

Eureka College

Est. 1855

"...large streams from little fountains flow, tall oaks from little acorns grow... "

Early in the nineteenth century, David Everett wrote this line which captures the philosophy of a small, liberal arts college in Central Illinois. Nestled on 112 wooded acres and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Eureka College, chartered by the Illinois Legislature in 1855, places great emphasis on service and leadership. Both values have come to fruition, as graduates have gone on to serve in Congress, as state governors, college presidents, and, most notably, as the 40th President of the United States-- Ronald Reagan, Class of 1932.

Founded by Kentucky abolitionists and affiliated with the Disciples of Christ, the progressive college's first faculty in 1856 included four women and four men, and was the first college in the state to admit women and men on an equal basis.

This history of equality was evident in 1912, when suffrage leader Elvira "Ella" Seass Stewart -- a Eureka College graduate, class of 1890 -- became the first woman to give the Founder's Day address at the college. In that speech, she talked about her great-grandfather, Rev. Bushrod Henry, a founder of the college and she noted, "They realized that the only value in education is to change and modify, never to solidify." Stewart exemplified these values by becoming a leader in the Illinois Suffrage Movement. By changing and modifying the status quo, Illinois became the first state east of the Mississippi River to grant female suffrage in 1913.

Today, the college welcomes approximately 770 students annually from all faiths and backgrounds and offers more than fifty majors with very small student to faculty ratios. One of the College's honored traditions is the "Ivy Ceremony" dating to 1925. During the Opening Convocation each student is given a piece of ivy which represents strength, flexibility, and tenacity – the qualities the college hopes to instill in their graduates. The sprigs are placed in a basket where they symbolically grow together as one. As students graduate, they may part ways, but they take their own piece of the chain of ivy ...to take root wherever they go "as little acorns grow."

Congratulations to Eureka College on becoming a Peoria Historical Society Centenarian organization.