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Anacostia Community Museum Archives

Birney School Life Newsletter, November 1950

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[[image - drawing of an honor roll and symbols of various activities in school]]

Outstanding Citizens of Anacostia

The mark of progress of any community can be measured by the high standards of its distinguished citizens. All of the citizens, however have not reached the high places on the mountain; neither have all of the citizens dropped into the valley but each has made a definite contribution regardless of his station in life. These contributions have covered the cultural, spiritual, physical and mental aspects of the community. The following observations and notations are a resume of the highpoints of contribution which has brought about great advancements for the Anacostia area.

Anacostia has a right to be proud of her sons and daughters, for from her earliest history, distinguished citizens have consistently written their names upon her roll of honor. Here is a history of which any community might be proud.

One of the early residents of Anacostia and one of its most notable citizens was the late Frederick Douglass. He became a resident of the District about 1869. Here he edited until 1872 the New National Area. President Hayes appointed him U.S. Marshall for the city in 1877. President Garfield made him Recorder of Deeds, which office he held until 1886. In 1889 President Harrison made him Minister to Haiti. This was the last public office he held.

Mr. Douglass, who was born a slave, escaped from Maryland in 1838. Later a fund was raised and his freedom was purchased from his owner, Thomas Auld. Douglass first wife to whom he was married in New York died in Washington in 1882. He later married a white woman, Miss Helen Pitts, employed in the office of the Recorder of Deeds. He took up his residence, Cedar Hill in Anacostia, on W Street between 14th and 15th, at least as early as 1878 and here he died. His second wife preserved Cedar Hill as a memorial to him. Anacostia is proud of this monument to a distinguished citizen.

Old timers will remember other outstanding citizens, Dr. Georgianna Simpson teacher of languages, scholar and the first Negro woman Ph.D. in America; Mr. A. L. Smith, a former pupil of Birney School, who served forty years in the D.C. Public Schools and retired as principal of the Garfield School; Dr. J. C. Bruce for many years Divisional Director of the schools in the southeast area; Miss Emma V. Smith, teacher and outstanding civic worker; Miss Lucy Moten, one-time principal of the Miner Norman School; Mrs. Minnie B. Smart, prominent woman undertaker and philanthropist; Mrs. Helen Wills, only Negro member of the Women's Needlework Guild of America, who secured clothing for needy pupils of Birney School; Mrs. Blanche Parks, one-time worker in the community center located at Birney School; Mr. Elzie Hoffman long-time president of the Barry Farms Civic Association and Mr. John H. Dale, Sr., first Negro clerk in the Pension Bureau, who was one of the petitioners for Birney School. More recently we remember Lt. Paul Graham Mitchell, of the U.S. Army Air Force, the first of the pilots trained at Tuskegee to lose his life in World War II, and in whose honor a housing project at Tuskegee, Ala. has been named. We also remember Lt. Milton Wright, who was killed in a plane crash while on active duty in Europe. Lt. Wright once volunteered and trained the upper grade boys



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We are grateful that all whom we have men-

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