

First Ladies of America



When Grover Cleveland married Frances Folsom in 1886, he was 27 years her senior and old enough to be her father.

A friend of her family and partner in her father's law firm, Cleveland had known Frances since the day she was born. He was a presence in her life as she grew up; upon her father's death, when she was 11-years-old, Cleveland took over the administration of her father's estate and become her unofficial guardian.

Affectionately known as "Frankie" during her childhood, Mrs. Cleveland was born in Buffalo, N.Y., as the Civil War was drawing to a close.

She received a well-rounded education, topping off her grammar and high school years with enrollment at Wells College, one of the first liberal arts schools for women in the country.

While there, she studied astronomy, botany, and political science, and enjoyed activities including debate and theater, for which she made sets, sewed costumes and acted in various roles.

It was during her college years that future president Grover Cleveland developed romantic feelings for her. The couple became engaged in August of 1885, but didn't disclose their plans until a week before their June 1886 wedding.

The couple's marriage inside the Blue Room of the executive mansion was a much-anticipated event, with Mrs. Cleveland the only first lady to be married in the White House.

Actively involved in local charities for African-American children, Mrs. Cleveland was also a firm supporter of education for women. She served on the board of trustees for her alma mater, Wells College, and was instrumental in a campaign that led to the establishment of the New Jersey College for Women.

At the White House, she was a gracious hostess who planned regular receptions on Saturdays so that working-class women could attend. Wherever she went, her youth, charm and charisma drew crowds of enthusiastic and devoted admirers.

So popular was Mrs. Cleveland, in fact, that the unauthorized use of her image to sell products became the target of legislation aimed at preventing such unscrupulous business practices. The measure never passed, but it did foreshadow problems future first ladies would experience from an overly enthusiastic public.

Frances Cleveland's tenure as first lady ended when President Cleveland lost the next election to Benjamin Harrison, but she was undaunted, vowing the couple would return to the White House again. Her prediction came true, and in another historic moment in 1893, she became the only first lady to preside at two nonconsecutive administrations.

During her second tenure, Mrs. Cleveland was still beloved by the public, but this time, she was a mature woman more focused on raising a family.

After Cleveland's death in 1908, Mrs. Cleveland remarried Thomas J. Preston, but upon her own death in 1947, she was laid to rest beside the former president. Today, she is remembered for being one of the most popular first ladies of all time.

Grover Cleveland Administration, 1885-1889 & 1893-1897



Frances Folsom Cleveland Preston

Born: July 21, 1864, in Buffalo, New York

Education: Central (High) School, Buffalo, N.Y.; Wells College, Aurora, New York

Marriage: 1886 to Stephen Grover Cleveland

Children: Ruth (1891-1904); Esther (1893-1980); Marion (1895-1977); Richard (1897-1974); Francis (1903-1995)

Died: October 29, 1947, in Baltimore, Maryland