

MRS. GERALD R. FORD

Birthdate: April 8, 1918

Mrs. Betty Ford came to the White House determined to make the mansion as warm, friendly, and open as the Ford family homes have always been. Her own lively interests in the arts, handicapped children and women's rights have been combined with a focus on home and family life.

Mrs. Ford was born Elizabeth Anne Bloomer in Chicago, Illinois. Her family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, when she was three and she began her study of dance there when she was eight. After graduating from high school in 1936, Mrs. Ford attended two summer sessions of the Bennington School of Dance, where she first met Martha Graham. Her dance career continued in New York City, where she joined one of Miss Graham's troupes and modeled with the John Powers Agency.

She returned to Grand Rapids in 1941 and became fashion coordinator for a local department store. She also formed her own dance group and taught dance to handicapped children.

Only weeks after their 1948 marriage, Gerald and Betty Ford moved to Washington, where he began his political career as representative from Michigan's 5th District and she began hers as a wife and mother. Within seven years, the four children were born.

During the 1950's and 1960's, Betty Ford's world centered on her active family of three sons and one daughter. Her outside activities primarily involved the Episcopal Church and the Republican Party.

Three years ago with the two younger children almost out of high school, Mrs. Ford thought of going back to work outside the home. But before she found such a job, her husband became Vice-President and in August, 1974, President. Those jobs gave her new responsibilities which used her experience in entertaining, meeting people, and keeping a busy schedule.

In White House entertaining, Mrs. Ford has relaxed the official style to make it more people-oriented. The decorations often are American handicrafts, and the guest lists reflect the diverse interests of the entire Ford family.

Mrs. Ford's lifelong enthusiasm for the arts has shown up in decorations, White House guests, and, most especially, in her own involvement in artistic events. Her schedule shows an active interest in handicapped children and her statements a firm commitment to women's rights.

Today, the Ford home has a very special address, and as President and First Lady, Gerald and Betty Ford have unique responsibilities. But the Fords and their four children, Mike, 25, Jack, 23, Steve, 19, and Susan, 18, continue to be a close-knit family despite geographical separations.