

opposed it arguing that the immediate enfranchisement of "this enervated and ignorant race" might introduce "in our system an element of disaffection, danger and corruption."

Following passage of the suffrage amendment, Blacks in Minnesota jubilantly held a state convention of their own on Jan. 1, 1869 — the sixth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation — and listened to an address by Marshall.

"In the name of the state of Minnesota, which has relieved itself of the reproach of unjust discrimination

**Please note, DeGroat wasn't the first American Indian to serve there were others before him.**

Although present-day Minnesotans may find it surprising that voters twice turned down the chance to extend voting rights to Black men, Minnesota was one of the few states to enfranchise Blacks and Indians voluntarily.

The battle for "Negro suffrage" was won two years before the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted, with its provision that the right to vote "shall not be denied or abridged in the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

So viewed in historical context, Minnesota could still be considered a progressive state.

—Beverly Smith

## Minority membership increases

A little-noticed piece of history may have occurred when the 77th Session of the Minnesota Legislature convened Jan. 8.

There are now three House members with minority backgrounds, which is apparently more than at any time in the state's history.

Two are newly elected members Edwina Garcia (DFL-Richfield) and Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul), who are Hispanic. The third is incumbent Rep. Richard Jefferson (DFL-Mpls) who is Black.

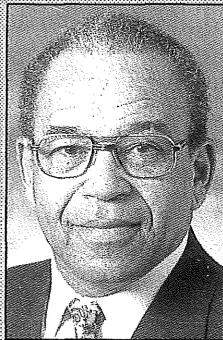
Prior to this session, there were only two minority members serving in the House at any one time. This occurred in 1973 and 1979.

Ray Pleasant, who was elected in 1973 and served until 1981, was the second Black person to be elected to the House.

And the late Frank DeGroat of Detroit Lakes, who was elected in 1962 and served until 1974, was the first and only known American Indian to serve in the House.

Frank Rodriguez, who is Hispanic, was elected in a 1979 special election and served until 1981.

The first Black House member was John Francis Wheaton, who was elected in 1899.



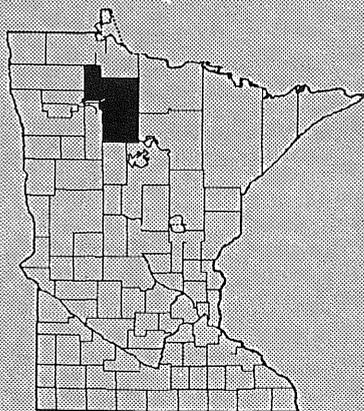
Rep. Richard Jefferson



Rep. Edwina Garcia



Rep. Carlos Mariani



## Do you know?

Giacomo Beltrami's quixotic search for the source of the "King of Rivers" ended in disrepute, but his gift for self-promotion was so strong that settlers in northern Minnesota later named a county in his honor.

Banished from his native Italy in 1821, Beltrami set off for the New World and eventually found himself abandoned near the Red Lake River in the farthest reaches of the Louisiana Territory.

Convinced he was joined by the spirits of Marco Polo, Columbus, and other famed Italian explorers, Beltrami made his way to the heart-shaped lake which he christened Lake Julia after a woman friend, and proclaimed it the source of both the Red Lake and Mississippi rivers.

His book triumphing his travels met mixed reviews: it was praised for its stirring narrative but criticized for its many inaccuracies. By 1825, Beltrami went to the public in his own defense and sharply denounced his critics.