

Rondo Neighborhood Before I-94

A look through my eyes

From the beginning, Rondo was a place for people of color and immigrants. Learn of the neighborhood's vibrant Black community and 19th century Canadian, German Russian, Irish and Jewish immigrant families that found homes in this community just west of downtown. Learn of early discrimination faced by both immigrant and Black neighbors as you join historian Frank M. White on this fascinating journey through the early years of Saint Paul's Rondo neighborhood.



Curated by Frank M. White
In cooperation with Hallie Q Brown
Community Center

OLD RONDO TOUR

Before we start on the tour, here's a brief history of Black people in Saint Paul.

From the beginning Black people lived downtown, just like most people that were drawn to this growing city in the mid-19th century. You'll find that there was a Black neighborhood in lower town that was referred to as the Borup Addition, this section included homes and businesses owned by Black people and also included Pilgrim Baptist Church's first dedicated structure that was built in 1872 of stone and wood on the Sibley Street. Pilgrim's members received support from the trustees of First Baptist Church of Saint Paul to purchase a lot worth \$200.00 on Sibley Street near Norris Street, on which to build a meeting place.



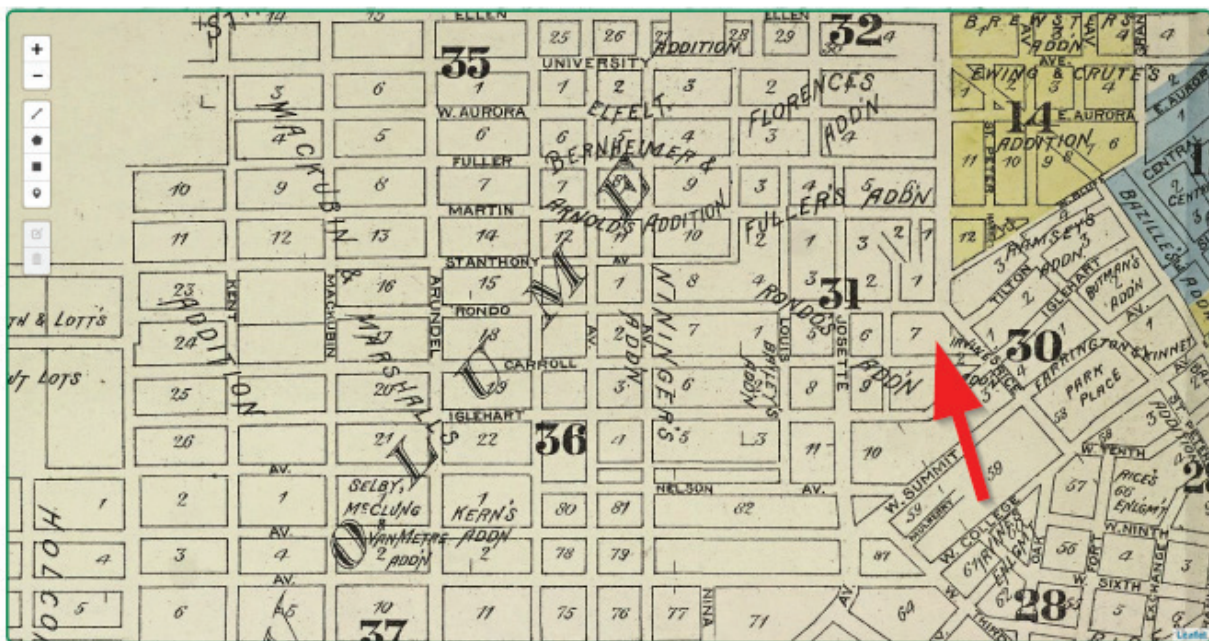
There were other areas of downtown that Black people lived and owned businesses as Saint Paul began to grow and become more established.

Overtime many people began to move westward towards what is considered today the Summit University area.

The original street name Rondo was named after the landowner near Rice Street, Joseph Rondeau (approx. 1884), who moved there in the late 1850's from a site close to Fort Snelling, where he had faced discrimination due to his wife's mixed white and Indigenous heritage. French Canadian immigrants followed Rondeau to the area in the late nineteenth century, later German, Russian, Irish, and Jewish families found homes there.

Rondeau sold his claims in 1872, but his name stuck to the area. Intensive settlement of the area began after 1890, when a streetcar line was built along University Avenue. The neighborhood quickly attracted working-class migrant populations fleeing poor conditions in the flood-prone West Side Flats. Among these populations were German Lutherans, Irish Catholics, Eastern European Jews, and Black migrants from the South. By the late 1920s, the neighborhood came to be defined by Black and Jewish residents. Jewish inhabitants mostly left the neighborhood (often for Highland Park) after World War II, strengthening the identity of Rondo as a Black neighborhood.

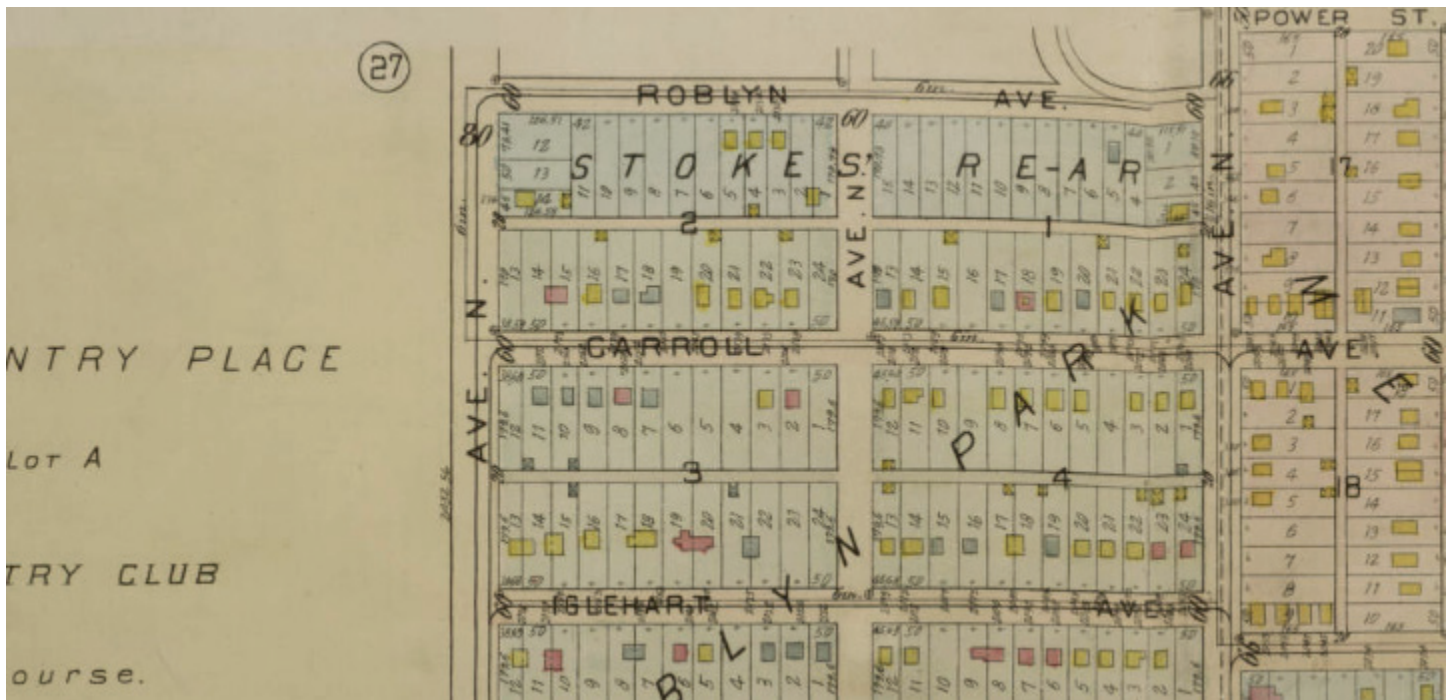
Rondeau's home would be just west of number 30 (Rondo 1885):



Rondo Street extended west as the city grew, in 1884 Rondo Street started at Rice Street and went west to Dale Street. In 1892 it extends further west to Lexington. In the 1908 Curtice's revised atlas, Rondo appears from Rice Street west to Cretin.



In the Plat book of the City of Saint Paul 1916, Rondo was renamed Roblyn Avenue and extends east to Pascal Avenue, where the street ends. When the street in the same position picks up again to the east of Griggs St., it is Rondo St.



When the first German and Jewish families moved into the area, one of the reminders of this movement and neighborhood is the Redemer Lutheran Church at Dale Street and Iglehart Avenue built in 1911.

This migration or movement of people also included a new St. Peter Claver Catholic Church built on the corner of Aurora Avenue and Farrington Avenue in 1892.

The Rondo neighborhood was the backbone of the Black community in St. Paul. Black homeownership thrived, beginning in 1900 and beyond.

Beginning in the 1910s and 1920s, Rondo experienced a social and cultural boom. Music and theater flourished. Black newspapers such as the *Appeal*, the *Northwestern Bulletin*, and the *St. Paul Recorder* represented Rondo's interests and needs. In 1913, St. Paul established its chapter of the NAACP, making it a center for civil rights activity. One member of the chapter, Rondo resident Roy Wilkins, later led the national NAACP.

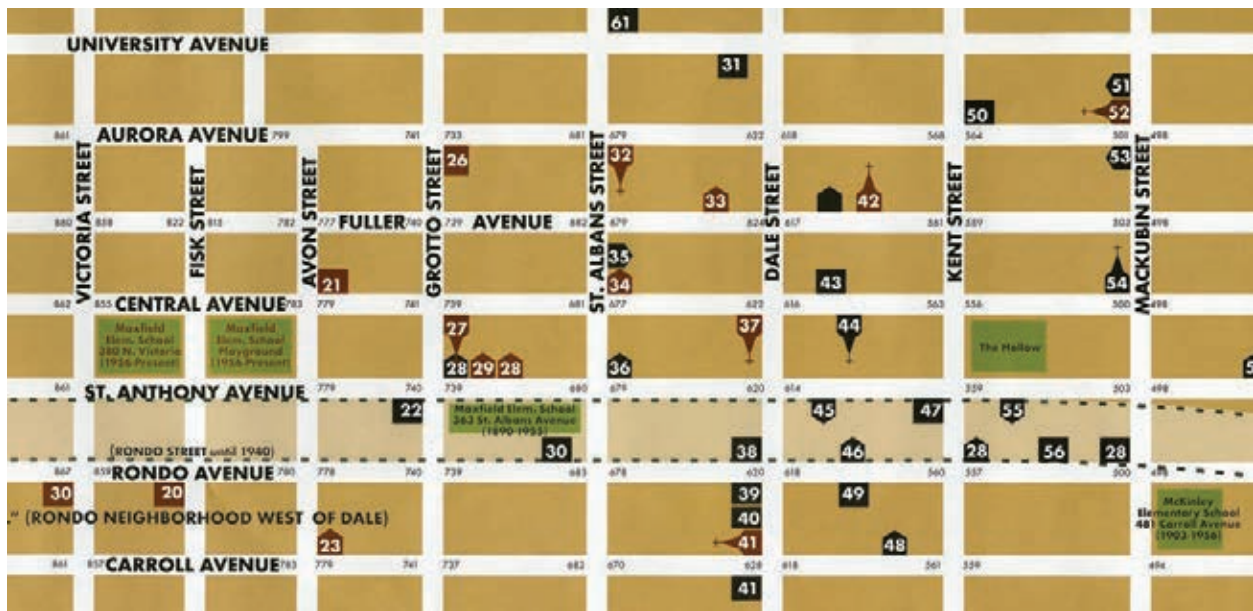
A third Pilgrim Baptist Church was built at 732 West Central in 1928 again as Black families moved into the area. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places.

By the 1930s Rondo was the heart of Saint Paul's Black community, not only housing the majority of Black residents in the city, but also home to critical community businesses, organizations, and institutions such as the Pilgrim Baptist Church, the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, and the Sterling Club. However, by the late 1950s this tight-knit community would be shattered by the construction of Interstate 94, connecting the downtown business corridors of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

It's important to note that while this was the heart of the Black community, the Rondo neighborhood was a diverse community.

The core of Rondo was demolished between 1956 and 1968.





Section taken from St. Paul's Rondo Neighborhood map 1920-1960 by James Gerlich

This section of the map gives an idea of I94 and its construction as it divided the Rondo neighborhood.

On the SE corner of Dale Street and Rondo, **620 Rondo** was Majestic Drug Store, owned by Mr. Lafayette Fields (1896-1982). This was the local place to purchase pharmaceuticals and a local hangout for teens that visited the fountain stand located within.

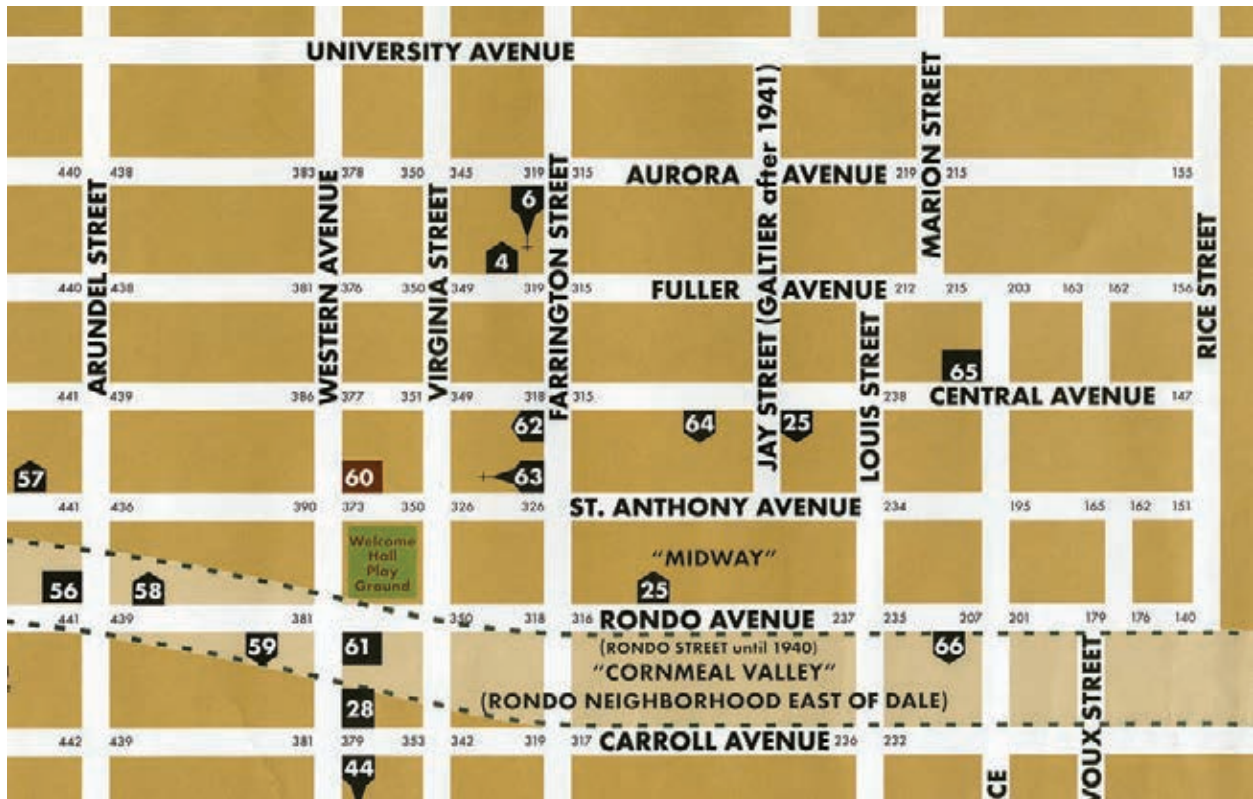
#46 587 Rondo was the boyhood home of James (Jimmy) Griffin, St. Paul Polic Officer (1941-1983). He was also Saint Paul's first Black Deputy Chief (1972).

#49 588 Rondo was the meeting place for several organizations:

- Pilgrim Commandery No. 22, Free and Accepted Masons (1920-1927)
- Pioneer Lodge No. 1; Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons (1927-1940)
- Princess Oziel Chapter No. 45: Order of the Eastern Star and Queen of Sheba
- No. 5: Order of Eastern Star (women masons 1927-1940)
- St. Paul Local No. 3; of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (1930-1934)
- Gopher Elks Lodge No. 105; (1939-1954) also located at 207 W. Central

#56 525 Rondo was the office of the Dinning Car Employees Union Local (1953-1958), this building at 525 Rondo was also the Wm Squire & Flora Neal Funeral home (1940-1953)

Note that as we're traveling east on Rondo today, the original location of Rondo Street is out in bed of I94, look at the next map (page 7) and note that Rondo Street is on the north side of I94 and was called St. Anthony.



Section taken from St. Paul's Rondo Neighborhood 1920-1960 by James Gerlich

#6 St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, Aurora Ave., and Farrington Street.

#60 Ober Boys Club/Welcome Hall Playground, **375 St. Anthony**. Founded in 1943 by the Union Gospel Mission.

#57 **455 St. Anthony** was the residence of I Myrtle Carden from 1929 to 1940. She was the first Director of the Hallie Q. Brown Community House

#58 **437 Rondo** was the boyhood home of William K. "Corky" Finney Saint. Paul's first black Chief of Police (1992-2004). Finney's Beauty studio & Hair Salon (Artie Finney 1931-1938; Luella Watkins & Lola Vasser, 1938-1943; Lola Finney 1943-1948).

#59 **394 Rondo** is one of the locations of the Turtle Club (the late 1950s and had multiple locations in the Rondo neighborhood). The Club was prominent historically significant Social organization and after-hours bottle club. By 1958 membership had grown to 1000 members.

Refer to map on page 7.

The Hollow (was about one-half of the entire block) was an open space located in the square block between Kent, Mackubin, St. Anthony, and Central. It had four playing fields, horseshoe beds, and in the winter an ice-skating rink. Also, the Twin Cities Colored Giants practiced here.

#55 532 St. Anthony is the girlhood home of Evelyn Fairbanks the author of "The Days of Rondo".

#47 560 St. Anthony (Jim) Williams Pool & Billard Parlor later known as "Jim's Place" (1924-1959). Mr. Williams was the first Black business owner in St. Paul to get a liquor license. Gordon Parks considered the Parlor his home away from home from 1928 to the early '30s.

#45 606 St. Anthony was the home of Wm T. And Mrs. (Nellie Griswold) Francis (1897-1924). Mr. Francis was an attorney and civil rights activist whose efforts were along with others in getting an anti-lynching law passed in MN in 1921.

#36 679 St. Anthony was the home of Clarence Wesley "Cap" and Mrs. (Viola) Wigington (1922-1949). He was the lead architect for many St. Paul buildings. A couple of examples include the Pavilion on Harriet Island, The Highland Park Water Tower, and the Roy Wilkins Auditorium.

#29 719 St. Anthony/1036 W. Central Homes of Rev. Floyd and Mrs. (Ethel) Massey Jr. 719 St. Anthony (1945-1955) 1036 W. Central (1955-1965). He was the longest-serving minister at Pilgrim Baptist Church (1944-1965).

Maxfield School was originally at 363 St. Albans at St. Anthony and was built in 1890. In 1955 a new school was built at **680 St. Anthony** at Victoria, and Central.

#14 931 St. Anthony was the office of the Associated Negro Credit Union (Founded in 1936 in the home of William B. Walker. Mr. Walker served as the first Vice President of the Union with Thomas Woodward as the first President). The Credit Union moved to Minneapolis in 1947.

#5 St. Peter Claver School 1060 W. Central founded in 1950 by St. Peter Church.

1041-1053 Carroll was the location of the WW II Veteran's Quonset Huts (1947-1955). Today this location is Oxford Community Center and Stacy Robinson Field.



1016 Rondo boyhood home of Historian David Vassar Taylor. He served as the Dean of General College at the U of M.

331/333 N Chatsworth

- 1920 William Forrester's Grocery
- 1925-1929 The Henrietta Beauty Shop (Henrietta Goins)
- 1930-1935 Vacant
- 1943-1956 Apostolic Faith Mission
- 1956-1962 New Hope Baptist Church

941 Rondo home of Owen and Annice Howell. Mr. Howell was a founder (1922) and longtime President of the St. Paul Business League in addition to owning and operating the Uptown Sanitary Shop in downtown St. Paul and owner of the St. Paul Echo newspaper 1924-1927.

334 N. Milton (at Rondo)

- 1920 Norman McFarren's Grocery
- 1930 George Melquist's Grocery then Perry's Grocery
- 1940 (Robert & Armand) Hochschildt's Grocery and Meals
- 1950 Gospel Mission of Church of God in Christ (Rev. Walter Battle).

697/862 Rondo

- (Aaron) McGavock's Funeral Home (697 Rondo) 1938-1941
- Brooks Funeral Home (697 Rondo) 1941-1960 (862 Rondo) 1960 director George Brooks Jr (current location 862 Rondo).

820/822 Rondo

- 1916-1957 (Emmett) McGill's Grocery at 820
- 1930 Nickolas Kaller's Barbershop at 822
- 1940 Abraham Cooperman's Tailor Shop at 822
- 1950 Victoria Cleaners at 822
- 1959-1975 Young Brothers Barbershop at 822 (Richard & John Jr)
- 1964 VFW Twin Star Post 8854
- **2018 Rondo Commemorative Plaza**



315 N. Dale Clubhouse of the Sterling Club for Professional Afro-American Men from 1924-Dec 1976. The Sterling Club was a social club that was founded in

January 1918 at the Union Hall located at 553 Aurora. A Ladies Auxiliary was added in the 1930s. The Sterling Club today located at 300 N. St Albans.

285 N. Dale/307 N. Dale Lutheran Church of Redeemer (founded in 1889). The current location of 285 N. Dale was built in 1911.

More info:

#28 Neighborhood Rooming Houses and Hotels (multiple locations in the Rondo neighborhood).

- 557 Rondo Wm McLeigh (1930's-1955)
- 697 St. Anthony Villa Wilson (1930's-1955)
- 707 Rondo, James Rideaux home.*
- 739 St. Anthony Clara Bowers (1942-1958)
- 379 Carroll Keystone Hotel/Three Pals Bar (1920-1941). John W. Bridges was the manager, and this location was frequently visited by John Dillinger in the late 1920s to the early 1930s.



#6 **332 Aurora/375 N. Oxford** St. Peter Catholic Church founded at Aurora and Farrington on

12/21/1892. The present church opened on April 20, 1957, for Easter Mass. (332 Aurora/375 N. Oxford).

Significant Rondo African Americans contained in tour.

James S. Griffin - #46

<https://rchs.com/publishing/catalog/ramsey-county-history-winter-2002-a-memoir-jimmy-griffin-st-pauls-first-black-deputy-police-chief-remembers-his-first-years-on-the-force/>

Myrtle Carden – #57

<https://aaregistry.org/story/i-myrtle-carden-community-activist-born/>

William K. “Corky” Finney - #58

<https://www.twincities.com/2021/10/15/st-paul-police-station-renamed-for-former-chief-bill-finney/>

Rev. Denzil A. Carty – #51

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/carty-rev-denzil-1904-1975>

Hallie Q Brown - #50

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hallie_Q._Brown_Community_Center

William T. and Mrs. Nellie Griswold Francis - #45

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/francis-william-t-1869-1929>

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/francis-nellie-1874-1969>

Clarence Wesley “Cap” Wigington - #36

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/wigington-clarence-1883-1967>

Rev. Floyd Massey Jr. - #29

Pilgrim Baptist Church

<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-oldest-black-church-pilgrim-baptist-marks-150-years-of-praise/211702161/>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/massey-floyd-jr-1915-2003>

St. Peter Claver Catholic Church and School - #5 & #6

<https://spcchurch.org/history>

Sterling Club - #40

<https://rchs.com/event/history-revealed-the-sterling-club/>

Frank M. White Oral References:

I've put this tour together based upon my personal history of living in St. Paul for most of my life.

Especially growing up and living at 409 St. Anthony Ave. and 589 Iglehart Ave., attending St. Peter Claver Catholic School, Marshall Jr. High, and Mechanic Arts High School.

During this time, I had two different paper routes within the Rondo neighborhood, played sports, played on the ballfield at Ober Boys Club and watched my father play basketball at Hallie Q. Brown.

I loved going to Wazzie's (Clarence Lewis) barber shop (SW corner of Rondo and Mackubin) and traveling with my father throughout the neighborhood.

While living at 409 St. Anthony, I watched the houses of my friends across the street (south side of St. Anthony) being taken down and then watching large earth movers come in and change the landscape of what used to be the land between St. Anthony and Rondo.

While as a young adult, I attended the University of Minnesota after my stint in the Air Force. I began working at the Oxford Playground to fill time and soon after a couple of years, working and still attending the U, I became the Director of the Martin Luther King Recreation Center, within the building known as the Martin Luther King Center and Administered by Hallie Q. Brown.

References:

- <https://www.mnopedia.org/african-americans-minnesota>
- <https://aaregistry.org/>
- <https://libguides.mnhs.org/rondo>
- Minnesota History Center, Sanford Insurance Maps
- County Historical Society Magazine. [Ramsey County History – Fall 2002: “Lost Neighborhood: Borup’s Addition and the Prosperous Pioneer African Americans Who Owned Homes There”](#) *David Riehle*
- Map St. Paul’s Rondo Neighborhood 1920-1960 by James Gerlich
- Ryan Mattke, Map & Geospatial Information Librarian
- Head, [John R. Borchert Map Library](#)
- Program Director, Big Ten Academic Alliance Geospatial Information Network
- Co-Director, Mapping Prejudice
- Adjunct Faculty, MGIS Program
- They Played for the Love of the Game, Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota, Frank M. White

Prepared by
Frank M. White, Rondo Elder, Historian, Author



St. Peter Claver Church



BookerT Bar B Que



Jimmy Lee - 1939



Road Buddys



First Black member of the Midway Speed Skating Club. 1951.



HALLIE Q BROWN MEN'S BASKETBALL 1946
Kneeling L-R: Frank Schene, Edgar Pillow, Clarence "Wazzie" Lewis, Robert "Muff" Graham, Richard Washington.
Standing L-R: Coach Kenny Wilson, Tim "Tiny" Bellamy, Readus Fletcher, Mohs Wallace, Jim Griffin, Roscoe Reed, Louis "Pud" White.



Hallie Q Brown building



MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA



1948 Wirth Golf Course



Ober Boys Club



Mechanic Arts Senior High