

RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Imagining a Future that Doubles Our Impact
Campaign to Transform Gibbs Farm

CHAD P. ROBERTS, PAGE 35



A Sacred Dakhóta Site Inspires Community Renewal

From Lower Phalen Creek Project to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi

DANIEL W. MCGUINNESS, WITH MAGGIE LORENZ, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

In the 1970s, land below St. Paul's white bluffs along Phalen Creek to the Mississippi was a mess: toxic soils, polluted water, an abandoned dump site—all on what is sacred Dakhóta land. East Side activists assembled as the Lower Phalen Creek Project (LPCP), and with help from other organizations, created a community vision to transform the site, daylight sections of the creek, and build the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Along the way, members better understood the sacred and historical importance of the land around them. They connected with and listened to Dakhóta community members and invited Dakhóta leaders to the board. Under Dakhóta leadership, the vision of the group transformed, as did the organization's name—Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi (WTA). Daniel W. McGuiness, an early member of LPCP, and Maggie Lorenz, executive director of WTA, share this history in "A Sacred Dakhóta Site Inspires Community Renewal: From Lower Phalen Creek Project to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi" on page 1. Below are a few facts about WTA in 2022:

Events hosted by Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi:

- 18** Urban Restoration & Conservation
- 26** Cultural Connections & Healing
- 29** Environmental Education

Volunteers and volunteer hours:

442/1,299

Funds raised to daylight a section of Phalen Creek:

\$3.3 million

Funds raised to build Wakan Tipi Center:

\$13.2 million

Native trees/shrubs planted:

72

Trash removed:

2,500+ pounds

SOURCE: Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi, 2022 *Annual Report*, August 2023.

ON THE COVER



Lower Phalen Creek Project transformed a toxic site into a nature sanctuary. Soon, the organization now known as Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi will build its long-planned Wakan Tipi Center. Here, Mishaila Bowman, with longtime ties to LPCP/WTA, leads a group of bird watchers through the sanctuary. *Courtesy of Lower Phalen Creek Project and Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi.*

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Message from the Editorial Board

As part of environmental reclamation, a process called daylighting brings waterways previously channeled through underground pipes above ground. It returns water to its natural state, restoring ecological balance. Daylighting can appropriately describe this issue of *Ramsey County History*, as we present articles by and about Dakhóta people and their sacred connection between land and language (iápi)—what has been lost and what has been brought back into light.

In the Dayton's Bluff area, neighbors sought to reclaim Phalen Creek from the damage wrought by human impact. As this group revived the creek, they learned more about its meaning to Dakhóta people and how it is a corridor to the Mississippi and flows by a sacred meeting place—Wakan Tipi. Working patiently to overcome pollution, neglect, and the history of conflict and loss, what started out as a creek reclamation project transformed into something bigger. Dakhóta iápi was nearly *another* casualty of westward expansion. In Dakhóta tradition, land and language go hand in hand, and much like the land of the Dakhóta, their language began to disappear. A young generation of Dakhóta language learners and scholars show us what it means to care for their spoken and written word. Our everyday language in Minnesota includes many Dakhóta place names, words we say without thinking of their meaning. We have the capacity to learn much more about the land and language of Mnísota Makhóche—the place we all call home.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

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From Lower Phalen Creek Project to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi

DANIEL W. MCGUINESS, WITH MAGGIE LORENZ

The sound of celebratory singing by local Dakhóta drum group, Imnížaska, filled the cavernous Clarence W. Wiginton Pavilion at Harriet Island Regional Park in St. Paul on September 14, 2023, as part of the annual fundraiser for the nonprofit organization Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi (WTA). During the event, drummers performed in honor of Jim Rock, who was gifted a beautiful star quilt and a plaque for “stewarding and advocating for Wakan Tipi for over twenty years.”¹

In his acceptance remarks, Rock, of Dakhóta ancestry, noted that he grew up in the Mounds Park neighborhood, 200 yards from a place called Wakan Tipi—one of a few caves at the base of the bluffs next to an active railroad yard. Rock described the sacred cave as “a place in between” the earth and the sky and how we are “in between—in between our great grandparents, grandparents, parents, and our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.” He reminded guests of the concept of mitákuye owas’iŋ—the belief that we are all related in wótakuye (kinship).²

Eighteen years earlier, Rock offered a prayer and spoke about the significance of Wakan Tipi to Native Americans at the opening of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, which is situated on land around the Wakan Tipi site.³ That event was sponsored by the Lower Phalen Creek Project (LPCP), a once-informal group of neighborhood environmentalists. Now, on this evening in 2023, Rock found himself being honored by this same organization. However—the organization’s name had changed recently from Lower Phalen Creek Project to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi (those who care for Wakan Tipi).

Readers might wonder how LPCP, which was started by mostly Euro-American volunteers interested in reclaiming an abandoned rail yard



To receive a star quilt as a gift from members of the Native community is a special honor, one well-deserved by Wakan Tipi scholar Jim Rock. Photograph by Tommy Sar, courtesy of Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi.

and nearby creek corridor on the East Side of St. Paul, eventually transformed into a Native-led organization with a new mission, vision, and values. LPCP changed slowly—over decades—as Native and non-Native people began to communicate, build trust, and recognize each other as allies. The result is a story of restoration of Native land, renewal of Native leadership, and revitalization of Native language and cultural ways.

That Which Once Was—A Brief History

As you might guess, this story begins at Wakan Tipi, and it ultimately returns there. This small but significant cave was formed through the erosion of sandstone and limestone bedrock by spring water flowing out of the bluffs just below what is now called Indian Mounds Regional

This image of “Carver’s Cave in Dayton’s Bluff” comes from photographer Edward A. Bromley. Prior to the cave’s exploration by Jonathan Carver and its renaming sometime after 1766, the cave was and still is known to the Dakhóta people as Wakan Tipi. Today, the entrance to the sacred site is sealed. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*



Park. Its name translates closely to “Dwelling of something sacred.” Wakan Tipi is part of a larger sacred landscape that includes the Dakhóta site of first creation at the confluence of the Minnesota (formerly St. Peter) and Mississippi Rivers—Bdóte. The cave was known to early settler colonizers as Carver’s Cave, named for Jonathan Carver, the first European visitor known to enter the site around 1766.⁴

“For hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years prior to European and American colonization, this was a place of gathering and ceremony for Dakota [and other Indigenous] people,” until the signing of the Treaty of 1837, when Native land east of the Mississippi River was ceded to the United States. Most Dakhóta people were forced west of the river and eventually exiled from the state entirely. Almost immediately, white settlement swept over both banks of the Mississippi River and along what would become known as Phalen Creek, named after Edward Phelen, who settled here in the late 1830s. Other early immigrants from Sweden, then Ireland, Poland, Italy, and Mexico, would take up residence along the creek in what would eventually be known as Swede Hollow.⁵

In 1855, North Star Brewery set up shop in two small buildings and a cave below the bluff near Commercial Street. Around 1860, Andrew T. Keller built a small brewery on the upper end of the hollow on land acquired in 1864 by Theodore Hamm. Hamm’s Excelsior Brewery (later Hamm’s Brewery) thrived into the 1970s.⁶

Minnesota’s first rail lines were laid in 1862 at the confluence of Phalen Creek and the

Mississippi River. Between 1865 and 1893, St. Paul became a hub of rail transportation in the Midwest. In the early 1870s, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad connected the three cities and created a rail yard for switching and servicing trains here. To make room for more lines, the railroads removed seventy-five feet off the face of the bluff at Wakan Tipi. In doing so, the entrance to the cave was destroyed, along with thousands of years of history embedded in the petroglyphs on its interior walls. In the early 1900s, James J. Hill had created the Great Northern Railroad, which used this land as a staging area for its famous Empire Builder passenger service west to the Pacific. By 1970, as train traffic declined, the railroads drastically reduced use of the yard.⁷

As St. Paul’s East Side grew, companies such as the Seeger Refrigerator Company (later Whirlpool) and Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (later 3M) invested in the area, providing jobs and a strong tax base for the community. But, along with continued growth, periodic flooding and increasing pollution of Phalen Creek prompted the city to bury and divert the creek into a system of underground storm sewers—a process completed by 1930. Meanwhile, the once-bustling Swede Hollow deteriorated until it, too, disappeared. In 1956, the city declared the area a health hazard and forcibly removed the settlement’s remaining occupants. Left unattended, the ravine from Minnehaha Avenue and Hamm’s Brewery to the mostly abandoned rail yard near the Dayton’s Bluff and Railroad Island neighborhoods became an unofficial dumping ground and gathering place for people “riding the rails” for the next two decades.⁸

Transforming Our Damaged Land

In the mid-1970s, it took the wherewithal of Olivia Dodge and other members of the Saint Paul Garden Club, along with several East Side residents and the Saint Paul Parks Department, to suggest converting the unsightly area into a vibrant city park. This they did over the next fifteen years. During this time, the city restored a small portion of Phalen Creek above ground—a process called daylighting.

Phalen Creek historically flowed from the south end of Lake Phalen, meandering

for about four miles through what is now the East Side of St. Paul, emptying into the Mississippi River near Wakan Tipi cave. This creek served as a corridor for the Dakota people who lived here, traveling from the Wakpa Tanka (Mississippi River) . . . by canoe to Bde Mato Ska (White Bear Lake), . . . where they gathered psin (wild rice).⁹

Today, continued daylighting is bringing more of the creek back above ground to improve water quality and ecosystems, create new habitats, help with storm water management, and connect visitors to their natural world. From this initial effort, in 1994, East Side residents formed Friends of Swede Hollow (FOSH) to provide advocacy for the new park.¹⁰

In turn, FOSH created the Lower Phalen Creek Project. LPCP teamed up with Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE). CBE leaders Amy Middleton and Sarah J. Clark, along with Dan Ray of the McKnight Foundation, planned “to create a vibrant green space and improve the water quality of this Mississippi River tributary.” This would require cleaning up industrial pollution in the ravine and convincing the city to expand public parkland from Swede Hollow downstream to the railroad yards at Commercial and Fourth Streets. The vision was reinforced by a *Metro Greenprint* report prepared by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.¹¹

The 1980s and early '90s brought increased interest in reconnecting St. Paul to the river. City leadership, supported by nonprofit organizations and foundations, saw the Mississippi River and the Lowertown neighborhood as the next locations for economic development and urban renewal. With start-up support of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation (LRC) and its leader, Weiming Lu, along with the McKnight Foundation, twenty-five organizations, including the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation, collaborated to back LPCP.¹² At that time, the six LPCP founders had no intention of creating a formal nonprofit organization. Rather, they simply wished to revitalize the area by creating new parks, trails, and natural open spaces.

In 1997, the collaborators created a steering committee. Railroad Island resident, Kristin (Murph) Dawkins chaired the committee and

was joined by Karin DuPaul, Christine Baeumler, Carol Carey, and Colleen Ashton—all Dayton’s Bluff residents active in the Friends of Swede Hollow organization. Lu was also a member, representing the LRC and CapitalRiver Council. The committee convinced collaborating organizations to raise funds for consultants to further define the work and organize the community for specific projects. For example, in 1999, LPCP and the city received \$20,000 to stop erosion on the bluffs near the cave, and the Minnesota Environmental Initiative provided \$9,000 so volunteers could plant native trees and shrubs. Individuals used their connections to build support for the work, as well.¹³ Still, professional help was needed to provide focus and a unified vision. LPCP retained Marjorie Pitz, a landscape architect with Martin & Pitz Associates, Inc. to help.

In 2000, the committee also enlisted Trust for Public Land (TPL). The Minnesota-based, national organization identified a twenty-seven-acre site potentially available as a public park and trail link from Swede Hollow to the Mississippi River. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad owned the land, located below Indian Mounds Regional Park. Most of the original buildings were long gone, but old rail sidings, some warehouses, and at least two known caves existed in the bluffs on the site.¹⁴

As TPL negotiated with the railroad, the steering committee rallied support and ideas from nonprofit organizations, district councils, the city, and government interests. With so many entities involved with their own agendas, there was potential for little progress and lots of chaos. Thanks to continued funding from the McKnight Foundation and LRC, however, most everyone got behind the task of creating a common vision and goals.¹⁵

LPCP published *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, prepared by Pitz and Barr Engineering Co., in July 2001. The report summarized the natural and human history and current condition of the creek corridor as a mostly abandoned dump site with a few empty buildings. It noted that a place called “Wakan-tebee or Carver’s Cave,” a historic gathering place of Dakhóta people, was located here. The document also presented a compelling plan for cleanup and restoration of the BNSF rail

and industrial lands and the protection of the Mississippi Flyway for migratory birds through the creation of a proposed Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. A year earlier, Bruce Vento, a long-time East Side resident, science teacher, environmentalist, champion of the unhoused and immigrants, and sitting US Congressman, had died of cancer. It seemed a fitting tribute to name the park after him.¹⁶

The LPCP vision also described the potential for multiple connections with local and state trails. In effect, the sanctuary was envisioned as the hub of hundreds of miles of pedestrian and bike trails. This would help community economic revitalization while protecting open space and natural habitat in lands adjacent to the trails.¹⁷

The report provided clear instructions, with ten strategic and phased action steps to be completed within six years, and it demonstrated widespread community support for LPCP as an emerging, although informal, organization.¹⁸

At the end of the plan, Pitz added a call to action:

Lower Phalen Creek Project is no longer just a dream. It is a responsible vision whose time has come. Money is on the table and plans are being made. The creation of the Bruce Vento Nature [Sanctuary] can happen with your support.

Help us reclaim this abandoned rail yard.

Help us knit together a green corridor, and create a sanctuary for migrating songbirds.

Help us learn from environmental abuse, and create an interpretive center where our children can learn about and respect nature.

Together, we can create a new preserve where the natural features that awed early river travelers on the Mississippi River can once again be revered.¹⁹

The vision gained wide support. Council Member Kathy Lantry, a leading proponent, called it, “The coolest project in the world.”²⁰

While the vision was being prepared, TPL secured funds and commissioned engineering and environmental studies to evaluate the site. Project partners expected that the decades-long industrial uses of the area likely contaminated

the soil and groundwater. It was important to find out what was there, what would be required to clean the site, and how much it would cost to make it usable as a sanctuary. Indeed, the location was toxic. Consultants developed a *Voluntary Response Action Plan* to remove contaminants or cap areas with clean soils.²¹

In 2001, TPL and the city retained cultural resource management consultants 106 Group to determine if the site contained any previously recorded or unrecorded intact historical or archaeological resources. There were numerous journal articles about Carver’s Cave and at least one other visible cave on the property. Also, historical accounts cited European settlement starting in the mid-1800s and the construction of a brewery, various mills, housing for workers, and railroad buildings. One of the largest structures adjacent to the property at the corner of Commercial and Fourth Streets was a four-story warehouse built in 1914 by Standard Oil Company.²²

Hoping the site would be acquired, LPCP retained Emmons and Olivier Resources, Inc. to complete a *Natural Resource Management Plan*, laying the groundwork for cleanup, removal of invasive plants, and restoration of woodland, savanna, and wetland habitat.²³

In November 2002, TPL acquired the twenty-seven acres from BNSF and, in turn, sold it to the city, with a seventeen-acre conservation easement held by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Soon, 106 Group began consulting with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council and leaders of local Dakhóta and Anishinaabe communities to complete additional studies. In February 2003, they issued a report stating that Wakanj Tipi cave was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This determination would play a pivotal role in the future of the site and the LPCP itself.²⁴

Efforts to move forward continued, and on June 21, 2003, 170 volunteers spent a combined 500 hours removing fifty tons of trash—tires, refrigerators, mattresses, coolers. Two days later, the Environmental Protection Agency announced it would provide a \$400,000 grant for cleanup of petroleum and hazardous substances. The activity spurred the Community Design Center of Minnesota Executive Director Ruth Murphy to create an East Side Conservation Corps. Over the years, hundreds of high

school students removed invasive plants, restored habitat, and built trails.²⁵

As 2003 ended, the committee reviewed actual and proposed expenditures for the sanctuary, with an estimated price tag of \$9.9 million.²⁶ But, LPCP still had no formal nonprofit standing, relying on a fiscal agent and cooperative partners. All of this required tremendous trust and many “handshake” agreements.

One Dream Becomes Reality—Others Follow

Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary opened to the public on May 21, 2005—five years after the *Community Vision* report was adopted. There, State Sen. Mee Moua spoke to an audience huddled during a rainstorm under a temporary tent. As local, state, and federal officials, Dakhóta educators, and representatives of partner organizations listened, she said, “For a project like this to succeed it takes many people getting together under one tent.” She smiled while looking out at the rain and noted that that’s exactly what happened. After the speeches, people gathered around Mayor Randy Kelly to discuss the vacant 36,000 square-foot, Standard Oil building near the sanctuary entrance. They urged the mayor to convince the city to acquire the structure for possible use as an interpretive center. The mayor agreed, and, in the fall of 2005, Sen. Moua submitted a \$5 million bonding request to the Minnesota Legislature.²⁷

An interpretive center would require a new level of planning, funding, and execution. The organization retained Pitz to revise the *Community Vision* document with a proposed acquisition of an additional 1.85 acres of land. In February 2007, Pitz presented schematics for two options: restoring the building or tearing it down and replacing it with a new structure.

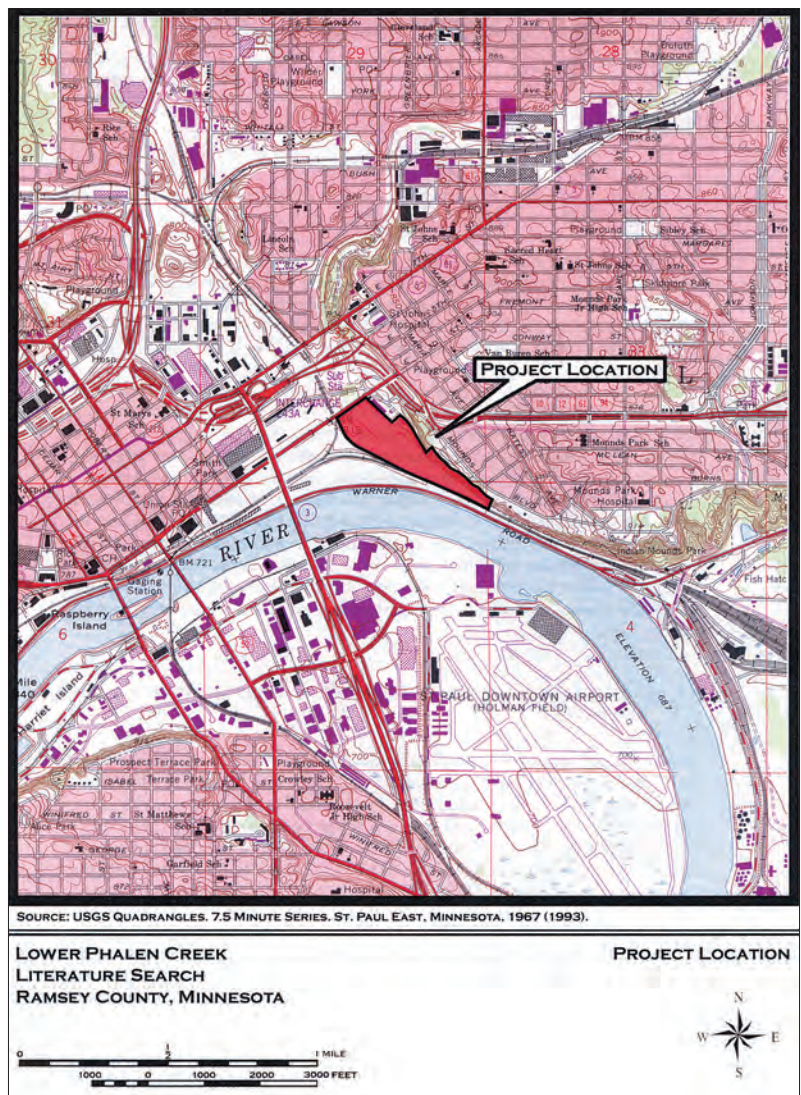
To add to the excitement, LPCP and the city organized a ribbon-cutting for the trail connection at the nature sanctuary’s Bruce Vento Regional Trail. The trail opened beneath the I-94 underpass on July 14, 2007.²⁸

LPCP continued to raise funds for land acquisition and for design and engineering work for an interpretive center. But this was difficult, as no one was yet sure if the center would be located in the existing building or part of a new structure. Nevertheless, St. Paul Riverfront

Corporation, the city, and LPCP teamed up to request \$4.3 million from the legislature. The proposal was approved by the Minnesota House and Senate only to be vetoed by Governor Tim Pawlenty at the end of the 2008 session.²⁹

On the heels of this disappointing outcome, TPL came through again and, within two months, secured funds from the Metropolitan Council to acquire the site and warehouse. The updated *Community Vision* was becoming a complicated vision and would require more than an informal neighborhood group to achieve success. It was clear LPCP had to become a formal nonprofit organization approved by the Minnesota Secretary of State and Internal Revenue Service. In 2010, LPCP prepared the necessary documents for a successful transition.³⁰

This USGS map was included in a 2001 literature search prepared by 106 Group to document archaeological resources. It highlights the project location at the bend in the Mississippi River. In *Lower Phalen Creek Project Archives*.





This 1914 Standard Oil building was an empty, abandoned eyesore. The city purchased it in 2009. For a time, LPCP had hoped to remodel the structure as an education center at the edge of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. *Courtesy of Dan McGuiness.*



Members of the 2006 Lower Phalen Creek Project Steering Committee helped bring the vision of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary to life: *(back, L-R): Amy Middleton, Paul Mohrbacher, Weiming Lu, Christine Baeumler, and Dan Ganje; (front, L-R): Dan McGuiness, Karin DuPaul, Sarah Clark, and Carol Carey. Courtesy of Dan McGuiness.*

A New Mission

In early 2011, LPCP adopted a new mission statement to “strengthen Saint Paul, Minnesota’s East Side and Lowertown communities by developing and maximizing the value of local parks, trails, ecological and cultural resources and connections to the Mississippi River.” For the first time, LPCP specifically included “cultural resources” in its mission. However,

there was no specific mention that this was and remains Dakhóta land, stating only that the organization would be “inclusive,” and it would “honor the legacies of the past.”³¹

On March 9, 2011, LPCP held its first meeting with an official board composed of past steering committee members—Paul Mohrbacher, Chip Lindeke, Dan McGuiness, and Carey as chair. Sarah Clark was retained as executive director

In 2007, a small crowd of LPCP members, neighbors, activists, legislators, bikers, hikers, and members of other organizations celebrated the opening of an extensive trail hub through the sanctuary. Dignitaries standing just behind the ribbon include Weiming Lu, Kathy Lantry, Mee Moua, and Sheldon Johnson. Mayor Chris Coleman, Sue Vento, and Betty McCollum, among others, stand at the back of the stage. *Courtesy of the office of Rep. Betty McCollum.*



on contract. That day, the group approved documents needed to file for formal nonprofit status.³²

The first five years of the formal organization's existence were difficult as LPCP struggled to develop plans for the interpretive center. The team eventually realized the Standard Oil building was far larger than LPCP needed. Further evaluation showed it would be too costly to restore and operate unless there were other interested investors. There were none. So, in June 2014, LPCP agreed, in consultation with the city and the Dayton's Bluff Community Council, to remove the warehouse.

Under the leadership of Cynthia Whiteford, a new LPCP board member and retired TPL executive, the city and LPCP executed a formal development agreement calling for LPCP to oversee fundraising, design, and construction of a new center. LPCP would operate the center under a long-term lease with the city. Council President Lantry urged approval of the agreement on February 25, 2016. LPCP hired Melanie Kleiss as its first fulltime executive director.³³

Dakhóta Land/ Dakhóta Leadership

Over the years, members of LPCP began to build relationships with members of local Native American communities. LPCP learned more about the significance of Wakanj Tipi and the land around it. Slowly, this longer and more complete history of the cave and Dakhóta presence on the site and in the region unfolded. It took endless conversations and years of trust-building. It was not easy. Many Native Americans were unsure of non-Native motives. In 2017, LPCP crafted and adopted an updated mission statement "to engage people in honoring and caring for our natural places and the sacred sites and cultural value within them."³⁴ This act acknowledged the significance of relationships between land, water, and people. It was a turning point for LPCP and the genesis of the idea of becoming a Native-led organization.

Under Board Chair Daniella Bell and Executive Director Kleiss, Thomas Draskovic, an enrolled member of Standing Rock Nation and a teacher at the nearby American Indian Magnet School joined the board in 2017, and Mishaila Bowman (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyáte) joined the LPCP staff in 2018. That same year, the organization

renewed efforts to obtain state funding, rallying allies and neighbors to participate in an organized Day at the Capital. Significantly, both Native and non-Native supporters testified before the House Capital Investment Committee in support of funds for Wakanj Tipi Center. This time, the bonding bill, including \$3 million for the center, was passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Mark Dayton.³⁵

In March 2019, Kleiss stepped down, and the board hired recently appointed board member Maggie Lorenz as interim executive director and center director. Lorenz, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa with maternal ties to the Spirit Lake Dakhóta Nation, quickly drew praise as a leader and communicator thanks to her relationships with both Native and non-Native communities.³⁶

With Lorenz at the helm, LPCP recruited and elected new board members—Patrice Kunesh of Standing Rock Lakhóta descent and Dr. Kate Beane, a citizen of the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe.³⁷ Twenty years after the LPCP was created by mostly white neighborhood activists, Native board and staff members became the majority and took on critical leadership roles.

One significant driver in this shift came as a result of Lorenz's involvement in a Native American movement called Reclaiming Native Truth, a national initiative created by the First Nations Development Institute to "foster cultural, social and policy change by empowering Native Americans to counter discrimination, invisibility and the dominant narratives that limit Native opportunity, access to justice, health and self-determination."³⁸

At a staff retreat that fall led by Indigenous Collaboration, Inc., Native and non-Native participants sought answers to many questions: What does it mean to be Native-led? What does it mean to be an ally or collaborator? How does LPCP talk about itself? Who are "we"—including our organization, staff and board, and plant and animal relatives? Do our mission, vision, values, and goals change now that we have become Native-led?³⁹

During the retreat, the board promoted Lorenz from interim to fulltime executive director and center director. Soon, a five-year vision and messaging plan was developed to move the organization forward. The McKnight Foundation

provided support to LPCP to take a first step in implementing this vision by organizing and cohosting a “We Are Still Here Minnesota” conference in St. Paul in March 2020.⁴⁰

In June, Franky Jackson (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyáte) a 106 compliance officer for the Prairie Island Indian Community, and Glenn Johnson, an executive with Mairs & Power investment firm, joined the board. To complete fundraising for the center design, Bell and Kunesh cochaired a capital campaign committee to raise \$10 million by the end of 2022. LPCP set the stage for this final push by hosting an event on Monday, October 11, 2021—Indigenous Peoples’ Day. More than 350 guests turned out to the biggest and most culturally and ethnically diverse gathering ever at the sanctuary.⁴¹ Scores of state and city leaders and speakers, artists, and performers from across the community joined to dedicate three acres of the sanctuary as the future site of Wakan Tipi Center. Minnesota’s Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan (White Earth Nation), St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, and other dignitaries joined Lorenz in thanking everyone for their help in restoring this space.

Representatives from Native American, African American, Hmong, and Latinx communities, along with people of white, non-Native heritage attended. Lorenz noted:

This place is holy and mysterious, and the ancestors of the spirits have chosen this

time to reclaim this place. Everybody that is here today, they have chosen you as their helpers. We are all here to make this happen.⁴²

Her comments echoed those of Sen. Moua seventeen years earlier at the opening of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary: Here we are, all under the same tent. Both women spoke from the heart while standing at a place that has been sacred to the Dakhóta for thousands of years.

LPCP Becomes WTA

By early 2022, through consultation with Native elders and non-Native leaders and after several internal discussions, LPCP formally agreed to change its name to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi. The word “awanyankapi” has several meanings, including, “They look after/protect Wakan Tipi.”⁴³ The board agreed that a Native-led organization with its focus on Dakhóta land, water, and people, should move forward with a Dakhóta name.

Finally, in August 2022, with additional funding from the state, WTA and the city broke ground for Wakan Tipi Center. It was another incredible milestone moment for the organization and the community. On a sunny morning, about fifty board, staff, donors, elected officials, partners, and community members gathered to celebrate and acknowledge this sacred next step.



Prior to the groundbreaking ceremony for Wakan Tipi Center at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary in August 2022, guests were invited to participate in the spiritual tradition of smudging. Here, Thomas Draskovic, a teacher at the American Indian Magnet School, cleanses his hair and body with the sage smoke rising from a shell held by Nicky Buck. Buck is a member of the WTA steering committee. Draskovic serves on the board.



Many of those who gathered for the groundbreaking included (*third row, L-R*): Rose Whipple, Čhaŋtémaza (Neil McKay), Chip Lindeke, Ben Gessner, Barry Hand, Franky Jackson, Prairie Island Council Member Michael Childs Jr., Sam Wegner, Prairie Island Council President Johnny Johnson, Jim Rock; (*second row, L-R*): Maggie Lorenz, Mishaila Bowman, Fern Naomi Renville, Ying Vang-Pao, Nicky Buck, Prairie Island Council Vice President Shelley Buck, Dan McGuiness, Prairie Island Council Member Valentina Mgeni, State Sen. FOUNG Hawj, State Sen. Mary K. Kunesh, State Sen. Sandra Pappas; (*first row*): Tanaŋiđan To Wiŋ (Tara Perron). *Both photographs by Wolfie Browender, courtesy of Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi.*

The ceremony was highlighted by the words of Lak'hóta elder, Jerry Dearly, who led a prayer and offered a song for the success of the project. This future Wakanj Tipi Center—which is scheduled to open in 2025—will serve to *reveal* history. But it also will *make* history as it leads by its own examples and creates an important gathering place for all people to communicate and learn from each other through programs and exhibits centered around urban conservation and restoration, cultural connections and healing, and environmental education.

And so, in a span of twenty-five years, Lower Phalen Creek Project's mission, values, leadership, and organizational culture transformed as people from different walks of life listened and learned from one another. This metamorphosis was more than learning about the complete and often erased history of people and place. It required acknowledging and celebrating the truth that Dakhóta people—resilient and courageous—have always been here and are here today with a renewed sense of purpose.

The change for the organization was gradual but increasingly intentional. Longstanding Board Member Lindeke recently reflected:

I don't think there was a specific turning point . . . but when we started to focus more on the Wakanj Tipi Cave, getting Native support for our work and, in the

process of naming the building project, I think we definitely were moving towards a more Indigenous focus . . . I think this move was happening, and we didn't realize exactly that it was happening.⁴⁴

A Sacred Responsibility

The future is bright for this land and the original peoples who were given to this place. For Dakhóta people, it is not about ownership or rights, but it is a sacred responsibility to care for the land, water, and natural world that was gifted by the Creator. Colonization has interrupted this tradition, and yet, nothing has been lost. Dakhóta elders will remind the younger generation often that although some of the old ways had to be put down, they are still waiting there to be picked up—when the time is right. For Dakhóta people in Minnesota, the time is now and the work of Wakanj Tipi Awanyankapi will ensure that Dakhóta people have the space, freedom, and safety to pick up these teachings and step back into their rightful roles as the caretakers of their homelands.

Daniel W. McGuiness is a native of southern Minnesota and has lived in St. Paul's Highwood neighborhood since 1986. He is retired from a fifty-two-year career protecting natural and cultural resources on and along the Mississippi



In May 2023, at a Wakanj Tipi Center Exhibits Unveiling at Metro State University, Wakanj Tipi Awanyankapi Executive Director Maggie Lorenz (*third from left*) and Curator and Director of Programs Ben Gessner (*far left*) presented star quilts to some members of the WTA steering committee. These include (*L-R wearing quilts*): Fern Naomi Renville, Mishaila Bowman, Juanita Espinosa, Tanağidan To Winj (Tara Perron), Cole Redhorse Taylor, and WTA Board Chair Dr. Kate Beane. Pictured in far back is Marisa Cummings, president and CEO of Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center and the event emcee. Steering committee members not pictured include Čhantémaza (Neil McKay), committee chair; Franky Jackson; Samantha Odegard; Leonard Wabasha; Cheyanne St. John; Nicky Buck; and Darlene St. Clair.



At this year's WTA Pollinator Festival, guests learned about plant and animal relatives on a walk at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary led by Liyah Archie, one of the Wakanj Tipi Indigenous Summer Youth Program participants. This is one of over seventy programs hosted each year by the organization. *Both photographs by Wolfie Browender, courtesy of Wakanj Tipi Awanyankapi.*

and St. Croix Rivers. McGuiness has volunteered with the Lower Phalen Creek Project/Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi since 2003. He currently serves on the capital campaign and governance committees.

Maggie Lorenz (Pabaksawin or Cut Head Woman) serves as the executive director of

Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi. She is Dakhóta and Anishinaabe and an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. She also has maternal ties to Spirit Lake Dakhóta Nation. Lorenz has spent her career in the fields of education, cultural resiliency and healing, and environmental justice.

NOTES

1. Program for Wótakuye Gathering for Wakan Tipi, annual fundraiser for Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi, September 14, 2023, St. Paul, Minnesota.

2. Jim Rock, Program for Wótakuye Gathering.

3. Nick Ferraro, "From eyesore to urban oasis," *Pioneer Press*, May 22, 2005, C1.

4. Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Mni Sota Makece: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 219-220.

5. *Wakan Tipi Center Final Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan* (St. Paul, MN: 106 Group, January 5, 2022), 6; See "Treaty with the Sioux, 1837," in Charles Joseph Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties 2* (Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1904), accessed through Oklahoma State University Libraries Digital Collection, <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/29573>; Westerman and White, 127, 156-160; "Swede Hollow: A Capsule History of a Famous Saint Paul, Minnesota Landmark," report, The Saint Paul Garden Club, 1976, <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Parks%20%26%20Recreation/Swede%20Hollow%20Capsule%20History%20-%201976.pdf>; Steve Trimble, "A Toast to the Old North Star Brewery," *St. Paul Historical*, <https://saintpaulhistorical.com/items/show/6#>.

6. Gary J. Brueggeman, "Beer Capital of the State: St. Paul's Historic Family Breweries," *Ramsey County History* 16, no. 2 (1981): 12.

7. Michael P. Malone, *James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); "Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986), section E, 8; Marjorie Pitz, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek* (St. Paul, MN: Lower Phalen Creek Project, July 2001), 16. Today, train lines still operate adjacent to and west of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary but not on sanctuary land.

8. John Halter, interview with author, September 2, 2023.

9. "Daylighting Phalen Creek," Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi website, <https://www.wakantipi.org/daylighting>.

10. "Daylighting Phalen Creek;" "Brief History of Swede Hollow," Friends of Swede Hollow website, <http://www.friendsofswedehollow.net/about-us.html>.

11. *Urban Watershed Profile: A Look at Phalen Creek*

(St. Paul, MN: Citizens for a Better Environment, February 1997), 10; *Restoring Lower Phalen Creek: A Strategy for Revitalizing an Urban Watershed* (St. Paul, MN: Citizens for a Better Environment and Friends of Swede Hollow, June 1997), 3; *Metro Greenprint—Planning for nature in the face of urban growth* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, December 1997), 42.

12. Frederick Melo, "After 33 years, St. Paul Riverfront Corp. to close in July," *Pioneer Press*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.twincities.com/2018/04/26/after-33-years-st-paul-riverfront-corporation-to-close-in-july>; Weiming Lu, "Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary: Empowerment towards a Community Dream," in *The Tao of Urban Rejuvenation: Building a Livable Creative Urban Village* (Edina, MN: Beaver's Pond Press, 2013), 132-133; Pitz, 3. Some other collaborating organizations not already noted include Railroad Implementation Task Force, District 5 Payne-Phalen Planning Council, Dayton's Bluff District 4 Community Council, and Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association.

13. Dan McGuiness, personal knowledge as member of the board.

14. Curt Brown, "Back to nature in St. Paul," *Star Tribune*, November 22, 2002, A1, A17; Lu, 135-136.

15. "Swede Hollow Greenway Redevelopment Wins Major Support," *Lowertown Bulletin*, Summer 1999.

16. Pitz, 14; Lu, 133-136; "Vento, Bruce Frank," Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, <https://www.lrl.mn.gov/legdb/fulldetail?id=10686>; Scott Nichols, "City decides to condemn land if BNSF railroad doesn't sell," *East Side Review*, November 12, 2001.

17. Pitz, 36-41.

18. Pitz, 55.

19. Pitz, 56.

20. Karl J. Karlson, "Green revolution," *Pioneer Press*, November 25, 2001.

21. *Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup: Voluntary Response Action Plan, Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary* (St. Paul, MN: Landmark Environmental, LLC, 2001), 1-2. BNSF maintained a railroad facility on the property, and Standard Oil and the former St. Paul & Duluth Railroad operated storage facilities there. A gas plant was also located on site. Investigations uncovered "lead, mercury, arsenic, chromium, total cyanide, benzo(a)pyrene" and other toxins in the soils. In addition, the property contained fill materials—glass, brick, coal, slag, and concrete.

22. *Determination of Eligibility of Carver's Cave (21RA27) and Dayton's Bluff Cave (21RA28), Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Project, St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: 106 Group, January 2023), 1-78; "Standard Oil Co," *St. Paul City Directory* (St. Paul, MN: R. L. Polk & Co., 1916), 1935.

23. *Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary at Lower Phalen Creek: Natural Resource Management Plan* (St. Paul, MN: Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc.; MMC Consulting, Inc. and Lower Phalen Creek Staff; and Ingraham & Associates), December 14, 2001.

24. *Determination of Eligibility of Carver's Cave (21TRA27)*, 78. In 2021, LPCP initiated efforts to seek official listing of the site on the National Register, a process that continues at the time of publication of this article.

25. Brown, A1, A17; Mary Abbe, "Making Over the Mississippi," *Star Tribune*, June 15, 2003, B10; Dennis Thompson, "From Brownfield to Greenspace: Creating the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary," *Cleanup Review* 14, no. 2 (August 2005): 1-2; Tom Sweeney, "A St. Paul Sanctuary," *Star Tribune*, July 23, 2006, B3.

26. For more information, see "Steering Committee Reports," in the LPCP/WTA archives.

27. Personal recollection of the author, who attended the event, May 21, 2005; Lu, 139.

28. Beth L. Podtburg, "Biking, hiking celebration marks addition of a new trail link to St. Paul's mix," *Star Tribune*, July 14, 2007, B3.

29. Jackie Crosby, "Project aims to unite nature, urbanization," *Star Tribune*, May 9, 2006, B3.

30. Sarah Clark, "LPCP Incorporation Materials," in LPCP First Board Meeting Binder, LPCP Archives.

31. Clark, "LPCP Incorporation Materials."

32. "LPCP First Meeting Minutes," LPCP Board of Directors, March 9, 2011.

33. Frederick Melo, "Kathy Lantry toasted at her last St. Paul City Council meeting," *Pioneer Press*, February 26, 2015, <https://www.twincities.com/2015/02/26/kathy-landry-toasted-at-her-last-st-paul-city-council-meeting/>; Saint Paul City Council Meeting, February 25, 2015, https://stpaul.granicus.com/player/clip/2772?view_id=37&redirect=true.

34. "LPCP Meeting Minutes," LPCP Board of Directors, December 16, 2017.

35. "Lower Phalen Creek Project," Corvus North, LLC, <https://www.corvusnorth.com/more-client-spotlight.html>; "Capitol Investment Hearing, Minne-

sota House of Representatives, <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hjvid/90/890490>.

36. "Wakan Tipi Center," *TPT Almanac 2022*, 7, <https://video.tpt.org/video/wakan-tipi-center-39062/>.

37. "Patrice H. Kunesch," Administration for Native Americans website, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/about/bio/patrice-kunesch>. Patrice Kunesch recently stepped down from the WTA, as she is now "Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans, at the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." She also serves as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs and as chair of the HHS Intradepartmental Council on Native American Affairs; Kate Beane is the executive director of the Minnesota Museum of American Art. She has a PhD in American studies from the University of Minnesota. She and her family have been leaders in the Twin Cities' community for many years.

38. Dan McGuiness, *Business Plan: Wakan Tipi Center at Bruce Vento Nature Center* (St. Paul, MN: Lower Phalen Creek Project, August 2019). This document is a good source of background and historical information about LPCP and the creation of WTA; "Reclaiming Native Truth," First Nations Development Institute website, <https://www.firstnations.org/projects/reclaiming-native-truth-a-project-to-dispel-americas-myths-and-misconceptions/>; Another good source is IllumiNative at <https://illuminatives.org> and their X (Twitter) site, @IllumiNative. These two organizations have helped LPCP/WTA board and staff find reliable information and guidance.

39. *Lower Phalen Creek Project/Wakan Tipi Center: 5 Year Vision and Messaging Plan* (Denver, CO: Indigenous Collaboration, Inc., October 2019), 15-17.

40. *Lower Phalen Creek Project/Wakan Tipi Center: 5 Year Vision and Messaging Plan*, 29-32.

41. Zoë Jackson, "St. Paul land dedicated for Wakan Tipi center," *Star Tribune*, October 12, 2021, B1, B3.

42. Zoë Jackson, "St. Paul dedicates land for future Dakota cultural, environmental center," *Star Tribune*, October 11, 2021, <https://www.startribune.com/st-paul-ceremony-honors-future-dakota-center/600105720/>.

43. See notes from LPCP archives from a special forum, "Acknowledging people and place at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary," February 23, 2022.

44. Chip Lindeke, email correspondence with author, April 13, 2022.

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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 Ĥeyáta Othúnywe (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.

RCHS offers public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion

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.

Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land

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.

Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.



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Dakhóta Iápi: A Brief History in Three Parts

This year, Dakhóta language scholars from the University of Minnesota—Eileen Bass, Justis Brokenrope, Deacon DeBoer, Ava Grace, and Heather Menefee, with their instructor Šišókaduta (Joe Bendickson)—have worked with Ramsey County Historical Society to write about Dakhóta Iápi (Dakota language). The piece begins on pages 12 and 13 with an early history of the language following settler colonization and extending through the boarding school era. It continues with a collaborative segment highlighting current language initiatives and the positive effects these have for both the Dakhóta and non-Indigenous communities in establishing themselves in Mnísota Makhóche history. The article culminates with words of encouragement to Dakhóta language teachers and second-language learners from Dr. Rev. Clifford Canku, one of the few remaining first-language Dakhóta speakers and a holder of traditional knowledge.

—Deacon DeBoer



Dakhóta language is present and celebrated throughout the Twin Cities at parks and in public art—as seen at Bdé Makhá Ská through work created by Mona Smith, Sandy Spieler, and Angela Two Stars; at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden installation, *Okciyapi*, also by Two Stars; and at the newly opened Unčí Makhá Park (Grandmother Earth Park) in St. Paul. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*