

# Edith Bolling Wilson

A First Lady's Birthplace Museum

## NEW BEGINNINGS

*The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum Newsletter*




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### Looking Forward, Looking Back

There is no doubt that the period of the past few years has been a difficult one. Like previous pandemics, the COVID outbreak was more than just a healthcare disaster. Rather, it impacted us all, economically and, no doubt, psychologically as well. But history shows that we Americans always rise above our circumstances. We persevere – as anyone who knows the story of Edith Bolling Wilson’s rise from her life as a young schoolgirl here in Wytheville to the role of First Lady of the United States can easily attest. And so, after months of challenges, the Museum is moving *forward*. With new staff in place and the return of visitors in significant numbers, we have now entered a period of growth and revitalization, dominated by innovative new exhibits and programming. As always, we thank our friends for their ongoing support, helping to educate and promote our mission to the public at large.

## New Team, New Energy

Since last fall, the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum has hired two individuals that come to the museum with strong academic backgrounds and an enthusiasm for education.

### Steven Dinero

Steven Dinero, the new Executive Director of the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum, previously served as Executive Director of the Carbon County Museum in Rawlins, Wyoming. His accomplishments while there included directing new avenues of education, access, and outreach to the community at large. He facilitated the creation of numerous initiatives to professionalize the institution, and developed several exhibits and programs with local, national, and international interest. He also ushered the museum through the challenges of remaining open throughout all but two months of the COVID pandemic.

Prior to his appointment at the CCM, he served for over 20 years as a professor at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. While there, he created and taught several courses, acquired a number of prestigious grants, and authored numerous publications. Raised in Buffalo, New York, Dinero is a graduate of the State University of New York at Albany. He holds a Master's degree from Brandeis University and a Ph.D. from Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey.

From his very first visit, Steven says, he was “beyond impressed” by the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum. “Standing out on the street you would never know what exists inside. The place is chock-full of incredible history about an incredible woman. I was simply blown away...I am so honored to be working with you all in this historic environment.”



Steven Dinero  
Executive Director  
stevendinero@edithbollingwilson.org



Adam Manuel  
Administrative Assistant  
adammanuel@edithbollingwilson.org

## New Team, New Energy (cont.)

### Adam Manuel

Adam Manuel is the museum's new Administrative Assistant, docent, and computer guru. Before coming to the museum, he worked for Wythe County Public Schools as an Evening Alternative Education Teacher. He also worked at Radford University as a classroom and office assistant. He recently earned his Ph.D. in history from Liberty University, where he focused on European and World History.

A lifetime local of Wytheville, Adam first learned of Edith Bolling Wilson in 2008, the year the museum opened. Since then, he has conducted research about Edith's life throughout his undergraduate and graduate studies.

Adam is excited to see where the "Edith Team" can take the **Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum** moving forward.

## Untold Power Review

***Untold Power: The Fascinating Rise and Complex Legacy of First Lady Edith Wilson*** is the newest in a long line of biographical works on Edith Bolling Wilson. The author, Rebecca Boggs Roberts, delves into the life of a woman who grew up in the post-Civil War south, and chronicles her rise to become one of the Washington elite. Following the unexpected death of her first husband, Norman Galt, Edith begins a carefree life as a woman of means. After a chance meeting with the president, Edith starts one of the most controversial love stories in United States history.

Roberts does not shy away from the more controversial subject-matter in relation to Mrs. Wilson's role during the President's convalescence. Mrs. Wilson described her role as one of "stewardship," where she only presented what was most important to President Wilson. However, Roberts claims that Mrs. Wilson is not giving herself credit for the role she played. She was not elected to the position, and yet a fateful situation gave her a level of power never seen or wielded by a woman of the early 20th century.

## Book Bonanza

**Untold Power** is not the only recent publication that discusses the life of Edith Bolling Wilson. In fact, since 2022 there have been three more books published on the topic.

***Edith Bolling Wilson Revealed: What You Should Know***, written by Sommerville Wickham was released at the end of 2022. Wickham uses never-before-seen photographs and documents to shed light on Edith in a new way. Wickham argues that Mrs. Wilson was far more invested in the suffragist and civil rights movements than previously believed. The images included in this book are truly remarkable, showing a Mrs. Wilson that was social and active in many key movements of the early 20th century.



## Book Bonanza (cont.)



*Virginia's Presidents: A History & Guide*, written by Heather S. Cole is a truly remarkable book. The inspiration of the book came from Cole's desire to create an informative and useful guide for individuals interested in visiting the birthplace home of the eight Virginia Presidents. The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace was fortunate enough to be featured in the book, considering Mrs. Wilson played a major role in the final years of President Wilson's term.

In *Ladies, First Common Threads*, Debra Scala Giokas discusses the needlework of the First Ladies in this unique and highly specific book. Additionally, the book doubles as a guide to where one can go to see the needlework of these First Ladies. The book includes a picture of a fringed napkin that Mrs. Wilson would give to family members as a gift. The item is located here, at the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum. The book then gives readers information on how to visit the museum.

To purchase these and other books, visit <https://ebwbf.square.site/>. All sales benefit the museum's educational programs.

## Power & Fashion

The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum held a fashion show and lecture May 2023 at the Bolling Wilson Hotel.

Ponnie Shawver of **Ponnie's Boutique & Gifts** and the lovely models kicked off the event by demonstrating many fashionable outfits from Ponnie's Spring/Summer Collection. The event was followed by a presentation by Rebecca Boggs Roberts who gave an informative talk about the life of Edith Bolling Wilson, and why she deserved such a worthy biography. The event emphasized that, like Edith, a woman can be powerful and elegant at the same time.



Pictured L to R: Farron Smith, Rebecca Roberts, Betsy Ely, Steven Dinero, Dolores Pfeuffer-Scherer

## Power & Fashion (cont.)

Special thanks to the **Bolling Wilson Hotel**, **Ponnie's Boutique & Gifts**, **Wythe-Grayson Regional Library**, "Mrs. Wilson" portrayed by Betsy Ely, the models-Patricia Austin, Kay Dunkley, Julie Kause, Lisa Moore, Patti Pizinger, Meredith Jones Walters, Peyton Whaley, our speaker Rebecca Roberts, and everyone who attended the Power and Fashion event for making it such a resounding success.

We are also pleased to announce that the Museum has seen a significant increase in visitors as people have become more familiar with **Untold Power**. It is because of Rebecca's wonderful writing and excellent research that Edith Bolling Wilson is finally getting the recognition that she deserves. For this, the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum is grateful.



Pictured with Ponnie Shawver is model  
Meredith Jones Walters

## Visitor Comments

The Museum values its visitors! We are so fortunate to have many great visitors each month, many of whom leave comments on our social media or in our local newspapers.

- "I was blown away with the quality of the museum and was so pleased that a town would take it upon themselves to showcase a local citizen." --Mark Levin
- "The museum hosts were wonderful to teach my elementary-age child a little bit of history...[it was ideal] for the short time we had." --jaclynh609
- "For a free tour, you get a lot out of it! It starts off with a brief video to Edith and her life in Wytheville. You're surrounded by donated artifacts from the remaining family and the community. The hostess was knowledgeable and the walk through Edith's childhood home was fascinating!" --ItzLowkey
- "This is a must see stop! This is a charming, fascinating and highly informative little museum tucked on Main Street in downtown Wytheville." --NewBernPuppets
- "...charming site....knowledgeable staff...." --Sandra P

## In the news...

Over the years, the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum has gained significant media attention. Here are just two recent examples of how the museum has been making the headlines.

- In August 2022, *Virginia Living Magazine* featured an article, "A Weekend in Wytheville." Freelance Appalachian writer, Mark Lynn Ferguson, gives a glimpse into the life of Edith Bolling Wilson and how the museum named to honor this First Lady has become a major tourist attraction in Wytheville and the surrounding area of Southwest Virginia. To read more, connect below.
- **WDBJ7 Here@Home** interviewed Farron Smith, Founder of the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Foundation, and Ponnie Shawver, owner of **Ponnie's Boutique & Gifts** for the Museum's Power & Fashion Event held at the Bolling Wilson Hotel. Here@Home is a television program that highlights important events in Southwest Virginia. To see the media clip, connect below.



Virginia Living Article



WDBJ7 Here@Home

## Outreach Initiatives

The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum is proud of its outreach and educational programs. Our Living History program has reached thousands of people all over the United States and internationally. Betsy Ely, who portrays Edith Bolling Wilson, has presented in front of children and adults, and they all are equally impressed by the way Betsy embodies the personality of the First Lady. In fact, Betsy Ely's portrayal of First Lady Mrs. Wilson is the Museum's most requested programs..

As we quickly move toward the Fall season, we look back upon the many successful presentations recently held by the museum.

Last year, as the world began to come out of the pandemic, the museum celebrated "Dinner Wythe Edith" the 150th birthday of Edith Bolling Wilson at the **Bolling Wilson Hotel**. It was wonderful to see Cary Fuller and Elizabeth "Betty" Evans and hear their stories as they reminisced about their memories of their great-aunt Edith.



Betsy Ely shown with Cary Fuller and Elizabeth "Betty" Evans



## Outreach Initiatives (cont.)

This year saw the museum begin a resurgence of our outreach program to local schools. **Spiller Elementary School's** fourth grade students visited the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum in May. The large group of students were divided into three groups to tour the Museum, the Bolling Home, and the Bolling Wilson Hotel where volunteers Joyce Covey and Alice Thompson presented a program using the educational book, "***How the Sheep Helped Win the War.***"

In June, Wythe County Treasurer, Lori Guynn, and Town of Wytheville Treasurer, Michael Stephens, included the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum in the **Treasurers' Association of Virginia's** Annual Conference held in Wytheville. The Conference drew over 300 Treasurers and vendors from across Virginia.

On the first day of the Conference, "Edith" greeted the group and charmed the attendees with her own Treasurers' story. "Edith" told her childhood story of the Bolling children forming a "Buying Club" where Edith served as Treasurer. The important role of Treasurer was given to Edith as she had more financial influence than the other children with their banker, Grandmother Bolling. Edith's role as a child treasurer served her well later in life when she became an entrepreneur and First Lady. The group delighted in the story as it related to their roles as Treasurers in Virginia.



Pictured L to R: Steven Dinero, Betsy Ely, Lori Guynn

As part of the Conference's activities, members visited the museum and toured the Bolling Home where they learned more about the First Lady's life, "***From Wytheville to the White House.***"

After the release of the recently published book **Untold Power** by Rebecca Boggs Roberts, many book clubs have gained an interest in Mrs. Wilson. Recent book clubs visiting the museum include the **Galax Book Club, Pulaski Cheryl's Book Club, and the Roanoke Van Buren Gang Book Club.**

More book clubs are scheduled in the coming months.

In July, Betsy Ely, Farron Smith, and Joyce Covey attended **The Virginia War Memorial** which hosted the **2023 Teacher's Institute**, drawing educators from across Virginia. While there, they presented continuing education in-service training for middle and high school teachers on the topic of the Great War. This innovative educational program is designed to engage educators and their students' providing resources for use in the classroom for World War I.

# Wytheville Walk of Fame

Most people are familiar with the *Hollywood Walk of Fame*. Did you know that Wytheville has something similar? Located outside the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum, visitors to the museum and locals alike can have their very own engraved brick placed in front of the museum.

Recently, Steven Dinero, Adam Manuel, and Dana Jonas with help from Marlene Jonas installed six engraved bricks on the walk of fame. The bricks are a great way to recognize family members, favorite teachers, high school graduating classes, memorial to a loved one, and more.

If you would like to purchase an engraved brick, scan the QR code or fill out the included order form, and send payment information to the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum at:



## BUY-A-BRICK

I would like to support the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum by making a contribution to the entryway renovation project. I have enclosed a donation in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_ \$175 | 4x8 brick paver | 3 lines of text, up to 13 characters per line including spaces

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ \$500 | 8x8 brick paver | 5 lines of text, up to 13 characters per line including spaces

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ \$1000 | Corporate Sponsorship Brick

A museum representative will contact you for naming information and company logo.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your support of the Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum .

Please Send Payment to:  
Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum  
145 East Main Street  
Wytheville, VA 24382





# Bolling Family Association Reunion 2023



Pictured are the attending members of the Bolling Family Association Banquet.



Pictured is Piper Alexander portraying "Little Edith."

The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum was honored with a visit from the **Bolling Family Association [BFA]** in the Summer of 2023. Every two years, the BFA holds a reunion bringing their membership together for genealogy research and historical programming. This year the BFA chose Wytheville, the birthplace town of First Lady Edith Bolling Wilson.

The Bolling family came to Wytheville from across the United States. As part of the three-day event, Bolling Family members visited the museum and toured the Bolling Home where their renowned relative was born. During the visit Betsy Ely, portraying the role of "Edith," shared the First Lady's story, "*From Wytheville to the White House.*"

Another event was held at St. John's Episcopal Church. Linda Brogden discussed the history of St. John's, and of the Bollings' role in the early years of the church. "Little Edith," portrayed by Piper Alexander, reenacted the

charming story of Edith's confirmation at the age of nine. This was followed by a visit to the East End Cemetery Bolling plot where many members of the Bolling family are buried, including Edith's parents, Judge William and Sallie Bolling, and her sister Bertha. Local actress and singer Holly Montgomery made a surprise appearance as "Bertha," during which she related a fascinating anecdote concerning "her young life with Edith."

The following evening the Bollings enjoyed a banquet at the Bolling Wilson Hotel. The program included Museum Director, Steven Dinero, and guest speaker Dolores Pfeuffer-Scherer.

The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum is forever indebted to the Bolling Family Association and their breadth of knowledge and generous support of the mission of the Museum. To the BFA, thank you for choosing Wytheville, and we eagerly look forward to your next visit.

# Upcoming Event

Save the Date!

**Sunday, October 15, 2023**



A celebration of the **151<sup>st</sup>** anniversary of  
Edith Bolling Wilson's Birthday &  
the **15<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of the official opening of the  
Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum!

Celebration highlights will include the film debut:

***The Bolling Wilson Hotel: History, Heritage, Hospitality***

Dedicated in Memory of Mrs. Ruth Anne Chitwood

Produced and Directed by Documentary Filmmaker Chris Conte

Millwald Theater, 205 W. Main Street, Wytheville

Wine & Cheese Reception to follow at the Hotel

Details Coming Soon @

<https://www.facebook.com/EBWBFoundation>

[info@edithbollingwilson.org](mailto:info@edithbollingwilson.org) ~ 276-223-3484

# Edith Bolling Wilson

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## Ways to Give



Donate by Mail:

Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Museum  
145 East Main Street,  
Wytheville, VA 24382



Donate Online: Scan the QR code below with a smartphone or tablet, or visit [edithbollingwilson.org/support](https://edithbollingwilson.org/support) to donate online.



Donate by Phone: Call us at (276) 223-3484.

Scan here to go  
directly to PayPal



## Acknowledgements

You will receive a thank you and acknowledgement letter from **The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace Foundation** for your tax records upon receipt of your contribution.

**Thank you for helping us keep history alive!**

*The Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace is a tax-exempt organization under Sections 501(c) 3 of the Internal Revenue Code. In accordance with Code requirements, please be advised that the tax-deductible amount of your contribution is limited to the amount of the gift less the value of any goods or services the Foundation provided in return. Gift deductibility should be determined with the assistance of the advisor of your choice.*



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