



From
Frontierswoman
to Flapper:



Ohio's
First Ladies





* Mentor

* Fremont

Garretttsville *

* Canton

* Marion

* Oxford

* Chillicothe

* North Bend

* Cincinnati

From Frontierswoman to Flapper: Ohio's First Ladies

It is remarkable that Ohio is the home of seven First Ladies who were born or lived in the state. Their lives spanned from the colonial days of the United States to ushering in the Jazz Age of the 20th Century. Anna Harrison was born in New Jersey before the American Revolution, but her family settled in the Northwest Territory that became the state of Ohio. Anna's Ohio was a wilderness, and she belongs to a class of rugged American women; the frontierswoman. The last two First Ladies were Florence Harding and Helen Taft. They were born in Ohio in 1860 and 1861 respectively. Their generation of women ushered in the Jazz Age, Prohibition and the Roaring 20s – the “new breed” of flappers with new opportunities for women. These seven women were unique and lively individuals, and their husbands had the good fortune to meet and marry them in Ohio.

Anna Symmes Harrison (1775 - 1864)



Anna Symmes was born in New Jersey on July 25, 1775. She was the second daughter born to John Cleves and Anna Symmes. Her widowed father served as a Continental Army Colonel during the American Revolution. He took both of his daughters to live with their maternal grandparents on Long Island, New York. Due to her family's wealth and prestige, Anna was given an excellent education - rare

for a girl at the time. Her education would serve her well for the life she was to lead as a frontierswoman, military wife and mother.

Anna moved with her family to the Northwest Territory in 1794. Her father was a Founding Father of the small town of North Bend, Ohio, near Cincinnati. While visiting her sister in nearby Kentucky, Anna met the dashing soldier of the Northwest Territory Indian Wars, Captain William Henry Harrison. Though her father initially objected to her marrying a "mere military man," Anna followed her own instinct and heart, and married Harrison on November 22, 1795.

The newlyweds moved into a log cabin in North Bend. The first of their ten children was born in 1796. Anna has the distinction of giving birth to the largest number of children by a First Lady. Interestingly, Anna would outlive all but one of them. Anna's life consisted of raising and educating her brood in an isolated and harsh frontier

often single-handedly. When General William Henry Harrison became governor of the Indiana Territory, the family followed. Even though little is known of Anna's life, it is easy to determine she was strong and brave. The only portrait of her depicts a serious and pious woman in her bonnet and bow, but through her surviving letters Anna's intelligence, education and political prowess shine through.

After a lifetime of supporting her husband through his military and political careers, the 65-year-old Anna could not have been happy when the Whig party coaxed the 68-year-old retired Harrison back into public service. Still, she was a visible presence during the presidential campaign of 1840. An illness kept her from accompanying her husband to Washington for his inauguration, and before Anna was well enough to make the journey, Harrison died from pneumonia just 30 days into his term. She would live another 24 years. Anna actively wrote letters to Presidents Tyler and Polk seeking political positions for her numerous offspring and relatives. After the large home on her estate burnt to the ground in 1858, she spent her remaining days in North Bend at the home of her only living son, John Scott, the father of her grandson, the future President Benjamin Harrison.



Lucy Webb Hayes (1831 - 1889)

Lucy Webb was born in Chillicothe, Ohio on August 28, 1831. She and her two older brothers were raised by their widowed mother, Maria, and her maternal grandfather, Isaac Cook. Grandfather Cook, an influential judge and early founder of Chillicothe, was also a strong advocate for the temperance movement. Before she was twelve, Lucy signed an oath of abstinence from alcohol that she would honor the rest of her life.

Because of her naturally sunny disposition, people were drawn to Lucy, and she sincerely returned their affection. Lucy was also well-educated. Her mother moved to Delaware, Ohio so that Lucy and her brothers could attend classes at Ohio Wesleyan College.



Since women were not allowed to enroll, Lucy attended classes but received no credit. Delaware was the hometown of the Hayes family. Rutherford B. Hayes was away attending Harvard at the time, but Lucy made a good impression on his mother. At the age of 16, Lucy enrolled at the Wesleyan Female College in Cincinnati and graduated in 1850 with a liberal arts degree. She is the first First Lady to receive a college diploma. During the last year of her studies, Rutherford came for a visit. Shortly thereafter, he moved

his law practice to Cincinnati. Secretly engaged in 1851, they later married at her mother's home on December 30, 1852.

The first of the Hayes's eight children was born in 1853. Like most women of the time, Lucy was very proud of her husband's service and also deeply concerned for his safety during the Civil War. When she received word from Hayes that he was wounded, she immediately left for Washington. She spent four frantic days searching for him before learning from others wounded from his regiment that he was recuperating in Maryland. Once they were reunited, she began to visit and attend to other wounded soldiers. During the war years, Lucy would join Rutherford at various winter camps where she would focus on the sick and suffering. She was not spared her own share of losses; two small sons died - one of dysentery in 1863, and the other of scarlet fever in 1866.

In 1867 Rutherford was elected governor of Ohio, and the family moved to Columbus. Lucy toured the institutions set up for the war-related disabled and orphaned. By the time her husband began his presidential term in 1877, Lucy was more than ready for her role as First Lady. Her pleasant nature and innate love of people gained her many admirers. She personally oversaw the receptions and state dinners, and expanded the White House conservatory to include a rose and violet house. The deep faith of the Hayes family meant attendance at church services on Sundays. They gave the White House staff the day off, and with friends and family spent Sunday evenings singing hymns and reading scripture. Rutherford and Lucy renewed their vows at the White House on their 25th wedding anniversary in 1877. The day was one of Lucy's favorite memories.

Rutherford and Lucy retired to their home, Spiegel Grove, in Fremont, Ohio in 1881 where Lucy led an active retirement. She taught Sunday school in her church. She also became involved in the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church – a group dedicated to helping the poor and new immigrants to this country. She enjoyed accompanying Hayes to Civil War veteran reunions. She died several days after having a stroke, on June 25, 1889. After her death and shortly before his own, Rutherford wrote that his marriage to Lucy had been “the most interesting fact of my life.”

Lucretia Rudolph Garfield (1832 - 1918)

Lucretia was the eldest of four children born to Zebulon and Arabella Rudolph on April 19, 1832 in Garrettsville, Ohio. The Rudolphs were deeply committed members of the Disciples of Christ religious organization. They also were ambitiously involved in their children's education. In 1847, Lucretia was sent to the Geauga Seminary School in Chester, Ohio. The following year, at age 16, she met the man who would eventually become her husband, James A. Garfield. Lucretia rejoined her family in Hiram, Ohio in 1850. A new college, the Hiram Eclectic Institute, was founded by her father and other members of the Disciples of Christ. It was at Hiram that Lucretia realized her attraction to the dynamic and charismatic Garfield.

Before he left to further his studies at Williams College in Massachusetts, James and Lucretia were engaged. Thus began a long distance relationship of ardent letters that did not carry the same passion when the couple met, and the engagement was broken. Lucretia

truly enjoyed teaching and making her own living. She taught at schools in Chagrin Falls, Ravenna, Cleveland, and finally Bryon, Ohio before the second engagement was announced, followed by marriage on November 11, 1858. The marriage, however, was not ideal, marked by James frequent travels and admitted infidelities. The marriage was maintained through long distance and letters. It wasn't until 1863, when the death of their eldest daughter brought the grieving parents together,



that the marriage became one of enduring love and devotion. Six more children were born. Five would live to become successful and remarkable adults in their own right.

As Garfield's political star rose, Lucretia's calming influence and political savvy were the catalysts that led him to the presidency in 1880. Lucretia, always a more reserved and private woman, even gained fresh admiration from him as she enthusiastically threw many successful White House dinners as the new First Lady - so it was alarming when Lucretia suddenly came down with malaria in May



of 1881. Once she regained some strength, the doctors felt the New Jersey sea side would speed her convalescence. Garfield was joyously looking forward to their reunion when he was shot by an assassin at the train station on July 2. Instead, it was Lucretia who returned to Washington to reunite with him for the final time. She was a calming force for the entire country as her husband slowly and agonizingly wasted away for the next 80 days. After his

death, she focused on various memorials to her husband.

From a \$360,000 gift given to Lucretia and her children by the American public, Lucretia was able to comfortably raise and educate her children. She divided her time between her homes in Mentor, Ohio and Washington, DC. She also had a home built in Pasadena, California in 1904 to take advantage of the milder winters for her health. She volunteered at the Red Cross and joined a literary club in Pasadena. Lucretia died on March 13, 1918 amidst the turmoil of World War I. Most of the country had forgotten her by then. Her children returned her body to Ohio and placed it next to her husband's beneath the Garfield Monument at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland.

Caroline Scott Harrison (1832 - 1892)



Caroline Scott was born on October 1, 1832 in Oxford, Ohio. She was the second child born to Dr. John and Mary Scott. Dr. Scott was a professor at Miami University, so education was a priority for the close-knit family. Caroline was a fun-loving, good-natured and head-strong woman. Her natural talents for music and art were encouraged, and she received instruction in both. She was fifteen when she met Benjamin Harrison, an admiring student of her father's at Farmers College in Cincinnati. When the Oxford Female Institute was established in 1849, Dr. Scott

became its first president, and the family moved back to Oxford. Benjamin Harrison followed in 1850 and enrolled in Miami University; their friendship was renewed and grew into romance. During his senior year of college, Ben and Carrie became secretly engaged. The two quietly wed on October 10, 1853.

Benjamin Harrison desired to advance his own legal career, apart from the reputation of the Harrison name in Ohio. He settled on the growing city of Indianapolis, Indiana where the couple had three children. With the support of Caroline, Ben joined the military in 1862 and quickly rose to become the regiment commander of the Seventieth Indiana Volunteers during the Civil War. Caroline anxiously worried and waited for war news and Ben's letters. The war years were especially difficult as a single mother of young children, but she volunteered for community work and nursed wounded soldiers. A deep-seated patriotism became a part of her being.

By the time Caroline Harrison entered the White House as First Lady in 1889, she had been a popular and successful hostess in

Indianapolis and Washington for over twenty years. As her children grew she found time to actively serve in many organizations, including a life-long commitment to the Indianapolis Orphan's Asylum. She became a star pupil of the German artist Paul Putzki and soon mastered the art of china painting. In addition to adding much needed updates to the White House, she restored the conservatories, grew exotic plants and flowers, and established an attic studio on the third floor. In 1892, she became the first First Lady to give her own public speech as the first President General of the Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Though Caroline seemed insatiably busy in her own work, she remained President Harrison's closest confidant. She accompanied him on presidential trips where her outgoing nature and friendliness were great assets to compliment the more formal and reserved nature of the President. Never in robust health, Caroline caught pneumonia in 1891. By July of 1892, she was well enough to convalesce at Loon Lake in the Adirondack Mountains. She initially improved, but after a relapse she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. She insisted on returning to Washington, where she died on October 25. Benjamin, who could hardly leave her side during her illness, was broken hearted by personal loss, and exhausted by political battles. His second term defeat was a relief. He returned to his home in Indiana.



Ida Saxton McKinley (1847 - 1907)



James and Katherine Saxton's eldest child, Ida, was born on June 8, 1847 in Canton, Ohio where James was a successful banker. Ida received an extended education, first at the Delhi Academy in New York, followed by the Sanford School in Cleveland, Ohio, and finally a finishing school, the Brooke Hall Female Seminary in Media, Pennsylvania. Upon graduation in 1867, she began working in her father's bank.

Though this female employee raised eyebrows, Ida paid little attention in her independent, determined, and self-assured way. These traits would serve her well for the rest of her life.

In 1869, Ida and her sister embarked on a six-month Grand Tour of Europe. In true fashion, Ida oversaw the budget and expenses. The young women noted the afflictions of the poor and hard labor of women they encountered in many countries. They also wrote of their escapades, such as drinking wine and attending the opera on a Sunday night in Germany. Ida returned to her job at the bank in 1870. Through increased legal business with her father, Ida became acquainted with the young lawyer and Civil War veteran, Major William McKinley. The two were married on January 25, 1871. Their oldest daughter was born on Christmas day, followed by another infant daughter in 1873 who died of cholera a few months later. It was after the birth of the second daughter that Ida McKinley's health deteriorated. She began to have periods of blinding headaches and epileptic seizures for the rest of her life. With the sudden death of

her eldest daughter in 1875, Ida's health further declined. William McKinley was devoted to his wife, and the two lived exclusively for one another.

Mark Hanna, the presidential campaign manager for McKinley in 1896, personally witnessed the steadfast affection McKinley displayed for his wife and knew it would garner votes. The taboo of epilepsy meant that many were suspicious of Ida's condition. At the time, many afflicted with epilepsy were shunned and placed in asylums. To counteract that stigma, Hanna brilliantly brought the effortless regard between the McKinleys to the forefront. For the first time, a candidate's wife was featured in numerous campaign ephemera and souvenirs. With her delicate spunk, Ida rose to the occasion. When she became mistress of the White House she attended to her duties as First Lady in her own fashion; seated in a chair, she held a bouquet of flowers as she greeted guests at receptions and dinners.

The three thousand-plus slippers Ida crocheted in her lifetime remain her unique contribution to charitable causes. She doted on her many nieces and nephews, and the extended Saxton and McKinley families were always welcome at the White House. Ida accompanied McKinley to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York in 1901. She

was visiting with friends when McKinley was fatally shot by an assassin. Ida calmly remained by his side during the eight days before his death on September 14. She returned to Canton and lived quietly for the next six years, occasionally visiting the temporary tomb of her beloved husband and overseeing local memorials to him. She died on May 26, 1907 and was placed beside him with her two daughters in the McKinley Monument.



Helen Herron Taft (1861 - 1943)

Helen Herron, nicknamed “Nellie,” was born on June 2, 1861 in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a young girl, Nellie liked to practice playing the piano and dreamed of a career in classical music. She attended many fine schools in the Cincinnati area, including the University of Cincinnati. She took a job teaching French at Madame Fredins School before joining the faculty at White-Sykes, an all-boys school. Though she was satisfied with teaching as a means of financial independence, she expressed in her diary her



frustration at the restrictions she felt as a woman. She still clung to her desire for a musical career. She was concerned about finding a husband who would appreciate her intelligence. Happily, Nellie found that trait in William Howard Taft. They became engaged in 1885 and married on June 19, 1886.

The newlyweds began their life in Cincinnati, where Taft was a superior court judge; Nellie, however, had bigger and brighter plans for his career. In 1890 when Taft became US solicitor general for the Harrison administration, she discovered the political scene in Washington, D.C. much to her liking. They moved there with their infant son; the Taft family grew to include three children. When the Taft's returned to Cincinnati, Nellie found a perfect way to nurture her love of music. She helped originate and became the first president of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1894. Her tireless efforts and attention to funds and publicity met with



continued success. When Taft was asked by President McKinley to serve as the Governor-General of the Philippines in 1900, Nellie was delighted; her one and only regret was resigning as president of the symphony.

The three years the Tafts spent in the Philippines remained some of Nellie's fondest memories. Much of what she learned was applied to her tenure as First Lady; interracial hiring of White House staff, musical entertainment after state dinners, and the design and establishment of the beautiful Potomac Park. The free weekly concerts held for the public at the park's bandstand lent to a sense of community enjoyment and pride. Sadly she suffered a stroke in May of 1909, only months into the Taft administration. It took a full year of rehabilitation before Nellie returned to public life.

After a failed bid for a second term, the Tafts settled in Connecticut for a time. Nellie penned and published her memoirs, *Recollections of Full Years*; she was the first First Lady to do so. When Taft became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1923, Nellie happily returned to Washington. She was content to be in on the political hustle and bustle once more. She remained in Washington until her death on May 22, 1943. Nellie is buried in Arlington National Cemetery next to her husband.

Florence Kling Harding (1861 - 1924)



The only daughter of Amos and Louisa Kling, Florence was born in Marion, Ohio on August 15, 1860. Florence was an animal lover and a tomboy as a young girl. Her father noted her intuitive business skills, and she learned to keep the books for his prosperous business accounts. Though she studied classical piano at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, she returned home after only one year's attendance.

In 1880, an ill-fated elopement with Henry DeWolfe quickly produced a son. DeWolfe was an alcoholic and deserted his family. Florence returned to Marion labeled as a divorcée. She eked out a living giving piano lessons, and was forced to hand over the majority of her son's upbringing to her father. She met Warren Harding in the late 1880s; despite her father's disapproval, they were married in their newly built home on July 8, 1891.

Warren Harding owned The Marion Daily Star newspaper. Florence took over the daily operations of the newspaper business due to Harding's ill-health. She thrived on the busy atmosphere and the news of world affairs. Her management made the newspaper even more prosperous over the next fourteen years. It also served as balm for her as she endured the affairs of her wayward husband. Florence suffered from kidney disease for over twenty years and often astonished doctors with her sheer will to live.



Florence considered the front porch campaign of 1920 the highlight of her life. Understanding the media from first-hand experience, she knew the importance of creating a great image. She posed with Warren for pictures, shared recipes, and enthusiastically spoke in support of the women's right to vote for the first time. Florence served as First Lady with genuine enthusiasm and joy. She devoted much time to improving the lives of disabled World War I veterans. She served as honorary president of the Animal Rescue League. When Harding died suddenly from a heart attack on August 2, 1923, she was by his side and emotionally shaken. She planned to stay in Washington and establish memorials to her husband when problems with her kidneys returned. As the Harding administration scandals began to surface, her physical health further declined. Florence died after unsuccessful kidney surgery on November 21, 1924. She was placed next to her husband at the Harding Tomb in Marion, Ohio in 1927.

It must finally be noted that Ohio can claim eight Presidents, but only seven First Ladies called the state home. Although Ulysses S. Grant hailed from Ohio, his wife, Julia, was not born in, nor did she ever live in the state. Still, Ohio boasts the most First Ladies of any other state in the union.

This exhibit is made possible by the following institutions:

Stark County Historical Society and McKinley
Presidential Library & Museum

The Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site, Indianapolis

The Ohio Historical Society & The Harding Home

The Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center

The Western Reserve Historical Society

Also visit:

James A. Garfield National Historic Site - 8095 Mentor Avenue, Mentor, Ohio 44060 - (440) 255-8722
www.nps.gov/jaga/

Garfield Monument Lakeview Cemetery - 12316 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44106 - (216) 421-2665
www.lakeviewcemetery.com

Harding Home - 380 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Marion, OH 43302
(740) 387-9630 www.ohiohistory.org/places/harding/

Harding Tomb - Vernon Heights Blvd., Marion, Ohio 43302
(740)387-9630 www.ohiohistory.org/places/hardtomb

Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site - 1230 North Delaware Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202 - (317) 631-1888
www.presidentbenjaminharrison.org

William Henry Harrison Tomb - Cliff Road, North Bend, Ohio 45052 www.ohiohistory.org/places/harrison/

Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center - Spiegel Grove, Fremont, Ohio 43420 - (419) 332-2081
www.ohiohistory.org/places/hayes

Lucy Webb Hayes Heritage Center - 90 West Sixth Street, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601 - (740) 775-5829
www.lucyhayes.org

McKinley Presidential Library & Museum - 800 McKinley Monument Drive NW, Canton, Ohio 44708 - (330) 455-7043
www.mckinleymuseum.org

McKinley Memorial Library, Museum & Birthplace Home
40 North Main Street, Niles, Ohio 44446 (330) 652-1704
www.mckinley.lib.oh.us

William Howard Taft National Historic Site - 2038 Auburn Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45219 - (513) 684-3262
www.nps.gov/wiho/



TOURS

All tours are guided and include both the changing exhibits at the Education & Research Center and the Saxton McKinley House, the restored Victorian home of President William and First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley. Tours last approximately 1 1/2 hours.

Tour Hours: Tuesday - Saturday at 9:30 & 10:30 a.m. and 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m., plus Sundays in June, July & August at 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m.

Tours begin at the Education & Research Center, 205 Market Avenue S.

Reservations are required for groups of six or more; recommended for all others.

\$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$5 children under 18 - includes both buildings; \$3 Education and Research Center only
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