

First Ladies of America



Although she died 18 years before her husband became president, Hannah Hoes Van Buren is considered America's eighth first lady. She is the first first lady who was born a United States citizen rather than a British subject.

The daughter of a farmer, Hannah Hoes grew up in Kinderhook, NY, a small community rooted in the Dutch Reformed Church. Her ancestors emigrated from Holland in the 1600s; from them she inherited her blonde hair and blue eyes. Dutch was her first language, and she never lost her accent. She was known for having a shy manner and a gentle, loving disposition, qualities that attracted the attention of Martin Van Buren, also of Kinderhook, when they were children.

Childhood sweethearts, they married in 1807 when Van Buren finished studying law in New York City and established a practice in Kinderhook. They were married only 12 years. Mrs. Van Buren died of tuberculosis at age 35, leaving behind her husband and four sons, one an infant.

During their marriage, as Van Buren pursued a political career and their family grew, Mrs. Van Buren led a busy, happy life. The Van Buren home in Albany, NY, was often filled with visitors, and Mrs. Van Buren joined the Presbyterian Church, as there was no Dutch Reformed congregation. Engaged in hands-on charitable work, she occasionally met resistance when more traditional members of her church worried that she might bring the "wrong kind" of people into their assembly. She was not deterred.

When Hannah Van Buren died, a request she had made was honored; the money, which by custom would have been spent to buy funeral scarves for her

pallbearers, was spent instead to feed the poor.

After his wife's death, Martin Van Buren never remarried. As president, he managed social events in the White House for the first 20 months of his administration. In 1838, the Van Buren's son, Abraham, married Angelica Singleton of South Carolina, and the new Mrs. Van Buren became acting first lady.

Angelica grew up on her parents' South Carolina plantation. During a visit to Washington, D.C., she met the president's son at a White House dinner with her mother's cousin, former first lady Dolley Madison.

During their honeymoon, Captain and Mrs. Van Buren had been presented at the royal courts of England and France. In the White House, Angelica Van Buren received and entertained guests in a manner similar to what she had observed in Europe. She was noted for her charm and grace, but the style she adopted in the White House created controversy, especially since the country was experiencing economic depression.

Angelica Van Buren's entertaining, so suggestive of European royalty, was scrutinized and criticized. When rumors circulated that she planned to make the grounds of the White House resemble those of European palaces, the president's opponents in Congress attacked him. President Van Buren was painted as a "monarch" in the White House, and the depiction damaged his campaign for re-election. In 1840 he was defeated by William Henry Harrison.

Martin Van Buren's Administration 1837-1841

Hannah Hoes Van Buren

Born: March 8, 1783, in Kinderhook, New York

Education: Kinderhook Academy, Kinderhook, New York

Marriage: 1807 to Martin Van Buren

Children: Abraham (1807-1873); John (1810-1866); Martin, Jr. (1812-1855)

Winfield Scott (1814); Smith Thompson (1817-1876)

Died: February 5, 1819, in Albany, New York

