

ACSA Diversity Achievement Award

2015-2016 Winner Submission Materials

GREG DONOFRIO

University of Minnesota

A RIGHT TO ESTABLISH A HOME

AUGUST 22, 2014 JANUARY 4, 2015



Crowd of people posing in front of 4800 Columbia Ave South
(The Crisis, October 1931)

I never saw anything like it. Here were literally five or six thousand people, men, women and children, both on the curbs and sidewalks, just standing and waiting as near as they could get to this little, dark house, soundless, voiceless, tragic. Six thousand white people waiting to see that house burned!

—Member of the crowd, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

It is incredible to think that a man would bring his wife and children into such a situation.

—Member of the crowd, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

One of the neighbors got up and said, “You all know me; if there is going to be any burning, I am going to be in on it; if there is going to be any stringing up, I am going to be in on it, but I think we had better let the police manage it.”

—Member of the crowd, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

The men were marching up and down, shouting, “come on,” and “let’s go,” just waiting to steam someone up to lead them. It was a sense of excitement due to the crowd.

—Member of the crowd, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

I had wandered about in the rear of the crowd when one of the negroes appeared. He was jostled about for a few moments until police surrounded the group, extricated the negro and put him in a car. Many names were hurled at the negro, and the common cry was “lynch him,” plus many unmentionable names.

I called to the negro to keep a stiff upper lip. A gentleman ahead of me immediately turned around and demanded to know what I meant. I had no sooner assured him that I meant what I said when he proceeded to punch my nose.

—Member of the crowd, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

This is an unlawful assembly, you can have your choice. Either leave or I’ll make some arrests. The only way to settle this is through committees. Be patient and everything will be all right.

—Minneapolis Police Captain Jensen quoted in “Home Stoned in Race Row: Sale of House to Negro Stirs Neighborhood,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 15, 1931

This is a time for sanity and patience, not hasty action. This government has been founded on certain principles of human and property rights. We must respect those rights.

—Minneapolis Mayor Anderson, quoted in Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities,” Master’s Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932

From the windows of his darkened home, Lee and his friends looked out, as from a barricaded fortress, on a sullen, angry semi-circle of humanity. They heard themselves threatened continually, from all directions. They heard stones strike against the house and heard windows crash as some of the stones took effect. Now and then a firecracker exploded on the lawn.

—“Crowd of 3,000 Renews Attack on Negro’s Home,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 16, 1931

While passersby joined the throng and soon there were cries of “lynch him” ringing in the air.

—“Mob Fails to Scare Minn Postal Clerk,” *Chicago Defender*, July 25, 1931

After efforts of police to break up the gang of hoodlums proved futile, the city fire department was called out and firemen turned long streams of water on the rioters. The mob retreated only to form again after the firemen had left.

—“Mob Fails to Scare Minn Postal Clerk,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 25, 1931

Traffic was at a standstill for several blocks in each direction and cars were parked for several miles around. The mob was defiant of the police and openly threatened Lee and 20 of his friends who had gathered in the home...

—“Another Sweet Case Averted in Minneapolis,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1931

On one occasion a motorcycle policeman was pulled from his machine and a squad of patrolmen was necessary to rescue him.

—“Another Sweet Case Averted in Minneapolis,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1931

Motorists surged into the neighborhood from all parts of the city, from adjacent towns, and from St. Paul, most of them eager to see their first real mob...

—Chatwood Hall, “A Roman Holiday in Minneapolis,” *The Crisis*, October 1931

Yells of “let’s rush the door,” “let’s settle this now,” “let’s drag the niggers out;” the clatter of glass being knocked from the windows by stones; the flash of photographers’ torches, and the bursting of fire crackers, created a revel of morons.

—Chatwood Hall, “A Roman Holiday in Minneapolis,” *The Crisis*, October 1931

Far into the early hours of morning for more than a week in the vicinity of the besieged house... the shrill voices of children, goaded on by the gruff voices of their parents defiled the mid-summer air; young girls and women in pajamas, arm in arm, promenaded back and forth; periodically, firecrackers exploded; refreshment wagons reaped a harvest of nickels and dimes.

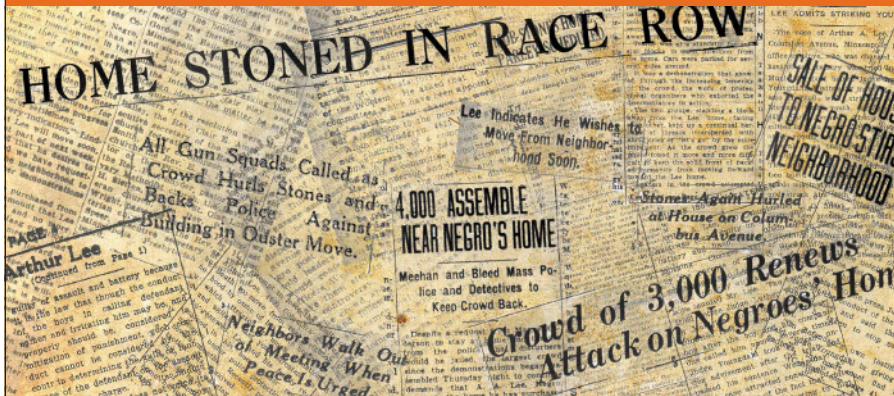
—Chatwood Hall, “A Roman Holiday in Minneapolis,” *The Crisis*, October 1931

THE STORY OF ARTHUR AND EDITH LEE

In the spring of 1931, Arthur and Edith Lee purchased a home at 4600 Columbus Avenue South in Minneapolis, where they intended to live with their daughter Mary.

Area homeowners thought they lived in a “white neighborhood”. Many wanted the Lees to move. Neighbors offered to buy the property from the Lees for an inflated price. When the family refused, vandals threw garbage and human waste at the property; black paint was splattered across the house and garage; signs were posted on the lawn proclaiming “No niggers allowed in the neighborhood. This means you.” People began walking by the Lee house in the evenings yelling taunts and racial slurs.

Conflict at the Lee house quickly escalated. On July 11th, around 150 people gathered on the lawn to protest. Five days later, the crowd had grown to 4,000. Some came from as far away as Hibbing to participate in what newspapers described as a “mob” and a “Minneapolis Riot”.



WOULD YOU HAVE STAYED?

“Nobody asked me to move out when I was in France fighting in mud and water for this country. I came out here to make this my home. I have a right to establish a home.”

—(Arthur Lee quoted in *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 15, 1931)

Born in St. Cloud, Minnesota in 1894, Arthur Lee fought in World War I and worked for the United States Postal Service in Minneapolis.

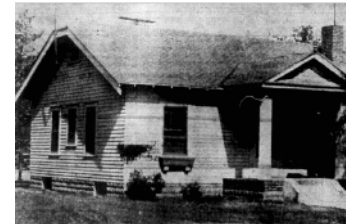


Arthur and Edith Lee seated with daughter Mary (Courtesy of Robert A. L. Forman and James T. Morris Jr.)

“This case is not the case of Lee alone. It is a case of the people, white and black, who believe in the fundamental laws of the country and the state. It is a case of right against wrong. It is the concern of any man, be he Jew or Gentile, white or black, Protestant or Catholic. This country will never be safe until the rights of every citizen are safe.”

(*Twin City Herald*, September 9, 1932)

4600 COLUMBUS AVENUE SOUTH



Arthur and Edith Lee House with black paint defacing corner (*Minneapolis Tribune*, July 16, 1931)

What does it mean to establish a home?

RACE AND HOUSING

In 1927, members of the Eugene Field Neighborhood Association (the neighborhood where the Lee house is located), voluntarily signed an agreement to sell homes only to Caucasians. Peer pressure helped keep the neighborhood white.

Other communities tried to ensure racial segregation with legally binding “covenants”, which were attached to property deeds, and prohibited the sale of houses to Blacks, Jews, and other races deemed “undesirable”. Covenants remained in place in communities throughout Minnesota until the United States Supreme Court outlawed them in 1948.

African Americans struggled for the right to live where they wanted. Their housing opportunities were constrained by racism expressed through intimidation, conflict, and a real estate industry intent on keeping “white neighborhoods” white. Those who broke through the color lines were rare and faced significant adversity. Some literally risked their lives.



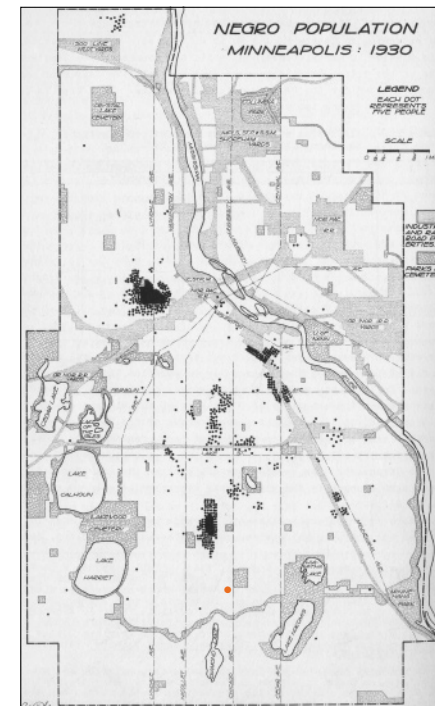
Three white women seated on lawn in Minneapolis, circa 1933 (Minnesota Historical Society)



“They know they are undesirable as neighbors and hope to make a greater profit on their investment by forcing white people to buy them out to get rid of them.”

—“Negro Question Causes Protest, 13th Ward,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 16, 1920

RACE AND HOUSING



This map represents the location of homes occupied by blacks in 1930 Minneapolis. The red dot shows 4600 Columbus Avenue, where the Lee family moved in 1931. (Calvin F. Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities*)



Minneapolis Morning Tribune, January 12, 1919

State and dist. up to	Deductions	Per Cent
Real and foreign neighbors, up to		20
General average, up to		20
Four and a half, up to		20
Disturbance, up to		100
Business (General, freight, transit, etc.), up to		100
Industrial, etc., up to		10

“Deductions” from Realtor’s Training Manual (McMichael’s Appraising Manual, 1937)

Is anyone excluded from living in your neighborhood?

RACE AND HOUSING

Additional Cases of Housing Discrimination in the Twin Cities

The Lee case was among the most notorious instances of housing-related racial conflict in the Twin Cities. There were also many others.

1909, LAKE HARRIET

When Mr. Malone bought his home, the newspapers slandered him, questioned his status as an Episcopal minister, and vandals broke the house's windows.

1909, PROSPECT PARK

Over 100 protesters marched on the home of Mr. W.E. Simpson and read him a paper detailing the reasons he should leave the neighborhood.

1912, SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS

After neighbors complained to the health department of unsanitary conditions at a rental property, the owner “retaliated” by leasing to black tenants.

THE OSSIAN SWEET CASE: HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IN THE NATIONAL NEWS

During the Lee house protests, potential violence concerned both city officials and the NAACP. The Sweet case had been widely reported on in the national press, and knowledge of what happened in Detroit was among the reasons the Lee case received so much attention from the local media, the police, and community leaders.

Ossian Sweet was a doctor from Detroit, Michigan. In 1925 he bought a home in a white neighborhood. When the previous (white) owner's life was threatened for selling the house to a black man, Dr. Sweet prepared to defend his house and family against violence.

1923, NEAR CRETIN AVENUE, ST PAUL

The KKK was responsible for two cross burnings at the home of Nellie and W.T. Francis, the first black couple to move into the neighborhood.



Members of the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross on the bluff at Mounds Park in St. Paul, May 25, 1926. (Minnesota Historical Society)

How would you protect your home?

RACISM IN MINNESOTA

Minnesota has never been immune to racism, despite its progressive reputation. In the early 20th century, racism in Minnesota took multiple forms. There were well-publicized acts of violence and aggression such as the lynching of three men in Duluth in 1920. The Ku Klux Klan was a visible presence in the state during that same decade. There were also everyday racial injustices: use of verbal slurs; restaurants that refused to serve blacks; stores that would not offer credit or employment.

THE DULUTH LYNCHINGS

On June 14, 1920, Irene Tusken and James Sullivan, a young white couple, reported that six black men working for a traveling circus had held the couple at gunpoint and then assaulted and raped Tusken. Though these accusations were unsubstantiated, rumors spread and newspapers printed articles about the incident. The next day, a mob estimated at 5,000 to 10,000 people swarmed the city jail. Several men broke into the jail and seized three of the suspects. Police did nothing to intervene. Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie were declared guilty by the mob and hanged from a lamppost in downtown Duluth.

The national press was appalled by the lynchings. Many people were aghast that such a thing could happen in a northern state like Minnesota. Memories of mob violence and national disgrace would have been in the minds of city officials and others as the Lee case was unfolding.



“Mob violence, a Photographic Review and Descriptive Account of the Appalling Lynching of Three Negroes by a Revengentful Mob After alleged assault on a Young White Girl, at Duluth, Minnesota, June 15, 1920” (University of Minnesota Law Library Rare Books collection)



“Down South Negroes understood their place and there’s no trouble, but here they are always pushing in. I don’t think we should treat them as the Southerners do; they won’t let him vote, you know. He ought to get the same chance in employment and civic affairs, but let them keep their family affairs to themselves. They’re lower than us; let them keep to themselves.”

—Quote collected by Maurine Boie, 1932

RACISM IN MINNESOTA

These quotes were collected for a 1932 thesis written by University of Minnesota student Maurine Boie. They illustrate the types of racist and discriminatory encounters that African Americans in the Twin Cities faced on a daily basis.

When I first came here, I went down on ___ Avenue to a little restaurant. We sat upon the stools. There was a lady waitress. She didn’t wait on us. The manager came by and said, “We don’t particularly cater to colored people here; there is a colored restaurant down the street; if you don’t mind we would like to have you go there.” He was apologetic; I felt it I had forced my way I could have got service.

We wouldn’t use Negroes in our bakery, because the white people might object.

I asked a man to hire a Negro. He said, you know I’m interested, but I couldn’t take another one on, because the one I had was reported to have stolen a tire.

The epithet “nigger” has been used by two radio performers over station ___ for several months. Many complaints have been made by colored citizens but none were made to the radio station. About two weeks ago Mr. ___ in a letter to the station protested against the term, calling attention to the fact that it is considered an insult by colored people. He received a courteous reply from the station manager and a letter of apology from (the broadcasters), who said that they would never be guilty of such an offense again.



Robed members of the KKK meet in a woods south of St. Paul, September, 1922 (Minnesota Historical Society)

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN MINNESOTA

The Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacy organization that first gained influence in the South after the Civil War, experienced a resurgence in the 1920s. The hardships of the 20s caused many people to look for a scapegoat and it was during this time that the Klan first made inroads in the Midwest. In 1924, the Klan claimed 100,000 members in Minnesota. Robed Klansmen took part in local parades and hosted fireworks displays in communities in Southern Minnesota. In 1923, the KKK was responsible for two cross burnings at the home of Nellie and W.T. Francis, the first black couple to move into a neighborhood near Cretin Avenue in Saint Paul.

How has racism in Minnesota changed?

DEFENDERS

Arthur and Edith Lee had help as they fought to stay in their home. Those who defended the Lees included family and friends, Arthur’s coworkers at the United States Postal Service, fellow war veterans from Arthur’s American Legion Post, and most especially lawyer Lena Olive Smith.

Lee family defenders helped guard the house around the clock during the week of riots. Fearing the mob would turn violent, a committee formed to negotiate a compromise. Arthur Lee, Lena Olive Smith, representative white neighbors, city officials, and members of the NAACP tried to find a solution. Initially, some negotiators suggested the family should move. Lee insisted that occupying the home was his right, and Lena Olive Smith supported him in this claim.

In addition to helping with the negotiations, Smith also worked to privately compel local authorities to provide police protection and publicly argued the Lee’s right to live on Columbus Avenue. On July 20, 1931, the Twin Cities newspapers published a statement from Smith proclaiming that the Lees did not intend to leave their home. This marked the end of the mob demonstrations.

The Lee family stayed in their Columbus Avenue home until late 1932, at which time they felt they had made their point and relocated to a nearby neighborhood that was better integrated.



Mr. Lee intends to remain in his present residence. He has no intention of moving now or later, even after we are assured the feeling in the district has subsided. He has nothing to trade, barter or sell. I believe we have made that clear to all parties involved. I am president of the Minneapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Mr. Lee's stand in this matter has been backed by that organization. We feel that the issue goes deeper than this individual case. I have been assured my client will receive ample police protection.”

—Lena Olive Smith quoted in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 20, 1931

DEFENDERS



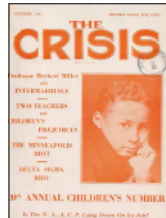
Lena Olive Smith (Minnesota Historical Society)

LENA OLIVE SMITH

In 1921, Lena Olive Smith became the first African American woman to be admitted to the Minnesota Bar Association. Ms. Smith had moved to Minneapolis in 1906, and made several bold career moves including working as an undertaker and realtor before pursuing her law degree. While in school, she joined the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP, and in 1930, became the chapter president. Lena Olive Smith was involved with a number of high profile civil rights cases during her long career, including the Duluth lynchings and the attempted ban on the film “Birth of a Nation” for its racist content.

THE NAACP

During her representation of the Lee family, Lena Olive Smith received the full support of the national office of the NAACP, which featured the case as a cover story in its monthly publication, *The Crisis*. The Lees were longtime NAACP members. The organization's support pressured the City of Minneapolis to protect the Lees and bring the protests to a non-violent conclusion.



Cover for *The Crisis*, October 1931

Why must rights be defended?

It should read exactly as follows: Some of [those favoring a less confrontational approach to segregation] were raised in the South and are used to catering to white men. I am from the West and fearless. I'm used to doing the right thing without regard for myself. Of course battles leave their scars, but I'm willing to make the sacrifice. I think it is my duty. It's a hard place to be — on the firing line — but I'm mighty glad I'm there.... Of course I want peace but I don't want it at that price.

—Lena Olive Smith as told to Maurine Boie, 1932

DEFENDERS

UNITED STATES POSTAL WORKERS AND THE AMERICAN LEGION

In Minneapolis, Arthur Lee was one of twenty-two black postal workers (sixteen clerks and six carriers). Arthur Lee was also a World War I veteran belonging to an American Legion Post in Minneapolis. These co-workers and fellow Legion members were some of the friends who helped keep watch over the Lee house.



Postal workers in Minneapolis post office, 1915. Family members believe that the person on the far right may be Arthur Lee. (Minnesota Historical Society)



First African American troops to leave St. Paul in World War I (Minnesota Historical Society)

Who would you go to for help?

WHY DOES THIS HISTORY MATTER?

MEANINGS OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Some members of the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood find meaningful personal connections to the history of the Arthur and Edith Lee House. Undergraduate students studying historic preservation conducted oral history interviews with several long-time neighborhood residents in 2012. They began by asking: is what happened in 1931 at 4600 Columbus Avenue South important to you? Why do you think it is significant? Answers varied. For many, the house wasn't just about one significant event that happened in the distant past. It was part of a longer, broader continuum of events, people, and actions that reflect the history of a neighborhood striving for public safety, inclusiveness, cooperation, mutual respect, and social justice.



Morgan Sheff Photography



JOE SENKYR MINJARES

Owner and proprietor of Pepitos Restaurant
and Parkway Theater

Joe Senkyr Minjares loves operating businesses on Chicago Avenue but had always felt that there was something about the neighborhood he didn't understand until he learned about the history of the Arthur and Edith Lee house. "I always felt that I had to cover my own tracks. I could sense something...calling it what it is, I could sense that there was some racism in this neighborhood. I started by going to the internet to see if I could find anything, and man, I couldn't believe that this thing was front page news. I started asking African American people, every black person I saw, practically. I would ask them if they had heard of it, and what was stunning to me is how many people hadn't heard about it. None of the kids. No one, no one knew about it and it started to make sense to me, this feeling that I had."

Morgan Sheff Photography



STEARLINE RUCKER

Board President of the Field Regina Northrop
Neighborhood Group

The neighborhood group was initially unsure if it should commemorate or even acknowledge this chapter in their history. "We all talked about it, went around the room, and finally we all came to the conclusion that the story needs to be told, because in order for us to go forward, we must know our past. As we started talking, we found there were people who would experience racial comments today. And so people realize that we need to talk about this, and we need to put it in such a way that we can have more understanding, and then put to rest some of the negativities that still go on 'the secrets,' we call it."

Morgan Sheff Photography



MRS. JOHNNIE NAPUE-EDWARDS

Neighborhood resident

Shopping for a house at 45th Street and Park Avenue South in 1968, Mrs. Napue-Edwards experienced shockingly overt racism. “My realtor took me to look at this house. And the owner of the property opened the door to receive us and he said in my face, and in my realtor’s face we were two black people he said: ‘The house is for sale, but I will never sell to blacks.’ ...It felt horrible.”

Morgan Sheff Photography



MRS. ALBERTA JOHNSON

Former neighborhood resident

Realtors wouldn’t show Mrs. Johnson homes south of Minnehaha Creek in the early 1960s, but she and her husband established a home for their family just north of the creek and were eventually welcomed by their neighbors. Still, they felt they had to maintain a higher standard than others. “We were the first black family in that 4900 block of Columbus Avenue; you didn’t go across the creek. We didn’t have a fireplace, but we had a nice open loft in the top of the house where the boys could all stay... and the neighbors were extraordinary, to tell you the truth. We were ‘the model’ that was the term for black people that move into these neighborhoods. My children never went outside without being washed and cleaned, and hair combed. And that’s how it was done; we had to do everything to make sure that nobody could ever point a finger and say, ‘That black family doesn’t do this, or their garbage isn’t ...’ No, we wouldn’t have done that no matter where we lived, but people just don’t know that about us, and they don’t want to know it. But then when they finally know these things about you they become the best friends. I still have friends that I see from when we first moved into the neighborhood.”

Morgan Sheff Photography



GERALDINE M. SELL

Neighborhood historian and resident

Gerry Sell had no patience for her realtor's racism when she and her husband bought their house at 43rd Street and Sheraton Avenue in 1965. "Finally I found the house that we have now, and I called the realtor and I said, 'I think we found a house,' and he said, 'where is it?' I said, 'it's on Minnehaha Parkway between Park and Portland,' and the guy said, 'Oh, that's too bad,' and I said, 'Why?' 'Well,' he said, 'if you'd of (sic) hung on a little longer I'm sure we could have found you a house west of Lyndale where the neighborhood is absolutely closed if you get my drift.' And I said, 'you are a son-of-a-bitch,' and I hung up!"

Morgan Sheff Photography



PEARL LINDSTROM

Current owner of 4600 Columbus Avenue South

Pearl Lindstrom is proud of the sacrifices the Lees took to make a stand and she relishes living in a historic house. "Oh, it means a lot to me; I'm a U.S. citizen, and I've been through a war. This house stands for freedom! You know, that freedom that they talk about? Well, some people believe in it and some don't. Yet, there are a lot of people that are prejudiced. When I tell people I've got a historical house, they say, 'Oh really?' Some say, 'well, our house is historical, too.' And I say, 'well, this one is special.'"

Morgan Sheff Photography



ANDRENA MCMILLON

Neighborhood resident

As a student at Washburn High School, Andrena McMillon noticed how her classmates grouped themselves in the cafeteria. “All the white kids tend to sit together, all the black kids sit together, and the Mexicans. And it’s not something that we consciously do, but it’s just something that we still do even though all of our ancestors and our older generations, they fought so hard to have gender equality and racial equality, and yet, us young people, we still tend to segregate ourselves, without even knowing it.”

Morgan Sheff Photography



ROBERT ARTHUR LEE FORMAN

Grandson of Arthur and Edith Lee

Robert A. L. Forman was 40 years old before he learned about what his grandparents endured at 4600 Columbus Ave South. Now, he feels like he was born to tell the story. “At that time, all across the country, similar things were happening. Most of them had horrific outcomes. This situation is more than unique in the fact that people came to the aid of my grandfather, not just because of the color of his skin, but because of his character. This is a story that I am happy and proud to tell to anyone who wants to listen. But this story needs to be told right; I want it remembered that this story needs to be told with the dignity, honor, and strength of character—the type of character that the people who helped also had. I wish I knew each and every person by name that was part of the solution to what could have been a terrible situation.”

Morgan Sheff Photography

A RIGHT TO ESTABLISH A HOME

AUGUST 22, 2014—JANUARY 4, 2015

GUEST CURATORS

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Stearline Rucker and the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group

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ARCH 3641: INTRODUCTION TO HERITAGE PRESERVATION

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Ann Juergens	Ben Petry	
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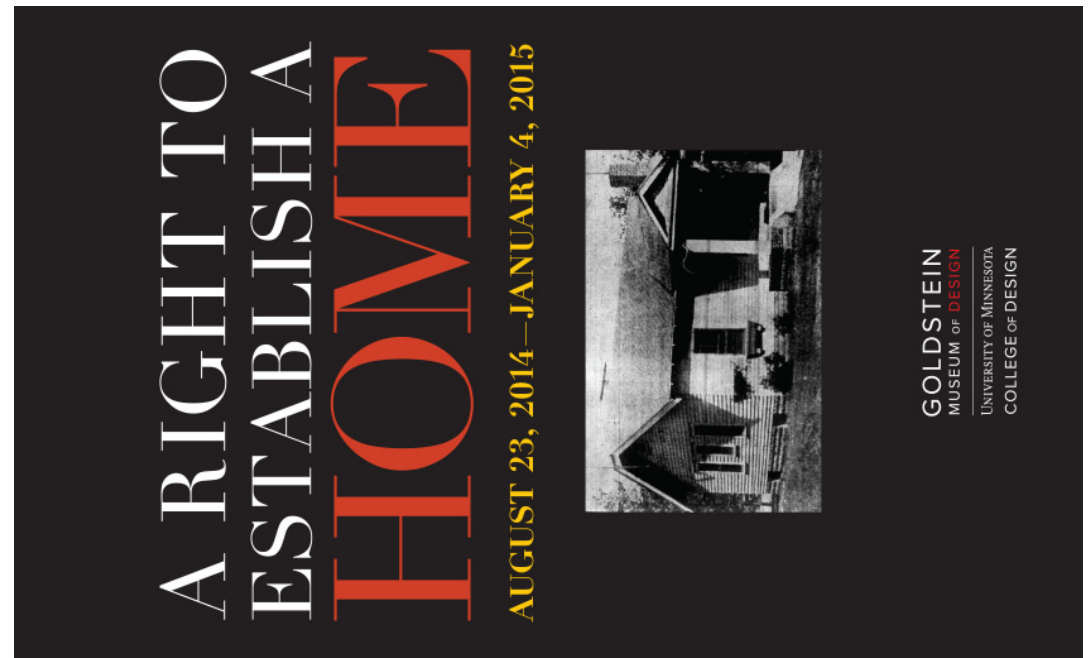
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A RIGHT TO ESTABLISH A HOME

AUGUST 23, 2014 - JANUARY 4, 2015

OPENING RECEPTION AUGUST 22, 6 - 8 PM
Featuring the Dove Choir of Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

HGA Gallery, Rapson Hall, 89 Church Street SE, Minneapolis

In August 1931, Arthur and Edith Lee, a young African-American couple, purchased a home at 4600 Columbus Avenue South, Minneapolis, in what many considered a "white neighborhood". *A Right to Establish a Home* examines the protests that followed in the context of race and housing in Minneapolis, racism in Minnesota, and the individuals and organizations that defied the NAACP and the distinguished attorney Lena Olive Smith.

GUEST CURATORS: Greg Donofrio, Laurel Fritz
COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS: Stearline Rucker and the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group
SUPPORTED BY: The IAS Heritage Collaborative; Minnesota Historical Society/University of Minnesota Heritage Partnership; Imagine Fund, the McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment; and Rapson Hall Exhibitions Fund with support from Judy Dayton.

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Research that established the content for the exhibition was conducted by forty undergraduate students in the workshop “Introduction to Heritage Preservation” taught by Professor Greg Donofrio in fall 2012. Students worked in small teams, and with several community collaborators, to conduct oral histories with neighborhood residents, to research the historical events and individuals associated with the property, and to experiment with creative ways to visually represent the information they found.



A RIGHT TO ESTABLISH A HOME

AUGUST 23, 2014—JANUARY 4, 2015

OPENING RECEPTION AUGUST 22, 6 - 8 PM

Featuring the Dove Choir of Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

HGA Gallery, Rapson Hall, 89 Church Street SE, Minneapolis



In August 1931, Arthur and Edith Lee, a young African-American couple, purchased a home at 4600 Columbus Avenue South, Minneapolis. In what many considered a “white neighborhood.” *A Right to Establish a Home* examines the protests that followed in the context of race and housing in Minneapolis, racism in Minnesota, and the individuals and organizations that defended the Lees, including the NAACP and the distinguished attorney Lena Olive Smith.

GUEST CURATORS: Greg Donofrio, Laurel Fritz

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS: Stearline Rucker and the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group

SUPPORTED BY: The IAS Heritage Collaborative; Minnesota Historical Society/University of Minnesota Heritage Partnership, Imagine Fund, the McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment, and Rapson Hall Exhibitions Fund with support from Judy Dayton.

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The Arthur and Edith Lee House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service on July 11, 2014.



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Greg Donofrio, Stearline Rucker, and Laurel Fritz







Community Engaged Preservation

In fall 2012, Professor **Greg Donofrio** (*Architecture*) challenged his Introduction to Historic Preservation class to consider “why is the site of an event that happened 80 years ago of interest to a neighborhood today? Why should we commemorate this history?”

At first glance, 4600 Columbus Avenue South doesn't look too special. But in 1931, the house was the site of one of south Minneapolis's largest racial showdowns. When Arthur and Edith Lee, an African-American couple, bought the house in what was then considered a white neighborhood, their neighbors mobbed the house to intimidate them out. A number of groups

and individuals stepped up to defend them, including postal service workers, WWI veterans, the NAACP, and attorney Lena Olive Smith.


Preservationists traditionally work with communities that have identified an issue, such as a specific type of conservation district, to produce a final report of their findings. Donofrio envisioned a different type of public engagement. He wanted to understand why, in addition to reasons outlined in the archives, the neighborhood considered the site historically significant. Recognizing that the students and the community possessed different

but complementary sets of skills and knowledge, his class collaborated with the neighborhood to develop the exhibition “A Right to Establish a Home.”

The class conducted oral history studies to record experiences with race and housing, race and public life, and race and owning a business. They attended community meetings. And they kept in touch. “When you have authentic community engagement, you can no longer make lateral decisions about how the exhibition's going to look,” Donofrio explained. “You have an obligation to stay in touch and consult them about how the material

reads, and whether you've quoted them accurately. It takes more time but the results are so much richer.”

The class collected enough raw material for Donofrio to partner with the neighborhood organization on a legacy grant to support **Laurel Fritz** (M.S. Heritage Conservation and Preservation candidate) to write and edit a National Register nomination. The Lee house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in July, 2014. z.umn.edu/emg15o



A RIGHT TO ESTABLISH A HOME

AUGUST 23, 2014–JANUARY 4, 2015
 HGA Gallery, Rapson Hall



A *Right to Establish a Home* examines the history behind a series of menacing protests that enveloped 4600 Columbus Avenue South, Minneapolis, following its purchase in August 1931 by Arthur and Edith Lee. The young couple was African-American, and they chose to buy a house in what many then considered a “white neighborhood” of South Minneapolis. On one night, as many as 4,000 protestors gathered in the street outside the Lee house, hurling insults, garbage, and even human waste at the property in an effort to intimidate the family into leaving the neighborhood. Confident in their right to establish a home, the Lees ultimately stayed in the house for more than two years, though the neighborhood never fully accepted the family’s presence.

The exhibition interprets the protests and responses in the broader context of race and housing in Minneapolis, racism in Minnesota, and the individuals and organizations that defended the Lees, including the NAACP and the distinguished attorney Lena Olive Smith. Additionally, through a series of oral history interviews with current Field Regina Northrop neighborhood residents, the exhibition connects the events of 1931 with the longer, broader continuum of events, people, and actions that reflect the history of a neighborhood striving for public safety, inclusiveness, cooperation, mutual respect, and social justice.

The exhibition encourages the audience to consider questions such as what it means to have the right to establish a home, what it means to be part of a neighborhood, and the ways that racism in Minnesota has changed since 1931.

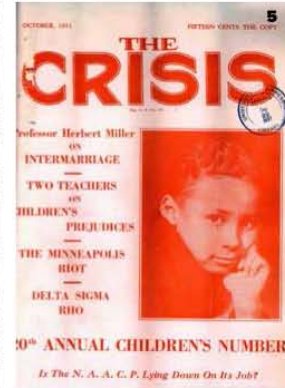
A Right to Establish a Home is the culmination of a multi-year partnership among members of the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group and the Heritage Conservation and Preservation Program at the University of Minnesota School of Architecture. The Arthur and Edith Lee House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service on July 11, 2014.

Event Curators: Greg Donofrio and Laurel Fritz

Community Collaborators:

Stearline Rucker and the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Group

Supported by: The IAS Heritage Collaborative; Minnesota Historical Society/University of Minnesota Heritage Partnership; Imagine Fund, the McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment; and Rapson Hall Exhibitions Fund with support from Judy Dayton



- 1 Protesters threw black paint (seen at the corner of the house) as well as garbage and even human feces at the Arthur and Edith Lee house during the 1931 “riots”. (*Minneapolis Tribune*, July 16, 1931)
- 2 Lee family
- 3 Compilation of newspaper headlines related to the Lee case
- 4 The crowd at the Lee House swelled to around 4,000 people during the height of the demonstrations. (*The Crisis*, October 1931)

- 5 Events at the Lee House were national news, making the cover of the NAACP *The Crisis* magazine as well as appearing in newspaper stories in cities from Chicago to Pittsburgh. (*The Crisis* cover, October 1931)
- 6 The Lee House “rots” were only one instance of the racially motivated aggression taking place in Minnesota during the 1920s and 1930s. The Ku Klux Klan also had a strong presence in the state and numerous cross burnings were documented around the same time. (Minnesota Historical Society neg #: 39376)



Brandt, Steve, “Site of racial showdown in Minneapolis heading to National Register,”
Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN), July 24, 2014.

The screenshot shows a StarTribune article from July 24, 2014. The article is titled "Site of racial showdown in Minneapolis heading to National Register" and is written by Steve Brandt. It discusses the historical significance of the Arthur and Edith Lee house in Minneapolis, which was the site of a racial confrontation in 1931. The article mentions that the house is being added to the National Register of Historic Places and that a museum is being planned for the site. It also notes that the house was the home of Pearl Lindstrom, a prominent African American leader in the NAACP. The article includes a photo of the house and a link to the National Register of Historic Places website.

Featured on the National Register of Historic Places website as part of the National Park Service's African American History Month 2015 programming.
<http://www.nps.gov/nr>

The screenshot shows the National Register of Historic Places website page for African American History Month 2015. The page features a header with the National Park Service logo and navigation links. The main content area is titled "National Register of Historic Places Program: African American History Month 2015" and includes a sub-header "Featured Historic Properties for African American History Month:". Below this, there are three featured properties: Robert Russa Moton Boyhood Home, Rice, Virginia; Linden Community and Recreation Center, Dayton, Ohio; and Lee, Arthur and Edith, House, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Each property is accompanied by a brief description and a "Read more" link. A photograph of the Robert Russa Moton Boyhood Home is also visible.

Featured on the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office Facebook page, December 2014.

Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office
December 1, 2014 · 🌐

We were excited to see a recent Minnesota National Register listing as the highlighted property on the National Register of Historic Places - NPS website last week. The Arthur and Edith Lee House was listed in July.

Lee, Arthur and Edith, House

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of...

NPS.GOV

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