Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
Twin Cities, MN
Permit No. 3989

Growing Up *Dos Culturas*

FRANK M. WHITE, PAGE 19

Top left: Francisco and Cresencia Rangel, n.d.

Bottom left: Kico shows off his decorated bike to his mother, Cresencia, n.d.

Above: Tía Juanita *(left)* and Fidela, the author's mother *(right)* in their late teens or early twenties, performing at St. Joseph's Hospital, n.d.

Photos courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Horseman of the Court

Pierce Butler's Seventeen Years Serving as St. Paul's First US Supreme Court Justice

JAMES FLEMING AND PAUL NELSON, PAGE 11

The Merit of Service

James and Frances Hughes and the Architecture of Black Excellence in Minnesota

JEREMIAH E. ELLIS, PAGE 1

James and Frances Hughes and the Architecture of Black Excellence in Minnesota

JEREMIAH E. ELLIS

My mother once told me about a day in her childhood when a teacher offered to drive her home from school. As they pulled out of the parking lot, the teacher instinctively steered the car toward the neighborhood near Hazelwood Street and County Road B East—assuming incorrectly that, because my mother was Black, that was the only place she could possibly live. This wasn't merely a navigational error; it was a manifestation of the "geography of assumption," a mental map of invisible boundaries that dictated where Black excellence was permitted to take root in 1960s Ramsey County.

However, long before these suburbs were officially mapped by developers, generations of Black Minnesotans were busy dismantling the myth of inferiority with surgical precision. The African American enclave that the teacher so readily identified was not an accident of urban sprawl, but the direct byproduct of—as well as a response to—the overt discrimination faced by James and Frances Hughes in their youths. Their victory over segregated military structures and university housing bans created a neighborhood defined by the excellence and resistance they had practiced for decades. This story of defiance begins not in a suburban classroom, but in the mud and merit of the 809th Pioneer Infantry during World War I, where the architecture of a new Minnesota legacy was first drafted.

REGISTRATION CARD No. 66

1. James T. Hughes — 22
2. 387 N. St Albans St. Paul Minn
3. Date of birth: September 17 1894
4. (1) Yes
5. Elgin Ill U.S.A.
7. Receiver
8. Strong & Warner 29
9. Mother by adoption
10. Single — African
11. No
12. Mother by adoption

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

James T Hughes

The 1917 World War I draft registration card for James T. Hughes, a twenty-three-year-old record clerk then residing at 387 North St. Albans Street in St. Paul. The missing lower-left corner is a physical remnant of the "Jim Crow Army" era: Regulations required registrars to tear off the corner if the applicant was of African descent to facilitate segregation. *Image courtesy of Ancestry.com, provided in association with National Archives and Records Administration.*

The 809th Pioneer Infantry and the Merit of Service

The entry of the United States into the Great War in 1917 forced a national reckoning with the "color line," as the Wilson administration—which had recently resegregated the federal government—wrestled with how to mobilize nearly three million eligible Black men.[1] While the military established a "Jim Crow Army" that relegated ninety percent of Black servicemen to labor battalions, the formation of the 809th Pioneer Infantry in 1918 offered a unique, albeit strenuous, middle ground. Pioneers were specialized units tasked with bridging the gap between manual labor and combat; they worked under artillery fire to repair roads, clear wire, and move ammunition to the front. Within this high-pressure environment, Minnesota's African American soldiers forged what contemporary observers called a "Splendid Military Record."[2] Despite a system designed to highlight their perceived "natural suitability" for humble toil, the men of the North proved that their merit was not defined by the tasks they were

As featured *in The Honor Roll of Ramsey County, Minnesota: A Record of Ramsey County's Contribution to the Winning of the Great War*, Battalion Sergeant Major James T. Hughes, a St. Paul record clerk who rose to the highest non-commissioned rank within the 809th Pioneer Infantry, American Expeditionary Forces. Returning from the Great War with an "Excellent" character rating and a Bronze Victory Button, Hughes translated his military leadership into a career as an industrial superintendent and a civic pioneer. *Image courtesy of the Minnesota Digital Library, St. Cloud State University Archives, St. Cloud, MN.*

assigned, but by the technical and psychological excellence they brought to them.

The struggle for recognition was inherent to the 809th's structure. As a segregated unit, it was often comprised of men from across the Missouri, Indiana, and Oklahoma regions, yet Minnesota men consistently rose to the top of the hierarchy.[3] Among these leaders was James T. Hughes, a slender, twenty-three-year-old receiving clerk at Lowertown's Strong and Warner Company.[4] Despite the military's practice of marking draft cards with torn corners to identify "African descent," Hughes's performance could not be marginalized.[5] Serving as Sergeant Major of the 1st Battalion, Hughes was part of a cohort of Minnesotans who dominated the regiment's non-commissioned officer (NCO) positions.[6] This advancement was no accident of geography; it was the direct result of psychological examinations held at Camp Dodge, where the Minnesota contingent outperformed their peers from across the country, securing the most critical leadership roles within the unit.[7]

The dominance of these local heroes was captured vividly in the primary source material of the era. In a letter dated November 30, 1918, sent from Savonay, France, Sergeant Norman Bradshaw wrote to Charles Sumner Smith, editor of the *Twin City Star*, to trumpet the achievements of the "boys from home."[8] Bradshaw noted with pride that Minnesota came out ahead in testing, resulting in the state's men being given "nearly all of the non-commissioned positions of the regiment." He provided a roster that read like a "Who's Who" of Black Twin Cities leadership, featuring names like James K. Hilyard, Jasper Gibbs, and James Hughes. For Bradshaw, sharing this record—"humble though it may be"—was a way to assert the intellectual and organizational capability of Black Minnesotans to a domestic audience that often viewed them through the lens of Jim Crow stereotypes.

Ultimately, the era of the Great War served as a crucible for James Hughes's identity. Though he returned to a "Red Summer" of racial violence and had to navigate complex bureaucracy to secure his $180 Minnesota State Soldier's Bonus, his service record remained "Excellent." The 809th Pioneer Infantry provided a platform where Hughes could thrive as a leader within a system specifically engineered to keep him in a secondary role. His transition from a St. Paul record clerk to a Battalion Sergeant Major in the American Expeditionary Forces established a legacy of leadership that informed his post-war life.[9] Like many of his contemporaries, Hughes's refusal to be limited by the "laborer" label helped lay the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement, proving that the merit of service was measured in character, not just in the rank on one's sleeve.

Frances Bouyer and the U: Scholarship as Survival

The experience of African American students at the University of Minnesota during the interwar years was a paradox of intellectual proximity and social distance. While the U opened its academic doors, it firmly shuttered its residential ones. Under the administration of President Lotus Coffman, the university enforced a rigid policy of housing segregation, denying "Negro" students access to campus dormitories. This systemic exclusion created a landscape of social isolation, forcing students to endure grueling commutes from St. Paul or North Minneapolis. Charlotte Crump's seminal essay, "This Free North," captured this atmosphere, exposing the myth of Northern racial exceptionalism as students navigated a campus that welcomed their tuition but rejected their presence. For Black women, the isolation was particularly acute; the simple act of living on campus was deemed "ridiculous" by the prevailing white social order, leaving them to freeze on long trolley rides home after a day of classes.[10]

In the face of such institutional hostility, resistance took the form of sisterhood. The Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority, founded on the principles of culture and merit, arrived at the University of Minnesota in 1922.[11] Initially organized as the Ivy Leaf Club under leaders like Bella Taylor and Katheryn Tandy, the group was formally installed as the Eta Chapter in December 1922 by National Basileus Lorraine Greene.[12] These women did not merely seek social outlet; they built a safe haven to counter the demeaning stereotypes of the era. By 1923, Bella Taylor became the first Black woman to graduate from the university in four years, setting a precedent that academic excellence was the ultimate tool

for social improvement and survival in an environment designed to marginalize them.[13]

This commitment to scholarship reached a historic zenith in 1926, a year now remembered for the "Hats Off to the Sorors" moment.[14] In a stunning reversal of fortune, the Eta Chapter rose from twenty-first place—the very bottom of the campus scholarship rankings—to first place among all women's Greek organizations.[15] With a grade point average of 1.512, the AKAs surpassed every all-white sorority on campus, including their nearest competitor, Delta Delta Delta. Dean of Student Affairs E. E. Nicholson characterized the feat as one of the most remarkable achievements of the year. It was a powerful, data-driven rebuke to "white psychologists" of the day who posited theories of racial inferiority; as the *St. Paul Echo* triumphantly noted, the AKAs had "fairly run away with the scholastic laurels," proving that their intellect was not just equal, but superior.[16]

Centering this narrative of resilience was Frances Bouyer. A Chicago native who moved to the Twin Cities, Bouyer embodied the AKA spirit of leadership and tenacity.[17] Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, she was a fixture of the U social and academic scene, serving as a general chairwoman for community initiatives like the "Big Baby Contest"[18] and later as the general conference chairman for the Eighth Annual Central Regional Conference in 1941.[19] Despite the social isolation of a campus where Black students were still excluded from the core of university life, Bouyer thrived. She balanced the demands of AKA leadership with rigorous study, culminating in her 1941 graduation with a degree in Library Science—a field dedicated to the preservation of knowledge she had fought so hard to access.[20]

The social fabric woven by Bouyer and her sorors was both elegant and strategic.[21] Because they were barred from campus housing, these women relied on a sophisticated network of private residences and community hubs like the Hallie Q. Brown House to maintain their organized social structure.[22] The home of Ms. Alice Franklin at 486 St. Anthony Avenue emerged as a vital node in this network. A prominent community figure and fraternal organizer who had lived in St. Paul since 1888, Ms. Franklin provided more than just a roof; her home served as a sanctuary and a domestic headquarters for scholars like her niece, Frances Bouyer.[23] This graduate network transformed private parlor rooms into sites of academic rigor and sororal bonding, ensuring that the lack of a dormitory bed would never result in the loss of a degree. Within these homes, the pink and green of AKA teas—meticulously appointed affairs featuring candlelight, twining ivy, and classical music—were more than just parties; they were rehearsals for the leadership and sophisticated social structures the sorority would eventually bring to the national stage.[24] Whether hosting cocktail parties for stars like Etta Moten[25] or formal dances at the new Coffman Memorial Union,[26] these women used the glory and honor of Alpha Kappa Alpha to transform scholarship into a means of survival and a blueprint for future community power.

Members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority gather on the steps of the University of Minnesota during the 8th Annual Central Regional Conference, May 30–June 1, 1941. Hosted by Eta Chapter and with Frances Bouyer serving as General Conference Chairman, the conference brought together delegates from St. Louis and Chicago to navigate a residentially segregated campus. *Image courtesy of Tiffany Scott-Knox personal collection.*

"Making a Little Job a Big One"

The struggle for economic parity in St. Paul during the late 1930s was often defined by a persistence that transformed modest entries into significant professional milestones. In March 1939, the Education Committee of the St. Paul Urban League convened a pivotal panel discussion at the Hallie Q. Brown House titled "How unusual jobs can be gotten and held."[27] Designed to open the Vocational Opportunity Campaign, the session featured pioneers like architect Clarence Wigington and James Hughes, then a foreman at the Quality Park Envelope Company.[28] The forum aimed to dismantle the

A dedicated civic leader and professional, Frances Bouyer Hughes *(standing, third from left)* was a cornerstone of the St. Paul community for decades. As a charter member of Delta Phi Omega, the Twin Cities' graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., she provided steady leadership as Basileus (President), Grammateus (Secretary), and as a guiding Undergraduate Advisor to the Eta Chapter at the University of Minnesota. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

myth of the closed door, providing a practical demonstration of how African Americans could secure and maintain employment in sectors traditionally shielded by institutional gatekeeping.[29] By emphasizing ability over race and the necessity of specialized training, the Urban League sought to inspire a generation of youth to view local industry not as a dead end, but as a landscape where one could, in the words of the era, make a "little job a big one."[30]

No individual better embodied this philosophy than James Hughes himself. Over a distinguished twenty-five-year tenure at the Consolidated Printing Ink Company, Hughes navigated the complexities of the industrial workspace to rise from a general laborer to the superintendent of the roller department.[31] His ascent was not merely a personal victory but a civic benchmark; by 1941, his expertise led to an appointment on the advisory committee for national defense training in St. Paul, where he represented the interests of Black workers in the burgeoning war economy.[32] His leadership extended into the social fabric of the city as president of the Sterling Club[33] and a board member of the Urban League,[34] proving that professional excellence was the bedrock upon which community influence was built.

The broader significance of Hughes's trajectory was codified in the 1945 Governor's Report, "The Negro Worker in Minnesota."[35] The report utilized James as a primary case study of success achieved in spite of the barriers that characterized the pre-war labor market. It highlighted his promotion to foreman at Brown & Bigelow—the world's largest remembrance advertising firm—as a definitive example of how "skilled and semi-skilled Negro workers" could be integrated into technical roles when given the opportunity.[36] This document served as both a testament to individual grit and a subtle indictment of the systemic hurdles that required such exceptional effort for standard professional advancement.

Parallel to these professional battles was a personal union that reflected the same spirit of endurance. In June 1942, James Hughes married Frances Bouyer at St. Mark's A.M.E. Church in Milwaukee.[37] The marriage was a meeting of two formidable intellects; Frances, a niece of the legendary Hallie Q. Brown[38] and a former educator in the Chicago system, brought a wealth of experience in navigating institutional gatekeeping herself. Together, the couple became a cornerstone of St. Paul's cultural and civic life, with Frances leading the Eta Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha[39] and managing library initiatives at the Hallie Q. Brown House.[40] Their partnership underscored a vital truth of the Rondo community: that the heights of professional achievement were often reached through quiet resilience and a home built on shared principles of excellence and service.

On Sunday, April 16, 1950, the St. Paul Urban League hosted a historic ceremony at the Sterling Club to present National Urban League Certificates of Recognition to eight local citizens. Featured among the honorees is Mrs. Frances Hughes: recognized for her "outstanding job performance" as a librarian and her tireless work promoting interracial goodwill. Standing with her are fellow trailblazers who dismantled professional "color lines" across the Twin Cities: *from left to right,* Chester Oden Jr., Rev. B. N. Moore, Hector P. Vassar, C. H. Roper, Martin Brookins, James Lee, Frances Hughes, James Griffin, and presenter S. Vincent Owens. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

The Ten-Acre Gamble in Maplewood

The story of the Maplewood enclave began not with a corporate developer, but with the quiet, strategic "night dealing" of James and Frances Hughes in 1946.[41] She a civic-minded librarian recognized for dedicated leadership through Alpha Kappa Alpha beyond the university; he a skilled superintendent at the Consolidated Printing Ink Company and prominent St. Paul

Urban League board member. They purchased ten acres of land in what was then known as a "restricted district" from a retired farmer.[42] This transaction was born of necessity and grit: Originally intended as a joint investment among four Black families, the others withdrew at the closing, leaving James and Frances to face the financial and social risk alone.[43] The farmer, reportedly feeling isolated and seeking to slight exclusionary neighbors, rejected a higher white offer to finalize the sale to the Hugheses.[44] This bold acquisition stood in stark contrast to the "lily-white" suburban reality later detailed in a 1961 *Minneapolis Star* report, which described the difficulty for Black families to secure suburban housing as being "almost harder . . . than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle."[45] At a time when federal mortgage insurance was often reserved for whites only, the Hugheses' purchase represented a rare breach in the wall of Twin Cities segregation.

James and Frances displayed remarkable patience, waiting thirteen years for the land to be cleared and the debt settled before officially platting the tract into twenty lots in 1959. Understanding that their community would be scrutinized by a skeptical public, James insisted on a rigorous aesthetic and economic standard to ensure the neighborhood remained beyond reproach. He established a minimum home value of $17,500—a significant sum for the era—and although he did not strictly require double garages, nearly all residents built them to match the high standards of the development. The gamble paid off with historic speed: Within a year of platting, every lot was sold to Black families. By 1967, the community had blossomed into the most populous Black suburban area in the Twin Cities, with Maplewood's Black population growing to 205 residents, up from seventy-five in 1960. The enclave stood as a testament to the Hugheses' vision of a self-determined, prosperous suburban life, proving that Black excellence could thrive even in the most restricted landscapes of suburban Ramsey County.[46]

The Social Fabric of Sandhurst and County Road B

By the mid-1960s, the ten-acre tract envisioned by James and Frances Hughes had transformed from a strategic land acquisition into a vibrant theater of Black middle-income life.[47] The architectural landscape of this enclave was defined by the custom-built ranch and split-level home, structures that signaled both modern taste and suburban permanency. These homes were often the result of long-held dreams and word-of-mouth networks; for Uzziel and Ann Marie

1961 architectural vision for Mr. and Mrs. John E. Armstrong's future home (1576 Sandhurst Avenue East), designed by John F. Glanton, represents a significant milestone in the Sandhurst-Hazelwood enclave. As a ranch-style structure, the house was purposefully engineered to accommodate a wheelchair user. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

To learn how another family found their way to Maplewood, see "A Tale of Two Lots: The Smith Family's Path to Frank Street" online.

James T. Hughes in 1959, the year he and his wife, Frances, formally platted their ten-acre Maplewood enclave. At this time, he was a board member of the St. Paul Urban League, a member of the city's advisory committee on national defense training, and later that year he would be elected president of the prestigious Sterling Club. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

Frances Hughes served on the Board of Directors for the Crispus Attucks Home for the Aged from 1953 through the 1960s, sustaining support for the city's only residential facility for Black seniors. Professionally, Hughes was an accomplished librarian for Gillette Children's Hospital, where she managed their residential facility before continuing her career with the State of Minnesota, ensuring literary access for rural communities across the state. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

This map *(above)* accompanied a 1961 *Minneapolis Star* report detailing the stark residential segregation of the era. While the article described the suburbs as "lily-white" and noted that a Black family's chance of buying a suburban home was harder than a camel passing through the eye of a needle, the map visualized the "well-defined areas" to which Black residents were largely restricted: the Rondo and Selby-Dale neighborhoods in St. Paul, and the North Side and South Central areas of Minneapolis. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

Rogers, who moved to Sandhurst Avenue in the 1960s, the neighborhood was a "treasury" for her children, offering a rural-leaning charm where "there were patches of wild asparagus" and woods where "kids could grow up and be able to go . . . and play for hours."[48] In 1965, real estate listings in the *St. Paul Recorder* highlighted properties like the four-bedroom ranch-style house at 1557 County Road B East, featuring recreation rooms, multiple fireplaces, and attached garages.[49] These homes, often marketed by prominent Black realtors like William M. Cassius and J. Nathaniel Smith,[50] were offered with Federal Housing Administration and GI Bill financing, providing a gateway for Black veterans like Mr. Don Colbert to secure a foothold in the "exclusive Maplewood district."[51] Mr. Colbert,

Aerial view of the neighborhood prior to development, 1945. The ten-acre farm property purchased by James and Frances Hughes at the northeastern corner of Hazelwood and County Road B is located at the top center of the image. *Held at the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota.*

a twenty-year Air Force veteran, recalls that entrepreneur Ira Rawls "saved the last lot" for him while he was stationed in Texas because Colbert "wanted to bring [his] kids up in a nice school system."[52] The presence of builders like Edgar Steel and Ira Rawls—who constructed his own home at 1622 Sandhurst Avenue East in 1961—ensured that the neighborhood was not merely a residential development, but a project of community self-determination.[53] Even in the face of racial intimidation, such as a 1962 cross-burning at the Rawls residence, the neighborhood remained resilient, buoyed by the support of white neighbors and a collective commitment to maintaining an immaculate suburban standard.[54]

Life in the enclave was characterized by a sophisticated "social courtesies" network that mirrored the elegance of the Rondo era while embracing the spaciousness of the suburbs. Mrs. Rogers noted that moving from the East Coast to a then-rural community was an adjustment, but the presence of neighbors like Marie Rawls—who shared news through the "community gathering place" of the beauty shop—created a tight-knit environment.[55] This closeness provided a "built-in security system" during the social upheavals of the 1960s, as residents felt "surrounded by our own."[56] The homes of residents like John and Elizabeth Armstrong (1576 Sandhurst), Phillip and Alma Freeman (1581 Sandhurst), and Archie and Coopie Anderson (1593 County Road B East) became centers for a continuous cycle of bridal, birthday, and holiday celebrations.[57] The *St. Paul Sun* and *Recorder* meticulously documented these gatherings, from the 1962 bridal dinner for Marcia Stewart Gordon decorated with silver candelabras, to a surprise birthday dinner, hosted that same year for Alma Stewart, where guests dined on shrimp creole, to the 1967 twin birthday celebration for eighty-two-year-old sisters Anna Banks and Emma Williams.[58] These domestic spaces also served as temporary havens for visiting intellectuals and students.[59]

By the turn of the decade, this private hospitality had coalesced into the Maplewood Neighborhood Club, a formal social organization that turned the Sandhurst cul-de-sac into a site of public celebration. The Hugheses, Stanleys, Freemans, and Armstrongs were core members of this community built by choice, not by force.[60] Beginning in 1967, the club's annual July Fourth Block Party became a regional landmark, drawing upwards of two hundred people[61] for an afternoon of "stereo taped music," yard games, and communal dining.[62] These festivities, led by officers like James Hughes Jr. and Alfred Stewart, were more than mere picnics; they were a visible assertion of Black joy and belonging in a historically "lily-white" county. They served as a living rebuttal to the racial intimidation seen elsewhere, proving that a diverse neighborhood could thrive through shared joy and mutual respect.

Members of the Maplewood Neighborhood Club and their guests gather for the annual July Fourth block party on the Sandhurst Avenue cul-de-sac in 1968. This 1968 gathering served as a powerful public rebuttal to regional housing discrimination and a visible assertion of Black excellence in a historically "lily-white" suburban Ramsey County. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

As the 1970s progressed, the neighborhood's influence expanded into the broader civic and political sphere.[63] Residents like Amos Haynes (1625 County Road B East) served on the selection committee for St. Paul City Council candidates and co-led ambitious NAACP membership drives, while others, like attorney James N. Bradford, served as Special Assistant Attorney General.[64] Through a blend of "pinochle club" intimacy[65] and high-stakes institutional leadership,[66] the families of Sandhurst and County Road B successfully wove their private quest for excellence into the permanent civic life of Ramsey County—proving Mrs. Rogers's reflection that "being more inclusive and diverse is good" and that "if you persevere . . . all's been well."[67]

Institutional Leadership and Civic Legacy

The transition of the Hughes family from the residential enclaves of St. Paul to the budding suburb of Maplewood was not merely a change in geography, but a migration of profound civic influence.[68] By 1968, the family's commitment to equity moved beyond the backyard of their Sandhurst Avenue home and into the formal halls of government. James and Frances Hughes were

To learn more about an international student exchange program hosted in the neighborhood, see "Bridging Continents: The 1964 African Women's Institute" online.

instrumental in the formation of the Maplewood Human Rights Commission, an entity established to advise the Village Council on anti-discrimination laws and to foster a "cultural mosaic" in a suburb that was, at the time, navigating the complexities of integration.[69] Their leadership ensured that the commission didn't just exist on paper but acted as a sentinel for progress, focusing on housing equity and educational reform.[70]

Frances Hughes's trajectory into this role was a natural evolution of a lifetime spent in the service of community organizations.[71] In the 1940s and 50s, she was a mainstay of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, often serving as secretary, where she meticulously documented the social and philanthropic pulse of the African American community.[72] By the late 1960s, these organizational skills were channeled into formal governance; as the newly appointed Corresponding Secretary for the Human Rights Commission, Frances transitioned from a community chronicler to a civic leader advising the Village Council. Her work helped bridge the gap between grassroots advocacy and legislative action, ensuring that the voices of minority residents were represented in the village's official growth strategies.

As for James T. Hughes, his lifetime of service was formally recognized in 1974. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, the City of Maplewood passed a formal resolution honoring him. The City Council cited his "uncommon dedication" and "civic leadership," noting that his efforts as a private citizen had significantly benefited the entire community.[73] This resolution stood as a testament to a man who had once had to purchase land through "night dealing" to bypass restrictive covenants, yet ended his years as a celebrated architect of the city's social and moral landscape.

A Map Redrawn

The Hazelwood enclave was never merely a cluster of homes or a geographic accident of sprawl; it was the physical manifestation of a lifetime spent navigating—and ultimately defeating—the architecture of segregation. For James and Frances Hughes, the ten-acre gamble in Maplewood served as the final blueprint in a long career of dismantling the myth of inferiority. From the mud of the 809th Pioneer Infantry to the scholarship laurels of the University of Minnesota and the superintendent's office at a major industrial firm, the Hugheses practiced a philosophy of excellence that refused to be contained by the geography of assumption. By the time they established the Sandhurst cul-de-sac, they had transformed their private quest for dignity into a public standard of suburban belonging. Their legacy did not just provide a roof for Black families; it created a self-determined community that forced Ramsey County to rethink its invisible boundaries and acknowledge a new map of excellence.

Returning to the memory of the teacher's "instinctive" turn toward Hazelwood, we see that her error was a tribute, albeit an accidental one, to the strength of the world the Hughes family built. She steered the car toward that neighborhood because, in her mind, "Black excellence" and "Hazelwood" had become synonymous—a testament to the fact that James and Frances had successfully anchored their identity to the land itself. They didn't just find a home in the suburbs; they anchored a standard of civic leadership and sophisticated social grace that continues to resonate in the permanent tapestry of Ramsey County. Their story serves as a reminder that maps are not just drawn by developers and surveyors, but by the courage of those who refuse to stay within the lines.

Jeremiah E. Ellis *is a public history researcher and St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commissioner dedicated to uncovering and uplifting African American narratives within the local landscape. He holds a Master of Public Administration and serves on the board of the Ramsey County Historical Society, fostering inclusive learning spaces that connect past to present. His commitment to archival research and local history preservation is profoundly inspired by his cherished roles as a husband and father.*

NOTES

1. Kinshasha Holman Conwill, ed., *We Return Fighting: World War I and the Shaping of Modern Black Identity* (Smithsonian Books, 2019); Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (Temple University Press, 1974).

2. "Minnesota Negroes Make Splendid Military Record," *The Twin City Star*, December 28, 1918.

3. "Splendid Military Record," *The Twin City Star*.

4. James T. Hughes WWI Draft Registration Card, June 5, 1917, https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/6482/records/28832824; James T. Hughes, Honorable Discharge Certificate, July 29, 1919, box 125.H.16.3B, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

5. Jennifer Keene, "African American Soldiers in World War I," lecture, 15th Annual Truman Library Teachers' Conference, August 10, 2018, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence, MO, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izZJ-4dhx2k.

6. "Splendid Military Record," *The Twin City Star*.

7. Popularized by army psychologists during World War I, these mass intelligence tests—primarily the Alpha (for literates) and Beta (for illiterates)—were often used to "scientifically" validate racial hierarchies. While psychologists like George O. Ferguson and Carl Brigham attributed the lower median scores of African Americans to innate deficiencies, the data frequently revealed that performance correlated more closely with educational access and geography than race. For instance, Black draftees from the North often outscored Southern white draftees, and the Beta test—which initially showed no significant racial differences—was revised by the military until it produced the desired discrepancy in scores. Within the 809th Pioneer Infantry, however, Minnesota's Black soldiers leveraged these examinations to secure a disproportionate number of leadership and non-commissioned officer (NCO) roles, effectively turning a tool of exclusion into a metric of merit. See Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 96-97; and Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (Temple University Press, 1974), 44-48.

8. "Splendid Military Record," *The Twin City Star*.

9. James T. Hughes, WWI Bonus Record, October 15, 1919, box 125.H.16.3B, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

10. Charlotte Crump, "This Free North," *University Literary Review*, April 5, 1937, University of Minnesota Archives, Dean of Women, Box 1, Folder 16, Negro.

11. Bella T. Taylor, "Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority at 'U,' " *The Appeal*, June 16, 1923; Linda Garrett, *The Hidden Figures of Delta Phi Omega Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.: Reflection Of A Golden Soror 1948-2022* (self-published, 2024).

12. "University Girls Organize: Sorority Plans Activities," *The Northwestern Bulletin*, October 7, 1922; "Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority," *The Appeal*.

13. "Completes Course In Social Service Work At State University," *The Appeal*, June 16, 1923.

14. "Hats Off to the Sorors," *St. Paul Echo*, October 2, 1926.

15. "Colored Girls Stand First in University List," *St. Paul Echo*, October 2, 1926.

16. "Hats Off," *St. Paul Echo*.

17. "Mrs. Frances Bouyer of Chicago and Mr. James Hughes . . . Married," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 3, 1942.

18. "Sorority Women Sponsor Big Baby Contest," *St. Paul Recorder*, November 1, 1940.

19. "Sorority Women Hold Eighth Annual Regional Conference In Twin Cities," *St. Paul Recorder*, June 6, 1941.

20. "University of Minnesota Graduates," *St. Paul Recorder*, June 13, 1941.

21. "A.K.A. To Hold Fellowship Tea Sunday," *St. Paul Recorder*, October 13, 1939.

22. "Sorority Sponsors Dance," *Twin-City Herald*, February 11, 1933.

23. "University of Minnesota Graduates," *St. Paul Recorder*, June 13, 1941; "96-Year Old St. Paul Woman Is Dead," *The Saint Paul Sun*, June 13, 1957.

24. "Eta Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Entertained at a Beautifully Appointed Tea," *St. Paul Recorder*, October 18, 1940.

25. "Etta Moten Is Feted By Alpha Kappa Alpha Chapter," *Twin-City Herald*, January 19, 1935.

26. "Eta Party at Union," *St. Paul Recorder*, December 20, 1940.

27. "Job Guidance Meeting Sunday At Hallie House," *St. Paul Recorder*, March 17, 1939.

28. "GETTING A JOB!!! WINNING A PROMOTION!!!" advertisement, *St. Paul Recorder*, March 17, 1939.

29. "Job Guidance Meeting," *St. Paul Recorder*.

30. "St. James A. M. E. Church: Young People's Meeting," *St. Paul Recorder*, April 10, 1942.

31. Governor's Interracial Commission, "The Negro Worker in Minnesota: A Report to Governor Edward J. Thye" (March 10, 1945).

32. "James Hughes On Saint Paul Defense Board," *St. Paul Recorder*, February 7, 1941.

33. "Sterling Club Conducts Hallie Q. Forum Sunday," *St. Paul Recorder*, December 3, 1943.

34. "New St. Paul Urban League Secretary Welcomed, "*St. Paul Recorder*, December 5, 1941.

35. Governor's Interracial Commission, "The Negro Worker in Minnesota."

36. "Are Skilled Workers More St. Paulites," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 16, 1946; "Harvester Defense Plant Upgrades Negro Employees," *St. Paul Recorder*, March 6, 1942.

37. "Marriage of Miss Frances Bouyer and Mr. James Hughes," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 3, 1942.

38. Hallie Quinn Brown (1849–1949) was a pioneering African American educator, elocutionist, and author who played a central role in the Black clubwomen's

movement and the fight for women's suffrage. A founding member of the National Association of Colored Women, Brown campaigned extensively for equal educational access and political representation. Her 1926 work, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, was the first biographical encyclopedia of Black women compiled by a Black woman. In 1929, the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center in St. Paul was named in her honor after a student essay contest identified her as an "outstanding leader" and model of "Black racial uplift." See Daleah B. Goodwin, "'A Torch in the Valley': The Life and Work of Miss Hallie Quinn Brown" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2014).

39. "Hallie Q. Brown Branch Library Open to Public," *St. Paul Recorder*, April 9, 1943.

40. "Sorority Elects Officers," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 16, 1944.

41. Sherrie Mazingo, "Negroes in the Suburbs: Two Centers Develop in Last 7 Years," *Minneapolis Star*, May 31, 1967.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Paul Gilje, "Twin Cities Suburbs Revealed As Almost Lily-White; *Minneapolis Star* Writer Finds," *St. Paul Recorder,* December 22, 1961.

46. Mazingo, "Negroes in the Suburbs."

47. Mazingo, "Negroes in the Suburbs."

48. Ann Marie Rogers and Don Colbert, interview with Jeremiah Ellis, "Community Conversation: Reflecting on Race and Housing in Maplewood," Maplewood Neighborhood History Project, February 6, 2025.

49. Wm M Cassius, "Real Estate For Sale," advertisement, *St. Paul Recorder,* October 28, 1965.

50. J. Nathaniel Smith, "Real Estate For Sale," advertisement, *St. Paul Recorder,* July 29, 1965.

51. "Armstrongs to Build Home," *St. Paul Recorder*, February 10, 1961.

52. Ann Marie Rogers and Don Colbert, interview by Jeremiah Ellis.

53. "Mr. and Mrs. Ira Rawls," *Saint Paul Sun*, October 5, 1961.

54. "Police Chief Calls Cross Burning Before Home a Teenager's Prank," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 4, 1962.

55. Ann Marie Rogers and Don Colbert, interview by Jeremiah Ellis.

56. Ibid.

57. "Open House by Armstrongs," *St. Paul Recorder*, December 8, 1961; "Personalities in the News: Saw Iris Gambol," *Saint Paul Sun*, February 22, 1962; "Mr. and Mrs. Archie Anderson," *Saint Paul Sun*, March 17, 1960.

58. Estyr Bradley Peake, "A delicious shrimp creole dinner," *Saint Paul Sun*, July 5, 1962; Estyr Bradley Peake, "Wearing a short apricot chiffon," *Saint Paul Sun*, August 2, 1962; "Twin Sisters Celebrate 82nd Birthday," *St. Paul Recorder*, December 28, 1967.

59. "African College Students Attend Women's Institute At Macalester College," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 2, 1964.

60. "Neighborhood Club Gives Block Party on 4th of July," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 11, 1968.

61. "Annual Block Picnic Held in Maple Wood for Fifth Year," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 8, 1971.

62. "Neighborhood Club Gives Block Party," *St. Paul Recorder*.

63. "Commission Organization," *1971 Annual Report* (City of Maplewood, 1972); "Area Rights Advocates Rally In Emergency," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 18, 1967.

64. "Executive Director St. Paul Urban League (Submit Resume to: Amos A. Haynes)," *St. Paul Recorder*, January 24, 1974; "St. Paul NAACP 1979 Membership Program," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 10, 1979; "Atty.-Gen. Mondale Reappoints James N. Bradford," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 27, 1960.

65. "Breakfast Pinochle Club," *St. Paul Recorder*, May 29, 1969.

66. "Manager Equal Opportunity Programs," *St. Paul Recorder*, June 25, 1970.

67. Ann Marie Rogers and Don Colbert, interview by Jeremiah Ellis.

68. Mazingo, "Negroes in the Suburbs."

69. "Six Appointed to Maplewood Human Rights Group," *St. Paul Recorder*, July 11, 1968.

70. "Future Goals of Commission," *1971 Annual Report* (City of Maplewood, 1972).

71. "St. Paul Urban League To Present Certificates Of Recognition To Citizens," *St. Paul Recorder*, April 14, 1950.

72. "Delta Phi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Society," *Twin City Observer*, September 28, 1950; "Delta Phi Omega Chapter . . . met Friday, May 18," *Twin City Observer*, May 24, 1951.

73. Maplewood City Council Meeting Minutes, "Resolution 74-9-216," September 19, 1974, City Archives, Maplewood, MN.

Horseman of the Court

Pierce Butler's Seventeen Years Serving as St. Paul's First US Supreme Court Justice

JAMES FLEMING AND PAUL NELSON

The following is the second of a two-part series about the life and career of Pierce Butler. To read the first article on Butler's early career in St. Paul, see Vol. 61, No. 1 of Ramsey County History.

Why should Ramsey County remember Pierce Butler? For one good reason: He was the first Minnesotan (and St. Paulite) to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

But the judgment of history has been harsh. The rather few scholars who have paid attention to Butler's judicial career have rated him undistinguished at best.[1] Such ratings are subjective, but the core of them are an assessment of whether a judge's opinions have had a lasting impact on the law; Butler's have not.[2] On the court, he was never a star, nor did he strive to be one. On those rare occasions when he had a chance to shine (see: the *Buck v. Bell* online sidebar), he declined. He wrote the majority opinion for only one historically pivotal case, a case that marked the end of one Supreme Court era, and which also touched off the most consequential defeat of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. We'll come to that story later, but remember the name: Tipaldo.

When Butler joined the Supreme Court in January 1923, he was just what President Warren Harding and Chief Justice William Taft were looking for: a Catholic, a Democrat, a hard worker, and a reliable conservative whose legal thinking was firmly grounded in the nineteenth century.[3] (Taft told Harding that Butler was a Democrat, "but not enough of a Democrat to hurt.")[4] The nation was still reacting to the perturbations wrought by the Great War, including vastly increased federal power; the railroads, for example, had been temporarily nationalized. There had been too much change.

Portrait of Pierce Butler in December 1922, just before he officially joined the US Supreme Court. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Photo Company Collection.*

Harding had been elected on the slogans "Triumphant Nationality" and "Back to Normalcy." The key word there was "back": back to pre-war America, back to a federal government that did as little as possible. He chose former President Taft as Chief Justice in 1921, precisely to move the Supreme Court back toward nineteenth-century concepts, particularly in the areas of government meddling in the economy (bad).

Congress followed similar impulses. In 1921 it passed the eugenics-inspired Emergency Quotas Act, followed in 1924 by the even more drastic Asian Exclusion Act and National Origins Act. From the 1890s forward, the United States had seen an unprecedented surge of immigration from eastern and southern Europe—Jews, Slavs, Sicilians—that made many Americans, including in the elite classes, uncomfortable. They saw the new immigrants as inferior and feared that they would degrade the country's heretofore genetic "excellence." The new law set

Pierce Butler *(at left)* with Chief Justice William Taft *(at right)*, 1922. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Photo Company Collection.*

quotas designed to permit immigration mostly from the country's early sources in northern Europe. Back, back, back. (The country's current immigration turmoil has a precedent almost exactly one century old.)[5]

Pierce Butler was the perfect man for this moment. He detested government economic regulation and social programs of all kinds. American citizenship, to him, carried with it the duty of unquestioning obedience to government (as we saw with the Warren Schaper case in part one of this series, where the University of Minnesota professor lost his job over Butler's perception of his insufficient patriotism). To Butler, pacifism and socialism were alien and abhorrent concepts. In 1926 *Time* magazine observed that Pierce Butler was "ruthless, intolerant, forceful, impatient with all forms of progressive thought."[6] This made him, to Taft, a man of "sound . . . constitutional views."[7]

The qualities he had developed in St. Paul—industry, determination, preparation, inflexibility, and a supreme conviction of his own rightness—served him well on the court for almost a decade. According to the leading historian of the Taft Court, Robert Post, while Taft remained chief justice (he resigned in 1930), Butler was one of the toughest judges "in conference"—that is, in the meetings among the justices where they hashed things out—and also one of the most persuasive. No one was better than him at turning divided decisions into unanimous ones, a quality prized by Chief Justice Taft.[8]

Because the Supreme Court makes the news only in cases of controversy, like gun control, some readers may suppose that big stuff is all it does. But the contrary is true. Most of the cases it takes, though difficult, matter deeply to the litigants but do not affect the general public. The issues are technical and arcane, and the Court's opinions, where the justices explain what they decide, are incomprehensible for most people.

In his nearly seventeen years on the Supreme Court, Pierce Butler wrote over three hundred majority (that is, winning-side) opinions, nearly all of them unanimous.[9] Most dealt with knotty stuff like railroad and utilities regulation, Butler's area of expertise. There were few deeply divisive cases, and this was probably a congenial time for Butler. Taft had, with President Harding's acquiescence, built a reliable core of conservative justices: Taft, Willis Van Devanter, George Sutherland, James McReynolds, and Butler—like-minded men of similar ages. The latter four became a bloc, meeting, socializing, golfing, and voting together. In time they would become known, disparagingly, as the Four Horsemen (as in, of the apocalypse).[10] More about that later.

Butler took office in a time of comparative national prosperity and consensus. Both were shattered by the coming of the Great Depression in 1929. That, in turn, brought the 1932 election of Franklin Roosevelt as president, and with him an endless number of laws, programs, and agencies designed to restore some measure of prosperity, or at least hope. Butler, deeply suspicious of such meddling, considered FDR "a damned fool."[11]

Roosevelt was determined to use every legitimate power of the state to fight the national crisis. The Horsemen were equally determined to resist him, and with four of the nine Supreme Court votes, they were in a strong position to do so. FDR and Congress rushed many programs into life in 1933 and 1934; then the legal challenges to them worked their way through the courts. Everyone knew a crisis might come.

And then it came. Between January of 1935 and May of 1936, the Supreme Court ruled six Depression-fighting programs unconstitutional: the Railroad Retirement Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Guffey Coal Act, and the National Recovery Act (Roosevelt's keystone).

All these were federal statutes designed to help some large and suffering category of people, including rail workers, farmers, and miners. Pierce Butler voted to strike down all of them.[12]

We come now to *Tipaldo*. The last big case of this set, which set off the Judicial Crisis of 1937 (as historians have called it), was a New York state minimum wage case called *Morehead v. New York ex rel. Tipaldo*. This was a close, 5–4 decision—the Four Horsemen plus one—with the opinion by Pierce Butler. This was the only truly important opinion he ever wrote. The Supreme Court, the New Deal, and American constitutional law would never be the same again.

Architectural drawing by George N. Ray, for a 1925 addition to Pierce Butler's residence on Nineteenth Street NW in Washington, DC. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Waggaman & Ray Archive.*

The Tipaldo Case

Joe Tipaldo was the manager of the Spotlight Laundry in Brooklyn, and a bad boss. In 1933 the New York legislature had passed a minimum wage/maximum hours law for female laundry workers; the Depression had driven pay so low that, in the legislature's view, many women were working at starvation wages. Tipaldo responded by pretending to pay his female workers the minimum, then requiring kickbacks. He was caught, convicted, and sent to jail. Laundry and hotel businesses, hostile to minimum wages, pooled money to make Tipaldo's case a test of New York law.

Tipaldo and his enablers had good reason to be optimistic. Just ten years earlier, in 1923, the US Supreme Court had ruled a very similar law, setting minimum wages for women and children in the District of Columbia, unconstitutional: *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*. Though this was long before the Depression, the impulse was the same, to protect from exploitation workers who had no effective bargaining power.[13] It was the kind of law that Pierce Butler and the Four Horsemen disdained.

Adkins was a 5–3 decision, with one justice, Louis Brandeis, not taking part, and three dissenting. When *Tipaldo* came along, in 1936, two enormous changes had taken place. One was the Depression, which put powerful pressure on government to act for suffering workers. The other was Supreme Court turnover: all the justices who dissented in *Adkins* were gone, along with one who voted with the Horsemen. This set up the possibility of a 5–4 split, with a single justice who had not voted in *Adkins* deciding the fate of *Tipaldo*—and, by extension, the future of the New Deal.

Owen Roberts was that single justice, a Republican appointed by President Hoover in 1930. Roberts had been hard to pin down in New Deal cases; sometimes he voted with the Horsemen, sometimes not. This time he did, giving them a 5–4 majority. Pierce Butler, who almost never got a writing assignment in a close case, got this one. It would change his life.

He probably found writing it rather easy. The controlling precedent was *Adkins*, and so Butler's opinion in *Tipaldo* relied heavily on *Adkins* and reached the same result. It has been written that Pierce Butler pared his judicial prose to remove any language that might prove to be memorable,[14] but in this case, Butler changed his tone. Confrontational and defiant, Butler wrote: "The State is without power by any form of legislation to prohibit, change or nullify contracts between employers and adult women workers as to the amount of wages to be paid."[15]

Butler's *Tipaldo* opinion reflected his hardened nineteenth-century views. While countless

Clerk of the Supreme Court Charles B. Cropley, Chief Justice Charles E. Hughes, Justice James McReynolds, and Justice Pierce Butler enter the House Chamber in the US Capitol, 1939. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Harris & Ewing Photograph Collection.*

Aline Fruhauf, *Nine Old Men,* collotype print on paper, 1936. *National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Erwin P. Vollmer. © Estate of Aline Fruhauf. Reprinted with permission.*

workers across the country were being crushed by starvation wages, "the state is without power by *any form of legislation*" (emphasis added) to intervene. Here was Pierce Butler's worldview, forged on the Dakota County frontier, grilled into him at Carleton, and petrified in certainty through his decades of success (and wealth), made the immutable law of the nation. The French novelist and poet Anatole France had written that "the majestic equality of the laws . . . forbid rich and poor alike to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread."[16] Pierce Butler now suggested an American counterpart: The Constitution, in its magnificent equality, permits rich and poor alike to toil their lives away in sweatshops.[17] Butler had put a dagger into any legislative action to ameliorate the calamity of the Great Depression for workers.

Justice Pierce Butler leaving his Washington, DC home for his morning walk on his seventy-first birthday, March 17, 1939. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Harris & Ewing Photograph Collection.*

Historian William Leuchtenberg called *Tipaldo* "the most consequential event of all."[18] It seemed to confirm what Attorney General Homer Cummings had warned FDR: "Mr. President, they mean to destroy us . . . We will have to find a way to get rid of the present membership of the Supreme Court."[19]

Tipaldo came down on June 1, 1936, just as the campaigns for the fall presidential and congressional elections were beginning to move. Roosevelt was popular but the Depression had not relented; no one knew what to expect in November. The popular response to *Tipaldo*, nationwide, was overwhelmingly negative. The Republican Party, fearing its backlash, took the extraordinary step of condemning the decision, which was so out of sync with the times.[20]

Roosevelt, who had been uncertain how, when, and even *if* to act against the Supreme Court, now decided to take Cummings's advice. He would act, but wait for the right moment. The election brought it nearer. His unprecedented victory—over sixty percent of the popular vote and complete control of Congress—showed that the people had voted overwhelmingly *for* Roosevelt and *against* the Supreme Court.

On February 5, 1937, Roosevelt struck. In an address to the nation, he announced his so-called court-packing plan, a reform of the federal court system that would permit the president to appoint an additional judge, at all levels, including the Supreme Court, for every judge over seventy who declined to retire. All four of the Horsemen (and two other justices) were older than seventy. This would not require a Constitutional amendment because the Constitution did not fix the number of Supreme Court justices; that was up to Congress. If approved, the plan would give Roosevelt six appointments to the Supreme Court and boost its size to fifteen.

Despite Roosevelt's popularity and congressional majorities, opposition to his proposal grew and spread, including in his own party. People saw it for what it was, a presidential takeover: They hated this particular court's intransigence but respected the court as an institution. And no president, no matter how critical of the Supreme Court, had ever dared act against the institution itself. A letter published February 10 in the *Minneapolis Journal* provides an example of the reaction: "Having made a rubber stamp

out of Congress and a bunch of office boys out of the cabinet, he [FDR] now proposes to dictate to the Supreme Court. Truly, one is tempted to say with Cassius . . . 'Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed, that he is grown so great?' "[21]

The struggle rumbled on all through the spring and summer of 1937, with opposition gaining strength week by week. On July 14, 1937, Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson went home from a long, hot session of trying to force the bill through, collapsed, and died. The Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937 died with him. (The bill did ultimately pass, but stripped of the key language.) Historian William Leuchtenberg wrote, "Roosevelt had suffered a severe setback, and his proposal had drawn its last breath."[22] And Pierce Butler's opinion in *Tipaldo* had touched it off.[23]

This was a stunning victory for Butler and the Horsemen. But now a series of events in quick succession turned that apparent victory into a defeat so thorough that it has been called a constitutional revolution.

While the reaction to *Tipaldo* was being absorbed, the 1936 elections fought, and the court-packing wrangle resolved, still another minimum-wages-for-women case made its way to the Supreme Court. Washington State had a similar law for decades, but it went unenforced. Elsie Parrish worked as a hotel housekeeper in Wenatchee for eighteen months, and over that time was paid $216 less than the statutory minimum. When she quit, she demanded that amount, her employer refused, and she sued. Because of *Tipaldo*, she lost at every level. But she kept appealing.

With rare exception, the Supreme Court takes only the cases it wants to hear. That it heard arguments in the *Parrish* case in December 1936, less than six months after the *Tipaldo* decision, signaled that something had changed. That change, never fully explained, took place in the mind of Owen Roberts.

Like *Tipaldo*, the *Parrish* vote was 5–4; the only difference was Justice Roberts, who switched sides. A shockingly short time had passed: *Tipaldo* was decided June 1, 1936; *Parrish* came down on March 29, 1937. It was, in effect, an admission that *Tipaldo*, and *Adkins* before it, were simply wrong. Chief Justice Hughes, writing for the majority, got right to the issue that had been skated over, and by implication denied, in *Tipaldo*: a state's compelling interest in forbidding sweatshops. He wrote, "What can be closer to the public interest than the health of women and their protection from unscrupulous and overreaching employers? And . . . how can it be said that the requirement of the payment of a minimum wage fairly fixed in order to meet the very necessities of existence is not an admissible means to that end? . . . The legislature was entitled to adopt measures to reduce the evils of the 'sweating system.' "[24]

Butler joined in Justice Sutherland's understandably angry dissent, but according to historian Leuchtenberg, the Horsemen understood immediately that they and their way of thinking, in command for so long, had been, just nine months after *Tipaldo*, made obsolete.[25] Thus was "liberty of contract" in employment, free from government regulation, so cherished by Pierce Butler and the Horsemen, swept away. And here was the constitutional revolution: The government was now free to regulate wages to ameliorate the effects of the Depression. The nineteenth century was over.

A Tragic Turn

Butler's last three years on the court cannot have been happy ones. In 1937 his friend Van Devanter left, followed in 1938 by Sutherland.[26] He and his remaining mate, McReynolds, fell into increasing isolation. In his first three years as a justice, Butler had dissented twice. In his last three, after *Tipaldo*, forty times. *Tipaldo* was a victory that returned only gall. Pierce Butler had not changed; the personnel of the court had changed, and that meant, in effect, that the Constitution had changed. He must have hated the transformation, but if he felt anger, no anger showed in his opinions; they remained measured and well-composed.[27]

In early 1938, a mysterious tragedy struck him and his family. His son Kevin, the youngest child born in 1905, died on a journey from St. Paul to New York. He was on a passenger train near Greensburg, southwest Pennsylvania, when he fell into a ravine and fractured his skull. The version of events published in most newspapers, probably the official family version, was that a sudden movement of the train on a curve thrust Kevin through a bathroom window,[28] and

To learn about four pivotal Supreme Court decisions during Butler's tenure and how he voted, see "Rights and Reasoning: Pierce Butler's Supreme Court Opinions" online.

Pierce Butler *(at right)* standing with his son, Kevin Butler *(at left)*, 1927. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, George Grantham Bain Collection.*

this is repeated in the death certificate.[29] But it is not believable. The force required to propel a full-grown man through the small window of a railcar bathroom would be stupendous, and trains must reduce speed on curves. The *Minneapolis Star,* alone among local papers, reported at first that he had "leaped out the window of a speeding passenger train."[30]

In late 1938 things got worse: Butler began to suffer from leukemia. Always dutiful, he continued to work, but now rarely wrote majority opinions. The last time he had the pleasure of writing for his colleagues was May of 1938.

Pierce Butler died of leukemia on November 16, 1939, was eulogized in Washington, and buried in St. Paul.[31] His grave, marked by an obelisk in the Butler family plot at Calvary Cemetery, lies not too far from that of a man he knew and admired, Archbishop John Ireland, and from that of his old political mate and courtroom rival, Fred McGhee.[32]

Shortly after the death of Justice Pierce Butler was announced, his seat on the Supreme Court bench was draped in mourning, 1939. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Harris & Ewing Photograph Collection.*

A Complicated Legacy

Who was Pierce Butler? It's a question that is hard to answer, made harder by Butler himself. Before he died, he directed his clerk to destroy his Supreme Court papers. This direction, of doubtful propriety (he was, after all, an employee of the United States) deprives posterity of essential information and invites speculation. What was he hiding? We are left with an incomplete record.

Butler deserves to be remembered in Ramsey County as the best Minnesota trial lawyer of his generation. He was an energetic public figure and as a regent of the University of Minnesota he was completely devoted, but he could also be rigid and intolerant. His persecution of Warren Schaper for "insufficient patriotism" cannot be defended.

As a Supreme Court justice, Pierce Butler was dutiful and hardworking. He lacked flexibility, but he probably would have said that what the job required instead was fidelity to tradition. Among scholars, the consensus has been that he ranks among the lower tiers of justices. Even former Minnesota Supreme Court Justice David Stras, a modern conservative, was able to mount only a tepid and unconvincing defense of Butler's record.[33] Butler was a nineteenth-century thinker caught up in the twentieth-century maelstrom of the Great Depression and a profound rethinking of constitutional law. The verdict of history—always temporary and contingent—has been that he held on mulishly to outmoded ideas, ideas that also happened to serve very well the nation's wealthy. Pierce Butler was no crank; he believed the meaning of the Constitution (as *he* understood it) was unchanging and unchangeable; its principles were fixed and eternal, and if they bent to the pressures of the times, they were no principles at all.

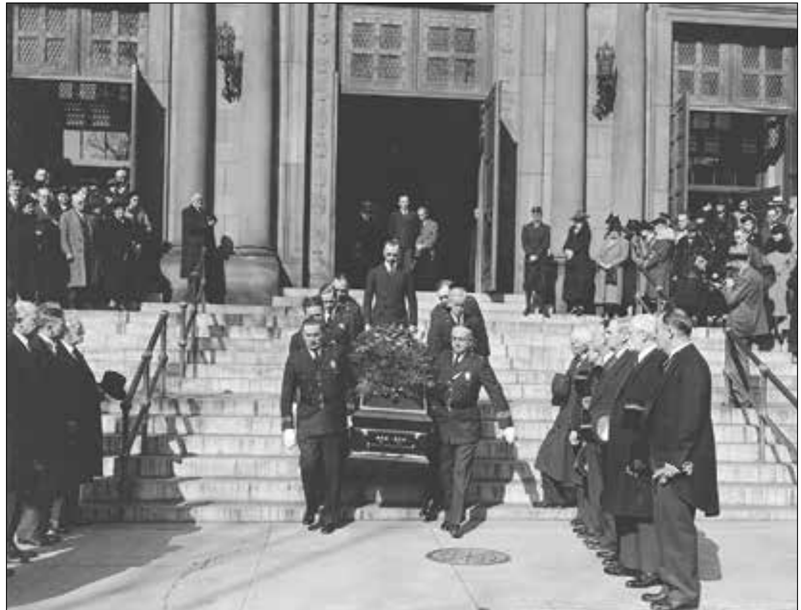
Events in the ninety years since *Tipaldo* remind us that in American law, as in life, things sometimes go in cycles.[34] Pierce Butler adhered to a view of the Constitution in which "the right of contract" was sacred; this had been a prevailing view for decades. But just nine months after *Tipaldo*, in *West Coast Hotel v. Parrish,*[35] the Supreme Court, through Chief Justice Hughes,

put an end to that approach; freedom of contract wasn't sacred after all.[36] One era of Constitutional law had come to an end, and a new one began. In the new era, government could act to intervene decisively in relations between employer and employee. It was revolutionary in the sense that an old regime had been toppled and a new one installed. The new one, which led to the Warren Court's expansion of civil rights and liberties, has lasted for nearly a century.

But a new cycle may have begun. The current Supreme Court majority, using an approach known as "originalism,"[37] embrace an old constitutional creed of long ago, limiting privacy rights,[38] voting rights,[39] affirmative action,[40] health care for minors,[41] as well as a host of shadow docket rulings that curtail Congress's appropriations authority.[42] Almost as quickly as the 1937 *West Coast Hotel* ruling swung the pendulum left, today the pendulum swings in the other direction. Pierce Butler would probably be pleased.

James D. Fleming *is a retired attorney who in thirty-six years of practice served as Chief Public Defender in the Fifth and Second Judicial Districts in Minnesota. Fleming serves on the Board of the Ramsey County Historical Society and lives in Minneapolis.*

Paul Nelson *is an amateur historian, the author of* Fredrick L. McGhee: A Life on the Color Line 1861-1912*, and many articles of Minnesota history published in* Ramsey County History, Minnesota History, MNopedia*, and other publications.*



The body of the late Justice Pierce Butler being carried from St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, DC following a high mass of requiem, 1939. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Harris & Ewing Photograph Collection.*

Justice Pierce Butler, circa 1924. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, National Photo Company Collection.*

NOTES

1. In their 1978 book *The First One Hundred Justices: Statistical Studies on the Supreme Court of the United States*, law professors Albert P. Blaustein and Roy M. Mersky relied on a 1970 survey of sixty-five professors of law, history, and political science from prestigious universities. Butler was one of eight rated a failure, along with his mates Van Devanter and McReynolds, evidently for their opposition to the New Deal as a bloc.

2. In his *Vanderbilt Law Review* article about Butler, David Stras—the Trump-appointed Court of Appeals judge and former justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court—tries, without much success, to rehabilitate Butler's reputation: "Scholars have characterized his role in the development of constitutional law as 'minimal' . . . Some scholars have gone even further by characterizing Butler's tenure on the Court as a 'failure,' and when he is mentioned, it is often on lists of the least successful Supreme Court Justices of all time." David R. Stras, "Pierce Butler: A Supreme Technician," *Vanderbilt Law Review,* 62(2), March 2009, 696.

3. David J. Danelski, *A Supreme Court Justice is Appointed* (Random House, 1964), 145-46.

4. Robert C. Post, *The Taft Court, Making Law for a Divided Nation, 1921-1930* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 61.

5. See Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* (Scribner, 2020).

6. "Grey Wigs," *Time Magazine* 8, October 11, 1926, 8. Quoted in Post, 62.

7. Post, 61.

8. Post, 65. See also David Schroeder, *More Than a Fraction: The Life and Work of Justice Pierce Butler* (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009), 163. William O. Douglas in his diary describes Butler as "a powerful advocate. . . . When you cross swords with him you have a worthy opponent."

9. The numbers are based on the authors' compilation of Butler's opinions, which itself is based in part on Lorraine Gardner's typescript compilation, *Supreme Court Justice Pierce Butler,* found at the Minnesota Historical Society.

10. Barry Cushman, "The Secret Lives of the Four Horsemen," 83 *Virginia Law Review* 559 (1987). In this difficult essay the author comments, "For more than two generations scholars have seen The Four Horsemen as far right, reactionary, staunchly conservative apostles of laissez-faire and Social Darwinism. And with good reason."

11. Pierce Butler III, interviewed by Robert Goff and Lila Johnson, Minnesota Historical Society, June 19, 1968, 13.

12. The sequence of events is well told in "The Origins of Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Court-Packing Plan,' " the fourth chapter of William E. Leuchtenberg, *The Supreme Court Reborn: The Constitutional Revolution in the Age of Roosevelt* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 82-131. The cases were, in order: *Panama Refining Co. v. Ryan* (1935), *Railroad Retirement Board v. Alton Railroad* (1935), *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* (1935), *Louisville Joint Stock Land Bank v. Radford* (1935), *United States v. Butler* (1936), and *Carter v. Carter Coal Co.* (1936).

13. *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, 261 U.S. 525 (1923).

14. Stras, "Pierce Butler: A Supreme Technician," 733.

15. *Morehead v. New York ex rel. Tipaldo,* 286 U.S. 587, 611 (1936).

16. The quotation comes from the mouth of an oddball character in his 1894 novel, *The Red Lily* (Dodd-Mead & Company), 91.

17. *Tipaldo.*

18. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn*, 105.

19. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn*, 92-93.

20. James F. Simon*, FDR and Chief Justice Hughes: The President, The Supreme Court and the Epic Battle Over the New Deal* (Simon and Schuster, 2012), 291.

21. "Rubber Stamp Court," *Minneapolis Journal*, February 10, 1937, 14.

22. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn*, 153-54.

23. Simon, *FDR and the Chief Justice,* 290.

24. *West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*, 300 U.S. 379, 398 (1937).

25. William E. Leuchtenberg, "The Case of the Chambermaid and the Nine Old Men," *American Heritage* vol. 38, no. 1, December 1986.

26. "Willis Van Devanter, 1911-1937," Supreme Court Historical Society, accessed July 12, 2025, https://supremecourthistory.org/associate-justices/willis-van-devanter-1911-1937/; "George Sutherland, 1922-1938," Supreme Court Historical Society, accessed July 12, 2025, https://supremecourthistory.org/associate-justices/george-sutherland-1922-1938/.

27. This tally is based on the authors' compilation of Butler's dissenting votes. Despite the increase in dissents, Butler voted with the majority in most cases—despite everything, most decisions were unanimous because most cases lacked controversy.

28. "Kevin Butler to Be Buried Monday," *Pioneer Press*, February 12, 1938, 9.

29. "Kevin Butler," Ancestry.com, https://www ancestry.com/search/collections/5164/records/3189037. The death certificate records that the primary causes of death were shock and skull fracture "due to fall out of window of train." As for the crucial question, what caused the fall: "cause undetermined."

30. "Leaps From Speeding Train," *Minneapolis Star*, February 10, 1938, 1. All other accounts, including later in the *Star*, used "fell," rather than "leaped."

31. "Pierce Butler's Career: The Story of Rise from Log Cabin Boyhood," *Minneapolis Star-Journal,* November 16, 1939, 4. Most press accounts specified only "bladder problem" as the cause of death, but his grandson Pierce Butler III said it was "acute leukemia." "Interview with Pierce Butler III, Minnesota Historical Society.

32. "Calvary Cemetery," Catholic Cemeteries, accessed April 3, 2026, https://catholic-cemeteries.org/calvary/.

33. Stras, "Pierce Butler: A Supreme Technician."

34. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (Crown, 1997) 20-21.

35. *West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*, 300 U.S. 379 (1937).

36. *West Coast Hotel Co.*, 300 U.S. at 391-93.

37 Jonathan Gienapp, *Against Constitutional Originalism: A Historical Critique* (Yale University Press, 2024).

38. *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022).

39. *Shelby County v. Holder,* 570 U.S. 529 (2013), *Louisiana v. Callais* 608 U.S. ___ (2026).

40. *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard,* 600 U.S. 181 (2023).

41. *United States v. Skrmetti*, 605 U.S. 495 (2025).

42. *U.S. Doge Service v. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington* (2025), *McMahon v. New York* (2025), *Rhode Island State Council of Churches v. Rollins* (2025).

Growing Up *Dos Culturas*

FRANK M. WHITE

When I think back on my family history, where do I begin? I was born in November of 1945, which seems like a long time ago, into a bicultural family: African American and Mexican American. Over the years, this has provided me with some interesting experiences. Sometimes people would look at me and ask, or suggest that I was something other than what I am.

My family lived first at 1088 North Dale Street, and I attended Como Elementary School from kindergarten through fourth grade. Then when I entered fifth grade, we moved to 409 St. Anthony Avenue in the Rondo neighborhood, where my father, Louis V. White Jr., had grown up. My mother, Fidela C. Rangel, had grown up on the West Side Flats, after arriving here in 1928 via from Mexico via Kansas, but they had this in common: Rondo and the West Side were diverse communities, where people had good relationships with their neighbors.

Probably because we lived in the Rondo community, everyone considered me African American, but few knew or considered me Mexican. When I was growing up, it didn't really matter to me: I was just a kid who enjoyed playing baseball, learning, and being with family. This story is about my growing up as a part of the Rangel family, which I'm immensely proud of—both of my cultures and families. Both families were respected in the communities in which they lived.

My memories of my Rangel grandparents really didn't begin until I entered the fifth grade. My father now had a car, a blue Packard, and this would allow us to travel to the West Side, through downtown and across the Mississippi River. I always loved seeing my mom's family, because it meant driving through downtown and seeing all the large buildings, and then across the Robert Street Bridge and the stores that lined the street entering the West Side Flats. What an adventure for me, just seeing things along the way and the places in the flats that I didn't see every day.

On this drive, I knew that I would see my *abuelo* and *abuela de Rangel* and *tíos* and *tías*. I was always excited to see Grandpa Francisco and Grandma Cresencia, or, as they were known in the neighborhood, Don Francisco and Donna Chencha. At that time, I didn't have any idea how important my grandparents were to the community on the West Side Flats. Because I was just a kid and they only spoke Spanish, I could understand just a little bit.

At nine or ten years old, I could appreciate seeing my relatives! But looking back, little did I know how important this would become in my life's journey, as I would continue to learn more about this side of my family over the course of my life. I would later find out, as a teenager, that my grandfather was someone who always stood up and helped Mexicans with their rights in Minnesota, so much so that he would serve as a representative of the Consulate of Mexico.

A short time ago, I had lunch with my friends and long-time West Side Flats residents Don Luna, Tony Ruiz, and Larry Luico. I asked them if they had any memories of the family. They remembered my uncle Kico's band playing for all the dances, weddings and *quinceañeras*.[1] Tony Ruiz remembers my uncle Kico playing at his wedding, at Fourth of July celebrations, and for backyard dinner parties.

Recently I attended the funeral of Genevieve Gaona-Rangel, my mother's last living sibling. As I listened to the homily about my tía, Genevieve, I was touched. It reminded me not only about how great she was, but about all my mother's siblings and how they had touched my life.

The Journey from Mexico to St. Paul, 1927

My grandparents, Francisco and Cresencia, met through Cresencia's brother Euglio, while they were both working for the railroad in Aguascalientes. After a period, Francisco fell in love with Cresencia and asked for her hand in marriage,

The Rangel family in Mexico, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

which was the custom. They were married on January 23, 1921. They would have four children while in Mexico: Juanita was born on October 12, 1921, followed by Nicolas, Fidela, and Eugenia. Nicolas would die within a few months of his birth, reasons unknown.[2]

Sometime later, my grandfather Francisco decided to take a six-month leave of absence from the railroad and planned a trip to visit Cresencia's aunt in Juarez. After a weeklong visit, the family decided to visit another aunt in Topeka, Kansas. Passports were arranged.

When they arrived at the border, they had to go through a process where each person was sprayed with some type of powder, possibly some type of disinfectant. Once on the train, they realized everyone spoke English, which created difficulty because the family only spoke Spanish. The family was hungry and they didn't know how to ask to buy food, so my grandfather would stop the vendors, point at what he wanted, and hold his hand out with the money. The vendors would take the money; he had no choice but to trust them to be honest.[3]

Francisco and Cresencia Rangel sit on the back of a pickup truck in Granite Falls, about twenty miles from their home in Bird Island, 1931. Cresencia is pregnant with Genevieve (who was born on October 19, 1931) in this photo. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

The family lived in Topeka for a couple of months, before a part-time job with the railroad brought them to Pomona, Kansas. After a few months there, they heard from family in Mexico that Eulogio had moved to Minnesota. He said there was lots of work and Francisco should bring the family to Minnesota.

The family packed up, and in May 1928 they arrived in St. Paul.[4] My aunt Juanita remembers looking out the window of the train, seeing a bridge with two arches, and being struck by how big and beautiful it was. The family settled in with Eulogio and Tomasita, where they would live for a year and a half, and then one week after the family arrived, my grandfather was hired by Cudahy Packing Company. In 1929, the Depression came and Grandpa was laid off from work. At this time, Grandma had another baby, my uncle Augustine.

Then Grandpa Francisco found work with the American Sugar Company. The company was in Chaska; the job was in the sugar beet field. Grandpa Francisco and Uncle Eulogio signed a contract with them: thirty acres of land in exchange for sugar beet crops. The company provided transportation and moved the family to Bird Island, Minnesota.

The work was hard labor. First was the planting of the seeds, then the thinning of the plants once they were bigger, so there were one or two plants every twelve inches. When the plants were big and ready to harvest, they chopped the top of the beets where the leaves were and then threw them out on the next aisle. The farmers would pick them up and take them to the factory to make sugar.

While living in Bird Island, there was an accidental fire in the corn crib where the family was living.[5] The farmer was so mad he told them they had to fend for themselves—no more place to live. Luckily, neighbors from Bird Island heard about the fire and brought blankets and a large tent so the family had some protection from the elements.[6] The year was 1931.

While they were living in Bird Island my aunt Genevieve was born, but they completed the contract and Grandpa was called back to work in St. Paul, so the family moved back to the city. Shortly thereafter, in 1932, tío Eulogio and tía Tomasa departed back to Mexico along with their five children.[7] As a policy to encourage self-deportation, the state of Minnesota would pay to send any immigrant living in Minnesota back to their country of origin. They took the offer.

At Home with Don Francisco and Donna Chencha

The Rangel family had lived in several homes in the area: They had first lived on Eaton Street in front of a movie theater called the Red Mill, before moving to Indiana and Kentucky Streets. After living in Bird Island as migrants, the family moved back to the West Side on State Street across from the city dump. In 1932 they moved to Plato Boulevard, and in 1936 to 252 ½ Fairfield Avenue. The last family home on the West Side Flats was at 175 Eva Street, a few blocks from Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.[8]

For holidays and everyday visits, we would travel to my mother's family home on the West Side, and we would be welcomed by my grandparents. I remember my first sight of my Grandpa Francisco Rangel was when they lived upstairs at 252 ½ Fairfield. There were shops on the street level, and as I learned later, a bar right under their apartment.

There were times when we would visit my grandparents, and a man would be at the house. I would ask my mother, "Who's that?" She would explain that my grandparents would help some individuals when they arrived from Mexico until they could find work and a place to live.

One of the intersections that I remember most was Fairfield Avenue and Eva Street. On one corner was Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and across Eva was La Casa Coronado, one of the first Mexican restaurants in Minnesota. Directly across Coronado's on Fairfield was the New Ray Theatre, and across the street from the movie theater and the church was the park and playground called the Lumber Yard.[9]

At this early age, my memories were mostly of visits to their home and my grandmother always saying, "*Pasale,*" or, "Come in," in Spanish. Her next comment would always be "*¿Tu queries comer?*" or, "Do you want something to eat?" Even as I grew older, this was always her comment! Even talking with my cousins, they also remember Grandma always asking if we were hungry.

The Rangel family in front of their home on the West Side Flats, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

I observed that Grandpa always had jalapeños or chiles when he ate. In fact, one time he said to me, "*¿Tu queries dulches?*" suggesting sweets or candy, and then gave me a pepper. I took one bite and that was the end of that! My mom always said that's why I like hot things today.

I loved my grandma's enchiladas and tamales and always wanted her fresh-made tortillas. I

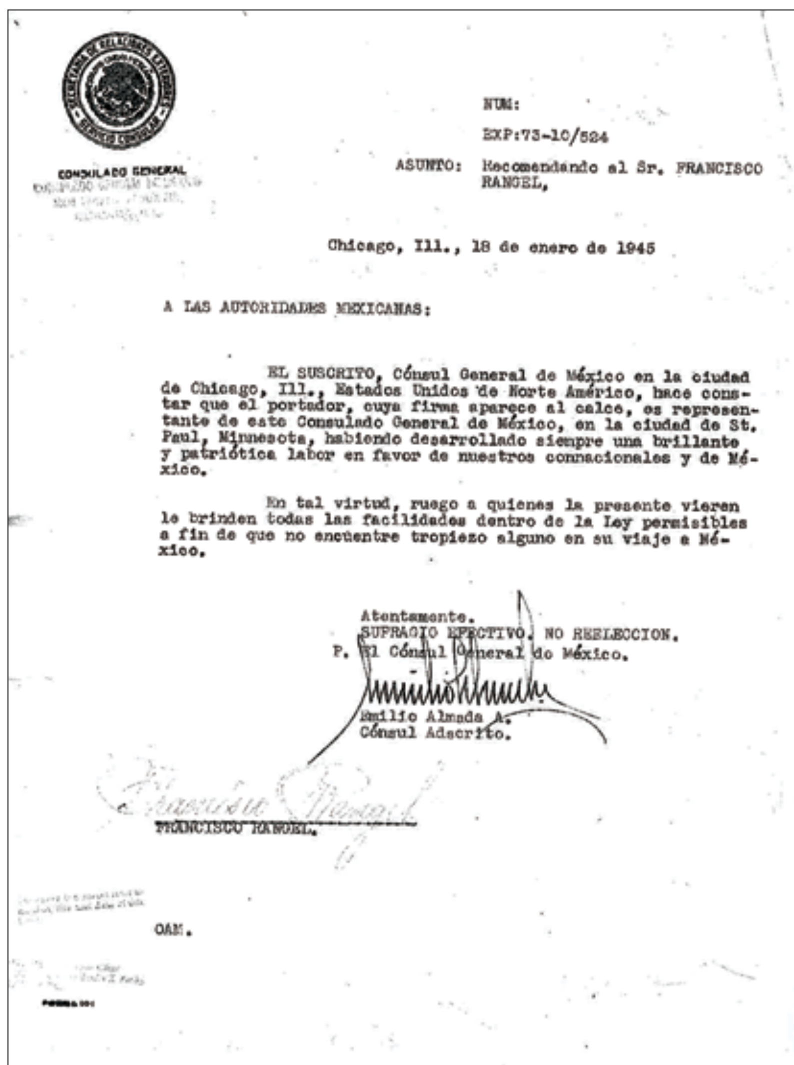
Grandma Cresencia with friend making tamales, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

also watched sometimes when she ground corn in a *molcajete* to make corn tortillas or tamales. My mother would use one occasionally, but Grandma would do it all the time. I loved flour tortillas but always wanted Grandma's corn tortillas.

My generation of the Rangel family includes fifty-one first cousins, plus more if you add spouses, so the stories could be endless. My *prima* Sarita (Chari) Gaona-Nickman, Genevieve's daughter, remembers our grandmother Cresencia this way: "If she wasn't in the kitchen cooking, she was busy crocheting beautiful layette sets for newborn babies. She also crocheted me a golden yellow and white dress when I was in the seventh grade."[10] My prima Marisa Kelly, Rachel's daughter, recalls: "I would help Grandma in the kitchen making dough for tortillas and I would also read letters that Grandma would receive from family in Mexico. Grandma would tell me that it was a good way to learn Spanish."[11]

Sometimes my grandparents would share stories, reminiscing about Mexico. One of those stories was about my grandfather being hidden in the hills to avoid being taken by the Federales into the army. Or there were stories of Pancho Villa coming into their town and throwing money at the residents living there.

By the time our family would visit the grandparents' home, most of my aunts and uncles were adults, and I would only see them occasionally. Kico, Genevieve, and Rachel still lived at home. I really liked hearing Kico playing his saxophone. Sometimes, his friends would come over, and they all played some musical instrument.



CONSULADO GENERAL

NUM:

EXP:73-10/524

ASUNTO: Recomendando al Sr. FRANCISCO RANGEL,

Chicago, Ill., 18 de enero de 1945

A LAS AUTORIDADES MEXICANAS:

EL SUSCRITO, Cónsul General de México en la ciudad de Chicago, Ill., Estados Unidos de Norte Américo, hace constar que el portador, cuya firma aparece al calce, es representante de este Consulado General de México, en la ciudad de St. Paul, Minnesota, habiendo desarrollado siempre una brillante y patriótica labor en favor de nuestros connacionales y de México.

En tal virtud, ruego a quienes la presente vieren le brinden todas las facilidades dentro de la Ley permisibles a fin de que no encuentre tropiezo alguno en su viaje a México.

Atentamente.
SUFRAGIO EFECTIVO. NO REELECCION.
P. El Cónsul General de México.

Emilio Almada A.
Cónsul Adscrito.

FRANCISCO RANGEL.

OAM.

This document officially names Francisco Rangel as a representative of the Consulate of Mexico. The letter reads: "The undersigned, Consulate General of Mexico in the city of Chicago, Ill., United States of North America, certifies that the bearer, whose signature appears below, is a representative of this Consulate General of Mexico, in the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, having always developed a brilliant and patriotic work in favor of our countrymen and Mexico. In such virtue, I ask those who see this to provide him with all the permissible facilities within the law so that he does not find any stumbling block on his trip to Mexico." *Translation by the author. Courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

Community Anchors

There were two anchors on the West Side that the family became involved with: Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, and the Neighborhood House, which provided social services, entertainment, dances, a place to socialize for youth, and a meeting place for the adults.

The Anáhuac Mutual Benefit and Recreation Society, founded in 1922, provided a safe place for immigrants to gather. It offered advice about the neighborhood, announced employment opportunities, and nurtured the local culture. For dues-paying members, it also provided sickness and funeral benefits.[12] My grandfather Francisco would become the informal leader and secretary of this organization for many years.[13]

There were many times when the Mexicans living in Minnesota had to collaborate with local officials to resolve issues. For example, sometimes farmers or railroads did not honor the labor conditions stipulated by the Bracero Agreement and mediation was needed. In such cases, Anáhuac seemed a natural representative of the community; however, group action on the part of Mexicans was difficult. Therefore, responsibility for community concerns fell to a prominent leader, chosen both for his moral

qualities and his diplomatic skills. The immigrants counted on someone who could work with both Mexican and United States officials to resolve problems in a legal and undisruptive manner.

The man who became the informal leader of the Mexicans in Minnesota was Francisco Rangel. Unlike leaders in many ethnic communities, Rangel was no "immigrant entrepreneur" or successful businessman, but a laborer at Cudahy's Packing Plant in St. Paul. Nevertheless, he was educated and had experience in administration. Equally important, he had the drive and the dedication to work toward achieving better treatment for Mexicans in Minnesota. His activities on behalf of the community occupied much of his free time, but he never received any monetary compensation for his efforts.

Soon he had written enough letters to force the government to treat his requests seriously, and he was appointed the Honorary Consular Representative in St. Paul. The title gave him authority to approach local officials of the US government in St. Paul, although he still had to work through the nearest Mexican consulate in Chicago.[14]

Keeping Traditions on the West Side

Francisco and Cresencia were known as West Side "keepers of culture."[15] The family kept two pianos and other musical instruments in the apartment, which the children could learn. They would organize celebrations for Mexican holidays[16] and stage plays with neighborhood children, including scripts written by Francisco and songs and dances taught by Cresencia.[17] As documented in *Latino Minnesota*, "Music was something the entire Rangel family shared with the community, as they performed at social and church events, to the pleasure of all those who remember. In a 1976 interview, Juanita Rangel de Moran said, 'My father would say that he did this so that the young people could learn and preserve important aspects of our Mexican culture.' "[18]

Growing up, listening to my tías singing and my tío Kico practicing at home was just the usual for me. It was only later, as I moved through my journey, that I learned how popular the Rangel family had become. They were known as the first Latino musical family in Minnesota, as friend Richard Aguilar reported

Tío Kico practices the saxophone at home, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

in Kico's obituary.[19] My uncle Kico had been encouraged by his sister Eugenia to pick up the saxophone as a teenager,[20] learning songs from family and neighbors as well as a local music shop. His sisters performed as a group called Las Hermanas Rangel, and Kico formed a band of his own that played "Mexican polkas . . . tango, cumbia, merengue, samba, and mambo."[21] They were part of the "West Side Sound," a hybrid of Mexican and American, popular and traditional music.[22]

A *City Pages* feature in 2005, more than sixty years after the sisters' breakthrough, confirms that "the Rangels' influence was deep."[23] I can remember my mother sharing all the time that Kico's bands were playing all over the Twin Cities, places like the Manor in St. Paul, the Calhoun Beach Club and Hotel in Minneapolis, summer concerts for Park and Recreation Departments. Later on, I even hired his band when I was the Manager of Recreation in Richfield, because they were always requested to be a part of the summer series.

I'm not exactly sure when I first saw this photo of my mother singing with her sisters. I didn't know she had done that, and had to confirm with my tía Juanita that my mother had sung with the group until she married my father. They would also sing in the choir at our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. My tía Genevieve, who had a beautiful voice, would continue to

sing with the choir; they were even invited to sing at the Vatican once.

Neighborhood Divisions

I remember when I was eleven or twelve, I came home one day to find my uncle Kico visiting, and my mother said, "There's something in the back for you." I went out the back door and there was a great-looking Schwinn bicycle; later I would find out that it was my uncle's. This bike was all dressed up and even had a key to lock the front tire. All my friends were impressed with this bike, and it made me feel special because I knew my parents couldn't afford to purchase a bicycle for me without buying one for my sisters also.

Las Hermanas Rangel practicing at home, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

Tía Genevieve with the Cathedral Choir at the Vatican, n.d. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

Every spring, the river would flood and going to the West Side became difficult. Homes would be surrounded by water, and in some places, even in the water. I remember my uncle Kico and a couple of friends taking me and my cousins out on a raft in the flood waters. The housing stock could not withstand annual floods, and in 1956 the city announced that the entire area would become the Riverview Industrial Park. Between 1961 and 1963, the city bought and tore down all the houses in the neighborhood, displacing the residents.[24]

It's now interesting to me that at the same time, the Rondo neighborhood was also being torn down to make room for I-94. So this meant that both parts of my family had to move and find another place to live. As a youth it meant that my friends moved, and I didn't always know where they moved to. But for my parents and family it was more stressful; it was hard to find a place because of bias on both sides of the river.

It was only in time that I learned about the accomplishments of my grandfather Francisco and my grandmother Cresencia. Another challenge that I would find out later was that some of my mother's siblings didn't approve of whom she married, and this also created a distance. I really feel sad for my mother, because all of us need our family connections, and I'll never know how this really made her feel. I also know that my father kept his distance for obvious reasons. But whenever we visited my grandparents' home, we felt welcome and were treated well at the time, like family.

After graduating from high school, my cousins Sal (Chucho), Victor, Marie, and I started to hang out together, and without a plan this brought the families back together. I know that many of the younger family members today don't know about this part of the story. Today our large Rangel family is extremely diverse; in fact, at our most recent reunion, I had to ask some of the younger folks, "Are we family?" I only mention this because it's a part of the story,

but today, watching all the family interactions, you would never know.

Remembering the Legacy

The Rangel family is still known in Minnesota. The Minnesota Historical Society has oral interviews with family members, including Crescencia, Juanita, and Kico, in its archives.[25] The History Center did an exhibit on the West Side Flats, which featured several families, including the Rangel family, and the History Theatre even premiered a play about the Rangel family in 2001, titled *Los Rumbaleros*.[26]

And today, Juanita's daughter, my cousin Rebecca Moran-Cusick, leads Los Alegres Bailadores, a Twin Cites-based Mexican folkloric dance group. In fact, my oldest daughter Rebecca, my niece Denise, and my youngest sister Felicia all dance with this group. It also includes many of our family's next generation of children.

Looking back, I'm so proud of my place in the Rangel family and the legacy started by my grandparents on the West Side. Growing up, I didn't realize how much they helped others, but after hearing many stories and researching information at the History Center, I'm amazed at what they did. They didn't have much, so it wasn't like they were sharing out of affluence; they were sharing what they had every day to survive and live in the US.

In 2006, I was hired for a special project by Dave St. Peter, President of the Minnesota Twins, to begin increasing their diversity as they prepared for a new stadium. The intent was to meet with representatives from the Latino, African American, and Native communities. At one of the meetings, I was introduced to Jesse Bethke Gomez,[27] President of CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio). I recognized his last name and asked him if his mother's name was Irene. He answered yes, and then I shared that according to his mother, my grandfather and his grandfather knew each other in Mexico. With a look of surprise, he turned to Dave St. Peter and said, "Thank you for the opportunity to meet today," and then he stood up, reached across the table, shook my hand, and said, "I'm honored to meet the grandson of Don Francisco Rangel!" I couldn't believe it. I had never met this man, and here it was, forty-plus

Kico *(at left)* and friends on bikes. The bike he is riding was later gifted to the author. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

Becky Moran-Cusick, Juanita's daughter and the author's cousin, n.d. She leads Los Alegres Bailadores, a Twin Cites-based Mexican folkloric dance group, in which many family members continue their cultural traditions. *Photo courtesy of the author and Rangel family archives.*

years after my grandfather's death, being reminded how respected he was. I'll never forget that feeling of pride!

One of my greatest acknowledgements in life was being honored, along with my tío Kico, with the La Familia Heritage Award at the seventeenth annual La Familia Latino Heritage Celebration. With a few family members present, this was extremely important to me because it confirmed my connection with the Rangel family to the larger St. Paul community. It also celebrated my mother, Fidela, through her oldest son. My cousin Becky Moran-Cusick reminded me that the traditions started by our grandparents Francisco and Cresencia have been handed down for five generations in our family. That's surely what Francisco and Cresencia wanted: keeping their Mexican traditions alive, acknowledging their contributions to the culture, and continuing their love through family!

***Frank M. White** is a Rondo elder, author, and historian. He's currently serving his third term on the State Historic Preservation Review Board and is a board member of Historic Saint Paul.*

NOTES

1. A *quinceañera* is a traditional coming-of-age celebration marking a girl's transition from childhood to womanhood. It combines a religious mass with a lavish reception featuring a formal dress, a court of honor, traditional dances, and symbolic rituals, such as the change of shoes.
2. Juanita Rangel-Moran, "My loving and adorable children," unpublished manuscript, n.d.
3. Juanita Rangel-Moran, "Rangel History," unpublished manuscript, October 2003.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Rangel-Moran, "My loving and adorable children."
7. Ibid.
8. Don Luna, in discussion with the author.
9. Ibid.
10. Sarita Gaona-Nickman, in discussion with the author.
11. Marisa Kelly, in discussion with the author.
12. Leigh Roethke, *Latino Minnesota* (Afton Historical Press, 2007), 32.
13. Francisco 'Kiko' Rangel, interviewed by Grant A. Moosbrugger, Mexican-American Oral History Project, Minnesota Historical Society, August 4, 1975, https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/p16022coll548:1291.
14. Sarah Chambers, "Mutual Cooperation and Local Leadership Among Mexican Immigrants in Minnesota, (senior thesis, Carleton College, 1985) 52, Minnesota Historical Society F613S9M536, April 1985.
15. Roethke, *Latino Minnesota*, 32.
16. Jackie Renzetti, "Music History Spotlight: Las Hermanas Rangel," *The Current*, March 17, 2016, https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2016/03/17/music-history-spotlight-las-hermanas-rangel.
17. Roethke, *Latino Minnesota*, 33.
18. Roethke, *Latino Minnesota*, 33-34.
19. Zoe Jackson, "Francisco 'Kico' Rangel, 'icon' of Minnesota Latino community, dies at 87," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 9, 2023.
20. Renzetti, "Music History Spotlight," *The Current.*
21. Roethke, *Latino Minnesota*, 68.
22. Ibid.
23. Peter S. Scholtes, "Summer Music Guide," *City Pages* vol. 26, no. 1279, June 2005.
24. Paul Nelson, "West Side Flats, St. Paul," *MNopedia*, March 30, 2015, last updated August 14, 2025, https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/place/west-side-flats-st-paul.
25. Crecencia Rangel, interviewed by Victor Barela, Mexican-American Oral History Project, Minnesota Historical Society, July 2, 1975, https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/p16022coll548:1333; Juanita R. Moran, interviewed by Victor Barela, Mexican-American Oral History Project, Minnesota Historical Society, July 31, 1975, https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/p16022coll548:854.
26. *Los Rumbaleros*, by Maya López-Santamaría, dir. Ron Peluso and Maya López-Santamaría, musical dir. "Nachito" Herrera, History Theatre, St. Paul, MN, April 21-May 27, 2001, https://historytheatre-first40.com/2000-2001/.
27. Irene Gomez-Bethke was the founder of Centro Cultural Chicano and Instituto de Arte y Cultura in Minneapolis.

What is your favorite place in Ramsey County? Crosby Park, specifically the floating bridge/boardwalk as it winds through the willows on Crosby Lake.

What is your favorite restaurant in Ramsey County and your "must order" dish? Khue's Kitchen and their jicama ribs.

What is your favorite song—currently or all time? "Ganges Delta Blues" by Ry Cooder and V.M. Bhatt—song for all time**.**

If you could invite any three people from history to dinner, who would you choose? Mark Twain, Michelle Obama, and Robin Williams.

What is your favorite part of the day? Right before sunrise, doing my "brain games" with a cup of coffee after an exceptional night's sleep.

MUSICIAN

BETWEEN 2 URNS

Between 2 Urns is an interview-based podcast that weaves together the personal stories of everyday people doing extraordinary things—and extraordinary people living everyday lives. Each episode invites listeners into a conversation that explores what drives us, challenges us, and connects us as humans.

Through thoughtful, empathetic interviews, *B2U* uncovers the humor, heartbreak, and hope within real human experiences—from artists and educators to entrepreneurs, community leaders, and change-makers. Get to know our guests before you listen.

This podcast was made possible by the Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts.

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

DIRECTOR OF COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITS, RCHS

What is your favorite place in Ramsey County? Como Park and Conservatory.

What is your favorite restaurant in Ramsey County and your "must order" dish? Meritage, pommes frites with béarnaise.

What is your favorite song—currently or all time? "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay" by Otis Redding.

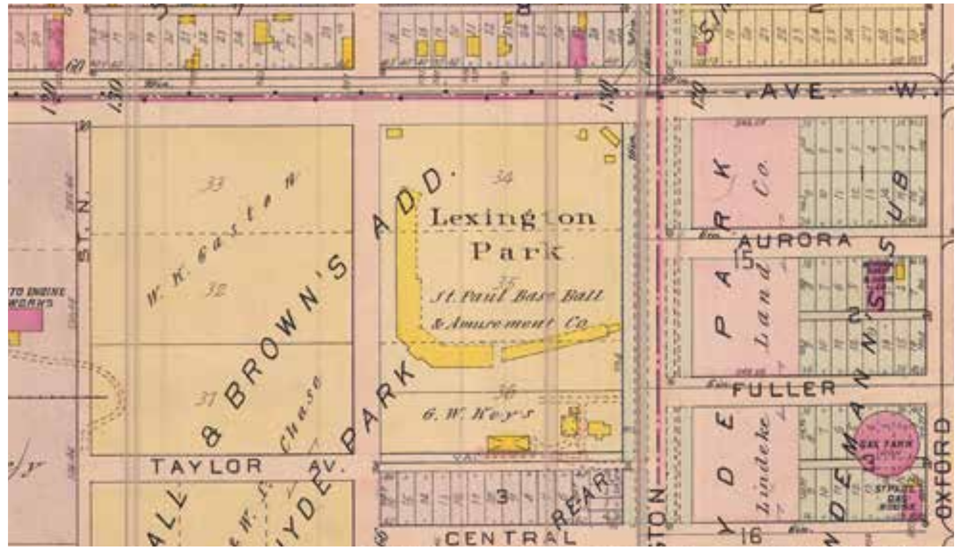
If you could invite any three people from history to dinner, who would you choose? Cleopatra, Siddhartha Gautama, and Johannes Gutenberg.

What is your favorite part of the day? End of day—reflecting on the day and what's anticipated for tomorrow.

IN OUR COLLECTION

In Our Collection shares the pieces acquired by Ramsey County Historical Society.

The collection contains tens of thousands of pieces, including archives, books, objects, and photographs, which are maintained by Director of Collections and Exhibitions, Mollie Spillman, in downtown St. Paul.



These weathered wooden signs are among the last surviving fragments of Lexington Park, carrying with them the echoes of cheering crowds and summer afternoons long past. Donated in 2013 by Gary Sparr, they come with a story passed down through his family. When the ballpark was torn down in 1956–57, his father joined others in salvaging pieces of the structure—wood that was once part of grandstands filled with fans. What might have been burned or discarded instead endured, transforming these simple boards into rare, tangible connections to St. Paul's baseball past.

LEXINGTON PARK GRANDSTAND SIGNS
DONATED BY: GARY SPARR
ACQUIRED: 2013
RCHS COLLECTION: 2013.60

Lexington Park served as home to the St. Paul Saints from 1897 to 1956. Built by Edward B. Smith for team owner Charles Comiskey, the ballpark stood at the corner of Lexington and University Avenues, more than two miles from downtown. While its distance posed challenges, it also allowed Sunday games—restricted elsewhere under blue laws—making the site uniquely valuable. Comiskey later moved his team to Chicago, where it became the modern-day Chicago White Sox, but St. Paul remained a stronghold of minor league baseball.

At its opening, Lexington Park was widely praised as one of the finest ballparks in the country, with a spacious field and thoughtful accommodations for fans. After a destructive fire in 1915, the park was rebuilt with a more efficient design focused on moving large crowds quickly, reflecting its role as accessible entertainment for the public. Its dimensions shaped play in memorable ways: A deep right field made home runs rare, adding to the park's distinctive character.

The park hosted decades of competition, including the intense rivalry between the Saints and the Minneapolis Millers. Holiday doubleheaders—played on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day—drew large crowds who often traveled between the two cities to watch both teams in a single day. These events became a defining part of Twin Cities culture.

Lexington Park also welcomed some of baseball's biggest names during exhibition games. Fans saw legends like Babe Ruth, as well as future Hall of Famers such as Roy Campanella, who played briefly for the Saints in 1948 and delivered an extraordinary run of performances. Over the years, the park also hosted amateur games, football, and community events, further embedding it in local life.

By the 1950s, the aging wooden structure was no longer adequate, and the Saints moved to Midway Stadium in 1957. Lexington Park was demolished soon after, and the site was redeveloped. Although the physical ballpark is gone, commemorative markers and artifacts like these signs preserve its legacy. They stand as reminders of a place where sport, community, and history intersected for nearly six decades.

In Ramsey County, the most memorable places aren't always the ones marked on a map. Beyond the familiar landmarks of St. Paul lie quiet corners, overlooked buildings, and tucked-away landscapes that hold rich, often untold stories. This feature invites you to look closer—down side streets, behind historic facades, and into spaces that rarely make the spotlight. From forgotten gathering places to subtle traces of the past woven into everyday surroundings, these hidden locations reveal a deeper layer of the county, waiting for curious explorers willing to slow down and notice what others pass by.

By Renoir Gaither

Safety Patrol in Sneakers

Spring blossoms with things familiar and newfound. In St. Paul, green buds pop on boulevard trees as children thread their way to school. Many of these kids have peers who help keep them safe while crossing busy streets. Youth crossing guards are one of the city's lesser-known historical gems. They summon my own memories as well.

As a sixth grader, I'd accepted the role of crossing guard at my school in Indianapolis, Indiana. I remember strapping a strange pale belt around my waist and right shoulder, then tromping off towards school, earlier than usual, to await schoolmates at my assigned corner of the earth. Their infectious laughter, awkward gaits, and raucous tin lunchboxes merge into a parka of memories. "Don't run," I'd bark as one sprinted across the street after some vehicle had exited our small rectangle of levity, vapid jokes, and innocence. They'd look back at me, all smiles in sneakers.

Little did I know then that other such youngsters in St. Paul had helped pioneer the school safety patrol concept over a hundred years ago today. Early decades of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in automobile travel. Formal programs for driver training and pedestrian safety were in their infancy. In 1927, the public school district in Gilbert, Minnesota offered the first distinct driver's training course. [1]

Efforts to increase traffic safety awareness involving youth took root in the Twin Cities in 1919. The Minneapolis police department began a program to train Boy Scouts to direct traffic during a city-wide “No Accident Week.” St. Paul Police designed a program to train “school police” among public school youth the following year, and St. Paul’s Catholic schools soon joined the effort. [2]

The principal of the Cathedral School in St. Paul, Sister Carmela Hanggi, developed the idea to train school children as crossing guards. Sister Hanggi reportedly garnered the idea after observing mothers helping children cross busy streets during her travels around the country. She instituted crossing guard training for students, and on February 21, 1921, the first monitored crossing took place outside the Cathedral School at the intersection of Summit Avenue and Third Street (Kellogg Boulevard). [3]

The program was a huge success and expanded citywide in 1922. Its legacy is felt today by millions of children worldwide. A flagpole and plaque now commemorate what many consider the first school crossing guard program. The historical landmark is located on a knoll on Cathedral Hill Park in St. Paul’s historic Cathedral Hill neighborhood.

[1] Robert Tate, “Remembering the Early Days of Driver’s Education,” MotorCities National Heritage Area, April 17, 2017, https://www.motorcities.org/story-of-the-week/2017/remembering-the-early-days-ofdriver-s-education.
[2] Eric W. Weber, “Origins of the School Safety Patrol, 1921,” MNopedia, October 29, 2012, last modified March 19, 2026, https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/thing/origins-school-safety-patrol-1921.
[3] Ibid.

Visit the monument at
215 Summit Ave,
St. Paul, MN 55102.

Renoir Gaither *is a writer, reminiscer, and flâneur. A former librarian, he has held positions at the Shapiro Undergraduate Library at the University of Michigan and Magrath Library at the University of Minnesota. He is a member of the RCHS Editorial Board.*

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Editor
Emily Gastineau

Interim President & CEO
Roger Meyer

Vice President
Youa Vang

Director of Collections and Exhibitions
Mollie Spillman

Director of Gibbs Farm
Sammy Nelson

Gibbs Farm Youth Programs Manager
Janie Bender

Gibbs Farm Volunteer & Adult Program Manager
Clare Holte

Gibbs Farm Office Coordinator
Carole Evenchik

Research Associate
Anna Olson

Editors Emeriti
Andrea Swensson, Meredith Cummings, John Lindley, and Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Board of Directors

Robert W. Mairs
Chair

Elizabeth J. Keyes
First Vice Chair

Deborah Lee
Second Vice Chair

Alison J. Midden
Secretary

Marc J Manderscheid
Treasurer

Jeremiah Ellis, Jo Emerson, Stephanie Fastner, James D. Fleming, Tonya Flower, Timothy Glines, Lorraine Griffin Johnson, Joe Lutz, George P. Mills, Dr. Megan Morrissey, Dixie Nelson, Šišókaduta, Mark Taylor, Ellen M. Turpin, Joe Twomey, Glenn Wiessner, Helen Wilkie, Mark Williamson, Lee Pao Xiong, July Vaj Xyooj

Directors Emeriti

W. Andrew Boss, George A. Mairs, Richard T. Murphy Sr., Paul A. Verret

Editorial Board

Mark Taylor (Chair), Thomas H. Boyd, Anne Cowie, John W. Diers, James D. Fleming, Renoir W. Gaither, John Guthmann, Lisa L. Heinrich, Kyle Imdieke, Laurie M. Murphy, Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender, Peter Rachleff, Steve Trimble, Matthew Wright

Honorary Advisory Board

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

Ramsey County Commissioners

Rafael E. Ortega, Chair
Mai Chong Xiong, Vice Chair
Commissioner Tara Jebens-Singh
Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire
Commissioner Garrison McMurtrey
Commissioner Kelly Miller
Commissioner Rena Moran
Ling Becker, Manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2026, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN 0485-9758.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. *The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.*

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Established by a community of history lovers led by Mrs. Ethel Stewart, Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) has been preserving, interpreting, and presenting the remarkable history of our capital county since 1949. Created to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, a National Register of Historic Places site since 1974, RCHS has expanded to include publishing, exhibits, preservation, research, and public programming spanning the entire county.

RCHS's vision for the future recognizes the trusted role it plays in our community as a key steward of our shared heritage. As we strive to preserve and share the lessons of the past, our hope is that it will help all of us build a better future for our descendants.

> **Vision:** *Ramsey County Historical Society will continue as a trusted, innovative steward and teacher of history, committed to working with our community to build and sustain a more just and vibrant future.*

The largest and most popular program of RCHS is Gibbs Farm, serving more than 15,000 students every year as well as thousands of teachers, families and individuals. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Ȟeyáta Othúŋwe (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 and in 2010, it created the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center. Collections entrusted to RCHS total more than four million items ranging from a historic farmstead to building permits to images and maps that capture the unique history of our community.

Our mission, vision, and values guide our work and unite a team of volunteers, members, donors, and staff to serve more than 50,000 people every year while ensuring our history is preserved and accessible. We are honored to have the support of so many in our community and welcome you to join us if you have not already.

Values

- We strive for **AUTHENTICITY** and **ACCURACY** in all programs and activities.
- We embrace **INNOVATION**; seeking new and unique ways to collaborate with and educate our community about familiar and unfamiliar history.
- We act with **INTEGRITY**; adhering to the highest ethical and professional standards.
- We prioritize **INCLUSION** and **EQUITY** in our activities, processes and decision-making.
- We embody **RESPECT**, listen with intent, and work to build trusting relationships.

Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land

Mnisóta Makhóčhe, 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 Makhóčhe. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands. RCHS is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

www.rchs.com info@rchs.com (651) 222-0701

Introducing Viewfinder

Ramsey County History is proud to launch a new feature that finds the remarkable stories in the places we pass without a second glance. Beyond the well-known sites of St. Paul are overlooked buildings, quiet streets, and everyday landscapes layered with history. *Viewfinder* turns its lens toward these under-the-radar spaces, uncovering the people and moments that shaped them. By shifting focus away from the obvious, this feature reveals a richer, more nuanced picture of the county. Know a place worth a closer look? Send your ideas to emily@rchs.com and help guide future editions of *Viewfinder*.

ON THE COVER

Group posed by automobiles, circa 1935. This image foreshadows the themes of community building, social mobility, and Black suburban life highlighted in "The Merit of Service." Pictured in the photo are Bessie Farr, Mark Gibbs, Dorthea Nichols, Edward Nichols, James Hughes, and Mrs. Orleta G. Hughes (Oden), prior to his marriage to Frances Bouyer). *Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

1961 architectural vision for Mr. and Mrs. John E. Armstrong's future home (1576 Sandhurst Avenue East), designed by John F. Glanton, represents a significant milestone in the Sandhurst-Hazelwood enclave. As a ranch-style structure, the house was purposefully engineered to accommodate a wheelchair user. *Image reprinted with permission from the* Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY • VOLUME 61 • NUMBER 2 • 2026

Contents

1 *The Merit of Service*
James and Frances Hughes and the Architecture of Black Excellence in Minnesota
JEREMIAH E. ELLIS

11 *Horseman of the Court*
Pierce Butler's Seventeen Years Serving as St. Paul's First US Supreme Court Justice
JAMES FLEMING AND PAUL NELSON

19 **Growing Up *Dos Culturas***
FRANK M. WHITE

28 **In Our Collection**
MOLLIE SPILLMAN

30 **Viewfinder**
RENOIR GAITHER

Message from the Editorial Board

This issue of *Ramsey County History* draws from several different areas of Ramsey County.

Jeremiah E. Ellis's article, "The Merit of Service," is a fascinating look at James and Frances Hugheses' success in starting a Black neighborhood in Maplewood with a land purchase in 1946. I was impressed by the Hugheses' determination to purchase land in Maplewood, some twenty-two years before the odious practice of redlining was finally outlawed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The story of the Hughes family is a reminder of the strength that a neighborhood can have to unite families.

Part two of James Fleming and Paul Nelson's series about Pierce Butler focuses on Butler's tenure on the US Supreme Court. It spanned the years 1923 to 1939, a tumultuous time in American history that saw the nation move from the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression, and to the outbreak of World War II in Europe. Butler was part of one of the most interesting episodes in the history of the Supreme Court: FDR's so-called court-packing scheme, where he advocated to expand the Court in order to appoint justices who were more amenable to his New Deal reforms. Fleming and Nelson demonstrate how judicial rulings can be either long-lasting or ephemeral, and the sidebars highlighting specific cases show that Butler's judicial philosophy was not always predictable. The two articles about Butler shed new light on a significant figure in Minnesota's judicial history.

Frank M. White is well known in Ramsey County as one of the foremost historians of the Rondo neighborhood, as well as a scholar of baseball. In his article, "Growing Up *Dos Culturas,*" White shares memories of visiting his mother's relatives, who lived on the West Side Flats, across the Mississippi River from downtown Saint Paul. The Rangel family came to Minnesota from Mexico during the late 1920s, and they became part of a West Side neighborhood where Mexican culture flourished. Both White's and Ellis's articles show how neighborhoods foster a strong sense of belonging among their inhabitants.

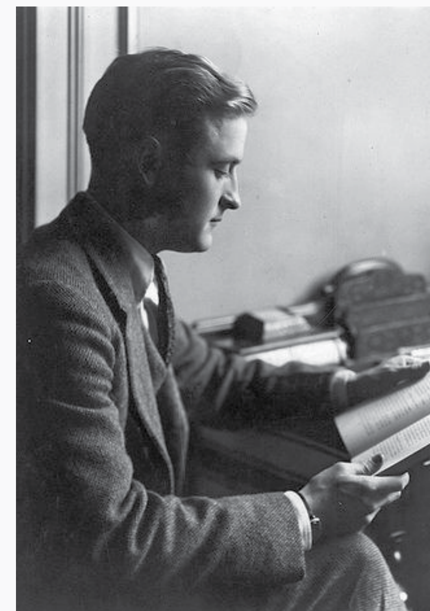
The three articles in this issue show the broad range of history to be found within Ramsey County.

Mark Taylor
Chair, Editorial Board

Visit Gibbs Farm this summer for public hours on Fridays (12pm-3pm) and Saturdays (10am-2pm). Please check www.rchs.com for more info.

Top photo: Opening Day at Gibbs Farm - May 23, 2026

Bottom photo: F. Scott Fitzgerald circa 1920-21 via Bettmann Archive. RCHS will be hosting a St. Paul F. Scott Fitzgerald walking tour on September 23, 2026 with Mark Taylor.



Dear readers,

The articles in this issue are connected by themes of family and legacy. Though family is often thought of as natural, its forms reflect the values and power structures of each time and place. Family serves both social and economic purposes within capitalism, transmitting resources as well as culture. Within this framework, the question of legacy can mean quite different things, depending on whether, how, and when one's ancestors arrived on this land.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The catalyst for this issue's cover piece was a story that Jeremiah Ellis's mother told from her childhood in Maplewood. He went looking for how a Black suburban neighborhood came to be, and focused in on the story of James and Frances Hughes. Even before they created this haven for Black families in Ramsey County, both were shaping lives of community service. Their work spanned community building, economic opportunity, and policy change—all interconnected factors that made it possible for Black families in Ramsey County to solidify a place in the middle class.

As I have been collaborating with two longtime editorial board members, James Fleming and Paul Nelson, on the Pierce Butler articles, the Supreme Court has issued decisions that fundamentally alter the country. This has also brought new insight to the writing, as we considered the impact of one man's legal, ethical, and social perspective, from our own standpoint a century on. These articles consider not only how Butler was a product of his time, but also how he became an emblem of a previous era of history. When does political rhetoric harken to a particular narrative of the past, and why?

Writing about one's own family history is a tender and complex undertaking, and I've been glad to work with Frank White as he explores his connections to his mother's Mexican American side of the family. The Rangel family has been recognized for their contributions as culture keepers, and here he combines archival research with personal memories to share a unique view on the everyday life of the family, as community anchors on the West Side.

Apart from publishing, the summer season brings opportunities to gather with like-minded, history-curious folks at programs presented by the Ramsey County Historical Society. Gibbs Farm is open for the summer, with opportunities to volunteer and pitch in on planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting projects. You're also invited to join us for the Farm-to-Table Dinner on July 26, featuring a thoughtfully crafted three-course dinner by chefs Weston Smith and Catherine Olsen of Local Effort, and live music by Chris Koza. Come savor the peak summer harvest at the farm! Learn more and sign up on our website —where you can also get a glance at an exciting lineup of fall events as well.

EMILY GASTINEAU

Photo of Gibbs Farm at dusk by Steven Cohen