

Dolley Madison

1768–1849



WHY SHE MADE HISTORY Dolley Madison was the wife of President James Madison. She is known for her elegance and grace as the official hostess of the White House.



As you read the biography below, think about how Dolley Madison's charms and manners helped her become the "unofficial" first lady of the Jefferson administration.



National Archives

Dolley Payne Madison was born in 1768 to a **Quaker** family in Virginia. She married a lawyer and Quaker named John Todd in 1790. The couple had two children, but John and their youngest son both died from yellow fever in 1793. The following year, Dolley married James Madison. She was expelled from the Society of Friends because James Madison was not a **Quaker**.

In 1801 Thomas Jefferson appointed James Madison secretary of state. Dolley Madison often helped President Jefferson with state functions, such as entertaining guests. Both Jefferson and Vice President Aaron Burr were widowers, and Dolley Madison took on the role as unofficial first lady for the Jefferson administration.

Dolley was known for her charm, tact, and elegance. She was very outgoing and loved parties and social events. When James Madison became president in 1809, Dolley Madison continued her role as Washington's hostess. The Madisons entertained in their home and held weekly **salons**. She insisted on formal **etiquette** and kept her guests comfortable.

During the War of 1812, British troops invaded Washington, D.C., and attacked the White House. Dolley Madison was able to save many valuable

VOCABULARY

Quaker member of the Society of Friends, a Protestant religious sect

salon society meeting

etiquette manners

belongings, including the White House silver and important official papers, from being destroyed by the British invaders.

After James Madison's two terms as president, he and Dolley retired to their plantation in Virginia. When James Madison died in 1836, Dolley moved back to Washington, D.C. She died in 1849.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. From what you have learned in this passage, list two adjectives that describe Dolley Madison.

2. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think that entertaining guests might have been so important during Dolley Madison's time?

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are helping Dolley Madison entertain during an event at the White House. On a separate sheet of paper, create a simple invitation to this social event. Include the name or title of the event, the date and time, and a description of what might be expected at the party.