

## **Ladies of K-State, 1863-2009**

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K-State celebrates Founders' Day on February 16! On that date in 1863 ownership of Bluemont Central College, the school established by the leaders who settled the Manhattan area in the 1850s, was transferred to the state and became Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University). It is the oldest public institution of higher education in the state.

For the last 146 years, twelve men have held the office of president at K-State, from Joseph Denison (1863-1873) to Jon Wefald (1986-2009). What better time than Founders' Day to recognize the women who joined their husbands to serve the university as first ladies! Unfortunately, this venue does not provide the space to adequately describe the individual characteristics of these outstanding women. Collectively they: supported their husbands; raised children; became leaders in campus and community organizations; hosted visiting dignitaries, faculty, and students; and carried out countless other roles to benefit their institution.

The average tenure of a first lady was 12 years with Janet McCain serving the longest, 25 years, while Marie Will remained in her position for two. Ruth Ann Wefald has been at K-State for 23 years.

Below is a list of the 12 first ladies, their husbands, years of service, and one random tidbit about their life or time at K-State. (Photos of the first ladies and presidents are available on the [University Archives website](#).)

**Frances Ann Osborne (Dennis) Denison** (Joseph), Sep 1, 1863-Aug 31, 1873. Only first lady and husband to have had a previous marriage.

**Ann "Nannie" Taylor Foote Anderson** (John), Sep 1, 1873-Sep 1, 1879. Met future husband during childhood.

**Charlotte Pearl Halstead Fairchild** (George), Dec 1, 1879-Jun 30, 1897. Son, David, married Marian Bell, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell.

**Marie Van Velsor Rogers Will** (Thomas), Jul 1, 1897-Jun 30, 1899. Had excellent voice and sang at campus events.

**Marguerite Rae Nichols** (Ernest), Jul 1, 1899-Jun 30, 1909. Born in Aberdeen, Scotland.

**Margaret Ward Watson Waters** (Henry), Jul 1, 1909-Dec 31, 1917. When they left Manhattan, the home they built at 311 N. 14<sup>th</sup> was purchased by Kappa Kappa Gamma as their sorority house.

**Effie Lane Nebeker Jardine** (William), Mar 1, 1918-Feb 28, 1925. Only first lady of two Kansas public colleges/universities (William became president of Wichita State in 1934).

**Mildred Leona Jenson Farrell** (Francis), Mar 1, 1925-Aug 31, 1943. Only first lady to have a baby during her tenure.

**Helen Elsie Eakin Eisenhower** (Milton), Sep 1, 1943-Jun 30, 1950. Only Manhattan native to become first lady.

**Janet McLean Henry McCain** (James), Jul 1, 1950-Jun 20, 1975. An accomplished ballerina, she served longest term as first lady, 25 years.

**Shirley Hansen Acker** (Duane), Jul 1, 1975-Jun 30, 1986. Accomplished artist who took lessons from Oscar Larmer, K-State and Manhattan artist.

**Ruth Ann Joynt Wefald** (Jon), Jul 1, 1986-summer 2009. Driving force behind the establishment of the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art at K-State.

With President Jon Wefald announcing his retirement effective the end of the academic year (2008-2009), a national search was undertaken for a replacement. On February 11, 2009, it was announced that Kirk H. Schulz and Noel Nunnally Schulz will become the 13th president and first lady of K-State!