

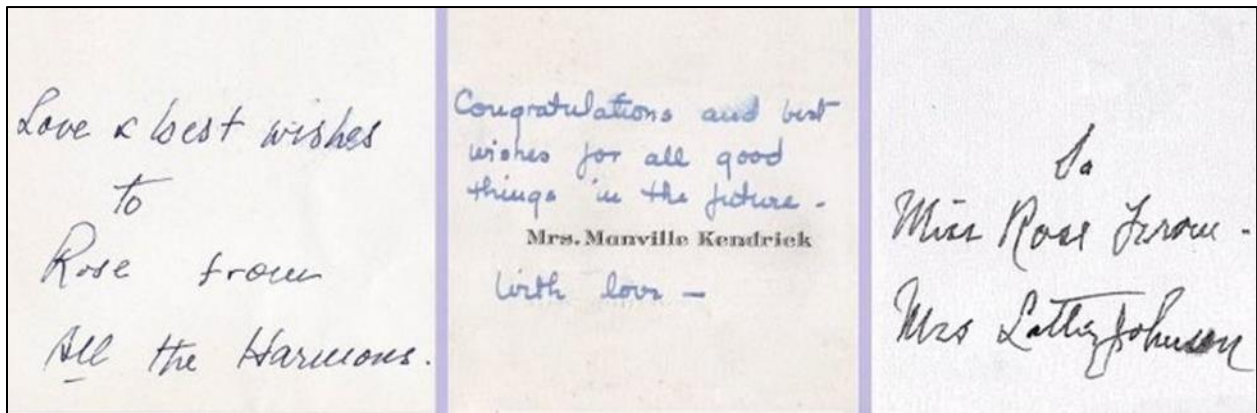
Rose Sobotka Hill: Two Years in the Butler's Pantry

By A. Rose Hill (used with permission)

Alta Rose Sobotka Hill was born on a farm in Harrison County, near Cainsville, Missouri. When her farmer father took his own life, Rose's mother moved her four daughters to Sheridan, Wyoming, to find work and put her girls in school.

In 1947, Rose successfully interviewed for a job at Trail End, the stately mansion of the Kendrick family - Manville and his wife Diana, their two children John and Hugh, and Manville's widowed mother, Eula Wulfjen Kendrick. Her husband, John B. Kendrick, served as a United States Senator until his death in 1933.

Rose worked at Trail End from early 1947 through the spring of 1949. An award-winning poet, Rose has compiled her memories of these years in a little booklet entitled "Two Years in the Butler's Pantry." It is reprinted here by permission.



Graduation Gift Cards, 1949 (Courtesy of the author)

TWO YEARS IN THE BUTLER'S PANTRY

Born Alta Rose Sobotka on a farm near Cainsville, Missouri, I came to Sheridan in early 1947 at the age of 15 with my mother and three sisters. My mother was a widow with four girls to raise so she came to Wyoming because her sister lived here. I answered an ad in the newspaper for a maid, simply called telephone #3 and made an appointment for an interview. I put on my best navy cotton dress, one I had sewed myself, and went to Trail End.

For the interview, I came to the intimidating front door and rang the bell. I was admitted by a wizened little lady, Mrs. Johnson, whose white hair was pinned up in a bun on the back of her head. She was dressed in a light green uniform with a spotless white apron.

Once I went to work I learned that she cooked as well as cleaned bathrooms and vacuumed the floors when it was necessary. She taught me, a green kid from the farm, what I needed to know to be a maid and I owe her a great deal for that.

Once I went to work I was given a day uniform, the bright blue one with white collar and cuffs plus a white bibbed apron for every day work, and a black long-sleeved uniform with button-on white collar and cuffs and an apron without a bib for serving the evening meal.

WHO LIVED IN THE MANSION AT THAT TIME?

The matriarch was Mrs. John B. Kendrick, nee Eula Wulfjen, born at Old Round Rock, Texas, April 26, 1872. She died June 6, 1961. Mrs. J. B. Kendrick's son Manville and his wife Diana Cumming Kendrick along with their two sons, John B. Kendrick II born in 1931 and Hugh Smith Cumming Kendrick born in 1934 also lived there.

Young John Kendrick II had already been away to Philips Exeter Academy at least a year and was home for the summer. He often stayed at one of the many ranches and when he was at home, weather permitting, he slept in his bedroll somewhere out on the grounds.

Hugh was still at home, a freshman in high school the fall of 1947 and attended Sheridan High School. Since I was a junior, the twain rarely saw one another in school except to wave as we passed in hallways. He also attended Philips Exeter beginning in the fall of 1948. In addition to the family Mrs. Lottie Johnson, the cook who admitted me that first day, lived up the back stairs on the third floor. I was also given a room on the third floor in the quarters reserved for the help. Mrs. Johnson's room was next to the bathroom on the east [the cook's bedroom] and mine was around the corner at the west end of the hallway [the housekeeper's bedroom].

Another Mrs. Johnson called Johnsie came to do the family's personal laundry one or two days a week.

MORNING DUTIES

My first duty every morning, no later than 7 a.m., while Mrs. Johnson prepared for breakfast, was to set the dining room table for Mrs. Eula Kendrick and Mr. Manville Kendrick, including water goblet, plate and silverware, and set out cups and saucers for coffee. Usually Mrs. Kendrick came down about 7:30 a.m. and Mr. Kendrick by 8:00 a.m. Both were served fresh fruit or fresh-squeezed orange juice, coffee, toast, bacon, sometimes an egg.

Mrs. Diana Kendrick took her breakfast in bed. When she rang for breakfast, she came to the top of the back stairs to tell us she was ready and give any special order. Usually her breakfast consisted of fruit or juice, tea, toast, sometimes bacon. Mrs. Johnson was always careful to be sure the water was boiling hot and the teapot was hot when she added the water. I took the tray up the front stairs, never up those steep back stairs.

Mrs. Johnson and I ordinarily found time for our breakfast while we waited for the family to make an appearance. John and Hugh came to the kitchen whenever they wanted and usually had juice and cold cereal.

After that first time when I rang the front door bell, I never again entered Trail End through the front door. The "help" was required to use the west entrance. The back door, of course, was locked every evening until the next morning. When the "help" went out in the evening, we used a key, hidden in a small broom cabinet on the back portico, when we returned.

Once when I was a senior in high school and stayed out very late one Saturday night - on a date with my future husband - the key was missing when I returned. I had no idea what to do and at length decided my only option was to ring the door bell. Who should answer but Mr. Manville Kendrick himself. I apologized and went upstairs to my room. His only comment next morning was something like, "You must be tired this morning, Rose." The key was always available after that. I suspect one of the boys came in before me and forgot to replace the key.

MORNING CHORES

As soon as breakfast was over I went to the second floor where the vacuum and cleaning supplies were kept. Mrs. Eula Kendrick instructed me to "use my head to save my heels" by taking all the tools I needed for each chore along with me so that I need not trot back and forth because I forgot something. I remember she kept a month's back issues of newspapers neatly stacked in the closet.

When Mrs. Diana Kendrick was dressed for the day, I made her bed and that of Mr. Kendrick. The sheets were changed each week and that first week Mrs. D. showed me how to miter hospital corners for sheets so tight she could bounce a quarter on the bottom sheet, no small feat since fitted sheets had not yet been invented. She and Mr. Kendrick used the northeast room and slept on twin beds with monogrammed pink percale sheets.

Although a central vacuum cleaner system had been installed when the mansion was built, it was not in use at that time. Instead I used an Electrolux canister for vacuuming

those carpets on as regular a schedule as possible. I can't tell you how many times I cleaned that red carpeting in the front hall and main stairway.

As soon as the family was bathed, dressed and gone it was my duty to clean the bathrooms, especially Mr. Manville's and Mrs. Diana's. I went over the showers or tubs, scrubbed the stool, wiped down the sinks and finished by wiping up the floors. Because it was done each day, it was never a really big chore.

Mrs. Eula Kendrick cleaned her own and rarely asked me to touch it up. An early ranch wife, she was accustomed to much harder work than that. Once I was working in her bathroom when she and Diana held one of their rare conversations. I could tell it was one of those confidential talks best not overheard so I kept as busy and noisy as I could. It evidently dealt with some less than honorable event in the Senator's past. I regret not listening because I missed a chance to hear some of the family history, not for use at the time but for my writing later.

DINING ROOM DUTIES

Lunch was served at 12:15 p.m. I was shown how to set the table with place mat, napkin, water goblet, service plate, silverware. A cup of soup on its saucer, was served from the left, removed from the right. I was to keep an eye on the water goblet, replenish ice and water as needed. The entree came from the kitchen on a tray and was carried so that each diner could serve herself or himself, from the left. Accompanying dishes came next, also carried to each diner, who served himself - from the left. When diners were finished, plates were removed from the right and replaced with a dessert plate put before each diner. Dessert was then served, sometimes in individual bowls, sometimes I carried a tray to each diner who served himself - from the left. A buzzer in the floor enabled Mrs. D. to signal when the diners were ready for the next course.

It all sounds very complicated but it went very smoothly and quickly. The table was usually set with three or four places depending on which family members were present. If only Mrs. Eula had the evening meal, for instance, she often asked for a tray in her room.

Sometimes Hugh asked a friend to lunch or dinner. I remember one attended by Hugh and a young friend. As I served his mother with my back to him, Hugh was able to quickly tie a tight knot in my apron strings, more than once. With my hands full and my back turned there was nothing I could do.

Unheard of nowadays, each diner used a white damask napkin with his own engraved silver napkin ring. Unless the napkin was very soiled or stained, it was used for several meals.

The blue dining room carpet is gone now and usually the dining table is stretched out and set for several diners. The sideboard which I used still sits just inside the dining room door from the butler's pantry.

Dinner was a more elaborate repeat of lunch, more dishes, salad course, meat, potatoes, gravy, vegetables, dessert and at the end a tiny demitasse cup of very strong coffee with its tiny spoon. Also on the table at each place setting was a pepper shaker and a tiny silver dish with a blue glass liner and tiny silver spoon for salt.

Dishes used for lunch were the Minton Rose china which you will see in the butler's pantry. Dinner dishes were white including service plates, soup plates, dinner plates, butter plates, salad plates, all washed, dried, put away by hand - my hands - after each meal. There was nothing so modern as a dishwasher in those days. Usually I could leave the butler's pantry by about 8:15 p.m.

Afternoons were mostly quiet for a couple of hours. I might answer the telephone, take messages. Mrs. Diana was often out and Mrs. Eula Kendrick usually went for a drive in her big black Buick when she finished her after-lunch nap. Mrs. Lottie Johnson, the cook, worked through the afternoon most days with dinner preparations.

Occasionally guests came for dinner. You will recognize names such as Harry and Margaret Fulmer. When I first went to work at the mansion, Mrs. Rosa Maye Kendrick, Mr. Manville's kind and lovely sister, was visiting. One summer her whole family, husband General Harmon, daughter Eula and son Kendrick came for a few weeks visiting the ranches and other Wyoming attractions. Mrs. Harmon sent me an elegant gold circle pin when I graduated from high school. I wrote a thank you note and mailed it to her - I thought. Several days later Mrs. Eula told me Mrs. Harmon had received the note but along with it was another note from a local gentleman. He had found the letter, added his own note of explanation and mailed it on. I do not know how the letter went astray or where he found it.

Each July after the rodeo parade the Kendricks hosted a buffet to which upwards of 200 business and ranch people and their guests were invited. Mrs. D. planned her menu to include sliced ham, tomato aspic, canned asparagus among other foods. Once when the numbers were greater than planned and food was running low, a ranch friend called. When I answered the telephone, she wouldn't allow me to call Mrs. D., but said, "I have

18 guests and I want you to be honest. If we will be too much for you, I will feed them here before we come.” I quickly reassured her that we would find the means to feed them although we had fed more guests than expected. The dear lady fed her crowd herself.

HOW MUCH WAS I PAID?

In the summer I received \$75 a month which amounted to about \$2.50 a day, possibly as much as \$.20 an hour. During the school year, I received \$7 a week - serving breakfast in the morning and dinner in the evening, cleaning on Saturday. Remember I did have a place to live. I could do my own laundry (by hand, no washing machine or dryer) and I had plenty to eat. I had Thursday afternoon off but I had to come back and serve dinner. After lunch on Sunday I was done for that day. My uniforms were furnished. During the day I wore a blue dress with white collar and cuffs and a white bib apron. For serving the evening meal, I wore nylons, black slippers and a long-sleeved black dress with detachable white collar and cuffs, buttoned on and off, to be removed and replaced when I changed to a fresh uniform.

WHY DID I LEAVE?

I graduated from high school, made plans to be married in the fall of 1949 and start college classes at Sheridan College - classes that were held in Sheridan’s City Hall - but that’s another story.

After her graduation from Sheridan High School, Rose Sobotka married Gail R. Hill (she wore the pin Rosa-Maye had given her) and received an AA degree in accounting from Sheridan College. The couple adopted three children and in 1959 Gail started the radiator repair business now owned by one of those children. Rose has kept books for the business since that time. She also acts as historian for her church (writing a history column for the newsletter) and sings in the choir. In 2015, she was appointed to the position of Wyoming Poet Laureate.



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