

1891 - 1996

Audrey Munson, was born in Mexico, New York in 1891 to Edger and Catherine Mahaney Munson. She attended the local Mexico Academy before leaving in 1906 with her Mother for New York City.

Munson was discovered by chance in New York City by a professional photographer who passed her on the street. She soon became the most famous artists' model, posing for hundreds of works that still adorn public buildings and museums in New York City and around the country.

In 1915 she was selected to be the primary model for sculptures and murals for the Panama Pacific Exposition in California.

Audrey not only was a model for sculptures and statues but was the model for two U.S. Minted Coins, the Mercury Dime and a Half-Dollar.

She starred, nude, of course, in four silent films. She was the first female to appear nude in a film, which proved to be the beginning and the end of her career. The films, entitled, "Inspiration" "Purity," "Girl O'Dreams," and "Heedless Moth," caused picket lines attempting to block entry to theaters that dared to screen them. Ministers throughout the country objected to her appearance in these films which added to her notoriety.

Headlines announcing, "Syracuse Model wanted in N.Y.C. Tragedy," contributed to her downfall as an actress. The 1919 murder of a doctor's wife in N.Y.C. by the woman's husband scandalized Munson as she and her Mother had lived at the seaside home of this doctor. Audrey was not involved and the doctor was arrested but this unfortunate publicity put an end to her film career.

In 1922 Audrey and her Mother returned to the Mexico - New Haven area due to her tarnished image and ruined career. She was broke, tired, and depressed. She attempted suicide in 1926 but was saved by the quick thinking neighbors.

In 1931, she was committed to the Ogdensburg Psychiatric Institution because it was believed she had lost her mind after her career ended.

She lived there in obscurity for more than 60 years until she died in 1996 at the age of 105.

She was buried with her father and stepmother in the New Haven Rural Cemetery on Route 104.

The book, "American Venus, The Extraordinary Life of Audrey Munson, Model and Muse," was written by Diane Rozas and Anita Goettehher, published in December, 1999, telling the chronicle of her unusual life.

Written by Nancy Searles, New Haven Historian, February, 2000