

# First Ladies of America



Claudia Taylor Johnson, known as Lady Bird, became first lady following a national tragedy. The stunning public assassination of President John F. Kennedy, along with the nation's outpouring of sympathy and support for his popular wife, meant that Mrs. Johnson's transition would not be any easy one. However, Lady Bird Johnson had great strength of character and eventually left her own unique mark on American history.

Mrs. Johnson received her famous nickname during infancy from a nurse who had commented that she was "pretty as a ladybird." After the death of her mother in 1917, she was raised by her father and an aunt.

She was a successful student, graduating early from high school and receiving degrees in liberal arts and journalism from the University of Texas at Austin. Her introduction to Lyndon Johnson in 1934 while he was a congressional secretary marked the start of a whirlwind romance culminating with his marriage proposal a few months later.

Long before Lyndon Johnson became president in 1963, Mrs. Johnson was a homemaker, managing family homes in Washington, Houston and the LBJ ranch in Texas. She raised the couple's two daughters and used her considerable business acumen to turn a radio station investment into a substantial fortune.

As a political wife, Mrs. Johnson actively campaigned for her husband, who served in the House and the Senate before becoming vice president in 1961.

When her husband was abruptly thrust into the role of president in 1963, Mrs. Johnson found herself with some important choices to make as first lady. Mrs. Johnson delayed assuming a fully public first

lady role until some of the grief and shock of the Kennedy assassination had subsided.

She did, however, establish her own White House preservation committee to continue Mrs. Kennedy's work in that area, and she sought advice from the former first lady on other matters involving life in the executive mansion.

Gradually, she became more politically active and traveled the country extensively in support of President Johnson's Great Society programs.

Mrs. Johnson's own special interest, however, was the environment, and she worked tirelessly to promote the beautification and preservation of America's landscape, especially in areas that were disintegrating due to misuse or neglect. Legislation restricting the placement of billboards along public roadways, known as the Highway Beautification Act, was the crowning achievement of her efforts to bring attention to environmental issues.

After leaving the White House, Mrs. Johnson retired with her husband to the LBJ Ranch, but she continued her environmental work, founding the National Wildflower Research Center in the early 1980s. For this achievement, she was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal.

Long before her death in 2007 at the age of 94, she had won many admirers and much respect for the courage, determination and strength she displayed during a long life devoted to service.

## Lyndon B. Johnson Administration, 1963-1969

## Claudia "Lady Bird" Taylor Johnson

**Born:** Dec. 22, 1912, in Karnack, Texas

**Education:** Marshall Public High School, Marshall, Texas; St. Mary's College for Girls, Dallas; University of Texas at Austin

**Marriage:** 1934 to Lyndon Baines "LBJ" Johnson

**Children:** Lynda Bird, born in 1944; and Luci Baines, born in 1947

**Died:** July 11, 2007, in Austin, Texas

