

STEWARDSHIP CAPACITY— INADEQUATE FUNDING LEADS TO REACTIVE MANAGEMENT, PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE TAKES A BACK SEAT

In examining stewardship capacity, NPCA assessed how well equipped the National Park Service is to manage resources at Frederick Douglass NHS in the categories of funding/staffing and interpretation.

The park's annual operating budget of about \$429,000 is a direct congressional appropriation, rather than part of the normal National Park Service budget process. Park Service sources identify \$1,967,000 in historic preservation needs for Frederick Douglass NHS, including \$200,000 for historic landscape restoration and \$350,000 to conserve the treasured library books. Added to the estimated \$550,000 in collection conservation needs, *the total unfunded resource protection costs for the park exceed \$2.5 million.*

Seven full-time employees and one part-time student work at the park. All employees, except one curator, do double duty, acting as interpreters for visitors. Staff can draw from the regional office for historical, architectural, curatorial, and landscape architectural expertise. However, regional staff have many competing priorities. The result is a crisis-management scenario in which preventive maintenance and conservation take a back seat.

The interpretive program at Frederick Douglass offers guided public tours of the house, visitor center exhibits, and grounds. All interpreters are encouraged

to conduct research and develop their own personalized tours. While this adds diversity to the visitor experience, it does not ensure that each visitor leaves with key pieces of information or with a sense of the importance of historic preservation.

Visitors are free to roam the grounds at the site, a wonderful option for guests but one that is devoid of interpretation related to the landscape.

Recommendation: NPCA recommends that the Park Service develop key interpretive messages for inclusion in all tours of the residence.

Furthermore, park staff should provide educational tours of the grounds or, as an alternative, place interpretive messages on waysides around the grounds to facilitate self-guided educational tours.



On the day that President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Frederick Douglass wrote: *"We were waiting and listening as for a bolt from the sky...we were watching...by the dim light of the stars for the dawn of a new day...we were longing for the answer to the agonizing prayers of centuries."*

Courtesy of the National Park Service



Frederick Douglass chair ©Krista Schlyer



Frederick Douglass' living room ©Bill Updike

STATE OF THE PARKS®

On average, less than 10 percent of the National Park Service's annual budget is earmarked for management of cultural resources and just 20 percent is targeted for natural resources. In most years, only about 7 percent of permanent park employees work in jobs directly related to preservation of park resources.

The National Parks Conservation Association initiated the State of the Parks® Program to assess the condition of cultural and natural resources in national parks, forecast future conditions of those resources, and determine how well equipped the National Park Service is to protect the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policy-makers and the National Park Service improve conditions in national parks and ensure a lasting natural, historical, and cultural legacy for future generations.

State of the Parks® cultural resource assessment methodology is based on National Park Service cultural resource management guideline standards. For information about the methodology, other reports in this series, and the State of the Parks® Program, see www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact NPCA, State of the Parks® Program at P.O. Box 737, Fort Collins, CO 80522. Phone: 970-493-2545; E-mail: stateoftheparks@npca.org.

The National Parks Conservation Association, established in 1919, is this country's only private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System for present and future generations by identifying problems and generating support to resolve them.

- 300,000+ members
- 8 regional offices
- 68,000 local activists

To learn what you can do to help preserve Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, contact:

Frederick Douglass NHS
1411 W Street, S.E.
Washington, DC 20020
202-426-5961 or
TDD 202-426-1452
www.nps.gov/frdo

The National Parks Conservation Association thanks its members for generously supporting efforts to protect and enhance America's National Park System for present and future generations through publications such as this report.

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STATE OF THE PARKS®



A Resource Assessment

FREDERICK DOUGLASS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

FEBRUARY 2003



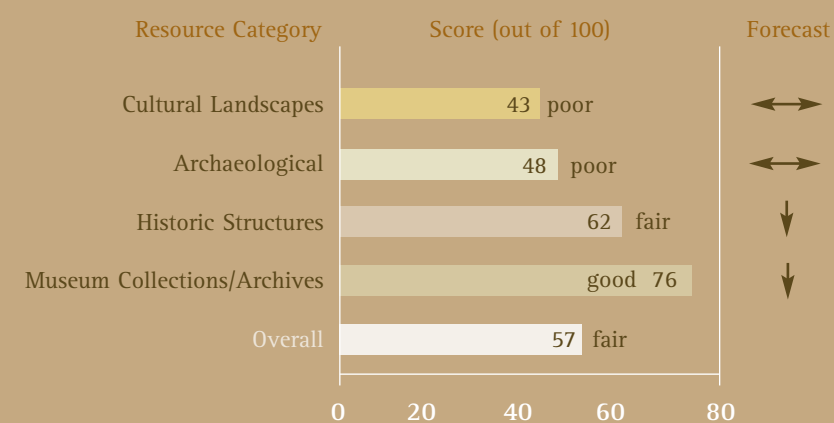
Protecting Parks for Future Generations®

OVERVIEW—FROM ENSLAVED TO GREAT ABOLITIONIST

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site is dedicated to preserving the legacy of a truly great American, a man whose life was a testament to courage and persistence that continues to serve as an inspiration for those who struggle in the cause of liberty and justice.

The Douglass site covers 8.5 acres known as Cedar Hill and includes the main house, gardens, and an extensive collection of personal effects that both captivates visitors and educates them about Douglass

CONDITIONS AT FREDERICK DOUGLASS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



and his family. Douglass moved to Cedar Hill in 1877 and lived there for 18 years. During that time, he served as U.S. Minister to Haiti and as U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia, continuing all the while to write about and speak out for human rights and equality until his death on February 20, 1895.

This historic site, part of the park system since 1962, suffers from a number of ills. An unresolved moisture problem threatens the house and the treasures it contains, and a plan is not in place to guide historically accurate restoration of the grounds. Most important, the park lacks sufficient funding to ensure that it remains a fitting tribute to Douglass, the man who was born enslaved in 1818 and rose to become one of the nation's foremost abolitionists.

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site was evaluated as part of the National Parks Conservation Association's State of the Parks® program. The program was launched in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources at national parks. The current overall condition of cultural resources at the Douglass site rated only 57 out of 100, which is one point away from poor. In the chart, flat arrows indicate that conditions are not likely to change over the next ten years, and down arrows indicate likely deterioration of conditions.

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site is one of 12 parks in the National Park System that celebrates outstanding African-American contributions to this country's history, culture, and society. The other 11 parks are:

- Booker T. Washington National Monument, Virginia
- Boston African American National Historic Site, Massachusetts
- Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Kansas
- George Washington Carver National Monument, Missouri
- Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Arkansas
- Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Virginia
- Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, Georgia
- Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site, Washington, D.C.
- Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas
- Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, Alabama
- Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, Alabama

Frederick Douglass in Haiti, where he served as U.S. Minister from 1889 to 1891. Courtesy of the National Park Service

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES—MAINTENANCE/RESTORATION PLAN NEEDED

Cultural landscapes received a score of 43 (poor), which reflects the lack of an up-to-date Landscape Maintenance Plan. Without such a plan, park staff have no guidance to meet the cultural landscape management goal of re-creating and preserving the appearance of Cedar Hill as it was at the time of Douglass' death.

There is considerable controversy over the nature of the Landscape Maintenance Plan. The park's 1994 Resource Management Plan stated a need for a new landscape plan because the old one was believed to be historically inaccurate, even though the Park Service's regional landscape architect has argued that the old plan is adequate. A new one has been in the works for several years, but lack of funding and low priority have indefinitely postponed its completion.

Information does not easily move between the four layers of National Park Service management that are responsible for Frederick Douglass NHS. As one example, on-site staff and staff in the National Capital Regional office only recently learned that the Landscape Maintenance Plan had been shelved. Such lack of communication and coordination could result in landscape changes that are historically incorrect and that may damage resources.



Frederick Douglass Residence ©Bill Updike

The park has no written plan to guide accurate restoration of the site's cultural landscape. Archaeology is not a priority even though such work could reveal a great deal about Douglass' life and the historic layout of the grounds.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES—FAILURE TO MEET LEGAL PRESERVATION REQUIREMENTS

Archaeological work is not a priority at Frederick Douglass NHS, as indicated by a score of 48 (poor) in the archaeological resources category. The park also has no Archaeological Overview and Assessment—a baseline study that the National Park Service has mandated for all national park units.

Lack of archaeological oversight and activity at the Douglass site is primarily the result of insufficient staff. There are only four archaeologists for the entire National Capital Region of the National Park System, which includes Frederick Douglass NHS. The four employees are responsible for more than 78,000 acres of parkland—the work of at least 11 people.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires the Park Service to consider the effects of its actions on cultural resources before disturbing a site and to identify and evaluate the condition of all resources under its care. Most past archaeological

work at Frederick Douglass complied with this requirement. However, structural work, including ground disturbance, is now occurring at the residence with no direct archaeological oversight. And no comprehensive survey has been done at the park to satisfy the requirement to identify and evaluate archaeological sites. Additional archaeological activity could reveal more about the Douglass family's life, their activities and the historic layout of the estate and possibly uncover prehistoric resources.

Recommendation: NPCA recommends acquiring the archaeological expertise required by legal mandates to inventory and evaluate—and thus protect—cultural resources, including archaeological artifacts, at the park.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES—MOISTURE IS STILL A PROBLEM

Frederick Douglass purchased Cedar Hill for \$6,700 as a gift for his first wife, Anna Murray. He acquired the house through public auction, which ironically meant he was not bound by a stipulation that prohibited sale of the property to Negroes, immigrants, Irish, and Catholics.

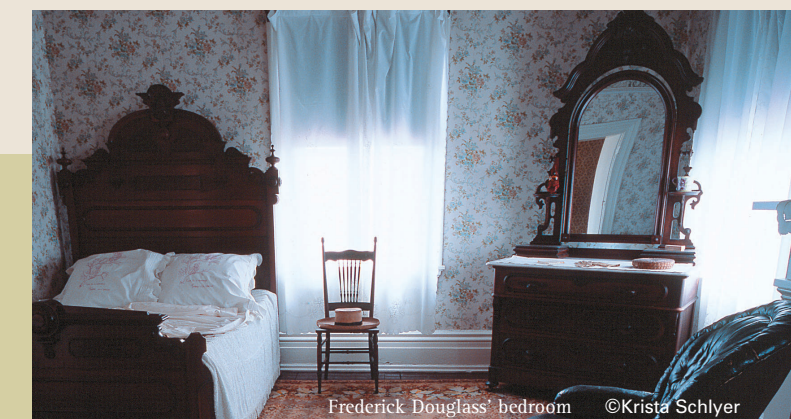
Today, the historic structures at Frederick Douglass NHS require a number of improvements, and moisture and weather-related issues at the main residence must be addressed to ensure its preservation. For these reasons, historic structures scored 62 (fair) in the State of the Parks® assessment.

In 1962, the National Park Service began a ten-year renovation of the residence. Despite that work, several threats continue to plague the house. In the summer of 2002, the entire roof was replaced to help alleviate cracking that led to backups in the drainage system and caused water to leak into the house. But other moisture-related problems have the potential to ruin the residence over the long run, and it is clear that new environmental monitoring systems are

needed. In January 1999, for example, an outside air sensor failed, resulting in serious moisture damage to the interior of the house. Fog was seen floating in some rooms.

The Park Service plans to replace a heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system by spring of 2003. But in a complicated twist, the constant level of humidity provided by the HVAC is beneficial to the museum collection objects while, at the same time, it traps moisture in the house's uninsulated brick walls and damages the structure.

Recommendations: Park staff must reconcile the competing needs related to the HVAC system. In addition, NPCA recommends that staff be trained in proper operation of the house's mechanical systems.



Frederick Douglass' bedroom ©Krista Schlyer



Frederick Douglass' dining room ©Bill Updike

Even though the National Park Service has made progress to improve resource conditions, an unresolved moisture problem still plagues the house and its collections.

MUSEUM AND ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS—PAPERS REMOVED FOR SAFEKEEPING

The score of 76 (good) for museum and archival collections reflects the Park Service's determination to preserve items in the collections that are most at risk and to protect the entire collection. The park contains a rich storehouse of more than 27,400 items. These range from a rare 19th-century oil painting and a hand-carved German clock given to Douglass by German journalist Ottilia Assing to charming pillow shams embroidered by Douglass' second wife, Helen Pitts Douglass, and the straw Panama hat that Douglass wore while he was U.S. Minister to Haiti. While some of the most fragile items have been removed or replaced with reproductions, 70 percent of the collection can be traced directly to the Douglass family.

Douglass' personal library is the most significant part of the collection. However, its volumes were taken

from the house after water damage was discovered in the wall behind the bookcase. Nearly all of Douglass' personal papers are now at the Library of Congress.

Recommendation: To ensure continued progress in preservation of the collections, NPCA recommends that funding be directed at (1) fixing the moisture problems, (2) updating the 1985 Collection Management Plan and the fire and security plans, (3) conserving the collections—particularly paper artifacts such as 19th-century photographs that have been damaged by poor lighting, and (4) studying whether visitation practices contribute to the deterioration of collection items.