

First Ladies of America



When Louise Henry Hoover came to the nation's capital as first lady, she had perhaps more education and leadership experience than any first lady before her.

Mrs. Hoover was poised to become an inspirational and memorable first lady when the bottom dropped out of the country's economy. With the stock market crash of October 1929, the Great Depression began and, in a few short months, the Hoovers' approval rating reached dismal lows.

Born in Waterloo, Iowa, Mrs. Hoover grew up something of a tomboy. Her father often took her camping in the woods, where she learned to ride a horse, hunt and discovered a deep love for rocks, minerals and mining.

Mrs. Hoover earned a teaching certificate with plans of entering the education profession. However, she continued her education at Stanford University, where she majored in geology and met fellow geology major Herbert Hoover.

Mrs. Hoover became the first woman in America to earn a college degree in geology. She and Hoover married and then followed his job as a mining engineer to China.

The Hoovers spent three decades in China and numerous other European countries as her husband pursued his career. During this extensive foreign sojourn, Mrs. Hoover mastered the Chinese language, and is the only first lady to have fluently spoken an Asian language.

After their return to the United States, Mrs. Hoover became active in the women's rights movement and helping women lead healthier, more productive lives. Having spent many days of her youth outdoors, she believed strongly in exercise and founded the National Women's Athletic Association, which encouraged young women to participate in sports.

After first serving as a troop leader in 1917, she was later elected national president of the Girl Scouts. Additionally, she was involved in the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women and the National Geographic Society.

Mrs. Hoover also demonstrated her patriotism during times of national crisis. During World War I, the Hoovers became internationally known for their work coordinating relief efforts for Belgium refugees.

Additionally, with her husband's appointment as chief of the U.S. Food Administration, she headed the Administration's Women's Committee, where she promoted the conservation of food needed to feed American forces and war refugees abroad.

In a practice that became known as "Hoovering," many Americans reduced their wheat, meat and sugar consumption, and they were aided in their efforts by the recipes offered by Mrs. Hoover.

Although she enjoyed her duties as White House hostess and even set the precedent of delivering public addresses over the radio, Mrs. Hoover gradually retreated from public view as the Great Depression worsened. When the couple left the White House in 1933, public opinion was firmly rallied against them.

The Hoovers retired to their Palo Alto, Calif., home, where Mrs. Hoover became publicly active on a local level. She died of a sudden heart attack in 1944 and was originally buried in Palo Alto. In 1964, she was re-interred next to her husband at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa.

Herbert Hoover Administration, 1929-1933

Louise Henry Hoover

Born: March 29, 1874, in Waterloo, Iowa

Education: San Jose Normal School; Stanford University

Marriage: 1899 to Herbert Clark Hoover

Children: Herbert Charles, (1903-1969); Allan Henry, (1907-1993)

Died: Jan. 7, 1944, in New York

