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Cover-up in the Wilson White House

Lead: In the middle of an epic battle over the League of Nations, President Woodrow Wilson suffered a major stroke. His true condition was covered up for months.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: As one of the principal architects of the post-World War I peace, Woodrow Wilson believed that the key to future international harmony was an effective League of Nations. To overcome political resistance to the League Treaty, Wilson embarked on a nation-wide

tour, 8000 miles, 40 speeches to wildly enthusiastic crowds. The tide was shifting in favor of the League. On September 25, 1919 at Pueblo, Colorado, he collapsed following a speech. Almost immediately his train returned to Washington where on the morning of October 2nd he suffered a massive stroke paralyzing his left side. It was clear within hours that he was totally incapable of carrying out his duties. Wilson's health had been problematic since his youth and had gradually deteriorated, but his determination and frequent periods of rest had held serious sickness in check. This time it did not.

Edith Bolling Galt Wilson intervened. Thus began what some

have called the “First Lady Regency.” Wilson’s true condition was kept as a closely guarded secret with the President’s physician and the White House press operation issuing evasive bulletins for weeks carefully denying the facts and giving the impression that the President was in full control and recovering nicely. In fact he was not. Completely devoted to her husband, the First Lady controlled access to his bedside, became the arbiter of what matters were important enough to bring to his attention, and made many important decisions on her own. Until Wilson clawed his way back to moderate health the following spring, his wife had perhaps more influence over the affairs of the Executive Branch than

any First Lady before or since.

Research assistance by Douglas Schaefer, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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