

ALBERT & LOUISE ORDEAN

The Founders of the Ordean Foundation



ALBERT ORDEAN LIVED A STORIED LIFE, yet following his death he was described as a “man nobody seemed to know” who could appear “cold and indifferent” to those who were not acquainted with him. After a legendary start in banking among the lawless mining camps of Colorado, he would move to Duluth, Minnesota, and become a successful businessman and banker, friend of presidents and business tycoons, so revered and trusted he was called upon to save the grain industry when the nation underwent a financial panic. In private life, he and his wife Louise gave generously to myriad social causes, most often those supporting children and the poor. In Duluth, they would come to personify the idea of *noblesse oblige*, a spirit that lives on today through the work of the Ordean Foundation.

ORDEAN'S EARLY LIFE

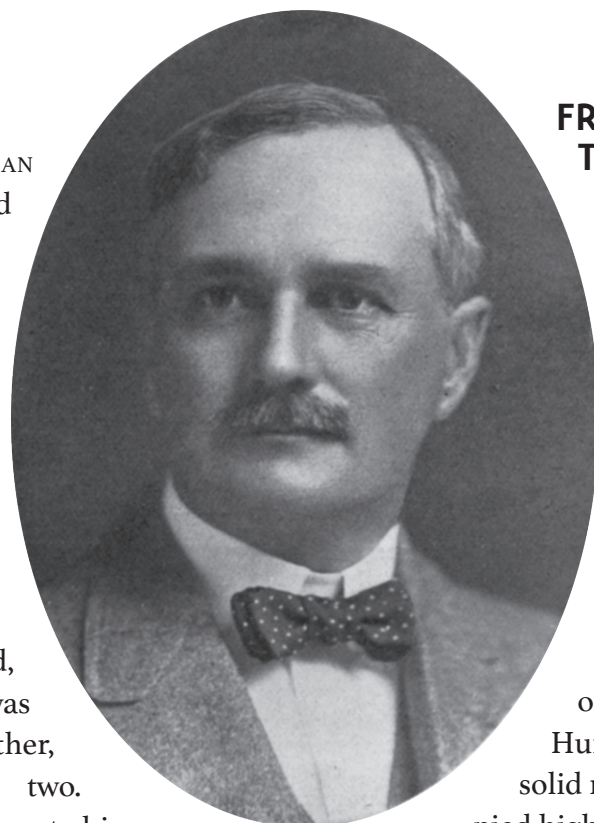
ALBERT LEGRAND ORDEAN (1856–1928) was the third and youngest child of DeRock (1833–1866) and Martha Shovier Ordean (1833–1909), born on August 22, 1856, in Crawford County, Pennsylvania (although some biographies give his birthplace as New Brighton, which is in Beaver County, Pennsylvania). By the time Albert arrived, his sister, Ida (1853–1911), was three years old and his brother, Clifford (1854–1912), barely two. What DeRock did to support his young family is unknown, and even his birthplace remains unclear. While records suggest he emigrated from Canada—and his surname is of French origin, perhaps French-Canadian—Albert lists both his parents as being born in Pennsylvania in the 1880 census.

By 1852 DeRock was indeed living in Pennsylvania, where he wed Martha Shovier, a native of Franklin County, Pennsylvania. The family apparently moved between Crawford and Beaver counties until DeRock died in 1866. By 1870 Martha had moved her family—thirteen-year-old Ida, twelve-year-old Clifford, and ten-year-old Albert—to Canton, Ohio, where she found work as a dressmaker. She passed the skill on to her daughter, and in 1877 Ida advertised in the *Stark County Democrat* that she was looking for “three or four good girls to learn dressmaking,” which she taught out of the family home at No. 31 Tenth Street in Canton.

ABOVE:

Photo of Albert Ordean from the 1902 book Men of Minnesota.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]



FROM CANTON, OHIO, TO COLORADO

ORDEAN'S BIOGRAPHERS ALL state that he began working in banking “as a boy,” and an 1877 letter indicates that he found employment with the Savings Deposit Bank of Isaac Harter & Sons in Canton in 1874 when he was seventeen or eighteen years old. By the time Ordean first went west in 1877, at the age of twenty-one, he and associate M. G.

Huntington had already earned solid reputations and “each occupied high positions of trust in prominent business establishments of this city and enjoy the entire confidence of all by whom they are known,” according to the *Canton Repository*.

The newspaper was reporting that the pair had decided to open a bank in Hays, Kansas, a plan they did not carry out. That October the *Repository* announced Ordean had taken a job as a cashier at a bank in Abeline, Kansas. Back then a cashier had much more responsibility than a bank teller does today—the cashier served as a bank's chief executive. The paper called Ordean “one of our best and most promising young men.”

The following February Ordean left Kansas for an opportunity with Isaac Harter Jr., son of his former employer, who planned to open a new bank in Carbonate, Colorado. Their investors included owners of a bank in nearby Leadville, Colorado. Ordean moved to Carbonate to begin the enterprise, but a month later the paper stated Ordean, Harter, and others planned to open the Summit County Bank in the brand new mining town of Kokomo, also not far from Leadville. A year later, in July 1879, he was thrust into another role, that

of the Assistant Cashier of the First National Bank of Leadville. He rented a room in Emma F. Thomson's boarding house.

That summer a visitor from Canton wrote the *Repository* with his description of the bustling mining town of Leadville. There, he wrote, young Albert Ordean was considered *suaviter in modo*—one known for doing what needs to be done “with unflinching firmness,” at the same time conducting his business “in the most inoffensive manner possible.”

By the time Ordean arrived, Leadville—founded as Oro in 1859 during the Pike's Peak Gold Rush—had already been stripped of its gold, but the heavy black sand that had hampered early mining efforts was found to be rich in silver and lead. In 1877—just as the Colorado Silver Boom began—the community was incorporated as Leadville. It was there that one legend of Ordean was forged, a tale that perhaps helps us understand why he was a man of few words and how he became *suaviter in modo*.

LEADVILLE, COLORADO

IN JANUARY 1926 *SKILLINGS MINING REVIEW* first printed a story about the young Ordean that would come to define his early life. In 1879 Ordean was asked to transport \$50,000 in cash—worth over \$1.4 million dollars in 2019—from

the train station in Denver to Leadville, then fraught with the “rush, confusion and dangers of a booming Rocky Mountain mining camp.” Its first marshal had been run out of town a few days after he was appointed, and less than a month later his replacement was shot dead by one of his deputies. Finding no express company willing to transport that amount of money, Ordean took on the task himself.

He'd have to take a stagecoach, which were often held up by highwaymen in the lawless territory. A well-dressed banker with a satchel containing \$50,000 would be hard for bandits to miss, so Ordean disguised himself. He changed his suit for miner's denim and stuffed a simple pack with shirts, pants, and socks, which were in turn stuffed with cash. He tucked a pistol under his coat and boarded the stage; for all his fellow passengers knew, Ordean was just another young man come west hoping to strike it rich prospecting for silver.

When the coach stopped in Fairplay for the night and passengers took shelter at the Traveler's Hotel, Ordean decided against a private room: the expense would have drawn suspicion. Instead he shared a room with five other boarders using the cash-laden pack for a pillow—but he never let himself sleep, staying awake through the night with his pistol nearby. Keeping a low profile—and his mouth shut—Ordean and the cash made it to Leadville without incident.

The silence Ordean employed to keep his secret likely cultivated within him the wisdom of speaking only when necessary. Perhaps this stoic nature created the impression that he was cold.



LEFT:
*Postcard of Leadville, Colorado,
made from a photograph taken
in 1880.*

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]



MEANWHILE, BACK IN CANTON

LOUISE HARTER (1857–1932) DIDN'T THINK Albert Ordean was cold. Born Eliza Louise Harter in Canton, Ohio, on December 17, 1857, Louise was the youngest of eleven children born to Ohio native Isaac Richard Harter Sr. (1811–1876) and Amanda Zenbia Moore (1815–1895). Native Pennsylvanian Isaac Harter had, according to one eulogist, made a success of himself through “honest, thorough and persistent industry to competence.” In 1854 he established the Savings Deposit Bank of Isaac Harter & Sons. Twelve years later his sons George D. and Michael D. opened Canton's Geo. D. Harter & Bro. Bank. Isaac Sr. also operated a successful wholesale grocery business, handling about \$150,000 in business a year in the early 1870s (worth over

ABOVE:

This grainy image of Louise Harter Ordean was created from a newspaper facsimile of a photograph made in 1887. Research has uncovered very few photos of Louise and Albert Ordean.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]

\$3.5 million in 2019). By 1870 Isaac Harter Senior's personal estate was valued at \$18,000 (\$361,000) and he owned real estate holdings worth \$100,000 (\$2 million).

When Isaac Harter Sr. died in 1876, the *Repository* reported that the news of his death left the community “shocked and pained,” and that the city had lost “one of its oldest and most respected citizens.... Everyone felt that in Mr. Harter they had a friend.” He was honored for his reputation as “an honest, able, and substantial businessman” and one of Canton's “best citizens” who helped make Canton a “safe, stable, and prosperous city.” “It is not easy to overvalue the importance as such men” as Isaac Harter, the newspaper stated. “He was liberal and courteous, the poor man, the farmer, the laborer had the same kind word and treatment from him as the rich.” When he died, Eliza Louise and her siblings all became shareholders in the family bank.

Albert Ordean had gone west within a year of his Isaac Senior's death. While he was becoming an integral cog in Isaac Junior's Colorado banking machine, Eliza Louise remained at home in Canton, living in her mother's house. By 1880, when she was twenty-three, she had dropped “Eliza,” preferring to go by her middle name. Louise and Albert Ordean had undoubtedly met when both were younger. In 1881 Albert was still in Colorado, but that December he returned to Canton to spend the winter.

Perhaps this was when the two began a courtship. Ordean was certainly known and trusted by Louise's family, and perhaps she recognized many of her father's qualities in the impressive young man from Pennsylvania. On July 19, 1883, they wed in Canton, and soon thereafter Louise left the Ohio city to live with her husband not in Leadville, but in Duluth, Minnesota, where Albert had established himself the year before. Like Louise's father, banker Albert Ordean had entered the wholesale grocery business in Duluth; Isaac Harter appears not only to have been Louise's father, but a father figure and role model to Albert as well.

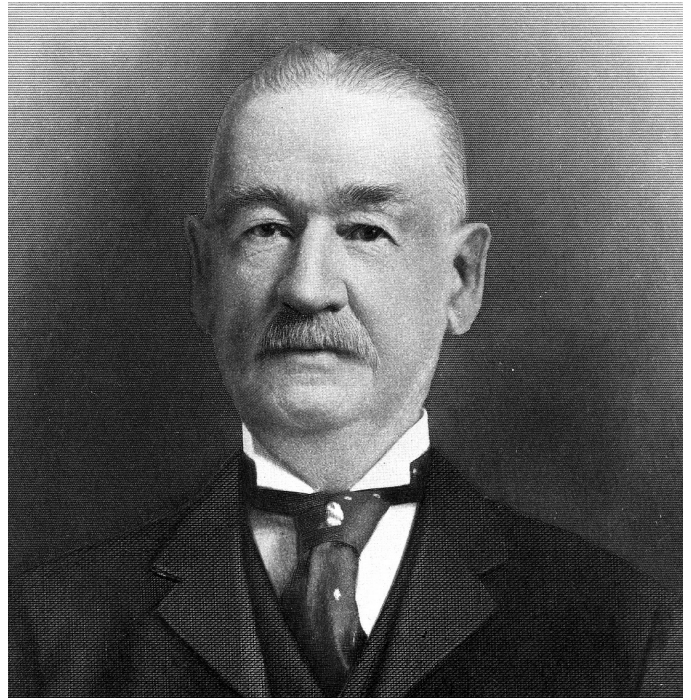
DULUTH, MINNESOTA

WHEN ORDEAN ARRIVED IN DULUTH IN 1882, he found a bustling community in the midst of its third population boom. The first, in 1856 when Duluth was established as a townsite, ended abruptly with the Financial Panic of 1857. The town lay all but dormant until Philadelphia financier Jay Cooke announced in early 1869 that he would terminate the northern end of his Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad in Duluth, and that the railroad would connect with his transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad, making the Zenith City that railway's eastern terminus. The town's population, less than two hundred at the beginning of the year, grew to over three thousand by early 1870. That March Duluth became a city.

In 1869 Cooke had sent several of his agents to Duluth to put some infrastructure in place. Two of them, George Sargent and George Calvin Stone (1822–1900), opened the community's first bank, with Stone serving as cashier. Stone would become one of Duluth's most prominent early citizens, later helping to open the Vermilion Iron Range and organize the Duluth & Iron Range Railroad.

Stone's brother William Reade Stone (1827–1915) visited often. When Duluth became a city William Stone was living in Chicago, a prominent member of that city's wheat exchange. He decided to move to Duluth in 1872 to open the Pitt Cooke Dock (named for Cooke's brother) and build warehouses to store "flour, feed, salt, lime, iron ore and general produce" to be sold through the wholesale trade through the firm of Wm. R. Stone & Co. The "company" included Joshua B. Culver, Duluth's first mayor. The *Duluth Minnesotian* wrote that William, like his brother and Shakespeare's Yorick, was "a man of infinite jest." The newspaper liked the man, but not his fashion, stating that "it would add to our pleasure if he wouldn't wear that stove-pipe hat."

Then Jay Cooke ran out of money, setting off the Financial Panic of 1873 and bringing nearly every enterprise in Duluth to a halt. While over half the population fled, the Stone brothers stuck



around. The following year William Stone and Culver organized the Duluth Lake Transfer Co., which operated the steamers *Metropolis* and *Manistee* between Duluth and Buffalo, New York.

Duluth struggled to survive the panic. By 1877 the city reduced its debt to bondholders by 75 percent by reorganizing as a village and retracting its borders until it could pay back its investors. Fortunately, soon thereafter the Red River Valley sprouted with wheat, which was shipped east on the Northern Pacific to Duluth and loaded onto Great Lakes merchant vessels and shipped to cities in the east. The lumber trade arrived soon thereafter, and Duluth boomed once more. Just 2,200 people lived in Duluth in 1878, but by 1887 population would be closing in on 30,000. In 1879 Stone turned his focus to his wholesale enterprise, incorporating Wm. R. Stone & Company Wholesale Grocers in 1880. In 1882, when the population reached 12,000, Stone was the village's only wholesale grocer—and there were many mouths to feed. Stone needed help.

ABOVE:

Pioneer Duluth grocery wholesaler William Reade Stone, Albert Ordean's first business partner in the Zenith City.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]

STONE-ORDEAN-WELLS

THE FIRST ADVERTISEMENT FOR Stone-Ordean Wholesale Grocers appeared in the *Duluth Weekly Tribune* on August 8, 1882. The firm was operating out of the southern half of a warehouse at 345-347 South Lake Avenue. By 1888, with business booming, the warehouse had been divided in half by a rail line that ran through its center, and boats could tie up to load or unload at its dock in what is today the Minnesota Slip.

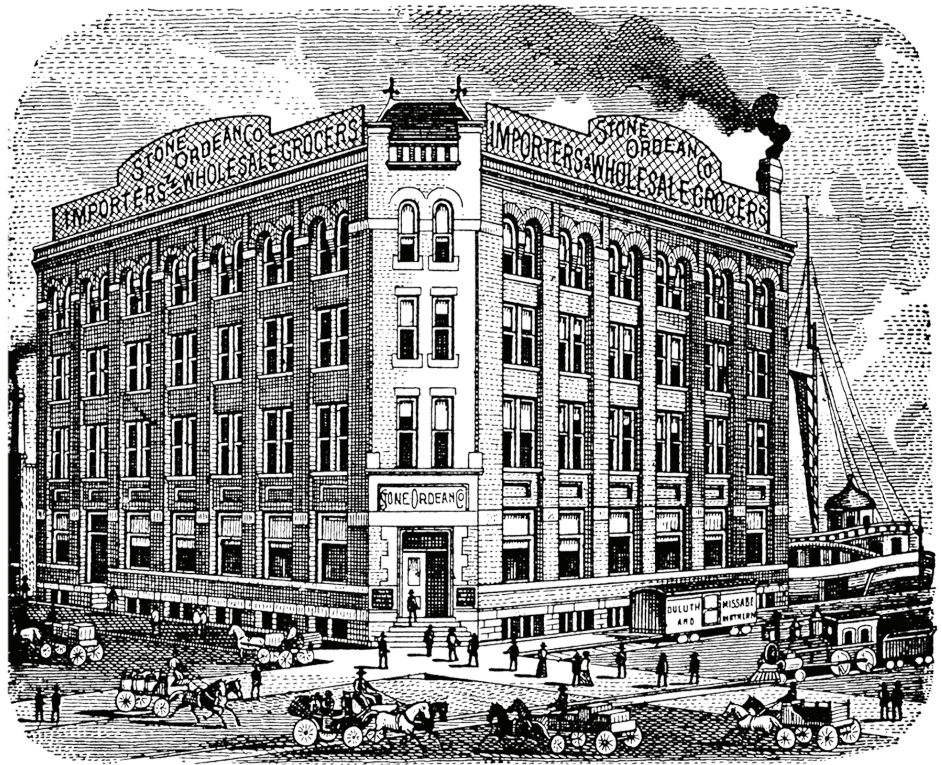
Stone-Ordean maintained their Lake Avenue warehouse through 1893, when they asked Oliver Trap-hagen & Francis Fitzpatrick, then Duluth's foremost architects, to design a four-story Romanesque building of brick and Port Wing brownstone at 203-211 South Fifth Avenue West.

Constructed for \$4,800, the building had a flat corner entrance and arched windows on the top floor. It could ship and receive items from railcars along tracks on one side of the facility and from ships via a dock along a slip on another.

In 1896 Stone-Ordean merged with the Michigan's

Wells-Stone Mercantile, dealers in groceries and hardware, which had established a foothold in Duluth in 1887. The merger was prompted by the deaths of Wells-Stone founders Charles W. Wells and Farnum C. Stone (no apparent relation to George Calvin or William R. Stone, but the father of Duluthian George Chickering Stone). Charles's son Benjamin joined the new firm, becoming the "Wells" in Stone-Ordean-Wells (SOW). Frederick A. Patrick, who joined Stone-Ordean in 1890, took control of SOW while Stone essentially retired and Ordean focused on his other career as a bank executive.

Another SOW warehouse was constructed adjacent to the Fifth Avenue West facility in 1899; the Patrick-Granger Co. (see page 11), would occupy a portion of the new building until it



W. R. STONE. A. L. ORDEAN.

STONE & ORDEAN,

WHOLESALE GROCERS

—And Dealers in—

PROVISIONS.

FLOUR, FEED,
GRAIN, SALT,
OIL, ETC., ETC

Carry a Full Line of Stock,
and Can Fill Orders
Promptly

Call or Write for Prices.

LAKE AVENUE, - DULUTH.

LEFT:

The first print advertisement for Stone-Ordean Wholesale Grocers, August 8, 1882.

ABOVE:

Sketch of the 1893 Stone-Ordean facility along Fifth Avenue West.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]



ABOVE:

The Stone-Ordean-Wells facility along Fifth Avenue West after its expansion in 1900. The facilities of hardware wholesalers Kelley-How-Thomson can be seen behind Stone-Ordean-Wells.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]

RIGHT:

The coffee and spice mills of Stone-Ordean-Wells along West Michigan Street, ca. 1920.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]





The Goods That Give Every One
ENTIRE SATISFACTION
ARE THE

Nokomis
AND
Hiawatha
BRANDS

Of Pure Food
Canned Fruits Canned Vegetables
Teas Spices
Coffees Extracts

BECAUSE THEY ARE ALWAYS THE
Very Best Quality Obtainable

Stone-Ordean-Wells Company
DULUTH, MINN.
AND BRANCHES

Charles Denby

A GREAT
NATIONAL
SUCCESS

STONE ORDEAN WELLS CO.
DISTRIBUTORS

Top:
A parade float advertising Honeycomb Class cigars, distributed by Stone-Ordean-Wells.

Left & Above:
Advertisements for SOW's Nokomis and Hiawatha brands and Charles Denby cigars.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]



became F. A. Patrick & Co. and built its own facility nearby in 1902. By 1903 SOW was the largest grocery wholesaler in the Northwest. The next year another substantial addition was made to its facility. The company also leased a four-story building at 332 West Michigan Street to grind coffee and spices; when SOW moved out in 1922 to open a similar facility in West Duluth, the building became home to Duluth Plumbing Supply, which still occupies the building's first floor (the Harbor City International School currently occupies its upper floors).

Throughout the years SOW distributed mainly groceries with brand names of Stone, Nokomis,

Hiawatha, Bluebird, and Express, but it also dealt with automobile tires, cigars, and wooden ware. The firm manufactured peanut butter and syrup, ground sugar, and at one point roasted and ground about 3.5 million pounds of coffee a year. The firm had three branch offices in North Dakota, four in Montana, and one in Minneapolis (which strictly handled tobacco products) and distributed in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, and eastern Idaho.

William R. Stone died in 1915, and the company continued after Ordean's death in 1928. Stone-Ordean-Wells did not survive the Great Depression, folding in 1937. After it closed its Fifth Avenue West facilities were occupied at various times by Alworth Woolen Mills, Western Electric Company, and Gershgol Food Stores. It was demolished in 1966 for the expansion of Interstate 35.

ABOVE:

Stone-Ordean-Well's teamster Guy Z. Hassler poses with his team and loaded wagon in Duluth, ca. 1915.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]

DULUTH BANKER

AS DULUTH BOOMED IN THE 1880s, Ordean looked to get back into the banking game. In 1887, the year Duluth paid off its debts and became a city once again, Ordean and others organized Merchants National Bank. Ordean served as its president.

That same year the Duluth National Bank began construction of a large Romanesque building designed by Oliver Traphagen at 229–233 West Superior Street; which featured an arched entrance with carved columns of Fond du Lac sandstone and a pyramidal corner tower. The bank had been organized in 1882 by Luther Mendenhall who, like George C. Stone, came to Duluth in 1869 as an agent of Jay Cooke. Just months after the bank building opened, Duluth National merged with the Union National Bank, creating the Duluth Union National Bank. Shortly thereafter Union National merged with Ordean's Merchants National to become the First National Bank of Duluth.

Mendenhall served as the bank's president until he retired in 1896 as the bank underwent reorganization; Ordean, who had served as vice president and manager, then replaced Mendenhall as president. He was reelected as the bank's president every year for the rest of his life.



In 1929, the year after Ordean died, First National merged with the American Exchange Bank, becoming the First American National Bank. The new bank remained in the 1887 building until 1957 when it moved to a new structure across the street. (The bank later became Norwest and is now Wells-Fargo. The building was demolished in 1958; in 1977 the Normandy Mall, later renamed the Holiday Center, was built on the site.)

**MERCHANTS NATIONAL
BANK.**

Paid in Capital, - \$150,000
Authorized Capital, - 500,000

A General Banking Business Transacted.

Money transferred by draft to all parts of the world. Accounts of Merchants, Corporations and Individuals solicited.

Officers—A. L. Ordean, President; A. S. Chase, Vice President; H. A. Smith, Cashier.
Directors—A. S. Chase, W. N. Brown, D. G. Cash, A. W. Wright, E. G. Swanstrom, H. A. Smith, A. L. Ordean .

LEFT:

The first advertisement for Merchants National Bank, which appeared in the April 8, 1887, Duluth News Tribune.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]

ABOVE:

The 1887 Duluth National Bank, photographed in 1915.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]

OTHER BUSINESS INTERESTS

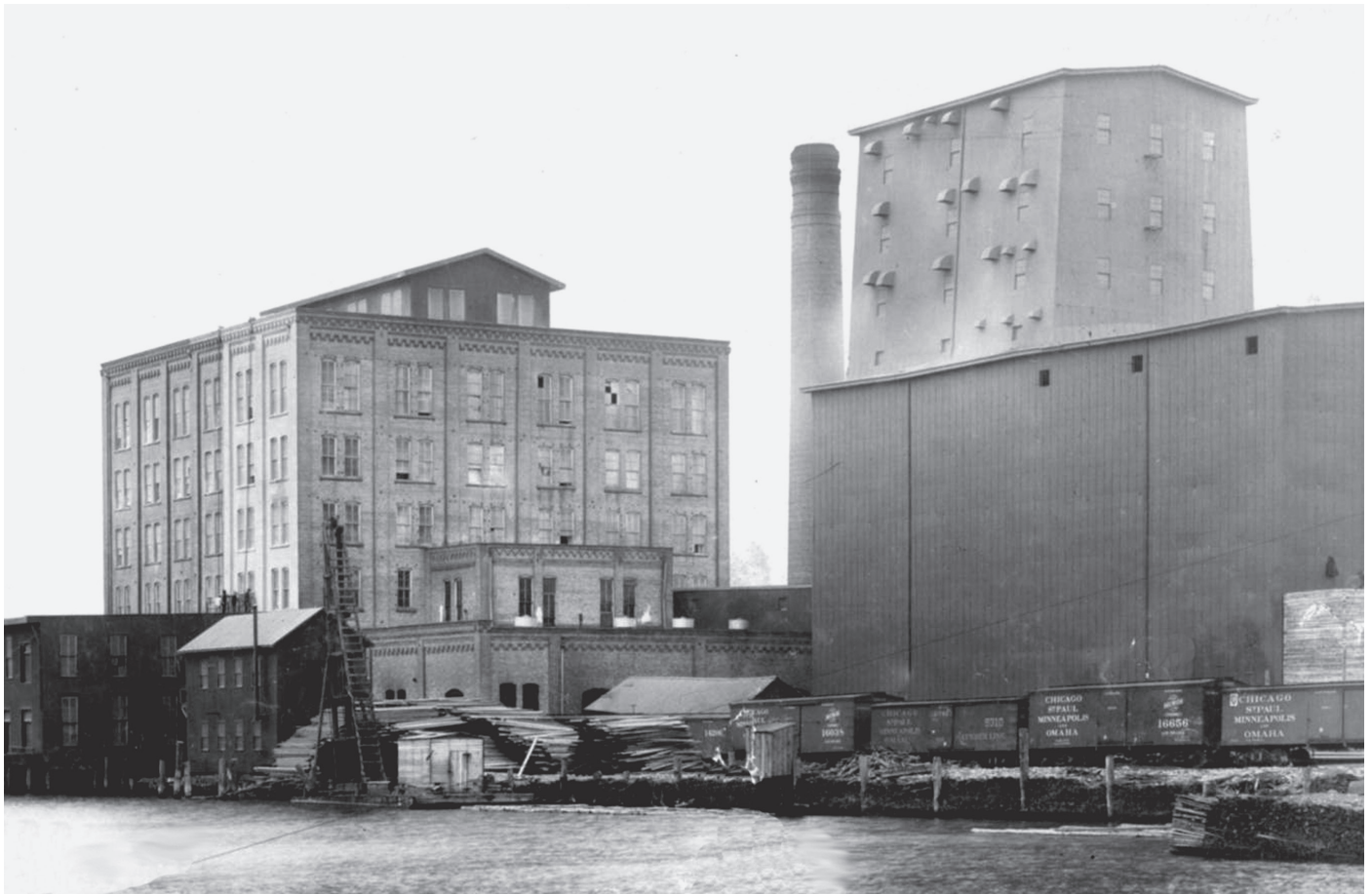
BESIDES THE WHOLESALE AND BANKING BUSINESSES, Albert Ordean invested in several other enterprises over the years. Just after he arrived in 1882, he and William Stone, along with other prominent Duluthians, organized the Duluth Electric Light Co. When the Chamber of Commerce reorganized in 1886, Ordean was named its treasurer, and he remained associated with the organization until his death. In 1887, the same year he organized Merchants National Bank, he was also named president of the Northwestern Fire Insurance Co. Four years later Ordean served as the chairman of a group organizing Duluth's Jobbers Union (wholesalers at the time were called "jobbing houses"). When he took over as president of First National in 1896 he also became president of the Board of Directors of Duluth's Imperial Mill, at the time the largest and most advanced flour mill on the planet. Duluthians organized a Home Consumers' League

in 1898 to promote the sale of products made in Duluth, and named Ordean its treasurer. He invested in Patrick & Granger Wholesale Dry Goods, organized in 1899 by Stone-Ordean-Wells manager F. A. Patrick. The firm would soon become the F. A. Patrick Co., which later operated the Patrick Duluth Woolen Mills, famous for popularizing the Mackinaw jacket throughout the U.S. Ordean also dabbled in real estate. In 1906 he sold the Hosmer Block at 13–15 East Superior Street—which housed the village/city government in the 1880s—for \$50,000, a sum worth more than \$1.4 million in 2019. He also spent \$250,000 of his own money (about \$6.5 million) in 1913 to organize the Bankers' Trust Company, Duluth's first trust company.

BELOW:

An photograph of Duluth's Imperial Flour Mill, one of several Zenith City businesses in which Albert Ordean invested.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]



A FRIEND OF A PRESIDENT AND AN EMPIRE BUILDER

ON OCTOBER 13, 1899, WILLIAM MCKINLEY (1843–1901) became the first sitting president to visit the Zenith City—but it wasn't his first time in town. He had visited Duluth twice before he became president, but while he was still considered “one of the most notable men in public life,” as described by the *Duluth News Tribune*. Prior to his 1899 visit, the newspaper anticipated a mutual love-fest between the city and the president, stating that “President McKinley has always entertained the kindest feelings toward Duluth. He is personally acquainted with many people here, and it is said that his sentiments toward Duluth have had weight in the itinerary of his Western trip.”

Names on the committee to meet and greet the president in Duluth read like a who's who of prominent Duluthians of the time, Ordean among them. Further, Ordean—along with congressman Page Morris and Duluth mayor Henry Truelson—had traveled to Minneapolis to “extend a formal invitation to the president and party to visit Duluth.” Ordean was already well-acquainted with the president; in fact, he likely knew the president since both were young men.



McKinley had moved to Canton to practice law in 1867, and there he courted and wed Ida Saxton (1847-1907), daughter of a prominent family. Ida's great-grandfather was Michael Harter, Louise Ordean's grandfather; Ida McKinley and Louise Ordean were cousins. Ordean's obituary mentioned that he and McKinley were good friends, and that the president thought so much of Ordean he asked him to join his cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury, an offer Ordean turned down. Duluth newspapers do not mention if the McKinleys, who stayed at the St. Louis Hotel, visited the Ordean home during their 1899 visit. Louise and Ella Stone, William's wife, entertained the first lady and another cousin, Ida's sister Mary Barber, by taking them on “a drive about the city.” Mary Barber was more than a sister to Ida, acting as a nurse to help the first lady deal with epileptic seizures and severe bouts of depression, which she often managed with laudanum, a tincture of opium commonly prescribed at the time.

ABOVE:

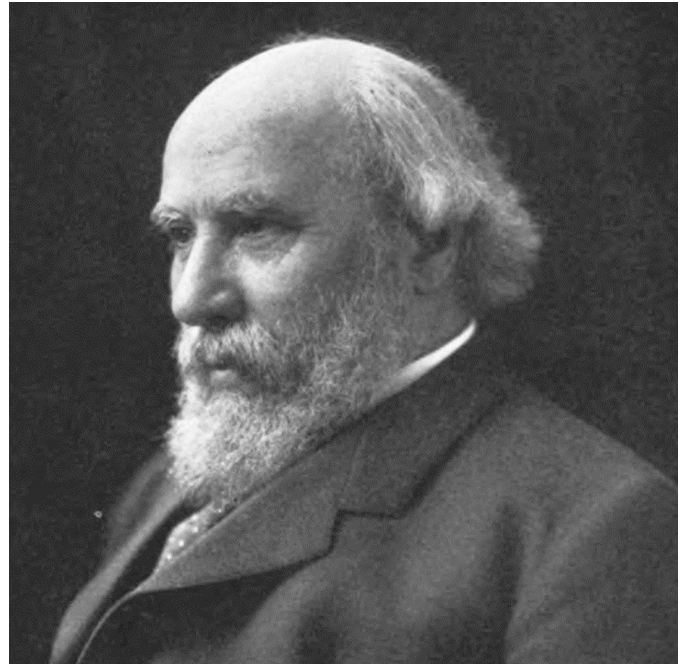
William and Ida McKinley photographed in 1896.

[PUBLIC DOMAIN]

LEFT:

McKinley touring Duluth in 1899. The gentleman seated directly across from the president resembles Albert Ordean.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]



After an assassin shot McKinley in 1901, the *Duluth News Tribune* sought Albert Ordean's reaction. The Ordeans had been guests of the McKinleys in Canton less than a month earlier and had found Ida in great spirits, pleased with herself that she had not used laudanum in over three weeks. Ordean expressed concern for Mrs. McKinley, worried that if the president died of his wounds it would "hasten Mrs. McKinley's death," but felt he confident the president would pull through. He even suggested it would be better for all if Mr. McKinley outlived his wife. McKinley, of course, did not survive. Mary Barber became her sister's primary caregiver until Ida passed in in 1907 of "epilepsy complicated by barbiturates induced by laudanum and others."

St. Paul railroad tycoon James J. Hill (1838–1913), aka "The Empire Builder," was also impressed with Ordean. Ordean's obituary mentions that the two men shared a deep friendship, and that Hill called Ordean "one of the greatest bankers in the Northwest." Hill turned to Ordean during the Financial Panic of 1907, caused by the failing of the Knickerbocker Trust company and other New York banks. The crisis had stopped the shipment of wheat, which sat in Duluth and Minneapolis grain elevators, waiting to be sent east—but brokers had

neither credit nor cash to make transactions or pay for shipping, essentially blocking freight. Hill called Ordean, and together the pair raised \$4 million (worth nearly \$109 million today) from banks in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth to make loans and thereby keep the grain trade afloat. Every penny was entrusted to Ordean, who would approve the loans. The effort was said to have "saved" the American grain industry.

When Hill died, Ordean was quoted in newspapers as stating that "Mr. Hill was a man I knew well, almost intimately, I might say.... I truly believe that money was not Mr. Hill's object in life, and that he would have done his work just as cheerfully if there was not a cent in it for him. He wanted to accomplish things and gave every effort to do this." The words may have been applied to Ordean himself. While the Hill family kept the funeral service private, they invited Ordean and Duluthians A. M. Chisholm and A. D. Thomson, also close friends of Hill. Ordean and Thomson both served as directors of Hill's Great Northern Railway.

ABOVE:

*Mutual admirers Albert L. Ordean (left, ca. 1905)
and James J. Hill (right, date unknown).*

[TOP: ORDEAN FOUNDATION; BOTTOM: PUBLIC DOMAIN]

THE ORDEANS' SOCIAL SIDE

AFTER ALBERT AND LOUISE WED IN JULY 1883, a brief notice in the *Duluth News Tribune* read: “Duluth and Canton, O., join hands in a wedding. Ordean–Harter.” Ordean had been in town less than a year and Duluth, by virtue of the newspaper, was already claiming him as one of their own.

Albert and Louise took rooms in the St. Louis Hotel at 330 West Superior Street, then Duluth’s finest hostelry, although Louise spent most of her time visiting Canton, where she often wintered. In fact, Louise Ordean spent so little time in Duluth her name did not appear in the city’s directories until the 1890s. Beginning in 1889 Albert Ordean is listed as residing at a variety of addresses, including simply “Lakeside” (1889–1890), 1409 Bench Street (1891; Bench later became Superior Street); the Brighton Hotel at 322 West Superior Street (1892), the Spalding Hotel at 424 West Superior Street (1893–1894; today’s Ordean Building occupies a portion of the Spalding’s footprint), and a boarding house at 2602 Branch Street (1895, Branch also later became Superior Street).

In 1896 the Ordeans moved into a home at 1801 East Superior Street and remained there until 1905, when they moved to 2307 East Superior Street, a brand-new three-story Georgian Colonial Revival–Style home faced with red brick designed by Emmet Palmer and William Hunt. Palmer and Hunt, along with Lucien Hall, designed Duluth’s foremost architectural landmark, the 1892 Duluth High School. The Ordeans remained in the house the rest of their lives.

Louise and Albert Ordean never had children. They traveled often, taking many “pleasure trips” as described by the *Duluth Weekly News* in the 1880s. They made frequent visits to Chicago, St. Paul, Colorado, and of course Canton. They occasionally wintered in the south, usually either in Florida or California, and later in life they built a second home in Pasadena. In 1892 the pair journeyed to the pacific coast and later took a steamship to England. They toured Europe and did not return to Duluth until August 1893. In 1910 they once again traveled to Europe, spending most of their time in southern France.



The 1905 Albert L. and Louise Ordean estate at 2307 East Superior Street in Duluth, ca. 1910. [UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]



A trip to Alaska in 1894 was thwarted by a shipwreck. The Ordeans took trains to Victoria, British Columbia, where they boarded the steamer *Queen* to sail the Gulf of Alaska to Juneau, but the vessel became disabled, described in newspapers as “wrecked.” Ordean told newspapers that he and Louise suffered no hardships from the incident, other than not making it to their destination. The trip was not a loss, as Ordean described the natural beauty he witnessed traveling through Canada: “There were crags and canyons, steep mountains and beautiful rivers all mingled together in a happy combination. Nature has been very gracious to that region.” The Ordeans also spent time at Yellowstone, which he called “one of nature’s paradises.”

In Duluth, Albert Ordean joined organizations favored by his wealthy friends, including the Kitchi Gammi Club, the Northland Country Club, and the Duluth Curling Club; he even kept a membership with St. Paul’s Minnesota Club. At Northland, Ordean became an avid golfer. A 1912 article in the *Duluth News Tribune* featured a photo of Ordean and stated he had contracted “golfitis;” his fellow club members considered him among their finest

golfers. He was an accomplished fly fisherman, as well, called by his friends at the Winneboujou Club on the Brule River in Northern Wisconsin to be “the best fly-caster in this part of the country.” When asked for the secret to his fishing success, the modest Ordean replied simply, “It’s luck.”

Louise Ordean was a modern woman, embracing the automobile as it became popular among those who could afford one. In May 1909 she purchased a Baker Electric automobile from the Duluth Motor Company, and three years later she and her sister Christie travelled to Pensacola, Florida, “whence they will motor through Florida,” newspapers explained. Christie Harter, Albert’s sister Ida Rex, and Ida’s daughter Ruth frequently visited from Canton. In 1912 the Ordeans drove to Boston.

Louise was a charter member of Duluth’s Outlook Club, organized in 1897 by “twenty-five prominent women of the East End.” The group functioned much like a book club, focusing on reading, studying, and discussing literature. They frequently invited guest speakers, often authors, to address them. Louise also belonged to Duluth’s International Order of King’s Daughters, a non-sectarian philanthropic organization for young women, which later evolved into Duluth’s Junior League. She often hosted luncheons and teas at the Kitchi Gammi Club and Northland Country Club for former prominent residents visiting Duluth.

ABOVE:

The original Northland Country Club clubhouse. Ordean, a member, purchased property that once belonged to the club.

[ZENITH CITY PRESS]

THE ORDEANS' GENEROSITY

ALBERT AND LOUISE ORDEAN RECOGNIZED they were better off financially than most, and like many other wealthy Duluthians of their day were guided by the idea of what the French called *noblesse oblige*, the inferred responsibility of privileged people to act with generosity and nobility toward those less advantaged.

Albert Ordean and his business partner William Stone used their company to extend their generosity, as Stone-Ordean donated heavily to the fund drives that helped create St. Luke's Hospital in the 1880s and often donated food and other goods to a variety of causes.

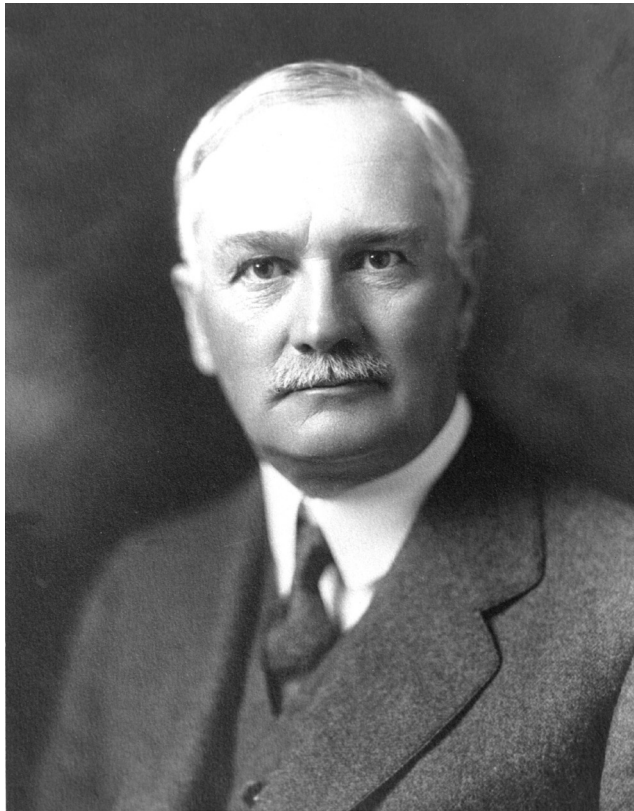
While the Ordeans had no children of their own, they took an active interest in the Duluth Children's Home even before its official founding in 1887, becoming generous contributors to the institution. Albert served on the advisory committee for many years and, as a trustee, pushed for the construction of a new facility for the organization, which opened in 1904 at 504 North Fifteenth Avenue East. Louise played a large role organizing the Home's annual Charity Ball, through which the organization received most of its funding. Today the organization is called Northwoods Children's Services.

During the first world war Mr. Ordean took a leading part in the Liberty Loan program and



The 1905 Duluth Children's Home, ca. 1910. Albert and Louise Ordean supported the institution since its inception in 1887; Albert was not only a trustee but worked on the building committee as well. [UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]

other drives conducted by the government to finance the conflict. He also acted as assistant treasurer for the Minnesota Belgian Relief fund after the war first began in 1914 and contributed to the Austro-German Red Cross at the same time (when the war first broke out, America was not sure which faction to support, so the wealthy often gave to relief efforts on both sides of the conflict). When the war prevented the shipment of cotton from the U.S. to Europe, Ordean and bankers in St. Paul and



Minneapolis raised \$1 million to contribute to a national “cotton pool” of \$135 million that was sent to relieve cotton farmers in the American south.

At the time of his death, Ordean was serving on the advisory board of the Duluth Community Fund. In 1928 a local reporter recalled having written a story for *Labor World* some years earlier about a young mother desperately trying to take care of two young children after her husband deserted them. Upon reading the article, Ordean had summoned the reporter to his office and gave him \$100 for the woman and her children, insisting that his gift remain anonymous. What the writer couldn't have know is that Ordean likely saw in that family his own back in 1866, when his father died and his mother had to support ten-year-old Albert and his siblings on her own. Ordean's own childhood experience is likely why he and Louise would be particularly kind to impoverished children.

ABOVE:

Albert LeGrand Ordean, photographed in 1918.

[ORDEAN FOUNDATION]

THE ORDEAN'S LEGACY

ALBERT LEGRAND ORDEAN DIED September 27, 1928. While newspapers did not mention the cause of death, they did report that Ordean had been confined to his bed since the previous April. He was seventy-two years old.

Newspapers printed many tributes to Ordean following his death, and the *News Tribune* summed them up when it wrote that “his associates cited him as a man of highest character,

pointing out his steadfast honesty and integrity in business and his kindness and interest in humankind about him.” David Williams, vice president of First National Bank in 1928, knew Ordean for twenty years. He told the press that “the public never understood his generosity. He was a hard man to commit to a business proposition, but once committed, he was adamant. Whenever he said he would do a thing, his word was as good as his bond.”

In its tribute to Ordean, *Bede's Budget* wrote that Ordean, “possessed the Episcopalian rather than the hallelujah temperament.... There is no record of any speech he made.... While others reveled in their factions he quietly rejoiced in his benefactions, for he was successful beyond the common man and rendered many a gracious service to those less fortunate than himself. And yet, Albert LeGrand Ordean was not known well to the home folks. Being a big banker he was presumably cold, and in the public mind the precursor of the Frigidaire.... He was in the world but not of it, in the popular sense.” The *Duluth Herald*

called Ordean “a quiet and unassuming citizen” who “never sought publicity but could always be depended on to support any worthy public enterprise.”

The writer quoted above describing Ordean as a seemingly cold, indifferent “man nobody seemed to know” wrote those words in a tribute to Ordean that appeared in *Labor World* in 1928. “Strange, isn’t it,” he wrote, “that some men must die before we know them?” The writer went on to describe Ordean’s will to show readers that Ordean was indeed a kind and generous man.

To Trinity Cathedral, the Episcopal church where he and Louise attended services, Ordean left \$25,000 (worth about \$375,000 in 2019; the church, which stands at at 2012 East Superior Street, became Mount Olive English Lutheran Church in 1956). To St. Jean Baptiste, a French-Catholic church at 2432 West Third Street, he also gave \$25,000, likely as a nod to his French-Canadian heritage (the church was demolished in 1996).

To his beloved Children’s Home he left \$50,000 (\$745,000 in 2019) and another \$25,000 to St. James Catholic Orphanage (now The Hills Youth and Family

Services). He gave St. Mary’s Hospital, a Catholic institution, \$100,000 (\$1.5 million) and Protestant St. Luke’s \$200,000 (\$3.7 million). Another \$10,000 (\$190,000) went to the Aftenro Home for the Aged, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., and the Rescue Home for Fallen Women. His will also remembered friends, business associates, and even the janitor and two elevator operators—brothers—who worked at the First National Bank building.

Prior to his death Ordean had purchased the land below Superior Street along Fortieth Avenue East—once part of Northland Country Club’s golf course—which his will gave to the city for “park and recreational purposes only.” The gift included money for the purchase of recreation equipment,

but it wasn’t spent until the 1930s, when the Works Project Administration helped finance the construction of a large field-house on the site. Ordean Field was officially dedicated in 1938. (In 1956, East Junior High School was converted to a senior high school, and a new junior high—named for Ordean—was built on part of the Ordean Field site. The junior high underwent an extensive transformation in 2011 to become the new home of Duluth East High School, and the original East again became a junior high school, bearing Ordean’s name.)



This grainy image—made from a facsimile of a newspaper clipping—is the only known photograph of Albert and Louise Ordean, ca. 1925.

[UMD MARTIN LIBRARY]

Albert Ordean also left money in his will for a “fine, artistic bronze statue” of Daniel Greysolon Sieur du Lhut, a 17th-century French explorer and Duluth’s namesake, “made by a sculptor of note to be erected on a suitable site within the city.” Perhaps, like his gift to Jean Baptiste, the statue was likely inspired by his French heritage.

It wasn’t until 1963 that French Cubist sculptor Jacques Lipschitz agreed to make the statue. The nine-foot bronze titled “Sieur Duluth” arrived in Duluth in 1966 and was mounted on a thirteen-foot pedestal made of Minnesota granite and placed within Ordean Court on the University of Minnesota Duluth Campus. The statue is part of the collection of the university’s Tweed Museum of Art, named for George and Alice Tweed, friends of the Ordeans.

And of course the will provided for Louise Ordean, a sum that had grown to \$300,000 by 1932 (about \$5.6 million in 2019). Following Louise’s death, the rest of Ordean’s fortune would be used to create a charity to administer and furnish “relief and charity for [Duluth’s] worthy poor without discrimination to age, sex, color or religious inclination of the beneficiary,” a statement reflective of the Ordeans’ progressive values.

Louise Harter Ordean passed away on December 17, 1932, a day shy of her seventy-fifth birthday, after a long, undisclosed illness. Her will suggested the charity’s name: The Albert and Louise Ordean Charity, the Ordean Foundation’s original name. Following her death, what money Louise did not leave to family and friends was added to the fund, and the organization was officially created in 1933.



“Sieur Duluth” by sculptor Jacques Lipschitz, part of the collection of the University of Minnesota Duluth’s Tweed Museum of Art, stands within Ordean Court adjacent to the museum. George P. Tweed sat on the Alfred and Louise Ordean Charity’s first board of directors.



Ordean

FOUNDATION

ALBERT & LOUISE ORDEAN: THE FOUNDERS OF THE ORDEAN FOUNDATION

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RESEARCH, TEXT, AND DESIGN BY TONY DIERCKINS

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