

# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



### Archie Franklin Williams (May 1, 1915 – June 24, 1993)

“One of First Black Meteorologists, Gold Medal Olympic Athlete”

**Archie Williams** was born on May 1, 1915 in Oakland, California. As a child, Archie was fascinated with airplanes. In 1931, Archie won the Oakland Tribunes Model Airplane Contest, at the Oakland Airport. Archie attended University High School in Oakland where he ran track. He enrolled in San Mateo Junior College where he studied Mathematics and Physics and also ran track. In the Fall of 1935, he transferred to the University of California, continuing his pursuit of an Engineering degree and joining the track team. During the spring of 1936, Archie won several key races. He won a gold medal for breaking the University of California record for the 440-yard sprint and also set a new world record of 46.1 seconds for the 400-meter race at the 1936 NCAA Men's Track and Field Championships in Chicago. He also ran his 200-meter personal best there at 21.4 seconds. With his win, he qualified in July for the Olympics and traveled with his teammates, including Jesse Owens, by ocean liner from New York City to Germany. In Berlin, Archie's team bunked in the Olympic Village's segregated U.S. quarters while trying to make up for lost training time. On Friday, 7 August 1936, Archie ran his 400-meter race with a time of 46.5 seconds; longer than his own world record, but enough to win the Olympic gold medal. Owens won four Gold Olympic medals. When Archie returned from the Olympics and on September 25, 1936 he was celebrated with a parade to City Hall.



In Archie's senior year, he joined the newly established Civilian Pilot Training Program, which was created to increase the number of available pilots in case the U.S. would get involved in the looming war. He graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in December 1939. He began working as a mechanic on small planes in Oakland. While searching for work, his attention was drawn to the Tuskegee Army



Flying School, at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. At this time, the armed forces were still segregated. In September 1941, Archie was hired as an instructor to teach civilian pilots and also some of the first of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. The Air Corps sent Archie to UCLA for master's-level training in meteorology. In 1943, commissioned as second lieutenant, he returned to Tuskegee to work as a meteorologist and as a flight instructor. He and his 14



fellow students became the first Black meteorologists in the United States. Archie entered the service in late 1942. He was one of only 14 African Americans who were commissioned during World War II in the aviation meteorological cadet program. He drew weather maps, made forecasts, and taught Intro to Flying for the all-Black 99th Pursuit Squadron back at Tuskegee. Due to the success of the Tuskegee Airmen, in 1948 President Harry S. Truman ended segregation in the military. In 1950, Archie was deployed to Korea, Okinawa and Japan. He flew four combat missions in B-29s.

Following the Korean War, Archie helped set up the weather station at Lockbourne AFB in Columbus, Ohio. He had a weather detachment with the Air Defense Command 26th Air Division in New York, then on to Alaska (Elmendorf AFB) and March AFB in California, eventually retiring in 1964 from the military with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. After his retirement, at the age of 50, Archie obtained a teaching credential through The University of California. He began teaching mathematics and science, focusing on students with special needs, at Sir Francis Drake High School in Martin County, where he taught and coached for 22 years.



He retired from teaching in 1987 at the age of 72 to return to his love of flying. He was the co-owner of Blue Sky Advertising.

Archie Franklin Williams died on June 24, 1993, from a heart attack at the age of 78, leaving behind his wife, Vesta, and two sons, Carlos and Archie Jr.

Sir Francis Drake High School was renamed Archie Williams High School in 2021.

