

BC-FIRSTLADIES

U.S. first ladies library to open in Ohio

By Marguerite Nugent

CLEVELAND, June 7 (Reuters) - America's first ladies now have a home of their own.

The National First Ladies Library opens in Canton, Ohio on Monday featuring a comprehensive collection on the contributions of the country's 43 first ladies and other prominent American women.

Former first lady Rosalynn Carter will preside over the ribbon-cutting and will join state and local dignitaries for a \$1,500 a plate Victorian gala Monday night.

The library is housed in the former home of William McKinley, who served as president from 1897 to 1901, and the festivities have been fashioned after that era.

The library is the dream of Mary Regula, the wife of U.S. Representative Ralph Regula, an Ohio Republican. The idea was born 30 years ago when her husband asked her to give a speech on his behalf marking the birthday of President Abraham Lincoln.

Mary Regula decided she would talk about Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, but was disappointed with the information available.

This began a long journey which brought together Democratic and Republican members of Congress, major corporations and private donors to raise the more than \$1.0 million to fund the library.

"This (the library) marks the culmination of a long dream of mine to bring the works and achievements of America's first ladies within reach of the American people," Regula, a former teacher, said.

"For far too long the contributions of these important women have gone unrecognized, yet their influence has been great," she said.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who will not attend the opening, has said of the library: "This unique American institution will give people from all walks of life the opportunity to learn about the important social, political and humanitarian contributions our first ladies have made over the years."

Clinton inaugurated the Library's Internet site at a press conference at the White House in February.

Located at www.firstladies.org, the site offers a database of 40,000 books, manuscripts, journals, letters and audio-visual materials about first ladies. In addition, there are links to presidential sites and presidential libraries.

"The library differs from the presidential libraries in that it is a showcase for all the first ladies," said Edith Mayo, the curator of the Smithsonian Institution First Ladies Exhibit who acted as executive advisor for the library.

While many first wives are included in their husbands' presidential libraries, not all are recognized this way since presidential libraries did not begin until after President Herbert Hoover left office in 1933, she said.

The first ladies' library will offer a variety of events, educational activities and seminars on first ladies and their role in American history.

The Smithsonian's Mayo said the library would help correct popular misconceptions about first ladies. For example, many presidential wives of the 19th century were as much political partners with their husbands as Hillary Clinton is.

"She was not the first. Abigail Adams (wife of John Adams, the second president of the United States) practically invented that role, but in the 20th century most wives took on different roles ... more behind the scenes," she said.

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It's ladies first

An elegant crowd gathers in Canton to celebrate the opening of a new attraction: the National First Ladies' Library



LEW STAMP/Beacon Journal

Up front for the ribbon cutting are (from left) Mary Regula, library founder and president; former first lady Rosalynn Carter; Frances Hughes Glendening, first lady of Maryland and vice president of the library's national board; and Dr. Sheila Fisher.

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Tuesday, June 9, 1998

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PHOTOCOPY
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Rosalynn Carter dedicates collection

BY JANET FRANKSTON
Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: So many people gathered in front of the Saxton McKinley House yesterday afternoon that William McKinley could have been giving another campaign speech from his front porch.

Only it was a century later, and the crowd that assembled on Market Avenue South was dressed in tuxedos, delicate Victorian dresses and evening gowns.

They had come to inaugurate the National First Ladies' Library, the first of its kind in the country. Just after 6 p.m., the new library was born. It will honor first ladies and offer scholars a place to advance their knowledge of them.

Former first lady Rosalynn Carter cut the red, white and blue ribbon. She was joined by Mary Regula, the library's founder and



JOCELYN WILLIAMS/Beacon Journal

Dressed in the style of the McKinley era, actress Jean Stapleton chats with visitors and Hope Taft in the Saxton McKinley House before going to a news conference.

president; Sheila Fisher, who supervised the home's restoration; and Frances Hughes Glendening, the first lady of Maryland.

"Here we will step into the

past as we step forward into the future," said Regula, who was attired as first lady Mary Todd Lincoln in a regal purple dress with a hoop skirt.

"Here we will step into the past as we step forward into the future."

MARY REGULA

*Founder and president of
National First Ladies' Library*

Mrs. Regula, wife of U.S. Rep. Ralph Regula, R-Navarre, thanked Mrs. Carter, the only first lady who came to Canton for the event.

"Your own life has been an idyllic example of service to others," Mrs. Regula said, beaming as she looked over the crowd. "You have proven with your actions that you not only care about people, but you are willing to work diligently to make a difference."

Mrs. Carter, who has been active in issues of mental health, said she became a student of first ladies after her husband was elected president in 1976.

"I became interested in first ladies, naturally, and I didn't know anything about first ladies when Jimmy was elected president," she said. "I don't think we studied it in school."

She remembered learning

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• A gala at the Saxton McKinley House in Canton is a celebration of history. **Page A6.**

• Nation overdue for woman president, former first lady Rosalynn Carter says. **Page A6.**

LADIES

• Historical costumes evoke the McKinley era

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about Martha Washington and Dolley Madison, but no others.

"First ladies have more impact on the history of our country than people realize," Mrs. Carter said, her Georgia accent filling the afternoon. "Many of their contributions have been unrecognized and unappreciated. I think they were unappreciated because people didn't know what first ladies did."

Hillary Rodham Clinton is not the only first lady who has guided policy. Mrs. Carter noted that Ellen Wilson, the first wife of Woodrow Wilson, was the first first lady to turn a project into legislation. Mrs. Wilson wanted to rid Washington of its slums and worked on public housing.

"She died the same afternoon the bill was passed," Mrs. Carter said. "But that was (1914). People think it's unprecedented today when the first lady tries to work projects and make legislation."

Mrs. Carter said she was also fascinated with the history of White House china.

For the first 100 years, she recounted, the president either brought his own china to the White House or bought it after he got there. At the end of the term, the china was auctioned off or just sold, she said.

Caroline Scott Harrison (Mrs. Benjamin Harrison) "first realized the importance of collecting and retaining or preserving that china," she said, adding that Edith Carow (Mrs. Theodore) Roosevelt refused to let any of it be sold.

"Do you know what they did with any of the china that was chipped or damaged at that time during those administrations?" she asked. "They cracked it up and threw it into the Potomac River."

It's such delicious tidbits of information for which the library will serve as a repository.

"This library will provide a home for all of this information,"

Mrs. Carter said, "and it's really wonderful information."

Later, after the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Mrs. Regula promptly asked for the copy of Mrs. Carter's speech. It would become the library's first acquisition after opening. Mrs. Carter, noting a trick she learned from Mrs. Clinton, pulled it out of her sleeve and donated it.

"One hundred years from now, we will have this in our cases," Mrs. Regula said.

The idea of creating a rich source of first lady information has been a dream of Mrs. Regula's for more than three decades. But it was not until three years ago that she came up with the concept of an online library and began soliciting donations and help from Democrats and Republicans across the country.

The library, housed in the childhood home of President McKinley's wife, Ida Saxton McKinley, will hold a growing collection of books, letters, photographs, newspapers, journal articles, audiotapes and videotapes about first ladies. The opening ceremony was emceed by Paula Zahn, an anchor for CBS News who lived in the Canton area as a child.

Also in attendance were Canton Mayor Richard Watkins, U.S. Rep. Tom Sawyer, D-Akron, and U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Lake-wood. But the star was the new library.

Helen Morris, 88, of Alliance, said she remembers when the Saxton McKinley House was not the beauty it has become.

"It's so wonderful they're using the Saxton House like this," said Morris, who also came to see her daughter, Sarah Brown, one of the original 12 local women tapped by Regula three years ago to help start the library.

Before the ribbon cutting, dozens of people lined up in front of the home to see the Victorian women, Mrs. Carter and the actress Jean Stapleton, who played Eleanor Roosevelt onstage and on television.

"I'm here to see the ladies dressed up in costumes," said Rebecca Gregory, 11, of North Carolina. She picked this week to visit her grandmother in North Canton so she could see the opening of the library and remember it. "It's very exciting."

LIBRARY TOURS

The National First Ladies' Library is at 331 Market Ave. S. in Canton. Tour schedules of the Saxton McKinley House will be available later this summer.

For more information, call 330-452-0876, or check the library's Web site at: <http://www.firstladies.org>

• Victorian gala opens new library in Canton's Saxton McKinley House. Hundreds attend event

BY KERRY CLAWSON
Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: Yesterday was Ida Saxton McKinley's birthday, and nearly 400 celebrated at her childhood home at the grand opening of the National First Ladies' Library.

The Victorian gala at the Saxton McKinley House was a celebration of history as well as the scholarship to come at this new national archive, created to preserve the contributions of America's first ladies.

Mary Regula, wife of Rep. Ralph Regula, R-Navarre, saw the project that she had conceived three years ago come to life. Regula, founding chairwoman and president of the library, was dressed in deep purple as one of her favorite first ladies, Mary Todd Lincoln.

"I'm sure she (Ida Saxton McKinley) would be pleased, looking down and smiling on Mary Regula," said Dr. Bernadine Healy, former director of the National Institutes of Health and dean of Ohio State's College of Medicine.

Healy, who described many of the early first ladies as a quiet force, said it was fitting for Ohio to host the first national institution honoring these women.

"Ohio really does convey the spirit of this. Quiet, sometimes taken for granted, but powerful," she said.

Rep. Tom Sawyer, D-Akron, who was on the committee for the library opening, said that Ohio is the birthplace of not only American presidents, but also first ladies. After yesterday's ribbon cutting, he saw former first lady Rosalynn Carter tucking her speech notes in her sleeve, and he encouraged her to pass the notes to Mary Regula, which she did.

"That becomes an item of history," he said.

Sawyer was among hundreds of guests who enjoyed a reception in the Victorian garden outside the Saxton McKinley House before the dinner and program. Among the Akron guests were Sam and Salma Gibara, Pat Kempf, Harvey and Patty Graves, and Fran and

A new chapter begin

for first ladies

PHOTOCOPY PRESERVATION

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JOCELYN WILLIAMS/Beacon Journal

ecked out in their Victorian attire, Debbie Poole (left) and Patty Withers, employees of Woodmere China of Newcastle, Pa., take photos at the grand opening of the National First Ladies' Library in Canton yesterday.

ick Buchholzer.

Many guests were dressed in elaborate Victorian costumes. They included nine women and one gentleman from Woodmere China of Newcastle, Pa., the company that designed commemorative dessert plates featuring the portraits of eight first ladies. Also troling through the crowd were two docents in period costume, and a suffragette wearing a "Votes for Women" sash and hat band.

Frances Glendening, first lady of Maryland and co-chairwoman of the Ohio first lady Janet Voinovich of the First Ladies of the States Committee, said she was specially excited to see the historic photos of all the first ladies in the ballroom. They were donated by Cleveland collector Craig Johnson, who came to the grand

opening dressed in authentic costume as President Franklin Pierce. He wore a broadcloth and wool topcoat; a dark, wavy-haired wig; and pince-nez glasses, formerly owned by Florence Harding, wife of president Warren Harding.

Another guest from the Washington, D.C., area was Frankie Hewitt, producing artistic director of Ford's Theatre and a friend of Mary Regula's. In 1968, first lady Lady Bird Johnson helped her get her first big grant for the theater, and every first lady since Johnson has supported the theater.

"I decided if anybody owes first ladies it is I, because I've had the privilege of working with every one of them since Lady Bird," she said.

Fran DeWine, wife of U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, said she is

especially interested in former first lady Caroline Harrison, who grew up in Oxford, Ohio, where DeWine attended college at Miami University. DeWine lives in an 1823 home in Cedarville, formerly owned by Whitelaw Reid, vice presidential running mate of President Benjamin Harrison in his race for a second term.

Mary Regula greeted guests outside the dinner tent, where they dined at tables with floral napery in a combination of muted purple, mauve, red, gray and gold over pink taffeta, designed by Maria Miller of Cleveland. Victorian topiary centerpieces by Blooms of Cleveland included larkspur, lady's mantle and five shades of roses with springer greenery.

Outside the tent, Regula spoke about her previous frustration in

researching the first ladies as well as her desire to expand the library's collection and develop study units about the first ladies.

"I had a difficult time figuring out where they (the first ladies) were born, let alone the year they were born in" because the search was so incomplete, she said.

She spoke of Martha Washington riding from camp to camp on horseback, delivering messages for her husband, and of abolitionist Mary Todd Lincoln bringing Abraham Lincoln to a slave auction to show him the evils of slavery.

"These are the things we need to know about our first ladies," she said. "They're role models for our children."

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Carter looks to past, future

• U.S. overdue for female president, library a boon for first ladies, she says

BY RUSS MUSARRA

Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: Rosalynn Carter looks to the day when America elects a woman president.

"I think we should have had a woman president before now," the former first lady said yesterday in Canton.

Carter was responding to a question at a news conference in the third-floor ballroom of the new National First Ladies' Library, which she had dedicated a few minutes earlier.

The walls of the room were lined with photos and drawings of all the nation's first ladies, including Carter, who stood at a microphone a few feet in front of her framed likeness.

The library will give future first ladies an advantage Carter did not have: an instant resource on the lives of their predecessors. Carter said she believes the National First Ladies' Library Web site (www.firstladies.org) will be a boon for those studying the role of first ladies.

That role has changed as the role of women has changed, Carter said, adding, "a strong first lady does what she wants to."

She recalled reading that Eleanor Roosevelt said a first lady has to have skin as tough as a rhinoceros and observed that in her own case local politics were worse than the national scene because "you know everyone who criticizes you."

Asked whether she had offered advice to first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Carter said she had passed along a tip someone had given her when the Carters were in the White House:

"You've got to do what you think is best for yourself and the country."

Carter brightened at a question about her current projects, which include promoting her latest book, *Helping Someone With Mental Ill-*



LEW STAMP/Beacon Journal

Former first lady Rosalynn Carter speaks after the dedication ceremony yesterday for the National First Ladies' Library in Canton as Frances Hughes Glendening, first lady of Maryland, looks on.

ness (Random House, \$24), published last month.

Mental health has been one of her projects since her White House days, but it didn't always get the media attention she would have liked.

That was because, a newsman once told her, "mental health is just not a sexy issue," Carter said.

Regardless, Carter hasn't faltered in her efforts for the mentally ill, working through the Carter Center in Atlanta.

The center focuses on health and peace in the United States and abroad, she said. The work

has included health and agriculture programs in 35 African countries and home construction through Habitat for Humanity, which she and former President Jimmy Carter take part in one week each year.

"Next week we'll be building 100 homes in Houston," Rosalynn Carter said.

"We" includes 4,000 to 5,000 volunteers, the former first lady said.

Yesterday, however, the job was to open the rebuilt home of former first lady Ida Saxton McKinley to the world as the National First Ladies' Library.

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A sibling surprise for Rosalynn Carter

Former first lady Rosalynn Smith Carter had a surprise waiting for her yesterday when she arrived in Canton: her brother.

Jerry Smith, a systems engineer for a Pittsburgh steel company, had a meeting in Louisville in Stark County. So he decided to make the short drive to see his sister.

"She doesn't know I'm here," Smith said an hour before the opening, sitting in a room sealed off by the Secret Service. "We have a meeting (in Louisville) once or twice a month. And so I just happened to be here."

He was taken on a tour of the library. "I think it's great," said Smith, who looks a bit like his famous brother-in-law. "The first lady pictures on the third floor were tremendous."

This Mary's no ordinary organizer



Library founder determined and down-to-earth

BY JANET FRANKSTON
Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: When she stands outside the Ida Saxton McKinley House tomorrow to cut the ribbon inaugurating the National First Ladies' Library, Mary Regula will have accomplished a longtime goal.

But that doesn't mean she's satisfied.

"We're going to keep moving forward and growing," said the founder and president of the national library, the first of its kind in the country.

"I can envision the future of the library," she said, sounding off some points she'll make in her speech tomorrow and comparing her efforts to establish the library to climbing up a mountain.

"Climbing the mountain won't be reaching the goal, it will be the beginning of the journey. The goal is to build on that."



Former first lady Rosalynn Carter heads list of VIPs to attend ceremony. Page F3.

Mary Regula is driven by Mary Regula. Being a congressman's wife doesn't

define her. Socializing with some of Washington's elite doesn't affect her. Mary Regula is still Mary Regula - she's adamant about that.

Like her style or not, most people who know her say she gets things done, and for that they say they respect her.

And when she speaks, people listen - and give money.

"People don't say no to her very easily. She's very persuasive," said her husband, U.S. Rep. Ralph Regula, R-Navarre. "I'm thinking about turning her loose on fund raising for the campaign," he said jokingly.

People in Stark County and Washington alike have marveled at the way she garnered support for the library, bringing Republicans and Democrats together and raising more than \$1.5 million in less than three years.

Her passion for first ladies' history dates 30 years, according to political lore. As the story goes, she was asked to fill in for her husband, then a state senator, for a speech about Abraham



ROBIN WITEK/Beacon Journal

At top, Mary Regula's favorite recipes of first ladies. Bottom, Mary Regula stands in front of an engagement photo of Ida Saxton McKinley at 23 years old.

Instead, she chose to talk about Mary Todd Lincoln. The lack of available information about the 16th first lady frustrated her.

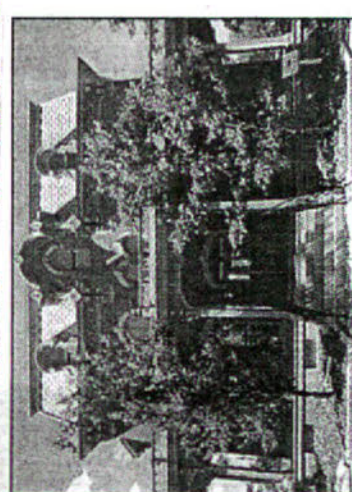
"If it wasn't available at your local library, you just sort of

gave up," said Mary, a former history teacher who is known to dress up as Ida Saxton McKinley or Mary Todd Lincoln when she speaks about those first ladies. Mary didn't give up.

"While some people would have simply chosen another topic, Mary decided to create an entire library," first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton recalled this past week. "She instinctively knew the importance of preserving the past and the value of making sure those lessons survived."

The current first lady, who will not be attending the ribbon cutting, said of Mary Regula, "Our country owes her a debt of gratitude for her vision and commitment."

"If you've done any research on first ladies - or women for



JOCELYN WILLIAMS/Beacon Journal
Exterior of Ida Saxton McKinley House

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MARY

• Organizer known for pocket-size cookbooks

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that matter - it is so limited," Mary said last week while sitting in William McKinley's study in the restored Saxton McKinley House on Market Avenue South. A photo of the former president, his wife, Ida, and his mother, Nancy McKinley, hung behind her. "We've pretty much ignored them. Why am I surprised at this?"

While Mary Regula has improved that, she is still looking ahead and said she won't stop promoting the importance of women's history, especially as it relates to first ladies. She wants the library to increase its collection and disseminate its information "so I can get others as excited as I am," she said. "I want to attract serious scholarship; I want people to write more books and plays."

When she talks about women's history she gets fiery and precise. She can tell you when Ida Saxton McKinley did this or that.

No labels, please

But when it comes to talking about herself in terms of years, Mary Regula is vague. "I'm very difficult with dates," she says, refusing to surrender her age, the year she graduated from college and the ages of her three children. "I'm very stubborn," she said.

She won't tell her age, she said, because she doesn't like to be labeled.

Yet the woman who prefers to be called Mary isn't afraid to call herself a feminist. "Absolutely," she said. "I would have been a suffragette."

Her college roommate said Mary is still very much the same person she met nearly 50 years ago at Mount Union College in Alliance - someone who is comfortable with herself.

While Washington made her more worldly, Mary never forgot who she is and where she came from, said Pat Foltz Warren, her roommate of four years.

Mary Ann Rogusky grew up humbly in Girard, near Youngs-

town. The daughter of Polish and Lithuanian immigrants, she was the first in her family to attend college.

She grew up in a Democratic family, and her father worked in a steel mill and belonged to the union.

In high school, Mary said she was inspired by an English and literature teacher who talked to her about college. When Mary said her family couldn't afford it, the teacher said, "We'll find the scholarships," Mary recalled. "Who knew what college was?"

She found the money in scholarships and attended Mount Union. She made good grades and joined a sorority. By her senior year, she was Student Union president and editor of the yearbook.

As president of Mount Union Women, an alumnae club, in the 1960s, Mary founded and raised money for scholarships for women - giving back help as she had been helped.

Mount Union is also where Mary met her husband. "I thought she was pretty cute," Ralph Regula said of his wife.

"It was love at first sight," she recalled - even though his political beliefs were different than hers.

"Ralph was the first live Republican I had ever met," she said, laughing at the memory.

The political differences didn't cause a conflict, and neither did the young couple's religious differences. Mary was a Roman Catholic; Ralph, an Evangelical. They raised their children Episcopalian. "If you want to work it out, it can be worked out," she said.

Since they married four decades ago, the Regulas have lived on a 200-acre farm in Navarre in southwestern Stark County.

They have three adult children: Martha, (Mary swears she's not named after Martha Washington) the eldest, is a librarian for Western Reserve Academy in Hudson; David is a real estate agent and auctioneer in Stark County; and Richard, the only child involved with public service, is a Bethlehem Township trustee and runs a bulk hauling company.

When she's in Navarre, Mary spends Tuesdays and Thursdays with her two grandsons, Garrett, nearly 2, and Thomas, 4.

She is often found walking around the lake on their property early in the morning or gardening.

Washington connection

The Regulas divide their time between Navarre - "where our roots are planted deep," Mary said - and Washington, where Ralph Regula has served in Congress since 1972.

With their youngest child, Richard, still in high school, Mary didn't move to Washington until Ralph's second term. Since then, she has kept a desk in his office. She has used the desk as president of the National Congressional Club for spouses and to organize personal tours of the Capitol for constituents.

"I'm always teaching history," she said. "I (gave tours) until my legs gave out" from the hard marble floors.

In her 26 years in Washington, Mary has made an impression.

"She is one of the most down-to-earth people that I've ever come across in Washington in 20 years," said noted historian Carl Anthony, who prepared the library's bibliography. "I think she has a strong sense of herself. She knows what to value and what's important."

Democrats have warm things to say about her, too.

"I think the first thing I remember about her was getting a copy of the Mary Regula cookbook," remembered Sidney Yates, a Democratic congressman from Chicago who has sat on the Appropriations Committee with Ralph Regula for two decades. "She's a very determined and dynamic person."

Around the district, Mary is known for the pocket-size cookbooks, given out every time her husband runs for re-election. They are paid for with campaign funds.

"This year, I'm going to do a casserole one," she said last week as she juggled phone calls. "Sheila, I need a recipe from you," she yelled across a room at the Saxton McKinley House to Sheila Fisher, who has overseen the Saxton McKinley House's renovation. Across the hallway, a woman hung wallpaper.

"The way she did this First Ladies Library, she got an idea and she did it," said Martha Lottman of Canton, one of the first 12 local women Mary recruited three years ago to help with the library. "She's a real leader in the sense that she inspires people."

First Ladies' Library brings the past to life

• Visitors to the Ida Saxton McKinley House uncover historical facts via a virtual stroll down memory lane

BY GREGORY KORTE
Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: On the first day of public tours of the National First Ladies' Library, the docents weren't quite sure what people would be interested in, or what questions to expect.

Some were interested in local history, and others in architecture.

Lynda Schaffner came with other members of her Louisville Towne and Country Garden Club specifically to see the garden, with its rare varieties of roses.

Others remembered all too well the days before the Ida Saxton McKinley House was rescued from demolition in 1978. Before then, the building was home to a bar, a restaurant, a barber shop and what tour guides delicately refer to as "an inexpensive boarding house."

But there's one thing that most visitors to the First Ladies' Library notice: There are hardly any books.

"My father asked that," said tour guide Donna Bishop. "I said, 'Dad, it's a virtual library!'"

Though there are some books and papers of the first ladies, the goal of the library is to create a computerized database of materials pertaining to the wives of U.S. presidents.

So while the house is being restored to what it looked like in the period after the widowed Mrs. McKinley returned home to Canton from the White House, it's also the home of an interactive high-tech Internet site and video-conferencing center.

Visitors to the library also can interact with the first ladies themselves, as re-enactors lead tours and talk about life in the White House.

In the sitting room, yesterday's visitors to the library came face-to-face with Ida Saxton McKinley — as portrayed by Mary Jane Queen,

TOUR INFORMATION

The National First Ladies' Library is in the Ida Saxton McKinley house, 331 Market Ave. S. in Canton. Today's scheduled public tours of the house have been filled, and the summer tour schedule won't be finalized until later this month.

For more information on tours or to volunteer, call the library at 330-452-0876 or visit its World Wide Web site at <http://www.firstladies.org>.

who has appeared as the nation's 23rd first lady for Canton-area schoolchildren for decades.

Pat Goffus of Louisville said she almost got heart palpitations as Mrs. McKinley told of losing her two young children to illness and her husband to an assassin's bullet in Buffalo, N.Y.

First lady Edith Bolling Galt Wilson — the second wife of Woodrow Wilson — was portrayed by Laurie Kollenbrander, who could be considered a first lady herself. She's the wife of Mount Union College President Harold Kollenbrander.

Even as the first public tours were being led through the three floors and the basement, workers were getting the house ready for tomorrow's dedication. The wallpaper — all custom-made to be as historically accurate as possible — was still being hung in the bedroom yesterday.

"I'm impressed. It's beautiful," said Goffus after the tour. "I love Victorian and I love this kind of thing. I'm doing my house little by little in Victorian. I love the wallpaper, but I doubt if I can get it."

CHRONOLOGY

Events leading to the grand opening of the National First Ladies' Library:

1991: U.S. Parks Department buys the Ida Saxton McKinley House on Market Avenue South for \$1 million.

1994: Renovation of Saxton McKinley House is complete. Mary Regula begins to give regular speeches about first ladies, asking for a fee to be donated to a First Ladies' Library.

1995: Mary gets the idea for an on-line bibliography. The six living first ladies agree to be involved with the project. She also solicits help from Stark State College of Technology for the Web site and hires historian Carl Anthony to compile the on-line bibliography. She gathers 12 local women to discuss the idea and gain their support.

1996: Mary solicits first major donation — \$100,000 — from Consolidated Natural Gas Co. Foundation. (Even though her husband, U.S. Rep. Ralph Regula, R-Navarre, oversees the House Appropriations Committee, which controls budgeting for the Energy Department, neither CNG nor the congressman sees this as a problem.)

1997: Saxton McKinley House is redecorated to reflect the times of Ida Saxton. Penny campaign is organized to collect money from local schools and public libraries. Significant dollars come in, including nine other \$100,000 donations of money, equipment or services from corporations such as Microsoft, General Motors and Coca-Cola.

Jan. 27, 1998: Luncheon at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., to announce the project.

Feb. 23: National First Ladies' Library Web site (<http://www.firstladies.org>) launched at the White House by Hillary Rodham Clinton.

June 8: National First Ladies' Library grand opening in Canton.