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**“OHIO’S FIRST LADIES”
A TALK BY STEPHANIE BOHNAK
SHELTER HOUSE, FRED FULLER PARK, KENT
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2024, AT 7:30 P.M.**

From championing causes such as women's rights and education to serving as trusted advisors to their presidential spouses, the First Ladies of Ohio left an indelible mark on the nation. "Ohio's First Ladies" is an engaging and informative program that delves into the remarkable lives and legacies of the First Ladies of the United States who hail from the state of Ohio. From the dynamic leadership of Florence Harding to the quiet strength of Lucretia Garfield, this program takes viewers on a captivating journey through the lives of these influential women who played pivotal roles in shaping American history. This engaging program offers a unique perspective on the contributions and accomplishments of Florence Harding, Lucretia Garfield, Lucy Hayes, Ida McKinley, Helen Taft, Anna Harrison and Caroline Harrison. From their early years in Ohio to their time in the White House, each First Lady's story is explored in depth, providing insight into their experiences, challenges, and achievements. Join Stephanie Bohnak, Director of Education and Outreach at the national First Ladies Library and Museum as we honor the legacy of Ohio's First Ladies and their profound impact on the nation.

As the Director of Education & Outreach at the National First Ladies Library & Museum, Bohnak brings a distinguished background and unwavering dedication to the institution. With an MA in History and Public History from Bowling Green State University, specializing in women's history and American enslavement, Bohnak is dedicated to illuminating often-overlooked narratives in American history. Her BA in History from the University of Akron, accompanied by minors in Anthropology and Classics, provides a comprehensive understanding of historical contexts and concepts. Additionally, Stephanie Bohnak holds an AS in Culinary Arts from Sullivan University, reflecting a diverse skill set that enriches educational endeavors with interdisciplinary perspectives. Through innovative programming and outreach, Stephanie Bohnak honors the legacies of America's First Ladies while fostering historical literacy and inclusivity for all.

Our optional pre-meeting dinner will be at Eddy's Deli & Restaurant, 4581 Kent Road in Stow, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

The Origins of the American "First Lady"

By Matthew Costelle

Excerpted from <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-origins-of-the-american-first-lady>

Article 2 Section 1 of the United States Constitution begins with the following: "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." This passage goes on to define the length of the president's term; how the president will be elected; citizenship and age requirements; presidential succession; compensation; and finally, the presidential oath that all chief executives have sworn to uphold. While there would be many future questions regarding the limitations of executive power, the title and duties of the "President" were firmly entrenched in the Constitution.

But what about the first lady? There is no mention of such a position in our government's founding document, but like many roles in the White House it took generations of women to shape it into its modern form. As the mounting responsibilities of the president's wife became more visible at the turn of the twentieth century, public acknowledgement of the role's importance grew slowly. Over time the title "First Lady" became a distinction bestowed upon current and former ladies of the White House.

While there are a handful of these mentions in the historical record, there was no definitive moment that the position of "First Lady" came into existence. The language used to describe the White House matriarch varied from "Lady" to "the President's wife" to "Mrs. President." In order to understand how the title "First Lady" originated we must explore these descriptions, written by news correspondents and reporters, and how they changed over time. As newspaper coverage and circulation expanded in the twentieth century, the widespread use and acceptance of the title "First Lady" signified a shift in public perception toward the president's wife. Media outlets began to recognize this prestige and newfound authority by watching one woman who wielded it quite effectively. This transformation emerged during the era of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who used her "unofficial" position to hold press conferences, promote her husband's New Deal policies, and write columns about civil rights, social inequalities, and education reform.

Her activism bolstered the First Lady title and its significance in American politics, society, and culture. As a result her successors are not only addressed as the "First Lady" but also often measured in comparison to Eleanor's accomplishments. Many first ladies fought for and achieved major public policy initiatives; others labored tirelessly to preserve the historical integrity of the White House and its collections; but all have used their authority as "First Lady" to serve the American people in some way. While "First Lady" still remains an unofficial position today its transformation, both in terms of title and responsibilities, further illuminates the fluidity of White House positions and how they evolve to meet the demands of changing times and circumstances.



Taken by photographer Jackie Martin, this image shows First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt meeting with her secretary Malvina "Tommy" Thompson, seated, and the social secretary Edith Helm, standing. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/NARA