

Frederick Douglass

National Historic Site
Washington, D.C.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

“TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED
IN SLAVERY I CAN SAY, I, TOO,
HAVE SUFFERED...TO THOSE WHO
HAVE BATTLED FOR LIBERTY,
BROTHERHOOD, AND CITIZENSHIP
I CAN SAY, I, TOO, HAVE BATTLED.”



Frederick Douglass spent his early years in a home broken beyond most people's comprehension. His mother, a slave, was forced to leave him as an infant. He never knew the identity of his father. He lived in poverty crowded into two rooms with grandparents and cousins. Beyond that, Frederick was a slave—listed on an inventory along with mules and bushels of wheat. His owner could sell him on a whim because, then in America, slavery was legal. But all this adversity did not break the spirit of young Frederick for he possessed an intellectual curiosity undeterred by his circumstances. At age 8, he was sent to Baltimore as a house servant. He became fascinated by the “mystery of reading” and decided that education was “the pathway from slavery to freedom.” Because

it was illegal to educate slaves, Frederick learned how to read and write by trading bread for reading lessons and tracing over words in discarded spelling books until his handwriting was smooth and graceful. By age 13, he was reading articles about the “abolition of slavery” to other slaves. When he escaped to freedom at age 20, Douglass eagerly shared his hard-earned wisdom. His lifetime triumphs were many: abolitionist, women's rights activist, author, owner-editor of antislavery newspaper, fluent speaker of many languages, Minister to Haiti, and most respected African American orator of the 19th century. In his closing years at Cedar Hill he was deemed the “Sage of Anacostia,” an accolade that celebrated the intellectual spirit within him that never grew old.

Frederick Douglass

"Neither we, nor any other people will ever be respected till we respect ourselves, and we will never respect ourselves till we have the means to live respectably."



A Douglass Chronology

1818 born in Talbot County, Md., exact date unknown; his mother a slave, his father is white, perhaps her owner; christened Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey

1826 sent to Baltimore as house servant; his owner's wife begins teaching him to read but stops when warned that education means "there will be no keeping him;" convinced that knowledge is freedom, Frederick teaches himself in secret to read and write

1833-34 is moved to nearby plantation; deemed unmanageable, is hired out to a slave-breaker who starves and whips him—which fuels his dreams of freedom

1836 attempted escape fails; is returned to Baltimore; learns trade as ship caulker; meets many free African Americans, including Anna Murray

1838 boards train in sailor disguise; escapes to freedom in New York City; Anna Murray joins him; they marry and move to New Bedford, Mass.; adopts Douglass surname from Sir Walter Scott's poem, *Lady of the Lake*

1841-47 becomes active in abolition movement; hired by Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society; lectures in New England; 1845 publishes *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*; leaves at once for Europe to escape slave hunters now



Anna Murray, born free of former slaves, was his wife for 44 years.

alerted to his identity; speaks out for world peace, Irish home rule, and "the cause of the poor, no matter whether black or white." English friends buy his freedom; returns to U.S.A. in 1847

1847-59 launches newspaper, the *North Star*, later renamed *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Rochester, N.Y.; outspoken defender of women's rights and of political action as means to abolish slavery; in

1855 publishes *My Bondage and My Freedom*; opposes John Brown's raid in 1859, but his alliance with Brown compels brief asylum in Canada and England

1863 in wake of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass issues "Men of Color, to Arms!" urging free African Americans to join the U.S. Army; meets with Pres-

ident Lincoln on treatment of soldiers; serves as his adviser

1872-81 Frederick and Anna move to Washington, D.C.; buy a house at 316 A Street N.E.; in 1877 they break "whites only" covenant by purchasing Cedar Hill; serves as U.S. Marshal of the District of Columbia from 1877 until 1881

1881-84 publishes third autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*;



Helen Pitts, 2nd wife; their mixed marriage sparked debate.

Anna Murray Douglass, mother of their 5 children, dies in 1882; marries Helen Pitts in 1884; they travel to Europe and Africa

1889 on 26th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, denounces the government for abandoning African Americans; President Harrison appoints him Minister to Haiti; resigns post in 1891; continues to address human rights

1894 delivers speech, "The Lesson of the Hour," an attack against lynching; censures politicians and citizens alike for empowering segregation and rejects "the idea that one class must rule over another"

1895 on February 20, shortly after attending a women's rights rally, Douglass dies at Cedar Hill; nationally mourned and acclaimed as gifted orator and champion of the oppressed



Cedar Hill

Douglass was nearly 60 years old on September 1, 1877, when he moved with his wife, Anna, to this 1850s brick house that he named Cedar Hill. For 40 years he had battled for human rights, and Cedar Hill provided a welcome respite. There was time to exercise or to linger at the dining table for lively discussions about politics. Here he displayed belongings that measured his success: Abraham Lincoln's cane given by Mrs. Lincoln after the assassination; a leather rocking chair from the people of Haiti; a handcarved German clock, gift of admirer Ottilia Assing. His books were his most beloved treasure,



and Douglass spent much of his time in the library or in the outdoor "Growlery" reading about politics, philosophy, and law. Anna died in 1882, and 18 months later he married Helen Pitts, friend and co-worker. After Douglass died in 1895, Helen vigorously preserved Cedar Hill as his memorial. She organized the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association in 1900; it joined in 1916 with the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. In 1962 the care of Cedar Hill was entrusted to the National Park Service.

photos by Larry Olsen



About Your Visit

Visitor Center All of the activities, including tours of Cedar Hill, the grounds, and the Growlery, begin at the visitor center. Here you will find exhibits and a film that tell you about Douglass, plus publications and items pertaining to Douglass and

African American culture. The visitor center, restrooms, and first floor of Cedar Hill are accessible to visitors with disabilities. Group tours must be arranged in advance; contact the park for information. Cedar Hill is open daily except Thanksgiving,

December 25, and January 1. Seasonal hours: spring-summer 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; fall-winter 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Getting Here From the Mall, travel south on 9th Street to I-395 north, exit onto I-295 south across bridge,

exit onto Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., turn left on W Street, SE, proceed three blocks to visitor center parking lot. From I-495/95 beltway, take exit three north onto Indian Head Highway (Md 210), which becomes South Capitol St., bear right

on Martin Luther King Jr., Ave., turn right on W Street to parking lot. From the Howard Rd. Green Line Metro, take the Mt. Rainier B-2 bus to Douglass home.

More Information Frederick Douglass National Historic Site 1411 W Street SE Washington, DC 20020 202-426-5961 or TDD/202-426-1452 www.nps.gov/frdo