

**THE FOUNDERS OF P.E.O.**

It was on January 21, 1869, that seven young women – “girls” as they are affectionately termed in P.E.O. – formalized a college sorority on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, for the purpose of bonding their friendship and perpetuating ideals which they held as important values of living. The seven chose three English letters, P.E.O., to designate their society and later as the Greek fraternity movement gained momentum, voted to retain these letters as well as the off-campus chapters which had been formed, thus changing from a college group to a community group, a group destined to start its second century with a membership of over 165,000 with chapters in all of the fifty states and five provinces in Canada. P.E.O. developed into a philanthropic organization supporting three major educational projects at the close of its first century of existence: *The P.E.O. Educational Fund*, a revolving loan fund that since 1907 has loaned over \$7,500,000 to over 15,000 young women for education beyond high school; *Cotley Junior College for Women*, a fully accredited liberal arts college at Nevada, Missouri, owned by P.E.O.; *The P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship Fund* which has provided over 1,000 scholarships for foreign students to study in colleges of United States and Canada since its inception in 1949.

*The photographs of the seven founders of P.E.O. on the preceding pages are reproductions of the oil portraits by Marion Dunlap Harper which were unveiled in P.E.O. Memorial Hall in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on September 23, 1929. The portraits also are reproduced in color in the centennial history, OUT OF THE HEART, A Century of P.E.O., by Stella Cady Clapp. The biographies of the founders are based on those in the history, deletions having been made to fit the limitations of space.*

The seven founders of P.E.O. were fortunate in their heritage. Theirs was a pioneer and religious background with highly significant emphasis on education. All of the seven founder families were deeply religious people – not just pious, but people who made practical application of religion in everyday life. They were the kind of people who settled Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and made it a cultural center.

That cultural center became fertile soil for the rapidly changing social structure of the mid-nineteenth century encompassing, as it did, the Feminist Movement which developed hand in hand with education for women.

Small wonder that our founders responded as they did to their heritage and environment. Small wonder that they developed the characteristics necessary to bring about greater change. They were charmed by the idea of P.E.O. and by the magic of working together for the advancement of women. These were new concepts in a century just awakening to the tremendous possibilities involved in educating females.

As a haunting bit of melody sometimes runs through a musical composition, so the Christian ethic touches P.E.O. in every phase of its endeavor. Within that Christian ethic P.E.O.'s found the dynamic purpose of living for others.

Each founder brought some rare gift to P.E.O. Those abilities, gifts or attributes have been mentioned in many ways by many writers. They might be summarized as follows: From Mary Allen P.E.O. gets its poise; from Alice Bird, its literary bent; from Hattie Briggs, its homemaking tendencies; from Alice Coffin, its interest in education; from Suela Pearson, gaiety and charming sociability; from Franc Roads, its vision and progressiveness; and from Ella Stewart, its desire for social service. – *From OUT OF THE HEART, A Century of P.E.O.*



*Frane Roads (Elliott)*

*February 10, 1852*  
*August 9, 1924*

## FRANC ROADS (Elliott)

**F**RANCES ELIZABETH ROADS was born February 10, 1852, at Marshall, Iowa, a little town almost at the edge of Mount Pleasant. Her father, Addison Roads, was a business man and later a public official in Mount Pleasant. Her mother, Nancy McClure Roads, firmly supported the idea of P.E.O. and lent a helping hand whenever she could. It was she who designed and helped the girls make the aprons for the march into chapel that introduced P.E.O. to the world.

Franc, as she preferred to be called, attended Howe's Academy then enrolled in the scientific course at Iowa Wesleyan in September, 1866, at the age of 14. She soon learned that it was possible to graduate in three years, and she did, receiving the B.S. degree on June 16, 1869. She was granted the honorary M.S. degree in 1872. Of Franc, Dillon Payne said:

*Franc Roads is fresh in memory. There was dignity and poise in her manner, stocky form, broad forehead, kindly eyes and shocky head of hair. She took her place in our class as a substantial member. She was the gyroscope when our class ship was being tossed by the billows. She never rocked the boat. When the old college bell rang the class hour, Franc was there. No tardy marks blurred the page. She was rather quiet, not a tomboy. Her face was serious and thoughtful but pleasant and engaging. She took life seriously and not as joyously as might be expected of one with such artistic temperament and talent as she later demonstrated. However we were all too young to be looking for the budding of genius. Work and play, all absorbing at the time, filled our entire horizon. Her character was needed in the building of the temple of P.E.O. She became a devotee of art in the early years and acquired fame in her chosen field.*

Franc Roads and Simon Charles Elliott, son of Dr. Charles Elliott, president of Iowa Wesleyan 1857-61 and 1864-66, were married on June 6, 1872. They made their home in Lincoln, Nebraska, where Mr. Elliott operated a china store, a Queen's Ware store, as it was called. There were two children: Charles Addison, who became a distinguished medical diagnostician in Chicago and professor of medicine at Northwestern University; and Stella May, who was educated at the University of Nebraska and was assistant in the department of physical education there for several years and later became head of physical education for women at Ohio State University. She was married to James A. Canfield, son of the chancellor of the Nebraska and Ohio Universities and brother of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, author and critic. The Canfields spent most of their married life in New York where Mr. Canfield founded the Canfield Paper Company of which he was president for many years. They had two sons, Charles and Robert Canfield. Dr. Charles Elliott was married to Genevieve Cole, originally from Mount Pleasant. They had three sons: Frank Roads Elliott, M.D.; Margaret C. Elliott, M.D.; and Ernest Charles Elliott, a business man.

Through most of her life, Franc practiced art as a profession. She studied whenever and wherever she could – at the Rookwood Potteries in Cincinnati, in Europe, at Columbia and Leland Stanford, at the Chicago Art Institute, and the University of Chicago. She was associated with the art department at the University of Nebraska. When the Elliotts were faced with financial disaster, due to the panic of 1893, Franc entered the field of art supervision in the public schools to help finance their son's medical education. She was highly successful at Salt Lake City, Utah, and Aurora, Illinois, where she created a model school room that attracted wide attention.

Mr. and Mrs. Elliott moved to Chicago where Franc presided with poise and charm over her son's household until his marriage in 1911. Franc continued to make her home in Chicago after Mr. Elliott's death there in 1915. She maintained her intense interest in art, education, and civic advancement, and lectured extensively during the later years of her life.

Changing social conditions and the advancement of women were lifelong challenges to Franc. She had strong personal convictions in this area and a willingness to do something about them. She had a

crusading spirit and counted as her friends Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and many others interested in the Feminist Movement.

In 1884 Mrs. Elliott represented Nebraska as assistant commissioner of art at the New Orleans Exposition, the first time that women were named as commissioners at any exposition. She also worked for eighteen years to secure for women the right to a seat and a vote in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. At first she was alone in her contention, but one after another, influential leaders came to her point of view and the mission was accomplished.

There were many facets to the character of the youngest founder. She was a beautiful young woman with a vivid personality. Mary Allen spoke of her as “not tall, but well proportioned with dark hair, and eyes that fairly danced with the fullness of life and merriment.”

Franc Roads Elliott died at the home of her son in Chicago on August 9, 1924. Her body was cremated. On Sunday, September 28, 1952, P.E.O. dedicated a marker for her, placing it on the Elliott lot in Forest Home Cemetery, Mount Pleasant.

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*Mary Allen (Stafford)*  
December 30, 1848  
July 10, 1927

## MARY ALLEN (Stafford)

MARY ALLEN was born in Mount Pleasant on December 30, 1848, the daughter of Reuben and Evelyn Caulk Allen. Mr. Allen was a business man, real estate being one of his many pursuits. It is said that his name appears on many property abstracts of southeastern Iowa. Little is known of Mrs. Allen except that she was a warm, friendly person whose home was always open to friends of the members of her family. Much of early P.E.O. happened in the Allen home.

Mary attended the Preparatory Academy at Iowa Wesleyan, then entered the university in the fall of 1865. She received her B.A. degree there in June, 1869, and was granted an honorary M.A. degree by her alma mater in 1872. This honorary degree was a customary procedure at Iowa Wesleyan providing a graduate had been successful in a chosen field of endeavor the three years following graduation.

Dillon H. Payne, a classmate of the founders who has recorded a short description of each as she was known in college, says of Mary Jane Allen:

*Mary had good taste in dress and made smart clothes look better, was graceful, cheerful and popular with the boys. She entertained nicely in her home and stood well in her classes...She chose the classical course. In those days the hurry to get married did not keep the girls from the classics... Mary was a leader at the "Sidereal Soiree" and relished our country dance substitute, "Weevilly Wheat", She was born, bred and destined to wear the star and be a founder.*

On July 4, 1871, Mary Allen was married to Charles Lewis Stafford who graduated, B.A., from Iowa Wesleyan and was ordained to the Methodist ministry. Mr. Stafford earned his M.A. degree from Iowa Wesleyan in 1874 and his D.D. from Upper Iowa University in 1888. In 1905 Iowa Wesleyan honored him with a D. LL. He was president of Iowa Wesleyan from 1891 to 1899. He was accorded most of the honors that his church and his college could give, and in each area of service he received the gracious help and inspiration of his beloved Mary. Mary was a wonderful homemaker and possessed a delightful sense of humor, and in each of the many homes where she presided as a minister's wife, it was a home where friends gathered, where there was love, laughter, and understanding.

The Staffords were parents of four children: Clarence Allen, who attended Iowa Wesleyan and became a successful business man and rancher; Eva May, the lovely little girl with brown eyes and golden curls, who died of scarlet fever at the age of four; Charles Ralph, who graduated from Iowa Wesleyan in 1900, from the University of Chicago Law School, cum laude, in 1911 and later maintained his own law practice in Muscatine, Iowa; and William Reuben, who died at Duluth, Minnesota, in 1913, just a year after graduation from the University of Wisconsin.

Charles Ralph and his wife Lucille Norvis Stafford had no children. Clarence Allen and his wife, Mary DeLescaille Stafford, had two sons, Charles Joseph and William Reuben. Charles, who married Elizabeth Brown, lives in LaJolla, California. Their daughter, Ann Elizabeth is a graduate of the University of California at Davis. Their son, James Ralph, is now (1967) a student at San Diego Junior College.

William Reuben, who married Katherine Leach, lives in Davenport, Iowa, where Katherine is a member of Chapter EM. Their son, Hugh Allen, graduated in 1967 from Iowa Wesleyan College. The daughter, Mary, is a student of Central High School in Davenport (1967).

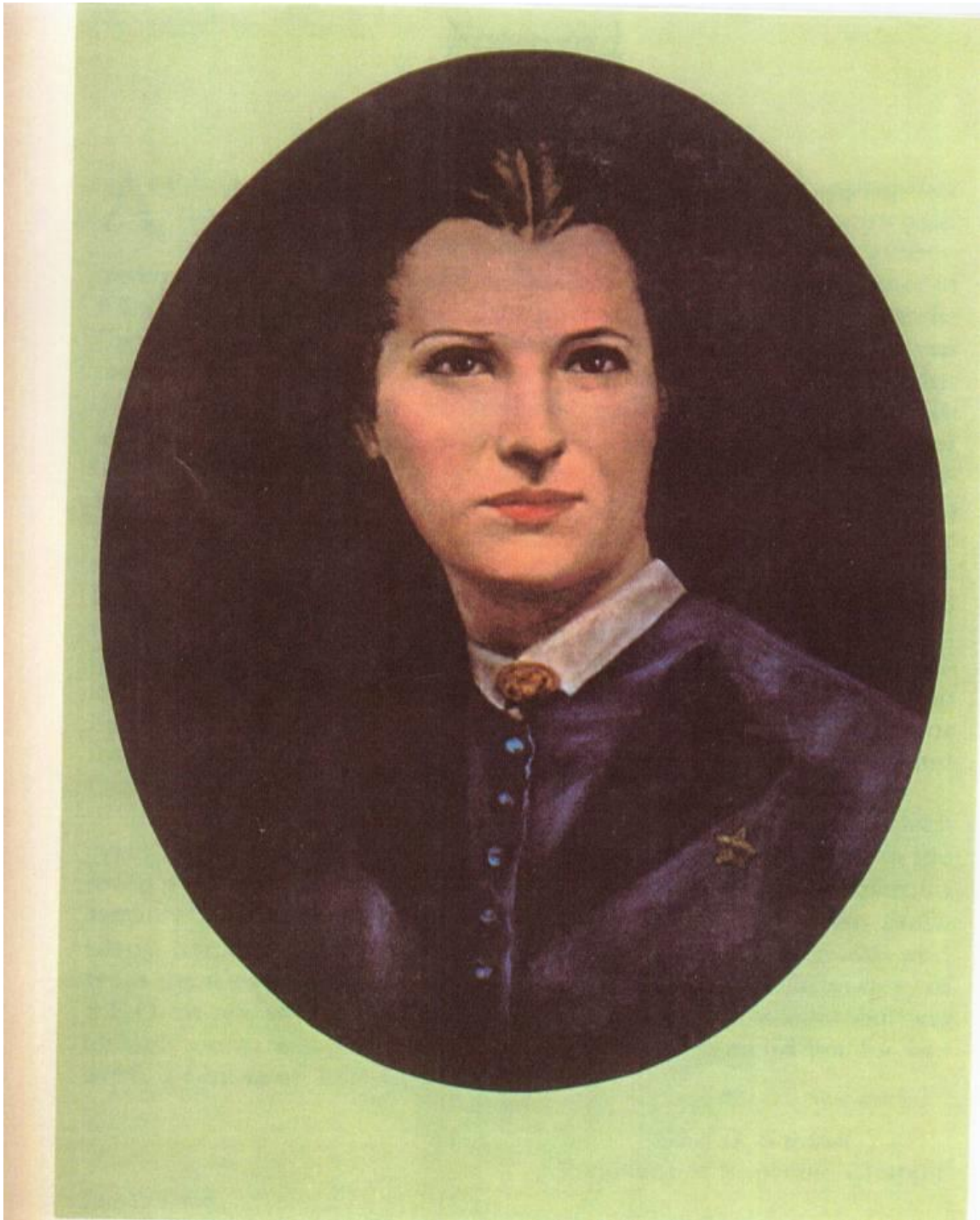
Mary and Charles Stafford lived in at least ten different towns in Iowa before retiring to Muscatine in 1917. During many of those years they lived in towns where no P.E.O. chapters existed, but Mary maintained her interest in P.E.O. and was an active participant wherever possible. She kept her membership in Chapter A until 1905 when she transferred to Chapter B, Bloomfield, then to Chapter X, Oskaloosa; AH, West Liberty; and FC, Muscatine.

Mary was a beloved member of each of those chapters. Her wise and kindly interpretations of P.E.O. laws and activities helped to create the image of P.E.O. for those who came later. 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. Her life was totally centered in other people. She treasured her friends. A close relationship existed between Mary and her daughters-in-law. She was adored by family and friends, and respected by all who knew her.

This lovely lady died July 10, 1927, at her home in Muscatine, Iowa. She is buried in Forest Home Cemetery at Mount Pleasant, Iowa. \*





Ella Stewart

May 8, 1848

December 12, 1894

## ELLA STEWART

**E**LLA LOVINA STEWART was born in Pittsburg, Iowa, on May 8, 1848, the daughter of the Reverend Isaac I. and Mary Robinson Stewart. The Reverend Mr. Stewart had been a pioneer Methodist minister in Iowa for many years before he met Mary Robinson. He had lost two wives and four children by death. He became presiding elder for the Mount Pleasant district of the Methodist Church and moved his family to Mount Pleasant soon after Ella's birth. The family moved into one of the two apartments on the second floor of the Institute Building, the only building on the campus of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute which had opened in 1846. President Huestes and his family lived in the other apartment and classes were held on the first floor. In 1853 the Collegiate Institute was renamed Iowa Wesleyan University and the Institute Building became known as Pioneer Hall. Mr. Stewart became financial agent for the college in 1852. Plans were made for erecting Main Hall, completed in 1855. When funds for the building were assured, the Rev. Stewart again assumed pastorates at various towns in southeastern Iowa.

It was at Keokuk that disaster came to the family with the death of the Reverend Mr. Stewart in 1864. Left with five children and another soon to be born, Mrs. Stewart moved back to Mount Pleasant. Ella was sixteen at the time and must have assumed much responsibility in the household. The baby was born in October and Mrs. Stewart, gallant little Irish woman that she was, soon started a boarding house for students, continuing in that business for many years.

Ella entered Iowa Wesleyan in September, 1865. She did not graduate from the college. This was not due to lack of scholarship, but because the need for help at home was so great that she could not carry a full schedule or attend classes during certain hours. It seems likely that she audited many classes as a special student, though not for credit, and she participated in college activities. Here is Dillon Payne's description of Ella Stewart:

*Ella qualified as a founder. She had auburn pompadour hair, florid complexion, dressed neatly and in good style, was bright and lively, could play and sing. She always graced our social affairs and took an active part in all of our amusements. Her name was always on the list and by some chance often placed beside mine. In making plans for dates and events, the boys would make a list of their names and each chap would write his favorite's name opposite his own. We knew pretty well beforehand, where the girls' names would be written. Sometimes the names would be written and we would draw by lot. That prevented monotony, but did not change preferences. Ella dropped out of college, but kept her place in all our group entertainments. Her home was free for social stunts and she was a splendid hostess. She wore the gold star and sometime a Beta pin. I have the pin still. Every P.E.O. founder was included in our winter skating parties on Skunk River and our woods picnics when the spring flowers began to bloom. The custom was for the boys to furnish the buggies and the girls the lunch baskets. Ella's basket was a delmonico of delicacies. It was a delight to be there at the opening. College festivities were simple. No cut flowers or taxis were required for town affairs. There were more heart thrills in a slow stroll homeward, gazing at the stars in the Milky Way, having an earthly one on your arm, exchanging mutual confidences. That was quantum sufficit. Ella always shone with luster in the galaxy of the seven heavenly luminaries.*

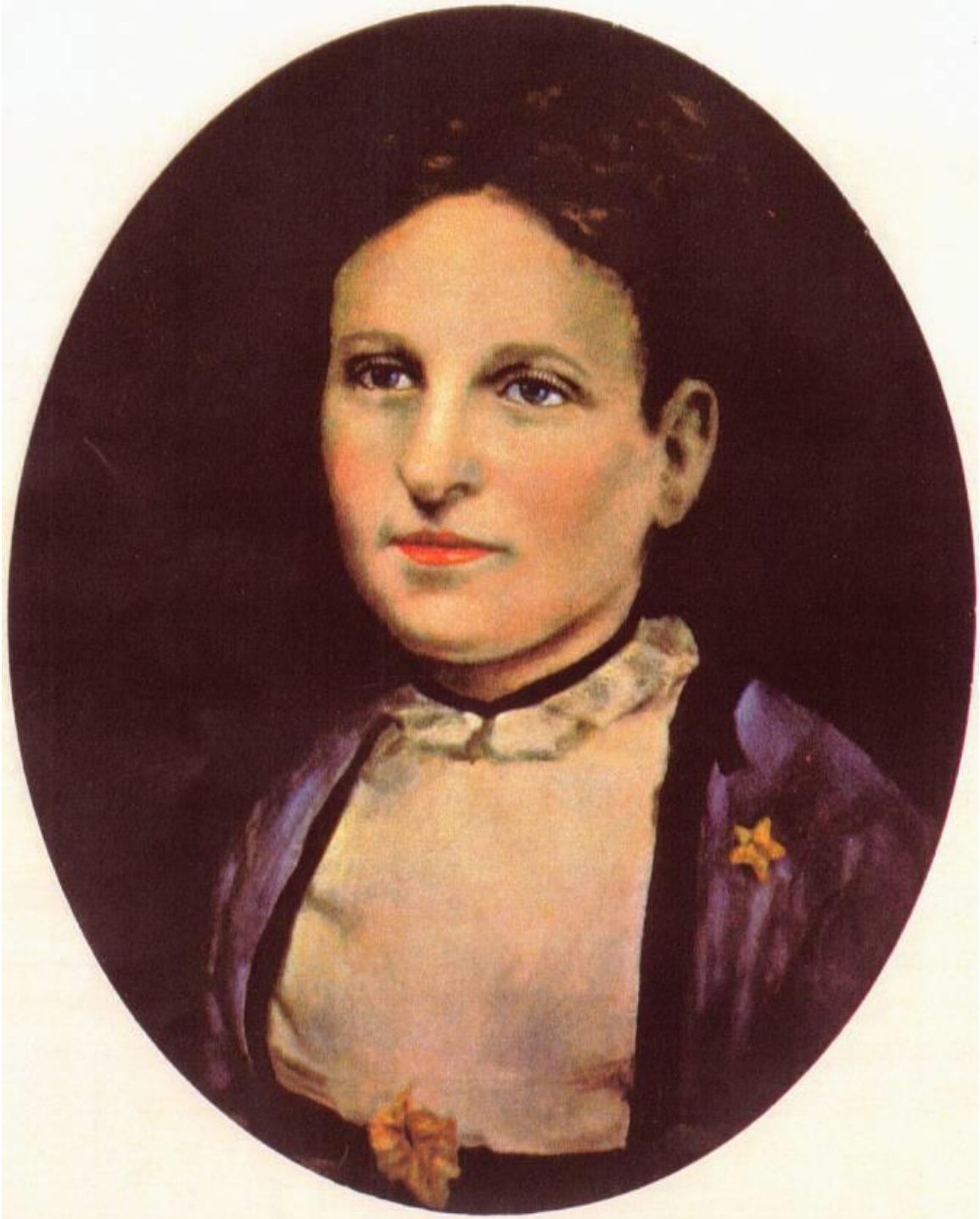
For many years Ella gave piano lessons in Mount Pleasant and adjacent towns. This was not particularly remunerative. Feeling she should make a change, she sought the advice of her father's old friend, the Reverend Mr. Thomas Corkhill. For many years he had worked with wayward boys, and he suggested that Ella take a position as teacher at the Iowa Industrial School in Eldora where she might help him with "his boys". This appealed to her and she spent eight years as a teacher there. These years gave purpose to her life, and nothing would have induced her to give up that position except ill health. She was not well, and returned to Mount Pleasant in 1891 or 1892, hopeful that she would be back in Eldora after a rest. But this was not to be. She had a long illness from which she did not recover.

Ella Stewart's P.E.O. pin is the only one of the original seven pins in existence. Ella bequeathed this pin to Alice Bird Babb, who wore it with her own jeweled pin on special P.E.O. occasions. Both of these pins have been on display in Memorial Hall in Mount Pleasant. Another piece of jewelry that is of

interest is the diamond ring, cherished throughout her life, which was given to her by Dillon Payne. This ring she left to May Brooks Snider, her constant companion during her long illness.

Ella Stewart's life was one of devoted service to others. She loved people – all people – and readily identified herself with every person she met. Few could match her keen wit. She was a disciplined person, bright and cheerful, industrious, considerate and courageous. She was small in stature with curly hair and deep blue eyes, an attractive person at all times. She almost invariably wore earrings, and Alice Bird spoke of “the scent of violets that often followed in her wake”

Ella Stewart died during the early morning hours of December 12, 1894, and she is buried in the old cemetery at Mount Pleasant. \*



*Fattie Briggs (Bousquet)*

*October 10, 1849*

*June 22, 1877*

## HATTIE BRIGGS (Bousquet)

**H**ARRIET BRIGGS was born in the little town of Troy, Iowa, on October 10, 1849, daughter of the Reverend and Mrs. Elias L. Briggs. The family moved to Mount Pleasant in the early sixties. Hattie, as she came to be called, attended the Preparatory Department at Iowa Wesleyan and entered the university in September, 1865. She, with other of the founders, was a member of the class known as The Lifebloods and received her B.S. degree in June, 1869. Three years later she received the honorary M.S. degree from Iowa Wesleyan. Of her Dillon Payne said:

*The best hearted girl that ever lived. None knew her but to love her... Her father was a minister and her family lived near the college. The front door had oiled hinges and opened readily to her college chums. Hattie.....chose the scientific course. She was modest and retiring.... Her shoulder was a normal place for the five pointed gold emblem. The five words [Faith, Love, Purity, Justice and Truth] were innate with her.*

After graduation Hattie taught music and art. At this time she lived with her parents, first in Ottumwa, Iowa, and later in Knoxville, Iowa, where, in 1871, her father had accepted a pastorate. On January 12, 1873, Rev. Briggs preached his regular Sunday sermon, but his congregation was larger than usual that day. There was also a noticeable air of expectancy, if not excitement, among some members of the congregation and a few of the visitors present.

At the close of the service Hattie J. Briggs and Henri L. Bousquet met at the altar where Hattie's father united them in marriage, a complete surprise to most of the congregation. Soon after the ceremony Mr. Bousquet and his bride, accompanied by a large group of friends from Pella, Iowa, left Knoxville for Pella, where the Bousquets were to make their home. Mr. Bousquet, then a business man of Pella, soon became assistant cashier of the Pella National Bank.

Two sons were born to this couple: Cutts Duddock and Henri Lyman, two years younger than Cutts. The beloved Hattie, who was perfectly cast in the role of wife and mother, enjoyed that role less than five years. Her death in 1877 was the first in that circle of seven founders. Her son, Henri Lyman, died November 14, 1881, shortly before his sixth birthday.

Hattie's husband, Henri L. Bousquet, was a native of Amsterdam, Holland. He came to Pella with his parents when he was nine years old. He attended school there, including Central College. He worked at the printing business for two or three years, then had three years of military service during the Civil War. After returning to Pella, he was elected county clerk, later managed a mill, then became the assistant cashier of the bank. In 1884 he moved to Knoxville, Iowa, where he entered the merchandising business, and later became clerk of the Supreme Court of Iowa.

Cutts Duddock attended Iowa Wesleyan for a time, then enlisted in the Spanish-American War and remained in the regular army for many years. He died in the Veterans' Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, July 10, 1957.

Cutts had married Hattie Clara Degenaar, September 11, 1916, using the same ring that Henri Bousquet had placed on the finger of Hattie Briggs in 1873. Cutts and his wife and one daughter, Geraldine Bousquet Durham (Mrs. Kenneth L.) who inherited the Hattie Briggs wedding ring and was wearing it when she was initiated into P.E.O. by Chapter M, Knoxville, Iowa. Geraldine and two of her daughters, Kathie Lee Durham and Karen Rae Dykstra, visited the P.E.O. executive office in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1962 and gave the wedding ring and several other items to P.E.O. A third daughter is Kay Bousquet Caston.

Hattie Briggs possessed the rare quality of making everyone near her feel comfortable. She joyously accepted the world about her with little thought of personal gain, always receptive to the needs of others. She was naturally a leader in church affairs and campus activities. Everyone knew her and students instinctively loved and looked up to her. She was above average size, had light brown hair, a fair complexion, and large expressive blue eyes, but she is remembered best for her radiant smile. She was bright and cheerful and thoroughly democratic.

Hattie Briggs died on June 22, 1877, at Pella, Iowa. She is buried in Oakwood Cemetery at Pella, Iowa.

HISTORIAN'S NOTE. *In previous biographies the birth date of Hattie Briggs has been given as October 10, 1848. The date which is on her gravestone is October 10, 1849. In working on her biography, I became convinced that this date was correct in light of other records. This is the date which appeared in the History of Marian County, Iowa, 1881, which contains a biographical sketch of Henri L. Bousquet which states: "On the twelfth day of January, 1873, he married Miss Hattie J. Briggs, a native of Troy, Davis County, Iowa, born on the tenth day of October, 1849." Mr. Bousquet would have been in his late thirties at the time of Hattie's death. He was known as a meticulous person, careful of details, as evidenced in choice of his vocations, and it is my belief that he would have made certain that the correct date of Hattie's birth was on the marker for her grave.*

*-- Stella Clapp*



*Alice Bird (Babb)*

*May 8, 1850*

*November 21, 1926*

## ALICE BIRD (Babb)

**M**ARY ALICE BIRD was born in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on May 8, 1850, the daughter of Dr. Wellington and Sarah Thornton Bird. Dr. Bird, a pioneer from Pennsylvania was the first physician in Henry County, Iowa. Mrs. Bird also came from the East but by way of Indiana. She was a courageous, cheerful, busy little person interested in everything and everyone about her. The Bird family figured notably in the early history of Mount Pleasant and Iowa Wesleyan.

Alice, or Allie as she often was called, attended high school at Howe's Academy. She entered Iowa Wesleyan as a freshman in the fall of 1865 at the age of 15. Dillon Payne wrote of her:

*Fresh from the Academy she bolted into our class. She was a town girl....medium height, black hair thrown back, dark piercing eyes, tailor made clothes, taking long and bold strides as she passed through the college campus...Allie immediately took rank and had to be reckoned with. Nothing short of the classical course would do. The time to complete it did not figure.... Virgil, Cicero and Socrates were not to be slighted. She was a forceful reader and singer, a member of the College Quartette and in demand on all the downtown and college literary programs. How well do I remember when she declaimed "The Maniac"....and in "Hiawatha" portrayed the terrors of "The Famine and the Fever".... When any bold or daring adventure was incubating, Allie was there in the midst. She was not a man worshipper, met the boys like brothers and generous in her attention to all. She was an expert in Latin and Greek .... It was foreordained that she should be a founder of P.E.O.*

This founder, a brilliant student with a tremendous knowledge of literature as well as the ability to create or declaim it, was graduated from Iowa Wesleyan in June, 1869, with a B.A. degree and in 1872 was granted the honorary M.A. degree. For a time she taught at the academy, and in 1872 was invited to fill the chair of Latin and Greek at Iowa Wesleyan University, an appointment she filled for four years. In addition to Latin and Greek, she taught elocution. Her father and her husband, Washington Irving Babb, to whom she was married on October 9, 1873, were also members of the faculty, Dr. Bird teaching pharmacy and Mr. Babb, law.

Mr. Babb, a veteran of the Civil War, entered Iowa Wesleyan in 1865 to continue his education and was graduated with the B.A. degree in 1866. He received the honorary M.A. degree in 1869 and a D.LL. in 1898. He also received a D.LL. degree from the State University of Iowa in 1907. He practiced law in Mount Pleasant for many years – for a time with his son Max – and was district judge of the second judicial district of Iowa from 1891 to 1895. He was a trustee of Iowa Wesleyan from 1874 until his death on September 4, 1925. In 1906 the family moved to Aurora, Illinois, where Mr. Babb became legal advisor and later president of the Western Wheel Scraper Company, and where he had other manufacturing and banking interests.

The Babbs were the parents of four children: Max Wellington, a Wesleyan graduate who became a successful lawyer, then an executive, and eventually the president, of the Allis Chalmers Company in Milwaukee; Miles Thornton, also a graduate of Iowa Wesleyan, who for many years was manager of the Western Wheel Scraper Company, and later district sales manager of the Allis Chalmers Company; Clarabelle, the adored little girl who died of diphtheria in 1890 at the age of seven; and Alice, a graduate of Northwestern University. Alice is married to Donald Knox Ewing. Their home is in Aurora, Illinois.

Miles Babb died in 1967. He and his wife, Lottie Allen Babb, lived in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, for several years following his retirement, and early in 1966 moved to Centerville, Iowa, to be near Lottie's niece, Mrs. Robert Beck, Chapter D.

Max Babb died in 1943. He and his wife, Vida Kemble Babb, had three children. Winifred, Mrs. Phil Nolte of Lac de Flambeau, Wisconsin, who has one son and one daughter; Irving Thornton Babb, a lawyer in Milwaukee whose family includes three daughters and one son; and Max, with the Allis Chalmers Company, who has one daughter and two sons.

Alice Bird Babb was an enthusiastic participant in P.E.O. from its organization until the end of her life. With her ready pen and her fine sense of phraseology, she made a tremendous contribution to Grand Chapter, notably in the preparation of resolutions, laws and ceremonies. Her accustomed presence at



meetings and her good judgment helped to direct Grand Chapter during its formative years. She was a superb letter writer. She was associate editor of *The P.E.O. Record* during the first three or four years of its existence, often writing under the pen name of Avis. She cherished the jeweled pin presented to her in 1902 at the time of Chapter A's 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary, and wore it and Ella Stewart's original pin at 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary functions she was able to attend. Alice Bird was a gifted and lifelong student, quick to share her many talents with those she knew and loved.

Alice died at her home in Aurora, Illinois, November 21, 1926, and was buried in Forest Home Cemetery, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

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*Alice Coffin*

MAR. 29. 1848  
*March 29, 1848*  
*July 28, 1888*

## ALICE COFFIN

ALICE VIRGINIA COFFIN was born on March 29, 1848, on Louisville, Kentucky, where the family lived for the year following, then moving to the old family farm at Salem, Indiana, where her father, Matthew Starbuck Coffin, had met and married Martha Thompson, an educated and accomplished young woman, the daughter of Judge John Handley Thompson, a lawyer and political leader in Indiana. The couple lived first in New Orleans where Mr. Coffin engaged in merchandising, eventually becoming part owner of a steamship that plied the Mississippi. One child, Mary Frances, was born in New Orleans. The climate there had an adverse effect on Mrs. Coffin's health, thus the move to Louisville, where she had attended school. Two sons, Charles and Matthew, Jr., were born during the family's sojourn at Salem, 1849 to 1855. The family then moved to Newton, Iowa, where Mr. Coffin engaged in the mercantile business, suffering severe financial losses. Mrs. Coffin died in 1857, when Alice Virginia was but nine years old. The family continued to live in Newton for six years, then Mr. Coffin accepted the position of supervising the transportation of Civil War troops and supplies on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Later he moved his family to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where they might be assured of a good education in high school and at Iowa Wesleyan University.

Alice Virginia's father was of the sixth generation of the Coffin family in the United States, descendant of immigrant Tristram Coffin, the first governor of Nantucket Island and one of ten men to buy the island in 1660 and establish a settlement there. His daughter, Mary Coffin Starbuck, formed the Society of Friends on the Island and became a Quaker preacher. There were many Quakers in the Coffin line of descent. A group of them left Nantucket when the Island became crowded and settled for some years in North Carolina. Slavery became unbearable to them and the group divided, one section settling near Salem, Indiana, in 1815.

Alice Coffin entered Iowa Wesleyan as a freshman in September, 1865. In writing of her, classmate Dillon Payne said:

*Did you notice that tall willowy blond enter chapel that morning with the gold star and apron? She combined all the qualities of a stunning personality. In the drawing room she would be a queen; in the ball room, the first lady. Her name was always on the list of our Beta banquets. Perhaps the most striking couple in our public festivities was Alice Coffin and Will Pearson, brother of Sue. They were tall, courtly, handsome and up-to-date dressers. Will had black hair and blue eyes; Alice was a typical blond, with elegant grace and costume in the latest style. The law of mutual attraction or human gravitation drew them together and the boys expected Will to select her as his partner. She could lay aside her dignity and become a hilarious romp, which she often did. She was said to be an elegant dancer, but Methodist college gave her no chance to shine in the ballroom. She naturally became one of the seven.*

The romance of Alice Coffin and Will Pearson did not have the anticipated ending, Alice finding it necessary to break the engagement. Later there were other offers of marriage, but Alice did not accept them. She was graduated from Iowa Wesleyan in June, 1869, receiving the B.S. degree. Three years later she was granted the honorary M.S. degree. She became an excellent and beloved teacher. She taught for a short time at Des Moines, Iowa, several years at Chariton, then went to Newton, where she had spend her early school days, and was a teacher there until the last year of her life. Alice had been a Methodist, as her mother was before her, but while teaching in Chariton she became a member of the Episcopal church. Her reasons were twofold: She was receptive to the rituals and ceremonies of that church, and she was fond of dancing which at that time was frowned upon by the Methodist church.

Alice's sister, Mary Frances, married Mr. Vernon W. Skiff while Alice was still in college. The Skiffs made their home in Newton. Mr. Coffin lived in the Skiff home and Alice lived nearby when she returned to Newton to teach. The Skiffs had three children: Blanche Skiff Ross (Mrs. Frank P.); Stella Skiff Jannotta (Mrs. A.A.); and Frank Vernon Skiff. Alice had three other nieces, daughters of Charles and Lillie Coffin: Frances Coffin Boaz (Mrs. Tucker); Alice Virginia Coffin Foote (Mrs. H.B.); and Lucille Coffin Donaldson (Mrs. Russell).

Alice was a devoted, imaginative teacher, deeply conscious of the needs of her students. Each child she taught was a challenge to her and she spared neither time nor effort in imparting knowledge. To her, the total child was important: his scholastic ability, his physical and emotional needs, his approach to learning. Her own ethical standards must have lifted many young people to higher levels. She lent encouragement to her students, for she was a perceptive person, and some she helped financially. She was an excellent seamstress and was always beautifully dressed, a teacher one remembers. One student wrote of her, "She was the kind of teacher that the girls copy and the boys silently worship."

Alice died July 28, 1888, in the home of her sister at Newton. In accord with her request, she was buried in Union Cemetery at Newton, just as the sun was setting.

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*Luella Pearson (Denfield)*

*August 24, 1851  
September 20, 1920*

## SUELA PEARSON (Penfield)

**M**ARIE SUELA PEARSON was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 24, 1851, daughter of Dr. Clement and Marie Rose McKinley Pearson. Dr. Pearson was one of the successful early practitioners of the homeopathic school of medicine. He was founder of the Hannemann Medical Society and was its president for many years. Mrs. Pearson was a beautiful, cultured woman with a distinguished family background. William McKinley, president of the United States, was a relative. About 1860, when Suela and her brother Will were still in grade school, the Pearsons moved to Mount Pleasant. Here their beautiful new home, enhanced by Mrs. Pearson's flower gardens, soon became a showplace and social center.

Suela attended the academy at Iowa Wesleyan, then entered the university as a freshman in the fall of 1866, just after her fifteenth birthday. She participated in many school activities, became an excellent musician, and was outstanding in dramatics – elocution as it was called in those days. She was charming, gay and gracious, beautiful and intelligent. She seemed meant to be adored, and adored she was. Dillon Payne told of her conquest of the campus as follows:

*This star was the planet with a ring (of boys) around it, but not so far off. Her father was a doctor, the mother most hospitable and interested in the college young folks, the brother a Beau Brummell, and she herself a peach. At sometime she was the sweetheart of each of us; we all looked alike to her. When it was about time for Sue's gentleman caller to say good-night, the mother would appear in the parlor with a tray of cake and ice cream or some other tidbits, take part in the conversation and remain for the good-night ceremonies. But Sue did not need watching, nor assistance, was not silly, but charming. She had talent, could sing, and was a rival of Allie Bird as a reader. Her songs were rather sentimental, such as "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still", or "Leaf by Leaf the Roses Fall, Drop by Drop the Spring Runs Dry". She was an attraction, a magnet. She had more beaux in the list at the same time than all of the other founders. The heart throbs were all in the male breast. She was absolutely impartial. Can you imagine the girls leaving her out of the original seven? If they had the Betas would have initiated her. The horoscope told her to wait for larger game, and she did. Another thing in her praise was that none of the other girls was ever jealous of her. Her light shown on all, and no one wanted it put under a bushel.*

Suela enrolled in the comprehensive classical course using an extra year to complete it. She received her B.A. degree from Iowa Wesleyan in June, 1871, and the honorary M.A. degree three years later. Soon after her graduation, the Pearson family moved to Washington, D.C., where Suela might have more educational and cultural advantages. Some time was spent in New York City, but Washington remained the Pearson home until Dr. Pearson's death in 1888.

In 1876 Suela was married to Frank Harold Penfield of Cleveland, Ohio. Mr. Penfield was of English ancestry and of Mayflower descent. He was associated with the Standard Oil Company. The Penfields lived on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, near the Rockefeller home, and they held a prominent place in Cleveland society. There were two children, Marie Rose Penfield and Frank Pearson Penfield. Their son died while a student at Yale University following surgery. Daughter Rose was educated by private tutors and in finishing schools in Cleveland and Boston. She was a charter member of Chapter AH, Cleveland.

Life did not continue to unfold as an enchanting story for the founder who was recognized as the most beautiful and popular of the seven. When trouble came into her life, as it did, Suela responded like a thoroughbred. She measured up magnificently to the heartbreaking tasks required when death claimed her father, her brother Will, and her son; when financial reverses changed their pattern of life; and when other complications arose within the family. Her mother became an invalid and for many years Suela and her daughter Rose devotedly cared for her until her death.

Some years after Suela's marriage, perhaps in 1890, she was contacted by her friend and classmate, Ella Kilpatrick Dinwiddie, wife of Major William A. Dinwiddie, then commandant of the Iowa Wesleyan University Cadet Corps. Mrs. Dinwiddie desired that Suela send something, perhaps a banner,

that might be presented to the best drilled cadet corps of the year. Suela responded by providing a gold badge with the stylized letters "P.E.O." set in small precious stones over a gold star centered with a large diamond. Below the diamond were cross arms on a shield and the initials for Iowa Wesleyan University and Cadet Corps. So long as the cadet corps remained on campus, the badge was worn by the first sergeant of the winning company at the exhibition drill held during commencement week. This badge, on loan from Iowa Wesleyan, has been on display in the P.E.O. Memorial Rooms at Mount Pleasant.

After a long illness, attended much of the time by her daughter Rose, Suela Pearson Penfield died in Cleveland on September 20, 1920. She is buried in Lake View Cemetery, Cleveland.

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