

Some Later Leaders Among Wyoming Women, 1959:
Carroll Durkee, Frances Paton, Eleanor Mc Kinney,
Lorna Patterson, etcetera

Wyoming's Wonderful Women

An admirer recites the special charms of his state's spirited females, from Nellie Tayloe Ross, the nation's first woman governor, to today's teen-age cuties.

By PAUL SCHUBERT



Margaret Milne of Casper, a June graduate of the University of Wyoming, ranks second in the nation in goat tying, a rodeo event for women.

This girl was mighty good-looking, a twenty-five-year-old honey with regular features assembled with a piquancy that balanced that strong jaw; she had high cheekbones, level, confident eyes, a mouth combining character and humor, and she held her head erect and proudly as if there wasn't a darn thing in the world she was afraid of.

She was dressed in a down-lined jacket against the cold; below the coat her well-cut frontier pants left no doubt that she was superbly stacked.

When I came out of the winter night into Carroll Durkee's Big Horn Drugstore in Greybull, Wyoming, she was talking to Ivan Mitchell. A blast of snow followed me through the door as Ivan asked, "How's the Billings road?"

"O.K.," the girl said cheerfully. "Lot of snowpack this side of Lovell. I took a double spin on that long, slick grade—thought I might have to stop and chain up."

This damsel had just driven in alone from Billings, Montana, 130 miles through a winter storm, after dark. Towns are six to forty miles apart, no houses between towns; the road passes through miles of desolate badlands. A skid off the blacktop could leave you lying in the sagebrush to freeze to death before another car came along.

I looked at the girl with admiration and real affection. Couldn't place her by name, wasn't sure I'd ever seen her before. But you didn't need to know more than you could see. She was terrific. Wyoming women are like

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Some Later Leaders Among Wyoming Women, 1959, continued

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Below are some of the coeds who competed for the title of Miss Wyoming on the campus at Laramie this year. Winner Linda Phillips was out sick when this picture was taken, but she will enter the Miss America contest this fall.



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Photographs by Gene Lester

that—have been from the beginning—wonderfully female, yet competent, strong, forthright, self-reliant, the finest kind of companion for man, woman, child or horse on any kind of expedition, from a picnic in Yellowstone Park to the journey through life.

I hereby confess to a permanent love affair with all 100,000 of the dear creatures—from the perky teen-age high-school cuties switching down the street in their wide ruffled and flounced square-dance skirts to the stoic, stern great-grandmothers at the Old-timers' Picnic, with their memories of log-cabin homesteads and frontier loneliness.

If you think this avowal of devotion will get me shot by some hard-riding cow-punching neighbor, think again. Wyoming men have always thought and said Wyoming females were the greatest—trusted 'em, respected 'em, honored 'em, adored 'em.

One of the first things the first Wyoming Territorial Legislature did, back in December, 1869, was to pass a bill declaring that every twenty-one-year-old woman "residing in this territory may, at every election, cast her vote; and her right to the elective franchise and to hold office under the election laws of the territory shall be the same as those of (male) electors."

Incredible, there on the Indian-fighting frontier, which always was supposed to be the exclusive domain of the mustachioed pistol-packing male.

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At Greybull, high-school girls vying for the title of Rodeo Queen not only have to be good-looking but also have to prove their ability as horsewomen. This year's winner was Sue Wamhoff (second from left).

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This was six and a half years before Custer's Last Stand against the Sioux on the Little Big Horn, a whole half century before women were to get this far, politically, back in the effete, educated East.

When Wyoming Territory acquired statehood in 1890, the provision for equal rights was retained in the state constitution. They call Wyoming the Equality State. The equality goes far beyond politics. There has never been a time in Wyoming's history when Woman wasn't Man's full partner. She had to be. There was no room for clinging vines or fluttering Victorian types there on the hard frontier. Equality was born of frontier necessity. It has resulted in an extraordinarily buoyant female morale.

Wyoming had the world's first woman justice of the peace, square-shooting square-jawed old Esther Morris at South Pass City back in 1870, and Esther did a job any man would have been proud of. South Pass City was a rough frontier town on the Oregon Trail—today it's a ghost town. History records that "the rowdies of the place undertook to intimidate Mrs. Morris and thus force her resignation—and prove that women were unequal to the performance of political duties—but they retired humiliated and discomfited from the contest. Nearly forty cases were brought before her, and so justly did she administer them that not one was appealed to a higher court."

It was Wyoming that first seated women on a grand jury, first included women in a trial jury, first swore in a woman bailiff, all in Laramie in the spring of 1870, all experiments so radically "unnatural" that newspaper readers throughout the United States and Europe were regaled with detailed reports from the scene in anticipation of spectacle and fiasco. Laramie was a rip-roaring shanty town of "1000 law-abiding and 4000 lawless citizens" at the end of steel on the transcontinental railroad then under construction.

The first trial case was for murder. The jury deliberated two days and brought in a verdict of "guilty in the second degree," whereupon the presiding justice complimented the jurors—six men and six women—in the highest terms, saying women were fully the equal of men if not better. One male reporter did make the snide comment that the clicking of a lady juror's knitting needles had been intensely irritating to the other jury members.

The only unmarried woman on the jury was young, pretty, gently bred Eliza Stewart, recent valedictorian of the graduating class at Washington Seminary in Washington, Pennsylvania, who had arrived in Laramie alone by stagecoach to open the first school. Juror Eliza was married the following June—unwed schoolteachers seldom remain single long in Wyoming.

Two kinds of women came into Wyoming at the beginning. A few were as

tough as they made 'em—the type that followed the railroad track crew, dancehall girls and gamblers' shills, even occasional lady bullwhackers like the notorious Calamity Jane, who could handle a double yoke of oxen like a man and didn't fear hell or high water. You still find a scattering of back-country ranch women who remain crude in the old style, go round the cabin barefoot, do any work a man will do and use language colorful enough to curl your permanent.

But from the beginning Wyoming's floozies and hillbilly types were outnumbered by another brand of females who have set strong stamp upon the state's womanhood—females loaded with character, strength and virtue, equally marked by feminine gentleness and high intelligence.

These dames just don't push around. When Democrat Nellie Tayloe Ross was elected and installed as the state's—and the nation's—first woman governor back in the mid-1920's, she faced a politically hostile Republican state legislature. On an important bill involving a political appointment, the legislature sent a delegation to the governor's mansion to propose a deal—they would pass the bill if the lady governor would agree not to name a Democrat to the job. Up to now the lawmakers had known Mrs. Ross not as governor, but as the governor's wife—she succeeded her husband, who had died in office. Gracious, pliant, very much the dignified first lady, she had always seemed a negative, background character. What a change, now that she was governor in her own right! There was no deal—and the legislators went back to the statehouse and passed the bill anyway.

Mrs. Ross worked hard and capably throughout her term and was an excellent governor, but was narrowly defeated for re-election by a Republican in a contest interesting in that the Wyoming female electorate manifestly did not vote together as a sex, but split on party lines, blasting one ancient male dread that voting women would stick together against any man. Mrs. Ross turned to national politics, was active in the Al Smith campaign, became vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and after that was director of the Mint for twenty years. She now lives in retirement in Washington, D.C.

So many Wyoming towns have had woman mayors down through the years that this is news no longer—the latest was the same old Laramie, which has become a tranquil university city. As for school superintendents and directors of education on all levels, Wyoming's educational system has grown great, thanks to the tireless contributions of devoted self-effacing women. The state ranks near the top in money spent per capita on education.

All this in a 97,914-square-mile frontier country notable for sagebrush, rattlesnakes, gullies, rivers a mile wide and an

inch deep, Indians, coyotes, cattle and sheep, antelope, big game, great gaunt chains of rocky mountains, a limitless arid world where you need thirty acres to graze one cow. In Wyoming roughly half the land is still owned by the Federal Government, and there's nearly a square mile of space for every three persons. Population 320,000, half of 'em female, and you can decide for yourself at what

The Broken Music Box

By Charles Lee

Though sound has ceased
Within this dainty box,
Who will presume
To say its music
Has been totally released?
Is not tinkling even now
Around this very room?
Lilts lightly in upon the
dawn—
And not by chance
Makes even darkness dance?
Ah, you must allow
When love's the key,
Mute music boxes
Blithely play
As if to prove the heart's
remembrance
Far more real than broken
steel
Or clay.

tender age the ripening bud is entitled to the tag "woman." I say there are 100,000 women because that's a nice round number and they have nice round shapes. It's one of the world's most exclusive clubs, because if a gal doesn't like Wyoming, you can't keep her there. Either she's crazy about it—or if she feels fleshpots are indispensable, she goes a long, long way and never comes back.

The first Wyoming woman I had a chance to get well acquainted with was twelve-year-old Frances Paton. Her father ran a dude ranch at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains, with a string of twenty-five saddle horses which were turned loose on mountain pasture every night to graze. The job of gathering up those horses early every morning is technically known as "wrangling," and it is a man's job. In fact, a man usually makes quite a thing of it—I mean he does it with a lot of noise, swagger and show-off.

Twelve-year-old Francie wrangled as if there were nothing to it. She would ride

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off bareback five or six miles up the mountain, gallop a mile and a half rounding up the string, and bring them down to the corral in style. When it came to putting halters on them, it was a treat to see Francie move around the corral—no swinging lariat, no wild-eyed, snorting scramble. She slipped among the horses like a shadow, put a loving hand on an unsuspecting neck, and before the nag knew what was happening he was haltered—and he liked it. As she threw the saddle on his back, she talked to him, kidding him shamelessly—and he liked that too. Young Francie could catch and saddle two horses for every one saddled by any man on the place. Then she would ride off into the red foothills, conveying a docile string of adult dudes with the aplomb of an old cowhand. Watching her, I couldn't help feeling masculine unease—made you believe there might be something to this "female-of-the-species-is-more-deadly-than . . ." stuff.

Another Wyoming woman who made a distinct early dent on me was Eleanor McKinney, who sold me a can of fly spray in a hardware store in Greybull the first time I ever visited that neighborly Western town. Eleanor is a girl easy to remember. It's more than good looks. She has poise and personality and—well, she'd stand out if she came up to you in a shop on Fifth Avenue or Bond Street, and she was a very pleasant surprise in Olsen Brothers' hardware store in Greybull.

As time went on, I got to know both McKinneys, Eleanor and husband Cleo. And what I learned about attractive Eleanor made me respect her to the heels. Eleanor and Cleo, it developed, had a modest farm on the Emblem Bench, twenty miles from town. They had two fine, growing sons—by now one of those boys is in the Air Force, the other at the University of Wyoming. Their farm wasn't big enough, in Wyoming terms, to take a man's full time, nor could it provide a first-class living for a family of four, so the boys worked the farm after school hours, and both Cleo and Eleanor worked at other jobs.

Eleanor not only clerked for Olsen's but since she had to drive to and from town she doubled up pay checks by carrying the rural mail for the Emblem route. Stopping at every R.F.D. box for twenty miles on the way home, all she had to do when she got there was cook supper and fill those male tummies, keep up with her house cleaning and take care of the washing.

They all worked equally hard, and they were all happy—and looked it. That, I concluded, was why Eleanor McKinney's face was so attractive. However hard she worked, she was a happy woman. I hadn't realized that industry, thrift and the good cheer that comes from useful hard work were still the rocky ribs of the American body politic, but the good-looking girl who sold me

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Versatility, I've learned in the years since then, is a Wyoming female characteristic. Great modesty goes with it. These are virtues of the frontier personality—Wyoming is still a frontier state in spite of paved highways and summer tourists.

In any case, beware of underrating the Wyoming woman who performs menial services for the Yellowstone-bound tourist. There's a lady who spent twelve years as a trustee of the University of Wyoming who will fill your gas tank and wipe your windshield on U.S. Highway 14, about 110 miles east of the park; check your oil, too, and if you have sense enough to listen, give you fascinating homespun comment on the state of this wide, cockeyed world.

This is Lorna Patterson, former county school superintendent, a college woman and a schoolteacher by profession. She and husband George own a crossroads general store called Old Shell Lodge. Lorna also teaches the village primary school, not because she has to, but as a labor of love, and the handful of ranch youngsters who learn their letters in her room are as lucky as children can be, because Lorna is not only a pedagogue of the first rank but also a woman of striking personality.

Lorna, who could teach anywhere in the world on any level she chose, insists that she has been trying for thirty years to get away from teaching. As a schoolmarm freshly diplomaed, she came out of North Dakota to the raw Bighorn Basin because she wanted frontier adventure—the classroom was just a way to earn a living. When she promptly married Scottish sheepman George Patterson, she gave up teaching, and the newlyweds went to housekeeping in a canvas-covered sheep wagon, following 2500 woolies through the green pastures on top of the Big Horn Mountains. Lorna took to the life with enthusiasm, got used to riding horseback forty and fifty miles a day.

Then one day a hat-twisting, self-conscious deputation of ranchers and townsmen got off their horses beside the sheep wagon and told the lady sheep rancher they wanted her to take on the useful, confining, praiseworthy indoor job of county school superintendent. Wyoming, they said, had plenty of folks who could raise sheep, but women like Lorna with the drive and know-how to educate children were rare, precious and too good to lose.

So, she's been connected with the schools ever since, one way or another. She did quit long enough to bear her own daughter, but the classroom got her again, just as it still has her in Shell. "It's a challenge," she says, "and you can't pass up a challenge." Twelve years ago the big reward came when she was named a trustee of the University of Wyoming, at

Laramie. She still pumps gas, though, if a car rolls up in front of Old Shell Lodge. Why not? Somebody has to.

A challenge of another sort faced Wyoming's Kitty Meloney, of Basin, when she went to the last Republican National Convention, in San Francisco. Kitty is a forceful, quick-witted, self-confident, levelheaded member of the Republican National Committee, and was a convention delegate from Wyoming. Before she left Basin, Len Hall, then National Committee chairman, called her on the phone and asked her to take on the convention's most onerous job, treasurer.

If you can think of a meaner, more thankless labor, name it. It gave her the responsibility and bookkeeping headache of administering, disbursing and accounting for funds running well into six figures—doing it, moreover, under the lunatic atmosphere of a nominating convention.

Previous convention treasurers had, Kitty discovered, been inclined to shirk most of the hard personal labor by using hired accountants and disbursing agents for that part of it, while the Honorable Treasurer sat on the convention platform with the other high brass. Unfortunately this method notoriously produced a fiscal snarl of shuddery dimensions.

Fortunately Kitty is not one to feel bound by precedent. To understand Kitty and her husband, Con, you've always got to remember that when their wedding automobile broke down and they had to catch a train seven miles away, they didn't hesitate to coast that distance downhill on a spur track, riding a small railway flatcar with a two-by-four stuck through a hole in the floor for a brake. A wild ride—but they caught the train.

Kitty and Con Meloney are professional bankers and business partners. They head the Security State Bank, of Basin, Wyoming—population 1220, elevation 3870. Kitty got into politics by being president of the State Federation of Women's Clubs, which put her in line for the Republican National Committee—she's now a vice chairman, doing real well on the national political scene.

Treasurer Kitty Meloney arrived at the San Francisco convention accompanied by partner Con plus two girls from the bank, a set of ledgers all set up, and a battery of adding machines, calculating machines and check-writing machines. She set up shop in her hotel room. No expensive suite of rented offices, no high-priced staff of hired help. Just four small-town professionals ready to work.

Did you ever try to check out some \$500,000 in half a week—fat checks for big brass bands, tiny checks for taxi rides from the depot, checks for bales of bunting and checks for ham-and-cheese sandwiches delivered after midnight to smoke-filled rooms? The climax came when Kitty and staff sat up till daybreak preparing individual pay checks for each of the hundreds of Cow Palace ushers, doormen

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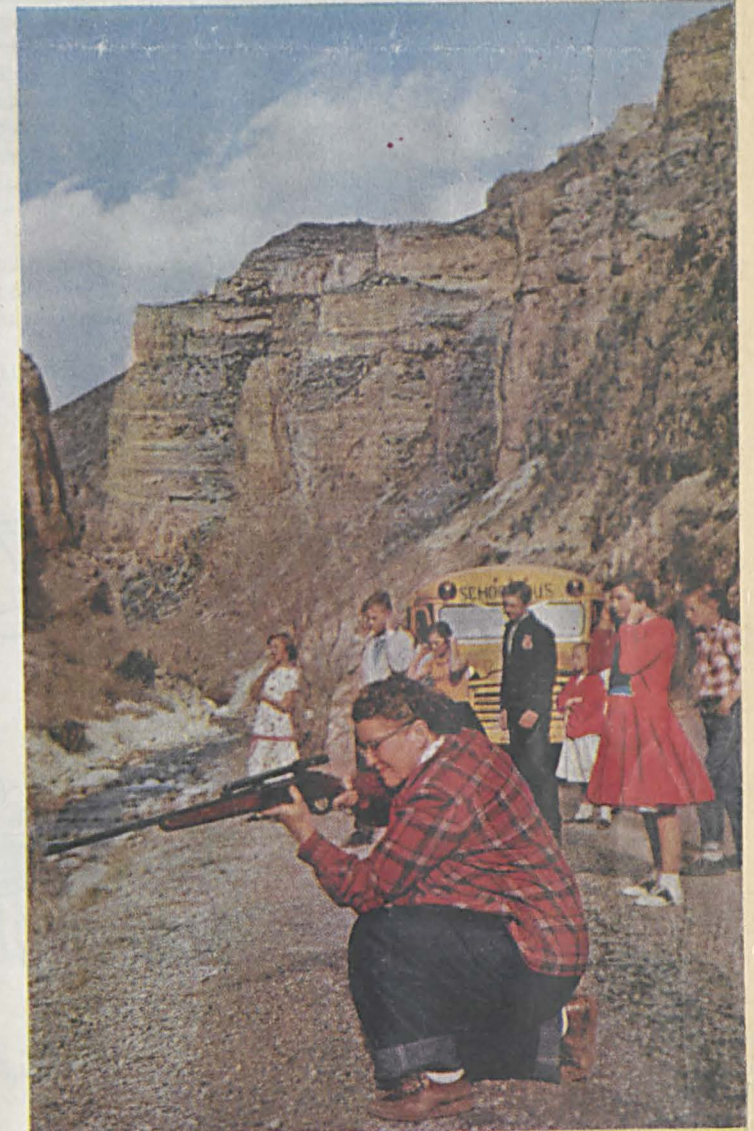
Margaret Milne, shown here with a two-day-old lamb, also raised livestock while studying nursing in college. Once she even tried parachute jumping.



Schoolmarm Lorna Patterson, a University of Wyoming trustee, often helps her husband by pumping gas at their store.



Mrs. Mary Jester Allen, 84, is Buffalo Bill Cody's niece. She came to Wyoming thirty-seven years ago to build a museum for him.



Mrs. Steva Scott, an expert huntress, drives a school bus and an oil truck. Above, she demonstrates her marksmanship in Shell Canyon.

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and pages, averting the unavoidable loss of thousands of dollars which traditionally disappear unaccounted for when the payoff is made in cash. When the convention ended, there wasn't a cent unaccounted for; the books were posted and balanced. And Kitty Meloney, looking as fresh as a daisy, but feeling exhausted and limp, hadn't missed a single convention session as a Wyoming delegate.

Of course, most Wyoming women lead quieter lives, get along without brushing big-time elbows on either the state or the national scene. A quarter-century ago Lillian McDonald said of herself, "I am not famous for anything, but belong to that vast number of women who have helped to make Wyoming what it is today by trying to do the best I could each day as it comes along." Lillian was a covered-wagon pioneer who lived on Willow Creek, sixty miles west of Casper, and remembered the days before paved roads or electric wires or modern kitchen appliances or motorcars.

The early days hadn't been unhappy. "The strangeness of pioneer life, the fear of unknown dangers and the simple pleasures of a new country brought the people very close to each other. All the joys and sorrows were shared. Ah, those were happy days!" said Mrs. Alfred H. Beach, author of *Women of Wyoming*.

I think today's women, when they, too, look back, will say the same thing. In its essence, Wyoming hasn't changed. Wyoming girls still enjoy simple rather than sophisticated pleasures. At high-school age they show off their shapes by serving as rodeo queens, homecoming queens, class queens. They burn up energy and wild elation on pep squads and in cheering sections. Drum majorettes practice for hours with the baton, love their skin-tight suits and shapely bare legs. Girls play in school brass bands and sing in innumerable close-harmony groups, TV style. The state isn't naturally musical, but it makes up in enthusiasm and noise for deficiencies in tone and harmony.

Wyoming girls, who get lots of hard work at home, don't go in for female team athletics. They ski enthusiastically, and at college level like water sports.

Rodeo, of course, is something else again. That's not athletics—that's important! Girls rope calves, ride broncs, and when it comes to trick and fancy acrobatics on horseback, they practice and perform with breath-taking dedication. And thousands of girls grow up steeped in Four-H and Future Homemaker activities, know how to feed livestock, fatten steers, grow gardens, make dresses, bake bread, put up jam.

Fishing and hunting attract hordes of female devotees to the mountains and streams—the hard, high world where you can't fake anything and performance

pays off, where the only thing that counts is being all woman or all man, good afoot or ahorse, good in camp, a good stalker and a good shot, a good, cheerful soul.

I went into the Basin telephone office recently, and there behind the desk sat Hap Crane's daughter, Vera Jean, and we got to talking about Lake Solitude. Hap, a Hyattville outfitter, has a permanent fishing camp up on Lake Solitude, and this girl spent three weeks up there last summer. When she got to talking about it, that look came into her eye, that curious, gone look—the office disappeared, and I disappeared, and the street outside disappeared, and she wasn't a young woman working for the telephone company. She was just woman, and the place she wanted to be was up in the mountains.

Out in the street Steva Scott came along, driving George's big oil tanker. That tanker is so big that Steva looks tiny in the cab. "Get your elk, Steva?" I asked her.

Ruefully Steva shook her head. Outwardly the lady is a comfort-loving housewife; in the civic department she's the one who was chief supervisor of the rear-end-puncturing department when 700 kids got emergency shots during the polio epidemic; but if ever there was a passionate huntress and fisherwoman at heart, it's Steva Scott.

"Made me so mad," she said, as if she meant it. "Evelyn Beall went up in a car, spent the afternoon and came home with game. George and I camped on the mountain, and the only elk we saw came walking through our camp the night before hunting season opened—and George wouldn't shoot it. Sometimes I just hate being honest!"

A fierce primitive closeness to nature is, I think, the key to many Wyoming women. In this big-sky state the measure of womanhood is still uncomplex. When you ask the question, "Who stands out as the finest woman you know?" the answer is always like the one I got over on the South Fork of the Shoshone:

"Amanda Holman. Through all the years she lived here on the river she was the finest woman you could hope to meet. I never talked to her without feeling better when I came away. The Holmans never had an easy life. Holman was sick a lot, and there was lots of work to do on that place. But no one ever heard Mrs. Holman complain. She was as good a rider as I ever saw, and one of the best hands with horses. She knew cattle. She kept a spotless house. But other people have done those things. The great quality in Amanda Holman was her spirit. She was wonderful. It was a sad day when the Holmans grew too old to ranch and had to leave the valley."

Seventy years ago they said the same

thing about Roshanna Reader, a covered-wagon pioneer. One of Mrs. Reader's neighbors wrote, "I have no words to express the gratitude I owe her. Many times when I sent for her in great anxiety over the illness of a child, she rode miles to help me. Her calm efficiency and Christian faith brought peace to my troubled heart."

Do you think the same thing doesn't go on today, just as truly and surely as it did in past generations? If you do, think again. The pioneer ideal of womanhood, unchanged, is everywhere, all over Wyoming. They start out as cutie-pies in tight pants, screaming their heads off for Grey-bull to beat Cody or Basin in the big high-school gyms. They live past the rodeo-queen and drum-majorette stage, and they turn into women just like the women their mothers and grandmothers were. I adore the whole wonderful lot of 'em. Wyoming's female sex is terrific!

THE END

(Conclusion)

Some Later Leaders Among Wyoming Women, 1959, concluded