

The Childhood and Cultural Forces Influencing President Woodrow Wilson's Performance at the Paris Peace Conference: An Investigation

Honors History Thesis by Olivia Rosenfeld, College of Arts & Sciences 2025

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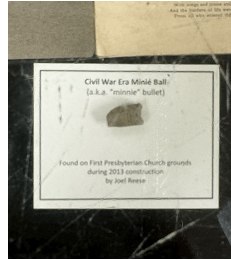
Funding Purpose: Trip to Wilson's Boyhood Home in Augusta, Georgia

Central Research

Question: How did Wilson's upbringing impact his performance at the Paris Peace conference?

Follow-Up Question: What was the intellectual and spiritual impact of living during his formative years in Augusta, Georgia during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War?

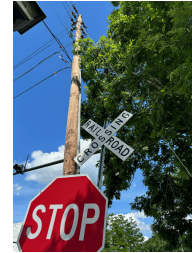
Follow-Up Question: What was the religious atmosphere of Wilson's upbringing, given that his father, Joseph Wilson, was a pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Augusta and that the Wilson family lived in the manse across the street from the church?



Bullet found on the lawn of the First Presbyterian Church, which functioned as a makeshift hospital for injured Confederate soldiers (who were transported to Augusta via train)



Drawing by Wilson depicting the town of Augusta (notable for the representation of industry and of soldiers departing a train)



Railroad tracks in the same location at those which existed during Wilson's childhood (down the street from the First Presbyterian Church and Wilson's home)



Upper level - site of Wilson's Lightfoot Baseball Team's meetings (Wilson wrote the constitution for the club, a practice he would repeat throughout his life)



Pew dedicated to Wilson in the renovated sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church (likely the same pew in which he would have sat in the old sanctuary)

Findings: Traveling to Wilson's Boyhood Home in Augusta and exploring the surrounding the town and its relevant sites (such as the First Presbyterian Church and the Old Medical College building) allowed me to conceptualize the different influences affecting him during his adolescence, such as the town's involvement in the Confederate war effort during the Civil War and the familial and physical proximity to the First Presbyterian Church. The religious and cultural ideals imparted to Wilson during his upbringing manifested during the time he spent at the Paris Peace Conference in two major ways: a) he insisted on making decisions at the Paris Peace Conference alone, citing a strict observance of the powers granted to him by the American Constitution, and b) he prioritized instituting the League of Nations. Both elements of Wilson's performance at the Paris Peace Conference negatively impacted his ability to successfully implement his vision of "peace without victory."