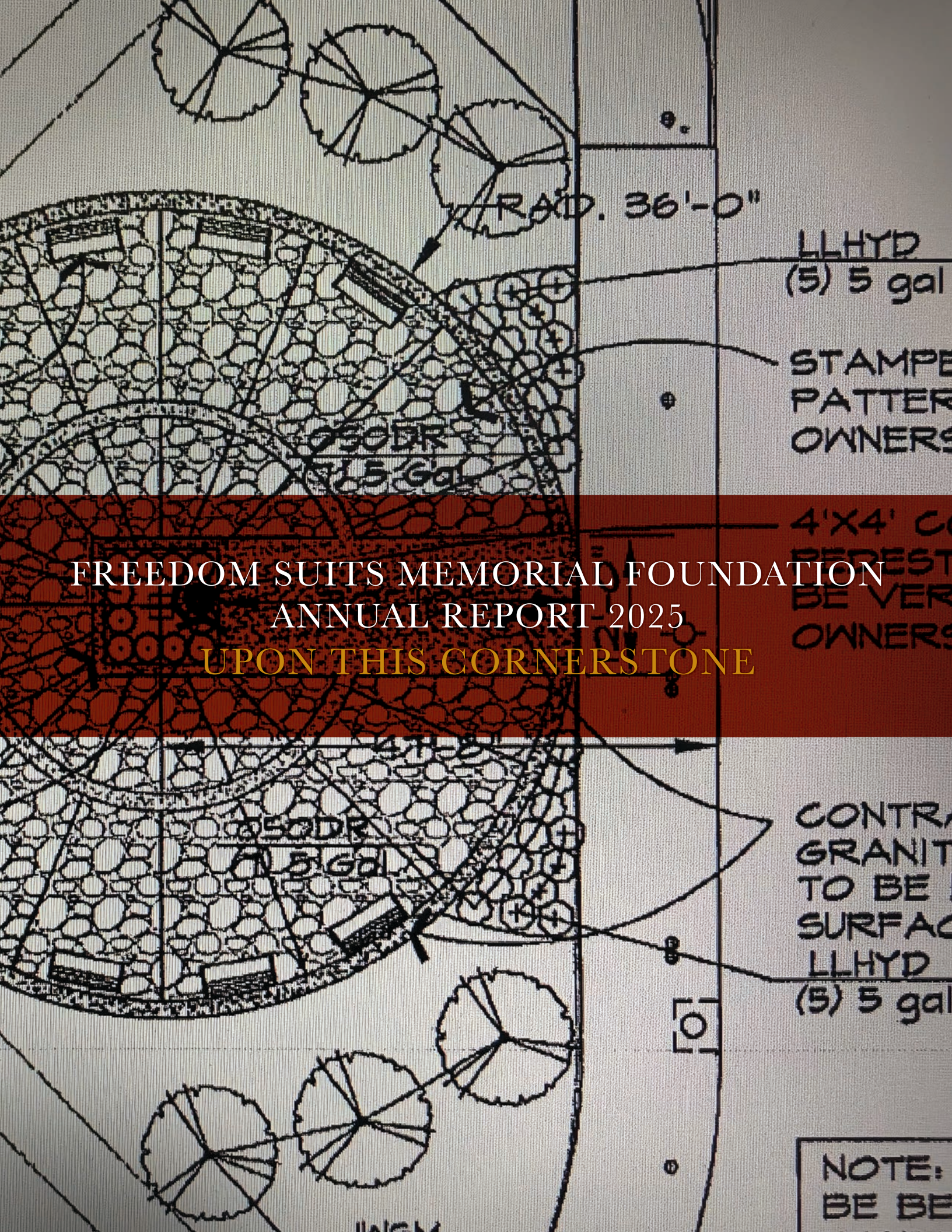




FREEDOM SUITS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION
ANNUAL REPORT 2025
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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE FOUNDATION

This annual report's theme "*Upon this Cornerstone*" operates at both a physical and intangible level. First, it recognizes the fact that since the Juneteenth 2022 unveiling of the Freedom Suits Memorial on Freedom Plaza, the on-going efforts to honor the freedom suits freedom seekers, we have a very concrete and real focal point. Second, it recognizes the not so well-known fact that those efforts have been carried out by a number of individuals and groups since before Judge David Mason's stroke of brilliance to advocate for a memorial.

The front and back cover of our 2025 Annual Report – close up images of the 2012 Freedom Plaza site plan by landscape architect, Randy Mardis – captures one of the earliest phases of this wonderful and inspiring undertaking. From the outset, its concept of placing the memorial sculpture in the center of an expansive 60-foot diameter paved circle has conveyed its uniqueness. This plan grew out of an early collaboration between Judge Mason and Randy Mardis, more than two years before Judge Mason convened the Freedom Suits Memorial Steering Committee in August 2014. Some details have been added to this original site plan, but for the most part, its classic layout has remained.

As our Foundation members continue their work, we are learning more, too, about what is perhaps aptly described as the unintentional heritage or scholarly ancestry of the freedom suits. Historians and scholars have devoted hundreds - if not thousands - of hours, as far back as the early 1980's, to conduct research and to write articles recounting the compelling stories of the very courageous freedom suits plaintiffs. People like William Foley (1984), Robert Moore (1993-94), and David Konig (2006). They were drawn to learn about the freedom suits plaintiffs and to share it many years before the Freedom Suits Memorial Steering Committee began its work.

The Sankofa bird is the basis of an African proverb, the wisdom of which is unquestionable: "Always remember the past, for therein lies the future, if forgotten we are destined to repeat it". Literally, '*san*' means "*go back*" and "*kofa*" means "*get it*". We have all heard wise people voice this very well taken position and warn us to know our past to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. In these challenging times, where some of the bleaker chapters of human behavior is being ignored or even suppressed, such advice should be our watch words now and into the future.

Paul N. Venker
President

ST. LOUIS FREEDOM SUITS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS

Diversity is the North Star for our Foundation's board composition, but there is more to that quality than one might immediately expect. Its origins are in the diverse Freedom Suits Memorial Steering Committee, which Memorial founder, Hon. David C. Mason, convened in 2014 for the Freedom Suits Memorial sculpture.

Many of those who made Freedom Plaza and "*Freedom's Home*" become a reality, wanted to also be involved in the ambitious educational mission of the Freedom Suits Memorial Foundation. The FSM Steering Committee unanimously voted in 2020 to form as a non-profit entity. Our board has an appropriately complex experience base, including: educators; freedom suits scholars; lawyers and judges; fine arts/theater people; and, a social media/website expert. All these disciplines are routinely drawn upon for our mission of remembering and honoring the hundreds of St. Louis freedom suits plaintiffs.

Together, the members of the Foundation's Board of Directors cooperate and collaborate not only with each other, but also with other like-minded organizations such as the NCHE, Missouri State Archives, Gateway Arch Park Foundation, Gateway Arch National Park, National Park Service, Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis, the St. Louis Bar Foundation, the Law Library Association of St. Louis, and others, to have the broadest reach possible for its message of the relevance and importance of the St. Louis freedom suits, its plaintiffs and those who helped them, to our fuller understanding of an accurate history of America.

*St. Louis Old Court House prior to the grand
Re-opening, May 2025 Image Source: M. Carroll*



Steven H. Akre,
Attorney at Law



Meredith Benage,
Attorney at Law



Dr. Andrea S. Boyles,
Associate Professor



Gregory Carr, Assistant
Professor of Theater,
Harris-Stowe State University



Mark Scott Carroll,
Creative Director,
Graphic Design Artist



Kendra Chappell,
Fine Arts/Theater Teacher



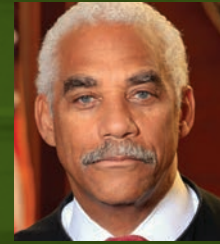
Commissioner Anne-Marie
Clarke, Retired Family
Court Commissioner



Lauren C. Collins,
Litigation Attorney



John Dougan,
State Archivist and Records
Services Director



George William Draper III,
Retired Missouri Supreme
Court Judge



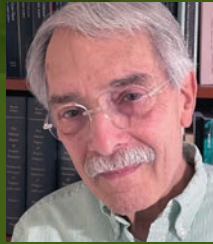
Trish Gunby,
Former Missouri General
Assembly Representative



Jerry M. Hunter,
Senior Counsel



Lynne M. Jackson,
Founder Dred Scott
Heritage Foundation



David Thomas Konig,
Emeritus Professor of Law
and History



Judge David C. Mason,
Founder Freedom Suits
Memorial



Thomas K. Neill,
Attorney at Law



Adolphus M. Pruitt, II,
President, St. Louis
NAACP



Untress "Trez" Quinn,
Attorney at Law



Ryan Turnage,
Corporate Counsel



Anne Twitty,
Associate Professor



Paul N. Venker,
Attorney at Law



Lynn Ann Whaley Vogel,
Attorney at Law



Harry W. Wellford, Jr.,
Attorney at Law



Kenneth H. Winn, PHD,
Legal Historian

FINANCIAL REPORT

In 2025, we were fortunate to receive a \$3,000 grant from the St. Louis Bar Foundation. We are also fortunate that one of our board members, Dr. Kenneth Winn, has independently applied for and been issued grants both through the William E. Foley Research Fellowship (sponsored by the Missouri State Archives) in the amount of \$1,500, as well as from The Supreme Court of Missouri Historical Society in the amount of \$5,000. These funds add to the St. Louis Bar Foundation's 2024 grant of \$3,000 issued to the FSM Foundation. These funds are restricted for use and disbursement in pursuit of the research and writing of articles on Judge Mathias McGirk and Judge George Tompkins. We are also supporting the research and writing of educational pieces and articles on freedom suits plaintiffs and certain attorneys involved in the freedom suits, as well as building the content of this aspect of the freedom suits on our Virtual Learning Center/Website.

Throughout 2025, we expended funds on an array of educational undertakings, such as the March 2025

National Council for History Education (NCHE) Conference, for registration and other costs. We have also incurred expenses for landscaping maintenance of Freedom Plaza. Funds were disbursed from the Grant Account for work on the articles, which continues in 2026.

As of December 31, 2025, the foundation had approximately \$10,000 available for its General Account and approximately \$10,000 in its restricted Grants Account. There were no unpaid debts at that time.

As a young foundation, we still have not yet established ongoing fundraising methodology or apparatus to provide a consistent flow of financial support. We hope to remedy this soon. Still, during 2025, we were fortunate to have generous donors support us with approximately \$10,000. Those donations are available for the general pursuit of the Foundation's mission and the upkeep of Freedom Plaza. We continue fundraising in 2026.

#WEMUSTREMEMBER

Thomas Satterwhite Noble's first professional painting was "Last Sale of the Slaves," which he completed in 1865. This oil painting depicts an auction near the steps of the St. Louis Courthouse that reportedly occurred on January 1, 1861. In 2011, Gateway Arch National Park hosted a slave auction reenactment at the courthouse under the creative guidance of cultural preservationist and independent historian, Angela da Silva.

Interestingly, Noble served in the Confederacy during the Civil War.



**Freedom Suits
Memorial Foundation**



JANUARY

January 16 - Amanda Clark (Public Historian and Tours Director, Missouri History Museum) was kind enough to meet with Kendra Chappell and Paul Venker at Freedom Plaza and to visit the Foundation's Freedom Suits Mini-Museum, located in the Law Library on the 13th Floor of the Clyde S. Cahill, Jr. Court Building. This was a productive session which also allowed us to share the beautiful, main reading room of the Law Library, with its ornate, coffered, and illustrated ceiling, which soars some 20 feet high. We hope to bring the Freedom Plaza and the Freedom Suits Memorial more in the orbit of the tours which the Missouri History Museum offers.



Freedom Suits Memorial sculptor Preston Jackson with Freedom Suits Memorial founder, Judge David Mason, at Freedom Plaza on June 15, 2022, installation of his 14-foot-tall masterpiece "Freedom's Home: on the Memorial's base."



*Image source: Trip-Advisors, Alson M.
Adjacent page image source: Washington University
Human Resources*



Freedom Plaza is now clearly marked as a destination in downtown St. Louis.

Washington University continues to carry the mantle of advocacy for the Freedom Suits.

FEBRUARY

February 5 - in the Law Library, **Judge David Mason** and **Paul Venker** accepted a “Big Check” from the **St. Louis Bar Foundation** for its grant for the Foundation to the coordinate research and writers of an article about **Judge Mathias McGirk** and **Judge George Tompkins**, who worked together to put the “once free, always free” legal theory into Missouri law of freedom suits.

February 12 - **Judge David Mason’s** solo perseverance paid off! The City of St. Louis placed street signs for “**Freedom Way**” on the section of 11th Street immediately in front of Freedom Plaza. **Paul Venker** captured this in photographs; signs are at the corners of 11th and Market and 11th and Chestnut.

February 19 - **Judge Mason** joined **Prof. Kelly Schmidt** at Washington University for a Black History Month freedom suits program, hosted by Washington University at the Law School.

MARCH

FSM Foundation Presents Freedom Suits Lesson Plan At 2025 Annual Conference Of National Council For History Education - Our Foundation participated in its first educational conference with the 2025 Annual Conference of the National Council for History Education (NCHE), which was in St. Louis. Our presenting Education Committee members were: Dr. Andrea Boyles (Tulane); Rob Good (UMSL); Lynne Jackson (Great-Granddaughter of Dred and Harriet Scott), and Dr. Anne Twitty (Stanford).

Their November 2024 submission of creating a freedom-suits-focused carousel lesson plan used the facts of five freedom suits as the core information set. The NCHE approved that, and in March 2025, they conducted a presentation on it at the Conference. The lesson plan is on our Virtual Learning Center/website and is "classroom ready". It is intended for students of at least the fifth grade level. Not surprisingly, it was a hit with the conference attendees who packed the room!

We also had a booth in the Exhibit Hall. Board members, Kendra Chappell (genius of "The Milly Project") and Paul Venker were fortunate to have Bill Glankler Historian, Missouri State Archives help staff the booth and bring two freedom suits pop-up banners which the Missouri State Archives still has as part of its traveling, freedom suits exhibit.



*NCHE Executive Director, Jessica Ellison
with Lynne M. Jackson.*

*FSMF Education Committee members:
Lynne M. Jackson, Dr. Anne Twitty,
Dr. Andrea Boyles and Rob Good.*

MAY

***National Park Service Grants
Our Foundation's Request
For Freedom Plaza To Be Included
In The National Underground
Railroad Network To Freedom -***



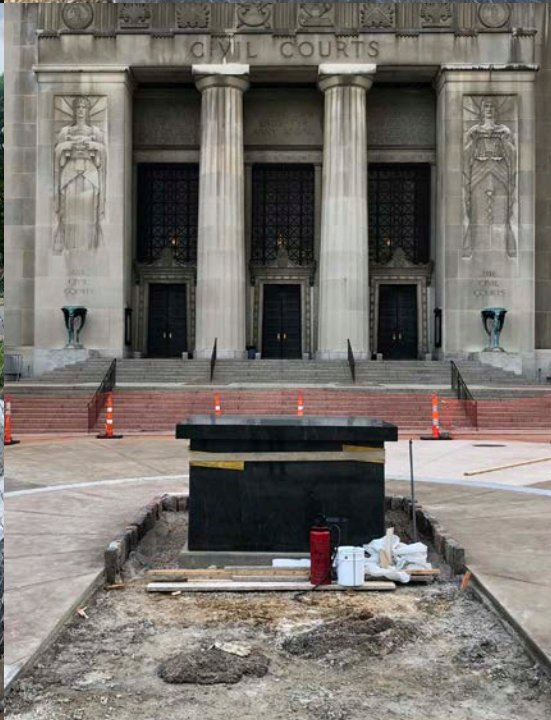
In May 2025, the National Park Service granted the application which the Foundation's specially formed committee had spearheaded for many months to have Freedom Plaza (home of the Freedom Suits Memorial) be included as a site on the National Underground

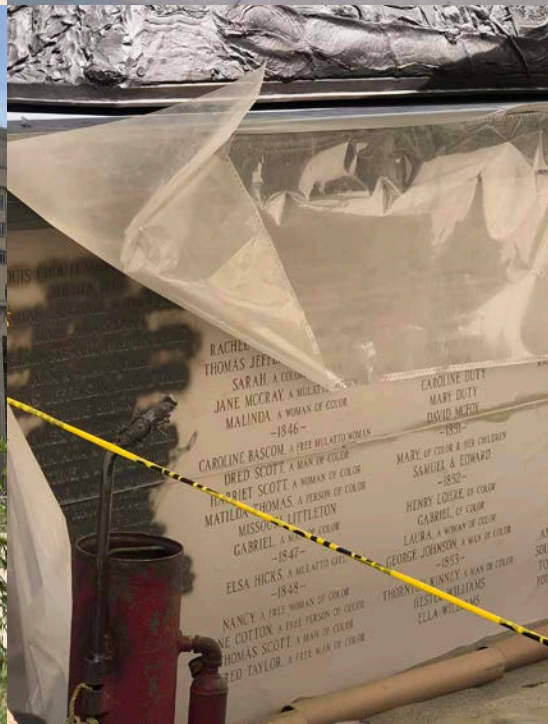
Railroad Network to Freedom. Dr. Anne Twitty, nationally renowned freedom suits scholar and author, led this effort with the help of Dr. Kenneth Winn, a noted Missouri historian. Paul Venker provided support, but the Foundation's success here was clearly due to Dr. Twitty's leadership and scholarship.

Our Foundation is grateful that Freedom Plaza received this designation, which rightly puts it and the Freedom Suits Memorial in a select group of other Network to Freedom sites in and around St. Louis. Notably, these include: the Old Courthouse; the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing; Greenwood Cemetery in Normandy (Harriet Scott's burial site); the Tower Grove House (Missouri Botanical Garden); St. Peter Cemetery in Hilldale (Archer Alexander burial site); the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center; and, Howell's Ferry Crossing (Archer Alexander).

This designation also places Freedom Plaza and the courage of the more than 320 women, men, and children who filed freedom suits in St. Louis, in a special national network of more than 800 Network to Freedom sites.







JUNE

June 2 - the FSM Foundation's dialogue with the **Missouri State Archives** to obtain permission to allow us to purchase a set of the wonderful four pop up panels they created on the Missouri freedom suits pays off and they are delivered!



June 3 - the Foundation, after acquiring the four-panel set of freedom suits pop-up panels created by the Missouri State Archives, set them up as the backbone of the freedom suits "Mini-Museum" in the Clyde S. Cahill, Jr. Court Building. This opening was intended to serve as a month-long (and continuing) history project in substance to celebrate Juneteenth all month long.

June 12 - **Ken Winn's** independent grant request for \$3,000 from **The Supreme Court of Missouri Historical Society** is not only granted but is increased by \$2,000 for a total of \$5,000! This funding is to be used for the research and writing of a scholarly article on Judge Mathias McGirk and Judge George Tompkins, the two



judges who put into Missouri law the freedom suit legal theory of "once free, always free." **Paul Venker** is a member of the Board of Trustees of that Historical Society and spoke in favor of this grant being made. This work is being done in concert with the funding from the Foley Research Fellowship and the St. Louis Bar Foundation.

Juneteenth - **Kendra Chappell** and **Mark Carroll** attend **Missouri History Museum Juneteenth** event on behalf of the Foundation. They met many people, including **Minister Joyce Elliot**, who told them how she initiated the Alton Juneteenth celebration many decades ago.



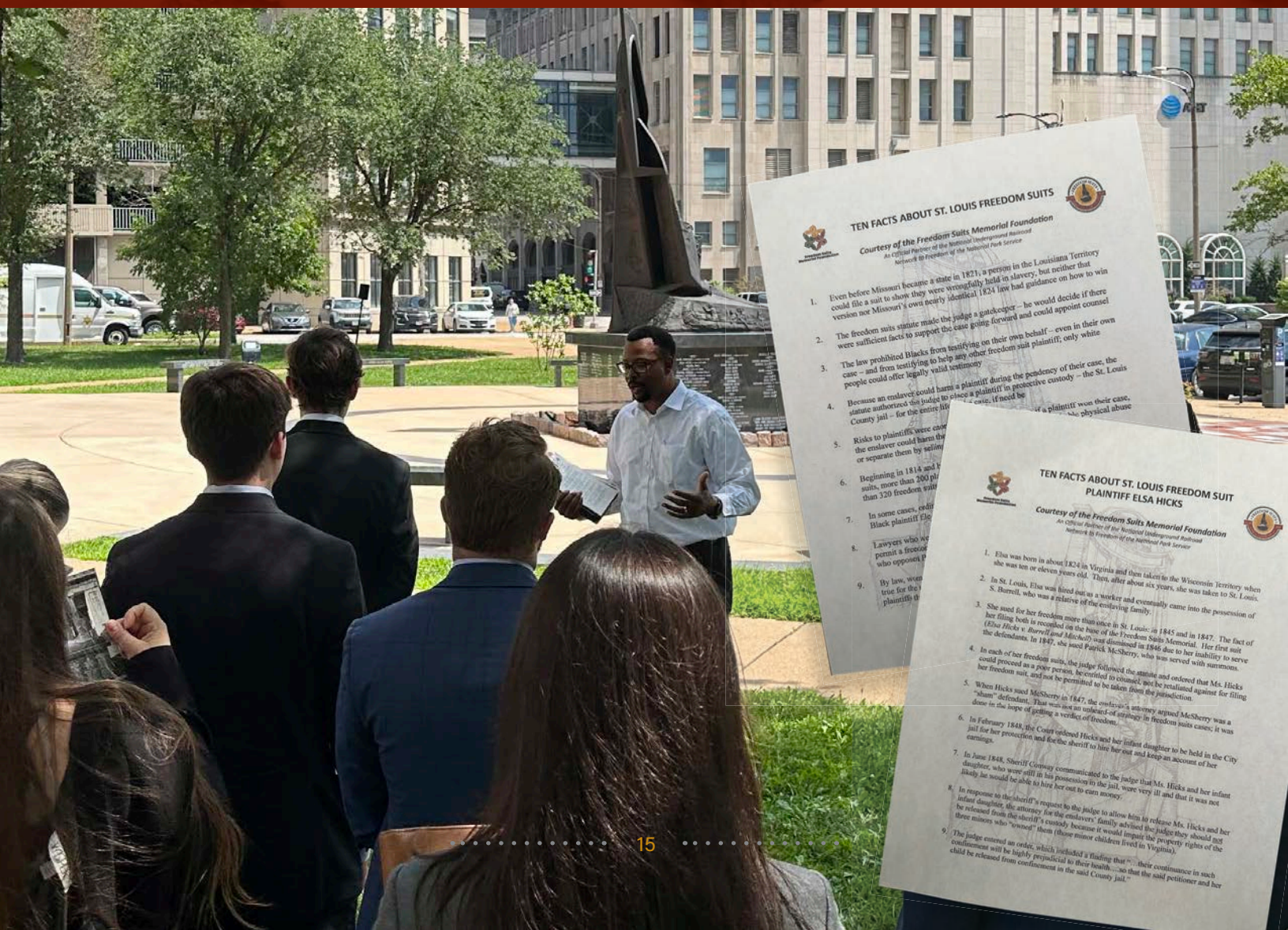
**MISSOURI
HISTORY
MUSEUM**

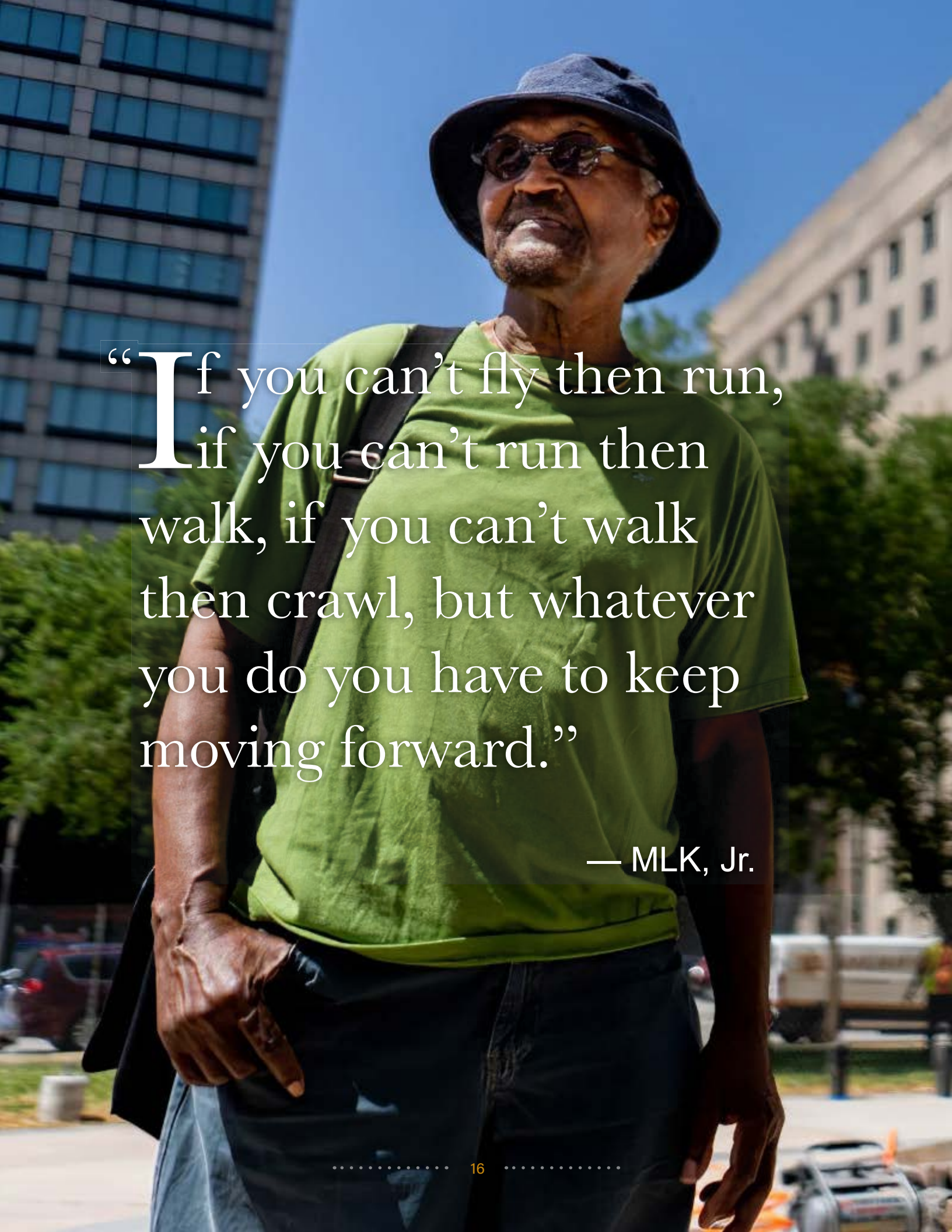
MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JULY

Foundation's Ryan Turnage Leads Presentation To BAMSL Summer Associates On Freedom Plaza - On the morning of July 25, foundation board members, Ryan Turnage and Paul Venker welcomed a summer associate luncheon group sponsored by the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis (BAMSL) to visit Freedom Plaza. Ryan told the 23 law clerks about Elsa Hicks. The petition she filed in her first case in 1845 described her as a "mulatto girl". That case was dismissed and in 1847, she filed a second case during which she and her infant daughter – as unimaginable as it sounds – were placed in the county jail for "safety".

In June 1848, the sheriff informed the judge that Elsa and her infant daughter had been in his custody since the previous February and that they both were so sickly that he was concerned about their well-being. This is but one of the heart-wrenching stories of the many courageous freedom suits plaintiffs.



A photograph of a man walking in a city. He is wearing a green t-shirt, a dark bucket hat, and sunglasses. He has a beard and is looking slightly to the side. The background shows a modern building with many windows and some trees. The text is overlaid on the image.

“If you can’t fly then run,
If you can’t run then
walk, if you can’t walk
then crawl, but whatever
you do you have to keep
moving forward.”

— MLK, Jr.



*Pictured opposite page: Freedom Suits Memorial
sculptor, Preston Jackson, Professor Emeritus of Sculpture
at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.*

SEPTEMBER

Freedom Plaza And Freedom Suits Memorial Included On The “Echoes Of Justice” Tour For National Park Friends Alliance Fall 2025 Conference

- On a very warm September 15 afternoon, fellow FSM foundation board members, Lauren Collins and Paul Venker were fortunate to make a St. Louis freedom suits presentation to a wonderful group from the National Park Friends Alliance (NPFA), which held its fall 2025 In-Person Meeting in St. Louis. We were so honored to have Freedom Plaza and the Freedom Suits Memorial be included on that afternoon’s “Echoes of Justice” tour, along with other stops the group visited to learn about St. Louis history, such as The Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing and the Old Courthouse (for the grand finale).

We provided this very attentive group – who traveled from all over our great nation (including as far away as Hawaii Hawaii) – an overview of the St. Louis freedom suits, and how Freedom Plaza and the Freedom Suits Memorial fit so well into the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program of the National Park Service. Lauren took the lead by telling the compelling and true story of Winny, who was so courageously involved in multiple freedom suits to free herself and her nine children. She also won a significant victory in the Missouri Supreme Court’s 1824

decision, which imbedded the case theory of “once free, always free” into the freedom suits law of Missouri. Her victory paved the way for literally scores of freedom seekers who turned to the court system over the next almost three decades. Paul Venker provided a bit of a docent’s commentary on the Freedom Suits Memorial, both



about the names on the base and the rich imagery of “Freedom’s Home”, the 14-foot-tall bronze sculpture.

Our Foundation very much appreciated being invited to join this tour by our friends at the Gateway Arch Park Foundation (GAPF), which supports the Gateway Arch National Park. GAPF is a member of the National Park Friends Alliance.



OCTOBER

October 14 - Paul Venker attended and assisted **Bill Glankler**, of the **Missouri State Archives** in a freedom suits presentation at the **Law Library**; this included the group touring the freedom suits “Mini-Museum” as well as some visiting Freedom Plaza.



Bill Glankler



NOVEMBER

November 17 - board members **Lauren Collins** and **Ken Winn** represented the Foundation board at the **BAMSL Center** to accept the “Big Check” symbolizing the \$3,000 grant which the **St. Louis Bar Foundation** awarded the FSM Foundation to support its research and writing of a scholarly article on Judge Mathias McGirk and Judge George Tompkins, the two Missouri Supreme Court judges who imbedded the “once free, always free” legal theory into Missouri law on freedom suits.



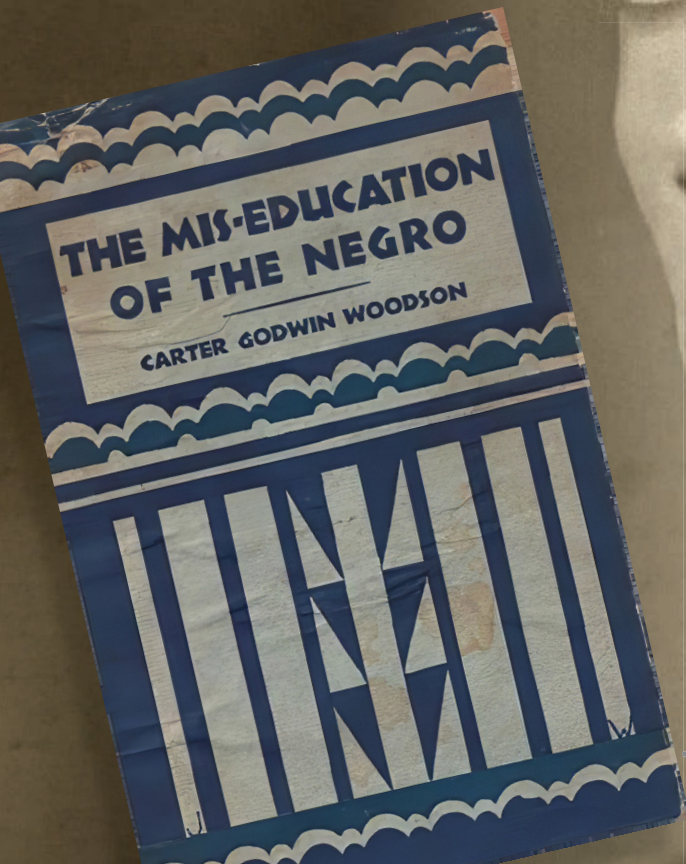
Morgan Murphy, President, St. Louis Bar Foundation and Susan McCourt Baltz, Executive Director, BAMSL presenting the check.

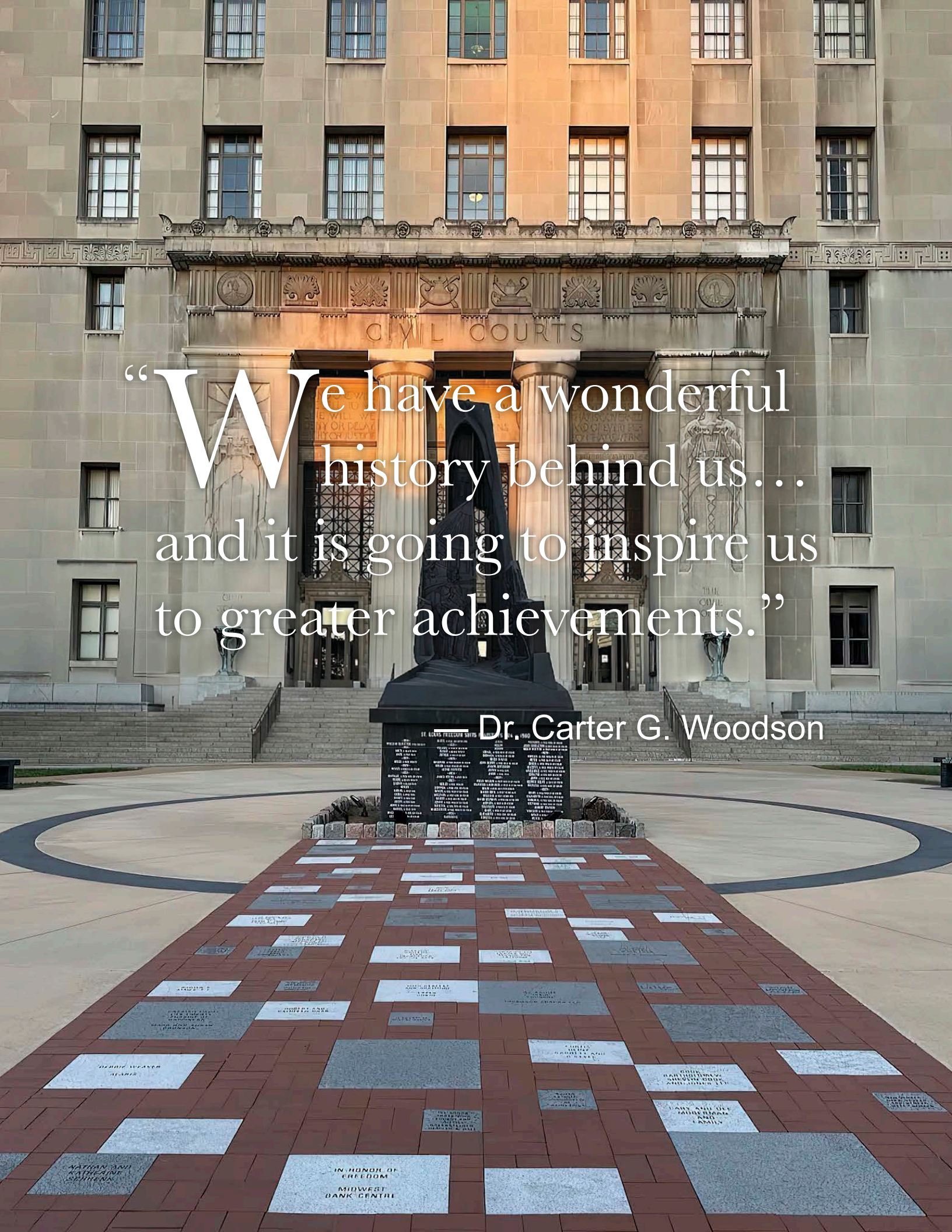
The Law Library is located on the 13th floor of the Hon. Clyde S. Cahill, Jr. Court Building (formerly, the Civil Courts Building; Image source: Dan Donovan, Washington University)

DECEMBER

December 19 - Judge Anne-Marie Clarke, Prof. Gregory Carr, and Mark Carroll, collaborated to post about Black History and Cultural educational icon, **Dr. Carter G. Woodson** and to announce our Board's decision to dedicate our entire 2026 educational calendar in his honor and to highlight his contributions to America.

*Woodson's **The Mis-Education of the Negro**, published in 1933 presents his thesis that Black people in the early 20th century were being culturally indoctrinated, rather than taught, in American schools. He challenges his readers to become autodidacts and to "do for themselves", regardless of what they were taught:*





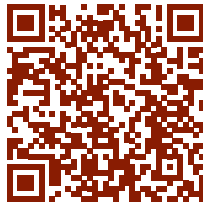
“We have a wonderful
history behind us...
and it is going to inspire us
to greater achievements.”

— Dr. Carter G. Woodson

WE MUST REMEMBER

It cannot come as a surprise that we need the financial support of as broad a segment of the St. Louis community as we can muster.

As we look ahead, we can definitely use your assistance to help us carry out our ambitious educational mission! You can donate by scanning the QR code on this page or by going to the Freedom Suits Memorial Foundation website and locating the “**DONATE**” button on the top tool bar: stlfreedomsuits.org



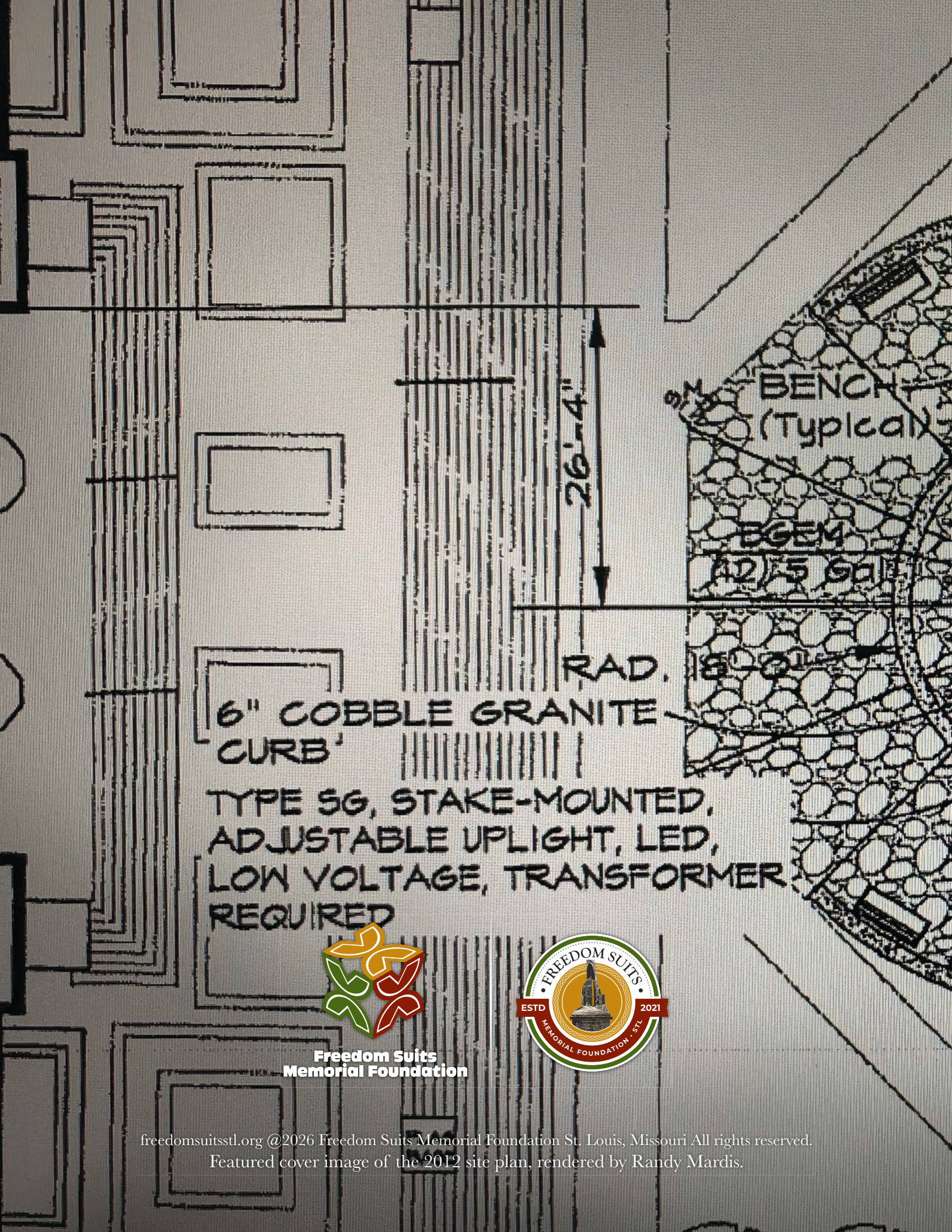
CONCLUSION

As our board members look back on 2025, they have good reason to feel that we have accomplished much and also have much to look forward to in 2026 and beyond. We have worked to strengthen our relationships with organizations including the Missouri State Archives, the Law Library Association of St. Louis, and the Gateway Arch Park Foundation. We initiated collaborations with the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center, the Supreme Court of Missouri Historical Society, and the Missouri History Museum. In 2026, we are well underway with additional educational events, including enhancing our freedom suits Mini Museum.

We look forward to accomplishing as much as we can, looking well ahead to Juneteenth of 2027, which will be the five-year anniversary of the Juneteenth 2022 unveiling of Freedom Plaza and the Freedom Suits Memorial.

We welcome your feedback and reactions to our any of our undertakings and welcome your ideas for educational programs and events at: stlfreedomsuits@gmail.com.





BENCH
(Typical)

EGEM

AD 5 GALL

RAD. 18'-0"

6" COBBLE GRANITE
CURB

TYPE SG, STAKE-MOUNTED,
ADJUSTABLE UPLIGHT, LED,
LOW VOLTAGE, TRANSFORMER
REQUIRED



**Freedom Suits
Memorial Foundation**

