

# CEDAR HILL: Frederick Douglass's Home in Anacostia



## Frederick Douglass at Cedar Hill

In the summer of 1877, he purchased close to ten acres of farmland and a mansion on the outskirts of the city of Washington, leaving his A Street urban dwelling two blocks from the Capitol to escape the hustle and bustle of the District of Columbia for a more simple and tranquil countryside in the suburban village of Anacostia. One of the reasons why Douglass chose this property was because of its serene physical character. He named his final residence [Cedar Hill](#), because of the cedar trees that already encompassed its sprawling landscape.

It stands atop a hill with an expansive panorama toward the south east of the city. Off in the distance to its far left is a beautiful view of the Capitol. To the far right is a tranquil vista of the state of Maryland. This beautiful outlook acts as a vivid metaphor for Frederick Douglass's life. It signified to the world the heights to which he rose by the latter years of his life.

## Turning Cedar Hill into a Historic Site

Historic buildings rarely survive generations by accident. Someone made a choice, or in the case of the Douglass Home, a whole lot of women made a whole lot of choices over decades. They choose to save this home for future generations. Those women include: Helen Pitts Douglass, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Talbert, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, Sallie W. Stewart, Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry, Gladys B. Parham, and Rosa L. Gragg & Mary E. C. Gregory.



- In 1900, at the urging of Helen Pitts Douglass, the U.S. Congress chartered the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association (FDMHA). Upon Helen's death in 1903, the FDMHA received the property.
- The FDMHA partnered with the National Association of Colored Women to complete the first restoration of the Douglass Home in 1922.
- The FDMHA, under the leadership of Rosa L. Gragg, later petitioned the federal government to become involved in the preservation of Cedar Hill.
- On September 5, 1962, the Frederick Douglass estate became a unit of the National Park Service. Plans for restoration were put forth in 1962.

## Construction and Purchase of the House

- The house was built between 1855 and 1859 for John Welsh Van Hook, an architect from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The house consisted of between 6 to 14 rooms.
- In 1854, Van Hook partnered with John Fox and John Dobler and formed the Union Land Association, whose offices were in the Van Hook home. These developers purchased 100 acres of farm land to form a new subdivision called Uniontown (today Anacostia).
- On September 1, 1877, Douglass paid \$6,700 to the Freedmen's Savings and Trust company for the home and 9 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres of land.

**CEDAR HILL**  
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Source: National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
<https://www.nps.gov/frdo/index.htm>