

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Joseph Henry Douglass

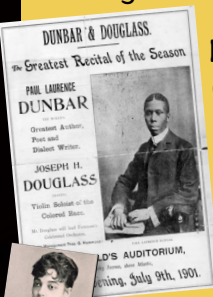
(July 3, 1871 – December 7, 1935)

“First Black Concert Violinist to Gain National Recognition and The First Violinist to Record for Victor Talking Machine Company”

Joseph Henry Douglass was born on July 3, 1871, in the Anacostia area of Washington D.C., to Charles and Mary Elizabeth Douglass. Joseph was the grandson of the famed abolitionist, orator, and writer, Frederick Douglass and the only child born to his parents that would live to see adulthood.



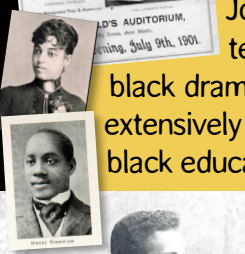
Joseph initially learned to play the violin from his grandfather, Frederick Douglass who was a talented violinist. With the financial and moral support of his grandfather, Joseph attended the New England Conservatory for five years and later the Boston Conservatory for formal education.



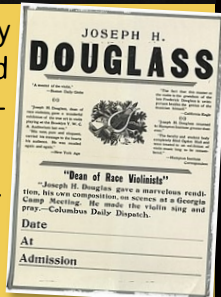
In 1893, at the age of 22, Joseph performed at the Chicago's World Fair for Colored American Day. Colored American Day was a day designated at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago's World Fair) in Chicago, Illinois to appease Black activists who protested the fair's exclusion of black people. The day was August 25, 1893, and Frederick Douglass was the keynote speaker. Joseph shared the lineup with renowned poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, black tenor, Sidney Woodward, who was one of the most celebrated of his day and



black dramatic soprano, Madam Desseria Plato. Following his performance, Joseph toured extensively throughout the United States and abroad for nearly three decades and played in every black educational institution, as well as a large number of churches. He also appeared at the Grand Military Concert sponsored by the U.S. Marine Band in Washington to commemorate the presidential inauguration of Grover Cleveland.



Joseph was also the first violinist of any race to record music for the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1914, although his recordings were never released. He performed for several U.S. presidents, including William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, and Howard Taft. By 1910, he was performing at Carnegie Hall and was considered a “revolution” and a violinist of great artistic skill.



Aside from his work in music, John opened and directed the violin department at Howard University. Later he became the director of the Colored Music Settlement School in New York. He often played slave spirituals that he learned as a child for family members. Joseph married fellow musician Fannie Howard. The couple had two children.



GRANDSON OF DOUGLASS DIES OF PNEUMONIA

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12.—Joseph H. Douglass, grandson of Frederick Douglass, died here today of pneumonia. He was 64 years old. He was born in Washington, D.C., on July 3, 1871. He was a violinist and a composer. He was the first black violinist to record for the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1914. He performed for several U.S. presidents, including William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, and Howard Taft. He was considered a “revolution” and a violinist of great artistic skill. He was buried in the National Harmony Memorial Park Cemetery, Hyattsville, Prince George's County, Maryland.

In December of 1935, Joseph suddenly became ill with pneumonia and was unable to recover. Joseph H Douglass died on December 7, 1935 at the age of 64. He is buried in the National Harmony Memorial Park Cemetery, Hyattsville, Prince George's County, Maryland.

