



**Testimony to the Committee on Buildings and Family Services  
Performance Oversight Hearing for the  
Department of General Services  
February 28, 2023**

*Rebecca Miller on Behalf of the DC Preservation League*

Good morning, Councilmember Lewis George and the members of this committee.

My name is Rebecca Miller and, I am the Executive Director of the DC Preservation League (DCPL). For over 50 years, the DC Preservation League (DCPL) has served as Washington's citywide nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to preserving and protecting our city's historic resources. DCPL invests significant time, effort, and funds to work with local agencies and stakeholders on preservation-related issues across the District of Columbia. The organization works diligently to ensure that all preservation projects encourage community development that is socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable.

For years, DCPL has appeared before Council to express its concerns over the deterioration of properties under the responsibility of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) and the Department of General Services (DGS). This ongoing failure to maintain properties has now resulted in the catastrophic loss of the last remaining barn in the District of Columbia, which burned down in a fire in early December. While you may think that it was just a barn, it was an instrumental piece to an ensemble of buildings that tell the story of the agricultural history of the District of Columbia and, specifically, the **St. Elizabeths campus**, a National Historic Landmark. According to the incident report provided by the DC Fire and EMS, which I have attached to my testimony, residents of the nearby shelter were known to congregate there.

**The “investigators on the scene agreed there was an open flame fire inside the barn. However, the reasons for that fire are unknown. As a hangout for transient individuals and based on my training, knowledge and experience; I know that there is a tendency for open fires to occur in vacant properties for a multitude of reasons. Some of the reasons include fires for individuals to stay warm, to cook, and for lighting. Often, these fires are left unattended or not extinguished properly which leads to a fire developing unnoticed.” – Page 5 of incident report.**

According to DMPED, this well-known “hangout spot” is DGS’s responsibility. While the focus has been on the southern end of the campus, this unique historic property was left to rot. The 2012 Master Plan for St. Elizabeths East called for the retention and reuse of the farm complex, including the 1884 dry barn. And I quote: “Restoration of the farm complex will offer opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy food that enhance the neighborhood’s livability. Additional programming on the site could include child, youth, and adult education, workforce training, small business incubation and development, and potential employment opportunities, while future building rehabilitation could provide an additional community resource such as meeting rooms.” Consistent with this approved Master Plan, the Barn must now be reconstructed to restore the historic integrity of the farm complex and provide these intended programming opportunities.

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Vacant since 2008, the **Recorder of Deeds** Building, a DC Landmark has been suffering from extreme neglect on the part of the District Government. As you can see from the attached photographs, there is a good deal of spalling on the limestone facade, including the cornerstone. The steel grid windows, which may be original, have open gaps around them that are likely leaking water into the interior. Many joints between limestone panels are open to the elements, and water is probably penetrating the opening behind them, which would exacerbate the spalling. If this building continues to remain vacant, a maintenance plan needs to be put in place to deter further deterioration. The continued neglect of buildings begets more expensive repairs in the future. The city is simply deferring maintenance to save money now that will cost the taxpayers in one form or another more in the future.

The next buildings of concern are the historic **Jon Fox Slater and John Mercer Langston Schools** that were built for African American children. The contract for redevelopment of the site, which dates to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was awarded almost two years ago and is, according to DMPED's pipeline website, "in negotiation." Yet during this time, DGS has not taken any steps to secure the school or deter continued deterioration. As you can see from the attached photographs, the buildings, particularly Slater, are showing visible signs of neglect. DCPL has asked the Council for years to intervene. The result of this failure to take preventive steps will be a much more costly redevelopment of the site.

An additional example of neglect by the District Government is **Anne Archbold Hall**, located on the Reservation 13 campus. Built in 1931-32 as the Nurses' Residence of the Gallinger Municipal Hospital (later, Gallinger Memorial and ultimately D.C. General Hospital), this was originally a major teaching institution for nurses. The site was designated a DC Landmark in 2006. DMPED's database shows the parcel that includes Archbold Hall as "in negotiation," placing maintenance responsibility on the District and not the future lessors. The pictures attached to DCPL's testimony speak for themselves. Again, no intervention by DGS to deter deterioration of this historic building.

The District Government should be embarrassed by the condition of these important buildings for which it has direct responsibility. Continuing to neglect them will only increase the cost of rehabilitation and renovation in the future. This continued neglect doesn't just affect the integrity of the buildings, but the residents who live, work or recreate nearby.

We recognize that DGS doesn't have historic preservation experts on staff. However, we encourage them to use the resources available through the DC Historic Preservation Office or DCPL's professional staff and consultants. Simple assessments of the many historic buildings in DC's portfolio can triage needs to deter future damage to the city's resources. The longer a building sits open to the elements, the more costly it becomes to rehabilitate or adaptively reuse in the future. General maintenance is vital to the responsible management of city-owned resources. Real Estate is too valuable in the District of Columbia for the Mayor, the Council, and the agencies that manage publicly-owned buildings to continue neglecting and withholding necessary maintenance. The DC government has a fiduciary responsibility to the public it serves to ensure that these assets are protected and managed properly.

DCPL looks forward to working with DGS to address the maintenance issues related to these historic sites so they can return these significant resources more easily to productive and economically viable uses in the future.

Thank you for your time.

Washington DC Fire & EMS Department  
2000 14TH STREET, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
202 673 3320  
info.fems@dc.gov

Incident Report  
2022-0199913 -000

Printed: 02/08/2023 16:21:49  
Number of Pages: 6

<b>Basic</b>		
Alarm Date and Time	15:47:25	Saturday, December 3, 2022
Arrival Time	15:52:37	
Controlled Date and Time		
Last Unit Cleared Date and Time	01:36:24	Monday, December 5, 2022
Response Time	0:05:12	
Priority Response	Yes	
Completed	Yes	
Fire Department Station	32	
Shift	D	
Incident Type	111 - Building fire	
Aid Given or Received	N - None	
Alarms	1	
Action Taken 1	11 - Extinguish	
Action Taken 2	86 - Investigate	
Casualties	No	
Apparatus - Suppression	17	
Apparatus - EMS	29	
Personnel - Suppression Personnel	40	
Personnel - EMS Personnel	71	
Property Loss	\$10,000.00	
Contents Loss	\$0.00	
Property Value	\$10,000.00	
Contents Value	\$0.00	
Detector Alerted occupants	2N	
Property Use	819 - Livestock, poultry storage	
Location Type	Address	
Address	2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE	
City, State Zip	WASHINGTON, DC 20032	

<b>Situation</b>	
Initial Dispatch Code	STRUCTURANY STRU
Final Dispatch Code	STRUCTURANY STRU
Critical Incident	No

<b>Fire</b>	
Structure Type	1 - Enclosed building
Area of Origin	98 - Vacant structural area
Heat Source	60 - Heat from other open flame or smoking materials
Item First Ignited	UU - Undetermined
Cause of Ignition	U - Cause undetermined after investigation
Contribution To Ignition 1	UU - Undetermined

<b>Structure</b>	
Status	6 - Vacant and unsecured
Floor of Origin	1
Stories Above Grade	1
Building Length	120
Building Width	60

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**Structure**

Total Square Feet	7200
Fire Spread	4 - Confined to building of origin
Item Contributing To Spread	17 - Structural member or framing
Type of Material Contributing To	63 - Sawn wood, including all finished lumber
Detector Presence	2
AES Presence	3

**Authority**

Reported By	(a)(2) - Carroll, Hakim 11:46:26 Tuesday, December 6, 2022
Officer In Charge	- ,
Reviewer	- ,

**Narratives**

Narrative Name	CAD Narrative
Narrative Type	CAD Narrative
Author	- ,
Narrative Text	<p>F220199913 E Type:STRUCTURANY STRUCTURE FIRE (NOT LISTED ABOVE) Sub Type:Disp: COMMENTS: 428,38:51:14.3856) (a)(2) ANI/ALI STRUCTURANY STRUCTURE FIRE (NOT LISTED ABOVE) default IC VACANT BUILDING ON FIRE+2ND CALL @1547CALLER STATES HE SEE SMOKE AND FIREADV THE BARN ON CAMPUS ON FIRE CALLER STATES SHE SEE BLACK SMOKE Duplicate Event:Location = 2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE DC : @SHELTER - 801 EAST MENS SHELTER AND HOUSING, Cross Street 1 = PINE ST SE, Cross Street 2 = MAGNOLIA ST SE, Type = DETGARAGE DETACHED GARAGE OR BUILDING FIRE, Caller Name = (a)(2), Caller Ph Number = (a)(2), Caller Address = LL(-76:59:37.5864,38:51:09.1007), Call Source = ANI/ALI, Alarm Level = 0FIRE INSIDEFlames and/or SmokeSomeone trappedNo one trappedENGINEBARN INON FIREOUTSIDE THE LOCATION ..End of Duplicate Event dataFOC MONITORING..3RD CALL.ENGINES: 32, 33, 25, 3, &amp; 27VACANT BUILDING POLICY IN EFFECT...DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS PER COMMAND BFC 3 REQ WFDWORKING FIRE-PER CHANNEL 02 BC3 WILL BE GIVEN STAGGING AREA MOMENTARILY 1557-TAC CHANNEL 06 FOR 2ND ALARM-2ND ALARM STAGING/. MALCOLMX AND SYCAMORE-Duplicate Event: DC : alias MILWAUKEE PL SE/M L K AVE SE DC, Cross Street 1 = MILWAUKEE PL SE, Cross Street 2 = MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE, Type = OUTOTH OUTSIDE FIRE-OTHER (EXPLAIN), Caller Ph Number = (a)(2), Caller Address = (a)(2), Call Source = ANI/ALI, Alarm Level = 0OUTSIDE FIREOUTSIDE FIREOUTSIDE FIREFlames and/or SmokeNo one trapped-CALLER STATES SHE CAN SEE FLAMES ON MLK AND REDWOODCHANNEL 02 NOTIFIED OF CALLSTREETS ARE NOT INTERSECTINGEnd of Duplicate Event data-ADDITIONAL CALL:MILWAUKEE PL SE/MLK AVE SE.....E29 IS TAKING THE REHAB UNIT...MALCON XAND SYCAMORE ,,,REQ MPD FOR TRAFFIC CONTROL</p>



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Narratives

...20MIN DUR@ 1612MLK CMD ALSO USING TAC 07-----30  
MIN CURATION 1622-PER FLO....T14 TRANSFER TO T07 AT 1625-PGE838  
ENROUTE WITH THE TRANSFER 1625-MLK AVE COMMAND RELEASING R1,  
TW3 AND T10.....-40 MIN DURATION AT 1632-KING AVE  
OPERATIONS RELEASING E06 AND E02-KING AVE OPERATIONS REPORTS  
ACCOUNTABILITY IS EVEN.....-KING AVE OPERATIONS REPORTS FIRE  
IS STILL BEING PUT OUT.....-CANTEEN UNIT IS  
RESPONDING.....-A29 COPY TRANSFER TO E15 1637-50 MIN  
DURATION 1642-CAR01 REQ TO BE IN THE 2ND ALARM AT 1643-PGE838  
ADVISED IS AT E19 AT 1649-60 MIN DURATION 1652-KING AVE COMMAND  
REPORTS NOINJURIES AND NO DISPLACEMENTS AT THIS POINT AT1658-T14  
IS AT T07 QUARTERS AT 1700-70 MIN DURATION AT 1702-A29 ADVISED  
TRANSFERED TO E15 AT 1706-PER FLO E05 CONTACT FIRE OPERATIONS  
CENTER AT (a)(2) .....E05 COPY THE MESSAGE AT 1708-80  
MINDURATION AT 1712-KING AVE WATER SUPPLY ADVISED RELEASING  
CHANNEL 07....ALL UNITS WILL BE OPERATING ON CHANNEL 03 AT 1715-90  
MIN INCIDENT DURATION @1722FIRE KNOCKED DOWN...ACCOUNTABILITY  
EVEN...WILL BE ON SCENE FOR A DURATION...DISCONTINUE  
DURATIONSWILL CLEAR 07 MONENTAIRLYSTILL HAVE HOT  
SPOTS...HOLDING E32 E15 E33 T8 T7 T16 AMD EMS 2 M19 AND A32 CANTEEN  
UNIT REHAB UNIT DFCOP Duplicate Event:Location = 2720 MARTIN LUTHER  
KING JR AVE SE DC: @UCC - UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS CENTER, Cross  
Street 1 = CEDAR DR SE, Cross Street 2 = PINE ST SE, Call Source = PHONE, Alarm  
Level = 0SPECIAL ADDRESS COMMENT:PSPD WILL BE MONITORING THIS  
LOCATION AND ARE AVAILABLE FOR DISPATCH 24/7.End of Duplicate Event  
dataKING AVE COMMAND HOLDING E15 E32 E19 T7 T8 T16 EMS2 A32  
M19Duplicate Event:Location = 2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE DC:  
@SHELTER - 801 EAST MENS SHELTER AND HOUSING, Cross Street 1 = PINE ST  
SE, Cross Street 2 = MAGNOLIA ST SE, Call Source = PHONE, Alarm Level = 0End of  
Duplicate Event dataT07RELEASED FROM BOX --PER KING AVE COMMAND  
@1915 E33 ADVISED LEAVING THE FIRE GROUND ----@1952MLK AVE  
ADVISED ----RELEASING -- M19 T08 AND EMS2 @1957 AIR2 ADVISED  
LANDLINE IN SERVICE FROM THE FIRE GROUND @2153 PER BC3  
RELEASING E15,E32, E19, A32 AND BC3, TERMINATING COMMAND TURNING  
THE SCENE OVER TO E05, E17, E02 UNIT WILL REMAIN ON THE TAC  
CHANNEL @2158E29 AND E23 ON THE SCENE @0433E10 0700 FIRE  
WATCHE02 1000 FIRE WATCH

Narrative Name  
Narrative Type  
Narrative Date  
Author  
Author Rank  
Author Assignment  
Narrative Text

Fire Investigation

Incident

11:45:45 Tuesday, December 6, 2022

(a)(2) - Carroll, Hakim

INVEST

8

On Saturday December 3rd, 2022, at 1547 hours, fire suppression units within the third battalion were dispatched to 2722 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE WDC 20032 for the report of a structure fire. Initial 911 calls indicated that smoke and fire was visible emanating from a barn on the campus of Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in front of the 801 East

#### Narratives

Men's Shelter. First arriving units arrived on the scene with fire showing throughout the interior and through the roof of a two-story barn-style structure consisting of wood frame construction (Interior and exterior consisted of wood framing). The structure was reported to be vacant, so fire suppression crews initiated defensive firefighting operations.

The structure transitioned to full fire involvement leading to the fire consuming all the structural members above the first floor causing the structure to collapse. Due to the duration of the fire and the collapse hazards presented the structure was deemed unsafe for entry. Fire suppression crews continued defensive firefighting operations overnight and fully extinguished the flames some time in the early morning hours. When the fire was extinguished, a fire watch was put in place to secure and monitor the scene until a fire origin and cause investigation was completed.

On Sunday December 4th, 2022, at approximately 0900 hours members of the Fire Investigation Unit and the DC ATF Task Force returned to the scene to conduct a fire scene examination to determine the origin and cause of the fire.

A systematic fire scene examination was initiated at the incident location on the exterior of the structure. Documentation included photographs, interviews, and notes. A full exterior investigation was done before moving to the interior of the structure. During the exterior investigation of the structure a site safety assessment was completed. Due to the duration of burn time for the fire, the structural integrity was severely compromised. Before making entry into the structure a designated entry and egress point was established to ensure the safety of investigators entering the structure.

The structure was a cow barn constructed in the early 1900s to accommodate the Hospital's herd of about 100 dairy cattle and their associated dairying operations. The building was approximately 120 feet x 60 feet, with foundations and basement of brick and a superstructure of wood. Additionally, concrete floors and columns were installed in the basement and first floor levels of the barn. The concrete floors and columns prevented the entire structure from collapsing into the basement and first floor. The second floor of the barn was not able to be accessed due to the collapse of the roof. The second floor presented a significant safety risk to investigators due to weakened flooring and structural instability.

Security staff for the 801 East Shelter reported the vacant structure was used as a "hangout spot" for individuals living inside the shelter. The structure had no working utilities.

Prior to making entry into the structure, two cadaver canines were introduced into the scene to search for the presence of any human remains since the structure was initially determined unsafe for entry. The cadaver canine search was negative.

The investigation revealed the fire originated on the first floor of the barn in an area beneath the lower roof. There was differential damage along the "B" side of the structure. Along the "B" side of the structure was significant mass loss to the wooden structural components and interior framing. In this area of the barn ("B" side of the structure) the fire patterns and damage observed were indicative of fire burning on the first floor and

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### Narratives

moving upward and outward throughout the first floor of the barn until the fire was able to extend to the second floor and eventually through the roof. The wooden structural members and framing of the structure provided all the fuel the fire needed to continue flame propagation and spread throughout the structure.

There was clear evidence of transient human activity inside and around the area of the barn. The entirety of the structure and all of its contents were consumed by the fire. During the fire scene examination, the burned remnants of clothing, cardboard boxes, totes of medical supplies, empty bottles, beer cans, food containers, charcoal grills, smoking materials, and other combustible items were observed. Because the fire burned for such a long duration and collapsed, the actual fuel load, the number of combustible items stored and the exact location of the combustibles inside the structure was not able to be determined.

All investigators on the scene agreed there was an open flame fire inside the barn. However, the reasons for that fire are unknown. As a hangout for transient individuals and based on my training, knowledge and experience; I know that there is a tendency for open fires to occur in vacant properties for a multitude of reasons. Some of the reasons include fires for individuals to stay warm, to cook, and for lighting. Often, these fires are left unattended or not extinguished properly which leads to a fire developing unnoticed. The fact there was a fire inside of this structure and it could be reasonably inferred that the fire was ignited but intended to be used for something other than nefarious reasons; it does not preclude or omit the idea that the fire was ignited intentionally and maliciously to cause damage to the structure. However, at the time this incident report is being written, there is not enough evidence to make a determination on whether or not the fire was a criminal act. Based on the fire scene examination, evidence and artifacts examined at the scene, and interviews conducted, I am currently unable to determine a specific sequence leading the ignition of this fire. This fire is classified as UNDETERMINED pending receipt of further information which may allow me to change my determination.

Narrative Name	T07
Narrative Type	Incident
Narrative Date	13:06:36 Wednesday, December 7, 2022
Author	(a)(2) - Henry, Christopher
Author Rank	SGT
Author Assignment	1
Narrative Text	2nd Due, took position on the A side per command. Setup for ladder pipe operations. Flowed the ladder pipe to extinguish fire.
Narrative Name	E3
Narrative Type	Incident
Narrative Date	16:59:55 Wednesday, December 7, 2022
Author	(a)(2) - Roop, Michael A
Author Rank	LT
Author Assignment	1
Narrative Text	Arrived on location, E3 supplied E-33 and crew assigned to T-7, to assist with setting up monitor nozzle.
Narrative Name	E6
Narrative Type	Incident

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**Narratives**

Narrative Date	00:26:45 Thursday, December 8, 2022
Author	(a)(2) - Trace, Mark
Author Rank	CAPT
Author Assignment	1
Narrative Text	4th due on the initial box. Bumped to 2nd due on the 2nd alarm. Assisted with water supply.

End of Report





















(a)(2)

(a)(2)

(a)(2)

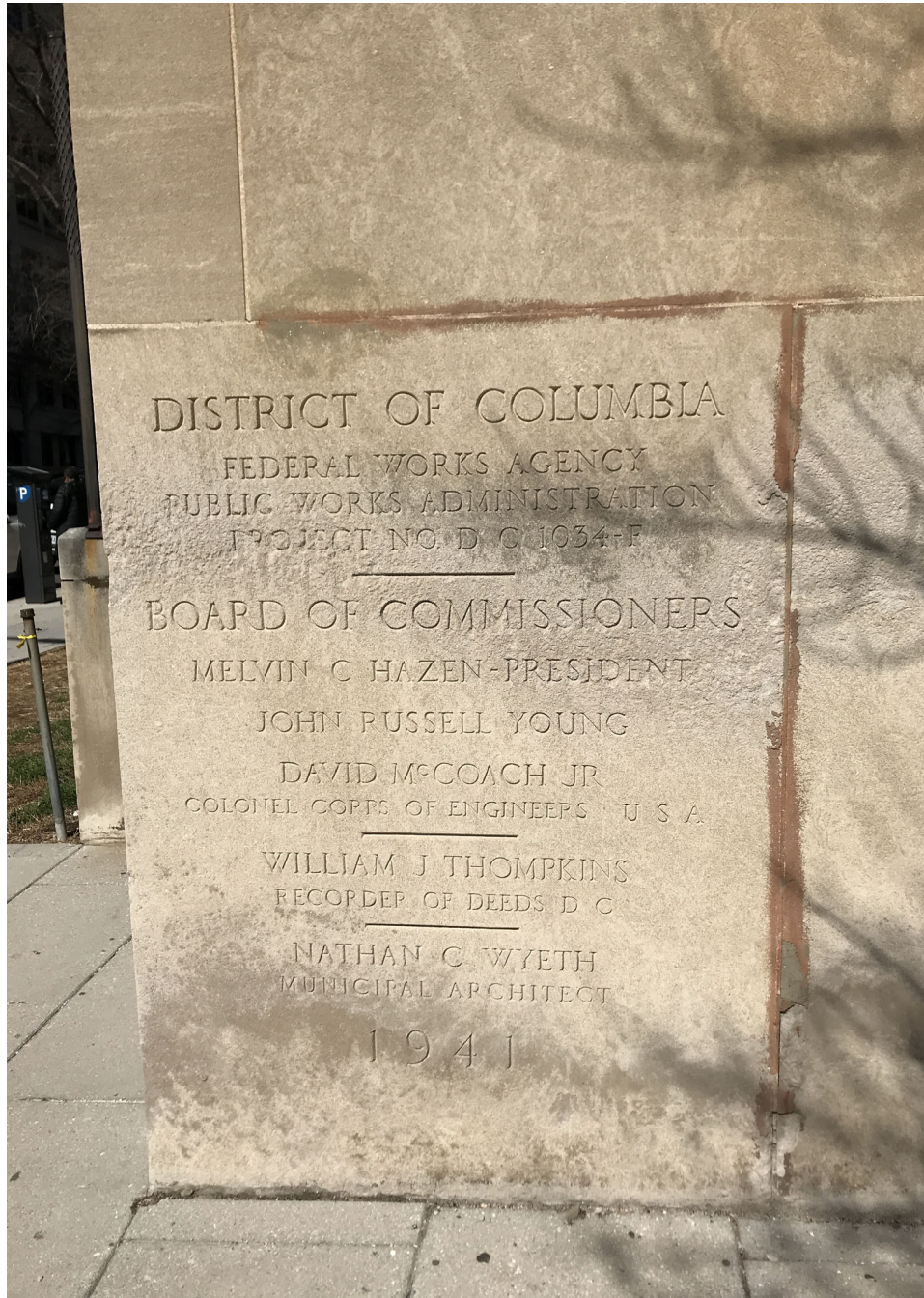
FIRE MARSHAL  
POLICE



Recorder of Deeds Building, 515 D Street, NW









Images of Murals located within the Recorder of Deeds Building

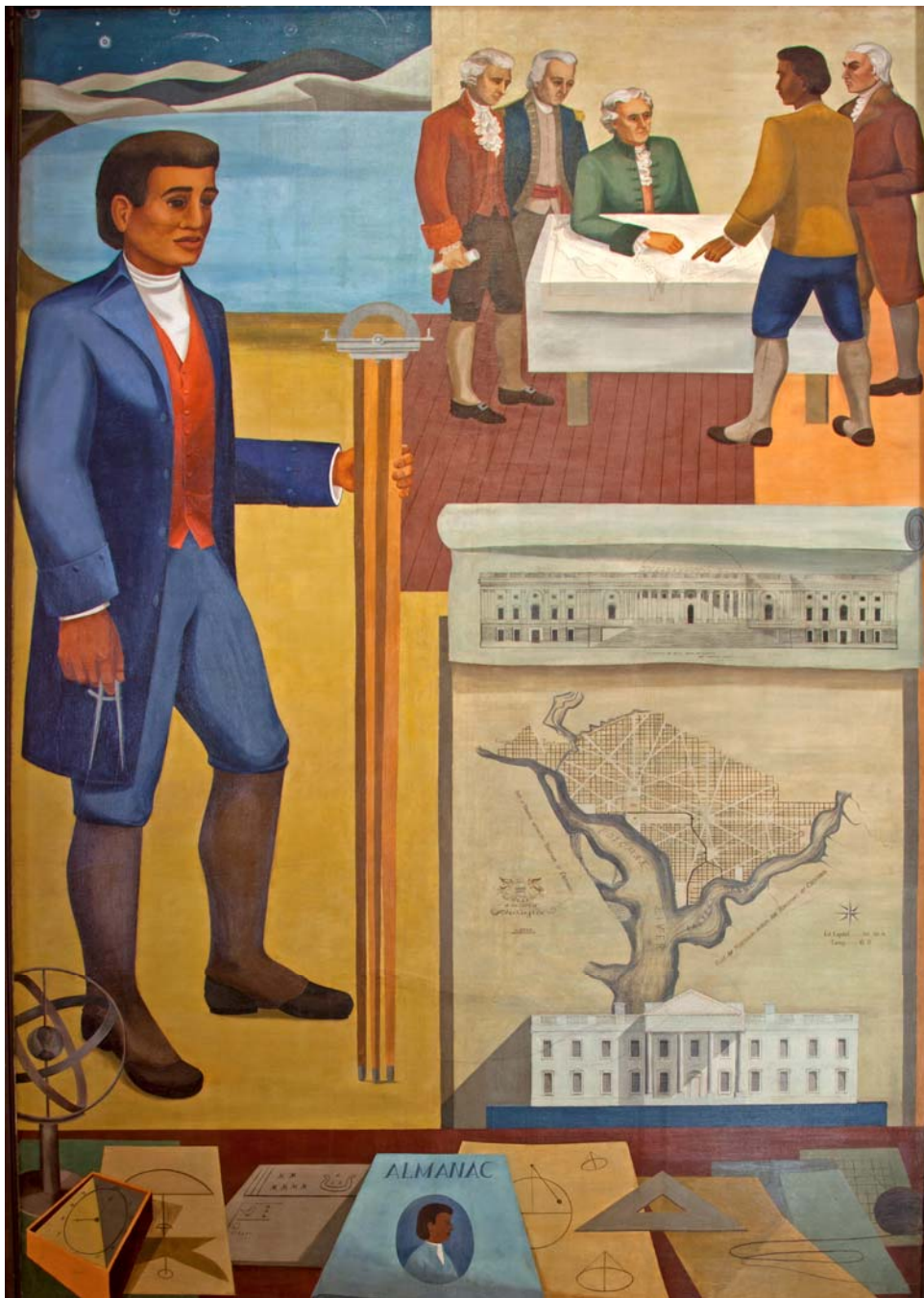


Right: "Crispus Attucks," by Herschel Levit

Below: "Matthew Henson Planting the American Flag at North Pole," by Austin Mecklem







Right: "Benjamin Banneker and the District of Columbia" by Maxine Seelbinder

Above: "Frederick Douglass Appealing to President Lincoln" by William Edouard Scott



Slater and Langston Elementary Schools - February 2023



Photos by: Scott Roberts for DC Preservation League











## Anne Archbold Hall - February 2023



*Sylvia M. Randolph*



*Sylvia M. Randolph*





*Sylvia M. Randolph*



*Sylvia M. Randolph*