

1898 was the last year Hastings students attended Irving High School and the first year of their organized football team. It must have been an exciting year for students and their families when the team ended the season as champions. They lost their first game to Central High 0 - 35, but won all 5 of their other games without giving up a point. The 5th game of the season was Hastings 35 River Falls 0. In reporting the results of the game the River Falls Journal stated, "Hastings made but slow gains through the Falls line, and were frequently stopped for loss when they tried it. But their end runs seldom failed to make from four to forty yards. Their interference was superb and massive. Their play was quick and accurate. Their training and team work were magnificent. The players were gentlemen, and the game was clean and good throughout." A team photo of the players that season shows one colored player, Thomas Willis, among the proud team members.

Thomas's mother, Louise had moved back to Illinois following her husband's death in 1896, so it is unlikely that she and her daughters, Lucinda and Anna, were there to cheer for Thomas and the team. It is very likely though, that the Wallace and Curry families were in the stands for all the home games.

It may have been Thomas who inspired their young sons to play football themselves when they were in high school. In 1910 Robert Wallace was on the football team photo as a player and Paul Curry as the coach. Unfortunately, Thomas, who had moved away from Hastings and was living with his family in St. Louis would not have been there to cheer on his young friends. However, there can be little doubt that the James and Ellen Wallace family and the James and Ella Curry family attended the games with pride. Ten years later, the youngest Curry son, William, also played football during his years at Central High.

Nine of the ten Curry children graduated from Central High School.

Georgianna graduated in 1901 and then attended Brown's Business college in Northfield. Mary graduated in 1903, Howard was one of only four males in the 1905 class of 29 graduates and Florence was valedictorian of her class in 1906. She attended Hampton Normal Institute in Hampton, Virginia, took a post graduate course in library work at Tuskegee Institute at Tuskegee, Alabama and then returned to Virginia where she was Assistant Librarian at the Hampton Institute. The remaining Curry siblings graduated thus: Charles, 1907; Paul, 1911; Virginia, 1913; Murlin, 1919 and William 1921.

At least three Curry family marriages took place in their home on 4th Street. Georgiana, married John W. Collins from Minneapolis in October of 1909. Attendants were Mary, sister to bride and Jacob, brother of groom. The attendants married each other in June, 1911, also at the family home. Murlin was married in 1922 at the Methodist parsonage followed by a six o'clock dinner at the Curry home.

Georgiana and John Collins lived in Minneapolis following their marriage and Mary boarded at their home and worked as a Physician's attendant until her marriage. By

1920 William was the only child living with James and Ella in Hastings. The rest of their children were living and working in Minneapolis.

Charles, Gilbert and Paul all joined the service in August, 1918 and served in the 809th Infantry during WWI. Charles as a Private in the AEF, Gilbert served overseas as a musician in Company E. and Paul as a Sergeant in Company E, AEF. Following their discharges from service they returned to Minneapolis.

The Wallace family was missing from the 1920 Hastings census for the first time in 50 years.

James Wallace, John and Nancy Wallace's son, died June 23, 1915 from heart trouble at the age of fifty-two. Ellen moved to Minneapolis to be near her children after James died. Her daughter Julia, who graduated from Central High School in 1911 had moved to Minneapolis and gotten married in 1914. Julia provided a home for her mother and brother George. Robert and his wife Rhoda were also living in Minneapolis and his brother James was their boarder.

In 1919 on June 28th, Nancy Wallace died at the age of 84 years.

The Black population on 4th Street now consisted of William and Elizabeth Douglas and James and Ella Curry. Though the Curry children had moved away from Hastings and Fourth Street, they were frequent visitors through the years with their own growing families. When her daughter-in-law Hazel gave birth to triplets in August, 1927, Ella went to Minneapolis to help care for the new babies and their older brother and sister. The triplets were only a year old when another daughter was born. Helping with her grandchildren kept Ella busy.

Ella and James celebrated their Golden Wedding in 1932 with a family reunion at their home on the corner of 4th and Vermillion Streets.

A year later, on November 24, 1933 James died. He had been working as the public school janitor for 15 years and was admired by many. His death caused great sadness in the community. All the Hastings newspapers carried articles about his life and death. The downtown businesses closed for his funeral and the Methodist church was packed. Larry Ho, who grew up in Hastings, served two terms as mayor of St. Paul and wrote for the St. Paul Dispatch paid tribute to him in his column. He said,

“One of the best friends of my childhood days - James Curry of Hastings is dead. This splendid colored man who was raised in the atmosphere of slavery, sang his gallant way through life. .. I am proud that so splendid a man loved me truly. I reverence, I salute his memory and in reverence I tell this one incident of his glad and smiling life. One night he sang a song at the Hastings opera house at a church benefit. In the midst of his song the electric lights went out. Jim laughed and called out, ‘cheer up folks, we are all the same color now’.

No, Jim old pal, unfortunately we are not all the same color, though we

should be. You were radiant gold all through while most of us are a drab yellow. I'd like to throw a rose to you Jim, but across the distance all I can throw is my heart - no less loving in this hour of our parting than on that first day 50 years ago, when you first held me on your lap."

Ella continued living in Hastings for a year before moving to Minneapolis after James' death. She lived with her youngest daughter, Murlin until she died in October 8, 1943. James and Ella are both buried in Lakeside Cemetery.

January 26, 1934 William Douglas died at the age of 68. The headline for his obituary read, "Former Mail Carrier Dies — William Douglas, Colored Resident Interred Wednesday". He was also buried at Lakeside.

On January 22, 1954, The Hastings Gazette carried this obituary:
"Henry Thomas, 74, Friend of Many, Died Here Monday"

"Henry Thomas, 74, this city's only Negro resident, died of a heart attack here at 1:20 p.m. Monday.

Funeral services for Mr. Thomas, who has made his home here for some 23 years, will be held at the Guardian Angels church at 9 o'clock this morning (Friday) with the Rev. Ferguson officiating. Interment will be in the Guardian Angels cemetery.

Except for his birth date, January 2, 1879 details of Mr. Thomas' life before he moved to Hastings are almost entirely lacking, although it is known that he worked in a St. Paul hotel at one time.

"Henry" as he was known to his many friends here, was not given to talking about himself. He was noted for a dry sense of humor, a broad grin and a delight in spinning yarns which left his listeners wondering if Henry was 'pulling their leg.'

Mr. Thomas worked diligently at a variety of jobs here but his first love was washing and simonizing cars, an occupation he pursued faithfully and diligently during his years in Hastings. His greatest pleasure was turning out a good job—and pleasing the people he met and worked for.

Henry Thomas was a man whose wants were few. But his accomplishments were great in the sense that he knew no ill will here. Henry will be greatly missed by Hastings residents.

Acting as pallbearers for Mr. Thomas at funeral services today are Frank Kummer, L.H.Oliver, Ben J. Bahls, Harry Heseltonl, John Gardell, Sr. and E. Russell Swanson."

97 years spanned the period of time between Robert Burns and Henry Thomas in Hastings. During that time members of the colored race had fought for their freedom and then their rights as citizens, had celebrated the victory of obtaining those rights and joined together in learning more about becoming good citizens. They dreamt of and organized their own church to worship God according to their consciences without shame or fear, only to have it destroyed by arsons. They watched their children attend and excel in scholarship and sports. Many worked, died and were buried in Hastings, but their children chose to pursue their own dreams where there were more opportunities for themselves and their children.

The public is invited to attend Building Bridges in Hastings – Our Black History on Saturday, Feb 24, at 2 p.m., Hastings High School Auditorium. The program will include a Readers' Theatre dramatizing our black history and a performance by Blackout Improv, a professional black improvisational theatre group from Minneapolis. <https://www.black-outcomedy.org>. Admission is free.

Building Bridges in Hastings is a newly formed organization dedicated to creating a more welcoming and inclusive community. Members of Building Bridges include pastors and faith leaders from Hastings' churches, and representatives from Hastings Prescott Area Arts Council, Lakeside Cemetery Board, Friends of LeDuc and Historic Hastings, as well as concerned citizens. More information about Building Bridges in Hastings and Hastings' black history can be accessed at: <https://lakesidecem.org/hastings-black-history-month/>