

**PERLE  
SKIRVIN  
MESTA  
1889-1975**



**HOSTESS  
WITH  
THE  
MOSTEST**

She was an American socialite and political hostess, known for her lavish parties, bringing together artists and political figures in bipartisan *soirées* of high-class glamour. Her most memorable party was in London in 1953, which included the royal family, movie stars, diplomats and generals.

Pearl Reid Skirvin was born in October 1889 in Sturgis, Michigan. The family moved to Oklahoma City in 1906 where her wealthy oilman father Bill built the landmark Skirvin Hotel. Pearl studied at Chicago's Sherwood School of Music to become an opera singer. She quit after one concert and married wealthy Pittsburgh machinery manufacturer George Mesta in 1917. During the World War I years, George worked in Washington while his plant manufactured war machinery. After the war, they traveled extensively in Europe until George died suddenly in 1925 of a heart attack.

Pearl moved to Newport, Rhode Island in 1929. She used her fortune to hone her skills as a society hostess and Republican fundraiser in the 1930s. Mesta also became interested in the National Woman's Party. As a self-described 'feminist', she worked for a constitutional amendment giving women equal rights. By 1944, Mesta became disillusioned with the Republicans and switched parties – and changed her first name to Perle.

She became a friend and early patron of Harry Truman. She leased President Hoover's former home to use for lavish entertaining. Mesta soon realized the influence a party could have on politics when important groups of people were brought together in a social situation. Her guest lists were strategically planned to accommodate the topics of the day. On March 14, 1949, Time Magazine featured Perle Mesta on the cover.

In 1949 Truman named her Ambassador to Luxembourg. The appointment was designed to raise the standing of women in politics, but many criticized her selection. She assumed her position with a profound sense of responsibility by establishing monthly parties to entertain over 25,000 US troops stationed nearby, all paid for by her personally. In 1951, she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

At the 1952 Democratic Convention, Mesta said, "Together, men and women are a tremendous force. And I feel certain that when our forefathers said that our society should be based on equal rights for all men, they did not mean it just that way. They meant equal rights for all men – and women."

Returning to America in 1953, Mesta continued to be Washington's premiere hostess. Her influence remained strong during the Eisenhower years, despite her support for Democrats, but her power waned significantly with the Kennedys in 1960. A generation gap made it impossible for her to stay relevant.

At one of her last parties in 1972, John Connally toasted her. "You are a tradition; you are an event in the life of America." The salutation was not far off the mark. Perle Mesta had been the reigning Washington hostess for almost thirty years. She returned to Oklahoma City in 1974 and died there a year later at age 85.