

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 3621 Portland AvenueCity or town: Minneapolis State: Minnesota County: HennepinNot For Publication: Vicinity: **3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:**Date**_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:**Date**_____
Title :_____
**State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government**

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/ Single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/ Single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS

Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: FOUNDATION: Concrete block; WALLS:
Stucco, concrete block; ROOF: Asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Harry Davis, Sr., and Charlotte Davis House is a one-story, single-family home located at 3621 Portland Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The house was constructed in 1914 by its original owner C.R. Ahl. The Central neighborhood, in which the Davis House is located, features an array of similarly sized single-family homes and bungalows built during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The home is a rectangular, stucco-clad bungalow located at the center of a 0.1-acre parcel. The house is front-gabled and features a small, one-story wing at the north end of its east elevation. There is a one-story garage, constructed in 1918, that is located at the northeast corner of the parcel and is accessed by an alleyway that runs north to south immediately east of the parcel.

The Harry Davis, Sr., and Charlotte Davis House retains sufficient integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to communicate its significant association with Minneapolis civil rights activist, community leader, and politician, Harry Davis, Sr., and his wife Charlotte Davis, during the property's period of significance from 1954 to 1971.

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Narrative Description

Site

The Harry Davis, Sr., and Charlotte Davis House is located at 3621 Portland Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Photographs 1 and 2). The house's west-facing façade fronts Portland Avenue, which is a two-lane, one-way road that carries southbound traffic past the house. The house sits on a 0.1-acre parcel, roughly equidistant from the west and east property lines but is sited with closer proximity to the parcel's north property line than its south. The surrounding neighborhood consists of similarly sized parcels ranging from 0.1 to 0.2 acres. These parcels feature one- and two-story homes with similar footprints to the Davis House. These houses were largely constructed during the same period, mostly during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The property parcel is bounded on the west by a paved cement sidewalk, on the north by a chain-link fence shared with the property parcel to the north, on the east by a paved alley, and on the south by a low metal fence shared with the property parcel to the south. The alley to the east of the house is at a lower elevation than the property parcel. There is a one-story garage that is accessed by this alley, located at the northeast corner of the parcel. The Davis House was built in 1914 by its original owner C.R. Ahl.¹

At the center of the lot, a paved concrete pathway extends eastward from the public sidewalk towards a concrete set of steps that provide access to the house's primary entryway (Photograph 2). There is a secondary paved concrete pathway along the north boundary of the lot. This pathway extends eastward from the public sidewalk towards a wood gate located at the northwest corner of the house. This gate provides access to the north elevation of the house and the private yard.

Beginning at the northeast corner of the house, there is a pathway that extends to the east towards the alley (Photograph 18). This pathway, which features a set of stairs in the middle, accesses a wood gate located at the northeast corner of the garage. This gate provides access to the alley. A wood fence with vertical boards extends from the northeast corner of the house to the northwest corner of the garage, bordering the southern edge of the pathway that provides access to the alley. Another wood fence with vertical boards extends along the eastern edge of the parcel. Below this fence, a set of concrete pavers acts as a retaining wall between the parcel and the lower elevation alley. At the southwest corner of the house, there is a wood gate connected to a wood fence with vertical boards.

Exterior

The Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House is a one-story, rectangular house (Photograph 1). The house features a front-gabled roof covered in asphalt shingles. The roof features open, overhanging eaves with exposed wood rafter tails. The south roof slope features a stretcher bond brick chimney near the ridgeline, towards the east end of the roof. The house is clad in stucco on all elevations and rests on a concrete foundation.

¹ "Real New Bungalows," *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), November 8, 1914.

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Most of the house's fenestration arrangement appears to be historic, although window openings on the west-facing façade above and to the north of the entryway, as well as at the west end of the north elevation appear to be non-historic. The house's windows are mostly non-historic, replacement materials. The house's stucco cladding is original to its construction.² Applied Craftsman-style details around the house's primary entryway also appear to be historic, as similar details appear on an adjacent house at 3625 Portland Avenue which was constructed by Ahl at the same as the Davis House.³ The home's original interior layout is unknown but building permits indicate little change has been made to the house's floorplan. The basement is believed to have been originally unfinished but appears to have had at least one finished room when the Davises purchased the home. Further remodeling to the basement occurred in 1960, 1967, and 2004. It is now used as additional living space.

West Façade

The west façade features a single-leaf steel door with an aluminum-framed, glass storm door at its center which serves as the house's primary entryway (Photograph 2). The entryway is accessed by a set of concrete steps with metal railings. On either side of these concrete steps, there are flowerbeds formed by brick pavers.

To the west of entryway, there is a vinyl three-light sliding window with a wood planter underneath that was installed in 2017, replacing three nine-over-one aluminum windows.⁴ To the east of the entryway, there are three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows separated by thick wood surrounds with a wood planter underneath. There are geometric motifs affixed to the far north and south ends of the elevation and on either side of the primary entryway. Above the primary entryway in the gable's apex, there is a rectangular recessed opening with a wood sill along the bottom. There is a six-light wood awning window located within this recessed opening. This opening appears to be historic but was likely not originally recessed. The current window was installed between 2019 and 2022, replacing a six-light vinyl window.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the house is divided into five bays of fenestration openings (Photographs 3 and 4). The first and easternmost bay, located on the wing's north elevation, features three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows separated by wood surrounds. Below these windows, on the basement level of the house, there is a vinyl casement window with a wood surround. The window well is lined with corrugated metal. The second bay features a window opening filled with glass blocks. Below the second bay, there is a former window opening on the basement level of the house that has been covered and sealed with stucco. The third bay features a one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window with a wood surround. The fourth bay features a one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window with a vinyl surround. Below this window on the basement level of the house, there is a vinyl casement window with a wood surround. The window

² "Real New Bungalows," *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), November 8, 1914.

³ "Building Permit No. B111191," City of Minneapolis, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2467386.pdf>.

⁴ "Building Permit No. BLDG657203," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department; "Street View," Google, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://www.google.com/maps>.

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well is lined with corrugated metal. The fifth and westernmost bay features a two-light vinyl sliding window that was installed in 2017.⁵

East Elevation

The east elevation of the house features a one-story, partial-width wing at its north end (Photographs 5 and 6). This wing is believed to be historic as a lot survey of the property from 1918 shows this wing was present on the house at this time.⁶ Furthermore, the same wing can be found in the same location on 3625 Portland Avenue, constructed by C.R. Ahl at the same time as 3621 Portland Avenue. This wing features a front-gabled roof with overhanging eaves covered in asphalt shingles. The wing is slightly shorter than the main volume of the house. The east elevation of the wing features three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows separated by thick wood surrounds. The south elevation of the wing similarly features three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows separated by thick wood surrounds. Located adjacent to the wing, at the center of the house's east elevation, is a secondary entryway to the house. This entryway features a single-leaf steel door with a rectangular glass inset on the door's upper half. This door is accessed by a slightly raised wood platform deck that spans that southern half of the house's east elevation.

South Elevation

The house's south elevation is divided into four bays (Photograph 7). The first, westernmost bay features a vinyl one-over-one, double-hung window with a thick wood surround. The second bay from the west features three historic six-light wood casement windows with thick wood surrounds. Below these windows, at the basement level of the house, there are two vinyl casement windows. The window wells are lined with wood. The third bay from the west features an oriel supported by four, pointed wood horizontal posts that project from the house's south elevation (Photograph 8). This oriel projects away from the house and rises to the roofline. This oriel has three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows separated by thick wood surrounds. This oriel is likely original to the house as the same feature can be found in the same location on the adjacent 3625 Portland Avenue which was also constructed by C.R. Ahl at the same time as 3621 Portland Avenue. The fourth, easternmost bay features a one-over-one, double-hung, aluminum window with a thick wood surround.

Interior

The interior of the Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House includes an enclosed partial-width porch, a front room, a dining room, a kitchen, an office, a bedroom, and two bathrooms on the first floor (Figure 3). Much of the house's first floor interior layout appears to be unchanged. The porch was described in a 1915 real estate listing as original being "sashed and screened," indicating that it was historically a partially, enclosed, three-season porch.⁷ It was enclosed at some point for year-round use, although there are no available records to indicate when this work took place. The first-floor features thin, wood floor

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Lot Survey: B132132," Hennepin County Library, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://digitalcollections.hclib.org/digital/collection/p17208coll12/id/6452/rec/1>.

⁷ "Real Estate—Improved," *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), March 8, 1915.

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planks throughout except where otherwise specified. There is a common area, a laundry room, two bedrooms, and a bathroom in the basement (Figure 3).

The main entrance on the west-facing, primary façade opens to the enclosed porch which is located at the northwest corner of the house (Photograph 9). The enclosed porch is a rectangular space with walls clad in horizontal wood planks (non-historic). The ceiling of the porch features historic beadboard. The room's windows and doors are framed with wood surrounds. The south end of the porch features original double-leaf wood doors with fifteen-lite glass insets. At the southeast corner of the room, on the room's east wall opposite the primary entrance, there is a historic single-leaf wood door with eight-lite glass insets. Both doors provided access to the front room.

The front room is located at the southwest corner of the house (Photograph 11). This room is a large, L-shaped space with historic wood baseboards. At the northeast corner of the front room, there is an arched opening that frames a small entry hall that leads to a closet accessed by a historic single-leaf, wood door. At the east end of the front room, there is a wide, flattened ogee arch opening that provides access to the dining room. To the north and south of the arched opening, there are low height alcove bookshelves with three shelves. These alcoves feature the same flattened ogee arch shape as the opening into the dining room.

The dining room is rectangular and located to the east of the front room (Photograph 12). This room features original wood baseboards and doorframes. This room features a built-in wood buffet along the east wall. To the south of the buffet, there is an open entryway that leads into the kitchen. The south wall of the dining room features a recessed window bay located within the oriel on the house's south elevation. This window bay is clad in wood, and its lower half features a wood shelf above heating elements which are concealed by a hinged, wood screen. On the west wall, there are recessed alcove bookshelves located to the south and north of the arched entryway into the front room (Photograph 13). At the north end of the dining room, there is a historic wood, single-leaf door with a wood surround that provides access to a hallway.

The house's kitchen is a narrow, L-shaped space that was entirely remodeled in 2013 (Photograph 14).⁸ This room features square ceramic tiling on the floor, wood cabinets with crown molding, and stone countertops. This kitchen also features historic wood baseboards, which have been painted. The walls feature a stone backsplash. At the north end of the kitchen, there is a small staircase to a landing that provides access to the door leading out to the home's backyard and the basement.

At the north end of the dining room, there is a hallway. The house's primary bedroom is located at the east end of the hallway, within the partial-width wing located on the house's east elevation. This room is an L-shaped space and is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. Located immediately north of the entrance to the bedroom, there is an ensuite bathroom which was entirely remodeled in 2013.⁹ This

⁸ "Building Permit No. BLDG43077," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department.

⁹ Ibid.

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bathroom is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. The east end of this bathroom features a floating wall vanity with a medicine cabinet. The west side of the bathroom features a fiberglass tub with tiled stone walls and a sliding glass shower door. At the northwest corner of the bedroom, there is a reach-in closet with double-leaf, bi-fold hollow core wood doors.

Directly to the north of the dining room, on the north side of the hallway, there is a bathroom which has been entirely remodeled. This bathroom is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. It features tiled wainscoting and hexagonal tile flooring. At the east end of the bathroom is a fiberglass tub with tiled walls and a sliding glass shower door. At the northwest corner of the bathroom, there is a floating wall vanity and a medicine cabinet.

At the west end of the hallway, there is an office which is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. The office is carpeted and features a reach-in closet with a single-leaf wood door at the northwest corner of the room, on the west wall.

The house's basement is believed to have been originally unfinished. A 1954 real estate listing for the house indicates that the house featured a finished room in the basement by that time.¹⁰ The basement has been remodeled at least three times between 1960 and 2004.¹¹ It is accessed by a carpeted staircase located to the north of the kitchen, off of the landing for the back door (Photograph 15). The basement is carpeted unless otherwise noted. The staircase leads to an irregularly shaped common area that provides access to all rooms in the basement. Near the center of this common area is a square structural support column. At the southwest corner of the basement, this common area is employed as a living room. To the east of the living room, there is a laundry room. This laundry room is accessed by a single-leaf, hollow core wood door located on a canted wall.

There is a rectangular bedroom located at the northeast corner of the basement. This bedroom is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. At the northwest corner of the bedroom, there is a reach-in closet that is accessed by double-leaf, hollow core wood bi-fold doors.

To the west of the bedroom, there is a bathroom. This bathroom has tiled floors and features wallpaper on its east wall. At the west end of the bathroom, there is a shower. The north wall of the bathroom features a vanity and a mirror affixed to the wall.

To the west of the bathroom, at the northwest corner of the basement, there is a bedroom. This bedroom is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door. On the west wall of the bedroom, there are two reach-in closets. The southernmost closet is accessed by a single-leaf hollow core wood door, and the northernmost closet is accessed by double-leaf hollow core wood bi-fold doors.

¹⁰ "Houses for Sale," *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 1, 1954.

¹¹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 126; "Building Permit No. B400428," City of Minneapolis, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2779606.pdf>; "Building Permit No. BLDG217090," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department.

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Garage

At the northeast corner of the property, fronting the alley that runs along the parcel's eastern boundary, there is a square, one-story garage that was constructed in 1918 (Photograph 16).¹² The garage is located at the same level as the alley, below the parcel's slightly higher elevation. As a result, much of the garage's south and west elevations are below grade and not visible (Photograph 17). The garage is constructed of concrete blocks and has an overhanging, front-gabled roof that is covered in asphalt shingles and features exposed rafter tails. On the east elevation of the garage, the gable end is slightly recessed from the wall plane that features the garage door. This wall plane is clad in stucco and features a single-stall, overhead aluminum garage door at its center. This garage door is framed within a wood surround. What appears to be a metal track for an original sliding garage door is located directly above the garage door. Above the projecting volume, there is a small pent roof covered in asphalt shingles with exposed rafter tails. Above the pent roof, the gable end is clad in wood shakes. The south elevation of the garage is barely visible due to the south roof slope's proximity to the ground. The only portion of the west elevation that is visible is the gable which is clad in wood shakes. The north elevation of the garage features a window opening at its center that has been covered with plywood (Photograph 18).

Alterations

A lot survey of the property from 1918 shows that the layout and location of the house and garage have not changed since this time.¹³ Building permits indicate that alterations to the property's exterior since its construction have been minimal. In 1918, four years after the house was constructed, a permit was issued to then-owner O.E. Carlson for the construction of the garage currently on the property.¹⁴ Shortly after a basement fire in 1960, the basement was repaired and remodeled.¹⁵ In 1962, a permit was issued to Davis for a kitchen remodeling with no construction of an addition required. This work was completed by Johnson Builders and Supply.¹⁶ In 1967, Davis was issued another permit for interior alterations including a remodeling of part of the basement and miscellaneous repairs. These alterations were carried out by Pioneer Home Improvement Company.¹⁷

In 2004, the basement was remodeled which included the addition of three bedrooms with egress windows.¹⁸ In 2013, the basement bathroom, the kitchen, and both first-floor bathrooms were

¹² "Building Permit No. B132132," City of Minneapolis, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2502595.pdf>.

¹³ "Lot Survey: B132132," Hennepin County Library, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://digitalcollections.hclib.org/digital/collection/p17208coll12/id/6452/rec/1>.

¹⁴ "Building Permit No. B132132," City of Minneapolis, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2502595.pdf>.

¹⁵ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 126.

¹⁶ "Building Permit No. B379382," City of Minneapolis, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2665074>.

¹⁷ "Building Permit No. B400428," City of Minneapolis, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/DisplayDocApp/home/?app=HBP&doc=2779606.pdf>.

¹⁸ "Building Permit No. BLDG217090," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department.

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remodeled.¹⁹ The current three-light sliding windows to the north of the entryway and the sliding windows at the west end of the north elevation were installed in 2017, each replacing sets of three grouped nine-over-one windows on both elevations.²⁰ Additional elements that have been changed within the property are the installation of hollow core doors, vinyl and glass block windows, and exterior steel doors. Except for exterior doors and windows, all elements on the house's exterior including materials, footprint, and decorative details appear to be historic.

Integrity

According to the National Park Service, all properties nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places must have sufficient integrity to convey its significance.²¹ According to the *African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota* Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) Form, "integrity of association, location, and feeling are of a comparatively higher level of importance than design, setting, materials, and workmanship" for properties eligible under Criterion B. Furthermore, under Criterion B, integrity of interior spaces may possess higher importance if the home's layout is integral to how the significant individual used the property. The Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House retains all seven aspects of integrity: setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The house has remained in its original location at 3621 Portland Avenue since both its construction and the period of the Daveses' ownership. Therefore, the property continues to retain its integrity of location. The arrangement of roads, sidewalks, and alleyways in proximity of the house has not changed since the time of the Daveses' ownership. Similarly, the arrangement of homes in the surrounding neighborhood and their respective lot sizes have remained the same since the end of the period of significance. There does not appear to be any new construction on surrounding blocks that is incongruous with the scale and style of other neighborhood properties. Therefore, the property has retained its integrity of setting.

The house retains its integrity of materials, workmanship, and design. There are no indications that any changes to the house's form have been undertaken since the Daveses' ownership, with any substantial changes completed prior to the start of the period of significance. A lot survey of the property from 1918, conducted for the permitting of the garage's construction, shows that the footprints and locations of the house and garage have remained unchanged since before, during, and after the Daveses' ownership.²² According to a description of the house in a 1915 real estate listing, the house originally featured a "sashed and screened front porch", terminology commonly used to describe enclosed, three-season porches.²³ This porch was likely insulated for year-round use, but records do not suggest that this alteration was completed after the period of significance. Overall, the circulation and layout of the house

¹⁹ "Building Permit No. BLDG43077," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department.

²⁰ "Building Permit No. BLDG657203," City of Minneapolis, on file with the Community Planning and Economic Development department; "Street View," Google, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://www.google.com/maps>.

²² "Lot Survey: B132132," Hennepin County Library, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://digitalcollections.hclib.org/digital/collection/p17208coll12/id/6452/rec/1>.

²² "Lot Survey: B132132," Hennepin County Library, accessed March 26, 2026, <https://digitalcollections.hclib.org/digital/collection/p17208coll12/id/6452/rec/1>.

²³ "Real Estate—Improved," *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), March 8, 1915.

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remain largely original. The basement is believed to have been originally unfinished. According to Davis's son, Davis's mother lived in a bedroom in the basement prior to her death in 1958, indicating that the basement was already finished and had been converted to living space either before or during the first years of the Davises' ownership.²⁴ The basement was repaired and remodeled following a fire in 1960 that was confined to the basement, although the extent of this remodeling in comparison to its previous condition are unknown.²⁵ Davis appears to have carried out additional remodeling to the basement in 1967 during his time living in the home. Further remodeling or finishing of the basement was completed by the owner who preceded the current owner, after the period of significance. Overall, the changes that have been carried out within the home are not incompatible with the house's use as a single-family residence as it was when the Davises owned the property. The presence of original wood baseboards and narrow plank flooring throughout most of the first floor, flattened ogee arch openings, wood doors, and wood surrounds in the front room and dining room, and wall alcoves with flattened ogee arches in the front room and dining room are historic and therefore these features appear as they would have when the Davises owned the home. The home's exterior remains largely unaltered except for the installation of replacement windows and doors which largely came after the end of the period of significance. Although the interior of the home has experienced remodeling and layout changes since the Davises' ownership, there is no indication that the home's interior arrangement is integral to Harry Davis, Sr.'s historic significance. Therefore, the Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House retains its integrity of materials, workmanship, and design both on the house's exterior and within the house's interior.

The Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House retains its integrity of feeling and association by way of its continued use as a single-family home that has experienced few exterior alterations to its detailing or its massing since the end of the period of significance, outside of changes to fenestration materials. Where interior alterations have been carried out within the home, these changes have not drastically changed the property's function or use. It remains identifiable as a single-family home that appears much as it would have when it was the residence of Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis.

²⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 118; Harry "Butch" Davis, Jr., interview with Kendra Ellner, January 22, 2026.

²⁵ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 126.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE - BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1954-1971

Significant Dates

1957

1969

1971

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Harry Davis, Sr.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

C.R. Ahl

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House at 3621 Portland Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the *African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota* Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) Form.²⁶ This property meets the general and property-specific registration requirements established by the MPD under Criterion B in the areas of *Social History*, *Politics/Government*, and *Ethnic Heritage – Black* and is closely associated with Context VII: Segregation, Discrimination, Civil Rights, and Reclamation. The property is locally significant under Criterion B as the extant resource most closely associated with the productive life of Black activist and community leader, Harry Davis, Sr. While Davis contributed to Minneapolis's Black community in a variety of ways during his life, his work on behalf of the advancement of civil rights and his active involvement in local politics stand out as his most impactful historical contributions. The property's period of significance is 1954 to 1971. This period of significance begins with the Davises' ownership of, and residency in, the property starting in 1954, encompassing Harry Davis, Sr.'s most productive period of political and civil rights activism and ending with his 1971 mayoral bid in which he became the first Black major party candidate in the city's history.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Davis's Early Years

Harry Davis, Sr., christened as William Harry Davis, was born on April 12, 1923, in an apartment at 711 Lyndale Avenue North in North Minneapolis.²⁷ His multicultural ancestry included Black, Native American, and Spanish, which he later cited as the foundation of his principles to support historically marginalized community groups in Minnesota.²⁸ His great-grandparents on both sides settled in Minneapolis in the late nineteenth century via Fort Snelling, which served as a conduit for early Black migration to the Upper Midwest following the Civil War.²⁹ Growing up during the Great Depression, Davis's family was forced to navigate poverty, discrimination, and neighborhood disinvestment. During

Davis's early years, he was raised by his parents, Leland C. Davis and Elizabeth Frances Jackson Davis, in a very close-knit and nurturing Christian family. He was the youngest of six children, living with his

²⁶ Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota" (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026).

²⁷ Percy Villa, "Almost About Everything," *The Minneapolis Spokesman* (Minneapolis, MN), February 26, 1960.

²⁸ *Minnesota Issues*, "Fighting for Equality: A Life of Service with speaker W. Harry Davis," produced by University Media Resources and Arthur Naftalin, aired January 30, 1984, KTCA.

²⁹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 20-23.

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siblings in a small second-story apartment that was often filled with extended family, including his paternal grandfather, uncles, maternal grandmother, and cousins.³⁰

In 1925, at two years old, Davis was afflicted with polio.³¹ Around five years old, he was considered disabled by the disease and went to Michael Dowling School for Crippled Children in Minneapolis.³² There, Davis was left behind at the school while other students were taken to a local hospital for heat and massage therapy due to the hospital's policy of barring Black patients.³³

However, it was at the Michael Dowling School where he established a relationship with Dr. Paul Giessler, one of the school's founders, who was a professor and orthopedic surgeon at the University of Minnesota in the 1930s. Around the age of eight, Davis's polio condition was treated by Dr. Giessler pro-bono. The successful treatment allowed Davis to walk again and go to a traditional public school.³⁴ Harry Davis, Jr., his eldest son, recalled that "you would never know [his father] had polio," even though the illness left his right leg permanently shorter and weaker than the left.³⁵

Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House and Golden Gloves Boxing

During Davis's adolescence in the mid-1930s, his parents separated and, although they never legally divorced, the separation forced him to become more independent. As a result, Davis spent a considerable amount of time at the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House in Minneapolis, which had been founded on October 17, 1924.³⁶ This organization, which has been known as the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center since 1970, was a cornerstone social institution in North Minneapolis and remains so today. First established by the Woman's Christian Association (WCA), a social services organization whose membership consisted of white women, the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House was intended by the WCA to provide young, Black women the same social services available to white women at the time. The WCA chose W. Gertrude Brown, a Black woman, to be the first head resident. Since its founding, the organization has become a cornerstone of Minneapolis's Black community, evolving to serve the

³⁰ Ibid, 19-26.

³¹ Ibid, 34.

³² "W. Harry Davis: Champion in ring and in life," Insight News, June 11, 2012, https://www.insightnews.com/news/local/w-harry-davis-champion-in-ring-and-in-life/article_d7420289-d301-533b-a72f-b2f8cb276765.html.

³³ Steve Brandt and Mary Jane Smetanka, "Force for civil rights, voice for decency," *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 12, 2006.

³⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 34-41.

³⁵ "W. Harry Davis: Champion in ring and in life," Insight News, June 11, 2012, https://www.insightnews.com/news/local/w-harry-davis-champion-in-ring-and-in-life/article_d7420289-d301-533b-a72f-b2f8cb276765.html.

³⁶ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 51.

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community through settlement housing assistance, sports and educational programming, networking and professional opportunities, cultural activities, and more.³⁷

By 1937, around the age of fourteen years old, Davis entered the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House's new Golden Gloves boxing program. The Golden Gloves program originated in Chicago and New York as a newspaper-sponsored amateur boxing competition, created in part to boost interest in newspaper circulation and advertising revenue. Its success led to the establishment of state chapters across the country. Davis was introduced to boxing by his Uncle Dixie, who was a professional boxer, because his polio-related leg limitations prevented Davis's participation in popular sports such as track and football. The Golden Gloves boxing program provided Davis with a source of discipline, purpose, and leadership training. He also developed skills in communication, fundraising, bookkeeping, and mentorship through the program. In 1943, the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House provided him with an opportunity to transition from student to teacher, to serve as a boxing coach for the program.

Davis used boxing as a tool for positive influence.³⁸ He empowered his students through discipline, physical and mental fitness, and personal responsibility. In addition to training young men in athletic techniques, this work doubled as civic education. He taught them how to fundraise, the value of being aware of current community events, and the importance of their right to vote. He also used the boxing ring as a way to stem community violence, taking, in the words of *Minneapolis Tribune* editorial writer Robert S. Lyle, "street fighters and showing them that there's a better way to work off their resentments than maiming and killing in the name of revenge."³⁹ His coaching efforts produced highly skilled athletes and provided young boxers with the opportunity to compete nationally and internationally. Their collaborative efforts, according to Lyle, "helped raise the sights of kids who felt that they didn't have a chance in the system."⁴⁰ Between 1943 and 1955, young boxers at the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House secured fifteen Upper Midwest Golden Glove championships.⁴¹

Davis's role at the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House also opened pathways into his civic and political activism. It was there that he forged relationships with key political figures, including Hubert Humphrey, who was then-mayor of Minneapolis and later U.S. Senator (1949-1964) and Vice President of the United States (1965-1968). Humphrey visited the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House regularly and shared organizational ties with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For Davis, a partnership between the NAACP and the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House provided structure

³⁷ Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-62.

³⁸ Barry Lytton. "Fighting chance." *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), June 26, 2016.

³⁹ Robert S. Lyle, "Harry Davis's correct 'tough' stance," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), January 26, 1982.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "These Gloves Coaches Instruct Your Sons", *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), November 8, 1955.

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in which he learned parliamentary procedure, governance, the mechanics of elections, and financial skills that shaped his civic and political influence.⁴²

Davis ultimately spent almost fifty years involved with the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House as an amateur boxing coach and later as Upper Midwest director of the program. During his tenure, he expanded and organized the Upper Midwest's network of Golden Gloves programs into a wide-reaching group of directors and coaches overseeing the training and teaching of 4,000 boxers.⁴³ This program evolved into the Golden Gloves Association of America, of which Davis became its national president in 1969.⁴⁴ According to civil rights activist and legal professional, Judge LaJune Lange, who grew up around the Davis family: "He was able to develop a quiet dignity, where he was able to focus and positively respond to any type of situation to improve the community and move things forward. These traits were deemed essential for being a coach and teaching youth."⁴⁵

Life at 3621 Portland Avenue

In 1940, Davis met his future wife, Charlotte Napue, at a summer camp sponsored by the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House. Charlotte was fourteen and Davis was seventeen. They married two years later on October 3, 1942, shortly after Davis graduated from high school in 1941.⁴⁶ Although Charlotte was sixteen at the time, Davis assured Charlotte's father that their two families would have greater support if they joined together. That promise held true, as they supported each other's families throughout their lives and they remained together for sixty-one years until Charlotte's death in 2003.⁴⁷

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, forced the United States' active involvement in World War II. Davis attempted to enlist for military service but was deemed ineligible due to his polio-related leg condition. Davis was, however, given the opportunity to contribute to the war effort through civilian defense work at the Minneapolis-based Onan Company, a major defense contractor responsible for producing electric generators and rocket ignitors. Davis secured a starting position at fifty cents an hour in the wash-and-paint department.

By late 1954, Davis and Charlotte, for the first time in either of their families' histories, had the financial means to pursue homeownership.⁴⁸ However, redlining, the process by which the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) limited mortgage loans in certain neighborhoods with populations of Black people,

⁴² W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 149.

⁴³ Dick Cullum, "Harry Davis 'Believes' in Gloves," *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), April 29, 1966.

⁴⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 264.

⁴⁵ Judge LaJune Lange, interview with Kendra Ellner, January 20, 2026.

⁴⁶ Trudi Hahn, "Charlotte Davis dies at 77; was leader in black community," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), November 1, 2003.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 122-123.

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and racial housing covenants limited the options available to them.⁴⁹ These restrictions had already forced the development of three distinct Black communities in Minneapolis during the early part of the twentieth century, largely consigning Black Minneapolitans to living in neighborhoods with other marginalized minority groups. One of those neighborhoods was the Old Southside, bordered by 34th and 46th Streets East and Nicollet and Chicago Avenues, where the Davis family chose to relocate from their rented North Minneapolis duplex at 1107 Emerson Avenue North.⁵⁰ This was one of the few areas in Minneapolis where Black residents could own property and businesses, leading to the development of a hub of Black economic success during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵¹ In 1954, Davis and Charlotte joined this legacy with the purchase of their first home, in a realization of their goal of homeownership which Davis described as a “dream that energized us.”⁵² It was a bungalow-style residence at 3621 Portland Avenue which they acquired with a \$9,000 mortgage.⁵³ The home represented a significant generational milestone, allowing the family to obtain a major financial asset. They moved from the North Minneapolis neighborhood that they grew up in, which was then experiencing disinvestment and featured small, deteriorating housing stock. Further harm had been inflicted on the community established there due to highway construction and urban renewal projects which displaced many Black Minneapolitans from this area of North Minneapolis. With the purchase of their home at 3621 Portland Avenue, the Davises established themselves in a part of Minneapolis that had better-resourced schools and a growing presence of Black homeowners.⁵⁴

Davis and Charlotte raised four children in their home: Rita (born in 1943), Harry Davis, Jr., also known as “Butch” (born in 1946), Richard Charles (born in 1955), and Evan (born in 1968). The home was shared by all six Davis family members, as well as Davis’s mother and Charlotte’s father. According to Davis Jr., the house was often filled with neighborhood children including Evan’s friend, a young Prince Rogers Nelson, who would later gain international fame and occasionally visited to practice music with Evan in the garage.⁵⁵ The home was held in high regard not only by the Davis family but also by community members who came to know them. As Judge Lange, recalled, “the yard was kept immaculate, and the property maintained with care, reflecting the pride and respect associated with the people in the household.”⁵⁶

Despite the growing demands of his public life, Davis was an engaged and devoted father who consistently made time to attend his children’s sporting events, support their education, and participate in

⁴⁹ Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-11.

⁵⁰ Minneapolis Directory Company (ed.), *Minneapolis City Directory 1953*, 1954.

⁵¹ Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-50.

⁵² W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 122.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 122-123.

⁵⁵ Harry “Butch” Davis, Jr., interview with Kendra Ellner, January 22, 2026.

⁵⁶ Judge LaJune Lange, interview with Kendra Ellner, January 20, 2026.

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Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings.⁵⁷ Charlotte's role in maintaining the household and supporting school involvement enabled Davis's extensive civic commitments.⁵⁸ Charlotte remained consistently supportive of Davis's coaching work, even forming a group called the Phyllis Wheatley Wives to help fundraise, host banquets, and organize extracurricular events for the boxing program. She also accompanied him on select trips, providing essential support during competitions and events. Through this shared commitment, the Davises broadened opportunities for young athletes across racial and economic lines and elevated Minneapolis's national and international reputation in amateur boxing.⁵⁹ For over twenty years, Charlotte was also member of Links Inc., an international women's organization founded on a commitment to "sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry."⁶⁰ Charlotte participated in the Links Inc.'s Debutante Cotillion and scholarship programs where she encouraged women to pursue social etiquette. Charlotte, who former Minneapolis Mayor Sayles Belton had known since Sayles Belton was a child, said upon her passing on October 27, 2003, that Charlotte was "all the things you admire about your community."⁶¹

Path to Civil Rights Leadership

Border Methodist Church Merger, 1955-1957

Davis's heritage and life circumstances led to a deep involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. A pivotal decision that set him on that path came early in his marriage to Charlotte, when the couple sought a shared church community for their growing family. They chose Charlotte's congregation, Border Methodist Church (Border) at 814 4th Avenue North in Minneapolis. Established in 1918, Border operated within a denomination that maintained segregated structures well into the twentieth century. When Davis joined in the late 1930s, the congregation consisted of around 150 members under pastor Reverend Damon Young. It was Reverend Young who planted the seeds for a growing relationship with the Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church, a predominantly white congregation, at 511 Groveland Avenue. At a time when interracial cooperation in religious institutions remained rare, the two churches shared funding, programming, community events, and pastor leadership exchanges.⁶²

Davis played an active and influential role in the deliberations facing Border's future in the face of the church's demolition as part of a larger effort to construct the Glenwood and Lyndale housing developments.⁶³ In 1955, the pressures of urban renewal, restricted resources, and the complexities of racial segregation within the Methodist Church itself led to the final decision to dissolve Border. With the early efforts of Reverend Young, on January 6, 1957, Davis was able to facilitate a joint worship service and merger between the Border and Hennepin congregations, the first ever in Minneapolis. This union,

⁵⁷ Harry "Butch" Davis, Jr., interview with Kendra Ellner, January 22, 2026.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 63-116.

⁶⁰ "The Links, Incorporated," The Links, Inc., accessed March 9, 2026, <https://linksinc.org/the-links-incorporated/>.

⁶¹ Trudi Hahn, "Charlotte Davis dies at 77; was leader in black community," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), November 1, 2003.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Martin E. Marty, "Inclusive Church—Inclusive Theology," *Christian Century*, February 27, 1957, 257; W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 131.

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one of only two mergers between a white and Black congregation in a major Protestant denomination in the United States at the time, was celebrated locally as a major step toward religious integration.⁶⁴ Davis said of the merger, “[T]his is a wheel of progress turning and we become in a sense the hub for a national trend of integration in the churches.”⁶⁵

NAACP Leadership, 1964-1968

By the 1960s, through his church service work and deep involvement at the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House, Davis developed a broad network of connections among local civil rights activists and political leaders. During this time, he became active in the NAACP, eventually serving as co-chair and helping to lead voter-registration and membership drives. In January 1965, he was elected president of the Minneapolis NAACP chapter for a three-year term. One of Davis’s earliest actions was to call for the NAACP’s continued involvement in civil rights advocacy in Mississippi at a time that the national body of the NAACP was considering a retreat from activity there. Davis set out a plan at the beginning of his tenure to raise NAACP membership in a continuation of his successful 1964 campaign which yielded a 1,000-person uptick in membership, increase jobs and job training for Black Minneapolitans, and promote awareness of the importance of education for Black youth.⁶⁶

His leadership role in the NAACP helped Davis established relationships with influential figures, including Dr. W. D. Brown, a prominent Black Minneapolis doctor and civil rights activist; Cecil Newman, journalist and publisher of the long-running Black newspapers the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and *St. Paul Recorder*; attorney Raymond Cannon; pioneering civil rights lawyer Lena Olive Smith; labor activist Nellie Stone Johnson; and Hubert Humphrey, who was elected mayor of Minneapolis in 1945 and later became a prominent national political figure.⁶⁷ His association with Hubert Humphrey, whose advocacy for civil rights included early executive actions expanding public accommodations access for people of color in Minneapolis, demonstrated how municipal leadership could be used to advance racial justice. Through these relationships, Davis realized how organized civil rights efforts and the strategic use of politics could advance racial equality.⁶⁸

Davis’s growing connections and political influence led to a close relationship with Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin who held that office from 1961 to 1969. Davis supported Naftalin during his successful mayoral campaigns in 1961, 1963, and 1965, and Naftalin subsequently appointed him to numerous city committees at a time when Black representation in Minneapolis government and civic boards remained

⁶⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 127-136.

⁶⁵ Heidi Heller, “Paving the way for racially integrated churches,” *Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/blogdetail/paving-the-way-for-racially-integrated-churches-15863359>.

⁶⁶ Dick Cunningham, “New NAACP Head in City Asks Unity in Mississippi Action,” *The Minneapolis Tribune*, January 10, 1965; W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 155-156.

⁶⁷ George Grim, “I Like It Here,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), March 20, 1968.

⁶⁸ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 149-180.

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limited.⁶⁹ In 1965, Davis joined the Fair Employment Practices Commission, advocating for the elimination of racial discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and unions.⁷⁰ In 1968, he became the first Black person to serve on the city's three-member Civil Service Commission, where he identified discriminatory oral-exam practices that excluded Black applicants from positions in the police and fire departments. He also oversaw the local Human Rights Commission during this period. Davis credited his political education to experiences gained through Golden Gloves participation and coaching, NAACP leadership, and the mentorship from Humphrey and Naftalin.⁷¹

During the 1960s, North Minneapolis experienced significant racial tension stemming from longstanding issues related to a lack of economic opportunities for Black residents, widespread discrimination, and de facto segregation, culminating in civil unrest along Plymouth Avenue North in the summer of 1967. The unrest was preceded by an incident in August 1966 during which approximately fifty Black youth committed acts of vandalism and arson against Jewish businesses on Plymouth Avenue North. As NAACP president, Davis fostered outreach to Minneapolis's Jewish community to calm intercommunity conflict in the wake of the unrest; at the same time, Mayor Naftalin, Minneapolis's first Jewish mayor, publicly acknowledged the lack of economic and social opportunities available to Black residents and pledged that the City would address these inequities.⁷² Naftalin's announcement of the Plan for Progress, which offered only sixty new jobs to Black Minneapolitans instead of substantial economic and social change, was met with derision and skepticism.⁷³ By the summer of 1967, conditions had not substantially improved and frustration among Black residents had intensified. A mixture of a perceived lack of substantive action by the city government, discrimination toward Black residents by Jewish residents in North Minneapolis, and racism of the Minneapolis Police Department led to three days of sustained unrest along the Plymouth Avenue corridor beginning on July 19, 1967. Police intervention further enflamed tensions, resulting in several nights of arson, rock- and bottle-throwing, and assaults. Naftalin eventually requested the assistance of the Minnesota National Guard, resulting in a week-long deployment of hundreds of troops in North Minneapolis. These incidents marked one of the most turbulent periods in Minneapolis's civil rights history and underscored the urgent need for systemic change on Minneapolis's Northside.⁷⁴ As a respected civic leader, Davis was one of few advisors able to persuade Mayor Naftalin and Police Chief Calvin Hawkinson not to deploy the riot

⁶⁹ Ibid, 157.

⁷⁰ "2 New Appointees Named to FEPC," *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), August 18, 1965

⁷¹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 149-180.

⁷² Ben L. Kaufman, "NAACP Asks Peace With City Jews," *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), August 22, 1966.

⁷³ Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-84.

⁷⁴ Susan Marks, "Civil Unrest on Plymouth Avenue. Minneapolis, 1967," Minnesota Historical Society, Last modified September 30, 2025, <https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/event/civil-unrest-plymouth-avenue-minneapolis-1967>.

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squad during the unrest to make mass arrests.⁷⁵ Davis emphasized that people were frustrated and wanted employment, rather than further confrontation.

In 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Davis oversaw the formation of the Citizens Patrol Corps (CPC). The group was intended to be an on-the-ground presence to protect Black Minneapolitans against neighborhood crime and racial discrimination at the hands of police. Davis called it a response to “the desperate need for something to be done about law enforcement in Minneapolis.”⁷⁶ The CPC consisted largely of Black men who worked with both community members and police officers to maintain calm in Black neighborhoods, quelling crime before it happened and keeping an eye on arson attempts.⁷⁷ The CPC was ended in 1969 due to funding issues and discouragement from the mayor at the time, Charles Stenvig, a former police officer who succeeded Naftalin after a campaign centered on appeals to fears about crime rates and promises to loosen restrictions on police conduct.⁷⁸

Hennepin County committee service and the fight for economic equality, 1966-1970

One of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s core administration policies was his Great Society proposal which envisioned a fully reformed version of the United States. At the center of this policy was his War on Poverty program which established a number of agencies and initiatives that sought to lower unemployment and improve the economic security of the average American.⁷⁹ With the arrival of the War on Poverty in Minneapolis, Davis was appointed in 1966 to lead a subcommittee of Hennepin County’s Economic Opportunity Committee (EOC) to consider expanding target areas within Minneapolis for the program’s implementation.⁸⁰ Davis also played a decisive role in the formation of the Hennepin County Mobilization of Economic Resources (MOER) Board, as a representative of the NAACP. Rising from vice chair to chairman of MOER, Davis helped guide initiatives ranging from the expansion of Head Start (from a six-week program in 1966 to a full-year program by 1968), to job-training partnerships with the Urban League and the Twin Cities Opportunity Industrialization Center (TCOIC), to the establishment of neighborhood health services and housing-improvement councils. As chairman, Davis also fought against unfair employment policies and led protests against employers who were charged with illegal payroll practices.⁸¹ Davis served on the board until February 1970, at which point MOER had become nationally recognized as one of the most effective local War on Poverty agencies.⁸² During this time, Davis also

⁷⁵ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 162.

⁷⁶ David Jordan, “NAACP Told Citizen Patrol to Continue,” *The Minneapolis Tribune*, May 20, 1968.

⁷⁷ Robert T. Smith, “Robert T Smith,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), October 27, 1968.

⁷⁸ “Citizens Patrol Inactive, May Not Be Reorganized,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), July 20, 1969.

⁷⁹ Craig E. Blohm, *The Great Society: The War on Poverty*, (Lucent Books, Farmington Hills, MI), 6-7.

⁸⁰ Finlay Lewis, “New Unit to Review Poverty War Area,” *The Minneapolis Tribune*, (Minneapolis, MN), May 18, 1966; Bob Von Sternberg, “A cop, a Norwegian, a three-term mayor,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), February 24, 2010.

⁸¹ Jim Jones, “Eubanks cut wages, poverty workers say,” *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), April 22, 1969.

⁸² W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 167-180.

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joined the board of the Twin Cities chapter of the non-profit United Way in 1968 which organized fundraising efforts for non-profits and charity organizations.⁸³

By the mid-1960s, Davis's work had made him a respected advocate for education, job training, and youth employment, all of which were programs he identified as central to combating racism in Minneapolis. Despite the 1968 Fair Housing Act enforcing the end of racial covenants, discriminatory lending continued to be a barrier to where Blacks could live and own homes. Davis was passionate about eliminating these barriers to homeownership as a way to provide further economic opportunities for Black Minneapolitans.⁸⁴ With the support of Mayor Naftalin, Davis joined the founding board of the Urban Coalition in 1967. This board included other members of the Minneapolis business community and functioned as a voice for the working-class minority groups, as part of a national movement of cities addressing racial unrest and inequality. Davis became the president and chair of the Urban Coalition in 1968.⁸⁵ He was also a founding trustee and chair of one of their most impactful initiatives, Plymouth National Bank, the first two locations of which were located at 1723 and 2000 Plymouth Avenue North, respectively. The bank was one of the first in North Minneapolis committed to serving Black customers and educating them on financial management. It was also at the Urban Coalition where Davis led a community-wide training program for young people. This influenced a generation of youth to create a five-year plan and think critically about higher education and their futures, according to Judge LaJune Lange, who participated in the program as a youth.⁸⁶ When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated on April 4, 1968, Davis was deeply affected. That day, he issued a public statement through the Urban Coalition, declaring that racism had taken Dr. King's life. Furthermore, the Urban Coalition immediately organized anti-racism programs urging promises from state and federal political leaders to "root out racism" in American society.⁸⁷

Minneapolis School Board and School Pairing

Davis's commitment to civil rights, political knowledge, and community trust led to his appointment by the Minneapolis School Board to fill a mid-term vacancy on March 11, 1969. During a school board election later that year, Davis won a decisive victory with the support of local labor organizations and both the Democratic and Republican parties, becoming the first Black person to be elected to the board.⁸⁸

Davis and Charlotte were already deeply involved in PTA work as the parents of three children enrolled in Minneapolis Public Schools. Davis pushed the development of Minnesota's first significant school-integration initiatives, supported by the NAACP and Superintendent John Davis. These efforts

⁸³ Lauren A. Segal, "United Way lost a friend with Davis' passing", *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 21, 2006.

⁸⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 167-180.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 186-187.

⁸⁶ Judge LaJune Lange, interview with Kendra Ellner, January 20, 2026.

⁸⁷ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 181-196.

⁸⁸ Sherrie Mazingo, "Most votes captured by school board incumbents", *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), April 30, 1969

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included federally funded alternative-school models such as Montessori, open, fundamental, and continuous-progress programs as well as class-size reductions and focused curriculums.⁸⁹

As a Minneapolis School Board member, Davis frequently read and analyzed articles on school integration from cities of similar sizes and demographics, studying their approaches to inform his own understanding and approach to leading the process in Minneapolis.⁹⁰ Following a 1970 lawsuit by the NAACP to force school integration in Minneapolis, Davis worked as a liaison between the NAACP, the school board, and Superintendent Davis to facilitate the creation of a plan for school integration and reverse the unofficial segregationist policies that largely kept Black and white students at separate schools.”⁹¹ On November 24, 1970, Davis and four other members of the Minneapolis School Board passed a resolution to institute school pairing, wherein schools with disparate racial populations would be effectively merged, reversing the school district’s longstanding policy against busing.⁹² The resolution was described by the *Minneapolis Star* as an “educational Pearl Harbor” amid strong public backlash and threats from white residents.⁹³ This decision ultimately led to the 1971 Hale-Field Pairing in which Minneapolis’s Hale (majority white) and Eugene Field (majority Black) Elementary Schools were merged. Davis also cast decisive votes on budgets and funding allocations, advocated for improved teacher compensation, supported strikes, and worked to stabilize the district during a period of intense public scrutiny.⁹⁴ Davis ultimately served on the Minneapolis School Board from 1969 to 1989, including as board chairman from 1972 to 1976.⁹⁵

1971 Mayoral Campaign

Davis’s close relationships with Hubert Humphrey and Arthur Naftalin gave him a clear understanding of what political leadership demanded. He also had a strong desire to bridge the issues that divided people in Minneapolis. On January 13, 1971, Davis announced his candidacy for mayor, challenging then-Mayor Charles Stenvig and seeking the endorsement of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party. At the same time, Davis noted that he was open to receiving an endorsement from either the Democratic or Republican parties as well. In response, Ellis Olkon, the chairman of the DFL committee in charge of the search for a mayoral candidate stated the DFL would provide “overwhelming support” if Davis

⁸⁹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 196-207.

⁹⁰ Harry “Butch” Davis, Jr., interview with Kendra Ellner, January 22, 2026.

⁹¹ “Hale-Field pairing: ‘Pearl Harbor Day,’” *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), June 14, 1972; W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 206.

⁹² Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-58; Deborah Howell, “Pairings pass amid uproar,” *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), November 25, 1970.

⁹³ “Hale-Field pairing: ‘Pearl Harbor Day,’” *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), June 14, 1972.

⁹⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 196-207.

⁹⁵ “Board elects Davis, advocate of faster school desegregation,” *The Minneapolis Star*, July 6, 1972; Gregor W. Pinney, “Mason elected school board head,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 14, 1976.

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announced that he was seeking an endorsement strictly from the DFL and no other parties. Seeming to anticipate potential conflict with DFL leadership over his openness to all parties' endorsements, Davis preemptively remarked that he had "always been very much in agreement with the ideals of the DFL party."⁹⁶

Davis's mayoral campaign struck an early contrast with Mayor Stenvig, a law-and-order candidate who Davis believed maintained "poor relations with minority groups, senior citizens and police administrators."⁹⁷ At a DFL meeting early in his campaign, Davis was asked if his election chances would be affected by his race and liberal politics, to which he replied that his "[thirty] years of public service far overshadows Mr. Stenvig's two."⁹⁸ Despite Olkon's early backing, many members of the DFL worried that the odds of Davis unseating Stenvig were low.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Davis was endorsed as the DFL's mayoral candidate on February 20, 1971, receiving considerable support from "white, liberal, middle- and upper-class areas of the city which have elected Republican aldermen."¹⁰⁰ He was the first Black major-party candidate for mayor of Minneapolis, running on a platform centered on racial equity, public safety reform, and expanded investment in underserved neighborhoods. During his bid, Davis advocated for issues both local and national. Davis promised the formation of task forces to address issues of "housing, employment, education, economic development, labor, and urban renewal", according to *Minneapolis Star* reporter Jim Shoop.¹⁰¹ He also aimed to apply for federal funds to solve drug addiction in Minneapolis. Drawing on his years of community organizing and leadership, Davis made collaboration between the City of Minneapolis and community groups like the League of Women Voters and the Urban Coalition a core part of his platform.¹⁰² He stood in public opposition to a Minneapolis City Council amendment that would have weakened Black residents' ability to file complaints on police brutality.¹⁰³ As part of Davis's platform, he linked his opponent Stenvig, who was formerly a detective with the Minneapolis Police Department, to the issue of police brutality in Minneapolis, stating that Stenvig's lack of condemnation of police misconduct meant Stenvig "[had] to be a racist."¹⁰⁴ He also called for the United States's withdrawal from the Vietnam War, stating that the resources used by the war could be directed to cities instead: "[The money] could have been used to give substantial property-tax relief to the elderly and to all other homeowners, it could have been spent to give every Minneapolis child a quality education, it could have been spent to reconstruct and improve our cities."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ Jim Shoop, "Davis, asking DFL mayor backing, flirts with GOP, too," *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), January 13, 1971.

⁹⁷ "Davis Says Stenvig Lacking in Rapport," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), January 20, 1971.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Jim Shoop, "Anderson still might attend DFL fund-raiser," *The Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), January 29, 1971.

¹⁰⁰ Bernie Shellum and Dennis Cassano, "DFL Endorses Davis; GOP Picks Rasmussen," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), February 21, 1971.

¹⁰¹ Jim Shoop, "Davis asks voter tolerance", *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), January 21, 1971.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Jim Shoop, "City blacks vent anger at hearing," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), May 5, 1971.

¹⁰⁴ Greg Pinney, "Davis brands Stenvig as racist," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), May 11, 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Dennis Cassano, "Davis says Vietnam War used funds needed by cities," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), May 13, 1971.

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Davis's campaign earned enthusiastic community support. Organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House, and Sabathani Community Center organized significant voter-registration efforts during his campaign.¹⁰⁶ During the Civil Rights Movement, Davis had worked alongside leaders such as Cecil Newman, Josie Johnson, Nellie Stone Johnson, and others in campaigns aimed at ending discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodation, and education. These prominent figures also helped Davis build the organizational capacity necessary for increased voter participation and political representation among Black residents through a large-scale voter registration campaign during his mayoral run.¹⁰⁷ As Davis put it, "I like to think that my campaign made voters out of nonvoters for many elections to come."¹⁰⁸ Davis remained deeply engaged with Minneapolis residents during the campaign, even attending local high school graduations, including that of future Minneapolis mayor Sharon Sayles Belton who recalled Davis saying of his election bid: "I'm doing this today, so that you guys can have an opportunity tomorrow."¹⁰⁹ His strong community ties and decades of service earned him broad grassroots support, with volunteers of all ages stepping forward to help promote his campaign and spread his message.¹¹⁰

Davis's mayoral candidacy represented a watershed moment in Minneapolis's political history, signaling the growing visibility and influence of Black leadership within municipal government. His bid as the city's first Black major-party mayoral candidate drew national attention, including support from renowned gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who headlined the Weekend Jazz Festival for Harry Davis, a benefit concert that became his campaign's most significant fundraising effort. In total, Davis's entire campaign raised \$52,000.¹¹¹ Yet the campaign also exposed entrenched resistance to racial progress within the city. Davis and his family faced repeated racially-motivated threats, intimidation, and harassment while living at their home on Portland Avenue.¹¹² This harassment was also fueled by Davis's support for school pairing which became a central campaign issue, despite Davis's hope that it would not factor into the mayoral race.¹¹³ These conditions necessitated personal security measures, including Davis procuring a license to carry a gun, guard dogs, and continuous police and FBI protection throughout the election season. The Davises' phone would ring at all hours of the night disturbing their sleep and quality

¹⁰⁶ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 208-224.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Harry Davis, Jr., Louis Moore, and Sharon Sayles Belton. *Southside Oral History Project*. Interview by Harper Beeland, Caitlin Cook-Isaacson, and James Stephen. University of Minnesota, 2024.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 217.

¹¹² Steve Gallo, Treasure Tinsley, Max Chavez, Lindsey Wallace, and Laura Sadowsky, with assistance from Erin Que, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2026), E-90.

¹¹³ Dennis Cassano, "Krieger, Davis Debate Responsibility of Mayor," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), February 3, 1971.

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of life.¹¹⁴ Despite the challenges, his eldest son, Harry Davis, Jr., recalled that “he was always smiling when he ran for mayor.”¹¹⁵

In spite of his efforts, Davis lost the mayoral election on June 9, 1971, receiving 31,146 votes against Stenvig’s 81,280 votes.¹¹⁶ Despite the defeat, he stood firm in his belief that civic participation and principled leadership were essential to building an inclusive Minneapolis. Guided by this conviction, Davis was willing to confront personal threats and open hostility, demonstrating remarkable bravery and an unwavering commitment to democratic values. His campaign expanded the visibility and advancement of Black leadership in Minneapolis and went on to inspire future generations of political and civic advocates. Most notable amongst those inspired was Sharon Sayles Belton, who was present the night of Davis’s election loss and went on to become the first Black mayor in the city of Minneapolis in 1994.¹¹⁷ When Sayles Belton was herself elected, she brought Davis onstage and recounted their exchange that night in 1971 when she tearfully approached him following his defeat. She recalled him telling her, “Don’t feel bad [...] Think of all we accomplished in this campaign, all we learned. Maybe someday you will take these lessons and run for mayor yourself.”¹¹⁸

After The Election: Davis’s Work Continues

Following his campaign loss, Davis resigned from the Urban Coalition and the Onan Company, where he had worked his way up as the first Black executive. On August 13, 1973, he received an opportunity to become an assistant publisher at the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* and by 1975, the Davises had relocated to a home at 631 61st Street East in Minneapolis.¹¹⁹ His transition into this new role allowed him to approach community involvement from a different perspective. Davis’s longstanding involvement in amateur boxing led to his appointment to the 1971 U.S. Olympic boxing committee, where he supported boxers in achieving championship titles and medals.¹²⁰ In 1976 he would go on to represent athletes on the World Olympic Boxing Committee for a four-year term. At the same time, Davis served as the U.S. boxing team’s manager for Olympic games between 1972 and 1984. During this tenure, Davis oversaw the management of Olympic teams that included boxers Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson.¹²¹ As chairman of the Minnesota State Boxing Board, a role that Davis occupied beginning in 1980, Davis made headlines when he fought against the state’s consideration of permitting informal “Tough Man” competitions wherein untrained, amateur boxers could compete against each other with few safety

¹¹⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 208-224.

¹¹⁵ Harry “Butch” Davis, Jr., interview with Kendra Ellner, January 22, 2026.

¹¹⁶ Dennis Cassano, “Stenvig elected to second term,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), June 9, 1971.

¹¹⁷ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 222-223.

¹¹⁸ Lori Sturdevant, “He, too, fought the good fight,” *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), November 8, 2001.

¹¹⁹ “Harry Davis to join the Star and Tribune,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), June 20, 1973; Nick Coleman, “86 candidates have filed for city elective offices,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 22, 1975.

¹²⁰ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 265.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 265-272.

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precautions. Davis decried these matches as violent and antithetical to the values he taught through the Golden Gloves program.¹²² In 1982, Davis resigned from the board in protest over a four-to-three vote to allow the establishment of these games.¹²³ Davis also exercised his athletic principles outside of the world of boxing, contributing to major development initiatives and reporting on proposals for Minneapolis's emerging professional sports teams, including the Minnesota Twins franchise in Major League Baseball and the Minnesota Vikings in the National Football League.¹²⁴

In 1983, Davis lent his name to the W. Harry Davis Foundation, which was established to "develop leadership among minority and disadvantaged people."¹²⁵ Davis retired from his role as assistant vice president of Cowles Media Company and manager of employment services at the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* in 1987 at the age of sixty-three. However, his retirement did not slow his community work. He remained an adviser on minority affairs for Cowles and served as chairman of the Twin Cities Opportunities Industrialization Center (TCIOC), a vocational school that trained youth in trade skills to improve their job prospects. He also contributed to the Downtown Council's neighborhood committee, the Minnesota chapter of the National Medical Fellowship, and youth leadership programs at the Urban Concerns Workshop.¹²⁶

Davis's long-standing community involvement in an overwhelming number of public and political organizations demonstrated his lifelong commitment to coordinated civic action toward racial progress. His involvement included founding the Minneapolis Urban Coalition, as well as his work with the MOER Board, the NAACP, and the Minneapolis School Board. He became a trusted leader and mediator during periods of unrest and an essential bridge between Black residents and city government. Mayor Naftalin later stated as part of Harry Davis, Sr.'s, 2002 autobiography that Davis "was willing to be a human bridge between Black and white when this city really needed one."¹²⁷ In Minneapolis and across Minnesota, his leadership drove transformative changes in education, housing, employment, youth development, racial and economic equality, and civic representation.¹²⁸ Davis died on August 11, 2006, at the age of eighty-three. Upon Davis's passing, former Vice President Walter Mondale remarked, "Harry Davis is one of the truly remarkable leaders in Minneapolis, and has been for [sixty] or more years [...] He's been one of the voices for civil rights and sanity and decency in the community."¹²⁹

¹²² Dick Cullum, "Davis elected chairman of state boxing board," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 28, 1980.

¹²³ Robert S. Lyle, "Harry Davis's correct 'tough' stance," *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), January 26, 1982.

¹²⁴ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 237-242.

¹²⁵ Susan E. Peterson, "Seeds of civic activity were sown early for Harry Davis," *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), January 26, 1987.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ W. Harry Davis, *Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis*, ed. Lori Sturdevant (Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 10.

¹²⁸ *Minnesota Issues*, "Fighting for Equality: A Life of Service with speaker W. Harry Davis," produced by University Media Resources and Arthur Naftalin, aired January 30, 1984, KTCA.

¹²⁹ Steve Brandt and Mary Jane Smetanka, "Force for civil rights, voice for decency," *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), August 12, 2006.

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Conclusion

Beginning with his community involvement with the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House's Golden Gloves boxing program and his work between 1955 and 1957 to integrate two racially segregated Methodist congregations in Minneapolis, Davis's public life was largely defined by his contributions to multiple city commissions and community groups, including the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP, the Urban Coalition, and the Minneapolis School Board. Harry Davis, Sr. spearheaded crucial efforts to integrate Minneapolis public schools; eliminate racial discrimination in employment, housing, and unions; quell racial and economic tensions in the wake of periods of civil unrest; and establish community groups to address the dearth of job-training and health services for Black Minneapolitans. These numerous civic endeavors contributed to Davis's high profile in Twin Cities politics, culminating in his 1971 campaign as the first Black major-party candidate for mayor of Minneapolis. Throughout a lifetime of civic and political activism, Davis fought to secure equality and economic stability for Black Minneapolitans, leaving behind a legacy of civil rights advancements and community enrichment in the Twin Cities.

Comparative Analysis of Minneapolis Properties Associated with Harry Davis, Sr.

The property at 3621 Portland Avenue was the home of Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis, as well as their family, from when they purchased the property in 1954 to when they moved to 631 61st Street East between 1973 and 1975. There are no other extant properties in Minneapolis that represent Davis's most productive period of civil rights activism and political involvement as distinctly as this property.

Other properties associated with Davis's early life, such as his childhood home at 711 Lyndale Avenue North or the Michael Dowling School at 3900 West River Parkway, predate Davis's most productive period of civil rights activism and political engagement between 1955 and 1971. Davis's important connection to the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House at 809 Aldrich Avenue North and their Golden Gloves boxing program begins many years before the period of significance and, as it is no longer extant, that building can no longer convey any association with Davis and his accomplishments. Properties associated with this period of Davis's productive life, such as the Border Methodist Church at 814 4th Avenue South or the former offices of the Minneapolis NAACP during Davis's leadership at 130 10th Street South, have similarly been demolished.

Other properties in Minneapolis associated with Davis's most productive period are representative of only one aspect of his cumulative accomplishments, such as the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church at 511 Groveland Avenue. This is also true of the former Minneapolis Board of Education offices at 807 Broadway Street Northeast where the Minneapolis School Board would often convene. Although these example properties represent important, distinct moments in Davis's life—the integration of Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church and the integration of Minneapolis public schools, respectively—they do not illustrate the full breadth of his civic work. Furthermore, the meeting places of many of the commissions and committees with which Davis was involved, such as the Urban Coalition and the MOER, are unknown with regard to the period during which Davis was involved with them. The Davises' home at 631 61st Street East similarly does not hold any close associations with Davis's most productive period, as the Davises' purchase of the property coincides with the beginning of a less political and more private

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period of Davis's life during which he turned his attention towards coaching, educational initiatives, and fostering youth leadership. Although his work during this period was nevertheless important, it represents a quieter and more modest continuation of efforts that Davis had by then been spearheading for decades, whereas the period between 1954 and 1971 more clearly illustrates Davis's most consequential and impactful effects on social equality, politics, and government in Minneapolis.

Although the Davises' home does not appear to have been used as a meeting or organizing location, the home is nevertheless associated with significant events in Harry Davis, Sr.'s public life, particularly Davis's mayoral campaign in which he received racist threats and intimidation at the property due to his bid as the first Black major-party mayoral candidate in Minneapolis. According to his son, Harry Davis, Jr., much of Davis's work as an advocate and activist took place at their Portland Avenue home after his typical workday. According to Judge LaJune Lange, the property enjoyed a neighborhood reputation as a well-kept and manicured symbol of an admirable community leader and public figure, further underscoring the house's association with Davis and his significant local contributions.¹³⁰ Although Charlotte Davis's contributions to the local Minneapolis community and Davis's civic and political efforts are undeniable, evidence has not been found to suggest that they rise to a level of historic significance in the areas under which this property has been found significant. Therefore, as Harry Davis, Sr.'s longtime home during his highest level of public involvement and most fruitful period of accomplishment and activism, the Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House at 3621 Portland Avenue is the property most closely associated with Harry Davis, Sr. in the city of Minneapolis.

Eligibility under the *African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota*, MPD

The Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the auspices of the *African American Resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota*, MPD. The property meets the five general registration requirements provided in Section F of the MPD, as detailed below.

1. The nominated property is located within the 2025 City of Minneapolis city limits.
2. The period of significance for the nominated property, which is defined as 1954 to 1971, falls within the 1819 to 2025 period of significance defined by the MPD.
3. The nominated property retains its significant association with Minneapolis' African American history and demonstrates significance through the MPD's Context V, *Community, Social Organizations, Recreation, and Education*, and Context VII, *Segregation, Discrimination, Civil Rights, and Reclamation*.
4. The nominated property is significant under Criterion B in the *Ethnic Heritage – Black, Social History*, and *Politics/Government* areas of significance.
5. The nominated property retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association and so retains the required aspects of integrity for properties nominated under Criterion B through this MPD.

¹³⁰ Judge LaJune Lange, interview with Kendra Ellner, January 20, 2026
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This property meets Criterion B in the areas of *Social History, Politics/Government, and Ethnic Heritage—Black* as the property most closely associated with the most productive period of civil rights activism and political involvement in the life of Harry Davis, Sr. During his time living at this property, Davis simultaneously served on and chaired numerous local commissions and boards, such as the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP, and advocated for civil rights by advancing initiatives that supported people of color and promoted racial integration. Davis also spent nearly fifty years involved with the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House as a boxing coach for young Black men, eventually becoming the national president of the Golden Gloves Association of America. Most significantly, Davis achieved numerous historic milestones for racial equality in Minneapolis, including the successful advancement of school integration policies while serving as the first Black elected member of the Minneapolis School Board as well as becoming the first Black major party candidate for mayor of Minneapolis in 1971.

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Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- _____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 _____ previously listed in the National Register
 _____ previously determined eligible by the National Register
 _____ designated a National Historic Landmark
 _____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 _____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 _____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
 Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HE-MPC-22798

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property	less than 1 acre
----------------------------	------------------

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 44.936989 | Longitude: -93.267267 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:
2. Zone: Easting: Northing:
3. Zone: Easting: Northing:
4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundary of the property is the same as the boundary of the property parcel numbered 0202824330133. This parcel constitutes Lot 14 of Block 2 within the Veazie Addition to Minneapolis. The property parcel constitutes 0.1 acres and 4,433 square feet.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The parcel's lot is the historic boundary for the property since the house's 1914 construction. Review of Sanborn fire insurance maps and historic aerial photographs indicate that the parcel's boundaries and layout have not changed since the house's construction nor throughout the period of significance between 1954 and 1971.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kendra Ellner, Planner, HKGi; Max Chavez, Sr. Architectural Historian, 106 Group

organization: 106 Group

street & number: 550 Vandalia Street, #102

city or town: St. Paul state: MN zip code: 55114

e-mail: MaxChavez@106Group.com

telephone: (651) 403-8723

date: 7/31/2026

Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
City or Vicinity: Minneapolis
County: Hennepin State: Minnesota
Photographer: Steve Gallo, PhD, 106 Group
Date Photographed: February 3, 2026

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0001)
Overview of the Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House, view facing northeast.

2 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0002)
West (primary) facade, view facing east.

3 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0003)
West (primary) facade and north elevation, view facing southeast.

4 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0004)

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North elevation, view facing west.

5 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0005)
East elevation, view facing west.

6 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0006)
South elevation of wing on east elevation, view facing north.

7 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0007)
South elevation, view facing east-northeast.

8 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0008)
Oriel detail on south elevation, view facing northeast.

9 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0009)
Enclosed porch, view facing north-northeast from primary entrance.

10 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0010)
Front room looking towards dining room, view facing northeast.

11 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0011)
Dining room looking towards front room and hall, view facing northwest.

12 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0012)
Dining room looking towards kitchen, view facing southeast.

13 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0013)
Dining room alcove, view facing northwest.

14 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0014)
Kitchen, view facing northwest.

15 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0015)
Basement common area, view facing southeast.

16 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0016)
East (primary) façade of garage, view facing west.

17 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0017)
West elevation of garage, view facing east-northeast.

18 of 18 (MN_Hennepin_HarryDavisSr.andCharlotteDavisHouse_0018)
North elevation of garage, view facing east-southeast.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

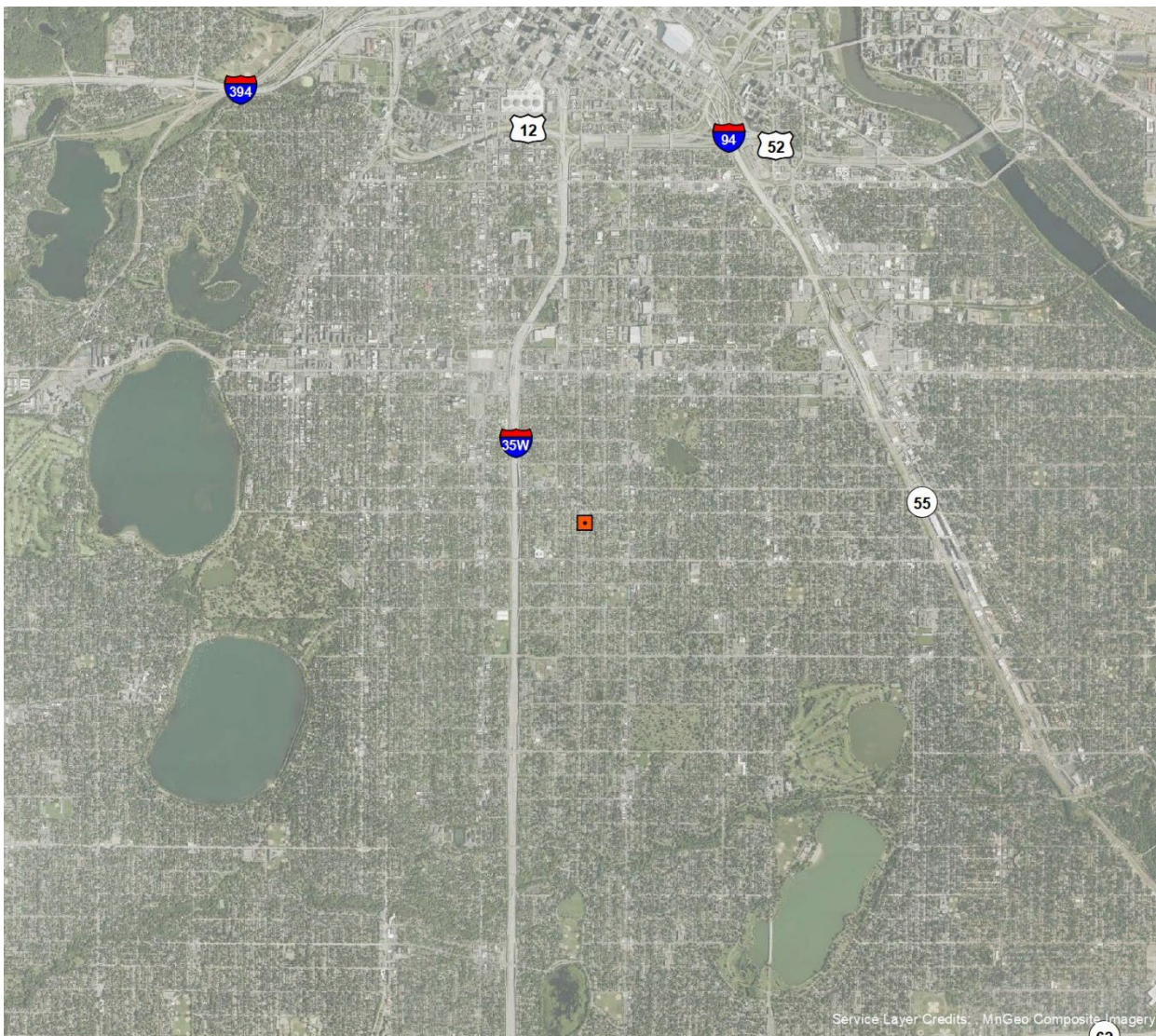
Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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Figure 1: Regional Location Map



Source: 106 Group, MnDOT

Map Produced by 106 Group 3/26/2026

**Harry Davis, Sr. and
 Charlotte Davis House**
 3621 Portland Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Regional Location Map

■ Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis House

0 800 Meters
 0 2,000 Feet

1:48,000

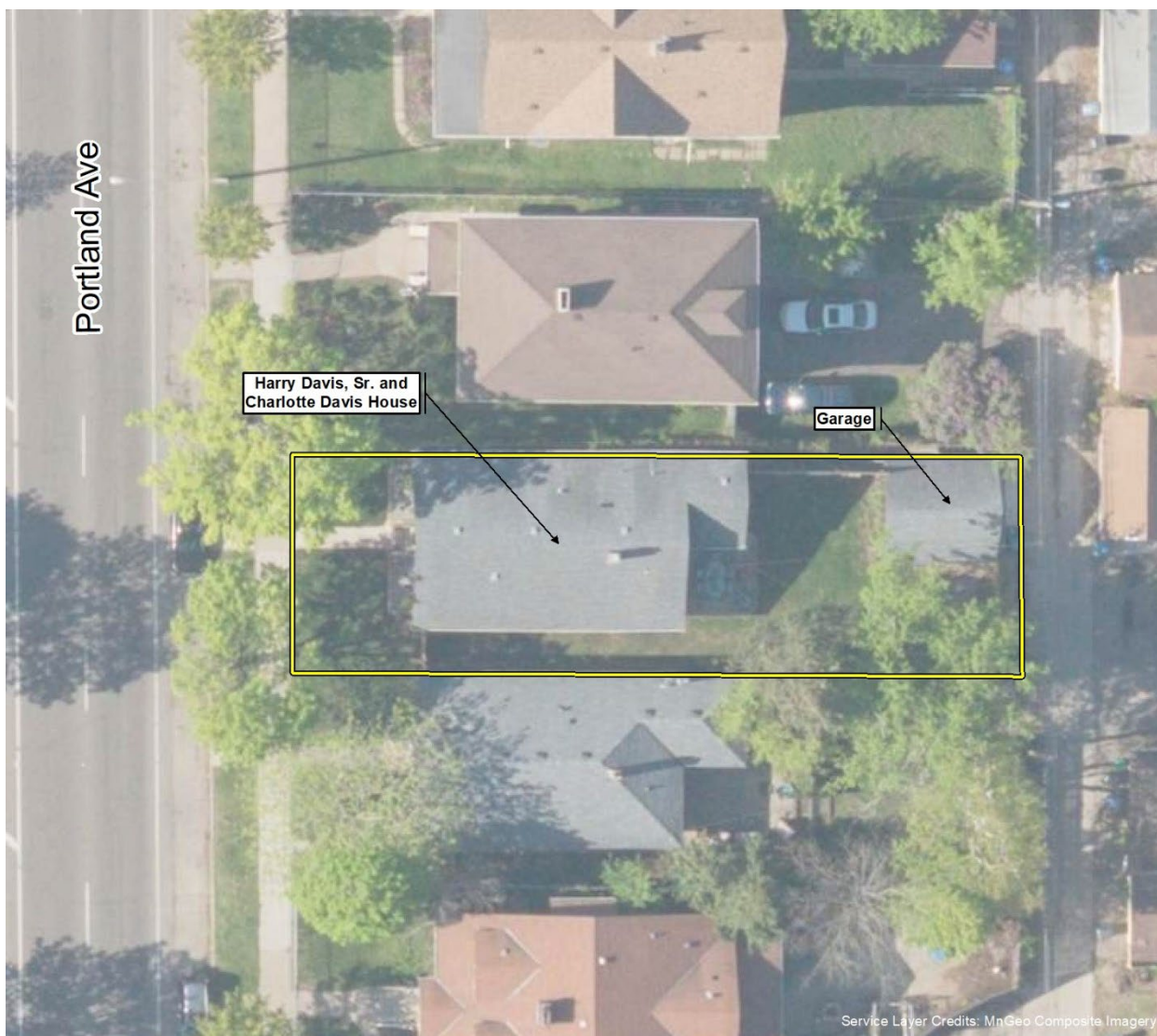


Figure 1

Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
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Figure 2: Boundary Map



Source: 106 Group, MnDOT

Map Produced by 106 Group, 7/20/2026

**Harry Davis, Sr. and
Charlotte Davis House**
3621 Portland Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Boundary Map

0 5 Meters
0 10 Feet

1:300



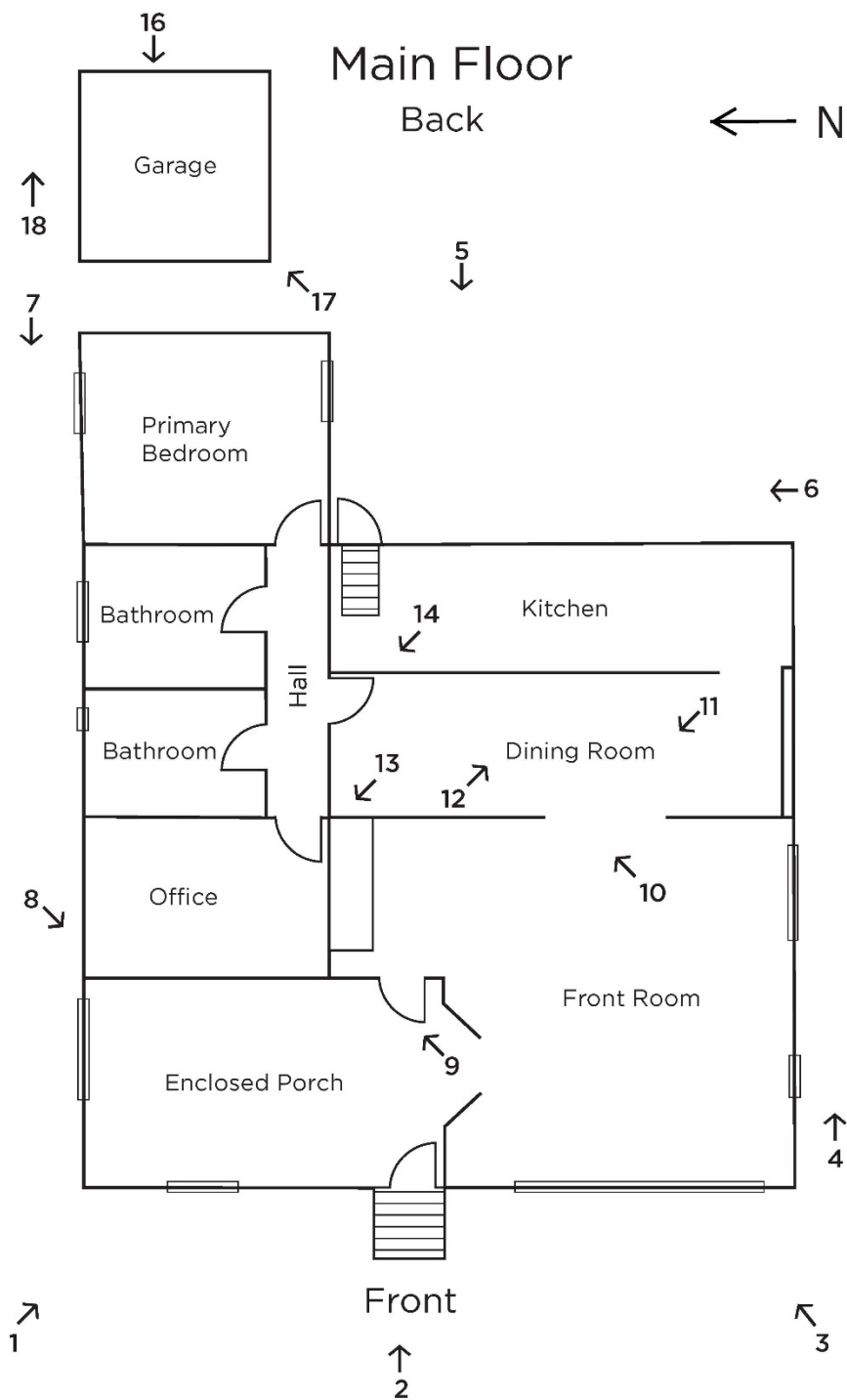
 Property Boundary

Figure 2

Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
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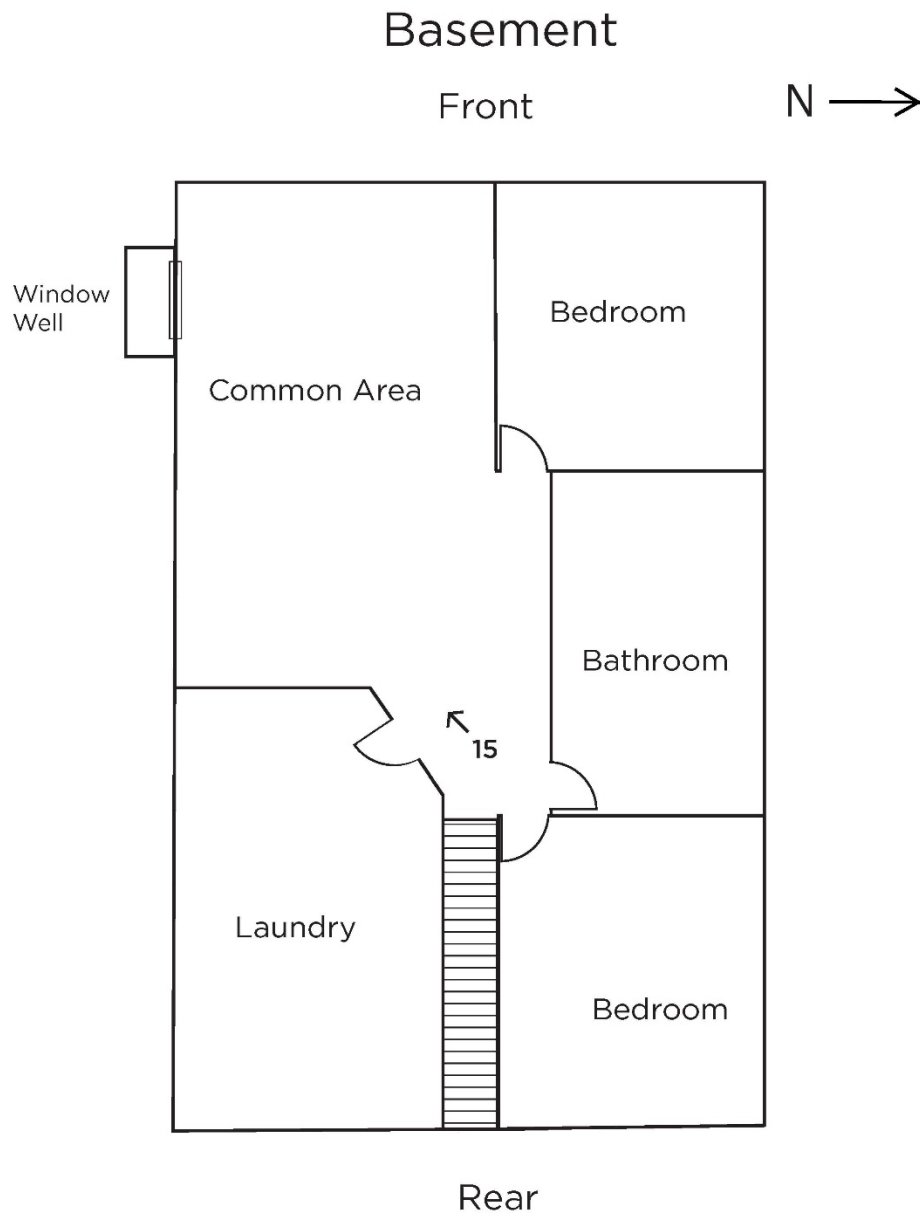
Figure 3: Floor Plan of Main Floor and Photo Key (not to scale)



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Figure 4: Floor Plan of Basement and Photo Key (not to scale)



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Figure 5: Harry Davis, Sr. with Golden Gloves boxers, John Bible and Roger Frazier, 1952
The Minneapolis Star Tribune, June 11, 1953



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Figure 6: Harry Davis, Sr. with Charlotte Davis on their first wedding anniversary, 1943.
Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis



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Figure 7: Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis toasting with Mayor Art Naftalin and Fran Naftalin at the Davises' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, 1967.

Overcoming: The Autobiography of W. Harry Davis



Davis, Harry, Sr. and Charlotte, House
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Figure 8: Harry Davis, Sr. and Charlotte Davis celebrating Davis, Sr.'s endorsement by the DFL, 1971.

The Minneapolis Tribune, February 21, 1971.



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Figure 9: Harry Davis, Sr. at the dedication of the W. Harry Davis Academy in 2003.
The Minneapolis Star Tribune, February 19, 2003.

