

# History of the Opening Ode

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“Blest Be the Tie That Binds” was used as the first opening ode and “God Be With You” was used as a closing ode. It was Alice Spilman, president of the Supreme Chapter from 1895-1897, who officially selected these two hymns to be used in the meetings.<sup>1</sup> Some chapters rewrote the words or wrote their own opening ode, but none of these became official until 1921, 52 years after P.E.O. began.

## *The First Ode*

In 1919, a special committee was working to revise the ritual for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary convention. The need for a new ode became apparent to the revision committee. The Kansas City convention was not far off and no inspiration in the way of song had developed. Virginia Corbett of Colorado, head of the revision committee, gives us the details in her own words:

In my extremity, I called upon Caroline Kettle, one of my chapter sisters, and assigned to her the task of writing some words for chapter opening. She protested and I insisted, knowing as I did, that she was gifted with skill and expression and had a sense of ritualistic style and had written some prose and verse for publication. The next morning she sent me the words now used as our opening ode.

I saw at once that they would be adapted to musical accompaniment or expression so hastened with them to another good friend, Mr. Howard S. Reynolds, head of the department of violin and teacher of harmony in our college conservatory of music. I knew that he could supply the tune for the new words, which express so fully the spirit of our sisterhood and meaning of our star. Mr. Reynolds is a man of rare musical appreciation and was not a novice as a composer. He agreed to adjust his listening ear to the suggestion of the muses in our behalf and the morning that I left for convention in Kansas City, he placed in my hands a copy of the ode set to music.<sup>2</sup>

The first time Virginia Corbett heard the new ode was in a rehearsal at the convention, and she was delighted with the results. “The ode filled a long-felt want for something that would give an artistic as well as a spiritual suggestion at the opening of every meeting.”<sup>3</sup>

There were many expressions of approval at the Kansas City convention where it was officially adopted as our Opening Ode.

Originally, Mr. Reynolds held the copyright which was to expire in 1950. However, in 1929, the original plates could not be located for the purpose of making more copies, thus necessitating the

need for new plates. At this time, a new contract was drawn up with Mr. Reynolds, allowing him five percent royalties on all copies for the next ten years. Though these royalties amounted to a very small sum of money, it pleased Mr. Reynolds that the Sisterhood wished to respect his rights as a composer.

Down through the years, many melodies for the Opening Ode were submitted to the Executive Board of Supreme Chapter. It is interesting to note that in 1957 the Ode was transposed to a lower key by Fred Wright, husband of Chellie Stevens Wright, past president of Supreme Chapter.

### ***The Second Ode***

In 1969, for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of P.E.O., Ethel Gardner, president of Supreme Chapter, appointed Elva Harbaugh Clark to review all music and to select an alternate melody for the Opening Ode. The music selected was written by Mr. Goodsell Slocum of Albuquerque, New Mexico, a BIL whose mother and two sisters were also P.E.O.s. It was officially approved as a new Opening Ode, however its use was optional. Chapters could still choose to sing the original Ode or use the hymn “Blest Be The Tie.”

### ***The Third Ode***

And that is how meetings started until January 1989 when P.E.O.s attending the International Convention in Phoenix adopted a third alternate tune composed by Roberta Lindly, president of Chapter EM, Texas. In celebration of her 30 years in P.E.O., Roberta, an accomplished composer, wrote the new melody to express her love, appreciation and thanks to P.E.O.

“...First, second, third – We who are sisters in heart and spirit give thanks for the Star and its message, its melodies. Blest be this tie that binds!”<sup>4</sup>

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1. This was disputed in early years and an opposing opinion is described in “History of the Opening Ode,” The P.E.O. Record, March 1929, p.7.
  2. “History of the Opening Ode,” The P.E.O. Record, March 1929, p. 7.
  3. Ethel Shelhorn Evans, “History of the P.E.O. Ode,” The P.E.O. Record, December 1931, p. 15.
  4. Ruth Krebill, “History of the Opening Ode,” The P.E.O. Record, March-April 1990, p. 46.