

## Ohioan Charles Chesnutt Honored by U.S. Postal Services



In January 2008, Charles Waddell Chesnutt was featured on the 31st postage stamp in the Black Heritage series. Chesnutt, a pioneering African-American turn-of-the-century social realism writer, was born in Cleveland OH. The stamp was painted by Kazuhiko Sano of Mill Valley CA, based on a 1908 photograph from the special collections of Fisk University's Franklin Library.

Ohioana was honored to host the U.S. Post Office's Columbus unveiling of the Black Heritage Stamp on February 5, 2008. At the unveiling from left to right: Postmaster Robin Ware, Jazzman Arnett Howard and Ohioana President Christina Butler

Photo by Kathy Lucas, USPS



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Charles Chesnutt was born to free black parents on June 20, 1858 in Cleveland and was educated for several years in Cleveland before he and his family moved to Fayetteville NC. In the 1870's Chesnutt taught in black schools in Spartanburg SC and Charlotte NC and eventually became first the assistant principal and then the principal of the State Colored Normal School in Fayetteville. In 1878 he married Susan Perry, daughter of a Fayetteville barber.

In 1883, Chesnutt returned to Cleveland and worked for the Nickel Plate Railroad Company in the accounting and then the legal office. He was admitted to the Ohio bar in 1887 and became a court stenographer with the Cleveland law firm of Henderson, Kline, and Tolles.

He wrote his first short story in Cleveland - *Uncle Peter's House* - which was published in the *Cleveland News and Herald*. Also while in Cleveland he began publishing stories in literary magazines and became the first black author to be published in the *Atlantic Monthly* with a story entitled *The Goophered Grapevine*.



Chesnutt with his grandson



He began publishing novels in 1898, and among his better known works were *The Conjure Woman*, a commentary on slavery; *The House Behind the Cedars*, the story of mulatto siblings who pass for white in the postbellum American South, and *The Marrow of Tradition*, a fictionalized account of the Wilmington Race Riot.

He died November 15, 1932 in Cleveland and is buried in Cleveland's Lake View Cemetery.

A complete bibliography of Chesnutt's works, as well as the complete texts of 63 works by Chesnutt, reviews of his work and other material is available on the Charles Chesnutt Digital Archive. The Archive is created, edited, and maintained by Stephanie P. Browner (Berea College). Assistance has come from Mike Freiermuth, Berea College students, the Hutchins Library at Berea College, the Charles Chesnutt Collection in the Fisk University Library's Special Collections.