

Daniel M. Storer, a builder and merchant in Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory, wrote in his journal on May 9, 1854, "A black man by the name of Griffin commenced work for me the 9th."

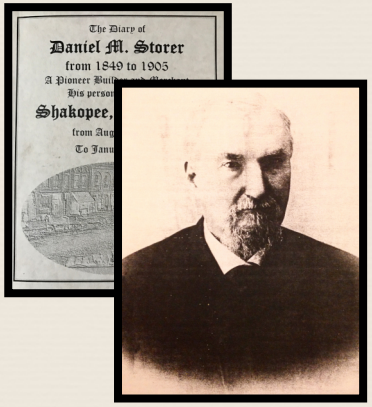
James Griffin was born an enslaved person in Prince George's County, Maryland around 1824. His master did not want to be in the U.S. Navy, so instead, he forced James, who was enslaved, to serve in his place.

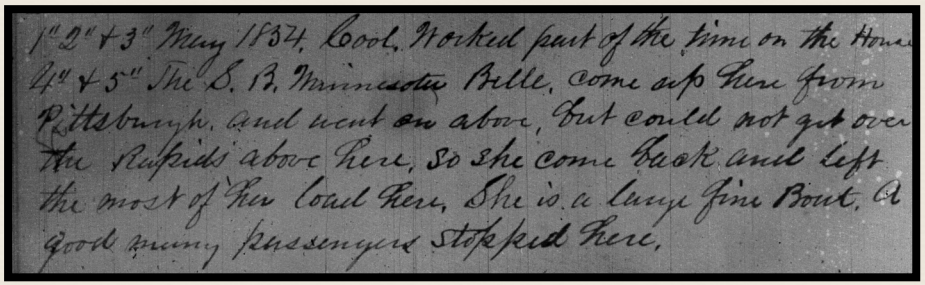
So, James was forced into the Navy for five years. While in the Navy, he learned the carpenter's trade.

In 1849, James married Mary Brown in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Because of his service in the U.S. Navy, James was given his freedom. He moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his wife, and he worked as a steamboat builder.

One of the steamboats that James helped build was the *Minnesota Belle*. When it was ready, James and Mary and their family moved to Minnesota on the *Minnesota Belle*, and from there, to Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory.

In the winter of 1853, Captain Samuel Humberston built, probably with James's help, a fine new boat, christened the steamboat the *Minnesota Belle*. It was loaded full of immigrants, intended mostly for his new town and headed up the Minnesota River on May 3, 1854. A few people on the *Minnesota Belle* during the first voyage were James and Mary Brown Griffin, along with their three children, Richard, Martin, and Estella. To the captain's great chagrin, Humbertson's new boat failed to climb the Little Rapids, near Carver, and he abandoned the river, townsite, and all, in disgust.





"The S.B. Minnesota Belle came up here from Pittsburgh, and went on above, but could not get over the Rapids about here…so she came back and left the most of her boat here. She is a large, fine boat. A good many passengers stopped here."

The Diary of Daniel M. Storer

The *Minnesota Belle* landed in Sha K' Pay after failing to get over the Carver rapids. "The boat was from Pittsburgh, bound for the upper part of the valley, and its being obliged to discharge its large cargo of freight and passengers here established Shakopee's reputation as the head of navigation. This incident was used to good advantage by citizens to secure new settlers."



Warner & Foote Plat Map of Wright County, MN - ca. 1879

"…Daniel Gray pre-empted (his original claim) for him (he not being eligible on account of color or race, under the constitution as it was then, to acquire land directly from the government."

Delano Eagle, July 2, 1891

James worked as a carpenter with Daniel Storer and then was a teamster by 1856. He had wagons and teams in Sha K' Pay, and helped immigrant families settle into the territory, including to Buffalo, Minnesota.

"Mr. Griffin (who is an intelligent colored man, much respected by the neighbors) had the honor of bringing the first team into Buffalo; and for a year or two afterwards, 'Griffin's team' was in great demand among all the settlers."

By the 1860s, James started a stagecoach line. He had a daily stage route between Buffalo and Monticello, and three times a week from Monticello to Minneapolis.

The Griffins made a claim on the shores of Lake Mary, outside of Buffalo.

When he was older and retired from the stageline, James became the first janitor at the new Wright County Courthouse.



—All of Mr. Griffin's many friends will be sorry to learn that he has been taken from St. Barnabas Hospital to the insane asylum.

—Judge Tarbox, Elmer Hamlet, E. F. and W. O. Merr, were among the Monticello visitors at

Buffalo Journal, Buffalo, Minnesota, May 3, 1899



DAILY STAGE.

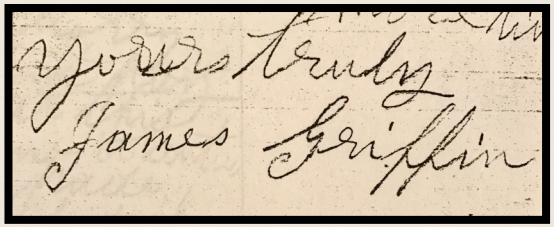
Buffalo and Monticello.

Leaves Buffalo every morning at 7 o'clock. Returning, leaves Monticello upon the arrival of the hack from Big Lake, about one o'clock P. M.

Freight and passengers carried on reasonable terms.

JAMES GRIFFIN,
Proprietor.

From Wright County Times, Monticello Oct 22, 1874



Yours truly
James Griffin

James Griffin died June 26, 1891, in Hot Springs, Arkansas of tuberculosis. According to the *Wright County Heritage Herald*, Winter 1999, "…after several years of employment at the courthouse, he gave it up because of failing health and sometime after that he sold his farm." He then moved to Hot Springs and died there.







James was buried at the Minneapolis Pioneers and Soldiers Memorial Cemetery.

Bibliography

Wright County Heritage Herald, Winter 1999.

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SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY



James Griffin

(Not a Picture of James)

ca. 1824-1891

In Sha K' Pay, MT 1854-56

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