

# Ladies who became FIRST

## Anna Tuthill Symmes - the Second in a Series by Randall Priest

Anna Symmes Harrison was born Anna Tuthill Symmes in 1775, the daughter of a Revolutionary patriot, John Cleves Symmes. At the time of her birth, the family lived on a farm called Solitude near Morristown, New Jersey. Anna was three years old when her mother died and was brought up by her maternal grandparents on Long Island until the age of nineteen. She then accompanied her father and stepmother to the Northwest Territory (now the state of Ohio). This area was known as the Miami Purchase, on the Ohio River, not far from the village of Cincinnati. John Symmes was appointed a judge in the territorial government and was also in charge of a million acres.

Anna would meet her future husband, William Henry Harrison, while living in North Bend, Ohio. Anna's father was not impressed with William who was devoted to his military career. John Symmes felt that the rugged life of an army wife was not in the best interest of his daughter. However, as young people have done since the beginning of time, William and Anna were secretly married on November 25, 1795, in North Bend, Ohio. John Symmes was away on business in Cincinnati when they got married. Two weeks later, John confronted William and asked him how he intended to support a family with Anna. William responded, "by my sword, and my own right arm, sir." It was not until William Harrison achieved fame on the battlefield that Symmes came to accept him.

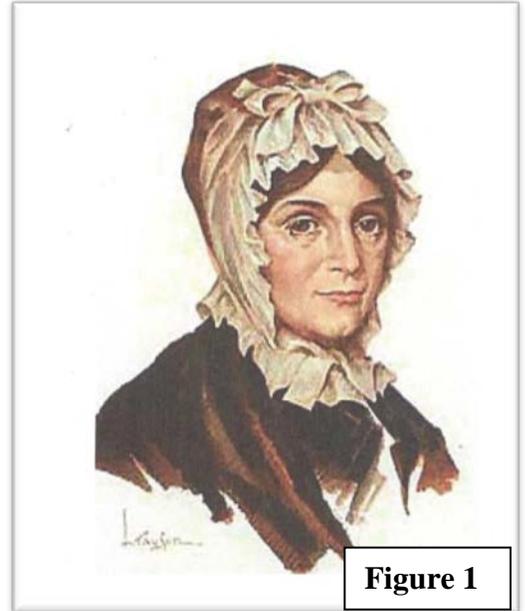


Figure 1

Anna's father had been right about one thing; it was not an easy life being married to an army officer. She focused her energies on home and family, managing the chores of farming and raising their children. She was a deeply religious woman [Figure 1] who relied on her faith for strength and courage during

the many lonely and difficult years of her marriage. On May 15, 1814, Anna gave birth to their 10<sup>th</sup> (and last) child.

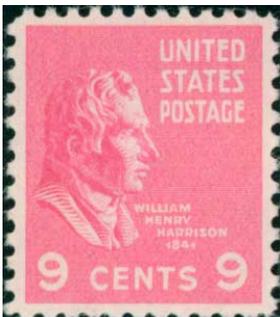


Figure 2

During Anna's growing-up years with her grandparents, she gained a broad education. Since schools in the frontier territory were few and far between, Anna took on educating her own children and those of their neighbors, in addition to the duties involved in running a farm.

Then once again change was to come to the Harrison family. At age 69, William Henry Harrison [Figure 2] was elected to the presidency in 1840. Anna had objected to his campaign as she wanted him to come home and live his retirement with her on the banks of the Ohio River. Hearing the news of her husband's landslide victory, Anna simply said, "I wish that my husband's friends had left him where he is, happy and contented in retirement."

Anna decided not to go to Washington for the inauguration in 1841 due to an illness at their home in North Bend. President-elect Harrison asked his daughter-in-law Jane Irwin Harrison, widow of his namesake son, to accompany him and act as hostess until Anna's arrival in May.

Exactly one month after his inauguration, President Harrison died of pneumonia. Anna was packing to move to the White House when she learned of William's passing so she never made the journey.

After William's death, Anna moved in with her son, John Scott, and helped raise his children including eight-year-old Benjamin, who later became our 23rd president [Figure 3]. Anna lived two decades after her husband's death and survived all but one of her ten children. As she had all her life, she kept up a keen interest in politics and also urged her grandson Benjamin to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

Anna Harrison died in 1864 and is buried next to her husband at the site of their North Bend, Ohio, home.



Figure 3

In continuation of the series, we will be looking at the rest of the first ten First Ladies. These are some of the facts that will be looked at and explained in the segments that follow.

1. One President had two different wives (not at the same time).
2. One First Lady was not born in the United States.
3. One First Lady never lived in the White House. (Anna Symmes Harrison)
4. Four of the First Ladies did not have any children.
5. Three of the First Ladies are on U.S. postage stamps. (Dolley Madison for one)
6. Nine of the First Ladies came from five different states.
7. One President had 14 children.

Reference:

Postal Commemorative Society // First Ladies of the White House by Nancy J. Skarmas

The Presidents of the U.S. of A. by Frank Freidel // [www.whitehouse.gov/1600/first-ladies](http://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/first-ladies)

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## Cover Corner by Phil Fettig

Tired of seeing the same old dealers at the shows? Maybe you should try this one! If the name "THE CLEAR-Y STAMP CO." is not enough to intrigue you, then how about the motto "When it comes to Stamps, we have them all licked"? Makes me wonder if the mint items still had gum! With the lack of a street address I have no idea if this operation was a storefront or mail order. Either way that is a strange omission. Also note the cover is addressed to somebody named Cleary so I am not sure of its purpose. Of course, 78 years later I could not find any record of the store. Bronxville, NY is a small village within Eastchester, NY. It is a suburb of New York City, located 15 miles north of Manhattan with a population of 6,400. I guess now any collectors have to attend the shows in the city. This is just another example of the fun little things you can find going through material.

