

First Ladies of America



Grace Coolidge became first lady in 1923 when her husband assumed the presidency after the death of President Warren Harding.

Intelligent, warm and witty, Mrs. Coolidge loved people and was gracious and tactful. As first lady, she became an admired national figure. She received a gold medal from the National Institute of Social Sciences for the "fine personal influence she exerted as first lady," and in 1931, she was voted one of the 12 greatest American women still living.

Growing up, Mrs. Coolidge showed no inclination that she longed to achieve fame or distinction. An only child, she had a sunny nature and was not driven by personal ambition. She did well in school, eventually graduating from the University of Vermont, but was not truly interested in academics.

What did engage her heart and mind was teaching children who could not hear. With college degree in hand, she accepted a teaching position at the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Mass. Her commitment to the school and to the hearing impaired continued for the rest of her life.

In Northampton, she met Calvin Coolidge, a young lawyer with political ambitions. They met in the spring and married in the fall, despite strenuous objections from Mrs. Coolidge's mother, who did not like Calvin Coolidge, then or ever.

Even though she and her husband loved each other, it was a difficult marriage for Mrs. Coolidge in some respects. While she was warm and gregarious, her husband was reserved and controlling, and to other people he often seemed cold.

During her tenure as first lady, she enlisted the President's support, and together they raised \$2 million for the Clarke School where she had taught. When the Coolidges left the White House, the first lady made her only radio address to the American public, in which she simply said "Goodbye."

What most endeared Mrs. Coolidge to Americans was her personality and character. She was a fashionable first lady, but she was also an American girl who loved baseball, followed the Red Sox, and could throw a pitch better than many men. She knew how to ride horses and ice skate. She favored bright colors, especially red, and loved animals, including Rob Roy, her white collie, and Rebecca, her pet raccoon.

Calvin Coolidge Administration, 1923-1929

The mother of teenagers, she always learned the latest dance craze. She opened the White House and invited the American people into her home.

The public's affection and respect for Mrs. Coolidge deepened in 1924 with the death of the Coolidge's son, Calvin Jr., who died of blood poisoning. Beyond comfort but finding strength in her religious faith, Mrs. Coolidge continued to carry out her duties as first lady with grace, determined that her personal loss would not prevent her from fulfilling them.

After leaving the White House, Mrs. Coolidge enjoyed retirement with her husband until his death in 1933 and eventually returned to public life on her own. She wrote magazine articles, expressed her views on issues, and served as a trustee of Clarke School.

Grace Ann Goodhue Coolidge

Born: Jan. 3, 1879, in Burlington, Vermont

Education: Burlington High School, Burlington, Vermont;
University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

Marriage: 1905 to John Calvin Coolidge

Children: John Coolidge, (1906-2000); Calvin Coolidge, Jr., (1908-1924)

Died: July 8, 1957, in Northampton, Mass.

