

author incorporates other historians' work in a graceful and enlightening way, putting her work into the broader context of the history of poor relief and social welfare. Readers of state and local history will appreciate her extensive use of county records and other local documents and her ability to tell a story that is both convincing local history and a case study that adds understanding to the broader history of social welfare and the New Deal Era.

Mamie Doud Eisenhower: The General's First Lady, by Marilyn Irvin Holt. Modern First Ladies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007. xiv, 189 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographic essay, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer John Robert Greene is Paul J. Schupf Professor of History and Humanities at Cazenovia College. His books include *Betty Ford: Candor and Courage in the White House* (2004) and *Presidential Profiles: The Nixon and Ford Years* (2006).

As a teenager becoming interested in history, I was thrilled when my grandparents asked me to accompany them on their yearly vacation jaunt to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. On the obligatory tour of the home first used as a presidential getaway, then as a retirement home, for the first couple of the 1950s, I was taken aback by its bright pink décor and the frilly accoutrements. I judged that the proprietor of that home, Mamie Doud Eisenhower, was as shallow and frilly as was her home. Marilyn Irvin Holt's fascinating new biography shows me just how wrong I was.

Mamie had a nine-year tie to the state of Iowa. She was born in 1896 in Boone, where she lived for less than a year, when the DouDs moved to Cedar Rapids. There they lived until 1905, when they moved to Colorado, where Mamie continued her early life as a privileged debutante. The moderately wealthy family wintered at San Antonio, where Mamie met a young lieutenant stationed at Fort Sam Hill. Of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mamie was clear: "I wanted that man" (9).

More than half of Holt's book deals with Mamie's pre-White House career. That is appropriate, particularly given Holt's overriding thesis — that, "in effect, Mamie Eisenhower's years as an army wife laid the foundation for her approach to the role as first lady" (xii). Mamie learned that the behavior and decorum of the spouse of a career officer was central to his advancement. She then perfected the role, using her parties, personal touch, and gift for the intimately political, to help Ike rise to the top. She was a true political partner, yet she was initially cool towards the general's decision to run for the presidency in 1952. Still, when he made his decision, she presented a

public resolve, and entered the campaign of 1952 swinging, often participating with vigor at campaign staff meetings.

The general public assessment of Mamie as First Lady — “Mrs. Average America” in the words of *Time* magazine — has to this point been unchallenged by historians. They point to the blandness of her pink frocks, her (now) startlingly short bangs, and her insistence that she not bother her husband at work (Holt notes that she visited the Oval Office only four times in eight years; the first lady quipped that “a wife never went near headquarters”) (69). But Holt’s book makes it clear that this contemporary assessment could not have been further from the truth. When Mamie entered the White House, Holt maintains, she simply kept doing for the president what she had done for the general — maintaining a home as refuge and running the social arm of the White House with an iron, if often hidden, hand. Surprising, but consistent with Holt’s thesis, is evidence showing the rather large number of invitations that Mamie extended to African American school and tour groups — even getting her picture taken with those groups. Americans loved Mamie as they liked Ike, but, it seems, they hardly knew her.

Well written, graceful, interesting to the point of being chatty, and particularly well sourced, Holt’s biography is a welcome addition to the only academic series dedicated to the First Ladies (full disclosure: I have also written a volume in that series). However, the book falls short in its analysis of the personal relationship between Mamie and Ike. Holt glazes over the effect of his wandering eye, and she accepts without criticism the official explanation of the rumored affair with aide Kay Summersby. Mamie’s 1923 reconsideration of her marriage (leaving Ike at his post in Panama and returning to Denver with her baby boy) is mentioned and then dropped. Her recurring health problems and temper tantrums also earn only quick mention. The result is a rather one-dimensional portrait of a fascinating relationship, as Holt offers her readers more of the political and professional, rather than the personal, side.

Yet this book merits a close read. It is the first to show Mamie Doud Eisenhower as a partner, rather than a house-frau; as an independent thinker rather than the passive wife of the savior of democracy. In short, Holt’s biography is an important addition to the emerging literature on the modern first ladies, and well worth recommending.