

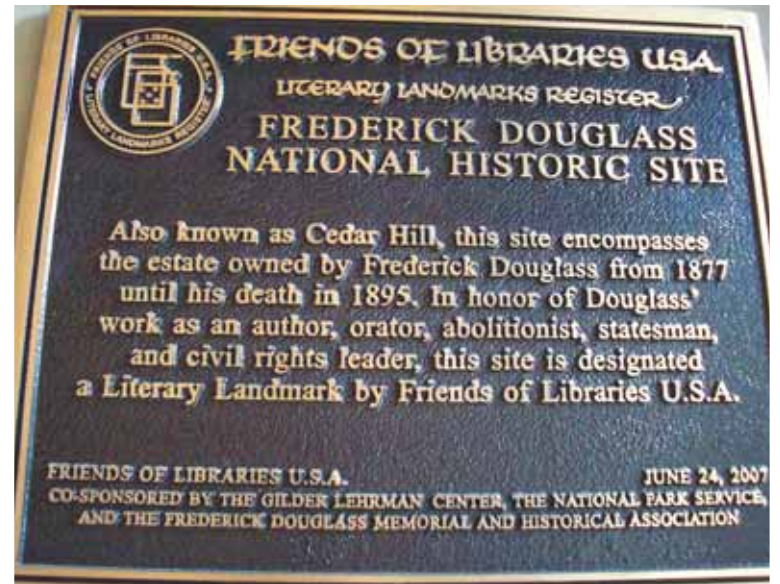
Visiting Frederick Douglass' House

An historic figure provides a heroic image

BY JOHN MULLER

CLOCKWISE from LEFT

1. A 2007 marker from the Friends of Libraries, USA demarks the FDNHS a literary landmark.
2. The view from the top of the FDNHS overlooks Historic Anacostia and all of Washington to the US Capitol.
3. The FDNHS on a recent evening as the American Flag is lowered.





Ranger Satterwhite gives a recent tour to a group of visitors.

In the early morning of Saturday, June 5, a seventeen year old absconding from the supervision of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services was shot and killed at the corner of 16th & W Street SE.

The next block down, fifty-one feet above the street, is the 19th century Victorian home of Frederick Douglass. In 1838, at the age of 20, Douglass absconded from Southern slavery to Northern freedom. He lived in the house from 1877 until his death on February 20, 1895 when he collapsed in the foyer at mid-day after attending a women's rights meeting.

The unpretentious yet dominating home, on the heights above the Anacostia River, provided its owner with a commanding view of the U.S. Capitol and the city of Washington. Its owner was a remarkable self-taught man who became a commanding figure in American history.

Slave, abolitionist, human rights activist, linguist, diplomat, author, editor, orator--Frederick Douglass was all these things, a role model for all people, for all times," according to a 1997 National Park Service advertisement. Douglass first moved to Washington, DC from Rochester, New York in 1871. He purchased two row houses, 316 and 318 A Street SE, on Capitol Hill prior to moving to Anacostia.

Cedar Hill, the Anacostia home which Douglass named for the abundance of Cedar trees, was originally named Van Hook's Hill after John Van Hook who developed the property from 1855 to 1859 and is known as the failed financier behind Uniontown. On the first of September 1877 Douglass bought the property for \$6,700. He would eventually expand the property from 9 ¾ acres to 15 acres and the home from 14 rooms to 21 rooms.

The home and property of the Frederick Dou-

glass National Historic Site (FDNHS) at 1411 W Street SE became a unit of the National Park Service on September 5, 1962. Following government hearings and renovations, the home was officially opened to the public on February 14, 1972.

The home re-opened in February of 2007 after nearly three years and \$2 million of renovations. About 90% of the home's artifacts are original.

An incline of eighty-five steps to reach the front door is a symbolic climb, says 12 year old White Dawes, who lives in the neighborhood, "They represent the steps to get to where you want to go in life."

"Frederick Douglass represents the black experience and the journey of our people. His ambition – travelling, writing books, political activism – is inspiring and that's why I'm bringing my children here," said Ken Martin of Dallas, Texas on a recent visit to the FDNHS.

In 1845 Douglass, then 27, an emerging orator and lecturer in the Abolitionist movement with the support of publisher William Lloyd Garrison, burst onto the national scene and immortalized himself in the American consciousness with his writing of "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave." Douglass wrote his narrative to prove that he had been a slave, which many doubted because of his raw intellect and masterful use of language.

As a slave in Baltimore, Douglass was taught the alphabet by his master's wife, although it was unlawful to teach slaves to read. To further his instruction Douglass took to the streets, where at 12 years old he would trade pieces of bread with poor white children for impromptu lessons.

"When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my re-

On Saturday, August 1 from 1pm – 4pm, the FDNHS will host its 3rd Annual Family Fun Festival. The free event will allow visitors the chance to experience the "everyday mechanics of Victorian life" with crafts, ice cream churning, live music and Junior Ranger activities according to Ranger Braden Paynter.

Last year, more than 43,000 visited FDNHS, including First Lady Michelle Obama and her two daughters.

Ranger guided tours are available throughout the day on a first-come first-serve basis Monday through Sunday at 9am, 12:15pm, 3pm, 3:30pm, and 4pm. Larger groups are encouraged to make reservations. FDNHS features a bookstore and is open from 9am to 4:30pm. For more information visit www.nps.gov/frdo or call (202) 426-5961.

turn. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge.

"While Frederick Douglass was known as the Sage and Lion of Anacostia, many of today's young people passing by the W Street property on the B2 and U2 bus and on foot are uninspired by the life of Douglass," says Mabula Samuel, 12, who lives nearby and has visited many times over the years, gaining an intimate appreciation for the struggles that came to define Douglass' life.

"If you learn how to read, you can do anything," says Mabula who spends time with his friends at the new Anacostia Library. Mabula says he "felt sad for a moment" when he first learned about Frederick Douglass while viewing a video shown at the site.

"He brought power to our race. He worked with President Lincoln. He tried everything in his power to free his people. That's why he's my hero," noted the young honor roll student.

"The youth today can recite a song on the radio verbatim, but know next to nothing about, or let alone can quote one of the greatest orators in American history," says Antar Tichavakunda, 20, a DCPS graduate and rising senior at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island who first remembers visiting the FDNHS in grade school.

"You think of what obstacles he surmounted and who am I to complain? You had to have had a different type of mettle to fight a slave-breaker back and never be hit again," said Tichavakunda. ★