

The Art of First Lady Ellen Axson Wilson: American Impressionist

Organized by the Woodrow Wilson House, a National Trust Historic Site, Washington, DC. With generous support from the James Dicke Family

Ellen Axson Wilson (1860 – 1914)



The young southern belle, Ellen Axson, began her formal art training at the Rome (Georgia) Female College at the age of eleven. In 1878, Ellen won a bronze medal at the Paris International Exposition for a drawing titled *School Scene*. This honor brought her regional recognition and she began to earn money for the commissions she received for portraiture. When she became engaged to Woodrow Wilson in 1883 while he was in his second year of graduate study at John Hopkins University, she began a year of study at the Art Students League in New York.

The Art Students League was a renowned liberal school that accepted students regardless of race or gender; however, proficiency in painting technique had to be demonstrated for advancement. After only two months, Ellen established herself in those more progressive classes. She studied under leading American Artists of the day: George de Forest Brush, Thomas W. Dewing, Frederick Warren Freer, and Julian Alden Weir. As

her year of study came to an end, Woodrow Wilson wrote of his regret that she would have to give up her promising art career to which she responded that she “would never give him a divided allegiance.”

After marriage, Ellen Axson Wilson immersed herself in establishing a home and raising a family. As her three daughters grew, she gradually began to paint more and more. In 1905, she studied at the summer artist’s colony called The Lyme Summer School of Art in Connecticut. She returned again in 1908 and continued her studies each summer through 1911.

At the 25th Annual Exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1912, her painting, *Autumn*, placed in the juried exhibition. In 1913, two of her landscapes were accepted at the 108th annual exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Shortly before the presidential inaugural ceremonies in March of 1913, Ellen exhibited fifty landscapes at her one-woman show in Philadelphia.

As an advocate for women, education and art appreciation, Ellen established a scholarship for needy girls and boys at the Martha Berry School in her hometown of Rome, Georgia. Proceeds from her artwork sustained the scholarship.

The National First Ladies’ Library’s exhibition of *The Art of First Lady Ellen Axson Wilson: American Impressionist* was made possible by the following additional organizations and individuals:

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division
Mr. & Mrs. Set Charles Momjian
Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University

The Art of First Lady Ellen Axson Wilson: American Impressionist

November 14, 2013 through May 16, 2014

TOURS

All tours are guided and include both the changing exhibits at the Education & Research Center and the Saxton McKinley House, the restored Victorian home of President William and First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley. Tours last approximately 1 1/2 hours.

Tour Hours: Tuesday - Saturday at 9:30 & 10:30 a.m. and 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m., plus Sundays in June, July & August at 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m. **Tours begin at the Education & Research Center, 205 Market Avenue S.**

Education & Research Center
205 Market Avenue S.

Saxton McKinley House
331 Market Avenue S.
Canton, Ohio 44702

(330) 452-0876

www.firstladies.org



FIRST LADIES
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Scan with your
smartphone to
view our website:



Scan with RedLaser

