



[Viola Irene Davis Desmond](#) was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia on July 6, 1914, one of 15 children in what was an unlikely family in that era (White mother, Black father).

Very early, she chose her path as a businesswoman. The Halifax of her childhood and youth showed a clear need for a Black beautician who devoted herself to the needs of [Black women](#) for skin and hair care. In spite of her intelligence, such employment was not permitted due to the color of her skin. In Nova Scotia at that time, the trade of beautician was forbidden to [Black women](#).

Undaunted, rather than indulge in self-pity, she chose to follow her dream and try her luck in Montreal and the United States. Imperturbable, she studied skin and hair care aesthetics in Montreal and New York.

After completing her training, she returned to her native Halifax to open not only her own beauty care salon for [Black women](#), but also to start a school, The [Desmond](#) School of Beauty Culture, dedicated to the training of Black women in aesthetics and restoration, encouraging them to venture into business, and conquer their financial independence. She was the

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champion of "Black wealth matters" before her time. It's the 1940s. Let's get to it! Thus, no fewer than 15 women graduated each year from her training center. In so doing, she defied the law, which prohibited the practice of such professions to women of color. This woman was an advocate of women's right to equal opportunity and the pursuit of whatever professions they chose.

In 1946, (she was 32 years old) fate offered [Viola Desmond](#) the opportunity to show herself as a tough militant against racial segregation. Wanting to attend a movie and refusing to sit in the area reserved for people of color (9 years before Rosa Parks!), she was arrested and sentenced to pay an infamous fine.

Again, they did not count on Viola Desmond's determination. Encouraged by the people of her church, she took legal action against the police for [racism](#) and [racial discrimination](#). Despite her defeats in court, she continued to fight to defend of the rights of people of color in Nova Scotia and Montreal.

She died in New York on 7 February 1965, at the age of 50, of a gastrointestinal hemorrhage. She was buried at Camp Hill Cemetery in Halifax.

In April 2010, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia granted her a posthumous pardon, the first of its kind in [Canada](#) . In addition, in 2018 the Bank of [Canada](#) will print a \$10 dollar bill with her on it, making her the first woman, after Queen Elizabeth of England, to appear on a Canadian note.

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