Sometimes I have a problem with the founders. They seem too good to be real. Perhaps that feeling comes after spending several weeks manning the information booth, lost and found counter and menu planning service at our house. These services have coordinated a group of young people of about the same age as our founders.

Topics handled were... How are you liking the army? Do we have a racquetball court reserved? If I don't get my grade point up, my scholarship is history! Not "let's start a society of our own".

Where did these young women come from who thought about ideals and virtues? How did they get that way so young? Where did they go after that famous beginning? A moment of insight came, recently, that explained something about the remarkable seven.

In an article entitled 'women at war" by Myra Vanderpool Gormley in Colonial Homes magazine, she wrote of American women during the American Revolution around 1775:

"Our colonial ancestress enjoyed more freedom than their European sisters. Especially on the frontier, they were partners with their husbands. Couples cleared land, built cabins, planted fields, reared children and faced dangers together .... Their rigorous life partly explains why many colonial women performed heroic feats during the revolution."

Less than 100 years later, on the new frontier in Iowa, our seven founders still enjoyed the freedom to attend college with civil war veterans and to innovate by forming a society of their own.
We tend to encapsulate the founders as we've seen them in founders' day programs and skits. They were young, clever, congenial and they had the "skin you love to touch." perhaps we suffer from a "canonization of the departed" syndrome. Collecting a few facts might provide a less limited picture.

The state of Iowa gave us five of the founders. Kentucky and Ohio brought us one each. They came from fairly large families. Franc Roads was the winner in this category. She was one of seven children. Hattie Briggs died youngest at a mere 27 years of age but Mary Allen lived until she was 78.

Fathers of our founders followed diverse pursuits. Two were Methodist clergy, three were businessmen and two were medical doctors. A talented bunch, the seven young women starred in singing, elocution, art and as students of classical language during their college years.

We particularly like to remember their specific contributions to P.E.O. as follows:

**Hattie Briggs** proposed to Franc Roads that they have a society of their own.

**Alice Coffin** designed our pin. She was the first vice president of P.E.O.

**Ella Stewart** was the first secretary. She did not care for the lettering of chapters. She would have preferred naming them after constellations of stars such as Pleiades.

**Suela Pearson** contributed beauty, vivaciousness and the joy she gave to others.

**Franc Roads'** mother, Nancy McClure roads, designed and helped make the aprons the girls wore to chapel the morning P.E.O. came into existence.

**Alice Bird** wrote our oath and first constitution and served as the first president of P.E.O.

**Mary Allen** insisted on proper procedure and good order in conducting P.E.O. business meetings.
These seven were as diverse as we are, now. We learned from the beginning of our sisterhood that including stones with different cuts is one way to build a strong foundation.

The story is loved and familiar. At Iowa Wesleyan, Libbie Brooks appeared on campus wearing a pin bearing mysterious letters. She had organized a group of college girls in Illinois and formed a society called I.C. Sorosis (which later became Pi Beta Phi). Libbie invited some of our founders to join the society, but not all of them. A division of their intimate group was unthinkable. Hattie Briggs proposed a society of their own.

Here is where most founders' day programs end. We might light a few candles, sing some old songs and have refreshments.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the seven young women after they left College? P.E.O. did not end at Iowa Wesleyan. It spread out into Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, and grew all over America and Canada. Did our founders just give birth and retire or did they nurture their baby? Some did watch it mature with great interest while others did not have that opportunity. To their death, the seven treasured the dream while retaining their great individuality. Let's track them down and see what happened after January 21, 1989.

Hattie Briggs was graduated from Iowa Wesleyan at the age of 19. At the conclusion of one of her father's sermons in the Methodist church, Hattie and Henri Bousquet of Amsterdam, Holland, surprised everyone by having her father perform their wedding ceremony in front of the congregation. Henri was an assistant cashier in the Pella National bank and a rising young man in the community. Hattie lived only eight years after the founding of P.E.O., dying of 'an unknown illness' at the age of 27.

Alice Virginia Coffin received her bachelor of science degree in 1869 and taught school in Iowa. One of her students was Mabel Davenport Dour, president of Supreme Chapter of P.E.O. in 1933. Alice's niece was Blanche Skiff Ross for whom the library at Cottey is named. Though
courted by many suitors, including Suela Pearson's brother Will, she remained single and the "jolliest of the jolly". She enjoyed dancing so much she left the Methodist church, which forbade it and joined the Episcopal which did not. She died in 1888, at the age of 40.

Ella Stewart was the only founder who was not graduated from college. After she had completed three years at Iowa Wesleyan, Ella's father died leaving his wife and six children. So there was much need to economize that Ella taught piano at 25 cents a lesson and later accepted a position at the Iowa Industrial School. She helped form Supreme Chapter and untangled early records of P.E.O. She died at the age of 46, having "burned herself out in the service to others" according to her eulogy.

Suela Pearson was the only sophomore in the group of senior class founders. After graduation, her family moved to Washington D.C. for further education. Suela lost contact with P.E.O. for 20 years. At that time, two ladies from Mt. Pleasant visited her and she expressed the hope that her daughter, Rose, might become a P.E.O. Rose was initiated in 1938, as a charter member of Chapter AH, Cleveland. Suela survived a divorce and bankruptcy and died at the age of 69, in Cleveland.

Franc Roads was perhaps the most brilliant of the founders. She entered college at fourteen years of age and breezed through in three years. After the financial panic of 1893, she took a position as art supervisor for the Lincoln, Nebraska public schools. She and her husband moved to Chicago in 1911, where she was often asked to speak before P.E.O. conventions. She believed the educational fund was the most important work of the sisterhood. She worked for 18 years to have women recognized at the general conference of the Methodist/Episcopal church before dying in 1924, at the age of 72.

Alice Bird stayed closest to P.E.O. throughout her life. Through speeches at conventions and articles for THE P.E.O. RECORD she provided a humanizing picture of the other six founders. Her good judgment contributed tremendously to the formation of Supreme Chapter. She was associate editor of THE P.E.O. RECORD during its first four years. Alice died at the age of 76, in Illinois.
Mary Allen was the last surviving member of the original seven. She attended her first P.E.O. convention in 1900. She was an honored member of many conventions and was asked to speak so often she chose to stay away if she could. She felt THE P.E.O. RECORD was a unifying agency that not only "disseminates news" but unites our interests, thoughts and policies. She died at her home in Muscatine, Iowa, in 1927, at the age of 78.

In a few short days on January 21, P.E.O. will be____________ years old. Our International Membership is well over_________ and our state membership was ______________ at the end of the last

P.E.O. year. We have_______ chapters in New Mexico. With single parent households the fastest growing segment in our culture, many of which are headed by women, P.E.O.'S mission of helping educate women is more urgent than ever.

Alice Bird said it so well, "of course we built well, but no thanks to us seven founders, for the time was ripe for just such a society and we caught the step."