

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Winter 2017

Volume 51, Number 4

*Primitive Simplicity and
Great Truths:*

Peoples Church,
the Reverend Samuel G. Smith,
and St. Paul

Philip J. Ramstad

—Page 13

William T. Francis, at Home and Abroad

Paul D. Nelson, page 3



The monument for the Francis family in Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville, Tennessee. In the left foreground is the grave marker for William T. (1870–1929) and on the right is the marker for Nellie G. (1874–1969). Photo by Robert Orr Jr.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

President

Chad Roberts

Founding Editor (1964–2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James Miller

Chair

Jo Anne Driscoll

First Vice Chair

Carl Kuhmeyer

Second Vice Chair

Susan McNeely

Secretary

Kenneth H. Johnson

Treasurer

William B. Frels

Immediate Past Chair

Anne Cowie, Cheryl Dickson, Mari Oyanagi Eggum, Thomas Fabel, Martin Fallon, John Guthmann, Richard B. Heydinger, Jr., Janine Joseph, Sandy Kiernat, Judy Kishel, David Kristal, Robert W. Mairs, Jeffry Martin, Father Kevin M. McDonough, Nancy W. McKillips, Lisa Dickinson Michaux, Jonathan H. Morgan, Robert Muschewske, Chad Roberts, Roxanne Sands, James A. Stolpestad, Susan Vento, Jerry Woelfel.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*, James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, Martin Fallon, John Guthmann, Lisa L. Heinrich, John M. Lindley, Greg Mackey, James Miller, John Milton, Laurie M. Murphy, Robert Muschewske, Paul D. Nelson, Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, Chad Roberts, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, *chair*

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Blake Huffman

Commissioner Jim McDonough

Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire

Commissioner Rafael Ortega

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, *manager*,
Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2017, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address: info@rchs.com; web site address: www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 51, Number 4

Winter 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

CONTENTS

- 3 William T. Francis, at Home and Abroad
Paul D. Nelson
- 13 *Primitive Simplicity and Great Truths:*
Peoples Church, the Reverend Samuel G. Smith,
and St. Paul
Philip J. Ramstad
- 20 “*The West Point of the Sky*”
The U.S. Army’s Air Service Mechanics School
in St. Paul’s Midway, 1917–1918
Roger Bergerson
- 27 Book Review

Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey County history has yielded some fascinating lives, and in this issue Paul Nelson looks closely at one: William T. Francis. Francis, a pioneering African American lawyer, had a successful career in St. Paul before he departed as consul to Liberia in 1927. While there, he investigated conditions of forced labor before he died tragically of yellow fever. His wife, Nellie, once spoke at the Peoples Church, a monumental landmark near the Cathedral of St. Paul that is now gone, is the focus of another article here. Philip J. Ramstad traces the history of that congregation, which welcomed other speakers as well-known as Mark Twain and Winston Churchill. On the other side of the city, the former Willys-Overland building at present-day Highway 280 and University Avenue housed a massive training program for the army’s air service mechanics during World War I. Roger Bergerson details the operation that taught 3,000 students before it shut down after the Armistice. Finally, as a reminder, because RCHS has now moved to a different fiscal year, its Annual Report will be included in the upcoming Summer 2017 issue.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

William T. Francis, at Home and Abroad

Paul D. Nelson

Tragic is an overused word, but it applies to the life of St. Paul lawyer William T. Francis. He was born with talent, ambition, a mother's love, and not much else. Ability and ambition drove him to an improbable position, U.S. Minister to Liberia, just at the moment when Liberia became important. Here's the tragedy: Achieving the diplomatic post he had pursued for so long cost him his life.

William Trevane Francis was born in Indianapolis on April 26, 1869, to Hattie and James Francis. When he came to St. Paul, probably 1887, his father was gone.¹ What became of James Francis, and why his wife and son came to St. Paul, are unknown. If Billy Francis finished high school, which is uncertain, he did so in Indianapolis.

St. Paul in the 1880s was just beginning its boom as a railroad town. In ten years, 1880 to 1890, its population grew from 41,000 to 133,000. Its ethnic base was Yankee, then German, then Irish, and the boom brought thousands of Scandinavians. Billy Francis's ethnic community, African Americans, comprised a village within the city, by 1890 about 1,500 mostly laboring people.²

Francis got his first job as a messenger for the Northern Pacific railroad. He moved up to office boy, then stenographer in the legal department. This was a very good job at the time for a black man in Minnesota, and there he stayed throughout the 1890s.³

Meanwhile, Francis matched his business success with social success. The life of polite St. Paul African American society in that era was chronicled obsessively by the *Appeal* weekly newspaper. Francis makes his first appearance there in April of 1887, at a birthday party. In October he sang at a young people's party in a quartet called the Little Four. Over the next few years, Billy Francis acted in a comedy, sang in an Irish trio and a Mozart quartet, played a nobleman disguised as a peddler in *The Gypsies' Festival*, starred as Knight Francis William in a play called "The Magic Mirror," and danced the schottische at a

Christmas event (and there was more).⁴ He was slim and handsome; he sang, danced, went to church, and had a good job: a golden young man.

While the William T. Francis story is a tragedy, it is a love story too. One of the guests at that birthday party in April 1887 was Nellie Griswold, age 13 or 14. She was there to hear the Little Four in October too—the event took place at her house. A sentimental historian would call these meetings fate.

Nellie matched Billy in just about every way. She was pretty, musical, and smart. Nellie was the only African American graduate of the St. Paul high school in 1891. Both the *Pioneer Press* and *Dispatch* rated her graduation speech, "The Race Problem," the finest of eight.

"I fail to see," she said, "whence the American derives that feeling of superiority, which prompts him to refuse the Negro the panoply of citizenship equal to his own." She argued that it had taken the Anglo-Saxon a thousand years to rise from Norman slave to modern Englishman, but the black American had made the same progress in just the twenty-eight years since Emancipation. America's real "race problem" was white America's misperception of the black man as dangerous and somehow "other." "He aims no deadly blows at the welfare of our government. . . . He is no anarchist, no socialist, but thoroughly American, patriotic and law-abiding."

She made this speech at St. Paul's finest performance venue, the vast and beautiful sanctuary of Peoples Church. The audience of thousands responded with loud applause. "[A] light set upon a hill cannot



The earliest-known image of William T. Francis. Though first published in 1903, this image, of a very young Francis, is certainly much older. Appeal, May 2, 1903, p. 3.

be hid," observed the *Appeal*, which predicted for Miss Griswold "a notable, brilliant career ere life's fitful dream is o'er." Both predictions—brilliant career and fitful dream—proved true.⁵

The many theatrical and musical performances at the church Billy and Nellie shared, Pilgrim Baptist, thrust them together time after time. When he played the prince in "The Magic Mirror," she played the bride. When in September of 1892 he starred in a comedy called "Betsy Baker," Nellie was his co-star. They married on August 14, 1893.⁶

For the next quarter century St. Paul black society revolved substantially, though not exclusively, around Nellie and Billy Francis. They sang, sometimes together, sometimes separately, in countless musical events; they hosted parties and dances; they gave speeches, they served on committees, they convened clubs. Only childlessness marred their perfection.⁷

As William T. Francis reached age 30 the ambition that would one day propel him to his death reared up. He may have seen that he could not rise much higher at the Northern Pacific (NP). In March 1901 he moved up from stenographer to clerk in the NP's legal department. In September of that year he enrolled at St. Paul College of Law (a predecessor of Mitchell Hamline School of Law), and graduated in 1904. A few years later, Francis became chief clerk in the railroad's legal department.⁸

Chief Clerk

Let us pause for a moment. The title does not sound impressive, but. . . . The end of Reconstruction in 1876 had set loose an unrestrained counter-revolution in the South—death squads, Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, and the near-extirpation of black voting rights. Minnesota was not Alabama, far from it, but even here there were firm, informal limits on black achievement. The position of chief clerk implied supervisory authority over other clerks, who were bound to be white. If Francis really had such authority, he must have been then the first Minnesota African American in such a position. As chief clerk, Francis traveled for the railroad from time to time, taking depositions. The NP also allowed him to practice law privately.⁹

A man of Francis's abilities and prominence could not avoid politics, racial and electoral. In race the greatest issue of his young life was how to respond to the attacks on black rights, lives, and livelihoods emanating from the South. Francis seems to have hovered around the periphery of most of the local civil rights groups that formed, worked, and disbanded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: the National Afro-American League (NAAC), the Law Enforcement League, and the Minnesota Civil Rights Committee. Small, poorly funded, and far from the front lines, they accomplished little except to give experience to the participants.¹⁰

A Republican in Politics

In electoral politics William Francis never strayed from conventional, middle-class, African American loyalty to the



W. T. Francis, about 1900. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Republican Party. In February 1906 Francis announced his candidacy as a Republican for a seat in the St. Paul city assembly. The *Pioneer Press* ran a short editorial:

Mr. Francis is a young colored man who represents all that is best in his race. His intelligence, industry, earnestness, modesty and public spirit have won not only the respect but the admiration of those who have been brought into contact with him. . . . Earnest without being aggressive, and of exceptional clearness of mind when measured by any standard, Mr. Francis would undoubtedly make a valuable assemblyman.

St. Paul's voters did not agree; Francis finished last in a field of eighteen.¹¹

The untimely death of Fred McGhee, Minnesota's first black lawyer and Francis's friend and mentor, at age 50, in the fall of 1912, changed Francis's life. He left the Northern Pacific to take over McGhee's law practice and with it the primary position of leadership in St. Paul's black community. In some ways Francis fit this role better than McGhee had done. McGhee never led from the center: He was a Catholic, a Democrat, and a W.E.B. DuBois man, all minority positions, and he had an edge to him. Francis was Baptist, Republican, a Booker T.

Washington man, and a more conventional thinker than McGhee had been.

McGhee had been a criminal defense attorney almost exclusively. That did not suit Francis, who lacked McGhee's zest for combat. Francis's practice included divorces, probate, real estate, business law, and personal injury in addition to criminal defense. McGhee had been a prodigious and popular speaker at church, charity, and civil rights events. Francis now carried much of that load.

Let's look at Francis's calendar for 1913. January: Ten days in Philadelphia for an Odd Fellows convention; presided over Emancipation Day celebrations in St. Paul; client Emmett Morgan pleads guilty to killing his wife (McGhee's clients almost never pled guilty). February: Wins a criminal theft case; represents Capitol Trust in a multi-party estate case; serves on a committee to celebrate the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson. March: Meets with Booker T. Washington; speaks at the opening of a new black-owned business. May: Represents Alonzo Robertson, accused of killing his wife (he pled guilty too); signs on to help raise \$1,000 for the NAACP; speaks at an Odd Fellows event. June: Sings at an event honoring a recent college graduate; delegate to the National Negro Education Congress in Kansas City. July: Participates in national Odd Fellows Supreme Court proceedings in Philadelphia. November: Founding member of the Minnesota NAACP. Such was William T. Francis's life for years to come.¹²

In Search of Opportunity

In the spring of 1911 U.S. Minister to Haiti since 1905, H.W. Furniss, offered President Taft his resignation. Francis saw an opportunity: He worked his many contacts in the Minnesota Republican Party. Minnesota Governor Adolph O. Eberhardt, Secretary of State Julius A. Schmahl, Attorney General George Simpson, Minnesota Congressmen C.B. Miller and W.C. Stevens, St. Paul Mayor Herbert Keller, and Ramsey County Judge Oscar Hallam all wrote Taft urging him to appoint Francis Minister to Haiti.

L.T. Chamberlain, a former assistant general counsel to the Northern Pacific, also wrote President Taft:

[H]e worked his way from a minor position in the office [NP legal department] to the chief clerkship . . . and filled every place with such complete satisfaction that his promotion could not be denied. . . . He seems to be a natural adviser to his people, as they come to him for guidance in political, business and social affairs. He is discreet and diplomatic and is a gentleman at heart as well as in his address.

But all this came to nothing. Taft rejected Furniss's resignation and he remained in office until late in 1913. By then the Democrat Wilson had succeeded Taft, so the Republican Francis put these ambitions on hold. But only on hold.¹³

Francis kept himself in the public eye. In late 1915 D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, a film still admired for its technical achievements and deplored for its racism, reached St. Paul. The *Daily News* convened a "Committee of Colored Men" to a private screening, then asked for and published their comments.

Lawyer Francis noted that Thomas Dixon, author of the novel on which the film was based (*The Clansman*) "says that his purpose was to incite hatred against the black man." The film celebrated the Ku Klux Klan; Francis quoted President Grant's condemnation. And *Birth of a Nation* "distorts history to create sympathy for lawless methods. . . . The scenes depicted are . . . false and vicious and should be prohibited. . . ." Francis reportedly drafted a city ordinance banning the film. That failed, but protests led by the local NAACP (without Francis) persuaded the city council to cut the most offensive scenes.¹⁴

In May 1916 William Francis tried again for elective office, this time as a Republican candidate for the legislature in St. Paul's 38th district—Frogtown. Things went no better this time: He lost 1,685 to 917.¹⁵

The World of Nellie Francis

While Billy Francis was going through his various changes, Nellie was busy too—she was a dynamo. She had worked several years as a stenographer for West Publishing, but now being the proper wife of a public figure meant supporting him and keeping the home; and this was not small, as entertaining guests, espe-



A high school graduation photo of Nellie Griswold, 1891. From Ahead of Her Time, A Woman's History of Central High School, p. 7, found in the St. Paul Central High School Records. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society, 131.D.19.10F.

cially visitors, was important. Booker T. Washington stopped by at least once.

Nellie (a contralto) continued to sing in solo performance, in ensembles, in minstrels, in comedies. She organized and directed children's concerts and events. She led an all-female ensemble called the Folk-Song Coterie. According to historian Karen Blair, the women "studied Negro folk songs, spirituals, and art music by contemporary black composers, and presented them to wide audiences." In her high school graduation speech, Nellie Francis had made a ringing defense of African American culture, and she was still at it almost thirty years later. The highbrow magazine *Musical America* took note of the Folk-Song Coterie in August of 1918: Its musical program consisted entirely of Afro-American spirituals and compositions, "which they regard as the only real American folk music." Nellie Francis was a serious person.¹⁶

When in 1909 Pilgrim Baptist needed a new organ, she went where the money was, to the richest man in the country. She called on Andrew Carnegie at his New York residence and returned with a donation of \$1,000. And on the way Congressman W.C. Stevens and Senator Moses Clapp took her to meet President

William Howard Taft in the White House. She may have been the first Minnesota African American to meet any president, and she did so two years before her husband did.¹⁷

She was very active also in women's clubs, one of the main ways women, black and white, approached public affairs in the days before suffrage. Nellie was the kind of person who soon ran any organization she joined. In due course she became the leading figure in all black women's clubs statewide. She traveled to Ohio and Maryland on women's club business. She was a delegate to the Minnesota State Suffrage Association annual meetings in 1916 and 1917. After women got the vote in 1920, she taught black women how to use it.¹⁸

Nellie had a memorable 1921. In March she met President Calvin Coolidge. In April the *Appeal* gave her and her husband equal credit for drafting Minnesota's new anti-lynching law, passed in reaction to the Duluth lynchings of 1920. The story that Nellie "wrote" the legislation, or co-wrote it with her husband, persists to this day, but it can't be true. The NAACP was then promoting model legislation; it had lawyers and did not need amateurs. According to historian John Bessler, the Minnesota statute was based on Kentucky's much older and stronger law. Minnesota's statute was weak. It did not make participating in a lynching a crime; peace officers who failed to do their utmost to prevent a lynching would lose their jobs, and for victims' survivors could sue for up to \$7,500 in damages. It would have done nothing to prevent the Duluth atrocities. The credit Nellie received looks like the equivalent of a lifetime achievement award.¹⁹

World War I gave W.T. Francis many opportunities to add to his resume as a responsible citizen. He lectured black draftees on "Loyalty," and raised money for dependents of black servicemen. He joined the Ramsey County chapter of the state Public Safety Commission, and was appointed a "war orator." Though he might have been an officer in the black Home Guard, he was content, apparently, to serve as a "drummer boy" in its band. He led several events to honor returning soldiers. Nellie also did her part. The

Folk Song Coterie sang at a Liberty Loan rally and at Fort Snelling, and Nellie did Red Cross work and completed a surgical dressing course.²⁰

A Party Loyalist Speaks about Race

During the 1920s, Francis solidified his credentials as a loyal Republican, probably with an eye to trying again for a diplomatic appointment. He was a Ramsey County delegate to the state Republican convention of 1920, then joined the state GOP central committee, and in September attended the national convention in Chicago. He was appointed a Minnesota presidential elector. During the 1924 presidential campaign he served as chairman of the Western District of the Colored Division of the Republican National committee, in charge of rounding up black votes over the western two-thirds of the country.²¹

Francis had cast his elector's vote for the 1920 winner, Republican Warren Harding. In October of 1921 Harding made a speech on race in Birmingham, Alabama, in which he surprised his listeners by declaring that the race issue was a national, not a local one, and that American democracy required that African American citizens enjoy equal political rights. Black listeners cheered. Southern politicians did not. U.S. Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi said that the president's remarks threatened white civilization. Senator Tom Watson of Georgia accused Harding of "planting fatal germs in the minds of the black race," and asked rhetorically if any right-thinking person would "like to see black bosses placed over white boys and white girls." W.T. Francis may have smiled—he had been that black boss.

Four months later, Francis made a speech in Minneapolis about Harding's Birmingham address in which he criticized the president for perpetuating a dangerous error. Harding had said that there existed a "fundamental difference between the white and black race[s]" that was not to be breached. This touched on a theme that Francis had spoken about many times, that the supposed differences between the races existed chiefly in the willfully uninformed white imagination.



Nellie Francis in 1912 when she was active in the women's suffrage movement locally and nationally. Appeal, July 27, 1912, p. 3.

The American Negro has been made in America. Bloods of all nations flow in his veins. This is shown by his color, which ranges from the blackness of an Egyptian night to the whiteness of a lily. . . . The white race does not understand the Negro because no effort is made to get an intelligent insight into his character.

He accused Harding of promoting ideas that would lead to enforced legal segregation, possibly even the relocation of blacks into specific areas of the county. But Francis also showed himself to be still a Booker T. Washington man. Washington had made himself popular with white America by denying any interest in social equality. Francis did the same: "The Negro does not seek social equality. . . . He wants the same right to work on a job, treat the sick, plead a case, paint a picture or write a book as the white man."²²

This was vintage Francis. We do not know what he said in private, but in public he did not demand equality without qualifications, as his late friend Fred McGhee, and McGhee's ally W.E.B. DuBois, had done. Nor did he, in his reported speeches, take up the national issues of lynching and voting rights.

Racial Discrimination in St. Paul

In March 1925 St. Paul lawyer and former

Republican U.S. Senator Frank Kellogg took office as Secretary of State.²³ This may have reawakened W.T. Francis's hopes for a diplomatic appointment. Other events close to home may also have loosened the attachments W.T. and Nellie Francis felt to St. Paul. In the fall of that year they contracted to buy a house at 2092 Sargent Avenue, a block west of Groveland School in the neighborhood now known as Macalester-Groveland. When word got out, the Francis's decades of public service, leadership, Republican politics, and middle-class respectability counted for nothing.

On October 4 something called the Cretin Improvement Association appeared in the pages of the *Pioneer Press*. Seventy-five people had met at Groveland School and voted unanimously for a resolution that "colored persons are not wanted in the district." Another 300 had signed a petition to the same effect. The organization authorized money to "provide horns, a brass band and torchlight processions to carry out the plan" to induce the couple to back out of the sale. The Francis's declined. And so the next night a giant cross burned on the lawn in front of 2092 Sargent (and the Association asked for police protection **for the cross-burners**). On November 1 two hundred people roamed the neighborhood "[a]rmed with horns and noisemaking devices." Though the Francis's had not yet moved in, the crowd blew horns and lit a flair. Not satisfied, they then lit another flair at the home of George Olson, who had sold 2092 Sargent to the Negro couple. William and Nellie Francis moved in two weeks later.

The president of the Cretin Improvement Association was Oscar Arneson, president of a downtown printing firm. His organization offered the Francis's \$1,000 to give up their house, the offer to expire 11 a.m. on Saturday, December 6. On the evening of Friday, December 5, perhaps as a reminder of the deadline, a second cross burned at 2092 Sargent, and the *Daily News* quoted Arneson: "[T]he Ku Klux Klan never burns more than two of these warning crosses." The deadline passed, and Billy and Nellie Francis did not back down. The St. Paul city directories for 1926 and 1927 show them living at 2092 Sargent. But one can only



The Folk-Song Coterie in 1918. Nellie Francis is bottom row, center. Musical America, 28 (August 3, 1918), p. 10, photo courtesy of University of Minnesota Libraries.

imagine the intense discomfort they felt at these events.²⁴

Minister to Liberia

Haiti was one of two assignments available to aspiring African American diplomats. Liberia was the other one. Solomon Hood, U.S. Minister to Liberia, resigned in January 1926, and the post remained vacant all of that year. On October 30 Francis wrote directly to President Coolidge: “I have the honor to make application for the appointment to the position of United States Minister to Liberia.” It would be a fateful letter. As references Francis cited U.S. Supreme Court Justice Pierce Butler (a St. Paul Republican), U.S. District Court Judge John Sanborn (the same), U.S. Senator Thomas Schall (a law school classmate), Minnesota Governor Theodore Christianson, Charles Donnelly, president of the Northern Pacific Railway, and Secretary of State Kellogg.²⁵

Letters of support came from around the country, and especially from black leaders. Mary McLeod Bethune wrote on behalf of the National Association of Colored Women. C.A. Campbell wrote on behalf of the Republican State Central Committee of Michigan. Assistant Attorney General William C. Matthews,

probably the highest-ranking black lawyer in the government, wrote that “the appointment of Mr. Francis would do the President a world of good” among black voters.²⁶

Frank Kellogg did not work on Francis’s behalf, explaining later that he felt he had already recommended too many St. Paulites for federal office. The Liberia post went instead to James G. Carter. But Carter never took office; he resigned in April of 1927, citing his wife’s health.²⁷

Francis’s supporters geared up again. Senator Schall had not written to endorse Francis the first time around, but now he did: “He is recognized as a leader of his people. He is very light. I am told you would hardly know he is colored. His wife is also very light in color. They are both educated and refined.” Massachusetts Senator William M. Butler endorsed Francis on behalf of the Republican National Committee. Emmett Scott, formerly Booker T. Washington’s right-hand man, now of Howard University, endorsed Francis for his “prominence, character, and ability,” and assured Kellogg that black Republicans would be pleased.²⁸

And so, sixteen years after he first tried for a diplomatic appointment, William T. Francis got what he hoped for. On July 12

President Coolidge appointed him United States Consul and Minister to the Republic of Liberia.²⁹ Fate.

Was he qualified? Francis was an able man, certainly: He had risen on merit within the Northern Pacific, in spite of the color line; he had become an effective trial lawyer in civil and criminal cases alike; he spoke in public often and well; and he was well-rounded—he still appeared in musical and theater productions despite his busy professional life. He was a loyal Republican soldier. He had learned enough about Liberia to lecture on the subject in St. Paul. But he had no money, no languages, and had never traveled outside the United States. He would not have been suitable for London or Berlin. But previous ministers had had no better qualifications than Francis did. One of them, James Curtis, had briefly practiced law in Minneapolis. It was a dangerous post: Five ministers had died in office, and Curtis had died just days after resigning in October 1917. Francis was qualified enough.³⁰

The next few months for Billy and Nellie Francis must have been filled with activity and emotion. They had to wind up the law practice, secure the household, and say their goodbyes, all the while try-

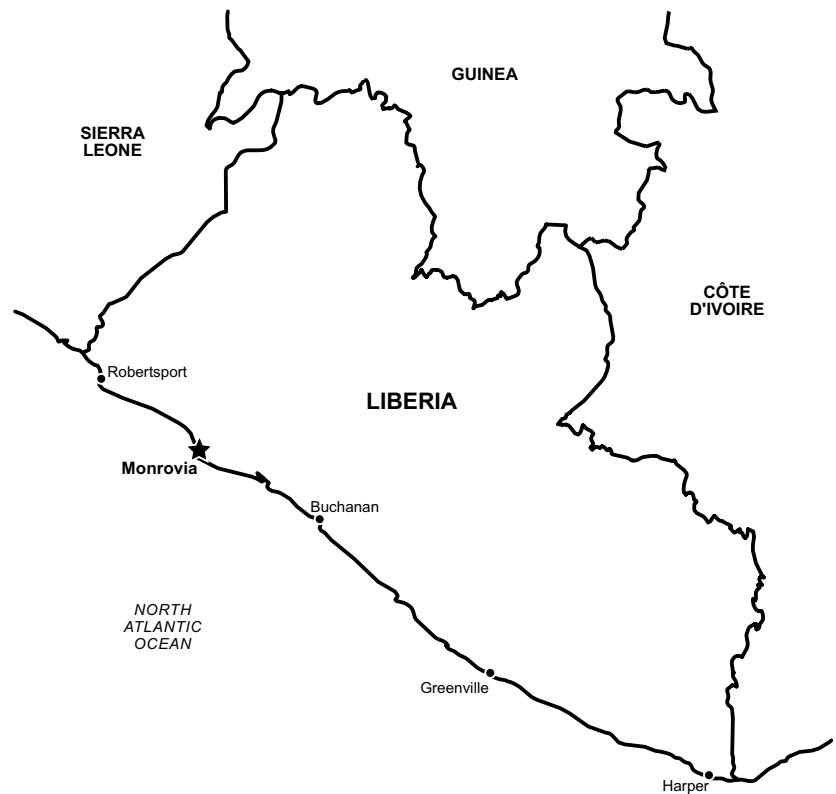
ing to plan for an adventure crowded with uncertainties. We know nothing about any of this. The Twin Cities' black newspapers, our indispensable source of information about the Francis and many other people, had gone out of business. If Billy or Nellie left papers, they have not survived.

Life in a Seaside Tropical Village

They sailed in November of 1927. Though Monrovia, founded in 1822, was seventeen years older than St. Paul, it had barely grown: the Liberian capital was a seaside tropical village. According to Sir Alfred Sharpe, who visited in the early 1920s, "the appearance of the place from the sea is pleasing and picturesque." The commercial center had nine streets, none of them paved. There were a few substantial buildings, the biggest President C.D.B. King's official residence. Charm for the beholder lay in the town's vegetation: acacia, frangipani, and oleander, in red, blue, and yellow. What were the first impressions of the Minister and his wife? Alas, we will never know.

While Midwesterners Billy and Nellie Francis may have welcomed the tropical warmth of Liberia in November (temperatures varied little, 75 to 85 every day), they were probably not prepared for its humidity. Even in the dry season, December to March, "one perspires throughout the day, even in the house." During the rainy season, April-November, "at times . . . there are steady downpours for several days or even a week." The town had no sewer or water system, or indoor plumbing. William and Nellie Francis had left a mature, temperate, and modern city for one of the least healthy places in the world for newcomers. An old sailor's proverb warned: "There's two comes out where three goes in."³¹

Certainly nothing could have prepared them for the tangle of Liberian politics. Liberia was really two countries. A handful of Americo-Liberian families dominated Monrovia, a few coastal towns, commerce, and government. Most of the territory and population (believed to be 1.5 to 2 million) belonged to traditional people in the villages, who had little in common with their rulers in the capital.



A map of Liberia showing its location on the west coast of Africa. W.T. and Nellie Francis were posted to Monrovia, the nation's capital.

According to Alfred Sharpe, "the Liberian Government draws a considerable revenue from the Hinterland people, but gives them little or nothing in return. Beyond the coast belt there are no roads, no good footpaths, no permanent bridges, no telegraphs, no postal system . . . , no agricultural effort, no medical or educational facilities, no public works." Together Monrovia and the back country made up a colonial society both typical—an urban elite ruling a rural majority—and unique—descendants of African American slaves running their own country in Africa.

Investigating Forced Labor

Tiny, poor, and corrupt, Liberia had never been important, but that was about to change, thanks to Harvey Firestone of Akron, Ohio. In this era before synthetic rubber, the supply of natural rubber, from rubber trees, interested many people. Great Britain controlled most of world supply through its colonies in Southeast Asia. Having this vital com-

modity out of U.S. control made leaders of industry and government uncomfortable (Firestone asserted that while the United States used three-quarters of the world's rubber, it controlled only one percent of its supply), and so the search went on for alternatives.

Firestone hit upon Liberia: It had a suitable climate, plenty of land, and a pliable government. In 1926 Firestone agreed to lease up to one million acres of Liberian back country with the intention of building vast rubber plantations, from which he hoped to produce as much as half of U.S. rubber needs. In return the Liberian government got annual rent payments, the construction of modern port facilities and roads, the promise of work for thousands of people (Firestone imagined as many as 350,000!), and new prominence in world affairs.³² The United States had a vital interest in Firestone's Liberian venture. World War I and then the growth of the auto industry had demonstrated how impor-

tant rubber could be to both security and prosperity. Both war and commerce ran on rubber.

Into the middle of all this walked William T. Francis, a provincial lawyer with no diplomatic experience, on his first-ever overseas trip. His great test as a diplomat came eight months into his residence in Monrovia. The Firestone venture, and with it Liberia's possible value as a client or partner, brought new, mostly negative, international attention to the country. Liberia had never had much of an economy. Most of the people lived lives of subsistence in the backcountry. The only commodity of value Liberia had to offer was labor. There were many rumors that officers of the Liberian government traded in forced labor, and these rumors had reached the League of Nations in Geneva.

Before Firestone the United States government would not have cared much about labor conditions in Liberia; but now Americans were running the show, and it was not good to be tainted. What is more, Firestone had an interest in developing an ample and efficient labor force, in dealing with an honest, or at least predictable, local government, and trying to keep up an honorable international reputation.

In July of 1928 William Francis received a secret assignment from Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson—to investigate the rumors of forced labor and slavery in Liberia and report back to Washington without tipping off the Liberian government. This demanded extraordinary discretion. Monrovia was a village: Everyone of importance knew, and was often related to, everyone else. As the representative of Liberia's patron country, Francis would be watched. He could not, for example, conduct fact-finding excursions in the backcountry.

He set about his task in a lawyerly way, gathering documents. The Liberian constitution and law forbade slavery and forced labor. Francis made copies. At the same time, the government had a written agreement with Spain to provide labor (always called "boys") for Spanish cacao plantations on the island of Fernando Po (now called Bioko). The agreement provided for the Liberian government to



Monrovia from the sea. A scene something like this greeted the Francis upon their arrival in November 1927. Undated postcard in the collection of Paul D. Nelson.

be paid a fixed amount for every "boy" shipped to Fernando Po. Under its terms several thousand young men had been sent to Fernando Po. Many of these never returned; many of those who did came back with only a fraction of their pay. Liberia cancelled the agreement in 1927. This came at a time when the cacao planters on Fernando Po were especially desperate for labor.

In 1928 longtime Liberian politician and labor racketeer Samuel Ross became the country's postmaster general (in a country with no postal system); the same year he made a private agreement with Spain to provide labor for Fernando Po. Minister Francis obtained documents showing that Ross was playing a double, or maybe a triple, game. Between April and December Ross had shipped 528 workers to Fernando Po and been paid nine pounds sterling per worker. Liberian law required him to pay the state \$2.50 for each, which he had not done, claiming an exemption authorized by President King. At the same time, in the fall of 1928, the Liberian House of Representatives had passed a bill forbidding all labor export, but it failed in the Senate. Francis wrote that Ross "claims to have secured the defeat of the Act in the Senate through the payment of 'bonuses.'"

Francis did not rely only on documents. Another player in the labor

racket was Liberia's vice-president, Allen Yancy. He had been a Ross labor subcontractor, then became a rival. Francis reported that he had learned from "a reliable source" that in January Yancy had convened a meeting of six tribal chiefs, where he demanded sixty "boys" for shipment to Fernando Po—on orders of President King. Francis quoted the Belgian consul in that "the three great principals in the 'slave trade' are President King, Vice President Yancy, and Postmaster General Ross," who had agreed with Spain to provide 3,000 laborers for a price of 37,000 British pounds.

Francis also reported a conversation with William Hines, Firestone's special representative to Liberia, who said that the Fernando Po traffic starved Firestone of labor. "He says he can use a thousand more laborers at Cape Palmas but cannot get them." In addition to laborers taken to Fernando Po, others were fleeing the area to avoid being taken. "Inquiry leads to the belief that very few of the 'laborers' ever return from Fernando Poo."

The cruelty of these practices was reflected in a popular ballad called "The Sad Song of the Wedabo Women:"

For this reason Yancy came to our country—
He caught our husbands and our brothers
Sail them to 'Nana Poo
And there they die!

And there they die!

Tell us, Yancy why? Yancy why?
Wedabo women have no husbands,
Yancy why?
Wedabo women have no brothers, Yancy why?
Mothers, fathers, son have died
Waiting for the return.
Yancy why?

Francis concluded: “[T]here is no doubt that the officials of the Liberian Government have knowledge of, are engaged in, and are making large sums of money by the exportation of forced labor which has developed into a condition analogous to slavery.”

In his letter to Assistant Secretary of State William R. Castle Jr., of March 22, 1929, forwarding his report, Francis wrote:

There is no hesitancy on my part in saying that the policy pursued by prominent officials of the Government in Trafficking in forced labor is destined to bring Liberia to grief. From the conditions as they now are it is not beside reason to fear that soon all caution will be thrown to the winds and there will be an open, mad race for money as regular “slave traders.” This situation cannot exist much longer without attracting public notice and, if the practice is given publicity, Liberia might be crucified on the altar of public opinion. Why those engaged in this business cannot see the breakers ahead I do not understand, unless it is that they are money-mad and have become so calloused they have lost all sense of right and wrong.

Time proved Francis correct about the “altar of public opinion,” and partially correct about bringing Liberia to grief.³³

The gist of the Francis memo should have come as no surprise to the State Department. Over the past ten years or more there had been many public reports of forced labor and mistreatment of Liberians on Fernando Po. In 1912 some native Kru people had appealed to the State Department for help against Samuel Ross. Henry Reeve’s 1923 book, *The Black Republic*, reported both the government’s use of forced labor and its involvement in Fernando Po.³⁴ The U.S. had not done much then, but for reasons



Nellie Francis, early 1920s. Though she lived another 45 years, this is the last known image of her. From Mary Dillon Foster, Who's Who Among Minnesota Women (1924), p. 111. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

not now clear, the United States used Francis’s report to take action.

In June Francis requested a meeting with President King. In what must have been an uncomfortable encounter, Francis gave King a message from Secretary of State Stimson:

I am directed . . . to advise Your Excellency that there have come to the attention of the Government of the United States . . . that existing conditions incident to the so-called “export” of labor from Liberia to Fernando Po have resulted in the development of a system which seems hardly distinguishable from organized slave trade. . . .

The message went on to present President King with an ultimatum: Submit to a rigorous investigation or risk “grave consequences” to Liberia’s relations with the United States. King consented—he had no real choice—to a League of Nations investigation. The only concession made to Liberia’s sovereignty was that one of the three members of the investigative commission would be Liberian.³⁵

The commissioners—Englishman Cuthbert Christie, black American academic Dr. Charles Johnson, and former Liberian president Edwin Barclay—conducted an extensive investigation start-

ing in the fall of 1929. They traveled the country and interviewed scores of people, including many native leaders. Their findings confirmed everything in William Francis’s report and went far beyond. They documented in detail the illegal fines, the floggings, the kidnappings, the payoffs, and the involvement of Liberian officials, including President King and Vice President Yancy, both of whom resigned after the report came out in early 1930. Postmaster General Ross died under mysterious circumstances in November of 1929.³⁶

The Death of W.T. Francis

The report vindicated the work of William T. Francis, but there was no pleasure in it for him. In January 1929 Francis had requested a sixty-day leave to return to the United States. Request granted: His leave was to begin July 13—but this was not to be. Francis’s meeting with President King turned out to be his last official act. On June 16, 1929, a Sunday, Francis complained of headaches that over the course of the day became unbearable. Monrovia’s only physician, Dr. Rudolph G. Fuszek, a Hungarian, found malaria parasites in his blood. Five days later, with Francis even worse, Dr. Justus B. Rice from the Firestone Company diagnosed yellow fever.

Yellow fever then, as now, had no effective treatment. Most victims (about 85%) recover on their own after a few days of high fever and great discomfort. About half of those who do not recover die of internal bleeding and organ failure. Though Francis appeared to fight off the fever, he remained very ill. Over the next four weeks the legation’s secretary, Clifton R. Wharton, kept up a steady succession of dispatches to the State Department. (Liberia was Wharton’s first posting in what turned out to be a long career. He was the first African American career diplomat, starting in 1924. He went on to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Romania, then Norway, and got his image on a postage stamp in 2006.)³⁷

By June 28 the physicians’ worries focused on Francis’s kidneys. But that evening he developed trouble breathing, diagnosed as a pulmonary edema. Francis fought that off too: “the physicians,”

wrote Wharton, “entertain some hope for his recovery, [though] at best a complete recovery will require a long period, perhaps years.” On July 4, H. Gordon Rule, Great Britain’s *charge d’affaires* in Monrovia cabled the American consulate with congratulations “on the marked improvement in the condition of His Excellency the American Minister.”

The rally did not last. On July 11 Wharton wrote that Francis’s stomach was so distended that a tube had been inserted to relieve pressure. “The intense pain and suffering of the Minister . . . can hardly be described.” Two days later Secretary of State Stimson telegraphed Francis’s personal physician, Dr. Valdo Turner in St. Paul: “Minister’s condition evidently worse . . . little hope for recovery.” He died at 5 a.m. on July 15. Later that day Stimson telegraphed Nellie Francis:

My deepest sympathy goes out to you in your great sorrow. The tragic death of Mr. Francis deprives the United States of one of its most able and trusted public servants. His notable achievement in furthering relations between this country and Liberia will not be soon forgotten and his loss will be most keenly felt by all who were associated with him in the Department and in the Foreign Service.³⁸

Some of this was just diplomatic boilerplate. Francis had served his country well, but his work mostly worsened relations between the two governments. And, of course, he was soon forgotten.

The ship that was to take William and Nellie Francis to the United States for their leave instead carried Nellie Francis and her husband’s body to New York, where friends and the NAACP organized a reception. They then traveled by train to St. Paul for memorial services, on August 11. Former Secretary of State, and 1929 Nobel laureate Frank Kellogg represented the Department of State. Nellie only paused in St. Paul; she had long since decided to move to her original home town of Nashville to live with her grandmother, and take her husband’s body for burial there. The State Department would pay for only one transportation of the body, so she had



The last-known image of W. T. Francis, 1924. From Northwestern Bulletin Appeal, November 1, 1924, p. 1.

to pay for its shipment from St. Paul to Nashville.

Soon after reaching Nashville, she went to Washington, D.C. to meet with Assistant Secretary of State William Castle with a personal plea: money. She had only her husband’s last paycheck, \$412. Alas, Castle told her, the Department could pay only what was authorized by statute. Her only option was a private act of Congress, for which he held out little hope. But she succeeded in 1935 with the help of St. Paul’s Congressman, Melvin Maas. Five years into the Depression, that \$5,000 was probably welcome, though it equaled only about one year of her late husband’s salary.³⁹

Nellie Francis lived another forty years, mostly in Nashville. We know almost nothing of her life there, except that for some years, in her 70s and 80s, she worked as a secretary at Tennessee A&I University. She died in 1969 and is buried next to her husband in Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville’s traditional African American burial ground.

Here is tragedy. W.T. Francis burned with ambition. It got him the diplomatic post he desired. There he did honorable work for his country in dif-

ficult conditions, work that led to major events in the government of Liberia. It also killed him, and though it cost the president and vice president of Liberia their offices, did it really change anything in the country? Nellie Francis, so vibrant, so central to the life of her St. Paul community, left it forever; she lost it and it lost her. The memory of these two remarkable citizens was almost extinguished. One of the few things local history can do is preserve memory. May the lives of Billy and Nellie Francis be remembered.

Postscript:

Francis’s report and the follow-up League of Nations inquiry may have caused some change in Liberia. Certainly by the mid-1930s labor traffic from Liberia to Fernando Po had almost ended. Corruption in the Liberian government did not. The military coup led by Samuel Doe in 1980 took lethal aim at many of the Americo-Liberian families who had run things in Francis’s time and who still ran things then. A civil war followed.⁴⁰

The League of Nations report was published in 1931 and can be found in some libraries and on-line today. Minister Francis’s report has never been published. The story of Liberia’s labor and corruption crisis has been very ably written by Professor I.K. Sundiata of Tufts University in his excellent *Black Scandal, America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929–1936* (1980), though without acknowledgment of the crucial role played by William T. Francis.

Paul D. Nelson is a member of the RCHS Editorial Board and a frequent contributor to this magazine. He published Fredrick L. McGhee: A Life on the Color Line, 1861–1912, the biography of St. Paul’s first African American lawyer, in 2002.

Endnotes

1. Douglas R. Heidenreich, "A Citizen of Fine Spirit," *William Mitchell* (Fall 2000): 2. The 1870 census lists James as age 23, born in North Carolina; and Hattie, 18, born in Kentucky, so probably both had been slaves. U.S. Census 1870, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, Third Ward, p. 125. By 1880 James was gone and Hattie supported William and herself by washing. *U.S. Census: 1870*, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, Third Ward, p. 20. Douglas Heidenreich reports that Francis came to St. Paul in 1888, but he was certainly here by October 1887. *Appeal*, October 15, 1887, p. 4.
2. *Eleventh Census: 1890*. Part I. Vol. 1, Table 6, Population of Cities Having 25,000 Inhabitants (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895), 370. During the same period the population of Minneapolis grew even faster, from 48,887 to 164,738. Paul D. Nelson, *Fredrick L. McGhee, A Life on the Color Line* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2002), 10 (black population.)
3. Heidenreich, 2; *Twin City Star*, December 20, 1910, p. 1.
4. *Appeal*, October 15, 1887, p. 4; May 25, 1889, p. 2; March 21, 1891, p. 3; April 18, 1891, p. 3; December 26, 1891, p. 3; January 2, 1892, p. 3.
5. There appear to be two partial versions of her speech still extant. The *Pioneer Press*, June 12, 1891, p. 4; *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 12, 1891, p. 3; and *Appeal*, June 13, 1891, p. 4 published one version, apparently based on the speech as delivered. The St. Paul High School's 1891 yearbook published a different one, possibly taken from her written essay. St. Paul High School, *Negatives of Ninety-One*, pp. 18–19. Both versions are quoted here.
6. *Appeal*, August 27, 1892, p. 3; Heidenreich, 2. Nellie Griswold and her family came to St. Paul from Nashville in 1885. *Appeal*, April 14, 1906, p. 3.
7. The number of possible citations here would be tiresomely long; a sample follows. A reader wishing to explore the Francis' activities can do so through Brendan Henahan's index of African American newspapers at the Minnesota Historical Society, or in the pages of the *Appeal* and *St. Paul Globe* in the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* service. Some specific citations: *Appeal*, July 3, 1903, p. 3 (they host anniversary party for Dillinghams, and Nellie sings); February 5, 1898, p. 3 (both sing at Masonic Hall); April 23, 1893, p. 3 (Billy sings in Mozart quartet at Irish-American Club); September 17, 1898, p. 3 (Nellie on executive committee of Law Enforcement League, a local civil rights group); November 5, 1898, p. 4 (William danced and acted in the great "Cuba" extravaganza); and December 25, 1897, p. 3 (William wants to be a father).
8. *Appeal*, February 24, 1900, p. 3; February 23, 1901, p. 3 (Francis also got a degree or certificate in osteopathy, but never practiced medicine). William T. Francis's registration card, St. Paul College of Law, William Mitchell College of Law archives (law school entry); *Appeal*, June 18, 1904, p. 3 (graduation); Heidenreich, 2 (chief clerk).
9. *Appeal*, January 6, 1900, p. 3; November 12, 1904, p. 3; May 25, 1907, p. 3; April 18, 1908, p. 3; March 13, 1909 (business trips for NP); October 15, 1904, p. 3; September 23, 1905, p. 4; February 10, 1906, p. 3 (private legal work).
10. For a summary of the various local civil rights organizations of the time, Nelson, 25–38. Nellie Francis was on the executive committee of the Law Enforcement League. *Appeal*, September 17, 1898, p. 3. William Francis served as vice-president (to McGhee) of the local NAAC chapter in 1903, as McGhee was on his way out of the organization. *Appeal*, February 7, 1903, p. 3.
11. *Appeal*, February 24, 1906, p. 3; *Pioneer Press*, March 4, 1906, sec. 2, p. 10; *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 2, 1906, p. 1.
12. *Appeal*, January 11, 1913, p. 3; February 8, 1913, p. 3; February 15, 1913, p. 3; February 22, 1913, p. 3; March 8, 1913, p. 3; May 3, 1913, p. 3; May 24, 1913, p. 3; May 31, 1913, p. 3; June 21, 1913, p. 3; August 2, 1913, p. 3; November 22, 1913, p. 3.
13. Letters to President Taft from Mayor Herbert Keller, May 26, 1911; Minnesota Secretary of State Julius Schmahl, May 31, 1911; Minnesota Attorney General George Simpson, received June 28, 1911; Judge Oscar Hallam, June 5, 1911; Congressman C.B. Miller, June 10, 1911; L.T. Chamberlain, June 24, 1911; telegram from Governor Adolph O. Eberhardt, Congressman W.C. Stephens, and Mayor Keller, May 31, 1911. The author acquired copies of these documents and others by a Freedom of Information Act request to the U.S. Department of State. Some or all of these, including W.T. Francis's report cited below, may be found at the National Archives, Record Group 59, 882.5048/1–120. The author's copies have been donated to the Ramsey County Historical Society, and are referred to here as Francis Papers.
14. *St. Paul Daily News*, October 19, 1915, p. 12; October 20, 1915, pp. 1, 12 (quotation); *Appeal*, November 27, 1915, p. 2 (ordinance); *Pioneer Press*, October 24, 1915, sec. 2, p. 2 (crowds disappointing); October 28, 1915, pp. 7–8 (scenes cut.)
15. *Appeal*, May 6, 1916, p. 2; *St. Paul Daily News*, November 8, 1916, p. 10.
16. Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890–1930* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 60. *Musical America*, 28 (August 3, 1918), 10. The author of the piece, identified only as F.R.B.S., wrote that the Coterie performed on this occasion "ostensibly" for a war benefit, suggesting that its real aim was cultural. Nellie's interest in black folk music may have been raised by her hosting of a reception for the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1916. *Appeal*, May 6, 1916, p. 2.
17. *Appeal*, April 24, 1909, p. 3; June 12, 1909, p. 3. Billy Francis met President Taft in 1911, *Minneapolis Tribune* August 6, 1911, p. 2, and again in 1912. *Appeal*, July 27, 1912, p. 4.
18. *Twin City Star*, July 6, 1912, p. 1 (president of Afro-American Women's Clubs of Minnesota); *Appeal*, August 1, 1914, p. 3 (Wilberforce); *Twin City Star*, July 8, 1916, p. 2 (Baltimore); *Appeal*, October 9, 1920 p. 3 (suffrage training).
19. *Appeal*, March 19, 1921, p. 2 (Harding); April 23, 1921, p. 2; May 7, 1921, p. 3 (anti-lynching law). The real achievement may have been in how seamlessly the bill, House File 785, passed into law. The House sponsors included three farmers (one of them future governor Theodore Christianson), a former Washington County attorney, and one legislator each from St. Paul and Minneapolis. Only three words were changed between introduction and passage, and the final votes were nearly unanimous. John D. Bessler, *Legacy of Violence, Lynch Mobs and Executions in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). The Kentucky statute provided for criminal penalties ranging from prison to death for all members of a lynch mob. George C. Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890–1980*. (Frankfort, Ky.: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 2:83. Legislative history: *Journal of the House of the Forty-second Session of the Legislature of the State of Minnesota* (St. Paul: McGill-Warner, 1921), 507 and 565; *Legislative Manual of the State of Minnesota 1921* (Minneapolis: Harrison & Smith, 1921), 624–42.
20. *Appeal*, July 21, 1917, 9; August 3, 1917, p. 3; August 18, 1917, p. 3 (Public Safety Commission); October 27, 1917, p. 3; November 10, 1917, p. 3; October 5, 1918, p. 3 (loyalty speeches); July 13, 1918, p. 3 (war orator); September 28, 1918, p. 3 and December 7, 1918, p. 3 (Folk Song Coterie sings as patriotic events); *St. Paul Daily News*, December 7, 1918, sec. 2, p. 8 (Nellie recognized for her war efforts).
21. *Appeal*, March 27, 1920, p. 3; August 28, 1920, p. 3; W.T. Francis to President Coolidge, October 30, 1926, Francis Papers.
22. *New York Times*, October 27, 1921, pp. 1, 11; October 28, 1921, p. 4; *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 26, 1922, sec. 2, p. 3. He made this speech at the Saturday Lunch Club, a long-running salon hosted by Minneapolis insurance man, left-wing politician, feminist, and civil rights advocate Sylvanus Stockwell. William P. Everts Jr., *Stockwell of Minneapolis* (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1996), 165–69.
23. Robert H. Ferrell, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, vol. 11, *Frank B. Kellogg/Henry L. Simson* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 1–24.
24. *Pioneer Press*, October 4, 1924, p.1; October 5, 1924, p. 1; November 2, 1924, p. 1; *St. Paul Dispatch*, November 15, 1924, p. 1; *St. Paul Daily News*, December 7, 1924, sec. 2, p. 1. *1925 St. Paul City Directory*, 382 and 455 (Francises at 2092 Sargent); *1926 St. Paul City Directory*, 170; 468 (Francises at 2092); *1927 St. Paul City Directory*, 429 (Francises at 2092).
25. W.T. Francis to President Coolidge, October 30, 1926, Francis Papers.
26. William C. Matthews to Coolidge, November 8, 1926; C.A. Campbell to Frank Kellogg, December 31, 1926; Mary McLeod Bethune to Coolidge, January 4, 1927, all in Francis Papers.
27. Linda Heywood, Allison Blakely, Charles Stith, and Joshua Yesowitz, eds., *African Americans in U.S. Foreign Policy: From the Era of Frederick Douglass to the Age of Obama* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 16 (Carter).
28. Thomas D. Schall to Coolidge, June 13, 1927; William C. Matthews to Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew, April 25, 1927; Emmett Scott to Frank Kellogg, June 16, 1927, Francis Papers.
29. *New York Times*, January 13, 1927 p. 10.
30. Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945–1969* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 45 (Negro posts). Curtis died in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where he had gone for medical treatment for peritonitis contracted in Monrovia. Monrovia then had no hospital and at most one physician.
31. Richard P. Strong, ed., *The African Republic of Liberia and the Belgian Congo* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 3–40 (descriptions of Monrovia). Henry Fenwick Reeve, *The Black Republic To-day. . . . with an Introduction by Sir Alfred Sharpe*. (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1923), 19 and 20 (Sharpe quotations); 154–55 (Reeve citation). This is a book William Francis may have read. We might have known what the Francis thought and felt. Nellie Francis lived until 1969. Her memories died with her. Clifton Wharton, the career foreign service officer stationed in Monrovia during William Francis's tenure lived until 1990. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945–1969* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 24–25, 46–47, 86–87, 108–109, 125, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/wharton-clifton-reginald>, accessed December 24, 2015.
32. Harvey S. Firestone and Samuel Crowther, *Men and Rubber: The Story of Business* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 259–65.
33. All quotations and almost all facts reported in this section come from the Memorandum, W.T. Francis to Assistant Secretary of State William R. Castle, Francis papers; additional facts from Ibrahim K. Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neoslavery, The Bight of Biafra and Fernando Po in the Era of Abolition, 1827–1930* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 141–45. "Sad Song of the Wedabo Women" from *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labor in the Republic of Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 37.
34. Reeve, 121–26, 131.
35. James Ciment. *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 180.
36. Ibrahim K. Sundiata, *Black Scandal, America and the Liberian Labor Crisis, 1929–1936* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980), 29, 53.
37. *New York Times*, May 17, 1925, p. 38 (Wharton's posting to Liberia).
38. Dispatch, Clifton Wharton to Secretary of State, July 11, 1929; Telegram, Secretary of State to Valdo Turner, July 13, 1929; Press Release by Secretary of State, July 15, 1929, Francis Papers.
39. Heidenreich, 6.
40. Ciment, 240–56.