

Triumph Over Trials: Lyngblomsten of Yesteryear Partners with Community Funds

By Sam Patet

When Lyngblomsten first opened its doors to residents in 1912, no one could have been happier than the founding women. After nearly a decade of visioning, planning, and fundraising, they had managed to open a home—not a poor-house—for elderly Norwegians. The women knew, however, that their work was far from complete.

Now that the building was open, they had to raise funds to pay the operating expenses. And at least as early as 1916, with a growing waiting list, there were calls to expand the building so as to care for even more people.¹

But how would they be able to expand? During World War I, they had to contend with rising food costs.³ In the 1930s, they, like others, struggled to stay in the black during the Great Depression. And in the 1940s and 50s, they had to balance the books as expenses increased, fewer women joined the Lyngblomsten circles because of entering the workforce, and new state regulations made it more difficult for volunteer management to operate a home. An additional factor in place from day one was that those who moved into the home paid a one-time fee of \$500 for care throughout the remainder of their lives. Although residents were also required to entrust to Lyngblomsten any property or assets over and above the admission fee, this system of payment meant no regular ongoing income for the home.⁴

Yet despite these trials, the women managed to expand—first in 1938 and again in 1963. And

Residents trim the Christmas tree on December 22, 1938, in the parlor of the new addition to the original Lyngblomsten building.

Photo, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society, from the December 24, 1938, edition of *The Minneapolis Tribune*.



Decorating the tree in the new quarters was fun for Mrs. Johannah Nelson, 74, formerly of Faribault, and George Bennett, 86. —Tribune Staff Photo.

they did so while staying within budget. How did they do it?

The women accomplished the seemingly impossible thanks in part to the relationships they formed with community organizations. In this installment of *Backstories*, we'll focus on the first expansion and Lyngblomsten's relationships with the Minneapolis Community Fund and the St. Paul Community Chest.

Expansion occurs

Although the case for constructing a second building was documented in the summer 1916 edition of the *Lyngblomsten Herald*, it would be more than 20 years before this call to action became reality. In 1920, with much rejoicing, the Mid-Summer Jubilee featured the burning of the mortgage—marking the completion of paying for the first building. By January of 1937, Lyngblomsten had raised \$54,646.61 for a new building.⁴ It put that money to use a year later,

when on May 11, 1938, Lyngblomsten's Building Committee voted in favor of soliciting bids from local contractors for a three-story addition to the original home.⁵ Two months later on July 19, Lyngblomsten president Mrs. Julius Hansen turned a first shovelful of dirt at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new building.⁶ And by December, the building was complete; residents moved in the week of December 18–24, 1938.⁷

But how were they able to do it? How were the Lyngblomsten circles able to raise over \$54,000 during World War I and the Great

“Without this help it would have been extremely difficult for us to carry on through the War [World War I] and post War periods.”

—Mrs. John O. Lee, president of Lyngblomsten 1917–1922

year was \$5,000.⁹ That amount likely accounted for over half of Lyngblomsten's annual budget.¹⁰

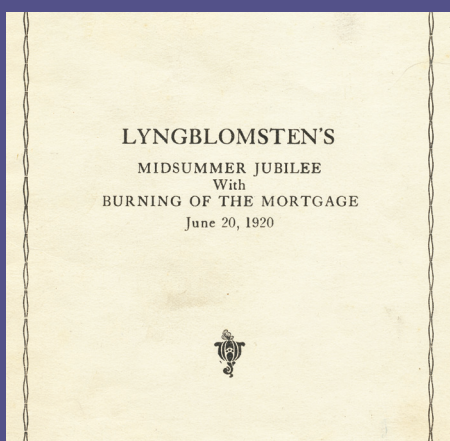
Additionally, in the early 1920s, Lyngblomsten started receiving money from the Community Chest. While the amount it received from the Community Chest was smaller than that from the Community Fund, it still was significant—\$2,876.25 in 1925, for example, and \$1,304.09 in 1936.¹¹

The monies from the Community Fund and Community Chest were used primarily to pay for day-to-day operations, which made it possible to direct other donations to the Building Fund.

According to an early Lyngblomsten publication,

“When Mrs. Lee [president of Lyngblomsten from 1917 to 1922] was leaving the presidency, she admonished the members to bear in mind the valuable aid which the Community Fund and Chest had given. ‘Without this help it would have been extremely difficult for us to carry on through the War [World War I] and post-War periods.’”¹²

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The front cover of Lyngblomsten's 1920 Midsummer Jubilee program. At the annual event, held June 20 in 1920, Lyngblomsten ceremoniously burnt the mortgage of its original building, having paid it off that year.

Depression?⁸ As best as we can tell, they did it by the sweat of their brow. Slowly and steadily, fundraiser after fundraiser, they saved.

But that only tells part of the story. What likely made it possible for them to save so much for building was the support they received from two community resources.

Community funds lend a helping hand

The Minneapolis Community Fund and St. Paul Community Chest were both part of the community fund movement that swept across the nation in the early 1900s. Its premise was simple: have one organization conduct a city-wide fundraising campaign for a number of social service agencies. Raised funds would then be distributed among the agencies.

As early as 1919, Lyngblomsten began receiving money from the Community Fund (at one time called the War Chest). The total received that

Balance on Hand March 1st,	\$253.68
Rec'd to General Fund	
Minneapolis Community Fund	840.00
St. Paul " Chest	560.00
Minneapolis No. 3	19.25
" " 9	16.62
" " 12	8.80
St. Paul No. 3	40.00
" " " 7	10.00
	<u>\$1,748.35</u>
Bills for February	1,534.61
	213.74 Bal. April
Approved & excepted April, 1, 1924, Arny Groff Sec.	

A page from the Lyngblomsten Board of Trustees minutes shows the balances as of March 1924, including money received from two Twin Cities community funds.

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Planning for the future

The Community Fund and Community Chest continued to support Lyngblomsten over the next two decades, helping pay for a variety of projects, including boiler repairs, a new water heater system, and funeral expenses for residents who had passed away. But by the late 1950s, with Lyngblomsten having reached financial stability, funding from the Chest and Fund was discontinued.

“As a result of the efforts of the Home in accepting residents on a pay-as-you-go basis and through the cooperation of the County Welfare Board, the Home appears to have reached a level where it no longer is in need of Chest [Minneapolis Community Fund] support,” wrote M.E. Salisbury, chair of the Community Chest’s Budget and Distribution Committee, to then Lyngblomsten president Mrs. Harry Nelson on December 18, 1956.¹³ “The Committee recommends, therefore, that the 1957 allocation be the final one and that the Lyngblomsten Home continue to provide its service without deficit financing.”

Still, even though Lyngblomsten was able to pay its bills in the late 1950s, leaders were keenly aware that the organization was going to face even greater expenses in the future. Mrs. Henry Dahl suggested this during her president’s speech given at the Lyngblomsten annual meeting in January 1960. “In 1933,” she said, “it cost \$10,000 a year to operate the home. By 1959, that cost had more than quadrupled to \$51,904.46. I am telling you this as I believe the cost will rise every year as you see it has.”¹⁴

Pressure to expand

Costs weren’t the only thing growing during this time—so, too, was the pressure for Lyngblomsten to expand. In 1948, a state inspector noted that the home needed a larger infirmary to care for sick residents.¹⁵ Lyngblomsten likely took care of this by repurposing the home’s third floor.

And by January 1960, the pressure to expand had apparently grown even further. Mrs. Henry Dahl expressed her disappointment that the land Lyngblomsten owned wasn’t being used to its full potential. “Now about our valuable ground lying idle, it is a sad mistake when it could be utilized to the comforts of the home. It has been idle for 47 years. Don’t you think it would be wonderful to have buildings on it?”¹⁶

The problem Lyngblomsten faced was that it didn’t have the money to pay for a new building. True, it had quite a bit in its Endowment Fund. But only the fund’s interest could be used, and that particular fund was designated for day-to-day operations. There was no money in the Building Fund.¹⁷

The solution Mrs. Dahl proposed was something Lyngblomsten had been thinking about for at least two years: form a partnership with the St. Paul Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (today the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America).

The women of Lyngblomsten had been guiding the organization successfully for over five decades. But would they be willing to share management responsibilities with another entity? Be sure to read our next edition of *Backstories*, where you’ll learn the conclusion. **L**

¹*Lyngblomsten Herald*. Vol. III. No. 3–4. July–August 17, 1916.

²*Lyngblomsten: Thirtieth Anniversary*. Pg. 27.

³*Lyngblomsten: 90 Years of Service and Commitment to Seniors*. Pg. 7.

⁴Lyngblomsten annual report 1937. Pg. 3.

⁵Lyngblomsten annual report 1938. Pg. 9.

⁶Lyngblomsten annual report 1938. Pg. 10.

⁷*The Minneapolis Tribune*. December 24, 1938. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁸Lyngblomsten annual report 1937. Pg. 3.

⁹Letter, November 12, 1918, Folder 206:1, United Way of Minneapolis Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁰Records for Lyngblomsten’s operating expenses in 1919 are not available. However, its operating expenses in 1930 were \$13,884.32, and in 1933 were \$10,845.46. (Figures obtained from Lyngblomsten’s

annual report booklets from 1930 and 1933.) The chance of the 1919 expenses being larger than these amounts is slim.

¹¹Lyngblomsten annual report 1926. Pg. 4 and Lyngblomsten annual report 1937. Pg. 3.

¹²*Lyngblomsten: Thirtieth Anniversary*. Pg. 33.

¹³Letter from M.E. Salisbury to Mrs. Harry Nelson, December 18, 1956, Folder 206:1, United Way of Minneapolis Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁴Mrs. Henry Dahl. Speech given at Lyngblomsten’s annual meeting, January 1960.

¹⁵Branch #9 of St. Paul Minutes, February 16, 1948. Pgs. 12–13.

¹⁶Mrs. Henry Dahl. Speech given at Lyngblomsten’s annual meeting, January 1960.

¹⁷Mrs. Henry Dahl. Speech given at Lyngblomsten’s annual meeting, January 1960.