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"MRS. PRESIDENT CLEVELAND"

First Lady Frances Folsom Cleveland will be honored in Medina on Sunday, June 2, the 110th anniversary of her marriage to Pres. Grover Cleveland. The event will begin at 2:30 p.m. on St. Mary's R.C. Church Parish Hall located in 215 Eagle Street. John Spare, an actor from Canandaigua, will impersonate Pres. Grover Cleveland. Following his forty-five minute monologue, an historic marker will be unveiled at the corner of Main and Eagle Streets where Frances Folsom once lived. This event is being produced by the Orleans County Department of History with the following sponsors: The Orleans County Historical Association, the Medina Historical Society, St. Mary's R C Church, Medina Chamber of Commerce, Medina Savings and Loan Association and Catherine Revelas.

Frances Folsom was born in Buffalo, N.Y. in 1864 to Oscar Folsom and Emma Harmon Folsom. Grover Cleveland was a law partner of Oscar Folsom. When Oscar died in 1875, Frances, his daughter, was only eleven years of age. It was not surprising that Grover Cleveland became her guardian. At approximately this same time, Frances and her mother moved to Medina where they lived for around three years with her grandmother Ruth Harmon.

My thanks to Medina Historian Edsel Grinnell, for determining the place of their residence. In an article of reminiscences published in the Medina Tribune in May 1914, we find that Mrs. Harmon lived at the southwest corner of Main and Eagle Streets. The article notes that the house was rented to different tenants for many years. It is entirely possible that they may have lived in other Medina locations but we are relatively sure of this one.

In an earlier article from the Medina Tribune dated April 29, 1886 we find this interesting bit of history: "The approaching marriage of the President and Miss Frances E. Folsom," says a Medina correspondent of the New York Tribune, "brings to mind the fact that for some years after the death of her father, the young lady and her mother lived in this place at the home of Mrs. Folsom's mother, Mrs. Harmon. "Frankie" attended the Medina high school and was popular among her schoolmates and teachers. Although only 15 years of age, she was beautiful and at once became the belle of the young society....At school Miss Folsom was a brilliant scholar and seemed to master without particular effort the most difficult lessons and at the same time retain everything she learned. After the affairs of her husband had been straightened by his law partner, Grover Cleveland, Mrs. Folsom and her daughter returned to Buffalo to reside."

In Buffalo she attended Central High School, where she prepared for college and so thorough was her work that she was able to enter the sophomore class of Wells College.

At the time of her graduation from college in 1885, she received a superb floral tribute from the White House conservatories. After graduation she went abroad in the autumn with her mother. No public announcement of her engagement to President Cleveland had been made, but the interested public felt that there was an understanding. When she landed in New York the following spring, she was met by the president's sister, Miss Cleveland, and his private secretary. The wedding occurred June 2, 1886, in the blue room of the White House.

Many people thought the bachelor President was pursuing Mrs. Folsom rather than the daughter due to the difference in their ages. When Frances Folsom married Grover Cleveland, she was twenty-one and he was forty-nine. He was the first president to be married in the White House and she was the



youngest First Lady.

Quickly becoming one of the most popular First Ladies of the 19th century, Frances saw women imitate her hair style and line up by the thousands to catch a glimpse of her at White House receptions. She would be singled out for years to come, alongside Dolley Madison, as one to imitate. Newspapers and magazines published many pictures of Frances. Possibilities for commercialization were not ignored, and unauthorized photographs and sketches of her began to appear in advertisements.

To put a stop to such practices, a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives in March 1888, making the unauthorized use of the "likeness or representation of any female living or dead, who is or was the wife, mother, daughter or sister of any citizen of the United States" a crime subject to fines of up to \$5,000. The bill's sponsor made clear that he was seeking to protect current First Lady Frances Cleveland, one of the few women in America then famous enough to encourage use of her likeness in testimonial advertising. Although the measure never passed, its introduction suggests a whole new phase in press attention to presidents' wives.

Our picture of Mrs. Cleveland shown here, is from an unauthorized advertising card endorsing something called Sulphur Bitters. I assume this may have been some sort of tonic. The label, "Mrs. President Cleveland", is at least amusing.

The Clevelands were also the first Presidential couple to have a child born in the White House. In all, they had five children. I had the pleasure to speak with the youngest son, Francis Cleveland, before he died last fall.

Grover Cleveland died in 1908 and five years later Frances Cleveland remarried, thus being the first First Lady to do that. She spent the rest of her life living in Princeton, New Jersey, where she died Oct. 29, 1947.