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This is a printer friendly version from the **Democrat and Chronicle**:

February 27, 2007

## **Douglass honored at Capitol**

### **Plaque in Washington praises the first black congressional reporter, a former Rochesterian**

Darlene Superville  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Frederick Douglass is known for fiercely opposing slavery after running away from his Maryland owner, for championing equal rights and women's rights and for being a forceful speaker.

But he spent much of his adult life as a journalist, first publishing a newspaper in Rochester, where he lived near the Canadian border to be able to get away if pursued, and then in the nation's capital.

Douglass was the first black reporter allowed into the Capitol press galleries, where journalists watch lawmakers on the floors of the House and Senate.

His role as a pioneering journalist was honored Monday during Black History Month when the committee of reporters that controls access to the galleries dedicated a plaque and portrait.

Douglass was a member of the congressional press galleries from 1870-1874.

"We know he was here because the congressional directory, then as now, prints a list of everybody who sat in the gallery," said Senate historian Donald Ritchie. He said the names of Douglass and at least one of Douglass' sons were listed.

Douglass came to Washington in 1870 after he was asked to become editor of the *New National Era*, which chronicled the progress of black people throughout the country. He later bought the paper after it ran into money trouble, but the enterprise collapsed in 1874 after a post-Civil War financial crisis wiped out many businesses in the city.

He continued to visit the Capitol, Ritchie said, sitting in seats for the public.

"He was here. He did report because the African-American community really wanted to know what was happening in Congress during Reconstruction," Ritchie said.

Jesse J. Holland, the first black reporter elected to the Standing Committee of Correspondents, said, "Frederick Douglass was the type of journalist who not only recorded history, he made history. So it's very appropriate that we're honoring him by placing this plaque and this painting here in the House Press Gallery."

Holland is an Associated Press reporter on leave to write a book about African Americans' contributions to Washington's historic sites.

Elliott Lewis, a freelance television journalist, author and regional director for the National Association of Black Journalists, said minorities still are underrepresented in most U.S. newsrooms.

"It is our belief that America's press corps should look like America, so to be here today to honor a pioneering journalist is certainly a great privilege," he said.

**Background**

Famed orator, publisher and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave from Maryland, also was an adviser to President Abraham Lincoln and an international advocate for human rights.

The 25 years he lived in Rochester are considered his most productive. He published the *North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper, and became recognized as a compelling orator and author. He is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

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