



Sarah Childress Polk | Wife of President James K. Polk

Summary



Sarah Childress Polk, painted by George Dury in 1883, 34 years after the Polks left the White House.

Sarah Childress Polk, the **wife of 11th President James K. Polk**, was noted for her grace, intelligence, and political clout throughout her husband's presidency. She obtained a unique formal education at the Moravians' Salem Academy, which aided her profound understanding of political issues.

She made many grand contributions to her husband's work throughout her life, making her a significant figure in American politics. As one of the [*First Ladies of the United States*](#)., between 1845 and 1849, she



exerted an influence of the broadest sort on the social and political scene of the day. However, she remained in practice a devoted and pillar-like support of her husband's principles.

Sarah Childress Polk Facts

Born:	September 4, 1803, Murfreesboro, Tennessee
Death:	August 14, 1891, at the age of 87
Husband:	James K. Polk
Children:	never had children
Parents:	Elizabeth Whitsitt and Joel Childress
Grave:	Tennessee State Capitol Nashville

Early Life of Sarah Childress Polk

Sarah Childress was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on September 4, 1803. She is the third child of six in a distinguished family. Her father, Joel Childress, was a prosperous farmer and trader who gave her a comfortable childhood. Unlike most women at the period, she acquired an excellent education. She attended the Moravian Female Academy in North Carolina, where she studied disciplines uncommon for women, such as literature, history, and social etiquette. Her academic education and social standing gave her the knowledge and poise she would later need as First Lady.

Sarah had a high intelligence and a deep interest in politics from a young age, which became even more apparent as she grew older. Raised in a conservative Presbyterian environment, she had strong religious views that shaped her decisions and her behavior throughout her life.



Marriage Life of Sarah Polk

Sarah Childress married James K. Polk on January 1, 1824, when she was twenty years old. Theirs was an institution founded on mutual respect as well as political desire. It is often said that James admired Sarah for her intelligence and support. She was an active figure in his political career, advising and counseling him on various matters. Sarah was elegance and prudence personified as she traveled with James on many of his political excursions. This made her James's closest confidante and partner, despite them not having children; the union was a strong one.

Sarah enthusiastically supported his efforts and managed his mail, frequently reading political literature and attending events with him. Her involvement in politics was unusual for a woman of that era, emphasizing her status as a political wife. The couple's intimate friendship was visible throughout James' presidency when Sarah was regarded as one of the most prominent First Ladies.

Sarah Polk First Lady

Sarah Childress Polk, as First Lady, was deeply involved in her husband's administration despite her public attitude being modest and restrained. She arranged and hosted formal gatherings with elegance, but unlike her predecessors, she refused to offer alcohol at White House events, reflecting her rigorous Presbyterian convictions. Sarah was widely known for her poise and knowledge, and she frequently attended James Polk's meetings and advised him on different state issues. Her participation in political debates behind the scenes won her the respect and admiration of many in [Washington, D.C.](#)

Sarah Polk, the First Lady, is credited with the following noteworthy accomplishments:

- Installing gas lights in the White House
- Using her favorite color as inspiration for the White House Red Room.
- Restoring the playing of "Hail to the Chief" as a notice of the President's entry into a room
- Being the First Lady to be pictured beside her husband on White House grounds.



Sarah Childress Polk Cause of Death



Sarah Childress Polk Grave, Tennessee State Capitol Nashville

After his last term in the White House, Sarah and James retired to their house in Nashville, Tennessee. Less than one and half years later, James Polk died from complications related to cholera, which had caused him to contract the disease; however, Sarah outlived him for 42 more years and was an even more popular woman in American life. She became devoted to maintaining her husband's legacy and running his estate. Sarah Childress Polk died on August 14, 1891, at the age of 87, leaving a legacy of



courage, intelligence, and patriotism. She was initially buried close to her husband in their Nashville home.

Sarah Polk's Legacy

Legacy Lives On Sarah Polk's legacy lives on as one of the most politically savvy First Ladies in American history. Her power over her husband's administration, the feeling of being duty-bound towards public service, and strong religious views were hallmarks of the prototypical stage role model of that era. She is remembered for finesse, modesty, and thoughtfulness. Sarah was well-read, remained highly engaged in political debates, and acted as a major advisor to her husband.

She advocated for education and women's rights, challenging the conventional gender roles of her time. Her memoir, written after her husband's presidency, offers insights into her experiences and perspectives. Solidifying her legacy as a remarkable figure who blended intellectual engagement with her societal duties