

PAT NIXON

What Kind of First Lady Would She Be?

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER



Pat Nixon is often photographed in her kitchen, yet she is not a "homebody."

Here is an intimate profile of the Republican candidate's wife; next week: Jacqueline Kennedy

WHEN 14-YEAR-OLD Tricia (short for Patricia) Nixon prefaced a sentence the other day with, "And when Daddy is President . . ." her mother Pat (also short for Patricia) cut in: "But we don't know that Daddy will be President!"

So when I recently asked the tall, slim, auburn-haired wife of the Republican Presidential nominee, "What kind of First Lady will you be if Mr. Nixon wins?" I could be pretty certain of her answer:

"It would be presumptuous of me to comment."

There was another reason for Mrs. Nixon's hesitancy. At a party in 1956, Nancy Kefauver told how her family would enjoy the White House swimming pool after her husband was elected President. Pat Nixon never forgot Mrs. Kefauver's subsequent embarrassment when the senator from Tennessee didn't even win the Democratic nomination for that office.

Although Pat Nixon refuses to speculate on her role as First Lady, her attitude and qualifications became amply clear during the two hours we discussed her past and present life in the Nixons' suburban Washington home.

It is quite obvious, for instance, that she will play neither the politically active role of an Eleanor Roosevelt, nor the part of the passive, domestic wife in the Bess Truman-Mamie Eisenhower tradition. Her forte will be somewhere in between, as she has already demonstrated.

Pat Nixon already is a veteran of the international and Washington banquet circuits. Yet she hates small talk to the point of avoiding, as much as possible, interviews solely about her opinions on housework and rearing children.

"I find politics much more exciting and stimulat-

ing," she told me. "I have also found that the officials I meet seem to enjoy my frankness and don't mind expressing their opinions freely because they know I won't betray their confidence. When I'm asked by reporters what transpired at an important dinner, I never include political opinions."

It was in 1946, when Dick Nixon went into politics, that she decided never to make any political speeches or comments. She has broken this rule only once, when she pinch-hit for her husband in 1956 while he was down with the flu. But there's no possibility that she would hold press conferences in the Eleanor Roosevelt manner.

However, Pat has worked so diligently on her husband's campaigns and has shared his confidence on official matters to such an extent that there seems little doubt of her continued influence on him and his decisions in political matters.

By upbringing and education, Pat is more qualified than some, and less than other, First Ladies for the part she may play come next January.

Her Early Life Was Hard

Most former First Ladies came from socially prominent families. Pat—the daughter of an Irish miner-turned-farmer and his German-immigrant wife—was born in a tent city in Ely, Nev. When she was a year old, her parents moved to Artesia, Calif., where Pat grew up in poverty, living in a house with scant plumbing and no electricity.

Her mother died when Pat was 14, and five years later her father died of silicosis. After her mother's death, and especially during the two crucial years she nursed her father, Pat ran the household which included a sister and three brothers.

At harvest time, she worked in the fields, then headed to the kitchen to cook the simple food which still typifies the Nixon fare and would undoubtedly become part of the White House menus.

Pat had to earn her education by hard work and long hours. To take care of her tuition at the University of Southern California, she swept out a bank in the morning and returned as a teller in the afternoon. Later she worked as a secretary, waitress, librarian, research assistant, and grader of papers, until she graduated with honors and a high-school teacher's certificate.

Mrs. Nixon's ability to learn and particularly to memorize would be a tremendous asset in the White House, as it has been when she has accompanied her husband on his many trips.

For instance, in 1953, when she went with Nixon on his first trip abroad as Vice President, she planned to do her share for good will and mutual understanding by speaking in the languages of the countries they were visiting—20 in all.

"I knew a little French and Spanish from school," she says, "but naturally it was impossible for me in a brief span of time to become familiar with all the languages. So I simply would memorize a few sentences phonetically between stops."

While Mrs. Nixon admits that she was not proficient enough to converse with the leaders, she did well enough to greet people in their own languages, and to say a few sentences when she visited hospitals and made other public appearances. This ability should pay off handsomely in the White House, where foreign dignitaries have been surprised—and pleased—when even a member of the staff, let alone the President's family, has been

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