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Read about the Minnesota Belle and the Griffins on page 3.



A brief history of Shakopee's city halls on page 7.

**Fall Membership Meeting**

Saturday, Oct. 21, 2017,  
1 p.m.

Shakopee Public Library  
235 Lewis St. S.

Bring a friend!

## Pathways of Shakopee History Park Updates

### Fundraiser at Turtle's

On Thursday, Aug. 17, the Pathways of Shakopee History Park Fundraiser happened at the Turtle's 1890 Social Centre in downtown Shakopee. Ninety-five tickets were purchased, and a large crowd enjoyed the festivities.

Starting with cocktails, the evening included silent and live auctions, a wonderful dinner, and a presentation about the history park. Almost \$5,000 was raised for the history park, and more people learned about the early history of Shakopee.

Thanks to all who contributed to the silent and live auction, the supporters of the park, and the SHS members who worked hard to make this fundraiser a wonderful event!

### History Park happenings

Sponsorship continues for the Pathways of Shakopee History Park.

The sign locations for the History Park are now up, and a banner about the park will soon be placed on-site.



Top Left: Items at the Live Auction table.

Top Right: Patrons enjoy dinner.

Bottom Left: A patron shows off her button of Jane Lamont Titus. Bottom Right: The table is lined with bidding sheets and silent auction items.



## Editors' Notes

- Welcome to our new members: Pat and Paula Adams, Teresa Hoffman, Donna Lane, Bill and Corky Mars, Tom and Sue Melchior, Patty Trutnau, and Diedri Young.
- Our president, Lois Wendt, will be the guest speaker at the Oct. 21 membership meeting. She will facilitate a conversation on sharing experiences growing up in Shakopee.
- Now's the time to start thinking about the annual membership meeting in January, where we elect board trustees. This upcoming year, we will be in need of some additional board members. Wes Reinke, currently filling the secretary role and a one-year term, will not be running due to increased work commitments; we have one additional vacant board seat. Also, Lois Wendt, Pat Ploumen, and Melissa Whiting's seats will be up for election.
- Thank you to everybody who attended and/or helped out with the Pathways of Shakopee History Project Fundraiser and Silent Auction on Aug. 17 at Turtle's 1890 Social Centre. See a recap and photos on page 1.
- We had a small turnout at our annual summer potluck. Thank you to Jay and Melissa Whiting for hosting! Any suggestions to increase attendance at next year's potluck are welcome.
- Senior Research Chair David Schleper has been busy as always researching Shakopee's interesting past. He will be presenting at the Šakpe ti Lounge, located in the Shakopee Community Center. Read more on page 5.
- To receive future issues of the Shakopee Heritage Society newsletter in color via email, instead of receiving a black and white paper copy, please send your name and email address to [newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org](mailto:newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org).
- If there's anything in particular you'd like to see included in future newsletters, please let a board member know or send an email to [newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org](mailto:newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org). We would love to hear from you!

## Swept Away:

### The Story of Rose Ann (Spencer) Spencer and Spier Spencer and Spencer Street

*By David R. Schleper*

Rose Ann Spencer was born in Terre Haute, Indiana on April 25, 1834. Her parents were George Spencer and Julia Duncan Spencer. She was educated at the St. Mary-of-the-Woods Convent.

The Sisters began building a school for girls called The Academy in 1840. The first student at the academy arrived for enrollment July 4, 1841. One of the early girls who arrived there was Rose Ann. The Academy is now known as Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and is the oldest Roman Catholic college for women in the United States. As early as 1846, a charter was granted by the state empowering the institution to confer academic honors and collegiate degrees.

In 1852, Rose Ann came to St. Paul with her parents. She married Spier Spencer, who was her cousin.

Spier Spencer was born in Elizabethtown, Spencer County, Kentucky, Jan. 22, 1827. His father, John Spencer, was a prominent slave owner. His mother was Pricilla Allen Spencer. Spier lived there until age 14, when his father sold his slaves and moved to Boone County, Indiana. The family stayed in Indiana for eight years.

In 1849, accompanied by his only brother, John B. Spencer, Jr., he went west and located at St. Paul, which was a small village at that time. The two brothers worked as carpenters until 1853. Then, John B. Spencer, Jr. and Spier purchased a farm between St. Paul and St. Anthony Park, which they kept for a short time.

On Nov. 16, 1853, Rose Ann married her cousin, Spier. They were married at Traverse de Sioux, and Rose Ann was the first white woman who was married there. Together, the two of them were swept away!

Spier and Rose Ann sold their farm between St. Paul and St. Anthony Park, and then bought one-third of the town of Shakopee from Thomas A. Holmes and David L. Fuller. It cost \$4100 in 1853. The town was part of *Tiŋta-otoŋwe*, which was also called Prairie des Français (French Prairie) near Faribault Trading Post with Oliver Faribault and Waken Yanke, and near Pond Mission House, which was called Prairieville. Thomas called it Holmesville, and by 1852 it had 20 white people (along with 600 Mdewakanŋtonŋwaŋ Dakota or the Spirit Lake People.) When David Faribault, who was part Dakota, and his wife, Winona Nancy McClure Faribault Huggan, started a rival town along the St. Peter's River (later called the Minnesota River), Thomas stepped up and called the area Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory in honor of Chief Šakpe II.

*Swept Away continued on page 8*

# The Minnesota Belle and James and Mary Brown Griffin

## In Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory 1854-1856

By David R. Schleper

The Minnesota Belle is one of the steamboats that James Griffin built. When it was ready, James and Mary and their children Richard, Martin, and Estella, were on the steamboat in the beginning of May, ready to locate at the new town near Blue Earth.

Captain Samuel Humberston had been very active in the trade, heading up and down the river with his boat, the Clarion. In the winter of 1853, he sold the little Clarion steamboat and built a fine new boat. It was 170 feet long, with thirty-eight well-furnished state rooms. The steamboat was built in Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, on the Monongahela River. James helped build this steamboat.

Captain Humberston christened the steamboat the Minnesota Belle, and he loaded the boat with immigrants intended mostly for his new town near Blue Earth. He hoped the new town would become the chief city of the valley. James, who helped build the steamboat, discussed with Mary, and decided to move west with the family.

The Minnesota Belle and the Griffins headed up the Minnesota River to a new town near Blue Earth. They started up the Minnesota River on May 3, 1854.

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.

African Americans traveling on the western waters were quite common. Some free black people, as well as slaves, worked on the steamboats, many as firemen, stewards, and chambermaids. African-American travelers occupied a different status from that of the white people on board. While some African-American slaves traveled with their masters and mistresses, sleeping on trundles in their owner's private cabins, and where they could take care of errands, probably most of the people on the Minnesota Belle were probably immigrants from other countries who moved to the United States. Free black people, such as James and Mary Brown Griffin, were not allowed in the private cabins, however, but had to travel on the lower deck.

Traveling by steamboat carried considerable risk. They could fall overboard since the decks had no guide rails and few people knew how to swim. Steamboats hit snags, ran aground on sandbars, and the engine boilers, which were on the lower deck close to the African-American workers and passengers, exploded regularly. The explosions occurred on the upstream voyage, when the captains pushed their boilers to dangerous levels going against the river's current.

The Minnesota Belle landed in Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory, in May 1854, after they failed to get over the Carver rapids. "The boat was from Pittsburg, 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."

James and Mary Brown Griffin and their family were part of the new settlers, staying in Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory from 1854 until 1856. According to the Wright County Heritage Herald, 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 he helped immigrant families to settle in the territory.

Race is written between the lines in early Shakopee history. If looking, you will not find anything in the majority of books and articles. Rather than spoken directly, it is only found through diaries, memoirs, letters, and government documents.

In The Diary of Daniel M. Storer from 1849 to 1950: A Pioneer Builder and Merchant, His Personal History of Shakopee Minnesota: In the May 9, 1854 diary, the pioneer builder and merchant in Shakopee made the following note:

"A black man by the name of Griffin commenced working for me the 9th."

James Griffin worked with Daniel Storer in Shakopee as a carpenter, and built some of the buildings in the town of Shakopee.



*Boarding a steamship on the shore of the Minnesota River.*

*Minnesota Belle continued on page 4*

## Minnesota Belle

Continued from page 3

By 1856, James was a teamster. He had wagons and teams in Sha K' Pay, and he helped immigrant families to settle in the territory.

In an article in *Minnesota History* about Emily O. Goodridge Grey called "The Black Community in Territorial St. Anthony: A Memoir," Emily Grey, an African American in Minnesota Territory, mentioned James and Mary Brown Griffin. On page 53, she said, "In 1855 there came from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, James Griffen, wife, and children, first locating at Shohope (Shakopee), afterwards taking up land near Buffalo."



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. James had no choice. He had to be in the military. A few Americans who were enslaved were rewarded with liberty, but the operative word is few. For the most part, slaves who fought for the rebels remained the property of their masters. The Anglo Americans who were fighting were for their freedom, but not for the freedom of their slaves. But he was lucky. He not only survived, but he was given his freedom. After being in the Navy for five years, James earned his freedom. While in the Navy, James learned the carpenter's trade.

James then moved to Philadelphia, where he worked as a carpenter. In 1849, James married Mary Brown in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his wife, and he worked as a steamboat builder.

James and Mary and their family were part of the new settlers, staying in Sha K' Pay, Minnesota Territory from 1854 until 1856. According to the Wright County Heritage Herald, James worked as a carpenter with Daniel Storer, and then was a teamster by 1856. One of his jobs was for James to bring the Amasa Ackley and G.A.J. Overton families from Shakopee to their new location in Buffalo. Buffalo, in Wright county, was situated on the banks of Buffalo Lake, on a sloping plateau and terrace, and shaded by many trees. James brought the first team into Buffalo in the fall of 1855. In Buffalo, Jim Sturges convinced James and his family to move to Buffalo, Minnesota Territory on Feb. 15, 1856.

Mary died Aug. 22, 1882 of cholera sporadic. James died on 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.

*Note to Reader:* The way people use words to label people is important. I use the term *enslaved person* instead of *slave* when referring to individuals who, under the laws of the day, were the legal property of other people. It is very different to say, for example, that "James Griffin was born enslaved" than it is to say, "James Griffin was Joe Doe's slave." This critical distinction reflects how we think about the people who were victims trapped in a powerful system. To say that people were *enslaved* means this condition was forced on them; it does not define who they were. It is meant as a respectful term for the individuality of the enslaved people. This information from Kenneth C. Davis (2016) *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Hidden History of Slavery, Four Presidents, and Five Black Lives*. NY: Henry Holt Company, page xvi.

**References:** Curtiss-Wedge, Franklyn (1915). *History of Wright County, Minnesota, Vol. II*. Chicago, IL: H.C. Cooper, Jr. & Company, p. 682-683. Doby Lloyd (2007). *Fighting... Maybe for Freedom, but probably not*. *The Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, August at [www.history.org/Foundation/journal/Autumn07/slaves.cfm](http://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/Autumn07/slaves.cfm). D.R. Farnhan's *History of Wright County, Illustrated, Agricultural Societies (1880)*. Delano, MN: The Eagle, page 140. Green, William D. (2015). *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Fall and Rise of Racial Equality in Early Minnesota*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Grey, Emily O. Goodridge (1984). *The Black Community in Territorial St. Anthony: A Memoir*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota History, p. 42-53. Hinds, William (1891). *A 1891 Sketch of Shakopee Minn. Historical and Industrial*. Reproduced by Michael Huber, Scott County Historical Society, 1996, unpagged. Hughes, Thomas (1905). *History of Steamboating on the Minnesota River*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society at [http://www.archive.org/stream/historyofsteambo00hughrich/historyofsteambo00hughrich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/historyofsteambo00hughrich/historyofsteambo00hughrich_djvu.txt). VanderVelde, Lea (2009). *Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier*. NY: Oxford University Press. *Wright County Heritage Herald*, Winter .1999. *The Diary of Daniel M. Storer from 1849 to 1905: A Pioneer Builder and Merchant, His Personal History of Shakopee Minnesota*. Shakopee, MN: Shakopee Heritage Society, May 9, 1854.

## Fall Recipe from the St. Mary's 1929 Cookbook

### Baked Apple Dumpling

1 cup flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ¼ teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons butter, 1/3 cup milk, 4 apples, ½ cup sugar.

Mix and sift flour, baking powder and salt. Work in the fat. Add the liquid mixing to a soft dough. Roll on a well floured board to ¼ inch in thickness. Wipe, pare and cut apples into quarters. Cut dough 4 or 5 inches square. Place a quarter of the apple in square and sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon. Fold over the apple. Bake in a moderate oven.

**Sauce:** Mix ¼ cup of sugar with ½ tablespoon of cornstarch. Add ½ cup boiling water and boil until clear. Add ½ teaspoon of vanilla and ½ tablespoon of butter. Serve hot.

Mrs. Lea Schaefer

## Members' Corner

New, starting in this newsletter, we would like to feature memories from our members. In each newsletter, we will pose a prompt/question and would like you to email us with your memories at [newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org](mailto:newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org), or by completing a response form at the next general membership meeting.

In the following newsletter, we will select members' responses to include in the newsletter, as well as pose another question to the membership. We may also include some responses on the website.

If you have suggestions for future prompts, please let Dave or Wes know at [newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org](mailto:newsletter@shakopeeheritage.org), or on a response form at the membership meeting.

This issue's prompt is: *What are some of your earliest memories of growing up or living in Shakopee?*

## History of Shakopee Series

Miss an opportunity to hear Senior Research Chair David Schleper speak on one of his many interesting topics at a past membership meeting? Now you've got a second chance, as he's presenting a free History of Shakopee Series for Shakopee Parks and Recreation, one of our partners in the Pathways of Shakopee History project, at the Šakpe ti Senior Lounge located in the Shakopee Community Center. Attend as many of these sessions as you would like, but please be sure to sign up ahead of time at the Shakopee Community Center front desk or online at [parksandrec.shakopeemn.gov](http://parksandrec.shakopeemn.gov).

Upcoming presentations for Shakopee Parks and Recreation include:

### "We Were Fierce!" Women in Early Shakopee

**Thursday, Oct. 12, 1-2 p.m.**

*Please register for program CD 1012 by Thursday, Oct. 5*

You may know some of the men of early Shakopee, but the women are even more interesting! Learn about Wakan Yanke, Mary Brown Griffin, Hopstina Makaakaniwankewin Black Flute Lucy Otherday, Jane Lamont Titus, Elizabeth Gerdesmeier Lenzmeier, Grace Faribault Manaige, Catherine Neafsey O'Connor and Mahala Conklin Shumway and many others in early Shakopee.



*Lucy Otherday*

### "We Were Here, Too!" African Americans in Early Shakopee

**Thursday, Nov. 9, 1-2 p.m.**

*Please register for program CD 1109 by Thursday, Nov. 2*

A carpenter, a farmer, a servant ... all African Americans and all living in Shakopee in the 1800s. An African American man who was enslaved and escaped from Shakopee, a former slave who built a church in St. Paul, an orderly in the Civil War, a piano player and a carriage driver — all from Shakopee. Learn about 15 African Americans who lived and worked in Shakopee in the 1800s.

### It Happened Here in 1848: In Tinja-otonwe, Prairie des Français and Prairieville (and Later Shak' Pay, Minnesota Territory)

**Thursday, Dec. 7, 1-2 p.m.**

*Please register for program CD 1207 by Thursday, Nov. 30*

Who was living here in 1848? The 600 Mdewakŋtonwan Dakota Indians, trappers, traders, an African American who was enslaved in Shakopee, missionaries and Jane Lamont Titus, who was part Dakota and spoke only Dakota when she moved here. In 1848 they all lived around Faribault Springs, speaking Dakota, French and English, and a combination of languages. Come hear their stories.

## At Valley Cemetery with Betty Dols

On Saturday, Sept. 23, 15 members of the Shakopee Heritage Society enjoyed a special treat with Betty Dols showing the members some of the graves of many early Shakopee settlers.

The Valley Cemetery was organized in 1862, and many of the New Englander settlers were buried here.

Harriet Woodbury Holmes, the fourth wife of Thomas Holmes, was buried here. (Thomas was buried in Alabama.) Julia Unze was buried here, then dug up, and later found, without her head, in the Minnesota River. Melinda Perry Apgar and her sister, Sophronia Perry Sommerville, are both buried here. So are Moses Starr Titus and his wife, Jane Lamont Titus. Sarah Brown Wakefield, who wrote about her experience during the U.S.-Dakota Conflict, was buried here. Reverend Samuel W. Pond and family, and many Faribault relatives' graves are located here, not too far from the Knights Event Center on Fourth Avenue. Daniel and Omittee Fletcher Storer, Charles Lord, along with his son, Frank Lord, who married Mary Hinds, daughter of Henry Hinds, are buried here, as were Spier Spencer and Rose (Spencer) Spencer!

Among the many stories that Betty told was the story of David Lennox How and his wife, Mary Sherrard How. Mary ran off with the married railroad man, J.G. Butterfield, in September 1872. She ended up back in town 15 months later, where she got off the train and into the front door of the Sherrard-How residence, back to her former life (though clearly not that thrilled with David!). He was buried here. His wife ended up at Lakewood Cemetery with her second husband!

Betty was smart as a whip, and such a wonderful historian. All of the members enjoyed the morning stroll through the cemetery, listening to the stories of the past. Afterwards, several people stopped at Turtle's for lunch and further discussion.

What a perfect day!



**Above:** Local genealogist and Shakopee Heritage Society member Betty Dols leads a field trip at Valley Cemetery. **Below Left:** Betty tells stories about people who were buried at Valley Cemetery. **Below Right:** Our guide for the cemetery tour, Betty Dols. We thank you for the tour!



# Shakopee's City Hall

*Compiled by David R. Schleper*

The first Shakopee City Hall was built at the northeast corner of Lewis and Second streets, across from what is now known as Bill's Toggery. The plan was drawn by Charles Bornarth (who ended up using the same plan for the Jordan City Hall). It was built in 1883, and Frank Buch was the contractor for the new two-story building.

The city hall was used until September 1957. The City decided to abandon and raze the old city hall, which was a termite terminal, in September 1957. (That area became a parking lot, and is now being renovated for a new downtown parking lot across from Bill's Toggery.)

Meanwhile, the city hall was moved to the north side of First Avenue. The First National Bank was here for many years, and was the location of a bank robbery that happened in 1929. The City of Shakopee decided to buy the building for \$20,000, and the city offices were moved to the first floor on June 15, 1958. This was the second location of the city hall. The City of Shakopee was in this location for 32 years.

In 1968, the original fire bell, which was in the tower of the first city hall, on the northeast corner of Second and Lewis, was decoratively placed for posterity at the front of the city office at the second city hall. The bell, cast in bronze, was sandblasted at Rahr Malting to get a revived look. The bell bared the names of officials of earlier times, cast in relief on the side of the bell: George E. Strait, mayor; David L. How, president of the council; Julius Coller, city recorder, and Jacob S. Kunsman, chief of the fire department. (The bell is now located at Fire House #2 in Shakopee.)

Meanwhile, the First National Bank moved to Holmes Street, on the northeast corner of Holmes Street and Second Avenue. Before this, this location was the location of the first brick house, which was built in 1853 by Mr. Coulton. The location became the house of the Sherrard family, and when David Lennox How married Mary M. Sherrard in 1862, they moved into this house.

Dr. H. P. Fischer remodeled it to become the first hospital in Shakopee, the Shakopee Hospital. From a hospital, it became an apartment, and then the American Legion Club. It was finally razed in 1955 to build the First National Bank building, which opened on Feb. 10, 1958. (This was the fifth place for the bank, which started at the old National Hotel in 1865.)

The First National Bank became Marquette Bank. The building is on 129 Holmes St. S., and became the third city hall. On Feb. 11, 1993, the city hall was occupied. The third city hall was about one block from the second city hall, which was about one block from the first city hall.

And finally, this year, 2017, a new city hall, Shakopee's fourth city hall, was built on the east side of downtown Shakopee, near the police station. The location is 485 Gorman St. If you need to contact people at City Hall, please call 952-233-9300. The website is <http://www.shakopeemn.gov/>.



*City hall at northeast corner of Second Avenue and Lewis Street*



*City hall at 129 First Ave. E.*



*City hall at 129 Holmes St. S.*



*Drone photo of Shakopee Police Department and City Hall campus at 485 Gorman St. Photo by Bill Schleper.*

## Swept Away

*Continued from page 2*

By 1853, David and Nancy left the area, the townsite dissolved, the Dakota Indians were forced to move to a reservation, and the village of Sha K' Pay became a booming town.

Spier and others built several homes in the area. Spier, along with Rose Ann, opened a general store in Sha K' Pay, and traded in produce and furs with the Dakota Indians who often came back to the area. The general store held stocks of goods that contained a value of \$5,000.

In 1855, Spier and Rose Ann built a home on the site later known as the Major Strait farm. Spier had a side business in 1861, owning and operating a steamboat, the Clara Hinds, on the Minnesota River. He was active in the affairs of the rapidly growing village of Shakopee.

Rose Ann was busy birthing children and helping in the home. The children included George H., Julia Esther, Charles H., Carrie, Hattie M., and Belle.

In the fall of 1862, a kernel of wheat struck Spier in the eye and caused inflammation, resulting in total blindness in one eye. Spier then disposed of the farm and bought a home on Second Street, and opened a private boarding house known as the Union Home. Later, he mastered the trade of broom-making and supplied local stores and communities until 1895, when he retired.

Spier passed away on Jan. 26, 1907, and was buried at Valley Cemetery in East Shakopee. Rose Ann was a kind and loving disposition, a kind neighbor, and a loving wife and mother. She died on Oct. 5, 1913. When she died, she was "summoned to enter into the Great Beyond, and a general wave of sorrow swept over the community when her death was announced."

*References: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisters\\_of\\_Providence\\_of\\_Saint\\_Mary-of-the-Woods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisters_of_Providence_of_Saint_Mary-of-the-Woods). Shakopee Tribune, Nov. 20, 1903. Obituary of Spier Spencer (1907). Shakopee Tribune, February 1, 1907; and Obituary of Spier Spencer (1907). Scott County Argus, Feb. 1, 1907. Obituary of Rose Ann Spencer (1913). Shakopee Tribune, Oct. 10, 1913.*

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