

CSPAN/FIRST LADIES HELEN TAFT

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SUSAN SWAIN, HOST: Helen Taft was more ambitious about getting to the White House than her husband, William Howard Taft, and was willing to get personally involved in politics to get him elected.

As First Lady, she overcame a serious illness to directly manage the White House, invited top classical musicians to perform there, and supported causes that mattered to her. Helen Taft also has one of the most visible legacies of all first ladies, Washington, D.C.'s famous Japanese cherry trees, the ones that frame the Tidal Basin in the nation's capital and bring tens of thousands of visitors to Washington every year.

Good evening, and welcome to First Ladies: Influence and Image, the Life of Helen Taft. Her husband served in the White House from 1909 to 1913. Here to tell us about her life and her legacy is her biographer, Lewis Gould. His biography of her is "Helen Taft: Our Musical First Lady."

You opened the book by making the case that of the 20th Century first lady, she's the most obscure, but you say she deserves better from history. Tell me quickly why she deserves better than being obscure?

LEWIS GOULD, HELEN TAFT BIOGRAPHER: Well, because she did some things that were, as you've mentioned in your opening, about that were very constructive, I mean, the cherry trees, bringing the classical music -- musicians to the White House, and, generally, trying to make Washington the cultural center of the nation. That was her ambition.

Now, it didn't work out because of medical reasons. But she had an agenda that would have made her rank with Eleanor Roosevelt or Lady Bird Johnson in terms of transforming Washington had things gone the other way.

SWAIN: She also seemed to have an agenda to get her husband to the White House.

GOULD: Yes, the story is that she decided when she visited the White House in the Hayes administration, "Hey, I want to do that as well." It's somewhat overdrawn. There are a lot of women who thought they'd like to have their husbands become presidents. And sometimes, she is portrayed as a cross between Mommie Dearest and Lady Macbeth, which isn't really the case. She was a much more constructive influence and a nicer lady than history has treated her.

SWAIN: Helen Taft has a very interesting story and we bet many of you in the audience will be hearing it for the first time tonight. We'd very much like to involve you in our conversation and you can do that in a lot of ways. You can send us a comment on Facebook.

We already have a robust discussion starting there with questions coming in about Nellie, Helen Taft. And you can also send us a tweet using the hashtag at FirstLadies. And we have phone lines, of course, which you will put on the screen and we'll get to your calls in a few minutes as the program progress. First we need to tell you a little bit more about her early biography.

I want to hear this story. How did she get to the white house at age 16 as a guest of the president?

GOULD: Well, her father and the Herrons in Cincinnati were friends with president and Lucy -- Rutherford B. Hayes and Lucy Hayes and they went to the White House. She went only once, but she had not yet made her debut, so he couldn't participate in social activities, but she was there. And President Hayes said it was wonderful to have it, the Herrons there.

And in the Taft family lore, she was supposed to have said, you know, I'm going to come back. It's not clear that that's really what she said, but she's -- like many people, she says I want to marry a man who may become president.

SWAIN: But she came from a political family.

GOULD: Yes. Her -- her father was a friend of Benjamin Harrison and had been involved in Ohio politics on her mother's side. There had been a congressman in their background. And she was quite the intellectual. I mean, she was reading Darwin and Goethe and other things in school and she had the ability to play the piano, which she studied quite seriously. I wish there were recordings, but there does not seem to be.

And so she had a salon in Cincinnati, which was a very culturally rich city in those days as it is -- I mean, I'm not planning to-- now, but it was sort of -- they had Seven Hills, so they thought of themselves as sort of the Rome of the Middle West.

SWAIN: Well, if she was from a political family and how this ambition, no matter how much a product of being just 16 and enthralled with it of getting to the White House, how did she choose Will Taft as her mate?

GOULD: Well, they -- they knew of each other, it was a small community. It was really after he had gone to Yale and come back to be in the Cincinnati Law School that their lives began to intersect and they began to court. She was in her mid-20's, which was late for marrying in those days, and he was almost 29 by the time he gets married.

But they started going out to some of the beer halls and other things of Cincinnati and gradually fell in love. He was much more smitten with her originally than she was with him. But he proposed, she rejected him, which was the standard thing in those days. The woman never accepted the proposal right off.

So they had a rather lengthy courtship by our standards, where sometimes it lasts all weekend. But in those days, she made him wait a while, but then they got married in June of 1886.

SWAIN: You mentioned her education, and we should give a little to her alma matter. Where did she go to college?

GOULD: She didn't -- she studied a little bit at the University of Cincinnati, but she really almost was self-educated, took some courses, but did not ever get a degree. She didn't have a degree like her husband did.

SWAIN: How -- well, how common was it for women to go to beer halls in those days?

GOULD: It was not the done thing, though in Cincinnati, with its German community and tradition of the, you know, Turn Verein and stuff like that, it was where young people went. And young people in the '80s had the same -- 1880s had the same impulses they have today. So that's where people went. They did not date quite the way they would later in the 20th century.

SWAIN: Now, William Howard Taft was not intending a career in politics when he proposed to Nellie Taft, Nellie Heron.

GOULD: He wanted -- he wanted to be a lawyer and he wanted to get to the Supreme Court. So he would later say, like, any good politician, he had his bull turned upward when offices were falling into his lap. But he definitely, I think, wanted to be chief justice of the United States almost from the time he learned about the law.

SWAIN: And for those of you who don't know the history, William Howard Taft made good on his wish. He's the only president who also served in the role of Chief Justice of the United States. And we'll learn more about his later part of the career -- his career after the White House, as our program progresses.

Well, if he didn't really pose the soul of a politician, how instrumental was -- was Helen in moving him in that direction?

GOULD: Well, at the initial stages, she had relatively little influence, but I think that -- because he becomes a state judge, then he becomes solicitor general of the United States and is appointed to the Court of Appeals in Ohio, so she watched him do that.

But I think the big turning point came in early 1900 when President McKinley called him and said come to Washington, and he offers him the chance to go to the Philippines and establish a civilian government in the Philippines.

And she says, take it. He says, do you want to do this, and she said, by all means. She said this would give my husband the sphere of power and influence that he wouldn't have had any other way. And I think that was the decisive moment in their lives when he's in his mid-40's, moving toward being in politics in a new way.

SWAIN: We have two quotes, one from each of the Tafts, but give you some sense of how interested the -- two of them were in politics, and you can say -- tell how much this really reflects, really, their overall attitudes.

From Helen Taft, she writes of her husband, Mr. Taft was all but impervious to any friendly advice, which being followed, would have tended to -- enhance his own political advantage. And we have a 1906 quote from William Howard Taft, and he says, "Politics, when I am in it, makes me sick."

GOULD: Some of that was for public consumption. Yes, I think he pursued a political career with more zest than we sometimes realize. And what Nellie, as everyone knew her, was saying is that he had a way of getting people to push him in a direction that he wanted to go. And so I think she is acknowledging that he moved her as much as she moved him.

SWAIN: Lew Gould referenced his career and he mentioned the two that were in the law. In addition to that, let's take a look at the political positions that William Howard Taft held over his lifetime.

In 1890 to -- in 1892, he served as solicitor general, as Mr. Gould told us. He was, as we learned, governor general of the Philippines and an important part in that country's development and our relationship with it, in 1901 to 1904. In 1904 was the secretary of war, today called the secretary of defense. Then his term as president, 1909 to 1913. And then later on, in 1921 to 1930, his life's wish, become chief justice of the United States.

Of those early positions, secretary of war, governor general of the Philippines, which was most helpful in setting his cap toward his experience in the White House?

GOULD: I think the governor general of the Philippines made him a national figure. And then, when he goes into Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet, he presents himself to Roosevelt as the logical choice in

1908. Once Roosevelt had said I'm not going to run in 1908, then as Roosevelt looked over the cabinet to see who might be his successor, Elihu Root was probably too old.

So there was Will Taft from Ohio, a state that really mattered to Republicans in those years, and he became sort of the logic of the situation.

SWAIN: Very briefly, why did the United States have the ability to appoint a governor general of the Philippines?

GOULD: As a result of the Spanish-American War and the Treaty of Paris in December of 1898, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States and they became a possession and would remain so until 1946.

SWAIN: One of the hallmarks of this program is, we've been taking you to historic sites that are associated with the first ladies and their lives. Throughout this program, we will be taking you to the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati. You see a picture of it there. It is available for you to visit as well. And we hope, those of you who are getting interested in this series will visit some of these places we're showing you.

Up next, you're going to meet the superintendent of the site, Ray Henderson. And he'll tell us more about the time that the Taft spent in the Philippines.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

RAY HENDERSON, WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

SUPERINTENDENT: She loved to travel and William Howard Taft got a chance to be the chairman of the Philippine Commission. She jumped at the chance, encouraged him to take the job. And they took the family and went to the Philippines, where William Howard Taft was later governor general of the Philippines. So she had a chance to travel around the world. She also got the chance to introduce her children to this travel. She learned different languages.

Banquets were a big thing. In fact, before she and the children got their William Howard Taft cabled, about some of the banquets he was really invited to, and Mrs. Taft like to have dinners and incorporate the military people, the Philippines people, and these are some programs from the different banquets that were there.

The Filipino people loved William Howard Taft and his family. They treated them just like -- just like equals. Mrs. Taft invited them to dinners. They attended a lot of the celebrations there at the Luneta, where she like to see the bands play. And so entertainment was a big part of the things that she did over there while she was in the Philippines.

About to go into the collections storage area where we keep some of our more valuable artifacts, as well as things that aren't on display. And as we'd come in, we see a Philippines chest. Mrs. Taft collected a lot of Philippines items, furniture, chairs, bed, these types of things. And this is a storage chest that they bought while they were over there and it was one of the kneader items that they were able to pick up while they were there.

What I have here is some photographs from some ladies in the Philippines. They took some formal photographs here and they wrote inscriptions and gave them to Mrs. Taft. My dear Mrs. Taft, best wishes from Adela Paterno, December 22, 1903, Manila, Philippines. And it just goes to illustrate the admiration that the Philippine people had for the Taft's family, especially Mrs. Taft, as she worked to make them feel integrated in the greater society, make them feel equal to the other people, invited them to the parties, put on musicals and those types of things, helped with their education.

And so, they really loved the Tafts. And to this day, we still get people coming from the Philippines that had that connection with the Taft family and the things that they did while they were there.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And joining us on the set is Jane Hampton Cook, a first lady scholar, whose books include *American Phoenix* and *The Faith of America's First Ladies*.

Jane cook, how important was that in time in the Philippines to the development of Helen Taft and her role as first lady?

JANE COOK: Well, it was very important to her development. And when she returned to the United States, she met a military wife in the army who had known her in the Philippines, and she said, you know, in the Philippines, you were a queen and here, you are a nobody. And I do not think Helen ever thought of herself as a nobody.

But when she was in the Philippines, she -- she wasn't a queen in a royal sense, but in a -- in an American sense that she invited people to her table, the Philippine women, American women and really brought this -- those two cultures together, and she served her husband very well by doing those things.

SWAIN: There were still colonial powers around the world, how unusual was it for -- I mean, in the piece we heard she treated the Philippines equal, we were in there country. So, today, we say why wouldn't she treat them as equal? So how unusual was this outreach?

GOULD: Well, the army in the Philippines, what they called drew the color line, which meant that they didn't socialize with the Filipinos. So for Taft to -- and Nellie to shake hands with the Filipinos, to dance with them was seen as quite radical. And there were elements in the military that were not thrilled with what Taft was doing.

He wouldn't have been able to do this in the United States, ironically, at the same time. But in the Philippines, that accounts in part for his enduring popularity. Though, the Filipinos, I think, wanted us out as soon as possible in the way of most colonial people.

SWAIN: On twitter, Presidential Ponderings wants to know more about what Helen Taft thought about the Philippine people and the culture when she lived there. And how did it shape her view about diverse populations as a whole?

COOK: Well, it extended I think the view that she had in her heart and I think it was something that she, by reaching out to them, and she could see the benefit of bringing their cultures together. And it was something that she was using her executive social skills, her executive management skills. But she would go out horseback riding.

She would -- they -- Taft ordered a band for the Filipino people and they said they'd go to the Luneta and then -- which is this big open space and have concerts. And so this was really something that meant a lot to her. And you can see when she wears the Filipino formal gowns, she's really embracing this culture.

GOULD: She wanted the Luneta to be an example for Washington and she started in the spring of '99 before the stroke.

SWAIN: I'm not familiar with the term. What's a Luneta?

GOULD: It's a -- it was a space in Manila where on Sundays, the aristocracy would gather, with carriages and they would go around and have band concerts. It was kind of the social setting for high society in the Philippines. And she wanted that -- this to be a place where Washington would do that. And the first couple of times, it was very popular.

After the stroke, when she couldn't personally manage it, it faded away. But it was one of those false starts that characterized her career.

SWAIN: Those of you who have been watching us along the way know that our goal this year is to teach you more, help you learn about each of America's first ladies. We're going to devote time in this series throughout this year to the 20th-century ladies.

Earlier in the year, we did the First Ladies beginning with Martha Washington. And our goal is to present the biography of them to help you understand more about their president's administration and also about our country and how it changed and how the role of women changed.

So there's lots to talk about. And we'll give you the telephone number so you can join in the conversation. If you live in the Eastern and Central Time zones, it's 202-585-3880. If you live in the Mountain or Pacific Time zones, 202-585-3881, and we will love having your calls and your questions. They have been a real hallmark of this program as it proceeds.

Also, we've developed a website for this series, FirstLadies@cspan.org. And each week, there's one special item attached to the first lady that we don't talk about during the program. Today, if you go to the -- to the site, you'll learn more about a chair that she really cherished that she acquired while she was in the Philippines. So we hope you'll have time to check that out.

Well, back from the Philippines, talk to me about a very important relationship, maybe the most important other than William Howard Taft's with Nellie, and that is the relationship with Theodore Roosevelt. How did that flourish?

GOULD: Taft and -- Will Taft and T.R. get to know each other in the early 1890s. What is significant is, almost from the beginning, there is not the same rapport between Edith and Nellie. In fact, Nellie would say later, I never liked Edith Roosevelt, and there was a competition between them that pulsed through the 1890s.

And when they were in Cincinnati, it was not so much, but when they got back to Washington, I wish I knew more about what exactly happened, but they seem to have been two women who just struck odds when they started out. And so you had these two men who were very close, but their intimate families, not so much.

And so there was not a strong underpinning of the T.R., Will Taft relationship once the two women got in closer proximity. It had something to do with Cincinnati versus New York, with Edith Roosevelt being from an aristocratic family or at one time aristocratic family and Helen Taft being from Cincinnati and wanting to be upwardly mobile.

SWAIN: We learned during Edith Roosevelt program that Mrs. Roosevelt had regular salon sessions with all the cabinet wives, which were required attendance. What was the effect of those on Helen Taft and her own thinking about how she might approach the job of first lady?

COOK: Well, Edith did have these weekly meetings, they met in the White House library from 11 to 12 once a week. Helen did attend. But I think she thought that they were a little too gossipy or the topics of conversation just bored her. It wasn't something that she really enjoyed.

And she made it known to the press before she became first lady that she would not be continuing them because they had not been successful. And that was, you know, quite a slam to Edith to say that publicly. She could have been a little more genteel on how she transitioned, but that's the way it was.

GOULD: They supervised some of the women in the Washington community. If you had a dalliance with somebody who wasn't your husband, you heard from the White House, you know, you better stop. And so there was a certain amount of nitpicking and gossiping that Helen Taft, who liked to have a beer, smoke a cigarette, play some bridge, was not as hoity-toity as Edith Roosevelt. And that was another source of tension.

SWAIN: So the Roosevelts, wanted their mores to be on social Washington.

GOULD: Oh yes, whereas Helen Taft wanted to set a cultural standard of sophistication, but not sort of a busybody about it, but Edith Roosevelt, who was somewhat priggish wanted to pull the higher moral standard.

SWAIN: So calls, we're going to begin with Kip watching us on Atlanta. Hi, Kip, you're on.

KIP (ph): Well, hello, and good evening. I had a question to Mr. Gould. In your research about Mrs. Taft, I wanted to know specifically if you're familiar with the miniseries, *Backstairs at the White House* that was -- that aired on NBC in 1979. And it -- and it starred the late Julie Harris that passed away recently as Helen Taft.

And I want to ask Mr. Gould if you're familiar with -- because that was really my first awareness of Mrs. Taft. And was that an accurate depiction of her. And I thank you.

GOULD: I think the *Backstairs at the White House* was generally genuinely accurate, but it had some fictional elements in it and I don't think most historians regard it as something you should take to the bank and be very reliable. And of course, it was dramatized for television purposes. So it's a useful source, but I would use it with caution.

SWAIN: So Theodore Roosevelt asked William Howard Taft to be his secretary of war. They had an opportunity then to see the world. How did that affect them?

GOULD: Well, Taft and Nellie both loved to travel. When Taft was president, he just was on the road constantly. In fact, it was something a political liability. But he became a troubleshooter diplomatically for T.R. In fact, when T.R. would go off hunting, he would say I've left Taft sitting on the lid in Washington, and the image of, obviously, Taft holding every -- all the troubles down. But he and Mrs. Taft traveled a lot.

A story that illustrates her ambiguity about this was when she was traveling and very nearly missed the train and she said to the stationmaster, "You've got to help me out. I am Mrs. William Howard Taft," no response. "I'm the wife of the secretary of war," no response. "I'm traveling with Alice Roosevelt," instantaneously, the stationmaster got her baggage and got her on the train.

SWAIN: There had to be a really painful (inaudible) friction between the two.

GOULD: Yes. And the family -- the Taft family teased her about that, that you were at the mercy of Alice Roosevelt.

SWAIN: How common would it have been for senior public officials to see that much of the world? Was there a lot of traveling going on at that period time?

COOK: Well, at this point, with -- with trains and all the -- the steamships, yes, it was more common. But secretary of war was his position, but he often called secretary of peace in the newspapers, because he was going and he was putting down conflicts in Cuba and he was really, really more of a peacemaker than he was focusing so much on defense.

And there's a really great story about his time as secretary of war when the emperors of Japan gives Helen a tapestry, and she really loves it, she really wants to keep it. But Taft says, no, no, no, legally, we need to give it back to the Smithsonian. She said, "But I'm a private citizen, I should be able to keep it." And he's -- and so she takes it to Roosevelt, she wants it that badly. And Roosevelt says, sure, you can keep it, you're a private citizen.

And that shows the difference between Taft and Roosevelt. Taft was very much by the law, very much wanted to honor the law, and Roosevelt would push the envelope a little bit. And he did that as president, and so in certain ways. So that's a good story to illustrate the difference between the two men.

GOULD: That became a fundamental difference between them and the way that they view the presidency. Roosevelt said if it wasn't forbidden, we can do it. Then Taft said, it has to be explicitly allowed before we can do it. The two views of the presidency were very vivid that they had -- that they had about this.

SWAIN: Here's a real study in leadership, an executive leadership that we had there.

GOULD: Yes.

SWAIN: On Facebook, Holly Hahn wants to know how did Mrs. Taft got the nickname Nellie.

GOULD: That's a good question. I think it was in the -- they were -- she had a number of brothers and sisters, and it was just one of those family names. But that -- her husband refers to her as my dearest Nellie, dear Nellie. I don't think he ever called -- and since their daughter was also named Helen, it was good that you have Nellie instead of two Helens.

SWAIN: And did she call him Will or did she call him Mr. Taft?

GOULD: Oh, she called him Will, yes. Most people who knew Taft well called him Will, and he was not Bill or Big Bill or something like that, just as almost nobody called T.R. "Teddy" who knew him well.

SWAIN: Next is John in Houston. Hi, John, what's your question?

JOHN (ph): Hey, I love this show so much. I even know the presidents in order too. I have two questions. One, of Abigail -- of the more modern -- of the first ladies of the 20th century, who were the more noteworthy after, like, Abigail and Dolley, and Mary Lincoln were noteworthy. Were any of the first ladies in the 20th century noteworthy, too?

(CROSSTALK)

QUESTION: And my second question is -- and my second question is, what -- what was Nellie's inspiration for the cherry tree? Thank you.

JOHN (ph): The first question is easy to answer. Eleanor Roosevelt was by far the one with the -- and Lady Bird Johnson, but Eleanor Roosevelt became a delegate to the United Nations. And so, in the post-first lady career, she and Lady Bird Johnson. Though, there are others, but those would be two.

SWAIN: Save the cherry tree question.

GOULD: Yes, yes.

SWAIN: Because we're going to show some video of it for later on there.

GOULD: That needs more attention.

SWAIN: Next is a call from Leroy, who is Monticello, Kentucky. Hi, Leroy.

LEROY (ph): Hi, ma'am. Great program. I've enjoyed this so much. I was looking forward to it from last week. Well, I didn't get to watch it. But, anyway, I've got a question for Ms. Cook. Was the Taft family, President Taft and his wife, were they Christian people, were they Born Again Christians, did they know Jesus and studied the Bible?

SWAIN: What was their religion and how important was it to them?

COOK: Well, she grew up in the Episcopal Church. He was a Unitarian. And at that time, you know, that was -- the difference was mostly about the trinity or not the trinity, the trinity being God, the father; God, the son; God, the Holy Spirit, which was more traditional Christianity. And Unitarians didn't embrace the trinity.

There was a story I read, though, of a minister in the more traditional tradition who went over to the White House and talked with Taft and he came away feeling very confident in his traditional religious beliefs. And so, you know, it wasn't -- it was important to them. It wasn't something -- they weren't evangelical in that tradition. But, definitely, it was something that was part of them.

GOULD: Well, Taft was talked about to be president of Yale in 1900 and decided not to do it. And he wrote his brother a sentence that if it had come out at the time, he would never have been president. He said he does not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Now, it never became known. In the campaign of 1908, he was both attacked for being a Unitarian and having been too friendly to the Catholics in the Philippines. And T.R. and Taft were very cautious about that, how they handled the religious views in 1908.

SWAIN: Michael is up next from Washington, Washington, D.C. All right, let me move on to Calvin in Summerville, Georgia.

MICHAEL (ph): Somerville, Alabama.

SWAIN: I apologize, Somerville, Alabama. Go ahead.

MICHAEL (ph): I was going to ask you about the connection that Mrs. Taft had with the other first ladies that came from Ohio, especially Lucy Hayes.

GOULD: Well, we talked a little bit about that earlier. Taft's -- the Herrons were very friendly with the Hayes family and they did entertain her at the White House. She did spend some time. Later on, it became like Mrs. or Ms. Herron was there, you know, almost every weekend. And that was way overdrawn. I think she only was there according to the Hayes' diary once.

SWAIN: So if Theodore Roosevelt makes the decision that he's not going to run for reelection and has the opportunity to anoint his successor within the Republican Party, how does it become William Howard Taft?

GOULD: It's quite a complex issue, which I'll try to nail down in a couple of sentences. He looks around, as I said earlier, Elihu Root is too old, though he will outlive both Taft and Roosevelt, he's also a corporate lawyer, which was not going to be the appeal that you wanted in 1908. So when he looked over the Republican Party, who was the most sympathetic available candidate, and here was Will Taft from Ohio, secretary of war, well known because of the Philippines, interested in the position.

And so, Roosevelt begins to convince himself that he and Taft agree on more than in fact they agreed on. And so there's kind of a courtship where both invest each other with the qualities they want to have. Later on, they would find out that they had somewhat deluded themselves. But from 1906 to 1908, Roosevelt becomes a staunch backer of Taft.

SWAIN: Well, we have many biographers who talk about Helen Taft's very serious lobbying of Theodore Roosevelt to select her husband and because of his known attitudes about politics and his desire for a Supreme Court role, maybe it indicated that he was a bit more hesitant. Here's a quote from Helen Taft, "Mr. Roosevelt thought he might to join with other Republicans in supporting Governor Hughes for the presidency, because Mr. Taft was such a poor politician. I reported this to Mr. Taft and urged him to display a little more enthusiasm on his own account."

So she's working both sides here, working Theodore Roosevelt and also working her husband who act the part more, act more interested. How influential was she in this decision?

COOK: She was very influential. And think about it, if your wife thinks that you can be president of the United States, that's a big boost that she has that confidence in you. She did meet with Theodore Roosevelt at least on two occasions to talk about this. Once, when he wanted to offer Taft a position on the Supreme Court, he called her in and she said, oh no, he wants to remain as your secretary of war. Wink, wink, nod, nod, he wants to succeed you.

And so, in the moment that you're talking about, Roosevelt didn't see the passion enough in Taft. And so he was trying to nudge Taft, hey, there are other men who want this -- want this, if you want it, you need to be more aggressive. And Taft did go out and he did some campaigning for congressional candidates in 1906 to prove that, yes, he could, you know, campaign.

SWAIN: Did Helen Taft meet personally with Theodore Roosevelt to make the case?

GOULD: Yes, in the fall of 1906, she -- Taft is out on the road and she does have a luncheon with the president, and he says come on over here and they go over -- over by one of the windows and chat for awhile, and she said -- and Taft and T.R. both believed that she had misinterpreted what he was trying to say, which was really you need to be more aggressive. But he was not threatening to support Governor Hughes. He did not like Governor Charles Evans Hughes, who would later become chief justice of New York. It was very unlikely he would ever have supported Hughes.

But Helen was so sensitive to any variation on T.R.'s part that she interpreted this kind of gentle warning as a threat that he might support the -- the soon-to-be governor of New York.

SWAIN: And what was the election like for the Republicans that year? How did it all turn out?

GOULD: They held on to the House and Senate in 1906. They suffered some losses. It was the -- the Republicans have been in then by almost, what, 10 years. But basically, Taft came out of it as the frontrunner and would get a first-ballot nomination in 1908.

SWAIN: And how much did he win by?

GOULD: In the...

SWAIN: In 1908?

GOULD: In the general election?

SWAIN: Yes.

GOULD: He beat William Jennings Bryan, what was it, 361 to -- I forget right offhand. But it was a pretty decisive victory. It was not as big as Roosevelt overall in Parker in 1904, but it was big enough for all practical purposes. Bryan essentially carried the South and a few Western states. And, Taft, who is a better campaigner than anybody thought, did very well.

SWAIN: There are several parts of the story. As I was getting ready for it, I kept thinking, Helen Taft seemed to want this her whole life and things often didn't break very well for her. One of those was Inauguration Day, itself, which there was a blizzard in Washington, D.C.

GOULD: Yes.

SWAIN: And that made the ceremony go indoors as opposed to outside. We remember that with Ronald Reagan's first inaugural as well. We have a video next about the inauguration. And then we'll come back and talk more about that day.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

HENDERSON: March 4th, 1909, Mrs. Taft got to realize her dream that she became the first first lady to ride back from the Capitol to the White House with her husband. These are some of the souvenirs from the inauguration. There's a program -- a couple of programs from the inauguration ceremony here, a little dance card from the inaugural ball with a little pin there, you could write down who you're dancing with.

And here is an invitation to the inaugural ball that would have gone out to -- to the different folks that the Tafts wanted to come. And it usually would come along with ticket and the place for you to park. So we have quite a few of these things in our collection.

This is a bible that was -- that was used for swearing in of William Howard Taft when he was inaugurated in 1909. It was also used when he took the oath of office of chief justice of the United States. And Nellie, of course, would've been right by her side during both of these ceremonies. And so this is a particularly interesting artifact that it represents, you know, the culmination of those two high points in his career.

The inauguration was the realization of her biggest dream, to become first lady of the United States. She had pushed her husband through a lot of different positions and even though there was a blizzard, there was a snowstorm, the ceremonies had to be pushed into the capitol building, this was one of the biggest days in her life, to be able to realize that dream of her husband becoming president of the United States.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So what are some of the stories you'd like to tell the public about inauguration day with the Tafts?

GOULD: Well, Theodore Roosevelt said, I knew it would be a cold day when I went out. And then he went off to the train station and went off to Oyster Bay, and then the Tafts road back and the

precedent-breaking moment when she went back to the White House. But it was the night before that was significant for the Roosevelt and Taft relationship.

T.R., quite on his own, had invited the Tafts to spend the night. Mrs. Taft later said in her memoirs, I don't think either Mrs. Roosevelt or I would have agreed to it if we've known about it in advance. And it was a very awkward evening. And Taft, later, four years later, when he -- the subject came up of having the Wilsons stay over, he said to his friend, Mabel Boardman, you were there for that funeral in 1909 and we do not want to do that again.

So, already, there was a great deal of tension between the Roosevelts and the Tafts the day before he was inaugurated.

SWAIN: I want to put the picture of her in the car coming back from the inauguration back on the screen. One of our viewers on Facebook says, I detect a smug look on her face in that picture.

What do we know about her emotions? As she made this decision to get into the car, break with all precedent, former first ladies, and ride back after the inauguration.

COOK: She wrote later, "I had a secret elation in doing something that no other woman had done." This was really her proudest moment, she later wrote, was riding in that car and being by her husband's side. This was -- she set a precedent, you know, first ladies who followed her have done that since.

And it was definitely something she was excited about. She did have a little fashion emergency with her hat -- it caught on fire the night before. The feathers, she had to trim them down. And those were called Mary Widow hats. They were very -- they were named after a play and they were very popular back then, all the flowers and feathers, so.

GOULD: It turned out that was really the high point of her time as first lady. It was almost all downhill after that, because two months later, she has this stroke and that life changes forever.

SWAIN: But she had a very busy two months and we're going to learn about her approach to the White House.

About her transition with Edith Roosevelt, that also contributed not just the stay-over, but the management of the one family moving out and the other family moving in. I think you referred to that, the -- just the oil and water of these two women. What about that transition contributed to the friction between them that had political consequences?

GOULD: Well, there really was no mechanism for the transition in those days and there hadn't been a transition from one first lady to another in that way before for almost 20, 25 years. So they were making it up as they went along.

But Helen was eager to get started. And so, she talked about changing who the footmen would be at the White House door. She want -- Edith had a gentleman who was white to greet people when they came to the White House. Helen wanted to have African-Americans in livery. Mrs. Roosevelt bridled at that.

Nellie wanted to change the furniture. She had other changes that she wanted to make right away, let's get started. And Edith, thinking that, hey, I'm going to be president, first lady until March 3 said, not so fast. Wait a while.

And there began to be -- you know, in the Taft family, they would say to the president elect, be your own king, you need to take over. And the Roosevelt people who had put Taft in because he would

extend Roosevelt's ideas said, wait a minute, what's going on here, what about the cabinet, what about the appointments that are being made?

And so the friendship began to erode. It really started to erode when Taft wrote T.R. a letter saying, you and my brother Charlie are responsible for making me president. And Charles P. Taft was a newspaper owner and T.R. just was infuriated by that statement. He talked about it for the next two or three years.

So here's poor Taft, he writes a thank you note and it starts the doom of his presidency.

SWAIN: And Seth, in the parlance of today, says Edith Roosevelt and Helen Taft were not BFFs, best friends forever, noted, duly noted, Seth tells us. Let's go to Horace in Philadelphia, on the air right now. Hi, Horace, go ahead please.

HORACE (ph): Hey, thank you for taking my call. I have been watching this series since the very beginning.

SWAIN: Great.

HORACE (ph): Even to repeat. And I was anxious when we started back in September. I had a question I wanted to ask and I am a little embarrassed to ask it. But I'd like to know when you can tell us the resting places of these first ladies, where are they actually buried.

SWAIN: OK.

HORACE (ph): In a strange sense, it helps us to realize that they once lived and they're not just information on paper or in the books and old -- and old magazines. I'd like to know their resting places when you can get to it.

SWAIN: Sure. Well, we'll tell you right now because it's another one of Helen Taft's and her husband's first. Where are they laid to rest?

COOK: Arlington National Cemetery. She is the first first lady to be buried there.

SWAIN: And the only other is Jacqueline Kennedy, is that right?

GOULD: Yes. As secretary of war, I think that's how he qualified to be in Arlington Cemetery. And then she got to be there because -- so...

SWAIN: So we want to spend a little bit more time understanding the personality of -- and what she brought to the role of the White House, first lady at the White House. You mentioned earlier that she was very intellectual and that even though she didn't go to college, she was self-educated. How important was this in shaping the role of first lady?

GOULD: Well, she -- as I said earlier, she wanted to make Washington the truly, the cultural center of the United States. This made people in New York very uneasy. And there were some newspaper columns saying, what is she trying to do. But Washington at that time did not have a symphony orchestra, didn't have opera. And she wanted to bring those musical things here.

But she also wanted to have the city generally embody American values. And this was a very ambitious agenda, to transform Washington into a city that would be sort of, like, under Dolly Madison, a focus for national and international attention. And that was partly what L'Enfant was about, the -- making the beautification of the city with the cherry trees. It was all part of her vision of what Washington could be.

And so she hit the ground running as you said, and she also started going to see Congress, visiting the Supreme Court, advising Taft on the cabinet. She was going to be very active as first lady for two months.

SWAIN: Personality-wise, one of the biographers said, I read, described her as outspoken, abrupt, and determined. Would you agree with those descriptions?

COOK: Yes, I would. She could be quite blunt. But she -- you know, when she was this young teenager visiting the White House and saw, you know, the magic of it and had the idea that she could maybe one day be there, I think it was because she sense that she had the skills to do it.

And you see her as a young woman creating these salon groups in Cincinnati where she brings friends together and they have amateur theatrical performances and/or book discussions. And you see her in the Philippines using those executive skills. And so I think she was just determined to bring what she had, her skill set, and use it to bring people together socially in Washington.

GOULD: She -- she had been president of the Cincinnati Symphony too. So she had run an orchestra, hiring the conductors in the 1890s. So she had demonstrated that she had executive qualities. And she also -- when Taft proposed somebody for the cabinet, she said to him, he's quite impossible, I can't imagine why you ever suggested him. And that was the end of that candidacy.

SWAIN: Mark is watching us in Minneapolis. You're on, Mark. Good evening.

MARK (ph): Yes, yes, hi. How are you doing? I like your series. I just have two questions. The first question is, can you tell us how -- can you tell us what Helen Taft's thoughts were towards segregation between blacks and whites in the South? And can you tell us what she felt about black men being able to vote and not her being able to vote during her time? Thank you very much.

SWAIN: Thank you. Very timely questions because that's the next two things on my list. First of all, some people have suggested that she disdained racism, as evidenced in her time in the Philippines. Would you -- I'd like to hear from both of you on this. Would you agree with that characterization that -- that she really was open in her attitude (inaudible) people of other races?

COOK: While she definitely seemed open, it's hard for me to know precisely what she thought about segregation in the South. But she through her actions, brought African-Americans in as employees at the White House. And so I think that's best testimony that we have of her attitudes on race.

She also -- they hire...

SWAIN: Can I say but as servants?

GOULD: Yes, yes.

COOK: Well, that's true. That's true. But it -- you know, when you read her memoir, she uses the language of the day. She uses the term colored, but she's not using other language. And so it's hard to fully -- she was a woman of her time period. And when it comes to the suffrage question for women, she wasn't sure that America was quite ready for women to vote, because they weren't politically active, they weren't public-minded enough. And so they weren't like her.

And she was very focused on politics, but she detected that a lot of women weren't, and that was her position on suffrage.

SWAIN: In using the language of the day, in our last program on Edith Roosevelt, you -- we referenced your scholarship on the fact that Edith Roosevelt had some personal letter used really...

GOULD: Racist terms, terms, yes.

SWAIN: Racist terms about African-Americans. We've got a lot of Nellie Taft's writings. Did she use those same kinds of...

GOULD: I did not find in her letters the same use of words like the tar brush or some of the other unfortunate things that Edith Roosevelt said. Both Tafts observed segregation. They didn't go as far as Woodrow Wilson in instituting it in the government, but Taft hoped to develop the Republican Party in the South by making it more lily-white than it had been earlier.

So I think Helen Taft was not a crusader for racial justice, but she was not a bigot either. She fell within that broad range of where American society was, whereas Edith Roosevelt, well, I think further out on the edge.

COOK: Well, and they also grew up post-Civil War. They were both born during the Civil War. And so they didn't live through it. And so they are these post-war baby boomer generation with some newer attitudes.

GOULD: Yes, ironically, Edith and Helen were born the same year, 1861.

SWAIN: Before we get too far into the story, Jennifer Sherman wants to go back to that overnight stay before the inaugural, and asked was the Roosevelt-Taft pre-inauguration overnight a preview of today's outgoing president hosting the incoming president for coffee on the day of?

GOULD: Not so much. If it was an initiative that T.R. started, it flopped. The traditions of the transition would evolve in the 20th century and we can't, I think, look at T.R. and Taft as any kind of helpful precedent for how one president -- it really was the case of -- they didn't even think through what the transition would be. It was just I'll be president until noon on March 4th and then you'll be president and I'll go to Oyster Bay and you're on your own.

SWAIN: We've got a photograph earlier you referenced that she was more modern in her approach to things, like enjoying alcohol and playing cards. We've got actually a photograph of her at the card table that we're going to show people next. She smoked, she drank.

GOULD: Yes.

SWAIN: And she played cards. How much did that connect her with the public at large?

GOULD: I don't think the public really knew much about that, that she played bridge for money and she would win \$10 or so, which sounds pretty tame. But if you put it into today's currency, she was winning about \$200 or \$300 in purchasing power when she won \$10. So if that had come out that she was playing cards, it would have been another political difficulty for her.

COOK: Well, and someone once asked President Taft what would -- what would Helen like to drink and he said anything with alcohol in it. So that was, you know, that was just -- that was her. And that's a contrast to Lucy Hayes, who, you know, did not -- their family did not drink alcohol in the White House because of the temperance. And that was a nuanced way of reaching out to them.

GOULD: Lemonade Lucy.

SWAIN: And did Edith -- right.

GOULD: Yes.

SWAIN: And did Edith Roosevelt drink alcohol?

GOULD: She had alcohol. Her father had been an alcoholic and I -- and there was -- alcoholism runs all through the Roosevelt family. The male Roosevelts, FDR and T.R. were really the only two who truly escaped the effects of alcoholism entirely. So Edith Roosevelt was not thrilled with the idea of champagne and other things that Helen Taft liked very much each day.

SWAIN: Another reason for the rift between them.

GOULD: Yes, yes.

SWAIN: Colleen is in Barnesville, Ohio. Hi, Colleen. What's your question for us?

COLLEEN (ph): Yes. My great uncle used to be personal secretary of President Taft and my grandmother used to go with him and meet the president and Mrs. Taft. And...

SWAIN: Yes?

COLLEEN (ph): And like they became really, really good friends. And President Taft considered that my grandmother will be principal -- to be the first Belmont County (inaudible) person for the Republic.

GOULD: Which of the -- of Fred Carpenter, Charles Norton and Charles Hilles was your relative?

COLLEEN (ph): Yes, Charles Dewey Hilles was his personal secretary.

GOULD: Yes, Charles Hilles was the last of Taft's secretaries and the most efficient. He helped him get the nomination in 1912. And his papers are at Yale and they're almost as big as the Taft papers.

SWAIN: As soon as we get more into current times in the 20th century, we'll have more and more connections that people are able to make with their families. Thank you for your call.

Julie is in Ashburn, Virginia. Hi, Julie, what's your question.

JULIE (ph): Hi, hello. Can you hear me?

SWAIN: We can. Thank you.

JULIE (ph): Hi, I wanted to ask. Helen was such a vibrant first lady. I just wanted to know what her transition from being a first lady to be kind of a private figure in terms of being married to a Supreme Court justice. How did that work for her?

GOULD: She had eight years of transition. They -- Taft after he left the presidency became a professor of constitutional law at Yale. And it was really quite nice for Mrs. Taft because she could -- in those days, you could get on a train and go to New York 80 miles, go to the theater, have a nice meal, do some shopping, and get back in time for dinner at night, so she could see a matinee. So she enjoyed that part of it after the pressures of the -- of the White House.

And then, of course, they went back to Washington and the role of the chief justice was very much less social than had been the president's. So, somewhat, she took -- sort of took the veil in the 1920s.

They also differed over prohibition. Taft, Chief Justice Taft wanted it enforced and Mrs. Taft, not so much.

SWAIN: Well, one thing we should talk about of another record for William Howard Taft is his size. He was a very large man. His highest weight was what?

GOULD: About 350 pounds in the presidency and he had -- he had neglected his health. His teeth, he hadn't been to a dentist in a couple of decades. He had -- yes, that gives you in terms of the -- of his avoirdupois at that point. And there's -- there were many stories about his weight. In fact, Chief Justice Melville Weston Fuller said, the president got up on the street car the other day and gave a seat to three women.

SWAIN: A lot of jokes going around at that time.

GOULD: Yes. There was...

SWAIN: At that time when the press was really very much following the White House.

GOULD: Yes.

SWAIN: And there was a lot of opportunity for commentary and satire. How did Mrs. Taft feel about his weight? Do we know?

GOULD: There's one biographer that says this was the source of some marital tension. She of course from a health point of view wanted him to reduce his weight. But this was an area in which he -- he didn't take much dictation in the White House about the weight. I think your point about emotional stress operated.

There's a story of him at a cabinet meeting and they had a bowl of fruit and he just picked each one off until the bowl was completely empty. He didn't find the presidency very enjoyable and I think he ate to forget.

SWAIN: There are stories about the fact that the White House needed an extra large bathtub to accommodate the president. Is that true?

GOULD: That's apocryphal. I mean, the idea that they had a big bathtub installed, there's a picture of three guys sitting in a bathtub for Taft, but that they had to put it in and it happened on the inauguration is one of those stories.

SWAIN: There's the Taft bathtub on display, so.

GOULD: Yes, yes, but it was not done in the way that they talked about.

COOK: Well, and he -- he was a big baby. His -- I have a seven-week-old son and I was reading how his mother wrote when he was seven weeks old that should couldn't put nursery gowns on him that had belts because he was growing so fat. So he just -- it was his metabolism that -- that was just how he was.

GOULD: But he was a very good dancer.

COOK: Yes.

GOULD: Far better than T.R. Somebody said -- asked the -- how was Roosevelt as a dancer, and the woman said, he didn't dance, he hopped. Whereas, Taft was very light on his feet.

SWAIN: Before we leave this section, one other important thing. What was her relationship like with the press, while we're talking about news, media and its burgeoning coverage of the White House? Would you like to start?

COOK: She seemed -- she seemed to have a good relationship with the press. They interviewed her after his nomination and she said, I love public life, this is exactly the position, you know, that I think my husband should have, I'm enthusiastic about Roosevelt, which she really wasn't, but she said that to the press.

They -- one of the reporters commented that she would be an intellectual, she had all these spheres, the intellectual, the cultural, and the domestic all in one package. And what a great opportunity for America to have Helen in the White House with her husband.

GOULD: The only time Edith was quoted was when there was a performance of Hansel and Gretel, the Opera in New York that she was a patron of. And she said, how much she loved fairytales. And otherwise, she didn't believe that a woman should be -- appear in the newspaper when you were born, when you were married, when you died. And that was -- and not be photographed.

She had to be persuaded to have photographs, eventually, whereas, Helen Taft was quite willing to share her opinions on lots of issues with the press. She didn't give interviews. She didn't speak out on every issue that came up, but if they asked, and there she was with her husband throwing out the first ball at a baseball game at the Democratic Convention in 1912.

She got out and about a lot more than Edith Roosevelt did.

SWAIN: The American public was wildly enthusiastic about the young Roosevelt family in the White House. What did the public think about the Tafts, and particularly Edith?

GOULD: The Taft -- well, that Taft family was older when they came to the White House. Robert was already at Yale, soon to be at Harvard Law School where he finished first in his class at Yale and first in his class in Harvard Law School. Her daughter, Helen, Helen Taft was at school in Washington and then at Bryn Mawr. And Charles P. Taft Jr. -- or not Jr. -- but anyway, he was at the Taft School that Taft's brother ran in Connecticut.

So they were not as charming and exciting as the little Quentin and Archie, who with their ponies and taking the pony upstairs in the White House and all the pranks that they did.

SWAIN: We promised you more about the cherry blossoms. Let's learn more about how she brought the cherry blossoms to Washington.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ANN MCCLELLAN, CHERRY BLOSSOM AUTHOR & HISTORIAN: When Helen Taft became first lady in 1909, one of the first things she did was to address having cherry trees planted around the Tidal Basin at Potomac River. The Tidal Basin in the early 20th century was a mess. There was a speedway where people raced their carriages at a top of speed of 15 miles an hour. But there was really nothing to draw people or to make it a beautiful place for people to gather and enjoy nature. And Helen Taft wanted to change that.

So she -- one of the first things she did when she became first lady was to ask for trees to be planted. It was -- they were requested from nurseries in Pennsylvania. But the Japanese heard about her interest and they decided to give 2,000 trees to the United States in her honor, from the city of Tokyo to the city of Washington as a gift honoring the American support of Japan in Russo-Japanese War.

2,000 trees arrived in January of 1910. Everyone was shocked because the trees that were sent were older and very tall and bug-infested. So it was decided that they would have to be burned. In fact, President Taft made the decision that they would have to be burned.

The Japanese were very accommodating and understanding and decided to send 3,000 trees, which arrived in 1912. And it's those that we still have a few of around the Tidal Basin.

This is the north section of the Tidal Basin within view of the Washington Monument, where many of the original trees had been planted. You can tell the older ones because they're wider, they also have gnarly trunks, overarching branches, very typical of the Yoshinos, which is the dominant variety of cherry tree around the Tidal Basin.

This is where Helen Taft would have planted the first cherry blossom tree that came with the shipment of 1912. These cherry blossom trees wouldn't be here if it weren't for Helen Taft. While many people were enchanted with all things Japanese in the late 19th century, they love the architecture, the culture, the pictures, the plant material, and it was her -- due to her that the trees are here today.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: Permanently transforming the capital city in ways that people for generations now have enjoyed. What else do we need to know about this story?

GOULD: Well, Taft was not pro-Japanese in his foreign policy. He was tilted more toward the Chinese. Taft -- T.R. had been more pro-Japanese, figuring there was no way to stop them in Asia by intervening at the Asian mainland. So this was I think a gesture by the Japanese government to try to make nice with Taft. But it did turn out to be one of the great beautification moves of the 20th century.

Taft would say in the '20s to his daughter, your mother's work with the cherry trees are now coming to blossom and making the city better than it has ever been, because of her contribution.

SWAIN: Taft had one term in the White House, but it was, nonetheless, a very busy and momentous time in American history. Here are a couple of the important things. Much of his presidency seemed to be a huge debate about tariffs. And the Tariff Act passed in 1909.

The 16th amendment also came into being in the Taft administration. And for those of you who don't know, that's the one that brought us the income tax. There was the great Standard Oil decision in 1911 and two more states admitted to the union, New Mexico and Arizona.

Helen Taft's role in all of that we're going to talk about. But how long was it after the inauguration, you've referenced it a few times, that she had a stroke?

GOULD: May 17th, 1909, they went out to take a cruise on the Potomac in the presidential yacht and the -- one of the cabinet members noticed that there was -- said there's something wrong with Mrs. Taft. And they realized that she had had some kind of seizure. And they turned around and took the presidential vessel back.

And Archie Butt said as he looked at the president, he had this face of a stricken animal that he was in such pain seeing his wife with his seizure. And so it was a moment that transformed their -- the presidency and their lives.

SWAIN: We -- at the time, they didn't really know what a stroke was. They called it a nervous disorder that she was having. How impaired was she and for how long?

COOK: Well, she lost -- she had some temporary paralysis in her limbs and that came back pretty quickly. But it was her voice, she could not articulate. She got to the point where she could speak fluently and could read something aloud, but you couldn't understand her fully because she just lost that articulation. And it took a long time for that to come back, and I don't know that she ever fully was the same.

But the nerves, earlier that morning, she had her stroke, her son had surgery. Her youngest, Charles had surgery, adenoids removed. And so she was a nervous wreck that particular day, very uptight and very worried about this operation. And then she had this obligation to go down to Mount Vernon on the boat.

So she was that particular day quite tense to begin with.

GOULD: Evidently, Charlie's operation had a good deal of blood and stuff. So it was very -- and he was her favorite son, I mean, Robert Taft was, you know, just so bright that they didn't have to worry about him. But when she sent Charlie off to prep school, she said, I'll never have him again back in the same way as a mother and as a son. So to see him go through this was a terrible trauma for her.

And the nice thing about what the president did is that there are stories of him sitting on a couch with Helen saying, now, say thee, darling, say thee. That's very good. Now, let's try to say thee again.

So he was running a kind of rehab in the White House for his wife while he was also being president.

SWAIN: Was he able to do his duties as fully as he should have?

GOULD: I think he -- I think he carried forward the duties of the White House. But what is striking to me is the emotional stress that it must have been, because any moment she could have had another stroke that she would have in May 1911.

But the concentration and the distraction of knowing that your wife is upstairs vocally impaired and suffering, I think, is an element of the Taft presidency, that even in the book I wrote about the Taft presidency, I don't think I gave it enough importance.

COOK: And it comes at a very critical time in his presidency when they are debating the Tariff Act and he loses her input to him on the political ramifications, if it goes this way or that way. And this was a highly stressful time for him and for her, obviously.

SWAIN: And he relied on her political advice. And so it was...

GOULD: He really had no other close friend because T.R. had been the close friend. But none of his brothers were very good at giving him advice, there was no structure in the White House, no chief of staff, no aides. There was just the secretary and clerks. And he had no friends out in the world that he could confide in.

She was his most intimate advisor and in an afternoon she's gone, in terms of giving him advice.

SWAIN: And as we said, not a natural politician to boot. So he...

GOULD: Yes. Well, Roosevelt had left him in a tough position. He delayed the tariff until it was dumped into Taft's lap. So it wasn't exactly a profile in courage for T.R.

SWAIN: Well, Rock is in Los Angeles. You're on the air.

ROCK (ph): Hi there, hi there. I can always, I guess, tell more about a person by their likes to dislikes in theater or art and music, and knowing that she was a steer-getting for a cultural change in Washington and try to upgrade everything. There's just one thing, some of the luminaries that she kind of favored or wanted to bring into the White House, either actors or writers or musicians, I'd like to get a better picture. Name drop, if you would, please.

SWAIN: Thanks very much. In your book, *Our Musical First Lady*, you actually, in the back list, the performers that she brought to Washington.

GOULD: She had Charles Coburn, who would later become a famous character actor in the 1950s. But he took Shakespeare around and they had performance of Shakespeare on the White House lawn. Edith Roosevelt had done a little bit of that, but these were full-blown productions of Shakespearean plays. And she had artists like Olga Sameroff, Rich Chrysler, Efram Zimbalist, Sr., the father of the – guy in the FBI series in the 1960s, and Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler, the great female pianist.

And so the who's who of classical music moved through the White House in those four years. It was as stunning a group of artists as would later become in the Kennedys or later on in the 20th century.

SWAIN: Did it have cultural and/or political impact on society?

GOULD: I think it was more cultural. I felt she didn't see this as sort of moving the poll numbers. It was what the first lady ought to do bring the finest music to the White House. And I think generally that's what cultural aspects of the White House do.

COOK: Well, and she wanted Washington to be the social representative city of the land. And, you know, like we have record, we have video and audio of -- and photographs of Jackie Kennedy's concerts that she had, but we don't have that with Helen Taft. So we've got the visual tangible cherry trees, but we don't have the -- just the technology wasn't developed enough to have the film that we have now with audio to know what those concerts were like in the White House.

GOULD: President Taft loved to listen to records. He and Archie Butt would play them into the night, and he enjoyed going to the musical performances. But one wishes we had 30 seconds of Helen Taft playing the piano would be -- I'd certainly listen.

SWAIN: Archie Butt, you referenced a few times, who is he?

GOULD: He's the -- the president had a military aide in those days. Now, there's a much more larger panoply of people. But this was Archibald Willingham Butt, B-U-T-T, who was the military aide. And he's famous because he wrote his sister letters. And there are three volumes of his letters, one from the Roosevelt years and two from the Taft years.

And he was a great gossip. He recorded everything that anybody said. Some of it may be right, some of it may be wrong. But it's a source the historians have used for years. The Archie Butt, Taft and Roosevelt, the *Intimate Letters of Archie Butt*.

SWAIN: And his amazing story is how did he die.

GOULD: He died on the Titanic.

SWAIN: A great loss to the Taft's (inaudible).

GOULD: It was -- it crushed Taft, because he -- Archie had started out pro T.R. and had moved over to Taft. And he had created this certain kind of emotional dependence on Archie. He wouldn't ask him for political advice, but he was with Taft most of the time.

And so when he went off to Europe, he -- he didn't want to be around when Taft and Roosevelt had their battle. And so he went off and made his way back in April of 1912. And supposedly was quite heroic on the Titanic, making sure women got into the lifeboats at the cost of his own life.

SWAIN: Despite her illness, one of the highlights of the four years that the Tafts were in the White House was the celebration of their 25th anniversary. We'll learn more about it in this next video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

HENDERSON: Mrs. Taft enjoyed being the first lady. Shortly after she came in the White House in May of 1909, she suffered a stroke and she wasn't able to attend to all of those things. So it was a little bit disappointing. But in June of 1911, they were able to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary there.

They had a big party there with the White House open, you know, thousands of guests came in. They had music and they received tons of silver, I mean, just embarrassing amount of silver. Some of it, expensive from, you know, all types of not just their friends, from corporations, from all types of people.

And we have some of that silver here that they would have been presented. And it was from things very small and they would have little inscriptions on them. This just say the Taft inscription here to some things that are -- let's see we have a very large silver tray that would have the dates of 1886 to 1911, or just as simple as having a T inscribed in them.

Some of the pieces were very large, which had the inscription. You can see 1886 to 1911. And William Howard Taft and Helen Herron Taft here on the back. In addition to the -- to the gifts of silver, many -- many telegrams were sent to the Taft family from all over the world. And this is the memento that showcases all those telegrams. And they kept those and collected those.

And some -- here are some from Washington, D.C., Buffalo, New York. Let's see. Here we have here South Orange, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Chicago. For instance, this one says permit me to join with your friends in the hope that today's great happiness of you and your family when possible will be exceeded by the happiness of your 50th anniversary.

So, you know, this one from Chicago was looking forward to 25 more years. This was a recognition of all of the people that appreciated the president and Mrs. Taft by the gifts, the telegrams. And it was just a strengthening affair for Mrs. Taft as she moved through her years in the White House.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: Well, this tweet, really, is a nice way to come out of that, asking how did Helen's stroke impact the marriage of the Tafts? So we have them celebrating their anniversary and you talked about how much he attended to her personally. What did it do that we know to the marriage?

GOULD: Well, I think it's strengthened an already very powerful union that they -- that they had established, because he became president as caregiver and doted on her and worried about her and was constantly solicitous about her. So they were a very devoted couple to begin with. And I think this, alas and sadly, I mean, they would have passed on it if they could have, but it did bring them closer together.

I mean, the letters that he wrote, he wrote to her every day when she was away and these were handwritten, six, seven, eight-page letters. Now, when you get to Woodrow Wilson who was writing letters for another reason, but here was Taft at the end of a very busy day sitting down and writing 2,000 to 3,000 words to his wife. That's devotion.

COOK: And she was away in Massachusetts recovering at a seaside house.

GOULD: Yes. Well, she couldn't be in Washington in the summer without air conditioning as it was in those days. That's why the British made Washington the hardship post. But he would dictate some letters and then she said please, handwrite them. and so he did that too.

SWAIN: Jim is watching us in Ipswich, Massachusetts, speaking of being in Massachusetts. What's your question?

JIM (ph): Yes, good evening. I'm just -- I live two towns over from Willy Taft's vacation...

SWAIN: In Beverly.

JIM (ph): In Beverly, Mass, what they call the gold coast. And my grandmother relived some stories when I was younger of seeing Taft in downtown Beverly and heading over to play golf at Myopia Country Club in Hamilton, and apparently had returned for a couple of summers while they were in the White House. So I just thought I would say I enjoy your show and pass that information along.

SWAIN: Thank you very much. And we have a photograph of a place where -- that she would recuperate in the Massachusetts coast in Beverly, Massachusetts. On her influence, even with her stroke, here is a comment from the chief usher, Ike Hoover at the White House observing her in action in Washington.

He wrote, "It was no uncommon thing to see her taking part in political and official conferences. Speaker Cannon, speaker of the House, consulting jointly with the president and Mrs. Taft. She attended almost every important conferences in the White House proper. She would even walk in on private conferences unheralded and unannounced."

GOULD: Well it's interesting -- and that was brought up in 1964, and her daughter wrote a letter to Time Magazine, saying, this is much overdrawn, my mother after the stroke couldn't do that anymore. Ike Hoover is a very well known memoir in the White House, but historians regard him with deep skepticism. And he didn't like Helen Taft. I mean, he was no fan of hers. So take it for what he says.

SWAIN: So we -- our view from her own writings and other people's observations of how deeply she was involved and consulting on policymaking is what...

COOK: Well, in reading her memoir, she downplays her role, but it seems to me that she had more of an advanced role than a lot of first ladies up to that point, but not nearly as advanced as we've come today. She was very Washington-centric in her outlook as first lady.

We talk about first lady influence, she was not going out and about around the country making stops in different parts of the country. She might have travelled with him had she not had that stroke. That might have been the influence that we're missing on his presidency.

SWAIN: So in no sense there were co-presidents?

COOK: No.

SWAIN: The last year when the rift becomes very great between Theodore Roosevelt and Taft, and he decides that he might be mounting a challenge to him, how did that all play out for the party and for the two men?

GOULD: Well, it was a disaster for the Republican Party that still echoes in its sort of DNA to this day. One reason, the Republicans generally compose their differences more than the Democrats is because there is this ancestral memory of the trauma they went through in 1912.

Helen was convinced that T.R. was going to run almost from the March 4th, 1909. Will saw it developing in a more measured way. But by 1911, it was clear that Roosevelt was being pushed very hard to get into the race. So she kept saying I know he's going to do it, I know he's going to do it.

And when he announced, she said I knew he was going to do it, and Will said, my dear, I think you have been predicting it for so long that you're happy now that your prediction has come true. So she was -- she didn't trust Theodore Roosevelt one minute in their whole relationship.

SWAIN: So, as you know, from history, Theodore Roosevelt split off and mounted an independent campaign with the Bull Moose Party. And his decision to do that brought Woodrow Wilson into the White House.

What were the last months of the Taft presidency like?

GOULD: Well, Taft took his defeat with unusual grace. He was not a bad loser. He said I have -- when the press said, you know, do you feel disappointed. He said, look, the American people gave me the gift of the presidency for four years, how many men have had that gift given to them. I would be an ingrate and a loser if I said that I was angry at this point.

And he writes to one of his relatives or friends in Cincinnati, you know, you have to put up with the vagaries of democracy, the American people have made their decision, I have to live by it. I can't be angry about it. And this -- he went out on a kind of wave of goodwill as somebody who showed the way democracy, small D, should operate.

So he was disappointed, but he was not embittered. And I think that resounded to his credit over the long haul.

COOK: Well, and that makes sense because what mattered most to Taft was the law and the rule of law and the people had spoken. And so he could accept that much more easily probably than some people.

SWAIN: Christine in Boise, you're on the air. Hi, Christine?

CHRISTINE (ph): Hi. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about her three children and what became of their lives and families.

COOK: Well, her oldest son, Robert ran for the senate and was a successful senator, and so was his son. And then his son, Robert, so Taft's great grandson was the governor of Ohio. Their daughter, Helen went on to earn a PhD. She married and had children. And then, their youngest son was the mayor of Cincinnati. Mr. Cincinnati was his nickname. So they had their own legacy in politics.

GOULD: Robert Taft becomes Mr. Republican. And Helen, the daughter, becomes the dean at Bryn Mawr and is a very influential educator. And as you say, Charles Taft had a career in Cincinnati politics. He tried to move up to be governor, it didn't work out. He was probably the most liberal of the -- between him and Robert Taft, and Helen was pro-suffrage at the time when her mother wasn't.

President Taft eventually becomes pro-suffrage because it's the way of enforcing prohibition. In his view, he didn't like prohibition, but if the American people wanted it, he wanted it enforced.

SWAIN: We have a list of some of the firsts that Nellie Taft brought to the role of first lady. As we learned earlier on, she was the first to ride with the president in the inaugural parade, the first to attend a Supreme Court argument. I love this one, she was the first to attend a political convention, but not of her husband's party. She went to the Democratic Convention in 1912.

GOULD: Yes. The Democrats met in Baltimore, which made it sort of a road trip for her and she went with a couple of Democratic women. Most of Washington society went over to see the Baltimore convention. And it was -- it lived up to its billing, unlike the dull routine political conventions of our time which is drained of all significance.

Then that -- the one that nominated Woodrow Wilson went 46 ballots. It had drama, it lasted a week, and she went there. And William Jennings Bryan was going to introduce a resolution attacking President Taft and he withdrew it, because he said I don't want to embarrass the first lady by having her become political while she's sitting in the gallery.

COOK: And that's an only for her. I mean, the first -- she was the only first lady to attend the opposite political party division.

SWAIN: I cannot imagine that happening today, can you?

COOK: No.

SWAIN: Among her firsts, again, she was the first to donate her inaugural gown to the Smithsonian and started that practice, which is now the most popular exhibit in the Smithsonian exhibition. She brought automobiles to the White House and, in fact, in a commercial venture, which we actually don't have time to tell that story, the first first lady to publish her memoirs and, as we said earlier, the first first lady along with her husband to be buried at Arlington Cemetery.

One of the viewers tweeted to us that they have been following along in our book about first ladies. I want to take just a second to tell you about it. We're doing this series in partnership with the White House Historical Association. And they have published a book called the First Ladies, which contains a biography of each one of the first ladies.

And we are making it available at cost, which is about \$12.95 on our website. The one I referenced earlier, first, CSPAN.org/FirstLadies. And there is a way to buy this book. You can read along with it and learn a little bit more about each one of these first ladies as we work our way through the series. So if you're interested, that's a resource available to you.

We have a video about the inaugural gowns. Let's watch that next.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

LISA KATHLEEN GRADDY, FIRST LADIES COLLECTION CURATOR - SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY: Smithsonian actually has very few pieces that belong to Helen Taft. But the piece that we do have is, I think, the most significant -- actually, one of the most significant pieces in the first ladies' collection. We're going to open it up for you.

Helen Taft was a woman of firsts, Helen Taft was a woman of combination, and this to me symbolizes all of that. This is Helen Taft's inaugural gown. She had the dress embroidered in the Philippines to wear for the inaugural ball. The inauguration was very important to Helen Taft. She

saw it as her husband coming into the White House and herself coming into the White House. It was a very ceremonious occasion for her.

She marked this occasion not only her entry into the White House, but really then added it as a mark of first ladies on the United States when she became the first first lady to donate her inaugural gown to the Smithsonian Institution. She happened to be the first lady when the founders of the first ladies' collection, Mrs. Hooves and Mrs. James were putting the collection together. And they met Helen Taft at a lunch commemorating Dolly Madison.

They asked her if she would be interested in this new collection they were putting together, this exhibit they were putting together on the first ladies. They were trying to acquire something from every first lady, every presidential administration.

Mrs. Taft generously offered to lend and then finally donate her inaugural gown to the collection. She's really the founding patron in many ways of the first ladies' collection and she established the tradition that first ladies would donate their gown to the collection.

Every first lady after Mrs. Taft who had an inaugural ball had an inaugural gown has donated it to the Smithsonian Institution.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And I'm sure many of you watching tonight have been to Washington have been through that exhibit over time.

Well, the Tafts leave Washington. He has the problem that he can't really practice law because he's appointed so many of the judges. So he goes to teach at Yale.

GOULD: Yes, on coming back to Yale, he tells the Yale Daily News.

SWAIN: And then how did he become the chief justice of the United States?

GOULD: He played things very carefully for eight years hoping that the Republicans would come back in. He was very disappointed when Wilson -- I think heartbroken was the case when Wilson was re-elected because he had come to hate Wilson.

But Wilson and the Democrats were repudiated in 1920 and Harding becomes president on New Year's Eve -- sorry, Christmas Eve of 1920, Taft is in Marion, Ohio and goes to see the Hardings and the Harding says, would you like to be on the Supreme Court? I'll put you on that court. And Taft said, well, I can only be chief justice. And Harding, in effect, says, well, we'll work it out.

Six months later, Taft, Chief Justice Edward Douglas White dies. Taft had said he was going to make way for a Republican anyway. But White did the honorable thing and expired at the right time, and Taft is appointed chief justice about July 1st, 1921.

SWAIN: I'm sorry, for how long?

GOULD: He served until his death in early 1930.

SWAIN: And Chief Justice William Howard Taft was responsible for giving the Supreme Court its own home. Until that time, it actually met in the Capitol building. And he understood as president how to get that done. He never lived to see the court actually work in the Supreme Court building. But he's the one that really got that under way and gave the court its own place in Washington, D.C.

Brian Steinberg asks, did Helen Taft -- well, we know the story -- like being first lady more than William Howard Taft liked being president, but goes on to say what was her role after he became chief justice? What was her life like then?

GOULD: She's pretty much very quiet because the wives of the justices did not have a public role. They didn't entertain. It really was very much cloistered in a way that is not the case today. Maybe we have chief justices speaking on all sorts of questions. And Taft's view was that, he issued opinions, promoted the law, he helped to get the Supreme Court building, but that was about it for society as far as the Supreme Court was concerned.

COOK: Well, and being first lady is what she had always wanted to do, so she didn't have a big ambition after that other than to just, you know, to live a quiet life. And so I think that's why, you know, we don't see that as much.

SWAIN: Bill in Tampa. Hi, Bill, you're on.

BILL (ph): Hey, I was channel surfing and I came upon your program. Wonderful, congratulations. I'll be tuning in for all of the episodes.

SWAIN: Thank you. You have a question?

COOK: And Ms. Cook, we love American Phoenix. Keep that work going. Thank you.

SWAIN: Thank you very much for the call. Appreciate it. She was a lucky lady health-wise. Even though she suffered two strokes, she outlived her husband and she lived until the ripe old age of 81. How did she spend most of those years?

GOULD: I think, interacting with her children and grandchildren, they continue going to Murray Bay. We haven't had the chance to talking about his love for Murray Bay in Canada, where they had, first thing, sort of cabin and then it grew into a kind of a Taft complex.

He would have made it the summer White House in Canada, but the president in those days, by tradition, could not leave the continental United States during their time in office. Somebody said if they could have annexed Murray Bay, Taft's presidency would have been a lot happier.

SWAIN: Can you imagine the political fallout of having a summer home in another country?

GOULD: Well, that's why they would have annexed. I mean, it would have become -- but, yeah, it just was impossible. But he loved Murray Bay so much, he just waited to get there to get away from the heat of Washington.

COOK: Well, and she was also -- this is not during the chief justice years, but right after the White House. She did write an autobiography with a ghostwriter. And that was a first to have it published. Louisa Adams wrote an autobiography, but it was not published in her lifetime. Helen's were published.

SWAIN: And published in 1914.

COOK: Fourteen.

SWAIN: As you said, just a couple of years after she left the White House. As a matter of fact, if you're really interested in her life, we have hyperlinked her autobiography on our website. It's in a public domain now. And you can read it if you'd like to have more of her detail. Again, it's on that website. Trying to put lots of resources on there for those of you who are interested.

GOULD: It's more about the Philippines than the White House. The White House is just about the last 15 percent. But it's unique even though it was ghost written by a writer from a magazine and her daughter. She didn't think it was dignified to write it herself.

SWAIN: You brought a letter you found on the Internet, as a matter of fact, of her and her post-White House years. Why did you find this charming or interesting?

GOULD: Well, I enjoyed collecting the actual letters of people. And so this came up on eBay and I bid on it, I was lucky to get it. But she's writing about the transition Taft had been on the National War Labor Board in World War I. That was coming to an end. They were moving back to New Haven and she talks about, and then we can go in summer to Murray Bay, which she, both of them loved the place.

SWAIN: She was invited back to the White House by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1940.

COOK: Yes, she was. And that's a quiet tradition that first ladies have. Helen invited Frances Cleveland back to the White House when she was first lady. She invited Frances Cleveland, and they were only three years apart in age. They got married the same year in 1886. And so, there's a little club of first ladies and to share and talk about their experiences and to invite a previous first lady back is a nice quiet tradition.

SWAIN: She died on May 22nd, 1943, and as we said earlier, is the first and only one of two first ladies buried at Arlington Cemetery. And you see some video there of Arlington National Cemetery and the Taft birth -- excuse the Taft burial place.

As we close out here in our final few seconds, I want to go right back to where we started. We have introduced people to Helen Taft. Why should she be remembered among the pantheon of first ladies?

GOULD: I think because of the cherry trees, I think because of the musicians that she brought, because of her role in making Taft president, because of her role in the split between T.R. and her husband. She was a consequential first lady in a cultural and political and marital sense. And I think she deserves much more from history than she's received.

SWAIN: And Jane Cook, what would you say?

COOK: I would say definitely all of the firsts that she did as first lady, but also that she made it OK for a woman to have an interest in politics. We can look back and see that she was ahead of her time, and to see the first ladies that came after her, more of them had that natural interest as well.

SWAIN: For our two first lady scholars, Jane Hampton Cook and Lewis Gould, thank you very much for helping us understand more about one of America's most obscure 20th century first ladies. We hope we've told the audience a bit more about her life and interested them in learning more. Thanks for being with us.

GOULD: Thank you.

MALE: Next Monday on First Ladies, Ellen and Edith Wilson. Ellen and Woodrow Wilson's deep love for each other was reflected in passionate letters and they were married for 27 years before moving into the White House. She died of kidney disease after being first lady for less than a year and a half.

President Wilson wrote, God has stricken me almost beyond what I can bear. Through this personal tragedy and with America on the path to World War I, President Wilson met Edith Bolling through a mutual friend. They fell in love, had a secret courtship and got married.

Edith Wilson is best known for looking after President Wilson and his affairs when he suffered a stroke during his second term. Her quote, "stewardship" of the presidency and the level of power she wielded remained among the most controversial efforts of any first lady.

Join us as we get to know both first ladies in the Wilson White House, Ellen and Edith, live Monday night at 9pm Eastern on C-SPAN and C-SPAN 3.

And we're offering a special edition of the book, First Ladies of the United States of America, presenting a biography and portrait of each first lady and comments from noted historians on the role of first ladies throughout the history for the discounted price of \$12.95, plus shipping, at CSPAN.org/products.

And our website has more about the first ladies, including a special section, Welcome to the White House, produced by our partner, the White House Historical Association, chronicling life in the executive mansion during the tenure of each of the first ladies. Find out more at CSPAN.org/FirstLadies.

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