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Press Release

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African American Commission and Maryland Historical Trust Awards \$1 Million to Assist African American Heritage Preservation

12 Organizations Receive African American Heritage Preservation Program Grants

CROWNSVILLE, MD – Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford, Planning Secretary Wendi Peters, and Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) Chair Lyndra Pratt Marshall presented the 2017 African American Heritage Preservation Program (AAHPP) grants today at a ceremony held at the State House in Annapolis. The AAHPP provided 12 grants totaling \$1 million to Maryland nonprofit groups in fiscal year 2017. These grants, made available through a partnership of the Commission and the Maryland Historical Trust (the Trust), offer assistance to organizations and private citizens in their sponsorship of successful acquisition, construction or improvement of African American heritage projects.

The goal of the AAHPP is to identify and preserve buildings, communities and sites of historical and cultural importance to the African American experience in Maryland. This year's grant awards ranged from \$5,000 to \$100,000 (See attached detailed list for all grants awarded).

"I commend the 12 individuals and organizations for their tireless work in preserving Maryland's unique African American history, heritage and culture to inform, educate and inspire our citizens and visitors," Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford said. "The range of these heritage preservation projects and their diverse locations throughout Maryland demonstrates the significant contributions African Americans made in every corner of the state. I applaud the efforts and dedication of the commission and the Trust in identifying these landmarks and ensuring these stories will be preserved for future Marylanders."

"Planning, through the Trust and its partnership with the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, is honored to support these 12 organizations with preservation grants," stated Secretary Peters. "Preserving history and, more importantly, making it accessible to people who live in and come to visit Maryland is one of Planning's three strategic initiatives."

The mission of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) is to interpret, document, preserve, and promote Maryland's African American heritage; to provide technical assistance to institutions and groups with similar objectives; and to educate Maryland's citizens and visitors about the significance of the African American experience in Maryland and the nation. MCAAHC is housed within the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives.

The Maryland Historical Trust is an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning. The Trust was formed in 1961 to assist the people of Maryland in identifying, studying, evaluating, preserving, protecting and interpreting the state's significant prehistoric and historic districts, sites, structures, cultural landscapes, heritage areas, cultural objects and artifacts, as well as less tangible human and community traditions. Through research, conservation and education, MHT assists the people of Maryland in understanding their historical and cultural heritage.

Online applications for fiscal year 2018 AAHPP funding will be available in early spring 2017 on MHT's website (http://mht.maryland.gov/grants_africanamerican.shtml). Application deadlines and workshop dates will also be announced on this page.

For more information about the grant program, please contact Anne Raines (MHT) at 410-514-7634 or anne.raines@maryland.gov, or Maya Davis (MCAAHC) at 410-216-6180 or maya.davis@maryland.gov. For information about organizations receiving grants, please contact the institutions directly.

Details on these projects are listed below. Videos that were presented at the event for each project can be viewed at http://mht.maryland.gov/grants_africanamerican.shtml.

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**McComas Institute – Joppa, Harford County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

The McComas Institute stands as the most important landmark in the history of black education in Harford County. Constructed in 1867, this building is one of three schools erected in the area for the Freedmen's Bureau after the Civil War. McComas Institute is the only one, however, to remain intact. This one-story frame structure with a gable roof is five bays long and three bays wide, stands on a raised stone foundation, and has a modest belfry over the north gable.

**Jane Gates House – Cumberland, Allegany County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

This property derives its name from Jane Gates, a former slave, who was able to purchase the property in 1871. She lived here with her 5 children, including Edward Gates, the great-grandfather of Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., a prominent scholar of African American culture at Harvard University. Dr. Gates showcased this property, 515 Greene Street, on his TV program "Finding your Roots" as a significant landmark for the Gates family. The property is still in Gates family ownership; it will be rehabilitated as a community center.

**Morgan State University: Carnegie Hall, University Memorial Chapel, and Holmes Hall – Baltimore City
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

Founded in 1867, Morgan State University is an urban, 143-acre campus with a diverse collection of structures. Three of these building – Carnegie Hall, University Memorial Chapel, and Holmes Hall – are to be assessed in preparation of impending construction. In 1917 industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie funded the campus relocation to its current site in northeast Baltimore, and the construction of Carnegie Hall (constructed 1919) - the oldest extant building on campus. Carnegie Hall was designed by Carnegie's New York architect Edward Tilden. University Memorial Chapel (constructed 1941) is the only National Register-listed building on campus, and honors the University's founding as the Biblical Centenary Institute. It was designed by African American architect Albert I. Cassell. Holmes Hall (constructed 1949) holds the University's signature clock tower – a classic symbol modeled after Philadelphia's Independence Hall. Designed by the Baltimore architectural firm Taylor & Fisher, the building was named in honor of the University's first African American President Dwight O. W. Holmes.

**Catoctin Furnace Iron Master's House Ruins – Thurmont, Frederick County
(\$5000 grant awarded)**

The Catoctin Furnace complex, is significant to American industrial history and industrial archeology; the industrial site and its related living quarters illustrate the growth and development of the iron industry between 1774 and 1904. Slaves labored in the village in various capacities including iron production, charcoal making, and domestic services. There are documented cases of enslaved persons leaving this site to seek freedom; this site is included in NPS's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Gateway program. While the 1781 Iron Master's House is in ruins, it is open for public viewing year round. A new interpretive panel will explain the role the Iron Master played in the community and the importance of this structure. The Iron Master's House is owned by the State of Maryland.

**Mutual Memorial Cemetery – Sandy Spring, Montgomery County
(\$78,000 grant awarded)**

Mutual Memorial Cemetery was officially established in 1873 as part of the historic Freedman's Village of Sandy Spring, one of the oldest free black communities in Maryland. The Quakers, who founded Sandy Spring, freed their slaves by 1800 – well before federal or state emancipation. These pioneering black families chose to remain within the borders of Sandy Spring in an area which became known as Freedman's Village. They purchased homes, founded houses of worship, created small businesses and established the Mutual Memorial Cemetery.

**John Wesley M.E. Church – Deal Island, Somerset County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

John Wesley M.E. Church is a late Victorian T-plan Gothic Revival church, dating from 1914. It is a prominent landmark in the low, marshy landscape between the settlements of Deal Island and Wenona. A black congregation has continuously worshipped on this site since at least the third quarter of the 19th century. The building will be used as a heritage-focused cultural and interpretive center.

**Old Pomonkey High School – Bryans Road, Charles County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

Old Pomonkey High School served as the first African American public high school in Charles County. Established in 1922, the original frame building was replaced in the 1930s by a one-story structure with high ceilings, large windows, and Colonial Revival styling. In the 1950s a one-story gymnasium wing was added; this is currently the only portion of the building that remains after a fire in the 1980s destroyed the 1930s portion. The building will become a cultural center and museum, with the 1950s wing rehabilitated and the 1930s portion ultimately rebuilt.

**Wiley H. Bates Legacy Center – Annapolis, Anne Arundel County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

The Wiley H. Bates High School is of exceptional significance in the history of the development of public education for African Americans in Anne Arundel County. From the time the school was built in 1932 until 1966 when the county public school system was finally desegregated, Bates was the only public school in the county which African-American students could attend for a secondary level education. The 1932 building was expanded in 1937, 1945, and 1950 to accommodate increasing enrollment. In each building campaign, facilities which equaled or exceeded those available to white students were provided. These expansions represent the response of the county to the "separate but equal" doctrine which was applied to public facilities in the first half of the 20th century.

**Denton Colored School – Denton, Caroline County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

Constructed in the late 19th or early 20th century, the Denton Colored School is a T-plan building which stands above a tall basement made of rough-cast concrete block. The half-acre of land which the school occupies was purchased by African American school trustees in 1867. The structure has been used as a masonic hall since 1969. The project will restore the structure to its historic appearance.

**Sis's Tavern / Baby Dee's – North Brentwood, Prince George's County
(\$50,000 grant awarded)**

Initially operated as a grocery, then as a tavern and music hall, the building on 41st Avenue has been owned and operated by residents of North Brentwood, the first African-American incorporated community in the county, and served town residents for over eighty years. It became known as "Sis' Tavern" during the 1960s, when owned by Marie "Sis" Walls; and later "Baby Dee's" after Deloris R. Spriggs. It was a central social hub for the town, attracting famous acts such as Duke Ellington and Pearl Bailey during its heyday, who would come to perform after hours when visiting the Howard Theatre in D.C. The building also housed a barbershop, in a circa 1920 addition, which was operational until Baby Dee's closed in 1996. In addition to being the first commercial building built in the town, it was owned at one time by the town's first mayor, Jeremiah Hawkins. When rehabilitation is completed, the building is planned for community use and will be managed by the town.

**Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church – Easton, Talbot County
(\$100,000 grant awarded)**

Bethel AME Church, built in 1877, houses a congregation that has been in existence since 1818. The Hill neighborhood, established by freed slaves in Easton, grew up around Bethel and the nearby Asbury AME Church. The church building may be the first structure for public use owned and operated by African Americans on the Eastern Shore. The building is still in use as a church.

**Asbury M.E. Church – Easton, Talbot
County (\$67,000 grant awarded)**

Asbury M.E. Church is the oldest African American church structure in Easton, and the second oldest African American church structure in Talbot County. The church was dedicated by Frederick Douglass in 1878. Asbury was a temporary high school for black students in the 1930's and is now a community center for a historically African American enclave known as the "Hill." The lower-level "fellowship hall" will become an education and research center for the public. The upper-level sanctuary is still used for worship.