

First Ladies of America



Edith Kermit Carow was President Theodore Roosevelt's second wife but his only first lady. In a time when the role of the president and his wife had become more challenging and visible, Mrs. Roosevelt successfully balanced the public demands of her job with the private duties of being a wife and mother.

Mrs. Roosevelt and her husband had grown up together, sharing a love for books, nature and athletics. Known affectionately as "Edie" by Roosevelt's mother, she received her earliest schooling inside the Roosevelt home, often studying next to "Teedie," who was three years older. She later attended finishing school, receiving the proper education for a young lady of that era.

As young adults, Mrs. Roosevelt and her future husband were attracted to each other, but when he eventually left for Harvard and married, their romance seemed to have ended. After the sudden death of Roosevelt's wife, however, they rekindled their affection and married in 1886. Mrs. Roosevelt became a stepmother to Roosevelt's daughter, Alice – a spirited and irrepressible child who eventually became a national celebrity – and over the next 10 years, the couple had five children of their own.

With President William McKinley's assassination in 1901, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumed the role of president, and his family moved into the White House. Mrs. Roosevelt's first order of business was to make the executive mansion their home. Although she was no stranger to politics – having supported her husband during the long years of his political climb to the nation's highest office – Mrs. Roosevelt considered herself a mother first, and she wanted her children to enjoy as normal an upbringing as possible. The press' interest in her young, energetic brood meant that it

would be a challenge to do so.

To that end, her most significant achievement was to renovate the White House by separating the public and family quarters. Congress supported her plans, and in 1902 it authorized funding for a long-overdue restoration; the construction of the West Wing offices provided the president and his staff a place to work, and his former office space on the second floor was devoted strictly to the family quarters, giving it far more space, comfort and privacy.

As Mrs. Roosevelt worked to raise her large family at the center of government, she also recognized the emerging importance of the first lady's role, which was becoming more official. She hosted an increasing number of formal dinners, invited artists, musicians and authors to the White House, and held weekly meetings with cabinet wives to discuss current issues.

Theodore Roosevelt Administration, 1901-1909

She also hired a social secretary, officially creating the Office of the First Lady. Additionally, she established the First Ladies portraits gallery in the White House, today considered one of the most distinguished collections in Washington.

After eight years, Mrs. Roosevelt was glad to return home to New York when her husband's presidency ended. She died in 1948, and is remembered as being a model of dignity and grace during a time when the role of first lady was undergoing significant expansion and change.

Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt

Born: Aug. 6, 1861, in Norwich, Connecticut

Education: Miss Comstock's School

Marriage: 1886 to Theodore Roosevelt

Children: Theodore Jr. (1887-1944); Kermit, (1889-1943);

Ethel Carow, (1891-1977); Archibald Bulloch, (1894-1979);

Quentin, (1897-1918); stepdaughter Alice Lee Roosevelt

Longworth (1884-1980)

Died: Sept. 30, 1948, in Oyster Bay, New York

