

Blacks in the St. Paul Police Department

An Eighty-Year Survey

James S. Griffin

ABOUT 1943 when I was a young officer on the St. Paul police force with no thoughts of history on my mind, I came upon an old, faded photograph which unfortunately has since been lost. It showed a group of policemen with high hats and handlebar mustaches. Two of them were standing by bicycles that had high front wheels. One of the men was a Black. The picture, which carried no names, was said by an older officer to date from the 1880s; this seems probable because of the style of the bicycles and because it is known that Blacks first served on the Minneapolis force in that decade. While no other record has been found, the writer's memory of that old photograph suggests that there may also have been at least one Black officer in the St. Paul Police Department before 1892.¹

The first Black for whom a definite record has been found was James H. Burrell, a former Pullman porter, who was appointed to the St. Paul force on October 25, 1892 — twenty-nine years after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. An early history of the department published in 1899 stated that Burrell was at that time "the only colored man employed on the force. As a police officer he has served continuously at the Rondo st. Sub-station, winning the respect and confidence of his colleagues and the unstinted praise of his superior officers by his faithful and meritorious performance of duty, at all times."²

According to the census of 1890, St. Paul's population totaled 133,156, of whom 1,524, or a little over 1 per

¹ For the Minneapolis police force in the 1880s, see "The Story of Afro-Americans in the Story of Minnesota," in *Gopher Historian*, Winter, 1968-69, p. 5. Much of the information used in this article is based upon the writer's own personal knowledge and experiences, upon bits of data gathered in informal oral interviews, and upon material supplied by the St. Paul Police Department's records unit and the St. Paul Civil Service Bureau. Published material is cited in the footnotes throughout. Annual reports of the St. Paul Police Department, carrying personnel rosters in the early years, are available in the Minnesota Historical Society's library with some notable gaps, especially from 1918-28. The latter are also missing from the St. Paul Public Library's file.

² Burrell remained on the force at least until 1901. See [Alix J. Muller and Frank J. Mead], *History of the Police and Fire Departments of the Twin Cities*, 106 (Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1899); St. Paul Police Department, in *Annual Reports of the City Officers and City Boards, 1892, 401; 1901, 1349*. According to Muller and Mead, 63, 65, the Rondo substation on the corner of Western and Rondo, as well as the other three St. Paul substations mentioned below, was completed in 1887.

Mr. Griffin, now a deputy chief, has been a member of the St. Paul Police Department since 1941.

cent, were Black. All males in the state had the right to vote, and no segregated schools had existed in St. Paul since 1869. It is not surprising that Officer Burrell had been employed as a Pullman porter, for during this period near the turn of the century many Black men worked as laborers, or bootblacks, or as coachmen, waiters, and porters on the railroads that served the city.³

A few Blacks owned businesses. Harry Shepherd was a successful photographer, George B. Lowe had a picture-framing establishment, and many of St. Paul's barbershops then and later were owned and operated by Blacks. Some like John Quincy Adams occupied white-collar jobs before 1900. From 1887 to 1922 Adams was the editor of the *Western Appeal*, St. Paul's Black newspaper, and he was also appointed bailiff and acting clerk of municipal court by Mayor Frank B. Doran in 1896. Other Black professionals of this period included Bessie and Minnie Farr, who were probably St. Paul's first Black schoolteachers; Dr. Valdo D. Turner, the city's first Black physician; Frederick L. McGhee, its first Black attorney; and William F. (Billy) Williams, who was first appointed executive aide in the governor's office in 1904 and remained in that post until 1957.⁴

Officer Burrell blazed a trail on the police force that a few others followed. In 1896 Louis (or Lewis) Liverpool, "formerly a hackman," started work as a janitor at the Central Station, then located on West Third Street. At this time the country was in a period of economic depression, and St. Paul patrolmen's salaries were reduced in September, 1896, from \$72.50 to \$70.00 a month. When Liverpool later became a patrolman, he was assigned to a beat in the Rice Street area, which was regarded as a "tough" section of the city where gangs of youths gathered on street corners and terrorized citizens. They were also known to shoot or beat up police officers.⁵

Many stories have been handed down orally about Liverpool, who is said to have gained the lasting reputation of being able to handle all comers on his beat. One story goes that, because of his fighting prowess, Liverpool was asked to go a few rounds in a boxing exhibition with an unknown man. Purposely no one told him who the fellow was; it was to be a big joke. During the first two rounds, Liverpool gave the fellow a real going over, but at the end of the second round somebody told him he was boxing with John L. Sullivan, former world heavyweight champion. Liverpool then lost his confidence, and Sullivan was able to handle him with ease.

After Liverpool, the next Black officer seems to have been James H. Loomis, who became a patrolman assigned to municipal court as a bailiff in 1900. Five years later the St. Paul force was expanded when 40 men were added, making a total of 217 employees, 161 of whom were in the foot patrol. Among them was Black patrolman Charles R. Grisim, who left the department two

years later and moved to Spokane, Washington. After Grisim's departure in 1907, at least four more Black officers joined the force: Abraham L. Yeiser from 1908 to 1912, when he transferred to the fire department; William P. Lewis in 1911; and Joseph C. Black and James T. Quarles in 1912. Joseph Black became the first Black officer to hold the rank of detective when he was promoted in 1914 — the year St. Paul adopted Civil Service for all city employees.⁶

Marquette Smith, better known as Mark Smith, a long-time white officer now deceased, once asked me if I had ever heard of Quarles, who, he said, had been a hero of his when he was a youngster growing up in St. Paul. I replied that I knew Quarles had been a member of the department and that my step-grandfather had been a pallbearer at his funeral. This remote connection seemed to please Smith, and he told me that he had become acquainted with Quarles before World War I when the

³ *United States Census, 1890, Population*, 1:389, 539; *Gopher Historian*, Winter, 1968-69, p. 8, 11, 29.

⁴ [Muller and Mead], *History of Police and Fire Departments*, 153; *Gopher Historian*, Winter, 1968-69, p. 8, 10, 18-20, 22; David V. Taylor, "John Quincy Adams: St. Paul Editor and Black Leader," in *Minnesota History*, 43:283-96 (Winter, 1973). The first Black was also elected to the legislature in this period. He was J. Frank Wheaton, a Minneapolis lawyer who served in the House of Representatives in 1899; *Gopher Historian*, 19.

⁵ [Muller and Mead], *History of Police and Fire Departments*, 71, 75, 81, 83, 126. Louis (or Lewis) Liverpool appeared as a janitor on the personnel rosters of the department from 1896 through 1899; see Chief of Police, in *Annual Reports of City Officers, 1896, 786; 1898, 947; 1899, 749*. The city directory listed him as a special policeman in 1903 and again in 1913. In between these dates he apparently worked as a watchman and operated a hand laundry. In 1914 he went into the express business. See *St. Paul City Directory*, 1903-14.

⁶ The *Minneapolis Tribune* of June 16, 1970, erroneously reported that a man in the Hennepin County sheriff's office in 1970 was the first Black detective in the history of Minnesota. Photos of Yeiser and Lewis and some information on Grisim may be found in Maurice E. Doran, *History of the Saint Paul Police Department*, 70, 82, 120, 122 ([St. Paul, 1912]). *St. Paul City Directory*, 1908, recorded Grisim's move to Washington. See also Board of Police, in *Annual Reports of City Officers, 1900, 780 (Loomis); 1905, 737, 754 (Grisim); 1908, 401 (Yeiser); Board of Police, Annual Reports, 1911, 68 (Lewis); 1912, 82, 92 (Black and Quarles), 1914, 5 (Black)*. The latter are listed as detectives in *St. Paul City Directory*, 1913, 1914. On Yeiser, see also St. Paul Board of Fire Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1913, 68*. For the beginnings of Civil Service, see St. Paul Bureau of Civil Service, *Annual Reports, 1915, 7, 30*.

Even with the help of photographs, it has been impossible to establish the identities of all the Black officers, and at least two others may have served on the force by 1912. The writer was told of a Black patrolman named William Joyce, and of Andrew Jackson, who began as a janitor in the police department on June 9, 1912, and, according to Civil Service records, transferred to administration in 1930, although I have been told he spent some time as a patrolman; see Board of Police, in *Annual Reports, 1912, 66; 1929, 24*.



JAMES H. BURRELL



ABRAHAM L. YEISER



WILLIAM P. LEWIS



JAMES T. QUARLES



JOSEPH C. BLACK



WILLIAM F. WILSON

JAMES A. MITCHELL



officer was walking a beat in the vicinity of Acker and Jackson streets near Smith's home. Smith said that Quarles was well known in the neighborhood and had the reputation of being a two-fisted, tough, and aggressive officer, who indulged in a little libation while on duty.

Mark recalled that he once saw Quarles coming out of a saloon at the intersection of Acker and Jackson and striding off up the street, staggering a bit as he went. Several young toughs saw Quarles and began to harass

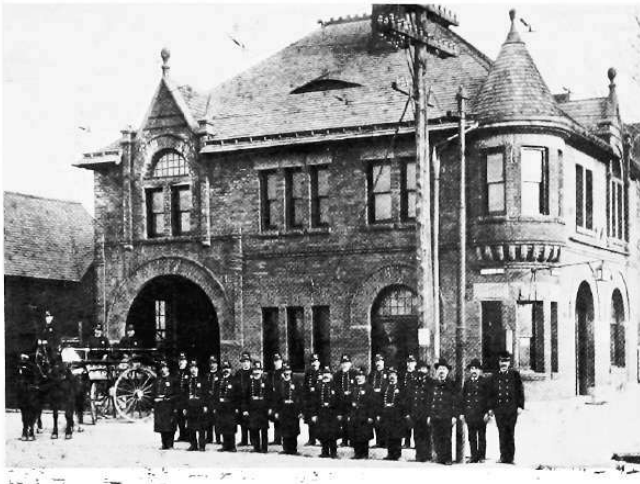
him. Smith said he realized immediately that the youths must be strangers in the neighborhood because everyone who lived there knew Officer Quarles was not a man to be trifled with. The youths told Quarles that "St. Paul must be in a sorry state to hire a nigger policeman." Smith reported that it took Quarles about three minutes to put all three flat on their backs and have someone in the saloon call the patrol wagon. Quarles remained with the department until his death on March 28, 1920.⁷

⁷ Quarles is erroneously listed in later departmental reports among those officers "killed or who died from injuries received while in the performance of their duty." See, for example, Bureau of Police, *Annual Reports*, 1929, 56. On his death, see *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 29, 1920, p. 1. At the time of his death, Quarles seems to have been working as a plain-clothes detective, although there is no record of his formal promotion to this rank.

⁸ On Wilson, see Bureau of Police, *Annual Report*, 1914, 11; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 7, 1923, p. 1.

THE FIRST Black officer to be appointed after the adoption of city-wide Civil Service was William F. Wilson, who was assigned to the Prior substation as a chauffeur on October 14, 1914. Wilson also has the distinction of being the only St. Paul Black officer to lose his life in the line of duty. He died in a fatal auto accident at Charles and Snelling while answering a police call on February 6, 1923.⁸

Fred E. Talbert and James A. Mitchell, who were appointed in 1917, were the next to be added under the



RONDO STREET substation around the turn of the century



CHARLES J. BRIGHT



ROBERT WILLIAMS

Civil Service system. Talbert and Mitchell also set two records that stand in the St. Paul department's files to this day. Talbert was the only Black ever to serve as a motorcycle officer, a choice assignment he received in 1922. Mitchell started as a detective without ever holding the rank of patrolman. (After 1918 such direct appointments were no longer possible; since that time it has been required that all officers on the St. Paul force begin their careers as patrolmen.)

Mitchell served in the department until August 22, 1939. He worked on many difficult cases, including the famous unsolved Ruth Munson murder in the 1930s, and was known as a courageous detective. On one occasion he and two other members of the force went to an upstairs address on Rondo Avenue to arrest an alleged murder suspect. When the officers knocked on the door and identified themselves, several shots were fired through the door, narrowly missing the men. The suspect then flung open the door, ran out, and jumped down a flight of stairs in an effort to escape. Mitchell gave chase and singlehandedly apprehended the man an hour or so later.⁹

Detective Mitchell was frequently detailed to burglary "plants," a particularly nasty assignment that could sometimes last more than a year for Black officers. In such cases the officer waits in a business place that is likely to be burglarized, watching for any attempt at illegal entry. A burglary plant is usually carried out at night. In winter, the buildings might be unheated, infested by rats, and lonely and uncomfortable. Such assignments are still unpopular among members of the force. In Mitchell's day Black detectives and patrolmen drew more than their share of plants and the most undesirable and toughest beats.

By the time these men joined the department, downtown St. Paul had at least a few Black-owned busi-

ness establishments. Probably the best known were Curley (Noah C.) Campbell's hotel and saloon at 122 East Third Street, and the Up-Town Sanitary Shop, a dry-cleaning and shoe-repairing firm at 339 Wabasha Street opposite the courthouse. The latter advertised "French Dry Cleaning" in 1919 and reported "We Call and Deliver."¹⁰

In those days after the turn of the century most cafes and saloons would serve Blacks, but hotels and barber-shops would not. When a national Black organization known as the Pan-African Council held a convention in St. Paul in 1902,¹¹ many owners of public accommodations objected on the grounds that it would bring too many Blacks to the city and create problems. The convention met, however, in the senate chambers of the old State Capitol, and cafe and restaurant owners who were willing to serve those who attended went on record by placing a card of a certain color in the windows of their establishments.

AFTER WORLD WAR I, with good times and ample employment in St. Paul, at least five more Blacks joined the force: Milton Noble Pryor in 1919, Charles J. Bright, William H. Gaston, and Robert Williams in 1920, and

⁹ Ruth Munson died mysteriously in a fire in St. Paul's Aberdeen Hotel on December 9, 1937. See *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 10, 1937, p. 1.

¹⁰ *St. Paul City Directory*, 1911-14, listed Campbell's at this address. The Up-Town advertised in *St. Paul Police Benevolent Association, Souvenir Book*, 1919, 70 ([St. Paul, 1919]), in which photos may be found of Joseph Black, 21, Mitchell, 23, and Quarles and Jackson, 32. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, James Williams' bar at 560 St. Anthony Avenue may well have been the most successful Black business in the history of St. Paul.

¹¹ On the convention, see Taylor, in *Minnesota History*, 43:295.

James Homer Goins in 1921.¹² The writer was later acquainted with some of these men. Williams was still on the force when I first joined in 1941, and he gave me valuable advice.

Homer Goins is remembered as a popular and well-liked officer of the 1920s. Nate Bomberg, a veteran police reporter on the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, provided the author with the following reminiscence of that period: "When I started out as a police reporter in the late twenties," Bomberg wrote, "there were four sub-stations in St. Paul. They were Rondo [at] Rondo and Western; Ducas [at] South Robert and Delos; Prior [at] Prior and Oakley; and Margaret [at] Margaret and Cable."¹³

"These sub-stations were little corrupt governments of their own with each having their own cells, bookings, wagon crews and a touring car manned by detectives and by anyone else who was around. All were in charge of captains who were the 'Kings' in their districts. These stations were abandoned when the police were motorized and the police radio went into effect [about 1930].

"Of all the personnel at these stations, one man always stands out in my mind. He was Homer Goins of the Rondo sub-station. He was a big man, six foot one or two and weighed about two hundred pounds and all muscle. He served as jailer, desk officer, chauffeur for Captain [Charles H.] Gates, bodyguard and general investigator.

He was used on all 'heavy' cases. In my book, Homer was a first class gentleman at all times, never an aggressor, but woe to anyone who aroused him or got out of line. When 'downtown' had a big raid to arrest a number of 'heavies,' such as stickup men or yeggs (safe men) and there were doors to crash, Homer was always called. He was the first one to break down a door and also the first one to go in. He never lagged behind. Among the 'heavies' of that day, Homer was respected by them and no one ever tried any 'monkey business' with him because they knew they would come out second best. On one occasion he had to crash in a door and several suspects jumped him. He subdued them and brought them in. They were treated for broken ribs and later Homer bought them chicken and ribs to show there were no hard feelings."¹⁴

In 1925 a total of eight Black officers was serving in the Police Department. This total gave St. Paul the distinction of having more Blacks on its force per capita than any other city in the United States at that time. During the 1920s, however, their fortunes in the department made an about-face as the administration began systematically to eliminate them. As they died, retired, or were forced to resign, no replacements were made. One commissioner of public safety went on record that no more Blacks would serve as policemen while he was in office. So during the sixteen years from Goins' appointment in 1921 until 1937, when Robert L. Turpin joined the force, not a single Black officer was hired.

The employment picture for Blacks generally hit an all-time low in the 1930s. With the Great Depression in full swing and jobs scarce, Blacks were usually the last to be hired and the first to be fired. After the department moved into the new Public Safety Building at Tenth and Minnesota on December 1, 1930, there was a layoff, and the administration attempted to discharge Robert Williams on the dubious grounds that he had been too old when he was hired. Williams engaged legal counsel, and the case was settled out of court. Under the Minnesota Veterans Preference Act, he was entitled to retain his employment.¹⁵

William Gaston was passed over on the Civil Service Examination list ostensibly on the grounds that it would not be in the best interests of the department to have a Black sergeant. In spite of protests from some segments of the white community and the strong protest of the Black community, Gaston never received the promotion.

In 1939 a Civil Service examination was posted for the position of patrolman. The St. Paul Urban League called the commissioner of public safety's attention to the fact that only one Black officer (Turpin) had been appointed during the past eighteen years. The commissioner assured the league that since 1936 the policy of the department had been that no one would be passed

¹² Before joining the force Pryor and Goins were waiters. Bright and Williams were porters, and Gaston was a laborer. See *St. Paul City Directory*, 1919, 1920.

¹³ Nate Bomberg to James S. Griffin, 1973. All these substations were for sale in 1929. At that time a foot patrolman's salary was \$153.20 a month, and the department had a total of 344 employees of whom 198 were patrolmen, according to corrected totals inked into its *Annual Report* in the St. Paul Public Library. The new police districts established at that time were at University and St. Albans, 480 Prior, 779 Margaret, and 402 South Robert. In 1929 the Captain Gates mentioned below was in charge of the South Robert district, while Captain Charles H. Gerber commanded the one at University and St. Albans, where Goins was then employed as a patrolman detailed as jailer. It is possible that Mr. Bomberg confused the two captains with the same first name. See *Annual Reports*, 1929, 5, 7, 32, 37, 42, 46.

¹⁴ Goins did not always escape unscathed himself. Although no details have been found, he is listed as having been injured on duty and lost eleven days of work in Bureau of Police, *Annual Reports*, 1930, 20.

¹⁵ On the new building, see Police Department, *Annual Reports*, 1930, [1]. Veterans' preference laws, frequently amended, go back at least to 1907 in Minnesota. In some periods in cities of the first class they permitted absolute preference for entrance after receiving a passing grade on Civil Service examinations or prohibited a veteran's removal from employment except for "incompetency or misconduct shown after a hearing." See *Minnesota Statutes*, 1927, p. 979; 1945, p. 1643; 1957, p. 1848; *Minnesota Session Laws*, 1957, p. 1005.



ROBERT
L. TURPIN

over on the Civil Service lists, and no preference would be shown. He added that neither would he pass over anyone just to appoint a Black. With this promise, the league held classes in the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center in order to help Black candidates pass the test. A recruitment drive by community leaders resulted in over thirty Black candidates among the 1,500 who took the test — the largest turnout in the history of the department up to the present time. Approximately seven Blacks passed, and their names were placed on the list on August 8, 1939. No appointments were made immediately, however, for funds were not available to hire new patrolmen, and the eligibility of those on the list was extended until August, 1941.

When hiring began in 1941, Walter N. Goins, a nephew of former Officer Homer Goins, was the first Black on the list. He chose to take a position in the post office. The next man, Victor E. Calloway, at first failed the medical examination but seven years later joined the fire department, and the third man, Lewis I. Williams, was then made a reserve or part-time officer in March, 1941. The writer, who was next on the list, also ran into problems with the medical examination, which he had to take six times before he was finally passed. (He was on both the fire and police department lists.)

In the medical examination for the fire department, which came first, he was told that the specific gravity of the urine was too high, he had an overlapping toe, and he was running a temperature. After returning several times, he was failed because the specific gravity of the urine was too low and for other inconsequential reasons. The writer then went to his own doctor, who told him he was in fine physical condition.

By this time the appointment date for the fire department had passed, but there were openings for police patrolmen. Although the writer had some support in the Black community, it was not unanimously in his favor. He obtained an appointment as reserve patrolman on August 6, 1941, with the help of Axel F. Peterson, then St. Paul commissioner of education, who had known him as a boyhood playmate of his son, Axel, Jr.¹⁶ This appointment brought the number of Blacks on the job to four, including Robert and Lewis Williams and Robert Turpin. Lewis Williams left the department in 1942 to serve in World War II and never returned to St. Paul. Robert Williams, who had been detailed to plain clothes in the morals division, retired in 1944, leaving only two Blacks on the force.

After his appointment, the writer attended training sessions for twelve hours a week — four-hour sessions held on three evenings. I found most members of the class very congenial, but one trainee persistently went out of his way to make ridiculous and derogatory racial remarks. Finally it became evident that I would have to meet this problem head on. Before the entire training group, I told the man that if he continued to make such remarks I was going to punch him in the nose. To my surprise the majority of the seventeen trainees in the group agreed that my action was long overdue.

When the group finished its 240 hours of training, each man was required to put in a minimum of four hours several nights a week from December 1, 1941, until August 16, 1942. During this time I was assigned to Grove and Mississippi, a melting pot area of the city, and to skid row on East Seventh Street. When I received my appointment as a full patrolman on August 16, 1942, I was assigned to the beat on East Seventh Street on a regular basis. Later Officer Turpin and I worked around the clock to cover the Rice and Iglehart beat. Only on rare occasions was a white officer assigned to this beat and never at night.

When the writer joined the force, Black and white officers worked together only on special assignment — at the jail or on the patrol wagon, for example. Usually on such assignments you would be working with older policemen who were often just marking time and waiting for retirement. Many of them resented Blacks and did not hesitate to say so, but gradually things began to improve for me as it became clear that I would not tolerate racial slurs and that I was prepared to risk suspension to make a stand on such matters.

At this time, too, it was an unwritten rule in the

¹⁶ The *St. Paul Recorder*, one of the city's Black newspapers, reported in a page-one story on August 22, 1941, that "Jimmie [Griffin] is the second one of our group appointed to the force this year, the first having been Louis Williams," and added that Griffin's "first official duty will be on the traffic squad at the Minnesota State Fair."—Ed.

department that no Black was ever to be assigned to motorcycle or squad-car duty with any white officer. The Blacks still drew many burglary plants, and I vividly recall other disagreeable (and cold) assignments such as watching the war clothing drive materials stored at the Farmers Market and the junk metal drive stored at Fourth and Cedar. With the appointment of Chief Charles J. Tierney in 1943, there was a slight improvement in working conditions. Better assignments, such as Seventh and Wabasha and Snelling and University, were given the Black officers.

EARLY IN 1945 the writer enlisted in the United States navy, leaving Turpin as the only active Black officer in the department. When I returned to work in June, 1946, the white-only assignment to squad cars was still in effect. After discussing this matter, Turpin and I decided that if changes were not made very soon, we would confront the chief about this situation.

In the middle of June, the department held its first sensitivity training session, sponsored in conjunction with the St. Paul Council of Human Relations. Former Chief Joseph P. Kluchesky of the Milwaukee Police Department directed this mandatory training program. He recommended to Chief Tierney that Blacks be assigned to squad-car duty on the same basis as other officers. Chief Tierney concurred. At that time the St. Paul department was using the one-man car system, so no problems were created when the writer was assigned to squad-car duty in July, 1946. Officer Turpin received a similar assignment a short time later.

Like most policemen, the writer during his years as a patrolman and detective had countless routine experiences, but he also had his share of excitement. In September, 1949, for instance, he joined in a major manhunt by St. Paul police over several blocks near the State Capitol. A bandit had held up a liquor store and then eluded police for several hours in a house-to-house gun battle, killing a detective. The fugitive was at last cornered in a tenement room, into which heavy charges of tear gas were pumped through a transom. The writer, though off duty, was one of two policemen who put on gas masks and went after the bandit, who was slain in the process.

Earlier in the 1940s, when the writer and Turpin were plain-clothes men, we gave the song, "Lay That Pistol Down, Babe," a practical application, as one newspaper put it. On a St. Paul street one night we came upon and quickly disarmed a young woman of slight build who was thrusting a large pistol — a fully loaded .45-caliber army automatic — in the ribs of a male companion. Both were from Minneapolis. The woman said the man was a former fiancé who had slapped her face in a St. Paul tavern when she refused to return to Minneapolis with him. She said the man pursued her when

she ran out of the tavern and that she then pulled the gun from her bag. We arrested the woman and took the man to jail as a material witness.

On another occasion the writer managed to subdue an early-morning fight between two men at a St. Paul restaurant. I arrested the man responsible for the brawl but not before being hit over the head with a pop bottle and receiving a cut that required several stitches.

The writer had his amusing moments, too, as a squad-car patrolman. One time, following instructions of a police radio dispatcher, I picked up a South St. Paul woman who had alighted from a streetcar in St. Paul before she realized she had left her purse containing \$140.00 where she had been sitting. I managed to overtake the trolley, and the woman got on it to look for her purse. She found it, much to her relief, on the seat where she had left it. Another time I was driving in a squad car when I was called upon to escort a truck whose trash in back had caught fire in a high wind at a dump. Unable to put out the fire, the driver stepped on the gas and, with the writer's help, raced to a fire station. There, firemen doused the fire with chemicals before it could damage the truck itself.

Still another time, the writer was asked to guide a rookie St. Paul patrolman on his first tour of duty. His initial "case" was not covered by instructions in the police manual — we came upon a lost horse lumbering alone down the street. We solved the "case" by tying the horse to the squad car and driving very slowly for several blocks to the Animal Shelter. (The sources for these various experiences are newspaper clippings in a scrapbook kept through the years by Mr. Griffin.—Ed.)

Many instances of racial bias were present in off-the-job but departmentally related activities in this period. When the writer was a member of the St. Paul police baseball team, for example, I was not invited to the party after the intercity game in Minneapolis. This was not the fault of the administration but rather of a few men on the team over the objections of many of the other players. Mahlon H. Thomas, a Black appointed to the force in 1949, tried to join the band, which had both police and nonpolice members, but he was not even afforded the courtesy of a tryout.

(Here the writer would like to digress briefly to point out that he has had many positive, prejudice-free experiences during his long career with the St. Paul Police Department. I was the coach and manager of the Public Safety American Legion Post basketball team, for example, and was the Americanism committee chairman for four years. I also was elected a delegate many times to the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers' annual convention, was a charter member, vice-president, and member of the board of trustees of the St. Paul Police Union, and still am on the board of trustees of the St. Paul Police Benevolent Association. I also was the found-



MR. GRIFFIN was the first Black to be promoted to sergeant (1955) in the St. Paul Police Department. This photograph was taken in October, 1955, during his assignment as a desk sergeant in the Public Safety Building.

er of the St. Paul police scholarship fund, awarded annually to sons and daughters of police officers by the St. Paul Police Federation, the union's present name. Over the years, too, I was a member of the St. Paul police pistol team and won many awards for shooting. During my years with the Police Department, I was also an interscholastic and intercollegiate basketball and football official and traveled the Midwest in that capacity.)

After the squad-car discrimination was resolved, the next work-related issue had to do with service ratings — the ratings all officers received every six months from their supervisors.¹⁷ It was difficult for a Black to obtain a high rating no matter how good his performance. Since the ratings counted 30 per cent, and it was necessary to have at least a C or better in order to take the promotional tests, it was thirteen years before I was allowed to take my first examination for promotion.

THE FIRST such examination for which I was eligible was that given in 1954 for the position of detective. My written score was 89.33, but due to my low service rating, I ended up thirty-third on the list and about twenty-fifth after my veterans' preference was taken into account. Needless to say, I was not promoted.

In that same year, however, Lieutenant Herbert A. Werner assumed command of my platoon, and almost immediately my service rating began to rise. In 1955 I had my first opportunity to take the promotional examination for sergeant. With a grade of 88.50 on the sergeant's examination and my improved service rating,

I came out seventh on the list. Veterans' preference brought me up to fifth. This caused some remarks to circulate in the department, such as "They will never make a nigger the boss around here" and "If you are behind Griffin on the sergeant's list, you will never be made sergeant." Chief William F. Proetz calmly appointed the top six men on the list, and I became the department's first Black sergeant in 1955.

One of the excuses that had been used on earlier occasions to deny Blacks supervisory promotions was that white men would not work under them, so finding an assignment for me presented something of a problem. I was given the job of desk sergeant, a position that did not call for direct supervision of the men. After I had held this post for about eighteen months, Lieutenant Burton E. Pond, commander of the shift to which I was assigned, recommended rotating the desk and patrol sergeants. His recommendation was accepted, and from that time on I was assigned on the same basis as the other sergeants. When the department gradually returned to two-man squad patrols in the early 1950s, there was only token opposition from the white officers to working with the Blacks.

One assignment I received while I held the rank of sergeant was unusual. After a potential riot situation developed at Kent and Rondo in August, 1959, Chief Proetz placed me in command of a tactical unit of twelve men assigned to that area, often referred to as "St. Paul's ghetto." At the time, tensions in the community could have been cut with a knife. The unit worked hard there for three months, using practical police procedures, common sense, and compassion. Happily, the incident was closed to the satisfaction not only of the police department but also the concerned neighborhood.¹⁸

During the 1950s, Blacks also began to fill other positions in the department. Dr. Alexander P. Abrams was appointed police ambulance surgeon in 1955, and Dr. Rodney W. England followed in 1957. (The police ambulance service as well as the position of ambulance surgeon was abolished in 1967.) So far as is known only Fredrick L. Weston in 1948 had served in a clerical capacity until Bradford G. Benner, Sr., was appointed police stenographer in 1955 — a post he held for ten years. The dearth of Black clerical workers was somewhat alleviated when he was followed by Wilma

¹⁷ The service rating system, inaugurated in 1928, called for an appraisal of each employee's "character, of his conduct, and of his efficiency on the job." See St. Paul Bureau of Civil Service, *The New Employes' Service Rating*, 3 (St. Paul, 1928), which also includes sample rating forms and instructions for scoring that clearly involved many subjective judgments. The Minnesota Historical Society library has a copy.

¹⁸ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 16, sec. 2, p. 1; August 20, 1959, p. 1; *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 15, p. 1, 2; August 22, p. 16; August 26, 1959, p. 19.

Young, Elnora Land, Helen C. Griffin (my youngest daughter), and Cornelius W. Benner. Benner later became a patrolman.¹⁹

The department saw other changes in the late 1950s. James O. Mann, a Black officer appointed in 1957, was very controversial on the job. He was a candidate for such offices as member of the school board, city council, and state legislature.²⁰ He is also a past president of the Summit-University Federation, held an elective position with the Model Cities program, and was the organizer and president of the National Conference of Minority Police. After a holdup at the Western State Bank on July 9, 1971, Officer Mann was active in negotiating the successful release of two hostages and the surrender of the bank bandits, bringing the affair to a close without further bloodshed and recovering the money taken in the robbery. For this act he was cited for outstanding police work by the department and by the Association of Commercial Clubs of St. Paul.

In 1965 the Civil Service Bureau posted an examination for the position of police captain. Because no tests had been held for the next lowest grade of lieutenant from 1954 to 1965, thirteen police sergeants petitioned the bureau for the right to take the captain's examination on the grounds that their normal job progress had been prohibited and that, according to Civil Service rules, an eligibility list for promotion should be maintained. The thirteen sergeants were allowed to take the test for captain in 1965 and again in 1969.²¹

The writer was one of the men in this group. He went into the 1969 examination with a good service rating, thanks to his supervisor, Captain Leroy S. Tynan, Sr. Captain Tynan, who had been a classmate of Roy Wilkins, executive director of the national NAACP after 1965, while both were students at St. Paul's Mechanic Arts High School many years before, was not a biased man.

¹⁹ The department's first ambulance was purchased in 1901, according to Doran, *History*, 45. Cornelius Benner, William K. Finney, and Joseph M. Bloedorn became police trainees in the spring of 1971. At the end of the police academy training period, Benner was turned down but was told he could re-enter the academy with the next class. He did so and officially joined the force in the fall of 1971.

²⁰ See, for example, editorial comment in the *St. Paul Recorder*, September 14, 1972.

²¹ Beginning in 1965 Timothy J. Howard, a Black who had been a police officer with the Parks Department in 1930, served for about five years on the St. Paul Police Study Committee. At that time the park officers were not a part of the Police Department. When they were absorbed into the department in 1971, Black Officer Donald N. McAdams joined the force. He had been a member of the park police since 1960.

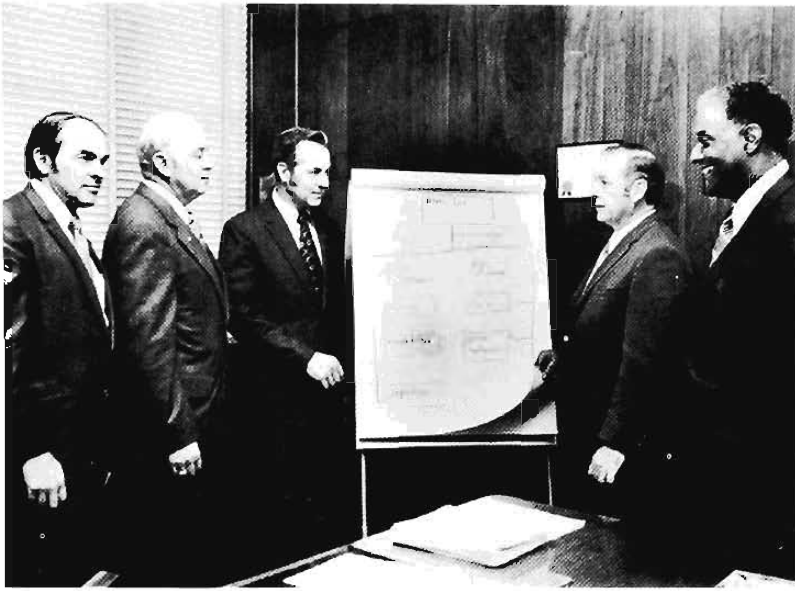
²² The Law Enforcement Assistance Act, first passed by Congress in 1965, was amended in 1968 to reimburse institutions of higher education for teaching officers enrolled full-time or part-time in approved courses. See United States, *Statutes at Large*, 79:828; 82:204.

His attitude was reflected in my improved ratings as had earlier been the case under Lieutenant Werner. With the help of an improved rating, I placed fourth on the list for promotion. The top five men were promoted, and I received a captaincy on March 2, 1970, thus becoming the first Black police captain not only in St. Paul but in the entire state.

The change that had come over the thinking within the department regarding Black promotions in the fourteen years since 1955 was reflected in a remark made by a young officer: "If you are ahead of Griffin on the list, you'll be promoted because they will appoint everyone ahead of him just to get a Black." Another example of the reversal in attitudes — this one on the official level — occurred in 1967 when Earl Beed was appointed to the force. Within six months a white officer with about twenty years of service refused to work with Beed because he was Black. The white officer was promptly suspended.

As a captain I was placed in charge of a station, where some amusing events occurred that brought out the nonmalicious, unintentional racism in our society. On occasion members of other police agencies or local citizens would come into the station commander's office, see me sitting there, and say, "No one here? I'm looking for the Captain," and walk away. On one very busy night about 1:30 A.M. the desk officer told me a lady wished to speak to me. I replied I would talk to her as soon as I finished the case I was working on at that moment. About forty-five minutes later I stepped outside the office and seeing a lady sitting there asked her if I could be of assistance. She said no, so I returned to my office. An hour later the desk officer inquired when I was going to speak to the lady who was waiting to see me. I stepped out of the office to see the same lady still sitting there. I again asked if I could help and she again said no, she was waiting to see the captain. I informed her she was speaking to the captain. When she recovered from her surprise, the captain was able to solve her problem and the lady left police headquarters satisfied.

In the 1960s two actions on the part of the federal government initiated programs that were to affect the St. Paul Police Department. The first of these was the passage by Congress in 1965 of the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, which encouraged police officers to attend college and work toward liberal arts degrees.²² St. Paul began to participate in this program in 1969. Twenty-eight years before when the writer joined the force in 1941, not all of its members had graduated from high school, and indeed a few of them could barely write their names. Not until January, 1950, was a high school education required, and at that time certainly no more than three or four men on the force had college degrees. Today over 10 per cent have completed four years of college and approximately another 10 per cent have as-



THE "TOP BRASS" of the St. Paul Police Department are shown here shortly after the 1972 reorganization. From left are William McCutcheon, Robert LaBathe, Donald Blakely, Chief Richard Rowan, and James Griffin.

sociate of arts degrees after two years of study. At least sixty more are working toward such degrees under the Law Enforcement Assistance Act.

The second program grew indirectly out of the large-scale riots in Detroit, Los Angeles, and Newark, which caused the loss of many lives and millions of dollars worth of property damage during the years from 1965 to 1967. Smaller conflicts occurred elsewhere in the nation. A commission on civil disorders appointed by the President released findings that have come to be known as the "Kerner Report." The group recommended, among other things, that more minority policemen be employed, especially in the inner cities where Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans lived.²³

IN 1970 the St. Paul Police Department made its first real commitment in the field of active minority recruitment suggested by the Kerner Report by requesting a grant from the federal government to create a Community Service Officer Program. As part of this program, the minority candidates recruited were to be given thirty-nine months of training in order to improve their ability to pass the patrolman's examination. The grant was approved, and the goal of the program was to enroll ten men. The department was unable to recruit ten men, but six Blacks agreed to participate: Samuel C. Ballard, Mack W. Warren, Fletcher L. Cornely, Samuel Stallings, Willie Hudson, and Fred Bell.

Trouble began when a patrolman's examination was given in December, 1971, about eighteen months after the program started. Four of the men in the Community Service program took this Civil Service test, but only Hudson passed it and received a job. The program was then cancelled twenty-one months prematurely, arousing a storm of protest in the community.

To make matters worse the men who took the Civil Service examination complained that it had not been fairly administered. The test had a hundred questions, and the examiner told the candidates that each question counted one point. Before the results were released, however, adjustments were made in the method of scoring the test. Because of these scoring changes, some candidates failed who otherwise would have passed, causing a great many hard feelings.

On March 1, 1972, five of them filed a discriminatory hiring practice suit in Federal District Court in St. Paul against the St. Paul Police Department and the Civil Service Bureau. They were Mack Warren, Fred Bell, Sam Ballard, Frank Foster, and Michael P. Benner. Foster, who had three years' experience as a military policeman in the army, worked part-time as a sergeant in the Ramsey County sheriff's reserves. Neither he nor Benner had been members of the Community Service program. Benner dropped out of the suit soon after it was filed, but Foster and the three participants in the program — Warren, Bell, and Ballard — persisted.

According to the *St. Paul Dispatch* of March 2, 1972, they claimed that they "had passed all other tests for patrolman and that their performance in police-related work was satisfactory. But they were fired Feb. 4, 1972." The paper reported that the complaint stated, "these plaintiffs were told that they had to pass the written Civil Service examination for patrolman to be given Dec. 18, 1971, or lose their jobs. This was totally unexpected in

²³ Named for its chairman, Otto Kerner, then governor of Illinois, the report was published by the federal government in March, 1968, under the title, *Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.

view of the previous presentations that the program would last two to three years and they would have more than one opportunity to take and pass the written examination.

"Michael Wolf and Dolores Orey, Legal Assistance attorneys, said the class action on behalf of all potential black police applicants is primarily a challenge of Civil Service tests which appear to have little to do with predictions of job performance. The pleadings in this case state: 'The written Civil Service examination is not related to the job of patrolman.'

"The written test relates to general academic knowledge and stresses formal language and reading skills, including grammar and vocabulary.

"The suit states: 'Many questions demand skills and knowledge which are foreign to members of the black

community, and require exposure to the culture and values of the white community.

"As a result black applicants have been denied employment as patrolmen with the St. Paul Police Department solely on the basis of their inability to pass such written Civil Service examination and other screening procedures which are not job related and have not been validated.'" The paper added that there were then "seven black members of the St. Paul Police force out of a total of 525."

After the suit was filed, the remaining four men who had challenged the patrolmen's examination were allowed to attend the next training academy. All but Bell accepted. After four weeks, Warren was unable to keep up the pace in the academy and was dropped. Foster and Ballard completed the course and became members of the department in 1972.²⁴

The federal court ordered the city to design a job-related examination and submit it for court approval. Civil Service and the Police Department engaged Personnel Decisions, Inc., of Minneapolis to make up an examination for court approval. As of this writing, the case is still pending.

In July, 1972, the writer also became involved in a controversy over the results of a Civil Service examination for deputy chief of police. When the results were posted, the writer was number one on the Civil Service roster. William W. McCutcheon, the number two man on the list, was appointed, breaking a thirty-year precedent of taking the first man on the list. The writer engaged the services of an attorney to contest the appointment. The issue, which attracted wide attention in the city, was settled out of court by the reorganization of the department to create a fourth deputy chief position for McCutcheon. The writer was appointed deputy chief of police on October 6, 1972, the first Black in Minnesota to hold so high a rank. As far as can be determined, this is the highest Civil Service rank held by any Black in any police department in the United States as a result of competitive examination.²⁵

The totals show that over the eighty-year period from 1892 to 1972, thirty-two known Black officers have served on the St. Paul force, three of whom obtained promotions, and that eight others served as doctors or office employees, making a grand total of forty. Of the total of 640 employees in the department in 1975, 14 are Black. According to the 1970 census, St. Paul had a population of 309,980, with Blacks numbering 10,930, or 3.3 per cent. Thus the Black population of the city increased slightly over 2 per cent in the eighty years covered by this survey, and the number on the force increased from one to fourteen.²⁶

²⁴ See *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 9, 1972, p. 21, 23.

²⁵ The details of this controversy may be found in *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 1, p. 1; August 11, p. 6; August 15, p. 10; August 16, p. 32; August 17, p. 1; August 23, p. 18; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 6, sec. 3, p. 12; August 29, p. 11; September 7, p. 47; October 7, p. 1, October 10, p. 11; *Minneapolis Star*, October 7, p. 2; *St. Paul Recorder*, August 10, p. 1; October 12, p. 1, 4 — all 1972. For a quick reference to news stories on the controversy, see the writer's scrapbook of clippings. While there are several other Black deputy chiefs of police in the United States, they hold appointive positions and were not selected by competitive examination.

²⁶ *United States Census*, 1970, *Minnesota: Population*, 64, 80.

THE PHOTOGRAPH of James Burrell on page 257 is from [Alix J. Muller and Frank J. Mead], *History of the Police and Fire Departments of the Twin Cities* (Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1899); those of Joseph Black, James Mitchell, James Quarles, and William Wilson are from *St. Paul Police Benevolent Association, Souvenir Book, 1919*, ([St. Paul, 1919]); those of Abraham Yeiser and William Lewis are from Maurice E. Doran, *History of the Saint Paul Police Department* ([St. Paul, 1912]). The photograph of Robert Williams on page 258 is published through the courtesy of Mrs. Williams. The photographs of Charles Bright, page 258, and Robert Turpin, page 260, are published through the courtesy of the Records and Identification Unit, St. Paul Police Department. The picture of Mr. Griffin on page 262 is published through the courtesy of the *St. Paul Recorder*; that of the chiefs on page 270, through the courtesy of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press-Dispatch*. All others are from the society's picture collection.

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