

Annie Ridenbaugh Bird

Company President/Philanthropist
1856-1937

by Janice Lee

For 30 years, Annie Rodenbaugh Bird enjoyed the conventionally genteel life of a prominent merchant's wife. The last 17 years of her life were far less traditional. She served as president of the city's largest commercial establishment, the Emery, Bird, Thayer & Co. She is believed to be the first Kansas City woman to hold such a position.

A native of St. Joseph, Missouri, Annie Bird moved to Kansas City with her new husband Joseph Taylor Bird in 1880. A year later, Bird became partner in the Bullene, Moore & Emery department store, one of the first and most prominent commercial establishments in a rapidly growing Kansas City. By 1890, the dry goods store had moved to an imposing structure at 11th and Grand.

When Joseph Bird died in 1918, Annie's life changed completely. She had been left a controlling interest in the business, had always followed its workings closely, and was soon regarded as a "vital force" by the company. In 1920, she was elected president of the thriving concern. She considered herself a trustee rather than a manager, and spent her workdays as a self-described "floorwalker," moving constantly throughout the store.

Annie Bird also continued her husband's philanthropic tradition by consistently contributing to a number of worthy causes in Kansas City. Most notably, she and daughter Josephine presented Mercy Hospital with a deed to property in the 1500 block of McGee Street in 1924. Proceeds from the sale of the property financed the construction of the Joseph T. Bird Nurses' Home and School of Child Nursing, dedicated in June 1927.

Annie Bird remained active in the business until 1937, when she died of pneumonia at age 80. The Emery, Bird, Thayer & Co., as it was renamed in 1894, remained open until 1968. The building that once housed a shopper's paradise was demolished in 1973.

Sources

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