

The  
**PALIMPSEST**

MARCH 1942

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THE EDITOR

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## A Study Club for Men

The Historical and Literary Club has maintained an organization and a program of study at West Union, Iowa, ever since 1880. Composed of fifteen men, the "H. A. L." has been repeatedly claimed, without contradiction, to be the oldest men's study club in Iowa, and indeed so far as local information goes no men's study club anywhere in the United States has a record going further back than this one.

Amazing enough is the fact that one of the club's charter members, H. P. Hancock, still lives at the age of eighty-nine and holds membership in the club, though by reason of his having a winter home in Florida he seldom attends any of the sessions, which continue week by week from November till April. Mr. Hancock came from New York State to Iowa in 1880, and as a young attorney set up an office in West Union, where he has remained ever since, until now, in his sixty-second year of practice in the same town he is the oldest

lawyer in the Thirteenth Judicial District. However, Byron W. Newberry of Strawberry Point, though a year younger, antedates Mr. Hancock in the beginning of his law practice.

Though comings and goings keep the H. A. L. roster changing a good deal in the lower brackets, seniority comes slowly, as will be seen from the dates when some of the members joined — H. P. Hancock in 1880, Frank Camp in 1897, W. J. Rogers in 1898, Walter H. Beall in 1907. After the year last named there is an interval of ten years before the group which has held membership less than a quarter of a century is reached.

Among the names remembered as those of early-day members of the club is that of P. F. Sturgis, whose rugged individuality long molded the club's traditions. He was a merchant and the political boss of Fayette County. Other prominent study club members were Oscar W. Rogers, attorney, inventor, and the first white child born in West Union; C. H. Talmadge, editor of the *West Union Gazette*; F. Y. Whitmore, banker; the Reverend James Mulligan, Catholic pastor; William E. Fuller, Congressman; Walter H. Butler, Congressman; J. B. Knoepfler, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; W. B. Lakin, State Senator; the Reverend W. O. Ruston, Presbyterian pastor; and Thomas L. Green, business man.

Attempts at times to get specific information from Mr. Hancock about the earliest days of the club have not been entirely successful. "The rolling mists of fifty years" had somewhat obscured his recollections even on the semi-centennial occasion in 1930. Perhaps modesty also played a part, for it is highly probable that the original suggestion to organize came from Mr. Hancock himself, because 1880 was his first year out of college, also his first year in West Union, when that tremendous concentration on the written word which is his notable trait was already marked in the set of his nature. All he will say is that "several of us thought we ought to get together and exchange ideas." If the suggestion did not come from Mr. Hancock, then the next best guess would be that it came from P. F. Sturgis, whose devotion to the club and interest in its discussions were perhaps equal to those of Mr. Hancock, though death cut his tenure of membership far shorter.

If any one has been able to say in the past thirty or forty years exactly when and where the first meeting of the H. A. L. club was held, such knowledge is not now available. For many years the meeting place was Mr. Hancock's office, but a change had to be made a few years ago when he began spending his winters at his "Little White House" at Merritt, Florida. The law office of

Antes & Antes is now the place of the sessions. The club at first met on Saturday nights, then Friday, but for forty-five years the meeting night has been on Monday.

On the first written page of the oldest minute book now in possession of the club, the constitution is preceded by the following preamble:

"We, the undersigned, who have associated ourselves together for mutual social benefit, and the cultivation of historical and general literary knowledge, do ordain the following rules and regulations by which we jointly agree to be governed."

The belief is held that when the club was founded it started with fewer than the permitted fifteen names on the roll, but the exact number of the original membership is not known, and it is remembered by present members that as far back as thirty years ago old members were heard to differ in discussion of the question whether certain old-time members were actually on the charter list or not.

After a careful checkup of old minutes, letters from former members, and Mr. Hancock's recollection, the present secretary has put into the records a list of all known members, past and present, living or dead. Of these only seven are reputed to have been on the charter list: H. P. Hancock,

Thomas L. Green, W. B. Lakin, P. F. Sturgis, W. O. Ruston, Oscar W. Rogers, and Charles H. Talmadge.

The written records of the club which have been preserved go back only to 1894, so that no means exist for checking up on the interesting years of the club's infancy. The minutes which have been preserved since 1894 are as a rule brief, telling only when and where the club met, who were present, and who led the discussion. They contain the same items from week to week, with little variety. No record of any of the great battles which were waged in the closed chamber exists except on the dimming tablets of human memory.

Traditions tell, however, of battles over the authorship of the Shakespearean plays which were waged intermittently over a long period, with P. F. Sturgis as the protagonist of the Baconian theory. And one churchman was reputed to have given up his membership because he grew weary of the persistent injection into the discussions by two or three members of their free thinking opinions.

Of programs in the proper use of that word there are none, as each session follows the same pattern — one member speaking as leader on the assigned subject and each of the other members being given a chance to add remarks in turn. For

a time some forty years ago the fashion was to propose questions in debatable form, and once in a while a secretary improved this opportunity to expand the minutes a little. On March 1, 1897, C. A. Diehl wrote: " 'Is Our Country Retrograding?' was discussed with C. A. Diehl as leader. After a heated discussion lasting until a late hour, the club seemed to be of the opinion that the country was safe. The warning voices of the leader and Tom Green availed naught."

Tradition and custom have great force in the H. A. L. Yet in one respect at least the years have wrought a great change. A generation ago an intellectual battle was likely to break out any time at a moment's notice, and the hotter it got the more bragging was done over the success of the session when the members compared notes the next day. Authorities were consulted to back up assertions, and the old subject would be dragged into later discussions to give some worsted debater a comeback. In later years much of the sharp edge of controversy has been dulled.

In these battles the Hon. William E. Fuller, after his return from Washington, D. C., in 1907, gave some of the young members a training which was painful at the moment but highly valuable in the end. He had a well-stored mind from a widely ranging library, besides forty years of per-

sonal acquaintance with hundreds of nationally known public men. Having served as member of the State legislature, Representative in Congress, and Assistant Attorney General of the United States, he was skilled in dialectics. At least one new member, after being taken down the line by Mr. Fuller a few times, came to appreciate Henry Adams's dictum, "In the H. A. L. there is no friend like an authenticated fact."

The club has never had anything like a crisis in its affairs. Though any organization could hardly endure for sixty-two years without having its ups and downs, the H. A. L. has never faced apparent danger of death either from violent quarrels or gradual decay.

The most memorable session of the club was the one held on the fiftieth anniversary in 1930 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Hancock. In the *Argo-Gazette's* account of that occasion it was stated that "the high spot of the evening was when Secretary W. H. Antes read twenty-nine letters and telegrams from former H. A. L. members in eleven States, each recalling club memories of the long ago, and making congratulations to Mr. Hancock the chief burden of the message. Earl Chandler of Seattle, Grant Finch of Danbury, Conn., W. E. Van Buren of St. Cloud, Fla., W. W. Peebles of Alvin, Texas, and Theo von

Rolf and W. W. Comstock of Hollywood, California, boxed the compass from the far corners of the United States, while the concluding greeting was from the Rev. Dr. George Elliott of New York City, editor of the *Methodist Review*, who went back in memory for forty-six years to recall his residence in West Union and his club membership." These greetings were presented to Mr. Hancock in a bound volume.

Among the living ex-members, the most distinguished is the Reverend Merton S. Rice, now of Detroit. Some other former members who at last accounts were still living are the Reverend George Elliott, Detroit; the Reverend John Gammons, Cresco; Dr. Grant E. Finch of Yale University; the Reverend W. G. Crowder, Cedar Falls; Henry L. Adams, Des Moines; King R. Palmer, Des Moines; and C. A. Diehl, Des Moines.

If there is anything that puts complete satisfaction into the breast of a present H. A. L. member, it is one of those not infrequent occasions when some long gone resident of the city says, or writes in a letter, "I valued my H. A. L. membership above anything else in West Union"; or "I consider the H. A. L. club the strongest influence in my intellectual life."

The only three-generation sequence in the club's membership is still represented by two mem-

bers. The three names are those of Frank Camp, now on the inactive list; the late Ruel P. Camp; and John P. Camp, now active. All were of the banking occupation. The present president and secretary, respectively, are Charles W. Antes and his father, W. H. Antes, who are law partners.

The membership has been drawn most largely from schoolmen, ministers, attorneys, and editors, though the club is seldom without a business man, generally a banker, and occasionally a farmer is induced to enter. County officers, dentists, station agents, physicians, and merchants have figured on the rolls. It is said that in the past thirty-five years, and probably longer, no man coming to West Union as a city superintendent, county superintendent, Methodist pastor, or Presbyterian pastor, has failed to belong to the H. A. L. club.

New members, after proposals wait one week, may be admitted to fill vacancies in the complement of fifteen if not more than one vote is cast against them. Within the past year a change was made to enlarge the roster of working membership by inserting the word "active" in the constitutional clause limiting the total to fifteen, so that placing the two oldest members on the inactive list still leaves fifteen men taking part in the studies.

As a rule, however, the club is conservative, and seldom makes a change in the method of study.

The choice of topics for discussion is made just as it was sixty-two years ago. Each member drops a signed slip into the secretary's hat. The secretary reads the topics proposed, but does not read the signatures. On a motion, one of the topics is selected for discussion two weeks later, then the secretary reveals the name of the member proposing it, who is said to be "stuck" to lead.

The subjects are often historical, these being handled usually on a biographical basis; and literary subjects also are likely to partake of the biographical cast. Geography also often comes in, but a battle, a play of Shakespeare, an historical period, or a country will be chosen as a topic at frequent intervals. Practically every leading personage in the public or literary affairs of the United States or Great Britain has been discussed, many of them several times; while the rest of the world is freely ranged for soldiers, statesmen, industrialists, writers, musicians, philanthropists, and notable battles or civil assemblages.

That the members range widely in their intellectual interests is shown by the list of topics which followed week by week in the club year 1935-36: The Earl of Strafford; William H. Prescott; George Dewey; Plato; Denmark; Ibsen; A. W. Greely; Charles Dickens; Russia; Rudyard Kipling.

That forty years have not made too much difference in the line of research carried on by the members is shown by the following list of topics covering the club year of 1895-96: Josephine; Lady Jane Grey; National Characters; Duke of Wellington; Louis XIV; Henry VIII; Elizabeth; Martin Luther; Influence of the Puritans; William II; Isabella of Spain; Laws of Heredity; Should Cuba be Granted Belligerent Rights by Our Government; The Silver Question; Antiquities.

In the weekly discussions the leader has twenty-five minutes for opening, which may be from manuscript, from notes, or from memory. The president then calls in such order as he chooses for the other members to take ten minutes each, after which the leader has five minutes in which to gather up the fragments.

The club year formerly ran from early in November till late in May, but since the advent of the automobile age the spring adjournment usually comes before the middle of April. In February an annual banquet is held, with the ladies attending, at which the subjects are almost invariably aspects of the lives of Washington or Lincoln, with three speakers drawn by lot. Of late years Benjamin Franklin has been admitted as a worthy subject in this select circle of anniversary topics.

The sessions of this study organization, while

usually not so hilarious as those of a luncheon club, yet do not lack the social or humorous elements. The member who is not out of town on meeting night almost always finds that any other excuse for absence falls on deaf ears, because the penalty, a treat for the entire membership, is one in which each member feels a direct personal interest. The imposition of a fine is usually accomplished in an atmosphere of cheerfulness.

WALTER H. BEALL

## P. E. O. Beginnings

On the sunny morning of January 21, 1869, Hattie Briggs and Franc Roads sat on a stile in the fence around the Iowa Wesleyan College campus and talked earnestly in hushed tones. A personal social problem was the subject of their conversation. Could some way be found to cement the bond of friendship that they had formed with a small group of prominent girls?

"Let's have a secret society of our own", said Hattie Briggs, to which her companion consented and they hurried off to tell a few special friends.

To five other girls they confided the plan. Alice Coffin suggested a meeting for that very afternoon. Alice Bird was directed to draft a constitution. Suela Pearson, Mary Allen, and Ella Stewart enthusiastically joined the group. And so after noon behind carefully locked doors in Old Main the seven girls met in deep secrecy to form the society to be known by the cryptic initials P. E. O. The meaning has remained a secret of the members.

At the time of the founding of P. E. O. there were very few associations for women. The Soldiers' Aid Societies which had flourished during

the Civil War had become obsolete before 1869. Though women were assuming leadership in social and political reform, people were not generally conscious of a feminist movement in America. And so perhaps it is significant that P. E. O. was founded at the beginning of the year in which the second volume of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* came off the press, the year that Frances Hodgson's first story was printed, the year the American Woman Suffrage Association was formed. The aims of the founders of P. E. O. reflected, perhaps vaguely, the trend of the times.

The seven founders of the society were not benign, elderly ladies, as present members might regard them, but typical, lively college girls. The organization they formed was in response to their own needs. Yet in the sincerity of their aspirations they unconsciously embodied the universal hopes of womankind, so that the modest college sisterhood spread beyond the campus and extended its cultural influence everywhere. In the character and personality of the seven Iowa Wesleyan co-eds there must have been some vital spark which was transmitted to the society they organized, for the spirit of their purpose has endowed each chapter and persisted through the years. Perhaps the diversity of talents represented by the original seven was prophetic of their success.

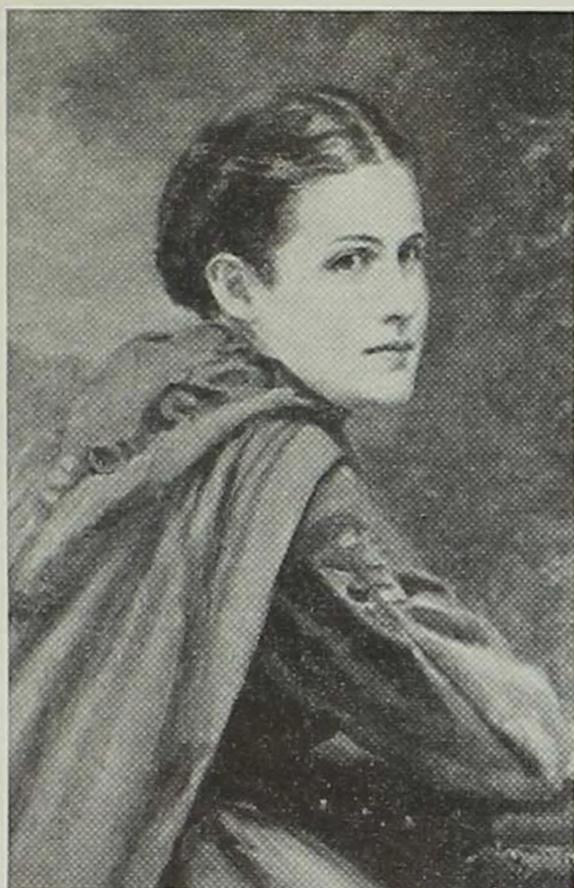
It was natural that Alice Bird (1850–1926), a senior, should be assigned the task of drafting the constitution for the proposed society. Well known in college for her literary skill, she continued to write all her life. She was an eager student who read avidly, and the characters in literature were no more confused or forgotten than her closest friends. The keenness of her wit and her clever descriptions made her a charming conversationalist. Perhaps her almost constant reading was the cause of her failing vision, for in her last years she saw but dimly. In this plight, however, her husband, Judge W. I. Babb, and her daughter Alice, fulfilled her need by reading to her.

While the author of the constitution and the first president of P. E. O. was distinguished for her literary ability, the first secretary possessed the equally important quality of being useful. Ella Stewart's life (1848–1895) was one of service given unsparingly. Her father, a minister, died when she was very young. After three years of college Ella had to quit to help her mother support the family, "as any good daughter would do". She was the only one of the founders who did not receive a college degree. In addition to helping her mother keep boarders she gave piano and painting lessons. Later she became a pioneer

in social service work through the influence of the Reverend Thomas E. Corkhill who fathered the movement for the reformation of juvenile offenders in Iowa. Ella Stewart worked with the boys in the Industrial School at Eldora for several years until her health failed, giving them a clear example of right living.

It was probably Suela Pearson (1851-1920) who instigated the first party called the "P. E. O. Siderial Soirée". At the elegant Brazelton House on that occasion witty Alice Bird and madonna-like Ella were centers of admiring groups, but sparkling, smiling, and dancing into everybody's heart was pretty Suela. The brown eyes, pink cheeks, soft curls, and winning ways of the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Clement Pearson of Mount Pleasant made her the queen of any festivity. After graduation in 1871 she studied music in the East and married W. A. Penfield of Cleveland.

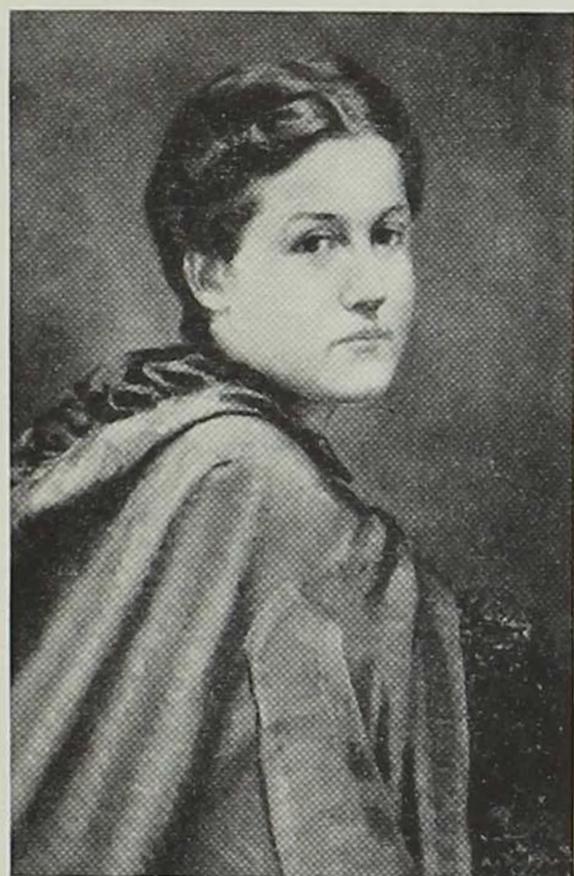
Franc Roads (1852-1924) was the girl and woman of vision with a talent for achievement. A year after her graduation, in 1872, she married S. C. Elliott, son of the former president of the college (and their daughter married the son of the president of Nebraska University). Along some lines she did more for the advancement of women than any other P. E. O. founder. She taught art to university students in Lincoln, Nebraska; she



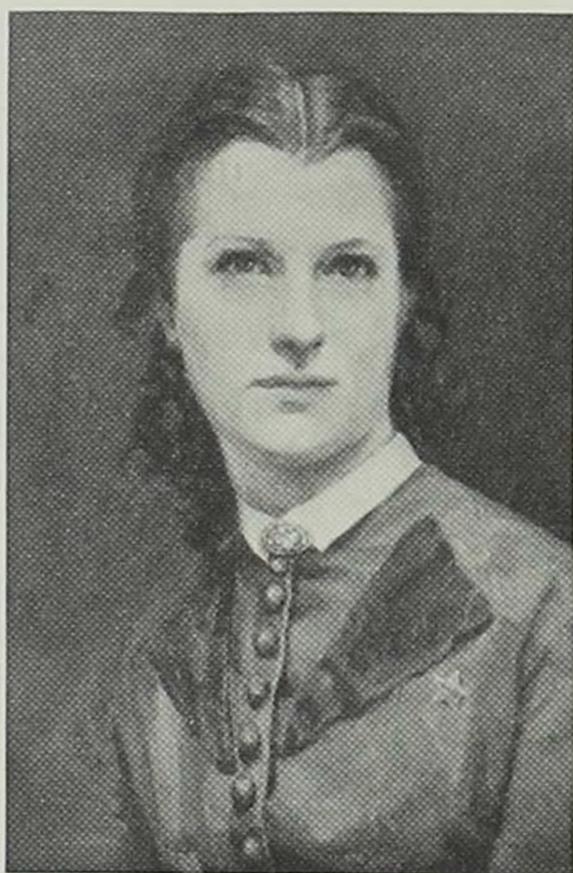
FRANC ROADS



HATTIE BRIGGS



ALICE COFFIN



ELLA STEWART

designed a model school room in Aurora, Illinois; she was a commissioner for Nebraska at the New Orleans world's fair; she actively opposed war; she traveled in France and Italy; she studied at Columbia, Stanford, and Chicago universities. Not a moment of Mrs. Elliott's life was dull. Her intellectual interests were exceeded only by her accomplishments.

The long and active career of Mrs. Elliott was in contrast to the short life of Hattie Briggs (1848-1877) who shared the original idea of organizing a society for women and was elected the first treasurer. Her sunny disposition introduced a note of joy in the chapter. After graduation in 1869 she studied science for a master's degree in 1872 and married Henry L. Bousquet in 1874. Though she wore the P. E. O. star only eight years, her radiant smile left a memory that grew stronger and sweeter.

The P. E. O. star that Hattie wore was designed by the artistic, beautiful Southern girl, Alice Virginia Coffin (1848-1888). Placed in the care of the college when her father went to war, she remained to graduate in 1869 and later took a Master of Science degree in preparation for teaching. Brilliant, well-poised, carefully gowned, and generous, she devoted her life to teaching other women's children with great kind-

ness and understanding in Chariton, Des Moines, and Newton.

Mary Allen (1848-1927) lived longest and was the most widely known of the P. E. O. founders. She was popular in college and active in religious work. Her marriage to Charles L. Stafford, soon after his graduation from Iowa Wesleyan in 1871, was the culmination of a college romance. Though she devoted herself to her home and the infinite duties of a Methodist preacher's wife, she continued to be a leader in P. E. O. affairs. She was the only founder to participate in the ceremonies of breaking ground and laying the cornerstone of the Memorial Library at Iowa Wesleyan.

Of these seven founders, at least five lived in Mount Pleasant. Five were seniors and one was a sophomore. The six who graduated also received master's degrees, which is a remarkable record for any seven college students. Six of the girls were Methodists; one was an Episcopalian. Five married and reared children. All were distinguished for founding one of the foremost women's organizations in the United States.

While P. E. O. is not now associated with colleges, it was originated by college girls and was in the beginning a strictly local society on the Iowa Wesleyan campus. Its purposes were much like

those of a modern sorority. The time and place of the meetings at the homes of various members were at first kept very secret. Their public activities were mainly social and literary in character.

The organization of P. E. O. was prompted by the formation of another secret society for girls at the college. Libbie Brook, who was one of the founders of I. C. Sorosis at Monmouth in 1867, started a chapter at Iowa Wesleyan. Some of the members proudly displayed their golden arrow pins at a fraternity party, much to the chagrin of the girls not invited to join. P. E. O. was organized the very next day, and for years the two groups were rivals, just as Greek-letter college groups are to this day. The members of each belonged to a different literary society, and the boys in the two fraternities had to be careful about dividing their attentions.

This rivalry was carried into public one day. The P. E. O. girls learned that the I. C. members were planning to attend chapel in a body dressed alike in blue calico. Not to be outdone, the P. E. O.'s hurriedly made white calico aprons, decorated with a black star and designed with a bib to be fastened on the left shoulder with the P. E. O. pin. Long before chapel time the P. E. O.'s crowded into a closet-like room used by the janitor, and just as the I. C.'s appeared farther

down the hall the P. E. O.'s stepped out and marched into chapel first.

At one time the rivalry became so strong that the principal of the Mount Pleasant Female Seminary, in which there were members of both societies, demanded that the pins be given to him for safekeeping until the girls could live together in peace. According to legend some of the girls could not find their pins. It was suspected that they wore them invisibly on their underwaists.

Eventually the I. C. Sorosis became the Pi Beta Phi sorority and the college chapter of P. E. O. left the campus to become a city organization. Today over many hearts the star and the arrow gleam side by side, and if the point of the arrow is a little sharper or the star a little more pointed because of this proximity "only the women with gray hair and who view the world through bifocal lenses can see it."

Nineteen initiates were taken into the newly formed P. E. O. society by the original seven in 1869. The first three to be elected were Ione Ambler of Mount Pleasant, Cassie Allen of Des Moines, and Emma Harbin of Keokuk. The others who joined in 1869, some after school opened in the fall, were Pauline Ambler, Cora Baxter, Belle Brooks, Laura Cleaver, Lulu Corkhill, Mattie Fell, Clara Gamage, Emma Kaufman, Ella

Kilpatrick, Lizzie Ogilvie, Dora Shaw, Mary Smith, Anna Taylor, Georgia Tuttle, Alice Wilson, and Carrie Woolson.

It was not until five years later that another chapter of P. E. O. was established on December 4, 1874, in Bloomfield. Six years later, on September 12, 1880, a chapter was started at Fairfield. In the following year Centerville had a chapter, and soon afterward chapters were founded in Iowa City, Moulton, Ottumwa, Albia, and Keosauqua. There are now over 2100 chapters in forty-four States, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Canada. The total membership is over 72,000.

Chapter A, designating the group at Mount Pleasant, was in a sense the governing body for thirteen years. Meanwhile, the desire to federate the separate chapters and provide a more democratic government had been growing. A preliminary meeting of two delegates from each of the five P. E. O. societies was held at Bloomfield on November 1 and 2, 1882, and in October of the following year at Fairfield a governing body called the Grand Chapter with general legislative and judicial powers of the sisterhood was established. Delegates came from Mount Pleasant, Bloomfield, Burlington, Iowa City, Centerville, Fairfield, and Jacksonville, Illinois. The first

president of the Grand Chapter was Mary Berry of Centerville.

Eventually State Grand Chapters were formed and the name of the general organization was changed to Supreme Chapter. Nebraska formed the first State chapter in 1890 at a meeting in Omaha. The second State chapter was established in Iowa in 1893. There are now twenty-nine State chapters as well as a province chapter in British Columbia and a high chapter in the District of Columbia.

In the beginning of the organization of various groups the members exchanged letters about chapter activities. When the Grand Chapter was formed, it was decided to publish a P. E. O. magazine. Mrs. Effie Hoffman Rogers was elected editor-in-chief at a salary of forty dollars a month. The *P. E. O. Record* was published at Oskaloosa and the first issue came out in January, 1889. The salutatory stated: "We intend to give you sixteen pages, two columns per page of good reading matter, pure, clean, and helpful." Advertising rates were one inch for one year at four dollars, up to one page for one year at forty-five dollars. Light-weight, colored paper was used for the cover.

From 1891 to 1893 and again from 1897 to 1914 Miss Mary Osmond of Osceola was the

editor. At the time of her selection she was the owner and editor of the *Osceola Gazette*, and so most of the work of printing, binding, and mailing was done personally in her own shop. In 1893 the job of editing and publishing the *Record* was submitted to bids and Mrs. Siddie F. Richards, whose husband was a newspaper man in Waterloo, got the contract. But subscriptions and advertisements failed to provide enough revenue. At the suggestion of Mrs. Richards in 1895 the Supreme Chapter allocated twenty-five cents of the dues of each member to the magazine and had it sent to all P. E. O.'s. With the increased size of the magazine in later years, the subscription price has been increased but it still goes to all members.

In over a half century of publication the *Record* has had only four editors. When Miss Osmond retired in 1914, Mrs. Rogers, who had pioneered in establishing the magazine during the first two years, resumed the editorial duties. For four years during the tense period of the World War, until her death in February, 1918, she managed the "Official Organ of the Supreme Chapter" with calm assurance. Since then, nearly half the lifetime of the magazine, Mrs. Winona Evans Reeves has served continuously as the editor. It seems prophetic that she was initiated in the orig-

inal chapter at Mount Pleasant while a student at Iowa Wesleyan during the very year the *Record* was started.

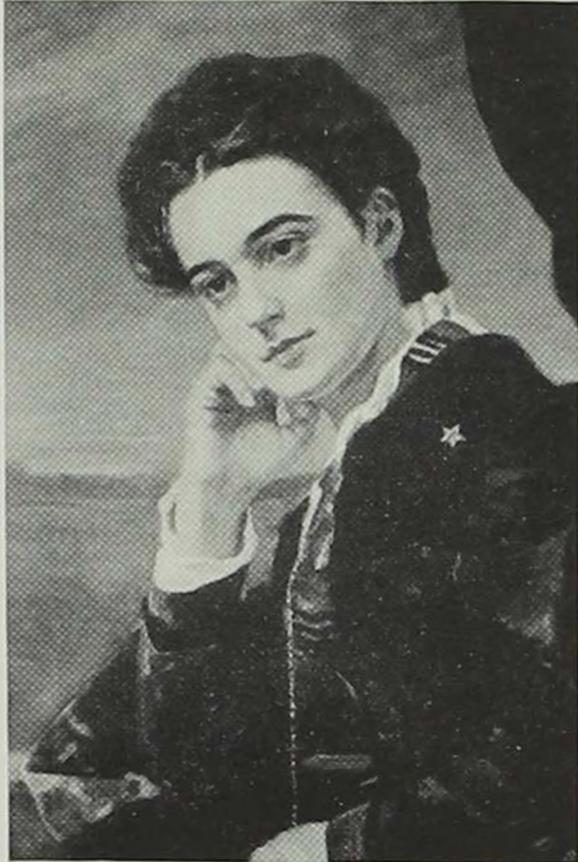
In 1907 the P. E. O. Educational Fund was established with approximately \$1000. The money was to be used for loans in assisting worthy young women to complete their higher education for the purpose of becoming self-supporting. The first loan was made in 1908 to a girl who attended Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls. By 1919 the fund had grown to \$100,000. In August, 1941, it amounted to over \$829,500, and had been used to help 8127 girls.

As the Sisterhood grew in strength and influence, the contribution of the founders was not forgotten. From time to time the establishment of a memorial at Iowa Wesleyan was proposed. This idea finally crystallized in the adoption of a resolution by the Supreme Chapter Convention of 1925 that a memorial library, which would also house the P. E. O. executive offices, should be erected on the Iowa Wesleyan College campus at a cost of \$100,000. When the news was received at the college, the old chapel bell pealed out "good news" to the elated student body.

Ground was broken for the building in January, 1927, by Mrs. Mary Allen Stafford, the last of the P. E. O. founders. She was also present at



MARY ALLEN



ALICE BIRD



SUELA PEARSON

the ceremony of laying the cornerstone. On that occasion Mrs. Lulu Corkhill Williams, one of the first girls to be initiated, spoke on the origin, growth, and outlook of the sisterhood, and Charles L. Stafford, husband of Mary Allen and former president of the college, gave an address on "The Smaller College as an Educational Factor". On September 27, 1927, the library was dedicated and presented to the college. Meanwhile, Mrs. Stafford had died, which saddened the dedication ceremonies.

The second floor of the Memorial Library is beautifully furnished with gifts of various chapters and individuals. On the east wall hang the portraits of the founders, painted by Marion Dunlap Harper from photographs taken in 1869 by Joe Leisenring, a bachelor and popular beau in 1869. The portraits were unveiled on September 23, 1929, in the presence of many members who came by special train from Chicago following the national convention. The pictures of the founders used to illustrate this story of P. E. O. beginnings are photographic copies of these portraits.

The first discussion of a P. E. O. home occurred in 1896 at the Iowa State Convention, but no decisive action was taken until 1929 when Mrs. Sarah Porter Beckwith of Mount Pleasant gave her large home in that city. The house is a two-story

brick building (with a fireplace in each of its twenty rooms), surrounded by a lawn of two acres planted with lovely old trees. Opened on May 10, 1930, for elderly Iowa P. E. O.'s who need its shelter, the home has always been well filled. In 1933 a new wing was added. P. E. O. homes have also been built in California and Nebraska. To assist members who need financial aid, State welfare funds have been established.

From the beginning, P. E. O. has been college-minded. It began in a college. It gave a library to a college. In 1927 it accepted the gift of Cottey Junior College in Nevada, Missouri, from Mrs. Virginia Cottey Stockard who founded the school in 1884. Since then the sisterhood has developed the college, thus perpetuating the purposes of its founder and extending the services of the society in behalf of higher education for worthy girls.

Over seventy-two years ago Hattie Briggs and Franc Roads sat on a wooden stile on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan College furtively discussing a vision of permanent companionship. Little did they then realize how many women their plan would affect or how widely the influence of their dream would spread.

FRANCES E. JACK

## The District School\*

When we came to Dayton in 1869, there was no school in our district and no church in the entire settlement. Provision for these was a matter of first concern to the immigrants. However, the division of the township into four-square-mile subdistricts had to await the arrival of sufficient population of school age (five to twenty-one) to justify the maintenance of a school. Our District No. 1 in Grant Township, Boone County, did not reach this population until 1873 and then only by including a number of grownups who had no intention of going to school.

During the years of waiting for a schoolhouse, education was not neglected. Instruction was given in homes and in coöperative activities which were conducted in Swedish. There were no illiterate immigrants, and every child of my age could read, write, and spell in Swedish before he entered school.

The standard pattern for schoolhouses, which was uniform throughout our county, was well adapted for their purpose and provided a comfort-

\*This reminiscent story is a sequel to "Pioneering in Iowa" and "The Dayton Swedish Settlement" previously contributed to THE PALIMPSEST by Dean Seashore.

able seating capacity of about forty. The schoolhouses were all painted white. Our schoolhouse and several neighboring ones were built by my father, who was a recognized house builder in that part of the settlement.

Our schoolhouse stood in the center of a well fenced half-acre patch provided with a hitching-post area outside. It was heated by a coal stove, the coal being hauled directly from the mines on the Des Moines River five miles distant at about two dollars a load for hauling and one dollar for the coal. It was the teacher's duty to care for the fire, sweep, and dust; but in these matters the Tom Sawyer stunt usually worked effectively and the building was kept clean and attractive. Drinking water was obtained from a neighboring farmer's well.

The school consisted of two terms: a summer term and a winter term of three months each. The attendance was held down in the summer by the necessity of keeping the older children at work on the farm, and in the winter the young children were often prevented from attending because of inclement weather.

The average salary of the first teachers was about twenty-five dollars a month. When, in the summer of 1885, I became the teacher in this school, I established the practice of devoting one

day to planting in recognition of the need of trees on the prairie. The children brought saplings, shrubs, and flower seeds. Sometimes the parents came along and helped us create a beautiful effect in the yard. This custom was continued for years and was a distinctive feature of District No. 1, before Arbor Day was generally observed.

I was eight years old when the school opened. The first day was an unforgettable event. I was sent with my dinner pail and a primer. With fear and trembling I approached the schoolhouse but, catching a glimpse of the teacher through a slight opening in the door, I immediately took to my heels and ran home. There were no children there, and the sight of the teacher was too much for me. Exactly the same procedure was followed on the second day. Then my mother took a sympathetic hand and arranged for me to go with two neighbor girls, one of them older than I. This time the teacher was ready for us. She received the three of us with open arms, took us on her lap, and kissed us to establish community solidarity. I was indeed glad there was no other boy present to witness the procedure.

We were there to learn English, starting from scratch. We did not understand the teacher and she did not understand us. My work began from a primer loaned me by a moron, who had no use

for it. During that three-months' term, I went through the first, second, and third readers and learned pronunciation so I could read with some facility. But much of the content remained Greek to me. Facility in reading, writing, and spelling was transferred effectively through my training in Swedish. All the pupils in the district were either Swedish or Danish, and so their elementary studies involved learning in two languages.

In the meantime we were acquiring some command of spoken English in the persistent chatter throughout the day. This was individual instruction at its best, and we made surprising progress. In my case this was facilitated because for years the teacher boarded at our house and thus initiated a most effective type of adult education for my parents in which we children also profited greatly. Although my father could neither speak nor write English, when he became the director of the school he encouraged the school board to pass a resolution that only English should be spoken in the schoolhouse and on the school grounds. This was a severe and hard-hearted rule, but during play-time we got some relief by jumping over the fence and playing in Hansen's pasture with freedom of speech in our native tongue.

The first teacher was Maria Balch from Boone. She had only a meager education but entered

whole-heartedly into companionship with us. In those days respect for the teacher was of a high order. We began the day with a prayer for which we had to kneel, and this was followed by the singing of religious songs which we greatly enjoyed. I can still see myself singing lustily:

I want to be an angel,  
And with the angels stand.  
A crown upon my forehead,  
A harp within my hand.

Reading books in arithmetic was most interesting to me because it dealt with numbers and concrete and practical situations so that within a comparatively short time I passed through White's first, intermediate, and advanced arithmetics. This was facilitated by the fact that the teacher did not know fractions and therefore threw us upon our own resources, which showed more wisdom than many a grade-school or high-school teacher shows today.

Two educational principles came out of that work in arithmetic. First, Lawrence Johnson and I, who were constant competitors in leading the school, found that if we committed the rules to memory and worked each example consecutively, we struck no snags in any grade of arithmetic. As we were of about equal ability, the contest was

constant and lively. This realization was a great educational achievement which I have applied countless times while teaching others. The second principle was that we were given the privilege of helping other children who were not so proficient in arithmetic and thereby developed a socialized situation of give and take.

Another teacher was Grover Baker, a splendid young farm boy from Ogden who rode a gentle black pony which he shared generously with me. It was my good luck to have the privilege of sleeping with Grover; and the process of learning English and the wisdom of the world through conversation was carried on deep into the nights, and even as he helped me with the morning and evening chores.

The school attendance rapidly increased from a mere handful the first term to an overflow in the schoolhouse in eight or ten years. The raising of children was the principal industry in District No. 1 and it was both a profitable and happy undertaking. The registration reached its peak of fifty-four, with an average daily attendance of forty, in the winter of 1885. From then the attendance decreased gradually down to twelve in 1917, when the consolidated township school was built. This rise and fall of the district school attendance gives a cross-section glimpse of what happened to

the raising of children in this pioneer settlement during that period.

Until I was sixteen my attendance was somewhat irregular due to strenuous home duties in the absence of my father. After the age of ten, I could not attend the summer school. I find that when I went to the Academy at Gustavus Adolphus College in 1884 and was admitted to an advanced class, I had attended the district school only about 600 days and had never seen a high school but was able to pass an examination enabling me to finish my work at the Academy in two years. The entrance examination was limited to United States history, advanced arithmetic, advanced geography, and advanced grammar, and the type of instruction I had had in the district school proved very effective in facilitating my passing it. I had complete mastery of the textbooks on these subjects, but that was all.

The method of teaching history was typical. The teacher would sit with the book open; the pupils sat with their books closed. The teacher would say, "Lawrence, will you begin?" and Lawrence would recite the lesson verbatim from memory. The entire procedure was a memory test and constituted most excellent training in the art of trusting one's memory. Thus after reading a chapter two or three times, one could recite it.

This was not true for all the children, but here another principle came into operation — the recognition of individual differences. Slow pupils were not blamed for being slow and were not pushed faster than they could go. Each one eventually got something out of the effort.

The school was socialized and operated on a constant competitive basis. In spelling, for example, we stood in a row arranged alphabetically from head to foot and the recitation consisted of spelling down. As soon as the one at the head missed a word, the one who succeeded in spelling it took his place. In that way spelling was highly motivated and made a game. It was regarded as a mark of literacy and going the rounds of neighboring district schools became a sport. Those of us who were proficient would ride our ponies and go from one spelling school to another, the main feat being to spell down the teacher. At that time courtesy required that all teachers present should enter into competition with the pupils. The procedure was standardized, and all the words were taken from McGuffey's speller. In this I developed an original idea which has played an important rôle in my educational procedures. I would first have my sister "hear" me and check all the words I missed in the speller. Then I took it for granted that I knew the unmarked words and so studied

only the marked ones. Then my sister gave me a second "hearing" and double-checked the words I missed. I mastered those and could defy any one in contest as I knew how to spell every word in the speller. The last word I learned was "phthisis".

In 1885, after one year in the Academy, I returned to teach District No. 1 and drew the munificent salary of thirty dollars a month. This was not so bad because I did not have expensive training for the job and had my time free mornings and evenings to work on the farm, which was not only a recreation but a profitable employment.

By this time the schoolhouse was full of children from the ages of five to twenty. I had not heard of the word pedagogy and knew nothing about grades in school organization but was able to pass the examination for a county certificate. Not having any technical preparation for organization of the school I had to use my head and heart. In this, the central idea was to maintain the school as a socialized group and keep each student busy at his natural level of successful achievement, largely through self-help or the friendly aid of a more advanced pupil.

There was little teaching, no lecturing, no classification, no promotions or demotions, but throughout there was competition in progress. I

did not teach the ABC's to six-year-olds because students three or four years older could do it much better and were delighted to have this diversion and render this service. The same principle was applied to each subject and at different levels. If any one wanted to know whether he had worked an example correctly or had mastered an assignment, he could go to some one who was ahead of him and usually glad to help.

There was freedom to move around and talk. It is interesting that when this becomes general it is not any more disturbing than on the playground because each one is on his own job and pays no attention to others. This method of pedagogy proved most fascinating and profitable to me although at that time I did not realize the novelty of it. This procedure, however, had its limitations since instruction was limited to the textbooks, but the mastery of them was thorough. To relieve the poverty of material, the school gave entertainments and raised a fund to purchase an encyclopedia which became a most fascinating source of information to many of the children.

In this type of organization I found no difficulty in handling a school of forty pupils or more in an overcrowded room. Discipline presented no problem; motivation was active all around; no one was trying to make pupils all alike; praise and

blame came in community recognition of achievement or failure in the tasks at hand. The spelling down method of teaching spelling was followed at various group levels and there was no reason why an advanced student should not act as the teacher for a lower group.

Singing was a feature introduced for the enrichment of the social life. Children were prepared to enter the then prominent singing schools in their own and neighboring districts.

During my first year of teaching the State required that hygiene be taught and that a special manual be used. This was supplemented in various ways. The subject was presented in relation to the situations at hand. For example, to teach the hygiene of smoking I wrote a play which was presented at a school picnic in our maple grove. Every family in the district was on hand for a basket lunch and entertainment. The leading character in the play was my cousin, Gilbert Seashore, then about twelve years old, who was required to smoke a cigar and suffered the conventional consequences. In a recent conversation with him, reference was made to this incident, and he said, "Do you know, that was both the first and last cigar I ever smoked, although I have been in politics serving as coroner of Hennepin County in Minnesota for over thirty years."

I cannot help feeling that there is a moral to this story of pioneer life in education. I have never been in sympathy with the carping criticisms of the district schools of those days. I am not sure that we gain much by forcing grading systems and highly technical preparation in pedagogy for country school teachers. The situation has, of course, changed. The people in the district want their children to become citified. Children are not so eager for self-help. Parents are more prone to criticize teachers. Extraordinary progress has been made in providing teaching material which greatly enriches the life of a child. But my experiences as a pupil and as a teacher in District No. 1 have created in me a lasting love for the district schools of that day and a grateful feeling of satisfaction in the privilege of having had a modest hand in the development of the public school education in that community.

CARL E. SEASHORE

## Comment by the Editor

### THE TRADITION OF CULTURE

"It is confidently believed that there is no town in the west where there is a larger proportion of men and women of education and culture", declared the author of *A Brief Description of Fort Dodge* in 1858. As evidence of this opinion he cited "the maintenance of a weekly Literary Society, at which original essays, poems, and rhetorical exercises are exhibited."

The significance of the cultural atmosphere in Fort Dodge was not its rarity, as this enthusiastic promoter supposed, but its common existence in most of the bustling new settlements on the Iowa frontier. There was scarcely a town that did not boast of a similar literary club. Though the pioneers who conquered the prairies of Iowa may have been seeking fortunes, they were also concerned with establishing communities of homes in which the amenities of civilization could flourish. To that end schools were supported generously, adult education was encouraged, and societies for the advancement of mutual interests were organized.

The men's study club in West Union is, indeed,

unique in its procedure and longevity, but it sprang from the same intellectual soil that nourished the young men's library associations, the dramatic clubs, and the lyceums of an earlier day. The roots of these organizations for educational recreation were planted in the district schools where, with little pedagogical training, resourceful teachers like Carl E. Seashore adapted instruction to the needs and aptitudes of the pupils. Perhaps the spirit of this general aspiration was most clearly expressed by the seven remarkable girls in Iowa Wesleyan College who instituted a sisterhood that has extended its cultural influence far and wide.

Lest the stress of present circumstances should distort our vision, it may be well to pause occasionally and recall the aims of the men and women who founded this Commonwealth. They, too, encountered many hardships, but their high purpose triumphed over the distractions of current emergencies.

J. E. B.

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