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First Ladies: Margaret Smith Taylor

Lead: The wife of Zachary Taylor, hero of the Mexican War and 12th President of the United States, passed most of her marriage moving from one frontier army post to another. Her fifteen months in the White House were spent largely in seclusion.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Born in Calvert County, Maryland, the daughter of a well-to-planter and veteran of the Revolutionary War, Margaret Smith met her future husband while visiting relatives in Kentucky. They were

married the following year and began the nomadic life that enveloped his nearly four decades of military service. Insisting on going with Zachary to the many wilderness stations to which he was posted, she raised her four surviving children in crude wintertime log cabins and warm weather army tents. Against their wishes, daughter Sarah eloped with young Lt. Jefferson Davis, the future President of the Confederacy. She died of malaria after only three months of marriage. Margaret's favorite post was Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and from there she received the news of her husband's exploits in the Mexican War.

When the Whig Party nominated "Old Rough and Ready" for President

in 1848, she was not pleased, considering it, “a plot to deprive her of his society, and shorten his life by unnecessary care and responsibility.” Nevertheless, she supported his bid for the only political office for which he ever ran, but her health was so bad that after the inauguration, she turned over the duties of White House hostess to her twenty-year old daughter, Betty.

Because the Taylors were political novices and largely unknown in the ruling circles of Washington, they were portrayed by the Democrats as crude backcountry folk. As late as the twentieth century Margaret was portrayed as in a political cartoon in the *New York Times* calmly smoking her corncob pipe while the ladies of

Washington looked on in horror. She was not present at the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington Monument on that steamy July 4, 1850 when President Taylor was felled with the stroke that took his life. Margaret Taylor returned to Louisiana and died in obscurity four years later.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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