

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Eliza Edgerton Newport and  
St. Paul's Floating Bethel, 1891-1903**

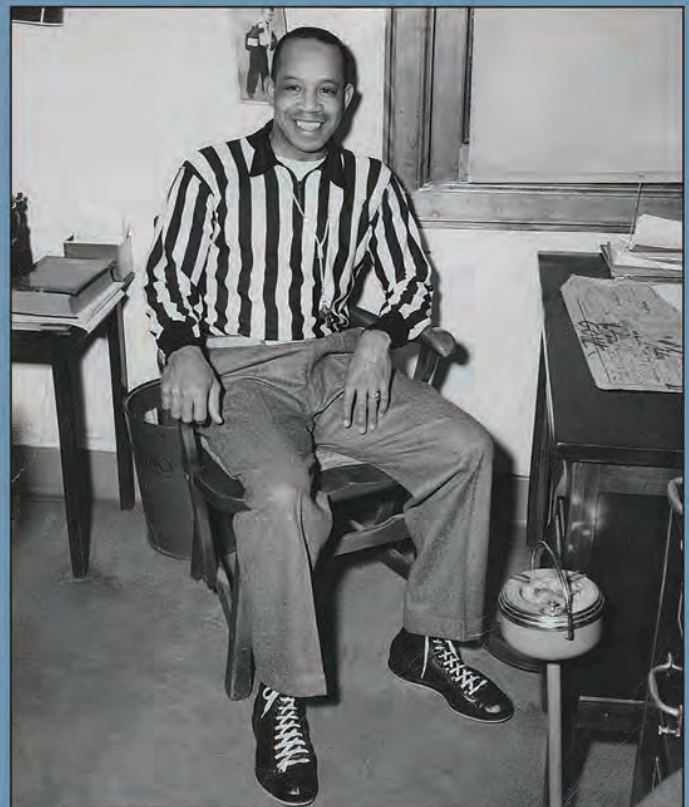
CHRISTINE PODAS-LARSON, PAGE 11



*Remembering One of  
Our Community Legends—*

## **Jimmy Lee**

FRANK M. WHITE, PAGE 1



Jimmy Lee was a respected go-to sports authority in the Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul, and throughout Minnesota.

## By the Numbers . . .

*Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities (UGMTC) oversees the Bethel Hotel, located at 435 University Avenue in St. Paul. It is the descendant of St. Paul's Floating Bethel.*

Number of UGMTC locations, including the Bethel Hotel

**5**

Number of emergency shelter beds available for men in need at UGMTC

**194**

Number of beds for men at the Bethel Hotel, UGMTC's transitional housing program

**107**

Number of men served at the Bethel Hotel in 2018

**1,286**

Number of men enrolled in UGMTC's Christ Recovery Center programs

**81**

Number of women and children who found safe shelter through UGMTC in 2018

**108**

### SOURCES:

Brian Molohon, V.P. Development, UGMTC  
www.ugmtc.org/

Christine Podas-Larson's article, beginning on page 11, brings the story of St. Paul's Floating Bethel to life and celebrates Eliza Edgerton Newport, whose charitable work changed lives.

### ON THE COVER



Jimmy Lee was an award-winning golfer. His love for golf and all sports led to a decade-long stint as a local sports columnist.

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AINE C. MCCORMACK AND EILEEN R. MCCORMACK

## Message from the Editorial Board

Some of the most fascinating parts of local history are the connections between the writers, their subjects, and even the readers. In this issue, Frank White introduces us to his childhood hero, Jimmy Lee, a respected black athlete and sports officiant. Lee wrote a column for the local African-American press and became the first black umpire in the Big Ten. Christine Podas-Larson tells the story of her great-grandmother, Eliza Edgerton Newport, a society woman who championed the working poor. Newport, an ardent temperance supporter, helped establish the Floating Bethel, a boat anchored on the Mississippi that provided beds, meals, and classes for those who needed support. Finally, Eileen and Aine McCormack present the history of the Tazewell Apartments at Laurel and Western. The Tazewell was home to middle-class tenants, including young professionals, teachers, stenographers, and railroad workers. In reading this article, I discovered that the authors included my favorite elementary school teacher, Gertrude Berg, who lived there for forty years. Thus, I happily confirm that Miss Berg did not, in fact, reside on the second floor of Linwood Park School, as I always assumed in fourth grade, but had her own life at the Tazewell, entirely out of school!

*Anne Cowie*  
Chair, Editorial Board

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## Remembering One of Our Community Legends

# Jimmy Lee

FRANK M. WHITE

*If anyone asks me, "Jim who was your hero? Was there one person in your life that you really looked up to?" the answer would be simple. Without a moment's hesitation, my response would be "Jimmy Lee." He was not only a fine person and a real gentleman, but he was also one of the finest football, basketball, and baseball officials Minnesota has ever seen . . .*

—JIMMY GRIFFIN,  
A SON OF RONDO: A MEMOIR

If history matters and we can learn from it, I've taken on a goal in retirement to share more information about special individuals who lived in the Rondo community of St. Paul. These stories have been kept quiet for too long. Looking at St. Paul's past, one might conclude there weren't significant contributions by African Americans or other people of color to our community. Contrary to our documented (or lack of it) history, there are many people of color who have contributed to the rich legacies of St. Paul and Minnesota.

Growing up, one of my joys in life was hanging out with my father, whether it was watching him play baseball, basketball, or fast pitch softball; going to the barbershop; or fishing. My father was my hero! In reflecting on those experiences, I realize today that I met some very important people who lived in the Rondo neighborhood at the time, but I didn't know who they were because they always spoke to my father, and I was just there as "Little Pud!" My father, Louis V. White Jr., somewhere along the line, was labeled with the nickname "Pud." In fact Jim Robinson, my father's friend and a long-time Rondo community leader, shared that "Pud" was short for "Puddie Pie." Who would have ever guessed?

On one of those occasions that seemed so ordinary at the time, I went with my father to his

work at the Hartford Insurance Company, E915 of the First National Bank Building (there were actually East & West addresses), in downtown St. Paul. That was the day I met one of those special people from our neighborhood, Jimmy Lee. Jimmy was the elevator starter (or operator) at the bank. Of course, I didn't know then how important Jimmy would become in my life. He had a great smile and was always very polite to me, either calling me "Little Pud" or, in later years, "Coach!"

I've always been attracted to history and historical places, always wondering "why" a place, a town, or city had begun in its location. Several years ago, that curiosity led me to agree to create an exhibit on black baseball players in Minnesota with Mollie Spillman, archivist/curator with Ramsey County Historical Society. What I found in my research and interviews took me far beyond baseball and helped me learn more about people like Jimmy Lee. I truly respected him as an elder of our Rondo neighborhood, and I soon learned that there was so much more to this special man!

Jimmy Lee was well known in his Rondo neighborhood as well as the greater St. Paul region. Here, he visits with fellow community leader Alice Sims Onqué, executive director of the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center from 1949 to 1965. One of Jimmy's first jobs was at the center. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.



## A St. Paul Beginning

James Hugh “Jimmy” Lee was born on September 24, 1905, in Vicksburg, Mississippi.<sup>1</sup> During the migration of African Americans to northern cities, Jimmy moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, in the 1920s. The reason Jimmy left his father, Walter, and mother, Addie Nelley, behind and headed to Minnesota’s capital city is unknown, but we do know that when he arrived, he lived with his cousin, Albert McFarland, and his family. The family included Albert’s wife, Mamie, and his sons, Albert Jr. and Walter. They resided at 493 Whitall Street in the city’s downtown. During Jimmy’s years at Mechanic Arts High School, from 1923 to 1926, the school’s records have two addresses for Jimmy: 505 Whitall and 493 Whitall. The homes were one house apart. The *St. Paul City Directory* indicates Jimmy lived at the first address through 1928, and in 1930, it had him living at 493 Whitall. When Jimmy graduated from Mechanic Arts in 1926, he was twenty-one years old, which was not an unusual age for students at the time.

After finishing at Mechanic Arts, Jimmy eventually found jobs as a porter with the Pullman Company and as a doorman/bellman at the University Club of St. Paul. He may have had trouble finding jobs. In those days, according to Jimmy Griffin, a longtime friend of Jimmy’s and a prominent city leader, it was tough for everyone to find jobs, but it was especially challenging as men of color! Jimmy Griffin reports that Jimmy’s *first real* job in St. Paul was as a Boys’ Worker with Hallie Q. Brown Community Center at Kent Street and Aurora Avenue (its original location) in the mid-1930s.

Unfortunately, as the Center increased its programming, Jimmy’s position was upgraded and required the incumbent to have a college degree. With only a high school diploma, he had to find a new job. The (Greyhound) bus depot hired him as a bellhop.

When Jimmy began working at the bus depot, he also started his officiating career, working for Saint Paul Municipal Athletics under Director Jerry Flathman as a softball umpire. Jimmy’s experience and special talent as an umpire led him to work baseball, basketball, and football games. Soon Jimmy was paid to work a full schedule of games. Although at the time, Jimmy’s career as a sports official began out of necessity rather than as a passion, his experience in sports and his gentlemanly nature surely helped him become one of the most respected sports officials in the state of Minnesota. About the same time, Jimmy married Jane Elizabeth Mitchell in 1934. Born in Pulaski, Tennessee, on July 13, 1908, Jane also found her way to Minnesota. She grew up in Minneapolis, graduated from Central High School, and moved to St. Paul following her marriage to Jimmy.

## The Baseball Player

Jimmy Lee was an excellent baseball player and played for many teams from the area. Most were all-black teams that barnstormed throughout the five-state region. One of those teams was the Uptown Sanitary Shop, sponsored by businessman Owen Howell.

In addition to the Uptown Sanitary Shop team (1923 & 1926), Jimmy also played baseball for other all-black teams: St. Paul Colored All

## The Great Migration

The Great Migration was the mass movement of about five million Southern blacks to the northern and western parts of the United States between 1915 and 1960. The primary reasons African Americans left the South and migrated north or west were a combination of the desire to escape oppressive economic conditions in the states of the former Confederacy and the promise of greater prosperity in the North or West. The main social factors that encouraged African Americans to migrate included widespread lynching, an unfair legal system, inequality

in educational facilities and opportunities, sharecropper peonage, and the denial of suffrage.

Although migration created the potential for better jobs, it also created competition for employment and living space in increasingly crowded cities, especially in places such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York City. While segregation was not legally enforced in the North (as it was in the South), racism and prejudice were nonetheless widespread.

Stars (1927); St. Paul Colored Gophers (1930); St. Paul Monarchs (1932); and the Twin City Colored Giants (1937). In 1930, he played on an integrated team, Scott's Hot Dogs, which won the St. Paul City League that year. It's likely that Jimmy played for more teams and for more seasons

between 1923 and 1937, but documentation is hard to find. It is interesting that athletes like Jimmy who played on black teams were not on high school baseball teams. Of course, this was a time when baseball was segregated; so maybe it's not a surprise but a good reminder of what



Jimmy Lee played on a number of all-black and integrated teams. Here he is with his 1923 Uptown Sanitary Shop Team:

Front row (L-R): First player unidentified, Dennis Ware, George White, fourth player (behind coach) unidentified, fifth player unidentified, Jimmy Lee, Samuel Stephens (furthest player to the right)

Back row (L-R): First player unidentified, second player unidentified, third player unidentified, Bobby Marshall, John L. Davis, Louis House

Coach/Manager unidentified

Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.

*Uptown Colored of St. Paul*

PL	NAME	POS.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	ALL	RECORD	TEAM	POSITION	OTHER
1	Do Love	C	26-4	0.3	6-3				H	OS		26	W						
2	Lee	P	30	4	16		W		9H	OS		8-4	3-4						
3	Mays	P	10	6-4			SO.		FC	FC		3							
4	March	P					SO.		W		16		16E						
5	White	P	17		3		3		FC		SO.		9H						
6	Winnice	C			16		SO.		3	16		16E	9H						
7	Robinson	P	10						OS	SO.		SO.							
8	Fields	P	20		3		SO.		FC	SO.		F.O.	FC						
9	Foster	P	17				SO.		3		6-4		FC						
10	Powell	P																	
Stats of Team			0	4	2	0	0	0	2	3	0	1	0	1	2				

Uptown Colored of St. Paul  
 Empire 8d 1923  
 of Collected 17  
 Scorer

A St. Paul Echo article titled, "All Stars Beat Oxboro in Extra Inning Game," ran Saturday, June 4, 1927, but according to the date on the score card, the game was played on May 29. Jimmy Lee had two hits in six at-bats, with a walk in this game. The team changed their name for that one game from Uptown Sanitary Shop to Colored All Stars. The score sheet listed them as Uptown, although the news article referred to them as All Stars. Original score sheet from the Lyle Gerhardt collection.

the opportunities (or lack, thereof) were for black athletes!

### The Golfer

Jimmy Lee was an avid and outstanding golfer who played almost anytime he could. One of his noteworthy accomplishments was winning the first Minnesota Negro Open golf tournament in 1939. He was the runner-up in that tournament in 1940. Always the competitor, he placed among the top finishers in many other tournaments. Today the competition is known as the Upper Midwest Bronze Amateur Tournament. One of the earliest and most well-known African American golfers in the Midwest, the late Jimmie Slemmons, started this tournament. It had its beginnings at the Twin City Golf Club, which opened in 1932 because blacks had difficulty joining public courses; thus they had no way to establish golf handicaps based on how they scored in a series of rounds prior to a tournament. Then, as now, golfers had to have a handicap to enter a tournament.

During an interview with Louverne (Noble) Williams and Stanley Williams, Louverne shared many stories about Jimmy and his best friend, her father, Charles Noble. Charles was also a great golfer, who invested in two sets of golf clubs because he enjoyed the game so much. He worked for the U.S. Postal Service in Minneapolis until

he retired at age sixty-two. Like his good friend, Jimmy, Charles won the Minnesota Negro Open; in 1946 and 1949.

Their regular foursome of Jimmy, Charles, and family friends Ed Brown and Bert Davison played golf just about every Saturday during the season. One of Louverne's fond memories was the friends' greetings; Jimmy greeted Charles (a tall man), with a throaty voice, "Bearrrr, Bearrrr," and Charles responded with, "Whadda say, Whadda say." The exchange was always the same between these two good friends. Many times they played at Glenwood (now Theodore Wirth Golf Club) and Keller Golf Course. They would, however, always have to change their shoes in the parking lot by the trunks of their cars because this was a time when African Americans weren't allowed to get ready in the club houses.

### Columnist for the Spokesman-Recorder

In 1936, because Jimmy was an excellent golfer and despite the fact that he only had a high school education, Cecil Newman, the editor of the *Minneapolis Spokesman/St. Paul Recorder*, asked Jimmy to write a column for the paper called "Golf Divots." Jimmy's first article appeared on April 24, 1936. The purpose of the column was to share some of his golf expertise and stories about golf outings. He wrote for this weekly newspaper that reached the local African American community throughout the summer of 1936.

The column was so successful that the editor asked Jimmy in 1937 to cover all sports. Thus he began writing "Sport Light" and continued producing it until 1946. Jimmy wrote about local sports in the Rondo neighborhood, high school sports, and sometimes included comments about the national sports world. He wrote about baseball, basketball, bowling, golf, boxing, tennis, track, and sometimes, even hockey. He reported the accomplishments of young athletes in a style similar to some of the sportswriters with today's major daily newspapers by using short paragraphs (mostly) or a couple of sentences to tell readers about players, coaches, and people in sports. Many times, he highlighted information about the Negro League baseball teams that barnstormed through the Twin Cities, playing games at either Nicollet

When the first local golf tournament for African Americans—the Minnesota Negro Open—debuted in 1939, Jimmy entered and won it all. His name tops the list, which also includes his friend Charles Noble, who won twice. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.



(Minneapolis) or Lexington (St. Paul) Parks. At times, he even had good things to say about the visiting teams or players. Jimmy sometimes included personal comments or insights about a sport or player(s). He was truly someone who was recognized for his wide-ranging knowledge of sports.

Jimmy wrote about African American athletes that the several major daily papers, with their much larger circulations, didn't even consider mentioning.<sup>2</sup>

Jimmy Lee's "Sport Light" is a wealth of information that includes names, information about athletes, updates on the upcoming high school seasons, and other sports highlights that might have been lost forever because they didn't appear in the Twin Cities' dailies. Truly, Jimmy's column is invaluable to the historian of local sports in the African American community today.

### A Daughter Remembers

Jimmy's youngest daughter, Jane Elizabeth Love, from Pontiac, Michigan, was named after her mother, Jane Elizabeth (Mitchell) Lee. She explained that Jimmy, who was from Mississippi, and Jane, who was from Tennessee, met and married after Jimmy moved to St. Paul and Jane moved to Minneapolis. They then made a home together in St. Paul.

Jim and Jane had three children: John Walter Lee, Patricia (Lee) Gooden, and Jane (Lee) Love. According to an article by Estyr Peake Bradley in the *Twin Cities Courier* (January 20, 1983), when Jane Mitchell Lee passed, her survivors included Jim and Jane's three children and ten grandchildren.

Jane, the daughter, shared that her father read three newspapers (sports pages only) each morning and then watched sports on TV whenever he could. Jane's sister, Patricia, once told her, "I don't even watch any sports games on TV because that's all we could watch growing up!" To keep up with all the local information, their dad also spent time at the barbershop as well as any other social setting where people shared something of value about African American athletes. Writing must have taken a lot of time from Jimmy's family life to make sure he got his column prepared before the paper went to press. Remember, those were the days of the manual



This photo was saved by Rondo community members when Jimmy's family home went up for sale in 2016. Jimmy stands with two of his favorite "girls;" his wife, Jane (left) and Jane's sister, Patty (Mitchell) Davison, who was married to one of Jimmy's golf partners Bert Davison. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.

typewriter, if you could afford one. All of this, of course, was done at the same time Jimmy worked other jobs.

Jane remembers her father as a workaholic, sometimes working three jobs as well as being a sports official. When I told her how much her dad made when he started working for the Parks and Recreation Department—just two dollars a game—she wasn't surprised. "I'm sure he did it for the "love of the sports!" she said.

Jane also remembers her father and mother being involved in several social clubs/groups like the Twin City Golf Auxiliary, the Sterling Club Auxiliary, the Birthday Club, and the Credjafawn Social Club. The Credjafawn Social Club's name was created by using the first initial of the founding members. These four clubs were for Americans of African heritage. In addition, her parents were very involved at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, where her mother was a member of the Altar and Rosary Society and, like Jimmy, was always willing to help.

Jimmy heavily promoted and advocated for Rondo youth and sports. Jane remembers a surprising story she heard from her father about the neighborhood. In the mid-1950s, Jimmy had a connection with a wealthy man who wanted to build a gymnasium for Saint Peter Claver Catholic School. All the man wanted in return for his gift was to have his name on the gym.



Jimmy Lee visits with an unidentified gentleman near the elevators at the First National Bank Building. Because he was so welcoming to guests and employees, Jimmy was asked to stay as a greeter once elevators became automated. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.

Naming a building after a donor is a practice that is very standard today. Back then, however, this way of acknowledging a donor surely was a different kind of recognition; the naming was turned down, and the gym was not built. The name of the potential donor: Oil magnate and one of the wealthiest men in town, I. A. O'Shaughnessy. WOW!

### Preserving History

After her older sister, Patricia, passed away in 2016, Jane and her two sons drove to St. Paul to deal with the family home at 963 Carroll Avenue, where Patricia had been living. Jane and her sons had decided to sell the home, so they began to discard items in the house that none of the surviving family members wanted. Jane's son Steve saw a man down the block installing a real estate sign and went to talk with him about selling the house. This man was Abe Gleeson. Abe played for one of our Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) All Star baseball teams, which was coached by Steve Winfield, Bill Peterson, and me.

While Abe was at the house, he noticed trophies and pictures that the family had placed in a large dumpster near the street. He recognized that these items were important, and he wanted to share this information. Luckily, the information got to me, and we connected the next day. Abe sent me some photos of what he'd discovered. I contacted Bill Peterson, and we drove to the Lee home to see the treasures in person. This find would be, in my opinion, a tremendous

piece of local history because the items included photos of Jimmy and his wife, old newspaper accounts of games, and the trophies and plaques that Jimmy had won or been presented over his lifetime.

### The First National Bank

Jimmy Lee's reputation as a cordial, respectful, and humorous person and official resulted in the First National Bank of Saint Paul hiring him as the chief elevator starter at the capital city's busiest elevator complex. He became an influential person through his contacts with some of St. Paul's most influential people. Those who knew Jimmy said of him, "If Jimmy Lee greeted you by your name, you had arrived!"

Former employees who worked at the Bank Building (Fourth and Robert Streets) shared their memories of Jimmy. Attorney Jay Ryan said, "I remember Jimmy Lee. He was an elevator operator, but when the bank changed from people operators, Jimmy was the only operator on the payroll who was retained as a greeter. I remember him standing in front of the elevators in the Bank Building with a friendly 'hello' each morning, willing to give everyone an update on any high school game the day or week before. He also served as a resource of information, as he knew where every office and most people in the building were located. He did that for years; a great and friendly guy."

William Studer, also an attorney, shared this memory: "Jimmy Lee was an older black gentleman who worked as an elevator starter in the First National Bank Building. He was very active in athletics, especially with young black players in St. Paul. The recreation center in St. Paul is now named the Jimmy Lee Recreation Center."

Retired attorney Chuck Levenberg's first connection with Jimmy was through his father, Joe Levenberg, who was the traffic police officer on Fourth and Minnesota. Jimmy referred to the elder Levenberg as "The Mayor of Minnesota Street!" The connection between Jimmy and Chuck began with Chuck's days working while in high school and continued through his days at the University of Minnesota to his time at the *Pioneer Press* to his years after graduating from Harvard Law School to work at what is today known as the Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnelly law firm, which had its offices on floors 14 to



18 at the Bank Building. One of Chuck's great memories was going with his father to watch Jimmy umpire a baseball game. There was a play at second base where Jimmy made a demonstrative non-verbal signal of "safe," as he simultaneously yelled, "You're out!" Of course, this created many opportunities for humorous comments between Chuck's dad Joe and Jimmy on many subsequent occasions.

### The Sports Official

When Jimmy Lee started working for St. Paul Municipal Athletics, he showed he had a special talent as an umpire, and he began to work basketball and football games, as well. Soon he was in high demand and working a full officiating schedule. Jimmy acquired a state-wide reputation and quickly became a much sought-after sports official in many prestigious conferences. As time went on, he developed an unquestioned knowledge of the rules, the respect of both managers and players, and an uncanny ability to keep the game under control, even when the contest was close and the tension was evident. Combine these virtues with his flamboyance, his flashy calls, and his close relationship with the fans in the stands, and it's easy to understand Jimmy's popularity. His talents benefitted hundreds of players, coaches, and fans in multiple sports and on multiple levels.

Jimmy's experience as an official was unusual in Minnesota. In those days, he rarely officiated a game involving black players. More than 90 percent of the time, he was the only black person in the stadium, or gym, or in the entire area. It was more than likely that he was the first black man many of the folks in some small Minnesota towns had ever met or seen in person. In time, Jimmy's reputation came to the attention of former Major Leaguer, Dick Siebert, the head baseball coach at the University of Minnesota. He began to hire Jimmy on a regular basis for the university games. Jimmy thus became the first black baseball umpire handling Big Ten contests.

In 1979, Patrick Reusse, long-time sports columnist for the local dailies, headlined one of his columns: "Jimmy Lee—'Fun to Be Around'" (*St. Paul Dispatch*, November 28, 1979). Reusse told his readers, "Minnesota baseball coach Dick Siebert used Lee regularly for Big Ten games.



Jimmy Lee early in his officiating career. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.

Siebert told me when he talked to the other coaches, they would say, 'Get the black guy to work that series . . . not that Irishman.'" The Irishman referred to here is George Sweeney, another sports official who was quoted in Reusse's column as saying, "You also learned from Jimmy. He always said a basketball official had to carry a wise whistle, and after you worked with him a

In a 1960 NCAA Midwest Regional Tournament game between Ohio University and Notre Dame University at Delta Field on June 3, 1960, Plate Umpire Jimmy Lee calls Notre Dame #32 out. Ohio University won 5-4. Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.



few times, you saw what he meant: ‘Let the kids decide the game.’”

Because of Jimmy’s reputation, he also officiated in the semi-professional Southern Minnesota League or “Southern Minny.” Future Major League stars such as Bill Skowron (New York Yankees), Samuel “Toothpick” Jones (Chicago Cubs), Howie Schultz (Brooklyn Dodgers), and many other noted athletes all played in the Southern Minny in their early careers. And when Negro League teams barnstormed through the state, Jimmy worked with those touring stars at Lexington and Nicollet Parks, as well.

Jimmy was a respected basketball official too. Joe Hutton Sr., a Hall of Famer and former Hamline University basketball coach, called Jimmy one of the finest basketball officials in the entire Midwest. Johnny Sammon, another former sports official, said, “They used to say I was whistle happy and that Jimmy let more things go. So, Joe Hutton over at Hamline would pick his officials accordingly. If he had a tough, physical team coming in, he would tell Jerry Flathman [the assignments secretary for the Midwest Intercollegiate Athletic Conference] to get Sammon and Hahn. If Joe’s opponent wasn’t quite as rough under the boards, then he would tell Jerry to work the game himself and bring along Jimmy.”

Jimmy’s reputation was surely recognized statewide, and over time he was honored by many coaches and conferences for his outstanding work as an official in the sports of baseball,

basketball, and football. There are so many stories and accolades about his success as a sports official (far too many to be listed here) that I’d like to share just one of those honors.<sup>3</sup>

*The White Bear Press Sports Corner, “Like It Or Not—It’s Mine” Column by RGR, n.d.*

Jimmie [sic] Lee, one of the real greats in the officiating business, worked the JV and Varsity basketball matches last Saturday. Will never forget the fabled St. Thomas—Hamline basketball games when the only guy that could keep the peace was Jim. Jim was tremendous as a baseball umpire and Pete Louricas told me Jim was the best “ball and strike” man he ever worked with. Jim is “real nice” people.

### St. Paul Honors Jimmy Lee

Jimmy Lee passed away November 25, 1979. It was a sad day in St. Paul, especially in the Rondo neighborhood and at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. Jimmy’s good friends, Jimmy Griffin and Paul Woods, with the support of many, felt that it would be fitting to rename the Oxford Recreation Center, which stands a short distance from Jimmy’s home, in his honor as the Jimmy Lee Recreation Center. By a unanimous vote, the Saint Paul City Council passed a resolution (C.F. No. 275185) on July 1, 1980, to rename the center. A dedication ceremony was held on September 11, 1980. Many people attended the event, as Jimmy had friends from all over Minnesota, but he was truly a recognized person in downtown St. Paul.

The following individuals comprised the committee members who planned the dedication ceremony: Jimmy Griffin, co-chairperson; Paul Wood, co-chairperson; Rev. J. Battle; Dr. George Berry; Charles Breeze; Fr. John Brown; Mahmoud El Kati; Dave Goodlow; Jeffery Hassan; Robert Hickman; Arvesta Kelly; Kwame McDonald; Katy McWatt; Jim Robinson; Julian Stafford; Fr. C. Talton; George Todd; Fred Williams; William Wilson; Mrs. Willie May Wilson; and Steve Winfield. Mayor George Latimer and Councilmember William “Bill” Wilson, along with others, delivered remarks honoring Jimmy that day. Donors for this event included the Credjafawn Social Club, the First National Bank

Jimmy Lee helped present St. Paul native and Hall of Famer David Winfield, who had just finished his first year with the San Diego Padres, with the St. Paul Lion’s Club Amateur Athlete Award at Attucks Brooks American Legion Post in 1973. (L-R): Frank White, Steve Winfield, Jimmy Griffin (back), Jimmy Lee, David Winfield, and Bill Peterson. Photo courtesy of Frank M. White.



of Saint Paul, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Twin Star V.F.W. This was truly an occasion when special individuals in St. Paul and Rondo recognized the many accomplishments of one of their own.

### **Respect and Dignity—A Different Time**

Growing up, our family didn't have much. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure many of my friends and their families were middle class. Still, appearances at church, work, and social events were important. Returning to my conversation with Louverne and Stan Williams, Stan shared that he always saw "Mr. Lee" wearing a white shirt and tie with his suit while working at the First National Bank Building. Stan said, "We knew him as 'Mr. Lee,' always greeting and having respect." This was an important reminder for me because as I recall, everyone my father introduced me to was always "Mr. Somebody." Introductions were respectful.

I remember my father, like Jimmy, always going to work with a suit or coat, white shirt, and tie! To be dressed for success was one of those markers that you had a good job. Of course, when I found out later how much my father earned every two weeks, I had to wonder how he and my mother made ends meet. I finally realized that my parents and Jimmy and most people in our community truly sacrificed for their families, but respect and dignity were always at the forefront.

### **Challenges of Times Gone By**

While doing research for my book on black baseball in Minnesota, the following story led me to work with others to nominate Jimmy Lee for induction into the Minnesota State High School League's Hall of Fame. As Jimmy Griffin wrote in his autobiography, *A Son of Rondo: A Memoir* (2001), although Jimmy Lee was recognized as one of the finest basketball officials in the Midwest, that recognition could take him only so far. "When Minnesota had a one-class basketball tournament, divided into thirty-two districts and eight regions, Jimmy worked in twenty of the thirty-two district tournaments and six of the eight regional tournaments. Due to the color of his skin, however, he never had the honor of officiating a Minnesota State Basketball Tournament game. Many athletic

directors, coaches, fans, and sportswriters were remiss, because they knew he had earned this honor, but few were willing to step forward and champion his cause."

In 2013, Jimmy Lee was inducted into the Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame. I'm so thankful for those friends and others who encouraged nominating Jimmy and shared positive memories of him. I'm so proud that I was able to attend this event. Jimmy's daughter, Patricia, and her son, Fred Gooden, were on hand to receive the award. When Fred went on stage to accept the award, he raised his arm along with the trophy and held it high as if he had won a championship himself. He did this because he was proud of his grandfather. His pride brought tears to my eyes.

Finally, a true Rondo and Minnesota legend was given his due and honored for who he was: an outstanding sports official, an outstanding person who cared for others, a man who worked hard and gave so much! Jimmy Lee was really a very complex individual. Taking into account his modest beginnings, his sustained love of sports, and his accomplishments, it's easy to see that he touched so many lives in Minnesota, particularly in St. Paul. It's clear he was more than just that man who blew a whistle,



Jimmy Lee was a local legend known for his love of and respect for sports. It was no surprise to see him inducted, nearly twenty-five years after his death in 1979, into the Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame. *Photo from Lee Family Collection, courtesy of Frank M. White.*

called balls and strikes, did very well on the golf course, and worked hard raising his family, with plenty of time to serve at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. I only wish that he were here now so that I could tell him, **we're all so proud of you, Jimmy Lee!**

*Frank M. White is a sports official and a retired parks, recreation, and sports administrator. He's*

*served as the RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) coordinator for the Minnesota Twins for eighteen seasons, including 2019. He also is a governor-appointed board member of the Minnesota State High School League and is the author of They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota (2016) and of an early chapter of this book that was published in Ramsey County History in 2010.*

## NOTES

1. Surviving records have two different years for Jimmy Lee's birth. In the U.S. Social Security records, which would have been filed sometime after the passage of the law establishing Social Security (1935), the year given is 1905; on his high school record at Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul, the year is 1903. Because these two dates are close and could easily have been misread, that might explain the discrepancy between them.

2. A snapshot of sports columnists who were also writing between 1937 and 1946 included "The Lowdown on Sports" by Charles Johnson of the *Minneapolis Star Journal* (1939–1945); "Sportographics" by George A. Barton, *Minneapolis Tribune* (1939–1945); and across the river, "The Sporting Thing" by George Edmond (1939–1941), *St. Paul Dispatch*; and "High and Inside" by Gordon Gilmore of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (1939–1941). All four newspapers over a period of three months each (usually the month of June) had only a single mention of a black athlete: professional boxer Joe Louis. For these sports columnists at the local major dailies, it appears the accomplishments of African Americans in sports weren't newsworthy enough to warrant mention. For example, none of these newspapers reported that Jimmy Lee won the first Minnesota Negro Open golf tournament in 1939, even though these papers included lots of coverage of golf and golf tournaments! In addition, all the photos and all the artist renderings in line drawings for ads in the newspaper (thousands) included only images of whites. For these newspapers, it seems, people of color didn't exist.

3. The following is a list of some of the other awards given to Jimmy Lee:

- 1964 Certificate of Award from St. Paul Officials Association
- 1967 Certificate of Award from Twin City Golf Club
- 1970 Plaque Citation from High School Football Association
- 1971 Plaque Sterling Club Golf Champion
- 1972 Plaque Certificate of Award from Credjafawn Social Club for Contributions to Sports
- 1973 Plaque Gopher State Award in Appreciation of Work in Minnesota High School Baseball
- 1975 Plaque Twin City Golf Club; Honorary Life Member
- 1982 Plaque Induction into Hall of Fame; Minnesota Softball Hall of Fame

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## INTERVIEWS

- Gordy Kirk
- Steve Paul Jones
- Chuck Levenberg
- Nancie Litin
- Jane Love
- Jim Robinson
- Jay Ryan
- William Studer
- Pauline Wallace
- Stan and Louverne Williams

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

*The mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society  
adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.*

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to be widely recognized as an innovator, leader, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and using local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens acquired and preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family had acquired in 1849. Following five years of restoration work, the Society opened the Gibbs Farm museum (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974). Originally programs focused on telling the story of the pioneer life of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the historic site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, building additional structures, and dedicating outdoor spaces to tell these stories. The remarkable relationship of Jane Gibbs with the Dakota during her childhood in the 1830s and again as an adult encouraged RCHS to expand its interpretation of the Gibbs farm to both pioneer and Dakota life.

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, an expanded commitment from Ramsey County enabled the organization to move its library, archives, and administrative offices to downtown St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An additional expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to better serve the public and allow greater access to the Society's vast collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, due to an endowment gift of \$1 million, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a wide variety of public programming for youth and adults. Please see [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com) for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps at Gibbs Farm, and much more. RCHS is a trusted education partner serving 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that bring to life the Gibbs Family as well as the Dakota people of Cloud Man's village. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

R.C.H.S.  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



# William Shields Fallon (1931–2018): A Tribute

William Fallon, former president and chairman of the board of the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS), couldn't get enough of his history. Fallon was born in the midst of the Great Depression, October 2, 1931, in St. Paul, and his father, William H. Fallon, served in the U.S. Seventh Army under George S. Patton from 1942 to 1946. Both monumental events shaped the way the younger Fallon thought about history beginning early in his life, and as he grew older, he operated with a global view of how important the past is.

Fallon passed away November 27, 2018. He'll be remembered as a loving husband, father, uncle, and grandfather, as a local attorney for half a century, and as a pillar in his community and church. The one interest of his that connected all of these roles was his hunger for history.

According to his longtime friend Father Kevin M. McDonough, "History was not so much an acquired taste for Bill, as it was a genetic inheritance." McDonough explained that Fallon was proud of his rich Minnesota heritage that included a familial connection to General James Shields, a Minnesota pioneer and Civil War general. In addition, Fallon's father was a mayor of Saint Paul (1938–1940), and his wife Jean Marie (Landherr) Fallon's family helped shape the town of Rose Creek in the southern part of the state.

Fallon majored in history at the College of St. Thomas, moving on to earn a law degree from the University of Minnesota. His son Martin Fallon imagines his father might have become a history professor, if he had it to do all over again. Fallon continually read about, studied, and jumped into all things history.

"He was a voracious reader," said Martin Fallon. "In fact, starting in 1982, he kept lists of every book he read. He had three manila envelopes of legal pads listing books; general history, ancient history, modern history, Russian history ... He had a very curious mind."



Fallon got involved with RCHS in the 1980s and served several terms in the 1990s as president and chairman of the board. He was active with the organization as a board member until he retired in the early 2000s and remained an honorary board member until his death. Fallon's son remembers that his father liked working with the Society's first magazine editor, the late Virginia Brainard Kunz.

"He was most proud of that magazine," said Martin Fallon, who himself is now a member of the RCHS Board of Directors and Editorial Board. "For a local historical society, [my father] knew they had a top-shelf scholarly journal."

In his later years, Fallon worked as chancellor of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and, according to Father McDonough, part of Fallon's job was that of chief archivist of the Archdiocese. "He always told me that he considered the chancellor position to be the best job of his life because of the Catholic faith he treasured, because he admired his coworkers, and because he became a steward of 150 years of Minnesota history," McDonough said.

Certainly William Fallon, this man who loved history, will be remembered as an important figure in St. Paul's own history. It was an honor working with Mr. Fallon, and we are grateful for all he did for the citizens and organizations of St. Paul and the Ramsey County Historical Society.

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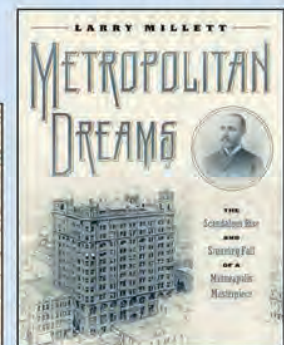
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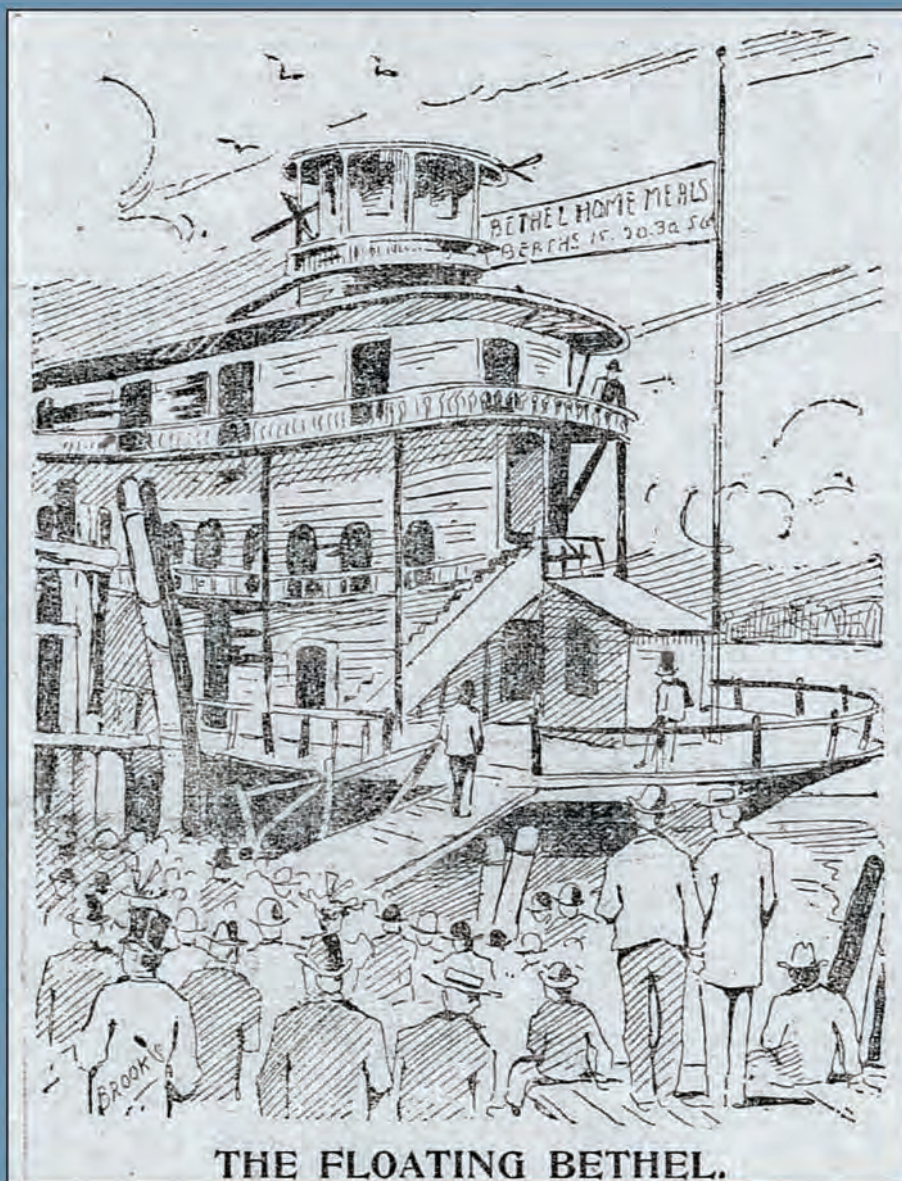
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The Floating Bethel, 1893, two years after it opened on the St. Paul Riverfront at Jackson Street. *The Saint Paul Globe*, July 7, 1893. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.