



LEAVE A LEGACY®

Donor Stories

Long After her Death, St. Louis Woman Continues Caring for Sick Children

By Diane B. Ludwig

I work for a woman who is 132 years old. She is gone now. Yet, she is very much alive. She lives on in the smiles of the children who benefit from her legacy and in the hearts and minds of those who protect and nurture that legacy. She would surely reprimand me for writing about her because she loathed publicity and wanted to do her giving privately. I admire her and want to tell you about what she has done for the children of St. Louis.



Mary Ranken Jordan with some of the hospital's young patients.

Mary Ranken was born in Northern Ireland in June of 1869. She came to America as a teenager in 1885 to live with her uncles after the death of both of her parents. She married Clay Jordan, a prominent St. Louis merchant, in 1905.

By the late 1930's, Mary Ranken Jordan had become a strong community advocate and philanthropist. She and her husband had no children of their own. Mrs. Jordan had a real wish to help children, especially those with medical needs.

After many visits with prominent pediatricians of the day, she was advised that what children in St. Louis needed was a place to convalesce from the ravages of polio, osteomyelitis and bone tuberculosis. A quiet, cool, restful place in the country with good medical care was just what the doctors ordered.

Armed with that information, Mrs. Jordan researched the country to find the best models for children's services and then planned a state-of-the-art facility. She chose a gently rolling site with flowering shrubs and pine trees in the country west of Lindbergh Boulevard. With the counsel of the finest physicians and architects, she built the Ranken Jordan Home for Convalescent Crippled Children, far from the soot and heat and noise of the city. April 9, 1941 was a grand day when the home opened to its first children. Mrs. Jordan was there to personally welcome them.



Today, the Ranken Jordan facility brings state-of-the-art comfort and care to its patients.

With most of the children in plaster casts and no air conditioning, many summer nights were spent sleeping on the roofs of porches built especially for that purpose. Children came and were given the best possible care. As their bodies healed, they went on their way and others arrived to fill beds.

We look at photos of those early days and see a woman who created this wonderful home and stayed involved. She visited regularly to have tea and talk with the children. She knew their names and rejoiced when they returned to their families. She made a difference in their lives.

Today, 60 years later, Mary Ranken Jordan is still making a difference. Her dream of caring for children with medical needs remains strong. Upon her death in 1962, Mrs. Jordan left a sizable endowment to maintain her dream. This astute vision and careful financial planning have allowed the organization to survive.

The home, now referred to as the Ranken Jordan Pediatric Rehabilitation Center, still accepts new patients each week as others leave. Some say Mrs. Jordan still visits regularly, too. One thing has changed, though: there is no more sleeping on the roof; air conditioners took care of that. Vaccines and medical advancements did away with polio and bone tuberculosis. Now, caregivers at the home specialize in treating birth defects, head injuries, burns, pre-natal drug exposure, orthopedic disorders, developmental delays, failure to thrive, and a host of other health challenges

Our budget is not the same either. Back in 1941, the home's total expenses for its first year were just over \$15,100. Today, costs average \$8,200 per day. Yes, Medicaid and private insurance pay their parts and private fundraising helps. Without the endowment fund established by Mrs. Jordan and the fund's annual income to close the gap, the doors would close. Health care costs have escalated to rates beyond Mrs. Jordan's comprehension. Yet, her vision for the children lives on because she created the home and endowed it for the future. We do have a future because of her forward thinking.

LEAVE A LEGACY® wishes to thank the Ranken Jordan Pediatric Rehabilitation Center for sharing this story.