

Black History Month

Honoring Judge Nathaniel R. Jones

Blank Rome recently lost a beloved colleague and friend in the passing of **Judge Nathaniel R. Jones** at age 93. Judge Jones was one of the brightest legal minds and civil rights advocates of our time, and his inspirational life and legacy will live on through the countless lives he has touched. Our Firm honors Judge Jones' tremendous contributions to the bar and to our community during Black History Month and every day.

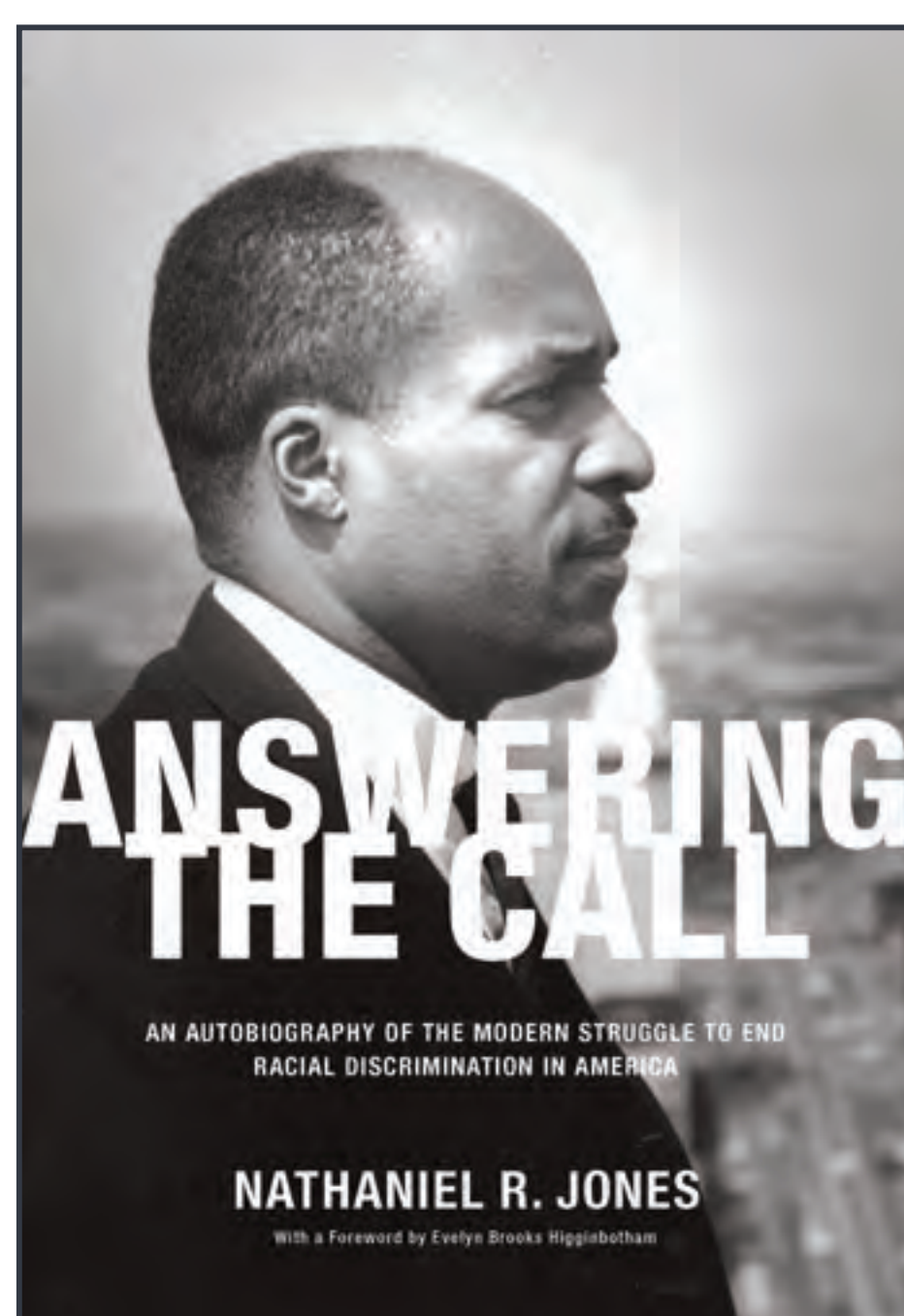
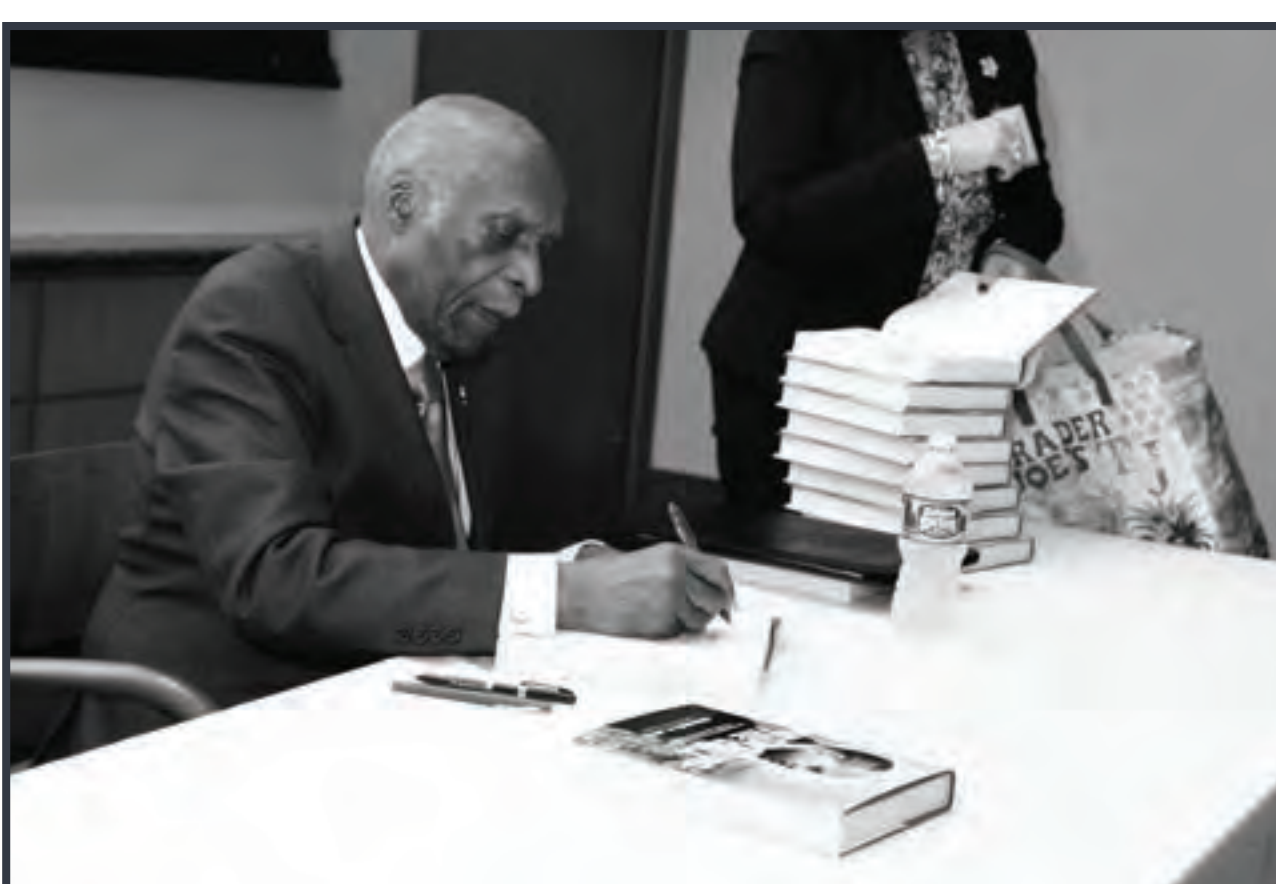
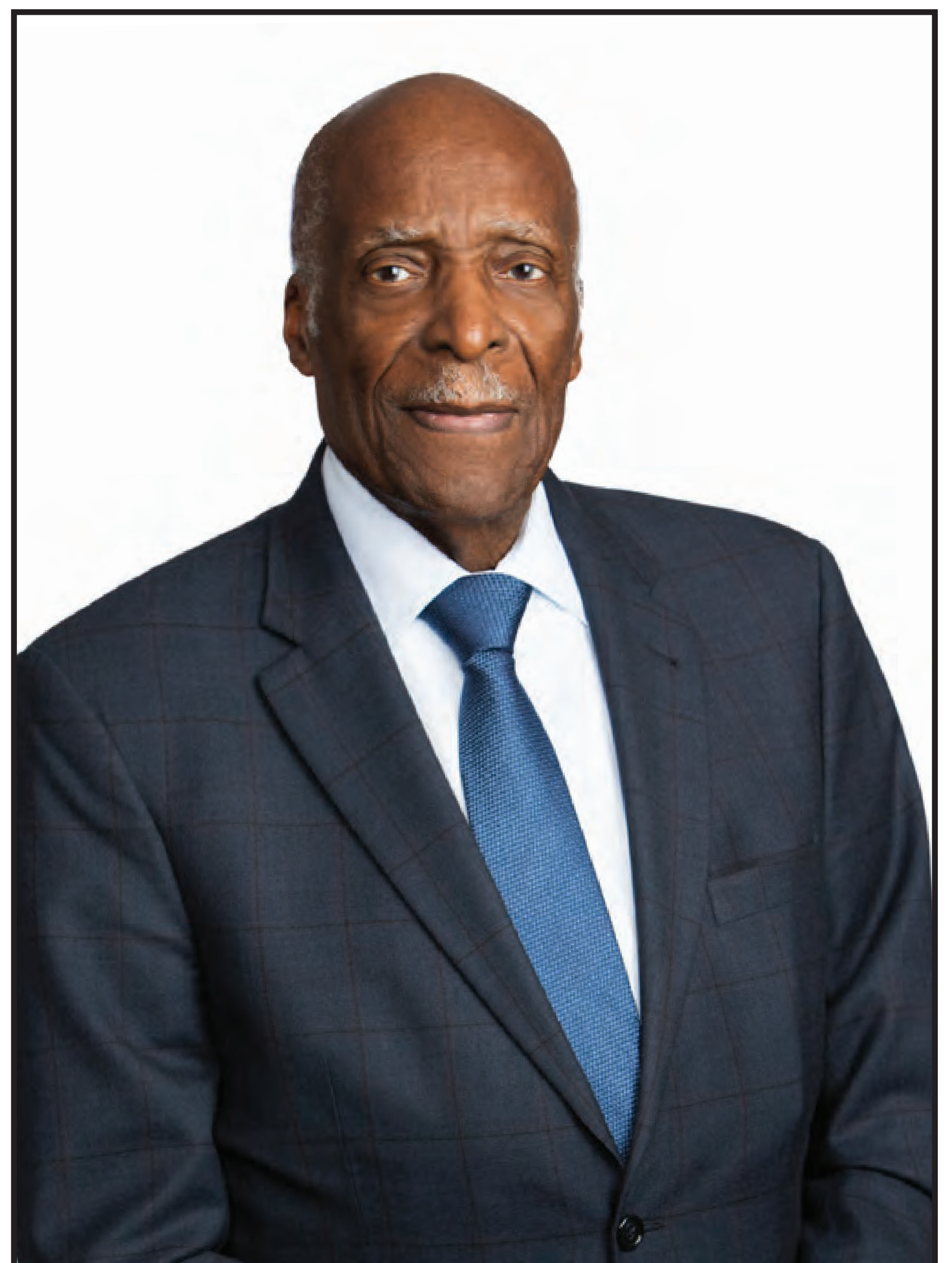
A Life-long Commitment to "Answering the Call"

In 1962, Judge Jones became the first African American to be appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio. In 1967, he became Assistant General Counsel to President Lyndon B. Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. He was general counsel of the NAACP from 1969 to 1979, and a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit from 1979 to 2002.

Judge Jones joined Blank Rome in 2002. He served as our first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, creating the strong foundation for our diversity and inclusion program. In 2013, we developed the Honorable Nathaniel R. Jones Diversity and Inclusion Award in his honor.

In May 2016, Judge Jones' memoir, *Answering The Call: An Autobiography of the Modern Struggle to End Racial Discrimination in America*, was published by The New Press. Judge Jones also taught at Harvard Law School and the University of Cincinnati College of Law, and is the holder of 19 honorary degrees.

In recognition of his outstanding career as a jurist and international civil rights leader, Judge Jones has received numerous notable awards and recognition, including the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center's International Freedom Conductor Award, and *The American Lawyer's* Lifetime Achievement Award, among many others.



Black History Month

The True Reformer Building

1200 U Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

The True Reformer Building, a four story rectangular brick building, is located at the southwest corner of 12th and U Street, NW, in Washington, D.C. The building was commissioned in 1902 by the Grand Order of the True Reformers, an African American fraternal organization that provided banking and insurance to the black community. The building, completed over 100 years ago in 1903, is considered historically significant because it was one of the first secular buildings to be entirely designed, financed, and constructed by black Americans. It is associated with the black self-help movement, wherein black Americans proactively created businesses, institutions and social systems to meet their own business, cultural, and social needs. The building's design and construction are a testament to the significant initiative, talent, and capability already present within the black community at a time when segregation and racial prejudice were part of the daily black experience.

In 1902, the True Reformers commissioned architect John A. Lankford, then only 28 years old, to design the building. Mr. Lankford was the first black architect registered in Washington, D.C. The True Reformer building was his first professional commission.

The True Reformer Building has operated since its inception as a multipurpose space in the heart of a thriving black community in Washington D.C. It offered black Americans living in segregated society the benefit of a bank, an insurance company, and spaces for various social gatherings in its many offices and conference rooms. It also housed a concert hall, where Duke Ellington held his first paid performance, charging a cover of \$0.05 per person. Over the years, the building has been used for various commercial purposes, and has also been the site of a church and a YMCA. At one point, the building was the armory for the District of Columbia's segregated National Guard units.

From 1937 to 1957, the True Reformer Building was the home of the Boys Club of the Metropolitan Police, which offered safe, supervised, and wholesome activities for black youth in the District of Columbia. When the Boys Club opened its doors in 1937, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt offered remarks at the dedication ceremony before a crowd of 2,000 people.

The True Reformer building has been listed on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites since 1987, and has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989. Today, the building is the headquarters of the Public Welfare Foundation.

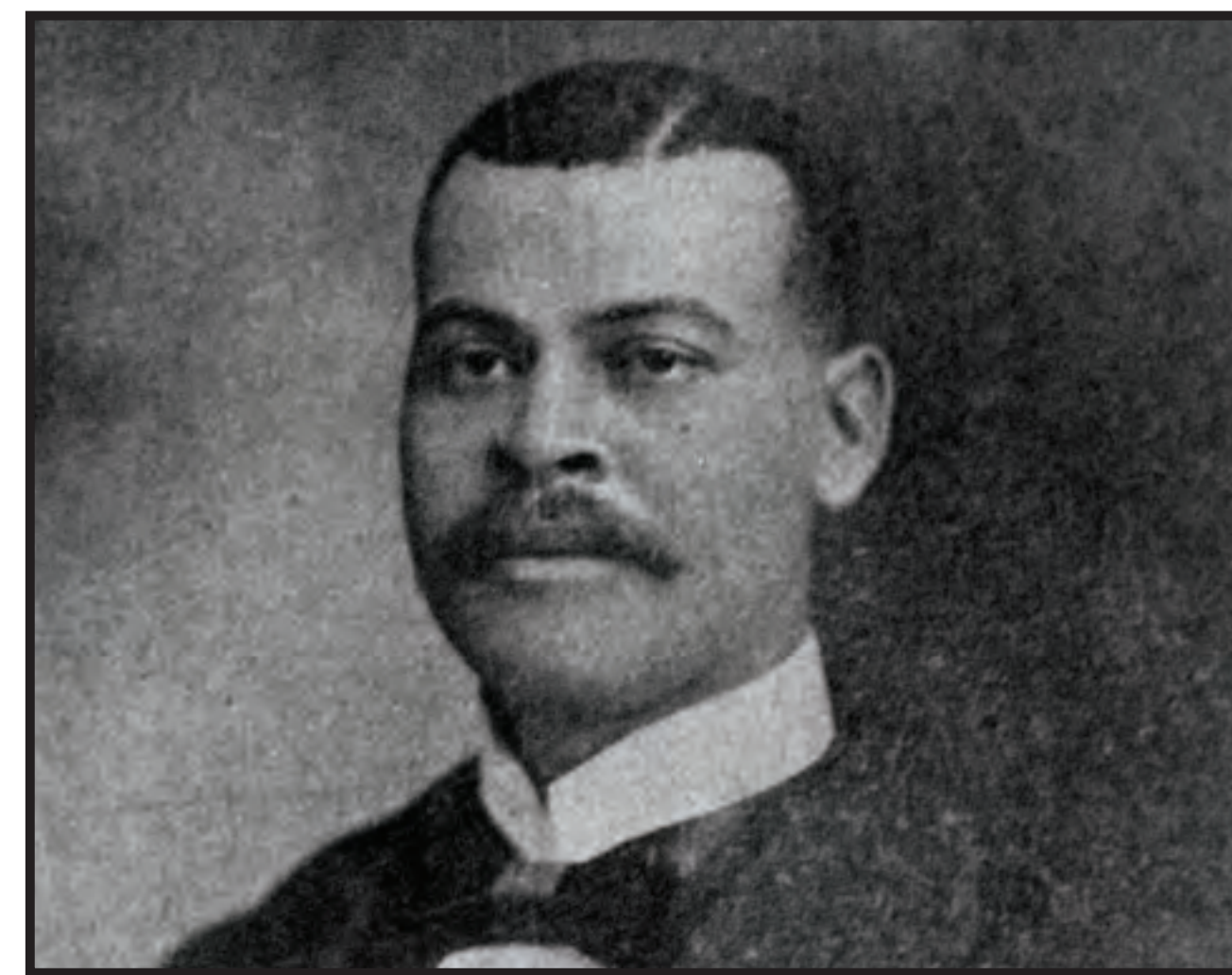
Past and Current Images of the True Reformer Building



Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator, John A Lankford, Bolling & Everett, Knights Of Pythias, Boys Club Of Metro Police, National Guard, and Harrison M. Ethridge, Mahon, Dynecourt, photographer.



John A. Lankford



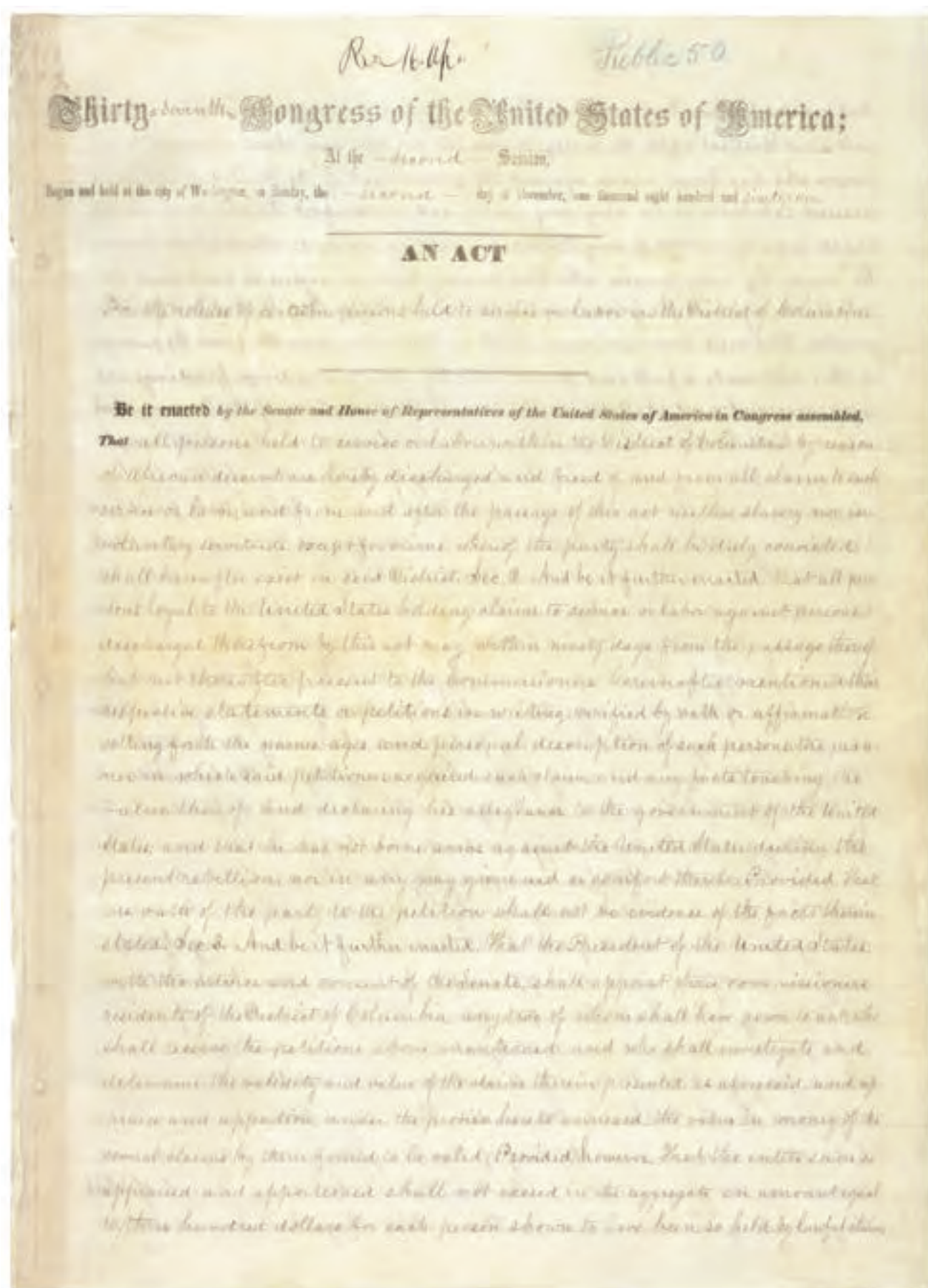
John A. Lankford was commissioned to design the True Reformer Building. *Image courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University.*

Black History Month

D.C. Emancipation Day

April 16, 1862

Thousands of enslaved people were freed in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862, through the D.C. Emancipation Act, or the Compensated Emancipation Act—almost nine months before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The D.C. Emancipation Act also provided for compensation to owners who freed their slaves upon the filing of petitions which included schedules providing details of enslaved people. Those records still exist and provide valuable insight into and details about the struggles and challenges of the lives of these enslaved D.C. residents. April 16 is still celebrated in D.C. with parades, discussions, and other events, and is a public holiday in the city. One of the few images of an early celebration of Emancipation Day is from *Harper's Weekly* magazine, dated April 19, 1866, and attributed to the artist F. Dielman.



Emancipation Day Celebration

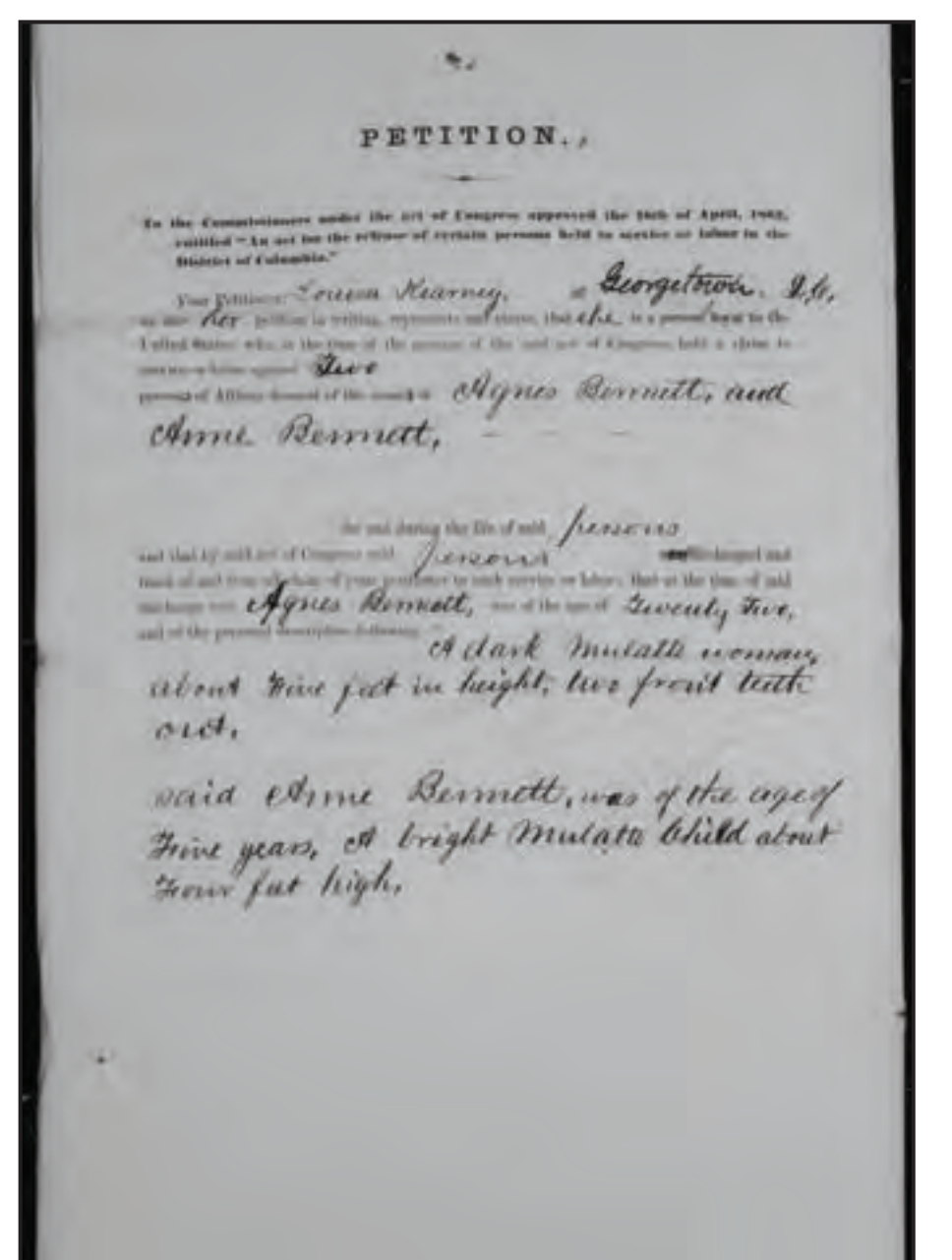
A celebration of emancipation taking place in Washington, D.C. on April 19, 1866. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

Emancipation Act: Page 1 of the Compensated Emancipation Act

The First Paragraph reads, “An Act for the Release of certain Persons held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that all persons held to service or labor within the District of Columbia by reason of African descent are hereby discharged and freed of and from all claim to such service or labor; and from and after the passage of this act neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for crime, whereof the party shall be duly convicted, shall hereafter exist in said District.” *Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration Office of the Federal Register.*

Petition of Freedom

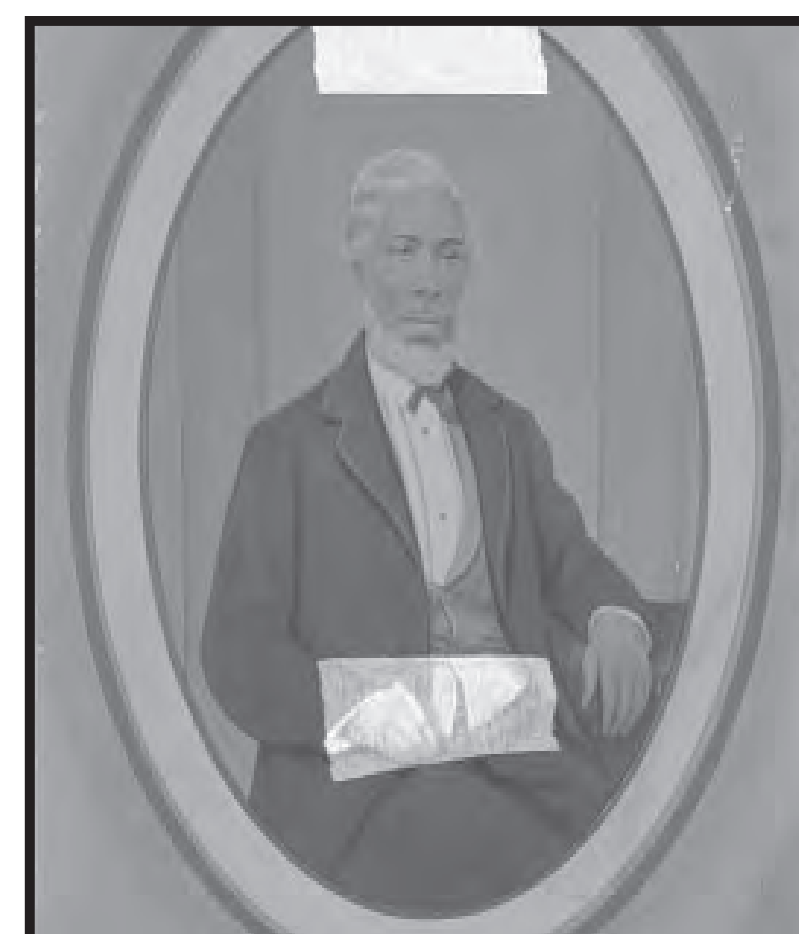
Image to the right is an example of a schedule filed pursuant to the Compensated Emancipation Act of D.C. Text of Petition: “Your Petitioner, Louisa Kearney of Georgetown D.C. by this her petition in writing, represents and states, that she is a person loyal to the United States, who, at the time of the passage of the said act of Congress, held a claim to service or labor against two persons of African descent of the names of Agnes Bennett, and Anne Bennett, for and during the life of said persons and that by said act of Congress said persons were discharged and freed of and from all claim of your petitioner to such service or labor; that at the time of said discharge said Agnes Bennett, was of the age of twenty two, and of the personal description following: (1) a dark mulatto woman, about five feet in height, two front teeth out. Said Anne Bennett, was of the age of five years, a bright mulatto child about four feet high.” *Image courtesy of the Records of the Accounting Offices of the Department of the Treasury, 1775–1978, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 217.6.5. (http://arcweb.archives.gov).*



Black History Month

YMCA on 12th Street

The YMCA on 12th Street in D.C.'s Shaw/U Street neighborhood was the country's first African American chapter of the YMCA. It was founded by Anthony Bowen, who was born enslaved in 1809 and went on to become one of the first African American clerks in the United States Patent office. The building was designed by William Sidney Pittman, a leading architect of the time and one of the first African Americans to graduate from the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. Over the years the 12th Street YMCA has been the center of D.C.'s African American community life—Thurgood Marshall held meetings there to prepare for various civil rights events and Langston Hughes lived there while working on his first poems. Today it remains a meeting place for community and neighborhood organizations.



Anthony Bowen

Copy of a negative of an oval matted portrait of Anthony Bowen. The original subject appears to be a hand-painted photograph (sometimes called a “crayon portrait”), possibly dating from the 1860s. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*

YMCA on 12th Street

A photograph of the YMCA by the Scurlock Studio, believed to be taken in 1933. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



Gathering of Boys in Front of YMCA

A gathering of young boys (and two girls) in front of the 12th Street branch of the YMCA believed to be taken in 1933. One sign states “Here Come the Business Men of the Future.” *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



Gathering of Men in Front of YMCA

A gathering of men in front of the 12th Street branch of the YMCA taken around 1941. They are believed to be part of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



Annual Fall Membership Campaign

Annual Fall Membership Campaign for the 12th Street YMCA taken in 1936. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*

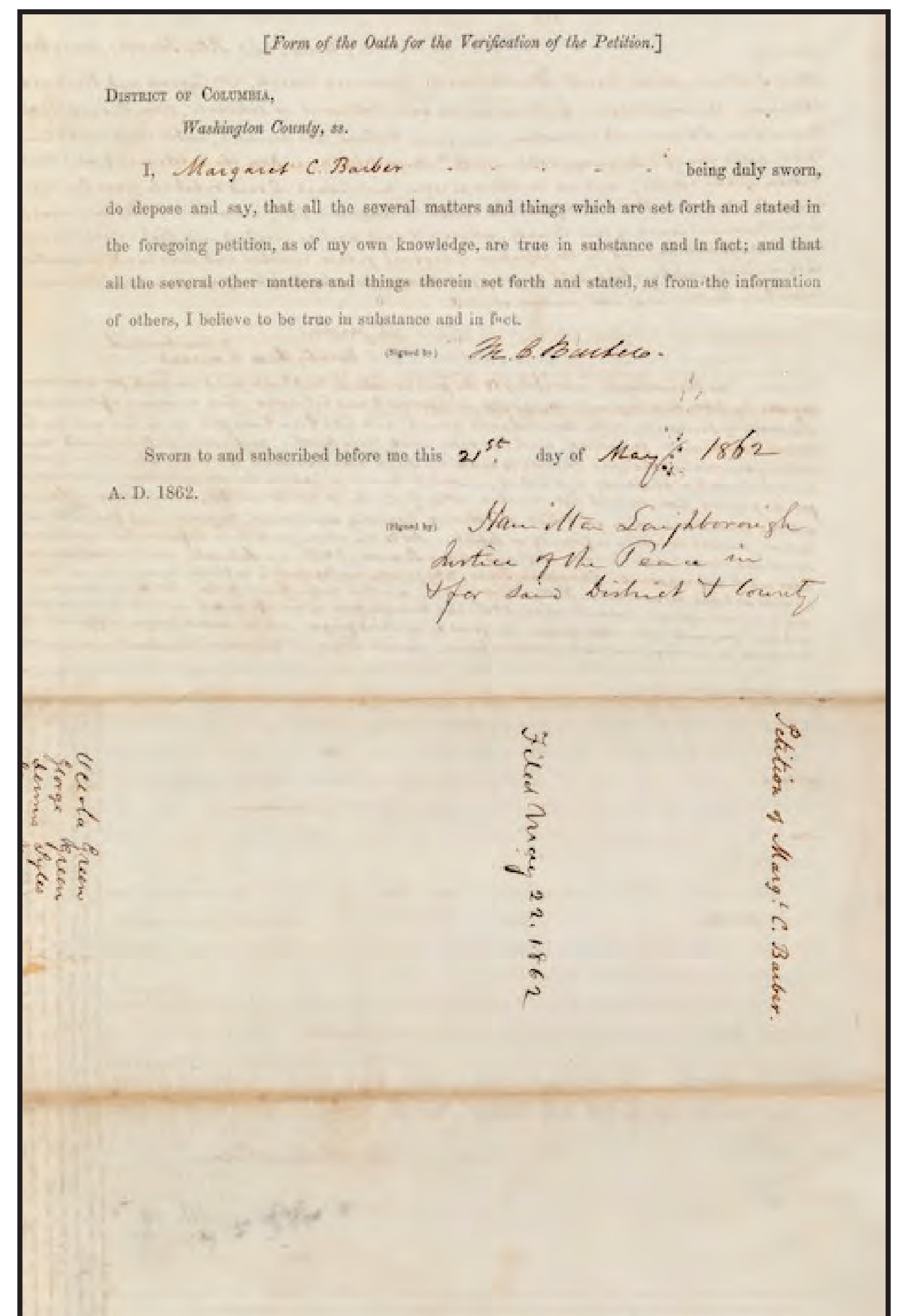
Black History Month

D.C. Court of Appeals Old City Hall

Old City Hall, built between 1820 and 1850, was Washington, D.C.'s first public building. It housed a court of law where trials of abolitionists and Underground Railroad participants occurred in the early 1820s. The American Convention for the Abolition of Slavery also met here in 1829. Frederick Douglass worked here as a U.S. marshal (1877–1881) and as a recorder of deeds for the city (1881–1885).

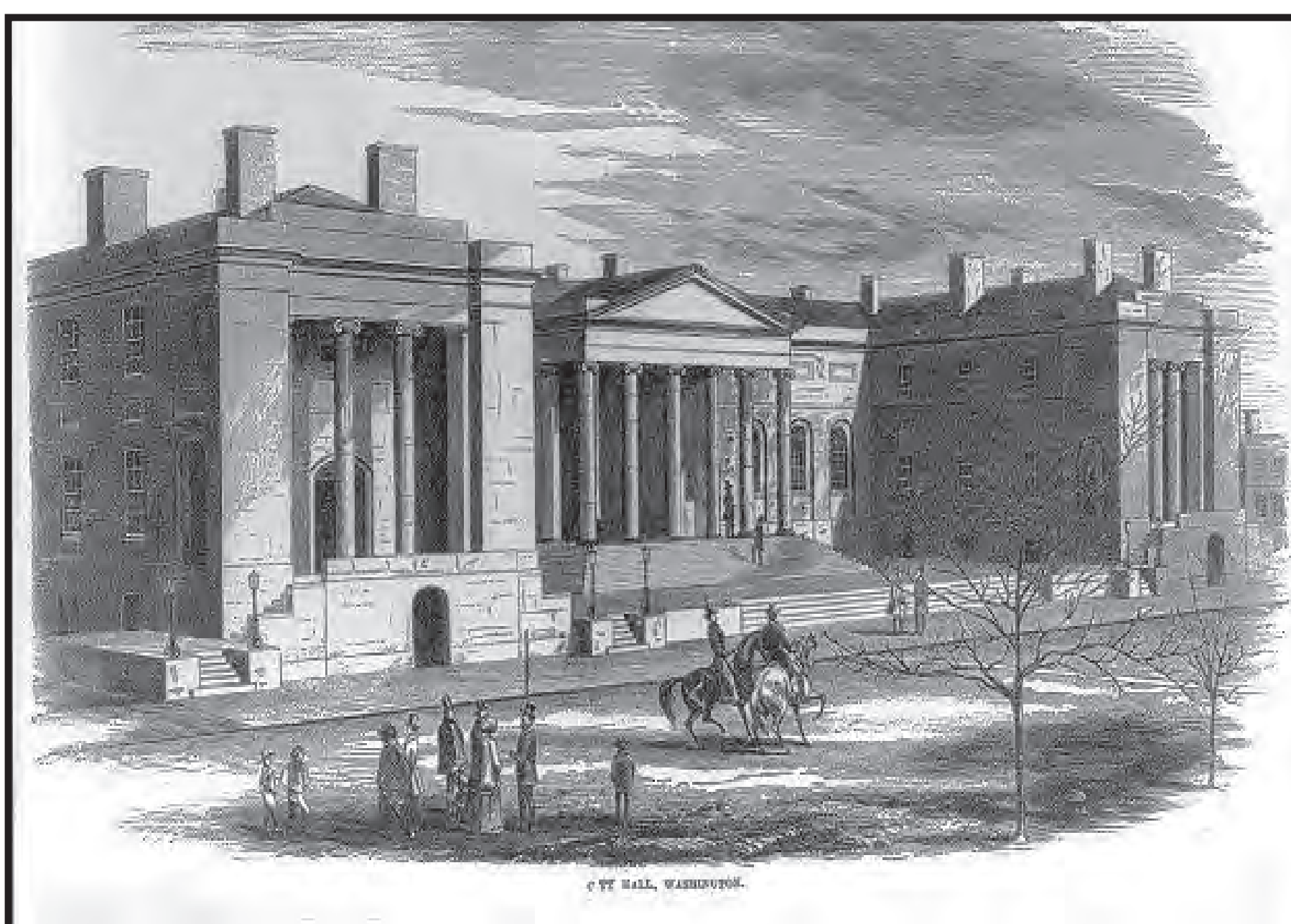
After President Lincoln signed the D.C. Emancipation Act in April 1862, a three-member Emancipation Commission held interviews at Old City Hall for slave owners seeking compensation for their property. African Americans participated in the process by testifying for and against white slaveholders seeking compensation. Though most claimants were white, there is some evidence that African Americans also sought compensation for family members whose titles they had purchased to keep them from being sold to whites.

After having been used for a wide variety of governmental purposes since 1820, the building was renovated between 2006 and 2009, with a new entrance pavilion added on the north side and additional space, including a large auditorium, built underneath. The building currently serves as the courthouse for the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.



Petition for Compensation

This is a petition filed pursuant to the Compensated Emancipation Act of D.C. Margaret Barber presented a claim to the Commission for the Emancipation of Slaves in the District of Columbia stating that she wanted to be compensated by the U.S. Government, which had freed her 34 slaves. Petition of Margaret C. Barber, 05/21/1862. *Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 217; National Archives Identifier: 4644520 (<http://arcweb.archives.gov>).*



District of Columbia City Hall

District of Columbia City Hall, 451 Indiana Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. Built 1820–1849, George Hadfield, architect. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.*



D.C. Court of Appeals

The D.C. Court of Appeals stands as one of the most historically significant buildings and complex historic preservation projects undertaken in Washington, D.C.

Black History Month

Sojourner Truth's Fight for the Freedom to Ride Washington's Streetcars



Sojourner Truth

Abolitionist Sojourner Truth holding a cased photograph of her grandson, who was a prisoner-of-war at James Island, South Carolina, between 1863 and 1865. *Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA*
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>.

"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?" Sojourner Truth (1851)

Sojourner Truth was born as Isabella Baumfree in 1797 on an estate north of New York City, and she was freed in 1827 when New York completed its emancipation of slaves. She filed an historic lawsuit and successfully convinced the court to order the return of her son, who had illegally been sold to an owner in Alabama. She then embarked on a remarkable career as a fierce advocate of justice, not only for the civil rights of African Americans, but also the equal rights of all women. Truth's mission took her around the country, and in 1851, at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention, she delivered the famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech (select portion above) for which she is perhaps best known today.

Less well known is her work in the District of Columbia, where Truth helped to recruit black troops for the Union Army and later served at the War Department's Freedman Bureau Hospital. Truth often needed to travel across the city to find clothing and other articles for the sick soldiers, and she rebelled against the notion that she could travel in only those horse-drawn streetcars known as "Jim Crow" cars, one of which was supposed to be available on each track. Truth confronted conductors who tried to throw her off the more spacious and comfortable cars reserved for white travelers, once landing in the hospital for her trouble, but with the aid of a Freedman Bureau attorney she filed an assault charge, which cost the conductor his job. She then petitioned the president of the rail line and marshaled public opinion, which ultimately produced a local law banning discrimination on Washington's streetcars.

Sojourner Truth passed away in 1883 and, 123 years later, Public Law 109-27 authorized the placement of the bust of this great American in the U.S. Capitol—the first such honor bestowed on an African American woman.



Horse-Drawn Streetcar In Front of U.S. Capitol

An example of a horse-drawn streetcar from the 1860s, similar to the one that Sojourner Truth would have taken around Washington, D.C. *Image courtesy of General Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*

Black History Month

The Sumner School

Built 1871–1872 on the site of a former Freedmen’s Bureau school, the Sumner School was one of the first public schools dedicated to educating African American students in the District of Columbia and served for many years as the flagship of the District’s segregated African American school system.

The Sumner School was named for Massachusetts U.S. Senator Charles Sumner, a staunch abolitionist and early supporter of desegregation of schools and other public facilities in the District of Columbia, and the victim of an assault on the floor of the U.S. Senate by a southern senator triggered by an anti-slavery speech, resulting in permanent disability.

Adolph Cluss, a noted Washington architect known for designs of public and private buildings in the Second Empire architectural style, designed the Sumner School, and it was awarded a medal for design at the 1873 Vienna Exposition. Cluss designed several other notable public and private buildings in the District from the 1860s through the 1880s, a period considered by many to be the beginning of the architectural transformation of the District of Columbia into a true national capital city. Other notable surviving Cluss designs include the Franklin School, Eastern Market on Capitol Hill, the reconstruction of the Patent Office Building, the Old Masonic Temple at 9th and F Streets NW, and the Smithsonian’s Arts and Industries Building (formerly the National Museum). The Sumner School is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, and as noted in its National Register nomination form:



The Charles Sumner School Interior

“An architecturally distinctive building, Sumner School incorporates many of the award-winning, innovative design ideas developed by Cluss in the prototypical Wallach and Franklin Schools. The design of these buildings represented solutions to problems of plan structure, lighting, acoustics, heating and ventilation [sic] in one of the new building types of the Reconstruction period-- the urban public school building. Located two blocks from the Metropolitan AME Church and within a block of the Massachusetts Avenue, Sixteenth Street and Dupont Circle Historic Districts, it is one of the few remaining physical reminders of the presence and history of Blacks in one of the most historic areas of the city.” (National Park Service – Sumner School Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places)

Located on 17th and M Streets NW, the Sumner School has over the years served a variety of purposes related to the public education of African Americans in the District. During its early years, the Sumner School housed eight primary and grammar schools, and served as the executive offices of the Superintendent and Board of Trustees of the Colored Schools Division of Washington and Georgetown. The first high school graduation for African American students in the nation took place at the Sumner School in 1877. Following an extensive restoration in the 1980s, the building now houses the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, which holds the archives and historical records of the D.C. Public Schools and the Board of Education, and serves as a museum dedicated to the preservation and exhibition of the history of public schools in the District.



The Charles Sumner School

Image courtesy of The Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives.

Black History Month

The New Negro Alliance

The New Negro Alliance (“NNA”) was founded in Washington, D.C., to protest the discriminatory hiring practices of white-owned businesses. Operating from 1933 to 1941, the NNA organized “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns, picketing and boycotting businesses in black neighborhoods that refused to hire African American employees.

In 1933, activist John A. Davis organized a protest of Hamburger Grill, a restaurant in an African American neighborhood that fired three black employees and replaced them with white employees. Davis’ action swiftly resulted in the restaurant rehiring the African American employees with higher wages and fewer working hours. Following this success, Davis founded the NNA along with Belford V. Lawson, Jr. and M. Franklin Thorne. The group went on to challenge many businesses, including the Evening Star newspaper, High’s Ice Cream, A&P grocery stores, Sanitary Grocery Company, and People’s Drug Store.

The NNA mounted their campaigns by identifying stores that refused to hire black employees and conducting surveys to determine the percentage of the stores’ customers that were African American. The NNA provided the stores with this data and demanded that they hire a proportional number of African American employees. If the stores failed to take action, the NNA undertook community education efforts and organized picketing lines and boycotts.

The NNA was also involved in legal cases to defend the rights of picketers.

In 1938, the NNA scored an important victory in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *New Negro Alliance v. Sanitary Grocery Co.* That case overturned an injunction that prevented NNA from picketing a grocery store that refused to hire black sales clerks and managers. This decision bolstered the rights of African Americans and groups like NNA to protest discriminatory hiring practices—even in the absence of an employer-employee relationship with the challenged business. By 1940, the NNA estimated it had secured more than 5,100 jobs in more than 50 businesses in the district.



Belford V. Lawson, Jr.

As lead counsel in the NNA’s victory in Sanitary Grocery Co., co-founder Belford V. Lawson, Jr., became the first African American lawyer to win a case before the Supreme Court. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



People’s Drug Store

Clergyman picketing People’s Drug Store on 14th & U. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



New Negro Alliance Committee

New Negro Alliance committee. *Image courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*