Charles Monson

Clan William

The Wild Ride

by Lori Hahn

William Munson > William Munson II > William Munson > William Munson Jr > Charles Monson > **Charles Monson Jr m (1) Sara Cowen** (2) Rae Adae Battersby

The subject of our story was the son of prominent and very wealthy dry goods store owner Charles Monson. The senior Monson operated The Charles Monson Co., one of the largest dry goods store operators in the New England area. His children grew up in the lap of luxury. Young Charles Monson, Jr. attended Yale University and belonged to Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. In 1904 he was made the Secretary of The Charles Monson Company.



One day in 1909, Charles Jr. got a call from his best friend, Townsend Miller, who at the time resided in the Hotel Patterson in New York City. Miller recounted that not too long previously, he met the most amazing woman by the name of Sara Campbellina Cowen, of Baltimore. Sara's father was the late John Kissig Cowen, former president of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad. The Cowen family was extremely wealthy, and Sara was left with a very large trust fund.

All's fair in love and war

Monson's friend Miller told Monson he had won the fair lady's heart and wanted Monson to meet his love. Monson did meet Sara and over the next two months met Sara over and over, without Miller. One day, Miller called him and said, "Look here, Charley, I'm desperately in love with Sara and want to marry her, but my mother says I am too young. What would you advise?"

Monson told Miller he agreed with Miller's mother and believed Sara would not suit Miller as a marital prospect.

Days later, on 28 Apr 1910, Monson and Sara eloped into the "Little Church Around the Corner" and were married. Miller was not present.

The couple were both popular in the circles of the young people of society who liked the nightlife. It was probably during this time Sara experimented with drugs. The couple moved to Tacoma, Washington, and lived there when Charles Monson, Sr. died about a year later in New Haven on 30 Apr 1910. The couple returned to the New York City/New Haven area for the funeral, but returned to Seattle afterwards. By then, the marriage had devolved to such a state, she told friends in Dec 1910 she planned to divorce. She began commuting back and forth from New York to Seattle because during the divorce process she could not leave the area for more than 10 days at a time. She accused her husband of chronic drunkeness and abandonment. Charles admitted to the judge the allegations were true via letter, and the divorce was granted.


Automobile Wreck Made Her Happy Ever After

Mrs Charles Monson, Jr., formerly Miss Sarah C. Cowen, whose engagement was the result of an automobile crash, in which she ran into Monson's motor.

An automobile romance culminating happily in the little church around the corner New York, yesterday, when Miss Sarah Cambellina Cowen of Baltimore, daughter of the late John J. Cowen, president of the Baltimore & Ohio railroad, became the bride of Charles Monson, Jr., the son of a retired capitalist of New Haven. It was an covement, too, for Miss Cowen told her relatives in Baltimore that she was coming up to New York to visit some friends, while Mr. Monson casually informed his family that he was dropping down to town on a little business. Mrs. Monson is a tall distinguished-looking girl, about 23 years of age. She made her relust in Baltimore society in the season of 1906, and has been a pronounced favorite, especially with the athletic set. It was twice reported that she was engaged to a foreign nobleman, but she always denied these attachments.

Ill prepared for marriage, happiness was short-lived and Charles and his bride moved quickly to divorce.

Charles moves on

Charles Monson Jr married divorcee Rae Battersby Adae on 01 Oct 1912. Rae's father A.H. Battersby was Secretary of the Brighton Beach Racing Association and a horseman who lived at 12 Shore Road in Brookly district 31, Bay Ridge. She had previously been married to Charles Flamen Adae, ten years her senior. Rae went to Reno to secure her divorce on 22 Sep 1912. The two lived a fairly quiet life, with

Charles dying in 1956 and Rae in 1974. Sara, Monson's first wife, did not live a quiet life following her divorce from Monson.

Sara Spirals

Sara Cowen's life went on a heady downward spiral unmatched by most heiress standards. (cont. on next page) Over the next 10 years, Sara inherited quite a sum of money. From 1911-1921, she spent an amazing amount of money on her lavish lifestyle. Reportedly, she was left over $100,000 in trust at the death of her father. Her mother didn't have the best of luck with money either and was forced to declare bankruptcy before her death in 1912. Some reports at the time claimed Sara burned through $2.5 million, but I just didn't find any evidence of this kind of money. She also had developed a severe drug problem—opiates, which was then the drug of choice for the upper class.

Sara lived the next 10 years in the Hotel de France in New York City, despite the fact she had inherited the family mansion in Baltimore.

The pull of opiates was strong, and though she tried over and over to be free of her addiction, she was never successful and returned to drugs.

Last desperate attempt

She gave one last valiant last try in May of 1921, when Sara decided to take up nursing as a profession. She entered the New York Post Graduate and Medical Hospital, allied with Bellevue hospital, as a student nurse. It was reported she hoped to kill her desire for drugs by throwing herself into the 12-hour shifts required of nursing. For some unkown reason, Sara left the Hotel de France in late July 1921 and checked in at the Hotel Maryland on W 49th Street in the Tenderloin of Manhattan with a man who was identified as her chaffeur. They registered as Mr & Mrs S. Cowen. Reports say the couple left the hotel shortly after checking in. Sara returned at 5 am Saturday morning, 31 Jul 21. Her companion returned two hours later to find Sara unresponsive on the floor.


WILL BE DEBUTANTE THIS SEASON

MISS SARA CAMPBELLINA COWEN

Released to death

A physician, Dr. J T Carriva, who resided in the hotel, entered the room and found Sara dead. He reported that on the table near her, were two glasses containing a brownish fluid and the other a white liquid. A package of white powder was beside the glasses. Dr. Carriva believed these items to be drugs. He phoned the police and her body was sent to the New York City morgue, where it remained, unclaimed, until a nephew eventually claimed the body. The cause of death was morphine overdose.

The chaffeur had run out of the hotel after the physician arrived, but did make himself available to the police at a later date. He stated he was married and did not want to get involved in the mess in which he found himself.

"Her death recalled to these friends memories of big dinner and theatre parties she had given at prominent hotels, where lavishness was the watchword. Some of the guests at them remembered that there came a time when her popularity began to wane. She had lost money, they said, in Wall Street, at the races, and in purchasing drugs to appease a desire which rapidly became a craving. Her once-plentiful money rapidly dwindling, she began to pawn her jewels and costly clothes to pay for drugs.

There are those who say some of her friends were friends in name only, and that they could account for much of Miss Cowen's money. The last year and a half of her life was a constant battle to overcome the drug habit—a battle she waged in Brooklyn, where a prominent woman in Brooklyn aided her in her losing fight…

…Miss Cowen, the police believe, is one of many girls of prominent families who have become drug addicts and creatures of the underworld. Their downfall, the police assert, can in nearly every case be traced to the use of narcotics given them be girl friends or by men who were planning to rob them of their money.

At police headquarters, the criminal record of Miss Cowen was found yesterday. Her picture was among thosein Dr. Carleton Simon's Narcotics Division. Miss Cowen had first been arrested on Jan 22, 1918, on the charge of having narcotics in her possession, and was placed on probation. In Jan 1919, she was again arrested and this time was again arrested, and this time sent to Blackwell's Island Asylum (now Roosevelt's Island) to get relief from her addiction. She was released on 9 Nov 1919.

--Daily News, New York, New York 02 Aug 1921, Tue, pg 3

Sara had come a long way from her early debutante days when she was crowned "the Oriole City's most beautiful bud." Her society connections, for the most part, did not attend her funeral, although a loyal group of friends made up the meager 50 guests at the funeral in Baltimore. She was interred near her mother in Aiken, South Carolina. Sara was 33 at the time of her death.