

Lou Henry Hoover Crusader for Causes Benefitting Children and Women

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Lou Henry Hoover, wife of Herbert C. Hoover, president of the United States 1928-1932, was a national figure in her own right. Between the years 1918-1939 she provided leadership to causes that benefitted women and children. Her early life experiences provided impetus for her involvement in civic activities and the importance of helping others.

Lou's childhood in Iowa was a departure from the standard Victorian upbringing of female children in the 1870's. By the time she was six years old she had spent much time with her banker father fishing, trapping animals, hiking and overnight camping. Those outdoor activities expanded as the family moved to California. Her play with both boys and girls included the usual childhood games as well as roller skating, baseball, tennis, horseback riding, biking and tennis. Later, as the first woman student in geology at fledgling Stanford University she deepened her knowledge and love of nature and continued her active lifestyle. In that she was joined by another geology student, Herbert Hoover. They married in 1899 and honeymooned on their way to Herbert's work as a mining engineer in China. Thus began a period of eighteen years of international professional work and a lifelong partnership. Upon resuming permanent residence in the United States following World War I relief efforts, they, both mutually and independently, gave unstintingly of their energy, time and personal resources in philanthropic and welfare causes. Lou decided to work with the Girl Scouts.

Lou's overriding purpose in her involvement with the Girl Scout movement and the Woman's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation was to provide for every girl and woman that which she had experienced as a young person, an opportunity to be active, preferably out-of-doors. She lamented the fact that so few knew how to play and were merely spectators. She wanted all girls to experience what a thrill it is "to throw ourselves into play and action and to get from it the refreshment and invigoration of muscles, nerves and spirit." To these ends she gave unstintingly of her ability, time and resources from 1923-1928 as president of the Girl Scouts and Woman's Division and continued that involvement on a lesser scale when she became first lady.

In addition to these causes, she often spoke on the importance of education, necessity of raising teaching standards and paying adequate wages, criticized the government's neglect of Washington D.C. schools, campaigned for child care, rights for women, more opportunities for minorities, and urged society women to become involved in helping the less fortunate. Known as a woman with a love of justice, a sense of humanness, clearness of vision, she was efficient and capable. She found joy in enabling others to experience that which she enjoyed, a healthy active lifestyle.