

Without the note in the book **Shakopee Minnesota Historical and Industrial, 1891** by William Hinds, people in Shakopee would probably not know about James Thompson being in the area.

The 1857 census listed James Thompson next to William Barnes in the Eagle Creek area. James and Marpiyawecasta's daughter, Sarah Thompson Barnes, who married William Barnes, and George Thompson were also noted. The half-breed scrip files had two documents signed and notarized in Scott County in 1857.

Though they all list these people as white, this was wrong except for William Barnes. One clinching fact is the identifying Thompson is the present of an eight-year-old boy, Charles St. Clair, in the James Thompson household. At the time of the 1855-1856 scrip registration, James Thompson filed an affidavit indicating that he has adopted Charles St. Clair. As St. Clair's guardian, Thompson would also been able to claim 400 acres of free land in his name, according to Walt Bachman in 2006.

The Scott County census for Shakopee in 1860, James Thompson was listed as living in Shakopee. Thompson was not defined as mulatto (as he was elsewhere). His wife, Marpiyawecasta, who was full-blooded Dakota, was not labeled this in the 1860s census. The two children, Sarah and George, were not listed as mulatto or Dakota. Instead, all four of them were listed as white.

But they were not.

Shakopee can proudly call James Thompson, a slave who used his skills and wits to procure his emancipation through an anti-slavery fundraising endeavor, a free man of color who was an interpreter with the Dakota in Kaposia. a humble

William Barnes	28	72	England	1	Farmer
Sarah Barnes	20	72	Minnesota		
Mary E. Barnes	2	72	"		
James Thompson	64	72	Hanksville		
Mary Ann Thompson	52	72	Minn.		
George A. Thompson	14	72	"		
Charles St. Clair	8	72	"		

man who helped build a church using his own two hands, was one of us!

There is no picture of James Thompson. Thomas M. Newson noted he "had a large, aquiline nose; a high forehead; a small, round eyes; a well-set mouth....Beside he was tall, slender, somewhat angular in his movements, and yet closely knit in his physical organization, showing that the proper care he might have lived at least ten years longer. His complexion was quite light, indicating Anglo Saxon blood, and his whole make-up clearly showed that he was away above the ordinary when a southern slave, and fully equal both to the white or the Indian when a free man. He had played an important part in the history of our city and state, and during the fifty-seven years that he had trod our soil, I find nothing to mar a well-earned and excellent reputation...."

In 1884, James and Marpiyawecasta moved to Nebraska to be closer to their son. Marpiyawecasta Mary Thompson died on October 11, 1884 at her son, George Thompson home at the Santee Reservation in Nebraska. Four days later, at the same place, James Thompson died on October 15, 1884.



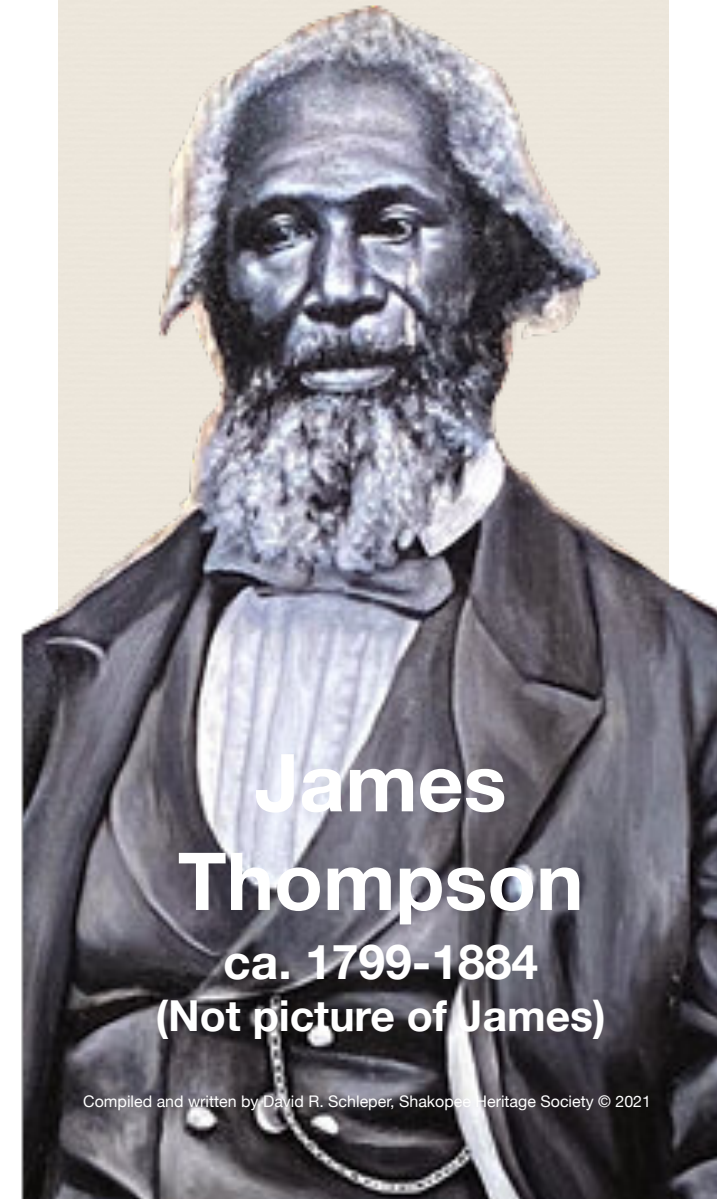
SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY
2109 Boulder Pointe, Shakopee, MN 55379

952-693-3865

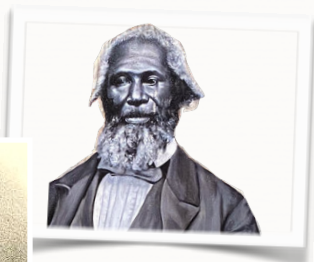
shakopeeheritage.org



SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY



James
Thompson
ca. 1799-1884
(Not picture of James)



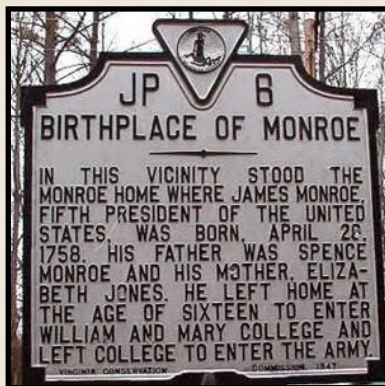
The book *They Chose Minnesota*, with a chapter on African Americans in Minnesota history, lists the numbers of African American in each county for different years. The list says there were zero African Americans or mulattos in Scott County in 1860.

But it was clear that there were African Americans in Shakopee. *A Sketch of Shakopee Minnesota Historical and Industrial, 1891* by William Hinds noted that “Ni**er Jim” built where Michael Berens’ store was.

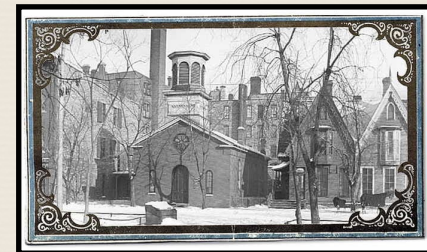
That Jim is James Thompson, one of the best-known African American residents of early Minnesota, who lived in Shakopee with his family from 1853 until 1860.

James Thompson was born ca. 1799 at the plantation of President James Monroe. James mother was African American, and his father was a white man, probably someone related to James Monroe.

Highland was a thriving plantation employing the labor of 30-40 enslaved man and women, including James Thompson. Quarters for field hands were at some distance from the main house, while the enslaved domestic people lived closer to their “master.”



Ash Lawn–Highland, located near Charlottesville, Virginia, and adjacent to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, was the estate of James Monroe, fifth President of the United States. Purchased in 1793, Monroe and his family permanently settled on the property in 1799 and lived at Ash Lawn–Highland for twenty-four years. Monroe had enslaved people working at the plantation, including James Thompson.



On New Year's Eve 1848, a group of 18 people formed the Market Street Methodist Episcopal Church. It was not only St. Paul's first Methodist church; it was also the city's first Protestant church. In 1849 the congregation celebrated the completion of their brick church building, built by James Thompson, which faced Rice Park.

James Monroe's nephew, George Monroe, owned James. George Monroe brought his young slave Thompson west from Virginia. George was a gambler, and upon reaching Kentucky, Monroe gave him to sutler John Culbertson in payment for his debts. In 1827, the enslaved James Thompson moved to Fort Snelling with sutler John Culbertson. A sutler is a person who followed an army and sold provisions to the soldiers. Culbertson then sold Thompson to William Day, an office with the First Infantry.

While he was enslaved, Thompson married Marpiyawecasta (later anglicized to Mary), the daughter of the Dakota leader Maḥpiya Wičašṭa and his wife, Caṅ Paduta Wiṅ of the Bde Maka Ska band who lived in the southern shore in Minneapolis in 1834. Jim Thompson learned the Dakota language from his wife.

James Thompson's value was not as an interpreter but as a diplomatic and symbolic gesture that bound the mission and the Dakota together. Methodist Reverend Alfred Brunson decided to have Thompson work as an interpreter to help teach the faith to Dakota in Minnesota country in 1837. Brunson purchased Thompson from Day in May 1837 for \$1200, and emancipated him. Thompson and Brunson traveled to Fort Snelling, and from there to Kaposia to begin their mission

The Indian village of Kaposia where Brunson established his mission sat on the west bank of the Mississippi, about ten miles below Fort Snelling, four miles below present-day St. Paul, in what now is South St. Paul (See picture below). With the erection of several log buildings that Thompson helped to construct—a mission house, schoolhouse, and store—the community was ready to begin its work.

By 1839, trouble happened in the mission. Two years after he had established it, Brunson left his post, and so did Jim Thompson. He and his family moved downriver to Pig's Eye in 1841. Jim Thompson was the community's first resident of African descent.

During this time Jim Thompson worked as a carpenter. A devout Methodist, James Thompson donated lands and supplies to build a church in downtown St. Paul in 1849. Jim cut the broad shingles from the cedar swamp below the Wabasha street bluff. Besides the shingles and his skilled labor, Jim also assembled a quantity of hand hewn oak timbers, and a town lot to help pay for the bricks.

