

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry
Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County



Selma Hortense Burke

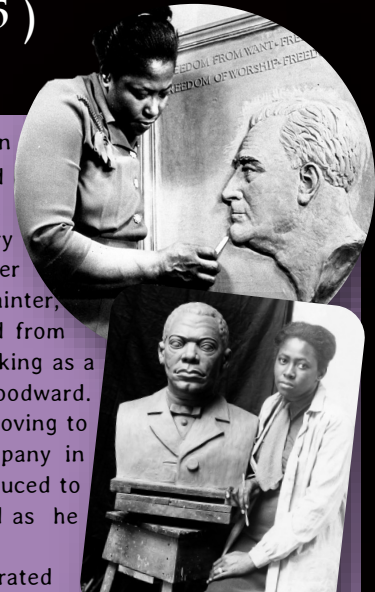
(December 31, 1900 – August 29, 1995)

"American Sculptor"



Selma Hortense Burke was born on December 31, 1900, in Mooresville, North Carolina to a local AME Church minister, Neal Burke, and Mary Jackson Burke. Selma was the seventh of ten children and attended a one-room segregated schoolhouse. Her love of sculpture started at a very young age where she molded clay found on the riverbanks, nearby. While her mother insisted she focus on a formal education, her grandmother, a painter, encouraged her to pursue her artistic expression. In 1924, Selma graduated from the St. Agnes School for Nurses at Winston-Salem University. She began working as a nurse and in 1928, she married her childhood friend, Durant Woodward. Unfortunately, Woodward died less than a year later of blood poisoning. After moving to New York in 1935, she worked as a private nurse for the dowager heiress of the Otis Elevator Company in Cooperstown. It was during this time that she met Jamaican writer and poet, Claude McKay and was introduced to the transformative energy of the Harlem Renaissance. The volatile relationship with McKay was short-lived as he often destroyed Selma's sculptures if they didn't meet his standards.

Selma began to teach for the Harlem Community Arts Center under the leadership of celebrated African-American sculptress, Augusta Savage. Around the same time, she worked for the Works Progress Administration on the New Deal Federal Art Project and sculpted a bust of Booker T. Washington that was given to Frederick Douglass High School in Manhattan in 1936. Selma traveled to Europe twice, studying in Vienna, Austria and Paris, France. While in Paris she met famed artist, Henri Matisse, who praised her work. When she returned to the United States, she opened the Selma Burke School of Sculpture in New York City and completed her Master's Degree in Fine Arts at Columbia University in 1941. Selma, feeling a sense of duty to her country, joined the U. S. Navy during WWII. Unfortunately, while she was driving a truck in the Brooklyn Naval Yard, she injured her back and was hospitalized. It was during her hospital stay, she entered a national competition to create a profile of President Franklin D. Roosevelt by the Fine Arts Commission in Washington, D.C. Selma was awarded the commission over 11 other competitors, three of whom were also black. She initially tried to create a portrait of the president from newspaper photos, but couldn't find a clear image, so she boldly wrote the president and requested a private sitting. President Roosevelt agreed, and on February 22, 1944, Selma Hortense Burke, the little girl from Mooresville, North Carolina, sketched the sitting president's portrait with charcoal on brown butcher's paper. From that sketch, she sculpted his likeness on a plaque. Her finished bronze plaque listed four freedoms above Roosevelt's face: freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of worship, and freedom of speech. On September 24, 1945, six months after President Roosevelt's death, Burke's portrait was revealed to the public. The portrait she created was adapted by the mint and is currently on United States dime.



Selma Burke with her portrait bust of Booker T. Washington, 1936

In 1946, Selma opened the Selma Burke Art School, also in New York. In 1949 she married Herman Kobbe, a famous architect, and moved with him to an artist's colony in New Hope, PA., where she opened the Selma Burke Art Center, in Pittsburgh, PA. When Kobbe died in 1955, Selma continued her work and became active with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, appointed by, and serving under, three different governors. Governor Milton Schapp proclaimed June 20, 1975, to be Selma Burke Day in Pittsburgh in recognition of her contribution to the arts in Pennsylvania. Selma Burke continued as an arts administrator and also taught in the Pittsburgh Public Schools for 17 years.



At age 92, Burke worked with children from East Hills Elementary School in an art class.

At the age of 80, in 1980, Selma produced her last monumental work, a statue of Martin Luther King, Jr., that graces Marshall Park in Charlotte, North Carolina. She was an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and received many other awards and honors including lifetime achievement awards from the Women's Caucus for Art, in 1979. She received the award from President Jimmy Carter in a private ceremony in the Oval Office. She also received a Candace Award from the National Coalition of 100 Black Women in 1983 and the Pearl S. Buck Foundation Women's Award in 1987. Selma Burke continued encouraging and inspiring young people to participate in the arts, well into her 90's. Dr. Selma H. Burke died of cancer, August 29, 1995, at the age of 94 near her retirement home in New Hope, Pennsylvania.



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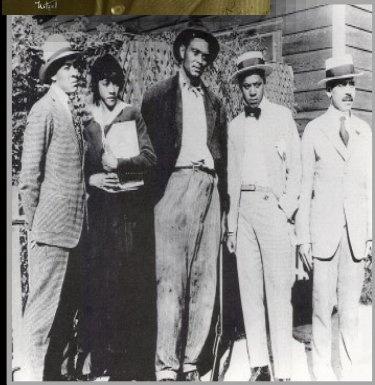
Lincoln Motion Picture Company (1916 – 1923)

"The First All-Black Owned Movie Production Company"



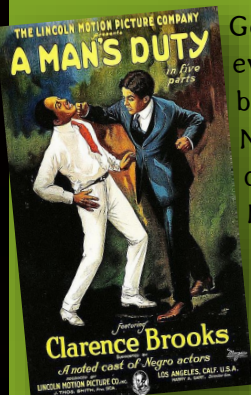
Noble Johnson

The Lincoln Motion Picture Company is the first black-owned film production company, founded in 1916 by brothers, Noble and George Johnson, in Omaha, Nebraska. At a time when African-Americans were being ignored by larger film producers, or only represented in slapstick comedies or demeaning stereotypes, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company set out to produce movies that showcased black actors in leading roles. At the time, Noble Johnson was a burgeoning actor and George Johnson worked for the post office. Within the first year of its opening, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company relocated to Los Angeles, California.



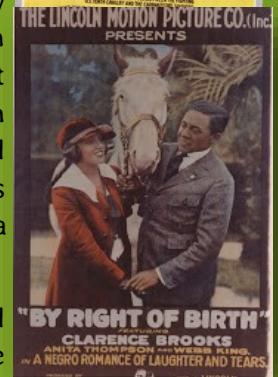
The company's first film, *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1916), was a silent, short film, starring none other than, Noble Johnson. The film was the first of its kind, to be owned, written, acted and produced by African-Americans. The film was directed toward black audiences and one of the first to show the black man as a determined and educated working man, who was successful through his own merits. The movie, unfortunately, is considered a "lost" film, which means there is no trace or recording to be found.

The Lincoln Motion Picture Company went on to produce four more films, *Trooper of Company K* (1917), *The Law of Nature* (1917), *A Man's Duty* (1919) and *By Right of Birth* (1921), a bold film produced in direct response to D.W. Griffith's racially charged movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. But by the late 1910s, several members of the black film community had established their own studios, creating serious competition for funding. The increased cost of movie production and the economic effects of the Great Depression forced most independent black film producers out of business. In 1923, the company announced that its next production would be *The Heart of a Negro*, but a few weeks after this announcement, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company closed.



George P. Johnson continued working as a postal employee for 37 years and eventually compiled an extensive collection related to blacks in the movie business, which is now held by the [UCLA Research Library](#).

Noble M. Johnson continued acting and appeared in more than 140 movies from 1915–1950. Some of his most notable films include: *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *The Ten Commandments* and *Moby Dick*. He was the tribal leader on Skull Island in the classic film, *King Kong* and its sequel, *The Son of Kong*. One of his last films was John Ford's classic, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Although he enjoyed a full repertoire of film work, after the closing of The Lincoln Motion Picture Company, Noble was often cast as the exotic, racially ambiguous, supporting character. Noble Johnson died on January 9, 1978, in California, at age 96.



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Cathay Williams / William Cathay

(September 1844 – 1893)

“First Documented Woman to serve in U.S. Army in 19th Century “

Cathay Williams / William Cathay was born September of 1844 in Independence, Missouri, to a free-man father and a slave mother. According to the laws, a child followed the status of the mother, which made Cathay a slave as well. Her first 17 years were spent working for a wealthy farmer, William Johnson, and although he died just as the Civil War was beginning, Cathay was not released from her inherited status.

Around 1861, Cathay was taken to Little Rock, Arkansas, by the 13th Army Corps of Union Soldiers, under the command of Colonel William P. Benton. When the war ended, she was returned to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.

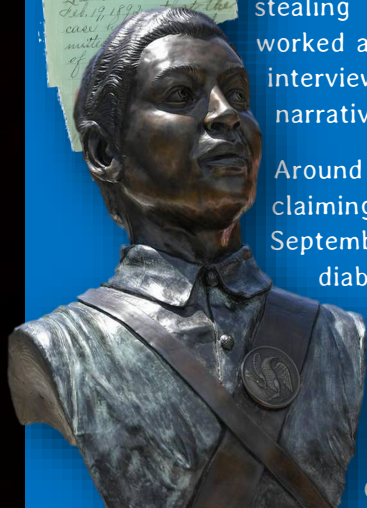
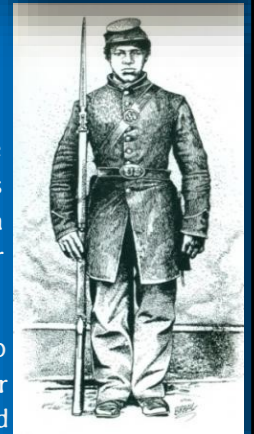
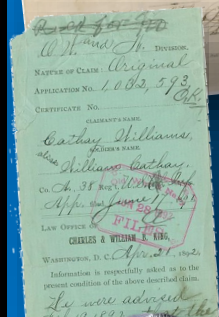
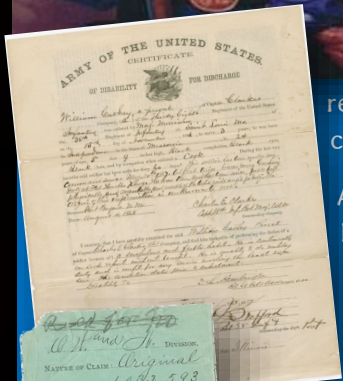
In 1866, Cathay concealed her identity and enlisted in the 39th U.S. Infantry Company A, in St. Louis, MO, as William Cathay, a male soldier. (This infantry company, along with six others, eventually became known as the Buffalo Soldiers.) She was described by the recruiting officer as 5 feet 9 inches tall, with black eyes, hair and complexion. Cathay stated that *he* was 22 years old and a cook.

Although she saw no combat, Cathay carried a musket and marched through Kansas and New Mexico and assumed guard duty as required. In February 1867, Cathay was hospitalized for smallpox and again in April for an “itch” which, by the medical standards of the mid-1800’s, was likely scabies or lice. By January of 1868, Cathay’s health had seriously declined, likely from the effects of smallpox and the years of marching in unbearable heat. She was admitted to the hospital on five different occasions, but no one discovered she was a woman until her final hospitalization. She was honorably discharged by her commanding officer, Captain Charles E. Clarke on October 14, 1868.

Cathay returned to working as a cook at Fort Union, New Mexico and later moved to Pueblo, Colorado. She married and divorced a con-man that was later arrested for stealing her money, gold and horses. She then moved to Trinidad, Colorado, and worked as a seamstress. It was during this time that a reporter from St. Louis heard her story and interviewed her about her service in the Army. On January 2, 1876, Cathay’s life and military service narrative was published in the St. Louis Daily Times.

Around 1890, Cathay entered a local hospital and at the age of 47, applied for a disability pension, claiming that illnesses she had contracted in the Army, destroyed her ability to support herself. In September of that year, a doctor examined her and found that although she suffered from neuralgia, diabetes and that all her toes were amputated, she did not qualify for disability payments. He determined that she was in overall good health and did not merit a pension. The Pension Bureau agreed and in 1892, rejected her claim for benefits. The exact date of Cathay’s death is unknown, but it is assumed she died sometime in 1893. Her final resting place is now unknown.

In 2016, a bronze bust of Cathay Williams was unveiled outside the Richard Allen Cultural Center in Leavenworth, Kansas to honor her Buffalo Soldier service.



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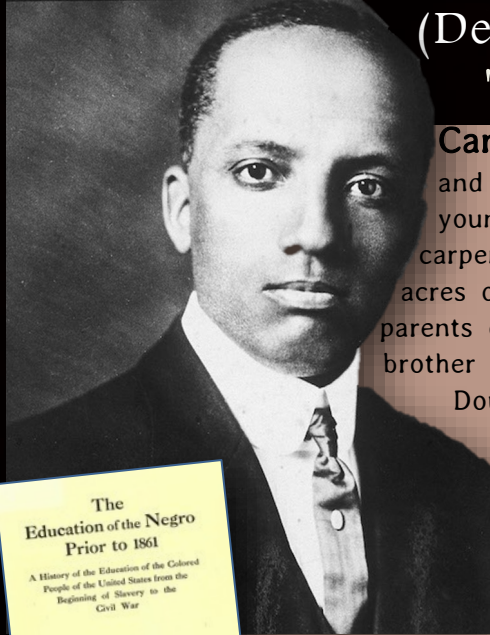


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Carter Godwin Woodson

(December 19, 1875 – April 3, 1950)
"The Father of Black History"



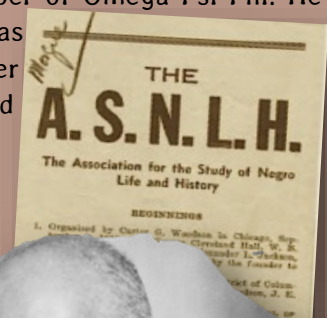
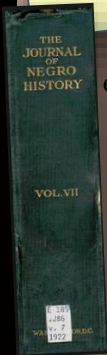
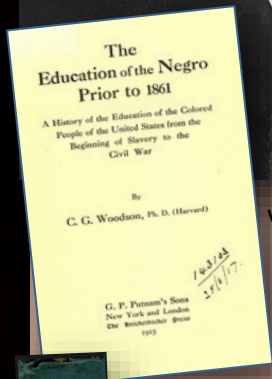
Carter Godwin Woodson was born December 19, 1875, in New Canton, Virginia, and was the youngest child of Anne Eliza (Riddle) and James Henry Woodson. As a young man, Carter's father escaped slavery and joined Union soldiers, working as a carpenter and then as a sharecropper. In 1872, as a freed man, his father purchased 21 acres of farm land. As a child, Carter was often pulled away from school to help his parents on their farm. In 1892, at the age of 17, Carter left home, following his older brother to Huntington, West Virginia, in hopes of attending a new secondary school, Douglass High School. Instead, he worked in the coal mines to survive.

In 1895, determined to continue his education, 20-year-old Carter Woodson, entered high school. Just two years later, he received his diploma and began teaching in the small community of Fayette County, WV. In 1900, just three years after graduating, Carter became the principal of Douglass High School. Soon after, he enrolled in Berea College and in 1903, the same year his father died, Carter received his Bachelor of Literature degree. For the next four years, Carter worked in the Philippines as part of the US War Department and traveled to Africa, Asia, and Europe and briefly attended the Sorbonne in Paris, France. In 1908, he received a Master's degree in History, Romance Languages, and Literature from the University of Chicago in Illinois. There he became a member of the first black professional fraternity Sigma Pi Phi and a member of Omega Psi Phi. He completed his Ph.D. in History at Harvard University in 1912, where he was the second African American, after W. E. B. Du Bois, to earn a doctorate. After earning his Ph.D., he continued teaching in public schools and later taught at Howard University, where he also served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

In 1915, Carter Woodson published his first book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* and co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (A.S.N.L.H.). A year later, he launched *The Journal of Negro History* which was published quarterly. On July 18, 1922, he purchased a three-story house in Washington D.C. that became his personal residence as well as the office for the Associated Publishers, Inc. and the national headquarters of the ASNLH.

In 1926, Carter Woodson launched the annual February observance of "Negro History Week" to increase awareness and interest in black history. It is said that he chose February for the observance because February 12th was Abraham Lincoln's birthday and February 14th was the accepted birthday of Frederick Douglass. In 1976, Negro History Week became "Black History Month."

On April 3, 1950, Carter G. Woodson died suddenly from a heart attack in his home in Washington, D.C., He was 74 years old. He never married and had no children, but his enduring legacy lives on every February and throughout the year.



The Carter G. Woodson stamp, issued in 1984.

CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton

(December 11, 1926—July 25, 1984)

"American Rhythm and Blues Singer"

Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton was born December 11, 1926, in Arton, Alabama to a Baptist minister father and a church singing mother. One of six children, she grew up singing in the church choir with her mother and siblings. When her mother died in 1940, 14-year-old Willie Mae left school to clean spittoons in a local tavern. The time she spent in the tavern exposed her to a style of music she never heard before in church. In that same year, music promoter Sammy Green discovered Willie Mae and recruited her to join his Atlanta-based Hot Harlem Revue. Willie Mae played drums and harmonica beside vaudeville entertainer, Diamond Teeth Mary, the half-sister of famed blues singer, Bessie Smith. While on the road, she studied the style of the other singers that included Bessie Smith and Memphis Minnie and was determined to become a singer as well.



After a few years on the road, at the age of 22, Willie Mae moved to Houston. A new style of blues was burgeoning that fit right into Willie Mae's brassy and bold style. She signed a recording contract with Peacock Records in 1951 and performed at the Apollo Theater in 1952. It was there at the Apollo Theater, she was given her nickname, "Big Mama," by Frank Schiffman, the manager of theater.



Big Mama Thornton
with the MIDWAY WATERS
Blues Band - 1966

Later that year, "Big Mama" recorded a new song written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller called "Hound Dog." "Big Mama" Thornton's original rendition of Hound Dog went to number one on the R & B chart. The record's success made her a star, but as with many artists of the time, she saw very little of the profits. Big Mama's success with "Hound Dog" was followed three years later by Elvis Presley recording his hit version of the song. Similarly, Thornton originally recorded her song "Ball 'n' Chain" for Bay-Tone Records in the early 1960s, and though the label chose not to release the song, they kept the copyright, which prohibited "Big Mama" from collecting publishing royalties when Janis Joplin recorded the song later in the decade.



"Big Mama" Thornton continued to record for Peacock until 1957, touring with various performers, including Junior Parker. But by the early 1960s, "Big Mama" was playing small venues and offers to play and record started to wain. Thornton left Houston and settled in San Francisco, where she continued to perform locally.

Popular interest in folk and blues music, beginning in the mid-1960s, helped revive her career, and in 1965 she toured Europe as part of the American Folk Blues Festival. She performed at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1966 and 1968.

In the 1970's, "Big Mama" continued to perform, shocking crowds by wearing men's three piece suits and singing the songs she chose, whether they were on the program or not. Heavy drinking and a life on the road took a toll on her health, but Big Mama's powerful voice never failed. On July 25, 1984, Willie Mae, "Big Mama" Thornton, died of heart attack in Los Angeles, California. She was 57 years old. Her funeral was attended by many blues greats and officiated by her old Peacock Records collaborator, Johnny Otis, who had since been ordained as a minister. In 1984, Thornton was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame. Her songs "Hound Dog" and "Ball 'n' Chain" appears in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame list of "500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll."

In 2004, the nonprofit Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls, named for Thornton, was founded to offer a musical education to girls from ages eight to eighteen.



Watch "Ball & Chain"

The Clerk's Black History Series



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Charles W. Follis

(February 3, 1879 – April 5, 1910)

"First African-American Professional Football Player"

Charles W. Follis was born, February 3, 1879, to James and Catherine Follis, in Cloverdale, Virginia. When Charles was just six years old, the family moved to Wooster, Ohio. One of seven children, Charles was the oldest son. All of the Follis boys played football for Wooster High School, but Charles was notably the biggest at six feet tall and 200lbs.

Charles graduated high school in 1901, and enrolled in Wooster College. And although he played baseball for the college, he chose to play football for Wooster Athletic Association, a local amateur football team, where he earned the nickname, "The Black Cyclone."

In one of the last games of the 1901, Charles played against the Shelby Blues, a football team based in Shelby, Ohio, and part of the larger Ohio League football organization. After a two-game series, Charles' impressive performance and spectacular speed, caught the attention of Shelby's team manager, Frank C. Schiffer.

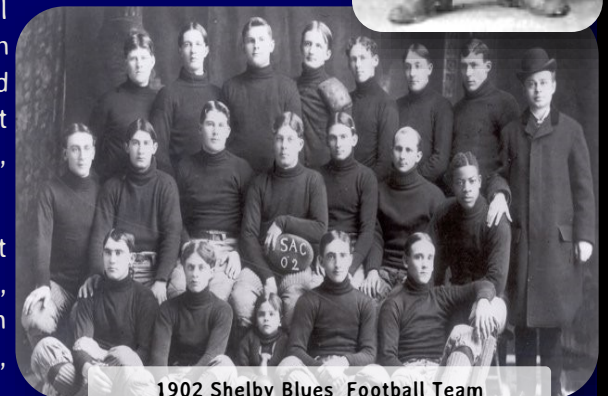
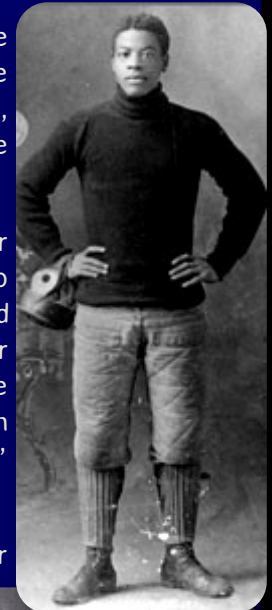
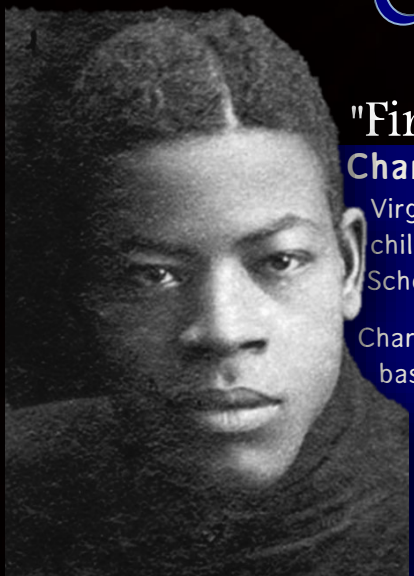
Impressed with his athletic ability, Schiffer asked Charles to play for the Shelby Blues. Charles accepted and moved 45-miles east, to Shelby, Ohio. Schiffer secured a job for Charles at Howard Seltzer and Sons Hardware Store and ensured his work hours allowed time for practice and games. Charles continued his football stardom during the 1902 and 1903 seasons, running for a 60-yard touchdown in a 58-0 win over a team from Freemont. But tragedy struck in 1903, when Charles' younger brother Curtis, died from a football injury at the age of 19.

In 1904, Charles W. Follis made history when he signed an official, paying contract, to play football for the Shelby Blues, making him the first African-American professional football player. The Shelby Globe newspaper reported: "The Shelby Athletic Association secured the services of Charles Follis for this season. The contract has been signed and football enthusiasts will be pleased to know Follis is on the team again this year." Eight days later, Charles played his first official professional football game, leading the Shelby Blues to a 29-0 victory, scoring an 83-yard touchdown.

Although Charles enjoyed a bit of celebrity, his time on the field was not without racial tensions and targeted abuse. He received many unpenalized, late hits, that eventually took a toll on his body. The last hit happened on Thanksgiving Day, 1906, Charles was helped off the field with a leg injury, never to return.

After the end of his football career, around 1909, Charles returned to baseball with the first African-American Professional Baseball team, the Cuban Giants. Again capturing the spotlight, becoming a star catcher and the leading power hitter. However, his return to sport was short lived when, in the spring of 1910, Charles was rushed to the hospital, where he died of pneumonia. He was 31 years old.

In 1995, Wooster High School named their new home stadium after Charles Follis. Wooster High School football is now played on Follis Field in his honor.



1902 Shelby Blues Football Team

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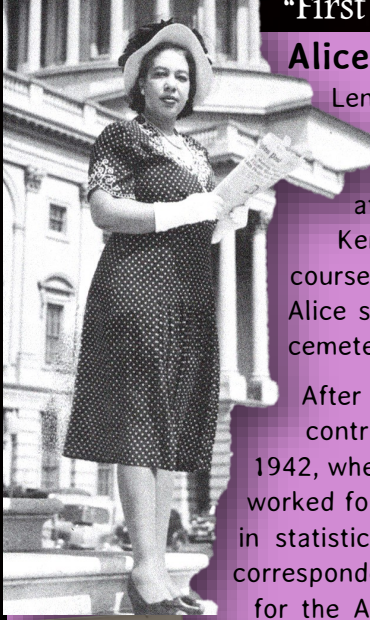
Alice Allison Dunnigan

(April 27, 1906 – May 6, 1983)

"First African-American Woman to Receive White House Press Credentials"

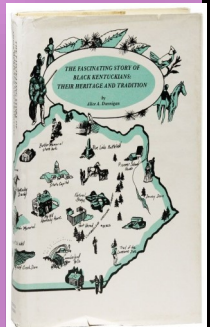
"First African-American Woman Member of Senate and House Press Galleries"

"First African-American Woman Member of Press to Travel with a President"



Alice Allison Dunnigan was born April 27, 1906, near Russellville, Kentucky to Willie and Lena Allison. In the segregated Russellville school system that Alice attended, black students were only allowed ten years of schooling. And although her parents saw no benefit in her advancing her education, a insistent Sunday school teacher did, and Alice was allowed to attend college. After completing a teaching course, Alice taught History in the deeply segregated Kentucky school system and incorporated omitted contributions by black Kentuckians to the course. Her collection of facts were later gathered into a manuscript in 1939 and published in 1982. Alice supplemented her meager teacher's salary by washing tombstones in the white cemetery, cleaning houses and doing laundry for other families.

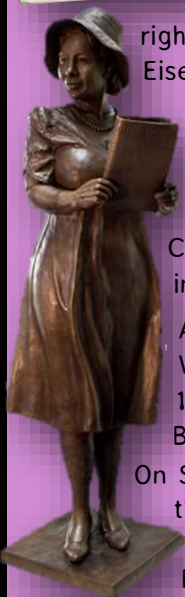
After teaching, Alice pursued the dream she had since she was a 13-year-old contributor to the local Owensboro Enterprise Newspaper, to be a reporter. And in 1942, when a call went out for government workers, Alice moved to Washington, D.C., and worked for the federal government from 1942 - 1946. While there, she took night courses in statistics and economics at Howard University. In 1946, she became a Washington correspondent for the black-owned, weekly, "The Chicago Defender." As an official writer for the Associated Negro Press, Alice sought press credentials to cover Congress, the Senate and The Supreme Court. She was denied her request on the grounds that she wrote for a weekly newspaper, and reporters covering the U.S. Capitol were required to write for daily publications. But just six months later she was granted press clearance and became the first African-American woman to gain the accreditation. Although she was paid \$100 dollars a month, her male colleges made double. Not deterred, the next year Alice became the first African-American female White House correspondent, and was the first black woman elected to the Women's National Press Club. In 1948, Alice traveled across 18 states with President Truman during his presidency campaign, making her the first African-American woman member of the press, to do so.



During her years of covering the White House, she frequently asked questions regarding the civil rights movement and the plight of black America. Her reputation for being a hard hitting reporter caused President Eisenhower to request her questions, often about racial inequality, in writing before each press conference. She refused, because no one else was required to do so, and he refused to call upon her. That all changed when in 1961, President J. F. Kennedy named Alice the education consultant to the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. She was an associate editor with the President's Commission on Youth Opportunity from 1967 to 1970. In 1970, after 28 years in government service, Alice Dunnigan retired.

Alice's autobiography, "A Black Woman's Experience: From Schoolhouse to White House" was published in 1974. Alice Allison Dunnigan died, May 6, 1983, in Washington, D.C. She was 77 years old. She was inducted into the Black Journalist Hall of Fame in 1985.

On Sept. 21, 2018, a sculpture of Alice Allison Dunnigan, was put on display at the Newseum located in Washington, D.C. Later this year, the statue will be placed in a new park dedicated to civil rights, in Alice's hometown of Russellville, Kentucky.





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Cheyney University

(Est. February 25, 1837)

"First Established HBCU—Historically Black College and University"

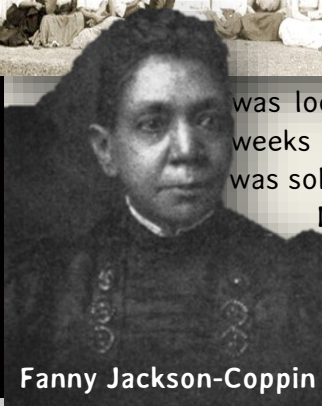


Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, was established February 25, 1837. After news of race riots in 1829, where Irish immigrants clashed with free and freedom seeking African-Americans, Quaker philanthropist Richard Humphreys, was compelled to help establish a system of education and trade skills for the African-American Community. In his will, Humphreys, a successful silversmith, bequeathed \$10,000 to the cause and charged thirteen fellow Quakers to establish a school to educate descendants of the African race. The school at its inception was called the **African Institute** and

was located on a 136 acre farm, seven miles from Philadelphia. The name was changed several weeks later to **the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY)**. In early 1846, the school closed and the farm was sold. In 1849, it reopened in Philadelphia, as a night school.

In 1869, Fanny Jackson-Coppin, a then ICY teacher, was appointed the principal of the

Institute, becoming the first African-American woman to become a school principal. She served as principal for 33 years and is responsible for transforming the institution, expanding and modernizing the curriculum and hiring many of the distinguished faculty members that gave the institute its character.

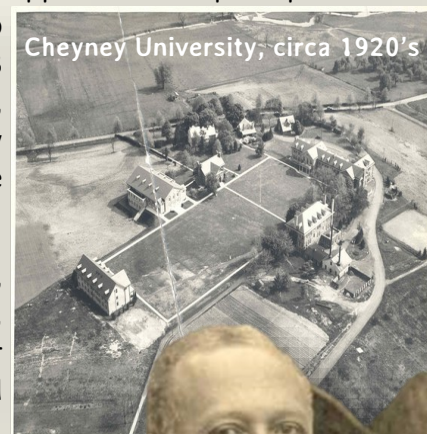


Fanny Jackson-Coppin

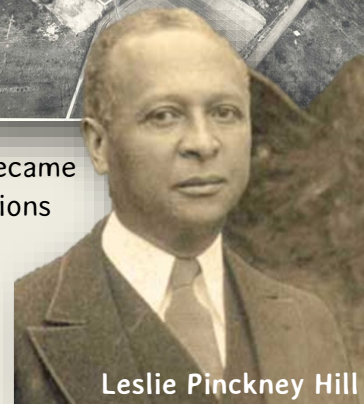


In 1902, with interest in the Institute continuing to grow, the board purchased a farm owned by another Quaker, George Cheyney, 25 miles west of Philadelphia. Booker T. Washington served as keynote speaker at the formal opening on May 5, 1905.

In 1913, a young Harvard graduate, Leslie Pinckney Hill, became the 5th principal of the school. One of Hill's first official actions came in January of 1914 when he proposed changing the name of the **Institute to Cheyney Training School for Teachers** to reflect the new purpose of the school. In 1921, Cheyney graduated its first class of state certified teachers. Under Hill's 38-year administration, the school grew from 14 students to nearly 500 students and became an accredited state college. Later, notable Commencement and "Cheyney Day" speakers



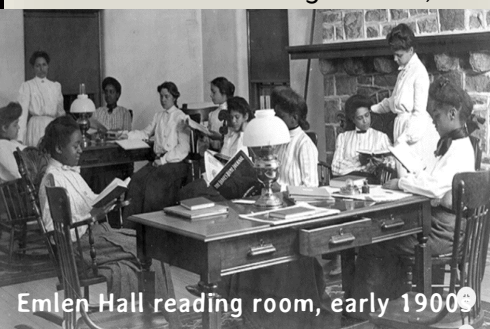
Cheyney University, circa 1920's



Leslie Pinckney Hill

included, Carter G. Woodson, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

By legislative act in 1959, the name of the school was changed to **Cheyney State College**. In 1983, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education was established by statute. As a charter member of the system, Cheyney State College became **Cheyney University of Pennsylvania**, the oldest of the fourteen member institutions and the oldest Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in the nation.



Emlen Hall reading room, early 1900's

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Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County

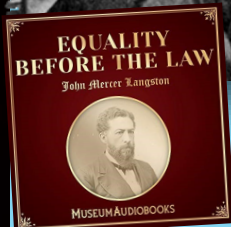


John Mercer Langston

(December 14, 1829 – November 15, 1897)

"First African-American Lawyer in Ohio"

"First African-American Elected to Public Office in Virginia"



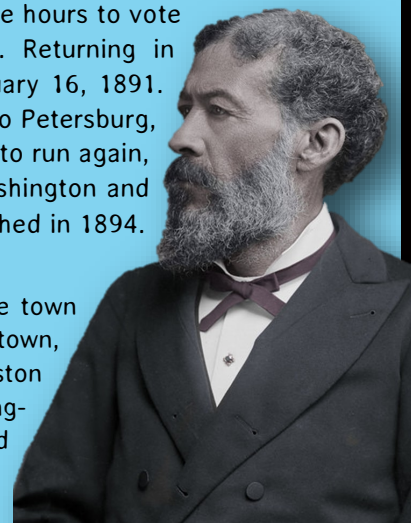
John Mercer Langston was born on December 14, 1829, in Louisa County, Virginia, the fourth child of Ralph Quarles, a white man, and Lucy Jane Langston, an emancipated mother of mixed race. Ralph Quarles, a former slaveholder, freed Lucy and their daughter Maria in 1806, in the course of a relationship that lasted more than 25 years. Their three sons were born free, as their mother was free. Both parents died in 1834, when John Langston, the youngest child, was four years old. The parents left the children a fairly large inheritance.

William Langston, an older half-brother of John, moved the children to Chillicothe, Ohio, after the death of their parents. In 1835, John's older brothers, Gideon and Charles started at the Oberlin preparatory school, where they were the first African-American students to be admitted. John Langston was 14 years old when he entered Oberlin Preparatory. John Langston earned a Bachelor's Degree in 1848, and a Master's degree in Theology in 1852 from Oberlin.

Although denied entry into law schools in both New York and Ohio, John Langston studied law as an apprentice under attorney and US Congressman, Philemon Bliss. He was admitted to the Ohio Bar in 1854, becoming the first African-American lawyer in the state of Ohio. He relocated to Brownhelm, Ohio with his new wife, fellow Oberlin student and abolitionist Caroline Wall, and on April 22, 1855, he became one of the first African-Americans elected to public office in the United States when he was elected Brownhelm Township Clerk. John and Caroline Langston became active in the abolitionist movement along with his brothers, helping slaves escape to the North along the Ohio part of the Underground Railroad. In 1856, he returned to Oberlin and served on the town's board of education. During the Civil War, Langston recruited black soldiers in the Midwest. He never served in the Union Army, but hired a substitute to take his place, a practice common among wealthy white men. Following the war, he served on the Oberlin city council. In 1868, he returned to Washington, DC, where he established the law department at Howard University. In the early 1870's, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts sought Langston's aid in drafting his Civil Rights Bill. In 1871, Langston received an appointment from President Ulysses S. Grant to the District of Columbia Board of Health. Langston served as Howard University's dean from 1868 to 1875 and as vice president and acting president from 1874 to 1875.

In 1888, John Langston entered the Virginia congressional election, as an *Independent* Republican candidate for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. The race caused bitter division between both racial and party lines and Frederick Douglass fiercely opposed Langston's candidacy. Due to voting irregularities, the final results of the election were contested during a two-year court battle. Separate lines at the polls meant black voters had to wait as long as three hours to vote and many ballots were reported missing. In 1890, John Langston was declared winner. Returning in December 1890 to his first full session in Congress, Langston made his first speech on January 16, 1891. Langston served in Congress from September 23, 1890, to March 3, 1891. Langston returned to Petersburg, Virginia, at the end of the 51st Congress. In 1892, Republicans in his Virginia district asked him to run again, but he refused. Langston spent the remainder of his life traveling between Petersburg and Washington and working on his autobiography, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, which was published in 1894. On November 15, 1897, three years after his retirement, Langston died in Washington, D.C.

The John Mercer Langston House in Oberlin, Ohio, has been designated as a National Historic Landmark. The town of Langston, Oklahoma, founded in 1890. In 1941, the historically black college in the same town, founded in 1897 as the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University, was renamed Langston University in honor of John Mercer Langston. John Mercer Langston Elementary School in Washington, D.C. was named in his honor. It opened in 1902 as a school for black students and remained open until 1993. John Mercer Langston was the great-uncle of the poet James Mercer Langston Hughes, better known as Langston Hughes.





The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Ethel Waters

(October 31, 1896—September 1, 1977)

"First African-American to Star in her own Television Show"

"First African-American Woman to be Nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award"

Ethel Waters was born October 31, 1896, in Chester, Pennsylvania, to Louise Anderson, a quiet, religious, 16-year-old girl. Due to the violent circumstances of her conception, Ethel was raised by her grandmother, in the rough streets of South Philadelphia's "Bloody Eighth Ward." She moved quite often throughout her childhood and married young at the age of 13. The marriage ended after four years and Ethel began working as a maid, making \$4.75 a week.

One night in 1917, two producers heard Ethel sing at a local bar and convinced her to travel with them, performing on the black vaudeville circuit. She quit her job and toured with the group until they reached the city of Chicago. There, she parted ways with the carnival and left for Atlanta. Finding herself in competition with revered blues singer, Bessie Smith, Ethel moved again, this time to Harlem, where the Harlem Renaissance was thriving. Enjoying great success, Ethel recorded her first record with New York's, Cardinal Records and then for Black Swan Records from 1921 through 1923. Her contract made her the highest paid black recording artist at the time. Over her lifetime, she recorded over 250 songs and is considered a crucial link between blues, pop and jazz music.

Until 1923, Ethel had only performed for black audiences, but after an audition for a white Chicago theater, that changed. Making a higher salary than she had ever earned, Ethel became the first black singer to break the color line in the local theater. Her new found fame, however, did not protect her from the harsh realities of deeply racist attitudes. Ethel revealed that while she starred in the show, her dressing room was located in the basement of the building, near the furnace, where the air quality was poor. She suffered from migraines for years afterwards.

All of those struggles aside, in 1925, her song *Dinah*, had become an international sensation.

In 1929, she appeared in her first motion picture, *On With the Show*, where she sang "Am I Blue," a tune that would become a number one hit. She also made a few short feature films for Vitaphone studios in New York, including *Rufus Jones for President* and *Bubbling Over*.

In 1939, during her very successful theater show, *Mamba's Daughters*, Ethel was asked by the NBC radio network to perform on an experimental broadcast for a new medium. She agreed - and made broadcast history. The new medium in development was called "television" and the program was *The Ethel Waters Show*. And on June 14, 1939, Ethel Waters became the first African-American to star in her own TV show. The 15-minute broadcast was a one-night experiment to gauge how audiences would respond to this new form of entertainment, the "Television." Ten years later, Ethel was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for the film *Pinky*. In 1952 the film version of *The Member of the Wedding* brought Ethel another Oscar nomination. Her appearance in a 1961 episode of *Route 66* received a 1962 Primetime Emmy Award nomination, the first dramatic performance by a black performer, as well as the first black woman nominated for an Emmy.

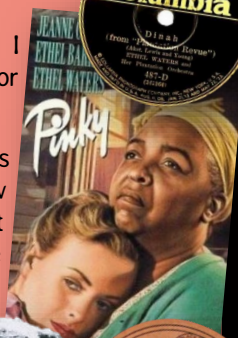
Three of Ethel's recordings were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame and her recording of "Stormy Weather" was listed in the National Recording Registry by the National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress in 2003. In her lifetime, she appeared on stage more than 20 times, had 25 Top 20 songs, and starred in 21 movies and tv programs. Her autobiography, "His Eye Is On The Sparrow" was published in 1951 and in 1971, she performed at the White House.

Ethel Waters died on September 1, 1977. She was 80 years old.

On September 1, 1994, the US Postal Service issued a stamp in her honor.



HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY
ETHEL WATERS
WITH CHARLES SAMUELS
New Preface by Donald Spivey



The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Dr. George Robert Carruthers

(October 1, 1939 -)

"Invented the Ultraviolet Camera/Spectrograph for NASA"
"Award Winning Physicist, and Space Scientist"

George Robert Carruthers was born on October 1, 1939, in Cincinnati, Ohio, the eldest of George and Sophia Carruthers. George Carruthers, Sr., who died when his son was 12 years old, was a civil engineer with the U.S. Army Air Corps, and encouraged his son's early interests in science. After his father's death, the family moved to his mother's hometown of Chicago. There George spent a lot of time in the Chicago libraries and museums and in the Adler Planetarium. He joined various science clubs and was a member of the Chicago Rocket Society. As one of only a handful of African-Americans competing in Chicago's high school science fairs, he won three awards, including first prize for a telescope he designed and built. In 1957, George graduated from Chicago's Englewood High School and entered the engineering program at the University of Illinois' Champaign - Urbana campus, focusing on aerospace engineering and astronomy.

George earned a Bachelor's Degree in Physics in 1961, a Master's Degree in Nuclear Engineering in 1962, and a Ph.D. in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering in 1964. He went to work for the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory as a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow. Two years later he became a full-time research physicist at the NRL's E. O. Hurlburt Center for Space Research.

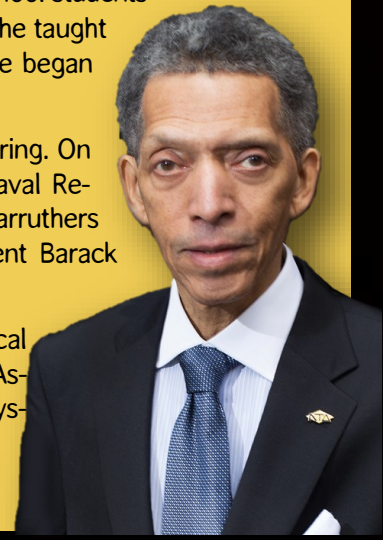
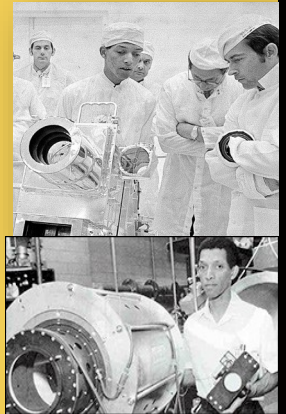
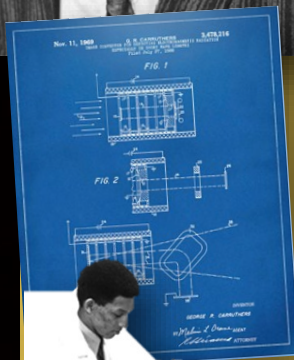
On November 11, 1969, Dr. Carruthers was awarded a patent for his "Image Converter for Detecting Electromagnetic Radiation Especially in Short Wave Lengths." During a 1970 rocket flight, his UV telescope, or "spectrograph," provided the first proof of the existence of molecular hydrogen in interstellar space. The invention was used again on April 21, 1972, during the first lunar walk of the Apollo 16 mission. The 50 lbs., gold-plated camera system was able to record radiation existing in the upper half of the ultraviolet system of the atmosphere. For the first time, scientists were able to examine the Earth's atmosphere for concentrations of pollutants, and see UV images of more than 550 stars, nebulae and galaxies. Dr. Carruthers was awarded NASA's Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal for his work on the project.

In the 1980s, one of his inventions captured an ultraviolet image of Halley's Comet and in 1991, he invented a camera that was used in the Space Shuttle Mission. Dr. Carruthers also helped create a program called the *Science & Engineers Apprentice Program*, which gave high school students the opportunity to work at the Naval Research Laboratory. In 1996 and 1997, he taught a course in *Earth and Space Science* for D.C. Public Schools Science teachers. Then, in 2002, George began teaching a course on Earth and Space Science at Howard University.

In 2003, he was inducted into the National Inventor's Hall of Fame for his work in science and engineering. On February 12, 2009, George Carruthers was honored as a Distinguished Lecturer at the Office of Naval Research for his achievements in the field of space science. On February 1, 2013, Dr. Carruthers was awarded the 2012 National Medal of Technology and Innovation by President Barack Obama at the White House.

He is a member of the American Astronomical Society, the American Geophysical Union, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Society of Black Physicists.

Dr. George Robert Carruthers lives a quiet, private life in Washington, DC.





The Clerk's Black History Series

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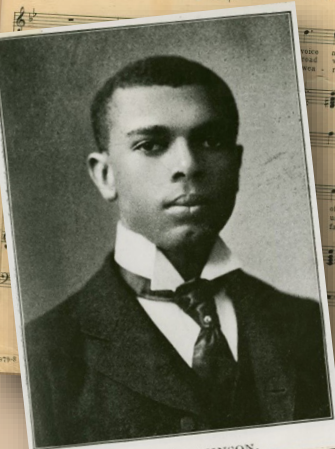


"Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"

(1899)

"The Negro National Anthem"

Words by
JAMES WELDON JOHNSON
Music by
J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON



JAMES W. JOHNSON

"Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" was written in 1899, by American author, educator, lawyer, diplomat, poet, songwriter, and civil rights activist, James Weldon Johnson.

At the time, James Weldon Johnson was principal of the Edwin M. Stanton School, in Jacksonville, Florida, a primary school named for President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War.

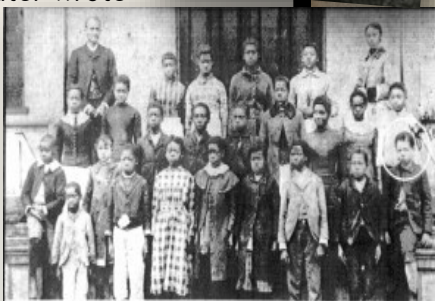


John Rosamond Johnson

Edwin M. Stanton was an ardent champion of human rights and an advocate of free, formal education for African-American children. As the principal, James was asked to prepare a speech for the upcoming birthday-anniversary celebration of President Abraham Lincoln. But, instead of preparing a traditional speech, Johnson wrote the powerful and lyrical poem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," invoking images of the struggle and resilience of his ancestors. Upon its completion, James presented the poem to his younger brother, composer and singer, John Rosamond Johnson, and together they set the brilliant piece of poetry to music.

The following year, on February 12th, 1900, on what would have been Lincoln's 91st birthday, five-hundred Edwin M. Stanton school children performed the song for the first time. James Weldon Johnson later wrote about the emotional performance stating "I could not keep back the tears, and made no effort to do so."

By 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had adopted "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as their official song and proclaimed it "The Negro National Anthem."



Stanton School Elementary Class, about 1882 J. W. Johnson in first

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,
'Til earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun
of our new day begun,
Let us march on 'til victory is won.
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope
unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for
which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with
tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path
through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
'Til now we stand at last
Where the white gleam
of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far
on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places,
our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine
of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.



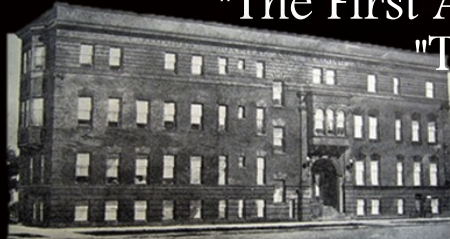
The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Provident Hospital (Est. January 22, 1891)

"The First African-American Owned and Operated Hospital"
"The First Open Heart Surgery Performed in the US"



Provident Hospital, Chicago
1896



Provident Hospital was established in 1891, in Chicago, Illinois.

Two years earlier, Emma Reynolds, a young African-American woman, who aspired to be a nurse, was denied admission by all of Chicago's nursing schools on the grounds that she was black. Her brother, the pastor of St. Stephen's African Methodist Episcopal Church, approached Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a respected black Chicago surgeon, for assistance in influencing the white schools for her admission. With no success, Dr. Williams, along with Pastor Reynolds, decided to open their own nursing school. In 1890, the pastor and doctor met with other black ministers and physicians

along with white and black businessmen in the area to discuss opening a nurse-training facility and hospital. At the time, there were only a few black physicians in Chicago and they had limited or no hospital privileges. The community leaders pledged their support and a large-scale fund-raising campaign began. One of the first and largest contributions came in 1890 when clergyman Reverend Jones secured a commitment from the Armour Meat Packing Company for the down payment on a three-story brick house at 29th and Dearborn. This building, with only 12 beds, became the first Provident Hospital.

Although the initial operation of the hospital was based on financial contributions, the daily functions relied on a strong, supportive, volunteer community. Local black residents, public officials, church leaders, and civic leaders all showed up to help and were critical to the daily operation of the hospital. In 1891, a board of trustees, an executive committee, and a finance committee were named, along with a community advisory and women's auxiliary board. Next, legal papers were prepared for the "Provident Hospital and Training School Association" and the charter stated: "The object for which it is formed is to maintain a hospital and training school for nurses in the City of Chicago, Illinois, for the gratuitous treatment of the medical and surgical diseases of the sick poor."

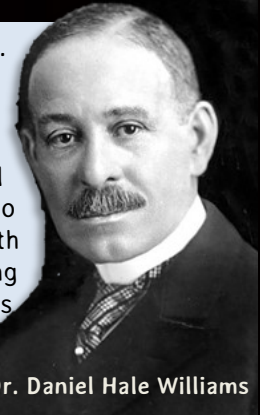
The hospital officially opened on January 22, 1891 as Provident Hospital and Training School, with an annual budget of \$5,429. By 1892, seven women, including Emma Reynolds, had enrolled in the first nursing class. The first physician in surgical training, Dr. Austin Curtis, received two years of instruction under Dr. Williams, from 1891 through 1893. Dr. Curtis later became the first black surgeon-in-chief at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C.



In the summer of 1893, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, the founding Doctor of Provident Hospital, performed the nation's first open-heart surgery. This operation, without X-rays, antibiotics, surgical prep-work or tools of modern surgery, placed both Dr. Williams and Provident Hospital in the medical history books. His patient, James Cornish, survived and was discharged just 51 days after his historic surgery.

As demand for medical care in the area grew, so did Provident hospital. In 1896, a funding campaign raised sufficient capital to construct a new building on donated land at 36th and Dearborn. The effort was promoted by abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who gave a public lecture and presented a donation to Dr. Williams at the hospital site. By 1897, Provident Hospital had 189 inpatients, and the outpatient clinic, the Armour Dispensary, treated approximately 6,000 patients.

In 1933, the Provident Hospital merged with the University of Chicago in an educational agreement which moved it once more to E. 51st Street. In the coming years, Provident would suffer two major financial setbacks, and the financial struggles caused it to close its doors in 1987. Provident Hospital of Cook County opened on August 17, 1993 as a public, community teaching hospital, and part of the Cook County hospital network.



Dr. Daniel Hale Williams



TRUSTEE BOARD OF PROVIDENT HOSPITAL



Emma Reynolds

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry
Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County

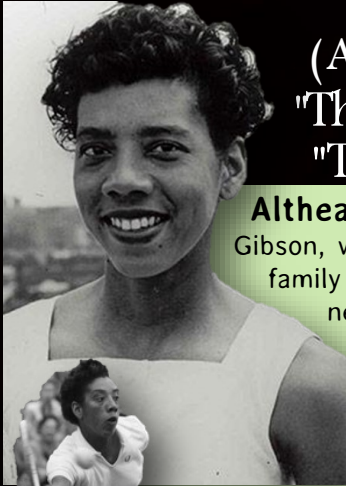


Althea Neal Gibson

(August 25, 1927 – September 28, 2003)

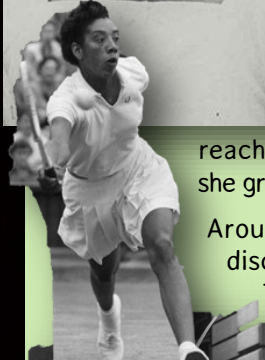
"The First African-American to Win a Grand Slam Title"

"The First African-American to Win at Wimbledon"



Althea Neal Gibson was born August 25, 1927, in Silver, South Carolina, to Daniel and Annie Bell Gibson, who were sharecroppers on a cotton farm. At the beginning of the Great Depression, Althea's family moved to New York City, where Althea grew up playing sports in the streets of Harlem. In 1940, neighbors encouraged by her athletic ability, collected money for Althea to take lessons at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club. In 1941 she entered, and won, her first tournament at the American Tennis Association (ATA) New York State Championships. She also won the ATA girls' division national championship in 1944 and 1945. And in 1947, Althea won her first of ten straight national ATA women's titles. In 1949, Althea was the first African-American woman to play in the United States Lawn Tennis Association's (USLTA) National Indoor Championships, where she reached the quarter-finals. Her accomplishments earned her a full athletic scholarship to Florida A&M University. When she graduated in 1953, segregated tennis facilities limited her playing options and she considered joining the Army.

Around this time, another tennis professional wrote a scathing article castigating the sport for their discriminatory policies that denied Althea the opportunity to compete in the world's best tournaments.




That next year, Althea was invited to play at Wimbledon, where she immediately ranked in the top 10 of US players. Later that year, she climbed to No. 7 in the US. In 1955, a sponsorship by the United States Lawn Tennis Association sent her on a State Department tour to compete in places like India, Pakistan and Burma. Her talent and worldwide experience culminated in her landmark win at the French Open in 1956, making her the first African-American to win a Grand Slam Tournament. In 1957 she became the first African-American to win Wimbledon and the first champion to receive the trophy personally from Queen Elizabeth II, in the 80 year history of the tournament. She returned home to a ticker tape parade, only the 2nd African-American to do so, after Jesse Owens. In 1958 she won the U.S. Open, another first for an African-American. In all, Althea collected 56 singles and doubles championships before turning pro in 1959. In 1960, Althea won the

Singles Title and for the first time, started earned money as a professional. She earned a reported \$100,000 for playing a series of matches before Harlem Globetrotters games, but after the tour ended, she made a mere \$500.00 winning the single and doubles titles at the Pepsi World Pro Tennis Championships.

Althea Gibson was a multi-talented, athlete and persona beyond her tennis career. She recorded an album, *Althea Gibson Sings* in 1959, appeared on television, *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *What's My Line*, worked as a sports commentator and appeared in the movie *The Horse Soldiers* (1959). In 1960 she published her first memoir, *I Always Wanted to Be Somebody*.

She continued breaking color barriers in 1964, when at the age of 37, she became the first African-American woman to join the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour. However, although her new sport was amiable to change, the rest of the world was not. Many hotels still excluded people of color, and country club officials routinely refused to allow Althea to compete. When she did compete, she was often forced to dress for tournaments in her car, because she was banned from the clubhouse. She endured another fourteen years of racial disparity before retiring from professional golf in 1978.



Althea's final years were filled with awards and recognitions, but plagued with financial struggles and health problems. In the late 1980s she suffered two cerebral hemorrhages and in 1992, a stroke. Ongoing medical expenses depleted her financial resources, leaving her destitute. Although she reached out to multiple tennis organizations for help, none offered. But when her former doubles partner Angela Buxton called on the tennis community to respond to her aid, they raised nearly \$1 million in donations from around the world.

In early 2003 Althea Neal Gibson survived a heart attack, but died September 28, 2003.

She was 76 years old. Althea's five Wimbledon trophies are displayed at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.



Althea Gibson & Angela Buxton

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Viola Irene Desmond

(July 6, 1914 – February 7, 1965)

"Civil Rights Icon and The First Black Person To Appear On Canadian Money"



Viola Irene Desmond was born on July 6, 1914, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to a black father, James Albert and a white mother, Gwendolin Irene Davis. Her father's work as a barber, influenced her early interest in the art of black hair care. After Viola graduated from a teaching program, she taught in two segregated schools. Later, pursuing her real passion, she enrolled in the Field Beauty Culture School in Montreal, one of the few schools in Canada that accepted black applicants. She also attended training courses in the U.S., in New Jersey and New York. She returned to Halifax and opened Vi's Studio of Beauty Culture, catering to the black community.

With changing hairstyles that required special products and maintenance, black beauty parlors were in high demand. Answering the call, Viola opened the

Desmond School of Beauty Culture, so black women wouldn't have to travel as far as she did to receive proper training. She had as many as 15 students graduate from the school each year.

Viola was in route to a business meeting on the evening of November 8, 1946, when her car broke down in the small town of New Glasgow. Told that the repair would take several hours, Viola checked into a hotel and decided to catch a movie at the Roseland Theatre that evening. She requested a ticket for main floor seating, but was given a balcony ticket instead. As she headed down to find a seat on the main floor, she was stopped and told that her 20 cent ticket was for a balcony seat only. Viola returned to the cashier and attempted to pay an additional 20 cents for the 40 cent main floor ticket. The cashier refused, saying, "I'm sorry, but I'm not permitted to sell downstairs tickets to *you* people." Offended when she realized that the cashier was referring to her skin color, Viola left the 20 cents on the counter and returned to a seat on the main floor. This time, when she was asked to move to the balcony, she refused. Soon after, a police officer appeared and dragged Viola, a petite woman dressed in her business best, from the theater, injuring her hip. She was arrested and taken to jail where she was left, injured and frightened, for 12 hours. The next morning she appeared in court, charged with attempting to defraud the government, based on the difference in tax for the 40 cent movie ticket. Tax on the 20 cent ticket was two cents, which she paid, but the tax on the 40 cent ticket, was three cents. Viola was officially charged with defrauding the Canadian government of one cent in tax. At no point in her "trial" was race mentioned as the reason she was asked to change seats. Without representation, she was found guilty and ordered to pay a \$26 fine. Seeking to clear her name, Viola fought the conviction. Her lawyer asked the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia to overturn the lower court's decision, but the suit never made it to trial. On January 20, 1947, they ruled against Viola on the grounds that the original magistrate court's decision should have been appealed to the County Court. And since the 10-day deadline for filing an appeal to the original conviction had passed, the conviction stood. The physical stress of the violent arrest and subsequent legal action took a heavy toll on Viola. Her case, however, was a key element for the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) to further their fight against segregation. Seven years later, in 1954, segregation ended in Nova Scotia. In the years that followed, Viola went through a divorce, shut down her businesses and moved, first to Montreal, and then New York City, for a fresh start. However, her health continued to decline, and on February 7, 1965, Viola Irene Desmond died in New York City. She was 50 years old.



Sisters, Wanda Robson and Viola Desmond



Sister, Wanda Robson and Lt. Governor Mayann Francis

In 2009, Wanda Robson, Viola's younger sister, wrote a letter to the mayor of New Glasgow and asked for a pardon of Viola's conviction. Sixty-three years later, on April 15, 2010, Mayann Francis, Nova Scotia's first black lieutenant-governor, posthumously awarded an official apology and pardon for Viola Irene Desmond. The same year, The Viola Desmond Chair in Social Justice was established at Cape Breton University. (Side note: Wanda Robson graduated from Cape Breton University in 2004 with a B.A. degree, at the age of 76!) In 2012, the Canada Post Office issued a Irene Desmond postage stamp.

Viola's vindication culminated when, in 2018, she was selected to appear on the Canadian \$10 banknote. The new bills went into circulation in November, making Viola Desmond the first nonroyal woman to appear alone, and the first black person, to be depicted on Canadian currency. Her devoted sister Wanda, (pictured right) proudly revealed the new design to the world.

Desmond Case Heard; Decision Is Reserved

Original Trial Convicted Woman Defrauding Government One Cent

