

Mrs. Lee is a reluctant first lady

By G. JEFFERSON PRICE 3D

Much against her will, Mathilde Boal Lee officially has become the acting first lady of Maryland.

The tall, handsome woman of 57, who has been called Mimi since childhood, views Annapolis and Government House, where she soon will take up residence, as the antithesis of practically everything she holds dear except the man she will accompany there.

She would rather be canoeing on the Potomac, backpacking along the Appalachian Trail or teaching children to swim than preparing a formal party.

For unlike some of her predecessors in the Governor's Mansion, Mimi Lee has no interest in the presumed glories of being a politician's wife. She has lived among the powerful since childhood and is hard to impress.

Above all, Mrs. Lee is determined to draw as little as possible attention to herself in her new role. Indeed, her first official act has been to declare an embargo on all press interviews for at least the next six weeks, and no amount of cajoling from her husband and others has moved her.

According to her family and friends, the decision stems in part from her desire to avoid any appearance of impropriety in the midst of the Mandel family trauma.

But she is equally concerned about having to leave behind the life she has developed for herself in the last several years. It has been a life largely removed from politics, in spite of her husband's voracious appetite for the game.

"There is a lot of anxiety about going to Annapolis," says Blair Lee 4th, the acting Governor's 32-year-old son. "The whole place is alien to her nature.



MATHILDE B. LEE

... would rather go canoeing

that surrounds the Lee family estate.

Since her marriage to Mr. Lee in 1944, she has raised seven sons and one daughter and now that her own children have grown up or gone away, she spends most of her week working with other people's children.

and the elderly. She works faithfully on charity events for the Holy Cross Hospital in Montgomery county, which the Lee family had a hand in founding.

But her favorite activities are the most energetic—canoeing and backpacking—and although her daughter left the scouts long ago, Mrs. Lee still takes groups of girls on trips, often to distant places.

"Anytime I see a rack of canoes behind a station wagon," says Lee Fisher, who has worked in the Red Cross with Mrs. Lee, "I know that it's Mimi giving another course."

According to Marilyn B. Scanlon, who has worked in the Girl Scouts with Mrs. Lee, the acting Governor's wife has taken large groups camping in places as far away as St. Johns in the Virgin Islands. Often, according to Mrs. Scanlon, she has taken other groups backpacking near Boalsburg, Pa., the home of her paternal ancestors.

Invariably, those who know her speak of Mrs. Lee in glowing terms. She has earned a reputation among her friends in Montgomery county, as well as among Mr. Lee's own associates, as a woman who thrives on giving to others.

"She is the most down-to-earth individual I have ever known," Mrs. Scanlon says.

Thomas M. Downs, an Annapolis lawyer who was formerly on Mr. Lee's staff, perceives her as "an infectiously wholesome person."

In the physical sense, Mrs. Lee is the exact opposite of her husband. He drinks; she never drinks. He smokes pack after pack of cigarettes; she never smokes and has campaigned unsuccessfully against the habit.

"In a way," he adds, "she is almost naive, vulnerable. She doesn't have the social instincts you'd expect. She would be happier in the woods."

That is not to say Mrs. Lee is a recluse. On the contrary, she has become something of a legendary figure around the rolling Montgomery county countryside

"Her whole life has been spent raising kids," says the younger Blair Lee. "Now her kids are grown and she has adopted the children of others."

Mrs. Lee spends much of her time teaching children to swim. She has been involved in a project of the Red Cross in Montgomery county, which employs swimming as therapy for the handicapped

There are still other differences.

"There isn't a muscle on Dad's body," asserts Blair Lee 4th.

"The most exercise he gets is from walking from the front of his house to his limousine," observes John Neumann, a longtime friend and neighbor of the Lees,

See MIMI, B2, Col. 1

Mrs. Lee no lover of politics

MIMI, from B1

who adds, "You could never get him into a canoe.

"When the lawn needs mowing, she's the one who gets on the tractor and mows it," says Mr. Neumann, noting that "the lawn covers a good 5 acres.

Mr. Lee's absorbing hobby is his flower garden, and his friends say he grows flowers of which any professional would be proud. Mimi Lee patters in the garden, but does not share her husband's obsession.

However, she does enjoy carpentry, and the younger Mr. Lee recalled that one year while his father was spending his free time arranging cut flowers, Mrs. Lee was building an addition to the third floor of their home.

The state's new—if unwilling—first lady is hardly lacking in social graces, however.

She has a reputation as a gracious hostess even though her son acknowledges that "she hates to get dressed up." She is a prolific reader and an engaging conversationalist, according to Mr. Downs, who recalled a night several years ago when the Lees were to visit his home for the first time.

"My wife was concerned that this was the first time we would be meeting Mimi, and frankly she was a little worried," he recalled. "But as soon as she was in the house she made everyone comfortable. She is very well read. She reads in French

as well as English and can find something to talk about with anyone."

Mrs. Lee's background is as aristocratic as her husband's. Her father, Pierre de Lagarde Boal, served in the diplomatic corps as ambassador to Nicaragua and Bolivia. Also something of an adventurer, he joined the Lafayette Escadrille—a group of American fliers who joined the French Army at the outset of World War I—and met his wife in France.

Mr. Boal is dead, but Mrs. Lee's mother, the former Jeanne de Menthon, lives on a farming estate on the French side of Lake Geneva. Once or twice a year, Mrs. Lee still travels to visit her there.

The trips at times have been a source of annoyance to Mr. Lee, according to his oldest son, but he says that Mimi Lee is a "lately developed feminist."

She has, says a friend, "a mind of her own and a will of her own which can be unbending. She is her own person."

None of Mrs. Lee's friends doubt that she will perform with any less grace in Annapolis than she has in Montgomery county for more than three decades, but they agree that she would just as soon stay at home and "do her thing."

"I have seen her as comfortable at the dinner table with Nelson Rockefeller as she is with anyone, but she isn't really excited by politics," says Mr. Downs, "and you sure won't find her going out of her way to drive to Southern Maryland for a chicken barbeque."