

# The aking of ilwaukee Stories

Historical Time Period : 1906-1921

## Golda Mabowehz: A Famous Milwaukee Citizen

*As a young girl, Golda Meir attended  
Fourth Street School in Milwaukee.*



*Golda Meir Grew  
Up in Milwaukee  
and Became Prime  
Minister of Isreal  
in 1969*



*Water Street and Wisconsin Ave.*

### Connecting to “The Making of Milwaukee”

Video Chapters: #7 - City of Immigrants

## *Golda Mabowehz: A Famous Milwaukee Citizen*

In 1906, the Mabowehz family immigrated to the United States from Russia and moved into an apartment on Walnut Street, near Milwaukee's East Side. They were Jews, and Russia was a place where Jewish people were often treated badly. Moshe Mabowehz, the father, came to Milwaukee before the rest of his family made the long journey. When his family arrived, they were fascinated by this new city. Sheyna, the oldest, and Golda, the youngest, were interested in everything their new hometown had to offer. At the time, Milwaukee was the 12<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States. It was a busy place and the new immigrant family heard many different languages, such as English, Italian, Polish and German, spoken in Milwaukee's streets. Milwaukee was also becoming a modern city with electric lights and streetcars, beautiful hotels and theaters, art galleries, and telephones. Automobiles competed with horses and wagons for street space. Electric streetcars took people to work and to fine stores in downtown Milwaukee.

During that time the city many grand buildings were built in Milwaukee. They included the Pfister Hotel on Wisconsin Avenue and the Grain Exchange on Michigan Avenue. But the building that caught the attention of all of Milwaukee was City Hall on Water Street. It was completed in 1895 and was the city's first million dollar building. City Hall, with its high bell tower and ornate German-style architecture, was a great symbol of pride. There were also numerous beautiful mansions built by Milwaukee's wealthiest people. Grand Avenue, which is now Wisconsin Avenue, had mansions from 9<sup>th</sup> Street all the way to 35<sup>th</sup> Street. Rich Germans, like the Pabst, Miller and Usinger families, lived in other mansions on Highland Avenue, just a few streets north of Grand Avenue.

But not everyone in Milwaukee lived in mansions. At the turn of the century, many people struggled to make a good life for themselves and had to work long days to support their families. The poor and working class people of Milwaukee often lived in crowded, uncomfortable housing conditions. So many people were coming to Milwaukee that our large city was one of the most densely populated cities in America.

As new immigrants, the Mabowehz family did not live in a mansion. In fact, the family had little money. The apartment they lived in had only two small rooms, and no bathroom or electricity. Moshe, the father, worked as a carpenter and in the local railroad yard. To make additional money, Golda's mother opened up a grocery store next to their apartment. She only spoke a few words in English, but neighbors helped her learn how to run a store. At the age of eight years-old, Golda had to work in the store, too. Sometimes she even had to miss school to help out at the store. This made Golda sad because she loved learning at the Fourth Street Grade School.

With a store located in the city, Golda's family stayed in Milwaukee even as the city began to grow outward and suburbs began to develop. Golda and her parents could not afford better housing. Even so, Golda wanted to help other people who struggled to make ends meet. At that time students did not have to pay money to go to public school but they did have to pay for textbooks. When Golda learned that many children did not have enough money to pay for their books, she and her friends decided to help them. They formed the "American Young Sisters Society", rented a hall and invited people to a special gathering on a Saturday night. Golda spoke to the audience about the poor children who could not afford books. She was very eloquent and persuasive. As a result of the event, Golda and her friends raised enough money so that all the children at Fourth Street School could have textbooks.

Golda's ability to take on leadership roles and serve others became evident at an early age. Even as she grew older, Golda wanted to make her city and the world a better place. So after graduating from Milwaukee's North Division High School in 1916, she went to the Milwaukee State Normal School to become a teacher. Golda became a teacher in the Milwaukee Public Schools and also in a Yiddish-speaking Folks Schule which promoted her strong interest in Jewish issues.

After Golda married Morris Meyerson, the young couple decided to leave Milwaukee and the United States. In 1921, they moved to Palestine in the Middle East to live with thousands of other Jewish people from around the world. After World War II, the country of Israel was formed from part of the Palestinian lands. In Israel, Golda was active in politics. In 1956 she changed her name to Golda Meir. She was so well liked and respected by other Israeli people that she was elected the Prime Minister of Israel in 1969. She became one of the most famous people in the world to come from Milwaukee.

In 1971, fifty years after she left, Golda was invited back to Milwaukee. During her trip, she visited the Fourth Street School. Golda told the children there to think about the kind of people they wanted to become when they grew up. She asked them to work hard, to be honest and to do good things for others. Today, the Fourth Street School is named the Golda Meir School and the UW-Milwaukee library is named the Golda Meir Library. They honor a great woman who grew up in Milwaukee, spent her life serving others and worked to make the world a better place.