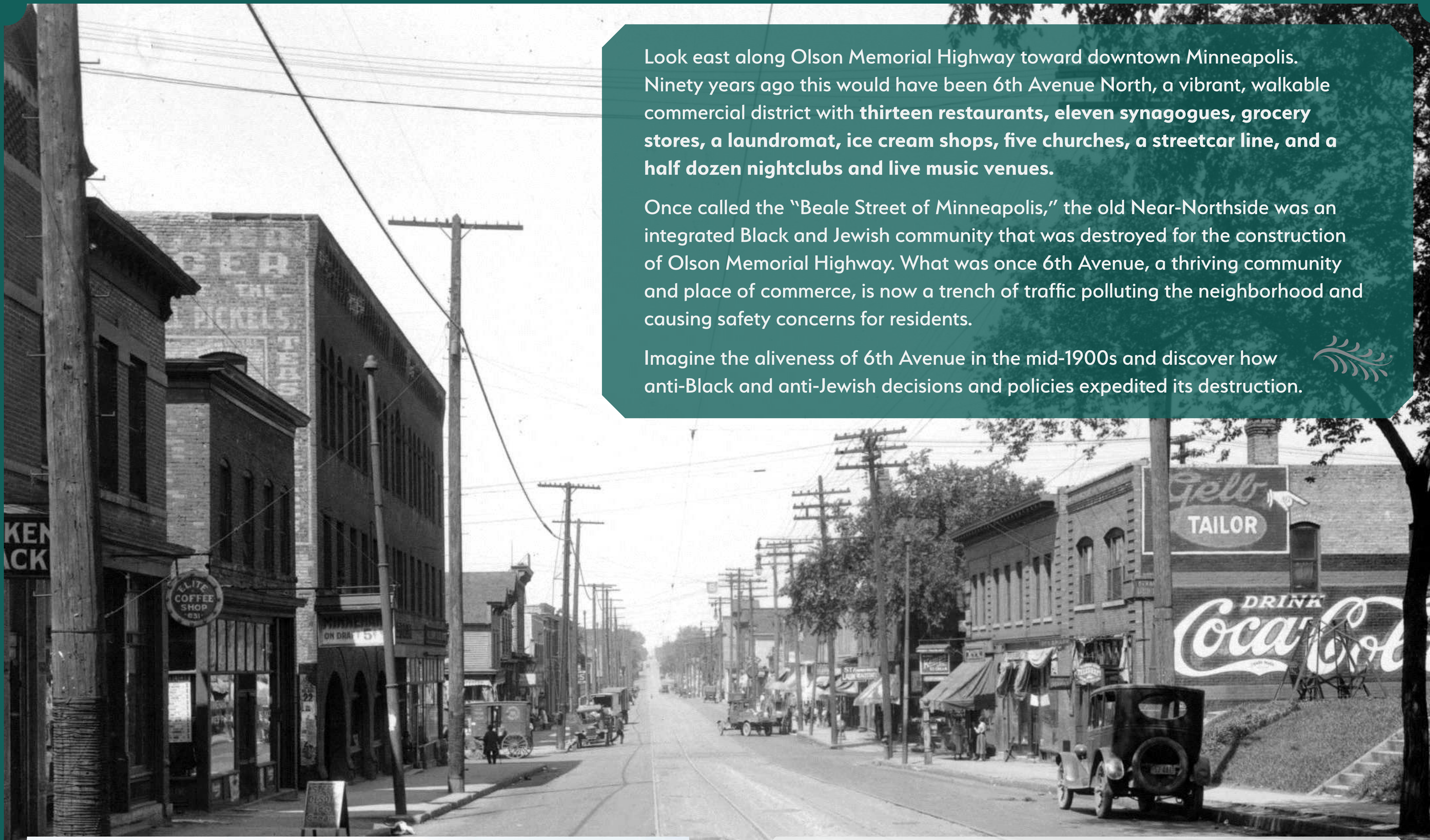


# BRINGING BACK SIXTH



Look east along Olson Memorial Highway toward downtown Minneapolis. Ninety years ago this would have been 6th Avenue North, a vibrant, walkable commercial district with **thirteen restaurants, eleven synagogues, grocery stores, a laundromat, ice cream shops, five churches, a streetcar line, and a half dozen nightclubs and live music venues.**

Once called the "Beale Street of Minneapolis," the old Near-Northside was an integrated Black and Jewish community that was destroyed for the construction of Olson Memorial Highway. What was once 6th Avenue, a thriving community and place of commerce, is now a trench of traffic polluting the neighborhood and causing safety concerns for residents.

Imagine the aliveness of 6th Avenue in the mid-1900s and discover how anti-Black and anti-Jewish decisions and policies expedited its destruction.

## HEYDAY TO DEMOLITION

6th Avenue businesses in 1922, then in 1936 when the city forced their sale and demolition for Olson Memorial Highway.

### 712 and 710 6th Avenue North Intersection with Lyndale Place



1922

Sam Allen's Cafe & BBQ (712) and The People's Store (710)

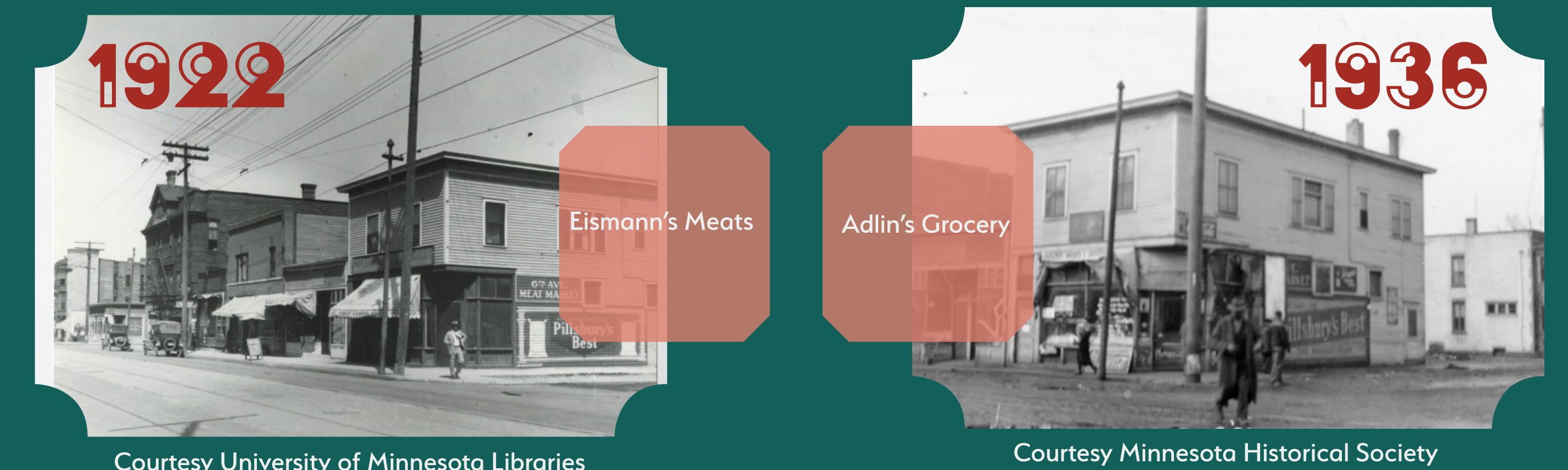
Landy's Meats (712) The People's Store (710)

1936

Courtesy University of Minnesota Libraries

Courtesy Hennepin County Library

### 800 6th Avenue North Looking West from Aldrich



1922

Eismann's Meats

Adlin's Grocery

1936

Courtesy University of Minnesota Libraries

Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

"Drivers see only dull pavement when they cruise past the Olson Memorial Highway and Interstate Highway 94 junction in north Minneapolis today. In my mind's eye, I see much more."

—W. Harry Davis, Sr., *Overcoming*, 2002

"The avenue was teeming from seven o'clock in the morning 'til way past midnight! People were so friendly. Everybody knew their own neighbors, not their immediate neighbors but for blocks and blocks around. And every corner had a group discussing topics of the day."

—Ben Brochin, son of Brochin's deli founder, remembering the 1910s and 20s



Looking west down 6th Avenue towards the Lyndale Avenue intersection, June 28, 1922. The Kistler building is on the left. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

**What void did the destruction of 6th Avenue create?  
How does that void still impact us today?**

## THE NEAR-NORTH NAMESAKE

- Olson Memorial Highway
- was built in two phases
- in 1939-1945 and 1957-
- 1959. It is named in
- honor of Floyd B. Olson,
- Minnesota's governor
- from 1930 until 1936.
- Olson was born and
- raised on Minneapolis'
- Near-Northside. During
- his tenure as governor,
- he supported and funded
- projects for increased
- unemployment benefits
- and the building of
- highways.



Floyd B. Olson Statue on Olson Memorial Highway (at Penn Ave) at dedication. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

Olson Memorial Highway, where 6th and Lyndale once stood, April 10, 2022. Courtesy Jessie Merriam

## TIMELINE

### 6th Ave N, Pre-Highway

In place of the current highway used to be a lively business district in North Minneapolis.

1870-1930

### Construction of Highway 55

All the businesses and homes along the north side of 6th Ave N were torn down in preparation for the highway.

1935-1940

### Expansion and Redevelopment

Olson Highway widening and Glenwood Redevelopment leads to demolition of south side of the street.

1950-1960s

LATE 1960s

### I-94 Arrives, Further Division

Arrival of Interstate 94, more displacement adjacent to former 6th Avenue North.



# THE BEALE STREET OF MINNEAPOLIS



The Prince Rogers Trio band included Prince's father, John Lewis Nelson (on the left), whose favorite stage name was "Prince Rogers." Courtesy Hennepin County Library and the children of John Glanton

Like Beale Street was to blues music in Memphis, 6th Avenue was to jazz (and later funk) in Minneapolis. Not only was 6th at the heart of a boundary-pushing music movement, it also attracted entrepreneurs and served people from many backgrounds to come and make their mark. During the first half of the 1900s, 6th Avenue North and its surrounding neighborhood was a Black and Jewish cultural hub, where residents worked, shopped, played, and learned together.

When Jewish immigrants arrived toward the end of the 19th century, the Near-Northside was a collection of aging stately homes and brick storefronts. By the 1920s, the area experienced an influx of Black

entrepreneurs and families looking to put down roots in the lively neighborhood.

The Avenue was narrow, its sides packed from Lyndale to Penn, with everything a community member could need within walking distance. It was also a place of city disinvestment and limited resources, where buildings and employment could be unstable.

Nearby blocks housed influential Jewish and Black youth and community centers that would help shape music and culture, labor rights and housing laws, and activist thinking to this day.



Near-Northside kids stage their own National Recovery Administration parade, 1933. Courtesy Minneapolis Tribune

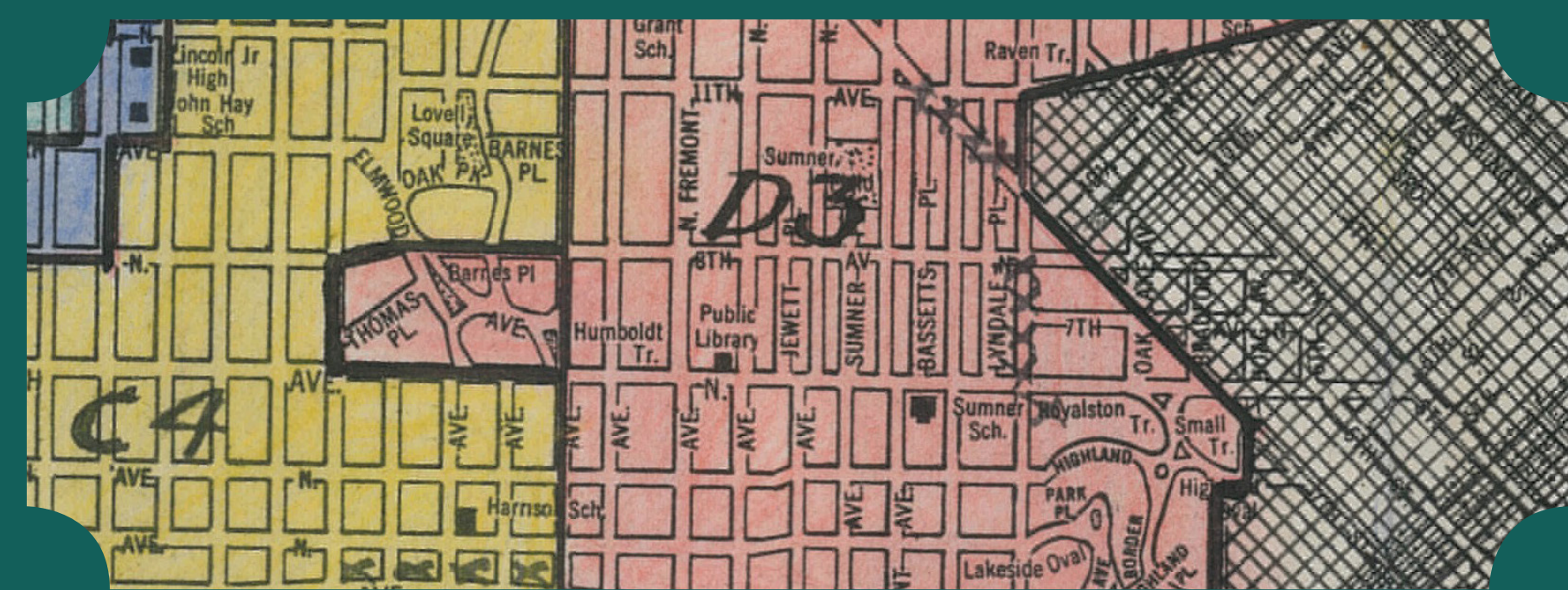
**"The North Side was a complete neighborhood: it had all the institutions and commercial establishments that Jewish communities need. It also had its great men and women, and it had its rogues."**

—North Side Memories: Upper Midwest Jewish History, 2000



## SEGREGATION AND HOUSING COVENANTS

Black and Jewish residents were congregated around 6th Avenue because of segregation, and the systematic devaluation of their communities. Legal tools allowed bankers and the government to limit Black and Jewish residents from living anywhere but "less desirable" neighborhoods.



D3 and C4 encompass 6th Avenue North. By the 1930s, D3 was a predominantly Black neighborhood while Jewish residents moved farther west and north. Public domain, Courtesy Mapping Inequality

Racially restrictive deeds, or covenants, prevented the sale of housing to non-white people, including Jews, concentrating minorities in specific neighborhoods.

In 1933, the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) "redlined" neighborhoods like the Near-Northside for mixing "incompatible" racial and social groups, deemed to create "instability" and a decline in property values. Redlining limited residents' ability to obtain funds to own or improve homes and businesses.

**The HOLC manual advised that "a high speed traffic artery may prevent the expansion of inharmonious uses."**

Government officials targeted 6th Avenue North for its "inharmonious uses": a mix of Black and Jewish residents living with aging infrastructure and a lack of generational wealth. In 1931, the City of Minneapolis labeled the neighborhood "blighted" for its dilapidated buildings, which residents could not get loans to repair.

## COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

Thriving along 6th Avenue was supported by community leaders and the gathering places they founded in the blocks nearby. Neighbors came together to construct significant buildings as social support and community hubs. Along with churches and synagogues, these were the community cornerstones that allowed life along 6th Avenue to flow. They played major roles in sparking interest for youth in music, including young Prince and Jimmy Samuel "Jimmy Jam" Harris III.

Emanuel Cohen and Phyllis Wheatley were two settlement houses, social support and gathering centers with safe accommodations and live-in staff. Settlement houses spread in popularity in the late 19th century in response to poor urban living conditions. Their values included respect, reciprocity, cross-class collaboration and strength-based contributions to the community.



Girls at Phyllis Wheatley, 1925. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

## SOUNDS ON 6TH

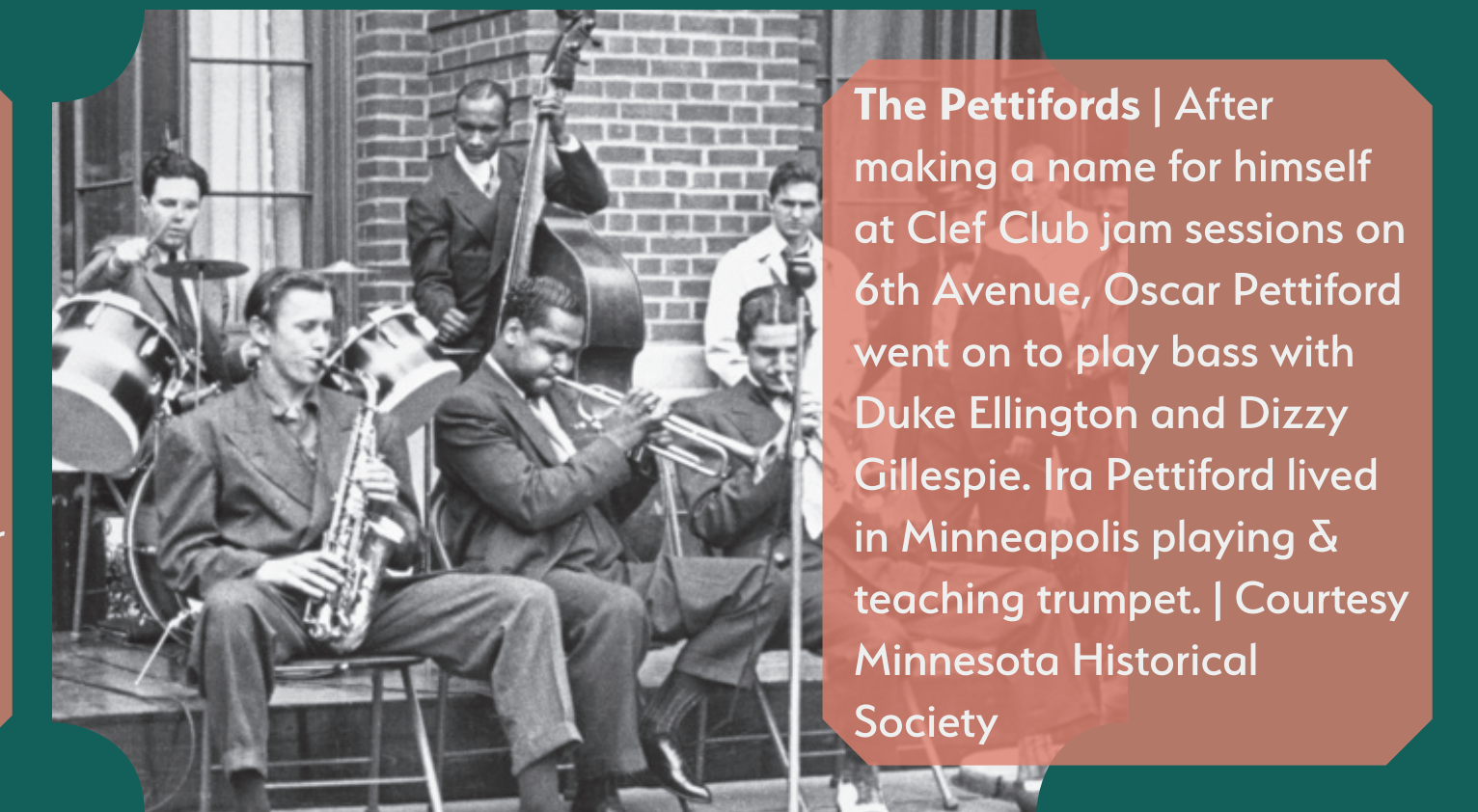
The musical influence of 6th Avenue is hard to overstate. Touring and local jazz musicians played here after downtown gigs and for events. Up-and-coming artists flocked to Corner clubs, or small bar-venues, to jam and learn from the greats.



Black musical icons and dynasties emerged from this neighborhood over the decades, including the Youngs, Pettifords, and Nelsons. Like many other Black families, Prince's maternal grandparents—the Shaws—came to Minnesota as part of the Great Migration of African Americans moving north to escape the Jim Crow South.



**The Youngs** | At 17 years old Lester Young moved to a grand house at 573 7th Avenue North. Lester would play with local star band leader Rook Ganz in the neighborhood and go on to be the most influential tenor sax player of the 1930s-50s. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



**The Pettifords** | After making a name for himself at Clef Club jam sessions on 6th Avenue, Oscar Pettiford went on to play bass with Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie. Ira Pettiford lived in Minneapolis playing & teaching trumpet. | Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

**For African Americans in the late 1920s, Clarence Miller remembered, "The Avenue was their only outlet for enjoyment after six days of hard labor on their jobs in those years. It was said that a Sunday was not a Sunday if you didn't get to 6th Avenue."**

—The Clarence Miller Memory Map, around 1950s



Summer Field offered Black and Jewish kids a place to play together in the summer and ice skate in the winter, 1936. | Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Kids on the corner of Humboldt and 6th Avenue North in the 1930s. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



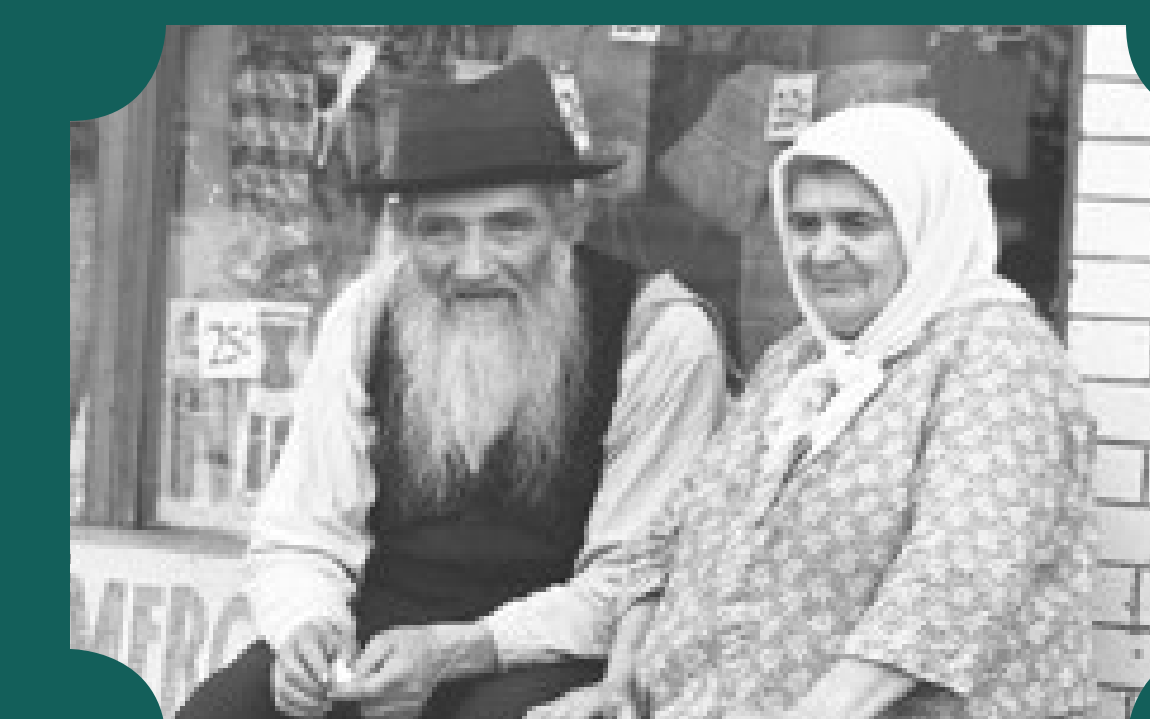
Looking east from Humboldt toward Girard on 6th Ave North, 1936. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Sumner Library, seen here in 1956, is a place of community learning. Built in 1915, it was a Carnegie library, won by librarian Gratia Alta Countryman. | Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Friends inside a cafe, 1940s. Courtesy Hennepin County Library and the children of John Glanton



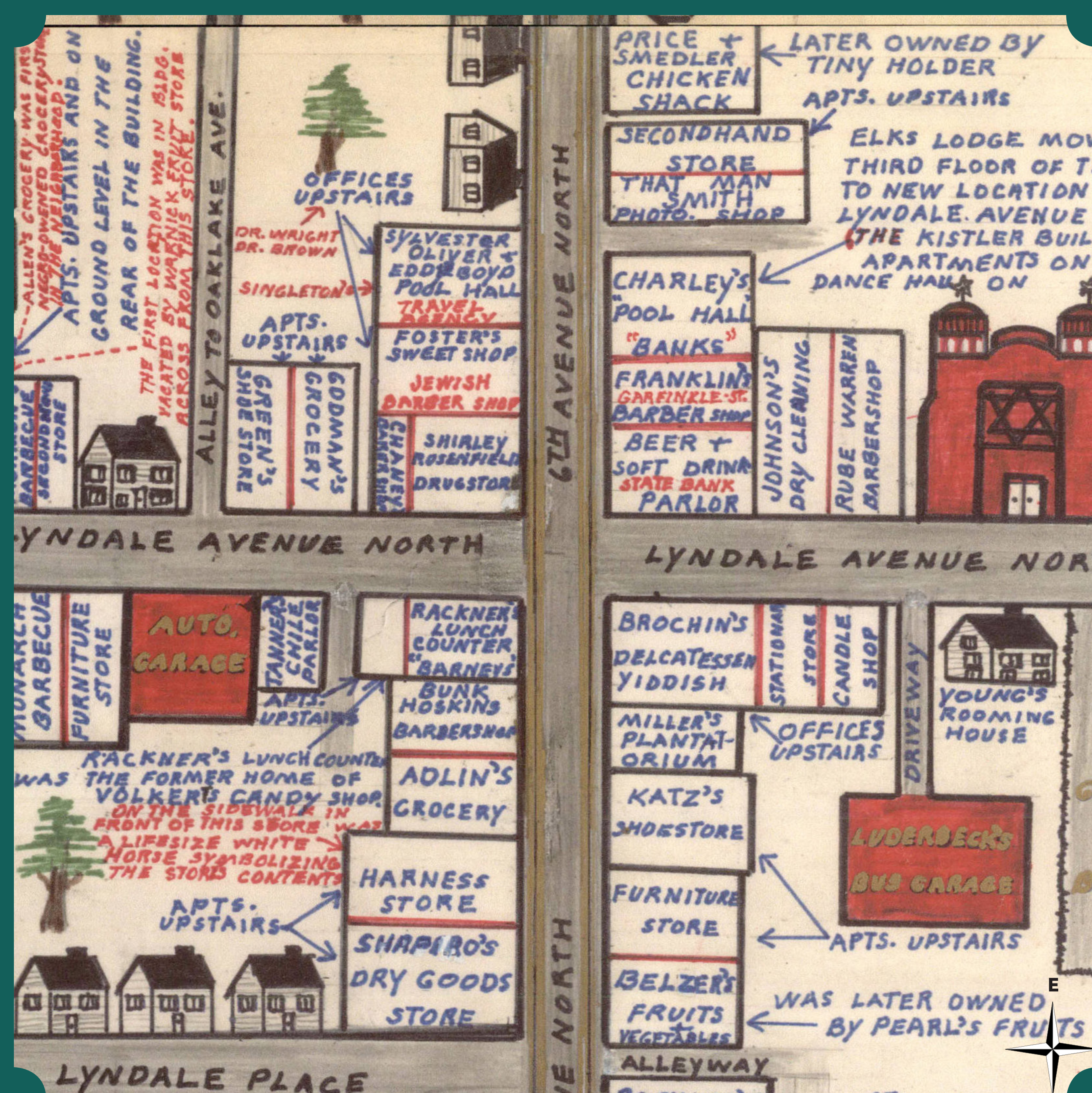
Close-up of a Jewish couple outside Harry Marcus Dry Goods, 1017 6th Avenue North, 1940. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Many Jewish families in old Near North made their living as they could, as peddlers of various goods like chickens or fruit. | Courtesy University of Minnesota Libraries



# THE CORNER



The Corner, detailed closeup from Clarence Miller's memory map, which he described as "The reflections of my neighborhood...from the year 1924 thru the year 1929," which was "the pinnacle period for Negroes in and near 6th Avenue and Lyndale Avenue North." Courtesy Hennepin County Library

## ELKS CLUB ON THE CORNER

Historically denied membership to many white fraternity groups, Black community members organized a Minneapolis branch of the Elks Club in 1906. The Ames Lodge 106 became a place where Black Elks could gather for social, political, and economic support and advancement. This image shows Ruben Warren (seated in the backseat on the passenger side), three-time president of the Elks Club and owner of the Royal Barber Shop on the Lyndale side of the Kistler, riding in the Elks Car during the Aquatennial Parade in the 1940s.



Courtesy Hennepin County Library and the children of John Glanton

"I had been invited to attend a meeting at the old Elks Club...to talk about whether we should have a union. From there on, [I] kept right on talking union and before before we knew it, we had enough people to call together" — Civil rights leader Nellie Stone Johnson, on formation of the Local 665, Hotel and Restaurant Workers union, in 1935. Interview, 1981.

## KISTLER ON THE CORNER

When the family of Dr. James Kistler constructed the building in 1889, they envisioned it serving as both a business and a resource hub to other businesses. For the next 68 years, the building was home to Jewish and Black-owned businesses of the Near-Northside, experiencing particular abundance.



The Kistler building in the last year of its existence, 1957. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

### 3rd floor of the Kistler:

(mostly music & dance clubs)

1890-1920 Kistler offices, Oddfellows, community hall, athletic clubs

1921-22 Elks Club (moved to 148 Highland)

1920s-30 Kit Kat Club

1930s Apex Club

1936 Clef Club

1950s Ebony Club

1958 Harry Kaplan sells the two lots to the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Agency (HRA)

"It was a place unlike any other in Minneapolis—more diverse, more dangerous, more disadvantageous, but also somehow, more alive."

—W. Harry Davis, Sr., *Overcoming*, 2002



Ben Brochin in his family's delicatessen, 1950. Courtesy University of Minnesota Libraries

## SOUNDS ON 6TH: THE NELSONS



From social dances to late night jams, the Corner was the focal point of music culture on the Avenue.

Many clubs came and went: The Cotton Club, Kit Kat, Howard's Steak House,

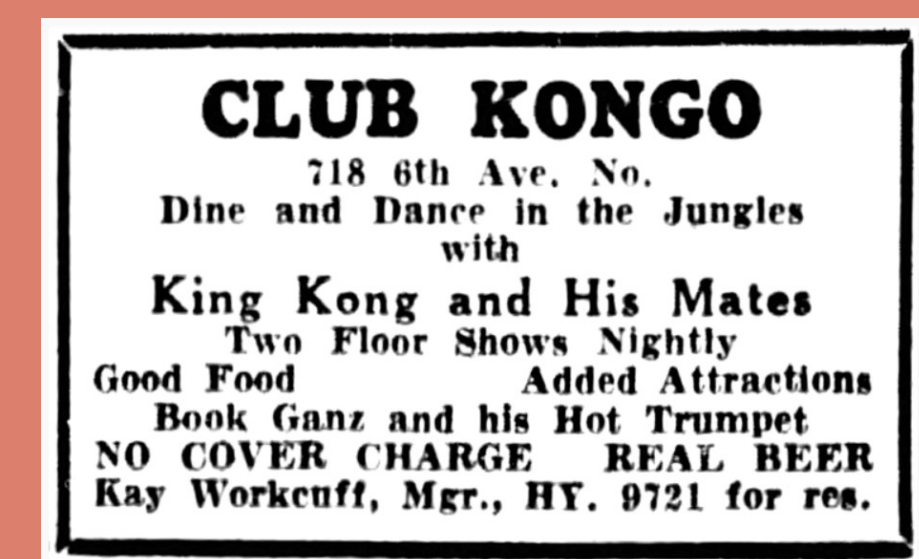
Harlem Breakfast, Konga, Rhombogie, and more.

Dance halls here were one of few integrated spaces. In 1995 Nelson Peery recalled, "it was in the Clef Club that the beautiful and democratic singer Peggy Lee convinced Benny Goodman to hire Lionel Hampton as the first black musician in a major white big band."

Prince's parents—John Lewis "Prince Rogers" Nelson & Mattie Shaw—were also shaped by the music scene on the Corner. Nelson played jazz piano and formed the Prince Rogers Trio.



The Cotton Club, 718 6th Avenue North. Courtesy St. Louis Park Historical Society



Club Kongo hosted dances & jazz musicians. They served real beer once legal, but the police put them out of business for staying open after 2 am. | Courtesy Twin Cities Music Highlights & Minneapolis Star, 1933

Weddings, bars and bat mitzvahs, a deli owner buying steamboat tickets for Jewish refugees, bootlegging, the city's first Black-owned grocery store, the hottest jazz and dances, and Foster's Sweet Shop hosting the conversations of labor organizers and other Black activists all existed on "The Corner."

From the early 1900s until the construction of Olson Memorial Highway in the late 1930s, the Corner of 6th and Lyndale was the focal point for all of the social and political activities of the neighborhood.

## KENESSETH ISRAEL & BROCHIN'S ON THE CORNER

Several community gathering places converged at the Corner. Keneseth Israel synagogue was just south of the Kistler Building and across from Brochin's Delicatessen.

The deli was where leaders would meet "to iron out any problem that confronted the Jewish community," Ben Brochin remembered. Then they would head over to the synagogue for larger meetings. Keneseth Israel was "the biggest meeting place of all...It seemed like there were mass meetings going on all the time during World War I and right after...when the...pogroms were taking place."

—Ben Brochin, son of Solomon Brochin of Brochin's delicatessen, *North Side Memories*, 2000. The pogroms were state-sanctioned Russian campaigns that persecuted Eastern European Jews from 1881 through World War I, resulting in immigration to the US.



Keneseth Israel synagogue, around 1900. Courtesy University of Minnesota Libraries

## NORTHEAST ON THE CORNER: THE 600 BLOCK

Foster's Sweet Shop was located in a building on the north side of 6th Avenue, across from the Kistler Building in the 1920s and 30s. "The Minnesota Club," a group of Black civic leaders and activists, would gather to strategize for civil rights organization at Foster's.

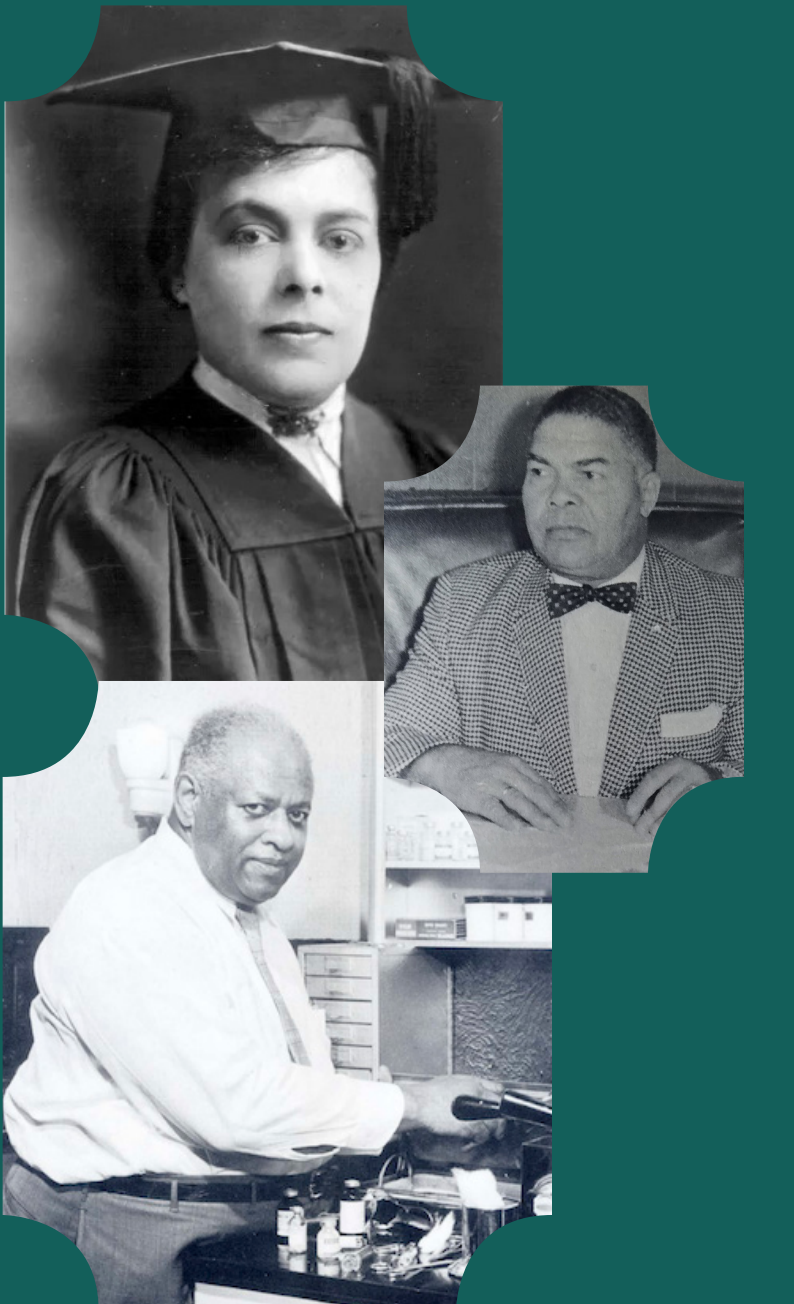
"We met once a month in Fosters Sweet Shop on Sixth and Lyndale. We met in the back and all they wanted us to do if we met there was to buy a dish of ice cream." —Anthony B. Cassius, 20th Century Radicalism in Minnesota Oral History Project interview, 1981

The Keystone Bar, a Jewish-owned speakeasy serving mostly Black clientele, was located at 644 6th Avenue North. In 1938, the city bought them out for the construction of Olson Memorial Highway, and the bar moved across the street to the first floor of the Kistler.



The storied Keystone Bar in the 1930s. Foster's was just a few doors down to the right. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

The civil rights group the Minnesota Club that met at Foster's Sweet Shop included Herbert Howell (reporter for the Black newspaper *The Spokesman*), Lena Olive Smith (first Black female attorney in Minnesota, first female president of the Minneapolis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), Dr. William D. Brown (civil rights activist and compassionate physician for the North and South Side Black communities in Minneapolis), A.B. Cassius (labor organizer and owner of the first Black bar in downtown Minneapolis) and others. Courtesy Walter Scott, *Minneapolis Negro Profile*, 1968. Courtesy African American Registry. Courtesy Minnesota Spokesman Recorder







- 1 Charley's Place**  
1900 6th Ave. N., around 1938
- 2 Labor Lyceum Hall**  
1426 6th Ave. N. in 1922
- 3 Wolf's Bakery**  
1306 6th Ave. N., around 1930s
- 4 Shank's Garage**  
1300 6th Ave. N. in 1938
- 5 Schuster Meats**  
1228 6th Ave. N., around 1930s
- 6 Sumner Library**  
1100 6th Ave. N. in 1938
- 7 Cotton Club**  
718 6th Ave. N., around 1930s
- 8 Landy Provision**  
Meats, Grocery, & Fruits  
712 6th Ave. N., around 1930s
- 9 People's Grocery**  
708-710 6th Ave. N. in 1936
- 10 Barney's Lunch & Kee Laundry**  
700 and 702 6th Ave. N. in 1936

The construction of Olson Memorial Highway eliminated both Charley's Place and the streetcar line that used to bring customers its way.

In 1938, city authorities tried to avoid responsibility for relocating the Labor Lyceum. It found a new home at 1800 Olson Memorial Highway in the building that is now La Creche Early Childhood Center.

In 1936, business owners like Joseph Wolf received dozens of eviction notices. Yet Wolf refused to abandon his home and bakery of seven years until after he finished fulfilling orders for Jewish holidays later in the month.

In 1935, mayoral candidate Thomas E. Latimer spoke at a Farmer-Labor Party meeting at Shank's Garage. Community meeting places like this one became the casualties of Olson Memorial Highway.

Although Black and Jewish families both experienced housing discrimination, the areas where African Americans could live were much more limited. Like many other Jewish community members, meat cutter Max Schuster eventually moved to nearby St. Louis Park.

Minneapolis architect Ceal Bayless Chapman designed the library in the Tudor Revival style. In 1938, "a crew of six men each turning a large jack" moved the building "one hundred feet directly north...one-eighth of an inch at a time" to its current location to make way for Olson Memorial Highway. —Adelaide Rood, Librarian, 1938.

In just over a decade, this building housed four different jazz joints, including the popular Cotton Club, a night spot known as a "chicken shack," serving food and entertainment. In 1928, a fatal shootout between city police and bootlegger Isadore "Kid Cann" Blumenfeld shut the club down. In 1938, Olson Memorial Highway silenced the music for good.

Before buying and demolishing properties along 6th Avenue, the city assigned them a number. This storefront, one of three Landy's Meat Market locations, became number 17 (see the person holding the number in front here).

People's Grocery was one of hundreds of properties condemned, seized, and razed for the construction of the Sumner Field Homes and Olson Memorial Highway.

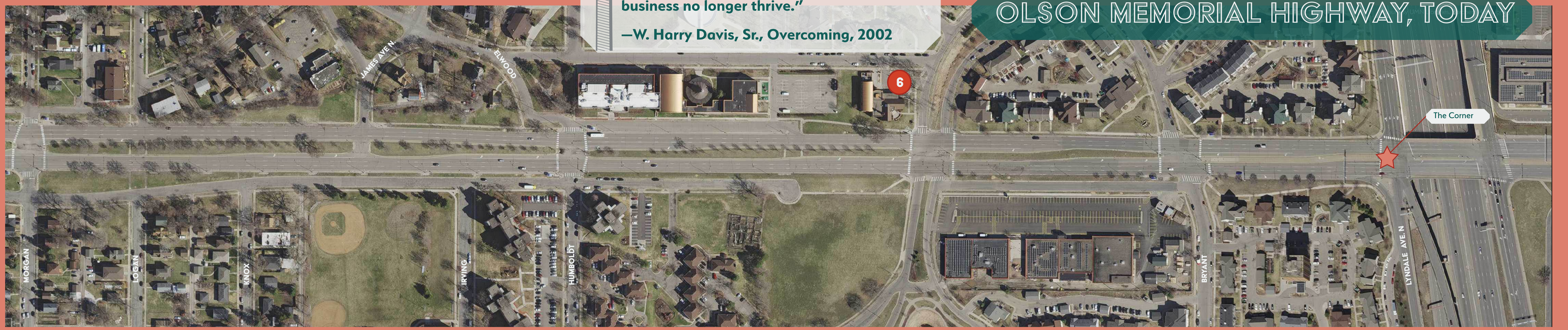
Barney's Lunch and Roy Kee Laundry were just two of many businesses on the popular corner of 6th and Lyndale. Clarence Miller recalled the location as the former home of Volkert's Candy Shop.



## 6TH AVENUE NORTH MAP, 1924

"[Construction of Olson Memorial Highway] made my neighborhood's main street a thoroughfare where pedestrians were no longer comfortable and retail business no longer thrive."  
—W. Harry Davis, Sr., *Overcoming*, 2002

## OLSON MEMORIAL HIGHWAY, TODAY



- 11 Northside Inn**  
1011 Olson Memorial Highway, around 1956
- 12 Harry Marcus Dry Goods**  
1027 6th Ave. N. in 1940
- 13 Liberty Theatre**  
1015 6th Ave. N. around 1914
- 14 Minneapolis Shade Cloth Company**  
905 6th Ave. N. around 1936
- 15 Adlin's Grocery and Meats**  
901 6th Ave. N., around 1930s
- 16 Aldrich Pharmacy**  
733 6th Ave. N. in 1938
- 17 Brochin's Delicatessen**  
701 6th Ave. N. in 1922
- 18 Katz Tailoring**  
535 Lyndale Ave. N. in 1938
- 19 Kistler Building**  
532 Lyndale Ave. N. in 1957
- 20 Ames Lodge, Number 106**  
148 Highland Ave. in 1937

A case study in the difficulties of tavern ownership on the Avenue, the Northside Inn switched names and locations many times between 1935 and 1972, facing licensing battles and policing issues. They were primarily an after hours music venue.

Construction delays on Olson Memorial Highway made the roadway in front of Marcus Dry Goods and hundreds of other businesses "impassable" for over one year.

First a vaudeville venue, the Liberty Theatre primarily served the Jewish community on 6th Avenue. The proprietor, Sol Lebedoff, "used to have a large Chanukah party for all the kids from all the shuls, and they would fill up the six hundred seats, and they'd give them gifts and it was a wonderful occasion." —Sol's son, Martin Lebedoff (1911-1992).

Even though businesses on the south side remained intact, they were still impacted by the construction of Olson Memorial Highway. Located at the corner of Bryant and 6th, the Minneapolis Shade Cloth Company was surrounded by wreckage of other homes and businesses.

When the north side of 6th Avenue was slated for demolition, Folk Adlin moved his business across the street. Formerly La Salle Drug Company, this building became the new home of Adlin's Grocery and Meats in 1936.

Aldrich Pharmacy and other businesses along 6th Ave. N. were popular among Near-Northside youth. Pictured here with three friends, W. Harry Davis, Sr. (third from left) became the first African American to run for mayor in Minneapolis.

Brochin's was a central fixture of the Corner and the Near Northside Jewish community. In addition to selling kosher foods, the establishment included a bookstore and served as a meeting place where neighbors could socialize and troubleshoot issues. Brochin's moved to Plymouth Avenue in 1934, as the second generation Jewish neighborhood moved north and west of the Corner.

Abraham Katz ran a tailor shop on the north side of the block and "a wonderful shoe store" on the south side. When construction took over the north side, Katz Tailoring relocated across the left of this building, to Lyndale Avenue, south of the new Olson Memorial Highway.

With entrances on both 6th and Lyndale, the Kistler Building was host to a variety of businesses, including Ruben Warren's Royal Barber Shop.

Originally located on the third floor of the Kistler Building, the community cornerstone of the Elks Lodge moved to Highland Avenue, into the former home of Dr. James Kistler. Harlem Breakfast Club was across the street at 141 Highland.

# THE AVENUE FORMERLY KNOWN AS 6TH: COMMUNITY SPACES AND PLACES



# UNDER PRESSURE UNDER FIRE



## 89 ARRESTED IN CLEF CLUB MORALS RAID

Dice, Card Games  
Broken Up at North  
Side Place

Woman Released  
to Care for Baby

A 23-year-old housewife arrested in the police raid on

### 1942 CLEF CLUB

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, plainclothes and uniformed police officers continued to target musicians, business owners, and the integrated venues they frequented.

The Minneapolis morals squad's "most impressive raid" resulted in the arrest of an integrated group of 89 men and women at the Clef Club.

Although the white press referred to the incident as an "accidental raid," statements by law enforcement suggest otherwise. According to Patrolman Elmer Hart:

"We had checked the place several times recently without results.... Early this morning we were driving up Sixth avenue N., en route to another place where we had complaints of illegal liquor sales and prostitution. As we passed the Clef Club we saw 40 OR 50 AUTOMOBILES PARKED on Sixth avenue N. and concluded something must be going on."

Courtesy Minneapolis Star-Journal, 1942.



**"One of these days we are going to have to find out whether we are developing a police state in this town. The cops have harassed and arrested Ritchie every time he turns around, and on the vast majority of the charges he has been found innocent in court...what is happening here is that the police are making up their own laws as they go along."**

—Walter Crammond, President of the Central Labor Union, 1956

### SOUNDS ON 6TH

Oftentimes, Black musicians and bands were not allowed to play at clubs in Minneapolis except for 6th Avenue venues. Police raided clubs and venues because of racial mixing and illegal alcohol sales, which made it difficult for Black musicians to work.

**Repeated raids and shutdowns pushed musicians like Lester "Pres" Young out of Minneapolis.**

"The police chief [after a Cotton Club brawl in 1928] ordered all night clubs and cafes to 'cease singing and dancing and the like' at midnight. As a result, Young left Minneapolis with the family band to work. He alone returned, only to depart again after similar crackdowns in 1932 and 1936." —Douglas Henry Daniels, *Northside Jazz*, 2004

Decades later, the same pattern continued. As the construction of Olson Memorial Highway eliminated many 6th Avenue jazz venues, Black musicians tried to find jobs downtown. King Solomon's Mines was the first downtown venue to welcome Black musicians and clientele. The venue was raided and closed down, confirming that the "liberal" and "progressive" city was not ready to truly embrace Black musicians such as Lester Young or his future contemporary Maurice McKinnies.



Musician Ira Pettiford (center) with his wife Jeane (left) and friends at Howard's Breakfast Club on the Corner. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society



Lester Young, 1930s, public domain

As early as 1922, Black and Jewish Near-North residents called out white newspapers and the Minneapolis police department for abusive treatment.

Black and Jewish employment in Minneapolis was severely restricted by racism. During Prohibition and the Great Depression, liquor and late-night entertainment venues were some of the few employment opportunities available along 6th Avenue.

Motivated by racial bias, policymakers and police enforced laws and morality standards (such as alcohol use and racial integration) more harshly on the Near-Northside than in other parts of the city, oppressing

residents and businesses in the 1920s and 30s. Under scrutiny and under fire, businesses traded hands, moved locations, and were forced to close, creating a distorted sense of instability and financial insecurity along the Avenue.

Even after beer was legalized in 1933, police, bankers, and city licensing councils continued to wage a multi-front battle against business owners, workers, and patrons.

These actions created a public perception, fueled by reporting in white newspapers, that 6th Avenue was lawless and "blighted."

## What if the Avenue had been allowed to flourish?

### REDEVELOPMENT, THE FINAL RAID

John Ritchie came to Minneapolis in the late 1940s hoping to make his name in business. He found success transforming a small shoe shining stand at a bus depot into a chain of stands around Minneapolis and St. Paul. In 1954, he remodeled the third floor of the Kistler building, opening the Ebony Social Club where patrons came to hear musicians, like Prince Rogers playing in the Lewis Buggs band.

Throughout 1956, Minneapolis police repeatedly raided the club, arresting Ritchie. Each time, nearly all charges were dismissed in court. As a final blow, the Housing Redevelopment Authority bought the building in 1957, along with all others on the south side, for the expansion of Olson Memorial Highway and the Glenwood Redevelopment plan.



The Kistler Building with Ebony Club sign, 1957. Courtesy Hennepin Public Library



Courtesy Minneapolis Spokesman, 1954

**MR. RITCHIE'S  
EXPERIENCE WITH  
THE POLICE WAS  
NOT UNIQUE.**

### BLACK AND TAN CLUBS

Taverns and music venues serving primarily Black and mixed race clientele, known as "Black and Tan clubs," flourished in the Prohibition period. In addition to a more racially progressive outlook, they generally welcomed other marginalized identities such as religious minorities and integrated groups. Because of their clientele and location in lower-income neighborhoods like Near-North, police and politicians considered them amoral and problematic. They were hassled, raided, and shut down over the decades. Redevelopment was often the final raid.

**"In Minneapolis' largest Negro district on the 'near' North Side, Negroes and whites intermingle sufficiently to result in immorality."**

—**"A Study of Minneapolis...a presentation of the geographic, community, and sociological factors characterizing each area," by the Family Welfare Association, 1944.**

This report covered everything from churches to industry, parks and the distribution of toilets, people of "mixed parentage" and the "desirability" of neighborhoods and distribution of "unusable" structures.



All Quiet in Black and Tans, Too Much Courthouse Heat

Friends at a Club, 1940s. Courtesy of the Hennepin County Library and the children of John Glanton

**"On February 15, 1935 the Minneapolis Spokesman reported that two night clubs, the South Side Night Club at 212 11th Avenue South, and the Harlem Breakfast Club at 141 Highland were ordered to cater to only one race last week."**

### Community or Corruption?

During the 1930s, dogged reporter Walter Liggett called Governor Floyd B. Olson's long standing community ties into question. Corruption concerns about Olson and Minneapolis' most notorious mobster "Kid Cann" (Isadore Blumenfeld) only escalated after Liggett's murder in 1936.

Liggett's wife and three others identified Cann as the shooter, but he was acquitted at trial in 90 minutes. Kid Cann was previously involved in another shoot-out at the Cotton Club at 718 6th Avenue North, and other instances of violent frays between gangsters, club patrons, and police along the Avenue.



Alan Sclator (far right), Northside Inn, 1940s. Courtesy of the Hennepin County Library and the children of John Glanton

Tavern Owners Appear at Hearing



Owners of the Northside Inn plead their case before the city council license committee. Minneapolis Morning Tribune, July 7, 1960



New York Times, February 1936



DEFIANT—

# 'Last Settler' Remains in Home

By JAMES P. EMERSON  
Staff Writer for The Star

"I won't sell for any price and they can't put me out."

Mrs. Mary Miller, 62-year-old "last settler" on the site of the North Minneapolis housing project barked her defi today to the city of Minneapolis and the United States government.

One by one, her neighbors on the 16-block site of the \$3,500,000 project have succumbed to gold or have been ejected by legal order during the past two years.

### Scorns Cash

But Mrs. Miller stays, "the last settler," in her home at 925 Eleventh Avenue N. Since October, she has scorned the cash sum of \$3,545 that has been awaiting her as the result of condemnation proceedings by the city.

"They can't buy this property and they can't bluff me," she warned today, waving her arms at the invisible power of government.

For the past month things have looked pretty black for her prospects of spending her 37th Christmas at home. Located on the north edge of the housing project, her oldest residence looks over a long



MRS. MARY MILLER  
"They can't put me out!"

# "GOVERNMENT EXPERIMENT"



Businesses on the north side of 6th Avenue were demolished between 1936 and 1938. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



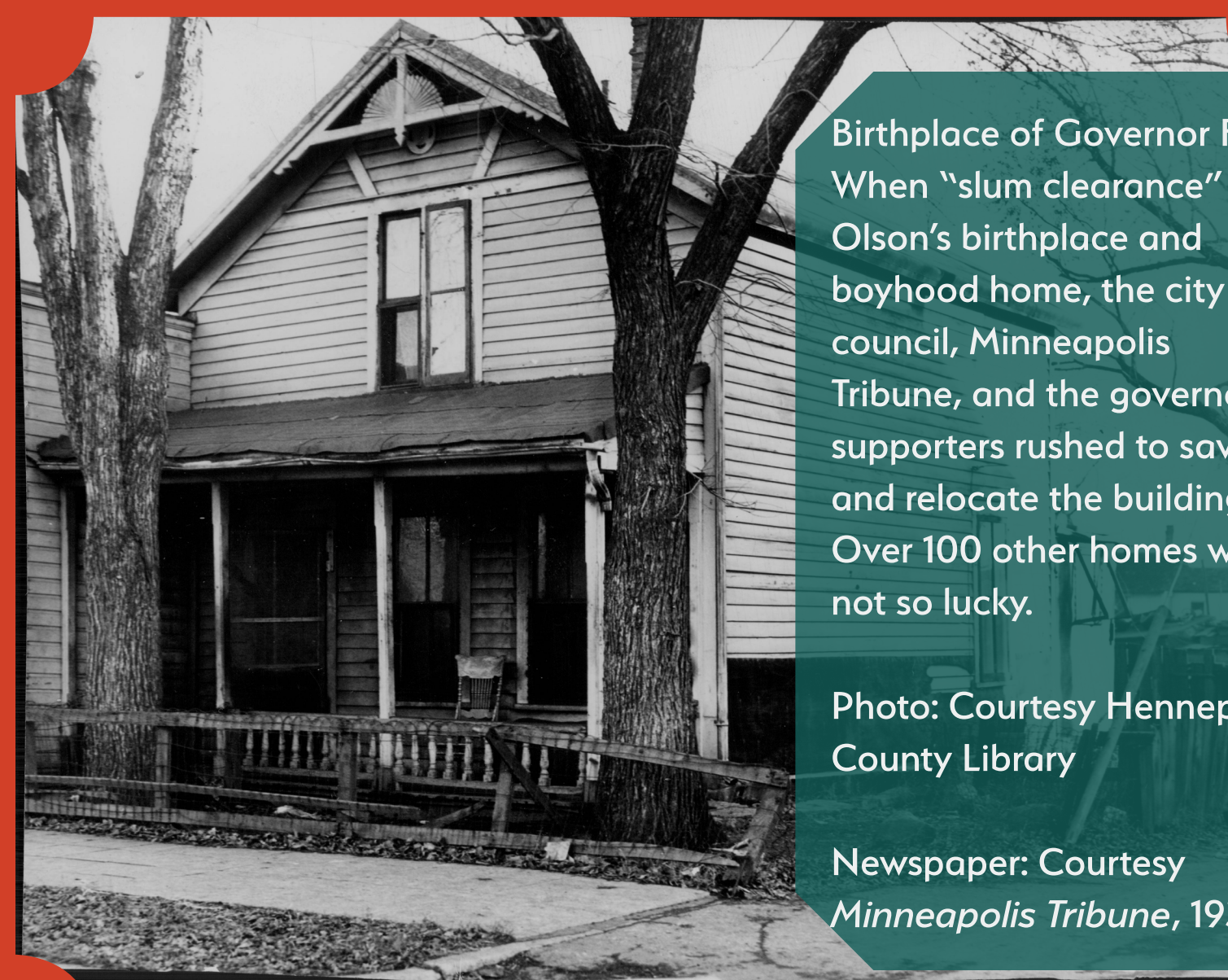
A family in front of their home slated for demolition in 1936, near the Corner. Courtesy Hennepin Public Library



Glenwood Redevelopment Project demolition caused the Homewood Theater to be torn down. The south side of the street was demolished in 1957. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

"What is this, Russia or something? Here I've slaved my head off for the last 36 years to buy and keep up this house, and the government men come around and say I'll have to leave."

—Mrs. Mary A. Miller, Minneapolis Star, 1936



Birthplace of Governor Floyd B. Olson at 1013 11th Avenue North, 1935. When "slum clearance" for the Sumner Field Homes threatened to demolish Olson's birthplace and boyhood home, the city council, Minneapolis Tribune, and the governor's supporters rushed to save and relocate the building. Over 100 other homes were not so lucky.

Photo: Courtesy Hennepin County Library

Newspaper: Courtesy Minneapolis Tribune, 1935

### Olson Birthplace Memorial Sought

The city council Friday will be asked to seek federal funds for the preservation of Gov. Floyd B. Olson's birthplace in north Minneapolis.

The roads and bridges committee Tuesday voted favorably on a request of the Farmer-Labor association to have the council petition the federal government to preserve the Olson birthplace located in the Sumner field federal housing site.

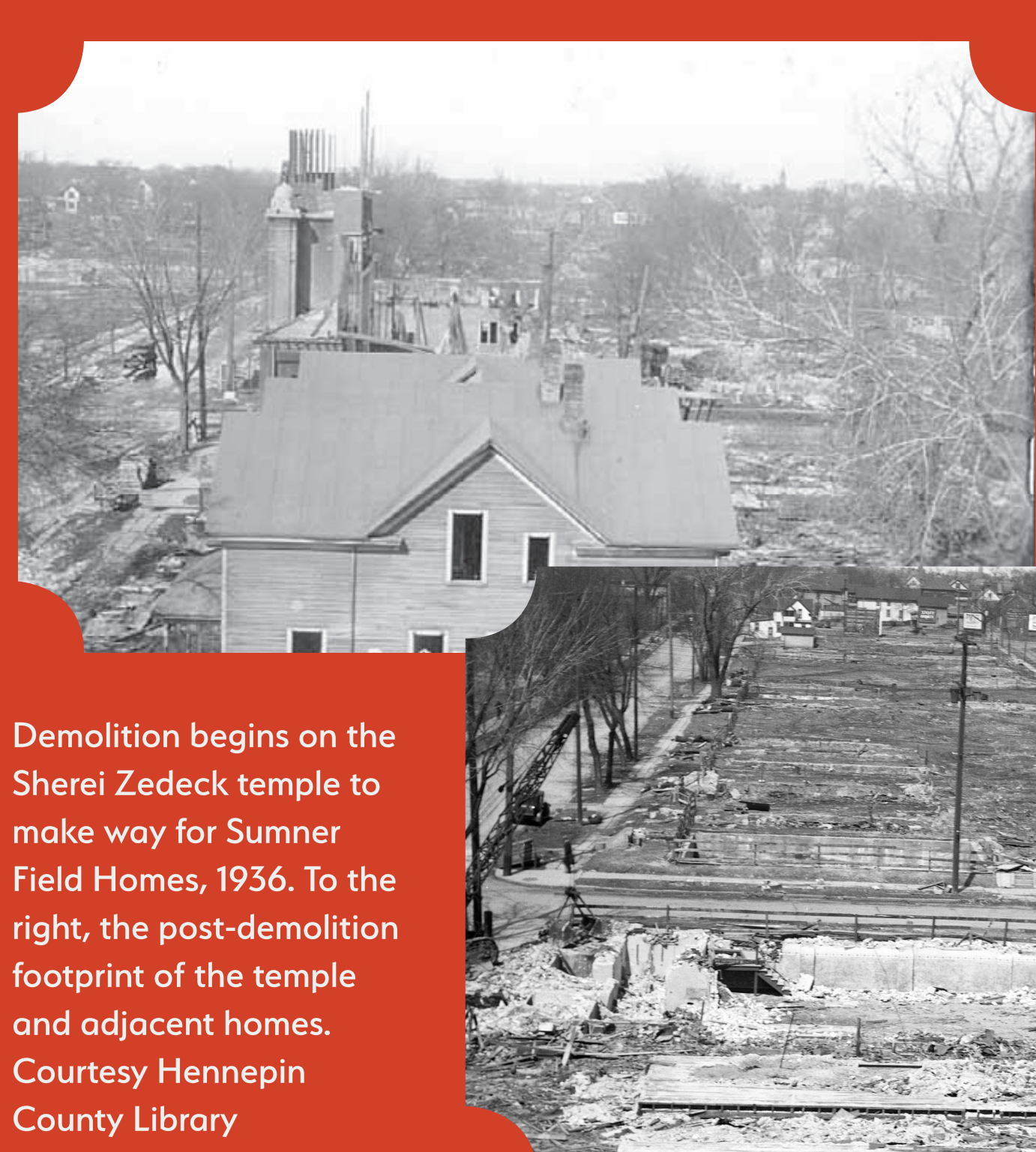
A survey, preliminary to starting demolition of 143 houses, 33 stores and several hundred sheds in the area, was begun today by Rose Brothers, wrecking contractors, who were awarded the wrecking job. Razing the buildings will start as soon as authority is received from PWA officials at Washington. Johnson, Drake & Piper, Inc., Minneapolis contractors, were low bidders on the contract for construction of foundations for homes and apartments in the \$3,500,000 federal housing project.

Sixth Avenue North was the section of Minneapolis where government planners tried out new concepts to eliminate the "problem of urban blight." "Blight" was a term used to mean "eye-sore," pointing to the condition of buildings, but it effectively cloaked prejudice toward non-white neighborhoods and legitimized disinvestment and, frequently, demolition. It began in the 1930s with the construction of the Sumner Field Homes, Minnesota's first federally-funded housing project. Designed to house the working poor in long brick row houses, they were unlike anything seen before in Minneapolis. A Minneapolis newspaper called it a "government experiment."

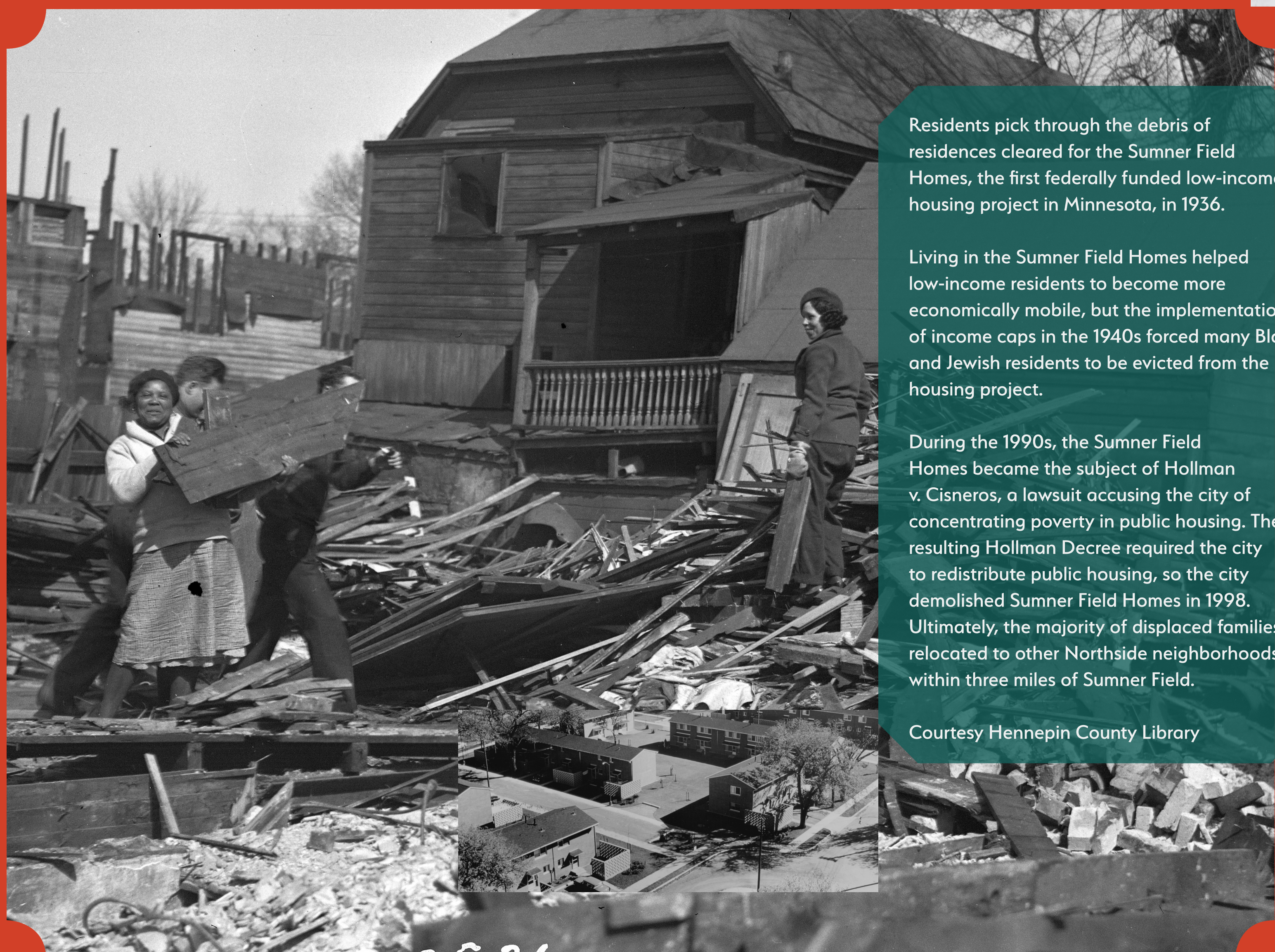
The same was true of Olson Memorial Highway. When it opened in the summer of 1940, newspapers called it the city's first "super-highway."

In the eight decades that followed, a cycle repeated itself again and again on the Near-Northside: government-funded demolition done in the name of "improvement" pushed people out of their homes and businesses. Most of them were people of color. They had no say in the matter and were rarely consulted on the plans that forced them to leave.

## How different would the neighborhood have looked if residents had been consulted?



Demolition begins on the Sherel Zedeck temple to make way for Sumner Field Homes, 1936. To the right, the post-demolition footprint of the temple and adjacent homes. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Residents pick through the debris of residences cleared for the Sumner Field Homes, the first federally funded low-income housing project in Minnesota, in 1936.

Living in the Sumner Field Homes helped low-income residents to become more economically mobile, but the implementation of income caps in the 1940s forced many Black and Jewish residents to be evicted from the housing project.

During the 1990s, the Sumner Field Homes became the subject of Hollman v. Cisneros, a lawsuit accusing the city of concentrating poverty in public housing. The resulting Hollman Decree required the city to redistribute public housing, so the city demolished Sumner Field Homes in 1998. Ultimately, the majority of displaced families relocated to other Northside neighborhoods within three miles of Sumner Field.

Courtesy Hennepin County Library

## TIMELINE OF DISPLACEMENT

1936-1938: Sumner Field Homes—1,100 people displaced

1938-1940: Olson Memorial Highway—all homes and businesses on the Near-Northside razed (except Sumner Library, moved 100 feet north)

1957: Olson Memorial Highway widened—homes and businesses on the south side demolished

1957: Glenwood Homes—400 families displaced

1968: I-94 created a new barrier between North Side neighborhoods and Downtown and displaced further residents

1990s: Sumner Field Homes demolished, Heritage Park built—1350 people displaced

2010-2020: Metro Blue Line light rail—planning and city-wide housing shortage leads to housing prices that displace further residents



## SOUNDS ON 6TH

Music might have been displaced from 6th Avenue, but it still found a home on the Near-Northside.

In addition to tearing up the club circuit and releasing hit records, Maurice McKinnies became a celebrated figure in Near-North.

"They used to practice in the [Lyndale Homes] projects, and I lived in the projects...I would see his car drive around, and I would run and run and follow, because I knew who he was. Maurice McKinnies!...they went and practiced down in the basement, and I jumped in the window well and watched them practice."

—André Cymone, who at age 12 formed his first band with young Prince Rogers Nelson, The Current, 2018



Maurice McKinnies and his band, 1970s: George Neal, Maurice McKinnies, Wilbur Cole, Theo Soluki. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

Maurice McKinnies, 1970s. Facing racism in the music industry that kept his records off air and his band out of bigger venues, McKinnies left Minneapolis for California in 1973. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society





# RESONANCE & RESILIENCE



In 1996, young local artists and community members joined Dr. John Biggers, Ta-coumba Aiken, and Seitu Jones to create the Celebration of Life mural. Spanning 200 feet on a sound wall near Interstate 94, the mural's artistic celebration of African history and culture welcomed people to Near-North until its destruction in 2001. | Courtesy City of Minneapolis

Each iteration of construction disrupted the Near-North community. Despite this cycle, residents and new arrivals, including Southeast Asian and African refugees, still found ways to thrive. Together, neighbors established youth and cultural centers and found places to make and share music, art, food, and history.

In 2012, towards the end of Heritage Park's development, longtime civic leader T. Williams spoke to the desire of the community to take the reins: "We want to rebuild the North Side. Actually, what they're saying is, 'We want to build for the first time'...What we want to do is to connect, we want to stop hiding the place and creating space for you to dump your trash. We want to shed some light on it."

—Theatrice "T" Williams, former director of Phyllis Wheatley, 1965-72.

## SUMMIT ACADEMY: BUILDING FUTURES

Glenwood Shopping Center as seen in the 1960s. One resident remembers seeing Ike and Tina Turner play for a grand opening in the early 1960s. Now a vocational training center, Summit Academy OIC occupies the former site of Glenwood Shopping Center.



Courtesy Hennepin Public Library



Summit Academy OIC Graduates. Courtesy Summit Academy OIC

## SUMNER LIBRARY: COMMUNITY CONTINUITY



On September 25, 1981, in a packed room at Sumner Library, Maya Angelou gave a talk about how poetry could be used as a strategy for survival. Her visit was part of "Minneapolis: Portrait of a Lifestyle," a National Endowment for the Humanities Learning Library program. The library is home to the Gary N. Sudduth African American History and Culture Collection, which Branch librarian Grace Belton helped to build in the 1970s. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

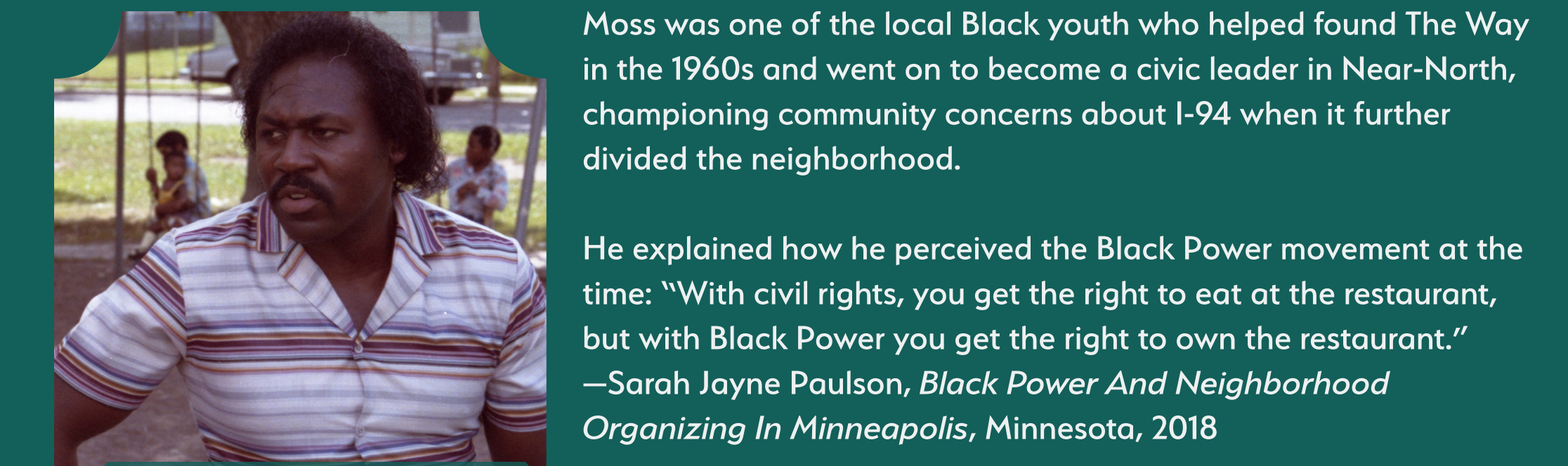


An addition was built on Sumner Library in 2004 and the library was renovated by architects Mohammed Lawal and Peter Sussman, who grew up going to the library. Cornbread Harris played at the 100th anniversary of the library. The 2004 addition with vaulted ceiling can be seen in the background. Courtesy Spokesman Recorder, October 14, 2015

## THE WAY: CHAMPIONS FOR ART & CHANGE



Prince performs with his band, Grand Central. Courtesy Hennepin County Library



Spike Moss, around the 1970s. Courtesy Hennepin County Library

Moss was one of the local Black youth who helped found The Way in the 1960s and went on to become a civic leader in Near-North, championing community concerns about I-94 when it further divided the neighborhood.

He explained how he perceived the Black Power movement at the time: "With civil rights, you get the right to eat at the restaurant, but with Black Power you get the right to own the restaurant." —Sarah Jayne Paulson, *Black Power And Neighborhood Organizing In Minneapolis, Minnesota*, 2018

The Way was a Black-led community arts organization created after the Plymouth Avenue Rebellion of 1967. In 1988, the building became the Fourth Precinct, where youth protested after the murder of Jamar Clark by the Minneapolis Police Department. As The Way volunteer and longtime KMOJ contributor Mahmoud El-Kati once said, "That's more than symbolic, that's erasure."



Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

## SOUNDS ON 6TH: KMOJ

In 1975, just after Maurice McKinnies left Minneapolis, KMOJ set up shop in the Glenwood Lyndale Community Center behind what is now Summit Academy OIC. Rooted on the Near-Northside, the community center provided new space for local musicians until it was condemned in 2007. Now located on Broadway, the station continues to connect longtime listeners and new fans.



Thornton Jones known as "Pharaoh Black" (left) and Kyle Ray, KMOJ DJ (right), about 1980. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

### Prince's Roots



Prince performs at Phyllis Wheatley. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

Prince's roots are inextricably tied to Near-Northside community centers and the musical culture of 6th Avenue.

He met some of his bandmates at The Way, where they took music lessons. Prince also performed with his high school band, Grand Central, at competitions at Phyllis Wheatley. In these competitions Prince gained the skills to launch his solo career.

We have lost some of the documentation of the musicians before Prince. The highway was an instrument that resulted in decimation of the Black musical heritage that existed for almost a century in the area. Prince, however, represents the rich cultural legacy of 6th Avenue.



## NEW NEIGHBORS

Starting in the early 1970s, many Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees moved into Sumner and Glenwood housing. When a court case threatened to take the developments down, the Southeast Asian community feared that displacement would also mean the loss of their new home.

**"The opposition to demolition and dispersal from the Southeast Asian community on the North Side was based on three complaints: that the dispersal of families destroyed their community networks, that they had not been full partners in the negotiations process, and that the relocation process had not been sensitive to their needs."**

— *Hollman v. Cisneros*, 2002



Gatherings at Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota near Harrison Park on Irving Ave, 2021-22. Courtesy LACM



## CONCLUSION



If the maps and overlapping storylines seem dizzying, it is not by accident. Disrupted history results in disrupted portraits, geographies, and timelines.

The story of 6th Avenue North is a poignant picture of the devaluation and ultimate demolition of a community's assets through state-led harm. Government leaders and city planners sacrificed 6th Avenue for the needs of people who didn't live on the Near-Northside. It became a place to funnel traffic, a place to experiment on solutions to exploitative housing systems. And yet, the rich legacy of culture, business success, and racial integration shine a light on the necessity to bring back 6th Avenue North. The present form of Olson Memorial Highway is not a foregone conclusion. It has been remade, many times over. This time, let's remake it for the people who live here.

From this layered collage of time and place emerges a vision of a walkable, livable, and persistently vibrant avenue that can be reimagined and rebuilt today. The voices from the past and present can speak together for a new, more community-centered version of The Avenue.

### Acknowledgments

Bring Back 6th Mobile Museum is presented by the University of Minnesota Heritage Studies and Public History program in collaboration with Our Streets Minneapolis, the Harrison Neighborhood Association, and The Musicant Group. Although this exhibit is not a complete history of 6th Avenue North, it provides a glimpse at life before the Highway. This collaboration would not be possible without support from our partners, community members, and historians of the Near-Northside.

The Heritage Studies and Public History program gratefully acknowledges Sheila Brommel, Marilyn Chiat, Michael Corey, Kirsten Delegard, Kate Dietrich, Ted Hathaway, Jeanne Kilde, Ryan Matke, Penny Petersen, Thomas Redd, and the other community members who provided guidance, encouragement, and feedback on the development of this exhibit.