



Foundation Document Overview

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

District of Columbia



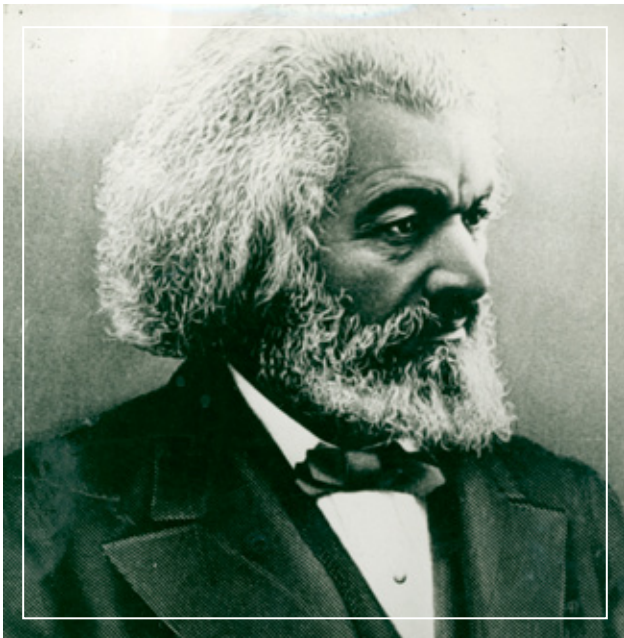
Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of FREDERICK DOUGLASS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to inspire and educate the public through the preservation and interpretation of the home, life, and legacy of Frederick Douglass through his Cedar Hill estate in Washington, DC.



Significance

Significance statements express why Frederick Douglass National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The importance of Frederick Douglass's legacy inspired visionary grassroots preservation efforts—led by the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and the local community—to preserve his historic Anacostia home, one of the first historic sites dedicated to an African American.
- Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, with its landscape, home, and rich collection of original Douglass objects that embody the power of the place, challenges and inspires us as a tangible symbol of the social revolution in 19th century America. That revolution saw Frederick Douglass rise from enslavement to one of the most prominent African Americans of his time.
- Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, along with its rich collection of original Douglass objects, reveals the many facets of Douglass the man: intellectual, advocate, statesman, ambassador, writer, orator, musician, family man, friend, colleague, farmer, and Victorian gentleman.
- Frederick Douglass built and worked with a powerful network of vibrant leaders whose fight for social justice continues to inspire us today. His associates included Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, and Senator Blanche K. Bruce.
- Frederick Douglass's Cedar Hill is positioned in the heart of historic Anacostia. This historic structure is an icon of American history and serves as both a steadying influence and a catalyst for change in the community.
- Offering commanding views of the nation's capital, Frederick Douglass's Cedar Hill estate was a symbol of his achievements and influence, a center for activism, and his personal refuge.
- A visit to Frederick Douglass National Historic Site exposes visitors to tangible symbols of African American achievement against overwhelming odds and also provides visitors of all backgrounds an opportunity for personal inspiration.

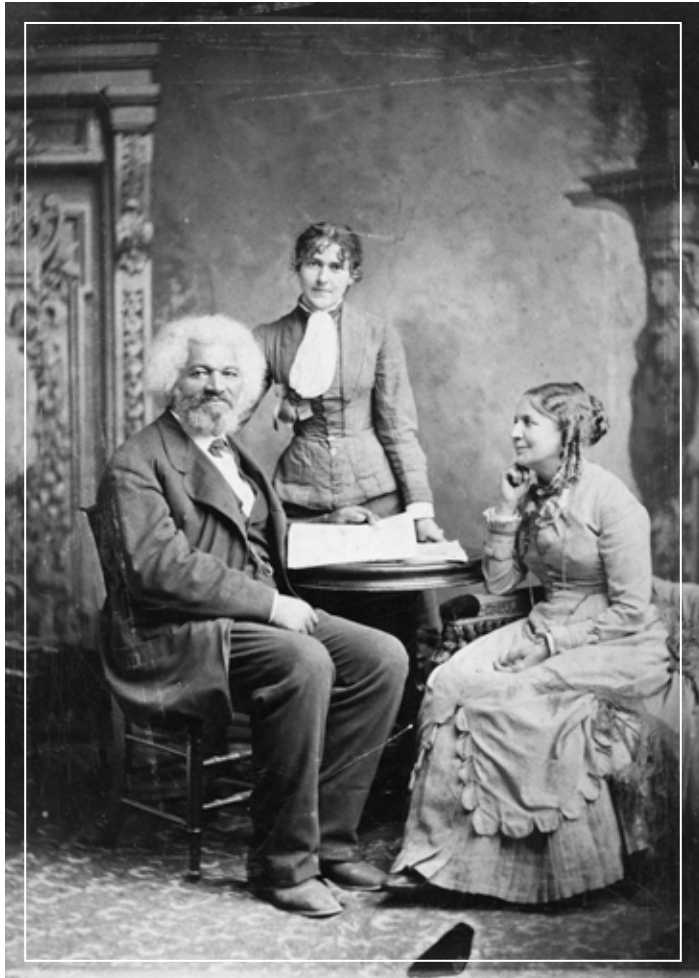
Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Douglass Home**
- **Cedar Hill Estate Cultural Landscape**
- **Museum Collection**
- **Opportunities for Learning and Understanding**

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Connections to the Anacostia Neighborhood**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The life and ideals of Frederick Douglass, centered in our nation's 19th-century struggle for civil rights and social justice, continues to challenge and inspire us today.
- The story of Frederick Douglass's journey from enslavement to prominence, achieved against overwhelming odds, challenges and inspires us to work untiringly to achieve our own aspirations.
- On a hilltop overlooking the City of Washington, Frederick Douglass's estate, including its extensive collection of original Douglass objects, symbolizes his unparalleled success and embodies the heights to which the "Sage of Anacostia" rose by the end of his life, inspiring Americans to preserve his home and continue his legacy.
- Frederick Douglass's broad-ranging advocacy for social justice issues including abolition, civil rights, and equal education regardless of race or gender helped to transform a nation struggling to live up to its ideals, and continues to be relevant by challenging and inspiring those who seek freedom and equality today.



Description

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site was established by Congress on September 5, 1962, through Public Law 87-633. This site at Cedar Hill, where Douglass lived from 1877 until his death in 1895, honors the life and legacy of Frederick Douglass, the most recognizable African American public spokesman of his time.

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site ensures the preservation of Douglass's Washington, DC, home while inspiring the public through the legacy of his dedication to the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, and activism against oppression. Douglass spent his career as an advocate not only for the rights of minorities and the abolition movement, but also for women's suffrage and temperance. His life triumphs were many: abolitionist, women's rights activist, author, owner-editor of antislavery newspapers, United States Minister to Haiti, and the most respected African American orator of the 1800s.

The Frederick Douglass Home, Cedar Hill, is a 14-room house with associated outbuildings that was constructed in the 1850s. The home is situated on a 14-acre tract on a hill with a commanding view of the capital city. The site includes a visitor center, located at the base of the hill of the Cedar Hill estate, and an adjacent, unfinished property that was purchased to support educational activities. Redesign of the visitor center and construction of an education center on the adjacent property will provide space for enlightened programming and experiential learning opportunities using dynamic multimedia. Through the rehabilitation of visitor services areas at the site, the park will provide innovative and compelling educational spaces focusing on the commitment to education, scholarship, collaboration, and agitation that was central to Douglass's life and legacy.

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland in 1818 to an enslaved mother and a white father. Largely self-educated, he escaped enslavement at age 20, moving first to New York City and then to New Bedford, Massachusetts. William Lloyd Garrison called upon Douglass to make an impromptu speech at an antislavery convention, where he first demonstrated his abilities as an orator.

After a few years of lecturing as an agent of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, and following the publication of his autobiography "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass" in which he revealed his identity as a runaway slave, Douglass fled to Great Britain. While in Great Britain, he worked as a lecturer and writer. There he became acquainted with such prominent figures as John Bright and Daniel O'Connell. Funds were raised by his friends in England to purchase his freedom (as he was still a fugitive slave) and to continue his antislavery agitation upon return to America.

In 1877, Douglass made his home in the Anacostia community of Washington, DC, with his first wife and the mother of his five children, Anna Murray Douglass. Anna died in 1882 and 18 months later Douglass married Helen Pitts, a friend and former employee. Douglas remained politically active while living at Cedar Hill. Here Douglass displayed belongings that measured his success, including Abraham Lincoln's cane, given by Mrs. Lincoln after his assassination. His books were his most beloved treasure, and Douglass spent much of his time in the library or the reconstructed "Growlery" outbuilding, reading about politics, philosophy, and law. In his closing years at Cedar Hill he was deemed "Sage of Anacostia," an accolade that celebrated his indomitable intellectual spirit. After Douglass died in 1895, his wife Helen vigorously preserved Cedar Hill as a memorial to his life and legacy. The home was administered by the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs from 1916 to 1962, when the property was conveyed to the U.S. government.

