

The First Lady at 60

Thelma Catherine Ryan Nixon

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WASHINGTON, March 15 — Thelma Catherine Ryan Nixon, better known as Pat to her husband and as the first lady of the land to the nation, will be 60 tomorrow. But she will celebrate her birthday, with a nod to her Irish ancestry, on St. Patrick's Day, Friday. Within the last year, said

Woman one of Mrs. Nixon's White House aides, she has News really sort of come into her

own—there's so much confidence in her, and people's awareness of her has really grown."

It has been a busy year. In June, Mrs. Nixon went to Peru to deliver relief supplies after that country was devastated by an earthquake. For that she was given the Grand Cross of the Order of the Sun, Peru's highest award.

In August, Mrs. Nixon toured Virginia, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon and California to focus attention on the President's "legacy of parks" program that is intended to develop recreational areas close to cities.

Africa and China

She was off to Africa in January, where she represented the President at the inauguration of President William R. Tolbert Jr. of Liberia and visited Ghana and the Ivory Coast.

Last month she accompanied the President to China, where newsmen gave her high marks for the gracious touch she brought to the delicate proceedings. Contrary to widespread reports, however, she did not try to learn Chinese phrases. An aide said "the intonation of Chinese is so difficult" that Mrs. Nixon decided not to risk misunderstanding.

In between these activities, Mrs. Nixon, like other First Ladies, has been doing her thing at the White House. Today, for instance, she surprised tourists by showing up at a display of historic items taken from the private family quarters. Mrs. Nixon has quietly been working to put on view more things that are not ordinarily seen by public visitors.

Pace Due to Continue

There is little reason to believe that the pace will slow. Mrs. Nixon is scheduled to go to Atlanta later this month to open a regional Republican conference, a prelude to her role in the

election campaign. The aide said that Mrs. Nixon would not campaign actively until after the convention in August.

Then she will accompany the President and will campaign on her own some of the time. Mrs. Nixon is also scheduled to go to Canada with the President in April and to the Soviet Union in May.

Despite her increasingly public role, Mrs. Nixon remains very much a private and reserved person. She told a television interviewer last fall, "I think the most difficult task of all is to be so guarded and to be surrounded all the time. You don't have enough of what I call blessed aloneness."

Interviewed at a secluded spot near their oceanside home in San Clemente, Calif., Mrs. Nixon said: "At the present time, it is the only place in the world where we can sit unguarded. There may be a few people outside, but we don't see them, so when we come in here, it's just heaven without anybody around."

Mrs. Nixon has a sense of humor. Once asked to assess the state of the union in one word, she said: "Mess." Then she added, "But if you're going to quote me, just say that things are so much better now than they were."

In Ghana she told a Ghanaian legislator, "Your kind of assembly is not like our Congress. Ours isn't half as much fun."

Asked by a newsman for some inside information about her African trip, she declined, explaining, "I want to cash in on my diary when I write it."

Father Called Her Patricia

Mrs. Nixon was born on March 14, 1912, in Ely, Nev., an hour before St. Patrick's Day. That evidently led her father, William, to call her Patricia. He was then a gold miner. Later the family moved to a farm in California.

When the future First Lady was 12, her mother died. Her father died five years later.

Mrs. Nixon was graduated from Excelsior High School in Artesia, where she played the part of Penelope in the senior class play, "The Rise of Silas Lapham." A review said that Penelope "in all her girlish moods, gay or serious, was charmingly portrayed by Thelma Ryan."

She then worked in a bank there and as an X-ray tech-

nician in New York, saving enough money to enter the University of Southern California, from which she was graduated in 1937. Mrs. Nixon played bit parts in the movies, taught commercial subjects at Whittier High School and acted in a little theater.

Met Fellow Actor

It was there that she met Mr. Nixon, also an actor in the theater. She had recalled that he proposed to her the first night they met and that "I thought he was nuts or something." They were married on June 21, 1940, in a Quaker ceremony at the Mission Inn, in Riverside, Calif.

The President and Mrs. Nixon have two daughters, Mrs. Edward Cox and Mrs. David Eisenhower. Mrs. Nixon has three brothers and a sister who are living in California.

Mrs. Nixon's family is planning a small birthday party for her at the President's retreat at Camp David in Maryland. Mr. Cox is scheduled to be there but Ensign Eisenhower, for whom the camp is named, will probably not. The Navy, of which his father-in-law is Commander in Chief, requires his services elsewhere.