

This Day in History... September 12, 1953

Wedding of John and Jackie Kennedy

On September 12, 1953, John F. Kennedy married Jacqueline Bouvier in Newport, Rhode Island. Their wedding drew national attention, but it came years before either could know how closely their partnership would become linked with American public life.

Jacqueline Lee Bouvier was born in Southampton, New York, on July 28, 1929, to John Vernou Bouvier III and Janet Lee Bouvier. Her family was wealthy, and she spent much of her childhood between New York City, Long Island, and later Virginia. She began riding horses as a young child and became an accomplished equestrian. At age 11, she won a national junior horsemanship competition. She also enjoyed reading, writing, drawing, and studying languages.

After her parents divorced in 1940, her mother married Hugh D. Auchincloss Jr., a lawyer and businessman. Jacqueline and her younger sister, Lee, spent time at the Auchincloss family's Newport estate, Hammersmith Farm. The property would later become the site of Jacqueline's wedding reception.

Jacqueline attended the Chapin School in New York and Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut. She then enrolled at Vassar College, where she studied French, literature, history, and art. During her junior year, she spent time studying in France through a Vassar program. She later transferred to George Washington University in Washington, DC, graduating in 1951 with a degree in French literature.

After college, Jacqueline took a job at the *Washington Times-Herald*. As its "Inquiring Camera Girl," she roamed Washington with a camera, stopping strangers and asking them questions about current events and everyday life. Her short feature appeared beside their photographs in the newspaper. The work gave her experience talking with people from many backgrounds and helped make her a familiar figure in Washington society.

In May 1952, Jacqueline attended a dinner party hosted by journalist Charles Bartlett. There she met John Fitzgerald Kennedy, then a US representative from Massachusetts. Kennedy was campaigning for the US Senate, hoping to unseat Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. He won the election that November. Jacqueline and Kennedy continued seeing each other, and their engagement was announced in June 1953.

They married on the morning of September 12 at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Newport. Boston's Archbishop Richard Cushing performed the ceremony. More than 750 guests filled the church, including members of prominent political, business, and social families. Boston tenor Luigi Vena sang "Ave Maria." Outside, crowds gathered for a glimpse of the couple.

Jacqueline wore an ivory silk taffeta gown designed by Ann Lowe, a gifted fashion designer whose work was popular among wealthy clients. A burst pipe had damaged the original wedding dress and several bridesmaids' gowns shortly before the wedding. Lowe and her team remade them in time. Jacqueline's veil had belonged to her grandmother, and she carried a bouquet of pink and white flowers.

The reception took place at Hammersmith Farm, where more than 1,000 guests attended. The newlyweds danced to "I Married an Angel," played by Meyer Davis and His Orchestra. They then traveled to Acapulco, Mexico, for their honeymoon before returning to Washington and Kennedy's Senate career.

During the 1950s, Jacqueline became an important part of Kennedy's public life. While he recovered from major back surgery, he worked on *Profiles in Courage*, a book about US senators who had taken unpopular stands. It was published in 1956 and received the Pulitzer Prize for Biography the following year. In 1960, while pregnant with their son John Jr., Jacqueline assisted Kennedy's presidential campaign from home. She answered campaign mail, gave interviews, recorded television advertisements, and wrote a syndicated weekly column, "Campaign Wife."

As First Lady from 1961 to 1963, Jacqueline Kennedy focused much of her attention on the White House itself. She created a committee of experts to guide its restoration and helped establish the White House Historical Association. Her goal was to preserve the residence as a place with a visible connection to American history, not simply as a changing home for each administration. In 1962, her televised tour of the restored White House introduced that work to a large national audience.

After President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, Jacqueline Kennedy helped shape the public memorial observances and continued to protect the historical record of his presidency. Her work as First Lady left a lasting mark on the preservation and interpretation of the White House.



Jacqueline selected this image for the first US stamp tribute to her late husband.



*This stamp features a photo taken by Jacque Loew and used in the book *The Kennedy Years*.*



In 1962, Jacqueline Kennedy's televised tour of the restored White House reached an estimated 80 million viewers and earned her an honorary Emmy Award.

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