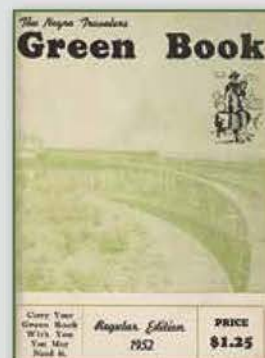
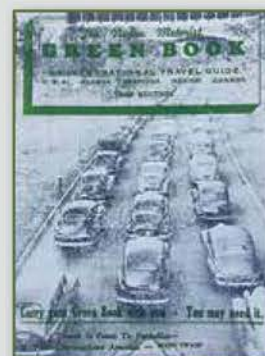


**Bob Brown:
 "Paint What You See"**

PAUL NELSON, PAGE 14



*Traveling Without Aggravation—
 How Victor H. Green Changed Travel for Black Americans*

Green Book Locations in the Historic Rondo Community (1940-1956)

NIEETA L. PRESLEY, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

If an obstacle blocks our path, we find a way around said barrier. African Americans needed a reliable resource they could consult when traveling in the Jim Crow era. Victor H. Green created *The Negro Motorist Green Book* to help people find safe and welcoming tourist homes, restaurants, and other businesses that made leisure life a pleasurable life. There were even locations in St. Paul!

First and last year businesses in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood were listed in the *Green Book*:

1940 and 1956

Victor Green's age the year he published his first book in 1936:

44

Number of Rondo locations listed in the *Green Book*:

9

Price of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in 1938 and the *Travelers' Green Book* in 1963-64:

\$.25 and \$1.95

Number of St. Paul businesses outside of Rondo that advertised in the *Green Book*, beginning in 1957:

15

To learn more, see "*Traveling Without Aggravation—How Victor H. Green Changed Travel for Black Americans: Green Book Locations in the Historic Rondo Community (1940-1956)*" by Nieeta L. Presley on page 1.

ON THE COVER



The Credjafawn Social Club hosted a "Gypsy Tour" to Wisconsin in 1952. Only the occupants in the lead vehicle and the social committee knew the itinerary. All other families caravanned to "unknown" locations

for a day of fun and friendship. Names listed on the photograph back: John H. Griffin; "Bubs" Powell, Jr.; Rodney Maxwell; Corrine Griffin; Yvonne Powell; Betty Maxwell; Revoida Wright; and Viola Johnson. Photograph in the *Murphy-Taylor Family Papers*, courtesy, Hallie Q. Brown Community Archives; "Gypsy Tour" details in *St. Paul Recorder*, June 27, 1952, 7.

The *Negro Motorist Green Book covers (1941, 1949, 1952)*, courtesy of Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections

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CHAD P. ROBERTS

Message from the Editorial Board

Successful communities are the result of dedicated citizens working for the betterment of all. This issue focuses on such teamwork, beginning with Nieeta Presley's never-before researched *Green Book* locations in the Historic Rondo community. In our county's history, Black visitors couldn't always find safe access to motels, restaurants, or other businesses. Rondo neighbors set out welcome mats and fulfilled this need.

During the Great Depression, the US government developed programs to help citizens earn a living at a time when few imagined seeing a stable paycheck again. The Federal Art Project enabled local artists, including Bob Brown, to get back on their feet. See Paul Nelson's story on page 14.

Our last two articles highlight historians: young students representing Minnesota at this year's National History Day and seven specially selected McWatt Fellows. Through community collaborations, these scholars have uncovered important contributions to our state's history, helping all of us better understand our past so that we may build toward a more equitable future.

The examples above depend on "we/us" to get things done. I joke that I am a one-woman publishing department, but I could never do this job alone. In fact, this year, it took assistance from twenty-seven executive and editorial board members, nine colleagues, twenty-five authors, and fifty individuals/businesses (4,100 volunteer hours!), along with our extraordinary designer Wendy Holdman and printers Modern Press, Co., and Bookmobile to tell our county's history. Thanks, too, to editorial chair, Anne Field. She usually writes this column, but she's on a much-deserved vacation. It's important to recognize such dedicated teamwork.

Meredith Cummings
Editor

Correction: The photograph on page 10 in our Spring 2022 issue should be attributed to Stephanie Dehler of Stephanie Dehler Photography.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also 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.

*Traveling Without Aggravation:
How Victor H. Green Changed Travel for Black Americans*

Green Book Locations in the Historic Rondo Community (1940-1956)

NIEETA L. PRESLEY

... highest appreciation for Mrs. Villa Wilson, 697 St. Anthony avenue, with whom six members of the cast of *The 'Mikado in Swing'* stopped while in the city of St. Paul. She proved to be a very charming hostess who seemed to think more of the comfort of her house guests than any mercenary reasons. . . .¹

This letter in the *St. Paul Recorder* from the company of a traveling operetta production speaks to the hospitality of a St. Paulite who provided a comfortable place for performers to stay in her Rondo neighborhood. Villa Wilson opened her door to guests beginning in 1917, advertising in local newspapers. In 1941, she began listing the home in a new national guidebook known at that time as *The Negro Motorist Green-Book*.²

Victor H. Green (1892-1960) first created the *Green Book* in 1936 to help Black travelers navigate their way through New York City. As a postal carrier from Harlem who worked in Hackensack, New Jersey, Green was frequently asked for safe and reliable recommendations in *The Big Apple*. By 1941, the book had grown to include hotels, restaurants, and other essential enterprises in all but a handful of states.³ Travelers were thrilled. In a personal letter to Green, a Mr. William Smith wrote:

'The Negro Motorist Green Book' is a credit to the Negro Race. It is a book badly needed among our Race since the advance of the motor age. . . . The only way we knew . . . to reach our pleasure resorts was . . . by word of mouth. . . . We earnestly believe [this book] will mean as much if not more to us as the A. A. A. means to the white race.⁴

Why was this book so important? Because traveling while Black to grandmother's house in Mississippi, a Baptist convention in Tennessee, or an NAACP meeting in Duluth could prove to be dangerous.

Rondo Welcome Mats at the Ready

Opening one's home to wary and weary travelers was not a novel idea when the *Green Book* was first published. In fact, thanks to tight-knit neighbors who communicated through local newspapers, church bulletins, and word-of-mouth, people had been working together to welcome others into their Rondo homes for decades.

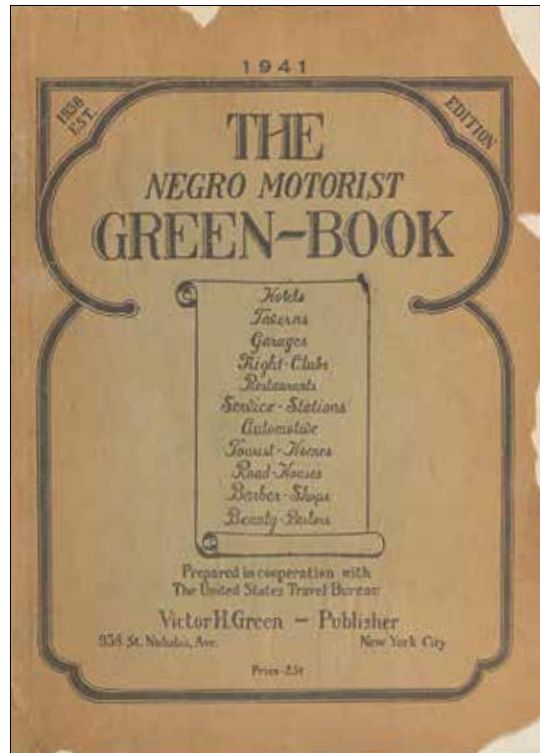
One person was John Quincy Adams, editor of *The Appeal*. In his role at the St. Paul newspaper in the early twentieth century, Adams knew when dignitaries such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, and others would be speaking in the city and would, of course, need a place to stay. He and his wife, Ella Bell, occasionally provided a room for visitors, and if additional rooms were needed, Adams relied on the members of The Sterling Club, a well-regarded men's leadership organization. They were always prepared to help.⁵

The Francis family—William T., a prominent attorney, and Nellie, a suffragist and activist—also opened their home to notable guests, including Mrs. Francis's mentor, Hallie Quinn Brown, an educator and civil rights advocate who journeyed from Ohio on various occasions to speak at Minnesota events.⁶

In his book, *They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota*, Rondo historian Frank White highlights another big name in town. From mid-May to early July 1948, baseball legend Roy Campanella

In most cases, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* will be referred to simply as the *Green Book*. Also, while not used today, the term "Negro" was a common word that described African Americans in much of the first half of the twentieth century. It is included in this article in reference to the *Green Book* title and in select quotations and paragraphs for historical context.

This extant house on St. Anthony Avenue once served as a tourist home for visitors to St. Paul. Villa Wilson welcomed business travelers, politicians, and performers. She listed the home in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* from 1941 to 1956, with the exception of the war years (1942-1946) when no *Green Book* published. *Green Book* cover and Minnesota entry courtesy of The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Original illustration courtesy of Jeanne Kosfeld.



MINNESOTA
DULUTH
TOURIST HOMES
 Mrs. C. Colby—616 E. 4th St.
MINNEAPOLIS
HOTELS
 Y.W.C.A.—809 N. Aldrich Ave.
 Serville—246½—4th Ave. So.
TOURIST HOMES
 Phyllis Wheatley House—
 809 Aldrich N.
RESTAURANTS
 Bells Cafe—207 So. 3rd St.
ST. PAUL
TOURIST HOMES
 Reuben Floyd—379 Carroll St.
 Wilson Villa—697 St. Anthony St.
RESTAURANTS
 G. & G. Bar-B-Q—318 Rondo St.



and his family stayed at the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Rideaux at 707 Rondo, while “Campy” played for the St. Paul Saints.⁷

The Turner and Harriet Price family, including a young Verlene Price Booker, lived across the street. They loved their “new neighbor” because whenever the ballplayer hit a home run, cereal giant General Mills awarded the athlete a case of Wheaties, which he’d share with the families on the block. Unfortunately, the excitement faded quickly, as by July, Campanella was recalled to New York to continue play with the Brooklyn Dodgers.⁸

Community elder Mary K. Boyd, a former Historic Rondo resident, remembers helping her mother clean and prepare rooms for visitors. Guests in town for church conventions, Eastern Star meetings, or performances at local theaters frequently stayed at the family home at 836 Iglehart. As a young girl, tired, perhaps, of keeping the house clean, she once complained. “It was explained to me . . . that there were places Negroes were not welcomed, like hotels [and] restaurants,” Boyd says. “So, that which was denied to us in terms of access was provided somehow within the village called Rondo.”⁹

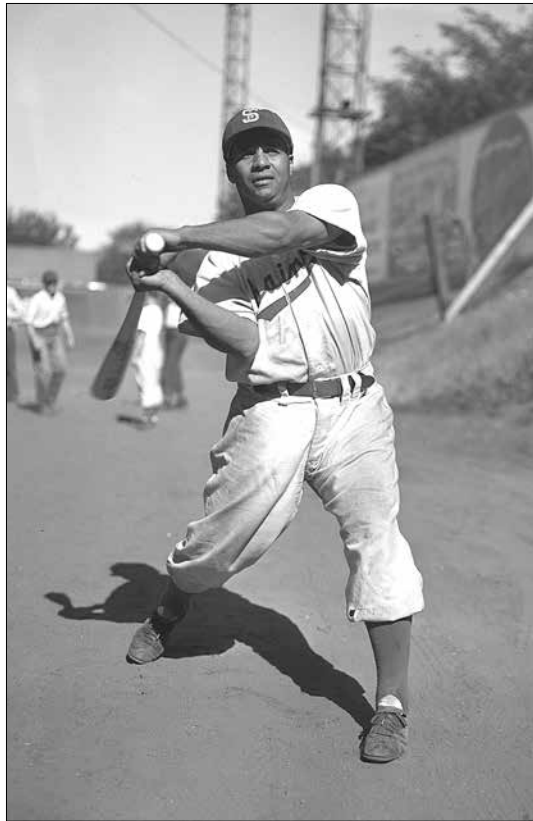
“Carry Your Green Book with you . . . you may need it . . .”

Many businesses across the US simply would not allow African Americans access. As the late, former Historic Rondo resident Ventress Laroe Jackson Roberson (1925-2007) remembered,

My dad had a car and he would take us all around in Minnesota. . . . And then we traveled South where his and my mother’s home are, down to Coahoma, Mississippi. . . . At that time, we couldn’t stay in motels, hey, no way. No, no, no. Black people weren’t allowed in hotels, and especially when you got South.¹⁰

“Sundown Towns” were another reason travel was difficult. In many places, ominous signs posted at city limits warned Negroes to get out of town before sundown or they could face legal repercussions, including fines, jail, or something worse.¹¹

Throughout much of the 1800s, enslaved people attempted to escape captivity in the



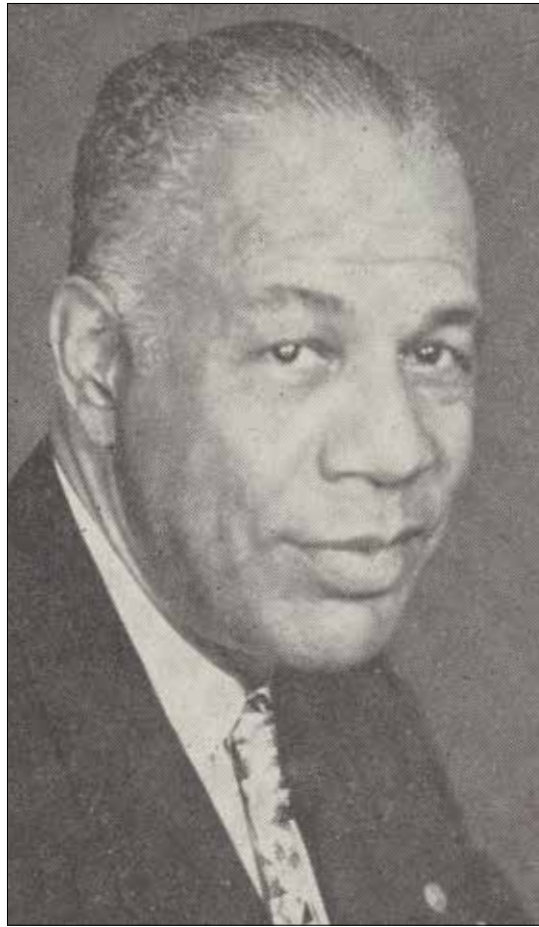
Roy Campanella played briefly for the St. Paul Saints. He and his family stayed at the Rideaux home in Rondo. While here, his son, Roy II, was born at St. Joseph’s Hospital. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

American South using the Underground Railroad, a secret network of safe havens set up by free Blacks and Black and white abolitionists to help people attain freedom in the North. In a sense, the *Green Book* became another “secret” way to serve Black Americans. No, people weren’t escaping the institution of slavery, which had been outlawed for decades. But that didn’t mean they were always safe when traveling. While “[t]he Underground Railroad promised freedom; the ‘Green Book’ offered something just as fundamentally American: leisure.”¹² Or, as some of the later volumes advertised—“Traveling without Aggravation.”

And people were anxious to travel. By the mid-1930s, the country was recovering from the effects of the Great Depression. More jobs meant more affluence; more affluence meant more Americans, including the Black middle class, could afford automobiles. By 1936, “many African American families made an automobile their biggest purchase.”¹³ This increase in disposable income meant families could also afford to take vacations in these new vehicles.

Community elder Boyd remembers her family car trips:

Victor H. Green was forty-four when he published his first *Green Book*. His wife, Alma, worked alongside her husband and continued publishing the book after his death in 1960. In *The Negro Travelers' Green Book, 1956* and *The Travelers' Green Book, 1961*, courtesy of *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.



While I am not aware of my dad using a *Green Book*, I know that each trip was planned for stops only for gas and with family, friends, or kin of friends. Trips to visit members of my dad's family in Nebraska were not as scary as those to Kentucky to visit my mother's family. . . . My dad could buy gas, but we were not allowed to use the restrooms. We ate food that had been prepared at home and packed in ways so that it would not spoil.¹⁴

An Invaluable Resource at One's Fingertips

Between 1936 and 1967, Victor H. Green & Co. published annual editions, usually in April. Some years, the company put out two books, one for domestic travelers and a second for international travel. World War II halted production from 1942 through 1946. The purchase price was reasonable—twenty-five cents in the early years and \$1.95 for later, international editions.

Green financed the publications by selling ad space to African American-friendly businesses, many of which were Black-owned. He also partnered with ESSO service stations, which not only distributed the guide but served African Americans as customers and encouraged interested business-savvy individuals to operate their own ESSO franchises.¹⁵

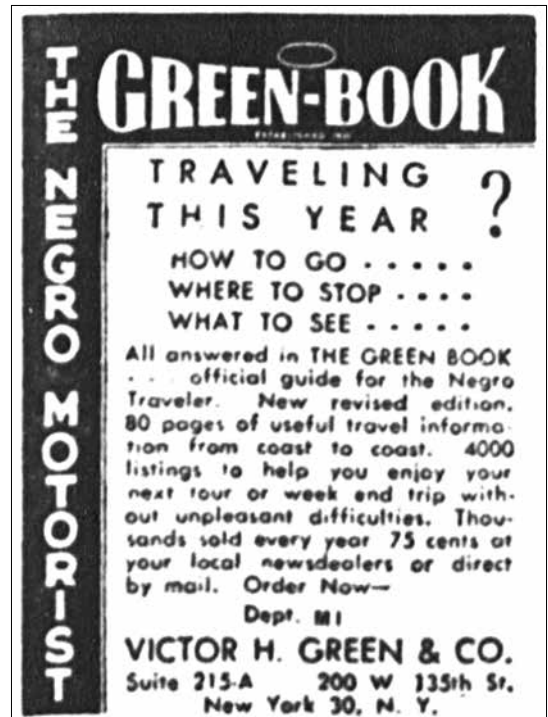
The desire, urgency, and necessity for the book meant Green and his wife, Alma, who worked with him, were always adding new features and information. All editions followed a consistent structure so information could be accessed easily. This included an introductory message and an alphabetical listing by state of welcoming businesses. The company shared information about highway systems, construction projects, safety rules, notes about political movements, and subscription and advertisement applications.

Following the war and the publishing hiatus, the 1947 edition came off the press bigger and better than ever. The book opened with articles encouraging readers to support, visit, and attend "Negro Colleges." They even provided a list by state of 106 post-secondary educational institutions. The book also highlighted Black-owned publications, including the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and *St. Paul Recorder*, with this suggestion: "When you reach your destination . . . purchase a copy of their paper and enjoy the latest news. . . ." Add to

SAFE DRIVING RULES

1. Watch out for the driver who crosses the White Line.
2. When the other car passes you, watch out that he doesn't cut in on you.
3. Watch out for the driver who doesn't know any better than to pass on a hill.
4. Even when the light is Green, look out for the reckless driver coming from left or right, who is ignorant that the Red light is against him.
5. Watch the driver ahead — you can't be sure whether or not he'll signal when he turns.
6. Even on highways, look out for parked cars.
7. Watch the car coming down the steep hill toward you. Maybe the driver doesn't know enough to go into second.
8. Don't assume that the other fellow has good brakes.
9. At night, look out for pedestrians walking on your side of the highway.
10. On Icy Roads look out! Some drivers don't know any better than to brake suddenly on ice.
11. Going over a hill, be ready for drivers who may be fool hardy as to make a turn across the road.
12. When you are passing, look out for the car that may be suddenly pulling out to pass just ahead of you.
13. Maybe the cop won't catch the car that passes you at 80, but "sudden death" is liable to.
14. On a three lane highway, watch out for the driver who thinks the middle lane is his exclusively.
15. Remember that Junior thinks that the ignition key is something to play with.

Rekeyed from *The Negro Motorist Green Book, 1938*, with some corrective edits.



The *Green Book* provided useful tips such as the driving information listed here. In *The Negro Motorist Green Book, 1938*, courtesy of *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

It appears Victor Green ran just one ad in local Twin Cities' newspapers between 1940 and 1956. In *St. Paul Recorder*, July 25, 1947, 6.

that thirteen pages devoted to automotive design and popular brands, including the Oldsmobile Special "66" and the 1946 Ford Mercury two-door sedan.¹⁶

For years, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, which was renamed *The Negro Travelers Green Book* in 1952, and, finally, *Travelers' Green Book* in the 1960s, had become a safe navigation tool/travel guide/map. As Alvin Hall, coproducer of the podcast *Driving The Green Book* put it, it was also a book of Black "refusal, resistance, and creativity."¹⁷

Welcome to St. Paul's Rondo Neighborhood

The 1939 *Green Book* was the first to include Minnesota travel sites—in Duluth and Minneapolis only. Between 1940 and 1956, nine diverse businesses invited Black travelers to St. Paul's Rondo community.¹⁸ In some cases, extensive research revealed ample information about these properties and their owners. A few are highlighted here:

Floyd Tourist Home

The first St. Paul business included in the *Green Book* was owned by Reuben Floyd. His house at

379 Carroll Street listed as a tourist home in the 1940-1941 editions.

Wilson Villa

In 1941, another tourist home—Wilson Villa—joined the *Green Book* ranks, although the proprietors—Robert F. Wilson and his wife, Villa, who ran the business—had been welcoming guests for years, as noted in this 1917 announcement in *The Appeal*:

Mrs. Robert F. Wilson of Portland, Ore., is in the city. . . . She contemplates opening a first class boarding and rooming house and has secured the property of Pioneer Lodge F. & A. M., 588 Rondo street for that purpose. Her house will be named "Wilson Villa" and will be up-to-the-minute in every respect.¹⁹

Less than a month later, Mrs. Wilson submitted her first advertisement to the paper. Within days, Frederick D. McCracken, an up-and-coming businessman, hosted a luncheon at Wilson Villa for local and visiting clergy. Timing of the opening wasn't ideal, however. World War I and a flu pandemic likely impacted the business's early success. Few ads or notices appeared in the paper,

other than in 1919, when the couple moved to 503 Rondo and in 1920, when the Wilsons advertised “a two-room suite, suitable for man and wife.”²⁰

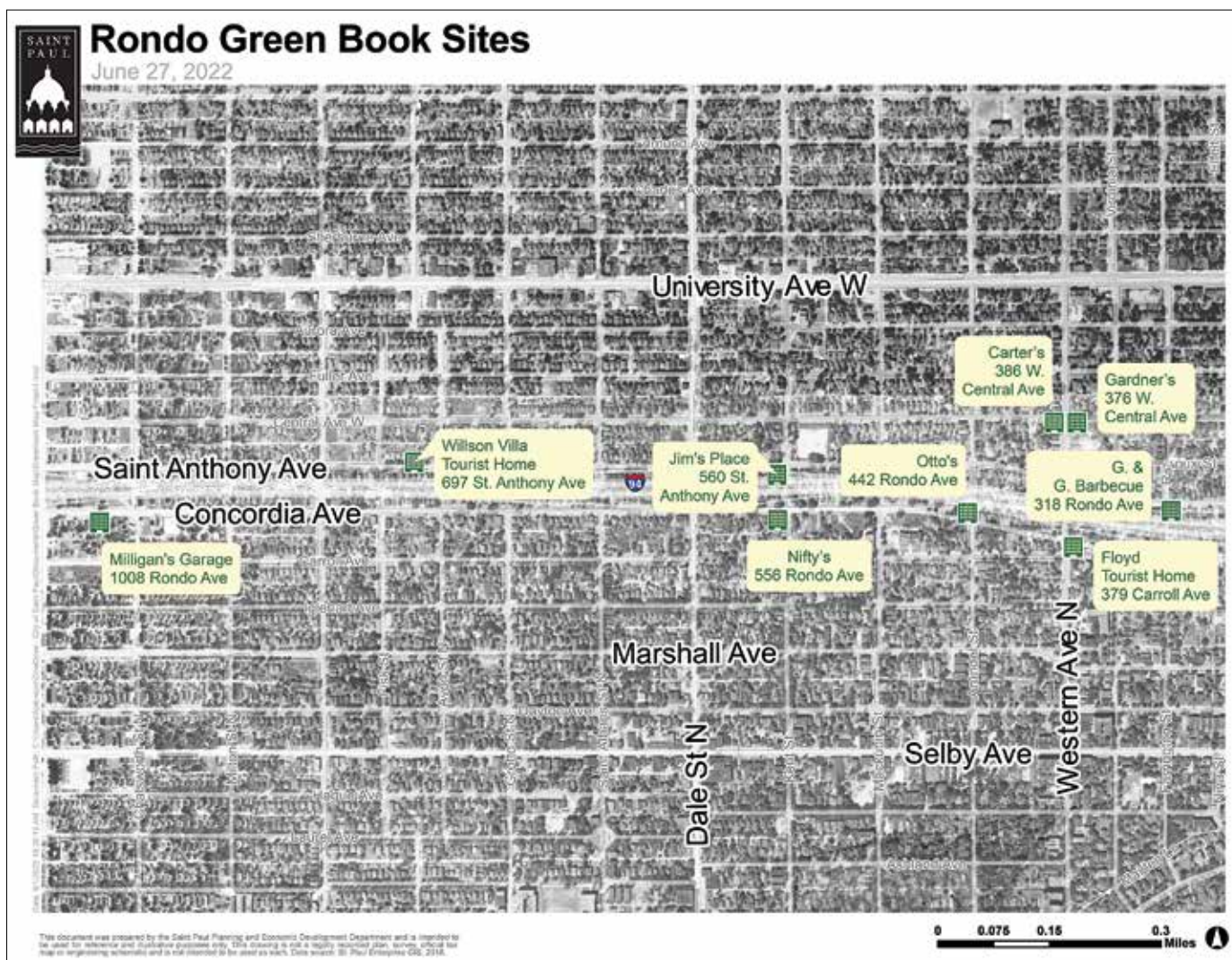
Eventually, business picked up again. In 1920, Dr. H. L. P. Jones, newly arrived from Tennessee as pastor of St. James A. M. E. Church, made the house his home while the parsonage was readied for him. The following spring, the St. Paul Branch of the NAACP invited community pastors to Wilson Villa for a member recruitment planning meeting, followed by a delicious dinner of beef tenderloin with mushrooms, Parker House rolls, and mashed potatoes.²¹

In 1922, the Wilsons sold their home to Mrs. F. Dodd Sears, who named her new hotel and cafe “The Henrietta.” The couple relocated to

697 St. Anthony Avenue, where Wilson Villa remained in business (with a few more stops and starts) for many years.²²

The Wilsons’ tourist home served many an eclectic group of folk. Guests included Robert T. Bess, president of a New York City brokerage company, and Mrs. George W. Mullen, the owner of a beauty parlor in Oregon and a saleswoman for the popular women’s hair products created by Madam C. J. Walker.²³

The Great Depression seems to have stymied business for several years until 1933, when the Canadian Pacific Railway subsidiary, the Soo Line, sought lodging for their Negro workers. The company considered seven homes and ultimately named Wilson Villa as *the* boarding



The nine Rondo-based businesses listed in the *Green Book* between 1940 and 1956 are identified on this aerial map from the 1940s. All stood in the path of the I-94 construction project that tore through the Historic Rondo neighborhood in the late 1950s and early 1960s. All but one structure—Wilson Villa—were

destroyed. One additional long-time business not included on the Rondo map was Drew Tailors, located at 1597 University Avenue and operated by Sidney Williams. Map courtesy of Senior City Planner Anthony Johnson and the City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development.

house for their male employees whenever they were in town.²⁴

The contract with the railway helped business, as did the improving economy. Word spread. Soon, Mrs. Wilson became host to traveling entertainers. These included “America’s best liked vaudeville actor” Bill (Bojangles) Robinson and singer Ada Brown. The two celebrities, along with Robinson’s second wife, Fannie, enjoyed a home-away-from-home at Wilson Villa in May 1933. Still more famous clientele visited 697 St. Anthony. Imagine, the talented Harlem Globetrotters staying at your home.²⁵

Mrs. Wilson not only was a good businesswoman, she also was a community leader and activist, and her generosity was well-documented. She won awards and high honors from her church, social networks, and St. Paul organizations. As a civic leader, she was one of the captains named by the NAACP to work on its member recruitment to gain 200 new members.

She even earned coveted space in Estyr L. Bradley’s holiday news column:

A snappy addition to the Christmas week activities will be the cabaret dance New Year’s Eve at the Sterling Club given by the Ladies’ Auxiliary. . . . With Villa Wilson as the pilot, this will surely be a gala affair.²⁶

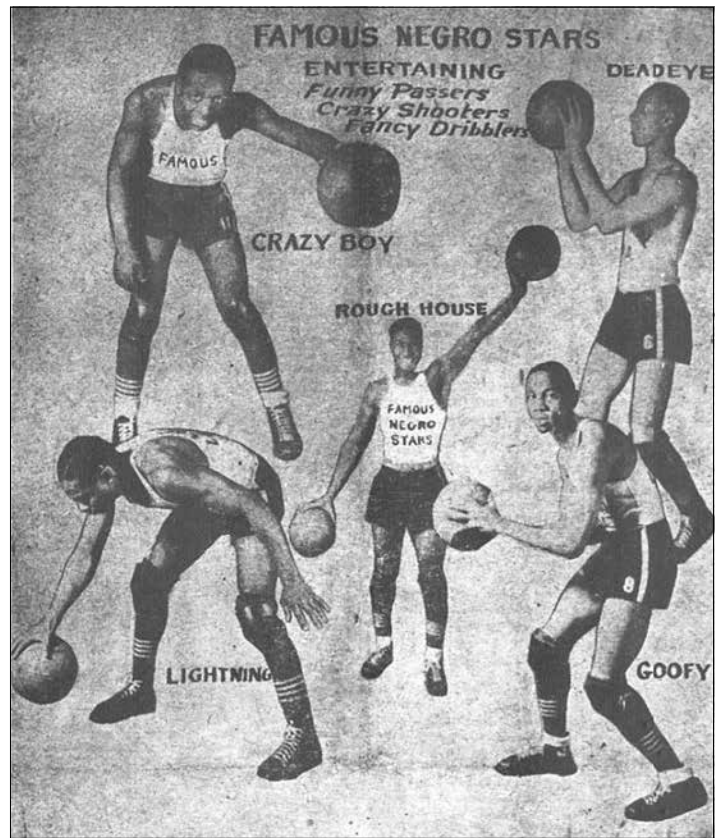
Wilson cared very much for her Rondo community. It’s no wonder Wilson Villa was a favorite stop for both local patrons and visitors, many of whom may have discovered the travel home using the very helpful *Green Book*.²⁷

Jim’s Place

Jim Williams first opened his Rondo-area tavern in 1924. It underwent various name changes, until the most popular moniker—Jim’s Place—stuck. Jim’s Place proved to be a special gathering spot amongst its local patrons and out-of-town



Bill and Fannie Robinson pose for publicity shots in 1941. Mr. Robinson, also known as Bojangles, was a popular entertainer who traveled the country. Mrs. Robinson accompanied him as his secretary and manager. *Carl Van Vechten photograph/Beinecke Library (c) Van Vechten Trust.*



In 1936, Villa Wilson hosted several basketball players with the traveling Harlem Globetrotters, including Inman Jackson, the team’s center and nephew to Mrs. S. L. Rogers, who lived up the street. *In Minneapolis Spokesman, January 3, 1936, 1.*

Jim's Place at 560 St. Anthony Avenue was a Rondo institution for years. Photograph from the collection of Earl McGee. Used with permission from Marvin Anderson, Rondo Avenue, Inc.



guests. Williams listed his business in the *Green Book* beginning in 1941 and in the local paper, although he didn't need to do so. He admitted to his friends at the *St. Paul Recorder* that they could count on him for regular advertising simply because it was his way of helping the paper in its early days.²⁸

For many, Jim's Place was the place to be for "The Best in Liquors . . . Congenial Atmosphere [and] Very Good Beer." The venue served fried chicken and other tasty items. Guests could count on good music, and it was one of the few places patrons could purchase tickets to upcoming shows, including Chick Webb and his N. B. C. orchestra, with swing vocalist Ella Fitzgerald headlining the show. Patrons lined up for tickets to Jimmie Lunceford and Les Hite and his Cotton Club Orchestra, as well.²⁹

Jim's Place also had its own inhouse singer—Katherine Pettiford. She was a longtime waitress there, but singing was her first love. She was known to croon a tune for her favorite customers. When she contracted pneumonia in 1943, the news hit the paper, but she was back to waitressing and singing in no time. Then, in 1945, she caught a break. A cast member of the traveling show *Carmen Jones* heard Pettiford sing and invited her to the Windy City to begin performing at The Ritz Lounge. One problem: How would she tell her boss? You see, Williams had a reputation for being pretty tough and sometimes unapproachable and gruff, but anyone who knew him well saw behind the facade. He gave the popular waitress his blessing.³⁰

In between the music and socializing, it wasn't unusual for political discussions to bubble up, including during the 1938 mayoral race between John McDonough and William Fallon.

One evening, customers took their own straw poll, the results of which hit the paper. McDonough won with twenty-four votes versus Fallon's nineteen. Despite "Jim's Place official results," Fallon served a two-year term through 1940; McDonough later served as mayor for eight years.³¹

Williams was proud of his business, which "was the only Negro tavern in the area operating with a State Liquor License."³² He kept his legal papers updated and his establishment in tip-top shape. He remodeled multiple times, installing a "modernistic streamlined bar" in 1937, and two years later, spending \$2,000 for roomy hardwood booths and tables, inlaid linoleum, and tasteful wall decorations and blinds.³³ It's easy to see why Jim's Place was a go-to business for locals and Black travelers.

Williams retired after more than thirty years in 1958. Chester W. Oden and John Rial bought the establishment and renamed it Roady's Bar.³⁴

G. & G. Barbecue

A 1933 announcement in the *Twin-City Herald* let readers know that Leona Goodman (wife of Edward Goodman) was the manager of G. & G. Barbecue, 443 Rondo: "Mrs. Goodman . . . is prepared to render first class service day and night," at the "barbecue, chil[i], lunch, and beer parlor." It didn't take long before she and her team of cooks were known for some of the best barbecued meats in the city.³⁵

Like Wilson and Williams, Goodman advertised in local papers and started listing her business with the *Green Book* in 1941. Unlike Wilson, who juggled work and a myriad of community activities at the same time, Goodman appears to have focused mainly on her business. She did, however, write a letter to the editor of the *Minneapolis Spokesman* over employment injustices at the Schmidt Brewery:

As proprietor of a business which uses a large quantity of a local brewery (Schmidt's) I want to heartily address your campaign to obtain proportionate employment for our people. I intend to do all I can . . . in your fight for justice for the colored worker. . . . I am sure the local brewers do not realize the injustice of the present situation.³⁶

Because locals and tourists alike stopped by for choice barbecue, within six years, the Goodman family had the opportunity to move the establishment to a new location at 318 Rondo that had more floor space and new furnishings and decor. The news was well-received by the community.³⁷

Still, G. & G Barbecue ran into some trouble. In 1936, at the old venue, Goodman was fined \$50 for selling beer after the bar had closed for the night. And, as happens in bars, there were fights, including a domestic disturbance between a male patron and his date in 1941. Mr. Goodman stepped in between the bartender, Moses Gardner (Mrs. Goodman's brother), to break up the altercation. In doing so, Goodman stabbed the perpetrator's arm. He, Gardner, and the patron, Allen King, were charged, receiving sentences that were ultimately suspended. Finally, in 1943, the city council revoked the establishment's business license after Gardner was arrested and pled guilty to drinking hard liquor on site, which requires additional licensing. Gardner paid another \$50 fine. The business continued to run ads—the first after the incident appearing in April of that year, so it's evident G. & G. Barbecue was not out of commission long. Based on advertisements in local papers and the *Green Book*, the business held on for a few more years.³⁸

In March 1946, Mrs. Goodman sold the business to Gene Harris, who formerly ran the cafe at Elks Gopher Lodge #105. He reopened the site as the Little Savoy Cafe in late April.³⁹ Harris did not advertise in the *Green Book*.

After retirement, Goodman, got more involved in the community. She was elected as an officer in the Como Temple 128 IBPOE and to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Executive Board. She won the BSCP Queen Crown, a contest between Minneapolis and St. Paul Ladies Auxiliaries in 1954.⁴⁰

Advertisements for G. & G. Barbecue continued to run in the *Green Book* from 1947 to 1956, although it is unclear whether the business was actually in operation in the later years.

Nifty Cafe

Artie E. Boyd gained ownership of Nifty Cafe at 556 Rondo after the death of its previous owner, William H. Simms, in September 1939. With a

This thank you ad from G. & G. Barbecue, which ran in the local papers when the restaurant moved locations, was part of a three-quarter-page spread of thirty congratulatory notices from local Rondo businesses. In *Minneapolis Spokesman* June 2, 1939, 4.

quick remodel, Boyd reopened the all-night restaurant on October 14, showing off a new, small dining room for private parties. Featured menu items included chicken, steak, and sandwiches.⁴¹ He advertised in local papers.

Nifty Cafe was the center of activity, especially for the social clubs of the day. The men of the Credjafawn group held a stag party in February 1940. That same month, the Cameo Club used the location as their departure site during the Saint Paul Winter Carnival on their way to a tobogganing event. They also enjoyed a meal there at a club meeting at which the late Mrs. Gordon Parks served as co-hostess.⁴²

Something was always going on at Nifty's. Boyd renovated several times, especially in the early years. The most notable changes included a bar, after receiving a license to operate as a tavern in 1940, and the addition of an upper-level "Blue Room," which served as a meeting room and game room for popular card parties.⁴³

One of the more harrowing events occurred when Boyd threw an inebriated customer out of the restaurant after the man caused a ruckus and overturned a table. The perpetrator returned several times, the last time with a knife. He knocked the owner to the floor, but Boyd, perhaps suspecting further trouble, had a gun and killed the assailant. The injured Boyd was taken into custody temporarily, but patron testimonies confirmed Boyd's accounting of his

Shortly after Artie Boyd married Dorothy Andrews Venable, he joined the war effort, and his bride suddenly had a new job as proprietress of Nifty's. In *St. Paul Recorder*, March 5, 1943, 1.



actions. If the shooting wasn't enough, a month later, one of the cooks suffered burns when an oven exploded due to leaking gas.⁴⁴

Boyd and his wife, Lela Juanita Boyd, divorced in 1941. Less than six months later, the restaurant owner married Dorothy Andrews Venable. The honeymoon didn't last long, as it was wartime, and Boyd enlisted in the US Army. Boyd was honorably discharged in 1944.⁴⁵

Nifty Cafe continued to prosper until Boyd sold the place to Gene Harris, the same businessman who had purchased G. & G. Barbecue a few years earlier. Interestingly, Boyd, never advertised Nifty's in the *Green Book*. It did not appear as a listing until 1948 under Harris's ownership and then only that year and in 1949.

Other Sites

Other Rondo-based businesses that advertised in the *Green Book* included Carter's Restaurant, owned by Bert J. Carter (later Road Buddy's);

Gardner's DX Station, under the management of A. Everett Gardner; Milligan's Garage, operated by Colonel D. Milligan; and Otto's Service Station, named for owner Otto C. Hall. After the war, a number of St. Paul liquor stores—scattered around the city but not in the Rondo neighborhood—were listed in the book.⁴⁶

"There Will Be a Day . . ."

All entries from St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood ended with the 1956 edition. After that, other businesses located mostly in downtown St. Paul debuted in the *Green Book*. These included Coleman's Restaurant, Covered Wagon, Hotel Lowry (and restaurant), Hotel Ryan (and restaurant), Jean's French Restaurant, Lee's Village Inn, The Lexington, Lindy's Steakhouse, Port's Restaurant, Sarrack Motel, Hotel St. Paul, Sugar's Restaurant, and the YMCA on W. Fifth Street.⁴⁷

What happened to cause Rondo businesses to shutter and a new smattering of mostly white-owned businesses catering to Black travelers to take over the listings in the *Green Book*? First, between 1956 and 1968, the construction of Interstate Highway 94 demolished the vibrant Historic Rondo neighborhood, razing 700 homes, 300 businesses, and affecting thousands of lives, tearing the once thriving community in half. The wounds of this decision remain raw to this day, and citizens still suffer its effects.⁴⁸

Second, in the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activism slowly but steadily began to take center stage across the country until most Americans were finally paying attention. Much of this time, it was still a bit precarious to travel while Black, but little by little, laws were changing, and attitudes were shifting. When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed by President Lyndon Johnson, it prohibited "discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin." It helped enforce voting rights and desegregation in schools and abolished Jim Crow laws that meant to keep people "separate but equal."⁴⁹

The *Green Book*, once an essential tool for Black travelers, became simply "handy" overnight. And that was okay. Green died in 1960, a few years before the signing of this momentous act. Years before his passing, he admitted his hope that the appreciated travel guide would no longer be needed:

There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.⁵⁰

Green's dream came true. After 1964, the Victor H. Green Company focused more on vacation destinations in the US and around the world until finally closing shop after the 1966-67 edition published. From then on, the book was mostly forgotten, even by families that had once relied on the vital information to safely travel. Interestingly, most white Americans had never heard of the publication—until Hollywood produced *Green Book*, a movie based on the experiences of classic pianist Dr. Don Shirley as he toured the South, relying on a white driver and a copy of the *Green Book*. The film, which proved controversial for some viewers, piqued people's interest, resulting in news articles, magazine features, books, podcasts, and even attempts to create modern-day "green books" to meet the needs and interests of today's African Americans and other groups.⁵¹

The original *Green Book* is out of print. The few remaining copies are, for the most part, preserved digitally at the New York Public Library

and a few university libraries. Still, this simple idea that Victor H. Green and his staff brought to fruition over thirty years—"Traveling Without Aggravation" for African Americans—made a monumental difference. Green also understood that travel can open doors, minds, and memories—for all.

Acknowledgments: Sincere appreciation to: Mary K. Boyd, Karen Carey-Bonner, Anthony (Tony) Johnson, Nathaniel (Nick) Abdul Khaliq, Cyrus Knudson, Gloria Presley Massey, Theresa Neal, Norman (Speed) Rawlings, and Frank White.

Nieeta L. Presley retired from the Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation in 2020. She is the owner of New Life Possibilities, LLC and coordinator for the Rondo Roundtable, a collaboration of Rondo organizations spearheading the vision to preserve the legacy and history of the community and to develop the Rondo Arts Culture Business Heritage District (RACBHD) and ReConnect Rondo, an initiative to build a land bridge over I-94. She serves as secretary of the Saint Paul Planning Commission and first vice president of the Saint Paul Branch of the NAACP. Presley is a daughter of Historic Rondo, although she now lives in the city's Swede Hollow neighborhood. She has three children, nineteen grandchildren, and twelve great grandchildren.

NOTES

1. "To the Editor," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 5, 1939, 5.
2. "Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul," MNopedia, accessed July 1, 2022, <https://www.mnopedia.org/place/rondo-neighborhood-st-paul>; "Rondo History," ReConnect Rondo: Build a Bridge to Better, accessed July 1, 2022, <https://reconnectrondo.com/vision/history/>. St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood began with the purchase of land in 1858 by Joseph Rondeau. It was settled by Blacks, Jews, and others. By the 1920s, 80 percent of the African American population lived in this thriving community that developed primarily between University Avenue to the north, Selby Avenue to the south, Rice Street to the east, and Lexington Avenue to the west; *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dc858e50-83d3-0132-2266-58d385a7b928,2>.
3. Victor H. Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*

Compendium (Camarillo, CA: About Comics, 2019), 5. In 1938, the book included travel recommendations for services in most states east of the Mississippi. The following year, locations across the continental US were represented. Latecomers included Utah (1940); US Territory of Alaska (1948); New Hampshire (1951); Nevada (1948); North Dakota (1957); and Hawaii (1963).

4. *The Negro Motorist Green-Book, 1940*, 2.

5. Adina Adams Gibbs, interview with David V. Taylor, Minnesota Black History Project, Minnesota Historical Society, December 18, 1970, 1, 26, 27; "Adams, J. Quincy," *Saint Paul City Directory, 1918* (St. Paul: R. L. Polk & Co, 1918), 147; Jeremiah E. Ellis, "St. Paul's Distinct Leadership Tradition: A Century of the Sterling Club," *Ramsey County History* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 13.

6. "Atty. And Mrs. W. T. Francis," *The Appeal*, August 17, 1918, 3-4; "Francis, Wm. T.," *Saint Paul City Directory, 1918*, 443; Leetta M. Douglas, "Votes for 'Everywoman': Nellie Griswold Francis, the Women of Rondo, and

Their Suffrage Crusade, *Ramsey County History* 55, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 5.

7. “Baby Boy: Mr. and Mrs. Roy Campanella,” in Social and Personal column, *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 25, 1948, 5.

8. Frank M. White, *They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: The Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016), 100; Frank White, email correspondence with editor, June 14 and 30, 2022; Brian Murphy, “Remembering Roy Campanella’s short, but oh-so-sweet baseball stint in St. Paul,” *Pioneer Press*, August 18, 2017, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.twincities.com/2017/08/18/remembering-roy-campanella-baseball-st-paul-saints-brooklyn-dodgers/>; “Roy Campanella, St. Paul’s New Catcher,” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 4, 1948, 1; Carl T. Rowan, “Campanella Blasts Homers at Record Clip, Becomes Hero ‘Terror’ of St. Paul,” *St. Paul Recorder*, June 18, 1948, 6; “Baby Boy,” 5; Carl T. Rowan, “Fans Disappointed as Brooklyn Team Recalls ‘Campy,’” *St. Paul Recorder*, July 9, 1948, 3; “Roy Campanella,” National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, accessed June 21, 2021, <https://baseballhall.org/hall-of-famers/campanella-roy>. Born in 1921, Campanella played eight years in the Negro Leagues. After Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball, Campanella followed him, joining the Dodgers in 1946, before being sent briefly to the minor leagues in St. Paul. He returned to New York two months later and played with the Dodgers most of his career.

9. Mary K. Boyd, interview with author, April 26, 2021 and email exchange with editor, June 26, 2022.

10. Ventress Laroe Jackson Roberson as told to Kate Cavett, *Voices of Rondo: Oral Histories of Saint Paul’s Historic Black Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 93.

11. Victor H. Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book Compendium*, 5; Alexander Nazaryan, “How the ‘Green Book’ Saved Black Lives on the Road,” *Newsweek*, March 9, 2017, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/2017/03/17/green-book-jim-crow-era-travel-guide-saved-black-lives-565430.html>; Curt Brown, “Book, website track history of racist ‘sundown towns’ in Minnesota, U.S.,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 28, 2018, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://www.startribune.com/book-website-track-history-of-racist-sundown-towns-in-minnesota-u-s/489425621/>; James W. Loewen, “Historical Database of Sundown Towns—Minnesota, History and Social Justice,” accessed June 23, 2022, <https://justice.tougaloo.edu/location/minnesota/>.

12. Nazaryan.

13. Ibid.

14. Boyd, email exchange with editor.

15. The New York Public Library has the most complete digital collection—twenty-three issues as of July 2022, covering every year except the war years, when the book was not printed. It is also missing the 1936, 1958, and 1965 editions. Despite extensive searching, we were unable to locate or confirm the existence of the ‘65 edition; Celia McGee, “The Open Road Wasn’t Quite

Open to All,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 2010; “Exxon Mobile and the Green Book, Exxon Mobile, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/Sustainability/Community-engagement/ExxonMobil-and-The-Green-Book>. ESSO was the name used by some Standard Oil franchises after a company shake up in 1911. The name stood for the phonetic pronunciation of the company’s initials: S—O. Today, the business is known as Exxon.

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17. *The Negro Motorist Green Book Compendium*, 5; Naomi Grevemberg and co-host Anais Monique, “Episode 4: Creative Black Resistance, Nomads at the Intersections” (podcast), accessed June 16, 2022, <https://diversifyvanlife.com/episode/creative-black-resistance/>. In the podcast *Driving the Green Book*, Alvin Hall and Janée Woods Weber share their experiences traveling from Detroit to New Orleans, “collecting powerful, personal testimony about how Black Americans used the historic travel guide *The Negro Motorist Green Book* during the height of segregation.” To hear the series, go to <https://podcasts.macmillan.com/podcast/driving-the-green-book/>.

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20. “Mr. F. D. McCracken entertained,” *The Appeal*, September 29, 1917, 3; “The opening of Wilson Villa,” *The Appeal*, June 21, 1919, 3; “For Rent,” *The Appeal*, September 11, 1920, 3.

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22. “Wilson Villa Sold; Changes Hands Monday,” *The Northwestern Bulletin*, April 29, 1922, 4.

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Witness Ladies Minstrel Nov. 23," *Twin-City Herald*, November 19, 1932, 1; "Sterling Club Auxiliary Gives Enjoyable Party," *Twin-City Herald*, November 25, 1933, 1; "Shower' For Hallie Q. Brown House," *Twin-City Herald*, May 5, 1934, 1; "NAACP Campaign Launched for 200 Members," *St. Paul Recorder*, March 17, 1939, 1; Estyr K. Bradley, "Social and Personal, St. Paul," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, December 25, 1936, 6.

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28. "Publisher's Corner," *St. Paul Recorder*, August 20, 1948, 4.

29. "Chick Webb Tickets Now on Sale," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, July 8, 1938, 1; "Jim's Place," *St. Paul Recorder*, December 19, 1937, 3; "Jimmie Lunceford," *St. Paul Recorder*, April 19, 1940, 1; "Les Hite's Famous Los Angeles Band Coming Saturday Night, May 4," *St. Paul Recorder*, April 26, 1940, 1; "Meet the Gang at Jim's Place," *St. Paul Recorder*, August 30, 1940, 4.

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47. *Travelers' Green Book: International Edition*, 1963-1964, 32-33.

48. "Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul," MNopedia; "Rondo History," ReConnect Rondo: Build a Bridge to Better.

49. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management, "Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," US Department of Labor, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/civil-rights-center/statutes/civil-rights-act-of-1964>.

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51. See numerous examples online. Jeffrey Brown, "In 'Green Book,' a black pianist and his white driver forge a bond amidst Jim Crow," *PBS Newshour*, November 23, 2018, accessed July 1, 2022. A children's book, *Ruth and the Green Book* by Alexander Ramsey Calvin and published by Minneapolis-based Carolrhoda Books in 2010, caught the attention of actor and director Viggo Mortensen. That was the first time he had heard of the *Green Book*. The movie starred Mortensen and Mahershala Ali. Ali also had not known of the *Green Book* until he began work on the film.

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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 Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Ĥeyáta Othújwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

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RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

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Mnisóta Makhóche, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

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Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.

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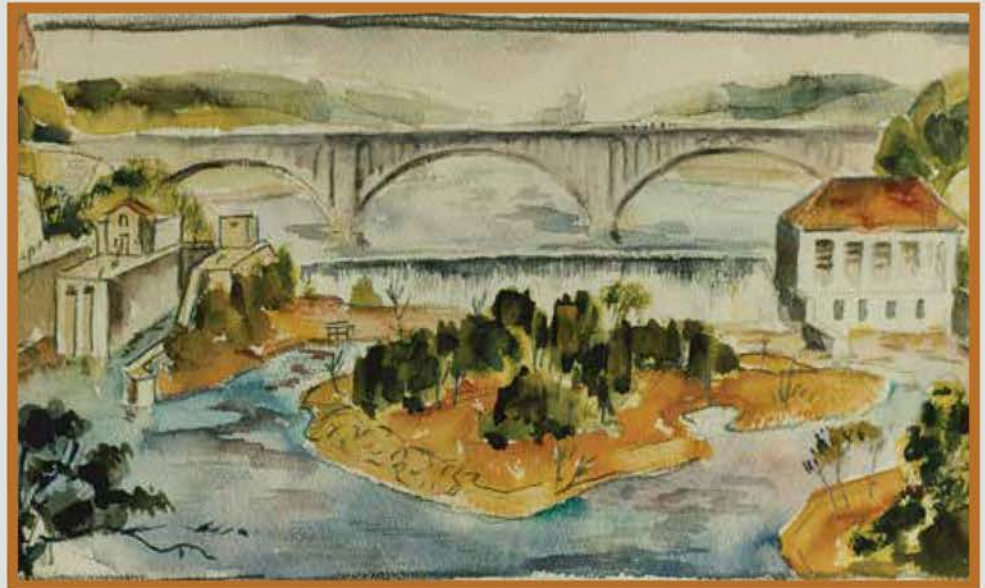
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Bob Brown: "Paint What You See"

PAUL NELSON, PAGE 14



Bob Brown was taught to "paint what you see," and so he did—creating scores of paintings of recognizable sights and scenes throughout St. Paul and nearby counties, including these depictions of the Ford Bridge and Swede Hollow. *Courtesy of Deborah LeSueur Photograph Collection of Bob Brown Originals and Minnesota Historical Society.*