

Flournoy House

Built by slave labor in 1826, the Jones H. Flournoy House is one of the oldest homes in Independence. Originally located at the intersection of Kansas and Pleasant streets, four blocks east of its current location, the Flournoy House is constructed of sun-dried clay bricks, which were made from material unearthed during the excavation of the basement. Oak beams from local trees provided support for the four-room residence. There were two rooms upstairs, and two rooms below ground level, each having its own fireplace. To maintain privacy there was no connecting door between the upper two rooms. In order to go from one room to the other the Flournoys and their guests had to first go outside. The windows and doors were crafted in the eastern United States and installed after the home was built. Jones H. Flournoy, his wife Clara, and their young daughter moved to Independence from Virginia in 1826 along with Flournoy's brothers and several slaves. In 1829, Jackson County appointed Flournoy to oversee the road from Independence to Rock Creek, which served as part of the historic Santa Fe Trail. He eventually became the first postmaster of Independence.

By August 1831, when Mormon leaders led by Joseph Smith Jr., Sidney Rigdon, and Edward Partridge visited Independence in a missionary effort to convert the Native Americans, they met Jones Flournoy who was eager to sell his farm land, due to his other work responsibilities. Smith determined that the location would serve as a headquarters and gathering place or Zion for members of the new faith, at that time known as The Church of Christ (later to be known as the Latter Day Saints or Mormons). On August 3, 1831, Smith dedicated a site on Flournoy's property for the construction of a temple. Tradition holds that it was in this house that Bishop Partridge and Flournoy reached an agreement for the sale of sixty-four acres of land that became known as the "Temple Lot Property," for \$130. The deed was recorded on December 19, 1831. Friction developed between the Latter Day Saints (LDS) and the non-Mormon settlers of Jackson County. General Moses Wilson, owned the Flournoy House in 1832, and although he led the anti-Mormon movement, he invited Joseph Smith to dinner. Smith told the Wilson family his story of the founding of the church, outlined basic Mormon beliefs, and described what the LDS had endured. Thereafter they refused to fight against the Mormons.

Since the Flournoy House was not part of the Temple Lot property, it went through several owners over the years. Richard Fristoe, the first eastern judge of the Jackson County Court acquired the house in 1833. Fristoe never lived in the house, but rented it to Mrs. Fuller, who used the structure as a schoolhouse. This makes the Flournoy House one of the oldest surviving school buildings in the state. New owners enlarged the Flournoy House significantly during the 1840s and 1860s. The house was owned by John Slaughter, who served as the third mayor of Independence, and by John Reid, a hero of the Mexican War and member of the House of Representatives who was one of the individuals responsible for making Kansas City into the second largest railroad hub in the United States. Eventually the house became so large and elegant that people referred to it as the Pleasant Street Mansion. Well-known Santa Fe Trail merchant and trader William McGraw owned the house during the Civil War, when it played a prominent role in a



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battle that took place on August 11, 1862. As Confederate troops mounted an attack, Union soldiers took refuge behind the Flournoy House and in the basement. A few bullet holes can still be detected in the soft clay bricks.

In 1963, the First Christian Church razed the mansion to make way for a parking lot. William and Annette Curtis took the initiative to dismantle the original Flournoy structure, which had most recently served as the mansion's kitchen and fruit cellar, and reconstruct it in a location where it could be protected and preserved.

F. M. Smith Study

Built by the Stallcup Family in the early 1830s, this structure initially served as the slave cabin for a large Jackson County farm. The native Missouri limestone fireplace and yellow clay bricks are all original, and the furnishings inside are authentic. Dr. Frederick M. Smith was the third President of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, serving from 1915 until his death in 1946. Several items and books in the study reflect President Smith's hobbies, including woodworking and gardening. The large photo above the drafting table is of Smith's father, Joseph Smith III. The color of paint, fence surrounding the study, stone walkway, and wildflowers inside the fenced area have all been restored to appear as they did during President Smith's years here. In 1937, Dr. Smith purchased an eighteen-acre farm in eastern Independence, which included a farmhouse and this small cabin, which served as a calf stable. Smith moved from his house at 630 South Chrysler in Independence because as leader of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) Smith found solitude nearly impossible. Missionaries would arrive unannounced, sometimes in the middle of the night, expecting room and board. The Smiths never turned away a guest, but these visits disrupted his family life, and F. M. Smith determined his later years would be more peaceful. Following his purchase of the property in 1937, Smith invited his second daughter, Lois Larsen, and her family to move into the farmhouse with him. Smith's wife, Ruth, had died in a tragic car accident in 1926. As Lois's family increased in size and activity, Dr. Smith spent an increasing amount of time in the cabin, using it as a retreat for study, prayer, and reflection. Smith eventually moved into the cabin, but continued to eat with his daughter's family in the main farmhouse.

Dr. Frederick Madison Smith was a grandson of Joseph Smith Jr., and son of Joseph Smith III. Born in Plano, Illinois, in 1874, "F.M." earned his PhD from Clark University in social psychology and became a counselor to his father in the First Presidency of the RLDS Church in 1902. As President of the RLDS Church from 1915 to 1946, Smith's role as leader was initially controversial. He was an exceptionally intelligent man, with energetic vigor, who believed he had a divine calling to maximize the church's resources for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, ministering to those in need, and developing a community or Zion that would serve as an example for the world. Smith initiated a broad range of programs, which addressed issues such as the church authority, representation at



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church conferences, the manner of administering church ordinances, the role of women in the church, the administration of the church's finances, and standards defining the church's beliefs. Smith's clear vision of the mission for the church conflicted with the model other prominent church leaders envisioned. Labeling the course of Smith's authority as "supreme directional control," critics attempted to block Smith's proposals. Smith thought his opponents lacked his commitment and simply mirrored the values of the general culture and society of the time. This controversy revolved around balancing theocratic leadership with democracy for the church membership. While Smith was ultimately successful in winning support for his programs, the limitations imposed by the Great Depression, followed by World War II, prohibited the implementation of many of his ideas. Still, the legacy of F.M. Smith for the RLDS Church and the Independence community can be seen in many ways, including the construction of the Auditorium, and expansion of Graceland College and the Independence Regional Health Center Hospital.

While remaining a deeply spiritual man all his life, in his later years, F.M. Smith turned his emphasis from decisive leadership to individual faith. He promoted an appreciation for nature and one-on-one relationships. He came to believe that love and peace cannot be imposed through organizational structure, no matter how well designed. Rather, it must be an outward expression of inner love and peace, which comes from living simply and focusing on the love of God.



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