

**James Knox Polk and Hail to the  
Chief - I**

**Lead: Frustrated that her husband was being ignored at social and political events, the First Lady determined that the president needed a theme song. Of such are traditions born.**

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

**Content: James Knox Polk was an unprepossessing man. He was short, he usually sported a bad haircut, and he wore cheap oversized suits. Often the President of the United States was**

**ignored when he entered the room. In short, he was a public relation expert's nightmare. Nevertheless, Polk had a secret political weapon. It was his wife, Sarah.**

**Polk was almost an accidental President. He entered public service as a friend and political protégé of Andrew Jackson. His nomination came as a surprise to most observers. At the Democratic national convention in Baltimore that met at end of May 1844 his name was not even mentioned in the first seven ballots. He emerged as a dark horse candidate after a stalemate developed between former President Martin Van Buren and Louis Cass of Michigan. In the end Polk was the**

**unanimous choice, won the election, and took the oath of office in March 1845. His was the first presidential inauguration reported by Samuel F.B. Morse's new invention, the telegraph. During his presidency the United States extended its boundaries to the Pacific Coast, annexed Texas, won the Mexican War, and secured the rest of the Southwest through treaty negotiation.**

**Despite his accomplishments, the Polks were not popular in Washington. They tended to wear their religion on their sleeves. Dancing, cards and drinking were banned at the White House and this did not go down well with what passed for sophisticated society in the**

**capital city. Sarah had a solution.  
Next time: *Hail to the Chief.***

**At the University of Richmond,  
this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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**Kane, Joseph Nathan. *Facts About the Presidents: A Compilation of Biographical and Historical Information.* New York, NY: H.W. Wilson Company, 1993.**

**Lindop, Edmund. *Presidents By Accident.* New York, NY: Franklin Watts, 1991.**

**Scott, Walter. *The Lady of the Lake, A Poem in Six Cantos.* New York, NY: T.Y. Crowell and Company, 1883.**

**<http://memory.loc.gov/cocoon/patriotism/loc.natlib.ihas.20000009/>**

***"Hail to the Chief: The origins and legacies of an American ceremonial tune."* *American Music* 15 (Summer 1997): 123-136. Call number: ML1 .A47, ISSN: 0734-4392.**