

Meet

Charles K. Blandin

Industrialist in Itasca County



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA



A tough, young life

The son of a Wisconsin farmer, Charles K. Blandin's childhood was marked by deep poverty and hard work. He was an entrepreneur before age 12, turning a part-time job at a weekly newspaper into an apprenticeship and, eventually, a career in publishing.

A self-educated and self-reliant man, he followed this advice: be progressive, try new things. In his lifetime, Blandin taught school, ran several weekly newspapers, managed a successful daily newspaper in St. Paul, and led the growth of a mill in northern Minnesota – which today is the UPM-Blandin mill in Grand Rapids.

A person who starts a business and is willing to risk loss in order to make money.



Grand Rapids

St. Paul

Pioneer Press

Growing a newspaper

Under Blandin's management in the early 1900s, profits of the St. Paul Pioneer Press newspaper rose impressively. The newspaper also owned the Dispatch Printing Company, which used newsprint paper from the Itasca Paper Company in Grand Rapids to print the paper. The owner of the Pioneer Press bought Itasca Paper Company in 1916 – but died soon after. His widow offered Charles Blandin a chance to manage the entire operation.

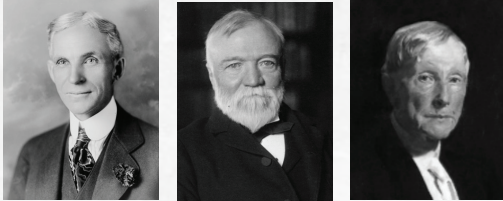
For 10 years, Blandin's wise choices helped the newspaper and the paper mill grow. He traveled between St. Paul and Grand Rapids to handle business. But by the late 1920s, newsprint was not as profitable. So he sold the newspaper, kept the paper mill, and became a pioneer in making high-quality coated paper for catalogs and other publications.

After Mr. Blandin's wife died in 1940, he spent even more time in Grand Rapids.

Blandin Foundation

From profits to philanthropy

Soon, Mr. Blandin decided to take his energy for his new hometown a step further. In 1941, he established the Blandin Foundation. Unlike his business, which he managed to make money, this new organization was designed to serve the Grand Rapids area.



He and dozens of other Industrial-Age businessmen across America – like Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and others – believed it was important to share their wealth with communities, and for causes, in ways they thought would improve society. Foundations sprang up all across America. This kind of work is called “philanthropy.”

In designing his foundation, Mr. Blandin emphasized several ideas to guide Blandin Foundation’s work far into the future:

- **Flexibility** – the Foundation’s managers, called trustees, were given the ability to adapt the organization’s structure and priorities to changing times
- **Supervision** – because he wanted to assure that the Foundation was operating as smoothly as possible, he asked the Ramsey County District Court in St. Paul to review the Foundation’s finances every three years. (This review still happens today.)
- **Splendid undertakings** – the underlying idea of the Foundation was that its work would lead to, in Blandin’s words, “the betterment of mankind.” This was very different from his objective for the paper mill.

The practice of giving money and time to help make life better for other people.

An institution financed by a donation or legacy to aid research, education, the arts, etc.

The foundation grows

\$1 Million

Each year, Mr. Blandin placed any profits from the paper mill that weren’t needed to pay workers, make repairs or for other business costs into the Foundation trust fund. By 1958, when Mr. Blandin died, this trust fund had grown to about \$1 million.



The Foundation provided money for community projects through something called “grants.” A grant is a payment to a person or group that does not need to be paid back. This makes grants different from loans from a bank.

Blandin Foundation’s first grant, in 1943, was to create Blandin Beach in Grand Rapids. In 1956, the Foundation began giving scholarships to children of paper mill workers to help pay for schooling after high school. (The Foundation still gives scholarships to Itasca area students today.)

When Blandin Paper Company was sold in 1977, the trust fund grew from about \$1 million to \$77 million.

Payment to a person or group that does not need to be paid back.

Since the sale, Blandin Foundation and the paper mill have been separate organizations. Today, a Finnish paper company named UPM owns the paper mill. Blandin Foundation continues to be independent of the paper mill.

The impact continues

Today, Blandin Foundation uses the flexibility Mr. Blandin envisioned for it. More than 30 people work at the Foundation. Some read and research requests for grants. Others coordinate meetings on important topics like education and using high-speed internet. The Foundation also offers a training program for adults who are leaders in their communities.



Blandin Foundation celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2016. Since 1941, the Foundation has awarded more than 8,000 grants totaling more than \$380 million. More than 60 percent of that amount has gone to the Grand Rapids area. The rest was awarded to other towns in rural Minnesota. More than 7,000 people have graduated from our leadership programs. More than 20,000 students have received scholarships.

Most importantly, people in the Itasca area – places like Remer, Blackduck, Bigfork, Hill City, Keewatin and more – have used the Foundation's resources to make their communities stronger. The Foundation has been part of ballfields, libraries, hospitals, computer labs, the food shelf, homeless shelters, band and theater groups, preschool classes and much more.

Your part in philanthropy

The Foundation's money, research studies and other resources truly shine when they are paired with the passion of individuals within each community. For this reason, the thousands of rural Minnesota volunteers, social service professionals, business people, public officials, families, teachers, and many others also represent the communities we serve.

Charles Blandin's passion for the Itasca area fueled the Foundation's legacy. Itasca area folks who live the spirit of giving back to their community feed the legacy today, and propel it into the future. We tip our hat to them, and encourage them -- and you -- to come up with great ideas to make the Itasca area great.



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Questions

General

If you had been Charles Blandin, would you have set up a foundation, or done some type of philanthropy?
Mr. Blandin thought it was important to share his wealth with his community. Do you agree? Why or why not?
Mr. Blandin left home when he was 12. How would you feel if you left home right now to start a business?

Legacy and Leadership video

What kinds of things did the people in the video share with their community?
What kinds of things do you share with your community?
What differences, if any, does philanthropy make in the Grand Rapids area?

Teacher Guide Questions

Growing a newspaper: Explain an example of what made Charles Blandin an entrepreneur.
The foundation grows: Provide an example of Charles Blandin's philanthropy in Itasca County.
The impact continues: Provide an example of a grant that is offered from the Blandin Foundation.

Online

Blandin Foundation

[Main web site](#)
[Legal documents setting up the Foundation](#)
[Legacy and Leadership video \(19 minutes\)](#)
[Legacy and Leadership segments \(6 total\)](#)

Other Itasca Area philanthropies

[Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation](#)
[United Way of 1000 Lakes](#)

Philanthropy

[Minnesota Council on Foundations](#)
[Foundation Center](#)
[Council on Foundations](#)

Supplemental information

Background: Blandin Foundation local giving area

Blandin Foundation has a special focus on the Itasca area. This local giving area encompasses Itasca County communities, including Bigfork, Blackduck, Bovey, Calumet, Coleraine, Deer River, Grand Rapids, Hill City, Keewatin, Marble, Nashwauk, Northome and Taconite.

Timeline

- 1872** – Charles Kenneth Blandin born in Iola, Wis.
- 1884** – Blandin leaves home at age 12, striking out on his own to find his fortune
- 1916** – Blandin acquires half the stock of the St. Paul Pioneer Press newspaper, and the associated Itasca Paper Company paper mill
- 1927** – Blandin sells the paper, focuses the paper mill on producing coated catalog and magazine paper instead of newsprint
- 1940** – Blandin's wife dies. He begins to spend more time in Grand Rapids
- 1941** – Blandin Foundation is formed
- 1943** – First grant awarded, for Blandin Beach
- 1956** – First scholarship awarded
- 1958** – Charles Blandin dies
- 1977** – Blandin Paper Company sold for \$77 million. The Residuary Trust fund grows significantly as a result.
- 1984** – Blandin Foundation begins its community leadership training program
- 1991** – Blandin Foundation celebrates 50th anniversary
- 2003** – Foundation gives \$20 million to build Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital
- 2011** – Blandin Foundation wins award from Minnesota High-Tech Association for its work on broadband
- 2011** – Foundation names its first woman President and CEO. Dr. Kathleen Annette is a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, and is the first Minnesota Native American woman to become a physician
- 2014** – Foundation renews its grant to Invest Early for 20 more years
- 2016** – Blandin Foundation celebrates 75th anniversary

Books

Papermakers: The Blandin Paper Company and Grand Rapids Minnesota
By Don Boese ©1984

The Foundation: A great American secret – How private wealth is changing the world
By Joel L. Fleishman ©2007



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GRAND RAPIDS
PROUD TO BE A PART OF
MINNESOTA'S NATURE