

I wonder how many of you know that in the President's Box, a dark green metal one which usually reposes in some dark corner of her closet, there is a yellow looseleaf notebook marked "President's Letters." For the most part they are a "state-of-the-chapter" sort of thing dealing with membership, finance, programs, etc. But in some respects they say a great deal more. Since this month marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of Chapter BL, the program committee suggested that I do this program based on excerpts from the President's letters.

We'll start at the very beginning with Betty Rennebohm's first letter dated January 8, 1953. "Chapter BL began its year on May 3rd. With the help of Marion Peterson and the reciprocity board and in the presence of the state officers and more than 100 Madison PEO's we were organized. Four girls were initiated and thirteen dimitts renewed their vows. One of the highlights of our year was the receiving of our charter at State Convention. Six of our group went with our delegates to LaCrosse to stand in convention opening day. It was a great thrill to not only have Alice Reinhardt, supreme organizer, present to congratulate our chapter but to receive our charter from the hands of Winona Reeves, one of PEO's most famous and beloved members . . . . We began our meetings in October with a membership of 18, a treasury in need of help, and every member acting on a committee . . . . Our goals as a chapter are still a bit hazy. Our projects for peace participation, PEO help in our community, growth of our chapter, extending courtesies to Madison's many unaffiliates are all ideas which we hope to make active in the months to come. We are more or less on a "shake-down cruise" but the spirit of each member is an inspiration and I believe that the spirit of PEO is guiding us in the right direction.



Just one year later in her second President's letter Betty reported, "We were very honored to be asked to give the Model Meeting at convention in Milwaukee in June. We were also a little apprehensive, or maybe I should say - just plain scared--but what a wonderful experience it was. Jane Dorschel was our guiding light and we did appreciate her help as we made our preparations. Needless to say, our biggest problem seemed to be "What do we wear?" But it was solved and we turned our thoughts toward perfecting our duties. This was truly a chapter project and a chapter achievement. And the thrill that came to each of us as we closed our meeting on the stage in Milwaukee will be long remembered.

Jeanette Thomas took over the reins as second president. The chapter had 27 active members, 5 of whom were non-residents and of that number only 8 of the charter 17 were left. They seemed to be over the hump of membership and were ready to get on with other things. So Jeanette wrote, "This Fall we decided that Chapter BL must do something to make ourselves stronger financially. In the past our annual Xmas Bazaar had been our one main source of income and a good source, too. Still wanting a bigger treasury, we entered the project of selling "Peanut Crunch and Mints." I'm certain that BL never realized what natural-born saleswomen existed in our chapter. Apparently feeling financially secure after still another "Peanut Crunch" sale the following year the chapter was able to make donations to all of the PEO projects, send \$25 to the PEO Home Fund and purchase a sizeable Savings Bond.

Not only could Jeanette mention these attainments, she also reported: "Chapter BL continues to break all records for "Production." Mary Heine had a lovely son this fall and Zo Kussow presenter her family with a daughter.



Before the year closes there will be three more new additions within Chapter BL. Due to our officers' great activity along this line, BL hopes that in the near future we will be able to purchase robes for their use!

By the time Betty Land was president the chapter's concern was no longer turned inward. She wrote: We are sincerely concerned with the large number of unaffiliates now in Madison. Even though we only have 8 of our charter members still with us, I'm sure we all remember that Chapter BL was formed five years ago next May 3rd with a charter list of 13 dimitts and 4 initiated. With a list of at least 24 unaffiliates in Madison we feel that our responsibility is in getting to know them better, and giving them a chance to know us. We have worked out a plan whereby our vice-president invites at least two unaffiliates to each meeting. This concern was later to culminate in the formation of Chapter BW during Betty's year as President of the Reciprocity Board.

No story of Chapter BL would be complete without mention of the Triple Trio. Mary Justice first referred to it in her letter dated January 20, 1959. "Our triple trio has certainly had an active year. We will have sung for 6 events this year. While it takes practice and work, our greatest joy is in being together. It was decided that there would be less coffee time and more rehearsal time." The following year she reported, "The Triple Trio was highly honored to be asked to sing for Supreme Convention. Since none of us can accomplish anything alone, this event was no exception. We borrowed robes from BC, Jane Horswill from V, Virginia Thurman from BW and moral support from all our BL's. They were still going strong during Jane Secord's term of office. Her letter said, "The Triple Trio sang at the Appleton convention at the invitation of Connie



Elvehjem, and Nancy Ragatz and I were simply bursting our buttons to think they were ours. The devotion of these members of Chapter BL to the Triple Trio is an honor and a credit to all of us. We are proud of their ability, but it is the spirit in which they do their work that is the most noteworthy. Their generosity of time and talent has brought to our chapter a special halo of sisterly love. In fact, they have so much fun, the rest of us are secretly thinking of enrolling in singing classes and who knows . . . . we may have a BL choir. Now there's a thought!

The Triple Trio was just another manifestation of the growth of Chapter BL. And Jane ended her letter by saying, "We have outlived the "shakedown cruise" as Betty Rennebohm called her term of office. We have become a real family, sharing joys and even some sorrows. Now just as a family finds itself beyond the early year, we have the opportunity to grow into a more mature understanding of each other and the inner meanings of the sisterhood."

By 1964, it was our turn to be a hostess chapter for the State Convention at Janesville, and all that "Peanut Crunch" money which had been stashed away in anticipation of this event made participation so much simpler. Beth Ross reported in her letter, "Betty Land and Jean Clausen were co-chairmen for our chapter. Their work was accomplished most smoothly. Betty was in charge of all convention music and served as song leader. Jean was chairman of invitations and of the Friendship Hour which was held around the pool of the Holiday Inn. Jane Stark was first-aid chairman. Charlotte King served as properties chairman. Jane Stark and Phyllis Memert were among the guards and pages.

By the time Ruth Thomas was president, our children were mostly <sup>out of</sup> the baby stage, our activities were changing. Some members were returning to work and



we began to consider changing our meeting times. I quote from her 1965 letter, "After several polls and the changing of meeting times the past few years, we weighed all the evidence and found that by changing to the 2nd Wednesday afternoon and fourth Wednesday evening, more of us could be present. Our average for members present since our change is 24, which gives evidence that we all want to be present at every meeting and our faithful attendance shows the close bond between us. She went on . . . . .

"With our members belonging to National Pen Women, writing for national and local publications; serving on physical fitness board, having charge of the World Day of Prayer, bringing Opera to Madison, participating in musical symphonies and productions, heading organizations at the University and church organizations at the local and state levels; helping husbands in their high offices; getting children married -- in all of this we feel we are using our talents and tasting in full measure of the rich rewards of life. Because of our PEO ideals and aspirations we are meeting challenges and seeking growth."

In 1967, we increased our support of PEO projects by 80% and we reached the culmination of one of our philanthropic goals during Mildred Wedemeyer's presidency with the decision to raise \$400 to sponsor an IPS student, and Jean Clausen could write, "We were all thrilled last May to learn that our IPS candidate, Maria Martinez was accepted. She came as a guest to a meeting in March, so that we had a chance to visit with her informally; she also gave our education program in November, proving to all of us once again that our IPS money is well spent."



I'll close this 20-year resume with the final paragraph from one of Jane Secord's letters. Though it was written in 1962, it is just as relevant to day as the day she wrote, "With so much that is not right in the world, we have in PEO an opportunity to make the world better. The president of Lawrence College, Douglas Knight, had this verse on his Christmas card which seems particularly meaningful for us in PEO. 'May this day reconcile us to our world; may we learn to meet the darkness without fear, and counter each evil with a star.' May our chapter be filled with stars."

A footnote and a challenge. The groundwork has been laid well. What will we, as members of Chapter BL, do to make those stars truly glisten in the decades to come?

*By Charlotte King*