

Billy Williams was a popular amateur baseball player in Minnesota. He was also asked to join the Baltimore Orioles. Of course, they did not want him to play as an African American player. They wanted him to pass as an American Indian to avoid racist opposition. They assured Williams that it would be easy for him to impersonate an Indian because he was “light complexioned, has an aquiline nose, and straight hair.” But Billy Williams was extremely proud of his heritage, and he did not want to ignore the African American part of him.

While Billy loved baseball, he realized that it might not be in the cards. In 1904 Governor John Albert Johnson offered Williams a position as an assistant in the governor’s office.

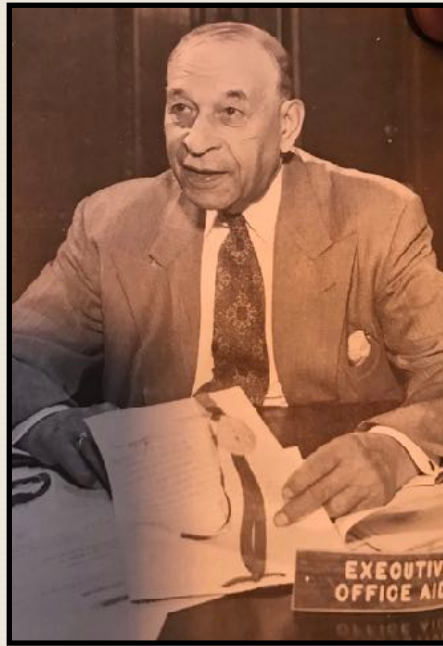
Billy finally decided to assist the governor. Billy was a great athlete, but he also wanted to do what is right. Williams was adept as an administrator, and based on his mother’s wish to take care of his family, Billy served 14 Minnesota governors for over 53 years.

Williams lasting legacy was made outside of the baseball diamond.

“I don’t want to take anything away from his baseball, because they said he was a great baseball player, but I think his influence at the State Capitol helped change things,” noted Frank M. White in the book *They Played for the Love of the Game*.



From right to left: “Billy” Williams, September 27, 1957 at his retirement celebration with Governors Orville L. Freeman (1955-1961); C. Elmer Anderson (1951-1955); Luther W. Youngdahl (1947-1951); Edward J. Thye (1943-1947); Elmer A. Benson (1937-1939); Hjalmer Peterson (1936-1937); and J.A.A. Burnquist (1915-1921).



In November 13, 1963 Billy Williams passed away following a long illness.

The flags on all Minnesota State buildings were flown at half-mast in his honor. He had retired in 1957 after a spending 52 years (1904-1957) as the executive aide to 14 consecutive governors.



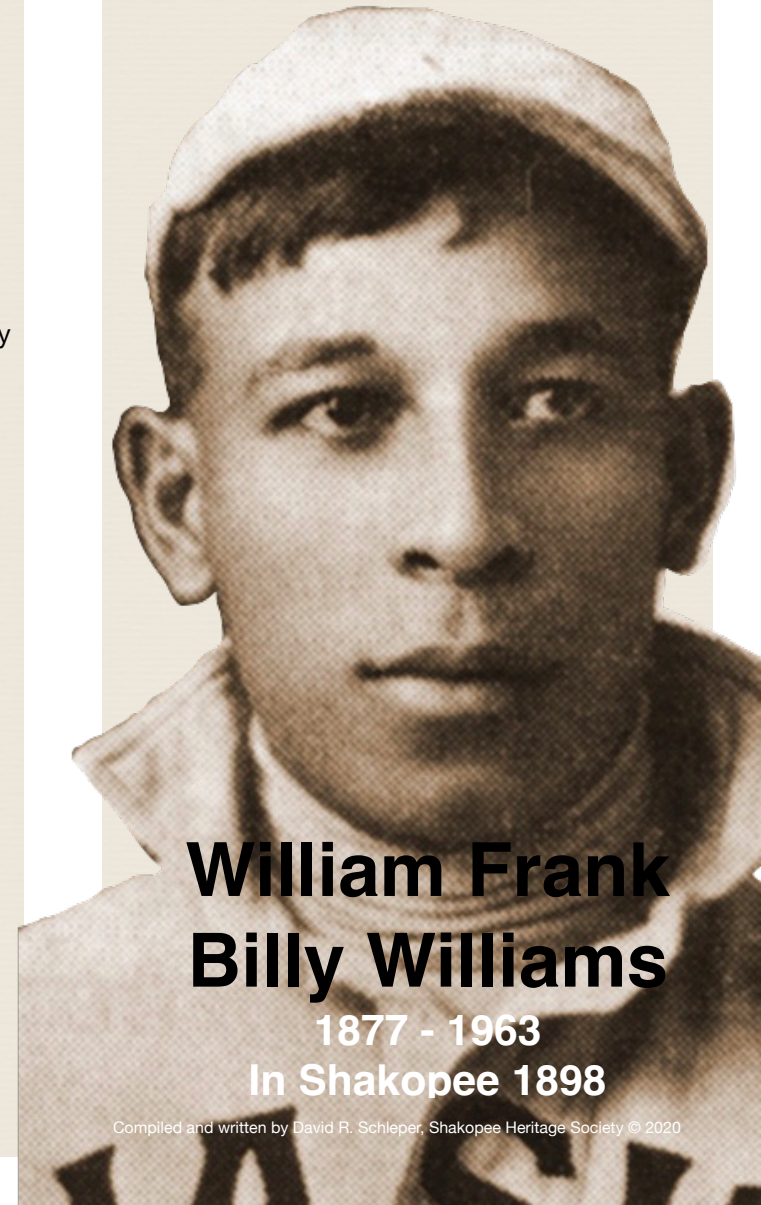
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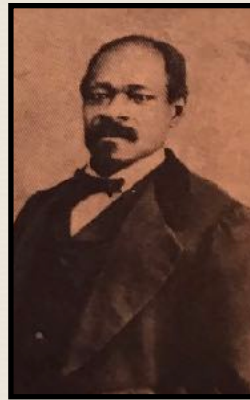


**William Frank  
Billy Williams**

1877 - 1963

In Shakopee 1898





On left is George Williams, of West Indian descent, who was Billy William's father. Barbara Smith Williams, who was German American, was Billy Williams mother. She is in the middle picture. To the right is William Frank "Billy" Williams. Pictures from Britts, Maurice W. (1977). *Billy Williams: Minnesota's Assistant Governor*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, p.10.

At the time, the African-American population of Minnesota was small. Only about 4,000 of Minnesota's nearly two million residents were African-American, and more than 90 percent of them lived in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

But African American baseball teams did play in Shakopee, including the St. Paul Colored Gophers and the St. Paul Quicksteps.

In 1887, the Shakopee Reserves played against the St. Paul Quicksteps, which was an African American team. "An announcement in the Western Appeal prior to the game on August 20 announced that the Quicksteps were to 'leave the Union Depot at 8:30, and all who wish to go are invited. Fare for round trip \$1.40.'" The Reserves won, 23-4.

One African American baseball player, William Frank Billy Williams, played on over 20 teams in the midwest, including the Chaska White Diamonds, the Knoblauch Lands Carver team, and the Shakopee Browns. He played with the Browns in 1898.

After his baseball play at the Shakopee Browns, he played at Carver and Chaska. In the May 2, 1907 *Chaska Herald*, the city's semiprofessional White Diamonds

baseball team, named after Chaska's White Diamond-brand flour, was ready to take the field. And it had a new standout player.

"The most notable addition is that of 'Billy' Williams, the great colored first sacker, who played such phenomenal ball at Carver the past two years," reported the *Herald*

Many celebrated baseball players have passed through the area over the decades. However, one of the greatest athletes to wear the Carver and Chaska jersey was William Frank "Billy" Williams according to Mark W. Olson in 2016.

Billy Williams loved playing baseball.



Knoblauch Lands Carver team with Billy Williams in the middle row, second from left.



William Frank Billy Williams loved sports. As a high school student he put in star performances in baseball, basketball, football and track and field.

But baseball was his favorite.

William Frank Billy Williams was born on October 24, 1877 in the shadow of the state capitol in St. Paul. His father was George Williams, of West Indian descent, who migrated from New York to St. Paul. He was a steward on a steamboat line that made frequent runs between St. Louis to St. Paul, where he met Barbara Smith Williams, whose parents were immigrants from Germany.

Mark W. Olson, in an article in the *Chaska Herald* in 2016, by the turn of the century, Williams' name was popping up in the daily newspapers as a standout Twin Cities baseball player