



Anna Murray and Annie Douglass

Anna Murray Douglass c1813-1882 and her Youngest Daughter, Annie 1848-1860

Frederick Douglass' hope and aspirations and longing desire for freedom has been told. It was a story made possible by the unswerving loyalty of Anna. Her courage, her sympathy at the start was the mainspring that supported the career of Frederick Douglass.

Anna Murray, first wife of Frederick Douglass, was born in Denton, Caroline County, Maryland. Her parents, Banarra and Mary Murray, were enslaved, as were her seven older siblings. Anna and her four younger brothers and sisters were born free. She moved to Baltimore at the age of 17 to work as a servant.

Frederick and Anna met at a meeting of the East Baltimore Improvement Society. Anna, who was several years older than Frederick, was employed as a housekeeper. She assisted in Frederick's escape from slavery by sharing her meager savings with him. This money helped pay for his train ticket north to New York and to the freedom he sought. When he arrived in New York, he sent for Anna and they were married. Soon they moved to New Bedford, MA. Their daughter Rosetta and sons Lewis and Frederick, Jr. were born there. Frederick first spoke out against the evils of slavery while living in New Bedford.

In the early 1840's the Douglass family moved to Lynn, MA., where their son Charles was born. While living in Massachusetts Anna worked as a servant and shoe binder. She supported the family while Frederick lectured abroad for two years. Anna enjoyed their time in Lynn and was reluctant to leave their farm. The family moved to Rochester in 1847 when Frederick began publishing his abolitionist newspaper entitled The North Star. They bought a house on Alexander Street, and in 1849, Anna gave birth to their fifth child, a little girl they named Annie.

They moved to a hilltop farm on South Avenue in 1852. Frederick's business trips kept him away from his family for long periods of time. Anna remained at home caring for their children and tending her garden. She had the reputation of being a model housekeeper who took pride in doing all the housework herself without hired help. Their five children were taught good manners and trained to be self-sufficient and industrious. An excellent money manager, her watchful spending "laid the foundation for (their) prosperity."

Her daughter Rosetta provided wonderful insights into her beloved mother. She wrote that "Father was Mother's honored guest." Anna was very proud of her husband and his work. She willingly entertained visitors from all backgrounds from famous people of the day to freedom





seekers. Her daughter recalled her mother's work as an Underground Railroad agent. It was not unusual for her mother to be called up at all hours of the night to prepare supper for a "hungry lot of fleeing humanity," in other words, poor freedom seekers stopping at the Douglass home on the Underground Railroad on their way to Canada.

From Rosetta we learn that Anna was a private figure. After she came to Rochester, she missed her friends in Lynn, Massachusetts. Her daughter said that the prejudice that "ran rampant in Rochester" made her mother distrustful.

We see another image of Anna, however. She could be seen playing "pitching quoits" with her children in Highland Park, wearing a dark cotton dress and a red bandanna. (Quoits is a game in which rings of rope or flattened metal are thrown at an upright peg. The object is to encircle the peg or come as close as possible. It sounds like our game of horseshoes, doesn't it?)

Their home on South Avenue was tragically destroyed by a suspicious fire in 1872, and they moved to Washington, DC. They eventually bought Cedar Hill, a lovely home located in Anacostia, DC.

Anna Douglass suffered a series of strokes and died on August 4, 1882, at Cedar Hill. Funeral services were held in Washington, DC. She is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery beside Frederick Douglass, her husband of 44 years.

This article was written from the research of Jean Czerkas.

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