

“A Greater



Pullman porters (far left and center) standing by to assist passengers boarding the Great Northern's Empire Builder, about 1926

“Victory”

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS IN ST. PAUL



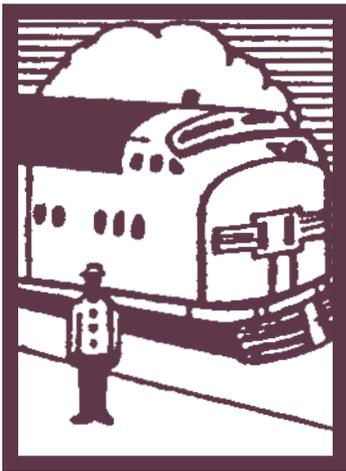
No one can deny the genius of George Mortimer Pullman, whose palatial railroad cars created American luxury travel in the late-nineteenth century. The flawless service that passengers came to expect on the Pullman cars depended on porters, African-American men who labored long hours under grueling conditions. Just as George Pullman retained ownership of all his rolling stock by leasing cars to railroads, he also maintained control over his workers—hiring, firing, and setting conditions of employment. Being “on the road”

Arthur C. McWatt

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looked like an opportunity for recently freed slaves, whose only alternative was lower-paying field labor. But the better money came at a high price. Pullman porters were expected to work 400 hours a month or travel 11,000 miles with almost no provisions for periods of rest. Wages were kept low; income depended heavily on tips. Persistent complaints were met by either warnings or dismissals. Under these conditions, the Pullman Palace Car Company became the largest private employer of African Americans by the 1920s.¹

Numerous attempts to organize Pullman porters failed until 1925, when Ashley L. Totten, a New York Pullman porter, convinced labor organizer A. Philip Randolph to head up a new effort. The result was the beginning of one of the most extraordinary movements in American labor history. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters challenged a great industrial giant, eventually forcing it to bargain collectively. Guided by national leaders such as



Randolph, Totten, Milton P. Webster, and C. L. Dellums, the union's success also depended heavily on the local efforts of organizers such as Frank Boyd of St. Paul. Equally important were the Colored Women's Economic Councils, a national support network of porters' relatives. In St. Paul activists such as Della Roberts, Caroline (Carrie) B. McWatt, and Allie Mae Hampton led the council to raise money for supplies, hold brotherhood meetings when their

husbands were "on the road," and host social affairs to keep up morale. They became civic leaders in their own right.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters showed African Americans that they need not be strikebreakers to earn a living.² Protected by their own union, they could give customer ser-

vice with dignity; their grievances would be solved rather than ignored; and they could look forward to improved benefits, higher pay, and a livable pension when they retired. In St. Paul, as across the nation, porters and their families held their heads high and became role models in their community.

The railroad era began in earnest in St. Paul in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the two great transcontinental lines—the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railways—linked with regional companies to make freight and passenger transportation readily available. In 1880 the city was home to about 490 African Americans; by 1910 their numbers had grown to about 3,150. As elsewhere, only poorly paid work was available to the majority of them. For many young black men in St. Paul, railroading offered a chance to make a reasonable wage, to be a "traveling man," to see the big cities, and to have adventures. It also offered danger, as shown by the \$4,000 settlement that Minneapolis attorney J. Frank Wheaton obtained in 1899 for Mrs. Richard Manning, whose Pullman-porter husband lost his life in a wreck of a Chicago, Burlington and Northwestern train.³

At first, the railroads offered African Americans all types of jobs, including those of fireman and switchman as well as porter and waiter. It offered them alike to former slaves and to the highly educated, who, if not self-employed, rarely found jobs to match their education. In fact, at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, President Grover Cleveland praised Pullman for being the largest employer of former slaves in the nation.⁴ Several years later, the editor of Minneapolis's *Afro-American Advance* commented, "St. Paul has more Afro-American graduates of law and other departments of science, in the railroad service, than Minneapolis. Some of these men said they used to be this and that, 'long time ago. We don't want to know what you used to be. We want to know what you are, and trying to be."⁵

¹ Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6–10. The Pullman Palace Car Co. was founded in 1866.

² See, for example, Warren C. Whatley, "African-American Strikebreaking from the Civil War to the New Deal," *Social Science History* 17 (Winter 1993): 525–58.

³ David Vassar Taylor, "The Blacks," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June D. Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 74, 76; *Afro-American Advance* (Minneapolis), June 24, 1899, p. 3; Richard S. Prosser, *Rails to the North Star* (Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1966), 27–39.

⁴ Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter* (New York: Walker and Co., 1989), 23.

⁵ *Afro-American Advance*, Nov. 25, 1899, p. 2.

By the turn of the century, Pullman had standardized the size of his rail cars and had created elegant interiors of black walnut furnished with Axminster carpets and beautiful chandeliers. He recruited porters who would be courteous to his passengers while tending to their every need and desire. Each day the porters had to break down and make up as many as 22 berths while being careful not to inconvenience anyone. Porters received passengers and helped them to board, carried on their baggage, saw that their clothes were brushed and their berths made up and pulled down when requested, and served food and beverages from the dining cars. They were also required, each night, to shine all shoes left in the aisle outside the berths. All were ordered to answer to the name "George," a custom from slavery days when slaves were called by their master's name.⁶

Perhaps most onerous was the lack of provision for their rest. The Pullman rule book allowed porters only three hours of sleep the first night out and none for the remaining days. Stationed in the men's smoker where they could be reached by sounding a buzzer, porters were expected to be at the beck and call of their wards at all hours of the night, standing by for any emergency and ensuring that their charges got off at the proper destination. Trying to sleep on the leather seats of the smoker, they were often awakened when passengers went to the bathroom or when those who had trouble sleeping merely wanted to talk. Their dependence upon tips guaranteed continued obsequiousness. (In 1883 porters were paid \$12.00 per month; by 1915 they earned \$27.50.) Porters received no overtime pay until they had logged at least 400 hours a month or 11,000 miles, whichever occurred first.⁷

The Pullman company, hated by its factory workers as well as its railroad employees, was ripe for unionization. But when Eugene V. Debs, president of the radical American Railway Union (ARU), organized most Pullman employees in the early 1890s, he ignored the porters; in fact, the ARU constitution excluded African Americans. It is ironic to note that the Pullman company used African-American strikebreakers against the union in the disastrous 1894 Pullman strike. When the strike ended after federal



Publicity shot of the Pullman sleeping-car berths

intervention, Debs was jailed and all Pullman employees had to sign a nonunion pledge in order to be rehired.⁸

Illustrations of the company's inhumane and arbitrary practices abound. In St. Louis in 1904, when the Olympics and the World's Fair were being held simultaneously, one porter who had been sent out on three consecutive runs—with no rest in between—was caught sleeping by his conductor. Reported to the superintendent, the porter was fired. When a group of 11 porters met with the superintendent to discuss more reasonable layovers, all were dismissed on the spot for insubordination.⁹

⁶ McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 15, 19–22, 44; Jervis B. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph, A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 163.

⁷ McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 44; Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 162–63; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 41.

⁸ McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 24–25; Whatley, "African-American Strikebreakers," 529, 545.

⁹ McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 49.

The demonstrated power of the Pullman company and the threat of losing a steady job intimidated many workers. The “big four” railroad unions—the brotherhoods of locomotive engineers, locomotive firemen, railway trainmen, and railway conductors—remained closed to African Americans. By 1895 the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had ceased enforcing its policy of racial integration yet refused to charter separate African-American unions until 1900. Unsuccessful attempts were made to unionize the porters in 1909, 1910, and 1913.¹⁰

During this era, Frank L. Boyd began his lifetime of union activism in St. Paul. Boyd was born in Kansas in 1881. After his mother’s death in 1894, he began working at odd jobs in Kansas and Nebraska. He moved to St. Paul in 1904, taking a job as a barbershop porter. A few years later he became a Pullman porter and was active in the early attempts to organize his fellow workers.¹¹

In 1912 Boyd, along with other porters around the country, circulated a petition to double Pullman porters’ wages, which were then \$25 a month, and to raise them to \$60 after two years of service. The Pullman company responded by increasing pay by \$2.50 a month, and Boyd was branded a troublemaker.¹²

Working conditions did not improve. In 1914 George T. Williams of St. Paul one day reported to work 15 minutes late and was told to go home. When he objected, he was arrested at the request of Pullman officials on the false charge of being drunk and disorderly. Williams called African-American attorney W. T. Francis, who arranged for his release. After a police court acquitted Williams, the porter and his attorney filed suit against the Pullman company for malicious prosecution. The jury award of \$2,999.99—the full amount that they requested—was, according to *The Appeal*, St. Paul’s African-American newspaper, the largest malicious prosecution verdict won in Ramsey County to that date.¹³

In 1915 the Great Migration from the South began, as recruiters sought cheap labor for industries taxed by the demands of World War I. The influential *Chicago Defender* urged southern Negroes to move north and recruited Pullman porters to spread the “Gospel of Exodus.” In St. Paul the migration had a limited effect, increasing the city’s black population from 3,144 to 3,376 between 1910 and 1920. This 7 percent gain matched the growth rate of the nation’s African-American population but was well below Chicago’s (148 percent), Detroit’s (616 percent), or the Midwest’s as a whole (10 percent). Many of the migrants took jobs either on the railroads or at the meat-packing plants in South St. Paul. Pullman porters’ wages were raised to \$47.50 per month in 1915.¹⁴

In 1918 porters from the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad organized the Railway Men’s International Benevolent Industrial Association. Designed to include all the groups of railway workers from station redcaps on up, the organization was “a capital idea poorly sponsored,” according to Boyd. It probably arose because the federal government encouraged the formation of unions during World War I in order to avert rail strikes and other labor troubles. A local was set up in St. Paul with George Shannon as chairman and Augustus Jones as executive secretary. Boyd was an active participant, holding card #4674.¹⁵

By 1919, according to Boyd, “Every thinking porter was talking organization.” He and other midwesterners corresponded with New York porters, initially hoping for AFL recognition. Instead, the men gathered in New York City in July and formed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Protective Union, a fraternal organization. A. W. Jordon was named the St. Paul local’s first president. He and Frank Boyd were then chosen as delegates to a Chicago convention in October.¹⁶

In 1920, after the passage of the national Transportation Act, the Pullman company was forced to begin negotiations with its workers.

¹⁰ Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 33, 36; Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and The Negro* (New York: Harper, 1944), 8; F. Boyd, “Previous Struggles of Pullman Porters to Organize,” *The Messenger* 8 (Sept. 1926): 283.

¹¹ Boyd, “Previous Struggles,” 283; *St. Paul Recorder*, May 11, 1962, p. 4; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 14, 1945, 2d sec., p. 14. The bust in Boyd Park, St. Paul, gives his birthdate.

¹² Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 164; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 41.

¹³ *Appeal*, Feb. 14, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁴ Taylor, “The Blacks,” 81; Daniel Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 100–102; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 74–85; Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 162.

¹⁵ Boyd, “Previous Struggles,” 283; Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 164; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 33.

¹⁶ Boyd, “Previous Struggles,” 283–84; *Appeal*, Oct. 18, 1919, p. 3.

The next year the company signed its first labor contract with a unit of the AFL's Railway Employees Department, and it eventually negotiated with the big four as well. It recognized the newly organized Order of Sleeping Car Conductors. But Pullman steadfastly refused to recognize its porters. Instead of negotiating with them, the company formed the Pullman Porters Benefit Association in about 1921, hoping to smash its workers' own fraternal organization. As a sweetener, salaries were raised to \$67.50, with \$2.17 taken out each month to help finance the so-called Plan of Employee Representation. In the absence of any other union representation, men such as Totten of New York and Boyd of St. Paul joined the plan. Hoping to "make the Plan function, if possible," Boyd served as a representative for about five years, chairing the local committee one year and sitting on the Central Zone General Committee for two more.¹⁷

Despite difficult working conditions and schedules that kept many men on the road much of the time, the porters were active and well-respected community members. In 1923 they were among the organizers of the nonpartisan St. Paul Colored Voters League. The group chose Shannon, previously involved in the Railroad Men's International Benevolent Industrial Association, as chairman and attorney O. J. Smith as secretary. According to Smith, the organization's main purposes were "maintaining and with the vote of the people demanding the constitutional rights of our people and all people."¹⁸

At about this time in New York City, two young Socialists were busy trying to organize trade unions while publishing *The Messenger*, which they called "the only radical Negro Magazine in America." The leader was Asa Philip Randolph, and his associate was Chandler Owen.¹⁹

Randolph was born in Crescent City, Florida, in 1889. After graduating as valedictorian from Cookman Institute, a high school for African Americans in Jacksonville, Randolph worked at

a succession of menial jobs. In 1911 he migrated to New York City, taking odd jobs such as porter, railroad waiter, and elevator operator before attending evening classes at City College. There he studied political science, economics, and philosophy and also took speech classes, developing a sonorous speaking voice.²⁰

In New York he met and married Lucille Green, who owned a thriving beauty shop and who introduced her husband to Owen. It was her business that supported the two men's publishing venture. Outspoken Socialists, the two traveled the country making speeches and published articles urging African Americans to stay out of the war because democracy treated them as "animals without human rights." They were arrested in Cleveland in 1918 and barely escaped prosecution under the Espionage Act. As a result of his activities, the U.S. Justice Department named Randolph "the most dangerous Negro in America."

In 1925 in New York's Central Station, Ashley Totten and a group of fellow Pullman porters approached Randolph and asked him to help them form a union. At first refusing, Randolph finally decided that the porters were perhaps his best chance of promoting black labor unionism. No one else seemed interested in taking up their cause. Thus, at an organizational meeting at a Harlem pool hall on August 25, 1925, the 36-year-old Randolph accepted the presidency of the newly formed Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). It would be 12 years before the Pullman company was forced to recognize the union.²¹

The new union's first demands, published in *The Messenger*, were to raise porters' salaries to \$150 a month and abolish tipping; institute a 240-hour work month; pay for "dead heading," or traveling to or from an assignment for reasons beyond the porter's control; guarantee four hours of sleep on the first night out and six on succeeding nights; and end the practice of "doubling out," or demanding that porters take another trip before their regular layover had been completed and they had a chance to rest. Porters asked to be paid conductors' full pay,

¹⁷ Brailsford R. Brazeal, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Its Origin and Development* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1946), 11–12; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 36; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 51–52; Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 164–167; Boyd, "Previous Struggles," 284.

¹⁸ *Northwestern Bulletin*, Nov. 17, Dec. 1, Dec. 29, 1923—all p. 1.

¹⁹ Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 73, 81; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 56–57.

²⁰ Here and below, see Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 11, 45–47, 52, 59–61, 105–8; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 57.

²¹ Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 168.



A. Philip Randolph, about 1950

which was double theirs, when they “ran in charge,” instead of the meager \$12 stipend the Pullman company added to their monthly check. (Running in charge meant doing the conductor’s work, for which they were amply qualified, as well as their own. The system created great resentment for porters who could never aspire to the whites-only job of conductor.) The brotherhood’s initial requests also included an increase in pension from the \$16 a month porters received after 40 years of service. Finally, they requested that name cards be posted in each car to avoid the indignity of being called George.²²

While the brotherhood was making these demands in New York City, Frank Boyd was busy in St. Paul. In June he had concluded that the Pullman company’s Employee Representation Plan was “a form without the necessary substance to establish justice.” In August 1925 he organized his first group of porters. In late September Boyd posted his letter of resignation from the Employee Representation Plan in the porters’ room at the St. Paul depot. His audaci-

ty served to increase enrollment in his newly formed local.²³

On the first of November Boyd was called into the office of C. C. Healy, assistant district superintendent of the Pullman company. There, he admitted his connections with the newly formed union and argued about the “rights and privileges of a Pullman porter.” A month later, as brotherhood membership began to grow, Healy again summoned Boyd. This time the superintendent threatened that if Boyd continued to use his influence in organizing the porters, whom Healy called “my men,” Healy would “feel personally offended” and would deal with Boyd accordingly.

On January 13 and 14, 1926, the newly organized Local #3 of the BSCP, with Paul L. Caldwell as secretary, held its first meetings at the Welcome Hall on Farrington and St. Anthony Streets in St. Paul’s Rondo neighborhood. More than 50 men and their wives attended and heard Boyd outline federal rules relating to the right to organize, while Caldwell detailed BSCP specifics. During the meeting, Boyd was notified that he should not report for his run the next day. Following the Employee Representation Plan’s grievance procedure, he attempted to gain reinstatement, filing the appropriate form and appealing to two levels of management. Not surprisingly, he received no response from either the plan or the Pullman company, proof enough of “the bankruptcy of the Plan, as far as the porters are concerned.” Boyd then took a job at the Armour meat-packing plant but continued on as an unpaid organizer for the brotherhood, a position he would hold through 1959.

In February a large audience turned out at St. James A.M.E. Church in St. Paul to hear Randolph and Totten, now the BSCP’s West Coast field organizer, speak. After denouncing all Pullman porters who were not union members as “Uncle Toms” and “stool pigeons” as well as “dangerous enemies to the Negro race,” Totten warned his listeners of an alleged espionage system being carried out by some of the protective association’s instructors who trained porters. Randolph eloquently warned the audience that they “must no longer invest their time in dance and song, but we must begin to think in terms of dollars and cents if we ever expect to take an active part in the trend of progress.”

²² Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 23, 50; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 60–61.

²³ Here and two paragraphs below, *St. Paul City Directory*, 1924, p. 560; Boyd, “Previous Struggles,” 284; *St. Paul Echo*, Jan. 16, 1926, p. 1.

The next day the BSCP officials spoke to an organized group of porters and waiters of the Soo Line Railroad in Minneapolis, who denounced their former leader and endorsed the brotherhood.²⁴

The year 1926 seemed to hold great promise for the fledgling union. In May the Railway Labor Act was passed, protecting the right of railroad workers to form independent unions and hold collective bargaining elections. Claiming 5,763 members—a 53 percent majority of porters throughout the country—BSCP leadership attempted to prove to a federal mediation board that it, and not the Pullman employee group, represented the porters. In a related action, Frank Boyd and organizers around the country circulated a petition demanding that the Interstate Commerce Commission compel the Pullman company to ban tipping and pay the porters a living wage. While these activities gave the workers hope (and caused brotherhood membership to grow for a time), neither was successful. The commerce commission ruled against the union and, after protracted maneuvering, Pullman convinced the mediation board that its employee union fairly represented the porters. Randolph, desperate to win something for his union, then threatened a strike for June 1928 but canceled it upon the recommendation of William Green, president of the AFL. BSCP leadership later conceded that the strike would have failed.²⁵

Boyd continued building membership in the brotherhood's Twin Cities Division against the Pullman company's tactics of intimidation. The railcar giant infiltrated the union with spies, and all suspected of belonging were summarily fired. In St. Paul another BSCP organizer, Nathaniel Evans, reported that while working out of his own apartment he had to "draw the shades in broad daylight for fear of the Pullman stooges." It is estimated that across the nation hundreds of porters, whose years of service ranged from 10 to 27 years, were fired, like Boyd, for their organizing efforts or union connections. Beyond removing troublemakers, the company hoped that the firings would frighten porters and destroy the union, whose locals depended on annual dues. At the same time, Pullman stepped up efforts to enroll porters in

its association. It succeeded in winning over some who did not understand unionism, felt Randolph was too radical, or were afraid of losing their jobs.²⁶

Given the dangers of union membership, the Colored Women's Economic Councils played a key role in BSCP organizing, moving Randolph to proclaim many years later in tribute to emigrant national leaders Helena Wilson and Rosina

Frank Boyd at the desk where he collected union dues and discharged BSCP business, 1951



²⁴ *St. Paul Echo*, Feb. 20, 1926, p. 13.

²⁵ Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 186–203; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 88–89.

²⁶ Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 178; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 43.

Pullman Porters and Sleeping Car Porters Generally, Attention!

IF

You are tired of being treated like
children instead of men;
You think you should work shorter
hours;
You think your wages should be larger;
You are tired of doubling back;
You are sick of Company tyranny;
You have a backbone instead of a wish-
bone—

THEN

Fill out this blank and mail it imme-
diately to **A. PHILIP RANDOLPH,**
General Organizer, **BROTHERHOOD**
OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS,
2311 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Act today, don't delay.

Spread the Good News.

Membership is growing by leaps and
bounds. :: :: **SIGN UP!**

Note—At the first big mass meeting held in New York City on August 25, 1925, attended by 500 enthusiastic Pullman porters, it was agreed that the name of no member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters would be divulged until over 51% of the porters in the employ of the Pullman Company had been organized, the requirement of the U. S. Railway Labor Board. This protects you from Pullman Company tyranny until the union is strong enough. We want to get this number (51%) in the next 60 days. Big Meetings will soon be held at important terminal points. Watch for the notices.

There are still a few copies of the July and August numbers of THE MESSENGER containing the famous articles on the Pullman porters. They are fifteen cents a copy; seventeen cents by mail. Send for them.

Gentlemen:1925

Please send me immediately an application blank for membership in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and all literature dealing with the movement to organize the porters into a strong union for, of, and by themselves.

Name
Street
City
State

Announcement from The Messenger, 1925

Tucker, "When the history of labor in the United States is written, especially with reference to workers of color, their names, together with all of the members and officials of the Ladies Auxiliary who have worked and struggled to build the movement, will stand out as beacon lights for the workers of coming generations." Founded in 1925 by the wives of Pullman porters, the councils formed a national network of support. The money they raised through teas and bake sales bought supplies for the national effort and for local needs. Chapters throughout the country mounted letter-writing campaigns to lobby for legislation such as a woman's eight-hour work day, better child-labor laws, workmen's compensation, low-cost housing, and slum clearance.²⁷

In St. Paul the first women's organizational meeting was held in 1926 at the Young Women's Christian Association branch at 508 West Central Avenue. Della Roberts was elected president of the council and was installed by Randolph himself. Shielding the workers from company reprisals, the members of the women's council often held BSCP meetings in their homes, frequently when their husbands were out on the road and could not be suspected of organizing.²⁸

Over the years the St. Paul council worked on a number of labor and social issues. Members raised funds to provide for porters' families in need and to create social programs. They worked on community programs for the poor, contributing financial aid to the Rural School Program in West Virginia. These efforts were well underway by 1938, when the Colored Women's Economic Councils officially became the BSCP's International Ladies Auxiliaries, chartered "for the purpose of a thorough organization of the women relatives of the Sleeping Car Porters . . . to cooperate and support the [BSCP] morally and financially."

To create greater knowledge of trade unionism among members and make their work more effective, the auxiliary's international board awarded scholarships to allow women to attend

²⁷ Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 43; *Black Worker*, Aug. 1949, p. 7, July 1959, p. 6. The tribute was part of Randolph's announcement of the 1959 National Conference of the BSCP Ladies Auxiliary, to be held in Chicago.

²⁸ Here and two paragraphs below, *Black Worker*, Aug. 1949, p. 7; Ladies Auxiliary to the BSCP, Certificate of Affiliation, June 9, 1939, in author's possession; *St. Paul Recorder*, July 11, 1947, p. 1; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 43; Brazeal, *BSCP*, 191-94.

local labor schools and leadership-training courses. In 1947, for example, Carrie McWatt, Allie Mae Hampton, the local's current president, and Lelia Jackson, its secretary-treasurer, attended the two-week Workers Education Training Course at the University of Wisconsin. Two years later Hampton obtained another scholarship.

Dedicated and articulate women such as McWatt propelled the auxiliaries forward. In 1938 she had been elected president of the St. Paul local with Carrie P. Lindsey as secretary-treasurer. In June 1939 McWatt was named to the 11-member International Executive Board, a position she held for more than a decade, and was replaced at the local level by Ella Archer. McWatt brought to her position writing and organizing skills as well as a long history of involvement in social issues. Her association with labor leaders began in 1921 when she and her husband, Arthur, entertained Chandler Owen of *The Messenger* in their home at 726 Sherburne Avenue. (They were so impressed with him that they named their sons A. Chandler and Randolph Owen.)²⁹

While raising four children (daughters Martha and Carolyn along with the boys), McWatt recruited substantial numbers of new members into the local auxiliary and provided leadership, the result of attending numerous workshops, seminars, and national conventions. In 1944 the University of Minnesota honored McWatt by inducting her into its Delta Phi Lambda writing society. From 1953 until 1955, McWatt lent her considerable writing skills to the St. Paul local, serving as corresponding secretary and reporting news to the national office in New York for publication in the *Black Worker*, the BSCP newspaper.

Despite the trying labor conditions, by 1929 the railroad industry had become the major employer of St. Paul's African Americans. While the stock-market crash and Great Depression resulted in some layoffs, the Pullman porters, waiters, and station redcaps were among the most economically secure groups in the black community during the depression years. Al-

PRESIDENTS OF ST. PAUL'S COLORED WOMEN'S ECONOMIC COUNCIL/BSCP LADIES AUXILIARY

Della Roberts	1926–29
Lelia Jackson	1929–31
Regina Morris	1931–35
Mae Maud Settles	1935–38
Carrie B. McWatt	1938–39
Ella Archer	1939–47
Allie Mae Hampton	1947–55

though a Twin Cities newspaper survey showed that porters' tips in 1930 had taken the biggest drop since the beginning of Prohibition—to half of the 1929 levels—the majority of men at least kept their jobs.³⁰

During the Great Depression, BSCP efforts to gain recognition intensified. By 1930 St. Paul's Local #3 was holding monthly meetings at the Hallie Q. Brown House and the Ober Boys Club. That summer Frank Boyd called an emergency meeting to organize a protest against the lynching of Pullman porter J. W. Wilkes of Kansas City, whose killers presumably resented the fact that he held a steady job. In October the brotherhood filed an injunction against Pullman, demanding it stop financing its company union. The Federal District Court of Northern Illinois ruled against the porters. The following June, local brotherhood president J. W. Baldwin asked Cecil Newman, editor of the *Twin City Herald* and a full-time Pullman porter, to serve as BSCP negotiator during attempts to organize the Soo Line porters.³¹

As the depression rolled on, the brotherhood's national membership declined to about 500 in 1933, but Randolph persevered. The union was able to maintain its New York office

²⁹ McWatt is the author's mother; information here and below is based on family knowledge. See also *St. Paul Recorder*, Oct. 5, 1962, p. 4. While on military leave, the author escorted his mother to the installation at Coffman Memorial Union.

³⁰ *Northwest Monitor* (Minneapolis), Jan. 20, 1931, p. 1. Postal workers and other civil servants were also secure in their jobs.

³¹ Brazeal, *BSCP*, 95–100. On Newman, see Henry Lewis Suggs, "Democracy on Trial: The Black Press, Black Migration, and the Evolution of Culture and Community in Minnesota, 1865–1970," in *The Black Press in the Middle West*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996), 177–79; *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Aug. 27, 1948, p. 6. By the mid-1930s Newman devoted himself full-time to journalism.



Members of St. Paul's chapter of the BSCP Ladies Auxiliary: (bottom row, from left) Carrie McWatt, Allie Mae Hampton, Ella Archer, Lelia Jackson, unknown; (top) Alene McMillan, Willie M. Black, Lillian Ruffner, unknown, Leona Goodman, Laura Foulkes

mainly by giving rent parties. Good news finally came in 1934, when the brotherhood became a full-fledged member of the American Federation of Labor (International Charter #18078), adding much-needed clout to the fight for recognition. That same year the BSCP, this time supported by organized labor, convinced the Interstate Commerce Commission to amend the 1933 Railway Labor Act, specifying that its protections against company unions and “yellow-dog” contracts (prohibiting workers from joining unions) extended to Pullman employees.³²

Between May 27 and June 27, 1935, a collective-bargaining election was finally held among

Pullman porters in 66 stations around the country. When the ballots were counted, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters received 8,316 votes to 1,422 for the rival Pullman Porters Protective Association. A jubilant Randolph telegraphed to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People chairman Walter White, “First victory of Negro workers over a great industrial corporation.” Elmer Carter, the national executive secretary of the Urban League (formerly head of the St. Paul league), declared, “No labor leadership in America has faced greater odds. None has won a greater victory.”³³

³² The BSCP had affiliated with the AFL in 1928–29 but, lacking funds and members, was not accorded full, international status and a charter until 1934; Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 209, 211, 217–19, 225, 229; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 107–8.

³³ Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 221. On Carter in St. Paul, see, for example, St. Paul Urban League, *1972 Annual Report*, p. 4.

After two long years of difficult negotiations, the BSCP finally signed its first labor contract on August 25, 1937. Salaries were raised to \$175 a month (an annual wage package of \$1.25 million), hours were reduced to 240 a month, and a grievance procedure was established. Throughout the long process, the Pullman company continued its efforts to undermine the brotherhood, delaying negotiations so much that the BSCP once again requested federal mediation. One often-repeated story tells that a stool-pigeon porter from Philadelphia gave Randolph a blank check from the Pullman company and told him to fill in any amount. Randolph quietly replied, "Take this blank check back to where you got it and tell them 'I'm not for sale!'"³⁴

It was 1937, the year of the historic contract, when Clarence Duke began his 30-year career as a Pullman porter in St. Paul. His experiences provide a snapshot of labor conditions at the time of this watershed event. Arriving in the city in 1908, Duke had worked at the St. Paul Athletic Club since 1920. At the time he was hired, porters were still held responsible for all items lost on their cars. During his early years on the road, Duke later recalled, the Pullman company deducted money from his wages to pay for combs, brushes, and towels that were lost or stolen. Duke also remembered his days on the "extra board," which listed all porters who had no regular runs. These men were required to report early every morning and stay until late afternoon, waiting for a possible assignment. Once, the day after returning from a grueling 29-day trip, Duke was told to take a car out at Ft. Snelling. When he protested, a Mr. Long, the sign-out man, retorted sarcastically, "You ain't even been out a month." Duke replied, "Put me on the sick list," one of the recent benefits of the union contract.³⁵

Other difficulties faced African-American rail workers on long runs away from home. Duke recalled that during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Chicago, home of the Pullman company, was the only place that kept decent overnight quarters for porters. Seattle, for

instance, maintained two old, run-down hotels. In the South, "Porters were left on their own resources and often could not find a place to eat or even get a drink of water." It was up to the porter to seek out a friendly black face and ask where one could safely eat and sleep. Duke himself had once gone an entire day without food.

In the decades following union recognition, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters continued to negotiate gains for its members, guaranteeing their work month, hours of rest, vacations, and wages that paid, when averaged over hours worked, better than those of firemen, engineers, trainmen, and conductors. Members also gained better layovers, schedules of runs, station duty, and extra assignments. In 1950 membership achieved a high of 16,000 enrolled in 102 locals. The brotherhood continued to serve as a role model for black unions throughout the nation. By that year St. Paul's Local #3 had grown to more than 700 members under the charismatic leadership of its president, Alfred R. North, the organizational skills of A. J. Leverette, vice-president, and Frank Boyd's quarter of a century of stewardship as secretary-treasurer.³⁶

Into the 1950s the rail industry, like the rest of the nation, remained racially polarized. In 1949 the BSCP had filed lawsuits in an attempt to protect the interests of the few remaining black locomotive firemen in the South, culminating in victory in December 1951 when the

Clarence Duke, 1943, and an unidentified worker



³⁴ Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 221–25; McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 112–13; Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 61–67.

³⁵ Here and below, Clarence Duke, interview by author, St. Paul, Dec. 15, 1993. See also McKissack, *Long Hard Journey*, 61.

³⁶ See Brazeal, *BSCP*, 208–22; *Black Worker* throughout the 1950s.

“lily white” Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen was prohibited from employment and promotion discrimination. In a curious turnaround, the Pullman company announced after the landmark 1954 school-integration decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, that it had decided to open the position of porter to all races, colors, and creeds. At the same time, the position of Pullman conductor remained open to whites only.³⁷

As late as 1959 Randolph created a furor at the AFL-CIO convention and clashed with its president, George Meany, by demanding that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen be expelled unless they eliminated the color bar from their constitutions within six months. Admitted to the AFL-CIO over Randolph’s objections, the firemen and enginemen had pledged to take action at its next national convention, which it then promptly postponed. The trainmen, who convened in St. Paul just before the 1959 AFL-CIO gathering, voted down a resolution to remove the bar. Both unions claimed that they needed more time, and Meany believed that he could exert more pressure on the recalcitrant unions if they remained within the House of Labor.³⁸

In July 1967 George Young of St. Paul became the first of six Twin Cities Pullman porters to be promoted to Pullman conductor by the Northern Pacific Railroad. It was a break in a racist tradition that had lasted almost a century. His promotion was the indirect result of a government deregulation order requiring the Pullman company to divest itself of control over both the production of sleeping cars and those who served on them. Suddenly, the individual railroads were forced to look within their ranks of experienced workers to fill newly created positions.³⁹

The 1960s ushered in a period of decline in rail travel and, consequently, in BSCP membership. In 1962 government figures showed only 3,000 Pullman porters working, as more and more Americans began using air and automo-

bile travel. Two years later their numbers had dropped to 2,000. Wages had increased to \$2.35 an hour, but hours had been reduced to \$174 a month, roughly equivalent to a 40-hour week.⁴⁰

In 1978 the diminished Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters merged with the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks. Only 1,000 strong, the porters were engulfed by the 250,000-member group. The merger marked the end of a great organization.⁴¹

The BSCP and its auxiliaries left a proud tradition—a half century of unionism—that demonstrated to all black Americans what could be achieved through solidarity. Beyond specific work issues, the men and women of these two groups made major contributions to civil rights, social justice, and public affairs. In 1941, for example, Randolph organized a March on Washington against job discrimination in the defense industry and the military. St. Paul’s NAACP chapter appointed Frank Boyd chairman of its “On to Washington” advisory committee, and Carrie McWatt was named to the larger steering committee. In June, after much high-level negotiation, the march was postponed when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 forbidding discrimination by all defense employers and trade unions and setting up the Commission on Fair Employment Practices to investigate and act upon complaints. The next year Randolph received the NAACP’s coveted Spingarn Medal for his determined mobilization of mass opinion that had resulted in the executive order. Thus the BSCP leader’s legacy includes being the first black man to call the bluff of the president of the United States, winning fair employment for black workers during World War II. Years later, in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented Randolph the Medal of Freedom, the highest honor that can be given to civilians.⁴²

In Montgomery, Alabama, it was Pullman porter E. D. Nixon, president of the NAACP’s

³⁷ *Black Worker*, Aug. 1949, p. 4, Jan. 1952, p. 1.

³⁸ Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 299; *Black Worker*, Sept. 1959, p. 5, Oct. 1959, p. 1.

³⁹ Minneapolitans James E. Mosley, Rahn Workcuff, Wilson May, Calvin Jones, and Russell Waldon began working as conductors that same summer; *St. Paul Recorder*, July 13, 1967, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Elsewhere in the rail industry, waiters’ numbers had dropped from 20,000 to 8,000; *St. Paul Recorder*, Jan. 26, 1962, p. 1.

⁴¹ *St. Paul Recorder*, Mar. 23, 1978, p. 2.

⁴² Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 241–59; *St. Paul Recorder*, June 6, 1941, p. 1. Randolph died in New York City in 1987, aged 98.

local chapter, who organized the now-famous Montgomery bus boycott and challenged Martin Luther King Jr. to take up the cause. This was the clarion call for the years of civil-rights activism that followed. The BSCP donated money to the boycott effort.⁴³

In St. Paul, BSCP and Ladies Auxiliary members were equally active in public affairs. In 1944, for example, the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party named the indefatigable Frank Boyd to be one of Minnesota's 11 presidential electors. The first African American in the state's history to cast such a ballot, he was also one of the first two black electors in the history of the Democratic Party. In January 1945 he traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration.⁴⁴

Allie Mae Hampton, auxiliary member and president from 1947 to 1955, was also active in the Democratic Party. In the early 1950s she joined the Young Democrats of Minnesota and went on to become a member of the DFL central committee. In 1955 she became the first female member of St. Paul's newly created Fair Employment Practices Commission. She retired from that unpaid position in 1961 after winning election as president of the St. Paul branch of the NAACP. By the mid-1970s she was executive director of the Ramsey County Opportunities Industrialization Center, a job-training program. Hampton also served as a national board member of Women in Community Service and the National Council of Negro Women, as well as the St. Paul United Way.⁴⁵

Similarly, Boyd's many activities in addition to labor organizing personify the commitment to social equality that was a hallmark of the BSCP. Also a member of the St. Paul board of the NAACP and the Urban League, he worked hard at nuts-and-bolts organizing on the local front but never lost sight of national issues and goals. A lynching in Kansas City, a march on Washington, D.C., and bigotry in St. Paul all had his attention. It is said that at a large public meeting Boyd shamed and discredited Ku Klux Klan organizers so that they soon left St. Paul.⁴⁶

In December 1951, at a testimonial banquet, Boyd heard his hero and mentor, A. Philip

CAREERS "ON THE ROAD"

■ In 1947, William "Race Horse" Taylor, one of the early Pullman porters, brushed down his last passenger. During his 29 years with the company he served hundreds, including Eleanor Roosevelt, President Warren G. Harding, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson. Born in Centerville, Indiana, in 1878, Taylor was known as a horse trainer and horse fancier. He participated in many northern county fairs and raced his trotter, Singlewood, at the Minnesota State Fair during the 1930s.¹

■ On March 1, 1954, William W. Wimberly retired after 48 years as a Pullman porter. This Spanish-American War veteran served in the armed forces until his honorable discharge in 1904. He worked for the Great Northern Railroad as a train porter in 1905 before being hired by the Pullman company the following year.²

■ Wade Hamilton estimated that during his almost 42 years as a Pullman porter, he traveled more than 7,000 miles a month—a total of 3,500,000 miles, equivalent to 141 trips around the earth. Hamilton started at the Pullman company in 1920, working on the Northern Pacific, Rock Island, and Burlington routes and traveling as far as Los Angeles, Houston, and New York. When he retired in the summer of 1961, he was a porter-conductor on the Great Northern line from St. Paul to Great Falls, Montana. One incident he recalled upon retirement was serving Lou Henry Hoover, the president's wife, who requested that her bed be made up so that her feet pointed toward the engine, which was counter to the usual practice.³

■ In 1967, when the Pullman company finally lost its monopoly and the job of conductor was opened to African Americans, Clarence Duke decided that 30 years on the road had been enough. Although he had run in charge, doing his own work and that of conductor, the 66-year-old Duke chose to retire. He had made runs in every continental state except Maine.⁴

¹ *St. Paul Recorder*, July 11, 1947, p. 1.

² *Black Worker*, Mar. 1954, p. 6.

³ *Black Worker*, June 1961, p. 6.

⁴ Clarence Duke, interview by author, St. Paul, Dec. 15, 1993.

⁴³ Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 53.

⁴⁴ *St. Paul Recorder*, May 11, 1962, p. 4; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 14, 1945, 2d sec., p. 1.

⁴⁵ Earl Spangler, *The Negro in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: T.S. Denison and Co., 1961), 152, 154; *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, May 17, 1986, p. 4B. When Hampton's term as president of the BSCP auxiliary ended in 1955, the group appears to have disbanded.

⁴⁶ Reginald Harris, interviews by author, St. Paul, May 1, 1976, Sept. 7, 1987; *St. Paul Recorder*, May 11, 1962, p. 4; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 30, 1976, p. 25.



A. Philip Randolph praising Frank Boyd, seated at table at his testimonial dinner, 1951

Randolph, praise him as a “black revolutionist” who would go down in history in the company of Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. Toastmaster A. J. Leverette, president of the Twin Cities Division of the BSCP, and a host of luminaries watched as Randolph gave Boyd a check for \$2,000 “with a deepest feeling of humility and as a small token of appreciation for the work you have done for the Brotherhood.” Milton Webster, Randolph’s first vice-president, praised Boyd as a rare combination of worker and intellectual. He recalled that Boyd had impressed him during the early days because he was always reading a book. After seeing the skillful way he organized Local #3,

Webster soon “realized why he had been reading those books.”⁴⁷

In January 1952 the *Black Worker*, the BSCP’s newspaper published in New York, printed a special tribute to Boyd titled “Hail to the Black Labor Prophet.” The lengthy editorial noted that he had “labored long and hard” for the union without compensation, spending 25 years as a “scourge to the timid, vacillating, weak porter and a terror to the stool-pigeons or those who would betray their brothers for a mess of pottage.”⁴⁸

In 1959 illness caused Boyd to move to Los Angeles to live with his son, Arthur. Until that time, the 78-year-old had continued to represent St. Paul on the BSCP’s international executive board. On May 2, 1962, St. Paul’s greatest black labor leader died in California after serving for more than three decades as both an organizer and negotiator for better working conditions for sleeping car porters. The gains he helped secure had been more successful than any others in stabilizing and improving employment conditions, thereby helping create a black middle class in St. Paul.⁴⁹ Many porters were able to send their children to college, thus contributing to the BSCP’s national reputation for turning out more college graduates than any other black occupational group. Many of these graduates went on to form the backbone of NAACP chapters and later become black legislators who provided national leadership.

On May 1, 1976, labor-oriented black citizens of St. Paul, led by Reginald Harris, former member of Firefighters Local #21, dedicated Boyd Park on Selby Avenue at Virginia Street. As part of the day-long festival in his honor, the community unveiled a plaque that reads, “Frank Boyd, 1881–1962. A Fighter for his Union, his People, his Class.” Joined about a dozen years later by a bust of Boyd, the two memorials were more prominently placed in the park’s 1995 renovation into a neighborhood playground and gathering place. The site is a fitting tribute to the man who had carried out his mandate with a lifetime of courage, dedication, and sacrifice.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *St. Paul Recorder*, Dec. 14, 1951, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *Black Worker*, Jan. 1952, p. 1–3.

⁴⁹ Boyd’s body was returned to St. Paul. He was committed to his grave in Elmhurst Cemetery by Rev. Dr. Floyd Massey Jr. of Pilgrim Baptist Church; *St. Paul Recorder*, May 11, 1962, p. 4; *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 8, 1962, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 30, 1976, p. 25, May 15, 1987, p. C4E.

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