

MINNESOTA
IN THE AGE OF
JIM CROW

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STORIES OF
RESISTANCE



Nellie Francis, about 1924

Image from Foster, Mary Dillon,
Who's Who Among Minnesota Women
(1924)

Nellie Griswold Francis (1874–1969)

From her early years, an activist

Born in Nashville, Tennessee, Nellie Griswold came to St. Paul with her family in 1885. In 1891 she was the only African American graduate of St. Paul High School (the predecessor of Central High School). Griswold was one of eight students who gave graduation speeches. Her topic was “the race problem,” which she described as one that existed entirely in the minds of white Americans.

Nellie married William Francis in 1893. An active member of Pilgrim Baptist Church, she also ran the press office of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, was president of the Everywoman Suffrage Club in Minnesota, and served twice as a delegate to state suffrage conferences. She met President Taft in the White House in 1909 and President Harding in 1921; she worked with Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois.

In 1921, the Minnesota legislature passed an anti-lynching statute. Francis was credited with writing the related bill. Likely the first African American woman to lobby the Minnesota Legislature, Nellie Francis garnered near-unanimous support for the bill.

This essay excerpted from Nelson, Paul, “Francis, Nellie (1874-1969),”
first published in *MNopedia* 2017; last modified 2021

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Frederick McGhee, about 1890

Photo by Harry Shepherd

Fredrick McGhee (1861–1912)

Gifted trial lawyer and one of the founders of the Niagara Movement

Fredrick McGhee was born into an enslaved family in Mississippi in 1861, just months after the Civil War broke out. The family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, after the war, where Fredrick graduated from college, and then to Chicago, where he worked as a waiter to pay his way through law school. In 1889, he settled in St. Paul, where he became the first African American admitted to practice law in Minnesota.

McGhee was known as a powerful, forceful orator and a formidable presence in the courtroom. But his influence didn't end there. After converting to Catholicism, he became a founder of St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul. He also became involved in national politics. In 1905, he was one of a group of 32 men led by W. E. B. DuBois who founded the Niagara Movement, which called for full civil liberties and an end to racial discrimination. The Niagara Movement was the catalyst for the 1909 founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). McGhee founded Minnesota's first NAACP chapter.

This essay excerpted from Roberts, Kate, "McGhee, Fredrick (1861-1912)," first published in *MNopedia* 2011; last modified 2017

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Cecil Newman (1903–76)

*Pioneering newspaper publisher
and influential Minnesota leader*

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903, Cecil Earl Newman moved to Minneapolis in the early 1920s. After being denied jobs at mainstream newspapers on the basis of race, he worked for several African American newspapers. He became editor of the *Twin City Herald* in 1927.

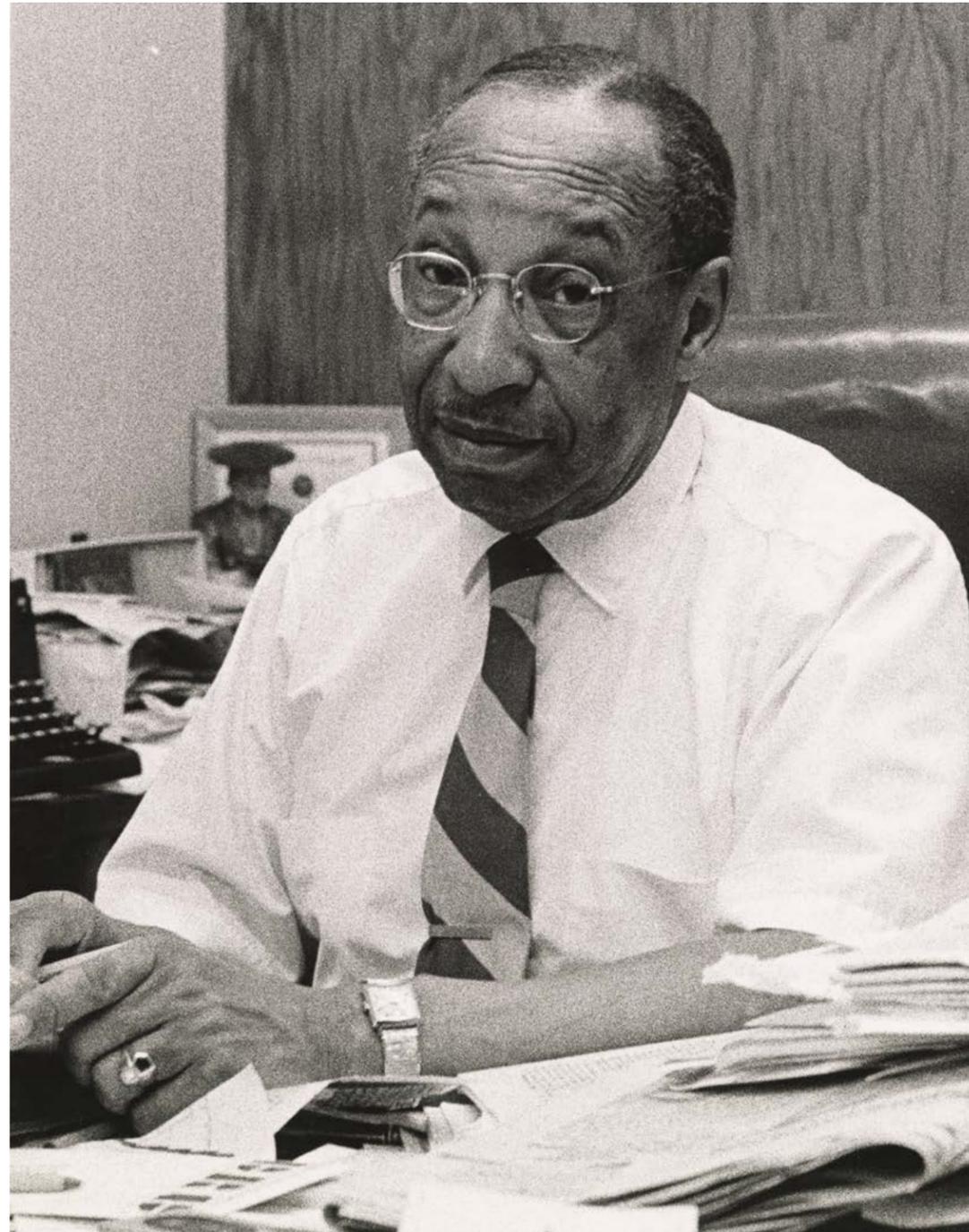
In 1934, Newman began publishing his own papers—the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and the *St. Paul Recorder*. He pledged to “speak out fearlessly and unceasingly against injustices, discriminations, and all imposed inequities.”

Through his actions as well as his words, Newman was a civic leader. He led a boycott of local breweries in 1935, citing their refusal to hire African Americans. He fought for African American access to jobs at local munition plants during World War II. He worked closely with Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey on civil rights issues. He served as president of the Minneapolis Urban League, and was the first Black president of the Minnesota Press Club.

Newman died in 1976. His wife, Launa, took over editing the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, followed by his granddaughter, Tracey Williams-Dillard. In 2015, the Minneapolis City Council designated the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* building (3744 Fourth Avenue South) a historic landmark.

This essay excerpted from Bergin, Daniel, “Newman, Cecil (1903-1976),” first published in *MNopedia* 2021; last modified 2023

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Cecil Newman, about 1965

Photo by Rohn Engh



Engravings of Harriet Robinson Scott (at left) and Dred Scott (at right) that appeared in the June 27, 1857, edition of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*

Dred and Harriet Scott in Minnesota

Landmark court case fuels the Civil War

African Americans Dred Scott and Harriet Robinson Scott lived at Fort Snelling in the 1830s as enslaved people. Though slavery was prohibited in the area, the US Army supported the practice by paying officers a supplement to employ servants (including enslaved people).

In the 1840s the Scotts sued for their freedom, arguing that having lived in “free territory” made them free. They brought suits in a Missouri court in 1846/1847, then filed in federal court in 1853. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney handed down the US Supreme Court’s ruling against the Scotts in 1857.

In addition to denying the rights of African Americans, the ruling contributed directly to the sectional fury already inflamed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act, “Bloody Kansas,” and the Fugitive Slave Law. It nullified the Missouri Compromise and the Northwest Ordinance. It strengthened the new Republican Party and helped elect Abraham Lincoln in 1860. It challenged the nation’s idea of itself as a “free country.”

Ultimately, the Scotts secured their freedom. Taylor Blow, a previous owner of Dred Scott who helped fund the cases and employed the Scotts during their suits, purchased the Scott family and set them free just before Dred Scott’s death in 1858. Harriet and her daughters stayed in St. Louis. She worked as a laundress until her death in 1876.

This essay excerpted from Atkins, Annette, “Dred and Harriet Scott in Minnesota,” first published in *MNopedia* 2014; last modified 2021

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Lena O. Smith, 1930s

Lena Olive Smith (1885–1966)

Prominent civil rights lawyer and activist

Lena Olive Smith was 21 when she moved to Minneapolis with her family in 1907. After experiencing racism in her work as a realtor, Smith enrolled in Northwestern College of Law. She became the only known African American woman to have a law practice in the Twin Cities throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

As a lawyer fighting for civil rights, Smith faced challenges. Racial segregation was common. Discrimination in hiring and firing practices and in housing was routine.

In 1925 Smith helped found the Urban League in Minneapolis. In 1930, she was elected the first woman president of the Minneapolis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She left this position nine years later to become a member of the Executive Board and Chair of the joint Legal Redress Committee of the Minneapolis and St. Paul NAACP.

In 1931, the Arthur Lee family bought a home in a previously all-white neighborhood in south Minneapolis. After a white attorney advised the Lees to leave the area, Lena Smith stepped in. Crowds estimated in the thousands milled around the Lees' home, threatening them. Smith successfully defended the Lees' right to stay in their house.

This essay excerpted from DeCarlo, Peter J., "Smith, Lena Olive (1885-1966)," first published in *MNopedia* 2014; last modified 2021

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John Quincy Adams, about 1892

Western Appeal

One of the most successful African American newspapers in the country at the turn of the 20th century

First published in 1885, the *Western Appeal* was one of many African American newspapers circulated in the United States. The weekly paper contained news, editorials, advertisements, and a literary page.

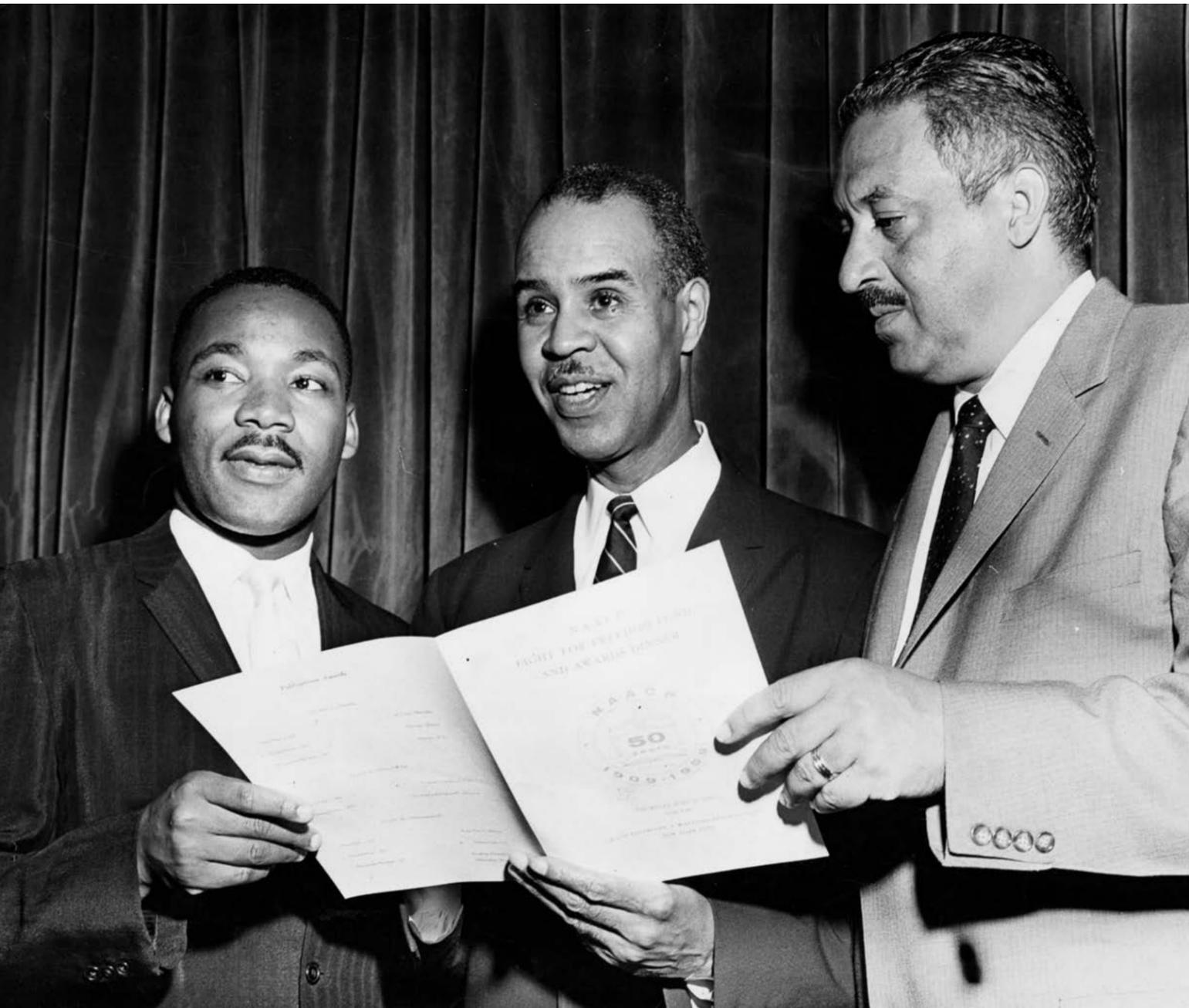
The paper struggled financially in its first years. But when John Quincy Adams took over in 1887, things changed. An influential writer and staunch Republican, Adams expressed his views through the paper's editorial page. By 1901, Adams had dropped "Western" from the paper's name, and had opened regional offices in Chicago, Louisville, St. Louis, Dallas, and Washington, DC.

Published on Saturdays, each edition of the *Appeal* had the same national news, features, and editorials, but carried its own local and social news. Like other papers of its time, the *Appeal* was a place for African Americans to express their frustrations, find common ground, and call for action.

With the rise of civil rights organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League after 1900, the influence of newspapers like the *Appeal* waned. Adams died in 1922; his paper was sold to a competitor the following year and ceased publication several years later.

This essay excerpted from Huber, Molly, "Western Appeal," first published in *MNopedia* 2011; last modified 2018

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Roy Wilkins (center) with Martin Luther King Jr. and Thurgood Marshall, about 1959

Photo by Cecil Lane

Roy Wilkins (1901–81)

*As leader of the NAACP,
a powerful advocate for civil rights*

Roy Wilkins was born in St. Louis, Missouri. After his mother died when he was five, he and his siblings moved in with relatives in St. Paul. Wilkins graduated from the University of Minnesota, where he wrote for the *Minnesota Daily*. After graduation, he moved to Kansas City, Missouri, to edit the *Kansas City Call*.

Wilkins joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1921. He became editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, in 1924, advanced to Acting Executive Secretary in 1949, and retired as Executive Director in 1977.

Under Wilkins, the NAACP led legal efforts that contributed to major civil rights victories, such as the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation in public schools. Over the next decade, more NAACP legal cases—along with marches, protests, and other activities of the movement—led to landmark laws including the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1964, and 1968, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The NAACP awarded Wilkins the Spingarn Medal in 1964. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented him with the country's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

This essay excerpted from Fitzgerald, John, "Roy Wilkins (1901-81)," first published in *MNopedia* 2013; last modified 2021

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STORIES OF
RESILIENCE

Dr. Obadiah Howard, 1st Sgt.
in the 16th Home Guard Battalion,
and his grandson Howard Maxwell,
1918



16th Battalion, Minnesota Home Guard

Ready and willing to serve

The Minnesota National Guard was ordered into federal service during World War I. As a result, the Minnesota Home Guard was formed to protect the home front.

Minnesota's Home Guard units followed the racist recruiting policies of the US military. African American men saw the creation of a "separate but equal" Home Guard as an opportunity to serve. On April 20, 1918, the all-Black 16th Battalion formed. About 500 men enlisted. The 16th also had a band and a drum corps.

On Memorial Day, 1918, the battalion marched in Twin Cities parades with all-white Home Guard units. According to newspaper accounts, the 16th received special applause from the crowds.

The Twin Cities' Black community embraced the battalion. There were patriotic rallies and parades. The band played at community events, dances, and battalion drills. The 16th escorted African American draftees to the train station.

When World War I ended, Home Guard units began to muster out. The 16th did not. Determined to continue serving, leaders of the battalion pushed—without success—for their unit to join the Minnesota National Guard. Instead, a new unit composed of the 16th Battalion was designated the First Infantry Battalion of the Minnesota Militia.

This essay excerpted from DeCarlo, Peter J., "Sixteenth Battalion, Minnesota Home Guard," first published in *MNopedia* 2015; last modified 2021

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African American Voting Rights in Minnesota, 1868

A milestone that was a long time coming

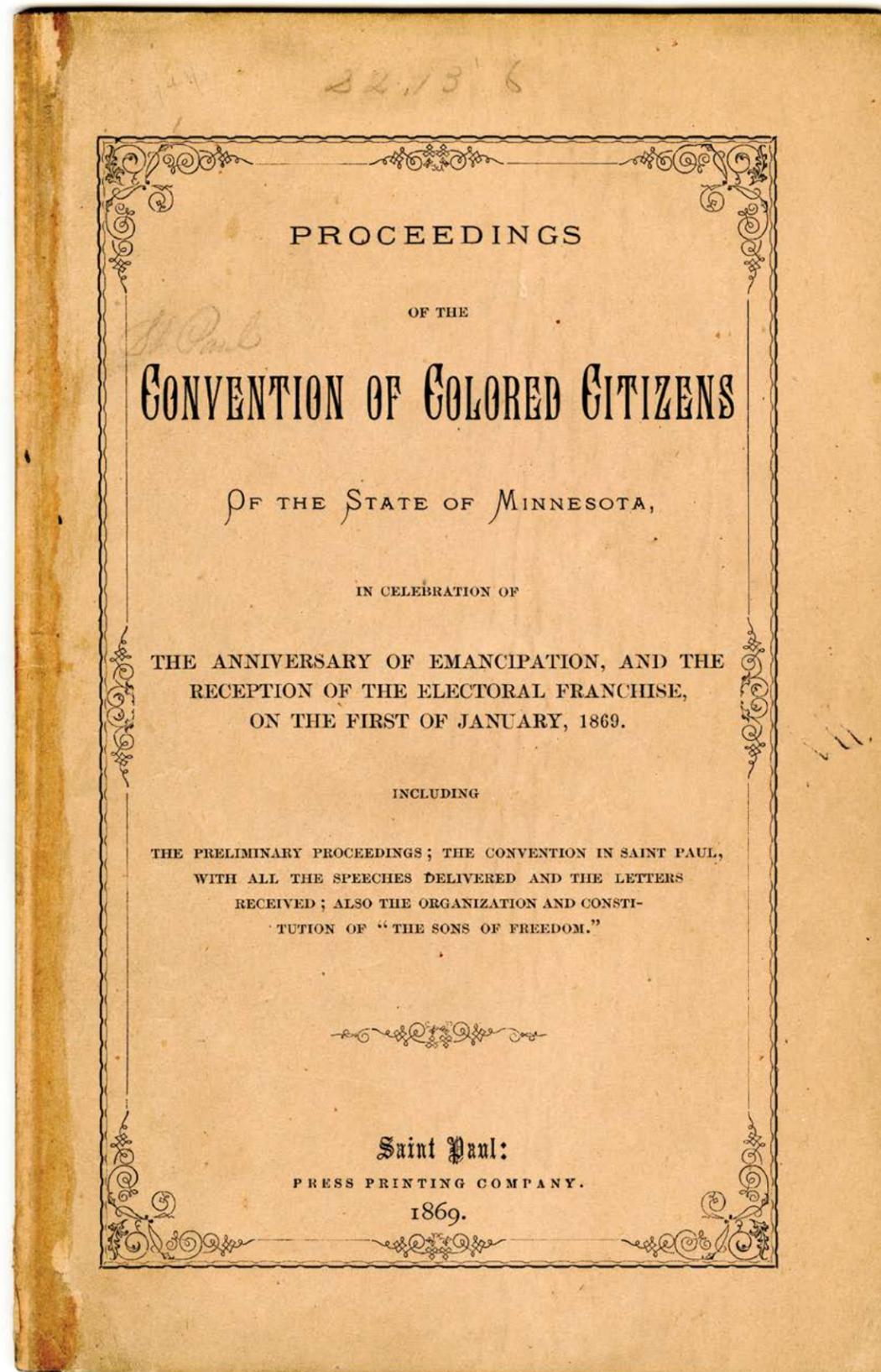
Minnesota became a state in 1858. Until the mid-1860s, a majority of the state's citizens supported the abolition of slavery in the South. They did not, however, support African American suffrage. Minnesota's African American citizens paid taxes, fought in wars, and fostered their communities. But they could not vote, hold political office, or serve on juries.

This continued until 1868, when an amendment to the state's constitution approved suffrage for all non-white men. On January 1, 1869, a statewide convention of Black citizens gathered in St. Paul to celebrate this milestone. The celebration also marked the creation of the Sons of Freedom, the first African American civil rights group in Minnesota. In February, 1869, John Richardson—thought to be the state's first African American voter—cast his ballot on a bond referendum in Lake City.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed. It said that states could not deny suffrage “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The amendment did not apply to African American women, though. It would be another 50 years before the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution upheld women's right to vote.

This essay excerpted from Reicher, Matt, “African American Suffrage in Minnesota, 1868,” first published in *MNopedia* 2014; last modified 2020

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*Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Citizens
of the State of Minnesota program, 1869*

The 25th US Infantry Regiment at Fort Snelling

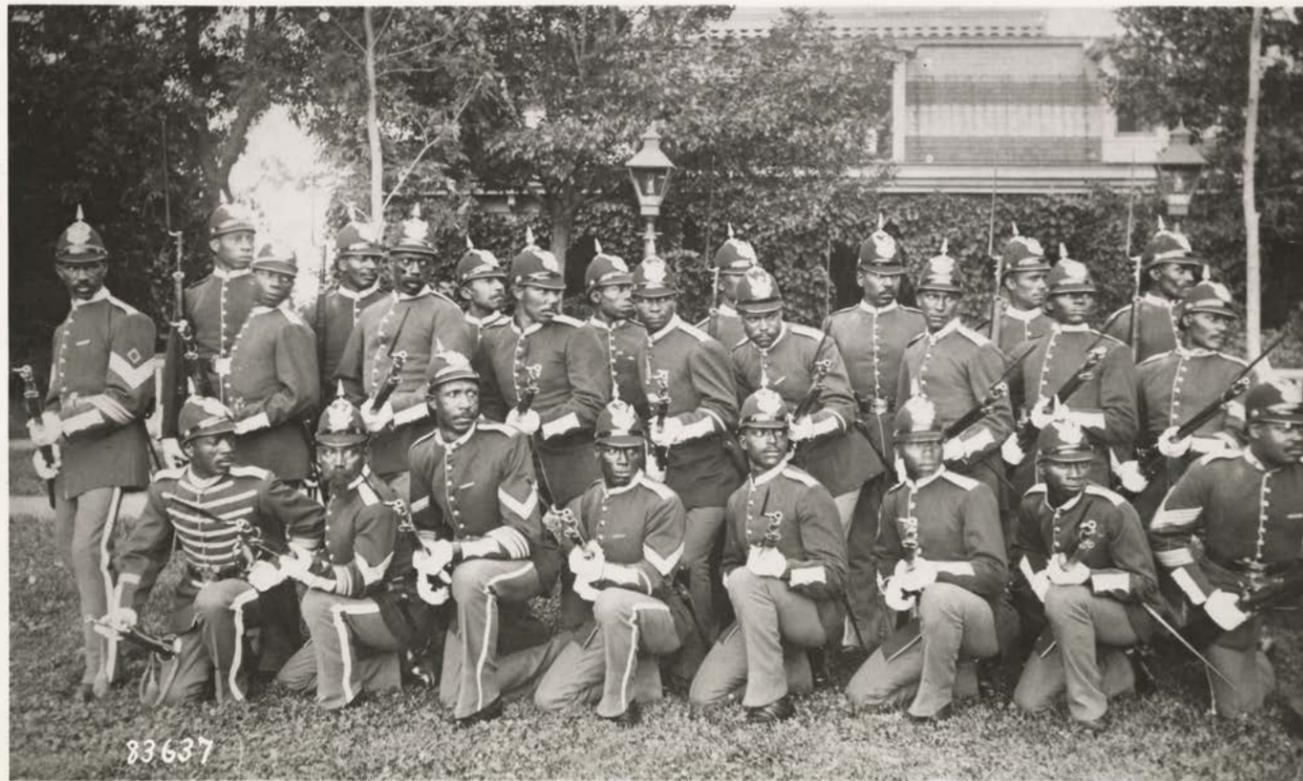
*One of four Black regiments
in the post-Civil War Army*

From 1882 to 1888, Fort Snelling was home to Companies B, C, E, and I of the 25th US Infantry Regiment. Many of the regiment's members were formerly enslaved, or were the sons of enslaved people. They became known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

The Army stationed the 25th and other African American regiments in the West. Buffalo Soldiers built roads, arrested cattle thieves, repaired telegraph lines, patrolled national parks and railway lines, and more.

Black regiments fought in the Spanish American War. Mingo Sanders, a member of the 25th Regiment, shared rations with Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders after the Battle of San Juan Hill. In 1906, Sanders's unit was accused of shooting two white men in Brownsville, Texas. The evidence was flimsy. Yet Theodore Roosevelt—by then US president—discharged Sanders and 166 other Black soldiers “without honor.”

Citing his model service, President William Howard Taft cleared Sgt. Sanders in 1912. He rests today in Arlington National Cemetery. President Nixon pardoned his fellow soldiers in 1972.



Company B, 25th US Infantry, Fort Snelling, about 1887

Mingo Sanders is thought to be kneeling, fourth from the left.

This essay excerpted from text for the exhibit *Many Voices, Many Stories, One Place*, currently on view at Historic Fort Snelling



William T. Francis, about 1904

William T. Francis (1869–1929)

A gifted lawyer and public servant

Born in 1869 in Indianapolis, William Trevane Francis came to St. Paul in 1887. Six years later, he married Nellie Griswold. After graduating from St. Paul College of Law in 1904, he became chief clerk in the Northern Pacific railway's law department.

When his friend and mentor Fredrick McGhee died in 1912, Francis left the Northern Pacific and took over McGhee's St. Paul law practice. Francis's caseload included personal injury, criminal defense, divorce, probate, and business law.

In 1927, after Francis was appointed US Minister and Consul to Liberia, he and Nellie moved to the African country. The following year, William was assigned to investigate rumors of political corruption. He concluded that high government officials, including the president, vice president and postmaster general, had profited from supplying forced labor from Liberia to the Spanish cacao plantations on the island of Fernando Po (now Bioko Island).

Within days of submitting his report, Francis contracted yellow fever. He died on July 15, 1929. His report helped force the government of Liberia to agree to a League of Nations investigation. The president and vice president of Liberia were forced to resign.

This essay excerpted from Nelson, Paul, "Francis, William T. (1869-1929)," first published in *MNopedia* 2017; last modified 2017

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Emily Goodridge Grey (1834–1916)

*Shaped the culture of the Twin Cities
by working for a strong Black community*

In 1857, Emily Grey left her home in Pennsylvania to become one of the earliest Black residents of territorial St. Anthony. She operated her own business as a seamstress, was active in her community, and was an antislavery advocate.

Grey was raised in a family of entrepreneurs elevating themselves from enslavement. Her father, William C. Goodridge, was a formerly enslaved businessman active in the Underground Railroad. Connected to prominent abolitionists, Grey was a key member of the movement's network in St. Anthony.

In 1860, Grey helped secure a major abolitionist victory in Minnesota, where proslavery sentiments were common. Eliza Winston, an enslaved woman, came to St. Anthony from Mississippi with Richard Christmas, who claimed ownership of her. Winston asked Grey to help pursue her freedom. Grey used her connections. Winston won her suit for freedom.

Grey's civic engagement helped build the Twin Cities. She was a member of the Minnesota Territorial Pioneers and led fundraising efforts for the St. Thomas Mission. Her later leadership included chairing an advisory committee of Minnesota's Black women during planning for the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

*Note: There are no known photographs of Grey. This illustration of her was created by Mathew LeFebvre in 2019 for the MNHS exhibit *Extraordinary Women*. It is informed by photographs of her sister, Mary Goodridge Nichols, and of Elizabeth Keckly, the formerly enslaved confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln. Both women were of similar social standing to Grey.*

Grey was featured in the 2020 MNHS exhibit *Extraordinary Women*. This essay is adapted from the exhibit text.



Neighborhood dance at
Phyllis Wheatley House,
about 1945

Phyllis Wheatley House, Minneapolis

The first settlement house to serve African Americans in Minneapolis

In the late 1910s, many young, single women moved to Minneapolis to find work. Social service agencies helped white women find housing, recreational activities, and more. But segregation prevented Black women from receiving the same help.

In response to this need, the Phyllis Wheatley House opened at 808 Bassett Place in North Minneapolis in 1924. The Wheatley House's programs focused on recreation, education, music, and theater. In 1929, a newly constructed Wheatley House opened at 809 Aldrich Avenue North. This larger building included a library, day care, a medical clinic, and lodging.

A center of African American life in Minneapolis, the Wheatley House offered more services than other settlement houses. It was a boarding house for Black college students. It housed visiting Black luminaries barred from staying in Minneapolis hotels, including Marian Anderson, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson. It was a meeting space for groups like the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Pullman Porters, who were not welcome at other places in the city.

The Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, now at 1301 10th Avenue North, continues to serve Minneapolis with educational, early childhood, and family programs.

This essay excerpted from Heller, Heidi, "Phyllis Wheatley House, Minneapolis," first published in *MNopedia* 2016; last modified 2021

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Flyer advertising the first Rondo Days celebration, 1983

Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul

A strong community fractured by a freeway

A century ago, St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood ran roughly between University Avenue to the north, Selby Avenue to the south, Rice Street to the east, and Lexington Avenue to the west. Beginning in the 1910s and 1920s, the neighborhood experienced a social and cultural boom. Music and theater flourished. African American newspapers represented Rondo's interests.

By the 1930s, half of St. Paul's Black population lived in Rondo. Several organizations, including the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, the Credjafawn Social Club, and the Sterling Club, met the growing community's social needs.

After the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was passed, a plan to run Interstate 94 through the heart of the Rondo area developed. Resistance to the plan came quickly. In early 1956, Rev. Floyd Massey Jr. and Timothy Howard started the Rondo-St. Anthony Improvement Association. The group protested the proposed route and pushed for assistance for those forced to move.

Resistance continued, but construction proceeded. I-94 opened in 1968. The Black community suffered a setback but was not destroyed. In 1983, the first annual Rondo Days Festival was held. More recent initiatives, including ReConnect Rondo and the Rondo Commemorative Plaza, reflect the community's strong and sustained identity.

This essay excerpted from Alam, Ehsam, "Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul," first published in *MNopedia* 2017; last modified 2021

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St. Mark's AME Church, Duluth

A community mainstay for more than a century



Rev. Alphonse Reff at the pulpit of St. Mark's AME Church, Duluth, 1975

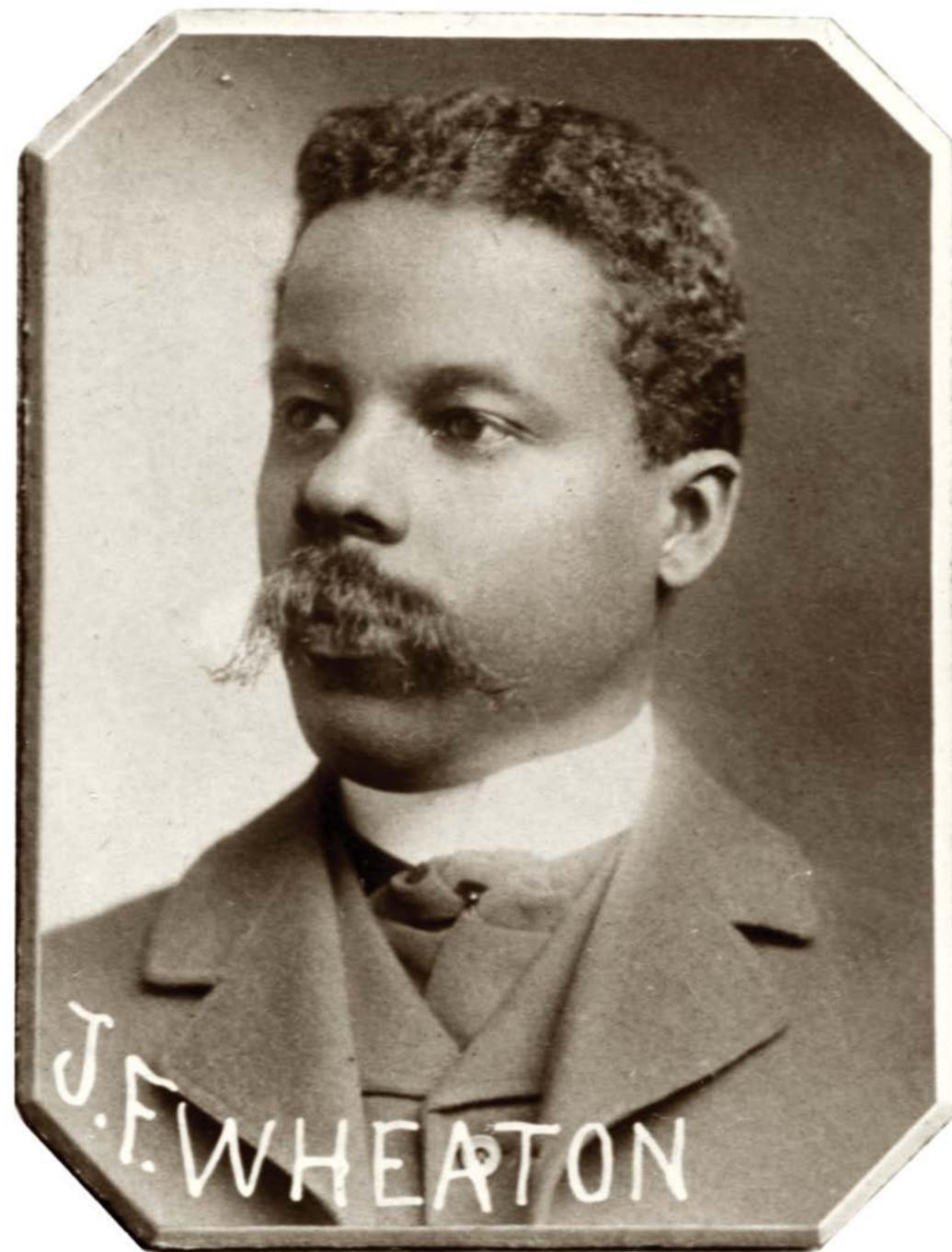
St. Mark's AME Church was the first and only building in Duluth built by Black people, for Black people. Founded in 1890 by Rev. Richmond Taylor, the congregation has gathered since 1913 in a brick building featuring a two-story bell tower and locally made stained glass windows.

St. Mark's growth in its early years paralleled the growth of Duluth's African American population. In the early 1920s, US Steel recruited laborers—many from Southern states—to work at their plant in Morgan Park, a planned community near Duluth. Recruits found poor wages, unfamiliar weather, and discrimination upon arrival. Morgan Park was whites-only, so many Black people settled in the East Hillside neighborhood, near St. Mark's.

In 1921, W. E. B. DuBois came to St. Mark's to speak to the newly formed Duluth chapter of the NAACP. He spoke in favor of Minnesota's pending anti-lynching law, which the state legislature passed the next month.

This essay excerpted from Heneghan, Natalie, "St. Mark's AME Church, Duluth," first published in *MNopedia* 2015; last modified 2023

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John Francis Wheaton, about 1899

Photo by Charles A. Zimmerman

John Francis Wheaton (1866–1922)

Lawyer, orator, and the first African American elected to serve in the Minnesota legislature

Born in Hagerstown, Maryland, John Francis (J. Frank) Wheaton graduated from Howard University Law School in Washington, DC, in 1892. After months of struggle against discriminatory practices, Wheaton was admitted to the Maryland Bar.

Wheaton moved to Minnesota in 1893, where he continued to face racial discrimination. He put himself through the University of Minnesota's law school by working as a hotel waiter and railroad porter. In 1894, he became the law school's first African American graduate.

After being elected to the Minnesota legislature by the primarily white voters of the Minneapolis Kenwood district in 1898, Rep. Wheaton introduced 15 bills. Chief among them was an amendment to an 1885 civil rights bill that prevented businesses from refusing service to anyone on the basis of race or color. Wheaton's amendment made the list of pertinent businesses exhaustive. The bill was signed into law on March 6, 1899.

Wheaton did not run for reelection. Instead, he went to Chicago to help establish the United Brotherhood, an insurance company open to people of all races. He moved to New York City in 1902, where he continued his career in law and public service.

This essay excerpted from Cameron, Linda, "Wheaton, John Francis (1866-1922)," first published in *MNopedia* 2015; last modified 2019

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STORIES OF

JOY



Casiville Bullard House, 2013

Photograph by Wikimedia Commons user St. Paul Paul

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Casiville Bullard House, St. Paul

*A house built and owned
by a skilled craftsman*

Casiville (Charlie) Bullard was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1873. His brother-in-law taught him bricklaying and stone masonry. He first came to St. Paul in 1898 to do stone work for the State Capitol. In 1902, he and his wife, Addie, moved here permanently.

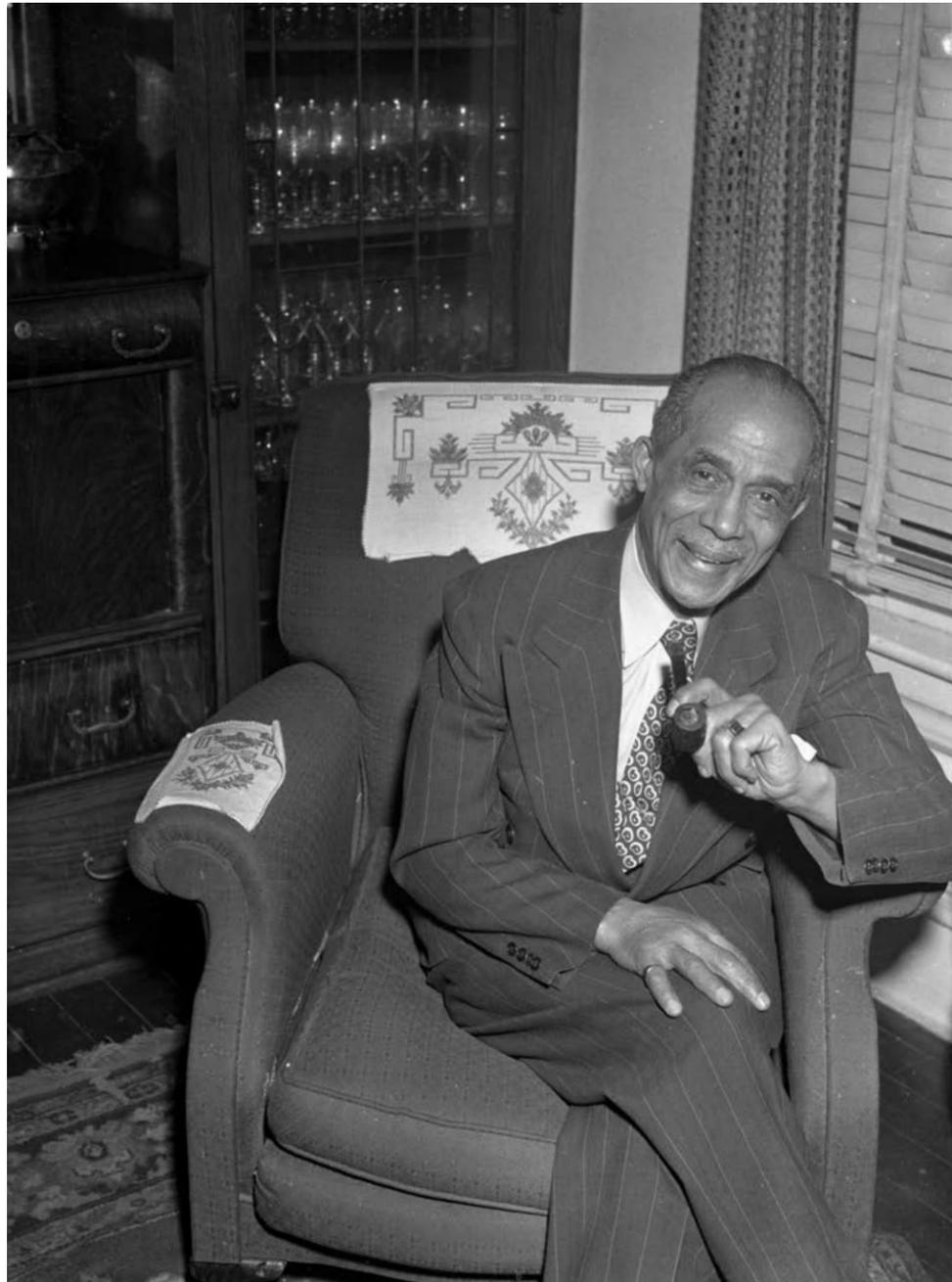
Bullard was a member of Bricklayers Local #1, which was highly unusual for an African American of his time. Skilled in both brick and stone work, he was in demand. His St. Paul projects included the Federal Courts Building (now Landmark Center), the Cathedral of St. Paul, Union Depot, and the Highland Park Water Tower.

Bullard applied all of his skills, including carpentry, to the brick house he built for his family at 1282 Folsom Street. This house, completed in 1909, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was a foursquare design with a front and back porch and a bay window. He built the house in the evenings, after work.

The Bullard family, numbering twelve by 1917, lived on Folsom Street until 1919, when they moved to a larger property a few blocks away.

This essay excerpted from Huber, Molly, "Casiville Bullard House, St. Paul," first published in *MNopedia* 2011; last modified 2023

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S. Edward Hall, about 1940

S. Edward Hall (1878–1975)

A successful businessman and advocate for the Black community in St. Paul and nationally

Born in Illinois, Stephen Edward “Ed” Hall moved to St. Paul in 1900. Six years later, he and his brother Orrington (Orrie) opened a barbershop in downtown St. Paul.

Both Ed and Orrie Hall catered to white customers at their barbershop, including prominent politicians and businessmen. The Hall brothers used their connections to circulate job openings to African Americans.

Recognizing the need in the Black community for a formal employment and social service agency, Ed Hall, Father S. J. Gilligan, and Dr. J. W. Crump founded the St. Paul Urban League in 1923. Hall spearheaded an Urban League community recreation project that led to the establishment of the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, where he was a lifelong member.

Hall was also active in politics, specifically within the state and national Republican Party. He was appointed to the Mayor’s Advisory Board in 1922 and to the General Unemployment Council in 1931. In the 1930s, he went to Washington, DC, and lobbied for the end of military segregation based on race. He was also a Republican presidential elector for four elections.

This essay excerpted from Hankin-Redmon, Eric, “Hall, S. Edward (1878-1975),” first published in *MNopedia* 2020; last modified 2023

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The Honeycutt family, about 1905

Standing, Nancy Brown Honeycutt and Prince Albert Honeycutt; kneeling at center, Albert and Inez Honeycutt; seated from left, Rose and May Honeycutt

Photo courtesy Otter Tail County Historical Society

Prince Albert Honeycutt (1852–1924)

Minnesota's first Black professional baseball player, firefighter, and candidate for mayor

Prince Albert Honeycutt was born into an enslaved family in Tennessee in 1852. During the Civil War, he served as a camp helper for James Compton, a white officer. Honeycutt was one of many enslaved people who pursued their freedom by assisting the Union Army.

In 1872, Honeycutt moved with the Compton family to Fergus Falls, Minnesota. The following year he organized the North Star Club, the town's first baseball team. He also volunteered with the local fire department, and was elected fire department steward. In 1884, he opened a barbershop in downtown Fergus Falls.

After his first wife died, Honeycutt married Nancy Brown in 1883. When Black visitors came to town, they boarded with the couple and their children. When 85 African American people from Kentucky moved to Fergus Falls in 1898, Honeycutt helped them enroll in school, join churches, and find jobs and housing.

In the early 1920s, Honeycutt became disabled and almost lost his home to foreclosure. His friends, a city alderman, and the city attorney helped him keep his home. He died in 1924, and is buried near his family members in Fergus Falls.

This essay excerpted from [Hermes, Melissa, "Honeycutt, Prince Albert \(1852-1924\)," first published in *MNOpedia* 2022; last modified 2022](#)

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Amanda Lyles, about 1913

Photo by Kregel Photo Parlors

Amanda Lyles (1850–1937)

*Community leader, organizer,
and businesswoman*

Amanda Lyles was a leader in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Minnesota Women's Loyal Union. She supported women's right to vote as a member of the National Woman's Party.

Through *The Appeal*, a prominent Black newspaper, Lyles promoted gatherings of social and political clubs. She used her resources and influence to support activists and organizers. A founding member of the St. James AME church, Lyles knew the importance of churches in her community.

Lyles was also one of Minnesota's first Black female entrepreneurs. She owned the Hair Bazaar, a salon that also provided event rentals for her husband's funeral home. Upon his death, Lyles took over his business.

Lyles received national recognition when she founded the National John Brown Memorial Association to raise funds for a monument honoring the abolitionist John Brown. In 1935, a statue was dedicated and still stands at the John Brown Farm State Historic Site in New York. In 2014, Amanda Lyles became the first African American inducted into the Minnesota Women Business Owners Hall of Fame.

Lyles was featured in the 2020 MNHS exhibit *Extraordinary Women*.
This essay is adapted from the exhibit text.

Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul

Minnesota's oldest Black church

In 1863, about 75 enslaved African American men, women, and children escaped from Boone County, Missouri. They traveled north on the Mississippi River, seeking to live and work as free persons. Not certain of their final destination, the travelers called themselves “pilgrims.” After a long journey, the group made their way to St. Paul.

Among the group was Robert T. Hickman. While enslaved, Hickman had learned to read and had organized prayer services. In St. Paul, he held services in the homes of his fellow travelers. Over the next several years, the group continued to meet in rented space throughout the city.

On November 15, 1866, Robert Hickman and others held a baptismal service on the banks of the Mississippi River near downtown St. Paul. This service marked the formal organization of Pilgrim Baptist Church. The congregation soon built a gathering place with seating for 300 on Sibley Street.

The congregation moved to its current building, at 732 Central Avenue West, in 1928. It continues to be a significant place of worship and a community center for St. Paul's African American community.



Ladies Aid Society,
Pilgrim Baptist Church,
about 1915

This essay adapted from Roberts, Kate, *Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things That Shape Our State*, 2007

St. Peter Claver Church, St. Paul

The first African American Catholic church in Minnesota

In the late 1880s, St. Paul's African American Catholics founded the St. Peter Claver Sodality, named for a missionary to enslaved people in Colombia who was canonized in 1888. Several years later, the group began fundraising for a new church. St. Peter Claver Church was dedicated at the corner of Farrington and Aurora Avenues in 1892.

From the start, St. Peter Claver was a cultural center for the community. Sunday school classes, a church choir, and men's and women's groups formed. In 1896, the congregation started the Toussaint L'Ouverture Literature Society. Church members as well as nonmembers gathered for the group's meetings.

By the 1950s, the church's congregation had moved west. The church opened a school and gym in 1950 at Oxford Street and St. Anthony Avenue. A new church was dedicated in time for Easter, 1957.

St. Peter Claver remains a community anchor. Although the church was established for and by African Americans, its congregation, like its neighborhood, was always racially mixed. The church is committed to social justice and to providing essential services to those in need.



Second grade class,
St. Peter Claver School,
1959-60

This essay excerpted from Goetz, Kathryn, "St. Peter Claver Church, St. Paul," first published in *MNopedia* 2013; last modified 2019

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Clarence Wigington, 1940s

Clarence Wigington (1883–1967)

The nation's first African American municipal architect

Born in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1883, Clarence “Cap” Wigington grew up in Omaha. After graduating from high school in 1902, he worked as a draftsman for Omaha architect Thomas Kimball.

Wigington designed many buildings before moving to St. Paul in 1914. The following year, he was hired as a senior draftsman in the then-new office of St. Paul City Architect. Promoted to “senior architectural draftsman” in 1915, Wigington became the nation’s first Black municipal architect.

Wigington was a leader of St. Paul’s Black community during World War I. In 1917 he successfully petitioned Governor J. A. A. Burnquist to form an African American battalion of the Minnesota Home Guard. His appointment as a captain earned him the nickname “Cap.”

As city architect, Wigington had to take the assignments he was given: schools, fire stations, park buildings, park benches, toboggan slides, and water fountains. Meanwhile, Depression-era federal funds led to more satisfying work. His WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects include the Hamline and Minnehaha playground buildings, Harriet Island Pavilion (since renamed the Clarence W. Wigington Pavilion), and the Highland Park Water Tower.

This essay excerpted from Nelson, Paul, “Wigington, Clarence (1883-1967),” first published in *MNopedia* 2015; last modified 2022

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This booklet supplements the exhibit *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow*, created by the New-York Historical Society and on view at the Minnesota History Center February 3 through June 9, 2024.

Information is drawn from sources created by the Minnesota Historical Society. Except where noted, all photos are from MNHS collections.

