

MEETING THE HATHAWAY FAMILY BACKGROUND ESSAY

We do not have detailed information about many of the families who lived in Davis Bottom in the 1890s, but we do know about one family: the family of Robert Elijah Hathaway.

About Robert Elijah Hathaway and His Family

As a child and young man, Robert was enslaved. During the Civil War, he joined the United States Colored Troops (USCT). After the war, he and his stepfather used their Army pay to buy a home in Davis Bottom. Robert worked as a waiter before finding his true calling as a Christian preacher.



Robert and his wife, Rachel, had three children – Fannie, Eva, and Isaac. Rachel died when Isaac was just two years old.

Robert made sure his children had an education. Fannie became a school teacher and principal. Eva became a nurse. Isaac became a sculptor and professor. In this painting, Robert is walking with his daughters in Davis Bottom.

About Isaac Scott Hathaway

Isaac Scott Hathaway was born in 1872. He loved to draw and make sculptures from clay.

Isaac's father knew he had talent. He sent Isaac to a school where he could study art. After graduating from high school, Isaac worked as an English teacher. He also earned money drawing illustrations for medical textbooks and painting racehorse portraits. Hathaway used the money he earned to pay for art school in Boston and Cincinnati. He also helped his sisters get more education. In 1900,

Isaac returned to Davis Bottom. Isaac and Robert set up an art studio in the chicken coop behind their house. Isaac is shown here gathering a bucket of clay to use for making sculptures. He dug the clay from the creek bank in Davis Bottom not far from his house.



Isaac continued teaching and sculpting for the rest of his life. He established ceramics programs at colleges and universities throughout the South, including a program at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama. In 1963, he was the Director of

Ceramics at Alabama State College. He retired that year and passed away in 1967.

From his beginning in an art studio in a chicken coop, Isaac Scott Hathaway went on to receive many awards. He is famous for his sculptures of important African Americans. His best known work is a bust of Frederick Douglas. He also designed the first two U.S. coins to feature African Americans.