

Behind the Scenes of Power

BY LORI
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Museum Salutes First Ladies

Although America's First Lady is not an elected official, few would dispute the power of this behind-the-scenes figure in the life of the President—and ultimately the nation. More than 20 years ago, Mary Regula, wife of Representative Ralph Regula, already knew that First Ladies played an important role in our nation. When she agreed to fill in for her husband at a Lion's Club meeting, she made Mary Lincoln the topic of her speech. While researching, she became frustrated by the lack of books on such a famous woman. It was then that she realized the enormous absence of research materials available on First Ladies, and she vowed to fill that void.

Although Regula initially wanted to create a bibliography for researchers, that mission eventually evolved into the National First Ladies' Library, which opened in Canton, Ohio, in June 1998, to educate the public about the contributions of First Ladies. Five years later, First Lady Laura Bush dedicated the accompanying Education and Research Center.

The National First Ladies' Library is a private, nonprofit organization that manages and operates the First Ladies' National Historic Site, which consists of the Saxton House, the ancestral home of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley, who lived with President McKinley in the house from 1878 to 1891. Guided tours take visitors through the completely restored Saxton House, a Victorian theater and a host of exhibits. On permanent display is a collection of photographs of First Ladies—from



Clockwise from top left: Portraits of Sarah Polk, Florence Harding, Mary Lincoln and Jackie Kennedy are on display at the First Ladies' Library.

Martha Washington to Laura Bush—and all the women who served as official hostesses in the White House. It's the only collection of its kind in the country.

"One thing about visiting us is that with our changing exhibits, each time you come back you will see something different and learn something new," says Executive Director Pat Krider.

A recent museum exhibit, "First Ladies' Campaigns: Once Every Four Years," examined the changing role that First Ladies and candidates' wives have played in the campaign process. Here are some of the highlights:

- Sarah Polk helped during her husband James Polk's 1844 campaign by acting as his unpaid secretary.

- Mary Lincoln was the first First Lady to appear (possibly by accident) in a campaign photo. The photo depicts a huge crowd in front of the Lincoln home as Mary Lincoln looks out the front window.

- In the presidential campaigns of 1888 and 1892, the image of Frances Folsom Cleveland appeared on ads for sewing machines, liver pills and cough syrup. Her young, attractive and photogenic image was used to soften the harsher and more unappealing image of her husband, Grover Cleveland.

- Florence Harding was so visible and so vocal in the 1920 campaign—the first time women could vote—that she played a major role in Harding's overwhelming victory. She spoke to women's groups and encouraged all women to not only vote, but to know what they were voting for.

- Eleanor Roosevelt was the first First Lady to speak at a national convention, doing so in 1940 when her husband, Franklin Roosevelt, was nominated for an unprecedented third term.

- Jackie Kennedy's beauty and youth were appealing to the young voters of 1960. Photos of her taken by Jacques Lowe were printed many times during John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign.

- In 1964, Lady Bird Johnson went on the campaign trail alone, traveling across the country on a train billed "The Lady Bird Special." It was the first time that an incumbent First Lady spoke to the American public about her husband's policies.

For more information on the library, call (330) 452-0876 or go online to www.firstladies.org

{QuickQuiz}

Answers to quiz on page 5: 1. Yes. Women did fight in the Revolutionary War, but they did so disguised as men. The first known woman to disguise herself as a male soldier and fight the British was Deborah Sampson. 2. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted women the right to vote in 1920. 3. Franklin Roosevelt appointed Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins to his Cabinet in 1933. She held the position for 12 years. 4. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan appointed Sandra Day O'Connor to the U.S. Supreme Court. Twelve years later in 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed the second woman, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. 5. Organized by women activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the Seneca Falls Convention took place in 1848, officially marking the start of the campaign for women's suffrage.