

## SUSAN McASHAN

Susan McAshan was a highly influential Houston leader. She supported causes ranging from family planning and civil rights to arts education and civic beautification. Her diverse contributions shared a common emphasis on enhancing human capability by increasing access to information, education, and beauty.

The daughter of cotton magnate Will Clayton, Mrs. McAshan was born in 1905 in Oklahoma City and moved to Houston with her family in 1916. She attended Smith College, graduating in 1928 and returning to Houston to marry Samuel Maurice McAshan, Jr.

Mrs. McAshan and her husband, as well as her mother Susan Clayton, were on the first board of directors of the Maternal Health Center (founded in 1936). This free medical clinic offered healthcare and birth control information to indigent women and prospective mothers. The center was loosely affiliated with the American Birth Control League, a precursor of Planned Parenthood. The Maternal Health Center was renamed the Planned Parenthood Center of Houston in the late 1940s. Today it is Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast. Mrs. McAshan's life-long support for family planning stemmed from her desire that all children be cared for and wanted.

In 1949, Mrs. McAshan was instrumental in bringing African American muralist John Biggers to Houston to found an art department at Texas State University (TSU; now Texas Southern University). The decision to develop an arts program at TSU was controversial at the time. Many leaders in Houston's African American community, which TSU served, thought that TSU students would be better served if they focused their educations on more practical professions. Mrs. McAshan, however, recognized the importance of providing access to the fine arts to all people.

Another of Mrs. McAshan's accomplishments in enhancing civic life was her work with the Houston Botanical Society, which campaigned to create an arboretum and nature center in Memorial Park. Mrs. McAshan was particularly interested in helping children learn about nature, and through the McAshan Charitable Trust, she and her husband funded the Aline McAshan Botanical Hall for Children in 1966, which is now part of the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center.

In her philanthropic work, Mrs. McAshan sought to do more than provide for material needs. She not only enhanced the health and well-being of women, children, and men but also made it possible for all Houstonians, regardless of their financial means, to access the beauty of nature and the arts. Mrs. McAshan died in 2001, but her legacy of service lives on in the Susan McAshan Summer Service Internships.