

# Black Cloud

THE STRUGGLES  
OF ST. CLOUD'S  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY,  
1880–1920



*Christopher P. Lehman*

**M**ORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, a small community of refugees of African descent lived in St. Cloud, Minnesota. They resettled there to flee the violence and oppression of the Jim Crow South. Some of them were ex-slaves. Comprising a fraction of the town of 10,000 people, this African American community never exceeded 20 people. They worked as porters, day laborers, and barbers, and some operated independent businesses. In 1910 the community consisted of two single men, two couples, and two families. The families included the first African American children raised to adulthood in the city, and those children attended desegregated public schools.

In the 1910s, however, the community collapsed. The number of residents sank to single digits and

remained there for more than 40 years. The independent businesses closed. No African Americans attended the city's public and private schools after the early 1910s, because no African American children lived in the city. The community's young adults vacated, leaving behind only their parents' generation. By 1920, none of the African Americans who had lived in St. Cloud in 1910 still resided there. A few newcomers arrived after 1920, but the community stayed in the single digits until the 1960s.

This community's history typifies the experiences of African American communities in Minnesota outside the Twin Cities immediately following the Civil War. Where Minneapolis and St. Paul had growing African American populations and multi-

generational families after the 1850s, St. Cloud's community repeatedly rose and fell in number and did not regenerate itself through families. In fact, it took until 1883 for the city to consistently have at least one African American resident.

St. Cloud's strong segregationist Democratic politics repelled most African Americans, and segregation of the community intensified during the 1910s. The city did not offer jobs outside of menial labor to young black adults, and the dearth of single young adults left few African American prospects for marriage. As the young generation relocated, the elders died without heirs to preserve their legacies locally. Furthermore, nearly all the migrants were renters. The limited income obtained from menial labor as barbers, porters, and domestics kept them from purchasing real estate in St. Cloud, thus preventing them from passing on tangible local wealth to their children. The community's decimation was not as complete as the total evacuation of African Americans from Montevideo, Minnesota, in 1903; nor was it as violent as the lynching of African Americans in Duluth in 1920. Nonetheless, Jim Crow and limited job opportunities stifled the community's growth for generations.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVERY**

shaped St. Cloud's first decade. Founded in 1856, the town drew wealthy southern slaveholders, who during summer months vacationed in Upper Town—the northernmost section—for the cooler seasonal climate. Some of them purchased real estate there. About one dozen southerners of English and Irish descent permanently left their homes in Tennessee and Virginia to reside year-round in St. Cloud, and by purchasing land they controlled

*St. Cloud's strong segregationist Democratic politics repelled most African Americans, and segregation of the community intensified during the 1910s.*

the town's politics through the pro-slavery Democratic Party. German Catholic immigrants, who comprised the section known as Middle Town, supported the Democrats for their favorable stances toward both immigrants and Catholics; this party affiliation aligned the German immigrants with advocates for slavery. Southern St. Cloud, known as Lower Town, was the domain of antislavery Republicans of Scottish and German heritage who had moved from the East Coast. During the Civil War, the enslavers left St. Cloud with their slaves, and Middle Towners remained in the Democratic Party. They outnumbered the Republicans in neighboring Lower Town, which meant the Democrats continued to rule city government. Downtown St. Cloud—the town's business community—lay in Middle Town.<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, St. Cloud had only one Republican-leaning newspaper, the *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, while two—the *St. Cloud Times* and *Der Nordstern*—promoted Democratic ideas. The *St. Cloud Times* preached the Democratic message of intolerance, even with no African Americans in town. In 1864 it proclaimed: "The white man first, and the negro afterward,' is the motto of Democrats." It elaborated: "We believe the government as it is was made by the white man for the benefit of the white man, and that it should remain so." It complained that Republicans wanted to make a "nigger's government," and it asserted, "We deny that it is proper for negroes to make laws to govern white men." When the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted the vote to the nation's African American

men in 1870, they overwhelmingly supported the Republican Party. The *St. Cloud Times* blamed their votes for the elections of Republicans to the US presidency: "We have always believed that enfranchised Sambo would prove a black Republican elephant, and this appears to point in that direction." The newspaper also warned that African American voter strength would yield an African American like "Fred Douglass or some other colored 'gemmin'" to the presidency if Democrats did not win.<sup>2</sup>

The St. Cloud Democratic press also worried about the impact of demographics on local political divisions. If any African Americans moved to the town, their support for local Republicans might upset the Democratic Party's local control. In 1871 the *St. Cloud Times* warned readers about sizable arrivals of African Americans: "Quite a number of the 'self conceited' Sambos arrived in this city on the Eastern train Monday evening and are just from the 'Sunny South.'" None of them, however, remained permanently. By 1875, St. Cloud's African American population had returned to zero.<sup>3</sup>

The local German-language newspaper, *Der Nordstern*, also made pejorative references to African Americans. For example, when it published a complaint from a resident about a political candidate's failure to pay him fully for work, the resident recalled having "*arbeitete wie ein Nigger*," which translated into English as "worked like a nigger." Another issue mentioned an upcoming minstrel show in 1883 by referring to the blackface performers as "*weisse Nigger*," or "white niggers."

The slur also appeared on multiple occasions in the publication's regular column "*Der Pennsylvanier*" ("The Pennsylvanian").<sup>4</sup>

After the Civil War, some African Americans fleeing the South's oppressive segregation and lynch mobs reached St. Cloud. These migrants had no ties to the enslaved people who had preceded them in the antebellum period; they did not come from Tennessee and Virginia; nor did they have relatives in town. The earliest of these refugees may have lived elsewhere in the Northwest before moving to St. Cloud to find work. St. Cloudites, however, did not recruit African Americans en masse for employment. Upon arrival, they discovered that local merchants did not need their ex-slave experience as farm laborers and domestics. Local farmers assigned tasks to their own children instead of hiring outsiders.

Only a few African Americans found work and stayed permanently. Most of these refugees were single men, but one exception was Billy Lee—an ex-slave from Harrison County, Kentucky. When Nehemiah Clarke hired him to work on his Meadow Lawn farm in St. Cloud in 1883, Lee brought his wife, Sally—a fellow ex-slave from Kentucky—and their four children to town. They moved to southeastern St. Cloud, where Swedish American immigrants had already settled to find work in the local granite industry. For years the Lee family were the sole African Americans on the southeast side of town, but they coexisted in peace with their Scandinavian neighbors. Lee spent nearly all of his life in St. Cloud as a day laborer.<sup>5</sup>

Other African American St. Cloudites had migrated directly from northern cities and were skilled laborers. They worked downtown as barbers and cooks at Josiah Hayward's Grand Central Hotel, the primary

gateway for African American migrants to enter the community. The hotelier was the only local European American resident to hire African Americans in the 1880s and 1890s. John Wesley Webster—an ex-slave from Pendleton County, Kentucky—worked as a barber in Delphos, Ohio, when he decided to transfer to the Grand Central in 1888. He lived in one of the buildings in the downtown area. Three years later his wife, Elizabeth—an educated woman born to freed people in Ohio in the 1850s—and their four children joined him. For the first time St. Cloud had a double-digit African American population. After Hayward died in 1895, his family employed African Americans for the next two decades.<sup>6</sup>

The Websters thrived in St. Cloud. In 1892 Hayward bought another commercial property downtown, the West Hotel, and allowed Webster to



Billy Lee, *St. Cloud Times*, July 25, 1939

operate an independent barbershop there. Webster followed Hayward's example of recruiting African Americans from larger midwestern cities to work for him, and two of these hires later briefly ran their own barbershops in town. Webster himself left the shop to start a cloth-dyeing business in 1899, and Hayward's daughter loaned space in one of her downtown buildings for the new venture. Meanwhile, the Websters distinguished themselves among St. Cloud's African Americans. Whereas nearly all the community's members rented space either in the downtown area or on the southeast side, the Websters bought a home in Lower Town in the early 1900s, making them the first African Americans to own St. Cloud property.<sup>7</sup>

During this time frame, the African American community's children received educational opportunities in St. Cloud that their parents had been denied due to slavery and plantation labor. The children attended public school in Lower Town, which remained the city's Republican stronghold. They sat alongside European American children in classrooms. As a result, the African American children became literate at much younger ages than their parents had. Also, unlike most African American children at the time, those in St. Cloud had time for extracurricular activities because they did not work on farms after school. Ruby Webster, for example, played in St. Cloud High School's band.

A studious girl, Ruby also achieved more academic accomplishments than her African American peers. Having moved to St. Cloud at age three, she attended local public schools throughout her childhood, and she benefited from having an educated mother. She graduated from high school in 1908 and then enrolled in St. Cloud Normal School, just a few blocks north of her house, to train for



Ruby Cora Webster, *Class of 1909* photo, *St. Cloud Normal School*

a teaching vocation. In June 1909, she became the institution's first African American graduate, earning a degree in elementary education.

None of the Webster or Lee children, however, stayed in town. Whereas St. Cloud's employment options for African Americans were limited to porters and domestics, the education the city's schools provided had prepared the younger generation for a broader array of opportunities. Furthermore, other cities offered larger pools of eligible African American single adults for marriage. Lee's sons, Edward and Arthur, moved to Minneapolis, married, and started families there. Webster daughters Addie and Emma moved with their husbands to St. Paul, and their sister Ruby settled with her husband in Kansas City, Missouri, where she became a teacher. Both Arthur and Emma had been born in St. Cloud, and their departure in 1913 made them the last of the small community's children to leave town.<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, the Haywards employed their highest number of African Americans at the Grand Central in 1910, but all were adults and they lived in the hotel. Married couple

*The Websters bought a home in Lower Town in the early 1900s, making them the first African Americans to own St. Cloud property*

Albert and Margaret Payne came from Ionia, Michigan, to cook in the hotel kitchen, and the unmarried Charles Dejohnette of Alabama and John Winbrush of Virginia worked as porters. None of these employees, however, lasted beyond 1913, and African Americans did not replace them. Their departures and the withdrawal of the young generation from the community reduced the population's number to single digits by 1913, and each of the remaining residents—Billy Lee, John Webster, and Elizabeth Webster—was at least 60 years old. The Websters remained in their Lower Town home, but Lee moved to multiple locations in the

downtown area over the next few years and occasionally worked as a live-in employee of Lower Town residents. Meanwhile, African American migration from the Twin Cities was unlikely, for newspapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul ignored the African American community and portrayed St. Cloud unfavorably. Most newspaper references to the town were found in announcements about convicts who were being sent to the St. Cloud State Reformatory.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, local anti-African American sentiment remained strong outside of Lower Town and the southeast side. In 1910, African American boxer Jack Johnson defeated

European American opponent Jim Jeffries in a championship match, and European Americans who gathered outside the St. Cloud Times building for bulletins were incensed over the outcome. A reporter mused, "It is doubtful if a colored man would have escaped from the crowd had one been there." The four African American employees at the Grand Central nearby likely held their celebrations privately in the hotel, in the kitchen if not in their rooms.<sup>10</sup>

The *St. Cloud Times* continued to malign arrivals of African Americans. In 1913 a visiting African American baseball team twice defeated St. Cloud's team, the Pretzels, and the *Times* referred to team manager Samuel Gordon derisively as "Mistah Gordon," mocking the idea that African Americans deserved the same titular respect as European Americans. The newspaper quoted Gordon speaking words of goodwill in dialect to the Pretzels: "We suah got good

*St. Cloud Normal School, 1915. Ruby Webster was the institution's first African American graduate.*



treatment up heah, and I wants to say youh boys ain't only ball playehs but they'se gemmen besides." A few years later, when the Great Northern Railway temporarily brought 10 African Americans into St. Cloud to break a union strike, the *Times* claimed that they were robbing people but provided no proof for the accusation.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Democratic president Woodrow Wilson segregated Washington, DC, in the 1910s, St. Cloud adopted a more aggressive practice of Jim Crow. For example, central Minnesota's baseball league voted to sign only European American players for the 1915 season, ensuring that no more African American players would defeat them. Furthermore, a downtown restaurant not only restricted African American diners to a specific time frame and a separate section but also charged them extra for the segregation. The restaurant desegregated after an African Amer-

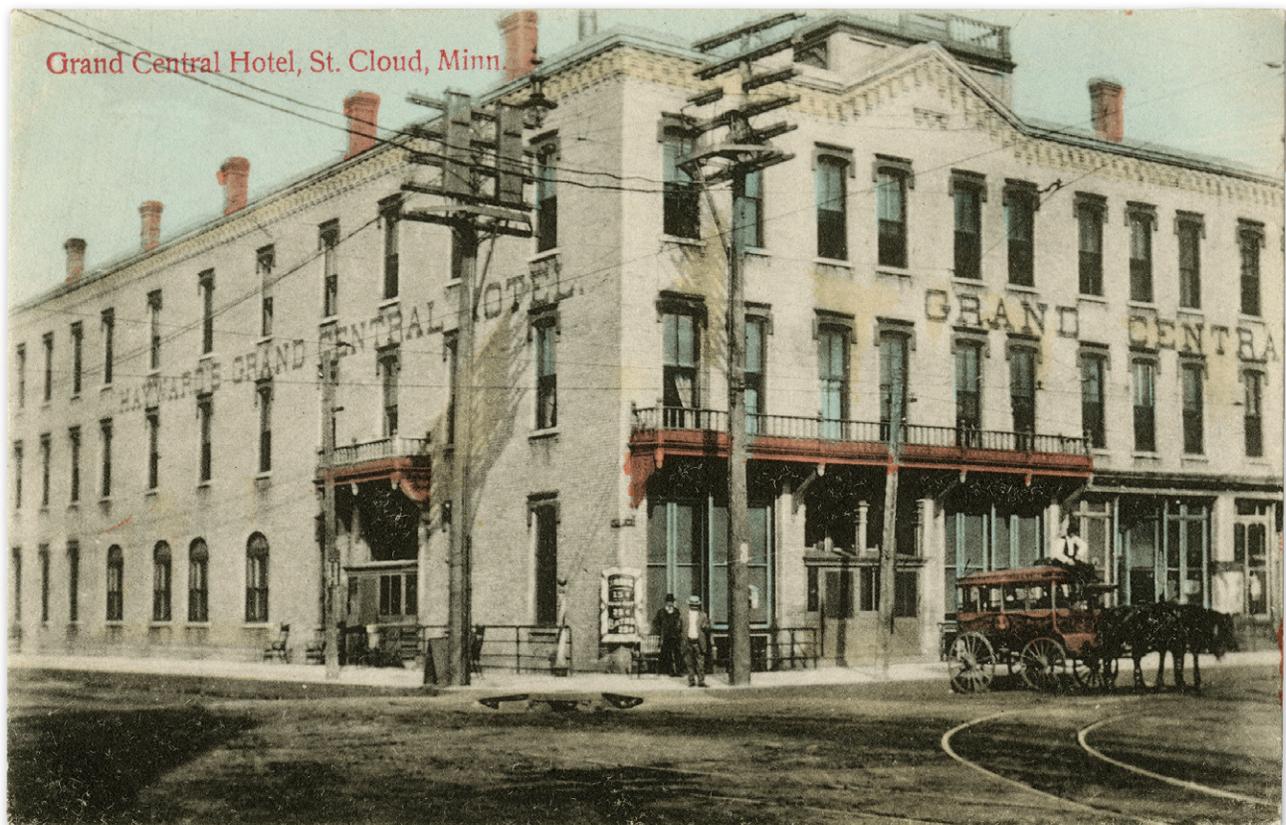
ican customer contacted county attorney Paul Ahles—a Lower Town resident—who then reminded the manager that Minnesota state law required desegregated public accommodations. Moreover, *St. Cloud Times* owner Frederick Schilplin supported segregationist Woodrow Wilson's campaign for reelection and served as a national delegate to nominate him at the Democratic National Convention of 1916.<sup>12</sup>

**THEN THE UNTHINKABLE** happened. In the fall of 1917, Katherine Tierk—a 25-year-old woman from St. Cloud's German American community—began fraternizing with an African American in his twenties named James Boozer. She met with him a few times downtown at the Neme-

Theatre, where he ran the projector. He had moved to St. Cloud one year earlier from South Carolina, where he had worked on the same land where his grandfather had toiled as a slave. His new job as a projectionist allowed him to financially support his widowed grandmother. Tierk was an unlikely candidate to have a relationship with him, for her German immigrant parents had raised her in the Roman Catholic church and sent her to parochial school. The Tierks' house at 309 Eighth Avenue North sat just three streets north of the downtown area, where, by this time, all of the city's African American migrants besides the Websters lived in rooms in saloons.<sup>13</sup>

Tierk's father had died around 1910, as she entered adulthood. By 1917 she worked downtown at The

*The Grand Central Hotel, about 1912. In the 1880s and 1890s, the proprietor, Josiah Hayward, was the only local St. Cloud business owner who would hire African Americans.*



Valet Cleaners to provide money for her family. Her job exposed her to her neighbors of color. Valet sat at 20 Sixth Avenue South in the H. B. Papermaster building. Next door was a building where an African American lived and ran a shoeshine stand. One street to the east was Fifth Avenue South, where Boozer and a porter resided above a saloon. At some point, Tierk and Boozer's paths crossed. Tierk had to walk just outside the cleaners to the corner of Sixth Avenue and West St. Germain—the heart of the downtown area—and then cross two streets on West St. Germain to reach Boozer at the Nemec. In addition, she likely asked someone from a downtown restaurant to deliver lunches to him.<sup>14</sup>

Boozer's job was a significant advancement for St. Cloud's African American community. He became the first African American since John Webster to not cut hair, shine shoes, or perform domestic work for employment. Also, Boozer received high public visibility in St. Cloud. The Nemec Theatre sat on St. Cloud's busiest downtown street, and the venue exhibited popular motion pictures within weeks of their premieres. When the pro-Klu Klux Klan movie *The Birth of a Nation* came to town in 1916, it played at the Nemec.

One night, after Boozer's shift ended, he and Tierk left the Nemec together, and Boozer walked her the



At the time she met James Boozer, Katherine Tierk worked at The Valet Cleaners (pictured ca. 1922), located in the Papermaster building in downtown St. Cloud.

unaccustomed to seeing an African American in their part of town. Middle Towners tolerated the presence

The negative reaction among German Americans in Middle Town may have been partly due to the fact that they were already feeling anxious. Seven months earlier the United States had entered World War I to fight Germany, and federal and state officials nationwide began questioning the loyalty of German American citizens. Officials discouraged the printing of German-language newspapers, and popular German items in the United States were renamed; for example, *frankfurter* became "hot dog" and *sauerkraut* became "liberty cabbage." St. Cloud's German

*Then the unthinkable happened. A 25-year-old woman from St. Cloud's German American community began fraternizing with an African American.*

four blocks to her house in Middle Town. By accompanying her, he prevented her from having to walk the streets alone at night. Tierk's German Catholic neighbors, however, were

of African Americans downtown and in Lower Town. Boozer, however, violated cultural norms not only by entering their community but also by courting one of their women.

American majority shielded the city from some of this backlash, but the local Catholic bishop called for the churches in the Diocese of St. Cloud to start offering one English-language sermon each Sunday. By dating Tierk, Boozer was yet another outsider causing trouble, just like the government and religious officials harassing German Americans.<sup>15</sup>

As the affair reverberated through St. Cloud, Boozer and other local African Americans suffered the repercussions. The Nemeč's management fired Boozer, and the theater never hired another African American. Boozer's dismissal reduced St. Cloud's African American community once again to only domestics, bootblacks, and barbers—limitations that would remain for more than a generation. Meanwhile, some Middle Towners were determined to lynch Boozer by hanging if he did not stop fraternizing with Tierk. This was not the first time such threats had been made in

*As the affair reverberated through St. Cloud, Boozer and other local African Americans suffered the repercussions.*

Minnesota, for throughout the state's history angry mobs had attempted to kill—and occasionally succeeded in killing—people suspected of committing crimes. The victims represented various ethnic backgrounds, but the majority were African Americans and Native Americans. The danger to Boozer's life fit this historical pattern. Moreover, the mob ignored that Tierk engaged with Boozer, and it neither threatened her nor gave her the responsibility for ending the relationship.<sup>16</sup>

Police Chief Edward J. Brick prevented mob violence from taking place but at great cost to Boozer. To

quell the public outcry, Brick ordered Boozer but not Tierk out of St. Cloud. Boozer agreed to leave his home behind, fleeing the city on November 26. According to the *St. Cloud Times*, "a Southern family, making St. Cloud their home" offered to shelter him, but he refused. By the end of the month, Boozer had resettled in Minneapolis.<sup>17</sup>

The whole affair put Brick in an uncomfortable position. The chief and some of his officers were neighbors of the Tierks in residential Middle Town, but the police had not prevented Boozer from entering their neighborhood and fraternizing

*St. Germain Street, the heart of St. Cloud's downtown area, 1917, the year James Boozer was banished from the city.*



1104 ST. GERMAIN ST. LOOKING EAST, SHOWING POST OFFICE, ST. CLOUD, MINN.

## NEGRO ORDERED OUT OF THE CITY

COLORED PORTER AT LOCAL THE-  
ATRE WAS ATTENTIVE TO  
WHITE GIRL.

## "NIGGERJIM" GETS WALKING PAPERS

LOCAL SACCHARINE BABY GOT TO  
FOOLIN' RAOUN WITH  
A WHITE GAL.

LOSES HIS JOB AND WILL BE  
ORDERED OUT OF TOWN BY  
ST. CLOUD POLICE.

Headlines from the *St. Cloud Daily Journal-Press* and the  
*St. Cloud Times* describe James Boozer's banishment from *St. Cloud*.

with Tierk. This fact further incensed Middle Towners. When a mob formed in response to Boozer's breach of their section of town, the vigilantes implied that they would provide the protection if Brick did not. The expulsion satisfied the mob, and no violence occurred that day. However, the police's actions in the name of defending Middle Town cost Boozer his civil rights, which the police refused to defend.

The reflexive response of Middle Towners to protect their neighborhood may have been partially incited by an article in the *St. Cloud Times* just a few days earlier. The newspaper complained that Brick had sent an accused rapist out of town instead of killing him. To justify death for the rapist, the newspaper quoted a notorious segregationist from South Carolina, US senator Benjamin "Pitchfork" Tillman, who said, "We men of the South will protect our women!" At the time, Tillman was known nationally for his vitriol about defending the virtue of European American women. His speeches praised ex-slaves for retaining their humility, but he denounced free African Americans as a

threat to white supremacy. He advocated lynching the latter to preserve this supremacy. Years earlier, in 1903 in Minneapolis, he had warned that equality would produce "intermarriage, amalgamation, degradation, hell-fire, and damnation." He said that "rivers of blood" would flow in South Carolina before that happened.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout its history, Minnesota never outlawed courtships and marriages between people of two different skin colors. Thus, Boozer and Tierk did not commit a criminal act by forming a relationship. Nevertheless, legal issues mattered little to the Middle Towners, and the former projectionist's banishment marked an extralegal milestone in *St. Cloud*. Brick sent several people out of town during his tenure as chief, but he considered those exiles to be guilty of crimes. In Boozer's case, Brick sent away someone who had not been accused of an actual crime, and the expatriate's dark skin color was more than a coincidence.

*St. Cloud's* purging of Boozer was not unique among American cities. In the first century after the end of legal slavery, cities and towns

across the country removed African Americans from within their borders. "Race riots" in places like Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898 and Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921 consisted of European Americans resorting to violence to force out African Americans because of the alleged criminal actions of a few. Innocent African Americans fled their homes and jobs, and some were killed as they tried to escape. Similarly, in 1903, European American residents of Montevideo, Minnesota, removed the town's single-digit African American population after an African American from out of town assaulted a resident. *St. Cloud's* African American community lost one individual through expulsion by city law enforcement. Thus, Boozer's removal constituted an official municipal act.<sup>19</sup>

To the *St. Cloud Times*, Boozer's departure was good riddance. The newspaper printed a tirade about the relationship between Boozer and Tierk, calling Boozer a "saccharine baby," a "saccharine boy," and a "black boy" despite his adulthood. Crudely calling attention to his skin color, the report referred to him as

“Nigger Jim” and noted in dialect that he “has got hisself” in trouble by “foolin’ raoun with a white gal.” The article also criticized Tierk, saying she “cast self-respect to the winds” when meeting with Boozer. The report was not critical of the prospective lynch mob; rather, it referred to their threat to “treat Jim to a ‘necktie party’” as a mere point of fact. Nor did the article express disappointment that the police had banished him.<sup>20</sup>

The expulsion did not entirely put the matter to rest. Days later the local press learned that on November 30 Boozer and Tierk had applied for a marriage license in St. Paul. According to the court commissioner’s office, the couple went together to get the license. The Republican-leaning *St. Cloud Journal-Press* assumed that they married after acquiring the license, but actually, the two never wed. Instead, Tierk returned to St. Cloud and kept working at Valet Cleaners. Tierk’s lawyer, Harry Rauch, demanded a retraction of the *Journal-Press*’s report. Fearing a reaction from Tierk’s neighbors, Rauch cryptically noted, “You can readily understand what it means to her to have an article of that kind published in her home town.”<sup>21</sup>

After the couple parted ways, the local press did not mention the relationship or Boozer’s expulsion. Tierk married a European American local resident named Thomas W. Brown, and she attended social events in the city over the years. Meanwhile, the story of the relationship never appeared in newspapers outside St. Cloud, and Boozer started his new life in Minneapolis in anonymity. He worked on the Great Northern Railway, but he had little time to adjust to his new job before joining the army. He had asked to be excused from the draft due to his grandmother’s financial dependency on him, but when she died on November 10, 1917, he

## *It took outside forces to revive St. Cloud from its 40-year slump in African American population.*

no longer had this excuse for deferment. Consequently, in 1918 he was drafted, and he fought in World War I in defense of a country that restricted his freedoms of residence and courtship. He briefly returned to the railyard in Minneapolis after the war before moving permanently to Utah in 1922, where he finally experienced professional and personal stability. He worked as a chauffeur and married a European American woman in Salt Lake City, where they remained together until his death in 1925.<sup>22</sup>

**AFTER BOOZER’S EXPULSION** from St. Cloud, the last of the city’s African American migrants from the 1880s departed, leaving only newcomers who settled there in the 1910s and afterward. John Webster died in 1918, and his widow moved to daughter Addie’s house in the Twin Cities, where Elizabeth died in 1923. Billy Lee, having outlived the other community members of his generation, moved to Minneapolis to live with his son Arthur. A mob unsuccessfully tried to prevent Arthur and his family from moving into a “whites only” neighborhood in South Minneapolis in 1931, and the Minneapolis police’s protection of Lee’s rights contrasted with the St. Cloud police’s expulsion of Boozer in the face of mob violence. In July 1939, Arthur accompanied his father for a one-day visit to St. Cloud, and local radio station KFAM interviewed Billy that day. After the interview, the Lees returned to Minneapolis, and the ex-slave from Kentucky died there three months later at around the age of 95.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, St. Cloud’s African American community stayed in the

single-digit range well into the 1950s. During World War I, businesses in the Twin Cities recruited thousands of African American southerners to fill job vacancies during the absence of European American workers who went overseas to fight, but St. Cloudites made no such offers. In fact, St. Cloud’s African American population declined from 1910 to 1920, even as the cross-regional Great Migration began, bringing thousands of African Americans to northern states. Despite this decline, some city neighborhoods established restrictive covenants to keep those few migrants from owning real estate in those places. Nelson Carwell was one of the community’s few newcomers in the 1920s, leaving Duluth after three African Americans were lynched there in 1920. Having witnessed deadly vigilantism in Duluth, the refugee viewed St. Cloud as an improvement over places that actually lynched people.<sup>24</sup>

It took outside forces to revive St. Cloud from its 40-year slump in African American population. The New York Giants major league baseball team sent Virgil Black to its minor league affiliate, the St. Cloud Rox, in 1951, and Black’s arrival broke the Rox’s color barrier four years after Jackie Robinson desegregated the major leagues. The Rox subsequently brought in at least one player of color each summer from 1953 until the team folded in 1971. Meanwhile, federal- and state-run facilities like the Veterans Administration hospital and the state reformatory at St. Cloud started bringing African Americans to the city for jobs in the 1950s, thus increasing the demographic and expanding fields of employment for them. The Fair Housing Act of

1968 banned restrictive covenants and forced the city to allow African Americans to live wherever they desired in St. Cloud—even in residential Middle Town. In recent years residents of the city have honored its first African American residents. Mayor Dave Kleis dedicated a new park in Middle Town in May 2017 named after the first African Americans in St. Cloud: Mary Butler (born a slave) and her son, John, born in St. Cloud. One year later, St. Cloud State University renamed its building 51B, the former facility of the business school, Ruby Cora Webster Hall, after John Wesley Webster's daughter, Ruby. These changes came too late to save the African American community of 1880 to 1920 from destruction, but newcomers who arrived starting in the 1950s rebuilt from the foundations the ex-slaves and their children had left behind.<sup>25</sup> □

## Notes

1. Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Germans in Minnesota* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2003), 63; John J. Dominik, *Three Towns in One City* (St. Cloud, MN: Stearns County Historical Society, 1988), 1–3, 13; Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 379.
2. "The White Man First—The Nigger Afterward," *St. Cloud Times*, Oct. 29, 1864; "A Nigger President," *St. Cloud Times*, July 22, 1874. The word "gemmin" is a crude ethnic caricature of the word "gentleman," meant to emphasize Douglass's African American ethnicity.
3. "Arrival," *St. Cloud Times*, Apr. 29, 1871, 4.
4. *Der Nordstern*, Nov. 2, 1882, 5; *Der Nordstern*, June 20, 1883, 8; *Der Nordstern*, Apr. 28, 1910, 15; *Der Nordstern*, Mar. 28, 1912, 15; *Der Nordstern*, Feb. 13, 1913, 15.
5. "Did Billy Lee, Quality Ge'man Ever Tell You of His Jockey or Slave Days? Then Listen," *St. Cloud Times*, Jan. 30, 1918, 5; US Census 1860, District 2, Harrison County, KY, 94; US Census 1880, Cynthia, Harrison County, KY, 5; MN Census 1885, St. Cloud, Stearns County, 48; Dominik, *Three Towns in One City*, 27–28.
6. "The Race Problem," *Lima [Ohio] News*, Jan. 4, 1890, 8; US Census 1870, Crane, Paulding County, OH, 26; US Census 1880, Delphos, Allen County, OH, 72; US Census 1860, Ward 1, Chilli-

cothe, Ross County, OH, 24; Carrie Williams Clifford, "The Business Career of M. E. Williams," *Colored American* (Sept. 1905): 477.

7. "40–25 Years Ago in St. Cloud," *St. Cloud Times*, Aug. 15, 1932, 12; MN Census 1895, St. Cloud, Stearns County, 4; *St. Cloud City Directory 1897–98*, 36; "A Small Blaze," *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, Mar. 30, 1899, 3; Stearns County Book of Deeds 152, 83; Stearns County Book of Deeds 155, 456.
8. "Called to Service: Minneapolis Draft Board Selections," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, Aug. 1, 1918, 13; "Marriage Licenses," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, July 7, 1920, 15; US Census 1920, Precinct 6, Minneapolis, Hennepin County, MN, 6B; US Census 1920, Precinct 9, St. Paul, Ramsey County, MN, 7A; *St. Paul Appeal*, Dec. 6, 1913, 4; "Charter Committee to Give Report," *St. Cloud Times*, Sept. 3, 1949, 4.
9. US Census 1910, Ward 3, St. Cloud, Stearns County, MN, 3A, 17A; "Saint Paul," *St. Paul Appeal*, Oct. 27, 1906, 3; "Saint Paul," *St. Paul Appeal*, Oct. 17, 1908, 3; "Saint Paul," *St. Paul Appeal*, Jan. 23, 1915, 4.
10. "Racial Feeling Was Intense," *St. Cloud Times*, July 5, 1910; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 441–43.
11. "Garrison Finish of Pretzels Is Nipped in Dud by Plutos," *St. Cloud Times*, Sept. 2, 1913; "Recent Thefts Thought to Be Work of Blacks," *St. Cloud Times*, Aug. 2, 1916.
12. "Negro Get Rights," *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, May 26, 1915, 7; "Negro Charges Discrimination," *St. Cloud Times*, May 26, 1915; "Right Sort of Man," *St. Cloud Times*, Feb. 11, 1916, 5.
13. *Newberry Herald and News*, Nov. 30, 1915, 8; US Census 1880, Township 1, Newberry County, SC, 38B; US Census 1900, District 89, Township 1, Newberry County, SC, 14B; US Census 1910, Precinct 1, St. Cloud, Stearns County, MN, 14A.
14. "Nigger Jim' Gets Walking Papers," *St. Cloud Times*, Nov. 26, 1917; "Negro Ordered Out of the City," *St. Cloud Daily Journal-Press*, Nov. 26, 1917.
15. Conzen, *Germans in Minnesota*, 68.
16. "Negro Ordered Out of the City"; "Nigger Jim' Gets Walking Papers"; John D. Bessler, *Legacy of Violence: Lynch Mobs and Executions in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xviii, 12.
17. "Nigger Jim' Gets Walking Papers."
18. "The North and South Way," *St. Cloud Times*, Nov. 24, 1917, 4; "Full of Brimstone," *Minneapolis Journal*, Mar. 21, 1903, 6; "Greeted Him as a Senator," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 22, 1903, 7; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 104, 112, 123; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 189, 206.
19. Christopher P. Lehman, "The Contemplation of Our Righteousness: Vigilante Acts against African Americans in Southwest Minnesota, 1903," *Minnesota History* (Fall 2015), 271; Alison Keys, "A Long-Lost Manuscript Contains a Searing Eyewitness Account of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," *Smithsonian* (May 27, 2016), smithsonian.com; James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone, 2005), 9, 23.
20. "Nigger Jim' Gets Walking Papers."
21. "Retraction Asked for by Attorney for Katherine Tierk," *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, Jan. 5, 1918.
22. "Only Colored Man Registered to Go," *St. Cloud Times*, July 22, 1918; US Census 1930, Ward 4, St. Cloud, Stearns County, MN, 3B; US Census 1940, Ward 1, St. Cloud, Stearns County, MN, 7B; "Mrs. Thomas Brown," *St. Cloud Times*, Mar. 30, 1942, 4; *Minneapolis City Directory, 1921*, 332; *Salt Lake City Directory, 1923*, 135; *Salt Lake City Directory, 1924*, 137. Boozer's cause of death is unknown.
23. David Vassar Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2002), 30; Earl Spangler, *The Negro in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1961), 65; Dominik, *Three Towns in One City*, 47–48; "Mrs. Webster Rites Held This Afternoon," *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, Aug. 24, 1923; "Home of A. A. Lee Is Storm Center," *St. Cloud Times*, July 15, 1931, 5; "2-Day Truce Asked in War to Oust Negro from Home," *Minneapolis Star*, July 16, 1931, 1; "Arthur Lee to Continue Home," *St. Cloud Times*, July 21, 1931, 11; *St. Cloud Times*, July 25, 1939, 1; "William Lee," *St. Cloud Times*, Oct. 26, 1939, 11. After two years of constant harassment, Arthur and Edith Lee and their children moved to a historically black neighborhood in south Minneapolis. The Lee house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014; "African Americans in Minnesota," MNopedia, mnopedia.org/african-americans-minnesota.
24. "Few Colored Men from Duluth," *Duluth Herald*, Oct. 18, 1917, 3; Christopher P. Lehman, "Jim Crow in Restrictive Covenants," *Crossings* (Oct. 2017): 10–13; US Census 1920, District 139, Duluth, St. Louis County, MN, 8B; "Nelson Carwell," *St. Cloud Times*, Jan. 28, 1949, 7; Michael Fedo, *The Lynchings in Duluth* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2000), 172–73.
25. "Rox Win, Get New Hurlers," *St. Cloud Times*, June 8, 1951, 12; "Virgil Black," *St. Cloud Times*, June 9, 1951, 8; Vicki Ikeogu, "St. Cloud Dedicates Park to City's 1st African American Residents," *St. Cloud Times*, May 6, 2017; Tony Langfellow, "51-Building Gets Historic Name Change," *University Chronicle*, Oct. 20, 2018, 1.

Photos and images on p. 234, 236 (bottom), 237, 240, 241, MNHS Collections; p. 236 (top), St. Cloud State University Archives; p. 238, 239, Stearns County Historical Society, St. Cloud.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

#### **Students and researchers**

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

#### **Teachers**

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

#### **About Illustrations**

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).