

Nelle Nichols Peters

Architect

1884-1974

by Susan Jezak Ford

Nelle Nichols Peters designed nearly 1,000 buildings in Kansas City at a time when few female architects worked in our city. The buildings she created during her 60-year career included homes, office buildings, and many apartments and residence hotels.

Nelle Elizabeth Nichols was born on a prairie farm in North Dakota in 1884. As she was growing up, she loved to study mathematics and art. After graduating from college in Iowa in 1903, she decided to combine her talents for math and art to become an architect. She was hired as a draftslady by Eisentrout, Colby and Pottenger, a Sioux City, Iowa, architectural firm for \$3 a week and spent four years there drafting and studying architecture through correspondence courses. In 1909 the firm sent her to Kansas City, where she received very little work from the company.

Nelle Nichols opened her own office, and in 1911 married William H. Peters, a designer for the Kansas City Terminal Railroad. She began designing apartment buildings for Charles E. Phillips in 1913, and many of her commissions after that were for his company, the Phillips Building Company. She designed dozens of small and large complexes for the corporation, including many surrounding the Country Club Plaza.

The 1920s were the busiest years of Nelle Peters' career. At that time, she was not only one of the most active architects in the city, but one of the few female architects in independent practice. Large apartment complexes surrounding courtyards became her specialty and trademark during this time. Her designs from this decade also include the Ambassador Hotel at 3560 Broadway and the Luzier Cosmetic Company at 3216 Gillham.

The Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II halted nearly all construction in Kansas City. She retired in 1967, but Peters' career never recovered from the building decline that lasted through the 1940s. Although she had created so many noticeable structures, when she died in 1974 she was unrecognized for her work in Kansas City.



Sources

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