

Astoria's Photographer – Fred Wilson

by Judy Wilson

If you live in Astoria or have ties to that city on Oregon's Columbia River, you likely have a photograph in your collection inscribed with the logo, "Wilson Studio, Astoria." Fred Wilson was my great uncle.

Fredrick Charles "Fred" Wilson was born August 30, 1888 in Astoria, Oregon, the son of John & Johanna (Mattsdotter Runtujärvi) Wilson, Finnish immigrants who settled in Astoria in 1881. [John Wilson was featured in the Winter 2011 Cumtux Magazine of The Clatsop County Historical Society.]

Fred lived with his brothers in the family home at 72 Columbia Avenue in Astoria. He was a very successful photographer who won various acclaims for his studio work. He was taken by cancer in 1943.

Fred enjoyed local community sports. As a young man he played baseball and football on local Astoria community teams. Later he was an avid golfer and member of the Astoria Golf and Country Club.



West Astoria Baseball Team, Fred Wilson, standing far right.

*The West Astoria Nine
circa 1910*



*Left, Fred Wilson circa 1905,
Uniontown Football Team*



Below: West Astoria Football team, 1906, Fred Wilson is seated, center holding the football.



Fred and his brothers loved music and played in local community bands.



Top Row, far left, brothers, Ed Wilson; far right, Fred Wilson
Seated, second from left, William Wilson with the coronet

Above Wilson Brothers, Ed & Fred, in Community band in 1907.

Below Community Marching Band including Dick, Fred & Ed Wilson, the year is unknown.





Fred at the piano.



Fred (left) and his brother, Ed Wilson (right) circa 1896.



Four Guys in a Row
Center: Ed & Fred Wilson

In 1909 Fred Wilson bought the Carter Photographic Studio in the Star Theatre Building. Mr. Wilson was formerly with A.A. Saari and has a wide experience in photographing. The studio is well equipped and he is prepared to do the highest class work. [Astoria Daily Budget, January 20, 1910]

In 1912 Fred was chronicled in an article from the “Centennial History of Oregon”, 1912, Vol. 4, “Fred C. Wilson, proprietor of a splendidly equipped photographic studio in Astoria, his native city and is one of the representative young businessmen of northwestern Oregon. At the usual age Fred C. Wilson entered the public schools, passing through consecutive grades until he put aside his textbooks to become an active factor in the business world. For some time he was assistant to A.A. Saari, a photographer, and eventually purchased the studio of H. S. Carter in January 1909. He is still proprietor of this establishment and has built up a gratifying business. The studio contains four rooms, well equipped for carrying on photography according to the latest processes. He had but little capital when he began business for himself but was soon accorded a liberal patronage because of the excellence of his work and has discharged all indebtedness on his studio and now has a profitable business. In his political views Mr. Wilson is a republican and keeps well informed on the questions of the day. His religious faith is that of the Lutheran church and his fraternal relations are with the Foresters. He also belongs to the Four-A Athletic club. He is interested in music and his personal talent in that direction finds expression in his membership with the Pacific Orchestra, with which he was connected for seven years when the demands of his business left him no time for active participation in musical circles. For a time he was a piano player of the orchestra and later had the snare drums. His musical ability and attractive social qualities have gained for him many friends and he is rapidly making for himself a most creditable position in business circles of his native city.”

In 1913, he married Astoria local, Agnes Karinen in Portland, Oregon. She was the daughter of Frederick Karinen and Emma Amanda (Johnson) Karinen. Agnes was born March 8, 1891. After Fred’s death in 1943 she married long-time friend, Alex Sarpola in 1944. Agnes died July 3, 1963. Fred and Agnes Wilson lived in a lovely home on Bond Street in Astoria. The house remains in that location today.



In 1915 Fred Wilson commissioned a house to be remodeled on Bond Street. – Astoria Daily Budget, Jan. 22, 1915 page 6: “Fred Wilson Builds Residence on 2nd & Bond: Fred Wilson, local photographer, has let a contract to John A. Niemi for the erection of a fine modern bungalow on Bond Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets. Work on same commenced early this week.”



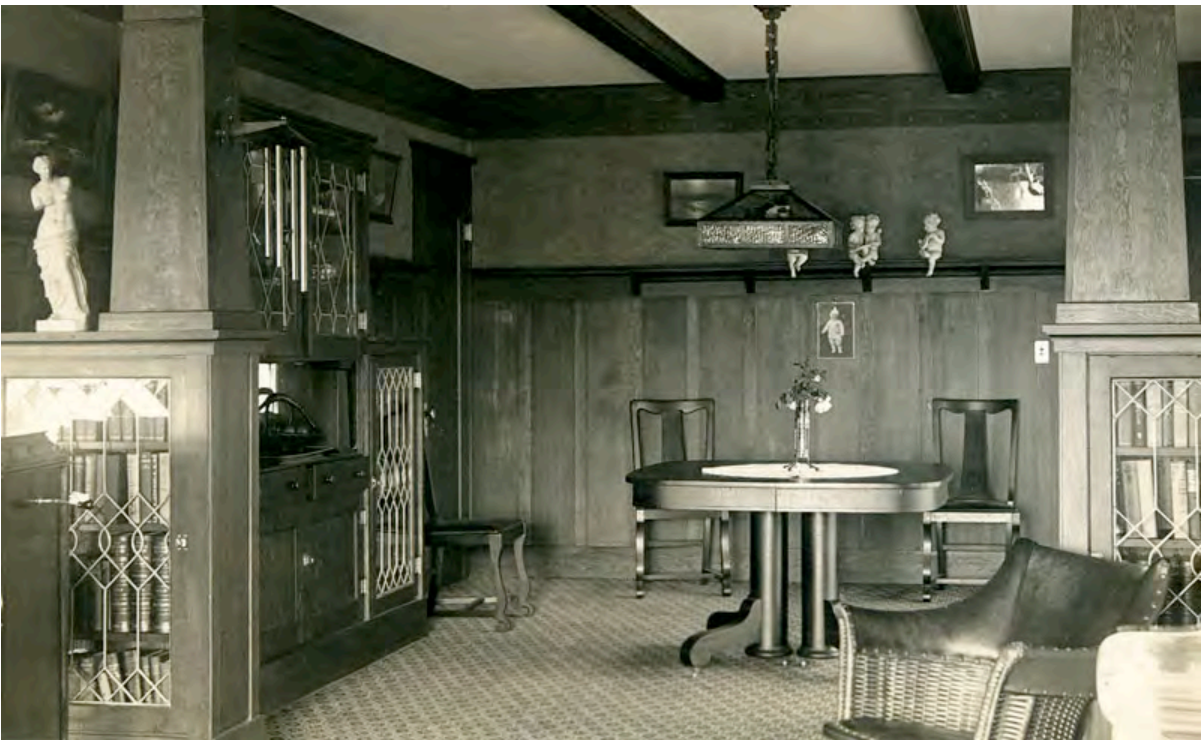
After remodeling in 1915.



Elegantly appointed interior views of Fred & Agnes Wilson's home on Bond Street.



[Note Fred Wilson's self portrait is on the wall upper right in this photo, and below is a photo of my dad, Howard Wilson, as a little lad in his white suit on the wall just above the vase on the table.]



Fred Wilson won many awards for his photography. Some of the notices for these awards were reported in local Astoria newspapers.

- 1923 - "Wilson, Fred C. - Active in Astoria, 1911-1923, operating as Wilson' Studio." The subtitle of the book is "A reference guide to photographers working in the 19th Century American West"; *Biographies of Western Photographers*, page 399.
- 1923 - Wins photo contest Victoria BC, *Astoria Budget*, Aug. 30, 1923.
- 1926 - Wins photo awards, *Astoria Budget*, Sept 25, 1926, p. 6.
- 1927 - "Amerikan Suomalaisia" p. 30, translated: "WILSON, FRED C., photographer, Astoria, Oregon. Born August 30, 1888, Astoria, Ore. Member Benevolent Protective Order of Elks. Attended school in Astoria, Ore., devoting himself to the profession of photography. He studied five years at Alfred Saari's photography studio in Astoria, Ore., establishing his own photography studio in 1909. The Photographers Ass'n of the Pacific Northwest recognized him as a member at its annual meeting in Vancouver, B.C., in about 1921. He received 1st Award and 1st-Honor Award in womens' portraiture. In Victoria, in 1922, at which time he was not judged, but he was praised for his display of numerous photos (100 at least) and, without splitting hairs, 97 were of high quality."
- 1930 - wins Seattle blue ribbons, *Morning Astorian*, Aug. 26, 1930.



Fred & Agnes Wilson

Fred Wilson died Feb. 10, 1943. His death certificate cited melanoma as the cause of death.



*Obituary: “**Photographer Wilson Dies:** Death came Wednesday evening following an extended illness to Fredrick Charles Wilson, 54, prominent local photographer who was widely known for his portraiture.*

A native of Astoria he was born here Aug. 30, 1888 and attended local schools. He began his photographic career at the early age of 16 and continued in this work until his recent illness. He was married in Portland to Agnes Karinen, an Astoria girl, in 1913 and returned to Astoria with his bride to make his home here.

He won 14 national portrait awards besides winning high recognition in other contests. Active in social and civic work, he was treasurer of the Astoria Gyro Club for many years and was also a member of the Temple lodge, AF and AM, Astoria Chamber of Commerce and the Astoria Golf and Country Club.

Surviving him are his widow, Agnes, a half-sister, Mrs. Sandra Päänttjä of California, and two brothers, Richard A. Wilson of California and J. Edward Wilson of Beaverton.

Funeral services will be held Friday at 1:30 at the Hughes Memorial chapel with Rev. R.A. Fedje pastor of the First Methodist church officiating. Committal service in Ocean View cemetery will be conducted by Temple lodge, AF and MM. All Masons are requested to meet at the Masonic temple Friday at 1 O'clock to open the lodge for the funeral service. Services are under the direction of the Hughes-Ransom Mortuary.”[Astoria Budget, Feb. 11, 1943, page 1]

The author, Judy Wilson, is a genealogist and family historian living in Beaverton, Oregon.