

Lots to Learn at National First Ladies' Library

Canton, Ohio's Unique Museum Honors America's Most Notable Women

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Discover the legacy and contributions of some of history's most renowned women at the National First Ladies' Library, the first and only U.S. archive of its kind.

Presidential liaisons. Fashion trendsetters. Champions of social reform. Although America's First Ladies play a significant role in history, no one facility was dedicated to documenting and celebrating their achievements until the [National First Ladies' Library](#) was established in 1996.

Located in Canton, Ohio, the [First Ladies National Historic Site](#) is a partnership between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library. Tours of the historic site include the beautifully restored Saxton McKinley house – a residence of the 25th U.S. President William McKinley and his wife, Ida Saxton McKinley – and the nearby Education and Research Center (ERC) in the former City National Bank Building, built in 1895.

Education and Research Center Showcases Presidential China, White House Menus, First Ladies' Gowns and More

The 90-minute tour begins at the ERC with the two floors that are open to the public. The main level features

- Frequently updated exhibits that center on First Ladies' interests and accomplishments;
- Presidential china from Monroe, Polk, Lincoln, Eisenhower and other administrations;
- White House menu cards and wine lists; and
- Gowns that belonged to 19th-century as well as more contemporary First Ladies.

On the basement level (which once housed public baths, a barber shop and a shoe-shine stand), visitors can observe a collection of First Ladies' inaugural gowns in miniature – from Martha Washington to Nancy Reagan – created by Evyon, maker of White Shoulders perfume. In addition, the facility's oldest piece in its permanent collection, a Reproduco pipe organ and piano (circa 1860), is on display in a 70-seat Nickelodeon theatre where the museum often hosts special events, such as film festivals and historic reenactments.

Saxton House Features First Ladies' Bios, 19th-Century Wallpaper and McKinley Pieces

Just a short walk from the ERC is the fully restored ancestral home of the Saxtons, one of Canton's wealthiest families. James Saxton, father of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley, built the home in 1840 and later left it to his daughter Mary Saxton Barber, who raised seven children there. The McKinleys also lived in the home at length throughout William's political career (although not the site of his famous [1896 Front Porch Campaign](#)), and Ida later returned after her husband's assassination in 1901.

Mary Barber's grandson Marsh Belden saved the Saxton House from the wrecking ball in 1972, investing \$1.5 million to restore the exterior that had been marred by a commercial store front. Mary Regula, wife of now-retired U.S. Congressman Ralph Regula, helped raise funding for interior restoration.

Visitors to the Saxton House can enjoy

- The third-floor ballroom with a photo and biography of each First Lady or White House Hostess;
- More than 30 meticulous reproductions of 19th-century wallpaper, including designs by William Morris and a hand-painted, hand-embossed pattern that Ida chose for the [White House](#);
- A formal parlor, library, sitting room, bedroom, dining room, breakfast room and kitchen with several family pieces;
- Ida's gowns, which emphasized her 18-inch waist; and
- A First Ladies' thimble collection and several of Ida's fans (she had more than 200).

Plan Ahead to Tour National First Ladies' Historical Site

Because of limited tour size, advance reservations are recommended. Groups of six or more must make a reservation. The site is closed on Mondays. To plan a visit to the National First Ladies' Historic Site and learn more about the [First Ladies](#) themselves, visit the National First Ladies' Library comprehensive Web site.

Other nearby attractions include downtown art galleries and unique restaurants, Pro Football Hall of Fame, Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, McKinley Monument, Canton Classic Car Museum, Canton Museum of Art, Harry London Candies, Hoover Historical Center and MAPS Air Museum.



[Saxton House](#)



[Education and Research Center](#)



[Chandalier inside ERC foyer](#)



[Saxton House](#)