

Bethinking of Old Orleans

12-5-84

C.W.Lattin • County Historian

Vol. VI

No. 49

JUDGE WILLIAM H. MUNSON
1886 - 1969

"Prove all things; hold fast
that which is good."

—St. Paul
1 Thessalonians 5:21

William H. Munson was born in Medina, N.Y. May 3, 1886, the son of Dr. Edward Munson and Lillian Smith Munson. He graduated from Cornell University Law School in the class of 1910. He then entered into the practice of law in the office of Attorney Thomas A. Kirby of Albion.

Judge Munson began his public career in 1911 by serving five years as Clerk of Surrogates Court in Orleans County. In 1916 he was elevated to public office when he was elected Orleans County District Attorney. Here he served for three terms or until 1925. At that point he did not seek re-election. However, in 1929 he ran again for District Attorney and continued in that position



Judge William H. Munson
(L. Monacelli photo copy)

through 1940 at which time he was elected Orleans County Judge and Surrogate. In this office he served only during the year 1941. In November of that year he was elected to the office of Justice of the Supreme Court for the Eighth Judicial District. At that time he defeated David A. Deamond of Buffalo. Deamond had been appointed by Governor Lehman in December 1940 to fill the vacancy caused by the unexpected death of Justice Bertram E. Harcourt of Medina, who served less than twelve months of his elective fourteen year term.

Judge Munson served in the Eighth Judicial District until the mandatory retirement age of seventy which was in 1956. Following this, he served one year as an official referee. After his retirement from the bench, he was in the national limelight when the Dominican Republic hired him and another lawyer from New York City, to investigate the strange disappearance of Dr. Jesus de Galindez in a New York subway. Dr. Galindez, a professor at Columbia University was a critic of Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo, Dominican dictator at the time.

For many years, Judge Munson maintained an office in Medina for his private practice of law. He also taught courses in jurisprudence at the University of Buffalo. Judge Munson was vice-president and treasurer of the Medina Iron & Brass Co. and acted as its directing head following the death of DeCourcy Cleveland, the president. Prior to his election to judicial posts he was active in Republican circles. He was a member of St. Johns Church and enjoyed participating in basketball and fishing. Judge Munson married Frances Ely of Ithaca in 1909. She died in 1941, and he later married Mrs. Ruth Etts. In 1952 Judge Munson moved from Medina to Buffalo. In 1959 he moved to Vernon, N.Y. where he died in 1968.

On November 28, 1984 a portrait of the judge was hung and dedicated in the Orleans County Court House. It was Judge Munson who started the tradition of hanging portraits of Supreme Court Justices in the Court Room of the Orleans County Court House. The others are: Sanford E. Church, Noah Davis, Sanford T. Church, Bertram Harcourt, and Henry A. Childs. Lyndon Billings, Chairman of the Orleans County Legislature presented a copy of the portrait to Mrs. William Beedon of Medina, a daughter of Judge Munson. During Judge Munson's career he was considered to be one of the hardest working judges on the court bench.

"The home of desire I leave behind.
Illusions forever avoid.
The open door of return and being
I close forever.
Yearning for regions of peace,
The holy land of choice,
Released from the path of return,
So wanders the Wise one forth.

— Richard Wagner