The First Ladies of South Dakota

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oftentimes history neglects the wives of men well known in public office, especially in the case of presidents and governors, and these women fade into obscurity. The First Ladies of South Dakota led active lives aside from assisting their husbands in political functions and their accomplishments are worthy of comment. These women participated in a variety of civic affairs and church work that benefited their communities and the state of South Dakota.

The following article includes a picture of each First Lady along with a biographical sketch about her. With the exception of Mrs. Farrar's and Mrs. Kneip's photographs, the pictures shown were presented to Governor Archie Gubbrud on 20 January 1964 to be hung in the Governor's Mansion. In 1965 they were moved to the Capitol Building where they are now hanging next to the doll display of the First Ladies in their inaugural ball gowns.

The governor from 1965 to 1969, Nils Boe, was not married and his sister acted as hostess of the Governor's Mansion. Therefore, there is no picture for that time period.

Mrs. Arthur C. Mellette, wife of the first governor of the state of South Dakota from 1889 to 1893, was born Margaret Wylie on 6 August 1843 at Bloomington, Indiana. She attended Bloomington Academy and Glendale Female College. She married the future governor 29 May 1866 at Muncie, Indiana. The



couple had four sons: Wylie, Anton, Charles, and Richard. Mrs. Mellette was active in the Congregational church and Eastern Star and served as state president of the Woman's Relief Corps. She was one of the founders of the first literary club in Watertown, and loved sleighing parties in winter and picnic parties in summer. Mrs. Mellette died on 29 November 1938 at the age of ninety-five at Pittsburg, Kansas. She was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery at Watertown, South Dakota.

Mrs. Charles H. Sheldon (Martha Frizzell) was born 27 December 1854 in Grantsburg, Illinois. She lived with her parents until she married Charles H. Sheldon in 1875 and went to Glendale where he operated a general store. She was Mr. Sheldon's second wife. They had three children: Ethel (Sheldon) Bayard; James B., who died when he was eighteen years old; and Charles H. The Sheldons moved to Groton, South Dakota because James had malaria and they were told that only a northern climate would save his life. Mr. Sheldon served as



governor from 1893 to 1897. Always interested in civic affairs, Mrs. Sheldon was active in the Baptist church and various clubs, such as Eastern Star and Current Events Club. She died on 7 July 1942 and was buried at Inglewood Memorial Park near Los Angeles, California.

Mrs. Andrew E. Lee was born Annie Chappell on 30 April 1851 in Kingston, Rhode Island. Mr. and Mrs. Lee were married at Vermillion in 1872. They had one daughter Jessamine (Lee) Fox, who is believed to be still living in New York state. Mrs. Lee was a member of the Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and



held office as regent of Paha Wakan chapter. She was an active worker in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Baptist church. Mrs. Lee died 17 May 1918 and was buried in Bluff View Cemetery in Vermillion, South Dakota. Mr. Lee was governor from 1897 to 1901.

Mrs. Charles N. Herreid, wife of the fourth governor, was well known in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and her body lies in the Riverside Cemetery there. Before her marriage on 12 March 1881, she was Eunice Jeannette Slye. She was born at Mindoro, Wisconsin, on 6 February 1859. She attended Galesburg College. Eunice "Nettie" Jeannette became a teacher near Madison where she met Charles Nelson Herreid, who was a young lawyer in Madison, Wisconsin. The Herreids had two



children. Grace was born in Leola 14 May 1885 and Roscoe was born 10 January 1888. Mrs. Herreid was an active worker in the Presbyterian church. She was also a member of the Aberdeen Tourist Club and the Eastern Star. She died 6 July 1940 and was buried in Aberdeen. Governor Herreid served from 1901 to 1905.

Mary Ellen Masten, who was born at Coatesville, Indiana, on 1 March 1863, became Mrs. Samuel H. Elrod, the wife of a future South Dakota governor, on 11 November 1884. His term ran from 1905 to 1907. Mrs. Elrod was educated at Coatesville and at Greencastle, Indiana where she studied



music. While living in Pierre, she was very active in the Methodist Episcopal church and community affairs. The Elrods had two children, Barbara (Elrod) Knittel and Arthur, both born at Clark. Mrs. Elrod died 16 November 1943 and was buried at Clark, South Dakota.

Mrs. Coe I. Crawford, wife of the man who served as governor from 1907 to 1909, was born in Iowa City, Iowa, on 20 November 1870 and after her death on 8 October 1959 in Huron, South Dakota, was buried beside her husband in an Iowa City cemetery. She was Lavinia Curtis Robinson before her marriage on 26 November 1896. Her sister had been her husband's first wife. She studied at Iowa University and Pierre



University, later known as Huron College. Mrs. Crawford's greatest interests were her family and home, her friends, P.E.O., Eastern Star and the Presbyterian church. She was also interested in child welfare. The Crawfords had three children: Robert Dean, born in 1898; Oliver Curtis, born in 1904; and Jeannette (Crawford) Lusk, born in 1905.

Mrs. Robert S. Vessey was born Florence Albert on 31 October 1862 at Oshkosh, Wisconsin. She married the governor-to-be on 27 August 1883. Mrs. Vessey was very active in community affairs and politics while living in Pierre. She was also an active worker in the Methodist church. The Vesseys had six



children: Harry, Verna, Florence, Bernice, Charles, and Robert, Jr. Mrs. Vessey died 13 June 1933 and was buried with her husband at the Pasadena Mausoleum in Altadena, California. Mr. Vessey was governor from 1909 to 1913.

Mrs. Frank M. Byrne, the former Emilie Beaver, was born near Kenton, Ohio, on 26 January 1866. She received her education at Kenton High School. She came to South Dakota Territory with two older half-brothers and her half-sister to prove a claim near Forest City in Potter County. Later, she taught in various towns in South Dakota. She met Frank M. Byrne in Gettysburg and they were married on 13 April 1888 at Watertown, South Dakota. Byrne was to be governor from 1913 to 1917. The Byrnes had six sons and one daughter. One son



and the daughter died in infancy. Mrs. Byrne was a member of the Eastern Star. In 1925 she took her husband to California for treatments and became a theosophist. She wrote poetry and a novel, *The Song Beneath the Keys* in which she discussed Christian Science. Mrs. Byrne died in November 1965 and was buried with her husband in Halcyon, California.

Mrs. Peter Norbeck, wife of the man who was governor from 1917 to 1921, was born 7 September 1873 at Stoughton, Wisconsin. She was Lydia Anderson when she married at Sioux City, Iowa, on 7 June 1900. Lydia attended public schools in Yankton, Dakota Territory. She was a member of a literary club,



Eastern Star, and P.E.O., but her main interest was in church work where she played the organ and taught Sunday School. Her greatest asset was her magnetic personality and her interest in people. The Norbecks had four children: Nellie (Norbeck) Wegner of Pierre; Ruth (Norbeck) Jennings; Peter Harold; and Sally (Norbeck) Earle. Mrs. Norbeck died 26 December 1961 and was buried beside her husband in Bloomington Cemetery near Platte, South Dakota.

Mrs. William H. McMaster was born Harriet Russell in Cooperstown, New York on 9 June 1879. She married William McMaster on 16 April 1902 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The McMasters had two children: William H. Jr., born in 1907; and Dorothy (McMaster) Armstrong, born in 1911. Mrs. McMaster was a member of the Episcopal church and was active in P.E.O.



During World War I, she did active work in the Red Cross. While Mrs. McMaster was keenly interested in politics, she never joined a political club or campaigned openly. She died in 1968 at the age of eighty-nine and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Dixon, Illinois. William McMaster was governor from 1921 to 1925.

Mrs. Carl Gunderson was born on 14 March 1871 on a farm in Clay County, South Dakota. She was Gertrude Bertlesen when she married the man who was governor from 1925 to 1927, in 1892. She received a BA degree from the University of South Dakota at Vermillion. She was president of the South Dakota



Federation of Woman's Clubs in 1916 and for many years was coeditor of the poetry magazine *Pasque Petals*. Many of her own poems were quoted in *Literary Digest*. She was also a member of the Congregational church, P.E.O., Sorosis, and League of American Pen Women. The Gundersons had four children: Helen Louise; Florence (Gunderson) Soutar; Carol (Gunderson) LaGrave; and Norris Ellwood. Mrs. Gunderson died in 1956 and was buried in the family cemetery plot at Vermillion, South Dakota.

Mrs. Sarah Farrand and William J. Bulow, the governor from 1927 to 1931, were married 15 October 1921. She was Sarah Wilhelmina Johnson, who was born in Lincoln County, South Dakota, on 10 April 1885. She married Clarence Farrand in 1903. They had two children: Calantha and Venice, who died in



infancy. After Farrand died in 1908. Sarah became a successful business woman and continued her husband's prosperous ready-to-wear millinery business. Governor first wife Bulow's was Katherine Reedy. They were married Thanksgiving Day 1898 and had three children: Maurene, William, Jr., and Kathleen. The first Mrs. Bulow died in 1918.

Mrs. Warren Green, whose husband was governor from 1931 to 1933, was a native of Ontario, Canada. She was born Elizabeth Jane Parliament on 5 July 1877 in Brighton, North County, Ontario. She came to Hamlin County in 1882 and married Warren Green 17 January 1899. They had four children: Maxwell,



George, Mildred, and Edson. Always interested in education, Mrs. Green served on the school board for sixteen years. She was also a member of the Methodist Episcopal church, the local Grange, and the extension service clubs. She is ninety-five years old, still active, and presently lives at Hazel, South Dakota.

Mrs. Thomas Berry was the wife of the 1933 to 1937 governor. Her maiden name was Lorena McLain and she was born 20 March 1879 in Nodaway County, Missouri. She attended schools at Springview and Fremont, Nebraska. She taught school in the Springview area for several years. Mr. and



Mrs. Berry were married 5 March 1905. Lorena Berry was a member of the Methodist Episcopal church, the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Rebekah Lodge. The Berrys had four children: Baxter, Nell (Berry) Phipps, Faye (Berry) Jones, and Paul. Mrs. Berry died 22 March 1963 and was buried at Belvedere, South Dakota.

Mrs. Leslie Jensen, the former Elizabeth Ward, was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota on 24 November 1895. She attended school in Aberdeen; Nashville, Tennessee; and Sweet Briar College in Virginia. The Jensens were married at Aberdeen on 19 December 1925. Her husband was governor from 1937 to



1939. They had three children: Leslie Ward and Natalie, who were born in Aberdeen; and Karen, who was born in Pierre. Mrs. Jensen's interests are reading, knitting, and bridge. She is a member of the Colony Club and the Episcopal church. She is now the secretary of the Peoples Telephone and Telegraph Company at Hot Springs, South Dakota, where her son is general manager.

Mrs. Harlan J. Bushfield was born Vera Sarah Cahalan at Miller, South Dakota on 9 August 1889. She attended Dakota Wesleyan University at Mitchell, the University of Minnesota, and Stout Institute at Menominee, Wisconsin. Mr. and Mrs. Bushfield were married 15 April 1912 and had three children: Mary Janith (Bushfield) Work, John Pearson, and Harlan J., Jr. Harlan Bushfield was governor from 1939 to 1943. Mrs.



Bushfield was active in politics and was appointed to the United States Senate to complete the term of her husband. She is a member of P.E.O., Eastern Star, and South Dakota Commission of Child Welfare. Also, she is a member of the Presbyterian church. Mrs. Bushfield, now eightythree years old, lives in Miller, South Dakota.

Mrs. M.Q. Sharpe, wife of the 1943 to 1947 governor, was born Emily L. Auld at Plankinton, South Dakota on 26 October 1883. She received her education from the public schools at Plankinton and Oacoma and upon its completion began work in a bank and title company at Oacoma. On 11 December 1918 she mar-



ried M.Q. Sharpe at the Auld homestead a few miles west of Chamberlain. They had one daughter Lorna Mae (Sharpe) Leedy. Mrs. Sharpe was a member of the State Board of Directors of the Congregational church and was an active church worker. She was also a member of the Oacoma school board for a number of years. She belonged to P.E.O., American Legion Auxiliary, and Beta Sigma Phi Sorority. Mrs. Sharpe died on 15 February 1957 and was buried in Graceland Cemetery in Oacoma, South Dakota.

Mrs. George T. Mickelson was born Madge Turner on 12 September 1903 at Jasper County, Iowa. She is the wife of the man who was governor from 1947 to 1951. She went to high school at Selby, South Dakota and attended Northern State College at Aberdeen, South Dakota. After graduation she taught school in eastern South Dakota for several years. She and the United States district judge were married at Sioux Falls on 6



April 1928. Their children are Janice (Mickelson) Carmody; Lavon (Mickelson) Meyers; Patricia (Mickelson) Adam; and George Speaker. Mrs. Mickelson was active in Eastern Star, P.E.O., American Association of University Women, and church work. She is now living in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Mrs. Sigurd Anderson was the former Vivian Dell Walz born 18 August 1911 in Clay County, South Dakota. She attended the University of South Dakota. Upon graduation in 1932, she taught English and Latin at Parkston, South Dakota and served as



secretary to the Superintendent of Schools at Vermillion, South Dakota until 1939. She married Sigurd Anderson, governor from 1951 to 1955, on 3 April 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska. The Andersons had one daughter Kristin Karen. Mrs. Anderson is a member of P.E.O., American Legion Auxiliary, Eastern Star, American Association of University Women, Federated Women's Clubs, and Business and Professional Women in South Dakota. In Washington she was a member of the Hospitality Committee of the League of Republican Women. She is also an active member of the Lutheran church. Mrs. Anderson is now living at Webster.

June Shakstad, who became Mrs. Joseph Foss on 9 August 1942 at La Jolla, California, was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on 10 February 1920. She attended Sioux Falls College and graduated from Iowa State University at Ames with a BS degree. June was a staff member at Scripps Metabolic Clinic and served as clinic dietitian in Santa Barbara, California. She also served as nutrition instructor for the Red Cross and the Sioux Valley School of Nursing. Mrs. Foss was active as a 4-H leader and organized the statewide Women's Civil Defense. She was an active member of the First Methodist Church, American



Association of University Women, Federation of Republican Women's Club, and South Dakota Dietetic Association. The Fosses had four children: Cheryl June, Mary Joe, Joseph Frank, and Eric Peter who died in infancy. Mrs. Foss died in November 1970 and was buried in Sioux Falls.

Mrs. Ralph Herseth was born Lorna Buntrock near Columbia, South Dakota, on 5 April 1909. After attending Northern State College, she taught in both rural and city schools. She became the Brown County Superintendent of Schools in 1936 and later served on the Brown County's Reorganization School Board



for seven years. She married Ralph Herseth 23 December 1937 and had three children: Karen (Herseth) Wee, Connie (Herseth) Stenseth, and Ralph Lars. Lorna served on the Shelby school board and the Brown County Red Cross Board, and is presently a state director of the Easter Seal Society for Crippled Children and Adults. Mrs. Herseth is now secretary of state and is living in Pierre, South Dakota. Ralph Herseth was governor from 1959 to 1961.

Mrs. Archie Gubbrud was born Florence Maxine Dexter at Canton, South Dakota, on 6 January 1914. She attended college in California and Sioux Falls College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Gubbruds were married 15 August 1939 and had two children: John Dexter and Maxine Louise (Gubbrud) Roberts. Mrs. Gubbrud taught elementary school at Sisseton, South Dakota and Spencer, South Dakota. She was active in the South Dakota Federation of GOP Women, P.E.O., Eastern Star, Pleasant Study Club, and the Lutheran church. She was also an honorary member of Business and Professional Women, Beta



Sigma Phi Sorority, and the 1962 State Christmas Seal Campaign. Mrs. Gubbrud is now maintaining a home on a farm north of Alcester, South Dakota and an apartment at Huron, South Dakota where her husband is state director of Farm Home Administration. Archie Gubbrud was governor from 1961 to 1965.

Mrs. Frank Farrar was born in Claremont, South Dakota, on 13 August 1931. She graduated with honors from the University of South Dakota at Vermillion, South Dakota. She taught at Summit High School before marrying Frank Farrar on 5 June 1953 at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Farrars have five children:



Jeanne, Sally, Robert, Mary, and Anne. Mrs. Farrar worked as a secretary in her husband's law office and also served as president of the Marshall County Chapter of the American Cancer Society. In Pierre she was a member of St. Mary's Hospital Auxiliary, of the apparel and textile advisory board of South Dakota State University, and of the South Dakota Commission on Status of Women. She is now residing in Britton, South Dakota and is a member of the Board of Advisors for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Frank Farrar was governor from 1969 to 1971.

Mrs. Richard Kneip was born Nancy Pankey on 27 April 1938 in Coles County, Illinois. She graduated with honors from Charleston High School in Charleston, Illinois. She was employed in a ladies dress shop in Blue Earth, Minnesota where she met Richard Kneip. They were married in 1957 and moved to Salem, South Dakota in 1959. The Kneips have eight boys: Kevin, Kent, Keith, Kurt, Paul, Philip, Patrick, and Michael.



Mrs.. Kneip is a member of Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, American Legion Auxiliary, and VFW Auxiliary. She is also an honorary member of the American Cancer Society and a member of St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. Her husband has been governor since 1971. Now living in the Governor's Residence, the Kneips' home is Salem, South Dakota.

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