

RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

"We Learn What We Live and Live What We Learn"

Growing Up at 1022 Rondo Avenue

MARION JONES KENNON, PAGE 13



Fifty Years of Friendship Connected in Community Service

The Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated

MARION JONES KENNON, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

In 1946, nine African American women from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, formed a volunteer service organization to enrich friendships and help their community, with a focus on civic, educational, and cultural solutions in the fight for civil rights and against racial injustices.

The number of members of The Links, Incorporated across 292 chapters:
16,700

The number of documented hours of community service annually:
Over \$1 million

Since its founding in 1979, the amount The Links Foundation, Incorporated has contributed to charitable causes:
Over \$25 million

The amount donated to Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) scholarships and endowments between 2019 and 2021:
\$1.5 million

The number of scholarships awarded to students attending HBCUs between 2019 and 2021:
Nearly 3,000

The Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. See *"Fifty Years of Friendship Connected in Community Service: The Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated"* by Marion Jones Kennon on page 1.

SOURCE: Mwika Kankwenda with The Links, Incorporated, email correspondence with editor, January 10, 2022.

ON THE COVER



Charter members of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated at their first official meeting in 1973. *Courtesy of Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.*

NOTE: To see the names of the women in this photograph, go to endnote 1 on page 10.

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STEVE TRIMBLE

Message from the Editorial Board

At times, many of us have observed our chaotic world and asked, "How can I make a difference?" But how many have acted on this question—fanning a spark of hope and growing an idea into something bigger?

This issue of *Ramsey County History* features writings by someone who did fan that spark: Marion Jones Kennon. Her desire to address the challenges facing local African American families led her to invite fifteen like-minded women to join the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated as charter members. The community work by this group of leaders focuses on helping youth, promoting the arts, and addressing national, international, and health concerns all while celebrating the lives of women and nurturing the joy and strength found through friendship. In a second, more personal, article, Mrs. Kennon shares her memories of her upbringing in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood. The love and lessons her parents instilled in her and her siblings helped the young Jones children become changemakers in their communities.

Another person who spent her formative days in Rondo was Scottie Primus Davis, the first African American woman to graduate from the University of Minnesota. A century on, author Steve Trimble followed a few scant leads to fill in details of the nearly forgotten life of this formidable scholar and educator.

The racial injustice faced by African Americans is undeniable. Here, we celebrate the progress and impact made against great odds and recognize how much more work there is to do. We offer testament to how sparks of hope, family, friendship, and service can build strong communities and make a difference.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

Corrections in the Fall 2021 Issue: In "Tikkun Olam: Jewish Women Serving Their St. Paul Community," a quote associated with endnote 61 on page 19 should be attributed to Rhoda Redleaf. In "Closing the Book: The James Jerome Hill Reference Library, 1921-2021," Samuel Pepys was misidentified. He was a seventeenth-century diarist during the English Restoration.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr., and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated¹

MARION JONES KENNON

On a summer afternoon in 1971, Marion Jones Kennon sat on the deck of her Edina home and reflected. She was a wife, mother, and educator at the Breck School and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated since her undergraduate days at the University of Minnesota.² That day, she thought about her country's progress over decades of civil rights efforts. So much had been done, yet there was more to do. The St. Paul Rondo neighborhood where she grew up was still reeling from the construction of Interstate 94. The Minnesota Department of Transportation had plowed through the historic neighborhood, destroying homes, businesses, and livelihoods. Within a dozen years, the once-prided setting saw more than 75 percent of African Americans living in substandard housing and attending inadequate schools. The Minnesota penal system disproportionately incarcerated African Americans. Then in 1967, tensions in North Minneapolis erupted in riots. Less than a year later, St. Paul found itself in a similar position.³ As one decade had turned into another, Kennon took stock of the obstacles facing many African American families in the Twin Cities.

But how could she and other Black female leaders make a positive difference? Through family, friends, and acquaintances, Kennon knew of a national not-for-profit called The Links, Incorporated whose members were "linked in friendship [and] connected in service"⁴ to improve the lives of African American families. The idea of becoming part of this organization was timely and relevant. There was one problem: no Links chapter existed in Minnesota.

Kennon's friend Marjorie Lennox was a member of the Omaha (NE) chapter. Through a flurry of phone calls and letters, Lennox and her mother, Viola, an organizing member of

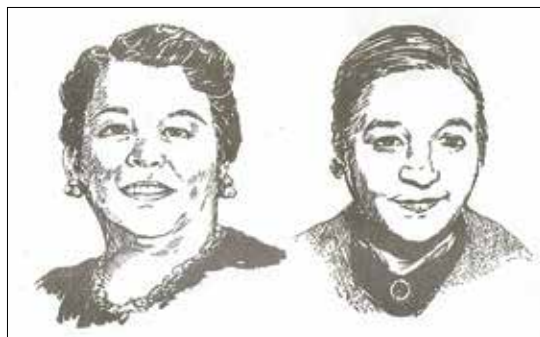
that chapter, Willie Glanton, an attorney from the Des Moines (IA) Chapter, and Central Area Director Evelyn Harper put the wheels in motion to accomplish Kennon's wish. "Consider it done," she was told. Kennon compiled a list of prospective members, starting with close connections. At the top of her list: sister Diane Jones and dear friend, Phyllis Hannah Ellis, whose mother, Helen, was a Links' member in Fort Worth.⁵ Kennon then drove to Ellis's house, where she placed a long-distance phone call to Lennox and asked her to share the good news with Ellis that the process for forming a Twin Cities chapter was underway . . .

The First Link in a Chain of Strength

Twenty-five years earlier, something similar occurred in Philadelphia. World War II had ended, and although African Americans had served in the military, many were denied good jobs upon their return. At the same time, it was still common for Blacks to be excluded from libraries, social clubs, theatres, concert halls, museums, and other places. And so, on November 9, 1946, Margaret Rosell Hawkins and Sarah Strickland Scott called a meeting with seven others to found a service club that would celebrate and enrich their friendships. They also hoped to respond to the needs of those less fortunate with an eye toward civic, educational, and cultural solutions in the fight for civil rights and against racial injustices. After the nine companions launched their organization, they urged friends in other states to establish local chapters—linking in friendship as a chain of strength to achieve their goals.⁶

In 1949, The Links invited members of nine newly established chapters from across the nation to convene in Philadelphia. The organization officially incorporated in 1951.⁷

Friends Marjorie Rosell Hawkins and Sarah Strickland Scott cofounded the first Links chapter in Philadelphia in the mid-1940s. Scott served as the organization's first national president and Hawkins its second. *From the collection of Marion Jones Kennon.*



Headquartered today in Washington, DC, The Links, Incorporated includes more than 16,700 women in 292 chapters in forty-one states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, and the United Kingdom. Members include doctors, lawyers, CEOs, educators, scientists, and more. Together, they contribute more than one million hours of documented community service annually by “enriching, sustaining, and ensuring the cultural and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry.”⁸

In addition to supporting their communities, residents, and institutions of color through programming, the organization maintains a presence of financial support. For example, in 2018, The Links Foundation, Incorporated named St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital its fifth \$1 million Legacy Grant recipient. The philanthropic arm of The Links has donated over \$25 million since its founding. Other grantees include United Negro College Fund, Inc. (UNCF); the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; the National Civil Rights Museum; and the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.⁹

Adding the Minnesota Link

... “So, it looks like we’ll have a Links chapter in the Twin Cities! What do you think?” Kennon asked after Ellis hung up the phone with Lennox. Ellis was elated. The two friends called to share the good news with Ellis’s mother, who sent a handbook of information about The Links and offered encouragement.¹⁰

Kennon hosted the initial interest meeting in late 1971 at her home. Kennon, Ellis, Jones, and thirteen others—Wilma Allison, Leonora Charles, Rosemary Anderson Davis, Christine McKinnie Dunham, E. Jean Napier Hudson,

Joyce Taborn Jackson, Shirley Carter Kaiser, LaRue Milton McClung, Sandra K. McGee, Wenda Weekes Moore, Beverly Young Thompson, Cynthia Supples Tyson, and Ida-Lorraine Jules Wilderson—pledged to “serve my community and my chapter to the best of my ability. . . .” if the prospective chapter was voted on favorably at the National Assembly in New Orleans in July. Indeed, permission to establish a new chapter was ultimately granted.¹¹

A chartering ceremony and member induction took place on December 10, 1972, at Ellis’s St. Louis Park home. Theirs became Chapter 123—the thirty-fourth in the Central Area.¹² Newly elected Central Area Director Willie Glanton conducted the ceremony with assistance from Des Moines (IA) Chapter President Delores Brewer. That evening, sixteen women embraced the ideals and purposes of The Links organization.¹³

The women held their first official meeting in January 1973 at the St. Louis Park home of Davis and her husband, Curtis, a Connecting Link. Elected officers included Kennon, president; Davis, vice president; Allison, corresponding secretary; Thompson, treasurer; and Jones, recording secretary.¹⁴

In less than two months, members organized their first scholarship benefit with a theme of “A Tour of Moscow” at Zion Baptist Church. Member Wilderson and her husband, Frank, also a Connecting Link, talked about an Intercultural Education Exchange Seminar they attended in the Soviet Union. The women raised \$3,000, enabling the chapter to award scholarships to college-bound African American high schoolers in North Minneapolis.¹⁵

That same month, Coretta Scott King visited Minnesota, speaking at a fundraising dinner for the Minneapolis YMCA. There, Kennon formally welcomed King and presented her with a charm memento on behalf of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter.¹⁶

That summer, the women gathered for a reception honoring two educators—Dr. Joyce Taborn Jackson (a Links member) and Dr. Marvin Trammel for their efforts to improve learning environments for children of color and more conducive work environments for Black educators. Jackson succeeded Trammel as principal of Minneapolis Central High School.¹⁷

The chapter also invited Minnesota State Senator B. Robert Lewis and Thearice Williams with the Minnesota Department of Corrections to speak on reported conditions experienced by inmates of color. The group wished to better understand the prison situation to determine what steps they might take to help.¹⁸

Mrs. Kennon Goes to Washington

In June 1974, Kennon flew to Washington, DC, to attend the Nineteenth Biennial General Assembly as a delegate from Minnesota. Over 700 members, Heir Links (children), and Connecting Links (spouses) from 133 chapters attended the five-day, late-June gathering.¹⁹

Opening ceremonies included an impressive procession of delegates and the welcoming of national officers. The organization honored twenty ambassadors to the United States, including representatives from Ghana, Mexico, Jamaica, and Japan. The Links also recognized Julie Nixon (representing her father, President Richard Nixon), Vice President Gerald Ford, and Ethel Kennedy (in absentia) for their service to country and community.²⁰

New member delegates learned more about the reach of service to communities of color and were encouraged to partner with other organizations for the most impact. All members gathered to interact via workshops and brainstormed with chapters from four regions—Central, Eastern Western, and Southern—to share ideas and problem solve.

Of course, it wasn't all work and no play. The women were treated to a tour of the White House and its famous rose garden, along with a performance of the traveling musical *I Do! I Do!*, starring Carol Burnett and Rock Hudson at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.²¹

At the end of the whirlwind assembly, members gathered for the traditional White Rose Banquet, which included the installation of new national officers and an invite from the Seattle (WA) Chapter to attend the Twentieth Biennial General Assembly in 1976.²²

Passing the Baton

After her one-year term ended, Kennon passed the leadership baton to Ellis, who also served one year. Since then, most presidents in the chapter's fifty-year history served one two-year



Local Links members had the privilege of speaking to Coretta Scott King at a private reception in March 1973: (L-R): Beverly Thompson, Phyllis Ellis, Ida-Lorraine Wilderson, Coretta Scott King, Diane Jones, Cynthia Tyson, and Marion Kennon. *From the collection of Marion Jones Kennon.*

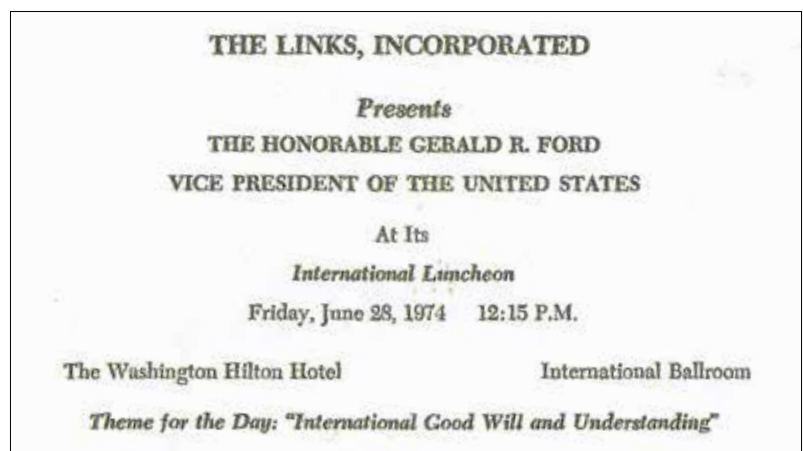
term. Twenty-four women have led the chapter, with two—Marcia Murray and Tawanna Black—serving two terms.²³

Presidents have many roles, including leading efforts to fundraise and host area conferences. The Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter has hosted two Central Area Conferences. In 1991 while Mabel Cason served as president, the chapter opened its doors to the Thirty-Third Central Area Conference with a theme of "Discovering Minnesota." Conference cochairs Jayne Baccus Khalifa and Josephine Reed-Taylor organized a '50s and '60s party, a walking tour of Minneapolis, and a gala at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.²⁴

The chapter—with former president D'Juana Ballard taking the lead—also hosted the fortieth conference in 2017. Members from sixty-nine chapters in sixteen central states attended.²⁵

To learn more about Heir Links and Connecting Links, go to <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-4-winter-2022/>.

Vice President Gerald Ford attended The Links, Incorporated International Luncheon at the Washington Hilton Hotel in 1974. *From the collection of Marion Jones Kennon.*



Presidents of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated and Their Last or Most Current Profession^a

1973-1974	Marion Jones Kennon	Director Financial Aid/Assistant Director Admissions, Breck School*
1974-1975	Phyllis Hannah Ellis**	Philanthropic and Civic Volunteer
1975-1977	Beverly Young Thompson**	Technical Leader, Control Data Corporation
1977-1979	Dr. Ida-Lorraine Jules Wilderson**	Psychologist & Administrator, Minneapolis Public Schools
1979-1981	Cynthia Supples Tyson**	Educator, Minneapolis Public Schools
1981-1983	Fanny B. Posey**	Homemaker & Community Volunteer
1983-1985	Dr. Delores Henderson	Administrator, Saint Paul Public Schools* & Executive Director, Delores Works
1985-1987	Irece D. Winans**	Educator, Minneapolis Public Schools
1987-1989	Wenda Weekes Moore	Trustee, W. K. Kellogg Foundation*
1989-1991	Mabel Evans Cason**	Administrator, Saint Paul Public Schools
1991-1993	Judge Pamela Alexander	Judge, Fourth Judicial District, Hennepin County, Minnesota*
1993-1995	Jayne Baccus Khalifa	Administrator, State of Minnesota/City of Minneapolis*
1995-1997	Linda Baker Keene	Corporate Executive* & CEO, Girl Scouts of the USA*
1997-1999	Lorraine Griffin Johnson	Corporate Human Resources Executive* & CEO, Griffin Enterprises
1999-2001	Lezlie Taylor	Corporate and Community Executive* & DEI Strategy Leader
2001-2003	Brenda Lauderback	President, Nine West Group, Inc.* & Chairman, Denny's Corporation
2003-2005	Marcia Norman Murray	Corporate Manager, US West, Inc.* & Vice President, Saint Paul Foundation*
2005-2007	D'Juana Ballard	President, Packaging Science Center
2007-2009	Michelle Miller	Chief Counsel, Employment Law, Medtronic
2009-2011	Gloria C. Lewis	CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters Twin Cities*
2011-2013	Marcia Norman Murray	(See 2003-2005)
2013-2017	Tawanna Black	Founder & CEO, Center for Economic Inclusion
2017-2019	Mercedes Henderson Clark	Administrator, Hospital and Health Care Industry
2019-2021	Judge Tanya Bransford	Judge, Fourth Judicial District, Hennepin County, Minnesota
2021-2023	Shirley Hughes	Corporate Human Resources Executive*

*Retired; **Deceased

During the event, the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter presented local service awards to Robin Hickman with SoulTouch Productions, Sarah and Lou Bellamy of Penumbra Theatre, Former Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton with Thompson Reuters, Judge LaJune Thomas Lange with the International Leadership Institute in Minneapolis, and Connecting Link Dr. Henry T. Smith, a fellow with the American College of Physicians.²⁶

Besides meetings at the conference, members enjoyed a little fun: a "Purple Passion Soiree" at the Minnesota History Center and a tour of Prince's Paisley Park.

A few fundraisers of note include a 2008 Harlem Renaissance-themed event for Big Brothers Big Sisters Twin Cities that brought in thousands of dollars through the efforts of The Links and corporate sponsors Target Corporation and 3M Company. In 2012, the chapter hosted its first

Emerald Award Luncheon fundraiser featuring award-winning actress Kimberly Elise, a Minneapolis native, as the honorary guest emcee.²⁷

Making a Difference

Over time, The Links, Incorporated has refined and expanded its mission to stay current with issues impacting the quality of life for others. In 1958, the national body of The Links created its first program facet—Services to Youth—as a way to target and develop relevant programs to uplift minority youth. The organization went on to create four more facets—The Arts, National Trends and Services, International Trends and Services, and Health and Human Services—all of which focus on specific community issues.

Over the last fifty years, members of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter have spearheaded countless programs connected to the five facets and have partnered with local

institutions, businesses, and corporations to make a difference in the Twin Cities.²⁸

SERVICES TO YOUTH

The Services to Youth facet helps young people excel in academics, cultural exploration, career development, and leadership skills and “empower[s them] to use their intellect and spirit of achievement to become successful and productive citizens.”²⁹ Over the years, members have created several mainstays, including the continued support of the UNCF. Other programs are singular events—a unique idea during the term of a particular president or program chair. All have made a difference for youth nationally and right here in Ramsey County.

Providing Scholarships

In 1973, the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter launched an annual scholarship program for African American students headed to college. Since then, the chapter has awarded \$1 million to several hundred students in and around the Twin Cities. Recipients have graduated from the University of Minnesota, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Macalester College, Stanford University, University of Michigan, Brown University, Howard University, University of Chicago, and Fisk University, among others.³⁰

One former scholarship winner is Judge Tanya M. Bransford, a North St. Paul-native. The funding from the local Links chapter not only helped her as a student at Gustavus Adolphus College, but that initial connection led to an internship with Links member and then-criminal defense attorney Pamela Alexander. According to Bransford:

She [Alexander] provided excellent advice to me, and when she became the first Black woman judge in the State of Minnesota, I realized that I could also achieve that goal. I followed in her footsteps by becoming a district court judge in 1994, about a decade after Judge Alexander’s historic appointment.³¹

Judge Bransford eventually joined the Links chapter and served as president from 2019 to 2021.

Another recipient, Artika Tyner, was awarded \$1,000 in 1999. Over twenty years later, the



now-Dr. Tyner still resides in St. Paul and is director of the Center on Race, Leadership, and Social Justice and a clinical professor at the University of St. Thomas. She is still grateful. “As a first-generation student, this scholarship provided me with a passport to the future,” Dr. Tyner said. “It provided me the valuable resources needed to learn, grow, and lead.”³²

To raise scholarship money, the chapter created a signature fundraiser—an annual fashion show produced in partnership with clothing boutiques and department stores, including Cedric’s, Schlampp’s, Dayton-Hudson, Macy’s, Marshall Field’s, and Saks Fifth Avenue. It was held at venues such as the St. Paul Hotel and the Hotel Sofitel. The program became a much-anticipated sellout social affair, with loyal patrons gathering for an enjoyable event as they generously donated funds for young scholars.³³

Informing Youth

The chapter’s Young Women’s Issues Forum brings together junior high and high school girls for interaction with peers, mentoring, and exposure to role models from the public and private sectors. Successful women share their experiences with the next generation to open windows of thought in imagining future possibilities. They also touch on tough topics, including racism and sexism, alcohol and drug use, teen parenting, self-esteem, and concepts about beauty, as well as financial management. For example, the chapter asked Cecilia

The local fashion show of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated was a big deal. Each year, members, along with Heir Links, Connecting Links, local celebrities, and, later—professionals—stepped onto the runway to model coats, suits, sportswear, lingerie, dresses, and evening wear. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

High school girls from around the Twin Cities participated in a Young Women's Issues Forum discussion in 1992. Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.



Clements, a corporate accountant and auditor, to teach a financial literacy class. Clements is a big believer that, “You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give”—one reason she ultimately joined the local Links.³⁴

The chapter also invites nationally recognized African American women who have broken barriers to share their stories. Youth have met with Susan Taylor, the former editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine; Hydeia Broadbent—at the time, the youngest known African American adolescent living with AIDS; and Olympic champions Gail Devers, Dominique Dawes, and Teresa Edwards. The young people who had only seen these women of note on television or in magazines or newspapers (or today, online) relish the in-person opportunities to connect with their role models.³⁵



Young women at the culminating Debutante Cotillion presentation in the mid-1990s. Following strict guidelines, they were required to wear white gowns with full skirts (hoops permissible) and a sweetheart or round neckline. They also wore white gloves that covered elbows, white pump shoes, pearl necklaces, and stud earrings. Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.

According to Judge Alexander, the Links member who established the Young Women's Issues Forum:

Due to the lack of ethnic diversity in the Twin Cities, many young people of color find themselves isolated from others who share their unique experiences. And that adds to the stress that normally accompanies the teens . . . developing a support system with others from their own reference group can make a tremendous difference.³⁶

Celebrating Young Women

A highlight of the chapter's programming for thirty years was the Debutante Cotillion. A cotillion, started by French royalty in the eighteenth century, is a ball at which young women or debutantes are formally presented to the public on the arms of approved escorts. In the 1940s and '50s, while segregation still ran rampant, Black communities—particularly members of social clubs and sororities—celebrated their young people at similar formal balls. The Links' version of the cotillion was more than just a fancy dance: following a competitive application process, high school seniors girls took part in a multi-month journey in which each cohort participated in community service projects, etiquette classes, career forums, seminars, and fundraising. The spring formal was the capstone.³⁷

According to Wenda Moore, a charter member, past president, and past cotillion chair, “[These young women] are the future leaders of our community.”³⁸ Case in point—St. Paul-native Mercedes J. Henderson Clark, a Links member who works as a healthcare administrator, was a 1988 debutante and an Heir Link. Her mother, Dr. Delores Henderson, was an early Links member and is still active with the group today. Henderson Clark remembers the cotillion *and* the many chapter meetings held at her home:

[I] saw first-hand what The Links were all about and how they actively contributed to the welfare of the collective communities of Minneapolis and St. Paul—from fashion shows to school reading rooms . . . I knew I wanted to become a part of what they gave to so many—service.³⁹

THE ARTS

The Arts facet expands and enriches communities through educational and engaging art experiences. The Links partner with museums, symphonies, arts councils, educational institutions, and corporations to promote art programming, with a focus on artists of color. The chapter has supported or partnered with the Martin Luther King Center in St. Paul, the Science Museum of Minnesota, VocalEssence, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, to name a few.⁴⁰

Honoring Talent

In 1996, the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter cosponsored an event with the University of Minnesota's Weisman Art Museum, where renowned African American artists Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence were presented with honorary doctor of humane letters degrees. As part of the ceremony, Links President Linda Baker Keene announced Governor Arne Carlson's proclamation of a statewide "Lawrence" day. Guests had the privilege of viewing the retrospective, *Jacob Lawrence: Thirty Years of Prints 1963-1993*, with Links members as guides.⁴¹

Fundraising

The Links also held fundraising events for Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul's Rondo community. The institution grew from the dreams and hard work of its first creative director, Lou Bellamy, and continues today under his daughter Sarah Bellamy's leadership. At one event in the mid-1990s, with AT&T as a corporate sponsor, The Links held a fundraiser for the theatre at the Minneapolis Hyatt Hotel—a lavish gathering festooned with purple, green, and gold balloons. Guests arrived in their formal finery and Mardi Gras masks before entering a ballroom transformed into New Orleans' Bourbon Street, a Cajun dinner, a parasol parade, dancing, and a live auction. The Links raised and presented \$25,000 to Penumbra.⁴²

Creating a Literary Legacy

In 2001, members gathered in the children's section of the Lexington Outreach Branch Library in St. Paul to dedicate the Dr. JoAhn Weaver Brown-Nash Reading Room. Nash was a leader



Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), a self-proclaimed socialist realist, documented the Black experience. He was one of the most widely acclaimed African American artists in the twentieth century. His wife, Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence (1913-2005), studied with sculptor Augusta Savage and worked as an artist until a few years before her death. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

in The Links at the local, area, and national levels and a strident supporter of childhood education. At the event, The Links donated \$1,000 and children's books to promote literacy and literature for young readers.⁴³

NATIONAL TRENDS AND SERVICES

Chapters promote the National Trends and Services facet to address long-term and immediate concerns in communities. Members work to "eliminate disparities by reducing barriers . . . through advocacy, education, and service."⁴⁴

Getting Out the Vote

"By linking together, 'Let our collective voices be heard!'" This was the call to action in the early 1990s by the national body, which challenged chapters to coordinate voter registration drives, host candidates' forums, and rally registered voters to get to the polls.⁴⁵

As part of that ask, the local chapter created an "Eyes on the Prize" voter initiative to encourage young people to participate in precinct caucuses and vote on election day. Raising awareness about the power of the vote has never been a one-time concern—members organize registration drives annually, but during the pandemic, the women of the Minneapolis-St. Paul

(MN) Chapter decided to do more to get “souls to the polls,” as member and local attorney Shawn Renee Kennon pointed out. She and others wrote and mailed notes to 1,500 young people—most of whom lived in precincts heavily populated by African Americans—to encourage them to vote.⁴⁶

Creating “PoSiTivity”

Also at this time, the national organization encouraged chapters to donate bright green benches to predetermined locations. Why? Because of the stress communities experienced during the pandemic, the benches are meant to “encourage youth and adults to invite positive relationships, signal for assistance, request a time to chat, take time to self-reflect and meditate or seek quiet time to read.”⁴⁷ The local Links placed one bench on Selby Avenue at the YWCA St. Paul and purchased a second for the North Minneapolis Agape Child Development Center.

Other projects have included donations to the Harriet Tubman Shelter for Battered Women (today’s Tubman) in Minneapolis to help family members impacted by domestic violence; the development of a Parents’ Education Exchange Program; a Food Shelf Project with St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Rondo; and an annual Christmas Toy Project at Hallie Q. Brown Community Center.⁴⁸

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS AND SERVICES

The fourth programming facet, International Trends and Services, was created in 1970 amid growing human rights concerns beyond the

national border. The Links, Incorporated answered the call with a plan to address educational, health, and cultural needs of people of African ancestry.

Promoting Healthy Births

The chapter has donated money to a World Health Organization-sponsored program to purchase *Maama* Kits for women in some African countries. These packets contain gloves, razor blades, soap, gauze, sanitary towels, a suction bulb, and a clean birthing sheet, among other tools, to help prevent infection and death of mothers and babies during childbirth.⁴⁹

Rallying Around Reading

Books for Africa is a national nonprofit that, since its founding in 1988, has sent more than 53 million books to children in fifty-four African countries. The Twin Cities is home to two locations. With the encouragement of Links member and Books for Africa-volunteer Cynthia Tyson, the local chapter and young women participating in its debutante program began collecting and packing books for the cause.⁵⁰

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Formerly a component of the National Trends facet, The Links, Incorporated established this program to advocate for deliberate and timely health practices and work to eliminate disparities in communities of color.

Highlighting Healthcare

Health in the African American community is a continual focus of The Links, and the local chapter has partnered with organizations, including the Minneapolis Urban League, to sponsor health fairs to bring awareness to cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS and help attendees identify symptoms of certain illnesses. One year, they joined the late Senator Paul Wellstone, who spoke of healthcare in less-advantaged communities, shared proposed legislation to address the inequalities, and provided tips to assist attendees through what, for some, is akin to a medical maze.⁵¹

That was in 2002, and healthcare is still a priority. Member Tonya Jackman Hampton, who works for Hennepin Healthcare, said it is vital that all people and, especially, “young

Marjorie Taborn, a member of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated spent time getting to know a few of the young people attending Camp Courage. During their week there, the campers, who live with sickle cell disease, were able to forget their worries and enjoy all the outdoors had to offer. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*





Members of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated in 2019. *Back Row (L-R):* Lorraine Griffin Johnson, Atty. Shelley Carthen Watson, Susan Bass Roberts, Dr. Allyson Brotherson, Marcia Norman Murray, Dr. Tonya Jackman Hampton, and Cecilia Clements. *Middle Row (L-R):* Atty. Shawn Renee Kennon, Atty. Michelle Miller, Dr. Melanie Brown, Stephanie Crosby, Dr. Duchess Harris, D'Juana Ballard, Mercedes Henderson Clark, Laverne McCartney Knighton; Dr. Iris Cornelius, and Jori Thibodeaux. *Front Row (L-R):* Shirley Kaiser, Dr. Christine Dunham, Marion Jones Kennon, Jayne Baccus Khalifa, Judge Tanya Bransford, Diane Jones Smith, Wenda Weekes Moore, and Dr. Delores Henderson. *Courtesy of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.*

people . . . have access to education [and] health services. . . .”⁵²

Fighting Against Diseases

Breast cancer is a common cause of death for African American women, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc. Aggressive cancers, including triple negative breast cancer, are often more prevalent and undiagnosed.⁵³ As such, the national arm of the Links asks members to pick a day each spring, solicit sponsorships, and walk in defiance of this disease that disproportionately affects communities of color.

In addition, the chapter has collaborated with corporate sponsors such as Medtronic and Jostens, Inc., to fund a week-long retreat at the nonprofit Courage Center in Maple Lake, Minnesota, for young patients living with sickle cell disease.⁵⁴

Making a Difference into the Future

The women of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated have worked as a cohesive team for half a century to make good on the initial promises of the original sixteen organizing members to do more for their African American communities.⁵⁵

One thing they try to do when working with youth is to offer messages of inspiration. Member Dr. Allyson Brotherson shares her favorite phrase, “*Non sine pulvere palma*,” which loosely means, “No victory without struggle.” According to Dr. Brotherson, “Anything worth having comes

at the price of dedication and hard work.”⁵⁶ This is good advice for members, too, because building a chapter while holding full-time professional jobs isn’t easy. Fundraising, managing finances, finding common ground, and supporting critical programming is challenging.

And while much has changed since the early 1970s, much has stayed the same. The chapter is still fighting against sexism and racism and finding ways to better serve the underserved. COVID-19 and the 2020 murder of George Floyd forced the group to rethink and regroup (mostly via Zoom meetings), but they did so with increased fervor. They masked up and walked six feet apart for the annual cancer walk. They also introduced an online pandemic film festival. Young people were encouraged to create short films about how they have survived COVID-19 and other social justice pandemics defined by participating youth through stories of loss, sickness, protests, educational and healthcare disparities, and more.

They also had to keep fundraising, so cochairs Shelley Carthen Watson and Duchess Harris hosted a virtual Quarantine Blues wine-tasting event to raise scholarship money for graduating seniors.⁵⁷

Yes, the past few years have been tough, but the dedicated members of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter know that if they remain linked in friendship and service, they will continue to make a significant difference in their communities.

To see the award-winning student-created pandemic films chosen by the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of the Links, Incorporated, go to <https://msplinks.org/2021/02/pandemic-film-festival/>.

Acknowledgment: Special thanks to Lorraine Griffin Johnson, Links member and past president, for her guidance.

Marion Jones Kennon is a graduate of Omaha University with a degree in elementary education. She earned a master's degree from the

University of Minnesota in educational psychology and taught at the Breck School, where she later worked as assistant director of admissions and director of financial aid. Kennon retired from Breck in 2013 after forty-six years. She served on the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission and the Minnesota Nonpublic Education Council.

NOTES

1. See cover image: The first members of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter and their professions in 1973. *Back Row (L-R):* Wilma Allison, educator; Cynthia Tyson, educator; Sandra McGee, educator; Beverly Thompson, document services manager, Control Data Corporation; Jean Hudson, educator; Shirley Kaiser, elementary school principal; Marion Kennon, educator. *Middle Row (L-R):* LaRue McClung, registered nurse instructor; Ida-Lorraine Wilderson, educator and PhD candidate; Diane Jones, educator; Leonora Charles, profession unknown; Phyllis Ellis, social worker and homemaker. *Front Row (L-R):* Joyce Jackson, assistant personnel director, Minneapolis Public Schools; Wenda Weekes Moore, staff assistant to Governor Wendell R. Anderson; Rosemary Davis, PhD candidate at University of Minnesota. *Courtesy of Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.*

2. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated was established at Howard University in 1908 as the first African American sorority for college-educated women. Marion Jones was an initiate of the Eta Chapter as an undergraduate and later joined the Delta Phi Omega Graduate Chapter. To learn more, see *"Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated: From Alpha to Mu Omega and Beyond"* at <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-4-winter-2022/>.

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Note to Sidebar on p. 4

a. List of presidents, 2021, Links, Inc., records, RCHS; Names and occupations compiled with the assistance of Lorraine Griffin Johnson.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyáta Othúnwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

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RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

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Mnisóta Makhóche, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

RCHS is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

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Forgotten to Time?

The Search for Scottie Primus Davis

STEVE TRIMBLE, PAGE 21



With degrees from the University of Minnesota and Harvard University, former St. Paulite Scottie Primus Davis was a lifelong learner and strict and well-respected educator. Courtesy of Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky.