

# Catching Up with “The Ones We Left Behind”

Like silent relatives suddenly blurting out their life story, the former residents of 470/472 Hopkins Street continue to reveal themselves. The exhibit *Open House: If These Walls Could Talk* set out to tell the stories of everyone who lived within the walls of a single ordinary house. Despite obsessive research, when the exhibit opened at the History Center in January, several former residents remained inscrutable to us, hidden from the historical record and, seemingly, beyond the reach of memory.

Predictably, perhaps, both of these suppositions are already proven false. The opening of the exhibit and the publication of my essay “The Ones We Left Behind” in the Winter 2005–06 issue of *Minnesota History* prompted responses from friends and relatives that I hadn’t known to look for. Through their generosity in sharing memories and information, we continue to hear more voices from within the walls of the house on Hopkins Street.

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BENJAMIN FILENE

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Doug Miller of St. Paul called to say that he knew John Orlando (472 Hopkins, 1936–40), whose city directory listing as the owner of “La Magica Excelsior Washing Fluid & Bleach Co.” had so intrigued me. Doug grew up a few blocks from Rice and Orange Streets, where Orlando had a vegetable stand and then a grocery store. Doug and his future wife met in the store: “My friends and I were there drinking pop, smoking cigarettes, and being fools when Diane walked in. Forty years later we’re still married.” And La Magica Bleach? Doug says that Orlando was

mixing it up himself in his apartment building in the vegetable-stand days and then carried on selling it in the store. “My mother used it. I can still picture the brown bottle.” Local historian Jim Sazevich sent an e-mail saying he knew the Orlandos, too, adding that his first after-school job was doing yard work across the street from the Orlando grocery.

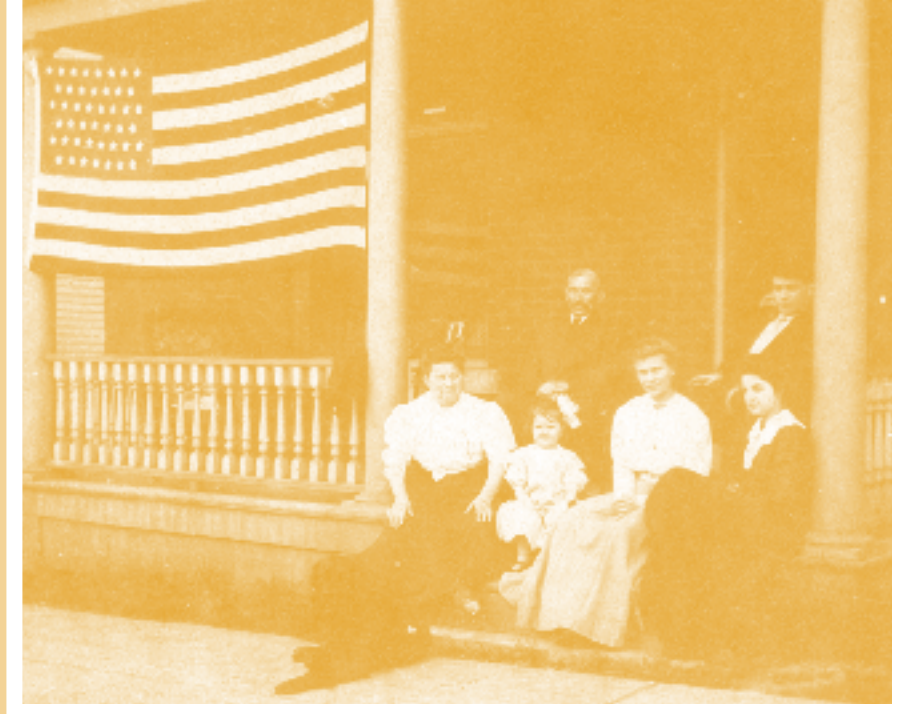
Bill Henry of Arden Hills came to see the exhibit and was startled to discover his grandfather’s sister, Daisy De Silva (470 Hopkins, 1910–16), featured there. When he returned the next week, I at long last got to see a picture of Daisy and her husband, George. City directories suggest that Daisy and George separated in the late 1920s, and George

*Entrance to Open House: If These Walls Could Talk, the exhibit that opened at the Minnesota History Center in January 2006*



died in 1931. Later in life, Bill recalls, Daisy kept some distance between herself and the rest of the family. Bill remembers going to midnight mass to hear her play the organ at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on East Sixth Street in St. Paul. She was also “famous for riding her bike everywhere,” Bill recalls. “She had a bicycle like the one in the *Wizard of Oz*.” Incidentally, Daisy’s brother was famous for a different sort of bike-riding. Newspaper clippings (undated, but from about 1908) show that Fred S. Haas set a world record at the State Fair on his Indian motorcycle, “covering the mile in one minute flat” in front of a “well satisfied crowd” of “at least 20,000 persons.”

**B**ill Conlan of St. Paul wrote to say that Frank Appleton (470 Hopkins, 1919–26) was his great-grandfather. “Frank was in partnership with his brother-in-law Richard Kelly in the beanery business. They had a beanery on East Seventh Street called Kelly and Appleton Brown Bread and Beans.” Frank is listed as a baker in the 1910 census. Connie Seeger called to disprove (convincingly, alas) a story that appears in the exhibit—the speculation that Frank, her grandfather, sparred with Gentleman Jim Corbett. Connie points out that Appleton would have been in his late thirties in Corbett’s heyday—and that Frank was only 5-feet 5-inches tall! She guesses that the family story might apply instead to one of Frank’s sons, Frank or Don. They performed on the Orpheum vaudeville circuit. In Connie’s recollection, though, grandfather Frank was one of the first white interlocutors, or master of ceremonies, at minstrel shows. As for the scar on his finger, the one we liked to imagine



*The De Silva and Haas families, July 4, 1906, at the home of Daisy (Haas) De Silva’s brother. Daisy sits second from right; her husband, George, stands at back, right.*

was an old boxing injury? “He probably cut it baking.”

**P**enny Zastrow of White Bear Lake stopped by with a startling find—a 1950 Christmas card written to her mother by a member of 470 Hopkins Street’s “first family,” Martha Schumacher (resident from 1888 to 1907). Penny’s mother, Adelaide (born 1910), took piano lessons from Martha as a girl. The two were still in touch decades later, and Penny grew up hearing stories about “Miss Schumacher”:

She had a studio of students who were pretty much society girls, girls whose families “lived on the hill.” Recitals were in houses on Summit Avenue. My mother’s family lived on Jefferson Avenue, *below* the hill. They were definitely working-class people. There were cheaper teachers, but her parents wanted her to have the best. It was a real privilege to take from her, but she was strict. She was very

German and very strict. If you didn’t practice you were in trouble.

A quarter of a century later, it seems, Martha was still practicing. In the card to Adelaide, she writes, “I practice nearly every day if possible. My favorates [*sic*] are Schubert-Liszt, “Serenade,” + also [by] the same composers, the “Ave Maria,” but very long + difficult to memorize; I have them well on the black + white—always glad when I am rid of those symbols on the pages.”

**S**o the story of the house on Hopkins Street continues to open up. Thanks to all the former residents, friends, relatives, and acquaintances for sharing their memories and making this project possible. Happily, it’s a story that won’t stop being told.

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*The family photo, above, is courtesy William F. Henry; the exhibit photos are by Eric Mortenson/MHS.*



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