

Black History Month

Former slave goes out of bondage to the pulpit

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PAUL—Robert T. Hickman, who received his surname from a prominent Missouri slaveholder who owned him, was probably classified as "contraband" when he came to St. Paul during the Civil War with a large group of black men, women and children.

The new arrivals of 1863 saw themselves as "pilgrims" on a journey out of bondage.

Today, Hickman's portrait is etched in stained glass above the sanctuary of St. Paul's Pilgrim Baptist Church, which he headed after becoming Minnesota's first licensed black minister.

The saga of the pilgrims is among the stories recounted in rebroadcasts this month of Twin Cities Public Television's 2004 documentary "North Star: Minnesota's Black Pioneers." A local theater artist, Brian Grandison, is also developing a play, "Adrift on the Mississippi," that dramatizes their journey.

The pilgrims who settled in St. Paul were part of a single-year influx that nearly doubled the state's black population, which had numbered only about 260 in 1860.

One of the first things a group of them did was organize a church, headed by Hickman, who had been a "slave preacher" in Missouri.

But for more than a decade, Hickman officiated for funerals, weddings and other events, while ordained white preachers signed the documents of record.

"I don't think when Robert Hickman started out that he knew what the end results would be—that he would become an ordained minister, living in free territory and running a church in St. Paul," Grandison said. "Life pulled him into events that were unexpected, which is indicative of the promise of what freedom can bring."

However, Minnesota's new arrivals received a mixed welcome.

According to one account, a riverboat carrying some of the black immigrants and towing others on a makeshift raft was prevented from docking in St. Paul by angry laborers who feared competition for menial jobs.

The boat continued upriver to Fort Snelling, where the passengers disembarked without incident and fanned out to several areas in the state, according to the account.

Grandison, who grew up in Jefferson City, Mo., says he has been trying to learn the details of events that took Hickman out of slavery and brought him to Minnesota. He believes Hickman escaped slavery by joining the Union Army.

"By doing that, he would have been consid-

Hampton University professor documents Rosenwald schools

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORFOLK, Va.—Fast disappearing from the landscape of once rural South, Rosenwald schools are a reminder of the nation's segregated history and a philanthropist's goal to educate black children in the South and Southwest.

Typically, the structures are made of white clapboard facing east to west to capture the day's light and have mature trees in the front yard to shade the porch. Many also are bordered by gardens used to teach students about growing plants.

The schools were named for Julius Rosenwald, a millionaire who teamed with educator Booker T. Washington to build more than 5,300 school buildings in 15 in southern and southwestern states, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The schools generally closed when public schools integrated.

Anne Pierce, an associate professor of education at Hampton University, is documenting rural schools dating from 1898 to 1948, where education graduates from Hampton Institute, as it was called then, established teaching gardens.

"It's become a passion," Pierce said. "When I take a drive or a trip in the South, I

always look because they are so distinctive."

So far, Pierce's project has identified about 14 to 15 community gardening sites, including the headmaster's home for the former Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School on Cappahosic Road in Gloucester. William G. Price, a member of the class of 1890 at Hampton Institute, served as principal of the school from 1899 to 1933. The school itself is gone, but the Price home clearly shows the Rosenwald influence.

Gertrude Henry, an associate professor in the education department at Hampton University, has lived in the Price homestead for 24 years, and has found numerous early-1900s textbooks and student records left there. She grew up in Hampton, but spent many childhood summer days in Cappahosic. She feels a special closeness and commitment to the house, and plans to preserve its historic image.

"I believe I was given this opportunity, as an African-American educator, to preserve this part of history," she said.

Locating the schoolhouse sites is only the first step in Pierce's project. Next, she hopes to record oral histories from people who went to

those schools before they become too elderly to recall details or pass away. Her project is funded by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.



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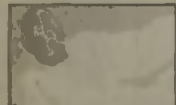
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