



- *Activist*
- *Artist*
- *First Lady*

TIMELINE

1883 – Meets Woodrow Wilson

1884 – Attends Art Students' League in New York City

1885 – Marries Woodrow Wilson

1902 - Becomes first lady of Princeton University

Ellen Louise Axson Wilson

1860–1914

Inducted 2000

Ellen Louise Axson Wilson was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1860. At age four, her family moved to Madison where her father became pastor of the Madison Presbyterian Church. In 1866 the family moved again, this time to Rome, Georgia, to join its First Presbyterian Church.

It was following a Sunday service in 1883 that Ellen met young Woodrow Wilson, who was in town on legal business. The two courted by correspondence and through occasional visits once Ellen began studies at the Art Students' League in New York City. They married in June of 1885 in Savannah.

Over the next few years, Woodrow taught at Bryn Mawr and Wesleyan University, during which time Ellen bore three children—all girls. In 1890, at age 33, Woodrow took a position at Princeton University as chair of Political Economy and Jurisprudence. In 1902 Ellen became first lady of Princeton University when Woodrow was elected university president. She served as research associate and foreign language translator for many of her husband's scholarly books.

"I am naturally the most unambitious of women and life in the White House has no attractions for me."

– Ellen Louise Axson Wilson

Ellen was a devoted mother who made time

for her artistic talent. She established a scholarship at the Berry School near Rome for the education of underprivileged and rural mountain children. The scholarship was in honor of her brother who drowned in 1905 with his wife and young son.

In 1910 Woodrow became governor of New Jersey. Just two years later he was elected President of the United States. Ellen became America's first activist First Lady.

As First Lady, Ellen was her husband's most trusted advisor and strongest supporter. She used her influence in matters of importance, holding open houses and visiting government offices—particularly the Government Printing Office and the Post Office

1905 - Brother's family drowns in accident; forms scholarship in memory, supported by sales of paintings

1912 – Becomes First Lady of the United States

1913 – Makes surprise visits to Government offices; uses influence as First Lady to improve working conditions for federal employees

1914 - "Alley" bill is passed by Congress in Ellen's honor; she dies later that day

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Department where she crusaded for better working conditions for all people—but for women in particular.

Ellen also led tours showing civic leaders, congressmen and their wives the poverty and substandard housing that surrounded them in the nation's capitol. She sponsored legislation to improve the living conditions of Washington's disadvantaged citizens. The "Alley" bill—credited to Ellen—was passed by Congress on August 6, 1914. Ellen died the same day, knowing her bill had passed. It would be one of many legacies she left behind in service to her country and its neediest citizens.

Additional Resources

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