

Woodrow Wilson Suffers Stroke, 1919

by Beth Huffer on Friday, 09/25/2015

When World War I ended, President Woodrow Wilson attended the Paris Peace Conference, where the Allied nations met to write the [Treaty of Versailles](#). In September 1919, President Woodrow Wilson embarked on a speaking tour of US cities to gain support for the treaty and the League of Nations, which Americans were reluctant to join.

Traveling with the President was Dr. Cary Grayson, Wilson's personal physician and friend. Grayson kept a diary of the trip and included notes on Wilson's health. On September 26, on a train bound for Wichita, Kansas, Grayson was woken up to attend to Wilson:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1919.

This morning at two o'clock I was awakened from my sleep and told that the President was suffering very much. I went at once to the private car and found him unable to sleep and in a highly nervous condition, the muscles of his face were twitching, and he was extremely nauseated. The strain of the trip had at last taken its toll from him and he was very seriously ill. He had a very bad asthmatic attack - the worst that he had had on the trip. For a few minutes it looked as if he could hardly get his breath. I was obliged to give him every possible care and attention.

Diary of Dr. Cary Grayson, page 58. (Courtesy of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library)

Grayson attributed this health breakdown to the immense mental and physical strain of the trip and urged Wilson to cancel the remaining tour stops.

Wilson returned to Washington, DC, on September 28, and Grayson commenced a regimen of rest and seclusion for the President, insisting that "he should be not bothered with any matters of an official character, and especially that no question of controversy should be brought to his attention." On October 2, Wilson experienced numbness on his left side and collapsed at the White House. Neurologist Dr. Dercum evaluated Wilson:

Examined by myself at about 4.30 P.M., the President was found in bed. His left leg and left arm were in a condition of complete flaccid paralysis, the lower half of the left side of the face was drooping. The President was conscious though he was somewhat somnolent. He answered questions a trifle slowly, but without evident impairment of articulation and the answers were always entirely responsive.

Final report on Wilson's condition written by Dr. Dercum, October 20, 1919, page 3. (Courtesy of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library)

Following his stroke, Wilson remained in seclusion with his wife, Edith, as the gatekeeper.

Although the United States did not join the League of Nations, Wilson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in its founding. Wilson left office in 1921 and died in Washington, DC, three years late