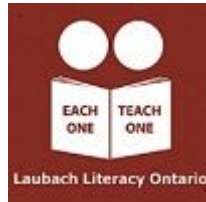


Famous Canadians Series

Viola Desmond



by Deanna Wilkinson



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Canada



Ontario



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Viola Desmond

by Deanna Wilkinson

The Fisher Street bus stopped in front of Sara. She waited for the door to open. Sara went up the steps into the bus. She put \$2 in the meter and said hello to the bus driver.

Sara looked for a seat. She saw a seat near a window and sat down. More people came on the bus. An older woman with nice white-grey hair and dark skin sat beside Sara. The woman smiled at Sara. Sara smiled back.



[Image source](#)

The bus drove down the street and hit a bump in the road. Sara bounced in her seat. She looked down and saw something purple. Sara picked it up. It was a \$10 bill.

Sara asked the woman next to her, "Is this yours?"

"No, it isn't," said the woman.

Sara looked at the \$10 bill. There was a picture of a mixed-race woman on the money. The name under the picture was Viola Desmond (Vi-o-la Dez-mund).

Sara said out loud to herself, "Who was Viola Desmond?"

Mixed-race:

a person with parents who are of different races.



[Image source](#)

"I can answer your question," said the woman sitting beside Sara. "I know the story of Viola Desmond. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, please," said Sara.

Sara's bus stop was still twenty minutes away. She was happy to have something to do to help pass the time on her bus ride. She also wanted to know what a person had to do to have their picture put on Canadian money.

"Viola's sister Wanda is one of the reasons Viola is on our \$10 bill. It was Wanda's determination (de-ter-min-a-shun) to tell Viola's story that made Viola famous," said the woman.

"What was Viola famous for?" Sara asked.



[Image source](#)

“Some people say Viola’s story helped start the civil rights movement in Nova Scotia (No-va Sco-sha).

Some people say Viola was someone who faced racism (ray-ci-zim) one too many times.

Everyone agrees that Viola was a strong, independent businesswoman of colour who helped with racial equality (e-kwall-e-ty) in Canada.”

Civil Rights Movement: a group fighting for equal rights for people of all colours.

Racism: a belief that one race of people is better than a different race of people.

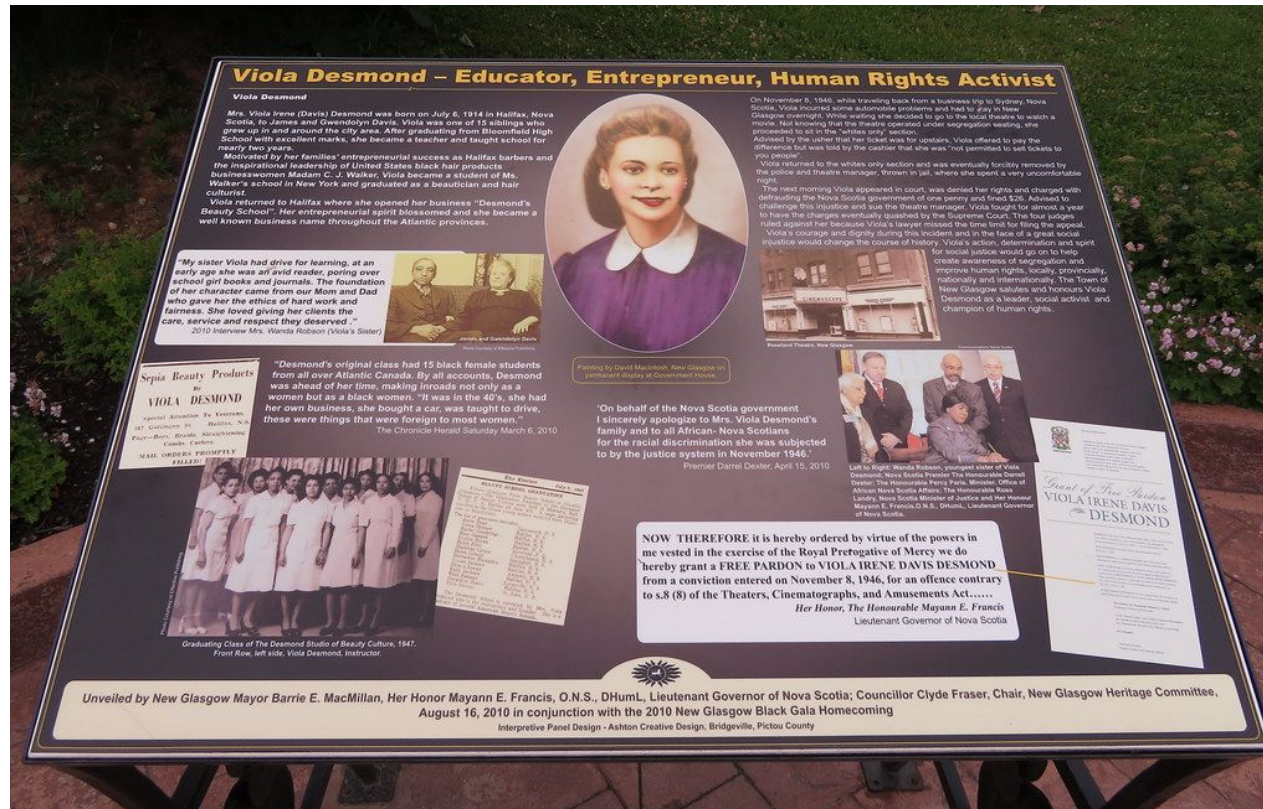
Racial equality: when every race of people is treated equally.



[Image source](#)

“Viola’s story began in 1914, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She grew up in a large, middle-class family with ten siblings. Viola’s parents were hard-working and well-liked in the community.

When Viola grew up, she wanted to be a successful businesswoman. Viola knew that black women needed special hair and skin products. These things were hard to find. Viola wanted to make and sell these products.”



[Image source](#)

“Viola needed to go to school to become a beautician (beu-ti-shun). The beautician school in Halifax did not allow people of colour to be students.

Viola had to go far away from home to go to school. She did not let that stop her dream.

She went to school in Montreal (Mon-tree-all), then in Atlantic City, and finally, Viola finished her schooling in New York at the famous Madam C.J. Walker’s beauty school.”

Beautician: a person whose job is to improve a person’s looks on their hair, skin, and nails.



*it's fun! it's easy! it's profitable!
... a glamorous career as a
professional beautician!*

ENROLL NOW in low-cost pay-as-you-go
courses in your nearest

MADAM C. J. WALKER COLLEGE OF BEAUTY CULTURE



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DALLAS

Write to Mrs. Marie H. Beach, Principal, 1913 Thomas Ave., Dallas, Texas.



INDIANAPOLIS

Write to Mrs. Margaret Smith, Principal, Walker Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.



KANSAS CITY

Write to Mrs. Roberta D. Adams, Principal, 1814 Penn Blvd., Kansas City, Missouri.



WASHINGTON

Write to Mrs. Louise G. Babine, Principal, 1711 1/2 Street N.W., Washington, D.C.



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C. MADAM WALKER'S GLONOL. World's first light-bodied pressing oil and hair dressing. Leaves hair soft and lustrous. Use with or without pressing comb. A grand hair dressing for men, women and children. Family

size, too. And special large sizes for beauty shops only.

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At fine stores, cosmetic counters and beauty shops.

[Image source](#)

“When Viola was done school, she came back to Halifax and opened her own hair salon called Vi’s Studio of Beauty Culture. Her business was a success!

Viola did not stop there.

She also opened a beauty school called the Desmond School of Beauty Culture. Now, women of colour did not need to leave Halifax to become a beautician.

Viola was not done yet!

She also made her own line of beauty products. She made hair and skin products for Black women. She sold her products in her salon and in other salons, too.

Viola had become a successful businesswoman.”

Sepia Beauty Products

By

VIOLA DESMOND

Special Attention To Veterans.

167 Gottingen St. Halifax, N.S.

Sur Gro	35c., 65c
Gloss Wax	35c, 65c
Press Oil	35c and 65c
Sepomade (for Men)	65c
Face Powder (Nut Brown) box	65c
Perfume (No. 3)	55c
Lipsticks (Black-Red)	65c
Nets (triangle)	35c
Hair Dye	2.00

Page—Boys, Braids, Straightening
Combs. Curlers.

**MAIL ORDERS PROMPTLY
FILLED!**

[Image source](#)

"It was on a business trip that Viola's trouble started.

On November 8th, 1946, on her way to Sydney, Nova Scotia, Viola's car broke down in the city of New Glasgow. The mechanic told Viola that it would take until the next day to fix her car.

To pass the time, Viola decided to see a movie.

It was this decision that helped shape Canada's history."



[Image source](#)

“Viola liked to go to the movies. She liked to sit on the main floor so she could easily see the movie screen. In Halifax, where Viola lived, this was not a problem. Everybody could sit anywhere they wanted.

Viola asked for a main floor ticket. Viola took her movie ticket and found a seat. Soon after Viola sat down, she was asked to move.

Viola was told that she had a balcony ticket, not a main-floor ticket. Viola thought that a mistake had been made. She went back to the ticket counter and asked to change her ticket for one on the main floor.

The ticket seller refused to sell Viola the ticket.”

Balcony: the upper floor that looks over the main floor below.



[Image source](#)

“Viola knew that this was about the colour of her skin. Unlike Halifax, this theatre still discriminated (dis-krim-in-a-ted) against people of colour. Only white people could sit on the main floor. People of colour had to sit on the balcony.

Viola did not let that stop her.

Viola went back into the theatre and sat back down in her seat.

The manager walked up to Viola and told her to move to the balcony.

Viola said no. Viola told the manager that she had tried to buy a main floor ticket but was refused.

Again, the manager told Viola she had to move. Viola refused to move.

The manager called the police. The police dragged Viola from her seat and took her to jail.”

Discriminated: to treat someone differently because of the colour of their skin or appearance.



[Image source](#)

“Viola spent the night in jail. She was charged with tax evasion (e-vay-shun). Viola was taken to court the next day and fined \$26.

The judge told Viola that she had failed to pay 1¢ in tax. Viola had paid for a balcony ticket, and she had sat on the main floor. The main floor tickets were more money. Viola had not paid enough tax to sit on the main floor.

Viola was convicted of tax evasion for not paying 1¢ of tax.

Nothing was ever said about the colour of her skin or that only white people could sit on the main floor. Viola knew that it was her skin colour on trial.

She had sat where only white people were allowed and for sitting there she was put in jail and convicted of a crime.”

Tax evasion: not paying the full amount of tax.



[Image source](#)

“Viola went back home.

Some people told Viola that Black people would always be treated badly. There was nothing she could do about it.

Other people told Viola that she should get a lawyer and fight back.

Viola chose to fight back.

With help from the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) and her community, Viola went back to court to fight her conviction.

It was a long battle. They tried to win, but in the end, nothing changed. The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia said that Viola’s case was about tax evasion, not racial discrimination.

Even though Viola lost her case, her fight for justice helped end Nova Scotia’s segregation (seg-ra-ga-shun) laws.”

Segregation: a law or belief that people of different races should not be allowed to be in the same place as each other.

THE CLARION

Published in the Interest of Colored Nova Scotians

VOL. 1., NO. 1.

NEW GLASGOW, N. S.

1946 DECEMBER.

Locals

The Season's Greetings to All Our Readers

Mr. and Mrs. James MacPhee have moved into their new home on South Albert Street.

Calbert Best, student at King's College, Halifax, will spend the Christmas recess with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. T. Best.

Congratulations are being extended to Rev. and Mrs. Thomas for their Christmas Calendar. It is a lovely job!

Miss Evelyn Williams, daughter of Mr. Norman Williams, stenographer with the Pay Roll Department at Ottawa, will be home on Dec. 29th to spend the Christmas holidays with her family.

Friends will be interested to know that Miss Thelma Parria, formerly of this town, has become an American citizen. She is making her home in Cambridge, where her mother, Mrs. Douglas Gordon, resides.

The Ladies' Auxiliary of Second Baptist Church held a successful sale and tea in the Church Hall on Dec. 10th. A lovely display of fancy work was noted.

Mr. and Mrs. Lemaie Mills left Saturday, Dec. 14, for Boston, where they will spend Christmas with their daughters, Mrs. Thornton Harper and Mrs. Bernice Shepherd.

Johnnie Mills met a deer—DEER, that is, recently, while driving his mother to Halifax. The deer darted out on the highway near Elmfield and hit the side of the car. Not seriously injured, the deer soon scampered off, none the worse of the impact.

Word has been received that Miss Irma Hallikey will be a participant in the St. John Music Festival in May. A student at Mount Allison School of Music, Miss Hallikey is a soprano of promise, and that she will make a creditable showing goes without saying.

The Senior B. Y. P. U. of Second Baptist Church chartered a bus and moved to Riverton where they held a service for the inmates of the Pictou County Home. Among those who took part were Rev. H. D. Thomas, Howard Lawrence, Miss Althea Lawrence and Mrs. Gordon Clark. About twenty-five persons made the trip.

The Ladies' Auxiliary of the Second Baptist Church had a surprise party early in December for Rev. and Mrs. Thomas at the Parsonage, Washington St. The gifts included china, linen, etc., and each gift was accompanied by an original verse. Typical of the verses was the one accompanying the crocheted baby gift of President Mrs. L. Mills:

"I may be small, but my mission is great,
I'm here to decorate you, cake and plate.
Your cakes I know are a treat to eat,
So no one who next your guests you treat."



MRS. VIOLA DESMOND

Takes Action

Mrs. Viola Desmond, 32-year-old Negro Halifax housewife, arrested and fined \$70 and costs by Magistrate Rod G. MacKay, of this town, for sitting downstairs in the Rosebud Theatre while holding an upstairs ticket.

Mrs. Desmond was fined for defrauding the Federal Government of one cent, the difference in the Amusement tax on an upstairs ticket of two cents and a downstairs ticket of three cents.

Counsel for Mrs. Desmond, F. W. Bisset of Halifax, has served a writ against Henry MacNeil, manager of the Theatre, charging false arrest, false imprisonment, assault and malicious persecution.

E. M. Macdonald, K.C. of New Glasgow, is acting for Mr. MacNeil.

Mrs. Desmond, the former Viola Davis, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Davis, of Halifax, is well known throughout the Province. She is a graduate of the Halifax High School, and is also a graduate in Beauty Culture from a leading Beauty College in New York. She is a niece of John Davis, Civil Service employee (Post Office Division), Halifax.

Viola Desmond's Appeal

Just as we go to press we are in receipt of a letter from Mrs. Bernice Williams, Sec'y N. S. A. C. P., informing us that an appeal trial of the Viola Desmond case will be held in Halifax on Dec. 27th, also a Viola Desmond Court Fund has been established by the Association soliciting contributions. A public meeting will be held by the Association on Dec. 22nd in Halifax asking everyone to attend and give their donation.

The N. S. A. C. P. is the Ladder to Advancement. STEP ON IT! JOIN TODAY!

Did You Know?

(a) That Adult education in rural communities is being sponsored by the N. S. A. C. P.

(b) That the Educational Department of the Province of Nova Scotia is supporting the movement.

(c) That a class has already started in Hammonds Plains and is progressing favourably.

(d) That the C.G. I. T. group of Cornwallis Street Baptist Church, Halifax, raised the sum of \$35.00 at their Christmas Sale. Mrs. Oliver is leader and all girls are under 16 years.

(e) That the money will be used for the work of the Summer Camp at Fall River.

(f) That Mr. Herborn, of Fall River, gave the use of an island near the Cornwallis Street Church camp site for the promotion of the Young People's work of that Church.

(g) That two Colored girls are enrolled as student nurses in two Halifax hospitals. They are Miss Gwendolyn Barton of Halifax and Miss Ruth Bailey of Toronto.

(h) That J. Calbert Best of King's College, Halifax, will write for the Afro-American, one of the largest weekly Negro newspapers in the U. S. A. Mr. Best has been asked to prepare a 700-word article on Canada. The weekly circulation of the Afro is 200,000.

The N. S. A. C. P.

The Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of the Colored People was organized in 1945:

(a) To improve and further the interest of the Colored people of the Province.

(b) To provide an organization to encourage and promote a spirit of fraternity among its members.

(c) To co-operate with Governmental and private agencies for the promotion of the interest and the welfare of the Province or any community therein, wherein Colored People are resident, and particularly in reference to said Colored people.

(d) To improve the educational opportunities of Colored youth and to raise the standard of the Colored people of the Province or any community therein.

The following people comprise the charter members of the Association:

Arnold P. Smith, Richard Symonds, William Carter, Bernice A. Williams, Carl W. Oliver, Walter Johnson, Pearl Oliver, William P. Oliver and Ernest Giosse.

Join the N. S. A. C. P.

Write BERNICE A. WILLIAMS, Sec'y

106 Maynard Street.

Halifax, N. S.

[Image source](#)

“Many years after Viola died, she was finally given a pardon. Viola was the first Canadian to be given a pardon after they were dead.

It was Viola’s sister, Wanda, who helped make Viola’s story famous. Wanda did not want Viola’s story to be forgotten.

Wanda was proud of her sister. Viola had stood up for herself and for other Black Canadians.

Wanda spent many years telling Viola’s story to schools, reporters, and everyone she could.”

Pardon: the act of removing a criminal charge from a person’s record so that they are no longer guilty of that crime.



[Image source](#)

"In April 2010, Nova Scotia's premier, Darrell Dexter, and the Lieutenant Governor, Mayann Francis, gave Viola Desmond a free pardon for her crime and an apology.

The government of Nova Scotia said that Viola had not committed any crime and that Viola had been treated unfairly."

Grant of Free Pardon

VIOLA IRENE DAVIS DESMOND



Viola Irene Davis Desmond

Mrs. Viola Irene Davis Desmond was born on July 6, 1914 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to James and Gwendolyn Davis. Mrs. Desmond was one of 15 siblings who went on to be a successful entrepreneur. She operated her own beauty parlour and beauty college in Halifax.

On Nov. 8, 1946, Viola Desmond became a victim of racism. While travelling to Sydney as part of a business trip, Viola stopped in New Glasgow at a local repair shop due to car troubles. While waiting for her car to be repaired, Mrs. Desmond decided to watch a movie at the Roseland Theatre.

At that time, the theatre had a policy that prohibited people of African ancestry from sitting on the main level of the theatre. African Nova Scotians were required to sit in the balcony where seating cost one cent less than the main level. Mrs. Desmond attempted to buy the more expensive main level ticket but was refused because she was African Nova Scotian.

Mrs. Desmond purchased a ticket which she thought was for the main level and proceeded to sit there. Her ticket was actually for the balcony. Mrs. Desmond was then removed from the theatre by the manager and police. After spending a night in jail, Mrs. Desmond was tried and convicted for an offence under the Theatres, Cinematographs and Amusements Act for failing to pay an extra cent in tax to the Province. She was given the option to pay a fine of \$20 plus costs associated with the trial, or to go to jail for 30 days. Due to her business commitments, Mrs. Desmond chose to pay the fine.

In the early 1950s, Mrs. Desmond closed her business and moved to Montreal, Quebec, where she enrolled in business college. She eventually settled in New York where she passed away at the age of 50.

Granting of Official Apology and Free Pardon

On April 15, 2010, the province of Nova Scotia granted an official apology and free pardon to the late Mrs. Viola Desmond who was wrongfully fined and jailed for sitting in the white peoples' section of a New Glasgow movie theatre in 1946.

On the advice of the Executive Council, the lieutenant governor exercised the Royal Prerogative of Mercy to grant a free pardon. A free pardon is based on innocence and recognizes that a conviction was in error. A free pardon is an extraordinary remedy and is considered only in the rarest of circumstances.

A Royal Prerogative of Mercy Free Pardon is meant to right a wrong. In this case, the free pardon is meant to right the wrong done to Mrs. Desmond.



[Image source](#)

“Viola’s story did not end there.

Shortly after Viola was given a free pardon and an apology, she was put on a Canadian postage stamp.

There are schools, parks, and a ferry boat named after Viola. There are portraits and statues of Viola found in many places in Nova Scotia and in other provinces.

Then in 2018, Viola Desmond became the first Black person and the first woman (except the Queen of England!) to be put on the \$10 bill.”



[Image source](#)

“So that’s why Viola Desmond is on the \$10 bill,” said Sara amazed at the story she just heard.

“It’s important to remember that change takes time and for people to never forget the past,” stated the old woman.



[Image source](#)

Sara looked out the bus window. She saw that her stop was coming.

Sara turned to the nice old woman and said, "Thank you. Thank you for telling me Viola's story."

"You are most welcome," replied the woman.

Sara got off the bus and started walking home. She smiled to herself and thought, "not only am I \$10 richer, but I also have a good story to tell my friends."



[Image source](#)

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