

## Celebrating the Holiday Season with Republican First Ladies

What have Republican First Ladies done to make the yuletide season more festive, memorable, and meaningful? Looking back over the last several decades, here are just a few examples:

In 1929, **Mrs. Herbert Hoover** began what has since become a tradition for First Ladies by deciding to decorate an official Christmas tree for the White House – one not intended to be a personal family tree. The holiday season that year was especially memorable at the White House because, during a children’s party given by the President and First Lady, an electrical fire occurred in the West Wing. After determining that the fire was not a threat to those in the area where the party was being held, and not wanting to cause a panic among the children, Mrs. Hoover kept the party going by having the Marine Band play Christmas carols loudly enough to drown out the noise of the fire trucks.

The next Republican First Lady to grace the White House was **Mamie Eisenhower**. During the Eisenhower presidency, Mrs. Eisenhower, in order to save money, personally wrapped each of the gifts she had purchased at area department stores for the White House staff. In addition, she and her artistic husband, using paintings done by the President, and with the help of Hallmark, created the first official White House Christmas cards.

The first official White House Christmas ornament was issued in 1981, the year that **Nancy Reagan** became our nation’s First Lady. In 1984, Mrs. Reagan was given the honor of lighting the National Christmas Tree at the annual Pageant of Peace. That was also the year that a nativity scene was once again displayed in the pageant, after an excess of political correctness had excluded it for several years.

Many of us recall First Lady **Barbara Bush’s** rides in a cherry picker to place the star atop the National Christmas Tree, which she began doing when her husband was the Vice President, and continued to do through his presidency. She also enjoyed hosting a special Christmas party for Washington, D.C. area homeless children, personally distributing gift bags and reading Christmas stories to them.

Following George W. Bush’s election as President, First Lady **Laura Bush** continued her custom of including Bible verses on their Christmas cards, as she had done when her husband was the Governor of Texas. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 left our country shocked and grieving, the First Lady decided to change the verses she had originally selected for that year’s White House Christmas card. The newly-chosen verses, from the 27<sup>th</sup> Psalm, offered a message of hope and encouragement: *“Thy face, Lord, I will seek...I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”*

At this year’s Pageant of Peace, President Trump and America’s new First Lady **Melania Trump**, are celebrating the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, which will be televised on December 4<sup>th</sup>. According to a recent story in the *Washington Post*, the President “has vowed to put Christmas back at the center of the winter holidays.”

May this holiday season and the year ahead be so bright for our nation that, as the NFRW has been saying, “we have to wear shades.”

Priscilla Poese, Americanism Chair

*One of my favorite websites for information related to American history is [www.wallbuilders.com](http://www.wallbuilders.com). Much of the material for this article is from Wallbuilders online resource “Christmas with the Presidents”, by David Barton.*