

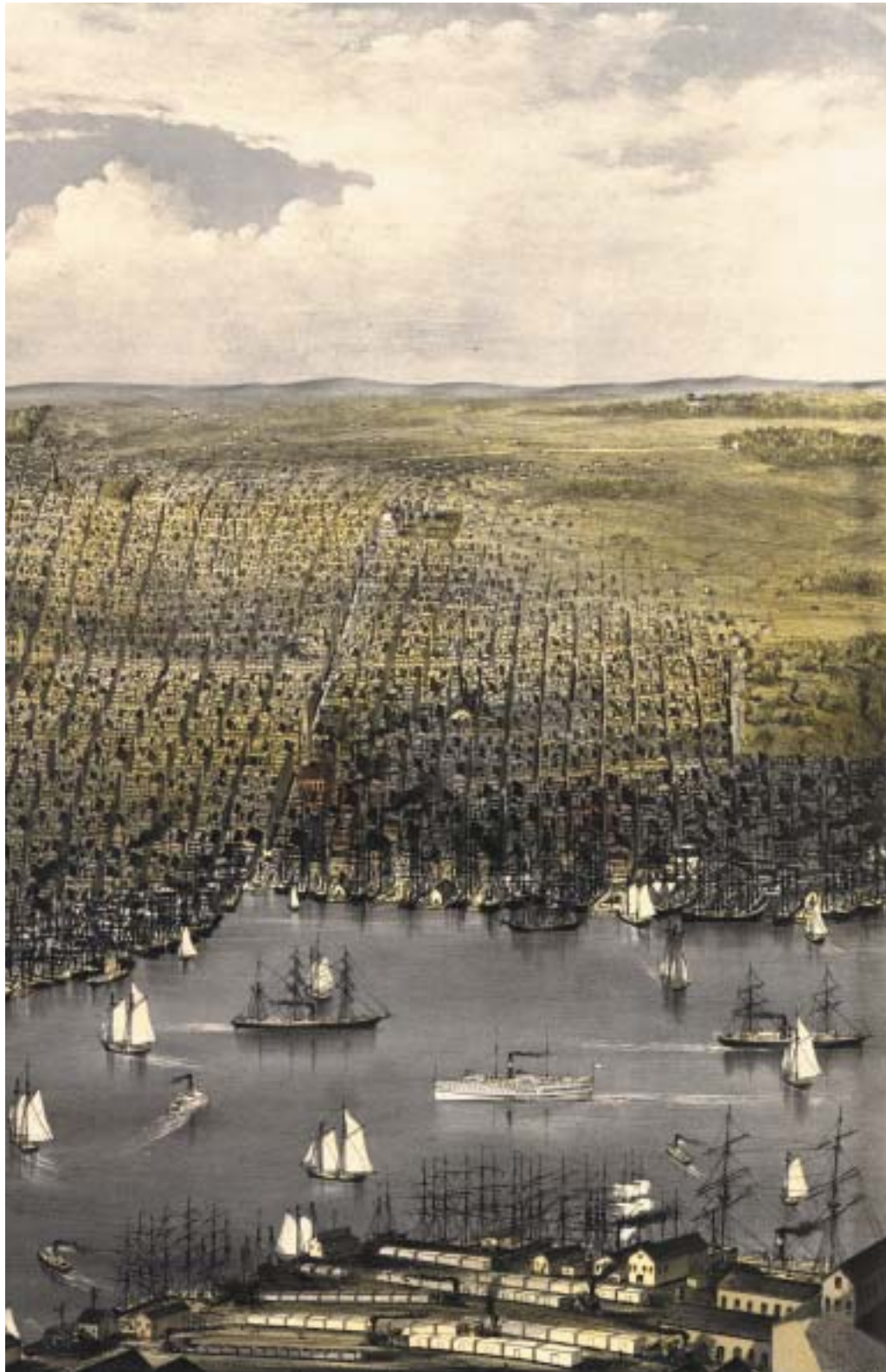
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by DIANNE SWANN-WRIGHT



**Baltimore,
around 1880**

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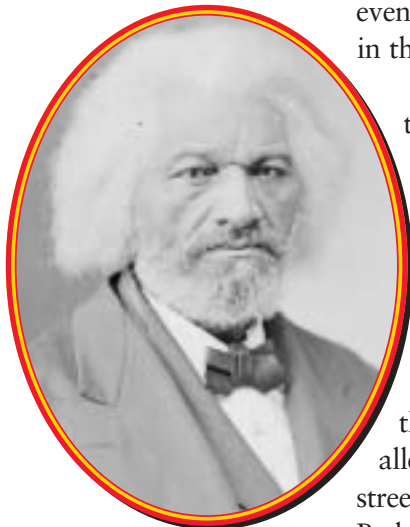
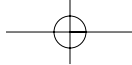
Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers came from two very different backgrounds. However, it was their determination to help African Americans that made them life long friends.

Both men were born in Maryland, and both traced their ancestry to Europe and Africa. Still, their early childhoods had little in common.

Frederick Douglass (born Frederick Bailey) did not know his father and grew up miles from his mother who was an enslaved field worker on another Eastern Shore plantation farm. Isaac Myers was born into a family of free African Americans who quite adequately provided for its children. Whereas young Frederick was separated from his family and sent off work in Baltimore when he was 10 years old, young Isaac grew up in his parents' home, leaving each morning to attend classes taught by a private teacher a short distance away.

By the time Douglass and Myers each neared adulthood, both were in the maritime industry. Each had mastered the skill of **caulking** and was able to repair ships and render them sea-worthy on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay

Caulking refers to the stopping up of cracks, seams, and the like of a boat, window frame, or door with a putty-like sealant or oakum.



**Frederick
Douglass**

and beyond. It was this common work-experience that would bond the two men, even though Frederick was 17 years older than Isaac and would eventually flee Maryland for freedom in the North.

When, where, and how the two met for the first time is not known. Chances are that when they did meet, they talked about Baltimore, which Douglass said was “the very place of all others, short of a free state, where [he] most desired to live.” They probably reminisced about how they had played in Baltimore’s alleys as children and ran through its streets. Most likely they spoke about Bethel and Sharpe streets, the African American churches they attended, and the thriving black community, which was rich with cultural

opportunities that shaped so many lives, including their own. Perhaps Douglass offered Myers advice and encouragement, confirming that it was a good idea—a much-needed idea—to found the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company, the first African-American owned and operated shipyard in this country.

Toward the end of their lives, Douglass and Myers would have had many accomplishments to share and for which they could congratulate each other as well. They were both known for supporting African American causes such as the right to work and the right to receive a good education. Both had traveled extensively and, as spokesmen for black workers, could have talked about how difficult the task had been. Both had published newspapers to highlight black progress