

Resolution of the City of Minneapolis

By Quincy, Glidden, Reich, Gordon, Hofstede, Johnson, Samuels, Lilligren, Goodman, Schiff,
Tuthill, Colvin Roy, Hodges

Honoring The Lee Family for Standing Against Racism and Supporting Fair Housing for All

Whereas, in June 1931, Arthur and Edith Lee and their 6-yr-old daughter Mary became the first African-American family to own a home in the Field neighborhood when they bought a two-bedroom bungalow at 4600 Columbus Avenue, an area of south Minneapolis which was racially segregated; and

Whereas, despite threats from neighbors and the neighborhood association, and an offer from neighbors to buy the home back for \$300 more than the Lees had paid, they settled into their new home with an intent to stay; and

Whereas, within two weeks of the Lee family's arrival, hundreds and up to thousands of white people would assemble nightly outside their home and stay until the early morning hours, hurling taunts and rocks, throwing black paint on the house, and jeering whenever someone went in or out of the house, as police stood outside urging crowds to disperse; and

Whereas, the terrified Lee family and their supporters were forced to hide in the house, "crouching below darkened windows with guns in hand to defend" themselves, knowing a sullen, angry crowd of men and women were threatening them from all directions; and

Whereas, Mr. Arthur Lee, a World War I veteran, declared, "Nobody asked me to move out when I was in France fighting in mud and water for this country ... [a]ll I want is my home, and I have a right to establish one and live in it"; and

Whereas, Lena Olive Smith, the first black woman licensed to practice law in Minnesota and the first female President of the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP, advised the Lees through the conflict, and encouraged them to remain in their home for the importance of the principal that African-American people may live wherever European-American people live; and

Whereas, the matter came to a head after the mob, which had grown to over 3,000, descended upon the Lee home throwing rocks and smashing windows, causing the police to form a protective cordon around home and for friends of Arthur Lee, who served with him in World War I, to organize a group of armed guards to help protect the house; and

Whereas, throughout this period of violence, threats and riotous crowds, the Lee family stood firm and refused to leave or sell their home as long as demonstrations persisted; and

Whereas, eighty years after these events the Field Regina Northrop Neighborhood Association, area residents and organizations, and the City of Minneapolis take pride in the Lee family's strength and fortitude and wish to honor them; and

Whereas, the Lee family, who won a significant battle for fair housing and civil rights, teach us that race and racism are an important part of our City's history and that we can learn from the past as we unite in peace with our neighbors.

Now, Therefore, be it Resolved by The City Council of The City of Minneapolis:

That the City Council honors the Lee Family, their friends and allies, and their attorney, Lena Olive Smith, for their courage in fighting against racism and on behalf of fair housing for all; and

Be It Further Resolved that the Lee Family and their descendents be remembered at the Lee Family Commemorative Event, to be held July 16, 2011, with the public invited to gather at Field School at 6:45 pm for a walk along 46th Street, retelling of the Lee story, and dedication of a commemorative sculpture.

Passed July 1, 2011

Barbara Johnson, President of the Council

Approved:

R.T. Rybak, Mayor

Attest:

Casey Joe Carl, City Clerk