century of P.E.O.", Mary Berry, Chapter I, Centerville, Iowa, who in 1883, became the first president of Grand Chapter (Now called International Chapter), Nellie Ambler Campbell, who was largely responsible for the initiatory ceremony approved in 1882, and finally Mary Florence Cowell, who helped bring P.E.O. to Texas in 1902.

Stars have also been symbols of the unattainable. Although our physical hands cannot reach them, we can touch them in other ways. Let stars stand for those things which are ideal in our life. Ella Stewart in 1890 called our star a badge-a reminder of the lessons taught by each point; Faith, Love, Purity, Justice and Truth. Our Sisterhood, as well as the life of each of us, is what we make it. The choice is ours. Let us resolve with God's help to aim high and reach for the stars.