

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA QUARTER DOLLAR COIN NARRATIVE

1. FREDERICK DOUGLASS: ABOLITIONIST, ORATOR, STATESMAN, PUBLISHER

DESCRIPTION:

The three elements to be included in the design are:

- (1) a figure depicting Frederick Douglass, seated at or standing next to an image of his rolltop desk that still sits at Cedar Hill, with the caption “Frederick Douglass;”
- (2) the outline of the current boundaries of the District of Columbia, with or without one or both of the rivers (i.e. the design could include the outline of the three straight sides only, or the three straight sides plus the Anacostia River);
- (3) the inscription JUSTICE FOR ALL.

EXPLANATION:

Frederick Douglass, the noted orator and abolitionist, was born into slavery in 1818, escaped to freedom in the North, soon becoming a prominent abolitionist orator. He settled in Rochester, NY for twenty-five years. Frederick Douglass was nationally known in his lifetime for speaking out against injustice for all Americans, in particular African-Americans and women. Douglass moved to Washington, DC in 1872, eventually becoming the Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia before President Harrison appointed him Minister Resident and Consul General of the Republic of Haiti and Charge d’Affaires for the Dominican Republic. One of the most recognizable historical Washingtonians, Frederick Douglass epitomizes the District’s struggle for basic rights in his escape from slavery, abolitionist cause, and the fight for women’s suffrage. Cedar Hill, the home where Douglass spent the last 15 years of his life, is now a National Historic Site, run by the National Park Service.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA QUARTER DOLLAR COIN NARRATIVE

2. BENJAMIN BANNEKER: ABOLITIONIST, MATHEMATICIAN, ASTRONOMER

DESCRIPTION:

The elements to be included in the design are:

- (1) a standing figure of Benjamin Banneker, dressed in the style of an 18th Century gentleman, similar to the way he is depicted on the USPS 1980 15¢ stamp (tri-corner hat, coat with tails, ascot, leather boots or buckled shoes), with the caption “Benjamin Banneker,”
- (2) a Diamond shape representing the original outline of the District of Columbia – a square stood up on one corner – with or without the Potomac and Anacostia rivers indicated (we prefer to have the rivers, if they do not interfere with the artistry of the coin);
- (3) the inscription JUSTICE FOR ALL;
- (4) optional is an image of the surveyor’s transit and equal altitude instrument (see photos of actual instrument attached and at: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/surveying/enlarge.cfm?recordnumber=758993>).

EXPLANATION:

Born in 1731 in Maryland, Benjamin Banneker was born free to a former slave and his wife. After his maternal grandmother taught him to read and write, Banneker taught himself to eventually become a mathematician, astronomer, and writer of almanacs. In 1791, when he was 60 years old, Banneker was hired by prominent surveyor Andrew Ellicott to help the survey team plot the land for the new capital city of the fledgling nation. Banneker’s almanac was notable for his accurate predictions of eclipses. The symbolism of his presence, a gifted black man in attendance at the creation of the nation’s capital, along with his other remarkable accomplishments, is undeniably one of the most significant testaments to the rich legacy of the District of Columbia. Key to the founding of Washington D.C., Benjamin Banneker’s image and memory represent ingenuity and progress.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA QUARTER DOLLAR COIN NARRATIVE

3. DUKE ELLINGTON: NATIVE SON

DESCRIPTION:

The three elements to be included in the design are:

- (1) a figure depicting Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, seated at or standing next to a whole or partial image of a grand piano, with the caption “Duke Ellington;”
- (2) the outline of the current boundaries of the District of Columbia, with or without one or both of the rivers (i.e. the design could include the outline of the three straight sides only, or the three straight sides plus the Anacostia River);
- (3) the inscription JUSTICE FOR ALL.

EXPLANATION:

Duke Ellington is an icon of Washington, DC history. He was born in the District of Columbia in 1899, raised in the LeDroit Park neighborhood, educated in DC Public Schools, and performed here as an adult. A symbol to Washingtonians of the local-boy-made-good saga of American life, Duke Ellington was recognized as the preeminent band leader and jazz pianist of his day. By the time of his death in 1974, Ellington earned 13 Grammy Awards and was bestowed with numerous honorary degrees and awards throughout the world, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969. Honoring Duke Ellington on the DC Quarter is a fitting tribute to a man who played such an instrumental role in the history of jazz, the quintessential American musical form, and nods to the importance of musical contributions of all forms from the District of Columbia.