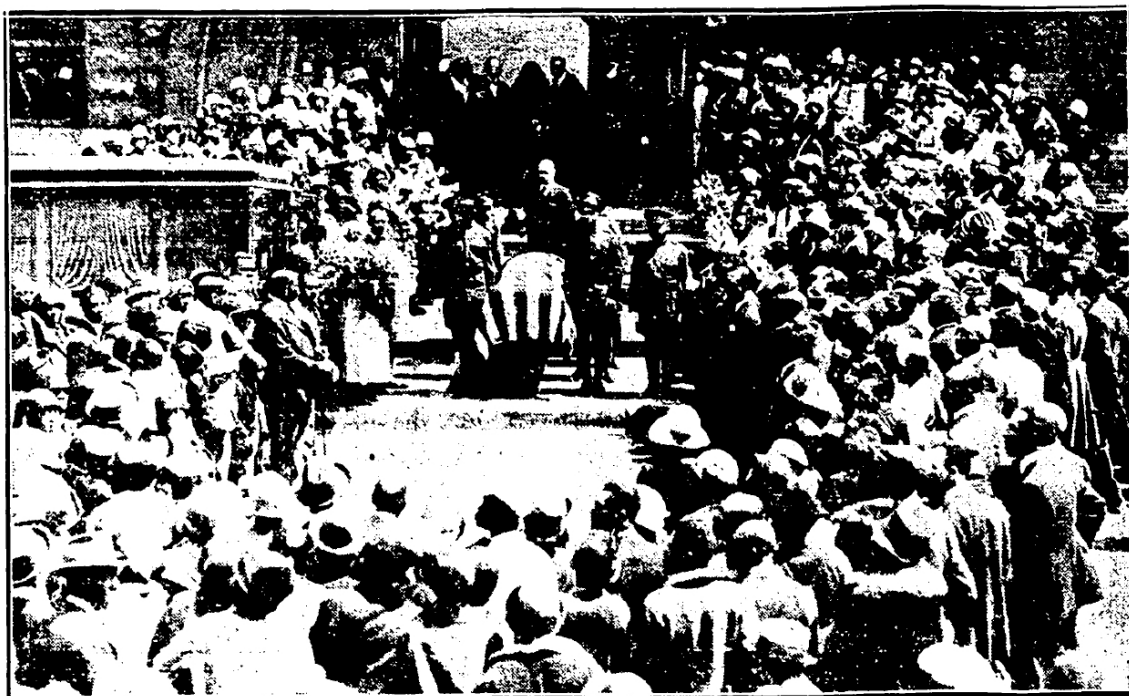




Evangeline Roberts, *The Chicago Defender* | May 15, 1926

CHICAGO PAYS PARTING TRIBUTE TO “BRAVE BESSIE” COLEMAN: Pioneer Aviatrix Starts Last Journey

PIONEER AVIATRIX STARTS LAST JOURNEY



Scene at Pilgrim Baptist church Friday morning following impressive ceremonies. Six sergeants, led by Lieutenant Briggs of the old Eighth regiment, tenderly bore the flag-draped casket containing all that was mortal of Bessie Coleman, only woman aviatrix of our Race, for the ride to its final resting place in Lincoln cemetery. It is estimated that 10,000 persons viewed the body while it lay in state in the city. Mrs. Susan Coleman, bereaved mother of Bessie, can be seen in the door of the church, supported by her son, John Coleman. —Photo by Defender Staff Photographer.

Original headline and photograph from the May 15, 1926 tribute to Bessie Coleman in The Chicago Defender.

The last rites for Miss Bessie Coleman, the young aviatrix who fell to her death from her plane at Paxon field, Jacksonville, Fla. April 30, were performed Friday morning at Pilgrim Baptist church.

A crowd filled the edifice to pay parting tribute to the brave girl who had struggle dot gain recognition from her own people and to awaken them to the necessity of becoming familiar with the most modern method of protection.

It is estimated that 10,000 persons viewed the body in Chicago. Wednesday morning it lay in state at the Kersey, McGowan, & Morsell's undertaking parlors, where floral offering from admirers and friends of both races here mingled with those of the saddened citizens of Orlando and Jacksonville, Fla., where her attempt to render service to her Race was so much appreciated.

As the time set for the service approached, a continuous throng hurried up the church steps, until the flag-draped casket tenderly borne by six overseas veterans of the Eight regiment, moved slowly up the aisle. Twenty-four honorary pallbearers, representing Chicago's leading citizens, followed.

The choir, directed by Prof. James Mundy, softly sang "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me," after which Rev. Schell, assistant pastor, read the Scripture and Rev. Fears prayed.

Mrs. Ennis W. Jackson, a close friend of the deceased, read the obituary. Mrs. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, acting as mistress of ceremonies, told of her meeting with Miss Coleman soon after her return from Europe. The aviatrix called at the home of Mrs. Barnett to express gratitude for the first and only letter of congratulations she had received from Chicago since returning to her native land.

Mrs. H.K. Hill, wife of Rev. H.K. Hill, pastor of the Mt. Zion Baptist church at Orlando, who accompanied the body to the city, related many incidents which had surrounded the life of Miss Coleman, from the time she entered their home, where she was accepted as one of the family. Mrs. Hill's voice broke as she spoke of the indomitable courage and unselfishness of the girl.

Although offered substantial sums to give exhibitions exclusively for the other race, she steadily refused to accept them unless her people were allowed admission. Had the proposed flight been successful, it would have meant thousands for the city of Jacksonville.

Mrs. Hill read resolutions from Orlando, the school children and the Negro Welfare League of Jacksonville, which had gladly defrayed all expenses of the funeral party to Chicago.

And indication of the high regard in which the aviatrix was held is the following letter, which was found in her pocket after the fall, written by a little 12-year-old school girl:

1008 ½ Ashley St.
Jacksonville, Fla.
April 29, 1926

Mrs. Coleman,

My Dear One: I am writing you to congratulate you on your brave doings. I want to be an aviatrix when I get a woman. I like to see our own Race do brave things. I am going to be out there to see you jump from the airplane. I want an airplane of my own when I get a woman. Many kisses.

Yours, a little girl,

RUBY MAE McDUFFIE

The remarks of Rev. J. C. Austin, pastor of Pilgrim, and Rev. C. M. Tanner, pastor of Greater Bethel church, emphasized the tragedy of ungratefulness. "This girl was 100 years ahead of the Race she loved so well, and by whom she was least appreciated," said Rev. Austin.

Beside an elevation that caught the glow of sunset, the soldiers stood at tense salute. The casket was silently lowered to earth, the aged mother, with tight lips, waved a trembling farewell.

"Oh, Bessie, you tried so hard," sobbed Georgia, the youngest and favorite sister, as she was led away, fainting.

The few friends who had followed to the end wiped away tears and the final chapter in the life of our bravest closed.

Funeral arrangements were made by Mrs. Ennis W. Jackson. The honorary pallbearers were Attorney Wendell E. Green, Dr. Midian O. Housfield, Major Adam Patterson, Attorney Earl B. Dickerson, Major N. Clark Smith, Oscar DePriest, Hon. Warren R. Douglas, Cary B. Lewis, Dr. Albert J. Northcross, Attorney Van G. DeSuze, Attorney Chester C. Horn, Dr. Jesse Trice, Dr. McCaskill, David W. Kellum, Perry C. Thompson, A.J. Gary, Louis Branch, Harvey A. Watkins, Dr. Roscoe Giles, Lucius C. Harper, Leslie M. Rogers and Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams.