

Honoring Our first Ladies

Americans, as well as people around the world, have long been fascinated by our nation's First Ladies. They want to know what the First Ladies are doing, where they're going, what they're wearing, and what's going on in their personal life. Because of extensive media coverage over the last twenty years, people's need for information about these women has been mostly satisfied, although the information they receive may not always be accurate. But what about those First Ladies who served in the 18th, 19th and most of the 20th centuries? People certainly don't learn much about First Ladies in their history classes in school and media coverage prior to recent years has been limited. So how can people find out about these women about whom they are so curious? The National First Ladies' Library in Canton, Ohio was created to fill this void.



The brain child of Mary Regula, President and Founding Chair, the National First Ladies' Library was founded in 1996. Frustrated by the lack of information readily available about First Ladies, Mrs. Regula wanted to form an organization that would educate people around the world about the important contributions of our First Ladies to our nation's history. By offering exhibits, programs, symposiums and curriculum units of study, as well as a research library the National First Ladies' Library is able to reach a diverse audience from schoolchildren to scholars and demonstrate to them that First Ladies have had a much greater impact than merely serving as the social hostess to the President.

Many First Ladies have been better educated and wealthier than their husbands. They have served as their husband's political confidante and advisor, worked to bring attention to causes, and campaigned tirelessly to help advance their husband's political careers – all without pay.



Martha Washington was much more than the kindly housewife as portrayed in history books. She was a wealthy young widow when she met and married George Washington. During George's frequent absences (many of which lasted for several years), Martha managed not only George's plantation, Mount Vernon, but also the extensive properties left to her when her first husband died. She took care of all of the financial matters for their holdings and trained the slaves to carry out their household duties. Martha also organized the complicated process of moving the household – first, yearly during the Revolutionary War when she joined George at winter camp, then later to Philadelphia and New York during the Presidency.

Abigail Adams was a political partner to her husband John. John recognized that Abigail was intelligent and politically astute, and often discussed political matters with her. She was always willing to lend an ear and to offer her strong opinions. A staunch supporter of women's rights, Abigail wrote John to "remember the ladies" when he was helping to draft the Declaration of Independence.

Dolley Madison aided her husband James political career in a social setting. Dolley often held receptions, using the opportunity to introduce her brilliant but shy husband to potential political allies. Dolley also kept in tuned with political happenings by attending congressional debates. All who came in contact with her admired Dolley's effervescence and charm.

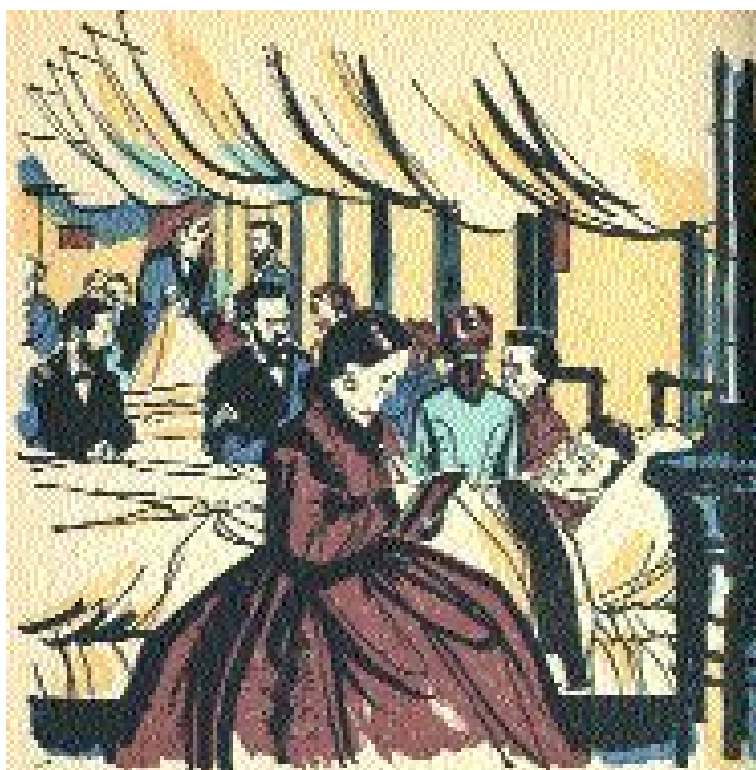
Much maligned Mary Lincoln quietly helped in several causes, which were unfortunately ignored by the media. During the Civil War she often visited hospitals, where she would read to, feed and write letters for wounded Union soldiers. The troops named "Camp Mary Lincoln" in her honor. Mrs. Lincoln supported the Contraband Relief Organization, which provided assistance to freed black slaves. Strongly opposed to slavery, Mary Lincoln is said to have convinced Abe Lincoln that slavery should be outlawed by taking him to a slave market.

A highly intelligent woman who spoke five languages including Mandarin Chinese, Lou Hoover was an advocate for women's physical fitness. She supported the Girl Scouts, serving as their National President. Lou Hoover particularly liked the service aspects of Girl Scouting as well as the cooperative ventures and the outdoor activities that were available to girls through scouting. She believed that scouting made the girls better homemakers, citizens, and friends, and that it encouraged keener minds and stronger characters. As First Lady she gave many radio talks encouraging girls to become active in their communities and cited the Girl Scouts as a way to become involved.

First Ladies serve our country in diverse ways. Some choose to be politically active, while others choose to aid non-political causes. Some enjoy being in the spotlight, while others prefer to remain quietly in the background. However they choose to carry out their role, there is no doubt that our First Ladies have a substantial impact on our nation's history.



Lou Hoover



Mary Lincoln



Dolley Madison



Mary Regula, President and Founding Chair of the National First Ladies' Library



Martha Washington

Visitors to the National First Ladies' Library can view our permanent and changing exhibits; tour the historically restored family home of Ida Saxton McKinley; attend programs, book signings, author lectures and other special events; and conduct research on each of the First Ladies in the research library that contains books, audio/visual materials, authors' research materials and a photograph collection. Extensive information is offered on the website at www.firstladies.org including a 50,000-entry bibliography of works on all First Ladies and a curriculum enrichment program with units of study on First Ladies.

For more information, contact:

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www.firstladies.org

