



MHS COLLECTIONS

COOL CAR. COOL CHARACTER. This 1918 photo calls to the kid in all of us. “Cool” means even more when you learn about the car’s driver, Frederick Jones, a black genius from Hallock in Minnesota’s Red River Valley.

The picture seems to be idling, ready to shift into gear. You can almost smell the oily exhaust and hear the rumble of the primitive engine. Dominating the composition is Jones’s racing coupe, named Number 15 for the year it was built. You don’t need to be a NASCAR nut to appreciate this image, just someone who enjoys wind in your face and a great story of achieving despite the odds.

Strangely, my eye is drawn to the man in the background, perhaps because I’m looking through the lens of the black experience. Is he one of Fred’s many friends and fans in the Red River Valley, or does his withdrawn posture suggest that he’s one of the small-minded folk who objected to Jones’s participation in local races? This mystery only adds to the picture’s narrative.

But Fred’s face quickly draws me back. Check out

the goggles and the confident grin. The speedster would go on to become an engineer-inventor and cofounder in 1938 of Thermo King Corporation. Jones would hold many patents, including ones for practical refrigerated transportation. His discoveries opened the door to the modern-day supermarket and brought blood plasma and fresh food to troops during World War II.

So, “cool” seems like the right word for this photo and its subject. Whether he was inventing things that would change the world or souping up his racer to delight his Hallock neighbors, mastering machines to make things better brought a smile to Fred Jones’s face. I hope looking at this photo brings one to yours!

—DANIEL BERGIN

Daniel Bergin is an award-winning filmmaker and a producer at Twin Cities Public Television. Fred Jones is among the characters in his new documentary, North Star: Minnesota’s Black Pioneers (www.tpt.org/northstar).

ST. PAUL ARCHITECT Cass Gilbert crowned his classical design for the Minnesota State Capitol with a white marble dome based on Michelangelo's Basilica of St. Peter in Rome. The jewel at the base of that dome is a golden personification of the state as a larger-than-life figure in a four-horse chariot, or quadriga, guided by two women. Constructed of gilded sheet copper to the designs of the era's preeminent American sculptor, the Quadriga's allegorical role may be vague, but its place in the aesthetics of the capitol and in the hearts of Minnesotans is clear.

Gilbert chose Daniel Chester French and animal-sculpture specialist Edward C. Potter for the commission. They had created a similar grouping for the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. The version French proposed to Gilbert would be distinguished by a heroic male figure: "I think that it should represent 'Minnesota,' if you think that a male figure can personify a state." The work took some three years from the date of the \$35,000 contract until it was installed in 1906; gilding by a St. Paul firm added \$1,684 to its cost.

The Quadriga, like the capitol itself, has been criticized for fiscal and symbolic extravagance. One early commentator derided "them Roman bronchos" [*sic*] as both costly and irrelevant to an American statehouse. Yet Minnesotans have had lasting admiration for the work. During a century of exposure to Minnesota weather, the Quadriga has been repaired, re-gilded, and in 1994, fully restored.

—THOMAS O'SULLIVAN

Thomas O'Sullivan, a writer and curator based in St. Paul, served as curator of the MHS art collection from 1980 to 1999. He is the author of North Star Statehouse: An Armchair Guide to the Minnesota State Capitol (1994).

Sources: Julie C. Gauthier, *The Minnesota Capitol: Official Guide and History* (St. Paul: Pioneer Company, 1907), 11–12; Thomas O'Sullivan, *North Star Statehouse: An Armchair Guide to the Minnesota State Capitol* (St. Paul: Pogo Press, 1994), 12–13, 57–62; Cass Gilbert Papers and Board of State Capitol Commissioners Papers, MHS.



BOTH PHOTOS: MHS COLLECTIONS

Daniel C. French and Edward C. Potter, The Progress of the State



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