Ben Screws Gilmer was born March 5, 1905, in Savannah, Georgia, but moved to Montgomery, Alabama in his early years. He received a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from Auburn University in 1926, and was awarded an honorary doctor of science degree from Auburn in 1958.

Gilmer began his distinguished career in 1926 with Southern Bell Telephone Company as a line and station installer. Throughout the years, he climbed the ranks from field survey engineer to rate engineer to assistant vice-president. In 1952, Gilmer left Southern Bell to become vice-president and general manager of Northwestern Bell in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A year later he was named vice-president of the California operations of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company in San Francisco, where he remained until March 1956, when he was named vice-president of operations for Southern Bell Telephone in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1957, Gilmer was promoted to the office of president of Southern Bell Telephone, and in 1965 was named executive vice-president of American Telephone and Telegraph Company in New York. On February 1, 1967, he received his final appointment as president of AT&T. He served in that capacity until his retirement on March 31, 1970.

As president of Southern Bell, Gilmer provided a positive influence on the operations and growth of the telecommunications industry in Alabama. As president of AT&T, he gave direction to the growth and modernization of the industry in the U.S. Gilmer's leadership abilities benefited the Bell Telephone Companies, the research and development efforts of Bell Laboratories, and the manufacturing operations of Western Electric.

Gilmer is a member of the Alabama Business Hall of Fame located at The University of Alabama, and a member of the Alabama Academy of Honor. He has received numerous other awards and honors, including the Distinguished Business Management Award from the School of Business Administration at Emory University; the Economic Education Citation Chair of Private Enterprise at Georgia State University; and the Outstanding Service Award from the Armed Forces Communications Association. For his humanitarian efforts, Gilmer has been awarded the Brotherhood Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Medallion from the New York Southern Society.

In 1976, Auburn University established the Ben S. Gilmer Award for Engineering Excellence, to provide honor and recognition to graduates who distinguish themselves in engineering. His alma mater also honored Gilmer with the Distinguished Auburn Engineering Award in 1969.

Ben Screws Gilmer has represented his profession well and graciously served the public throughout his many years in the telecommunications industry.