

# Kendrick's Ladies

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By Trail End State Historic Site Superintendent Cynde Georgen, 2009;  
for presentation to the Wyoming Cattle Women's Association

*So often, history brings us the stories of men who did great things. Rarely do we talk about the women who accompanied them on their journeys to greatness.*

*When Marci Mock first asked me to do this program, she said you'd like to have me talk about John Kendrick and the Kendrick Cattle Company. But as the date got closer, I got to thinking about my audience – Wyoming's cattle women. And so I decided to focus on a different aspect of the Kendrick Story – that of the women who worked alongside John Kendrick; from his childhood as a penniless Texas orphan, to his middle age as a Wyoming cattle rancher, to his senior years as a United States Senator in our nation's capital.*

*Because, as is true with every great man, he didn't do all this by himself!*



Ida Peeler Wulfjen, Eula Wulfjen Kendrick & Rosa-Maye Kendrick at Trail End, 1920s (Hoff Collection, TESHS)

## ROSA KENDRICK

Orphaned at an early age, John Kendrick always considered himself lucky that he didn't have to suffer his orphan status alone. His little sister, Rosa Kendrick, was shuttled around with him from one relative to another, none of whom welcomed the children with open arms. Unlike John, whoever, who quit school somewhere around the fourth or fifth grade, she not only stayed in school; she became a teacher. For many years, Rosa taught at the Coronal Institute in San Marcos, Texas.

Never married, Rosa concentrated her efforts on seeing that her boys – both her students and her brother – were happy. She was delighted when John married in 1891 and made plans to meet him at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. When John had to cancel at the last minute, Rosa

went alone. According to her letters, she had a great time, but on the train trip back home, she fell ill. She was soon diagnosed with typhoid fever.

As soon as he received the telegraph telling of his sister's illness, John took the first train to Texas. But he was too late; Rosa died just hours before his arrival. In her honor, the grieving brother had an impressive headstone placed in the Jacksonville Cemetery in Cherokee County, Texas. He also named his oldest child after her. John Pritchett, a friend of Rosa's, was pleased that her name lived on in John's daughter:

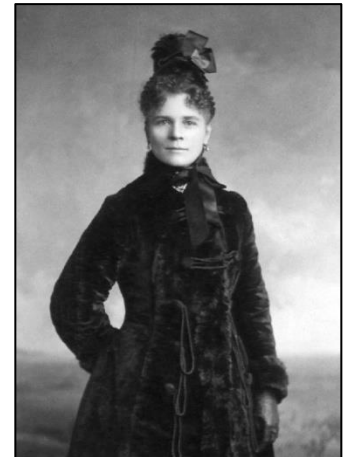


*I see you have named her for Miss Rosa. You could not have found a better name nor one with purer association. My best wishes are with and for the little girl, and when I say that I hope she will make as noble a woman as her aunt for whom she is named, I can say nothing further in that line.*

John always believed that his sister helped make him the man he was, because she encouraged his native curiosity – his love of reading and learning.

### **IDA JOSEPHINE PEELER WULFJEN**

John Kendrick came to Wyoming for the first time in 1879 as a simple cowboy on a cattle drive put together by Texas rancher Charles Wulfjen. When he made his second trip in 1884, it was as foreman of a Wulfjen Brothers cattle drive. From the start, Kendrick spent a great deal of time with the Wulfjens, building barns and fences at their ranches at Lance Creek and Sybille Canyon. He quickly became acquainted with Charlie's wife, Ida Josephine Peeler Wulfjen.



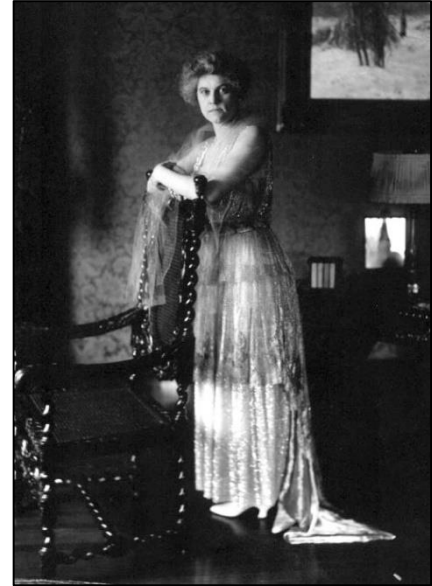
The daughter of an itinerant preacher and part-time inventor, Ida had been born in the wilds of Florida, but moved to Texas as a young girl. She married Charles Wulfjen at the tender age of fifteen (he was twenty-six years old).

Though she was the boss's wife, Ida was only four years older than John, and they had a great deal in common, from their upbringing in Texas to their interest in books. Ida and Charles enjoyed Kendrick's company so much, that he was often invited over to their house. There he met the Wulfjen children: Clarence, Mattie and the youngest, Eula. As fate would have it, John

would spend a great deal more time with Ida and Charles in the future, and not just as their employee.

### **EULA WULFJEN KENDRICK**

Ida wasn't the only Wulfjen woman who influenced John Kendrick's life and career. When she was seven years old – according to a story she later told a magazine reporter – little Eula Wulfjen hopped up into John Kendrick's lap, looked him in the eye, and announced that when she was old enough, she was going to marry him! No doubt everyone laughed and brushed it off as a little girl's crush. But just over ten years later, Eula married John – when she was barely eighteen years of age, and he a mature thirty-four.



Even overlooking their age difference, you wouldn't think the pair had that much in common: he was an orphan; she had a loving extended family. He was poorly educated and relatively unsophisticated; she attended finishing schools in Colorado and Texas where she learned painting, music and languages. One thing they did have in common was determination – a willingness to work hard for what they wanted.

Following a three-month honeymoon, John and Eula returned to their little home on the range, a log cabin on the OW Ranch in Big Horn County, Montana. There they lived for the next eighteen years – John building up his ranching empire, Eula running the home and raising their children. She eventually took over the ranch account books and taught herself to cook when it became apparent that cowboys wouldn't stay at a ranch where the food was no good.

Having lived on ranches as a child, Eula was familiar with life away from the bright lights of the city. She had her horses, her piano, her painting supplies and plenty of books, so could entertain herself when John took off on his frequent buying trips. Even so, she longed for a return to the social life she'd known as a girl. When the family moved to Sheridan in 1908, she saw her chance and quickly became active in local clubs and societies.

Eula encouraged John in his political aspirations. When he was elected Governor in 1914, she took to the role of First Lady like a duck to water. Two years later, when they moved to Washington, D.C., she became active in The Ladies of the Senate, an organization of political wives who knew their power and were determined to use it to their best advantage.

After John Kendrick passed away from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1933, a memorial service was held for him in the House of Representatives. There, Senator Robert D. Carey of Wyoming acknowledged Eula's contributions to the success of Senator Kendrick's career:

*How much inspiration for Senator Kendrick's knowledge and success resulted from the influence of that splendid lady, I shall not pretend to say; but having known John B. Kendrick for more than twenty years and appreciating the value he placed upon the finer things of life, my impression is that he gave to her the greater credit for all the happiness and success that had come to him.*

## **ROSA-MAYE KENDRICK**

Another source of happiness for John Kendrick was his daughter, Rosa-Maye. His firstborn, Rosa-Maye was a true daddy's girl who worshipped almost everything about him. And vice versa! When he was away, Kendrick longed to be back in the bosom of his family, but he knew that he was doing what would ultimately be best for them. As he wrote to Eula in 1907,

*If our two little ones were just ordinary children, I don't believe that I should be easily reconciled to make the sacrifice of such long separations. But since they are not just ordinary children I suppose it is all right.*



Rosa-Maye grew up on the OW Ranch, where she and her brother, Manville, were home-schooled by their mother. Rosa-Maye loved ranch life and was good at it. As her mother said, "The boys all said Rosa-Maye was always the best cowhand on the ranch." The older she got, the more Rosa-Maye appreciated her western upbringing. Sent to boarding school in 1915, she had plenty of opportunity to explore other walks of life. Following a trip to the Percy Rockefeller estate, Rosa-Maye told her father:

*I know now what a wonderful opportunity it is for a girl to come East to school, to come in contact with the different atmosphere. If then she decides, as of course I do, that her own West is God's own country, all the better, for she has seen both sides of life.*

In 1926, Rosa-Maye drove her father on a campaign swing through western Wyoming in support of Democratic Governor Nellie Tayloe Ross. On that trip, Rosa-Maye had ample opportunity to hear her father's dreams for his adopted state. As she recalled,

*Father had a vision which transformed the rolling sagebrush prairies over which we rose and dipped for mile on mile, into pleasant acres dotted with farmhouses, burdened with*

*crops and threaded by canals bearing the miracle working waters. He was confronted now by the difficult task of making this dream a reality.*

While she was interested, Rosa-Maye didn't have much of a chance to help her father make his dreams come true. In 1927, at the ripe old age of twenty-nine, Rosa-Maye married her longtime beau, Hubert Reilly Harmon. A career military officer, Harmon swept Rosa-Maye off to a life of military bases and temporary deployments all over the country. She never again lived in Wyoming or Montana – or even Washington, D.C. – but through almost daily correspondence, she kept in touch with what was happening on the ranches and in the Senate. She celebrated her father's triumphs, mourned his defeats, and encouraged him every step of the way.

### **DIANA CUMMING KENDRICK**

Another of John Kendrick's ladies was his daughter-in-law, Diana. Born at Blackbeard Island, Georgia, in 1901, Clara Diana Cumming had no idea that her life would take her all over the world and then plop her down in the wild western town of Sheridan, Wyoming! The daughter of Public Health Service quarantine officer Hugh Smith Cumming, Diana lived a sort of gypsy life, moving from Georgia to San Francisco to Japan to Virginia in the space of nine years.



In 1920, after several successes in the field of communicable diseases, Dr. Cumming was appointed to the position of United States Surgeon General, a job he held until 1936. This promoted his children to a position of considerable social prominence in the small town that was Washington, D.C. A graduate of Washington's Western High School, Diana became a society debutante whose primary expectation was to marry well and settle down to a metropolitan life of travel, parties and good works. But then she met Manville Kendrick.

Diana first came west in 1926, as Eula's guest at the OW Ranch. There she fell in love with the wide-open spaces, the blue skies, the unhurried lifestyle and – eventually – Manville. Three years after her first visit, Diana and Manville married in one of the biggest social events of the Washington season. Following a honeymoon cruise through the Panama Canal, the couple settled down to life in Sheridan.

Living at Trail End, Diana saw the comfort of her father-in-law as one of her primary duties. When John Kendrick returned to Sheridan, he was usually tired after long sessions in the Senate. So Diana made sure there was a maid on staff to see to his needs. She arranged small

suppers for him, ferried him to and from the train station, and entertained him with stories of local goings-on. She and “The Senator,” as she called him, had a casual, relaxed relationship. Their correspondence shows that their senses of humor meshed beautifully, and he was able to tease her about nearly every aspect of life.

## EULA WULFJEN HARMON

In his seventy-fourth year, John Kendrick finally got what he’d always longed for: grandchildren. His first-born grandchild was Eula Wulfjen Harmon, daughter of Rosa-Maye and Hubert Harmon. Born in Washington, D.C., in April 1931, Eula was followed a few months later by Manville and Diana’s son, John Benjamin II. Though raised on military bases around the country, Eula and her brother spent occasional summers at the OW Ranch, where they developed their lifelong love of the west.



Of all John Kendrick’s ladies, Eula Harmon knew him the shortest number of years, but it was her very existence that confirmed Kendrick’s long-held belief that he wasn’t just living his life for himself – he was living it for those who would follow him. Although he said the following about Trail End, the sentiment applies just as accurately to his ranching empire: “This was not built primarily for my own comfort and enjoyment, but in the hope that succeeding generations would have the privilege of enjoying its benefits and advantages.”

## IN CONCLUSION

The old saying says that “Behind Every Great Man Stands a Great Woman.” I think it’s safe to say that behind John Kendrick stands a whole row of great women. From his sister and his mother-in-law, to his wife and his daughter, to his daughter-in-law and granddaughter, John B. Kendrick was smart enough to realize that he couldn’t do everything he wanted to do alone. He couldn’t do it *by* himself, and he couldn’t do it *for* himself. He had the wisdom to know that we shouldn’t live and work just for ourselves. Those who take posterity into consideration are not only happier and more content, they are ultimately more successful.



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