

*Tikkun Olam*

**Jewish Women Serving Their  
St. Paul Community**

KATE DIETRICK, GABRIELLE HORNER, AND  
JANET KAMPF, PAGE 11



*Our Lady of Good Counsel/Our Lady of Peace*

**Two Names, Decades of Daily Mercy, and Innumerable  
Blessings at St. Paul's Free Hospice Home**

CHRISTINA CAPECCHI, PAGE 1

## By the Numbers . . .

Jewish women in the Twin Cities have served communities in need since the late 1800s and continue to do so today. One organization is the National Council of Jewish Women Minnesota, which formed as separate sections in St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1893. Check out what this now-combined organization has accomplished in the last year—during a pandemic, no less!

Amount spent on programs and services: **\$105,566**

Funding provided to local public school families in financial crisis: **\$13,522**

Books distributed to free libraries in a St. Paul neighborhood through the Books to Borrow initiative: **1,800**

Hygiene products delivered through the Just Periods program: **41,484**

Number of women involved in the Muslim and Jewish Women of Minnesota initiative who contacted state lawmakers about economic security and gender justice at a virtual “Day at the Capitol” event: **66**

The Minnesota NCJW has accomplished much over 128 years, thanks, in part, to the early efforts of their first- and second-generation predecessors—five leaders are featured in “*Tikkun Olam: Jewish Women Serving Their St. Paul Community*” on page 11.

SOURCE: National Council of Jewish Women Minnesota, *2020-2021 Annual Report*, <https://www.ncjwmn.org/2020-2021-annual-report/>.

### ON THE COVER



Sister Mary Regina shares a rosary with a patient so she may spend time reflecting at Our Lady of Good Counsel Home. This free care facility opened in St. Paul in 1941. Today it is known as Our Lady of Peace Hospice. *Undated photo by Richard Schweizer, courtesy of the Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Rose of Lima.*

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## Message from the Editorial Board

Legacy builders see needs and deficits and, through personal transformation, become the people who usher in better ways to address issues. Such are the legacies of several leaders featured in *Ramsey County History* this November.

Over fifty years, Mother Alphonsa, her friend Mother Rose, and the Hawthorne Dominicans opened seven free hospice homes for the cancerous poor—including St. Paul’s Our Lady of Good Counsel. Mother Alphonsa’s ministry took her on a long journey from her beginnings as a privileged child of American author Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In the late 1800s, three Jewish immigrant women settled in St. Paul—Hannah Austrian, Sophie Wirth, and Annie Paper. Each helped found or contributed to organizations to provide relief for impoverished Jewish families, embrace the resettling of immigrants, support education and job training, and rally for other basic rights. Their work inspired and mentored a second generation of leaders, including Gretta Freeman and Rhoda Redleaf, who with others from the National Council of Jewish Women, piloted a prekindergarten program—a precursor to Head Start.

Empire Builder James J. Hill centered much of his philanthropy on community building. Hill’s own formal education ended when he was young, but he always nurtured an abiding love of learning through books. The James J. Hill Reference Library in downtown St. Paul was his final gift to his adopted city.

This issue celebrates the vision, determination, and the communities of generosity built by these several extraordinary people and the organizations with which they were associated.

*Anne Field*  
Chair, Editorial Board

Correction: Regrets to Dr. David Lanegran, professor emeritus in the Department of Geography at Macalester College. He was incorrectly identified in “*The Aesthetics of Bridge Design: A Paean to Two of St. Paul’s Elegant Park Bridges*,” which ran in the Summer 2021 issue of *Ramsey County History*.

*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. Sincere thanks to Our Lady of Peace Hospice for their financial support.*

# Jewish Women Serving their St. Paul Community

KATE DIETRICK, GABRIELLE HORNER, AND JANET KAMPF

The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam* (pronounced tee-KOON oh-LUHM) means “repair of the world” and refers to each individual’s obligation to help perfect their community. It is first found in the *Mishnah*, a body of classical rabbinic teachings compiled in the third century and then redefined by medieval mystics who believed that the world had been shattered like a vessel that could not contain God’s light. Humans restore the light to God whenever we do a *mitzvah*—a sacred obligation. This restoration is *tikkun olam*, and it is the responsibility of all Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> It came into common use in the 1950s to refer to social action initiatives which were deep, sustained, and changed the course of people’s lives.

In a speech at a Passover seder at the White House in 2015, President Barack Obama said, “Like the Israelites who Moses led out of slavery long ago, it is up to us to never lose faith in the better day that lies ahead . . . together, we can continue the hard but awesome work of *tikkun olam*, and do our part to repair the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The noteworthy Jewish women in this story—and those who may have come before them—probably did not think of themselves as repairing the world. Rather, they likely were guided by the ideal to “do that which is right and good in the sight of God” (Deut. 6:18). This commitment was part of who they were and how they lived their lives. It was forged by their faith and experience as Jewish women in a world that had a never-ending need for compassion and justice.

What inspires people to give their money, time, or effort to advancing the lives and needs of others? What was it about Jewish women in St. Paul that made them leaders in giving? This article examines the lives of several women and organizations that have had an extensive, positive impact far beyond the local Jewish community. These early philanthropists and volunteers



The Jewish term *tikkun olam* written in Hebrew. Courtesy of Janet Kampf and Kate Dietrick.

all stepped beyond traditional gender roles of their times, and their efforts to do that which is right and good reverberate through our community to this day.

## First-Generation Leaders

The lives and accomplishments of three particular immigrant women—Hannah Leopold Austrian, Sophie Feist Wirth, and Annie Shapira Paper—provide insights into Jewish immigrant life in the Upper Midwest in the late nineteenth century. Their families’ quests for equality, financial opportunity, and freedom from oppression led to their emigration from Europe and their settlement in Minnesota. Their commitments to their community are examples of the dynamic role of Jewish women in the Progressive Era whose social values then provided the inspiration for a second generation that continued as leaders of Jewish philanthropy in the mid-twentieth century.

## Hannah Leopold Austrian—The Trailblazer

Sixteen-year-old Hannah Leopold immigrated to the United States from near Baden, Germany, with her brother Samuel in 1846. They traveled to Mackinac Island, Michigan, to join their eldest brother, Louis, who supplied nets, salt, and shipping barrels to local fishermen. At nineteen, Hannah married a fellow German émigré—the ambitious Julius Austrian—her brother’s business partner.<sup>3</sup>

As a couple, the Austrians headed the partnership's branch on Lake Superior at Madeline Island, Wisconsin, with stores, boats, and buildings previously owned by the American Fur Company. At least twice during the 1850s, Julius traveled the twenty-day winter dog train trip from La Pointe, Wisconsin, to St. Paul, by then the capital of the Minnesota Territory to, perhaps, obtain supplies.<sup>4</sup>

For twelve years, the family lived on Madeline Island, where their sons Albert and Edwin were born. Hannah loved music and sang to her children in Hebrew, accompanying herself on the banjo. In 1855, the Austrian and Leopold families held the first High Holy Day services in La Pointe, with Louis Leopold serving as cantor. In the early 1860s, the Austrians moved to Eagle River in Michigan's Upper Peninsula to operate another general store and to capitalize on a newly opened copper mine. Their daughter, Rachel, was born there in 1863.<sup>5</sup>

Around 1870, Julius retired from the business partnership and moved his family to St. Paul, where they joined Mount Zion Hebrew Association, the oldest Jewish congregation in Minnesota.<sup>6</sup>

The Austrian family made an immediate impact on Mount Zion and were known as some

of the most influential and generous pillars of the early congregation. Hannah was regarded as the "grande dame" of Mount Zion, and her influence aligned with emerging feminist views by Jewish women in England at the time.<sup>7</sup> Her initiative suggests that she had moved beyond Jewish women's traditional roles in religious and communal life. Her zest may have been a balance between a desire for more freedom and a reverence for Jewish tradition. At the same time, she may have been concerned about acculturation as a defense against antisemitism.<sup>8</sup>

Hannah helped found the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society (HLBS) in 1871—the first Jewish charity group in the state. Members were German-Jewish women from Mount Zion, and Hannah served as the organization's president for over twenty-five years. The society provided relief for impoverished Jewish families and served as the ladies' auxiliary of Mount Zion. The women made friendly visits to neighbors to assess their need for assistance and provided them with groceries or money. The society encouraged self-sufficiency. Organizational minutes describe a typical visit: "Mrs. Frankel called on the Bleuder Family, and finding them worthy, assisted them with 5.00 Dollars."<sup>9</sup> The women helped transfer Jewish orphans from state institutions to Jewish-run orphanages in the Twin Cities and Cleveland.<sup>10</sup> They also supported immigrants. For example, Rabbi Emanuel Hess and the HLBS contributed \$100 toward the opening of an industrial school.

A decade on, Hannah emerged as a leader in the crisis to settle Eastern European refugees in 1882. Previously in the 1870s, the wave of newcomers to the area began to grow, fueled, in part, by railroads advertising Minnesota as a haven. For Jewish immigrants, America was the *goldene medina* or "golden country" in Yiddish. Eastern European Jews flocked to America and eventually arrived in Minnesota—an open, growing state.<sup>11</sup>

The HLBS and other sisterhoods in the Jewish community had kept pace supporting immigrant families. But when 200 Eastern European Jewish refugees arrived with little notice, organizations debated how best to help them. Hannah, alongside Mount Zion Rabbi Dr. Judah Wechsler, called upon St. Paul Mayor Edmund Rice and Governor Lucius Hubbard to request

Hannah Austrian later in life on Madeline Island, where she raised a family in her early years. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Madeline Island Museum 2001.158.8.2.



aid beyond what the Jewish community could provide. Mayor Rice appealed to the city council for help, but one councilman responded that he “did not like the idea of having these people imposed upon us. . . . Some kind of action should be taken to put a stop to this way of sending paupers to St. Paul.”<sup>12</sup> A resolution was unanimously adopted directing that railroads that bring “paupers” to the city be punished. Such a sentiment and resulting action were at odds with the city’s “early tradition of total Jewish acceptance and integration.”<sup>13</sup>

Because Rabbi Wechsler and the Austrians were leaders in raising aid for refugees and with the charitable infrastructure at the ready, they collaborated with multiple organizations. In the end, an executive committee of the city council was formed to settle the refugees within the existing St. Paul community of “not over forty families of Israelites.”<sup>14</sup> While Julius’s name appeared in the news concurrently to assist with the arrival of the refugees, Hannah’s is the formidable voice with Rabbi Wechsler in meetings with the mayor and governor. Her previous decade as president of the HLBS positioned her for this pivotal moment. *The St. Paul Globe* reported “half the charitable money expended in St. Paul was dispersed by the Hebrew Relief Society [sic].”<sup>15</sup>

Hannah, widowed since 1891, left St. Paul after nearly thirty-two years of residency and community service and moved to Chicago in 1901 to live with her daughter Rachel’s family. She died in 1910 at eighty.<sup>16</sup>

### Sophie Feist Wirth—The Reformer

Sophie Feist was born in Mainz-Bingen Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany, in May 1848. She arrived in New York at the age of five and, with her family, settled in Milwaukee.<sup>17</sup> She married Jacob Wirth in 1869. The couple moved to St. Paul around 1884 after a fire destroyed the Wirth Block in Chilton, Wisconsin, where Jacob was a dry goods merchant.<sup>18</sup>

After her friend and mentor Hannah Austrian retired as president of the HLBS, Sophie Wirth took leadership for Mount Zion’s auxiliary fundraising efforts.<sup>19</sup> In addition, she took an active role in the emerging St. Paul section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

Founded in 1893, the NCJW is the oldest Jewish women’s volunteer organization that has

been at the forefront of social change for over a century. The St. Paul section was a charter member, having also begun in 1893.<sup>20</sup> Its mission was stated plainly:

Through an integrated program of education, service, and social action, [NCJW] provides essential services and stimulates and educates the individual and the community toward their responsibility in advancing human welfare and the democratic way of life.<sup>21</sup>

The tireless Sophie was also active with Neighborhood House, which began initially as the city’s industrial school. In the two decades leading up to 1900, “. . . Jews living in the Twin Cities increased dramatically from about 350 to 4,500 in St. Paul and 5,000 in Minneapolis. Jobs were needed and quickly so Jews would not go on the welfare roles [sic] and cause a backlash of anti-Semitism,”<sup>22</sup> but many new Russian immigrants did not have the skills necessary for immediate employment. In the spirit of philanthropy to build self-sufficiency, St. Paul’s Jewish community spearheaded, in part, by the HLBS and the St. Paul section of NCJW, led the effort to create the school.<sup>23</sup>

It began simply in 1895. A few members would teach a sewing class to immigrant girls using one of the rooms at the temple. Other members offered instruction in home and industrial arts. The project expanded quickly, particularly among the Jews of the West Side Flats. Rabbi Hess gave the undertaking his full support, but the organizer and supervisor was Sophie Wirth . . .<sup>24</sup>

Boys learned the rudiments of manual training. English language instruction was added and brought in adult students. The school also scheduled social gatherings such as picnics and encouraged adaptation to American culture.<sup>25</sup>

Sophie expanded the role of the school with modern teaching methods—taking teachers on field trips and demonstrating new instructional techniques. In 1901, local news reported that “Mrs. Jacob Wirth, superintendent of the school,” led twenty-five teachers to the state

Sewing classes, such as this one in 1911 at Neighborhood House, provided young immigrants with necessary skills that would help them eventually run households and find work to support their families. *Courtesy of Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.*



agricultural school to examine methods of teaching sewing and cooking.<sup>26</sup>

Her efforts to provide recreational opportunities for children also grabbed headlines:

A committee of West Side people are arranging for a playground near the Lafayette School and the Board of Education has granted the use of the Lafayette building one day each week during the summer for an industrial school.<sup>27</sup>

In the summer of 1900:

The members of the Jewish Industrial School will picnic today at Como [Park]. There will be a programme of games for the children, who will go to the park on two chartered cars. Mrs. Jacob Wirth and Mrs. S. Fox will have charge.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, Sophie's interests in charitable work appear to have shifted away from the friendly visiting model of philanthropy toward a focus on institutions, education, and reform. A clear example is illustrated in her 1903

appointment by Minnesota Governor Samuel Van Sant as a state delegate to attend the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>29</sup>

Sophie was always working. In honor of her dedication to the community, the St. Paul section of NCJW, which operated the Lake Rest Vacation Home on White Bear Lake, renamed its camp in 1926. The newly named Sophie Wirth Camp treated working mothers and their children to a week of respite from the heat and city life, as had been the camp's mission since its start.<sup>30</sup>

### Annie Shapira Paper—The Quiet Enigma

A precious photo album, created and carefully tended by Mary Paper throughout her life, was donated to the Ramsey County Historical Society in 2019. It provides a glimpse into the life of Mary's mother, Annie Shapira Paper, who became the first donor to the Saint Paul Foundation in 1944. The four-inch thick album, with photographs from the early 1900s to the 1960s, is a rare and delightful display of the arc of experiences for a local Jewish family.<sup>31</sup>

Annie Shapira was born in 1869. The family was reported as "Prussian" in the 1880 federal census. Her parents, Mayer and Rebecca, came from Lithuania, which, along with Poland, was taken over by the Russian Empire in 1795 and was considered part of Russia when the family immigrated to the United States in 1875. Annie was six. It is unclear when the Shapira family settled in St. Paul. However, in 1880, they resided on Park Street near the current state capitol.<sup>32</sup>

Lewis Paper also came from Lithuania. His father, Joseph, was a rabbi who died at sea. At seventeen, Lewis arrived in the US, settling first in Chicago. He moved to St. Paul in 1890 and, shortly thereafter, married Annie in Ramsey County.<sup>33</sup>

By 1910, the couple had moved to 570 Capitol Boulevard. Both Annie and Lewis were Orthodox Jews and members of one of the city's early congregations—Sons of Jacob—located on Wabasha and Saint Peter Streets, a short walk from their home.<sup>34</sup>

The visual history in the album illustrates the life of the Paper and Shapira families and their world travels, concurrent with the eventual success of the family business—Paper Calmenson. The company, founded by Lewis



The Lake Rest Vacation Home was established in 1911. After fifteen years, it was renamed Sophie Wirth Camp and continued operation until 1943. Here, a group of boys play billiards outside of camp cabins.



A Paper Calmenson scrap metal collection truck and workers in St. Paul in 1922. Both images courtesy of Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

To see additional photos from the Paper album, go to <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-3-fall-2021/>.

Paper and Moses Calmenson, became one of the first major scrap iron dealers and, later, a steel supplier in the United States.

According to family tradition, one of the partners provided the horse, another the wagon and the third the scale for weighing the scrap iron. Operating first from a small building near St. Paul's Lower Landing, the firm later occupied a site on East Seventh Street before moving to . . . a location on Highway 280.<sup>35</sup>

Annie and Lewis had six children, and Annie focused on her family. One daughter-in-law said, "She was a 'woman of the old school' who dressed simply and honored old world values."<sup>36</sup> Annie was a member of the St. Paul section of NCJW, as were her daughters and daughters-in-law. Her husband was a trustee of Congregation Sons of Jacob, and Annie was active in the associated Sisters of Peace charity. The women referred to their work as "quiet." Similar to Mount Zion's HLBS, the organization "[tries to] put what money and supplies we have where they are most needed and will do most good," sending between \$300 and \$600 into the community.<sup>37</sup>

Many of Annie's children and their spouses followed in her philanthropic footsteps. For example, her second-generation daughters Hattie and Mary and her daughters-in-law Gertrude Levy Paper and Lillian Davidson Paper were

active leaders of NCJW. In 1940, Gertrude, Meyer's wife, and Lillian, Joseph's wife, served in the Social Service division of NCJW and on the Sophie Wirth Camp Committee, among other committees.<sup>38</sup>

In 1940, St. Paul business leaders planned a new charitable foundation similar to community foundation initiatives around the nation. They sought to use private philanthropy to augment public funds that had diminished through government welfare programs of the 1930s. The concept gathers many individual donors who establish funds in their own names to support local projects disbursed by a committee of community leaders as needs change with time. The Paper family's previously quiet philanthropy suddenly became publicly recognized when Annie established through her will a \$5,000 trust in 1944 (\$75,000 today) —the first donor to the new foundation. Her gift ". . . did far more than supply income, for it has given [the foundation] a beginning and a sense of being on the way."<sup>39</sup>

In 2019, the Saint Paul Foundation and the Minnesota Community Foundation, prior to their merger, asked the Ramsey County Historical Society to search their collections so the charities could better understand the intent of Annie's initial gift. However, no additional information outside of her will has been found. Grandson Mark Paper remembers visiting Annie at her home on Summit Avenue as a boy. He

Annie Paper with her grandson Buddy and son Joseph in 1942. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*





believes that Annie's son Joseph and the family's attorney, Wilfred E. Rumble, likely advised her gift to the new foundation.<sup>40</sup>

Archival records of the St. Paul Foundation relay the beneficiaries of the Paper family's trusts. After Annie's initial gift, her children provided additional funds to the Lewis and Annie F. Paper Foundation. Joseph Paper also formed his own foundation. The beneficiaries of the Paper trusts include Mount Zion Temple, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the United Way of St. Paul, and the United Jewish Fund and Council of St. Paul.<sup>41</sup>

## Second-Generation Leaders

As one generation of Jewish leaders passed away in the first half of the twentieth century, a new generation of women stepped up to continue supporting their neighbors in need.

In January 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced a new initiative during his State of the Union address—tackling the War on Poverty. This so-called war was an effort to combat the growing rate of poverty in this country, which, at the time, hovered around nineteen percent. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was passed shortly thereafter, one tenant of which was funding for community action programs.<sup>42</sup>

This initiative sparked interest with the NCJW. Over the years, the organization's St. Paul section had offered training, education, and shelter for young immigrant women, advocated for child labor laws, arranged childcare for families, and provided services to help the disadvantaged. And so with this call from President Johnson, local NCJW volunteers began making plans to start a community program to combat the War on Poverty.

Their work began with the NCJW-led School for Community Action, a daylong seminar on April 6, 1964, at Mount Zion, located by then on Summit Avenue. It provided an opportunity for people to acquaint themselves with the problems for children with limited backgrounds and better understand what they could do to help. Afterward, the St. Paul Board of Education asked NCJW to write a proposal for a program targeting prekindergarten-age children. The plan, recommended to begin that fall, would run three years through spring of 1967.<sup>43</sup>

The St. Paul Council of Jewish Women, acting on advice of its parent group, the National Council of Jewish Women, has taken as a project for support, both through financial aid and personnel assistance, the improvement of educational opportunities for children living in disadvantaged areas. The goal of the program will be to broaden the background of experiences and to improve verbal skills; two problems which are consistently noted as prevalent in disadvantaged areas.<sup>44</sup>

An addendum included the budget and showed that the St. Paul section of NCJW contributed \$4,000—a quarter of their annual budget. This financial contribution paid for over half of the three-year program in one St. Paul public school. The idea was that around 100 children would be eligible in the targeted area. Each child would attend two sessions per week, with Fridays reserved for evaluation meetings.<sup>45</sup>

This pilot project would take place at McKinley Elementary School at 485 Carroll Avenue in the city's Rondo neighborhood. The Saint Paul Board of Education identified the school as most in need:

1. It is an area of high population density. The large, old houses have been divided and subdivided.
2. The median grade level of education for adults is from 8.6 to 9.5 . . . .
3. There is a high concentration of racial minorities . . . .
4. The median family income is . . . \$4,200 to \$5,200.
5. The percentage of families receiving public assistance is very high.<sup>46</sup>

Why might these white Jewish volunteers want to support a predominantly Black elementary school? In an NCJW bulletin from the 1960s, a quote from the *Talmud* reminded people, "Do not separate thyself from the community's welfare."<sup>47</sup>

## Gretta Freeman and Rhoda Redleaf—Innovative Advocates

The school board officially approved the proposal, and in the fall of 1964, volunteers from the St. Paul section began the program with the



A group of prekindergarten children working on a project at the McKinley School in 1967 (L-R): Mrs. Albert Levine, Louis Frazier, Collene Manley, Roger Thibodo, Carlos McIntosh, Rhoda Redleaf, and Lynda Byrd.



Gretta Freeman, who with Rhoda Redleaf, was instrumental in the success of the three-year McKinley program. Both images courtesy of Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

assistance of a teacher and support of the principal. Two volunteer cochairs were appointed from NCJW membership: Gretta Freeman and Rhoda Redleaf. Redleaf was a teacher and former director of Macalester College's nursery school. "It was exciting to be part of something so new, especially when you believed in what you were doing," she reminisced years later.<sup>48</sup>

The structure of the McKinley prekindergarten program was supported by childhood development studies of the era with various objectives—help children develop oral language, positive self-image, auditory and visual discrimination, social skills, and personal habits; provide opportunities for physical development; and present children with first-hand experiences through field trips. A daily schedule for both a morning and afternoon group of children included an activity period, cleanup, snack time, singing, rest time, games, walks, outdoor play, and story time.<sup>49</sup> For many of these four-year-olds, this was a very new experience.<sup>50</sup>

At the October 5, 1964, St. Paul section meeting, it was noted that sixty-four children

enrolled in the four different sessions.<sup>51</sup> Administrators felt the children were engaged and learning, their parents took interest and got involved, and attention flooded in almost immediately. Newspapers—from the *St. Paul Recorder* to the *American Jewish World*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *Pioneer Press*—wrote about McKinley. Other local organizations reached out to learn how the project was structured.<sup>52</sup>

But more than that, it gained *national* recognition and influence. In late 1964, as the McKinley project began, a group of people in Washington were just starting to create what would become Head Start, which would launch across the country in 1965. Prior to this time, the majority of intervention programs were privately run, mostly piece-meal, and did not have evidence-based practice guiding desired child outcomes. Knowing that Vice President Hubert Humphrey took interest in issues of education and anti-poverty, Irvin Rudick of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* wrote to Humphrey to tell him about what he coined "The Miracle of McKinley School." Rudick spoke of the impact and structure of this project and suggested that if Humphrey wanted more information, he should reach out to the cochairs, Freeman and Redleaf. Humphrey did respond to "My dear friend" Irvin, thanking him for writing; that same day, he contacted the two leaders to learn more.<sup>53</sup>

And so in January of 1965, the St. Paul section of the NCJW sent a nine-page report to Vice President Humphrey and Hyman Bookbinder of the Office of Economic Opportunity. This insight was passed on to the leaders involved in putting together the Head Start program. The report itself is rather dry: it shares information on McKinley's facilities, the schedule of the day, and the progress the children made as reported by the parents.<sup>54</sup> At the end is a note of recommendation:

The one problem we have encountered is the term 'disadvantaged' and others like it which are offensive to our parents. The repercussions have been few, but even those few hurt and can multiply. We realize it is solely a matter of semantics, and we have tried to use 'children of limited backgrounds' wherever it may apply. . . . Raising the self-image of our McKinley families is of vital concern to

all of us, and in speaking of our parents we always try to keep this uppermost in our minds.<sup>55</sup>

The national office of NCJW was especially interested in what was happening in St. Paul. In March 1965, St. Paul members attended the NCJW National Conference in New York, which featured Sargent Shriver from the Office of Economic Opportunity and leader of the Head Start program. Shriver called out the St. Paul section's work and used the phrase "Miracle of McKinley" in speaking of their groundbreaking progress in their educational program.<sup>56</sup> The October 1965 issue of the their NCJW publication showcases McKinley along with other NCJW-organized pre-K programs around the country:

St. Paul's successful experience may well have also affected the entire national Head Start program, for both Vice-President Humphrey and anti-poverty director Sargent Shriver's office asked for reports on its progress while writing the federal legislation which has now made Head Start an ongoing year-round project.<sup>57</sup>

The 1964 school year at McKinley was considered successful. After one year's attendance, children showed an average increase of 12 to 13 IQ points (the standard measurement assessment at that time) based on testing. Parents spoke of behavioral changes, and kindergarten teachers noted how those who were involved in the program seemed to have an advantage. In the remaining two years of the three-year program, attendance continued to increase, the number of volunteers involved rose, and the impact continued.<sup>58</sup>

Head Start launched in Minnesota in 1965. NCJW volunteers Freeman and Redleaf were asked to sit on the Head Start Advisory committee and continued speaking about McKinley to the League of Women Voters, the Minnesota Department of Public Welfare, church groups, and community centers.<sup>59</sup>

At the close of the project, the pilot was deemed beneficial, despite the 1967 closure of McKinley because of changing school district lines. Earlier that year, the St. Paul section of the NCJW celebrated the three years of progress

at McKinley in their bulletin, noting that 150 women gave 6,000 hours of time to help the city's children. McKinley Principal Oscar Trooien wrote his thanks, "The philosophy and attitude of this group was very impressive to me. They spoke of service to the Community and they really meant it."<sup>60</sup>

Years on, Freeman reflected on her volunteer work as integral to her identity as a Jewish woman. "I think Jews in general have a social conscience—they've been an underdog, they've been in places where they were treated as second-class citizens—so they carry a heritage, without even knowing it, of being concerned about other people."<sup>61</sup>

### **The Work of *Tikkun Olam* Continues**

Across generations, Jewish women embraced important work that we now conceive of as social justice—individually or within organizations, contributing financially or with their time. These women were leaders, in their Jewish communities and outside of them, and their obligation to help uplift people throughout Ramsey County was taken seriously. The responsibility of *tikkun olam* is an enormous, never-ending task, but it is not new. While organizations such as Neighborhood House and the National Council of Jewish Women continue to tackle issues needing repair, they stand on the focused work of the many women, including Hannah Austrian, Sophie Wirth, Annie Paper, Gretta Freeman, Rhoda Redleaf, and others who came before them.

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*Gabrielle Horner is a descendant of Italian, German, and English immigrants to St. Paul and is a lifelong resident. She is a coauthor of A Grand History: The Summit Hill Neighborhood's First 200 Years.*

*Janet Kampf joined Mount Zion Temple in 1968 and is a member of The Women of Mount Zion Temple. She is the past chair and the current secretary-treasurer of Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council.*

To read a supplemental article about Jewish mutual aid by Robin Doroshov, see <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-56-3-fall-2021/>.

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## NOTES

1. Jennifer Noparstak, "Tikkun Olam," Learning to Give, accessed September 24, 2021, <https://learningto give.org/resources/tikkun-olam>.

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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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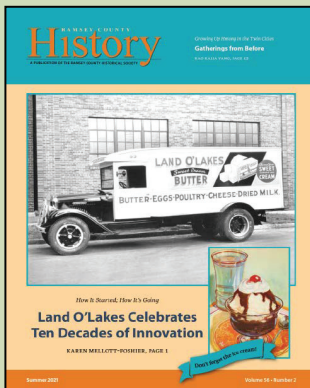


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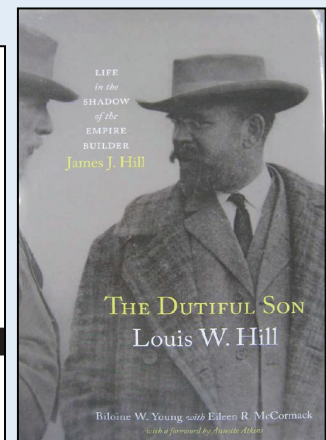
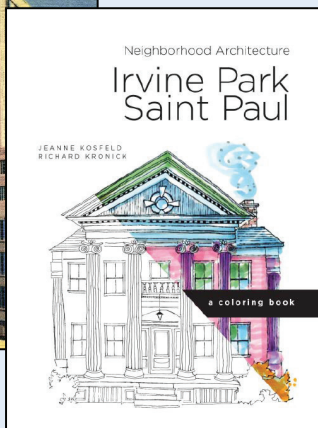
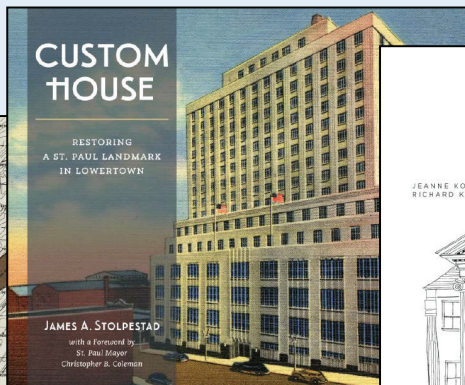
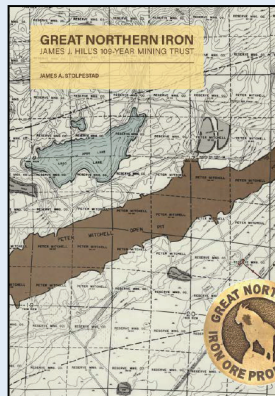


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