



YMCA OF THE GREATER TWIN CITIES – CELEBRATING 160 YEARS

1850s & 1860s

- On July 28, 1856, a small group met in St. Paul's First Presbyterian Church to form a Young Men's Christian Association. The Y would serve as a safe space for newcomers to the area to meet, socialize and participate in their communities.
- On June 27, 1866, the YMCA in Minneapolis was formed at Free Will Baptist Church.
- The Y was defined by its charitable outreach, including mission work in local orphanages and supplying Bibles and bandages to Union soldiers in the South.

1870s, 1880s & 1890s

- The Y offered evening classes for working boys during the Industrial Revolution, with topics ranging from English Composition to Freehand and Mechanical Drawing.
- In 1884 Dwight Lyman introduced the St. Paul Y to a new fitness movement called "muscular Christianity" created by Dr. Luther Gulick, who developed the idea that a person's well-being depended on an essential balance of "body, mind and spirit."
- The Minneapolis Y organized a Boys Branch for its young members in 1885. The Y held open gym time, concerts and lectures, including visits from Civil War veterans. The Y also featured a rambling club that led excursions to places like Minnehaha Falls, Fort Snelling and Lake Calhoun.
- The first dedicated YMCA facility in the Twin Cities opened its doors in 1885 on Wabasha & 9th Streets in St. Paul with gymnastic and exercise equipment.

1900s

- In 1900 the Minneapolis Y offered its first Boys Camp on Lake Minnetonka to 47 campers. A decade later, the Y would establish its first permanent camp sites – Camp Icaghowan and Camp St. Croix. Every activity was an opportunity to build character, develop leadership skills and appreciate the outdoors.
- The Hi-Y program was established in each Minneapolis high school in 1909 to promote community involvement and moral behavior. Boys were chosen for leadership in academics, athletic and social activities. This program also ran in St. Paul and reflected a close partnership between the Y and schools.

1910s

- Beginning in 1912, the Y formed cooperative relationships with churches and schools for facilities and equipment to run programs in neighborhoods outside downtown. Activities included hikes and outings, gym classes, sports leagues, swimming, Sunday School attendance contests and vocational lectures. The "branch without a building" model was used in many districts and suburbs of both Minneapolis and St. Paul for decades to come until suburban branches were built.
- The University Y merged with the Minneapolis Y in 1917. UY members welcomed incoming students, printed handbooks and gave orientation and tours. Students turned to the UY for financial aid, employment, class registration guidance, tutoring and English lessons. After World War I, the UY hosted convocations and discussions around geopolitical issues.

1920s

- The Y ran a program to help at-risk young men stay out of gangs.



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- The Minneapolis Y's "Find Yourself" campaign, conducted with community partners like the Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions clubs and the schools, offered vocational guidance to working boys through mentoring relationships.
- Many Y programs began to include women and girls, who played an active role raising money, teaching classes, hosting socials and delivering aid to soldiers. Programs available to women continued to expand in the decades to come.

1930s

- Throughout the Great Depression, the Minneapolis Y gave free memberships to the unemployed and refused to cut services to those in need. The Y still provided lodging, meals, medical attention, first aid, clothing and tuition for night school.
- Young unemployed men came to the Y for recreational activities, vocational counseling and support in maintaining their mental and physical health. The Y met their needs by providing a wide variety of free classes, activities and job interview preparation.

1940s

- During World War II, the Minneapolis Y partnered with the Minnesota Federation of Churches to combat racial and ethnic hatred. Y service clubs collected scrap metal for the war effort and sent resources like reading materials and athletic equipment to youth in enemy prison camps.
- In 1946 the Y hosted the For Other Boys educational program. A group of boys learned about the needs of youth around the world from global leaders and helped raise money for international causes.
- Youth in Government came to the Twin Cities in 1946. It began in New York in the 1930s to encourage integrity, leadership and learning about democracy. The model legislature program introduced youth to the issues, processes and challenges of state government and prepared them for potential careers in political leadership.

1950s

- The Y opened a state-of-the-art branch at Midway in St. Paul with many new features – and expanded options for women and girls. The Y welcomed 1,000 kids on Saturday mornings for 45 minutes of swimming and 45 minutes of open gym.
- The Indian Guides program was introduced. The program focus was on building father/son relationships through handiwork, recreation, nature, gardening and more. The program expanded to include options for father/daughter and mother/daughter pairs. It also introduced adults and kids to another culture and value set. While the program was not meant to appropriate Native American culture, it became clear that it needed to evolve to address cultural insensitivities. In its later years, it would be called "Voyageurs" and focus more heavily on strengthening familial relationships.

1960s

- The Minneapolis Y offered Adventure Club and Fun Club for kids in the summer, incorporating field trips like train rides, parks, zoos and more.
- By 1964, the Y's Detached Work Program was on the streets and in the schools, working in the community to address pressing needs in a time of social unrest. Y staff developed relationships with city youth to help them diffuse difficult situations and stay on a path toward success.



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- Beginning in 1968, the Y hosted Junior Sports and Olympics, working with community agencies and schools to engage 15,000 kids a year in basketball, wrestling, track and field, swimming and more.

1970s

- The first Y child care center opened at the Eastside branch in St. Paul in 1969 to accommodate families with two working parents. The program spread throughout the Twin Cities and included art, music, creative play and science to help kids learn, grow and discover.
- Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Y child care expanded into elementary and middle schools. The program also included free meals before school to ensure no young person had to skip breakfast.

1980s

- In 1980 the Y supported Southeast Asian immigrants new to the Twin Cities by organizing inner city soccer leagues to engage youth of all backgrounds. The Y also provided assistance in finding homes, jobs, English language training and more.
- The North Community and Blaisdell Ys established the Black Achievers program in 1989, which today is called Multicultural Achievers. Successful multicultural leaders were asked to serve as mentors to inner city students, building relationships to help develop their talent and leadership potential and encourage them to plan for future educational and career opportunities.

1990s and 2000s

- In partnership with the Wilder Foundation and St. Paul Schools, state funds were used on the economically struggling East side of St. Paul beginning in 1996 to improve schools and provide access to health care, social services and recreation. Part of the project included rehabilitating John A. Johnson elementary school and building an adjacent Y with state-of-the-art features and licensed child care.
- In 1996, the Beacons Network began as a partnership among Minneapolis schools, government agencies and youth organizations with the Y serving as the leading agency. The program provides low-income youth with access to a wide variety of educational and enrichment activities to support learning, social development and personal growth in a safe, affirming environment – right in the schools. Beacons helps improve attendance, academic performance and behavior.

2010s

- After nearly two decades working in close partnership, the Minneapolis and St. Paul Ys merged in 2012 to become the fourth largest Y association in the world.
- In 2016, the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities boasts 22 branch locations, 10 day camps, 7 overnight camps, 5 program sites, over 90 child care sites and many more outreach sites. The Y engages over 250,000 youth, adults, families and seniors each year in a variety of programs and services that enrich youth development, improve healthy living and ignite social responsibility.