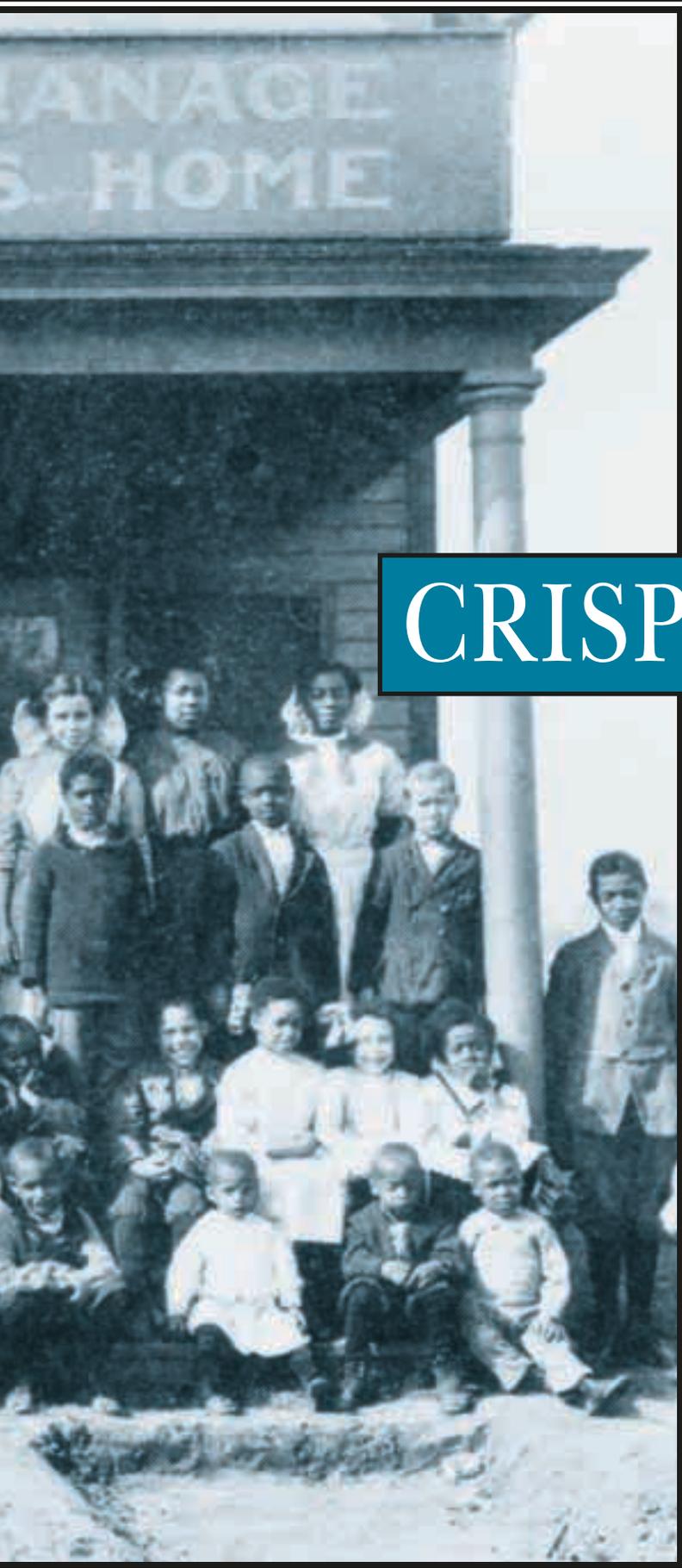


Old and young residents of Crispus Attucks Home, about 1909, with Fannie and Will King (on porch flanking window)



Orphans & Old Folks

ST. PAUL'S

CRISPUS ATTUCKS

H O M E

On a cold December day late in 1966 the Crispus Attucks Home closed its doors forever. For 60 years, precisely 50 of them at the same address, it had served the Twin Cities' African-American community as a residence for orphans and elderly. Created by and for black Minnesotans, it had been the first and only institution of its kind in the state. Though its leaders had resisted its closing for 15 years, the end came quietly. There seemed to be tacit recognition—for some, tinged with

PAUL D. NELSON

bitterness—that the community’s needs had changed or could be met better elsewhere.¹

The turn of the century was a time when infectious disease, especially tuberculosis, pneumonia, and influenza, routinely carried off adults, leaving their children and elderly parents without support. It was also a time of increasing racial separation—by Jim Crow laws in southern states and more subtle means in northern states. In Minnesota, law forbade race segregation in most public accommodations, but the law did not stop many people, white and black, from feeling that social segregation made sense. The Crispus Attucks Home addressed the need and the desire for African-American elderly, orphans, and neglected children to be cared for by their own.²

James William King and his wife Frances (Fannie) tried to meet this need and desire. King, born in 1861 in Galesburg, Illinois, and a clergyman since 1896, and Fannie, born (possibly a slave) in Canton, Missouri, in 1858, were partners in religious work. The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church sent them to Minneapolis in 1898, back to Illinois in 1900, and then to St. Paul in 1903. There they established the St. Paul Mission of the A.M.E. Church

at 741 Mississippi Street. The mission did not prosper, but its closing in 1905 freed the Kings to create something unique and enduring.³

They began their new work in 1906 in a little frame house at 228 East Acker Street, just east of Oakland Cemetery and north of a Great Northern railroad yard. They called it the Crispus Attuck [*sic*] Industrial School and Colored Old Folks’ and Orphans’ Home, after the black patriot killed by British troops in the Boston Massacre of 1770. The home’s stated purposes were “the improvement of industrial and social conditions of the colored people of the State of Minnesota” and “the establishment of a home for the indigent, deserving colored men, women and children.”⁴

At first and for the next several years it served many more “indigent and deserving” children than adults. A 1913 survey of Minnesota’s charitable institutions found that Crispus Attucks ordinarily housed 24 residents, 15 of them children. This pattern continued until about 1920.⁵

In the early twentieth century, Minnesota, like nearly all states, relied on charitable and religious organizations to make homes for orphaned and neglected children. In 1910 it identified nearly 1,300 such children living in institutions, but Minnesota’s only publicly supported residence, the state school at Owatonna, had places for fewer than 250. The rest lived in 21 private infants’ and orphans’ homes.⁶

About 7,000 Minnesotans (out of a state population of 2 million) claimed African her-

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¹ *St. Paul Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 1966, p. 23; Articles of Incorporation, Crispus Attuck [*sic*] Industrial School and Colored Old Folks’ and Orphans’ Home, St. Paul, filed Jan. 9, 1906, Minnesota Secretary of State records, State Office Building, St. Paul; Charles W. Bradley, interview by author, St. Paul, Feb. 9, 1995; memorandum from Committee on Crispus Attucks Home (CAH), Carl T. Schuneman, Chairman, to Rehabilitation Committee, Greater Saint Paul Community Chest and Council, Sept. 26, 1952, in Board of Directors’ Minutes, Nov. 1952, United Way of the St. Paul Area Records, 1920–88, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); memorandum from Ulric Scott, chairman of Committee on Services to the Aging, to Paul M. Berry, chairman of the Greater Saint Paul Case Work Council, May 8, 1953, Planning and Research Council Minute Books, v. 1952–53, p. 188–93, Greater St. Paul United Fund and Community Chest Papers, MHS.

² David V. Taylor, “Pilgrim’s Progress: Black St. Paul and the Making of an Urban Ghetto, 1870–1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1977), 179–80; Articles of Incorporation, 1906; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1906, 518; *Colored Orphanage and Old Peoples Home* (St. Paul, 1911), 3–4, copy in MHS; Minnesota, *General Statutes, 1894*, secs. 8002, 8003.

³ *Colored Orphanage*, 3–4; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1904, 937; Taylor, “Pilgrim’s Progress,” 179–81, identifies Oct. 15, 1903, as the mission’s opening date, but the *Appeal* (St. Paul), Jan. 9, 1904, p. 3, gives it as Jan. 10, 1904.

⁴ *Colored Orphanage*, 5; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1906, 518; Articles of Incorporation, 1906.

⁵ U.S. Census, *Benevolent Institutions, 1910*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 174–257, especially 208; *Colored Orphanage*, 10; Hiram W. Slack, *A Directory of Charitable and Benevolent Institutions* (St. Paul: Amherst H. Wilder Charity, 1913), 306, 330. Counts for 1909, 1912, and 1913 are ambiguous; Minnesota Board of Control, *Fifth Biennial Report* (Minneapolis: Syndicate Printing Co., 1910), 377, *Sixth Biennial Report* (1912), 390, *Seventh Biennial Report* (1915), 413.

⁶ Census, *Benevolent Institutions, 1910*, 31, 86–157 (especially 114–17).

itage. Nearly half lived in St. Paul. While most orphan homes in Minnesota had no policies against admitting African-American children, this was not the case in the capital city. There, the Protestant Orphan Asylum and St. Joseph's German Catholic Orphan Asylum excluded black children. The fact that Crispus Attucks so quickly took in more than two dozen children suggests that it met a substantial and previously unmet demand.⁷

That demand seems to have exceeded the capacities of Crispus Attucks's East Acker building, for by late 1907 the Kings were looking for more and better space. They soon found it, still in St. Paul but a world away. So, probably in the spring of 1908, they packed up wagons, loaded in the arthritic elderly and the squirming tots, and headed for the country. They most likely passed through downtown St. Paul, then followed West Seventh Street all the way to the Schmidt Brewery and a little beyond, to Randolph Avenue. There the wagon train of pilgrims turned, climbed the Highland bluff, and headed west onto the prairie. Their little Zion awaited them just two miles away at 1537 Randolph Avenue near the intersection with Snelling Avenue. It was a small frame house, no bigger than the one at Acker Street, but it came with a shed, a few acres of land, and plenty of room to build and grow. They called the new place "the farm."⁸

Neither the Kings nor the Crispus Attucks organization had the resources to buy the Randolph property. The move was made possible, or at least sustainable, by someone with no natural connection to the organization, Joseph Elsinger. Elsinger, a Jewish man from Cleveland, had arrived in St. Paul in about 1878 and, with his brother William and Jacob Dittenhoffer, founded the Golden Rule department store. The business made him rich, and he turned some of his riches back to the community by giving to charities.⁹

In 1901 Elsinger had donated land to the Children's Home Society of Minnesota for construction of the Jean Martin Brown Home for infants and orphans on St. Paul's Common-

Orphanages

were common in the early part of the century, as disease, accidents, misfortune, and problems with alcohol resulted in abused or abandoned children. Government provided little assistance, and the foster-care system had barely begun. The federal census for 1910 lists 1,151 "institutions for the care of children," including orphanages, training schools, state and county schools, temporary shelters, and foundling homes. The 108,070 residents of these institutions included orphans, half-orphans, children in trouble with the law, neglected and abandoned children, and newborns available for adoption.

Most of these private institutions, operated by charities and religious organizations, did not admit African-American children. As Jim Crow laws and segregationist customs took hold in the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s, however, parallel black institutions appeared. By 1910 more than 60 residences catered primarily or exclusively to some 3,000 orphaned and neglected black children, ranging from the venerable Colored Orphan Asylum of New York City, founded in 1837 and housing 300 children, to Nettie's Colored Orphan Asylum of Orange Hill, Florida, founded in 1894 and sheltering three.*

* U.S. Census, *Benevolent Institutions 1910*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1914), 26–31, 86–157 (especially 94, 126).

wealth Avenue. The city's black community had also supported that cause, contributing some \$500—a considerable sum of money then—to furnish the home's handsome reception room. Dedication ceremonies in May 1903 honored Elsinger for his generosity and also featured a speech by one of the leaders of the African-American donors, Fredrick (Frederick) L.

⁷ U.S., *Census, Population, 1910* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 991, 994; *Census, Benevolent Institutions, 1910*, 114–17.

⁸ Ethel McClure, *More Than a Roof: The Development of Minnesota Poor Farms and Homes for the Aged* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1968), 118; Slack, *Directory*, 305; Articles of Incorporation, Attucks Industrial School, Orphanage and Old Folks Home, Minnesota Secretary of State, filed Mar. 8, 1909, Secretary of State records; *St. Paul City Directory 1908*, 949; *Colored Orphanage*, 5.

⁹ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Jews in Minnesota* (New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1959), 158n.1, 262; *Book of Minnesotans* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis & Co., 1907), 146; *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), Jan. 11, 1917, p. 1.



A wagon loaded with young residents about to leave 228 Acker Street for “the farm”

McGhee. McGhee, Minnesota’s first black lawyer, was himself an orphan whose only child, Ruth, was adopted from an orphanage in New York. McGhee was also an early supporter of the Crispus Attucks Home, and he may have been the link to Elsinger.¹⁰

Elsinger’s intervention was critical, perhaps life saving, for the Attucks group, though precisely what he did, and when, are not clear. According to Attucks’s 1911 publicity brochure, the home had taken out a loan, in part for relocation, but the Kings had trouble making pay-

ments, and ruin loomed. Then, “To save our institution from being devoured by the American Real Estate Investment Loan Co., of Minneapolis . . . this invincible philanthropist came to our assistance as did the Tenth Cavalry in the Spanish-American war.” Elsinger seems to have put things right between the Kings and the loan company, probably in 1907, and he also had a hand, maybe *the* hand, in acquiring rights to the Randolph Avenue land. Neither the Kings nor the Attucks organization ever acquired title to the site; Elsinger did.¹¹

¹⁰ *Appeal*, Jan. 30, 1892, Apr. 18, 1903, June 6, 1903, June 20, 1903—all p. 3; *Pioneer Press*, May 30, 1903, p. 2; *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 30, 1903, p. 5; Children’s Home Society of Minnesota (CHSM), *Minnesota Children’s Home Finder*, Nov. 1903, p. 4, 6, May 1904, p. 6; W. A. Hennessy, *Past and Present of St. Paul* (Chicago: S. J. Clark Pub. Co., 1906), 632.

For the story of Elsinger’s many contributions to the CHSM, see Kenneth L. Green, *One Life at a Time, Children’s Home Society of Minnesota 1889–1989* (St. Paul: CHS, 1989), 14, and monthly issues of *Minnesota Children’s Home Finder* from 1903. The building at 2237 Commonwealth is now the St. Anthony Park Home.

¹¹ *Colored Orphanage*, 3–4. Elsinger acquired title to the property in the Sylvan Park Addition in May 1911 for the sum of \$900; deed from John and Sophie Leuthold to Joseph Elsinger, May 4, 1911, document number 405898, Book of Deeds 577, p. 354, Ramsey Co. Recorder, Ramsey Co. Government Center West, St. Paul. Because Attucks had been occupying the land for at least two years, it seems likely that Elsinger acquired possession of the place around 1908; *St. Paul Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1933, p. 5; McClure, *Minnesota Poor Farms*, 119.

While the choice of location seems odd because of its distance from the city's black community near downtown, the Kings and Elsinger may have been influenced by the very successful operation of the city's largest orphanage, St. Joseph's, a few blocks away at 1458 Randolph. Caring for 120 to 140 children on a 47-acre farm campus there, the Sisters of St. Benedict grew grains and vegetables and maintained an orchard to feed the residents and earn income. Siting the Crispus Attucks Home nearby seems more than a coincidence. More likely Attucks leaders figured to use their new neighbor as a model.¹²

C*rispus Attucks's move* marked the beginning of a tumultuous decade of reorganization, crises, big plans, and big disappointments. Through these struggles the home found a community role that it would occupy for the rest of its life. In February 1909 the organization reincorporated as the Attucks Industrial School, Orphanage and Old Folks' Home. Fannie King continued as president and Will King as treasurer. Having put together a network of community support that proved effective and durable, they assembled a board that included Joseph Elsinger and many African-American leaders: Owen Howell, owner of Valet Tailoring and other enterprises, an active Democrat and a fraternal-lodge member; Dr. R. S. Brown, Minnesota's second black physician; John H. Charleston, an employee of the prestigious Minnesota Club; Phil E. Reid, a prosperous saloonkeeper; William R. Morris, Minneapolis's first and Minnesota's second black attorney and a prominent Republican; John H. Hickman Sr., a member of one of the city's founding African-American families; and Alex Payne, a janitor for the Northern Pacific Railway.¹³

Women played a great part in supporting and operating the home from the beginning, too. Three of the five original incorporators, Fannie King, Inez Pope, and Flavia Rogers, were women. Fannie King had helped found the

Lincoln Orphanage in Springfield, Illinois, another combined residence for elderly and orphans. King and Pope served six years as Attucks's president and secretary, respectively. It may be, too, that Pope initiated its "industrial school" component, for in early 1905 she had opened a night school at the Kings' St. Paul mission. Other trustees and advisers included Mrs. J. H. Dillingham, Kittie Terrell, and Ruby Arroll. Women raised a great deal of private money for the home.¹⁴

African-American churches also gave vital support from the earliest days. No African-American charity work could long succeed without them, and the leadership of church, community, social, and even political organizations overlapped. Pope was a busy and prominent member of St. James A.M.E. Church, one of the city's leading black congregations. Board member Hickman's family had founded the Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul's early black

Fannie King and Joseph Elsinger, as depicted in the home's 1911 fund-raising brochure



¹² Slack, *Directory*, 309–12; Board of Control, *Fifth Biennial Report* (1910), 377.

¹³ Articles of Incorporation, 1909; *Colored Orphanage*, 2; *Appeal*, June 29, 1889, Sept. 21, 1889, July 16, 1898, Mar. 2, 1912—all p. 3, *St. Paul City Directory*, 1908, 1321, 1401, 1909, 1344, 1428.

¹⁴ *Colored Orphanage*, 2, 4; Articles of Incorporation, 1906.

congregation, and Hickman himself was choir-master. Owen Howell and McGhee were leading laymen of St. Peter Claver, the city's black Roman Catholic parish. Long after these early leaders passed away, black ministers and church groups continued to support Attucks with leadership and money and by visiting residents and conducting services at the home.¹⁵

The Kings put together a dynamic fundraising apparatus for Crispus Attucks. They had to, for theirs was the only major orphanage in the city that did not enjoy the permanent sponsorship of a well-established organization. Attucks had to rely to a great degree on individual generosity. To encourage this, Attucks leadership often used public events, such as the annual charity ball held in December from 1907 through at least 1915. These balls were grand public parties of a kind now rarely seen, and though they did not raise a great deal of money, they kept the home's public profile high during the critical early years. The 1909 event, attended by 200 paying well-wishers, featured three speeches, vaudeville entertainment, a supper, a "grand march up San Juan Hill," and four hours of dancing to a live orchestra, all for 50 cents.¹⁶

Supporters raised money in many other ways, too. Whist clubs held card parties. Black waiters put on baseball games for the coal fund. Women's clubs held teas and masquerades. Occasionally the leadership mounted fundraisers for specific purposes such as building a fire escape or paying down the mortgage. Because Attucks had to rely on the public, the money-raising efforts never stopped.¹⁷

Crispus Attucks's leaders also succeeded in winning support from white philanthropists. James J. Hill, Judge Grier M. Orr, Mayor Herbert P. Keller, and banker Otto W. Bremer reputedly made gifts. In 1910 St. Paul author Mercy M. Sanford left the organization a

bequest of \$1,000—a large sum at the time—plus many of her home furnishings. By 1911, perhaps earlier, the Amherst Wilder Foundation supported the home by subsidizing several residents.¹⁸

The first few years at "the farm" were probably the most exciting in Attucks's long history. The home had energetic and capable leadership, youth and vitality, and outstanding community support. When the original building proved too small, a donor, perhaps Elsinger, doubled its size with an addition. Elsinger contributed a barn and more; the organization reported in 1911 that when he visited and saw something lacking, he "orders it done, or gets it, pays for it, and sends us the receipted bill." Others gave a horse, a cow, pigeons, chickens, and seed for the three-acre garden. A "needlework guild" of African-American women contributed 230 new garments.¹⁹

In 1909 the organization reported satisfying progress:

This institution is more than an old folks' home and orphanage. It is a community center. We have found adoptive homes for children, servants for our friends and work for the unemployed. We have found good boarding and rooming places for strangers and upon our advice some persons have commenced buying and building homes. We are making our institution necessary to the comfort and progress of Minnesota.²⁰

Life at Crispus Attucks

was well ordered if, by today's standards, somewhat spartan. Boys and girls rose at the 6:30 morning bell, washed, and started their duties. All went to school and had mandatory study hours. Boys were expected to work making paint brushes or on the farm. Girls received

¹⁵ Jon Butler, "The Black Church in St. Paul, 1860–1900," *Journal of Negro History* 56 (Apr. 1971): 118–34; *Appeal*, Dec. 16, 1905, p. 3, Mar. 9, 1912, p. 3, Apr. 13, 1912, p. 3; *St. Peter Claver Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1892–1967 Diamond Jubilee* (St. Paul: St. Peter Claver Church, 1967), 6, MHS; Bradley interview.

¹⁶ *Appeal*, Dec. 7, 1907, Dec. 12, 1908, Nov. 27, 1909, Feb. 25, 1922—all p. 3.

¹⁷ *Appeal*, May 7, 1910, Sept. 20, 1913, Feb. 5, 1916, Feb. 24, 1917, May 12, 1917, Dec. 22, 1917, Aug. 17, 1918, Nov. 16, 1918, Feb. 22, 1919, Mar. 1, 1919, Apr. 21, 1923—all p. 3; *Twin City Star*, Jan. 20, 1912, p. 1; Feb. 3, 1912, p. 1; *St. Paul Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1933, p. 5.

¹⁸ *St. Paul Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 1966, p. 23; *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 9, 1964, women's sec., 21; *Twin City Star*, May 11, 1912, p. 4; estate of Mercy M. Sanford, Ramsey Co. Probate Court file 18,365, Ramsey Co. Courthouse, St. Paul; Amherst H. Wilder Charity, *Annual Report, 1916–17*, 8, *1917–18*, 34, MHS; Slack, *Directory*, 330.

¹⁹ *Appeal*, Nov. 27, 1909, p. 3, Dec. 4, 1909, p. 3; *Colored Orphanage*, 4; *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 9, 1964, women's sec., 21.

²⁰ *Appeal*, Nov. 27, 1909, p. 3.

Colored Orphanage and Old People's Home

Or Attuck's Industrial School, Orphanage and Old Folk's Home.

FOUNDED BY REV. J. WILL KING AND WIFE. INCORPORATED 1899. SUPPORTED ENTIRELY BY VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The cuts below will show some of the work we are endeavoring to do.

We have a string board of managers and trustees, who are trustworthy and of business tact, as follows:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. James King, president and
manager, Hampton, Virginia | F. J. Robinson, secretary, via
post-office | Rev. J. Will King, general super-
intendent, 1001 N. 1st St.,
Hampton, Virginia | Mr. W. B. Moore, treasurer, 1001 N. 1st
St., Hampton, Virginia |
|---|---|---|---|



Rev. J. Will King, president and manager of the orphanage and old people's home.



The Randolph building, which was the first building erected by the orphanage and old people's home.



Mrs. Mary Pugh, widow of the late Rev. J. Will King, and one of the managers of the orphanage and old people's home.



A view of the property of the orphanage and old people's home, showing the fence and surrounding area.



Another view of the Randolph building.



A view of the property of the orphanage and old people's home, showing a small building and animals.



A group of people standing in front of the orphanage and old people's home.



A group of people sitting at a table, possibly in a classroom or meeting room.



A group of people sitting at a table in a room, possibly in a classroom or meeting room.

Requirements of the Estates Must Be Observed.

First—Straight possession of the funds, unless some of them are held in trust and being received from a building and all preparation for the future must be fully attended to before any work is done.

Second—The estate must be in the hands of the trustee of the time left, work and account their notes.

Provisions.

First—All property coming from the estate, including the land and buildings, the contents of the same, etc.

Second—The use of the proceeds of any estate of the estate.

Third—All other provisions as may be required by the estate.



A group of people sitting around a long table, possibly in a meeting or classroom.

Governments.

The government is hereby advised in providing all property relating to the estate and in making a complete record of the same. The government is hereby advised in providing all property relating to the estate and in making a complete record of the same.

In the work of the government, as well as of the estate, the same is to be made and the same is to be made and the same is to be made.

Domestic Training for Girls.

The same training given to girls in the same school as that given to boys in the same school. The same training given to girls in the same school as that given to boys in the same school.

Fund-raising poster with various views, including the very modest Randolph building before its addition (top center)

domestic training in etiquette, dress, house-keeping, and physical culture. Baths were required on Saturday night to prepare for mandatory Sunday school plus afternoon and evening services.²¹

Reminiscing in 1964 about her three girlhood years at the farm, Vallie Turner recalled that “we had to draw well water and heat it and then get into tin tubs” to get cleaned up for Sunday. Children could not leave the premises without permission. The Kings proclaimed their administration “inflexibly strict,” and Turner agreed. “When I got home from school . . . I had to cook for the 35 others in the home at that time. Sometimes that meant as many as 19 loaves of bread 3 times a week. Things had to be just so, too. Aunt Fanny was very strict.” For good reason, according to the Kings: their regulations were “instituted . . . to promote the prosperity and happiness of the inmates . . . and to inspire and increase in every boy or girl self-respect and self-development.” Not all children found the Attucks regime congenial. In the summer of 1915, Orville Roberts, 12, and George Quinn, 13, ran away from the home, stole a horse and wagon, and made it to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, before they were caught and returned.²²

Who were the children of the Crispus Attucks Home? No internal orphanage records survive, but some conclusions from various fragments suggest that few infants lived there. Attucks did not have facilities for them, and other places, notably the Children’s Home Society, accepted African-American babies. As was true at most orphan asylums, not all the children were orphans. The 1910 census, for example, recorded 15 of the 21 children as “orphaned or dependent” and 6 as “received with parent.” Board of Control records indicate a high rate of turnover, suggesting children were placed in new families, returned to their original homes, or, after a certain age, were released to the world of work.²³

Just three stories of how children came to the home have survived. In February 1913 “baby Erickson,” the only infant known to have resided at Attucks, arrived through the interven-

tion of the Children’s Home Society. The child’s mother wanted the child boarded temporarily at the Jean Martin Brown Home, but that center accepted children for adoption only. Because the child’s father was black, it was placed at Attucks, where it died six weeks later. In May 1914 the *Appeal*, St. Paul’s African-American newspaper, reported another case: “Mrs. Evans and three children, who were sick and in distress . . . were provided for last Wednesday. She was taken to the hospital and the children were taken to the Crispus Attucks Home.” And in November 1915 a girl from Detroit named Katherine Merrit was found wandering St. Paul’s streets. Black club women arranged for her to stay at Attucks “until suitable work could be found for her.” These stories suggest that the city’s health, police, and charity officials made frequent use of Attucks for temporary placement of African-American children.²⁴

Not all went smoothly during these first years at 1537 Randolph; some crises had to be endured. The first had to do with educating the children. One of the advantages of the Randolph location was its proximity to the public Mattocks School, a one-room stone building located a block away across Snelling Avenue. (It has since been moved to the Highland Park Senior High School campus.) Attucks children attended it for all or part of the 1908–09 school year, apparently without incident, but their numbers crowded the building. The city’s school board then considered adding a room or dividing the space into two classrooms in time for the next school year.²⁵

This provided an opening for the expression of resentment among some parents of white Mattocks students. If another room were created, they argued, it should be used to keep the Attucks children separate. According to the *Appeal*, the white citizens claimed that the orphan children came to school dirty. Some school administrators seemed to give the proposal serious thought, for according to St. Paul’s *Pioneer Press*, an unnamed school official said, “It would be illogical to take half the colored orphans and put them under the same teacher. In fact, the natural thing to do

²¹ *Colored Orphanage*, 8.

²² *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 9, 1964, women’s sec., 21; *Appeal*, Nov. 27, 1909, p. 3, July 31, 1915, p. 3; *Colored Orphanage*, 9.

²³ Census, *Benevolent Institutions, 1910*, 116–17; Board of Control, *Fifth Biennial Report*, 377; *Sixth Biennial Report*, 390; *Seventh Biennial Report*, 413.

²⁴ *Appeal*, Feb. 22, 1913, p. 4, Apr. 5, 1913, p. 2, Dec. 27, 1913, p. 2, May 9, 1914, p. 4, Nov. 13, 1915, p. 5.

²⁵ *St. Paul City Directory, 1909*, 1164; *Pioneer Press*, Sept. 1, 2, 1909, p. 14; *St. Paul Daily News*, Sept. 1, 1909, p. 2; Sept. 2, 1909, p. 1; *Appeal*, Sept. 4, 1909, p. 3.

would be to have all the orphans in one room under one teacher.”²⁶

The leaders of St. Paul’s black community were keenly attuned to the advance of Jim Crow trends across the country and determined to fight them when they showed up locally. When they learned of the Mattocks proposal, probably in August 1909, they acted swiftly and brought out the big guns. Fredrick McGhee, an Attucks supporter, was also legal director of the Niagara Movement, a national civil rights organization headed by W. E. B. DuBois. No local lawyer, and few across the country, had more civil rights experience than McGhee. When the Mattocks controversy arose, he had been preparing a report and speech on civil rights litigation for Niagara’s fifth annual meeting in New Jersey, but he judged the Mattocks case so important

that he cancelled his talk in order to attend the local school-board meeting.²⁷

When the school board convened on the evening of September 1, it found present a large delegation of black citizens, headed by McGhee and Lillian Turner, president of the Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs. McGhee, an experienced trial lawyer and renowned speaker, likely gave the school board a learned and impassioned protest. Elsinger was enlisted, too, to pledge money for new laundry and bath facilities at the home. These exertions won the day, though they might not, after all, have been necessary. The school superintendent explained that Minnesota law forbade race segregation in public schools; white and black children at Mattocks would be educated together. After the Attucks delegation left, a group of eight angry

²⁶ *Pioneer Press*, Sept. 1, 2, 1909, p. 14; *St. Paul Daily News*, Sept. 1, 1909, p. 2; Sept. 2, 1909, p. 1; *Appeal*, Sept. 4, 1909, p. 3.

²⁷ Elliot Rudwick, “The Niagara Movement,” *Journal of Negro History* 42 (Apr. 1957): 197; Fredrick L. McGhee, “Report of the Fifth Niagara Movement Convention,” Aug. 14, 1909, W. E. B. DuBois Papers, University of Massachusetts—Amherst.



*The original Mattocks School on the southwest corner of Randolph and Snelling Avenues
with Crispus Attucks children on steps, about 1910*

white parents showed up. “Would you have colored children steal pencils from your children?” one woman challenged. “Would you? Would you? We won’t put up with it, that’s all.” They went on to claim that many of the children had parents living in other states and thus were ineligible for public education in St. Paul. The administration promised to investigate this allegation, and with this the crisis passed.²⁸

The second, and far graver, threat came from within. In 1910 or early 1911 Will King suffered a partially disabling stroke that kept him from fully performing his usual duties. While this brought no immediate crisis because of the institution’s community support, it may have contributed to some calamitous behavior a few months later.²⁹

In July 1911 Attucks officers published an open letter seeking financial support for building a new facility. “There is a crying need for a colored orphanage and old peoples home,” the letter read.

After fifty years of freedom from the manacles of slavery it is our hallowed privilege to make some provision for the care of our old fathers and mothers who spent their best days under the taskmaster’s piercing eye. Let us not cart them off to the poor farm. Who can care for an old negro—man or woman, or a little child, better than the people of their own race?

It explained,

We . . . have experienced not a little trouble in getting a black boy or girl admitted as an inmate into a white institution. . . . It puts both peoples in an embarrassing situation. This ought not to be. . . . Our people are far better satisfied among people of their own kind, which is easily discerned.

Friends, all we ask is our just privilege and the permission to care for our unfortunates, just as you do—Won’t you help us?

With this letter came a 10-page booklet, with 14 photographs, setting forth the history, organization, and financial accounts of the home.³⁰

In October and November 1911, the publicity push accelerated. On October 29 the organization hosted a rally at the state capitol that featured a speech by the mayor and talks or prayers by the city’s four principal African-American pastors. This event raised more than \$200. Two weeks later, Attucks released a sketch of its proposed new building—an enormous two-story brick structure with three wings to accommodate not just an orphanage and old people’s home but also a community center; had it been built, it would have been one of the grandest institutions in the city.³¹

At this apex of ambition and enthusiasm, however, came intimations of disaster. On January 20, 1912, Minneapolis’s black weekly, the *Twin City Star*, published this item:

We intend to give much space to the Attucks Home, and will state why we do not approve of existing conditions, which the many interested citizens of the Twin Cities have failed to improve. We are as much interested as any one in the success of the institution, and therefore we shall expose these conditions. If there is any “graft,” the public shall be informed.³²

Over the next several months the *Twin City Star* propelled the rumors but declined to offer specifics. In February, it reported “We will give the substance, ‘Next week, or sometime, but not now.’ We know the suspense is terrible.” In May: “Now some attention will be paid to the Old Folks Home Everybody is waiting for that investigation.” On June 8: “That Old Folks Home investigation came off, and it is rumored that Mr. Jos. Elsinger has withdrawn his proposed endowment. He caught somebody ‘with the goods.’”³³

The *Twin City Star* never got more specific, but interested observers would have no trouble reading between the lines. That same week in June the Attucks board removed King as superintendent and gave him the vague new title “general solicitor.” Fannie King was confirmed as matron, but in November 1912 both Kings resigned.³⁴

²⁸ *Pioneer Press*, Sept. 1, 2, 1909, p. 14; *St. Paul Daily News*, Sept. 1, 1909, p. 2, Sept. 2, 1909, p. 1; *Appeal*, Sept. 4, 1909, p. 3; Minnesota, *General Statutes, 1877*, ch. 74, subd. 6, sec. 1.

²⁹ *Colored Orphanage*, 3.

³⁰ *Colored Orphanage*, 1, and insert letter.

³¹ *Twin City Star*, Nov. 4, 1911, p. 3; *Appeal*, Nov. 11, 1911, p. 3.

³² *Twin City Star*, Jan. 20, 1912, p. 4.

³³ *Twin City Star*, Feb. 10, p. 2, May 11, p. 4, June 8, p. 2—all 1912.

³⁴ *Appeal*, June 29, 1912, p. 3, Dec. 14, 1912, p. 2.

The shoe dropped at last in March 1913 when St. Paul police arrested Will King on a charge of collecting money for the Crispus Attucks Home but keeping it for himself. After two weeks in jail awaiting trial, he pled guilty and received a suspended sentence of 60 days in the workhouse on the condition that he desist from soliciting in St. Paul for any purpose.³⁵

While Will King had once done praiseworthy work, his arrest seemed to come as no surprise to those who had been paying attention. The *Appeal* referred to him as the “Rev. (God save the mark!) J. Will King.” As if to confirm his utter degradation, King repeated the crime a year later, and St. Paul police arrested him once again. Pleading guilty, he explained to the court that paralysis from his stroke drove him to it. The judge gave him a choice: leave town within 48 hours or serve 90 days. King chose the former and disappeared; he seems to have died not long after.³⁶

Fannie King was never implicated in the swindles. After leaving Attucks, she stayed in St. Paul, remarried, and lived to see the home become a permanent part of the community. She died in 1935.³⁷

The Crispus Attucks

Home survived Will King’s betrayal, but the cost may have been high. It had been reported in early 1912, just as the scandal was breaking, that Joseph Elsinger had given, or was about to give, property worth \$25,000 to the home. The *Twin City Star* probably had it right in stating that the scandal caused him to change his mind. Though Elsinger remained involved and supportive, he never gave Crispus Attucks the title to 1537 Randolph, and it is unlikely that the total value of his generosity reached anything close to \$25,000. When Elsinger died in 1917 his estate totaled more than \$840,000, but not a

penny went to the Crispus Attucks Home. The organization would never again enjoy the support of a financial angel.³⁸

The home nevertheless retained strong black and white support. Capable people replaced the Kings, notably John H. and Blanche Charleston, who took over as manager (and corporation president) and matron, respectively. The board added a representative of the Wilder Foundation and appointed a white banker named M. Roy Knauft as treasurer. The articles of incorporation were amended to create an advisory board consisting of Elsinger and three other persons of his choosing. All of this put the organization on a sounder footing, and by late in 1912 plans for new construction (now reduced, apparently, to a modest addition to the original house) were revived. Black



Charity-ball announcement featuring proposed new facility, 1911

³⁵ *Twin City Star*, Mar. 21, 1913, p. 2; *Appeal*, Mar. 15, 1913, p. 3.

³⁶ *Appeal*, Mar. 15, 1913, p. 3, May 2, 1914, p. 3; *Pioneer Press*, Apr. 30, 1914, p. 5, Feb. 9, 1964, women’s sec., 21. Will King was not the last to try this particular swindle; in March 1919 the police caught a woman named Lillian Mahan doing the same thing. She was fined \$15; *Appeal*, Mar. 8, 1919, p. 3.

³⁷ *St. Paul Recorder*, Sept. 13, 1935, p. 1.

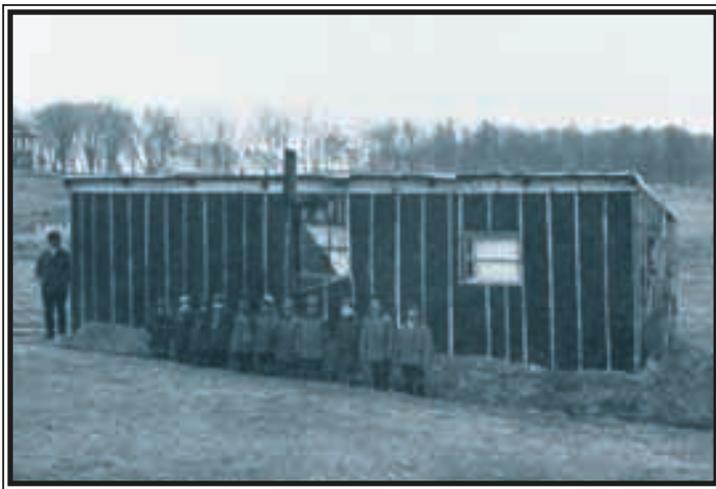
³⁸ Estate of Joseph Elsinger, Ramsey Co. Probate Court file 26,434, Ramsey Co. Courthouse. Elsinger apparently considered financing a new building. The *Appeal* reported a meeting between Elsinger and Attucks leaders and supporters, including McGhee, regarding “the need of a new home which is to be built by him”; *Appeal*, Jan. 6, 1912, p. 3. Six weeks later the *Appeal*, Feb. 17, p. 3, stated that Elsinger had donated land worth \$25,000 to the home, and upon his death, the *Pioneer Press*, June 11, 1917, p. 1, wrote that he had donated \$50,000. These figures appear to be vast exaggerations. Had he given anything approaching \$25,000, Attucks could have built its new building, for which the estimated cost was \$7,500; *Appeal*, Nov. 27, 1909, p. 3.

churches continued their support, and new fund-raising efforts went ahead. The storm had been weathered.³⁹

While the operation soldiered on, building plans faltered because the Twin Cities' African-American community, numbering perhaps 5,000, had many claims on its attention and finances. Still, the Randolph facility could not remain as it was. In 1913 the Wilder Foundation had reported that "the facilities . . . are inadequate in comparison with the demands made upon it." Meanwhile, the city of St. Paul was growing inexorably toward Snelling and Randolph, placing economic and social pressure on the Attucks organization to do something with the site.⁴⁰

In 1916 Attucks leaders settled for the feasible. Far across town, in an area known as Railroad Island and not far from where the home had begun, the Home for the Friendless Society had operated for more than 40 years a

board-and-care facility for the homeless. The women who ran that organization had their own plans for a new building and were ready to sell their old one. The place was not ideal—three stories tall, no longer new, and far from the black residential district—but it had proven its utility as a board-and-care building. Perhaps most important, it was affordable: built in 1883 for \$12,000, it could be had for a fraction of that amount. On October 6, 1916, the two charitable societies closed the deal; Crispus Attucks paid \$1,600 in cash, probably given by Elsinger, and agreed to pay the balance of \$3,400 in monthly payments secured by a mortgage on the property. During the first week of December, the home relocated to 469 Collins (now Tedesco) Street; there it would remain for the next half century.⁴¹



The building intended for the boys' brush and shoe shop but used as temporary sleeping quarters for the boys and men of Crispus Attucks, 1911

While orphans had at first outnumbered the elderly at Crispus Attucks, orphan care ended in the early 1920s. The reasons are not clear, but improvements in public health probably had resulted in fewer orphans and more old people. Changes in laws may have contributed, too. In 1917 the legislature brought all infant homes and orphanages under the supervision of the state Board of Control and forbade permanent placement of children without a court decree. These reforms brought licensing, inspections, and, no doubt, increased costs.⁴²

Attucks leaders may have decided that under the circumstances the dual mission of sheltering orphans and the elderly could no longer be sustained. The two populations had incompatible needs: one required discipline, education, and constant activity; the other, quiet and a measure of repose. To serve both well would have required resources far beyond

³⁹ *Twin City Star*, Nov. 30, 1912, p. 2, June 6, 1913, p. 2; *St. Paul City Directory*, 1920, 801; *Appeal*, Dec. 14, 1912, p. 2, Oct. 13, 1913, p. 3; Certificate of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation of Attucks Industrial School and Old Folks Home, dated July 7, 1912, filed Jan. 22, 1913, Minnesota Secretary of State records. These amendments also changed the name to Crispus Attucks Home.

⁴⁰ Minnesota, *Fifth Decennial Census of the State of Minnesota, 1905*, 67–68; Slack, *Directory*, 305; *St. Paul Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1933, p. 5.

⁴¹ *Quarter Century Report of the Home for the Friendless Association* (St. Paul: H. M. Smyth Printing Co., 1892), copy in MHS; McClure, *Minnesota Poor Farms*, 119; Abstract of Title to Lot 10, Irvine's Addition of Out Lots to the Town of St. Paul, in possession of Benjamin Bryant; *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 9, 1964, women's sec., 21; *Appeal*, Dec. 16, 1916, p. 4. The Ballard moving company did the moving for free; *Appeal*, Dec. 23, 1916, p. 3.

⁴² Minnesota, *Laws, 1917*, ch. 212, secs. 1, 7, 12, 19. McClure, *Minnesota Poor Farms*, 119, says orphan care ended a few years after the move to Collins St., but the *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 9, 1964, women's sec., 21, states the year as 1919. The *Appeal*, Mar. 26, 1921, p. 3, refers to "our old folks and orphan children" at Attucks.

Attucks's means. It would have required the grand facility dreamed of in 1911 but never achieved.⁴³

By 1922 the Attucks home had assumed its mature and lasting form: a board-and-care home for elderly black citizens operated by a local black organization and financially supported by a combination of government funds (mainly residents' old-age assistance, paid directly to the home for their care), institutional charity (the Community Chest, which in 1922 largely supplanted the Amherst Wilder Foundation), and small donations. Many of the latter were in kind, by individuals and organizations such as the Bethesda Baptist Sunday School, which gave nuts and candy, and members of the Adelphai Club, who met at the home in 1916 and were "expected to donate a glass of jelly." Students from Hancock School once donated a wagonload of groceries and Louis Liverpool a ton of coal.⁴⁴

Over the following four decades, change came very slowly to Attucks. The world, the country, and the city of St. Paul went through social, demographic, and political revolutions, but the Attucks home remained essentially a nineteenth-century enclave: a nineteenth-century building sheltering people born in the nineteenth century and living a life of nineteenth-century plainness with a few twentieth-century material improvements.⁴⁵

A report written by Ruth Bowman of the Ramsey County Welfare Department and based on an inspection done in April 1946 by two Wilder Foundation employees described life inside the home during these years. People familiar with daily life there in the late 1950s and early 1960s confirmed that little had changed in the succeeding 10 or 20 years.⁴⁶

The Wilder inspectors, a Miss Dickerson and a Miss Gurtler, described the Attucks building as old and somewhat decrepit. Outside there was a "huge" lawn with benches and, in the summer, a sizable vegetable garden. Inside were a modern kitchen and "two large, bright adequately furnished sitting rooms; the matrons' rooms, huge dining room with family size round tables, several large windows in spite of which the room is rather dark." The 13 residents, 7 men and 6 women, all lived on the second floor. Each had a private room, well ventilated and humbly furnished with a bed, dresser, and easy chair. Women had the front rooms, men the back. Also at the back was a large screened-in porch for summer use. There were third-floor bedrooms, too, but they were unused because "it is seldom that an applicant is physically able to climb two flights of stairs."⁴⁷

A roster compiled seven years later gives a good idea of a representative group of residents. Most were ambulatory; some needed custodial care, were blind, or were simply ill and "nervous." A dozen of the 14 received public assistance: 9, old-age assistance; 1, aid to the blind; and 2, direct relief. One more paid for his care with a railroad pension, and the other with a combination of insurance and family contributions.⁴⁸

Staff caring for the residents consisted of two matrons, a janitor, a laundress, and a cook. The cook served two meals per day: breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast, fruit sauce, and coffee or milk, often supplemented by muffins or pancakes, at 8:30 A.M., and a second meal of meat, two vegetables, bread and butter, dessert, and coffee or milk at 2:00 P.M. The home would have served another meal, but very few residents were hungry. Instead, "fruit and milk are always available and most of the guests have fruit in their rooms." The home purchased

⁴³ Other Minnesota institutions housing elderly and orphans together were the Minnesota Odd Fellows Home and Orphan Asylum in Northfield (from around 1900 to at least 1913); the Evangelical Lutheran Home for Orphans and Aged in Belle Plaine (from 1906 to at least 1913); and the Augustana Home for Children and Aged Women in Minneapolis (1896 to before 1913); Slack, *Directory*, 327–29; Ethel McClure, *A Historical Directory of Minnesota Homes for the Aged* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1968), 6.

⁴⁴ *Colored Orphanage*, 1; Slack, *Directory*, 330; *Appeal*, Nov. 5, 1921, p. 3; memo, Scott to Berry, May 8, 1953, United Fund and Community Chest Papers; *Appeal*, Jan. 24, 1914, Nov. 11, 1916, Nov. 30, 1918—all p. 3.

⁴⁵ Writing in 1968, McClure, *Minnesota Poor Farms*, 48–49, observed that "as recently as 1966 . . . the building (469 Collins) remained much as it had been . . . more than eighty years earlier." In 1966 reporter Kathryn Boardman concluded that the residents' imminent move to the Wilder facilities would be "something like a quick trip from the nineteenth to the twentieth century for the old people"; *St. Paul Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 1966, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Bradley interview; Benjamin Bryant, interview by author, Belle Plaine, Mar. 15, 1995; Eunyce Lewis, interview by author, St. Paul, Jan. 23, 1998.

⁴⁷ Meeting minutes, Apr. 8, 1946, Wilder Planning Committee, 1946–47 file, Wilder Papers.

⁴⁸ Memo, Scott to Berry, May 8, 1953, United Fund and Community Chest Papers.

most of its food from the Mikacevich Grocery at 457 Collins, supplemented by what residents grew and canned from the vegetable garden. The only reported food problem was the difficulty of finding foods the residents wanted, and many years later another observer commented that much of the cooking was southern in style, with catfish, collard and mustard greens, and the like.⁴⁹

The 1946 report continued that “for recreation, they have radios, books and the large living rooms for get-togethers. There are two pianos and frequently church groups come and have parties and programs. Each Sunday some church has services at the Home as the guests are not physically able to go out to church.” Dickerson and Gurtler concluded that “the relationship between the matrons and the guests seems excellent” and that all the residents “appear happy and content.”

The inspectors were “definitely impressed” by the apparently harmonious and well-ordered life, the spaciousness and cleanliness of the facilities, and the congeniality of residents and staff but troubled by the building itself. They found it “definitely not fireproof,” and though the home had a second-floor fire escape, “it is questionable whether any of the people could manage to use the fire escape in an emergency.” They concluded that “the Home was in need of extensive [though rather minor] repairs.”

Six years later the Community Chest made its own inspection of the building and found the conditions alarming: the wiring antiquated and dangerous, the plumbing substandard, and the building insufficiently fire resistant and not amenable to fireproofing except at enormous cost. If the needed repairs were undertaken, the inspectors found, “other basic defects would be discovered that would make the cost of rehabilitation . . . prohibitive.” What was more, though the building could house 20, occupancy had recently averaged 16 or 17 and currently stood at 14. Thus the home was not only old and dangerous, but underused as well, making further investment in it unwise. The Community Chest’s Crispus Attucks committee, which included Ruth Bowman, recommended various plans of action to the Attucks board; all called for closing the building as soon as possible.⁵⁰

The Attucks board resisted these recommendations, and meetings involving the Community Chest, welfare officials, and others went on into the middle of 1953. The Community Chest insisted that the present facility could not be maintained; Attucks supporters insisted that they did not wish the home to be disbanded “until a new institution on a non-segregated basis has been established or assured.” Grudgingly acceding for the moment to Attucks’s idea of leasing another building, the Community Chest urged the board to make immediate arrangements to move: “August 1, 1953, is suggested as a suitable period. No one would wish to face another winter in the present building.” The situation seemed to have reached a state of crisis. Yet the residents spent the winter of 1953 and a dozen winters more at 469 Collins.⁵¹

Several factors probably contributed to the home’s staying open where it was. Placing the residents in other facilities might have been possible—the Community Chest clearly thought that it was—but Attucks leaders and the African-American community as a whole were not so sure. The prospect of closing the home, even though it had only 14 residents at this time, raised enough concern that the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People became involved. Despite the home’s physical deficiencies, people could at least be confident that residents would be understood and esteemed. They could not be sure of that if the people were scattered to other places.

Finding a new facility presented insuperable problems or, more precisely, one insuperable problem: lack of money. The Crispus Attucks Home lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Income from the residents fell far short of meeting its modest needs. The Community Chest contributed as much as 25 percent of the home’s budget, but often even this was insufficient; the loss of a resident or two or an unplanned expense could bring a crisis. Cash reserves were minimal. To build new was out of the question financially; to buy or rent an existing building and make it suitable was hardly more feasible.⁵²

The home continued to enjoy strong support in St. Paul’s black community and in the city as a whole. People no longer put on charity

⁴⁹ Here and two paragraphs below, meeting minutes, Apr. 8, 1946, Wilder Planning Committee, Wilder Papers; Bradley interview.

⁵⁰ Memo, Committee on CAH to Community Chest and Council, Sept. 26, 1952, Wilder Papers.

⁵¹ Here and below, memo, Scott to Berry, May 8, 1953, United Fund and Community Chest Papers.

⁵² Here and below, minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Oct. 1959–Apr. 1963, in Bryant’s possession.



The building at 469 Collins Street, formerly the Home for the Friendless, photographed about 1961

balls as they had 50 years before; they helped in smaller, steadier ways. The organization held a fund-raising and social tea on the grounds every summer. This major social event produced some money and reconfirmed African-American support for the venerable institution. People made small contributions and bequests and many, many gifts in kind: turkeys, bread, blankets, and canned goods. Perhaps most important of all, they came to visit. Home records for the mid-fifties and early sixties show hundreds of visits by church and secular organizations: choirs, youth groups, women's groups, church societies, college groups, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Masonic groups, and men's clubs. Holiday times were especially busy. Records from December 1959, for example, show visits from 38 different groups and individuals and a multitude of gifts: a new television, a new hi-fi with 75 records, fruit, flowers,

an excess of candy and cookies, tobacco, cash, even a new thermos for each room—all for 14 people. Many, perhaps most, of the visiting groups came from white organizations. The Crispus Attucks Home seems to have been more closely knit into community life than are retirement homes of today.

Another force that kept the home open was its energetic and steadfast leadership. An unpaid volunteer board and officers, led for most of the 1950s and early 1960s by chairman Dr. Alexander Abrams, managed the operation. Abrams, a physician with a practice on St. Paul's Selby Avenue, ran a businesslike organization with monthly directors' meetings, meticulously kept minutes, and detailed reports. Attendance at these monthly meetings was consistently high—often 10 to 15—and sometimes the number of active board members exceeded the number of residents. Other stalwart members

included Benjamin Bryant, Charles Bradley, and Teretha Bledsoe. Abrams and the others continually pressed for expanded membership in the association, and in the early 1960s, the home published a newsletter, *Eventide*, that was prepared and printed by Bryant's journalism students at Mechanic Arts High School.⁵³

The home also enjoyed stability and dedication in the crucial post of head matron. Sarah Johnson held that position from 1932 to 1952 and Naomi Thomas from 1952 until the end, contributing to the happy relations between residents and staff that the inspectors noticed in 1946. Eunyce G. Lewis, a board member who first met Thomas in the early 1950s, described her as "a very committed, beautiful, Christian person" who took a personal interest in each resident. Lewis recalled that Thomas bought needed clothing for residents and that when holiday fruit arrived, she would personally

arrange the fruit in bowls and have them delivered to each resident's room.⁵⁴

This kind of closeness exemplifies the simplicity, even humility, of the Attucks operation. For lack of money and facilities, it could provide almost no services such as physical or occupational therapy. Residents received food, shelter, personal attention from the tiny staff, and a sense of comfort from the contributions from so many in the community. "They worked with what they had," Lewis said. "It was a scuffling thing but a beautiful thing."⁵⁵

The dream of building

a brand new facility, which dated back to 1908, never quite died. In 1960 board chair Abrams had the organization look into upgrading its status to a nursing home—the state said no, because of the age of the building—and then into buying land to build a new, 25-bed facility at a cost of \$250,000. This proved no more feasible than the grand plan of 1911.⁵⁶

The building at 469 Collins, meanwhile, relentlessly bled the treasury. In April 1961 the hot-water tank had to be replaced; then in July new fencing was required at a cost of \$1,445. Just when the directors had assembled most of the sum, the coal-burning furnace's boiler began to leak, and the fence money had to be used for the furnace (which cost \$2,300), while the coal bill from the previous heating season went unpaid. At 78 years of age the house, like its residents, was simply not going to get better. Circumstances had reduced the board's options to one: hold on until something happened.⁵⁷

Two revolutionary forces of the fifties and sixties, the civil rights movement and the interstate highway system, converged in 1966 to close the doors of the Crispus Attucks Home. The civil rights movement reduced resistance to integration, especially in public and foundation-supported institutions such as retirement homes. It also undermined the legitimacy of segregated institutions, even benign ones like Crispus Attucks. In April 1964 the Wilder Foundation had volunteered to take the Attucks



Three grandchildren of Will and Fannie King donated a "rare picture-record" (reproduced on p. 109) to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1963, as former resident Vallie Turner (center) examined its contents.

⁵³ Minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Oct. 1959–Apr. 1963, in Bryant's possession; Bradley interview.

⁵⁴ *St. Paul City Directory*, 1932, 293, 1950–51, 160, 1952–53, 165; *St. Paul Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 1966, p. 23; Minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Sept. 14, 1961, in Bryant's possession; Bryant interview; Lewis interview.

⁵⁵ Lewis interview.

⁵⁶ Minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Apr. 14, June 9, July 14—all 1960, in Bryant's possession.

⁵⁷ Minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Apr. 13, Sept. 14, Oct. 12, 18—all 1961, in Bryant's possession; W. A. Richter, budget analyst, Community Chest, to Earlyn Bell, CAH treasurer, Sept. 27, 1960, and Bell to Richter, Oct. 10, 1960, in minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, in Bryant's possession.

residents into one of its retirement centers, an offer repeated in 1965 and 1966. Meanwhile, the interstate highway system gobbled up huge amounts of inner-city land. In 1966 the Minnesota highway department informed the Attucks board that the Arch-Pennsylvania highway project—later known as Interstate 35E—required the land at 469 Collins.⁵⁸

Here, at last, was an imperative that could not be put off or patched. In August 1966 the Attucks board agreed to transfer all of its residents to Wilder facilities. Then in mid-November 1966 the board and the highway department came to an agreement on the only issue that remained: the price of 469 Collins. The department paid \$58,000 for the house and land, and within a month the last nine residents were gone. In December 1966 the Crispus Attucks Home ceased to exist. It had served the African-American community long and well, but like everything else it succumbed to change and time. Charles W. Bradley, the chairman of the home's board of directors, said that some in St. Paul's African-American community felt sadness, even a sense of betrayal by public authorities, but there were no protests. The end, in short, came quietly. The wrecking ball fell on March 29, 1967, and when its work was done all

physical traces of this unique Minnesota institution disappeared.⁵⁹

The Attucks board no longer had a building, but it did have what it had never had before: cash. Going back to the first goal of the original articles of incorporation—general uplift of the race—the Attucks board in the late 1960s and early 1970s made grants totaling \$10,000 to Model Cities health clinics. Then in 1974 the board turned its attention to education by reconstituting the organization as a scholarship fund, the Crispus Attucks Social Welfare and Educational Association, Inc. Since 1977 it has used the income from what remains of the proceeds of 469 Collins to provide monthly stipends to deserving African-American high-school students in St. Paul.⁶⁰

In the 1995–96 school year the Crispus Attucks Scholarship Fund made grants totaling \$2,740 to 12 students. The stipends are small, from \$15 per month for ninth graders to \$30 per month for twelfth graders. In the two decades since the program began, more than 90 percent of Crispus Attucks scholars have graduated from high school.

The Crispus Attucks Home no longer stands, but the work that Fannie and Will King began more than 90 years ago still goes on today.

⁵⁸ William Hoffmann, Greater St. Paul United Fund, to Charles W. Bradley, president, CAH Board of Directors, Apr. 6, 1965; Bradley to Frank M. Rarig, executive secretary, Wilder Foundation, Sept. 19, 1966; minutes, Board of Directors, CAH, Sept. 16, 1966—all in Bryant's possession.

⁵⁹ Warranty Deed, CAH to City of St. Paul, document 1698786, Ramsey Co. Recorder, May 4, 1967, Ramsey Co. Courthouse; Bryant interview; Bradley interview; index-card record for 469 Collins St., Dept. of License Inspections and Environmental Protection, City of St. Paul, Lowry Annex, St. Paul. St. Paul resident and historian James S. Griffin believes that many black people did not know about the Attucks home because it served so few people; Griffin, interview by author, St. Paul, Jan. 17, 1998.

I-35E actually veered west and took the first home's land at 228 East Acker St. The Collins St. building's site is now occupied by Eileen Weida Park.

⁶⁰ Bryant interview; Articles of Amendment of the CAH Association, Minnesota Secretary of State, adopted July 31, 1974, filed Oct. 6, 1975, Secretary of State records; annual report, Crispus Attucks Scholarship Fund, 1996, copy in author's possession.

The photos on pages 102–03, 106, 107, 111, and 114 are from the 1911 fund-raising brochure, Colored Orphanage and Old People's Home, and the other graphics are in Minnesota Historical Society Library. The picture record on p. 118 is from the St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press, Feb. 9, 1964, women's sec., p. 23; the announcement on p. 113 is from the Appeal, Nov. 11, 1911, p. 3.



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