

# First Ladies of America



Born in the tiny hamlet of Hiram in northern Ohio, Lucretia Rudolph was a bright and happy child who was given an excellent education. She attended grammar school and later Geauga Seminary, where she was schooled in Greek and Latin, as well as algebra, science, geography and music.

At Hiram Eclectic Institute, she exhibited a growing sense of independence and confidence by helping organize a literary society, which staged debate and oratorical presentations. As a member of this society, she often appeared onstage herself, defending the rights of women during a time when it was considered improper by most men.

At the Eclectic Institute, Mrs. Garfield met her future husband, who admired her sharp wit and knowledge. He courted her for several years, although they were separated for a time when he transferred to the more prestigious Williams College in Massachusetts and "Crete" – her nickname — pursued a career as a school teacher.

Lucretia Rudolph and James Garfield were married in 1858. When he became a U.S. Representative in Washington D.C., they settled into a newly-built home in the nation's capital. They were a happy couple, spending evenings with friends, making social calls and traveling abroad. Soon after their marriage, they started a family.

As a political wife and an independent woman by nature, Mrs. Garfield openly supported her husband's career. She was one of the first presidential candidate's wives to appear on a campaign

poster. In the White House, she continued to work closely by her husband's side, giving interviews to the press and discussing politics with his contemporaries. For these activities, she earned a reputation for being a woman of substance, and Garfield affectionately referred to her as "unstampedable," due to her strong convictions and grace in public.

She enjoyed wine, and despite pressure to do otherwise, she lifted the ban on alcohol in the White House that had been initiated in the Hayes administration. A firm believer in equality, Mrs. Garfield stopped short of publicly supporting women's suffrage, but privately she saw "no reason why women should not be entitled to all the privileges that men enjoy."

## James A. Garfield Administration, 1881

Mrs. Garfield was in New Jersey when President Garfield was shot July 2, 1881, inside a Washington D.C. railway station. Looking "frail, fatigued, desperate," as one eyewitness described her, Mrs. Garfield rushed back to the nation's capital to be with him. At her husband's side as he fought for his life, her stoicism won the admiration of Americans coast to coast, with one newspaper reporting "The wife of the President is the bravest woman in the universe." Mrs. Garfield's devotion, however, could not save President Garfield.

Lingering for almost three months, he died on Sept. 19, 1881, just 200 days after taking office. At his funeral, Mrs. Garfield became the first presidential widow to publicly participate in her husband's services. Mrs. Garfield survived her husband by 36 years, during which time she lived a private but comfortable life, devoting herself to the preservation of her husband's papers. She died in 1918 and is buried next to her husband in Cleveland, Ohio.



## Lucretia Rudolph Garfield

**Born:** April 19, 1832, in Hiram, Ohio

**Education:** Eclectic Institute, Hiram, Ohio

**Marriage:** 1858 to James Bram Garfield

**Children:** Eliza Arabella (1860-63); Henry Augustus (1863-1942); James Rudolph, (1865-1950); Mary "Mollie" (1867-1947); Irvine McDowell (1870-1951); Abram, (1872-1958); Edward "Neddie" (1874-76)

**Died:** March 14, 1918, in Pasadena, California