

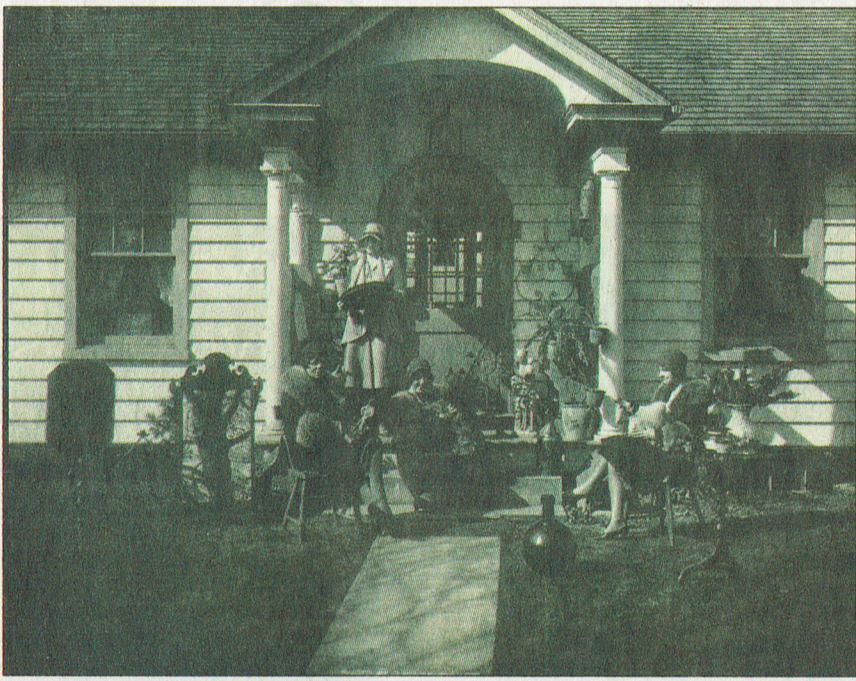


PHOTO PROVIDED

The Junior League at a meeting at Wyno Farm.

# Louise Franchot Munson: Known for her good deeds and great parties

Louise Franchot Munson, wife of Edgar F. Munson, was the most flamboyant of the three generations of Munson women profiled in this series. See the September 13th column for the stories of Lucy (Curtis) Munson, wife of Edgar Munson, and Josephine (White) Munson and Minnie (Tuller) Munson, wives of Cyrus Larue Munson.

Louise was known for her dedication to charity work, her love of art and decoration, and the extravagant parties she hosted. She was the president and/or founder of multiple Wil-

## Lycoming County Women



by MARY SIEMINSKI JANET HURLBERT

liamsport charitable and civic organizations. Her sense of style is evident in her elaborate redecoration of her Muncy home and in her redecoration of Pennsylvania Governor Earle's residence in Harrisburg. Her homes in Williamsport, Muncy, and Eagles Mere are still landmarks

in our area today. And the parties she hosted at these homes were legendary, in one case even featuring an ice ballet company brought in from New York City. In addition to her social circles in Williamsport, Muncy, and Eagles Mere,

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she had wide circles of friends in Philadelphia and New York.

Louise was born in Olean, New York, on December 2, 1882. She was the eldest child of Nicholas and Anna (Wood) Franchot. Her father, a wealthy businessman, was one of the nation's leading oil producers and a prominent figure in state politics. Louise was educated by private tutors, in the Olean public schools, and at St. Timothy's, a private girls' school in Maryland.

In 1907, Louise married Edgar F. Munson (1881-1930) of Williamsport. Edgar was the oldest son of Cyrus Larue and Josephine (White) Munson. Like his father, Edgar was a Yale-educated lawyer practicing in Williamsport. In addition, he was president of the E. Keeler Company and vice-president of the Williamsport Wire Rope Company and the Williamsport Savings Institution. Edgar served as a Lieutenant Colonel during World War I and was the Judge Advocate of the United States Army. Louise and Edgar had three children: George (1908-1988), Nicholas (1911-1999), and Anne Louise (1914-1963).

### Activities in the community

Louise consistently took a leadership role in Williamsport charities and clubs. During World War I, she was president of the newly formed Lycoming County Red Cross, in which she and her husband remained active for many years. She served on the board of the Home for the Friendless, the Williamsport Training Home for Girls, and the 1913 campaign to renovate the first YWCA

building at the corner of East Third and Mulberry Streets, which had been the Crawford Hotel. She was president of the Community Chest, the forerunner of the United Way.

In 1926, Louise was one of the founders of the Junior Charity Guild, a forerunner of the Junior League. From 1927 to 1929 she was the second president of the newly founded Women's Club.

### The three Munson homes

Louise and Edgar had three homes: 830 First Avenue in Williamsport; Wyno Farms, now the Bush House, in Muncy; and a cottage in Eagles Mere. Their 9000 square foot yellow stucco home on the corner of First and Rural Avenues is now the Chateau Apartments. Built in 1907, it was converted to apartments in 1931. The Lycoming County Historical Society has several photos of the ornate interior of the house.

In 1925, the Munsons purchased an estate in Muncy that dated back to 1847. Louise did extension renovations. She added marble floors and hand-carved mahogany pillars and incorporated Marie Antoinette's boudoir and a desk from one of British Admiral Horatio Nelson's ships. The home is now an event venue, used for weddings and other celebrations.

The cottage in Eagles

Mere had been in the Munson family since it was built in 1886. According to Barbara and Bush James, in Mere Reflections, a Unique Journey through Eagles Mere (1988), Louise was the acknowledged champion of extravagant house parties in Eagles Mere. In 1926, she "was determined to host a winter Christmas party in Eagles Mere. She paid to have the toboggan slide built and then hired a complete ice ballet company from New York City to perform for her guests."

### Later years

Edgar Munson died on October 4, 1930, at Wyno Farm, after a short illness. He was 49 and their children were in their teens and twenties. Louise continued to live in Muncy, where she had an antique store.

After Edgar's death, Louise had a successful interior decoration business, with clients in

Muncy, on the Philadelphia Main Line, and in New York City. One of her important commissions during this period was the complete refurnishing and redecoration of the executive mansion in Harrisburg, during Governor Earle's administration. She also traveled extensively. In 1937 she set off on a two-year world cruise, spending time in Honolulu, China, and Japan.

In 1940, Louise was sued for \$500,000 "for balm" by Charles Duncan, the estranged husband of her daughter, Anne. According to newspaper stories, Anne was unhappy in her marriage and her mother helped her to leave her husband and move back to Pennsylvania. Duncan did not win his case and the marriage ended in divorce.

In 1944, while she was living in Acapulco, Mexico, Louise married James B. Windham. They later divorced and she resumed using the name Munson. In the

late 1940s, she was living on the island of Capri in Italy, where she died on January 29, 1949, at the age of 67. According to several sources, she was suffering from terminal cancer and took her own life. She is buried on Capri.