

The Monday After: ‘Encore!’ exhibit examines artistic talents of first ladies

By Gary Brown

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CANTON —

Caroline Harrison and Ellen Wilson painted. Jacqueline Kennedy sketched. Betty Ford danced. Helen Taft played the piano. Nancy Reagan acted. Rose Cleveland wrote poems and essays that were published in literary magazines.

These first ladies are featured in the new exhibit — Encore! The Artistry of America’s First Ladies” — now displayed at the National First Ladies Library.

“Over the years we’ve done many exhibits about the first ladies, and during the research one of the



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things we noticed was that so many of them had artistic talents,” explained Pat Krider, executive director. “I think who come to see this exhibit will discover that not only do first ladies embrace causes, they also have personal interests.

“Some of them had burgeoning careers before they became first ladies. First ladies didn’t just plan dinner parties.”

Rose Cleveland, for example, was an accomplished poet who, while tending to White House hostess duties for her brother Grover Cleveland during years he was a bachelor president, also maintained a literary career.

“Her first book, a literary criticism entitled ‘George Eliot’s Poetry and Other Studies,’ was published while she was serving as a reluctant first lady in 1885,” notes a pamphlet published by the library as a companion to the exhibit.

Krider called “Encore!”, which is set up in display cases on the first floor of the National First Ladies’ Library research center, a “fun exhibit.” The joy taken by each of the first ladies is evident in the artifacts and text panels that make up the displays.

“There wasn’t any type of dance that Betty Bloomer didn’t love — ballroom dancing, acrobatic, tap, ballet, jazz,” says the companion reader about Betty Bloomer Ford. “As she wrote, ‘Dance was my happiness.’”

The Ford display, which includes examples of clothing she wore while dancing at the White House with President Gerald Ford,” is one of Krider’s favorite parts of the exhibit, she said.

“I like the dresses of Betty Ford,” said Krider, “and I like the oil paintings of Ellen Wilson. “We have some of her original landscapes on display. They’re beautiful.”



ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

WHAT: “Encore! The Artistry of America’s First Ladies”

WHEN: Through Nov. 6

WHERE: National First Ladies’ Library at 205 Market Ave. S

WHO: Evidence of interest in the arts is offered by the exhibit for first ladies Louisa Catherine Adams, Rose Elizabeth Cleveland, Caroline Scott

Harrison, Helen Herron Taft, Ellen Axson Wilson, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Betty Bloomer Ford and Nancy Davis Reagan.

WHY: To show that the wives of presidents had interests — often artistic — beyond their duties as hostesses of the White House.

HOW: The exhibit can be viewed during normal business hours of the National First Ladies' Library. Tours are offered at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. and 12:30, 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, plus 12:30, 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. Sunday during June, July, and August. Reservations are required for groups of six or more.

RELATED EVENTS

The National First Ladies' Library has announced its "Encore! The Artistry of America's First Ladies" series of programs. All events are reservation only by calling (330) 452-0876, Ext. 301.

- On July 11 is the Nancy Reagan Film Festival, a free event featuring two films and lunch beginning at 10 a.m. A brief lecture will precede each movie along with free popcorn: 10 a.m., "Donovan's Brain"; noon, lunch break (reserved boxed lunches \$6); 1 p.m., "East Side West Side."
- On July 25, "A Celebration of Art and Music" will honor First Ladies Ellen Wilson and Helen Taft with an 11:30 a.m. departure by motor coach for the Cleveland Museum of Art. Those attending will dine and shop on their own in Little Italy then attend The Cleveland Orchestra and Gershwin's "A Rhapsody in Blue" at Blossom Music Center. Deadline to register is June 24. Cost is \$47 or \$35 for seniors over 60.
- On Sept. 12 is the film "Jackie: Behind the Myth." The free event features a lecture by Karen Kalleher, co-producer and co-writer of the PBS film, at 10 a.m. Guests can meet over coffee with her from 11 a.m. to noon. (Lunch from noon to 1 p.m. is on your own). The film will be viewed at 1 p.m.
- Oct. 17 is "A Little Poetry, a Little Music," coffee house entertainment featuring the artistry of Louisa Adams and Rose Cleveland at 10 a.m. Cost is \$10.

QUOTE

"Life was meant to be lived, and curiosity must be kept alive. One must never, for whatever reason, turn his back on life."

— Eleanor Roosevelt