

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Minnesota's German
Forty-eighter*

**Albert Wolff:
Brilliant Career, Tragic Death**

LaVern J. Rippley
—Page 12

Spring 2016

Volume 51, Number 1

“Brighter and Better for Every Person”:
**Building the New Salvation Army Rescue Home
of St. Paul, 1913**

Kim Heikkila, page 3



“Children of the Home.” This large portrait of twelve children is from the Salvation Army Rescue Home and Maternity Hospital annual report for the year ending September 30, 1916. The home, located on Como Avenue in St. Paul, cared for 207 children that year, 109 of whom had been born in the home. The inset photo is Adjutant True Earle, superintendent of the Home from 1913 to 1918. Photo courtesy of The Salvation Army USA Central Territory Historical Museum.

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Ramsey County History is published quarterly
by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323
Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN
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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 51, Number 1

Spring 2016

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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*Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from
Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr.
and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

A Message from the Editorial Board

Buildings often tell stories. Historian Kim Heikkila shares the story behind the drive to build the Salvation Army Rescue Home on Como Avenue, which was led by Adjutant True Earle and businessmen Joseph and William Elsinger. Designed by Clarence Johnston, the Home served many young women and their newborn children as part of the Salvation Army’s outreach programs. Not far away from Como Avenue, near Hamline University, sit eleven houses constructed by a Swedish contractor, Carl Florin, or his brothers, John and Gustav, all of whom lived in St. Paul in the early 1900s. Authors Barbro Sollbe and Ann Thorson Walton give us a rare look into the family who constructed middle-class homes of that era in the popular bungalow style. Records from the St. Paul Building Permits Collection, available in the RCHS Research Center, helped with this article. This issue also contains a biographical profile of Albert Wolff, a journalist with training in theology who came to St. Paul to escape the strife of 1848 in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. According to author LaVern Rippley, Wolff founded German-language newspapers in New Ulm, Chaska, and St. Paul, encouraged emigrants to move to Minnesota for new lives in our invigorating climate, and supported Abraham Lincoln’s Union.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Carl Florin, Ray Florén, and Eleven Houses near Hamline University

Barbro Sollbe and Ann Thorson Walton

Shortly before I left Stockholm to return to St. Paul in 1993, a dignified gentleman, Ray Florén, came by my office to say goodbye. He was a tenured employee of The Swedish Council for Building Research (*Byggforskningsrådet*), the publisher with MIT Press of a book I had written about the Swedish architect Ferdinand Boberg.

Carl's Early Years

Ray told me his father, Carl O. Florén (1884–1948) had traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota, in the early part of the twentieth century to take a job at Hamline University teaching courses in animal behavior. When he was fifteen years old, Carl left home to work as a day-laborer with his brother on a construction job in Stockholm. The brothers were employed in building the Stockholm Central Post Office (1897–1904), which today is a protected historical property used by the office of the Swedish Prime Minister. Ferdinand Boberg (1860–1946), who was one of the most productive and prominent Swedish architects at the turn of the twentieth century, designed the exterior of the Central Post Office and many of its interior furnishings following his tour of the United States in 1893. Greatly influenced by what he had seen in America, the Post Office in Stockholm could easily have fit in with the architecture found in any large city of the U.S. In Sweden, Boberg's building was considered a masterpiece.

Initially, Carl was paid to run errands for the construction workers, which most of the time involved buying beer for them. These fellow workers scoffed at Carl and he felt they belittled him with their comments about his youth. Then one day he proved himself their equal by singlehandedly moving a heavy building scaffold; a task that typically required two men. As he grew to be accepted by the others at the job site, Carl found he was invited to have a beer with these men.



The front cover of a Swedish temperance magazine from 1900 carried this photo of Carl Florén, left, enjoying a beer with a friend in Stockholm. All photos reproduced in this article are courtesy of the Ray Florén family archive.

A Stockholm photographer captured this indulgence at the time. Eighty years later that same photograph was published in a temperance publication titled *Alkohol-debatt*, which warned of the abuses of alcohol when a boy as young as Carl was permitted to have a friendly beer with a twenty-year-old co-worker. The caption at the bottom of the magazine's cover page reads, "Merry Christmas photo for Mother and Father in the year 1900; the boys are 16 and 20 years of age."

Following his work on the Central Post

Office, Carl visited Oslo and Helsinki. He also had a job at the Swedish Royal Livery. This was a branch of the Swedish Royal establishment that was responsible for maintaining the royal carriages. Among other tasks, Carl painted linear ornaments on the highly polished exteriors of new carriages.¹ In 1900, when Carl was sixteen, he left Sweden aboard the Anchor Line's steamship *S.S. California*, sailing out of England via Denmark. The ship docked on Long Island, New York, and Carl proceeded to set out to see America. Among other adventures, Carl and a friend survived the celebrated earthquake of 1906 San Francisco.

Carl and the Hamline Neighborhood

In time Carl made his way to St. Paul to visit an aunt who worked as a housemaid for the railroad builder, James J. Hill. Hill, like Carl, was an immigrant. He had left Guelph, Ontario, Canada, at the age of seventeen to seek his fortune in the United States half a century before Carl. Hill arrived in St. Paul in 1856, a time when the city was a frontier town and Minnesota was still a territory. By dint of hard work and the knack for finding excellent business partners, Hill was able to move into railroading and in 1893 his Great Northern Railway became the nation's northern transcontinental railroad. Because many Scandinavians had labored hard to build Hill's railroad, the Empire Builder, as Hill was known, liked Swedes and he is reported to have said, "Give me snuff, whiskey, and Swedes, and I will build a railroad to hell."²

The identity of Carl Florén's aunt who is supposed to have been a housekeeper for Hill is uncertain. Perhaps she was called Alma. What is certain from the historical record is that Carl was hired by Hamline University to teach courses



Carl Florén in Minneapolis about 1908 before he almost died from typhoid fever.

in ethology, the study of animal behavior. After a time in this position, Carl resigned from teaching and took up property development close by the Hamline campus because this work offered the prospect of earning more money.

Two photographs from this time in Carl's life also document his unfortunate brush with typhoid fever, which robbed him of his curly hair. A small photo of Carl that was taken in Minneapolis before this illness shows a young man with curly hair; a later photo, which was his wedding portrait, presents him as he looked after he had recovered. According to Ray Florén, Carl could not chew anything during his illness and was only able to sip liquids, mostly beer, for nourishment.

Once he had recovered, Carl returned to Sweden for a short time. By then, he had been in the United States for a decade and thought he would visit his parents and be of help to them. During this trip to his homeland, Carl met Hildur Karolina Ström, who sometimes worked as a governess in the homes of various relatives. Hildur Ström's family owned a brickyard in Korsberga, which is in the province of Västergötland, Sweden. Her father, Carl, had bought property that had good clay soil and started a brickworks with his brother-in-law, who at the time was a rural storekeeper. Together these entrepreneurs had built additional brickworks in several other towns. Later, after the death of his brother-in-law, Carl Ström bought out his relatives and was the sole owner.

Hildur had attended a coeducational secondary school in the town of Hjo and

was well educated for that time. She also became known as a good gymnast, which was unusual for a young woman. Carl Ström had purchased another brickyard at Mölebo, which stretched his finances to the point where Hildur had to leave school when she was fourteen.

Fortunately Hildur was sufficiently well educated that she could teach others, which was how Carl Florén came to meet her, woo her, and eventually marry her in St. Paul in 1911. Carl was then twenty-seven and his bride was twenty-one.³

In St. Paul, Carl's construction business flourished and he returned to Sweden several times in the following years. Although there is no family lore or records that explain why he changed his name at this time, Carl Florén became Carl Florin, a decision which made his dealings with the U.S. Customs easier. As a home builder, Carl's method was a simple one. He would build a house, sell it, and then use the profit from the sale to pay for building another house. Although this business plan worked for Carl, it had one drawback: the family was obliged to live in whichever house was being built while it was under construction. This not only provided the family with a roof over their heads, it also allowed them to furnish the house handsomely and make it look comfortable and cozy. By "staging"



The wedding portrait of Carl Oscar Florén and Hildur Karolina Ström when they married in 1911. By this time, Carl was fully recovered from typhoid fever, but his curly hair was all gone. The photographer was Algot Anderson of St. Paul.

each house, to use the modern term, Carl Florin got a higher price for it when the house was sold.

The Alien Certificate of Registration for Mrs. Hildur Caroline Florin shows that between 1913 and 1917, she and her family had their home at 860 Holton Street in the Hamline neighborhood. This



Two unidentified children pause in their play in front of a row of new houses near Hamline University. Carl and/or John Florin likely built some of these houses.



When the state of Minnesota issued this Alien Registration Certificate to Hildur in 1917, she and Carl were living at 860 Holton Avenue in the Midway and both had changed their surnames to Florin.

certificate also indicates that by this time the spelling of her surname had changed to Florin as well.

This house at 860 Holton Street was the last home that the Carl Florin family occupied before they returned to Sweden permanently. Two years later, in 1923, Ray was born in Sweden. A postcard in the family's records from 1916 shows the house at 860 Holton at that time. Built between 1912 and 1913, the St. Paul building permit shows that the house was owned by Carl and that his brother, John, was the contractor who built it.

Several of Carl's brothers joined him in the United States and became part of his contracting business. Carl's eldest brother, Jan, also emigrated to St. Paul, where he became known as John Florin and is listed on several building permits as either the owner or the builder of the residence. Another brother, Gustav Florin, joined the business in America at a later date. According to the building permits issued for the houses the Florins built, in 1912 John Florin lived at 1396 Van Buren Avenue and Carl's address was 1305 Hewitt Avenue. In 1922 Gustav Florin's address was 1732 Lafond Avenue. All three addresses are in this Midway neighborhood.

One way to see how the Florin brothers developed what was known as College Place East Division is to examine the Ramsey County plat map for this area. According to Ray, "Daddy not only built the fifteen to twenty houses [in this Division] . . . he was even allowed to make a town plan for the whole area." Based on

an examination of the building records, the earliest permit issued to a Florin family member was to John on February 1, 1912 for a house located at 1425 Hewitt Avenue, north side of the street, at the corner of Holton Street, in lot 3, block 11.

During the years that Carl was building houses in the Midway, he also took on other projects. When the Zion Lutheran Church (currently located at 1697 Lafond Avenue in the Midway) needed interior work, the church hired Florin Painting and Decorating for the job. First organized in 1890, Zion Lutheran Church initially held services in a small chapel at Fairview and Thomas. Over the next twenty years, the congregation raised enough money to erect their current building in 1911. It's possible that Carl and Hildur and their family worshipped at this church because services there were conducted in English and Swedish until 1931.

While Carl and Hildur lived in St. Paul, Ray's oldest sister, Lillian, was born.⁴ Lilly, as she was called, can be seen in a family photo in a carriage that is being pulled by a goat. The label on the carriage reads "Made in America" and the goat bears a "St. Paul" banner.

Sometime after the Armistice of November 11, 1918 ended World War I, Carl and his family decided to return to Sweden. They expected to make a short

visit and then return to the United States and settle in Seattle, where Carl would engage in the same kind of real estate development that had been so successful for him in St. Paul. For reasons that are unknown today, the family instead returned to Sweden in 1921 and never again lived in America. Prior to the family's departure, Carl bought a new car, which he had shipped to Sweden. According to the family, as Carl drove the car from Gothenburg, which was their port of entry on Sweden's west coast, he observed a carriage with runaway horses and elderly people seated in the carriage. Carl stopped the car, got out, and with his good knowledge of animal behavior, he halted the horses before the passengers were injured.

One of the reasons the Florin family left St. Paul for Sweden was Hildur's health. She found Minnesota winters were hard on her. One winter during their years in St. Paul, Carl found he was suffering from nose bleeds. In an effort to remedy this problem, he underwent surgery to remove a piece of bone in his nose. Following this operation and against the advice of his physician, Carl visited a car exhibition. Not wanting to appear with a surgical bandage over his nose, he removed it and suffered the consequences; the wound became frostbitten. Consequently Carl was



Lillian Florin, Carl and Hildur's oldest child, sitting in a wagon pulled by a goat. This photo was probably taken by an itinerant photographer about 1915.



Zion Swedish Lutheran Church's new building on Lafond Avenue in the Midway. The photo was taken in 1913.

very ill and had to be constantly cared for over the next nine days.

Tirelessly Hildur nursed Carl, took care of baby Lillian, and managed the family business while Carl recovered. That experience confirmed Hildur's wish to escape from winter in St. Paul. The decision to return to Sweden was made easier for Carl and his family because he had made so much money in St. Paul that he could retire in Sweden and never need to work again. Hildur and Carl bought a large property in Älvsjö, south of Stockholm, where Ray was born and the family continues to live today.

Ray's History

During his youth, Ray commuted from Älvsjö into Stockholm daily to attend Södra Latin High School from which he was graduated in 1949. Carl died in 1948 and Ray spent much of that year helping his mother care for his father. Following his graduation from high school, Ray began his mandatory stint in the Swedish military. He was assigned to build bridges with the engineers. These bridges were built on pontoons using anchors weighing more than 100 kilos. On one occasion while building a bridge, Ray carried one of these pontoons which resulted in permanent damage to his

back and pain that remained with him the rest of his life.

In two years, Ray was promoted to the rank of officer. In honor of his promotion, the Cadet School held a celebration which unfortunately led to an accident in which Ray stumbled into a rabbit hole while he was heading for a swim after the party. When he caught his foot in the hole, Ray cracked a joint in his foot and had to be taken to the hospital in Varberg on the west coast of Sweden where he remained for the next six months. Although he had planned to enter the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm shortly after his promotion, he had to defer his entry until the following year because he was on crutches while his foot healed.

Once he was healthy again, Ray went on to earn a degree in Civil Engineering from the Royal Institute with a specialty in road and canal construction. As an active leader of the student union while he was completing his education, Ray was invited to attend the Nobel Award Ceremonies as the student representative. Thus he had the great pleasure of escorting Clementine Churchill during the festivities because her husband, Winston Churchill, who won the prize for Literature in 1953, was unable to attend.

As part of his education, Ray went to Spain, where he worked for five months at a Spanish power station on the Ebro River. He was one of sixty students who were chosen to go on an all-expenses-paid study tour of the United States and Canada. During this trip, the students traveled 6,000 kilometers studying skyscrapers, suspension bridges, airports, and earth-erosion problems. His graduate thesis was a book about the management of the Idkerberget mine in the central Swedish province of Dalarna. At Idkerberget, the miners had to descend five hundred to one thousand meters below the surface to mine coal. Ray's book was so well received that the National Road and Water Construction Administration (*Väg-och vattenbyggnadsstyrelsen*) hired him. He worked there until 1980 when he joined the Swedish Council for Building Research, which is where we met in 1991.



This photo from the mid-1920s shows Carl, now back in Sweden, holding his son Ray, who was born there in 1923.

Under Ray's leadership at the Swedish Council for Building Research, the GPS (Global Positioning System) became the "chosen Christmas gift of the year" in Sweden, once the U.S. Army had accepted Sweden's application for the system. At that time, the U.S. Army had two satellites in the air for the purpose of making measurements. Acceptance of the Swedish application occurred only after an unfortunate accident at Nynäshamn on Sweden's Baltic coast where an oil tanker ran aground. That could have been avoided through the use of GPS.

Another of Ray's projects during his service at the Swedish Council for Building Research was the development of a computer-controlled building robot that could function twenty-four hours a day with great precision. He also consulted on the construction of a large shopping mall outside of Minneapolis, which may have been the Mall of America. One of his most interesting projects was consulting on the building of the "Icehotel" in Jukkasjärvi (in Lapland, Northern Sweden), which opened in 1990. This was the world's

Eleven Houses Built by Carl, John, or Gustav Florin in the Midway's College Place East Division of St. Paul between 1912 and 1924

The building permits for the houses that were built by Carl, John, or Gustav Florin between 1912 and 1924 all classified these dwellings as bungalows. The word “bungalow” comes from Hindi and means a house in the Bengal style. There was no connection between these houses and India, however. Instead they reflected a trend in home building that swept across the United States in the first quarter of the twentieth century. According to architectural historian Brian McMahon, the bungalow style was not only popular in the Twin Cities, it helped address a pent-up demand for housing that was driven by an energized real estate and construction industry and increasingly mechanized building companies.

At the time, the typical city lot in the Twin Cities was 50 wide x 120 feet deep. The homes the Florins built all range in width from 22 to 29 feet wide and 26 to 36 feet long. Although urban lots were typically 50 feet wide, many lots in this neighborhood, for which the plat was drawn in 1881, have a smaller width. The bungalows that the Florins built were all either wood-frame, one-story or one-and-a-

Street Address	Permit Issue Date	Owner/Contractor
1425 Hewitt Avenue	February 1, 1912	John Florin, owner and contractor
1419 Hewitt Avenue	October 26, 1912	Carl Florin, owner; John Florin, contractor
1421 Hewitt Avenue	March 12, 1912	John Florin, owner and contractor
860 Holton Street	January 9, 1913	Carl Florin, owner; John Florin, contractor
1408 Taylor Avenue	December 4, 1922	Gustav Florin, owner; John Florin, contractor
1412 Taylor Avenue	December 4, 1922	Gustav Florin, owner; John Florin, contractor
1420 Taylor Avenue	November 28, 1923	Gustav Florin, owner and contractor
1416 Taylor Avenue	December 6, 1923	John Florin, owner and contractor
1424 Taylor Avenue	December 26, 1923	John Florin, owner and contractor
812 Holton Avenue	September 16, 1924	John Florin, owner and contractor

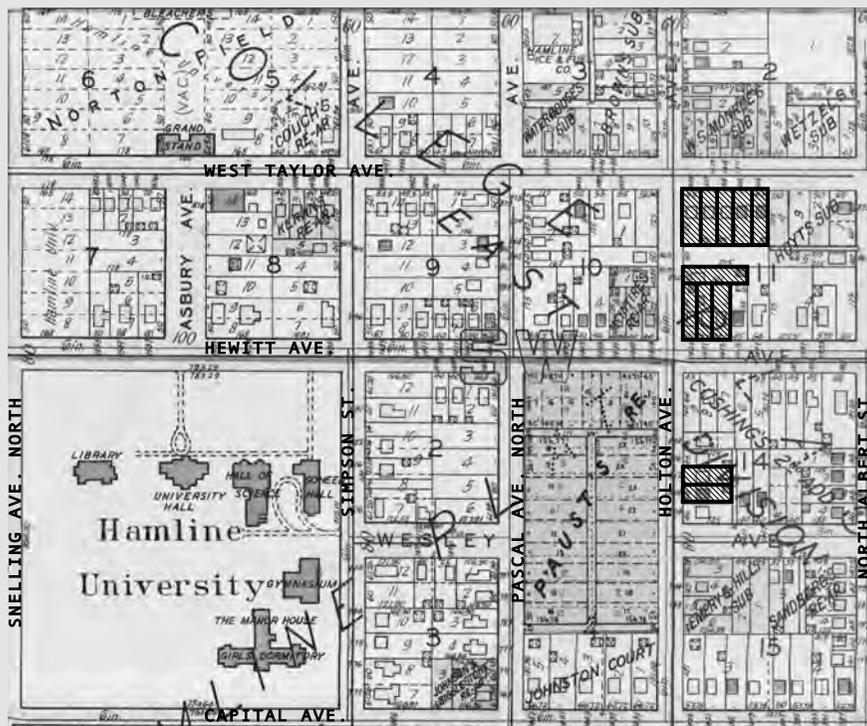
half stories high (roughly 30 feet). The exteriors of the houses had wood siding, which some owners later replaced with stucco. Many had a driveway on one side leading to a garage in back or a garage in the rear that butted on the

alley behind. All eleven homes had a basement, a shingled roof, a single stairway if there was more than one floor, hardwood floors, and plastered walls and ceilings. A coal-fired boiler in the basement of each of the three houses built in 1912 produced hot water that circulated through pipes and radiators for heat in the winter. By the 1920s, the coal-fired furnaces that the Florins installed produced warm air that circulated via natural convection from the basement through ducts to the rooms above. Based on the dates reported by the building inspectors, construction of each house took about six months from the time the basement was excavated until the house was finished.

As McMahon explains, the homes were relatively simple to build and there was an abundance of available plans that builders or do-it-yourselfers could follow. Sears, Roebuck even offered manufactured bungalows that were de-



The house at 860 Holton Avenue that Carl Florin owned and John Florin built in 1913 as it looked in 1916.



The eleven houses near Hamline University that Carl, John, or Gustav Florin built are highlighted on this section from a St. Paul plat map by the heavy rules and hatchwork shading around home sites on West Taylor, Holton, and Hewitt Avenues. The street names overlaying the map are the ones used in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1940 the City of Saint Paul changed Capital to Englewood Avenue and Wesley became Hubbard Avenue. Today Hamline University has a much larger footprint between Capital and West Taylor and from Snelling to Pascal Avenues than it did when this map was drawn. The source for this plat map is the 1928 G.M. Hopkins Saint Paul Plat Map, plate 27.

livered by railcar with all the lumber precut, numbered according to the blueprints, and step-by-step directions of how to assemble the home.

Bungalow homes are characterized by simplicity of design, straightforward use of materials, harmony with their setting, low-slung elevations and roof lines, structural brackets supporting overhanging eaves, open and expansive floor plans, and connections between indoors and outdoors via porches, stoops, pergolas, and verandas. In addition, homes in this style were a popular choice because they were affordable, especially for newly arrived immigrants or families moving from rural areas to the city.

All the building permits for the houses that the Florins constructed include an estimated cost, which ranged

from a low of \$1,800 (860 Holton; about \$43,000 in 2016) to \$3,400 (1424 Taylor; about \$47,000). The reason the house on Taylor Avenue that was built in 1923 had an inflation-adjusted cost only about \$4,000 more than the one Carl Florin owned in 1913 is the dollar bought more in 1923 due to deflation in the Midwest that was attributable to the agricultural depression of the early 1920s. Simply put, the dollar bought more house in 1924 than it did in 1912.

Sources:

All information on the eleven homes built by the Florins is from the St. Paul Building Permits Collection, Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn. For more on bungalows, see Brian McMahon, "The Bungalows of the Twin Cities, with a Look at the Craze that Created Them in St. Paul," *Ramsey County History*, 30:4 (Winter 1996): 15–18.

first ice hotel and it attracts thousands of tourists from around the world. Besides being built entirely from ice and having no heat, the hotel serves vodka at its bar in ice glasses and its ice beds are covered with reindeer skins for comfort. Ray retired in 1995 and died nearly twenty years later in June 2015 at the age of ninety-one. The last time I saw him was at lunch in Stockholm with Barbro Sollbe and another colleague.

Barbro Sollbe lives in Gävle, Sweden, where she remains active in civic affairs after her retirement from fifty years in journalism. She is an honorary member of the Association of Swedish Journalists. In the 1990s, she worked at the National Swedish Council for Building Research where she was the editor of their monthly magazine. Ann Thorson Walton is a resident of St. Paul and holds a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Minnesota. She is a frequent traveler to Sweden, the primary source for her scholarly research. She is the author of Ferdinand Boberg—Architect; The Complete Work (1994) and The International Decorative Arts Exposition in St. Petersburg, 1908 (2009).

Endnotes

1. For a period of several years, author AnnWalton lived for months at a time in a small apartment on Djurgården where the King's horses trotted in tandem every morning to keep in practice for ceremonial occasions.
2. Albro Martin, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; reprint ed. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 559.
3. The wedding photo of Carl and Hildur was taken by Algot Anderson (born Vaxjö, Sweden in 1887; died Ramsey County, 1946) whose studio was located at 195 East Seventh Street in St. Paul.
4. Ramsey County Birth Certificate no. 1913-47029 is for a child simply identified as "Florin" whose mother's birth name is listed as Strom. The child's birth date is June 30, 1913, which would be accurate for Lillian if this is her birth record.

R.C.H.S.
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Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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This portrait of Albert Wolff was reproduced as the frontispiece in his posthumously published Literarischer Nachlaß. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.