

First Ladies of America



When the topic of casual political conversations turns to former First Lady Barbara Bush, the image that immediately comes to mind is that of a kindly, white-haired woman that anyone from the youngest children to the oldest of adults could like.

In fact, Barbara Bush herself once stated that her public image was that of "everybody's grandmother," which is one reason she had such broad appeal with the American public during her husband's presidency. A devoted wife and mother, Barbara Bush had no overly ambitious plans during her tenure as first lady, but she did fulfill the traditional roles of hostess and worked on behalf of issues she considered most important.

During her junior year of high school at Ashley Hall Boarding School, Barbara Pierce returned home for Christmas vacation and met her future husband, George H.W. Bush, at a dance. They became engaged following her high school graduation in 1943, and although she attended Smith College for little more than a year, she left school and married.

While her husband pursued an Ivy League education at Yale and traveled the country working different jobs, Mrs. Bush stayed home to raise the couple's children. The loss of the couple's 3-year-old daughter, Robin, to leukemia was admittedly one of the most difficult periods of her life, and it was during this stressful time that her hair began to turn prematurely white.

Mrs. Bush's exposure to national politics began with her husband's election to Congress, and continued during his service as vice president

under Republican President Ronald Reagan. When her husband was elected president and began his administration in 1989, Mrs. Bush became the only first lady to move from eight years as wife of a vice president to living in the executive mansion at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

As first lady, Barbara Bush worked on behalf of the nation's children, and she was a supporter of education programs such as Head Start and literacy initiatives. Believing that illiteracy was the cause of many social ills, including crime, drug abuse and homelessness, Mrs. Bush's interest also stemmed from the struggles of her son Neil, who had dyslexia. In 1989, she helped establish the Barbara Bush Foundation of Family Literacy, to which she donated the entire post-tax proceeds from a memoir she wrote for the White House dog, titled "Millie's Book." Mrs. Bush also used her position to promote AIDS education and awareness, and a widely-publicized picture of her cradling a baby with AIDS eased national anxieties about how the disease spread.

After Mrs. Bush's husband lost his bid for a second term, the woman who had been named to Good Housekeeping's "Most Admired Women" list for four consecutive years did not seem too disappointed. Instead, she looked forward to future years in which there would be more time for life's simple pleasures, including her gardening and her grandchildren.

**George H.W.
Bush
Administration,
1989-1993**

Barbara Pierce Bush

Born: June 8, 1925, in New York

Education: Rye Country Day School, Rye, New York;

Ashley Hall Prep School; Charleston, S.C.; Smith College

Marriage: 1945 to George Herbert Walker Bush

Children: George Walker (1946); Robin (1949-1953);

John (Jeb) (1953); Neil (1955); Marvin (1956); Dorothy (1959)

