

**Winter 2018**

Volume 52, Number 4

*“Another Siberia, Unfit for Human Habitation?”*  
St. Paul’s Super Ice Palaces, 1886, 1887, and 1888

*Robert A. Olsen, page 3*



An artist's depiction of the storming the of 1888 Ice Palace. Note the clouds of smoke from burning sulfur fires that caused the palace to glow in multiple colors.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 52, Number 4

Winter 2018

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**

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### A Message from the Editorial Board

This year’s lovely Winter Carnival Ice Palace in Rice Park forms a good backdrop for TV shots during the Super Bowl, but Bob Olsen’s article in our Winter issue tells us about the original, huge ice palaces of the 1880s. Built to refute East Coast claims that St. Paul was “another Siberia, unfit for human habitation,” they towered high above Central Park (the current site of the Centennial parking ramp) and hosted the annual overthrow of King Boreas by the Vulcans. The 1888 structure even sported a labyrinth, which later formed the inspiration for F. Scott Fitzgerald’s story, “The Ice Palace.” Victoria Hopwood also shares with us her story of growing up in St. Paul’s Rondo and Merriam Park neighborhoods. Because her father held a good job as a waiter on the Great Northern’s Empire Builder, she spent her youth in a house that was filled with books and music. It also allowed some great vacations to see scenery of the American West! Finally, as a reminder, we now have all back issues of our history magazine (beginning in 1964) available at no cost online at the RCHS website, [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com), for research and recreational reading. This has been the result of hard work by staff and forms part of the Society’s updated website to give you even better access to our local history.

*Anne Cowie*  
Chair, Editorial Board

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## Growing Up in St. Paul

### Fifteen Minutes with My Dad: Reginald L. Hopwood

Victoria Hopwood

**I**f you want to marry well, marry a railroad man!" That is the advice my grandmother, Mary Magdalene Chambers Bradley Hamilton, gave my mother as a young woman growing up in the late 1930s. After all, grandmother married and divorced a railroad man, Charles Bradley, my maternal grandfather who was a waiter on the Great Northern's Empire Builder. Grandmother later remarried and her second husband, Wade Hamilton, my step-grandfather, was a porter for Great Northern. By marrying a railroad man, a wife could count on her husband to bring home a paycheck from steady employment and also receive the benefit of free rail travel. Not a bad job for many black men who found themselves locked out of employment from many professions and labor trades due to racism. Mom did marry a railroad man and because of my dad's employment (and my mother's) we were a middle-class black family living in the St. Paul community known as Rondo. As a daughter of a railroad worker, this is my father's story.

#### Prelude

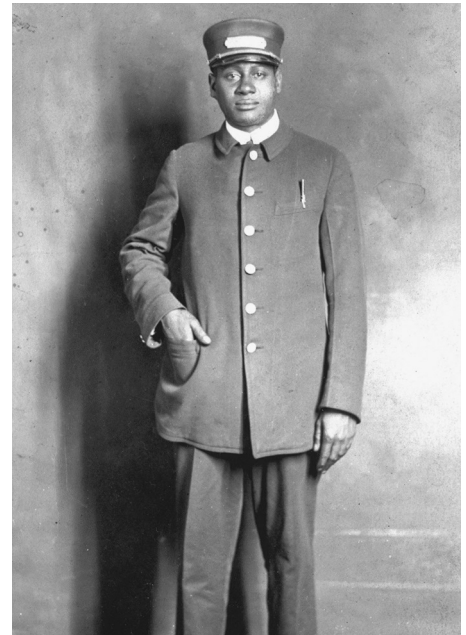
In the fall of 2017, I spent countless hours assisting my daughter with her college applications, reviewing and editing her essays, entering financial information into the computer, and arguing with her about minor improvements to her essays. This task tested the boundaries of our mother-daughter relationship!

My daughter, Hannah, came to me one night and asked that I proofread another essay response before she hit the enter button and sent her submission off into cyberspace. I was happy to oblige and gave her the conditions of my acceptance as her editor—there would be no eye rolling or heavy sighs at any of my suggested edits. The essay question that she answered was: "Name someone, past or living, that you would like to spend 15 minutes with and explain why."

I just knew she was going to list a family member, after all our family had some pretty major accomplishments she could write about that would make for interesting reading. For starters, there is me, Mom! My life was jammed packed full of interesting globe-trotting adven-

tures that were entertaining. If not me, she could have selected tales of her Uncle Gregory (a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a track athlete from St. Paul Central); or her stepfather (a Vietnam combat veteran with a Purple Heart; past winner on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour; a jazz vocalist who had opened or performed with Carmen McCrae, Lou Rawls, Dyke and the Blazers, to name a few); or her maternal grandfather (a member of the Kansas City Monarchs Negro Leagues baseball team; a World War II veteran who had served in George S. Patton's Third Army; and an employee of the Great Northern Railroad); or Aunt Tami (a former St. Paul cop and the fourth black woman to join the force); or Aunt Katherine, affectionately known by family members as Grizzly Adams (she built her own home on ten acres in Bruno, Minn., population 69, back in the 1980s and lived there until her death in 2010). Our family provided a wealth of material (most of it suitable for print) and characters whose lives made interesting stories.

Hannah had the option of writing about the military and the involvement of the men in our family who served in either



Wade H. Hamilton, my step-grandfather, married my grandmother in the fall of 1957 and their marriage lasted until his death in February 1974. Wade was a Pullman porter, mostly likely on the Northern Pacific Railway. This photo is from about 1920. Kregel Photo Parlors. Mary Hamilton Family Collection at the Minnesota Historical Society. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.

World War II or Vietnam. She could have written about our family's involvement in music, civil rights, and/or business. Lastly, there was her Uncle Jon (a Cold War veteran and the first black hockey player for both Macalester-Groveland and Merriam Park recreation leagues and St. Paul Central High School—he was a great skater).

I couldn't wait to see which family member she chose to write about. I was feeling a little cocky and preparing myself to see my name in print and ready to edit my accomplishments as written by my doting daughter. My eyes began moving from left to right across the computer



*My father, Reginald Hopwood, in his Kansas City Monarchs uniform. When this photo was taken in April 1928, he was a left fielder. He loved the game of baseball, but I remember him talking about the lead owner of the Minnesota Twins from 1955 to 1984, Calvin Griffith, and how he had moved the Washington Senators to Minnesota in 1961 because Griffith thought the black people in the nation's capital didn't support his team. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood. A copy of this photo is in the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Mo.*

screen and I was getting more excited by each passing word until I saw the answer to the question when the name Gustav Holst jumped off the screen.

**Gustav Holst!** I knew who he was, but I wasn't sure he was worthy of such an honor. It was I, not Hannah, who was guilty of eye-rolling and sighs. I didn't agree with her choice, but it got me thinking. I quickly reminded myself that this was Hannah's essay question to answer and not mine—I had to stand down.

Gustav Holst (1874–1934) was an English composer whom Hannah first learned about from her days playing classical violin in the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony, better known by their acronym, GTCYS (pronounced GIT SEEZ).<sup>1</sup> Holst wrote many classical pieces but his most famous piece was, *The Planets* (Op. 32), a seven-movement orchestral piece. The seven movements are named after each of the planets in

our solar system and its corresponding astrological character: Mars (the Bringer of War), Venus (the Bringer of Peace), Mercury (the Winged Messenger), Jupiter (the Bringer of Jollity), Saturn (the Bringer of Old Age), Uranus (the Magician), and Neptune (the Mystic).<sup>2</sup>

Of the seven movements, Hannah told me that she loves “Jupiter” because the music touches her in a special way. She went on to tell me that she chose Holst because she wanted to talk to him about his motivation for writing the piece and how he created the melodic lines of “Jupiter,” a haunting melody that is hypnotic—what moved or inspired him? How long did it take him to write this piece? These are the questions that Hannah wanted answered.

I am a musician and have studied and played the string bass in both classical and jazz genres. As a musician, I understand how a piece of music can touch your soul and for that reason, I could appreciate Hannah's answer. Rational analysis of this choice aside, I was still a little miffed that none of my family members made the cut. Then I asked myself to answer the same question: who would I like to spend fifteen minutes with? Would it be Oscar Pettiford, a world renowned jazz bassist who was born and raised in St. Paul, a St. Paul Central graduate (I am an alumna), and someone who went on to play with Duke Ellington?<sup>3</sup> Would it be a historical or religious figure? No! My choice would be Reginald Lanier Hopwood, my father. Why?

Why would I want to get fifteen minutes back with my Dad? There were no outstanding issues between us. There were no hurtful words that required absolution. There were no events that needed to be litigated; only questions that I did not ask, stories that needed to be finished, and grandchildren I wanted him to meet. I would also use my fifteen minutes to tell my Dad of my accomplishments (and those of my siblings) that had come from his and Mom's willingness to work hard to establish and maintain a middle-class family structure—even after the fall of Rondo by the construction of Interstate 94.<sup>4</sup>

I cherish the information that I do have and will continue to research to fill

in the blanks, but more importantly, my mission is to ensure that I safeguard the information and memories to share with my children, future grandchildren, extended family, and for the public record. In the spirit of Erma Bombeck, I bring you my social construction of reality growing up during the turbulent 1960s and '70s in a middle-class existence in the Rondo community of St. Paul, the child of a nurse and a railroad worker. I cannot tell the story of my father without first telling the story of my mother.

### **The Nurse**

My mother, Lorraine P. (Bradley) Hopwood, was a northern girl born and raised in St. Paul. I believe my mother is a fifth-generation Minnesotan and our family dates back to the 1840s. This was pretty incredible for a local black family to trace their roots to the Territorial years (remember that Minnesota was granted statehood in 1858). Many of my white friends cannot make a comparable claim. As a child, and even into adulthood, I would use this fact as a retort when a racist would yell at me to “go back to Africa.” My mother was always supplying us kids with one-liners to use in school or while we were out in a different neighborhood or if we crossed paths with someone who bothered us because of the color of our skin. Back in the day, this was a common occurrence. Sadly, as a grown adult, I can honestly say that the racist taunts have not slowed down as much as I would have hoped and the Internet provides cover for many of these cowards.

As a young girl, I marveled at my mother's good looks. She was tall with a thin waistline, long beautiful legs, and elongated fingers that a hand model would envy. She had jet-black, straight hair and flawless skin tone. She spoke slowly and effortlessly and would enunciate every word from her vast vocabulary. She was a walking encyclopedia, dictionary, thesaurus, and Miss Manners all rolled into one—unique!

No wonder my father fell in love with her. A question that I did ask my Dad as a young girl was to describe when he fell in love with Mom. His reply was that she was so beautiful it was love at first

sight. His answer tickled my spirit and made me feel good inside. My mother was the *Beauty* to my father's *Beast*. My use of the term "beast" is not meant to be pejorative or hurtful. As a young girl, I saw my Dad as "the beast" because of the stark difference in my parents' ages, which also meant a difference in their physical appearance. My mother was twenty-five years his junior. I saw her youthfulness, athleticism, and beauty juxtaposed against my father's age; his gray hair and cat-frame eyeglasses made him appear even older than he was.

Both of my parents were older than the parents of my contemporaries, but my mother carried it well. Yes, my Dad was certainly much older than any of my friends' fathers and for a young elementary school-age-girl, I must admit that I was embarrassed by his age. Despite my father's age, I can say that my Dad was in great physical shape until lung cancer ravaged his body a year-and-a-half before his death in 1984. A former athlete, he lived his entire life without an ounce of fat on his body. Perhaps that is why he was able to maintain his railroad job into his seventies.

If mom was "the beauty," she was also the brains of the family, disciplinarian, planner of events, and keeper of the money. After all, Dad was on the road for consecutive days, off for a few days, and then repeated the cycle. He was gone more than he was at home. Most railroad wives were like single moms because the men were gone for a good period of time and the women had to tend to household and maintenance duties. Father would mow the grass, shovel snow, fix the car, and perform other duties when he was home off the road, but if those things needed tending to in his absence, mom did them. They couldn't wait for his return.

My mother was full of pearls of wisdom and expressions. One of those was that there are two things that made a family rich: *books* and *music*. As a child, I couldn't believe that was all it took to be considered rich. I would ask my mother if the people who lived in the big houses on Summit Avenue were considered rich if they didn't have books and music but lived in a huge house. Her reply was al-



*My current band, Everchanging Mood. I still play the same string bass that my mother purchased for me at B Sharp Music back in the early 1970s. I perform on a Kay bass with a blonde finish. From the left: Victoria Hopwood; Tommy Robinson, my husband, our vocalist; Rick "Sticks" Meyer, drummer; Melissa Stout, sax and flute; and Mjyke Nelson, guitar and vocalist. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

ways the same: only a home filled with books, music, and musical instruments meant you were rich. It took us children a few years to figure this out.

What she was telling us is that no one can take away anything that you have read and knowledge is power. Also, playing an instrument requires a skill that will serve you over your lifetime; the reading of music notation was just another form of reading and that we should know and appreciate all forms of music (she meant classical and jazz). She insisted that we know the classical warhorses (Tchaikovsky, Barber, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Bach, Vivaldi, Beethoven, Mozart, and others). You can imagine what happened when Dad came through the door with such 45s or albums (anyone under the age of 40 will need to Google these two terms) as "Walking After Midnight" by Patsy Cline, "Who's Making Love to Your Old Lady" by Johnnie Taylor, and "Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows" by Lesley Gore. Both Mom and Dad had eclectic tastes, but they agreed on the importance of listening to jazz; the true American art form.

My mother's idea of a good time was

to sit down and read a colossal book like *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (she actually read this book while on vacation riding the train to Seattle) and *War and Peace*. She enjoyed working the newspaper crossword puzzle, playing cribbage, and reading history books. Unlike some of the families in our neighborhood, we always had the latest set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. We also had a first edition bound color set of the Walt Disney Collection and many other wonderful books. In 1967, Santa Claus brought us a beautiful piano and that is when "we got rich"! Now, we had books, music, and an instrument. More musical instruments followed.

Under my mother's rule, it became a requirement that we learn piano and at least one other instrument. My younger brother and sister, Jon and Tami, learned violin and Tami also went on to learn drums. By the end of sixth grade, I started on the string bass and have continued to play it until this day. In junior and senior high school, I was the only bassist in class who owned her own instrument. All thanks to my mother who made the purchase from B Sharp music

in 1971 for \$300, which was quite an expensive purchase at the time. I selected a blonde Kay bass just like the one used by the bassist in Bill Haley and His Comets of rock and roll fame. I named my bass “Oscar” after the great bassist from St. Paul, Oscar Pettiford.

My mother was great with managing her money and Dad’s (as long as he brought home his paycheck or tips from his job without making a detour to try his hand at the roll of the dice and arrive home nearly emptied handed, which happened on occasion). Her financial management skills allowed her (and my father) to provide us with many opportunities that most white children did not get to realize and while that was great, sometimes things did not turn out so well just because we had the money.

A case in point is the experience of my sister, Tamara, an excellent gymnast. My mother wanted to help Tami realize her gymnastic potential; so she found a top-notch program in Edina at a studio that was located on France Avenue. Tami was enrolled the fall of 1970 or ’71. Despite her talent and our ability to pay the tuition, the parents and the owners did not like the fact that Tami was in the school

and was also one of the better gymnasts in the program. The owners did not pay too much attention to Tami or provide her with the same instructional opportunities as the other participants; she was kind of pushed off to the side. My mother’s assessment was they thought that if they froze her out, she would get frustrated and leave the studio. When that didn’t happen after about five months, the owners asked us to leave because some of the other parents were upset with our presence at the school.

Another pearl of wisdom from Mom regarding this situation and others like it was that if keeping up with the Joneses and the Joneses were black, there would be hell to pay from the white families who were doing the keeping up. She was right! Jealousy is a powerful emotion and when it is triggered out of bigotry or racism, it is extremely hurtful and can be dangerous. Some of the racism we experienced left lasting impressions and brought changes to our lives. Mother’s solution to this situation was to teach Tami as much about gymnastics as she could (almost like Richard Williams teaching tennis to his daughters, Venus

and Serena) until Tami reached high school and joined the team.

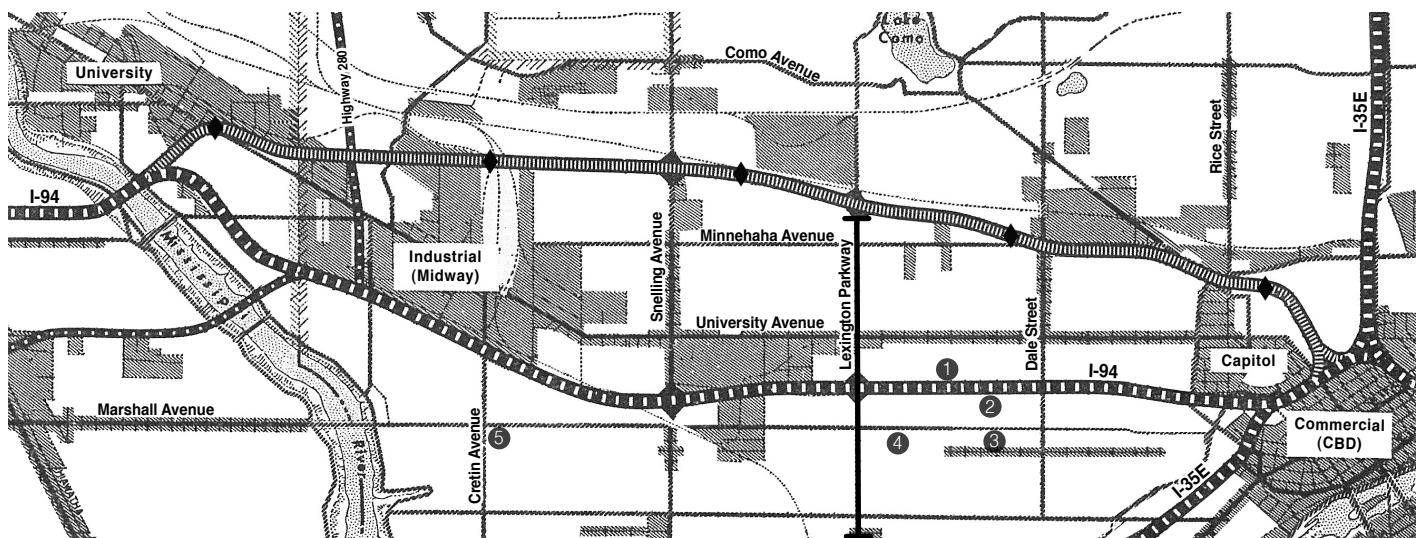
Remember what I said earlier about railroad wives left to make decisions, run the household, and take action as their husbands were out on the road? My mother made a major decision when Dad was out on the road during May of 1970. She decided to move and purchased our second home without telling Dad. She told Dad after the purchase and, as usual, he was fine that she made that decision. He trusted her to make family decisions without him—that wasn’t the problem. It was the location of the new house that presented a problem!

Until 1970, I lived my life in the Rondo neighborhood. My parents certainly made enough money for us to live just about anywhere we wished; however, we were not free to move to any neighborhood. Due to redlining, the practice of some banks, insurance companies, real estate agents, and other parties to home sales drawing boundaries around neighborhoods to stop blacks from purchasing homes outside of a racially designated area, we had to move within the Rondo boundary.<sup>5</sup>

Redlining was just as prevalent in the

— The western edge of the red line was at Lexington Parkway, which ran north to south.

◆ Herrold’s proposed route with I-94 just to the south.



This map shows the northern route for I-94 between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul that George Herrold, a city planner for the City of Saint Paul, proposed after World War II. That route was rejected and the current highway was constructed in the 1960s. Building I-94 between the two cities destroyed about 600 homes and 30 businesses in the predominantly black neighborhood known as Rondo. The western edge of the red line for housing in Rondo was at Lexington Parkway. The homes where I have lived are indicated with ① 895 St. Anthony Avenue (I was born in this house); ② 721 Carroll Avenue; ③ 714 Dayton Avenue; ④ 1009 Dayton Avenue (my favorite home); and ⑤ 2146 Marshall Avenue. The base map is reprinted with modifications from Herrold’s Route (<https://streets.mn/2013/09/10/the-birth-of-a-metro-highway-interstate-94/>).

North as it was in the South. My mother wanted to move further west, but we still had to live within the red-line district or boundary. Since we were limited in how far west we could move, my mother found a home that she liked at 1009 Dayton Avenue for a purchase price of \$13,000 in June 1964. Since my father had not bought a home after returning from World War II, my mother seized the opportunity to have him use his GI Bill benefit to finance the purchase of the home. We lived at this home for six years and I have the fondest memories of my neighbors, school, attending church at St. Peter Claver, and playing at Oxford playground. As a kid, there were no worries, just laughter and happiness!

My mother, on the other hand, had one big worry that impelled our move from Rondo: the influx of blacks moving to Minnesota from the South who did not sound like us. With the continuance of the great migration to Rondo, my mother felt that it was time to move out of the neighborhood and live around more sophisticated folks, black or white—it didn't matter as long as they talked like her. Mom thought that moving further west would be easy because by this time the 1968 Fair Housing Act had become law—or so she thought!

Just because a bill is passed and signed into law doesn't mean that those who have been in charge change their behavior or attitudes overnight. Nevertheless two years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, mother decided to purchase a home that was well across what was once the red line—we were movin' on up! Westward we went to 2146 Marshall Avenue in the Merriam/Desnoyer Park area; we were kitty-corner from Town and Country Golf Course (the oldest country club in Minnesota) and surrounded by a sea of white people who did not want us in their neighborhood.<sup>6</sup>

Mom didn't use a real estate agent for the purchase; she used her personal attorney, who coincidentally, lived a short drive south of what would be our new home. They showed up for the closing and the seller told his agent, in front of the group, that he refused to sell his home to a nigger.

My mother's attorney, who was Neale



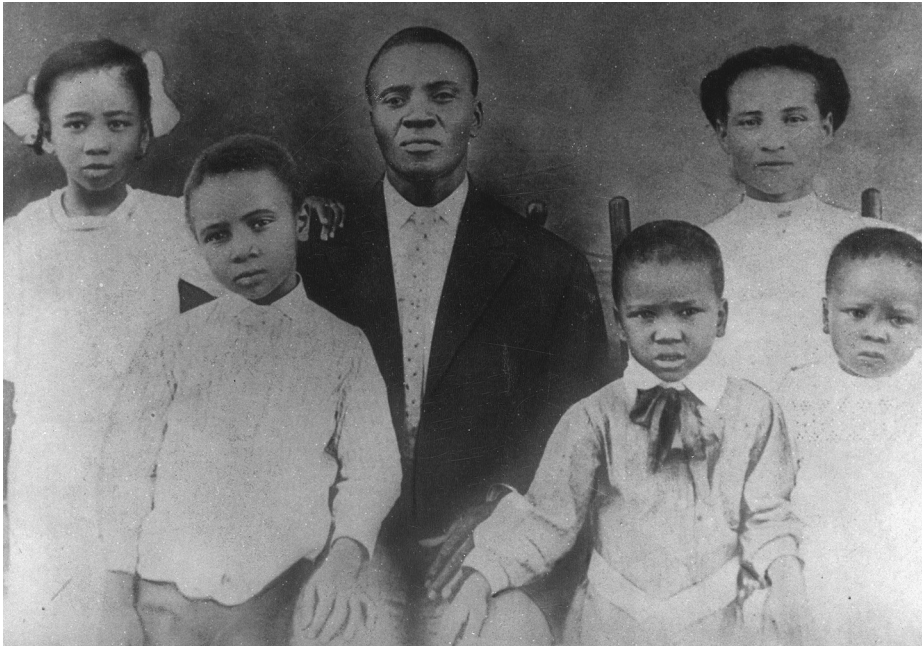
*The Hopwood home on Marshall Avenue. When my family moved here in 1970, we were the only black people in the neighborhood. Someone painted "KKK" on our garage, but my mother paid no attention to it. A white neighbor offered to paint the garage, but Mother refused the offer because it would be a constant reminder to all who drove by. Some years later, she did repaint the garage. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

Stuart Radsom, a partner in the St. Paul law firm of Stacker, Silverstein, Burke and Radsom, without saying one word, rose from the table. He walked over to my mother and put his hand on her chair to slide it back allowing her to stand and then took her by her arm to lead her to the door. Like a gentlemen, he opened the door for my mother and then he turned around and said to the owner, "As you wish. You can be certain that I will tie up the sale of your home in court for as long as I can and you will be stuck paying two mortgages. Good Day!" My mother later told us that by the time she and her attorney had taken two steps, the owner acquiesced. They returned to the table, signed the documents, and the house was hers.

My Mom would tell this story many times over the years. I remember meeting her attorney only once. I always felt a level of satisfaction that a man, this white man, defended my mother. We moved into this beautiful home in a beautiful neighborhood with newly purchased beautiful furniture. My memories of growing up at 1009 Dayton were full of joy, freedom, security, inclusion, and happiness. My memories of growing up at 2146 Marshall were not so happy, at least for the first several years. It's time to talk about my Dad.

### **The Railroad Worker**

My father was born in Marlon, Texas, on February 5, 1900 (he was 59 years old when I was born). He made his way to



*A photo of Reginald Hopwood's family in about 1905. Left to right, Johnnie Mae (my aunt); Hawthorne (my uncle); Hopwood (my grandfather); Reginald Hopwood (my father); Mamie Hopwood (my grandmother); R.D. Hopwood (my uncle). Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

Minnesota playing baseball in the Negro Leagues and was a frequent visitor, playing at the old Lexington Ballpark. He played right field for the Kansas City Monarchs, arguably one of the best baseball teams of all time. He counted Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and other baseball players of that era among his friends. This is where those fifteen minutes would come in handy so that I could ask my Dad to name all of his baseball friends or tell him that his grandson, Harrison, was an outstanding baseball player who truly loved this game. I could also tell Dad that Harrison shares his middle name, Lanier (not until after my father's death did I learn Dad's middle name after receiving some legal documents).

I'm sure that he talked about these men but as a young girl these names did not mean anything to me. In 1982, my brother, Jon, remembers our Dad getting ready to head out the door with a small duffel bag; so he asked Dad where he was going. My father's reply was that he was attending the funeral of a friend in Kansas City and Jon asked him who? To which he replied, "Someone I played ball with named Satchel Paige."

At the time of Satchel Paige's funeral, my father still owned a home in Kansas

City, Kansas. My father bought the home with his brother Ralph (known as RD) sometime back in the mid- to late-1930s. It worked out for both of the bachelors; Dad was traveling the country playing for either the Monarchs or barnstorming and RD was a jazz pianist who was traveling the country playing gigs. They both had a home waiting for them when they came off the road. After RD passed away, my father was the sole owner and he kept the house until his death.

I remember my father telling me that he left the most racist state in America—Texas!<sup>7</sup> He left Texas as a 13-year-old and hit the road after the death of his own parents; the year was 1913. After their deaths, the authorities took Dad's youngest sister, Ezelma, who was six or seven years old and placed her in a colored orphanage in Oklahoma. This didn't sit well with my father and his older brother, Hawthorne. The two of them devised and executed a plan to travel to Oklahoma and extract their sister from the orphanage, and they did it! Once they had her, they hustled back to Texas to collect their remaining siblings and then the five Hopwoods hightailed it to California. California would become their newly adopted state and the Hopwoods settled

there, except for two: RD and Dad. I don't know what my father did between the ages of 13 to 26 and 35 to the start of World War II. Again, this is where those 15 minutes would come in handy!

I had a great relationship with my father, but it wasn't until after his death on July 4, 1984 (at the age of 84 years) that I came to realize what an exciting, colorful, and historic life he led. As I began searching my memory after his death, I started stringing together phrases, events, names, and places I had heard him mention throughout my life—General George S. Patton, fighting Germans, France, Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, Roy Campanella, Billie Holiday, and more. His life had touched all of these people, places, and things. How I wish I knew the details! Throughout my adult life, I would come into contact with men my father had worked with and they would talk about my Dad in glowing terms and provide some context regarding his professional and personal relationships. I was grateful for any information I received.

I like to think of my father's life in terms of a three-act play:

**Act One** playing professional baseball for the Kansas City Monarchs;

**Act Two** enlisting to fight in World War II; and

**Act Three** working on the Empire Builder.

It is Act Three that is my focus of this story.

## **Cadenza**

My father was employed by the Great Northern Railway as a waiter for more than thirty years. He had so much seniority that he kept working even after the collapse of passenger rail service in the 1960s. He moved to Amtrak after the government takeover in 1971 and retired only in 1974.

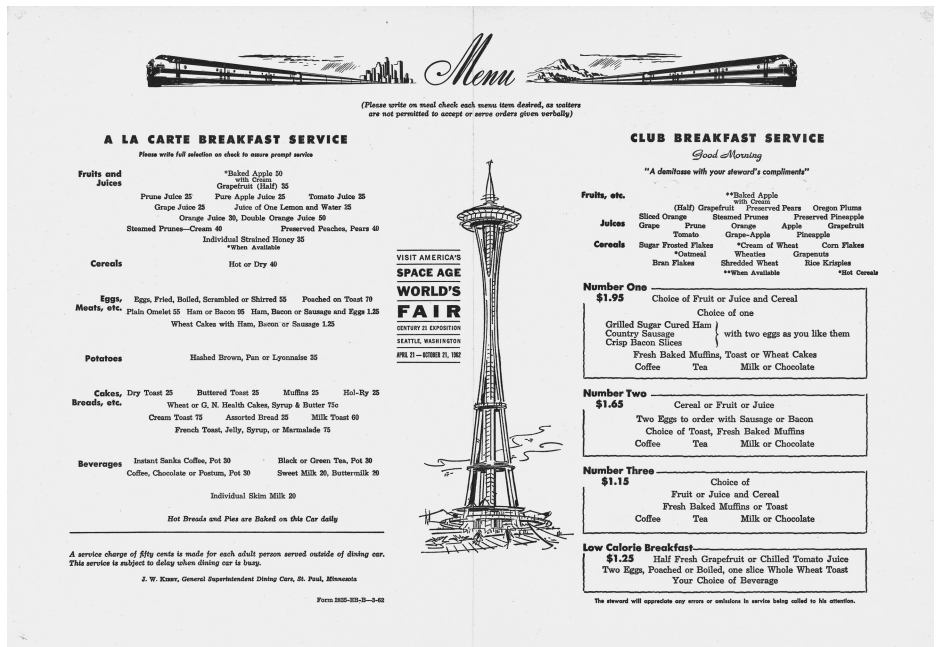
"Running the rails" is a term used to describe the men who worked on the trains in the capacity of porters, waiters, and cooks. To be historically accurate, black women also ran the rails by providing maid service to passengers and watching children; however, this employment service was phased out before I ever started running the rails with Dad on the Empire Builder. The Great Northern



Railway had two passenger trains that provided service from Chicago's Union Station to the Pacific Northwest stopping at various cities before reaching one of two destinations: Seattle or Portland.

My mother and older siblings ran the rails with Dad in the 1950s on the Western Star taking the route from St. Paul all the way to Portland and then transferring to a train that allowed them to reach their final destination of Los Angeles. On one particular trip they stopped in Great Falls, Montana, to visit Dad's brother, RD, who was playing jazz piano in a hotel there. How I wish I could have met my uncle. Music ran through our DNA. My younger siblings and I never rode the Western Star. All of our train adventures were made riding the rails of the Empire Builder and the Winnipeg Limited.

Train service through the Rocky Mountains will take the traveler through virgin, pristine environments that humans can only reach via train travel; untouched by the automobile. Long before my first train ride, I remember my mother passionately describing her experience watching the most incredible sunsets while riding the train. She described traveling through the Rocky Mountains during the summer months and watching as the sun began descending behind a



In 1962 the dining car menu on the Empire Builder prominently featured the Space Needle, the most visible landmark associated with the World's Fair that year in Seattle. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.

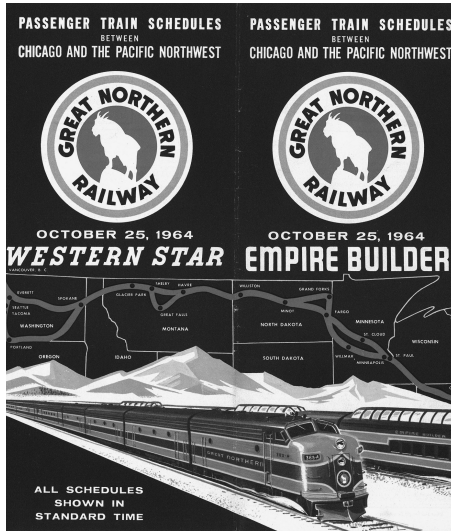
mountain peak while the moon began ascending over another mountain and at some point the two were perfectly positioned in the sky with brilliant colors stretching from East to West. Mother verbally painted a picture that we finally realized during one of our train adventures; this is a sight that most people will never experience in their lifetime—what a beautiful benefit!

Since Dad ran the rails, all of our extended family vacations were by train. We would travel to Seattle for our summer vacations, which lasted a month. Sometimes after we returned home, we would travel to Winnipeg in August to go school shopping. My parents worked out a pretty good system. When it was time for Dad to go to work, he boarded the train in St. Paul and made his way to Chicago, the origination point for the Empire Builder. When the train pulled back into St. Paul's Union Depot approximately twenty-four hours later, our family would board and that would be the start of our summer adventure in Seattle.

Once we reached Seattle, we checked into the same hotel that the train crew used and remained there for a month as we toured the city visiting landmarks and taking the ferry out to Bainbridge Island

and other adventures. Dad worked out some financial deal so that we would get the crew rate, making it affordable to stay for a month. Dad would have his layover and then work his way back to Minnesota and then come back to Seattle on his next run and bring us vacation money to continue our stay. I loved our vacations and the sense of freedom and adventure that our mother created.

Our grandparents usually drove us to the train station or we called for a Yellow Cab. Dad supplemented his train income by driving for Yellow Cab and he continued to drive into his late seventies, even after his railroad retirement. Many railroad men from our neighborhood during this period supplemented their train income by working second jobs on their days off. They were employed as barbers, caterers, shoeshine men, taxi drivers, and other professions. My maternal grandfather, Charles Bradley Jr., supplemented his train income working as a barber. The combination of Dad's railroad check, tips earned in the dining car, employment by Yellow Cab, and his winnings in the gambling car led me to believe that he always had money; he spent lavishly on us and anyone else who may have been down on their luck. I often wonder if



The cover of the 1964 timetable for the Great Northern's passenger trains between Chicago and Portland and Seattle, which included the Empire Builder (Chicago to Seattle via St. Paul) and the Western Star (Chicago to Portland and Seattle). Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.



*In 2012 I was one of several MnDOT employees who created a Black History Month program at the Minnesota History Center. Here I'm standing next to Gary R. Nelson, a retired Great Northern engineer who had worked on the Empire Builder and collaborated with us on the program, and a life-size cutout of my grandfather, Hamilton, at the Minnesota History Center in February. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

his spending on us children was his way of trying to make up for being gone so much of the time.

The combination of my parents' income and the benefit of train travel provided our family with many unique opportunities. My sister and I remember opening Christmas gifts one year and finding black dolls; pajamas and bed sheets that had black characters printed on the fabric; we received books that contained black characters. We had toys and presents that looked like us. We had always had these items, but they were white not black.

In St. Paul during the 1960s and '70s, the department stores did not carry ethnic toys and if they did, there were few available. My parents would ride the train to Chicago and purchase products that they could not find in the Twin Cities. Since Chicago had a much larger black population, there were Afro-centric toys, clothing, books, and hair products. These items were a pleasant surprise.

Dad's job at Yellow Cab brought his children freedom. Dad established an account whereby we could call a cab and then sign for it and the charges would be

settled by Dad at the end of his pay period. He set this up to be used for emergencies like missing the school bus or going to church if Mom didn't drive us. You can imagine his surprise when he (and Mom) found out that my sister and I were using the cab to go to the Dairy Queen on Lexington Parkway, to Sandy's Hamburger joint for lunch, and other places.

Dad didn't say a word to us or display any anger after he received the cab bill. He would run to Mom and yell her name in a George Jetson sort of way and say to her, "Do you know what the kids did?" Mom would ask him to explain the situation and then she would say, "What did you expect?" My younger siblings and I agree that it was a good thing our parents were older, mellow, in control, and not moved by too much of our mischief. For the most part, we always went unscathed as a result of our actions. Our childhood was one big sitcom!

From the time our family boarded the Empire Builder until we reached our destination, we were treated like royalty. The entire train crew knew we were Hoppy's family and they took excellent

care of us. There was the familiarity of the black crew members we knew from Rondo and we saw in our neighborhood stores or whose children attended school with us. Then there were the white crew members who were friends with Dad who lived outside of our neighborhood. I don't think we ever had the same crew twice when we were on vacation, but I do fondly remember Smithy, Hollywood, and Ermantinger.

No crew member was called by their proper given name. Everyone had a nickname that suited them based on their behavior, surname, hobby, physical appearance, etc. Hoppy was the name my father was called back in his baseball playing days. Smithy was a cook and perhaps his surname was Smith or Smithson. Hollywood was a waiter and his nickname was well deserved—he was the second coming of Tab Hunter or Paul Newman and all the women went crazy over his good looks. Ermantinger's crew position escapes me and I figured Ermantinger was his last name. My father considered Smithy and Ermantinger among his close friends; Hollywood was too young to be included in this group, but my Dad liked him because he was confident and "had gumption."

Race relations in America during the 1960s were turbulent. As a child growing up during this period, I remember three major events that rocked my parents' world: the assassinations of JFK, MLK, and Bobby! Today I'm not sure if my memories are of the actual events or if what I really remember is the reaction of my parents when they learned of the assassinations. Their subsequent display of fear and anger took hold of them for an extended period of time.

I didn't feel any better after my grandparents showed up at our house and the conversation turned to a man from Texas called LBJ. Everyone in the living room was glued to the television and when the newsmen announced that President Kennedy was dead, there were tears. As a small child, I thought it strange to see my grandparents, mother, and other adults crying and fearful. Everyone in the room expressed concern for the blacks in the country because a bad man from Texas was taking over. In hindsight,



*Riding the Empire Builder to Seattle while on a Hopwood family vacation. Our friend, Hollywood, is on the left while my brother, Jon, is being held by the cook Smithy. This photo was taken between 1968 and 1970. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

LBJ turned out to be a champion of civil rights and later signed major legislation that gave legal force to these rights.

The real test of race relations came with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Our white neighbors, priest, teachers, and my parents' coworkers were all drawn into a conversation centered on race, hope, and despair. My father talked about hope. He imagined a better future for his children and also talked about how we would not have to face prejudice and how prejudice would go away. He talked so much about prejudice that as a nine year old, I thought he was talking about a big, bad, person named Prejudice. I thought he was using a proper noun. Who is Prejudice? What I remember about this period was the level of intensity surrounding us from everywhere, but the events that year did not stop us from running the rails with our Dad. 1968 was a hell of a year!

Dad's good friend and crew member, Ermantinger, lived in Forest Lake, north of St. Paul. Ermantinger would invite our family out for Sunday dinner several times over the course of the summer. It seemed as though it took us an entire day to drive from our home in Rondo to Forest Lake. Ermantinger had a nice,



*The family in the dining car, left to right, Tami Hopwood (seated on lap of an unidentified train crew member), Victoria Hopwood (back row), Jon Hopwood in his father's lap (Reginald "Hoppy" Hopwood), Lorraine Hopwood (mom). This photo was taken between 1968 and 1970. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.*

spacious, home on several acres. As kids, we were not interested in his home. We were interested in what existed in the backyard that made the trip all the more exciting for us.

Forest Lake is aptly named due to the trees and greenery found throughout the city and county. In the backyard of the Ermantinger home was a sophisticated series of tree houses that could rival the Swiss Family Robinson structures. I believe Ermantinger built the tree houses himself for his children and they were impressive with their swing ropes, ladders, and platforms. Not to mention that they were pretty high off the ground and

it was so exciting to climb up so high while overlooking the massive yard below. We didn't care about eating dinner or even stepping one foot inside their home; we were content to play all day swinging from treehouse to treehouse.

Sometime later I overheard Dad telling Mother that the white neighbors confronted Ermantinger about inviting "those blacks" (I bet my last dollar the neighbors had actually used a pejorative word instead of "black" to describe us) out to the neighborhood to visit. Dad said that Ermantinger set the neighbors straight by telling them that he would invite whomever to his home and it was



Lorraine Hopwood, LPN nurse, pictured with Cybil Danberg (a fellow nurse) on Cybil's wedding day in the late 1960s. Cybil married a doctor and they moved to suburban North Oaks. She invited Mom and the family to her home many times for dinner and to socialize. I remember Cybil and her husband as warm people and my mother liked her very much—they were willing to break bread with us. Photo courtesy of Victoria Hopwood.

none of their business. Mom always said that you could tell when white people were sincere or really cared about you because they would invite you to break bread with them—invite you over for lunch or dinner. My parents experienced true friendships with some of their white coworkers throughout their careers.

I think the last time that we visited Ermantinger was in 1972 and then our families lost touch. Recently I decided to try and find some information on Ermantinger; so I turned to Google. I was too late. I found an obituary notice for a Frank Ermantinger who had passed away at the age of 87 who had also lived in Forest Lake. I believe this to be the Ermantinger that I visited. I wish that I would have done this ten years sooner. As an adult, I have come to realize the

courage shown by Ermantinger, my Dad's friend.

### Coda

If my daughter, Hannah, could have had her fifteen minutes with Gustav Holst, she would have asked what moved him to compose her favorite piece from his famous *Planets* series, "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity." If I could have fifteen minutes with my father—it would not be enough!—I would introduce him to my children, Harrison and Hannah. They both grew up to be musicians, athletes, and superior students. I know he would be proud. I would tell him that I finished college and traveled the world. I would perform for him because he never saw me play my string bass. I would introduce him to my husband, John

Thomas Robinson—he would like him. By the time I had said all of this, I would almost be out of time. So, in my closing minutes with him, I would say "thank you" for giving all that he had to give and tell him, "You were patient, calm, funny, brave, strong, open-minded, embraced feminism, witty, and you loved us. You and Mother were the bringers of jollity and for that, I am eternally grateful."

When I look back upon my childhood and describe our household to others, all I can say is that we had very few bad times. Our home was full of lively and cheerful activity and celebration, year after year. My fifteen minutes are up.

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### Endnotes

1. <https://www.gtcs.org/about/mission>
2. [https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Planets](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Planets)
3. Jay Goetting, *Joined at the Hip: A History of Jazz in the Twin Cities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2011).
4. Kathleen Jill Hope Cavett, *Voices of Rondo: Oral Histories of Saint Paul's Historic Black Community* (Minneapolis: Syren Book Co., 2005).
5. Redlining or restrictive housing covenants in St. Paul are discussed in David V. Taylor's "The Blacks" in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 81–82. In St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood, the western limit of the red line was Lexington Parkway. On the north, it was University Avenue and Iglehart Avenue on the south. Rondo was not the only redlined neighborhood in the city.
6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town\\_%26\\_Country\\_Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_%26_Country_Club)
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_slavery\\_in\\_Texas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_slavery_in_Texas)

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*An artist's rendering of the 2018 Ecolab Ice Palace on the south side of Rice Park in downtown St. Paul. Sketch courtesy of The Cunningham Group.*