

# First Ladies of America



When Mamie Doud married 2nd Lt. Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower, the 19-year-old bride was prepared to be an Army wife, and a devoted one she was.

During her husband's 37-year military career, she set up housekeeping in 33 different places, determined to make a home wherever his assignments led them. When their young son died, she returned to her parents for a time seeking comfort but soon reunited with her husband.

While Eisenhower served as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during World War II, she lived in a Washington, D.C. hotel and volunteered at an army canteen, once serving coffee to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who didn't recognize her waitress. Seven years after the war ended, Mamie Eisenhower was preparing to move into the White House herself.

As first lady, Mrs. Eisenhower ran her house with care, managing the accounts, reading grocery ads to find bargains, and once famously telling the White House kitchen staff to use cake mixes and Jell-O to save money.

Mrs. Eisenhower's bangs, her personal trademark, became more popular with her arrival in the White House. Women who wanted to imitate her style found they could easily do so by purchasing various styles of clip-on bangs that were sold in beauty salons.

While Mrs. Eisenhower gave wonderful dinner parties and received visitors in the White House, she stayed out of politics. The president's advisers demanded she limit her activities to the social realm of the White House, and while Mrs. Eisenhower resented having her role defined for

her, she accepted the restrictions. What she would not accept, however, was anyone getting in her way when it came to taking care of her husband.

In the weeks following Eisenhower's heart attack in 1955, Mrs. Eisenhower took charge of her husband's daily schedule and limited his visitors and meetings based on his doctors' medical advice. She also answered his mail, corresponding with both citizens and heads of state.

After the president recovered, Mrs. Eisenhower drew the line when she believed his health was being jeopardized. On one occasion, she refused to allow him to attend a state dinner, insisting that Vice President Richard Nixon take his place. On another, she intervened so that he would not be expected to campaign during the final days of the 1960 presidential election.

Although Mrs. Eisenhower did not play a public political role as First Lady and visited the Oval Office only four times while living in the White House, she didn't hesitate to voice her views privately to the president and even argue with him about his policies. On one occasion, he told members of a conference, "Let me try this out on Mamie. She's a pretty darn good judge of things."

Mrs. Eisenhower's work with the American Heart Association speaks of her sense of civic duty. During her years as the local and national chair of the organization's fundraising drive, contributions increased by 70 percent, and the number of AHA volunteers reached 750,000. She also was instrumental in establishing a retirement home for military widows.

## Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961



## Mamie Geneva Doud Eisenhower

**Born:** Nov. 14, 1896, in Boone, Iowa

**Education:** East Denver High School

**Marriage:** 1916 to Dwight David Eisenhower

**Children:** Doud Dwight "Icky" Eisenhower, (1917-1921);  
John Sheldon Doud Eisenhower, (1922-1979)

**Died:** Nov. 1, 1979