

First Ladies of America



Before she became a first lady, Lucy Webb had formed strong opinions about certain aspects of American life. She loathed slavery and disliked alcohol, and her education and intelligence led many Americans to believe that she would become an activist first lady. What they got, however, was a bit surprising.

In the White House, Lucy Hayes exhibited her belief that the role of first lady was a private one in a public setting rather than a public role to be carried out before the watchful eyes of the nation.

Born in Chillicothe, Ohio, in 1831, Mrs. Hayes grew up in a religious and reform-minded family that shaped her views from early on in life. Two of her aunts participated in the emerging feminist movement, her grandfather supported temperance, and her parents were abolitionists.

When Mrs. Hayes was a child, her father, Dr. James Webb, promptly returned to Kentucky to free slaves he had inherited; when he died there of cholera, her mother still freed the slaves despite advice from family and friends that she sell them for money to raise her three children. Mrs. Webb refused, but she did spend the rest of her life ensuring her daughter and two sons received the best possible education.

At 16, Mrs. Hayes entered Wesleyan Female College, where she was described as a "diligent" student.

Writing essays and taking part in debates as part of her studies, she confronted the question of whether women were the intellectual equals of men. She concluded: "Woman's mind is as

strong as man's – equal in all things and his superior in some."

Mrs. Hayes earned her college degree, and in 1852, she married lawyer Rutherford B. Hayes, a suitor who had known her family for many years. As Hayes rose through the political ranks, Mrs. Hayes devoted her energies to causes she believed important.

While he was governor of Ohio, she lent her support to reforming the state's mental institutions, improving public education, and helping care for the many children who had been orphaned by the war.

With her record of activism, many were surprised when, upon entering the White House as first lady, she settled into the more traditional role of hostess and mother to her children. With the support of her husband, she banned alcohol at all receptions, a move that resulted by her being mocked in the press as "Lemonade Lucy."

Mrs. Hayes did not shun public duties. She was the first president's wife to deliver prepared speeches — something now considered a requirement for first ladies — and she was active in the Methodist church and served as president of the Women's Missionary Society.

Although she was subject to some criticism as a first lady, Mrs. Hayes, in general, was exceedingly popular with the people.

In 1881, Mrs. Hayes retired with her husband to Fremont, Ohio. When she died on June 25, 1889, flags nationwide were lowered to half-staff in honor of the "most idolized woman in America."

**Rutherford B.
Hayes
Administration,
1877-1881**



Lucy Ware Webb Hayes

Born: August 28, 1831, in Chillicothe, Ohio

Education: Ohio Wesleyan, Delaware, Ohio; Wesleyan Female College, Cincinnati, Ohio

Marriage: 1852 to Rutherford Birchard Hayes

Children: Birchard Austin, (1853-1926); Webb Cook, (1856-1934); Rutherford (1858-1927); Joseph Thompson (1861-63); George Cook, (1864-66); Frances "Fanny" (1867-1950); Scott Russell (1871-1923); Manning Force Hayes (1873-74)

Died: June 25, 1889, in Fremont, Ohio