

About Lorena Hickok



Lorena A. Hickok

Lorena Alice Hickok (March 7, 1893 - May 1, 1968) was one of the first women Associated Press newspaper reporters, known in the late 1920s and early 1930s for her lively, informative news reporting. She was born in East Troy, WI, and lived with her family (her father was an itinerant dairyman) in a number of small towns in the Upper Midwest. After her mother's death, she left home, worked as a "hired girl," and completed high school in Battle Creek, MI. She began her journalistic career at the *Battle Creek Journal* in 1913. She worked for the *Minneapolis Tribune* until 1927, when she moved to New York, joining the AP after a six-month stint on the *Mirror*. By 1932, she had become the nation's best-known female reporter.

After being assigned to cover Eleanor Roosevelt during FDR's 1932 campaign, Hickok struck up a close relationship with the soon-to-be First Lady that continued throughout their lives. In 1933, Hickok left the AP and began work as the chief investigator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a department of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. She conceived or encouraged several of ER's activities, including her all-women press conferences, her syndicated newspaper column, her memoir, and her planned community at Arthurdale, West Virginia. In 1936, when her diabetes began to impact her activities, Hickok resigned from FERA and took a position promoting the 1939 New York World's Fair. From 1940 to 1945, she served as the executive secretary of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, living at the White House for most of this period. In 1945, she left Washington and moved to the Little House, the home at Mastic, LI, that had been her vacation house since 1938. There, she occasionally worked as a ghostwriter and speech writer for her Democratic colleagues, as well as collaborating with ER on the book *Ladies of Courage* (1954).

In 1955, she moved to Hyde Park, NY, to be near ER and the FDR Presidential

Library, where she researched several books for young readers (including two popular books about Helen Keller and her teacher: *The Story of Helen Keller* and *The Touch of Magic: The Story of Helen Keller's Great Teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy*). Her book, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Reluctant First Lady* (also written for young readers) provided a glimpse into her friendship with ER.

In the 1960s, Hickok donated her correspondence with ER to the FDR Library, with the stipulation that it would be sealed for ten years after her death. She died in 1968; the letters were unsealed in 1978.

Hickok's remarkably observant reports for Harry Hopkins at FERA were published in 1981, under the title of *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*. A 1980 biography by Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok: ER's Friend*, provides an account of Hickok's life.