

First Ladies of America



Jacqueline Kennedy fascinated the world on so many levels that the public's appetite for information about her seemed insatiable.

Married to the charismatic son of one of America's most prominent families, Mrs. Kennedy was a 31-year-old, devoted mother of two young children when she entered the White House.

Throughout her tenure in the executive mansion, she waged constant battles with the press to maintain privacy for herself and her family, but she fulfilled the role of first lady with a style reminiscent of royalty.

Born to wealth and privilege in New York high society, Jacqueline Bouvier was 10 when her stockbroker father and socialite mother divorced. Her mother's remarriage to Standard Oil heir Hugh D. Auchincloss provided stability and financial security for the young girl, who studied at some of the top schools in the country and abroad before completing her education.

Initially interested in a journalism career, Mrs. Kennedy secured her first job in 1952 as an "Inquiring Photographer" for the Washington Times Herald. However, her developing relationship with Senator John F. Kennedy and their marriage the following year changed the course of her life.

With her intense love for history and art, Mrs. Kennedy was saddened by the gradual loss of important White House artifacts and furnishings that had occurred before she became first lady. Up until her tenure, the White House occupants had enjoyed considerable freedom to keep what they liked and discard what they didn't, with the result being that many valuable pieces had vanished.

Mrs. Kennedy set out to restore the White House, establishing a Fine Arts Committee responsible for soliciting contributions of important pieces as well as locating missing items languishing in government warehouses. Americans saw the results of her efforts when she took them on a nationally televised tour of the White House in 1962.

To make certain her efforts at historic preservation could not be canceled by successors, she secured legislation protecting White House furnishings under the category of "inalienable property." Mrs. Kennedy also pushed to establish a White House Curator's position in an effort to ensure the ongoing protection of the mansion's historical integrity.

John F. Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963

With President Kennedy's public assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, Mrs. Kennedy fell into a deep depression. The painful memories of her married life in Washington prompted her eventual relocation to New York, and she married Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis, a move that drew criticism from some of her most loyal supporters.

Mrs. Kennedy continued to crusade for causes important to her, leading widely-publicized campaigns to preserve Grand Central Station and other historic architecture that was threatened.

When Mrs. Kennedy died of cancer in 1994, the public mourned a woman who had fascinated them for more than four decades. She was buried next to President Kennedy in Arlington National Cemetery, where the eternal flame she had requested for his grave 30 years earlier still burned brightly.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis

Born: July 28, 1929, in Southampton, New York

Education: Miss Porter's School, Farmington, Connecticut; Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York; University of Grenoble and Sorbonne, Paris; George Washington University, Washington D.C.

Marriage: 1953 to John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy

Children: Caroline Bouvier, born in 1957; John Fitzgerald, Jr., (1960-1999); Patrick Bouvier, (1963-1963)

Died: May 19, 1994

