

# Katharine D. Kane, 78; Boston's first female deputy mayor

By Emma Stickgold | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    OCTOBER 15, 2013

Through her work leading the city's Office of Cultural Affairs, and as the leader of major commemorative celebrations, Katharine D. Kane added pizzazz to Boston and its neighborhoods.

The success she achieved garnering private donations to supplement public funding for arts programs made her Mayor Kevin H. White's choice to head up the US bicentennial celebrations in Boston in 1976, which took years of planning. She reprised that role in 1980 when Boston celebrated its 350th anniversary.

By then, she had achieved a milestone of her own when White appointed her deputy mayor in 1975. She was the first woman to hold the post in a city that nearly four decades later has yet to elect a woman to be mayor.

"She was a trendsetter," said Barney Frank, a former US representative who previously served in White's administration. The job she held then, he added, was the most important ever by a woman in city government.

Mrs. Kane, who later started a consulting firm, became a chaplain at Brigham and Women's Hospital, and led religion courses for the Beacon Hill Seminars, died of complications from lung cancer Sunday in her home in Boston. She was 78.



GLOBE FILE PHOTOS

**At the Office of Cultural Affairs, Mrs. Kane helped launch a program that brought the arts to Boston neighborhoods.**

Though slight and soft-spoken, Mrs. Kane was known and respected for her deft, fearless approach to dealing with City Hall’s power brokers.

“She was a visionary,” said Michael Wasserman, who worked in her office. “She believed passionately in the quality of life for the Boston neighborhoods before that was trendy.”

Mrs. Kane served as a state representative before moving to White’s administration and the city’s new Office of Cultural Affairs, which launched Summerthing, a program that brought the arts to various Boston neighborhoods.

After White died last year, Fred Salvucci, a transportation adviser to White and a former state transportation secretary, wrote in the *Globe* that Mrs. Kane’s “brilliant citywide celebration of performing arts, spoke volumes. Performances of opera in city parks, boxing matches in city squares, rock music, and art said that all the left-out neighborhoods and social groups matter, and the city cared about us!”

Mrs. Kane “was a major player in the White administration and a deputy mayor, which she certainly deserved,” said Herbert Gleason, who served as corporation counsel for the city of Boston under White.

“She was effervescent, cheerful, and happy in the way that worked to her advantage,” Frank said.

Mrs. Kane kept her assistants busy as calls came in from constituents all over Boston requesting things such as a mobile stage or chairs for an event. She signed “KDK” on notes she left for employees. Those who didn’t return a phone call might receive a note upon which she drew a frowning face, former colleagues recalled.



**Kathrine Kane read a newspaper put out by a journalism workshop in 1968.**

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“She was a phenomenal manager who gave very young people enormous opportunities,” Wasserman said. “She gave us responsibility beyond anything we deserved and held us responsible for how we performed.”

Mrs. Kane, Gleason said, “had very set ideas about where she was going and how she was going to get there, and she would very much appreciate your help in getting there.”

He added that “she was always on the run. She always looked as if she had something terribly important just ahead of her, and she did.”

Born in Indianapolis, Katharine Daniels moved to New England to attend Miss Porter’s School in Connecticut.

She attended Smith College, graduating in 1956 with a bachelor’s degree in political science.

She landed an internship at the White House and received security clearance to work at the CIA, where she was assigned to the China desk. She later recalled with amusement that while there, she observed that the United States received much of its information about China from the British Foreign Office and the media.

While working for the government, she met Louis I. Kane, who was stationed at the Pentagon, and they married in 1957. Mr. Kane, who later served as chief executive of Au Bon Pain, died in 2000.

In the 1960s, young liberals met at Mrs. Kane’s Chestnut Street home on Beacon Hill and a young Barney Frank took notes at the gatherings. Those attending called themselves the Democratic Study Group and met Mondays after the Legislature adjourned to discuss how to bring their ideas to fruition.

Mrs. Kane served as president of Boston chapter of the League of Women Voters in the early 1960s until she ran for a House seat in the state Legislature, representing a district that spanned the North End and Chinatown.

“She went door to door all over the district, much of the time alone, and by gosh, she got one of the seats,” Gleason said.

After White named her deputy mayor, Mrs. Kane told the Globe in December 1975 that her campaigning experience “makes a difference in how the mayor sees me.”

“It can be very useful to have had to go from door to door asking for votes,” she added. “It can be humbling and hopefully it teaches you to be responsive.”

When redistricting changed her district in a way that made reelection seemed less likely, she moved to White’s administration.

The programs she helped launch through her City Hall work “were so beyond what Boston was accustomed to,” Gleason said.

The Beacon Hill Times reported that during a 1980 ceremony held in her honor, White praised her efforts to bring Boston to life through the arts, quipping that “no mayor had ever received as much acclaim from programs in which he personally had put in so little effort.”

Through the years Mrs. Kane was a member of many boards and committees involved with the arts, participating on some until just weeks before her death. She also traveled frequently and was an avid bridge player who achieved the rank of life master.

After leaving City Hall in the mid-1980s, she started and ran a consulting firm, Katharine Kane Inc., for a dozen years, helping to organize events.

In the 1990s, she returned to school, graduating from Harvard Divinity School in 1998 with a master’s of divinity and two years later with a master’s in theology. She then went to work as a chaplain at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

“Things got repetitive,” she told the Beacon Hill Times in 2004. “I needed something new.”

Mrs. Kane leaves two daughters, Holliday Kane Rayfield of Fayston, Vt., and Jennifer of Brooklyn, N.Y.; a son, Joseph of Ogunquit, Maine; and three grandchildren.

A service will be held at 1 p.m. Wednesday in the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Boston. Burial will be in Adath Jeshurun Cemetery in West Roxbury.

Because Mrs. Kane often worked behind the scenes, she “rarely got the recognition that her accomplishments warranted,” Wasserman said.

“She was upbeat, cheerful, and very principled,” Frank said.

Mrs. Kane, he added, was “very idealistic and knew how to bring out the best in people. She generated a lot of enthusiasm and good feelings.”

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