During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States experienced a massive influx of immigrants from Eastern European countries. In order to combat growing tensions and xenophobia in communities, some women reformers decided to open settlement houses, or community centers, to provide resources to aid immigrant families in their transition to American life. While the bustling, urban cities of Chicago and New York are often thought of as the location of most of these settlement houses, some may be surprised to learn that the Midwestern city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, proudly hosted its own settlement organization under the guidance of a local public figure, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Black Kander. This study sheds light on Kander’s work with Milwaukee’s growing Russian-Jewish population and asserts that she operated in neither the public nor the private sphere, but in a third space, one of her own creation in which her embrace of domesticity ultimately yielded public action. Using contemporary newspaper articles, inventory lists, meeting minutes, as well as Kander’s personal and professional correspondence letters, diary entries, and papers, this article examines Kander’s impact on both the Jewish and impoverished communities in Milwaukee, and the influence of her Jewish and female identities on her work during a rising tide of antisemitism. In telling Kander’s story, this project will contribute to the diversifying narrative of women’s experiences as social reformers and help to preserve Kander’s legacy in the Milwaukee community.

The front page of the Milwaukee Sentinel on July 25th, 1940, carried the headline “Civic Leader is Dead,” marking the passing of social reformer and Jewish activist Lizzie Black Kander. Kander had been a pioneer of the settlement house movement in the late nineteenth century and helped countless immigrant families acclimate to their new lives in Milwaukee. She often wrote of her love and passion for others and her interest in women and children, believing that their access to fundamental resources and education was integral to the betterment of American society. She was, as the article reads, the “guiding spirit for many civic enterprises.” The following day, the Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle reflected on her contributions to the local Jewish community, writing, “She didn’t regard the women and children of the immigrant families as just ‘poor folk.’ She knew that…the boys and girls would grow up and become self-sufficient and self-respecting members of the community.”

Despite widespread praise for Kander’s work, the effectiveness of the settlement movement at interrupting the cycle of poverty has historically been minimized. In his book Spearheads for Reform, Allen Davis diminishes the value of the work women reformers performed in the “Progressive Era,” asserting that they failed to permeate the public sphere and chose not to enter the political space. He adds that many female settlement workers were simply motivated by their disgust at the “wastefulness and disorderliness” in the homes of their immigrant neighbors, not by a sense of civic duty. Davis echoes the critique that women working in the settlement movement comfortably operated within the confines of the period’s gender norms and thus were not truly “progressives.” Although many women of the settlement house movement were not motivated by a desire to challenge traditional gender roles, this does not mean that they were inactive, nor their contributions inconsequential. Instead, Lizzie Black Kander, like many other female progressives, worked in a third space: one of her own creation that was neither the public nor private sphere, but rather at the intersection of both. It was in this third space that a woman’s duty to her home included streets, schools, and parks of her surrounding community. It was where a housewife could impact a stranger’s life and where mothering could inspire public change.

INDUSTRY, CLASS, AND MUCK IN THE CITIES

The heavy industrialization of the Gilded Age drove a wedge between the rich and the poor in American society, one that particularly affected immigrant communities in urban areas. Initially, aid societies and women’s clubs tended to the needs of the immigrants, but as time faded, patience and benevolence wore thin. In contrast to this wider trend, Kander continued to work for the immigrants of Milwaukee in the face of criticism and doubt from the public. As she familiarized herself with their community, she came to believe that many of their problems could be solved by both education and more importantly, access to social and cultural capital. Kander devoted her life to creating a space to integrate immigrants into American cities by providing services to empower and enrich the lives of these men, women, and children as future citizens of the United States.
The decades following the Civil War unleashed an unprecedented economic boom. From 1865 to 1900, the United States experienced a 600 percent increase in exports (primarily manufactured goods) and the gross national product rose from $7.4 million to $18.7 million. The prosperity of the U.S. lured millions of immigrants, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, all hoping to build a better life for themselves and their families. During this era some of the first multimillionaires emerged from the budding industrial system, including steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, who wrote in 1893, “it is probable that our successors in many future decades are to look back to the past decade as the golden age of the Republic, as far as material prosperity is concerned.” Despite the opulence and remarkable profit margins attained by a select few, the Gilded Age, as this period came to be called, did indeed live up to its name—it was a layer of shimmering gold covering a dismal, murky foundation.

As more people flocked to cities, the ills of industrialization began to reveal themselves. In the 1880s, one percent of the population owned 51 percent of the nation’s real and personal property. In addition, multimillionaires, who made up 0.33 percent of the population, owned 17 percent of the country’s wealth. This unequal distribution of capital left an estimated one-third of Americans living in poverty and on the brink of starvation. Metropolitan areas particularly suffered. Many descriptions of urban areas published during this period candidly describe the smog, muck, and general decay of the inner cities. In hopes of exposing the stark economic and social inequalities the majority-immigrant urban poor faced, Gilded Age journalist Jacob Riis famously documented their deplorable living conditions with haunting photographs and detailed accounts of their grim reality. In one account, Riis noted that one tenement he visited was “much like the one in front we just left, only fouler, closer, darker—we will not say more cheerless. The word is a mockery.”

His middle and upper-class audience found the realities of their fellow citizens’ living conditions egregious, and after the economic crises of 1873 and 1893, many Americans clamored for change.

The Progressive Era began in the 1890s and lasted until about 1920, and was largely a reaction to societal apathy to the perils of lower-class citizens and corruption during the Gilded Age. Progressive reformers sought to cleanse local and state governments of their endless web of trusts, corruption, and systematic inequalities upon which a small elite had built their wealth. Some Americans drew parallels between cleaning up the cities and tidying up a home, and referred to the movement as “municipal housekeeping.” More specifically, though, progressive women felt that male leaders had failed to properly care for their citizens and country. Those involved in this movement believed that it was precisely their perceived inherent traits as women that distinguished them as agents of social change. At the 1906 National American Women’s Suffrage Association Convention, activist Jane Addams expressed her grievances on the subject, saying, “[t]he men have been carelessly indifferent to much of this civic housekeeping, as they have always been indifferent to details of the household.” Many of these reformers, including Lizzie Black Kander, believed that the time had come for society to allow the traditional housekeepers—women—into the public arena to help get the nation back in order.

**THE QUESTION OF A WOMAN’S PLACE**

Gender relations in the late nineteenth century were dichotomous—men belonged outside of the home and women belonged within. This distinction between the “public” and “private” spheres was based on the biological determination of gender roles associated with either sex: men were naturally intelligent and controlled while women were inherently emotional, simple, and nurturing.

Gender relations in the late nineteenth century were confined them to domestic activities. It was acceptable for women only to support the political engagement of the men in their personal lives, not to be an active agent in their outside community. Merry Weisner-Hanks refers to women's political involvement in the nineteenth century as “Republican Womanhood,” in which women were “responsible for urging their husbands and sons to civic virtue, morality, and public service from the safety of their homes.” The public sphere was not only defined by physical space, but also by the exchange of ideas. Men openly reflected on their experiences, political beliefs, or identity, often excluding women from both the conversation and the public narrative. Women of this period, however, weary of their imposed alterity, felt that it was precisely their motherly instincts that could save the U.S.'s destitute cities. The solution was to redefine space by creating a new sphere which integrated their neighborhoods inside the four walls of their conventional, “private” territory.
One of the earliest forms of women’s civic involvement in the United States was participation in women’s clubs. Protestant middle-class women traditionally joined such organizations to fill idle time, often to discuss literature or facilitate philanthropic events.15 As the harsh realities of the industrial system surfaced, however, clubwomen stepped outside of their doors, focused on aid and reform in their neighborhoods, and used these social organizations as leverage to join the progressive movement. In the early twentieth century, the president of the New Jersey Federation of Women’s Clubs, Mrs. Frank A. Pattison, wrote, “The Relation of the Woman’s [sic] Club to the American City,” an article defending the necessity of reform-based, philanthropic, women organizations to the public. “[The woman’s club] is an aid in bringing to light some of the wrongs to be righted…Is it not also a power in ushering in that ideal democracy for which we as a nation stand?”16 Pattison believed that by allowing women into the physical space of the public, they necessarily became active citizens in their communities. The wide scope of the social clubs included refining schools, improving municipal sanitation systems, reforming local governments, and even supporting immigrant families.

Jewish charitable organizations of the Progressive Era received far less attention than the predominantly Christian women’s clubs. After a surge of Jewish immigration in the nineteenth century, many synagogues in metropolitan cities could no longer tend to the number of Jews in need. This deficit inspired Jewish men and women across the country, typically of the middle class, to work together in havarot, or charitable societies. However, the male-female unity of these clubs soon collapsed due to the increasing assimilation of Jewish members into American culture, which especially pressured them to subscribe to the Western concept of “public” and “private” spheres. Previously, American Jews had valued benevolence as an expression of both men’s and women’s civic virtue,18 but now, according to Western gender roles, benevolence aligned most closely with women’s perceived passivity and charity.17 The consequences of this shift were twofold: not only did it lend itself to the moral inflation of men’s acts of charity, but it also allowed Jewish men to question women’s ability “to participate as civic equals in the philanthropic public sphere.”19 In this way, many Jewish middle-class clubwomen in the Progressive Era faced adversity similar to their Protestant counterparts: neither were entirely welcome in the public sphere without the permission of men. Yet, their desire to work alongside the destitute in their communities prevented them from passively dwelling in the private sphere. Milwaukee native Lizzie Black Kander is an example of a woman who successfully navigated this vexatious divide.

IMMIGRANTS IN MILWAUKEE

Before the second wave of immigration in the late nineteenth century, Milwaukee’s Jewish community was largely comprised of German immigrants.19 Fortunately, the wave of antisemitism that had swept imperial Germany did not materialize in Milwaukee. But as more refugees arrived from Russia, Poland, and other Eastern European countries, the established immigrants and the newcomers began to polarize. In 1873, the number of Jews in Milwaukee totaled about 1,800 people; in 1895, the number swelled to 7,000, with Russian Jews making up 39 percent of the city’s Jewish population.20 Milwaukee became the destination for many families fleeing their war-torn homelands due to its established Jewish circles and comfortable distance from the overcrowded tenements of New York and Chicago. Upon receiving word of the impending arrival of Russian Jews, Jewish Milwaukee men anticipated the arrival of strong and highly-skilled boys who would contribute to the growing market. Although many fitting this profile did arrive, the community’s enthusiasm subsided at the sight of women, children, and elderly refugees in tow, chilling the originally warm welcome.21

When the first ten Russians arrived in Milwaukee in October of 1881, Jewish philanthropists formed temporary committees and relief societies in order to provide economic and social support; men filled every seat of the organizations. Two men of one such committee, Elias Friend and David Adler, composed a letter sent out to the local Jewish families for the purpose of raising funds, all addressed “Dear Sir,” urging those who saw themselves as “friends of humanity” or “lovers of freedom” to donate to the cause.22 At first, Jewish men in Milwaukee dutifully took it upon themselves, as active citizens, to support those of their shared faith background in their time of need, but as time progressed, their compassion turned into apathy. In the winter of 1882, a local rabbi wrote a seething letter to the Jewish community, writing frankly, “[n]o one seems to be concerned with the immigrant, and the entire burden of caring for them and providing work for them rests literally on the shoulders of three or four gentlemen.”23 Brief resurgences of interest and acts of charity soared after public outcries like these circulated, but they seldom lasted long.

Still, the Russian Jews continued to come. But instead of welcoming them with charity, male community leaders wrote to immigration organizers abroad, saying, “If you send many more Russians to Milwaukee…they will be shipped back to you without permitting them to leave the depot.”24 In the summer, the city’s chamber of commerce encouraged men of all religious denominations to happily receive the Russian immigrants; in July, the city’s mayor headed an emergency assembly that asserted, “[i]t is the duty of the citizens of Milwaukee, without distinction of race or nationality, to provide for [the Russians] immediate wants.”25 The Milwaukee Russian Relief Association tried its hand at the settlement of refugees, but failed at actually integrating families into the local community. The committee would be more aptly called the “Russia Resettlement Association,” as its attempts at relief and “settlement” involved relocating two hundred of the three hundred refugees out of Milwaukee and into the small farm towns of Wausau, Rock Island,
and Eau Claire. The issue, however, was that many of the Russian families had no prior agricultural knowledge and had to again ask for the financial assistance of the Milwaukee Russian Relief Association for food and clothing while living in the countryside. A deep-seated antagonism quickly developed between the Russians and the native Milwaukee Jewish community, prompting a Milwaukee correspondent for an English Jewish research committee to say, “[t]he Russian Jewish Immigrants who have come to Milwaukee have been a class that reflects no credit upon their brethren.” The collective rejection of the Russians quickly burgeoned into a palpable disaffection and evident ostracism. Many of the charitable committees dissolved as men abandoned their civic duty to the public.

Without the support of aid societies, the marginalization of the Russian refugee intensified. The Milwaukee Sentinel newspaper wrote an illustrative exposé on the living conditions of the Russian and Polish quarters in the city’s center, titled “A Glimpse into City's Ghetto.” The journalist begins the article by assuring his readers that American Jews are more relatable and less orthodox than Russians, before continuing to describe their kosher butcher shops as “uninviting places...to the point of offensiveness” and suggesting that “many do not know what sanitary is.” Throughout the investigation, the journalist consistently refers to the Russians as “[t]hese people,” confirming their ‘otherness’ within the community. No longer did the public welcome the newcomers with open arms; they had rejected them as strangers. Male leaders had not simply given up on aiding the Russian Jews, but had decidedly washed their hands of them. This exclusion of the refugees from the larger community paralleled that of all women during this time; perhaps it was precisely the resemblance of these two issues that prompted a young, middle-class Jewish woman named Lizzie Black Kander to resist the listlessness of the male public and take an interest in the plight of the refugees.

**THE EMERGENCE OF A CIVIC LEADER**

Born in Milwaukee on May 28, 1858, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Black Kander grew up on the city’s south side and lived comfortably in a well-to-do German-Jewish neighborhood where her parents, John and Mary Black, owned a dry goods store. Kander's family practiced Reform Judaism, and were founding members of the newest temple in Milwaukee, Congregation Emanu-El. Her parents taught Kander and her siblings the importance of “reconciling religion with the progressive ideas of the age,” as well as the equality of humanity, regardless of sex, from a young age. In Kander's household, nevertheless, a firm line remained between the duties of the wife and those of the husband; wives were to be the moral guides for the household, listen to God's calling for themselves, and raise strong children. Despite her parents' firm belief in the obligations of women to their home and families, they still had high academic expectations for their daughter in public school. She did not disappoint; Milwaukee's East Side High School named Lizzie Black the valedictorian of the class of 1878.

In addition to the rarity of a girl receiving such a title, the content of Kander's valedictorian speech itself also pushed the limits of acceptability. The address, “When I Become President,” is the first piece of her prolific writing career. In it, her forward and witty voice foreshadows her future strength and independence as a progressive reformer. On her graduation day, Kander lamented the abhorrent conditions of the Gilded Age, critiquing President Rutherford B. Hayes for his inaction in the face of corruption. “The only way to settle the difficulty, ladies and gentlemen,” Kander announced, “is by ousting Hayes, barring the White House doors on Tilden, and by electing me to that position.” Her proposition, although satirical for its time, pierced the veil of her assigned private sphere; she was a young woman providing both political and social commentary on a public platform, in an academic setting, almost forty-two years before women achieved suffrage. Kander's speech delineated her future views on gender relations, which fully aligned neither with traditional nor progressive ideas. Although she firmly believed in the strength and potential of women as reformers, she disavowed the initiatives of the suffragists, considering their efforts a diversion from the tangible, immediate work that should be done to improve women’s lives inside the home.

In 1878, Kander decided to take action and joined a local Jewish women's benevolent organization, the Ladies Relief Sewing Society. It was in this organization that Kander began her career as an active agent in her community, as she and her fellow clubwomen sewed and collected clothing for over forty families during the harsh Milwaukee winters. A few years later, Lizzie Black met Simon Kander, a local businessman and Republican politician; the two married in 1881. After returning to Milwaukee from an extended vacation through the South with her husband, the newly-minted Lizzie Black Kander rejoined the Society, and the organization soon grew to one of the largest aid societies in the city in 1885. Also during this time, from 1890 to 1893, Kander worked as a truancy officer where she regularly...
In 1895, the Ladies Relief Sewing Society elected Lizzie Black Kander as its President; Kander, however, had grown increasingly displeased with the passivity of her charity work. She found “almsgiving” very unsatisfying, as it perpetuated the idea of “beggars” and did nothing to restore an individual’s autonomy. Kander stressed that no church or society could truly support impoverished immigrant families “when misfortune, poverty, and debt have already dragged them down!” Still, she accepted the position with the intent to redesign the group’s model of service.

Kander delivered the address at the January 1895 Annual Report Meeting of the Ladies Relief Sewing Society, where she opened by criticizing a public male figure, Professor Felix Adler, who complained about the lack of an ideal “State of Society [sic]” in Milwaukee. Kander exclaimed that he must have been “groping around in the dark, looking—in vain” for such a society, “[w]hen here we are…with hearts and souls and willing hands, ever ready to do Service for Humanity!! [sic]” In her address, Kander expressed her outrage that Adler had ignored her contributions to the city as well as those of her fellow clubwomen—she felt that her club had been unfairly excluded from the public narrative of citizenship and service. Despite her overall frustration with the society, she still admired the spirit of the women and saw in them a great potential. Kander encouraged her peers to tend to those who had to “start life anew in a strange land,” and reminded them that “possessing the proper qualifications, any one [sic] can occupy the loftiest positions in the government ranks.” She later insisted that her fellow clubwomen visit the homes of the people they served to fully encounter the Russian immigrants where they were, face-to-face with their grim reality, writing, “[l]et us enter its unique atmosphere, climb its rickety stairs and ask the families, the women in particular, if they would like assistance with household duties.” Kander firmly believed that she could positively change public opinion of the ‘static’ Russians by Americanizing the immigrant families through English and civic education, as well as cooking instruction. Not only would her plan benefit the lives of the immigrants, but she believed that it would also improve those of the German Jews, as revealed in a later letter, writing, “[w]e too do it for our own selfish motives…If we look out for our neighbor’s welfare, we look out for our own.” Afraid of the rising tide of antisemitism at the turn of the century, she believed that each Jewish community, no matter its nationality, represented all Jews, and thus paid special attention to normalizing the Russian refugees to help them gain acceptance within the larger Milwaukee community.
immigrants, the community’s originally altruistic vision for the newcomers had not simply blurred, but knowingly shut its eyes altogether to the sufferings of the immigrant families. Their living quarters had become “a closed book to most Milwaukeeans.” Mostly concerned for their well-being as fellow citizens, but also afraid that public disdain for the Jewish immigrants would develop into antisemitism, Lizzie Black Kander decided to act single-handedly. By insisting that her aid society continue to serve this community, despite dwindling male interest, she went far beyond her prescribed duty as a wife and clubwoman and ultimately defied the spatial boundaries that confined women.

While some reformers, namely suffragettes, fought to minimize their differences from men, Kander welcomed them and believed that women should use their unique qualities to enact change. It was perhaps for this reason that she was initially drawn to the municipal housekeeping movement. In her eyes, women were indeed tender, loving, and domestic, and she sought to further empower them through these qualities, which “could remedy the problems arising from immigration, inadequate public services, and incompetent political leadership.” In her letter “Friendly Visiting Among the Poor,” she encouraged her fellow clubwomen to work intensely with the women of the Russian refugee homes during the daytime as they were sure to be there, “cooking, baking, and cleaning,” later assuring her members that their interactions with immigrant wives would positively impact the whole home, ultimately improving the “self-reliance” of the community. In that same letter, she maintained a realistic perspective on her privilege as a middle-class woman, and challenged the dominating male-driven rhetoric that the Russian refugees were simply being doomed to destitution. Kander asserted, “[t]hey are, after all, only what circumstances have made them, what we ourselves might have been had we suffered the long oppressions and the bitter persecutions.” Kander directed a group of women out of the confines of their homes and into the dreary, overcrowded tenements on Water and Knapp Streets, equipping her clubwomen with perspective and meaningful experiences with the forgotten immigrants.

As the Progressive Era gained momentum, more Jewish women throughout the city grew discontent with the traditional, banal activities of women’s clubs and yearned for more active services for the poor. This dissatisfaction prompted a group of women, including Lizzie Black Kander, to found the Milwaukee Chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in 1895. The NCJW offered sewing and cooking classes to children and hosted forums for adult women on how to weave their Jewish faith into their service. Inspired both by NCJW and her time as a truancy officer, Kander’s focus had slowly shifted from directly supporting the immigrant women to the future members of the Jewish community: the children.

Soon after joining the council, Kander changed the name of the “Ladies Relief Sewing Society” to the “Keep Clean Mission,” whose aim was to see that poor children “be kept clean and sent to school regularly” and offered a variety of classes in sewing, dancing, art history and “sermons on cleanliness” to an estimated one hundred attendees. Wanting to further expand the services of the organization to culinary arts, education, and general enrichment, Kander again renamed the organization, this time to the “Milwaukee Jewish Mission,” the following year. In 1900, she delivered her annual president’s report, celebrating the fourth anniversary of the mission’s founding and calling on the members to continue humbly working together for the future of the local Jewish community:

“We, the Jewish people of Milwaukee must rise in a body, throw aside wealth and pride and station and bring about a better state of affairs. This can only be done through the children. We must extend to them the hand of good fellowship and teach them habits of cleanliness and industry.”

To Kander, a critical step in dismantling the systemic disadvantage immigrants faced was to educate and Americanize children through schooling, industrial training, and cultural enrichment, mirroring her work with immigrant women.

During the four years of its operation, the Mission met in rented rooms in the basement of the Temple Emanu-El, but with attendance swelling, the organization quickly outgrew its space. This need prompted Kander to reach out to a second “public-spirited” women’s club in Milwaukee, the “Sisterhood of Personal Service,” to ask if they had an interest in merging with the Mission to serve a larger population and “obtain larger quarters.” In March of 1900, the two bodies unified, forming a new organization known as the “Settlement,” which operated out of a rented house in the center of the Jewish immigrant district on Fifth Street. Kander’s titles were president, founder, teacher, and executive director.
A COOKBOOK AND A GROWING SETTLEMENT
One of the first of its kind, the Settlement House was a space created entirely by women for all of those in need, regardless of age or gender. Not only did the house host public baths with the help of Schlitz Brewery, but also a library and a small bank. Upstairs, Kander and her associates transformed the living quarters into classrooms, which offered courses in sewing, history, Hebrew, English, dancing, choir, and, most popularly, cooking. As attendance continued to grow, the Settlement needed more money to expand its operations. A year after its founding, Kander appointed male colleagues of her husband—investors—to sit on the financial board, but their monetary contributions had been dismal. When she presented her idea of composing and selling a cookbook as a fundraiser for the Settlement at a meeting of the Board of Directors, the women nodded in agreement while the men mocked her, calling her idea an “extravagance.” Unshaken by their low expectations, Kander approached local publisher Merton Yewdale, who worked with the women of the Settlement to publish Kander’s two hundred page cookbook in 1901, The Way to a Man’s Heart: The Settlement Cookbook. The project was much more successful than the male board members anticipated; Kander sold one thousand copies in the first year for fifty cents apiece, making $500. The cookbook achieved local, and later, national fame as a ‘bible’ for Jewish cuisine and provided steady funding for the Settlement for the following nine years.

Attendance at the Settlement House continued to soar. By 1910, it had outgrown its space on Fifth Street and Kander again had to find a new home for her organization. Using the growing profits from her cookbook as well as separate fundraising campaigns, she soon raised the necessary $18,000, to construct a new building, subsequently named the Abraham Lincoln House. Though Kander and the Settlement’s Board of Directors could have easily broken ground in a more middle-class neighborhood of Milwaukee, they stayed true to their original mission to serve the Russian immigrants and decided to remain in the heart of the immigrant quarters on Ninth Street. At the ceremonial laying of the new building’s cornerstone, a newspaper reported that a local man, “Mr. Mack,” spoke of Kander’s civic contribution to the public, proclaiming that “the great elements of the American form of government—liberty and equality of opportunity for all may be cultivated with profit at an institution like the Settlement.” He continued to describe how Kander had helped immigrants and existing Milwaukeeans alike “to be better, more helpful, more noble Americans.” In the final print of the newspaper article, a picture of Kander sits below the title, “Prominent Figures at Laying of Corner Stone [sic] of Kander House,” demonstrating that she had transformed from just another “domestic clubwoman” to a public figure by virtue of her dedication to the needs of the community.

KANDER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: GIVE OUR GIRLS A “SQUARE DEAL”
There was, however, another sector of the city in which Kander was active: the Milwaukee School Board. In her essay, “The Problem of the Child that Leaves School at Fourteen,” she admits that her Settlement was “limited” in how much change it could enact through its enrichment programs, since many children, namely girls, did not receive adequate educational instruction in schools. She did not believe that girls were given a “square deal” and lamented the amount of
classroom equipment and vocational training boys received relative to girls. As the popularity of the Settlement and the Abraham Lincoln House grew, so did the interest of many public school principals in Kander's work. This interest manifested in the Woman's School Alliance's nomination of Lizzie Black Kander for the 1907 Milwaukee School Board elections. Upon receiving news of her nomination, a friend of Kander's promptly wrote to her urging her to accept and join the other women running. The friend asserted that one woman on the board would be too few as the male members would inevitably condescend to her instead of working alongside her, “because she is a woman instead of an equal member.”

The public announcement of her nomination sparked sexist headlines, such as "Another Woman Running for School Board" and "Women Should Not Run Yet," that stressed that the "time was not yet auspicious" for public women leaders, and suggesting that women were not “organized” enough to keep track of a whole day’s work. Yet, despite public rhetoric, Kander won the election. In August of 1907, “twelve dignified men and three timid women,” herself included, sat down at the first meeting of the newly-elected board. Frustrated with her fellow male board members’ disinterest in girls’ education, she suggested to the superintendent that establishing a trade school for girls was a necessity for the women of the city in order to equip them with skills perceived as necessary for their future as wives and mothers. “He seemed very much impressed and promised to do all he could to further the project,” Kander asserted. Just two years later, in 1909, the board reached a formal resolution establishing the first Milwaukee Trade School for Girls.

The founding of the school is a more tangible example of Lizzie Black Kander creating another space that navigated between the public and private spheres. Although the school, like the Settlement and Abraham Lincoln House, was innately a public space, its mission perpetuated the principles of the private sphere. Kander used her political presence to establish an institution that specialized in giving girls vocational skills, as well as instructed them “to become efficient and economical home makers and intelligent mothers.” Janna Wrench criticizes the mission of Kander's trade school, arguing that Kander felt “disdain” for the lower classes and that the curriculum of the trade school “was not based on the needs of the marketplace; rather it was off a sense of woman's duties to home and family based on middle-class principles.” Although Wrench provides critical insight into the school’s classist assumptions that many of the impoverished or immigrant attendees would have the option of being homemakers, her modern perspective mistakenly interprets the objective of the Milwaukee Trade School for Girls as patronizing. Having an institution dedicated to teaching 'home economics' transformed the skills of a homemaker from being merely an expectation of wives and mothers into a legitimate profession. Kander’s two-year fight to convince the male School Board members about the need for such a school further proves that it was in fact a break from tradition, even though the curriculum itself very much aligned with the domesticity of women. However, Kander always defended teaching young girls culinary and domestic arts by emphasizing the importance of creating something “useful and beautiful…[which] draws out her talents, leads her thoughts into healthy channels and influences her mental and moral character.” Even later in her life, Kander firmly believed that empowering women was best done by reaching them where they were, in their roles as wives and mothers, and that investing in their domestic lives would positively reverberate throughout the entire community.

KANDER’S MEMORY AND LEGACY
Throughout her career, Kander received public recognition for her service to Milwaukee as well as a wealth of gratitude. She accepted the most prestigious of her accolades in 1939, when the New York World’s Fair invited Lizzie Black Kander to represent Wisconsin in their program recognizing the nation’s most outstanding women. Just prior to her death in 1940, she received a letter from a former newspaper boy thanking her for her many words of inspiration during his childhood, adding, “what you’ve done for me, you and Mr. Kander have done for thousands of Milwaukeeans….You have done an invaluable service for Milwaukee which will be a perpetual influence.”

After her death, words of condolence flooded in from newspapers, colleagues, and family friends. The Settlement Cookbook Company lauded her foresight and her “deeply rooted interest in her fellow man.” The Jewish Center of Milwaukee credited its founding to her pioneering social work, as she concerned herself with “every phase of civic betterment.” Contrary to what some historians may conclude, Kander was not simply “disgusted” by the disorderliness and waste of poor immigrant communities; she was undoubtedly invested in restoring the humanity that the systematic inequalities of the Gilded Age had denied them. Although Kander will more than likely remain an obscure historical figure, her passion and resolute dedication to her growing community were noteworthy. Her relentless effort to legitimize the domestic work of homemakers and improve the lives of immigrants pushed the boundaries of acceptability despite some of her philosophies being antiquated today. Beginning with her service to the neglected Russian refugees, Kander dedicated her life to creating a space that countered the norm—one which sat in between the sheltered domestic and the dominating public spheres. Indeed, her spaces were ones in which men, women, and children of varying backgrounds were welcome to grow, learn, and regain their footing as new Americans. What shall never be forgotten is that in the face of extreme hostility and xenophobia, Kander opened her doors and invited her new neighbors inside.


[8] Ibid.


[12] Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 190, 178.


[14] Ibid., 154


[18] Ibid., 35


[21] Ibid., 71

[22] Ibid., 71

[23] Ibid., 73

[24] Ibid., 78

[25] Ibid., 79

[26] Ibid., 84-85.

[27] Ibid., 85


[30] Ibid.


[34] Although Kander’s maiden name was Black until her marriage in 1881, for consistency, she will be referred to as Kander during this section.

[35] Ibid., 38

[36] Ibid., 38

[37] Fritz, 40.

[38] Swichkow et al., The History of Jews in Milwaukee, 22.


[42] “Why Should a Man or a Woman Insure?”, LBK Papers.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.


[46] Ibid

[47] Ibid


[49] Seth Korelitz. “A Magnificent Piece of Work”: The Americanization Work of the National Council of Jewish Women.” 180-182. Kander’s approach to Jewish Americanization strongly resembled, and was perhaps influenced by, that of the National Council of Jewish Women. During this time period, the NCJW focused on supporting Jewish immigrant women in their adjustment to American life. Council members assisted women with their employment search, encouraged them to join social clubs, and facilitated educational opportunities. They were also particularly keen on providing religious education for the women, focusing on developing the immigrants’ identity of being a budding American and a Jewish woman.


Restriction League, founded in 1894, believed that immigrants from the Jewish-majority, Eastern European nations were “politically incompetent” and “atavistic.” It was due to the lobbying efforts of this group, as well as many others, that Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted the number of Eastern Europeans allowed to enter the country, targeting majority-Jewish nations.

[55] “Friendly Visiting Among the Poor,” Lizzie Black Kander Digital Collection
[56] Ibid
[58] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, 1940.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Janna Wrench, “Uplift the Downtrodden Multitude: Lizzie Black Kander and the Purpose of the Milwaukee School of Trades for Girls”, 1, 2.
[93] Although a woman’s thanks would have indeed been more meaningful to the theme of the paper, such correspondence proved difficult to find. In any case, McKillop’s letter to Kander highlights her broad influence on the greater Milwaukee community. “McKillop to Mrs. Kander,” December 31, 1937. Lizzie Black Kander Papers, Lizzie Black Kander Digital Collection. Wisconsin Historical Society.
[95] The Jewish Center of Milwaukee, August 7, 1940. Lizzie Black Kander Digital Collection.
[96] Allan Davis, 46.