

# Jane Fifield Flynn

Historic Preservationist  
1924-2006

---

By Dory DeAngelo

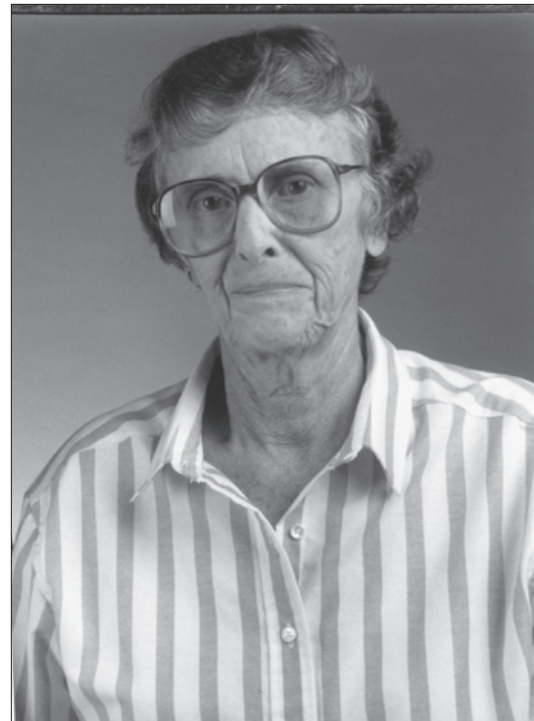
Jane Fifield Flynn dedicated over 35 years of her life working to preserve Kansas City's historical buildings. The 1973 demolition of the Emery Bird Thayer department store building, built in 1890 at 11<sup>th</sup> and Grand, so affected her that she became committed to save as many of the city's historic buildings as she could.

Jane Fifield was born in Kansas City on December 19, 1924, the daughter of Sumner Ernest Fifield and Jane Greiner Fifield. She attended Sunset Hill School and then went to Pine Manor College in Massachusetts. She later earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in elementary education from the University of Kansas City. Jane married Bob Flynn in 1950.

Jane's commitment to save Kansas City's historic architecture intensified when she joined The Jackson County Historical Society's board. In 1975 she was appointed administrator for Kansas City's new Landmarks Commission, dedicated to preserving the city's historic buildings. She served in this position for 12 years.

Jane couldn't save every historic building in Kansas City, but she tried. It was said that politicians in City Hall ran the other way when Jane Flynn showed up seeking their support to save a building. She once said, "I'm a street fighting preservationist. That is how I describe myself. I'd be willing to stand in front of the wrecking ball to stop the demolition of a historic building." Jane had a business card printed with "Troublemaker" next to her name. Mamie Hughes, executive director of Kansas City's Black Economic Union, gave credit to Jane for her efforts in making 18<sup>th</sup> & Vine and the Mutual Musician Foundation's building national landmarks. "Jane never wanted credit for doing that. I just can't say enough for her support," Hughes said in an article in *The Kansas City Star*.

After her job on the Landmarks Commission ended, Jane became president of The Historic Kansas City Foundation's board. She also served as chairman of the Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Jane helped to establish the historic John Wornall home at Wornall Road and 61<sup>st</sup> Terrace as a museum. She brought



national attention to the neglect of the neighborhood around President Truman's home in Independence, Missouri, and used her influence with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to designate Truman's home a national historic site.

The Flynns lived with their daughter Janie in the Crestwood neighborhood. Crestwood residents took pride in their gardens. Jane and Bob were avid gardeners, and Bob was the president of the Crestwood Garden Club for several years. Every year Crestwood residents took tours of each other gardens. "We're like one big family in Crestwood," Jane said in a *Kansas City Live* magazine interview. "All of the 157 Crestwood homeowners consider their neighbors an important benefit."

Jane was also a strong advocate for telling the stories of women who had contributed to the Kansas City area's history. In 1992 she helped to establish The Woman's History Collection at the Jackson County Historical Society.

Jane wrote two books: *Kansas City Style, A Social and Cultural History of Kansas City As Seen Through Its Lost Architecture* (with Dory DeAngelo), and *Kansas City Women of Independent Minds*, that told the stories of women who had contributed to Kansas City's history.

Jane was a monthly guest on KCUR's Walt Bodine radio show. She talked about the city's history and answered questions from 'call-ins'. In 2002 she served on the board of Friendship House, a home for women who were recovering from alcohol or drug addictions. She later served as co-chair of the capital campaign that raised \$2.9 million to build Catherine's Place next door to Friendship House. Catherine's Place is a safe place for the children of the residents of Friendship House. Jane was quoted as saying that she loved her work in historic preservation, because she was able to restore buildings, but she was grateful for her work for Friendship House because it gave her the opportunity to restore lives.

Jane died January 26, 2006, of a stroke. Bob Flynn died October 7, 2007.

## Sources

Burnes, Brian. "Tenacious Fighter for KC History Dies." *The Kansas City Star*, 27 January 2006.

DeAngelo, Dory. "Historic Buildings Have to Make Way for Progress." *Northeast World*, 4 February 1987, 1 & 4.

"Jane Fifield Flynn" (obituary). *The Kansas City Star*, 28 January 2006.

*Kansas City Live*. November 1989.

©2009

Photo: Courtesy of The Kansas City Star