

## 2.3 Significance of Historic Properties

### *Hamline Hotel*

The Hamline Hotel is recommended as eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of social history for association with the African American Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, with a proposed period of significance of 1947.

The Hamline Hotel was constructed in 1926 by owner and contractor R. E. Kimball at the intersection of Snelling Avenue and Charles Avenue in St. Paul's Hamline-Midway neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> Estimated at a cost of \$175,000, the three-story brick building with raised basement appears to have originally operated as an apartment-hotel, offering residents both the public dining facilities typical of hotels and the option for permanent living provided by apartment buildings. Initially, the property was known as the "Kimball Hotel." By 1932, the building was known as the "Hamline Hotel," and it continued in operation under this name through at least the mid-1970s.

Advertisements in the *Minneapolis Tribune* dating to 1930 noted that the hotel offered accommodations for "those who wish to save and at the same time enjoy the comfort and convenience of home." The hotel had both "apartments and single rooms, with or without baths." Amenities included a coffee shop, dancing salon, beauty parlor, and bridge room.<sup>2</sup> Another advertisement noted that the hotel had "large amusement rooms and reception rooms available for dancing and bridge parties," as well as "nicely appointed coffee shops, special dinners and catering service."<sup>3</sup> The hotel's target clientele included not only individuals in need of permanent housing but also college students seeking school year accommodations and tourists and travelers looking for temporary lodging. During the late 1920s, an illegal "speakeasy" and gambling establishment operated out of the building's basement. According to one newspaper account, the operation, which was exposed in a 1929 raid by federal agents, served a clientele "made up largely of prominent or prosperous citizens of Minneapolis and St. Paul."<sup>4</sup> From the 1930s through the mid-twentieth century, the hotel's public spaces were also utilized by various community organizations and groups for events and parties ranging from fraternity banquets to the Minnesota Industrial Chemists' Forum and the Younger Republicans of Ramsey County.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless cited otherwise, all information below was taken from an inventory form for the property prepared by this author to meet the requirements of this Section 106 review. See Appendix D, Inventory Form for RA-SPC-3424.

<sup>2</sup> "Hotels and Apartments," *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 16, 1930; "Kimball Hotel," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 9, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> "Kimball Hotel," *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 3, 1930.

<sup>4</sup> "Harney Seeks Padlocking of Raided Hotel," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, May 7, 1929; "U.S. Grand Jury Indicts 47 Here," *Minneapolis Journal*, May 26, 1929.



Figure 1. View of the Hamline Hotel at 545 Snelling Avenue North, looking northwest, 1926. Photo by Charles Nelson. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

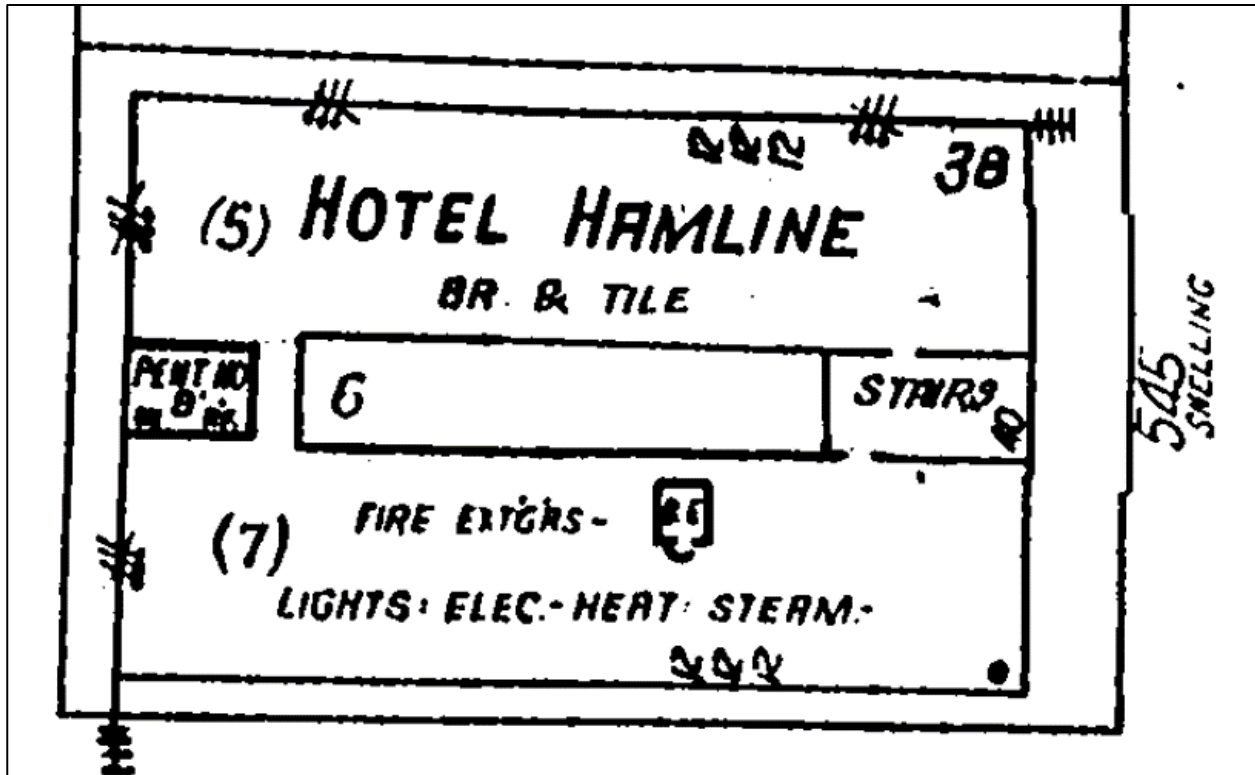


Figure 2. Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map of the Hamline Hotel, 1948. Courtesy of the Hennepin County Library and Proquest Digital Sanborn Maps.

In 1947, the hotel was the site of a notable sit-in led by Bayard Rustin, African American civil rights activist. Born in 1912, Rustin was an advocate for many social causes, including racial equality, workers' rights, and gay rights. In the context of the African American civil rights movement, Rustin is noted for his contributions to the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which helped open the way for the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as well as his mentorship to Martin Luther King Jr. in the nonviolent approach to civil resistance.<sup>5</sup> As a previous evaluation of the property's historical significance prepared in 2018 explains:

During the early-twentieth century, African Americans represented a small percentage of the population in Minnesota: in 1910, there were 7,084 African Americans in a population of approximately two million or 0.3 percent. Many of the state's black residents lived in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, and in both cities, vibrant communities developed as the number of African Americans increased. During World War I and the 1920s as southern blacks migrated to northern cities due to employment opportunities. By 1940, Saint Paul's African American population reached 4,139 or about 1.5 percent of the city's population (Delton 2002a: 420). The Rondo neighborhood was the center of the African American community, located in the area south of University Avenue roughly between Rice and Dale Streets.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Katherine Crawford-Lackey, "The Places of Bayard Rustin," National Park Service, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-places-of-bayard-rustin.htm>; "Bayard Rustin," National Park Service, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/people/bayard-rustin.htm>.

In response to on-going discrimination, African Americans in Saint Paul have a long history of taking action when denied services from white institutions, agencies, and businesses...Despite the advances from organizing, advocacy, and self-help, during the 1940s, racial discrimination against African Americans in housing, home loans, and insurance continued, making affordable housing difficult to obtain. A study by the Governor's Interracial Commission found that "the overwhelming number" of blacks were unable to find housing to rent or buy outside of the "definite neighborhoods to which white persons 'expect Negroes to be restricted'" (quoted in Foss and Wilder 2016: 73). The black community in Saint Paul, as elsewhere, was met with discrimination not only in housing, but in public institutions, employment, and wages. Seeking new ways to bring about change, activists increasingly turned to direct action, which gave rise to the Civil Rights Movement, a coordinated campaign of civil resistance, primarily in the south to end segregation and discrimination. The mass movement is generally considered to have begun in the mid-1950s and continued through 1968.

Before the mass movement of civil rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s, however, the stage was set previously, as described above, through political realignment, education, and opportunities brought by economic expansion. In addition, during the 1940s, the development of direct-action civil-resistance tactics was crucial. In 1941, A. Philip Randolph's threatened march on Washington to demand equal employment opportunities and desegregation in the military led President Roosevelt to issue an executive order creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). Non-violent direct action such as this was also being advocated by the early 1940s by organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

By the late 1940s, activists such as Bayard Rustin with CORE, James Farmer with FOR, and others were advocating for non-violent direct action informed by Gandhian non-violence, methods honed by labor activists during the 1930s, such as the sit-down strike, and their own pacifism. At a time often considered to be the low ebb in the long civil rights movement, CORE activists helped to keep the movement alive by travelling the country to hold week-long series of workshops or "institutes." During these institutes, they did more than educate about racial equality, they engaged in demonstrations, including direct action intended to desegregate public facilities. The institutes, which averaged between 150 and 250 participants, were held approximately 10 times per year at various locations from 1943 to 1955. During this critical period leading up to the mass Civil Rights Movement in the south, the institutes trained thousands of future activists, from marchers in Montgomery to leaders of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Wolcott 2018: 33, 38, 41-42).

In January 1947, Rustin was in Saint Paul for a week-long series of lectures and workshops at various institutions, including Hamline University and Macalester College. Professor Russel Compton of Hamline made a reservation for Rustin at the Hamline Hotel. However, when Rustin, who was African American, arrived, the clerk first claimed the reservation did not exist, then stated that, although a reservation had been made, no rooms were available. Rustin then stated that he would sit in the lobby until he could see the manager, thereby staging an

impromptu sit-in. According to a newspaper account, Rustin sat in the lobby all night and was joined by Professor Compton and James Morrill, President of the University of Minnesota, who sat with Rustin for much of the night. According to another account, Rustin was “joined by local activists,” suggesting a larger number of participants. In any case, the next morning, Rustin left the hotel to attend his scheduled engagements, telling the hotel management that he would return for a room later that day. When Rustin returned, he was provided a room at the hotel.<sup>6</sup>

The Hamline Hotel is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of social history for its association with this event, a successful sit-in that represents the struggle to desegregate public facilities in Minnesota. As noted in the previous evaluation:

During the 1940s, Bayard Rustin and other activists were offering trainings and demonstrations in the methods of non-violent direct action to confront segregation that would be used starting in the mid-1950s in the south. The Hamline Hotel was the site of an impromptu and successful sit-in that allowed an African American man, who had been denied service, to stay at the hotel. The events at the Hamline Hotel in January 1947 are associated with the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrate the importance of desegregating public facilities in the north, which trained and empowered activists to confront segregation in the south. For these reasons, the Hamline Hotel meets Criterion A.

The property’s period of significance is 1947, reflecting the year that the sit-in took place.

In the late 1970s or early 1980s, the property was converted to a halfway house for the chemically dependent and mentally ill.<sup>7</sup> By 1999, the property operated as the Snelling Avenue Apartments. In 2010, Beacon Interfaith Housing purchased the property and completed a \$2 million renovation.<sup>8</sup>

### *Hamline-Midway Multi-Family Residential Historic District*

The Hamline-Midway Multi-Family Residential Historic District is located along Charles Avenue between Snelling Avenue North and Fry Street and the area near the intersection of Fry Street and Sherburne Avenue (see Figure 3 below). The district includes 26 properties: 19 contributing buildings constructed between 1916 and 1948 as apartments, duplexes, fourplexes, a rowhouse, and an apartment-hotel and 7 non-contributing properties. The district is recommended as eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development as the best representation of multi-family housing development in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood during the first half of the twentieth century. The recommended period of significance is 1916 – 1948.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Schmidt, *Architecture-History Studies for the Allianz Field Development Project St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota* (submitted to Minnesota United FC, 2019), 50 – 52.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Meryhew, “Halfway House Saved at Last Minute,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 20, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> St. Paul Building Permit No. 20 09 199743 REM 00 B, 545 Snelling Avenue North, May 12, 2010, St. Paul Online Services; “Housing Project Assistant,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 4, 1999; personal communication between Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative and report author, email, July 25, 2022.