



**Lucy Wortham James**  
1880-1938

Founder of the  
Lucy Wortham James Memorial in  
The New York Community Trust  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

*In 1940, the will of Lucy Wortham James established the Lucy Wortham James Memorial in the New York Community Trust, to be administered for charitable purposes. Among the purposes she suggested were several in a favorite section of Missouri. To carry them out she recommended the establishment of the James Foundation in that state.*



*In New York in 1903.*

"She has the most beautiful mind I have known since the last time I saw her." This unusual tribute came from Sir William Osler, one of the great figures in the medical world at the turn of the century. The remarkable woman to whom he referred was Lucy Wortham Angus James, an American of considerable beauty and wit. Although she was one of the most delightful hostesses Washington, D.C., has known, she will be better remembered for her interests in music and medicine, ecology and recreation — fields far removed from the whirl (and often, to her, the tedium) of capital receptions.

Because of her own background, Lucy James felt very keenly the responsibility of her country's heritage. Her James ancestor was an iron master who settled in Maryland in the 1640s. In the late 1700s his descendant, Thomas James, set out on foot for the west, where he sold iron kettles and other housewares to the settlers of the Northwest Territory. One day he met a travelling band of Shawnee Indians and, noticing on their faces a red paint he suspected was made from hematite, one of the most important iron ores, he asked them to lead him to its source. After a long journey, they arrived at a beautiful

spring they called Maramec, near a swift river and a rich iron deposit in the Ozark foothills. He bought the forested tract from the government in 1826 and founded an iron works. It made his family prosperous by providing much of the iron used by the pioneers who opened up the midwest. During the California Gold Rush, James iron rolled west on the wheels of prospectors' wagons, and during the Civil War it sheathed Union gunboats patrolling the Mississippi.

A few miles from the ironworks, Thomas's son, William — known as "The Iron King of Missouri" — established the town of St. James, Missouri. There, in 1880, his granddaughter, Lucy Wortham James, was born. Lucy's childhood was spent in Dakota and Sioux Indian country, then in St. James and Kansas City and in El Paso, Texas. When Lucy was fourteen, her mother died of tuberculosis, and her great-uncle, Robert Graham Dun, asked her to come live with him in New York. Just as her grandfather had been a pioneer in industry, so her great-uncle was a pioneer in finance: He found-

ed what was to become the multiple service agency of Dun & Bradstreet, Inc.

He was also a cultivated man of the world who sent Lucy to the Spence School and introduced her to the arts. What inspired her most at that time was music. Hoping to become a concert pianist, she went to Vienna to study under the great teacher Theodor Leschetizky, who had taught Paderewski. But under the stress of the arduous hours of practice, she, too, contracted tuberculosis. When she recuperated, Leschetizky told her that her health would never permit a professional career. "Then I shall give it up completely," she said. She never played again.

Soon Lucy and her father visited Japan, where a Dun cousin, who had been Minister to Japan and had married a Japanese, was living. There she met Huntington Wilson, who was United States Chargé d'Affaires, and shortly afterwards, in 1904, they were married. It proved to be an unhappy marriage (after ten years they were divorced, and Lucy resumed her

maiden name), but Lucy's strong sense of duty made her determined to help her ambitious young husband in his diplomatic career. This she did masterfully; as the American diplomat, Colonel T. Bentley Mott, later wrote: "Mrs. Wilson accompanied her husband — one of the most beautiful and intelligent women our country ever produced." Lucy's charm captivated those whom the Chargé d'Affaires had to entertain, and it impressed diplomats and politicians who could be helpful. Such a man was William Howard Taft, later President but then United States Secretary of War, who introduced her to the Secretary of State, Elihu Root. She seized the opportunity to ask for a promotion for her husband. He got it. Thereafter, whenever Mr. Root met the couple, he smiled at Lucy and asked, "How's the firm?"

Outwardly, the life of "the firm" was a fascinating one. During the Russo-Japanese War, the Wilsons lived in Japan, where Lucy worked with the Japanese Red Cross and made many life-long friends. Among them were Yukio Ozaki, a founder of the anti-militarist Progressive Party of Japan; United States war correspondents Jack London, Richard Harding Davis and Willard Straight; and Captain (later General) John Pershing. There followed diplomatic travels to China, the Philippines, Turkey (immediately after the Young Turks' revolution), the Balkans (just before World War I), and the Andean countries of South America. When Philander Knox became Secretary of State, he appointed Mr. Wilson as Under Secretary and, disliking formal dinners, left much State Department entertaining to the Wilsons. Lucy's dinners became famous. Her Japanese cook provided superb meals, and Lucy proved to be one of the most gracious hostesses in the capital's history.

After her divorce in 1915, Mrs. James led a quieter, more intellectual life. She maintained a delightful New York apartment, spent many



*In Japan  
in 1903.*

springtimes in St. James, and summered in Newport in a secluded seaside house which she had largely designed herself. But she shunned ostentatious parties. Of one such, she said, "All the men could talk about was the stock market and their health." She preferred more stimulating groups — the Schola Cantorum, the Friends of Music, and the literary salon of Mrs. Frances Wolcott, which was a meeting place for the leading artists, actors, writers and musicians of the period. Her interests were surprisingly varied: She was a charter member of the Theatre Guild but also served on the National Eugenics Board; she was a critical student of poetry; she founded a model dairy farm; she was an influential member of the Board of Directors of Greenwich House and of Memorial Hospital in New York. Having inherited a part of the fortune of R. G. Dun, she was able to combine philanthropy with her other interests. In fact, when the firm later became Dun & Bradstreet, Inc., she was its largest single stockholder.

Believing that in the heartland of America lay the pioneer qualities that made this country and that must be preserved, she practiced her philanthropies in the Missouri counties around St. James. She left money to establish the James Memorial Library. She felt that children should learn early to love books, and she once remarked that she would be quite satisfied "if but one genius received his inspiration from his early reading in this library." Though she herself was childless, she adored children. She was most concerned with the building of character in the young and with the stimulation of their creativity. No one will ever know how many talented young musicians and writers she helped toward a higher education, for she gave so tactfully that even the students' neighbors did not know.

She was also ahead of her time in her gifts to science, becoming interested in the genetics of mental illness and in psychosomatic medicine

long before those fields became scientifically popular. Understanding the importance of basic research, she contributed the money for the building of the Johns Hopkins Woman's Clinic to emphasize research in gynecology, and she financed the first research budget and the first experimental animal quarters for the laboratories of Memorial Hospital in New York.

A prominent lawyer once said that Lucy James had a remarkably discriminating and astute legal mind. Another friend recalls that "Mrs. James was a wistful person and essentially sad, but she was one of the funniest people I've ever met, a superb mimic, a great conversationalist with a keen sense of the ridiculous." Of her magnetic personality, several acquaintances remember that "one was unaware of

*In Washington in 1913.*



others when she was in a room." Partly, this was due to her beauty. "Her beauty was in her coloring," a friend says. "She had huge brown eyes, very large and soft, dark brown hair and exquisite skin. She had a very formed mouth, as though painted with lipstick, which she never wore. Tall and slender, she could wear flowing robes and teagowns and look simply marvelous. Yet at heart she was very shy, modest, and retiring. She was a simple person, but with such beauty and intellect, you can't be simple."

Tragically, she was plagued most of her life by illness that was often painfully debilitating. Reflecting on her death at a relatively young age, a friend summarized, "Lucy James had too fine a mind for her bodily strength." Perhaps the most revealing indication of the inventiveness and imagination of her mind came in her own comments on her philanthropies. She said that she wanted them to be kept "flexible in response to the times . . . I do not want to make any rigid requests because circumstances may completely change the ideas which I hold at present." It was in order to achieve such flexibility that she established her Memorial in the New York Community Trust.



*The New York Community Trust,  
an aggregate of charitable funds,  
is the metropolitan area's community foundation.  
It serves charitable donors and builds an  
endowment for New York City.  
New York's major banks serve as trustees.  
Trustee for the Lucy Wortham James Memorial is  
the Bankers Trust Company.*