

Sadia Aslam

A Hand-Up, Not a Handout: William Volker as a Progressive Philanthropist, 1938 to 1941

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Introduction

“Where did you get the new teeth, Tommy?” asked Russell Greiner, affable Kansas City printer. Tommy, the crippled elevator operator, smiled broadly to reveal his new dentures. “Mr. Volker gave them to me.” “How did that happen?” “Well, I was down to the Helping Hand, and somebody suggested I go see William Volker. My old teeth were infected, you know. They said he would help me on account he had helped most of them. So I went down to his office, and I had to wait a long time. There must have been fifty people waiting to see Mr. Volker. Some of them were pretty well-dressed, too.” “Did you see Mr. Volker personally?” inquired Mr. Greiner. “I understand he has hired a social worker to help him, he has so many requests for help.” “Oh, yes, I saw Mr. Volker himself. He sees everybody. I told him my story and he was real interested. He asked a couple of questions, then asked me to come back in two days.” “Well,” Tommy related, “I went back but I didn’t have to wait this time. His secretary or something came over and gave me a slip of paper. It was a note to the dentist. I got a swell set of teeth, and do you know what! He sent me to his own dentist!” “Good for you, Tommy,” said Russell Greiner as he walked away, shaking his head in wonderment. “Mr. Greiner,” called the elevator boy after

him. “Don’t say anything about this. Mr. Volker asked me to keep it under my hat. I don’t know why.”¹

Progressivism and Early Twentieth Century

Philanthropy

Industrialization had many effects on Americans; everything from politics and the economy to social values and the urban landscape had to be reconfigured with the onset of intensified immigration and the urbanization that accompanied industrialization. Progressivism, the most effective non-partisan reform movement in American history, attempted to deal with the chaos created by the rapid changes in all sectors of society in post-Civil War America by trying to establish a new social order and uplifting the moral fabric of society.

At its core, Progressivism altered the social, economic, and political arenas of life. The relationship between the state and citizens became stronger as government sponsored agencies were created to help and protect constituents. American democracy was redefined as the economy moved away from solely laissez-faire and the government gained greater control over individuals’ daily lives.² American Progressives in general were college- educated and applied a scientific order to life by valuing rationalism above all else. Unlike earlier generations, who believed that poverty was the fault of the poor or ordained by God, Progressives saw poverty as the obvious result of the new changes in American cities. They tried to fix society with calculated precision, using methods such as settlement houses, prohibition, and better public education. These Progressive ideas can clearly be seen through William Volker’s early twentieth-century work to create a Board of Public Welfare, the Civic Research Institute in Kansas City, and his service on the Kansas City Board of Education. Volker, a Kansas City manufacturer turned philanthropist, once explained his views:

<?> Herbert C. Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: The Story of William Volker* (Chicago: Gateway, 1951), 137-8.

2 Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University, 2007), vi.

Vice, poverty, disease and crime are the vicious circle. They are so closely interwoven that they cannot be treated separately. Society lets its most valuable property shift for itself. If it finds good pasture, all very well. If it chances to stray into barren fields, that is nobody's lookout. Society is willing to let the risks for vice, poverty, disease and crime remain at the maximum...It is the policy of the welfare board to lend a helping hand to the worthy and to use the big stick on the unworthy. It is our experience that 80 percent of the loss from the vicious circle can be reclaimed for society.³

Although Progressivism as a movement lost momentum by the 1920s with the passage of legislation such as the 18th and 19th amendments, Volker's beliefs and actions, which embraced a Progressive philosophy fused with religious and personal ideals, remained consistent until the end of his life. In spite of Volker's commitment to social work, he became legendary in Kansas City because of his more personal private charitable contributions to individuals. Speaking at the dedication of the Volker Memorial on September 20, 1958, Henry Haskell, an editor for the *Kansas City Star*, remarked:

A friend once asked Mr. Volker how he reconciled the dispensing of private "charity" on this lavish scale with his known devotion to the newer concept of voluntarily organized social service, utilizing the latest preventative and remedial techniques under professional direction. He smiled and replied, "If there appears to be a real need, I never let my left hand know what my right is doing."⁴

Cryptic comments like this reveal Volker's complex views on

3 Henry Van Brunt, "William Volker's Hard Head Made Millions: His Soft Heart Gave Millions Away," *The Kansas City Star*, January 11, 1948.

4 Henry C. Haskell, "The Story of William Volker's Good Works," *The Kansas City Star*, September 21, 1958.

social welfare. Although his Progressive views seem to have come out of the early twentieth century, when he helped set up institutions such as the Board of Public Welfare, the conditions of the Great Depression in the mid- to late 1930s changed circumstances for many individuals. Instead of thinking of his grants as a handout, he must have considered his small aid a hand-up, a way to provide help to those he deemed deserving individuals while simultaneously encouraging the more ideal self-help.

The Progressive ideals of the early twentieth century shaped William Volker's philanthropy and determined who received aid from him. As the example of Tommy, the elevator operator, revealed, Volker provided money to individuals for specific reasons. As a result, he provided a service to the citizens of Kansas City that was not fulfilled by any other source at the time.

Kansas City: 1938-1941

As Volker had predicted in the early 1880s, Kansas City expanded immensely during the first half of the twentieth century. Like many of the big cities at the turn of the century, Kansas City, had a political machine, led by Tom Pendergast between 1925 and 1939.⁵ Because of the Pendergast connections with the Roosevelt administration, Kansas City did not suffer as badly as many other cities during the Great Depression. The recipient of many New Deal federal grants, much of Kansas City's downtown skyline today was the result of Works Progress Administration money during the 1930s.⁶ The WPA led to more jobs in Kansas City and stimulated the local economy. The widespread effect of this New Deal measure is present in some of Volker's notes about applicants as he mentions that some individuals were employed by the WPA.⁷

5 For more information on Pendergast and Kansas City during the era, see William M. Reddig's *Tom's Town: Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend* (1947. Reprint, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1986).

6 A. Theodore Brown and Lyle W. Dorsett, *K.C.: A History of Kansas City, Missouri* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1978), 199.

7 Kansas City, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, William Volker and Company Records, "Requests for Financial Assistance: 1941," KC 0059, Folder 33. Hereafter called WHMC.

Regardless of the New Deal legislation, Americans continued to suffer from the consequences of the Depression well into the late 1930s. It was not until full-scale mobilization for World War II that the United States emerged from the Depression. The lack of money due to monetary deflation during the 1930s had numerous daily implications for individuals, including everything from perpetuating malnutrition to the lack of affordable basic healthcare.⁸ Welfare came in the form of employment, loans to avoid foreclosure on mortgages, or similar plans rather than the direct relief that so many Americans needed to buy everyday necessities. Volker, as seen through his notes on financial aid applicants, focused on providing funds for healthcare and living expenses when approached by the needy. Since the general philanthropic attitude also shied away from giving money to individuals, dating back to ideas surrounding the importance of the Protestant work ethic, Volker's charitable actions served a much needed role in Kansas City.

Although William Volker played an integral part in Kansas City's development of many social welfare organizations, there have not been any scholarly studies of Volker or his influence on Kansas City. Philanthropy as a subject of scholarly research did not emerge until the 1980s because it was considered a component of social work since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹ Even now, the shape of philanthropy is continuously changing. This study incorporates several distinct areas of research to discover the effect of one individual on Kansas City and the forces that shaped his charity.

The William Volker and Company Records includes a sample of requests for financial assistance and notes made by Volker regarding the applicants. I am using the applications to gain an understanding of the kinds of people who received Volker's aid. I am also using a few individuals whose information is more complete as case-studies in order to describe a representative recipient.

In order to supplement the documents delineating

8 Ross Gregory, *America 1941: A Nation at a Crossroads* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 74.

9 Lawrence J. Friedman, "Philanthropy in America: Historicism and Its Discontents," *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 1.

Volker's charity, I am using numerous articles from *The Kansas City Star* that featured Volker and his charity. It was the *Star* that dubbed Volker "Mr. Anonymous," a name that stuck because of Volker's famed desire for anonymity.¹⁰

One of the legacies of the Progressive era was the formation of social agencies to research societal problems and ultimately correct them. By using contemporary reports and studies done by the Civic Research Institute, I can present a better picture of Kansas City between 1938 and 1941. The reports provide the goals and aims of the various committees, as well as a description of Kansas City's residents and the problems they faced. I will discuss how, although Volker's private charities did not always complement the work of social agencies, they consistently furthered the causes of such organizations.

William Volker: the Citizen

Every city has citizens who alter the future of the locale through small but significant actions. Sometimes these individuals become mythic heroes and join the folklore of local history, while others have a statue, park, or road dedicated to them but otherwise fade into obscurity over time. William Volker, a twentieth-century businessman and philanthropist, is unrecognizable today except in relation to Volker Boulevard, along which lies the Volker Memorial in the Frank A. Theis Park, and the Volker campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Sixty years ago, however, he was considered the "first citizen of Kansas City."¹¹

The fourth child of Freidrich and Dorthea Volker, William Volker was born in Hanover, Germany on April 1, 1859.¹² The family immigrated to Chicago, Illinois in 1871 to avoid military conscription during the Franco-Prussian War, arriving in October, a few

¹⁰ Harry Haskell's recent book *Boss-Busters & Sin Hounds: Kansas City and Its Star* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007), is a good source of Kansas City history as told through the story of the *Star*. Especially pertinent to this subject is his chapter on the "Progressive Decade".

¹¹ Van Brunt, "William Volker's Hard Head Made Millions: His Soft Heart Gave Millions Away," *The Kansas City Star*, January 11, 1948.

¹² Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: the Story of William Volker*, 3.

days after the Great Chicago Fire.¹³ At this point, twelve year-old Volker attended school for two years to learn English before getting a job as a clerk at a Chicago retail store, where he quickly rose in the ranks, with his wages increasing from \$1 per week to \$5 per week. Volker attended business college after this, following the advice of the head clerk.¹⁴ At the age of seventeen, in 1877, Volker began to work as a bookkeeper for the Brachvogel House, a Chicago business that specialized in manufacturing picture frames. He became interested in western Missouri, since it provided the walnut used to make the picture frames. Charles Brachvogel, the owner of the company, came to trust Volker's business ideas, so when Brachvogel unexpectedly died three years later, his family asked Volker to continue to run the business. He was only twenty years old at the time.¹⁵

Because he had six years of experience working in the picture frame business, in 1882 Volker decided it was time to start a business of his own.¹⁶ Since Chicago already had enough woodworking companies, Volker determined that it would be best for him to move to a place with fewer competitors. When choosing between St. Joseph, Missouri and Kansas City, Missouri towns near the source of the walnut he planned to use—he chose Kansas City “largely by hunch,” predicting the growth of the then small Midwestern city.¹⁷

From 1882 to the turn of the century, William Volker and Company expanded and became increasingly profitable, making Volker a millionaire by 1906.¹⁸ From the original picture and window frame manufacturing company, Volker gained control of similar companies including a window shade factory and a cotton mill in other parts of the nation.¹⁹ This merging of businesses reveals that, like many Gilded Age industrialists throughout the country, Volker too was interested in vertical integration--the incorporation of various related companies--to improve efficiency in production and increase profits. However, unlike

13 Van Brunt, “William Volker’s Hard Head Made Millions,” January 11, 1948.

14 “The Price of Success,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 27, 1915.

15 Van Brunt, “William Volker’s Hard Head Made Millions,” January 11, 1948.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Cornuelle, 68.

19 Van Brunt, “William Volker’s Hard Head Made Millions,” January 11, 1948.

many industrialists, he did not believe in Social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer's theory that money would naturally flow to the most capable in a free-market economy, thus justifying the enormous wealth of corporate giants in this new age. Volker's beliefs, shaped by his humble and religious upbringing, tended to lean more towards the Progressive ideology popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, explaining some of the reasons for his support of welfare organizations and penchant for giving to others.

Civic Involvement: Board of Public Welfare and Board of Education

Volker's business position led to his civic involvement in Kansas City. The Board of Public Welfare, which came into existence as the Board of Pardons and Paroles in 1910, was the first of its kind in the United States and preceded similar endeavors by more than two decades. Well ahead of others with this notion, Volker believed that "it was the City's duty to care for its indigent... [and] that welfare activities should be administered with the thought of prevention rather than cure; that it is much better to teach the means of prevention of social evils than to try to effect a cure after the evil exists."²⁰

The Board's efforts "combined a traditional emphasis on self-help with a forward-looking commitment to activist government."²¹ Its goal was to provide access to jobs, housing, loans, and financial and legal advice to limit the amount of direct financial assistance while simultaneously weaning clients off welfare efficiently. Going along with the Progressive aims of the day, the Board also regulated and surveyed work and social conditions by inspecting and monitoring factories, private charities, dance halls, and movie theatres.²²

Volker's actions and participation on this Board as the first president speak louder than words, since by most accounts he was a reticent man who wanted to stay out of the limelight. Even though

²⁰ Mary Lou Fenberg, "History of Board of Public Welfare, Kansas City, Missouri, 1910-1918," (unpublished Master's thesis, Washington University, 1942), 25.

²¹ Harry Haskell, *Boss-Busters & Sin Hounds: Kansas City and Its Star* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007), 106.

²² *Ibid.*, 106.

Kansas City Star writer Henry Van Brunt believed that Volker's service on the Board of Public Welfare was the best example of his ideal for public service, Volker served for only three years, claiming, "My three years of service as friend of the friendless has given me the deepest pleasure I have ever known. It has been a privilege to me to serve, as it would be to any man, and I am a better citizen now than I was before. It is not right that I should have all the pleasure when there are others to whom it would mean the same."²³

As Tom Pendergast consolidated power as a political boss, he branched into social work, finding out that dispensing charity and favors increased a sense of loyalty among his constituents. As a result, however, the Board of Public Welfare began to compete directly with the Pendergast machine, eventually leading to the decline of the Board in the late 1910s.²⁴ This remained the case until the end of the Pendergast machine and the reintroduction of the Board in 1940. In many of the notes Volker made regarding applicants, he recorded jobs, prospects for jobs, and often whether or not the applicant had applied to "PW," public welfare.²⁵ This shows Volker's continuing commitment to social service organizations and the importance of people using their services.

Although he worked with many institutions, including the Helping Hand Institute, the Jefferson Home for Women, and the Armour Home, between 1912 and 1926 Volker devoted a great amount of time to the Board of Education in Kansas City. Among the changes that ensued under his leadership were "the introduction of vocational training...regular health examinations, open-air classrooms, and the provision of milk for undernourished children."²⁶ He was most famous, however, for instituting a retirement plan for teachers, providing funds when needed.²⁷ It becomes evident through his actions on the school board that part of Volker's reasons for providing aid to fellow

23 Van Brunt, "His Hard Head Made Millions," January 11, 1948.

24 Haskell, *Boss-Busters & Sin Hounds*, 135.

25 William Volker, "Requests for Financial Assistance:1941" (Folder 33), *William Volker and Company Records* (KCo059), WHMC-KC.

26 Haskell, "The Story on William Volker's Good Works," September 21, 1958.

27 Van Brunt, "His Hard Head Made Millions," January 11, 1948.

Kansas Citians stemmed from his interest in creating successful lives--beginning with childhood problems. Through his service on these civic boards, Volker not only realized the needs of those around him, he was also able to institute reforms that are carried out to this day. His aid to individuals, as a result, can be seen as an extension of his actions on these committees, since he had the same goal in mind: helping people in need to better their lives through immediate assistance, whether it be rent for living, money for groceries, shoes for working, or a bicycle to get to work.²⁸

Promotion of Self-Help: Applying Progressive Ideals

There are no extant records that reveal Volker's lifelong dedication to Progressivism, but he showed his progressive character with through actions, taking part in civic social welfare organizations at the pinnacle of the reform era in the first decade and a half of the century. When the momentum of the reform movement ended with World War I, it is unlikely that Volker altered his beliefs and actions to flow with the new time. The result was an individual who carried on the work he had started, though on a much smaller and unpublicized scale.

In the second half of his life, Volker, along with the rest of the American populace, faced uncertain times as life changed dramatically between the two world wars.²⁹ Volker's interviewing and receiving individual aid applicants appeared to be his attempt to create order in a seemingly chaotic world, to make a rational attempt to allow people to help themselves by encouraging them to get an education, find a job, or seek treatment for health problems.

Aid Recipients: Trends and examples based on a Sample

An average of between fifty and sixty persons a day entered the Volker office, seeking financial aid. They were black and white, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile,

²⁸ Kansas City, WHMC, William Volker and Company Records, "Requests for Financial Assistance: 1941," KC 0059, Folder 33. These are all examples of reasons.

²⁹ Harvey Green's *The Uncertainty of Everyday Life, 1915-1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), provides an excellent synopsis of the various struggles and changes Americans faced in this time period, ranging from housing to labor and health concerns.

Protestant and Catholic...William Volker measured each applicant with his pale blue stare and quickly made his decision. He made few mistakes in judgment and was not often cheated...The Volker desk at the office sat inconspicuously among others of the same design and out in the open. There was a railed enclosure with chairs for visitors...and most of the visitors were applicants for aid. The run-of-the-mill down-and-outer looking for a handout, was given a card bearing the Volker name which, by arrangement with E. Terry Brigham, entitled the applicant to the services of the Helping Hand institute. Others, according to their merits, became “cases” on regular assistance. They numbered thousands and were of infinite variety.³⁰

Using the requests for financial assistance found in the Volker collection, I analyzed a sample of sixty-four requests to collect specific data. Based on a preliminary survey of the collection, I determined that the information Volker most often noted was the gender, family/marital status, reason for application, and amount of aid. Not all of this information was included in every request however, so the completeness of the data set varied greatly.³¹

One way to analyze Volker’s aid is to look at the people to whom he gave aid and to establish whether their conditions were representative of the larger Kansas City population. When screening applicants, it seems that age and gender were two of the most important criteria for Volker. *Star* writer Henry Van Brunt claims that “Mr. Volker confessed to a weak spot where aged, impoverished women were involved. ‘It never hurts to spoil old people,’ he used to say. ‘Old ladies ought to have money to jingle in their pockets.’”³² This was definitely the case with Martha Fuhrman, an

30 Van Brunt, “His Hard Head Made Millions,” January 11, 1948.

31 For some of the requests, the only information that remains is a ticket to the William Volker Charities Fund that notes the date, name of applicant and amount granted. In these cases, no reason or family status can be determined, thus limiting the results even further.

32 Van Brunt, “His Hard Head Made Millions,” January 11, 1948.

eighty-year-old woman whom Volker noted lived in the Armour Home³³ from 1929 to 1941. She came to Mr. Volker to get his help so she could see a doctor for her eye trouble. Another of Fuhrman’s visits to Volker was for her brain trouble. Both times she received small amounts of money (\$5), but, more importantly for her, she felt that going to a hospital would be more beneficial to her than seeing the Armour Home doctor³⁴

Based on the sample shown in Figure 1, approximately equal numbers of men and women received aid from Volker. An obscuring factor, however, arises from the fact that spouses were often listed in Volker’s notes and, when it came to regular recipients, some of the receipts were made out to one person, while others named the spouse. The same condition appears with members of the same family, i.e. sometimes a daughter or son came on behalf of a widow or parent. Regardless of gender, it appears that Volker asked standard questions in order to gain an understanding of the applicant’s history before asking the reason for the request.³⁵

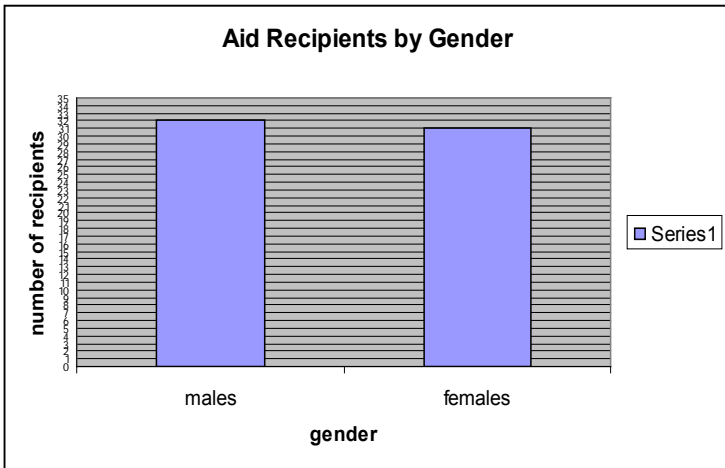


Figure 1

The Great Depression resulted in the breakup of many

33 According to George Green’s *Condensed History of the Kansas City Area: Its Mayors and Some V.I.P.s* (Kansas City: Lowell, 1968), Armour Home was an established home for older couples who were over 65 and had been residents of Kansas City for ten years. Couples had to sign over any property to the Home in exchange for an income during their lifetime.

34 Kansas City, WHMC, William Volker and Company Records, “Requests for Financial Assistance: 1941,” KC 0059, Folder 33, Furhman, 4/1/41.

35 Kansas City, WHMC, William Volker and Company Records, “Requests for Financial Assistance: 1941,” KC 0059, Folder 33.

families, as husbands often left home to find work. A striking example of this is seen in Volker’s notes on George P. Woods, a Kansas City resident for thirty-five years. Woods claimed to have been separated from his family for three years while working for the WPA between 1938 and 1940, among other things. He had three children, aged 17, 14, and 6 years, who were living with their mother. Woods had been out of a job since January 1941; he came to see Volker in September of the same year. He had been admitted to the Veteran’s Hospital between March and July of 1941 and asked for \$12 to pay off his bill at the Regent Hotel for \$8 since they were holding his clothes, as well as \$3.50 for a Greyhound bus fare. Volker issued a check on September 5, 1941 to Woods but cancelled it at the end of the month when Woods never came to pick it up.³⁶ The information Volker noted about Woods, the fact, for instance that he had been a store clerk for three years prior to working for the WPA, shows the amount of thought and commitment Volker put into each applicant’s request for aid.

Most of Volker’s applicants were married, as shown in Figure 2. The marital status of applicants, however, could be determined only if Volker mentioned a spouse. As a general trend however, most married applicants usually requested aid for subsistence, i.e basic living expenses such as groceries or rent, while single or widowed individuals were more likely to ask for educational or health related assistance.

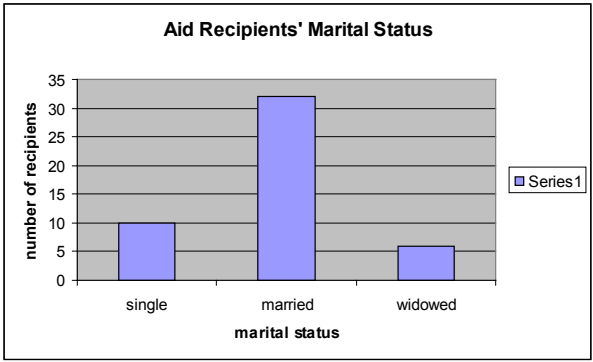


Figure 2

³⁶ A statistical view of reasons, generalized as educational,

Kansas City, WHMC, William Volker and Company Records, “Requests for Financial Assistance: 1941,” KC 0059, Folder 33, Woods, 9/1941.

health, living, or other, is given in Figure 3. The story of George R. Adkins and his family, however, reveals how reasons for requesting aid varied over time. Volker's notes on the Adkins started in February 1938 and continued until Volker received a letter from Adkins in January 1943. In September 1938, Volker noted that Adkins had seven children ranging in age from seven to eighteen years. He had worked for the WPA since June 1938, receiving wages of \$11 per week but owed \$6.25 in rent. In December 1938, Adkins was examined for TB and declared unfit for manual labor. He still had four children at home and requested money for his sixteen-year-old son, who needed surgery on his tonsils. A later note in September 1941 revealed that Adkins requested \$1 for a pair of

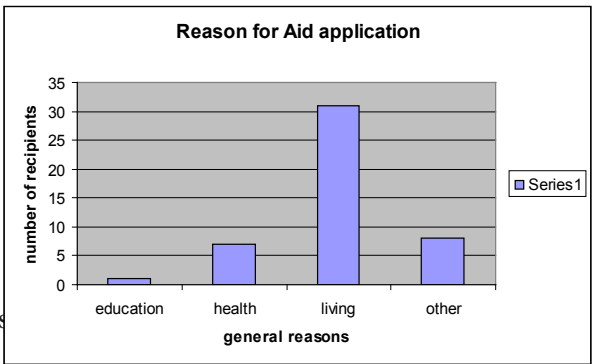


Figure 3

Interestingly, most of the amounts Volker gave to applicants were small, usually \$1. Although a dollar was worth more in the late 1930s, it still was not a small fortune. Again, this reveals that Volker was not trying to create a community of pensioners, but rather encourage self-sufficiency by encouraging and helping individuals to get jobs and more education. Although it seems counter-productive to give handouts, as Henry Haskell pointed out, Volker, it seems, could not resist helping out when he saw the need. He thought of it as an investment in the future and a step in the right direction rather than creating a group of people dependent on his charity for their livelihood. This explains the small amounts he gave: enough to make a small difference and help

someone along. Figure 4 shows the ratio of amounts recipients received

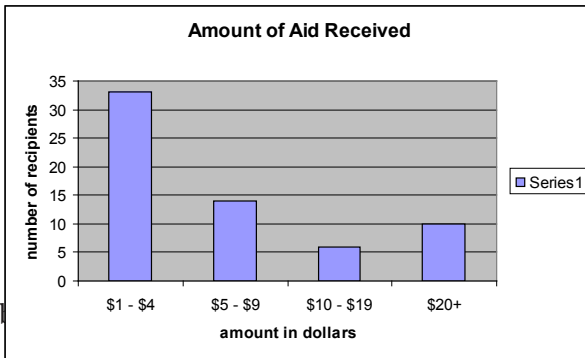


Figure 4

In 1937, Kansas City already had a significant tradition of social work funded through the Charities Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, but leaders expanded the organization. The recognized social planning agencies focused on five different areas: neighborhood work and recreation through settlement houses,³⁸ health and health education through hospitals and the city Health Department, children, family and individual service through social workers, aid for the aged and handicapped through homes and institutions,³⁹ and protective care through the Girls Advisory Bureau caring for unmarried mothers.⁴⁰ Since Volker was an honorary chairman of the Charities Committee, he was well aware of its goals and progress in Kansas City. It seems, however, that since the goal of each welfare institution was specific, and Volker realized that it was easy for a working family to fall through the cracks, he decided to supplement the existing institutions by interviewing individuals and giving out money of his own.

From annual reports such as the Council of Social Agencies meeting report, it is obvious the problems that plagued all cities, ranging from delinquency to disease, were present in Kansas City,

38 These included Guadalupe Neighborhood Center, Institutional Church, Italian Institute, Jewish Educational Institute, Mattie Rhodes Neighborhood Center, and Swope Settlement among others. Some of these institutes are still around today, revealing the longevity of the Progressive era institutions.

39 Some of these included Salem Home, The Little Sisters of the Poor, Catherine Hale Home, etc.

40 *Good Neighboring in Kansas City: Yesteryear...And This Year.* 1937.

but that cooperative efforts tried to mitigate them. For example, one committee was in charge of Christmas adoptions of families. The report presents numbers of families adopted compared to the number that had applied for aid, as well as challenges such as duplicate or even triplicate adoptions of the same family by different agencies.□ Summaries of activities and the annual budget of the Council are included to show what various social agencies were accomplishing and why cooperation made social work more efficient. Volker was the first president of this council in 1919, until he resigned later that year to take a more background role as was his preference.

A more revealing 1940 study of the 2,260 “unemployable” families in Kansas City tried to discern the reasons behind this phenomenon. The study revealed that “more than half these families were headed by women, almost half of whom were widowed, another half are separated or divorced and only a few have never been married.” Also, seventy percent of debt was owed to landlords, grocers, or doctors for essential supplies.□ These are the same reasons my sample of Volker’s aid uncovered. Many of the individuals who were regular recipients were either unemployed but seeking a job, or unemployable because of age, health reasons, or familial responsibilities, making them *deserving* when compared to those relying on welfare to live without trying to help themselves improve their condition.

Conclusion

William Volker has left an important legacy for Kansas City through the institutions he helped establish and fund. Although he did not want to be recognized for this work, agreeing with Ralph Waldo Emerson that “the silence that accepts merit as the most natural thing in the world is the highest applause,” it is important to realize the significance of this debt Kansas City owes Volker.□

As shown by this small sampling of his notes, Volker provided aid to many individuals for reasons ranging from education and health to living expenses. Volker’s reasons can only be conjectured, but are most easily explained by his commitment to social and civic

institutions, his religious and personal values, and his ideals as a Progressive reformer.

This is an important topic of study, especially relevant in today's societal progression towards community involvement and service. By studying previous models of philanthropy, we can make philanthropy even more effective to make a larger impact in bettering society as a whole. Also, keeping with Kansas City's tradition of being a unique city shaped by differing forces, Volker was a unique individual. Harry Haskell claimed that "we have among us no one quite like him... [And] I very much doubt whether any other American city has ever had his exact counterpart."

Over the last decade, philanthropy has moved back towards the actions Progressive reformers advocated. For example, community service is emphasized over simply writing checks to charitable organizations. Also, Progressives, especially female activists, advocated teaching people to improve their lives through education about hygiene, sanitation, and similar personal changes.

Consistent with the American reluctance to give out money, Volker provided money for specific causes in cases where he had the opportunity to make an immediate difference. A shy and unassuming man, unlike many of his Progressive contemporaries, he preferred to stay in the background. Although the memorial dedicated to him in 1956, a decade after his death, was well-deserved, Volker would not have allowed it in his life.

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