

Clara Cynthia Munson

By Unknown

This portrait of Clara Cynthia Munson was probably taken between 1906 and 1913. Munson was the first woman in Oregon elected to and to serve the position of mayor. Alice Burns was elected to Florence city hall in 1895, along with five other women, but the election was declared invalid and she never served.

Clara Munson was born in Oysterville, Washington, on June 15, 1861. Munson's father served as lighthouse keeper first at Fort Canby and later at the Point Adams lighthouse. Munson noted in a 1913 interview that she spent most of her youth in a lighthouse. "My father was thrown very much into the society of his own family," she said, "and so discussed political questions with us when the ordinary man would go down to the corner grocery and sit on a cracker barrel and discuss politics with his cronies."

Munson became a schoolteacher after graduating from St. Helens Hall, a Portland boarding school, in 1880. Around 1900 she moved to Warrenton, where she became school clerk, and, for a time, assistant postmaster. She was nominated for mayor in 1913. She noted that "a good many of the men who held old fashioned views about a woman's sphere being in the home, and who believed that a woman should be seen and not heard didn't like to see a woman running for mayor. Finally a Mr. Deidrich said that rather than have a woman for mayor he would run himself."

On December 18, 1913, the residents of Warrenton voted thirty-eight in favor of Munson, twenty-two in favor of Deidrich, making Munson the first woman mayor in Oregon. Interestingly, she stated soon after her election that she was "not very much in favor of woman suffrage," but since women had gained the vote the previous year, it was their responsibility to "take an active interest in political affairs and show they are able to make good use of a ballot."

Munson vowed that she would provide Warrenton "an economical and businesslike administration as mayor." One of her first actions was to eliminate the positions of city attorney and chief of police. She put the money towards city improvements, particularly the repair and construction of sidewalks. After her term was up, she went back to serve as director of the Warrenton school district, a position she held for a total of thirty-five years.

Munson died on October 19, 1938. In her eulogy, the *Astorian-Budget* wrote that Munson was "a public-spirited citizen of Clatsop county, serving her community in many ways, in a life bound closely to the early history of a young district."

Further Reading: Lockley, Fred. "Municipal Economy Aim of Warrenton's Woman Mayor." *Oregon Journal* (May 25, 1913).

"Oregon's First Woman Mayor." *Cumtux* 7:3 (1987): 20-21.

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