

THE NEGRO IN GRAND RAPIDS

1840 - 1956

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Unknown to many citizens of Grand Rapids is the fact that the Negro has been a citizen in Grand Rapids for many years. According to the United States Census, the first two free colored citizens lived in Grand Rapids in 1840. Although their names were not listed by the Census, it was made clear that these two men were former slaves who had worked and purchased their freedom from their former masters. They came to Grand Rapids because they felt that their free status as citizens would be recognized and accepted here.

It is believed that the first substantial group of free Negroes was brought to Grand Rapids in 1860 by C.C. Comstock who employed them to work in his tub and pail factory which was across the street from his general store located on the corner of Canal and Sixth Streets. The Negroes lived in a group of houses called Comstock Row located on the West side of Canal Street between Coldbrook and No. 5 Engine House, located on corner of Canal (Monroe) and Leonard Streets.

From 1840, the Negro population grew very slowly in Grand Rapids, and did not accelerate in growth until the middle 1940's, the postwar era of World War II. The following statistics chart the growth of the Negro population: 9 in 1854; 48 in 1870; 292 in 1884; 720 in 1889; 681 in 1900; 665 in 1910; 1,000 9j 1920; 2,956 in 1930; 2,725 in 1940; 6,912 in 1950, 11,156 in 1956.

In July of 1963, during the War between the States, Governor Austin Blair was authorized by the Secretary of War to organize one regiment of infantry composed of colored men from Michigan. 1600 of the Michigan colored

population enlisted for service in the Civil War, 30 of whom were from Grand Rapids, namely:

Joseph Alexander, 18 yrs, Dec. 2, 1863, 1st Infantry

William H. Ash, 22 yrs, Jan. 2, 1865

Isaac Bailey, 36 yrs, Jan. 30, 1865

Charles A. Chinn, 19 yrs, Nov. 4, 1863

Amos Cisco, 38 yrs, Feb. 23, 1865

Aaron Davis, 19 yrs, Sept. 3, 1864

Charles Graves, 20 yrs, Jan. 27, 1865

Benjamin Guy, 27 yrs, August 31, 1864 Co. I

Elijah Guy, 24 yrs, Aug. 31, 1864 Co. I

James Hamilton, 28 yrs, Dec. 28, 1863 Co. H

Leonard Harrod, 43 yrs, Feb. 17, 1864 Co. G

David Ingham, 18 yrs, Sept. 1, 1864 Co. H

George W. Jefferson, 35 yrs, Feb. 29, 1864 Co. I

Charles Jones, 19 yrs, Oct. 3, 1864 Co. K

Samuel Lett, 26 yrs, Aug. 31, 1864 Co. G

Henry Letts, 19 yrs, Feb. 18, 1865 Co. D

John Manning, 27 yrs, Sept. 1, 1864 Co. K

Foster Morley, 20 yrs, Oct. 8, 1864 Co. C

William Overton, 32 yrs, Feb. 16, 1865 Co. E

Alvin Reed, 22 yrs, Jan. 30, 1865 Co. E

Elijah Reed, 19 yrs, Jan. 30, 1865 Co. F

Elisha Reed, 27 yrs, Jan. 30, 1865 Co. F

Jeremiah Reed, 28 yrs, Jan. 30, 1865 Co. E

Thomas Spriggins, 17 yrs, Aug. 25, 1864 Co. A

Amos Swanagan, 23 yrs, Jan. 24, 1865 Co. F

Jesse Taylor, 30 yrs, Jan. 5, 1865 Co. G

Shadrack Valentine, 32 yrs, Sept. 2, 1864

Andrew Washington, 19 yrs, Feb. 29, 1864 Co. I

_____ Burnham, 18 yrs, Apr. 13, 1865, 9th Infantry

Captain Robinson, 30 yrs, Apr. 4, 1865, 13th Infantry

In every community to which the Negro has migrated, the church has been an important factor in his development - this was also true in Grand Rapids.

The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was organized on June 15, 1874 by Rev. F.Y. Hall, presiding elder of Northern Michigan. The first Negro church to be organized in Grand Rapids - the church building was located on Spring Street near Bartlett, and its first local pastor was Reverend G.B. Pope who was called to preach in August, 1874. The first officers were George Bentley, C.A. Pinkney, and Mrs. Susan Johnson. Subsequent pastors were: G.B. Pope, 1874-75; J.C. Burton, 1875-76; L.D. Crosby, 1876-77; J.W. Harper, 1877-78; J.H. Alexander, 1878-79; J.P. Coates, 1879-1882; Cyrus Hill, 1882-83; J. Bass, 1883-84; G.W. Chavons, 1884-85; C.H. Thomas, 1885-87, and J.H. Alexander, 1887-91.

The church group rented an old building on the corner of Spring and Bartlett Streets. This building was partially destroyed by fire on September 12, 1882, causing loss of all of the church furniture. They then moved into a blacksmith shop owned by William Smith, on the corner of Ionia and Cherry Streets, but their pastor during his efficient ministry, had collected most of the materials for a new building which was erected under the direction of

his successor, the Reverend C. Hill. The remaining burdensome debt of \$1,600 was paid off by Reverend C.H. Thomas. The church became self-sustaining, raising annually about \$300 and owned property worth \$4,000 which included the pastor's residence built as an annex to the church. The adult membership was 61, and the Sunday School, 65. The church seated about 300. Officers elected in 1891 were: C.A. Pinkney, Richard Jacobs, John J. Johnson, John Coleman, and John Williams.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E.Z.) was organized in Grand Rapids on February 1, 1878, being the second oldest colored congregation here. It occupied a building on Fifth Avenue between Jefferson and Center Streets. There were twenty-three charter members, and the first pastor was Reverend Luke Miles. The first elected officers were: Trustees, James Phillips, Henry Pinkney, David Williams; Secretary, I.T. Logan; Treasurer, Susan Smith. In May, 1881, the congregation purchased a lot on Withey Street (Fifth Avenue) and built a small, plain church edifice which was dedicated on October 10, 1881 with their pastor, Reverend D. Butler, presiding. The church was built to seat 200 people and was valued at \$1,500. The congregation numbered about 70; 46 were communicants, and 34 were Sunday School scholars. From 1881 to 1888, the following served as pastors: Reverends Luke Miles, D. Butler, G.W. Solomon, H. M. Cephas, J. Green, and William H. Snowden. In 1888, Reverend J.V. Given was called as pastor and his trustees at that time were - Thomas Corbin, James McConnell, Andrew Sims, George Washington, Alexander Washington, and Henry Brown.

It is to be noted that the difference between A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion is not one of creed, but of government. The A.M.E. body elects its Bishops for life while the A.M.E. Zion elects its Bishops for four-year terms.

In 1887, the Bible Christians, an undemominational group, organized under the name, "The Bible Christians Associated in Christ," They presented the remarkable instance of a white congregation with an African minister who served without pay, laboring with his own hands for his livelihood. "Prospect of permance is not great."

Contrary to the opinion of many, the Negro has always taken pride in home ownership and in paying taxes. According to the Grand Rapids City Directory of 1880-1915, the following Negro citizens owned or were buying their homes: Joseph Adams, Arthur A. Allen, Clifford Allen, Charles Allen, John W. Allen, Sarah Allison, Mrs. Caroline Anderson (Gilbert St., S.E.), Ebenezer Ballard (Arthur St.N.E.), Luke Bannister, John Banks, Stanley L. Barnett (Sheldon St., S.E.), John A. Bell (James St., S.E.), Samuel Benjamin (Henry and Bax ter St., S.E.), James Bolden (Highland St., S.E.), Mrs. Mary Bowman (Logan St., S.E.), Mrs. Mary Boyd (Logan St., S.E.), Samuel Brice (Covell Rd), Nettie Brooks, Peter Brooks, Mrs. Emmaline Brown (Henry St., S.E.), Genece Brown, Robert Brown, Eugene Browning (Franklin St., S.E.), Theodore Burgess (Sherman St., S.E.), Colum Burton (James Ave., S.E.), William Candler, Thomas Carrol, Newton Carter (Baxter St., S.E.), William Carter, Thaddeus Coleman, Thomas Corbin (Mason St.,N.W.), Henry Daley (James Ave., S.E.), Mrs. Eva Day, Richard Delsey, Emory Ebbo (Thomas St., S.E.) William H. Edwards, Rufus Ellis, Watson Everett, Mrs. Susie Fields, George Finn, Joseph C. Ford, Mr. Gaines, James Garel, Charles Gass (Sherman St., S.E.), William Gilbert, George Glenn, John Glenn, Minnie Goggins, James Goins, Leo Goins, Robert Goins, Emmett Grant, Henry B. Grant, Fredrick Graves, Robert Graves, James Green, Minnie Green, Calvin Grayson, William Guest, Anna Hall, Mrs. James Hammond, Benjamin F. Hanson, Mary C. Hayes, Richard Herod Rufus R. Hiatt, John Huse, Rev. David Ingham, Thomas Jefferson, Hiram Johnson,

John Johnson, William Johnson, Emma Jones, Jessie Jones, Sandy Jones, John Keene, William H. Lacey, D.B. Lampkins, Eldred Lebb, John S. Lett, George Logan, Martha Mabin, Frank Majors, Henry Milton, Adelia Molsøn, William Moody, Artimessia Moore, David Moore, John Murray, Rufus Patterson, Albert Payne, Clinton Peak, Clarence Perkins, Enoch Pettiford, Samuel Pinkney, Basil E. Ray, William Ricks, Edward Robinson, Mrs. J. Robinson, Mr. Sarreals, Chauncey Sherman, Thomas Sleet, Edwin Smith, George M. Smith, George F. Smith, Henry Smith, Ned Smith, Phillips Smith, William Smith, John Stevens, Stewart Green, Thomas Telesia, James E. Tyler, Vincent Duncan, Frank Warren, Bertha Weaver, William Western, Susie White, Benjamin Williams, Joseph Williams, John Wilson, Richard Wilson, Walter Winburn, David Woods, Guy Woodfall, and Thomas Wright.

The Evening Press, in an article dated October 17, 1902, stated that at least 60 families were paying taxes on \$100,000 worth of property.

The Grand Rapids City Directory of 1868 contains a complete list of colored residents giving their occupation and place of bread and board.

Dan Scott owned a barber shop in Bronwon House, located on the Northwest corner of Monroe and Crescent Streets; he employed three barbers who served as musicians and entertainers when not serving customers; resided on corner of Jefferson and Fremont Streets.

Jerry Bell operated a barber shop on Monroe Avenue opposite the Steketee store. Bell's mother was an Ocult Scientist in 1870 and was consulted by many as to their fates; took board on Fulton Street.

J.C. Craig ran a fine barber shop which was first located on Monroe Avenue, then moved to a site which is now the old Hermitage Garage. In 1883, was the first barber shop to be equipped with electricity and other modern apparatus. Craig acquired the foundation of a fortune by operating

bootblack stands in Washington D.C. during the Civil War and was reported to be worth \$60,000 when he came to Grand Rapids in 1868. His daughter, Mrs. Myrtle Craig Lasha, still resides in the old homestead, 649 Jackson Street, N.W.

J. Highwarden, barber, occupied a part of the ground floor of Rathbun House. Highwarden, a very dignified and well dressed man, claimed to be an offspring of a Spanish mother and father in spite of his very dark skin and curly hair. In addition to barbering, he decided to engage in medicine for which he was not qualified. After operating on a man from Muskegon, he was jailed for operating without a license; resided on Broadway between 2nd and 3rd Streets.

Samuel Brown, laborer, residence on LaGrave Avenue between Wealthy and Wenham.

John Gordon, porter at Gordan and Walker Barber Shop, boards at National Hotel.

John Lyons, porter at Rathbun House; boards at same.

James Phillips, barber, in shop at 61 Monroe Avenue; resides at 13 LaGrave Avenue.

Henry Pinkney, boards at 14 Barclay.

Alexander Roberts, barber, boards at LaGrave between Wealthy and Wenham.

Andrew Washington, laborer, resides on LaGrave between Island and Oakes Streets.

George Washington, barber, S.A. Douglas Shop.

James Water, barber, S.A. Douglas Shop; resides on corner of Jefferson and Tremont Streets. (S.A. Douglas is railroad ticket agent at Rathbun House and owner of the S.A. Douglas Barber Shop).

"Although it may appear that between the years 1868--1900, the majority of the early colored settlers seemed to be engaged either as barbers or laborers, we do find some diversity --

Politics

Joseph J. Adams (Jack) 1894, Republican, first colored to be nominated for a place on a city ticket, running for supervisor or "Poor Director."

Joseph C. Ford, 1899, known popularly as "Senator Joe," a wizard in Western Michigan politics. Employed in the cloakroom of the State Senate in Lansing.

Theater

Earl Bass, 1890, born in Grand Rapids, college graduate, travelling actor.

Culinary

James Towse, 1898, chief cook at Sweet's Hotel, active in Masonry and well known among Grand Rapids colored community.

Law

Alexander Hamilton, 1894. Former slave who gained freedom and came to Grand Rapids. Was educated in law by L.V. Norris; practice confined to Justice Court and divorce cases.

Business

Joseph J. Adams, 1890. Resided at 233 Williams Street; a native of South Carolina, but lived in Michigan for 44 years. A contracting mason successful in business, accumulated a fortune of comfortable size, lives in a pretty, commodious and well appointed residence with wife and three children. Takes active part in civic affairs, a member of several secret societies, and an all-around public spirited citizen.

Music Teacher

Eugene Hardy, 1895, a native of Michigan and a University graduate. Professor of music and taught private lessons for many years in Grand Rapids.

Around the turn of the century, we find the Negro citizen beginning to register public protest with reference to denial of equal rights based on color. According to an article in the Evening Press dated September 14, 1896, Negroes began protesting the fact that there were no colored policemen on the police force and Negroes were threatening to use their 300 registered votes to oust public officials because of the rejections by the Police Board.

The colored Knights Templar of Michigan and Ontario and the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons convened in Grand Rapids on September 23, 1899. The conclave ended with a parade and mass rally. The main address at the rally condemned the outrages against the Negro in the South and also his treatment in Grand Rapids. One of the great debates at the conclave was between two Grand Rapids representatives, Reverend Robert Gillard of Messiah Baptist Church and Professor Willis N. Pinkney, having divergent views with reference to the modern cakewalk. The first depllores; the second defends it.

On October 17, 1902, the Evening Press carried an editorial concerning the protest to staff new Diamond Avenue fire station with Negro firemen.

In 1903, when the Wesleyan General Conference met in Grand Rapids, it was accused of drawing the color line by refusing to admit Negroes to meetings. "Fountain of Colored" society organized; founded by Grand Deputy Bowen, headquarters in rooms of colored Masons. Objective - to benefit Negro rights.

In 1904, the Grand Rapids League of Independent Colored Citizens was formed, its objective was to uplift the colored race through the ballot. Its officers were, President, William Lee; Vice President, J.T. Adams, Secretary, A.D. Rideout. These early protest movements appeared to have some

immediate effect for according to the Evening Press, in an article of October 1, 1903, Enoch Pettiford, a well known and highly respected member of the Negro community, received an appointment in the superintendent's office in the depot building section of the Pere Marquette Railroad. However, rebuffs to the Negro continue to appear. On November 17, 1908, Circuit Court Judge Willis B. Perkins, ordered the Grand Rapids Veterinary College to enroll two Negro students, declaring that the college cannot draw the color line. Consequently, four days later, the members of the Junior Class of the college go out on strike, refusing to study with two Negro classmen. On November 29, the Circuit order had been appealed by the college to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, the Negroes were out and the white students were back in school.

Stanley Barnett and his partner, a Mr. Weekly, applied for a saloon license at 63 Kent Street in 1904. A delegation representing the Canal Street Improvement Association protest the granting of permission to open establishment at Lyon and Kent Streets. The action was deferred.

Cultural clubs are beginning to be organized in Grand Rapids to offer cultural outlets to its Negro citizens. The earliest was the Nineteenth Century Club of Colored Women which was formed in 1896. However, the only club to survive and still in existence is the Grand Rapids Study Class which was founded in 1904.

C.L. Stevenson, the first Negro letter carrier in the history of the city, began work on November 15, 1906. This was looked upon as one of the positive effects of the growing Negro protest movement.

The first open racial clash between the races occurred on July 8, 1912 in a riot between Negroes and Syrians; as a result, Booker T. Washington was invited to speak on October 7, 1912 in an effort to bring about better understanding between the races.

Racial intermarriage has often been frowned upon. However, on December 8, 1890, James H. Hurst, 53, white Englishman was granted a license to marry Angeline Johnson, Negro. This was the first mixed marriage license issued. On January 22, 1913, County Clerk Mosher refused to issue a license for a marriage between a Negro and a white woman. County Clerk Mosher explained to the petitioner that local Negro citizens took a dim view of the matter and that mixed marriages were often unsuccessful.

Reverend Henri Browne, pastor of Messiah Baptist Church, upholds the action of County Clerk Mosher in the refusal to grant a license for an interracial marriage. In an article published in the Evening Press of April 7, 1913, entitled "The Negroes of Grand Rapids," Reverend Browne spoke against mixed marriages, declaring that they were not beneficial to either race. Reverend Browne also stated that there were too many Negro churches in Grand Rapids. He felt that the five existing churches should be consolidated into two churches for more efficient operation. He also spoke on the social conditions of the Negro citizen, stating that housing and jobs were the two most serious problems. With reference to housing, he said that it was difficult to get a suitable house to rent. Landlords wanted first-class price for old ramshackle buildings. Difficult housing accounted for slow growth of Negro population. Rental refusal might be viewed as a blessing in disguise because it compelled many to buy homes. On three occasions, certain tracts of the city were opened. Still, handbills were distributed and thrown at the door of Negroes, handbills reading, "Negroes not wanted."

According to Reverend Browne in the same article, Negroes were denied lucrative jobs. They must work for small pay either as railroad porters or hotel waiters. But in spite of all this, Negroes were thrifty and accumulated property.

The Evening Press of May 5, 1913, carries an article on Reverend Henri Browne of Messiah Baptist Church with reference to the refusal of a Monroe Avenue shoe store to sell him a pair of shoes during a conference of ministers. He declared that it was time Negroes started making a fight for their rights which were in serious danger.

The first known Negro professional man to come to Grand Rapids was Dr. Eugene Browning, M.D., arriving here in 1905; he practiced medicine for many years.

George M. Smith, a printer who came to Grand Rapids in 1912, was the first skilled tradesman in Grand Rapids. In 1912, he was employed by the Etheridge Printing Company, and in 1915 was promoted to superintendent - first and only Negro to serve in such a capacity. He was active in civic affairs having served as one of the organizers of the local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. which was founded in 1915. He published the first Negro-owned newspaper, The Michigan State News, in 1917.

Daniel Lampkins came to Grand Rapids in 1905 and was the first outstanding Negro to participate formally in local and State politics. He was a registered Republican, served on the State Central Republican Committee in 1918; worked closely with the late Senator Arthur Vandenberg during Vandenberg's early political activity. He ran for the City Commission in 1918 and in the same year, went to France to represent the Y.M.C.A. He was the first Negro to serve as Document Clerk at the State House in Lansing, taking office in 1930. In 1955 he served as Sergeant-At-Arms for the House of Representatives in Lansing.

Stanley L. Barnett came to Grand Rapids in 1908 as headwaiter in one of the local hotels. He soon became one of the leading political and business leaders of the Negro community; was long active in Democratic politics

beginning in 1913. He established a hotel and cocktail lounge, was one of the organizers of the Citizens Voters League, and the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P.; filed first civil rights suit in courts of Grand Rapids against Greek owners of ice cream parlor for refusing service to two Negro youth. His opinions were highly regarded by civic, political, and government officials.

James Green came to Grand Rapids in 1905 from Sand Lake. In 1909, he began work as a laborer for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. Through study and hard work, he was elevated to the position of Stationary Engineer with the railroad, and for the past 55 years, has been the first and only Negro to serve in that capacity.

Milo M. Brown came to Grand Rapids in 1914. After working as a waiter in local hotels for several years, he established in 1926, the Brown Funeral Home thereby becoming the first and only Negro funeral director. He has been very active in civic affairs, serving as co-founder of the Progressive Voters League in 1928, and served on the original Board of Directors of the Brough Community Association, later Grand Rapids Urban League and Brough Community Association, organized in 1943; served as president of the board in 1954.

Miss Hattie Beverly was the first Negro school teacher (Henry School), having first taught in 1913 when there were 104 Negro students in the grade schools and 4 in high school.

Dr. Emmett Bolden, born and raised in Grand Rapids, was the first Negro dentist, opening his office on Monroe Avenue in 1920.

Walter W. Coe came to Grand Rapids in 1921 as a professional baseball player. He joined the local police force in 1922 and served with distinction for thirty-five years. In 1950, he was promoted to Captain of Detectives becoming one of the first, if not the first such appointment for a Negro in the entire country. He was active in community affairs receiving the

National Urban League award for outstanding achievement in 1947; served as president of the Superior Officers Club, Grand Rapids Police Department, and was Commander of the Crispus Attucks Post, American Legion.

Saint Philip's Episcopal Church, the first colored Episcopal Church in Western Michigan was dedicated on July 24, 1918.

Colonel Roscoe Conklin Simmons, an outstanding National Negro leader, spoke to the Grand Rapids Emancipation Society at its celebration held on August 5, 1919. He exhorted the Negro to fight harder for his rights in Grand Rapids. On October 27 of the same year, a Negro minister attending a Congregational National Conference in Grand Rapids, was expelled from a downtown hotel cafeteria. The entire Conference indignantly passed a resolution demanding equal rights for Negroes.

According to the Grand Rapids Press of June 5, 1926, the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board was notified that the Supreme Court holds valid the law to restrict Negro real estate sales. However, on September 4, 1929, one Joseph Nassar and thirty-two of his neighbors protest the occupancy by Negroes of a house on Ionia Avenue and Grant Streets. The city informed them that there was nothing it could do about it legally.

Eugene Kinckle Jones, secretary of the National Urban League, addressed the Welfare Union on September 23, 1927. He stressed the need for Negro social workers in the city so that Negroes can assist themselves in self-expression.

Dr. Cortez A. English, dentist, came to Grand Rapids in 1926, and in 1927 was the first Negro dentist to become a member of the Western Michigan Dental Society. He has been active as a board member of the N.A.A.C.P. since 1928.

Floyd H. Skinner, attorney-at-law, came to Grand Rapids in 1927.

An outstanding trial and criminal lawyer, he was the first Negro lawyer to become a member of the Grand Rapids Bar Association. He was a conscientious fighter for civil rights; served as president of the local N.A.A.C.P. for ten years; co-founder of the Progressive Voters League, and in 1928, won a court judgement against segregation in the Keith theater. This action paved the way for knocking down racial barriers in places of public accomodation such as rest urants, bars, nightclubs, etc. Early in 1930, he was instrumental in placing the first Negro in a white collar position in the city hall. In 1940, he was appointed an Assistant State Attorney General in the department of taxes and taxation and rendered several important legal opiniens in this field.

Reverend Albert C. Keith came to Grand Rapids in 1933 as pastor of Messiah Baptist Church. He was a member of the original board of the local Urban League and Brough Community Association (1943), and served as its first Secretary-Treasurer. In 1947, he was elected as president of the Grand Rapids Ministerial Association, making him the first Negro locally and nationally, to serve in this capacity for an interracial ministerial association.

Dr. Robert W. Claytor, physician, came to Grand Rapids in 1936; has been active in community affairs, serving as an original board member of the local Urban League and its first Negro president in 1947. In 1937, he was the first Negro physician to serve on the staffs of St. Mary's and Butterworth hospitals; first Negro to serve as a member of the local Community Chest board, elected in 1944, served for ten years.

In 1943, Brough Community Association (Grand Rapids Urban League and Brough Community Association) was founded by Lewis Bliss Whittimore, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan. The Urban League is a national

intercultural and interracial organization having as its purpose the elimination of all forms of discrimination based solely on race, color, or creed. There were many outstanding Negroes serving on the original board of the Association. The original board which included both Negro and white citizens is as follows: Mrs. Katherine Geiser, Mrs. Roy Dennis, Mrs. W.K. Williams, *Milo M. Brown, *H.H. Brown, * J.E. Jones, *Miss Eleanor Joiner, *Mrs. S.E. Simmons, Mrs. Lee Wilson Hutchins, *Edmond P. Hinch, Rabbi Jerome D. Folkman, Mrs. Paul Jones, *Mrs. Lovell Ming, Robert C. Heaney, Mrs. Allan P. Marzolf, *Mrs. W.R. Simmons, *Mrs. Scott Huso, *Dr. Robert Redd, *Rev. H. E. Shepard, *Mrs. C. Outley, *Drue Cobb, Bishop Lewis B. Whittemore, *Rev. W.H. Jones, Henry J. Van Wolvlear, *Rev. Albert C. Keith, Fred Pullen, *Edward Shields, *Rev. H.C. Toliver, Benjamin Buikema, *Dr. Robert W. Claytor, *Rev. W.M. Pasco.

Helen Wilkins Claytor came to Grand Rapids in 1944 from New York where she was serving as a staff member of the National Y.W.C.A. In 1949, she was elected as president of the Grand Rapids Y.W.C.A. becoming the first Negro to hold this office either locally or in the nation. She served as the Negro representative on the Study Committee which recommended the establishment of a local Human Relations Committee. In 1950, she was elected president of the Community Health Board, also a first.

Paul Phillips came to Grand Rapids in 1947 as Executive Secretary for the Grand Rapids Urban League. In 1951, he won election to the Grand Rapids Charter Commission, an at-large election which made him the first Negro to be elected to a public office. In 1953, he was selected by the United States State Department to tour Europe on an intercultural goodwill tour.

*Denotes Negro members of board

Dr. Julius Franks, dentist, came to Grand Rapids in 1951 from the University of Michigan where he was an all-American football player. He was the first Negro to become a member of the Grand Rapids Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the first Negro dentist to become a member of the Kent County Dental Society.

John T. Letts, came to Grand Rapids in 1954; he was the first Negro member of the staff of the local parole office. In 1955 he was selected to serve as an Assistant Kent County Prosecutor, a first in this office.

The City Commission by City Ordinance created in April 1955, the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission. This is an arm of city government, its purpose to help foster better human relations between and among all citizens of this community.