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Members of the Junior League of St. Paul rehearsing for the 1936 Junior League Cabaret, one of the League's more entertaining fund raisers. Left to right are Mrs. John Driscoll, Molly Turner, Betty Evans, Betty Scandrett, Betty Fobes, Edith Shull, Clotilde Irvine, Mrs. Thomas Wheeler, Alice Bartles and Betty Rugg. See article on the Junior League's seventy-five years of service to the community beginning on page 4.

The Junior League's First 75 Years

Follies, 'Friendly Visiting' and Women's C

Garneth O. Peterson

In the spring of 1917, as America still hoped to avoid entanglement in World War I, three young women founded the Junior League of St. Paul. Through the next seven decades, the League trained women to play an active role as community volunteers. For seventy-five years, League members have made noteworthy contributions to the city's social welfare organizations and to issues involving the arts, education and children.

As volunteers, League members initiated projects, then insured that those projects would continue to function on their own. Perhaps as significant has been how the League has mirrored women's changing roles in society, from their emergence from nineteenth century Victorian constraints to their present balancing of work, family life and volunteerism. This summary is intended to provide a flavor of the work Junior League members have undertaken in St. Paul, as their League training helped them develop new skills and abilities and the confidence to use them.

Creation of the League

Nationally, the Junior League was not a new organization. St. Paul was the nineteenth League formed. The first Junior League was organized in 1901 in New York City. The original intent was to encourage debutantes to draw upon the advantages of their education and leisure to improve human welfare within their communities. Members volunteered for work that most interested them, whether helping in a settlement house, or in an established charity organization.

St. Paul certainly had a history of volunteer efforts by women to improve the community, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. As early as 1867, twelve women from various Protestant denominations joined together as the Ladies' Christian Union and created the Home for the Friendless. It offered shelter for the many homeless persons coming to the frontier city of St. Paul, and later

housed the aged as the city's Protestant Home. In 1869, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened the House of the Good Shepherd for "fallen women," also prevalent in frontier communities. As in most other cities in that era, St. Paul's social welfare system was privately supported. These organizations had begun in times of change and transition in the 1860s and 1870s, as St. Paul began to move out of its frontier period. The founding of the Junior League of St. Paul in 1917 was during a similar time of transition, both for women and for the United States.

The Progressive Era in the years preceding World War I had resulted in child labor laws, good government reforms such as the initiative and referendum, the nation's first income tax, and ear-

ly feminist support of birth control, union involvement and cooperative apartment houses for women. Foremost among women's struggles was the battle for suffrage, a long-fought effort that finally was won in 1920.

In the early decades of the century, these crusading women still wore the long skirts and heavy constraining clothes of the Victorian era. But the emancipation of the 1920s was on the horizon. It was in this period of change and promise, against the backdrop of war in Europe, that the Junior League of St. Paul was founded by three women: Elizabeth Ames Jackson, Elizabeth Skinner, and Anne White. Elizabeth Ames was a St. Paul native, the daughter of C.L. Ames, the head of West Publishing Company. Mrs. Skinner was from St. Louis, Missouri, and Mrs. White from Columbus, Ohio, and both had experience in organizing Junior Leagues. Elizabeth Ames traveled to New York City to receive the official approval of the national organization, and the Junior League of St. Paul held its first information meeting in May, 1917.



Patients at the Convalescent Home. By the 1920s, the League had decided it wanted a project that was entirely its own. The result was the establishment of the Junior League Convalescent Home at 577 Oakland and later at 2 Kent Street.

anging Roles

The League's purpose was stated clearly in its 1920 By-laws:

1. To interest its members in the social, economic and educational conditions in St. Paul, and to bring them in touch with what is being done to improve these conditions, and to help them find their own work;
2. To provide, as far as it can, volunteer workers;
3. To raise funds for the maintenance or furtherance of work in which its members are interested or for which it has made itself responsible.

The group decided to expand to fifty members, inviting women, as described by Mrs. Jackson, "who had grown up in families much involved in civic affairs." Soon thereafter, the St. Paul Red Cross asked for League help in soliciting funds in its World War I campaign. The League also established contacts with local charities and agencies eager to train volunteers to work alongside professionals. Among the earliest volunteer projects were "friendly visiting" or office work for the Dale Street District of United Charities, assisting at the Neighborhood House on the West Side, or playing with children at the Protestant Orphan's Asylum on Marshall Avenue.

Members were required to commit themselves to three hours of volunteer work each week. The organization spent a good deal of time in the first decade emphasizing the need for volunteers to be dependable in fulfilling their requirements. In the early 1930s, a structured placement system which matched League members more closely with work that interested them was developed. The League also began a training program to teach volunteers about the agencies where they offered their time.



Two of the 800 patients cared for over the years at the Convalescent Home. The Home provided a place for women and girls, aged fourteen and up, to prepare for or recover from hospitalization.

The League's major effort in the 1920s was the Junior League Convalescent Home.



Social Welfare Projects

During its first thirty years, the League focused on social work, most of which was carried out privately until the rise of government programs during the depression. Early fund-raising and volunteer efforts supported the Phalen Park Hospital for Crippled Children (later Gillette Children's Hospital), the Children's Preventorium (a center for children with tuberculosis) and the United Charities (later Family Service) of St. Paul, where the League funded a position for the director of the Children's Division.

However, League members also wanted to focus on a project that was entirely their own. The League's major effort in the 1920s was the Junior League Convalescent Home, which provided a place for women and girls, aged fourteen and up, to prepare for or recuperate from hospitalization. Housed in a large dwelling at 577 Oakland, and later at 2 Kent Street, the Home cared for more than 800 women at a cost of \$16 a day. Patients were recommended by physicians, barring any mental, contagious or infectious diseases.

The League hired a registered nurse as

a matron, assisted by a cook and cleaning help. All other work was completed by Junior League volunteers, who sewed curtains, painted, drove patients to treatment and took over facility management whenever the matron took any time off. Monthly bills, handled by the League treasurer, included salaries (\$110 monthly for the matron), rent, food, laundry and utilities. By 1931, monthly costs were ranging from \$700 to a high of \$2,300.

Unfortunately, the League's good work could not overcome the economic effects of the stock market crash and the following depression. In late 1931, the League announced that it could not continue to fund the Home, and it closed at the end of December.

The Junior League Convalescent Home had been a tremendous, labor-intensive and expensive project for a young organization with fewer than 100 active members. During the time the Home was open, each League member was responsible for seventy-five hours of volunteer time yearly. However, managing the Home and the day-to-day care of its residents was a demanding and large responsibility. Clearly, those founding League leaders were not afraid to get their hands dirty.

After the Home closed and throughout the 1930s, the League maintained a special welfare fund which provided direct assistance for persons and families in desperate need. Beginning in 1934, a major fund-



The Junior League's Gift Shop in the Saint Paul Hotel, around 1930. A fund-raiser for the League, the shop sold merchandise ranging from baby bonnets to French lingerie.

ed project was the Children's Hospital Association. St. Paul's Children's Hospital had been founded in 1924, and three years later a new sixty-five-bed building on Pleasant Avenue was constructed. By 1933, however, the hospital was operating below capacity, and the Board of Trustees asked the Junior League to develop a Children's Hospital Association to support a Free Bed Fund for needy children.

The League created the Association and mounted a city-wide membership drive to sustain the Free Bed Fund. Member organizations could specify how their membership funds were spent: supporting a free bed at a cost of \$3 a day, or directed toward salaries, heating, maintenance, or food bills. In addition to community memberships, the League sponsored ice shows,

hockey games, concerts by the United States Marine Corps Band, and other fund-raisers to support the hospital. League involvement with the Children's Hospital Association ended in 1941, but the relationship was a significant chapter in developing the League and building connections to the larger community in St. Paul.

As the depression wound down and the Hospital Association prospered, the League voted to begin a new major project, developing a settlement house program in the Merriam Park district. St. Paul Community Service, Inc., was created to organize recreational and educational activities for children and adults, using playgrounds, parks, churches and other facilities in the neighborhood. From 1939 to 1947, the League contributed almost

\$20,000 to Community Service, which was governed by a board comprised of Junior League volunteers and Neighborhood House and Midway Council members. In 1943, the Community Chest (now United Way of the St. Paul Area) accepted Community Service, Inc., as one of its member agencies. The Merriam Park programs eventually resulted in construction of the Merriam Park Community Center to house the programs begun through the League project.

In 1948, the League helped create another St. Paul institution—the St. Paul Rehabilitation Center (now SPRC). This project was a joint effort with the Minnesota Society for Crippled Children and Adults and the Wilder Charities. The center originally was located in the Wilder

Dispensary at 279 Rice Street, but grew rapidly and by 1952 had moved to the newly remodeled Wilder Health Center Building at 319 Eagle Street. The League provided funds, volunteers and publicity for the Rehab Center, maintaining it as a project until 1954.

Raising Funds

Throughout its first three decades, the Junior League had developed a variety of ways to raise money to support its projects. A long-standing tradition was the "Follies," intermittent entertainments that began just three years after the League was founded and continued on a regular basis into the 1940s. Featuring League members and other St. Paul residents, the "Follies" was a major social event for St. Paul.

Each show was a bit different, but they all followed a format of songs and dance, carried out by performers in elaborate costumes. Music was borrowed from Broadway or other standard songs and woven into some type of loosely organized story line. Although later shows depended on a professional producer, the early shows were not so established. F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, had returned to St. Paul in the early 1920s after the success of his novel, *This Side of Paradise*. He wrote material for a League show in which Zelda made her debut as a dancer. A local writer recalled that "affable, charming, gregarious Scott was present at every rehearsal and that is a period forgotten in the Junior League unofficial records."

The time commitment for the "Follies" was demanding—daily and evening rehearsals for two to three weeks before the show opened. But the show was a funding mainstay, bringing profits of up to \$10,000 that could be used to support various League projects.

Another on-going fund-raiser, beginning in June, 1926, was a gift shop in the Saint Paul Hotel. The shop had its start when the League bought out a local "run down" shop for \$3,500. The League shop carried a wide variety of merchandise, from baby bonnets, pottery and toys to French lingerie. The shop continued until the early 1930s, when the League was no longer able to maintain it.

While the League made it through the



League members at the Children's Hospital. Created by the League, the Children's Hospital Association supported a Free Bed Fund for needy children.

A long-standing tradition was the "Follies."



depression and World War II years with occasional "Follies," rummage sales and small-scale fund-raisers, in the late 1940s the League opened its first Next-to-New Shop. Located first on Wabasha Street and at numerous other downtown addresses, and later on Payne Avenue, the Next-to-New shop was an on-going, somewhat more consistent method to fund League activities. Thus, it marked a departure from the more ad hoc fund-raising efforts of the first three decades.

The post-war era saw other changes in the League as well. As national social programs, more institutionalized social service agencies and professionally trained staff moved into the social welfare field, the League gradually began to shift toward arts and cultural activities.

Arts, Education, Children

The Junior League's interest in St. Paul's cultural activities did not spring up over-

night. As early as 1943, an Association of Junior Leagues of America (AJLA—now AJLI) consultant had visited St. Paul specifically to help establish a cultural program. Back in 1935, the League had begun a Children's Theatre project, with volunteers producing and acting in plays in schools and community centers throughout the city. A series of radio programs for children also were produced through the 1940s.

But perhaps the League's greatest arts contribution to St. Paul was its undertaking of a community arts survey in the fall of 1949. The survey collected information on cultural and leisure time resources in St. Paul. The survey evaluation pointed to a need for coordination among the organizations and led to the creation of the Committee of Arts and Sciences, with plans for an eventual Community Arts Center.

Although in 1950 the Community Arts Committee noted that "at present writing a building seems assured," it was not until 1964 that construction began on the new Arts and Sciences building at Tenth and Exchange streets. Throughout the intervening decade-and-a-half, the League had donated more than \$40,000 and countless



Sewing for women and babies, one of the first projects League members took on. The League also developed a settlement house program in the Merriam Park neighborhood. This eventually resulted in construction of the Merriam Park Community Center to house programs begun through the League project.

hours of service on committees connected both with the Council of Arts and Sciences and the construction of the Arts and Sciences building. The new building was outgrown almost as soon as it opened, and by the late 1970s, the Science Museum had constructed its massive new facility just across the street. The Museum took over the Arts and Sciences building, while other Council of Arts and Sciences members moved to Landmark Center, the former Old Federal Courts Building which was restored and opened as an arts and history center in 1978.

From the 1960s on, children's activities increasingly played a major role in League projects, including:

- A children's art project, which acquainted elementary school children with the Saint Paul Gallery of Art (now the Minnesota Museum of Art);

- “Let's Make Music,” a Junior League-produced program on KTCA-TV to introduce children to classical music;

- Vision and hearing testing for four-year-old children;

- Social Studies Institute—four years of summer programs for gifted high school students;

- School Volunteer Project—special school programs, with League members as volunteer teacher's assistants.

A long-lasting and still significant gift to the community was the League's project to develop the Joyce Hartzell Diagnostic-Remedial Materials Center (later the Special Education Instruction Materials Center—SEIMC) to provide materials and equipment for teachers of students with physical and mental impairments or learning disabilities. The center was created in conjunction with the St. Paul Public Schools. The project honored the League's former president, Joyce Hartzell, who had died in a tragic automobile accident. League volunteers helped organize the center and assisted in classroom demonstrations of materials and equipment.

Women's Changing Roles

Throughout its seventy-five-year history, the Junior League of St. Paul has held community service as its guiding objective. The nature of the League's work evolved over time, reflecting transitions in society and changes in women's roles.

Some of the changes involved member-

But perhaps the League's greatest arts contribution to St. Paul was its undertaking of a community arts survey in the fall of 1949.



ship in the organization. New members, known as “provisionals,” always have participated in a first year of training and completed a specified number of volunteer hours. Traditionally, the provisional training course has been an extensive series of lectures on topics related to the community. In the 1920s, the lectures focused on social work and factual information about the agencies where League members earned their volunteer hours.

A course schedule for 1933 showed the new trainees meeting three and four mornings or afternoons a week from October 30 through December 8. Several of the sessions included field trips to the Children's Home Society and juvenile and municipal courts, and to local settlement houses and social centers. At the end of the course, the members took a written exam, with three to four detailed questions on each of the agencies for which League members volunteered, including the Phalen Park Hospital, Goodwill Industries, the Preventorium, United Charities and the Baby Welfare Project.

The intensive training courses continued into the 1950s, although the number of sessions was reduced. Twenty years later, provisional training included a community orientation course of nine meetings over a five-week period in the fall, followed by monthly meetings held in various locations around the city.

A significant component of provisional training has been the volunteer hours of service. From the 1920s to the 1950s, seventy-five hours of service per year were required for members to maintain good standing in the organization. By the 1970s, provisionals were required to complete four half-days at the Next-to-New Shop and a minimum of six half-days on a League project. Today's provisional member must complete twelve hours of volunteer work and a training course with



Christmas Seal campaign, sometime during the 1930s. During these years, Junior League members also worked as volunteers at the Phalen Park Hospital, Goodwill Industries, the Children's Preventorium and the Baby Welfare Project.

monthly meetings from September through March in order to reach "active" membership status. The training course is no longer geared to Junior League projects, but is an introduction to St. Paul and how the community works.

Women's roles both inside and outside of the home also have had an effect on the League, which had its start with upper class women who had household help. Presumably, most of those women did not work outside the home. Yet, as early as the 1920s, the Junior League of St. Paul had a "professional" member status for women who were doing "full time paid work" and were unable to fulfill the seventy-five

hours of volunteer service. The "professional" category then disappeared until 1956-57, when it resurfaced as "working girls," a group that met in the evenings and participated in projects or worked in the Next-to-New Shop at night.

A decade later, there were enough women for a "professional group" that was integrated more closely with the rest of the League. For the first time, the professional group had its own executive committee and board representation. These changes provided the professionals with enhanced opportunities to participate in the League's governing structure. In 1972, the approximately twenty-eight professional mem-

bers asked to be called the "Evening Section" to more fully recognize that they were not a separate entity, but a part of the League as a whole. By March, 1980, with fifty percent of members working outside their homes, the League began to hold more membership meetings in the evening. The 1981 President's report stated that for the first time, "day and evening membership meetings have had a parallel focus and evening meetings are no longer the 'poor sister' of the organization." In the past decade, the "Evening Section" has disappeared and monthly meetings are held at night, but efforts are made for some daytime meetings to accommodate women

with daytime volunteer time.

League Membership

Becoming a Junior League member also has changed greatly over the years. Since the beginning of the Junior League, new members could join only if sponsored by an existing member, who had to know the proposed member well enough to feel certain she would complete her volunteer work and could afford the monthly meetings and other requirements. Sponsors were urged to take their jobs seriously, looking at the prospective member's background, education and personal qualities.

By the 1960s, the social changes that caused upheaval in every aspect of American life also affected the League. More and more women were entering careers, pursuing those careers before marriage, working outside of their homes after marriage or remaining single career women. Young wives of rising corporate executives, a traditional mainstay of League membership, found themselves moving more frequently as corporate transfers became more common. Society itself was changing, as the new freedoms won by women and people of color broke down

Women's roles both inside and outside of the home also have had an effect on the League.



old, established social barriers.

The Junior League of St. Paul began to examine its admission policy as the increasing mobility of both single and married women made it difficult for members to sponsor women they knew well enough to propose for membership. In addition, many potential members could not join because they were newcomers to the community. Beginning in 1970, the League began an open membership program which admitted all women who were interested in volunteerism. Prospective members who did not have a sponsor were paired with an active member who would advise and assist them in membership. The Junior League of St. Paul played a leadership role in advocating modified admission standards which were subsequently adopted by the international governing association

(Association of Junior Leagues International—AJLI). This system has resulted in a more diversified League, as reflected in the current mission statement, which affirms that the League “reaches out to women of all races, religions and national origins who demonstrate an interest in and commitment to volunteerism.”

Recent Projects

Since the 1970s, the League has moved away from focusing on a single project, as it had with the Convalescent Home, Children's Hospital, and the Arts and Sciences Center. With more members working full-time, volunteer opportunities had to change, too.

Through the 1970s and the 1980s, the League focused on volunteer projects with children, the elderly and the arts. Some notable efforts of those years included the Community Line (a parent assistance and referral service), drug education for youth, the Women's Institute for Social Change (women's leadership training), development of volunteers for the Science Museum, Omnibus (a school curriculum for gifted children), the Hmong Art Project, St. Paul Arts Festival, Prevention of Too Early Pregnancy and work with the Women's Economic Development Corporation (WEDCO) project.

Today's Junior League membership in St. Paul reflects the demands now made on women. The current membership includes approximately 200 active members. Of that total, seventy-five percent work full- or part-time and eighty-five percent have children. Their commitment to the community is strong—ninety percent volunteer not only for the League, but do additional volunteer work as well.

In its seventy-fifth year, the League is returning to its roots in its current volunteer projects. In a recessionary era, services to women and children are more critical than ever and desperately need volunteer assistance. This effort is carried out directly by the League's Hands-On Project, in which League members respond to short-term immediate community needs, such as serving meals for the homeless or painting houses during the community-wide Paint-A-Thon. The League also makes grants to other non-profit organizations for the development or management



Style Show in 1967, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Junior League of St. Paul. Left to right: (unidentified), Mrs. Robert Plunkett, Mrs. M. C. Green, Mrs. John Herrmann, Mrs. John T. Withy, Mrs. Richard Messing, Mrs. Pierce Butler III.



A long-standing tradition in St. Paul's social life. The "Follies" was launched as an entertaining fund-raiser in 1920s and became a major social event. This, however, is believed to be a raucous moment from the 1969 cabaret show, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby."

of their volunteer programs through the Community Financial Assistance Program. Since 1984, more than \$46,000 has been awarded to forty-six organizations. The League is also playing an active role in the Violence Against Women Coalition in the Twin Cities, joining with twenty-seven other groups to educate the public on breaking the cycle of violence that preys on women and children.

The League's 75th Anniversary Project is the Child Abuse Project, conducted in partnership with the Midwest Children's Resource Center at Children's Hospital. Volunteers will work with parents of abuse

victims and bring to the community educational materials that are aimed at changing opinions and attitudes on child abuse. It is entirely fitting that Children's Hospital, the beneficiary of early League volunteers in the 1930s, should again be a League partner in bringing important programs and assistance to the community.

Throughout the past seventy-five years, the Junior League's work has given women numerous opportunities to develop their leadership skills and to move on to other community work after their active League years have ended. This tradition of leadership, along with the projects it supports,

form the legacy of the Junior League and its continuing contributions to St. Paul.

Garneth O. Peterson has a master of arts in urban history from the University of Nebraska at Omaha where she worked for ten years as a city planner and served as president of the Douglas County Historical Society. She has published two articles in Nebraska History. She is now a planner for St. Paul's Planning and Economic Development Department. The author wishes to thank Carolyn Brusseau, Rosemary Gruber and Louise Jones, all past presidents of the Junior League of St. Paul, who read this manuscript and graciously shared their insights.