The End of Peace:
A Chronicle of the Failed Attempt to Keep the US out of WWI

CHAPTER ONE
The Election

Saturday, November 4, 1916

While cruising on the surface off the coast of Denmark, the German submarine U-20 came to a sudden halt with the sickening sound of scraping metal, knocking many of the sailors off their feet. It had run aground. Making several trips with the sole dinghy onboard, the captain evacuated all thirty-four members of the crew. As Denmark was officially neutral, there was no immediate fear of capture once the German sailors reached shore. After waiting for high tide, they returned, hoping to free their stranded vessel, but upon closer inspection, found that the engines were damaged beyond repair. They decided to sink their ship, loading it with explosives. The resulting explosion blew an immense hole in the bow of the ship, but it still didn't sink. It remained there throughout the remainder of the war, unusable, a black and ominous reminder of the German threat that lurked beneath the waters.

The U-20 was one of only 20 submarines that Germany had in active service at the start of the war in 1914. By 1917, the number had grown to 140, and they had destroyed about 30 percent of the world's merchant ships. The ultimate goal of the German Imperial Navy was to increase the number to 200.

At the onset of war, Britain had declared a war zone in the North Sea, filling it with mines, thus instigating a blockade which cut off not only all war supplies but also all food and other imported goods to Germany. Germany responded by designating its own war zone in which ships entering it would be subject to submarine attack, in effect attempting to exercise a blockade of its own against goods and supplies entering England. In a conflict where the land war had become a stalemate, with victories measured in fractions of miles gained in devastated land between a warren of trenches stretching endlessly across the countryside, the war at sea had become an effort to choke the other into submission through starvation.

The U-20 was only one of 178 German U-boats that were eventually sunk during World War I, but it was perhaps the most infamous of the entire war. This was the very U-boat that on the 7th of May, 1915, sank the Cunard passenger liner *Lusitania*, causing the death of nearly 1,200 men, women, and children, including 128 Americans. Many in the United States considered this an act of war, and it created an early crisis in the administration of Woodrow Wilson. Germany claimed that they had posted warnings in newspapers, warning passengers not to travel on British ships entering the war zone and that the *Lusitania* was carrying war material, making it a legitimate target. A number of German-Americans, including Lutheran Pastor George Allenbach in Lincoln, Nebraska, echoed these claim, posting editorials in

newspapers to counteract the rising anti-German sentiment and the demands for the United States to enter the war on the side of the Allies. After President Wilson had issued a series of protests notes, Germany agreed to place restrictions upon submarine attacks. They stated that passenger ships no longer would be attacked and that merchant ships believed to be carrying munitions would be attacked only after sufficient warning had been issued to allow those on board to get to places of safety.

Walther Schwieger, was the captain of the U-20 when it sank the *Lusitania* with a single torpedo. Four months later, he also torpedoed and sank the *RMS Hesperian*. Thirty-three lives were lost in that attack due to a mishap lowering one of the lifeboats. Also lost was the casket containing Frances Stephens, the widow of a Canadian politician George Stephens. She had been one of the victims of the *Lusitania* attack, and now had the unlikely but tragic misfortune of being sunk twice by the same U-boat and the same captain.

Following the *Hesperian* attack, there was significant fallout, for in the previous week Count von Bernstorff, the Imperial German Ambassador to the United States, had conveyed to President Wilson the German concession that passenger liners would not be attacked. Captain Schwieger was summoned to Berlin where he was reprimanded. However, by April of the next year, Schwieger returned to active duty. In all, Schwieger and U-20 sank 37 ships during the war. Schwieger died just two months prior to the ultimate demise of the U-20 when a different submarine which he was commanding was sank, killing all hands.

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The election of 1916 was nearing its close. More than a thousand people gathered in the building in Loyal, Wisconsin, a village that had earned its name from the number of individuals who volunteered to fight for the Union in the Civil War. The hall was jammed to the window sills and even the aisles were blocked. The crowd was considerably larger than the population of Loyal, as they had gathered from the surrounding area farms and nearby towns to see and hear their famous Senator "Fightin'" Bob La Follette. They came to town driving their Packards and Model-T trucks as well as in horse-drawn farm wagons. A significant number of those present were German immigrants who still spoke the native language of their home country and knew only a smattering of English. Nearly 30% of Wisconsin's population at the time were of German origin and another 20% had close German affiliation through marriage. Woodrow Wilson in June had insisted on inserting what came to be known as the "hyphen plank" into the Democratic platform at their National Convention in St. Louis. It was widely seen as an attack on German-Americans who had retained much of their German culture and language after becoming American citizens. La Follette, seeking his third term in the United States Senate, was opposed in this election by a German-American, William Wolfe, who spoke fluent German, seemingly the ideal opponent to defeat him. But regardless of their ethnicity, they came to hear their famous Senator. It was the first time La Follette had ever spoken in Loyal, and they gave him a rousing reception.

As a child, Bob was variously described as “irrepressible,” “extroverted,” and “mischievous.” Never shy, he claimed to have made his first public speech between the ages of three and four at an event at the local schoolhouse, where he recited

You’d not expect one my age
To speak in public on the stage.

Almost from that moment on, he delighted in public speaking and his ability to capture an audience. These were still the days of oratory, where speakers served the purpose of entertainment as well as information. Before radio or television or movies, the opportunity to hear a famous person whom otherwise they knew only from newspaper accounts was a significant draw. The Chautauqua circuit in the early part of the 20th Century brought to rural America speakers who entertained their audiences in large circus tents, and La Follette accumulated much of his fame on that circuit. Some of the best-known individuals of the day were orators. William Jennings Bryan is said to have spoken to more than five million people in twenty-seven states within a few short months. Billy Sunday, a former baseball player who became an itinerant evangelist, attracted the largest crowds of any evangelist before the advent of the electric sound system. Such oratory required not only the ability to project one's voice so that could be heard clearly even in the back rows, but also the forceful use of gestures, and the ability to ad-lib and speak without notes.

La Follette was a master of these techniques, often able to hold an audience's interest for up to two hours, discussing intricate details of railroad schedules, demonstrating how the railroad executives in their search for efficiency and profits were hurting individual farmers. Throughout his narrations, he sometimes elicited laughter, sometimes cheers, but almost always rapt attention. If he thought he was losing their attention, convinced of his ability to win almost anyone over, he would speak even more rapidly and loudly, going on even longer, seemingly insensitive to the growing unease of his audience. After all, it had taken him two years to convince Belle to marry him, as she had at first been content to remain “just friends,” and she sometimes brushed him off in an almost cruel fashion. But persistence had won her over, and when he believed he was right, he was convinced that his persistence would ultimately convince even the most begrudging of his doubters.

His long, thick, slightly graying hair was combed straight back and piled high in a pompadour. As he spoke, sometimes strands would stray from their brushed back position and straggle across his forehead, which he would impatiently brush back without missing beat of his train of thought. He had a broad forehead, chubby cheeks, and a protruding belly which made him appear to many as friendly and a jolly good fellow.

During this election campaign, the Republican party had split. The Teddy Roosevelt, the former president, and ostensible leader of the Republican party, was an avid proponent of going to war to defeat “the Hun,” and strongly supported the Republican nominee Charles Evans Hughes, who favored policies that would lead to entering the war in support of England. But the progressive movement in the Republicans created a party split, largely on this issue. La Follette, as well as others like Senator George Norris of Nebraska, who earlier had come to

Wisconsin to campaign for him, maintained that entering that bloody conflict would only benefit arms manufacturers who profited from war while bringing loss and heartache to the individuals compelled to participate in someone else's fight. Thus, on this occasion like at other campaign events, in addition to recounting his recent achievements in Congress, such as the passage of his seaman's bill which for the first time limited the number of hours of uninterrupted work and provided for better living conditions, La Follette spoke about why he supported an arms embargo against all of the belligerents to maintain strict American neutrality and why he was against the wanton increase of expenditures found in the naval and military appropriation bills. He believed that the current war in Europe would ultimately end in arbitration, and by maintaining neutrality the United States would secure a place at the peace table.

November 5, Sunday

Edith Wilson lay awake in her bed in the morning after a stormy night. A sudden downpour followed by high winds had made sleep difficult.

Her spacious bedroom was on the second floor of Shadow Lawn, a pretentious 52-room mansion where the "shadows" in the morning on the grassy expanse surrounding it, came from the three-story structure itself. The original builder had been convicted of bribery. Another previous owner was convicted of larceny. But in Edith's imagination, it bore at least some resemblance, even more than living in the White House, to the Virginia plantation home that had once belonged to her family before the Civil War.

The entryway of the mansion faced a broad staircase wide enough, Edith once remarked, for an entire regiment to ascend at once. A white marble statue stood in the middle of the lobby at the foot of the stairs. Edith found it offensive, and, because it was too heavy to move, they had it draped.

A semi-circular front portico towered over the formal gardens and terraces. On top of the third floor was an atrium and two pillared lookout towers from which to enjoy the view over the estate and down to the sea.

In Edith's family lore were tales of the plantation, with numerous slaves owned by her grandfather, before everything was swept away during the Civil War and the near poverty that followed during the years of Reconstruction. Edith had grown up in a dwelling above shops on Main Street in Wytheville, Virginia, in rooms which at one time had served as home for her parents, seven siblings, both maternal and paternal grandmothers, two aunts, and a cousin. Living at Shadow Lawn, even on a temporary basis, felt like a return to the grandeur that was rightfully hers.

Its large pretentious style and faux Romanesque features, however, seemed to be less pleasing to Woodrow Wilson than to Edith. He said it reminded him of a "gambling hall."

President Wilson and Edith had left the White House in September, shortly before the Democratic nominating convention, accompanied by some of their staff and Edith's African American maid, Susie Booth, to take up temporary residence at Shadow Lawn since Wilson felt the White House was the People's House, and it was not a fitting place from which to campaign for a party's nomination. After the nomination had been secured, the Democratic party leaders came to Shadow Lawn to hear his acceptance speech delivered on the front lawn where a speaker's platform had been erected.

This particular morning after a sleepless night, Edith was contemplating how much her life had changed in the few short months since she had been married to Woodrow. Since going from relative obscurity to becoming the wife of the President of the United States, she had come to enjoy almost every aspect of that life. She had, to her amazement, become Wilson's closest advisor. He seemed to depend on her not only emotionally, but also intellectually. He sought her opinion on most of the matters he was facing. Edith, therefore, worried as much if not more than Woodrow about the election's outcome—or at least more than Woodrow was willing to show. She worried about the criticisms of her husband's Mexico policy and the increasing problems the war in Europe was bringing. She worried about the large sums of money being spent by the campaign of his opponent Charles Evans Hughes, who in his speeches criticized war neutrality, endorsed women suffrage, and questioned Wilson's morality by calling attention to his swift remarriage after the death of his first wife. She turned over in her mind what they would do and what their life might be like when they left the White House, possibly in just four short months.

The door to Edith's bedroom opened softly, and her husband stood there already dressed. "I was hoping you were awake" he said "because I want to make the speech to you which I intended making yesterday." He proceeded to outline his plans for the country's future: laws to create an agency to regulate overseas shipping, to make the first government loans to farmers (a move that marked a reversal of his previous position), to prohibit child labor, to raise income and inheritance taxes, and to mandate an eight-hour workday for railroad workers. She noticed that the speech didn't include a constitutional amendment to permit women's suffrage—she knew that he, like herself had originally been opposed to the idea of women suffrage, but had come around to accept it if individual states voted to approve it—nor did it include anything about America's role in the war still raging in Europe.

She told him that she had been thinking about what they might do if he was defeated, how they could then live their own lives. He looked down at her and said, "What a delightful pessimist you are! One must never court defeat. If it comes, accept it like a soldier, but don't anticipate it for that destroys your fighting spirit."

Edith was the seventh of eleven children born to Judge William Holcomb Bolling of Wytheville, Virginia. Since her birth delayed the opening of the court that day, her father later would tease that she had begun her career "by keeping gentlemen waiting."

Unlike her three older sisters who attended school in Wytheville, Edith was mostly taught at home by her father and her grandmother. At fifteen she was enrolled at the Martha Washington College in Abingdon, Virginia. Not liking the demands of a structured education and the challenges of community living, she abandoned it after one year, complaining in a rather

self-centered manner about hunger and cold (despite steam-heated buildings and wholesome food) and of a narrow-minded and mean school director.

Despite an apparent aversion to hard work and difficulty, she was socially ambitious and dreamed of bigger things. Her opportunity came when her older sister Gertrude Bolling invited her to stay with her for a time in Washington D.C. Gertrude's husband was a member of a prosperous family-owned silver and jewelry business. Edith recognized this as a chance to follow the path Gertrude had taken, elevating oneself to higher social circles through marriage. Washington was a place where she could attend opera and theater and observe the people and fashions of the day.

The plan eventually succeeded. Tall, at five foot nine, but with a striking figure and adept a coquetry, she attracted the attention of many suitors. The persistence of one, Norman Galt, eventually led to a consent to marriage. She was twenty-two. Though he met the criteria of being from a respectable family, affluent, handsome, and immaculately groomed, there are few indications he was her first choice. It took four years of pursuit to win her over.

Marriage to a wealthy individual broadened Edith's horizons even more, expanding her social circles and enabling two trips abroad. After eight years of marriage, Edith gave birth to a son. Born prematurely, he died three days later. Less than five years later, her husband Norman died in January of 1908. At age thirty-five, Edith became a widow.

One might expect after a twin set of significant losses, Edith might have gone into long and difficult period of grieving. Such, however, does not seem to be the case. With money from her husband's estate, she was suddenly financially independent and free of most obligations. During the next five years she made one trip to the Western United States and four trips abroad. She ordered her wardrobe from Paris, drove her own car, employed a household staff of two, and stayed at luxury resorts on her holidays. Though there are no indications that her marriage to Norman was an unhappy one, her description of him after her thirteen years of marriage to him as "a lovely person," is the way, as her biographer, Phyllis Lee Levin noted, one "might recall a fond, fastidious uncle."

What brought her to the attention of the President of the United States is an example of the power of social circles, something Edith had intuited with her initial move to Washington D.C. On one of her trips abroad, keeping a promise she had made to one of her many close male friends shortly before his death, James Gordon, a wealthy mining engineer, she took his daughter, Alice Gertrude Gordon (who went by the name of Altrude), as a companion with her on a trip abroad. Altrude's mother had also died. Though Altrude was twenty years younger than Edith, they bonded and formed a tight friendship during the trip and its myriad of adventures. As Altrude was a "million-dollar heiress" with a stipend of $25,000 a year, she aided Edith's rise in social standings. A year later, at a dinner party Edith hosted, Dr. Cary Grayson, President Wilson's close friend and personal physician was in attendance and danced with Altrude. In the months that followed, they were often a trio at meals and automobile rides. Once, while Dr. Grayson was on an automobile ride with Wilson, the President saw Edith as they were driving past. It was just seven months after the death of his first wife Ellen. Wilson would remember that first impression years later, recalling both the exact location and the fact

that she was wearing a red rose. Wilson asked Grayson “Who was that beautiful woman?” Grayson obligingly filled him in.

Edith for her part seemed intrigued with the president. Though not an avid reader, she read his volume of speeches *The New Freedom,* caught glimpses of him at the theater, and had gone to hear his address to Congress. Through her friendship with Dr. Grayson, she also learned about Wilson's emotional state, of how he was having a very trying and difficult time dealing with so many complications both at home and abroad while still struggling with the loss of his wife. Perhaps as a result of these conversations with Dr. Grayson, he suggested that it might be helpful if she might become a walking companion with Helen Bones, the president's first cousin, who had originally moved into the White House to serve as an assistant to the first Mrs. Wilson and now took over some of her functions. Helen perhaps even more than Woodrow or even Ellen's three daughters, two of whom were married and a third pursuing a musical career, was grieving the loss of Ellen. Dr. Grayson had treated Ellen, relating her condition was due to her overwork in attempting both to meet the social demands of the White House while also doing philanthropic work in the slums of D.C., missing, or perhaps withholding from her the ultimate diagnosis of Bright's disease, the historical name for incurable kidney disease.

Edith, exercising what she thought proper propriety, at first demurely turned down the suggestion, claiming she was “not a society person” but soon acquiesced. On her walks with Helen she learned even more about Woodrow.

On a Spring day of March 1915, Edith was on a walk with Helen Bones when Helen invited her to tea at the White House. Again, out of politeness Edith initially declined, noting that she had muddied her shoes during their walk and fearful that she would be taken for a tramp, but was soon persuaded. Wilson and Dr. Grayson, who had been out playing golf, their shoes also muddied, arrived at nearly the same time. They laughed at their plight. Edith was secretly glad that despite the condition of her shoes, she had worn a smart black tailored suit made for her in Paris by Worth, and a matching hat.

Wilson was smitten. He had a one track mind, and his focus now became almost exclusively the romantic pursuit of Edith, almost to the point of the neglect of his duties. Wilson had long struggled with health issues and following the death of his wife, his health worsened. The presidency is a lonely office, surrounded by many people but almost all who want something from him. There are few that a president can trust or confide in. Responsibilities weighed heavily upon him, and their weight seemed enormous. Work eventually became his antidote, but there was little pleasure in it. Dr Grayson, perhaps unsure of a diagnosis for his frequent colds and stomach upset, prescribed “fresh air”: lots of golf and plenty of open-air automobile rides. Wilson himself said “there is nothing but the work for me now” and spoke of spending what little free time he had reading detective stories to forget “as a man would get drunk.”

Dr Grayson and Helen Bones were at first somewhat alarmed when they began to see what they had instigated by introducing him to Edith. Dr. Grayson, who had been greatly concerned about Wilson's overall health following his wife's death, was both surprised and somewhat worried by this sudden arousal of passion. Pursuit of courtship is not easy when one is the President of the United States, but aided by the few individuals Wilson allowed to be

close, he and Edith managed to find ways to spend time together. A private telephone line was installed between the White House and Edith's home so that calls did not go through the White House switchboard. Over the next several months 250 letters were exchanged between them, surely the most romantic outpouring from any occupant of the White House. On the occasions when Edith joined Wilson for dinner at the White House, the other guests would discreetly leave while Woodrow and Edith retreated to the Presidential study to carry on their discourse. On other occasions, their friends occupied the front seat of the car with the chauffeur, while with curtain closed, Edith and Woodrow sat in the back.

Edmund Starling was the Secret Service agent assigned to follow the couple. Sometimes he trailed them as they walked through Rock Creek Park, holding hands. On other occasions, he escorted the President home at midnight or later. Once he waited outside Edith's house for four to five hours. On another occasion, he watched while the President danced a little jig while waiting for a milk wagon to pass before crossing the street, all the while humming "Oh, you beautiful doll, you great big beautiful doll," a song he had probably heard at one of his regular theater outings. Wilson eventually arranged a vacation to Cornish, New Hampshire, where they were free to spend a concerted amount of time together, free from other distractions and responsibilities.

Woodrow was a Southerner like Edith, and they both shared attitudes about race and the “Lost Cause” and had tales to tell of the “horrors of Reconstruction” that they had either heard about or witnessed. Three of Wilson’s quotations were featured in the 1915 D. W. Griffith movie “The Birth of a Nation” with its praise of the Ku Klux Clan. They held in common the Southern views of former slaves. Edith’s stories would often revolve around an “old darky driver” or women smiling “as only darkies can smile, revealing the generous white teeth and something of the happy-go-lucky nature of the negro of the South.” Wilson for his part made no objection when Burleson, the Postmaster General created segregated window services for the public and reinstated segregation in post offices across the country, supposedly to eliminate friction between Negro and white government employees. W. E. B. DuBois, who had supported Wilson in the 1912 election, later wrote him a letter complaining that a clerk who couldn’t actually be segregated because of the nature of his work, had a screen placed around him to separate him from other workers. When a group of black professionals led by Monroe Trotter met with Wilson to protest segregation, he was summarily dismissed because Wilson was offended by his tone and passion.

Throughout, Wilson was the pursuer while Edith coyly offered mild resistance. She matched his tales of loneliness following the death of Ellen with her own descriptions of her times of “dark shadows” and passing through a “valley of darkness”—even though her actions subsequent to the death of Norman and her son show little of that. While demure in her response to the president's overtures and demonstrations of affection, in her family letters she is almost giddy at the attention she is receiving from him.

Rather quickly, after barely a three month's courtship, Woodrow decided it was time to find out for sure where he stood. He invited Edith to another dinner at the White House. The other guests again made their discreet departures shortly after the meal. Wilson invited Edith to join him for coffee on the south portico, where he ardently expressed his love to Edith and

proposed marriage. Edith replied, "Oh, you can't love me, for you don't really know me, and it is less than a year since your wife died."

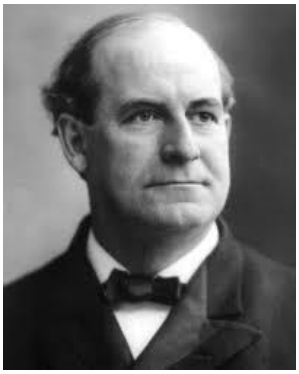
Wilson responded, "In this place, time is not measured by weeks, or months, or years, but by deep human experiences." He acknowledged he had only known her for a short time, and she would be exposed to waves of gossip by entering into such a public role, but he expressed again his love and his need for her.

Edith, while flirting with many but also adept at holding suitors at a distance to protect her freedom was understandably undecided at this moment. She had no doubt already considered this possibility because of Wilson's avid pursuit, but she wasn't yet ready to commit. "If I must answer tonight," she finally said, "the answer would have to be No."

Whether she consciously realized it or not, her rejection at this moment only deepened Wilson's need for her. In the following days, she heard from Helen and others how miserable she had made him.

They continued to write almost daily letters and Wilson, exasperated and dealing with severe headaches, finally wrote "For God's sake, try to find out whether you really love me or not," indicating he needed strength and certainty to the challenges he was facing. The bond was formed. She immediately wrote back, assuring him of her love and apologizing for adding to his burden.

While winning over Wilson's affection and deepening his emotional dependence on her, Edith was also beginning to recognize her influence on his thoughts and actions. All the while the President was deeply engaged in these romantic pursuits, he was also faced with the consequential task of penning official protest notes to Germany in the wake of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Germany had responded to Wilson's first protest note by attempting to justify its action by claiming that the Lusitania was in reality a British auxiliary cruiser that carried Canadian troops and ammunition. After composing a second note, he invited Edith to his office to read it. She was delighted to sit in his chair at his desk in the Presidential office and read what he had written. But she was not entirely pleased with what she read and didn't hesitate to say so. In a criticism designed to appeal to his vacillating ego—she had already discovered this about him—she informed him "there was nothing of you, yourself, in it and therefore it seemed flat and lacking color."



The revised note, which rejected Germany's rationale for its actions, did not please William Jennings Bryan, the Secretary of State, and he refused to sign it. The noted orator and pacifist complained that the proposed response showed no preference for mediation, was accompanied with no equivalent protest to England, did not bar United States citizens from traveling on ships carrying ammunitions, and left Germany with no option but to refuse to discontinue its warfare. When Wilson sent the note anyway, Bryan offered his resignation, grumbling that even before this his position was constantly being undermined by Wilson's personal envoy, Colonel House. He didn't yet realize the degree to which Edith was also an influence. Wilson was hurt, but accepted the resignation "with much more than regret, but with a feeling of personal sorrow."

Edith, who throughout had been urging a replacement of Bryan, felt no sadness at all, wrote “Hurrah! Old Bryan is out! I know it is going to be the greatest possible relief to you to be rid of him. Your letter is much too nice, and I see why I was not allowed to see it before publication.” Later she wrote “I will be glad when he expires from an overdose of peace or grape juice.” Bryan, an advocate of the Temperance movement, was known to serve grape juice instead of wine even at formal diplomatic functions.

When Germany dismissed Wilson’s second protest note, he had to write yet a third, this time asserting that further sinkings would be regarded as “deliberately unfriendly.” When the note was finished, he sent Edith an official copy, making her the first recipient of this state document. Clearly by this point Edith recognized the influence she had with Wilson and didn’t hold back from exercising it.

Shortly thereafter, the President attended a performance by Will Rogers in a Washington theater. Rogers stood for a moment, grinning sheepishly and looking up at the presidential box, and remarked, "I'm kinder nervous here tonight. . .I shouldn't be nervous, for this is really my second presidential appearance. The first time was when Bryan spoke in our town once, and I was to follow his speech and do my little Roping Act. As I say, I was to follow him, but he spoke so long that it was so dark when he finished they couldn't see my roping." He paused. "I wonder whatever became of him." Again a pause, as he waited for the laughter to recede. "There is some talk of getting a machine gun if we can borrow one. The one we have now they are using to train our Army in Plattsburg. If we go to war we will just have to go to the trouble of getting another gun. . .President Wilson is getting along fine now to what he was a few months ago. Do you realize, people, that at one time in our negotiations with Germany that he was five notes behind?"

Wilson laughed heartily at Rogers jokes and later went backstage to congratulate him.

November 6, 1916, Monday

Senator George Norris back home in McCook, Nebraska while the Senate was in recess, was not up for re-election until 2018, but in the role of assisting Republican friends and acquaintances running for local offices, he came to Orleans, Nebraska, a small town in southwestern Nebraska just twenty miles from Beaver City where he had spent many years as a lawyer and judge to speak at a campaign rally. At fifty-five with a pleasant face, a mustache, and short graying hair leaned slightly to the right like prairie grass in the wind, he still had the athletic build of someone who had done manual labor for a living. If one looked closely, one could tell his left cheek was slightly more raised than its counterpart, the result of a hunting accident. Pellets from a shotgun blast had lodged just beneath his eye. When it first happened and he couldn’t see, he desperately groped about trying to locate his gun and end his life right then and there. Fortunately, others pulled it away and his sight was eventually restored.

It was in Beaver City that Norris first met with success after many years of inauspicious undertakings. He came from a background that would be considered poor by most any

standards, though Norris seldom thought of it as such since most of the people he knew growing up faced similar circumstances. He was the youngest of eleven children. The crowded cabin in which they grew up had bare wood floors, and the family was delighted when they were able to replace tallow candles with a single coal-oil lamp which they set on a stool in the middle of the room. Norris never tasted ice cream until he was twenty-one. When it came time to split the family estate after the death of his mother, his share came to $132.

He was only three and a half when his father died from complications following a fall from a careening wagon pulled by horses spooked by rabbits. Norris said, "When I grew older it seemed to me my father had never lived." His only brother had also died just a few months earlier, a causality of the Civil War. He was raised by his mother and six older sisters, the three oldest sisters had already married.

At an early age, he took an interest in books. Among the first were Cushing's *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* and Robert's *Rules of Order,* which fascinated him immensely, intrigued that there were orderly procedures governing arguments. This led to an interest in debating, and while still a schoolboy, he attended meetings of a debating society organized by local farmers. One night on the spur of the moment he was asked to fill in for one of the debaters who had imbibed a bit too much. He was told he needed to talk for the entire ten minutes. If he should forget what to say he was told to look at a certain individual who would raise his right arm to suggest one particular point or his left arm for another particular point. He found it hard to remember what those particular points were but talked the full ten minutes without great effort.

As his prowess in debating grew, sometimes he himself proposed the questions for debate. Once it was "*Resolved*, There is more pleasure in living with a neat, cross woman than with a good-natured, slouchy woman." The schoolroom was crowded when it came time to debate this issue, and Norris, who had been the only one willing to take on the "slouchy" side of the argument, was ultimately declared a unanimous winner.

He went through college piecemeal, attending for a few months, then working as a farm laborer to earn enough money to continue. Eventually, he earned a law degree, but even then there were no permanent prospects, and to earn a living he did a little teaching combined again with farm work.

After a failed attempt to establish a law practice in Beatrice, Nebraska, with a little money in his pocket from a loan from one of his sisters, he headed for southwest Nebraska where new communities were still being founded as a result of the 1862 Homestead Act. The railroad took him only as far as Arapahoe, from where he traveled cross-country on makeshift roads. As he neared Beaver City, the road cut diagonally through a cornfield, and he was amazed at the height of the corn stalks which completely cut off a view of the horizon. In all of his years as a farm laborer, he had never seen corn that tall. Arriving in Beaver City, he was impressed with the surrounding farmland which was entirely stone-free, so different from the rocky terrain of Ohio where he had been raised. The agricultural blood stirred in him. Still, he had a law degree in his pocket, and this newly formed community consisting mostly of young men and young couples seeking a new life on the prairies, some still living in sod houses, would ultimately require legal services arising from indebtedness, divorce, and contested claims. He set down roots.

Thus, it was Beaver City that ultimately came to hold the strongest emotional ties for him, even after he later moved to McCook, Nebraska. It was in Beaver City that he won his first election as a judge, where he met his first wife, and where two of his three daughters were born. A fourth child, actually his first, a boy, was stillborn shortly after another spooked horse episode, this time, while the couple was out for a Sunday drive in a wagon, a wind gust blew a bonnet from a passing woman into the face of the pony pulling the buggy, who jumped into a ditch. The buggy did not overturn, but it greatly frightened his wife.

Like a character in a Thomas Hardy novel, George Norris lived during the time when an agrarian world clashed with rapid industrialization. Though in later life he traveled widely including trips abroad, he was acutely attuned to the values of small towns and a rural way of life. Railroads and large corporations brought many advances to the way one lived, but these gains were often accompanied by significant losses both to the environment and to individuals. Family values were challenged, and in many ways, it became more difficult to earn a living. Growth in efficiency benefited the whole but often harmed individuals. Though he grew up as a Republican, detesting the Democrats who seemed more interested in retaining power for their party than in service to the people, he eventually discovered the same was often true of Republicans. Norris eventually aligned himself with Progressive Republicans who believed that only government had the power to withstand and overcome the negative influence of corporations with their emphasis upon profit over the needs of the common man.

On this day in Orleans, Norris was denouncing the Democratic party for violating its 1912 campaign promises and arguing that Wilson's 'New Freedom' had appropriated more money than any other administration in history, much of it allocated for his so-called 'preparedness.' As he was speaking, Ashton Shallenberger, a Democrat who was running for Congress, arrived with a hired band in tow which, without waiting for Norris to finish began to play. A newspaper account of the event wryly notated that in response "considerable feeling was shown." Shallenberger had been Norris' opponent when Norris first ran for Congress in 1902. William Jennings Bryan, a three times candidate for President of the United States and fellow Nebraskan, came to Norris' hometown in McCook to campaign for Shallenberger. Norris' oldest daughter Hazel, then 17, heard him speak and came home absolutely fuming about this man who said some horrible things about her father. At one campaign event, Shallenberger had argued that a lawyer, like Norris, could never be a friend of farmers. Norris responded by issuing a "corn shucking" contest. He proposed a full day of shucking corn between the two of them, with the loser of the contest agreeing to withdraw from the race. It was a safe bet for Norris, who had previously won a similar bet against an experienced farmer. Shallenberger declined to take up the challenge.

November 7, 1916, Tuesday, Election Day

Unlike his opponent Charles Evans Hughes, who was barnstorming the country (though with a dry and bland style that did little to inspire), Wilson's campaign consisted only of a few occasional speeches. Colonel Edward House, the chief architect of his campaign, complained in his diary that Wilson naively "thought organization amounted to nothing and believed that

"people determined such matters themselves." Despite Woodrow's chiding remarks to Edith about being a pessimist, his stern Scottish Presbyterian moralism always strove to keep negative emotions in check and his outward serenity may have concealed his ambiguity about his future. His continued health problems, not to mention ongoing grief following the death of his first wife, had taken their toll. He delighted in his newfound happiness in his marriage, but at the same time his world seemed to become narrower, and presidential obligations became more a duty than a drive. Colonel House, ever the realist and recognizing that the election outcome was in doubt, as early as October had suggested to Wilson a scheme whereby upon defeat he could exit the presidential office immediately rather than waiting for the inauguration in March of the following year. Wilson could, he suggested, ask Vice President George Marshall and the Secretary of State Robert Lansing (Bryan's successor) to resign and then appoint Hughes as the Secretary of State, making him the acting president following Wilson's resignation. Wilson didn't immediately respond to the plan, but he liked the idea. It appealed to his sense of self-sacrifice.

Election Day dawned bright and clear. After an early breakfast, since residents of D.C. could not vote, the Wilsons were chauffeured in the presidential Pierce-Arrow from Shadow Lawn to Princeton, New Jersey, where Wilson had once served as the University President and where he was still a registered voter Edith remained in the car and enjoyed talking and laughing with the students who were pushing through the crowds to get a glimpse of the President as he went to a fire station to cast his vote. It was, she noted later in her memoir, the closest she ever came to voting in her lifetime.

Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon Wilson telephoned his campaign headquarters where Joseph Tumulty was in charge. He learned that the first scattered returns, which surprisingly came in from Kansas, showed him with slight gains over his vote totals in 1912. A telegraph company had offered to run a wire to Shadow Lawn so he could keep abreast of vote tallies as they came in, but he had declined, saying he would be happy to learn the news by telephoning his campaign headquarters.

That evening they had a small family gathering for dinner in the psuedo-Roman dining room. In addition to Woodrow and Edith, Woodrow’s daughter Margaret, son-in-law Frank Sayre (Jessie’s husband), Edith’s sister Bertha, and Dr. Cary and Altrude Grayson, who lived nearby at Ashbury Park, were present. Margaret, Wilson’s eldest daughter, now 30 and single, had performed some of the functions as First Lady after her mother’s death until Wilson’s marriage with Edith. Jessie, the middle daughter, had just given birth to a baby girl and remained behind in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Eleanor, Woodrow’s youngest daughter and the wife of Treasury Secretary William McAdoo, was in Washington with her two-year-old daughter Ellen, named after her mother and Wilson’s first wife, Ellen.

Dr. Grayson, the only non-family member at this gathering, was a navy physician who had captained the Presidential Yacht, the *Mayflower* during Taft's administration. He was Wilson's personal physician who doctored him through a great variety of illnesses. Eleanor McAdoo, Wilson's youngest daughter, described him as having a chuckle like “tearing silk” and who spoke with a soft attractive voice like “educated nigger.'" That was probably intended as a description of someone with a sonorous voice rather than a derogatory remark but displays

some of the racial stereotypes both the Wilsons and Edith had. Dr. Grayson first came to Wilson's attention when caring for his ailing sister, but due to his frequent attendance upon Wilson, they had become close. When Grayson prescribed outdoor activities such as daily automobile drives and golf as preventative medicine, it was often Grayson who accompanied him on these outings. And, of course, it was Grayson who had played an instrumental role in introducing Edith to Woodrow. As a reward, Wilson had offered up his name as a candidate for promotion from Lieutenant to Rear Admiral.

There was little talk of the election during the meal, their quiet conversations echoing off the marble floor.

After the meal, they went upstairs to the sitting room to play a game of Twenty Questions. Dr. Grayson, more anxious than this family group retreating into itself, took his leave to return to Asbury Park to check on the news.

This night, though, it was difficult for the Wilson family to fully get into the mood of games with the clock ticking away the seconds to a verdict. Around ten o'clock the phone rang, and a New York friend of Margaret offered condolences. Margaret was almost speechless. She sputtered that it was still too early to know the results as the polls in the West were still open. Her friend informed her that the light on *The New York Times* building was flashing red, the signal which would indicate a Hughes victory.

Dr. Grayson returned from his offices at Asbury Park with the news that the New York *World* also predicted a Hughes victory. "Four years from now," he said to Wilson, trying to be consoling, "the people will demand your return to the White House."

Wilson held up his hand. "No, Grayson, I'm something like the Confederate soldier who returned to his home after Lee's surrender. He looked over his farm. The buildings had been burned, the stock run off and the fences demolished. Then he looked at his bleeding feet and at his wounded arm, and said, "I'm glad I fought. I'm proud of the part I played. I have no regrets—but I'll be damned if I ever love another country."


PORTLAND DAILY PRESS. EXTRA

HUGHES ELECTED PRESIDENT

GOT THE FIGURES RAPIDLY

VICTORY BY GOOD MARGIN

Woodrow at last went to the phone to call Tumulty at election headquarters. The excitable Irishman was oddly constrained as he delivered the same news. Woodrow laughed. "Well, Tumulty, it looks as if we have been badly licked." Tumulty tried to offer him the hope that initial returns from the West showed positive signs, but Wilson was sanguine. "It begins to look as if the defeat might be overwhelming. The only thing I am sorry for, and that cuts me to the quick, is that the people apparently misunderstood us. But I have no regrets. We have tried to do our duty."

Wilson listened as family members expressed their feelings. He wondered aloud whether this would now mean entering the war as he had done everything he could to keep the country out. He feared Germany would take this as a repudiation of his policy. Finally, he concluded it was best to wait until morning to send a congratulatory telegram to Hughes "when things are more settled."

"Well, he said, we all got up early. What do you say about having a glass of milk and going to bed?" Around 10:30, an usher brought the tray of sandwiches and beverages. Wilson

grabbed a glass of milk, said goodnight, and headed off to bed, adding “I might stay longer but you are all so blue.”

After he left, the girls voiced their anger that the country had not stood by him and had failed to understand or appreciate what he was doing for it. When they asked Edith how she felt, she said she was disappointed as well but also couldn’t help but think of the freedom this would eventually give them. Then she left to see if there was any way to assuage her husband’s feelings.

Despite his brave face about fighting on and calm in the face of defeat, Wilson may have already resigned himself to defeat. He was tired. He admitted he hadn't had time to read a book in some months. More and more his time seemed to revolve around doing things with Edith. She helped him with the daily task of going through correspondence. They played golf nearly every morning and frequently took chauffeured drives in the Presidential Pierce-Arrow in the evening. He had talked of taking a bicycling tour of Europe. Edith, somewhat terrified of the thought, having never ridden a bicycle before, had one purchased for her which she secretly tried to ride up and down the halls of the White House. It did not go well. After several crashes and damaged porcelain, she gave up the idea and instead encouraged him to take up horseback riding.

As she entered his room, she found him already in bed. “Well, little girl (his favorite pet name for her),” he said, “you were right in expecting we should lose the election. Frankly, I did not, but we can now do some of the things we want to do.”

She sat on the bed and took his hand, thinking he might want to talk further, but in a few minutes, he was sound asleep.

* * *

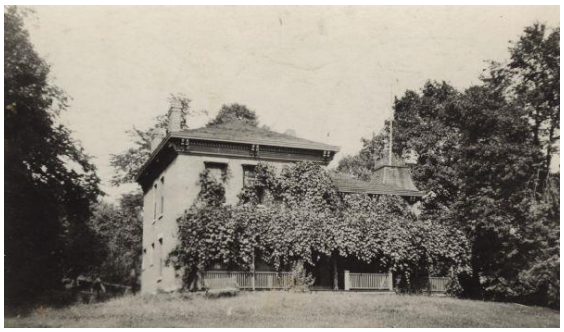
Colonel House wrote in his diary that he thought that both the President and Mrs. Wilson "were cheered," during these dark hours, "by the dramatic denouement we had in mind in the event of defeat"---the plan to make Hughes the acting president before the March inauguration date. Edith didn't see much cheer in her husband's demeanor, only a sign of the onset of depression that she had witnessed before.

* * *

Robert and Belle Case La Follette, together with their children and a few friends gathered in their home at Maple Bluff Farm to await election results. Belle Case La Follette, Bob’s wife, had served as his campaign manager. She was short, somewhat heavyset, with dark blonde hair parted down the middle, and blue eyes. Intelligent, outspoken, and knowledgeable, she was the first woman ever to graduate from the University of Wisconsin with a law degree. She was shy by nature and didn’t relish speaking at campaign events. Beginning with his run for governor up to the present election campaign, she seldom joined him on the campaign trail and didn’t always join him when he was in Washington. She said that being away from home felt like being “an uprooted tree.” Yet, she was strongly opinionated and didn’t hesitate to take a stand on issues that were important to her. When she and Bob were married, she objected to

the use of “obey” in the wife’s wedding vow, and the Unitarian minister who married them obliged. Likewise, she refused to wear a corset and stays, as was customary for women of the time, opting instead for looser fitting garments. Devoted to her family, most of the time while Bob was in Washington she remained at home in Wisconsin, caring for her children. When she was required to be in Washington, she detested attending social events. Once, when asked what Washington women talk about, she answered “Altogether too much about the weather.” While avoiding public speaking, she found her own ways to be politically active. She was the primary editor of *La Follette’s Magazine,* a magazine that she and Bob had founded to promote progressive issues. She wrote a regular column for it entitled “Home and Education” which gave her a forum for promoting issues important to her such as women’s suffrage and the Women's Peace Party, which she had co-founded. She also served as an informal “editor” of many of her husband’s speeches, offering blunt critiques. Sometimes she worried about that, fearing she did not praise the things she liked often enough. He, however, almost always seemed to appreciate her advice, calling her “my wisest and best counselor.” They seldom argued.

Their oldest son Bobbie (Robert, Jr.) had been a matter of great concern for both of them over the past two years. Despite their pleadings and encouragements, he failed to apply himself at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Bob and Belle’s *alma mater.* Belle had even taken the intrusive step of meeting with each of his professors and providing them with self-addressed postcards on which they were asked to report his progress. He gained some reprieve from these pressures when he developed a severe streptococcus infection that would not abate, and he dropped out of college in his sophomore year and returned home.



This evening of election day they relished as one of the rare times they could all be together in this place that was filled with positive memories. They had paid what was considered an exorbitant price for Maple Bluff Farm, $30,000, but it was on the shore of Lake Mendota with a splendid view of Madison, the state capital, just three and a half miles away. The mortgage proved to be a financial burden for them for years to come, but they never doubted the wisdom of their purchase. Maple Bluff Farm was a two story brick farm house. Ancient grape vines shaded the porch and covered the entire front of the house. Tall rose bushes on the south side tapped on the windows when the wind blew. A fire was blazing in the dining room this evening as winter weather had arrived.

Belle took frequent calls from town with the latest election updates from around the state and recorded them on a tally sheet as the family eagerly discussed their significance. Early returns showed Bob La Follette leading by nearly a two to one margin, while Hughes in Wisconsin held only a slight margin over Wilson in the Presidential campaign. Soon congratulating phone calls began arriving and Bob chatted with the callers in his typical boisterous style. Before midnight it was clear that LaFollette’s two to one margin would hold. The presidential vote total in Wisconsin was still too close to call.

Aston Shallenberger won his Nebraska Congressional seat when it was found that his challenger had died of acute pneumonia after speaking at an open-air meeting the previous night. Norris's Nebraska colleague in the Senate, Senator Gilbert Hitchcock, a Democrat, was elected to his second term, but by a narrower margin than that by which Wilson carried the state. It was his first win by direct popular election as at the time of his first election, Senators were chosen by a vote of the state legislature. Omaha born and raised, Hitchcock had always been Republican, but he was attracted to Democrat William Jennings Bryan's support of farmers and his pacifistic stance and became a "Bryan man." He was the publisher of the Omaha World Herald before running for Congress, where he had served alongside Norris when he was also in the House.

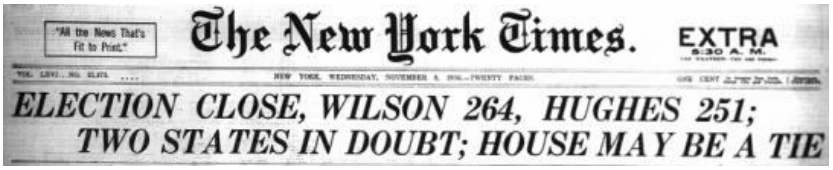
November 8, 1916, Wednesday

Edith was unable to sleep. Despite Wilson's equanimity, she knew he was hurt. She kept thinking of all the things he had wanted to do in his second term, the things he had outlined to her in the speech that he tested out on her Sunday morning, but now would be unfinished.

Around 4 a.m., there was a timid knock on the door. It was Margaret. She said she had just talked to Vance McCormick at the Democratic headquarters in New York, and he told her better news was coming in. He felt there was still hope. "Should we wake Father and tell him?" she asked.

Edith told her, "No. Let him sleep."

* * *


"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times. EXTRA 5:30 A.M.

ELECTION CLOSE, WILSON 264, HUGHES 251;
TWO STATES IN DOUBT; HOUSE MAY BE A TIE

An "Extra" edition of The New York Times Wednesday morning noted that the election was still in doubt with Hughes clinging to a slim 20,000 vote margin, and some indications that Wilson would surpass that. It also recorded that Miss Jeanette Rankin of Missoula, Montana, was the first woman ever to be elected to Congress. She was able to claim victory even before midnight. Montana was one of eleven states where women were allowed to vote. All eleven states were carried by Wilson, even though Hughes had come out in favor of a constitutional amendment establishing women suffrage, while Wilson had opposed it.

* * *

Later in the morning Margaret knocked on her father's door as he was shaving and gave him the news. Wilson was dubious. "Tell that to the Marines," he said and went about his shaving. Later he called Tumulty to learn what was going on. Tumulty confirmed what Margaret had told him. Wilson indicated that he was just beginning to enjoy the reactions he was receiving to his defeat when he was faced with the reality that the tide had turned.

Two friends from Wilson's Princeton days had written the week before to ask if they could see Woodrow and had been invited to lunch. Lunch arrived, but the friends arrived 30 minutes late, full of apologies. After coffee was served, they chatted for some time about the good times they had had at Princeton until Woodrow finally had to ask, "Well, it is delightful to see you fellows, but what was it you wanted to see me about?" They appeared embarrassed. Finally, they admitted they had planned to come on this date to congratulate him on his reelection. They had actually only arrived five minutes late but undecided what they could say remained at the gate for another 25 minutes before daring to enter.

* * *

Cipher Telegram No. 112 was sent from German Secretary of State von Jagow in Berlin to the German Ambassador in the US, Count von Bernstorff:

> Kindly inform me by wire whether the attitude of the American Government in the U-boat question is going to be influenced by Hughes' election for the remaining period of Wilson's term or during Hughes' presidency. The Navy desires to be at least allowed to torpedo armed enemy freight steamers without warning. Does your Excellency consider this also dubious, quite aside from the question of the likelihood of mistakes, particularly in connection with the fact that at present many Americans are designated as seamen on such steamers?

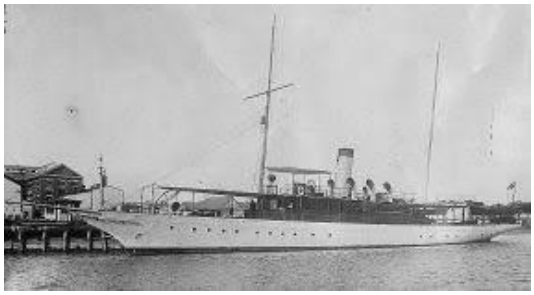
* * *

Nebraska was one of the earliest states to fall into the Wilson column, where he gathered more than 55% of the vote. Woodrow and Edith had once traveled as far as Omaha to campaign. Edith said she was greatly impressed not only by Indians at a pageant they attended but by the 115 hogs at a "swine show." Hughes mustered just under 42%, of the vote with several other minor candidates accounting for the rest.

November 9, 1916 Thursday

The Wilsons rose around 8 o'clock and found that the election still remained undecided. It all came down to California and its 13 electoral votes. The specter of vote fraud was raised and poll watchers guarded every ballot box. The California vote tally came down to the vote in Sierra County where it had snowed on election day, and sixteen rural districts had not been heard from. The nation waited as horse-drawn wagons carried the ballots over snow-packed roads to where they could be counted and certified.

Margaret had to leave to go to New York for a music lesson. She was pursuing a singing career and had already released a couple of records on the Columbia label. Meanwhile, Wilson and Edith played a round of golf. On the 8th tee, Dr. Grayson arrived with the news that it was thought that California was safe.



Yet, by 8:30 that night, while there still was no definitive news, they drove to Sandy Hook to board the Presidential launch, the *Mayflower*, to cruise to Williamstown, Massachusetts for the baptism of Wilson's first grandchild, Jessie and Frank Sayre's daughter Eleanor. When they reached the gate of the Navy Yard, they were met by Marines standing at attention. The Commandant of the Yard and his aide greeted them as they reached the gangplank, and at the top of the gangplank Captain Berry and his officers saluted and the entire crew stood at attention as a band played the National Anthem. They found the ship filled with flowers. They eagerly got into their steamer coats to sit on the wicker chairs on the deck and watched the scenery roll by.

Margaret, who had rejoined them, left them to go to bed. The Wilsons remained, walking the deck until marvelous lights of New York came into view against the dark shadow of the Statue of Liberty, which was not yet illuminated at night.

November 10, 1916 Friday

William Jennings Bryan, Wilson's Secretary of State who had resigned over Wilson's handling of the response to the sinking of the Lusitania, and who resided in Lincoln, Nebraska, sent this congratulatory telegram:

> The returns are now so nearly complete that I shall not longer deny myself the pleasure of extending to you heartiest congratulations upon your re-election and earnest good wishes for the success of your second term. Am proud of the west—including Nebraska. The states beyond the Missouri have rallied to your support and saved the day, and in doing so have honored themselves no less than you. They have been largely benefited by the great reforms enacted under your leadership, and they stand with you for peace, prosperity and progress.

* * *

The Wilsons reached Rhinecliff, New York in the morning and disembarked. A woman handed Edith a bouquet of violets saying "These with all our happiest wishes for our next President and his wife." Great crowds greeted them both at the dock and the train station as they headed for Williamstown for the baptism. The special presidential train car was also called "The Mayflower." Arriving at 1:30 p.m., they were greeted by Frank Sayre and soon headed for the church for a small and private ceremony. In the evening they dressed for a formal dinner party at Jessie's home.

* * *

The evening newspapers carried the official news: Wilson reelected! Minnesota's vote was still undecided but Wilson's lead in California was now deemed insurmountable. Earlier

talk of a recount in some states was becoming less likely as it appeared they would not change the final outcome. Nonetheless, Hughes didn't concede.

* * *

In Nebraska, many of the Republican party officials blamed Senator Norris for Hughes's poor showing, believing Norris had not done enough to promote him. They felt that Norris was too independent and was not consistently "regular." They began looking for possible opponents to run against him for his Senate seat in 1918.

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