

Saint Paul's First Black Police Officers

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The following commentary on Saint Paul's first Black police officers is based primarily on newspaper articles and other documents available through the Minnesota History Center museum and library that serves as the headquarters of the Minnesota Historical Society. It is located near downtown Saint Paul; at 345 W. Kellogg Blvd. If you go, don't be surprised if you find Jeff and/or Ed there hard at work. Please note that the outdated racial labels of Colored and/or African-American used in the original published documents (below) have been changed by these writers to the more current and generally accepted term of Black. The police officers listed are done so in sequential order, by date of appointment. Source documents are noted in blue script.

TRIBUTE TO HON. EDMOND RICE. "...I remember that while mayor of this city in 1883, some of our Black citizens called upon him and asked for the appointment of a Black policeman. His answer was: 'I desire to give your race the same consideration as all others. Send me a man of your race, recommended by you, and I will appoint him.' They sent Mr. William Thomas [Louis W. Thomas]. He was the first Black citizen that held a position under the city government. ...Mr. I.W. Evans [Isaac Wesley Evens] superseded Mr. Thomas, Mr. Liverpool [Louis Liverpool] superseded Mr. Evans, Mr. Thos. Jefferson [Thomas 'Tom' Jefferson] superseded Mr. Liverpool..." Thomas H. Lyles, Editor. [The Appeal; July 20, 1889, Page 2]

THE INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS IN MINNESOTA: 1849-1910. "... Thomas H. Lyles moved to St. Paul and set up business [1874]... Lyles organized a literary society and became active in real estate and fraternal orders. He is believed to have been responsible for convincing the mayor to hire St. Paul's first Black police officer in 1881." [William Mitchell Law Review; 1991, Volume 17, Issue 2, Article 11, Page10] Thomas H. Lyles and James K. Hilyard went on to publish The Appeal, a newspaper for the Black community. – Steenberg

3.1.9 POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS. "It was during the late nineteenth century that the Saint Paul police and fire departments first hired Blacks to their staff. Instrumental in this was Thomas H. Lyles, the Saint Paul businessman. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, he persuaded Saint Paul's Mayor Edmund Rice to add Blacks to the staff of both the police and fire departments. The first Black policeman in Saint Paul was Louis or Lewis W. Thomas, who lived at 76 Old West Ninth and was hired as a patrolman in 1881. Another officer was James H. Burrell, a former Pullman Porter, who was hired in October of 1892 and served at the Rondo Sub-Station throughout his career." [Saint Paul African American Historic and Cultural Context, 1837 to 1975; May 2017, 106 Group Project No. 2206, Page 26]

Louis W. Thomas [PastPerfect File #4026]

DOB: Abt. 1843

Nativity: Portuguese

Address (1): 76 W. Ninth Street, St. Paul, MN

Address (2): 493 St. Peter Street, St. Paul, MN

Appointed Patrolman: June 23, 1881

Resigned: February 06, 1883

- TEN NEW POLICEMEN. "...Mayor Rice yesterday announced his appointment of ten additional men to the police force... Among the list is a Black man, Louis W. Thomas. In making this appointment Mayor Rice was guided by the consideration that in a city where the Black population is so large one of their own number could best cope with the peculiar social qualities of the race. Thomas is a Portuguese by birth, and served fifteen years in the United States navy, from which he was honorably discharged." [Daily Globe; June 24, 1881, Image 1]
- PATROLMEN. "...Louis W. Thomas; Date of Appointment, June 23, 1881." [Manual of the Police Force of the City of Saint Paul, February 01, 1882] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.
- CITY GLOBULES. "...Mayor Rice on yesterday [February 06, 1883] accepted the resignation of police officer Thomas, which was caused by his inability to meet his bills." [Daily Globe; February 07, 1883; Image 8] It seems that the mayor had put out an order for all officers to take care of their financial responsibilities. Louis W. Thomas and one other officer failed to do so and were forced to resign. – Steenberg
- The career of Louis W. Thomas in the Saint Paul Police Department is also documented in David Taylor's African Americans in Minnesota; Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002.

Isaac Wesley Evans [PastPerfect #6396]

Nativity: American

Address: 464 E. Seventh Street, St. Paul, MN

Appointed Patrolman: April 10, 1883

Resigned: July 11, 1883

- CITY GLOBLES. "...Mayor Rice has appointed Isaac Wesley Evans, a Black man, as roundsman on the regular force, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Roundsman John Sheehan." [Daily Globe; April 10, 1883, Page 8, Image 8]
- MISCELLANEOUS. "The mayor sent in a communication stating that he had appointed Isaac Wesley Evans a policeman in place of John Sheehan." [Daily Globe; April 18, 1883, Page 2, Image 2]

- PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMON COUNCIL. "...I have this day appointed Isaac Wesley Evans a policeman in place of John Sheehan, deceased..." Edmund Rice, Mayor, April 09, 1883. [Daily Globe; April 20, 1883, Page 6, Image 7]
- CITY GLOBULES. "...The committee on police of the city council met yesterday afternoon, and decided to recommend Isaac Wesley Evans, (Black) as a member of the police force..." [Daily Globe; May 03, 1883, Page 8, Image 11]
- CITY GLOBULES. "...Two policemen, J.W. Evans, Black, and Hiram Clingersmith, were yesterday requested to resign, or be dismissed from the service. The charge against them is neglect of duty, in leaving their beats an hour and a half at a time. Both men have complied with the request. The former was appointed on the force on the 10th of April last, and Clingersmith a year ago last May." [Daily Globe; July 12, 1883, Page 8, Image 9]
- CITY GLOBULES. "M. Capehart and J. Sullivan have been appointed to fill the vacancies occasioned by the resignations of Evans and Clingersmith." [Daily Globe; July 14, 1883, Page 8, Image 8]
- SAINT PAUL. "...The Appeal is in receipt of the Seattle (Wash.) Press of last Saturday [August 23, 1890] which contains a splendid portrait and sketch of Mr. I.W. Evans, formerly of St. Paul but who now has the distinction of being appointed on the police force of Seattle. He is assigned to duty as night turnkey at the jail." [The Appeal; August 30, 1890, Image 3]
- "Seattle's first Black police officer quit soon after being appointed in 1890." [Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project; Est. 2005]

Louis Liverpool [PastPerfect #1019]

DOB: Abt. 1845

Nativity: American

Appointed Patrolman: July 15, 1885

Resigned: June 14, 1886

Appointed Janitor: June 06, 1896; Central Station

Resigned: June 05, 1900

- GLOBULES. "Mayor Rice added Louis Liverpool (Black) to the list of new police appointments yesterday. Liverpool is well known around St. Paul and is said to be a good sensible hard-working man." [St. Paul Daily Globe; July 16, 1885, Page 2, Image 3]
- PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMON COUNCIL. "Also appointed on the 15th inst. Louis Liverpool..." [St. Paul Daily Globe; July 25, 1885, Page 5, Image 5]
- CITY NEWS. "...Louis Liverpool was appointed on the police force on Wednesday, and his appointment is one that fails to give satisfaction either to the members of the force to which he is appointed, or to the citizens that the mayor has attempted to give representation to." [Western Appeal; July 18, 1885, Image 5]

4] Louis Liverpool was known as a Black pugilist whose appointment wasn't well received in the Black community. – Steenberg

- LIVERPOOL LOST HIS JOB. "Liverpool arrived at the mayor's office at the appointed time with his resignation already written out. ...Later in the afternoon Mayor Rice appointed Thomas Jefferson, the well-known Black sporting man, to fill Liverpool's place." [St. Paul Daily Globe; June 15, 1886, Page 2, Image 2]
- SEE THE STARS FALL. "...Yesterday afternoon Liverpool was duly installed as janitor at the central station, and so pleased was he over his appointment that he celebrated the day by washing the windows during a driving rain storm." [St. Paul Daily Globe; June 07, 1896, Page 3, Image 4]
- SOME LOCAL POLITICS. "Mayor Smith was very busy in his office yesterday... The mayor received and accepted the resignation of Louis Liverpool, the Black janitor at the central police station..." [Saint Paul Globe; June 07, 1900, Page 4, Image 4]
- INDEX OF BIOGRAPHIES. "...Louis Liverpool" [History of the Police & Fire Departments of the Twin Cities; 1899] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.

Thomas "Tom" Jefferson [PastPerfect #6397]

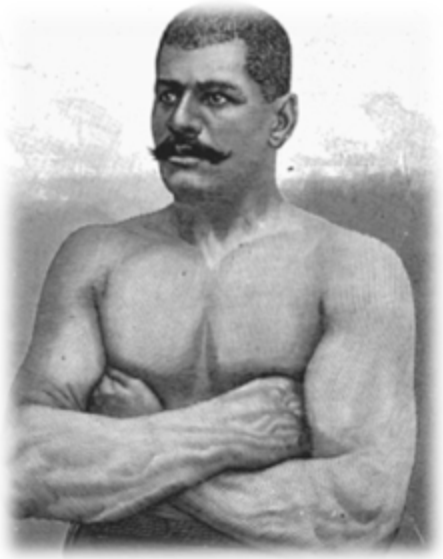
Nativity: American

Appointed Patrolman: June 14, 1886

Resigned: November 15, 1886

- LIVERPOOL LOST HIS JOB. "...Later in the afternoon Mayor Rice appointed Thomas Jefferson, the well-known Black sporting man, to fill Liverpool's place." [St. Paul Daily Globe; June 15, 1886, Page 2, Image 2]
- PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMON COUNCIL. "...I have this day appointed Patrick E. Hayes a member of the regular police force of St. Paul, to succeed Thomas Jefferson, resigned." Edmund Rice, Mayor, November 15, 1886. [St. Paul Daily Globe; November 20, 1886, Page 6, Image 6]





William "Billy" Wilson [PastPerfect #6398]

Nativity: American

Appointed Patrolman: January 02, 1888;

Central Station; Badge No. 72

Resigned: December 01, 1888

- GLOBULES. "Billy Wilson, the champion Black pugilist, yesterday received his appointment as patrolman on the police department. Wilson will have star '72' and will take a beat on Minnesota Street tonight." [St. Paul Daily Globe; January 03, 1888, Page 2, Image 2]
- WILLIAM WILSON WON. "Last Saturday the friends of 'Billy' Wilson were surprised to learn that he had resigned his position on the police force. He was a very efficient officer, and with his retirement the Black people of the city lost their only representative among the city's guardians." [Western Appeal; December 08, 1888, Image 3] It appears that William "Billy" Wilson followed the love of his life as she relocated to Duluth, Minnesota. – Steenberg
- GLOBULES. "Mayor Smith yesterday appointed Charles Mayer, formerly a park patrolman, on the police force... 'Billy' Wilson, resigned." [St. Paul Daily Globe; December 02, 1888]

James H. Burrell [PastPerfect #214]

DOB: Abt. 1864

Nativity: American; Monroe County, Alabama

Address: 443 Rondo Street

Appointed Patrolman: October 25, 1892;

Rondo Street Substation

Badge Nos. 82 & 83

Resigned: August 01, 1902



James H. Burrell

- MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS. "...The appointment by the mayor of Albert J. Zacher and James H. Burrell as patrolmen was concurred..." [St. Paul Daily Globe; October 28, 1892, Page 2, Image 2]
- THE POLICE OF ST. PAUL. "... Rondo street substation roster, corner Western avenue... (82) James H. Burrell" [St. Paul Daily

Globe; February 16, 1896, Page 19, Image 19] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.

- OFFICIAL ROSTER ST. PAUL POLICE DEPARTMENT, 1898. "...Rondo Street Substation... Patrolman J.H. Burrell" [Annual Report of the Police Department of the City of St. Paul; 1898] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.
- INDEX OF BIOGRAPHIES. "...James H. Burrell" [History of the Police & Fire Departments of the Twin Cities; 1899] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.
- BLACKS ON THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. "...On October 24, 1892, James H. Burrell, a former Pullman porter, was appointed to the St. Paul Police Department... As far as can be documented, Officer Burrell was the first Black officer on the police force." [Blacks in the St. Paul Police and Fire Department 1885 -1976; 1978, Chapter 2] – Saint Paul Police Historical Society Website.

For observations on Blacks hired by the Saint Paul Police Department beyond the aforementioned, please consider Blacks in the St. Paul Police and Fire Department 1885 -1976, by James S. "Jim" Griffin and published by E & J Inc. in 1978. James S. Griffin (Black) is a former Deputy Chief of Police of the Saint Paul Police Department and a partial reprint of his book, by permission of Griffin's widow, Mrs. Edna Smoot Griffin, is available on our Saint Paul Police Historical Society website.

It should be noted that in Deputy Chief Griffin's book, a footnote acknowledges Louis W. Thomas as "the first Black policeman," hired in June of 1881. Most of the Black police officers noted in this commentary were not documented in Griffin's scholarly work. At the time that Griffin was conducting his factual research the published documents we have noted were not readily available to him, and much of the information to be had was from existing city records or handed down orally over a period of years.

Copies of all of the aforementioned period newspapers can be viewed on film (microfiche reader) at the Minnesota History Center, or by downloading them from the nation's Library of Congress website, Chronicling America – Historic American Newspapers (1789-1963), at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.